ASEAN - AUSTRALIA DIGITAL TRADE STANDARDS INITIATIVE

Mid-Term Review

EQUITY ECONOMICS

About us

ABOUT EQUITY ECONOMICS

EQUITY ECONOMICS

Equity Economics is a leading consulting firm, providing analysis, policy development, design and evaluation services to government, private sector and non-government clients.

We specialise in economic and social policy, and international development. We combine technical economic skills with policy and design expertise, helping our clients contribute to a more inclusive, equitable society. Our work addresses the persistent challenge of social and economic disadvantage, through new and practical solutions. We work in collaboration with our clients and are believers in life-long learning. We are committed, and in for the long haul.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to both their land and seas. We also pay our respects to Elders – past and present – and generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples now and into the future.

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ACRONYMS

Acronym	Definition
ACCSQ	ASEAN Consultative Committee on Standards and Quality
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEC	ASEAN Secretariat
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DISER	Department of Industry, Science, Energy & Resources
DTSCWG	Digital Trade Standards and Conformance Working Group
EOPOs	End of Program Outcomes
GEDSI	Gender Equity, Disability, and Social Inclusion
KEQs	Key Evaluation Questions
MEL	Monitoring Evaluation and Learning
MELP	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan
MTR	Mid-term Review
NSBs	National Standards Bodies
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

The ASEAN-Australia Digital Trade Standards (DTS) Initiative (the Initiative) was announced by the then Australian Prime Minister as one of 15 initiatives at the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in Sydney in March 2018. It was established to support greater implementation of digital trade standards by ASEAN Member States (AMS) to increase digital trade for regional prosperity and security.

The DTS Initiative, supported through grant financing of A$5million, is designed to contribute to greater implementation of DTS by ASEAN Member States (AMS), to increase digital trade for regional prosperity and security. The investment seeks strong alignment with the priorities of the 2017 Australian Government Foreign Policy White Paper, the Economic Recovery pillar of DFAT's Partnerships for Recovery policy and ASEAN economic community pillar.

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) commissioned the Mid-term Review (MTR) to inform program improvement, assess effectiveness and efficiency of the program, including whether it has successfully pivoted to address the impacts of COVID-19 and inform decisions about future funding of the program. The MTR assesses and provides recommendations regarding the Initiative's performance towards achieving outputs and outcomes under Year 2 and 3 (2020-2021)[1] implementing activities including but not limited to the quality criteria of the Australian Aid Program and context specific issues.

MTR METHODOLOGY

The review team assessed the extent of achievement of the outputs, intermediate outcomes and EOPOs in the program logic (provided in Annex 1). This included an assessment of the extent of delivery of the investment's activities and the quality of delivery. The data collection approach and methods were designed to accommodate the restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, all data collection was completed remotely, with key informant interviews conducted through virtual videoconferencing.

A total of 23 stakeholders were consulted (15 women and 8 men), including four from ASEAN, ten from DFAT and nine implementing partner representatives. The individuals consulted were purposefully selected based on the extent of their knowledge of, and involvement in, the program.

MTR FINDINGS

Consideration of the Initiative's progress in achieving the EOPOs is analysed using the following "traffic light" evaluation system.

Evidence this is occurring and attributable to the program.

Some evidence this is emerging and partially attributable to the program.

Some evidence this is emerging but difficult to attribute to the program.

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[1] These years reflect the mid-term of the implementation phase.

The Initiative is assessed as being likely to achieve most of its EOPOs by the end of the current program. The Initiative's strength is its capacity to build knowledge and awareness on DTS. The development of the Digital Trade Standards Conformance Working Group (DTSCWG) is a good indicator that awareness, engagement and adoption of DTS has grown in recent years and this can be attributed in part to the Initiative. Engagement in international DTS fora has increased and while it is difficult to attribute this growth exclusively to the Initiative, there is evidence of extensive activity by the DTS Initiative in support of this outcome. Slow progress in take-up of priority DTS is to be expected given that standard development is a long process that can take anywhere from 10 to 15 years to see adoption.

This MTR finds the following ratings of the EOPOs, as shown in Table 1.

#	End of Program Outcome	Rating
1	AMS being more aware of DTS development processes and how DTS can support digital trade and economic growth.	**Evidence this is occurring and attributable to the program.**
2	Better engagement in international DTS fora as well as between National Standards Bodies (NSBs) and digital trade agencies.	**Some evidence this is emerging and partially attributable to the program.**
3.	Greater adoption of priority DTS by AMS.	**Some evidence this is emerging and partially attributable to the program.**

Table 1: End of Program Outcome ratings.

SUMMARY FINDINGS AGAINST THE KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1a. The Initiative is investing in the right areas. It is relevant to Australia's stated priorities, valued by AMS NSBs and well-integrated into ASEAN systems. Australia was a first mover in the sector for ASEAN when few partners were supporting digital trade or standards at that time, demonstrating that the investment was timely and innovative. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic created an even greater urgency for, and interest in, digitalisation and the role of standards. In interviews, ASEAN reported that the Initiative contributed to the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and is supportive of, and aligned to, ASEAN structures.

1b. The Initiative has effectively helped enhance knowledge of key international DTS that support digital trade and national priorities. The Initiative has effectively increased AMS knowledge of key international DTS through a variety of high-quality research papers, workshops, and other capacity building activities. These activities have been used and shaped by the DTSCWG, driven interest, and promoted greater awareness on DTS among AMS and the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC). The DTSCWG is arguably the single largest working group ASEAN has ever established, and in part, catalysed by the Initiative. These activities have also enhanced knowledge of DTS by AMS through providing education and information inputs into decision making processes at the ASEAN and AMS level.

1c. While the extent to which AMS agencies are advocating for adoption of priority DTS has been mixed across AMS and across standards, the development of the DTSCWG demonstrates a greater emphasis on DTS adoption. While AMS are engaged in the DTS program and increasingly view the program as a priority, the adoption of DTS by AMS is a slow process and will take time. It was noted that although the DTSCWG increased participation of AMS agencies in discussing digital trade standards, standards reform can take decades and accordingly a longer time horizon is needed to see the adoption of DTS. Standard capabilities still need to be built and significant resources will be required to see changes in AMS adoption of DTS. It was suggested by ASEC that further basic work needs to be done on harmonising and defining standards before AMS can advocate on a wider range of priority DTS.

1d. The participation of AMS in international standards fora has increased in recent years and this is partially attributable to the Initiative. Fifteen new ASEAN Members have joined international standards committees as either participating members or observer members since 2019. While a range of factors can increase participation, given this Initiative was one of very few capacity building activities in the sector from 2019 to 2021, it is likely that

the Initiative helped encourage an increase in participation post 2019. The extent to which AMS are engaging and communicating among themselves and with Australia on DTS adoption is also evident through the development of the DTSCWG which provides the platform for routine engagement on DTS.

2. DTS is managing its resources efficiently, particularly in terms of management arrangements and financial administration, but further development of governance arrangements is required and there is more work to be done on Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) implementation. The current implementation and management arrangements are seen to be efficient in delivering the Initiative's objectives. All delivery partners reported satisfaction with the current operating model and those roles were complimentary and working well collectively. The budget is utilised effectively, on balance, with the Initiative likely to spend its full allocation by program end.

Gaps have been identified in the governance framework for the Initiative. The current governance structure has not been able to provide the oversight and guidance sought by DFAT or implementing partners. More engagement from DFAT Canberra, such as from the Regional Trade Division (which also manages the Regional Trade for Development program), would bring to the Initiative more technical and strategic input and better "hooks" into other Australian programs and activities. Consideration could be given to integrating any future phase of the Initiative into the Aus4ASEAN Initiative. This could provide stronger inter-program engagement, Gender, Equity, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI), MEL and communications expertise and stronger links with ASEAN.

The need to strengthen the implementation of the MELP was also identified. Feedback on the MELP indicated that it is not delivering the information required by implementing partners and DFAT. Further work is needed by the RMIT Australian APEC Study Centre, in concert with DFAT and other partners, to ensure the MELP provides adequate value to the Initiative.

Interviews also identified a need to scale communications activities. While the MTR acknowledges several communications activities are scheduled for Year 4, ensuring the effective communication of activities and impact in a non-technical way for a wide and varied audience, is critical to the Initiative's success. As such, it is recommended that resourcing for communications be increased to provide the services required.

3. The program is beginning to promote GEDSI more effectively. During the review period, despite not having specific GEDSI objectives, the Initiative has effectively promoted GEDSI in several ways. It has played a role in acknowledging and highlighting the gender digital divide across AMS. It has also effectively encouraged the participation of women in workshops and as presenters or facilitators, with nearly equal participation and facilitation. Workshops have also sought to increase GEDSI awareness on DTS. ASEC and implementing partners are supportive of the incorporation of GEDSI objectives to the Initiative, but care needs to be taken that GEDSI is not seen as "Australia's priority" and a consideration usually handled by ASEAN's Socio-Cultural Community Pillar rather than as an integral part of every program.

4. A key challenge facing the Initiative is leveraging its valued position as an early mover and supporter of ASEAN's DTS efforts. AMS and ASEC requested more visibility and engagement by the Australian Government, reflecting the priority and value they place on Australia's role in DTS. The unique position Australia has established in relation to ASEAN's digital trade agenda will require attentive management, senior and official engagement, given competing interests and donor entry into the digital trade policy area, to retain the trusted position Australia has built through the DTS Initiative with ASEAN. Other risks include the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Initiative's ability to develop relationships and networks in a COVID-19 constrained operating environment.

5. DTS has proven highly adaptive and relevant in response to COVID-19. In terms of the logistical pivot to online platforms, the Initiative effectively shifted away from in-person workshops to online workshops and seminars. These created opportunities to reach a broader and more diverse audience and participation and engagement remained high online. At the same time however, the strength of some relationships was diminished. Interviews suggested a hybrid model with some in-person and some web-based capacity building and training options going forward. ASEAN noted the importance of Australian Government officials attending DTSCWG and other relevant meetings in-person where possible. COVID-19 has also increased the urgency and value placed on digital trade. The Initiative has been timely in providing assistance to ASEAN Members in this emerging and increasingly important field and in this way is contributing to Australia's Partnerships for Recovery COVID-19 response as well as ASEAN's Comprehensive Recovery Framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **That a further phase of the Initiative be supported.** The Initiative is effectively positioning Australia as a trusted partner to ASEAN in relation to DTS, being a key strategic area for growth in trade and development in the region. Continuation of the Initiative will build on Australia's established relationships in this area and demonstrate Australia's commitment to ASEAN particularly in terms of promoting trade in the region as well as position Australia as a key leader and collaborator on digital trade. Close consideration would be required on the areas for improvement and recommendations identified in the MTR to ensure the next iteration incorporated past lessons learned.

2. **Establish a Steering Committee to improve Initiative governance and strategic input.** This would allow DFAT and ASEAN better oversight of the Initiative and greater technical and strategic input to help steer the Initiative forward, and to leverage across other Australian Government and partner government programs. A stronger governance framework would help provide a more effective link to Canberra, through for example, DFAT's Regional Trade Agreements Division, (and through it the Regional Trade for Development program) which could provide the technical backing in Canberra to support it and help to drive consistency and connect the program to other relevant Australian activities. Providing a position on the Steering Committee for a senior ASEC official, such as the DTSCWG Chair and/or Director of the Market Integration Directorate, and ensuring recognition of DTS as an ASEAN program, will also help provide closer links with ASEAN systems. The value of moving any future phase of the Initiative under the umbrella of the Aus4ASEAN Futures Initiative could also be explored.

3. **Communications for a non-technical audience requires more focus and potentially, more resources.** In the first instance, RMIT could draw on its own in-house communications team, but more resources may be required to ensure that outcomes are translated to better inform policy making and target a wider audience. Outcomes also need to be carefully communicated across relevant ASEAN Sectoral Bodies and Working Groups including how those outcomes could contribute to ASEAN priorities and policies.

4. **Further work is required by RMIT in concert with DFAT and other partners to ensure the MELP provides adequate value to the Initiative**. DFAT and implementing partners should provide advice to RMIT on what further information or format they require to ensure improvement and learning opportunities are taken up appropriately, as well as considering whether more resourcing is required for MEL activities, especially to assist with new GEDSI considerations.

5. **Care needs to be taken in navigating the inclusion of GEDSI in a manner appropriate for this program.** It is important to recognise that the incorporation of GEDSI objectives is new to the investment and takes time. Acknowledging Australia's unique position in the DTS space, DFAT should work closely with ASEC and implementing partners to ensure GEDSI implementation is proportional to the investment, meets the needs of ASEAN and is well understood by implementing partners to maximise benefits.

6. **A return to Australian Government representation at key meetings to demonstrate support and leadership is recommended now that COVID-19 restrictions have eased.** Capacity building workshops and training should take place in person, where possible.

Background and Context

AUSTRALIA'S SUPPORT TO DIGITAL TRADE STANDARDS

The ASEAN-Australia Digital Trade Standards Initiative (the Initiative) was announced by the then Australian Prime Minister as one of 15 initiatives at the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in Sydney in March 2018. The Initiative was established to support greater implementation of digital trade standards by ASEAN Member States (AMS) to increase digital trade for regional prosperity and security.

Australia supports the Initiative through grant financing of A$5million (2018-2024). The Initiative seeks to contribute to greater implementation of digital trade standards by ASEAN Member States (AMS), to increase digital trade for regional prosperity and security. The Initiative seeks to have strong alignment with the priorities of the 2017 Australian Government Foreign Policy White Paper, the Economic Recovery pillar of DFAT's Partnerships for Recovery policy and ASEAN Economic Community pillar. The end of program outcomes (EOPOs) for this initiative are:

- EOPO1: AMS being more aware of Digital Trade Standards (DTS) development processes and how DTS can support digital trade and economic growth.
- EOPO2: Better engagement in international DTS fora [such as Pacific Area Standards Congress (PASC), International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO), International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) by AMS and National Standards Bodies (NSBs)], as well as between NSBs and digital trade agencies; and
- EOPO3: Greater adoption of priority DTS by AMS.

REVIEW PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The overall purpose of the mid-term review (MTR) was to inform program improvement, assess effectiveness and efficiency of the program, including whether it has successfully pivoted to address the impacts of COVID-19 and inform decisions about future funding of the program. The MTR assesses and provides recommendations regarding the Initiative's performance towards achieving outputs and outcomes under Year 2 and 3 (2020-2021) implementing activities including but not limited to the quality criteria of the Australian Aid Program and context specific issues.

REVIEW AUDIENCES

The primary audience for the review is the Australian Mission to ASEAN and relevant DFAT Divisions in Canberra. DFAT intends to share the final MTR report with DTS implementing partners, and, subject to approvals, publish it on the website. The secondary audiences are ASEAN, AMS, DTS implementing partners and other development partners currently supporting DTS.

Review Methodology and Situation Assessment

REVIEW METHODOLOGY

The review team assessed the extent of achievement of the outputs, intermediate outcomes and EOPOs in the program logic (provided in Annex 1). This included an assessment of the extent of delivery of the investment's activities and the quality of delivery.

The review was focused on the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) provided in Box 1 below.

KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1: How and to what extent has DTS broadly achieved the objectives (EOPOs) of the program?

- How and to what extent is the DTS Initiative investing in the right areas? (Criterion- Relevance and Coherence)

- How and to what extent AMS have enhanced knowledge of key international DTS that support digital trade and their national priorities in this area (Criterion- Effectiveness)

- How effectively are AMS participating in international standards fora? (Criterion- Effectiveness)

- To what extent have AMS agencies (e.g., NSBs) been advocating for adoption of priority DTS, and priority DTS been adopted by AMS? (Criterion- Effectiveness)

2: How efficiently is DTS managing its resources? (Criterion – Efficiency). Is the program making appropriate use of Australia's time and resources to achieve outcomes?

3: Is the program making progress in effectively promoting GEDSI in the program implementation? (Criterion – GEDSI)

4: What are the key program risks (up to three) that may affect successfully achieving end of program outcomes and how effectively is the program managing these risks? (Criterion – Risk).

5: How effectively has the program pivoted to address the impacts of COVID-19 and contributed to COVID-19 recovery efforts (including as identified in Partnerships for Recovery and the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework)

Box 1: Key Evaluation Questions

The data collection approach and methods were designed to accommodate the restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, all data collection was completed remotely, with key informant interviews conducted through virtual videoconferencing. Presentations on the Aide Memoire findings with DFAT were also completed through videoconference.

Document review
The MTR began with an analysis of 34 documents, including program design documents, reports, activity output reports, and key strategic documents. This analysis identified relevant information against the KEQs and identified gaps to be filled by the other data collection activities during the review. Further documents were identified throughout the review and fed into the analysis. Annex 2 includes a list of the documents reviewed in the MTR.

Key informant interviews
A total of 23 stakeholders were consulted (15 women and 8 men), including four from ASEAN, ten from DFAT and nine implementing partner representatives. The individuals consulted were purposefully selected by DFAT based on the extent of their knowledge of and involvement in the program. Many of those consulted were

followed up for second interviews and/or provided written responses to provide further context and information. A full list of individuals consulted, and their organisation is provided in Annex 3.

Data analysis methods

The information from the interviews was analysed using basic thematic analysis in an excel document against the KEQs. The documents provided were used to triangulate and validate information from interviews. In addition, a case study was undertaken to analyse and further describe the context, causes and drivers of a particular outcome within ASEAN. While the intention was to undertake an episode study it was deemed not appropriate due to limited data availability.

Limitations

As the review was conducted remotely, with online consultations, the data is possibly not as complete and rich as if field visits and face to face interviewing had been undertaken due to the loss of observational data from field visits. An extensive document review was implemented to overcome the limitations associated with the lack of random sampling of interviewees.

SITUATION ASSESSMENT

Australia became a dialogue partner to ASEAN in 1974, the first of 11 countries to do so.[2] The relationship was further strengthened in 2014 when ASEAN and Australia entered a Strategic Partnership and in 2015 when the two agreed to commence biennial leaders' summits. The Plan of Action (POA) to implement the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership (2020-2024) in 2019, guides implementation of the goals and objectives of Partnership, including Leaders' commitments from ASEAN-Australia Summits and Joint Statements, in particular, the Joint Statement of the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit: The Sydney Declaration (2018). The POA now includes an annex to accommodate Comprehensive Strategic Partnership activities.

The POA has enabled ASEAN and Australia to continue valuable political dialogue and collaborate in order to meet goals for mutual benefit. ASEAN-Australia economic cooperation has also grown through the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA), which came into effect in early 2010, enabling businesses of all sizes to utilise the available benefits of the agreement and encourage prosperous and inclusive economic growth across the region. Under AANZFTA, the trade relationship has expanded, with two-way trade amounting to over $101 billion in 2016-17[3]. The relationship was further strengthened in October 2021, when Leaders agreed to establish a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between ASEAN and Australia, underscoring Australia's commitment to ASEAN's central role in the Indo-Pacific and positioning the partnership for the future.[4]

The Initiative was announced by the then Australian Prime Minister as one of 15 initiatives at the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in Sydney in March 2018. The Initiative was launched in response to the identified need to seize the opportunity afforded by digital trade. Bain & Company research at the time estimated that by removing barriers to digital integration, up to $1.1 trillion of GDP value can be gained across ASEAN by 2025.[5] It was envisaged that ASEAN could leapfrog to the forefront of the fast moving digital economy, because of key enablers already in place, such as robust economic growth; literate population of about 600 million people, with 40 percent under 30 years of age; smartphone penetration of around 30 percent and growing; well-developed information and communications technology (ICT) and a track record of investing in innovation and new technology; and a renewed sense of optimism and urgency for economic integration associated with the implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025 (AEC 2025).[6]

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[2] European Union, though not a country, is included in this figure.

[3] DFAT 2022, Why ASEAN matters: our shared prosperity. https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/regional-architecture/asean/why-asean-matters-our-shared-prosperity

[4] Prime Minister of Australia, 2021, Australia-ASEAN Leaders Summit and East Asia Summit, Media Statement, 27 October 2021. https://www.pm.gov.au/media/australia-asean-leaders-summit-and-east-asia-summit

[5] Bain & Company, 2018, Advancing Towards ASEAN Digital Integration https://www.bain.com/contentassets/37a730c1f0494b7b8dac3002fde0a900/report_advancing_towards_asean_digital_integration.pdf

[6] Standards Australia 2018-19 ASEAN-Australia Digital Trade Recommendations Report, https://www.standards.org.au/getmedia/d0942d6e-b58a-4fe4-a17d-aecc52effd50/ASEAN-Australia-Digital-Trade-Recommendations-Report.pdf.aspx

The Australian Government identified that stakeholders, including from government, business and consumers from ASEAN Member States, would benefit from a more detailed understanding of the value of international standards in supporting digital trade, enhancing business competitiveness and contributing to greater economic growth. Digital trade was a relatively new concept, countries faced significant challenges determining where to start in the digital space, there were few success stories and the value proposition and potential impact of standards in supporting economic growth was not well understood across AMS.[7] The Australian Government also identified the potential to level the playing field and promote inclusive growth by unlocking opportunities, new technologies and markets to small and medium enterprises, women-run businesses and others who may not otherwise have had access to global value chains in the past.[8]

It was initially envisaged the Initiative would be a pillar of an earlier Connectivity Program, which was subsequently suspended. Despite this, the Initiative was developed through a collaboration between the ASEAN Consultative Committee on Standards and Quality (ACCSQ), the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on e-Commerce (ACCEC), the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources (DISER), and Standards Australia.[9] In recognition that further expertise was required, Access Partnership and RMIT became additional implementing partners in Year 2.

The initiative was envisioned to roll out in three phases. Diagram 1 outlines some of the key activities from each phase.

- Concept Phase (2018) consultations were conducted by Standards Australia with ASEAN, ASEAN committees, National Standard Bodies (NSBs) and other key stakeholders;
- Inception Phase (2019 - Year 1) delivered under a separate grant agreement with RMIT, Access Partnership and Standards Australia; and
- Implementation Phase 2020-2021 (Year 2&3) and 2022-2024 (Year 3&4).

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[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

1. Concept Phase 2018	2. Inception Phase 2019	3. Implementation Phase 2020-2022
• *Design and development of the Initiative.*	• *A suite of capacity building workshops run in select AMS by Standards Australia in cooperation with ISO and regional partners.* • *Development of a standards mapping exercise by Access Partnership, to identify priority standards linked to economic priorities.* • *Development and approval of a work plan by Access Partnership.*	• *Development of ten AMS playbooks.* • *Detailed report on Singapore-Australia digital trade as part of the Singapore-Australia Digital Economy Agreement (SADEA).* • *Capacity building workshops including development and delivery of a digital trade symposium series of six workshops.* • *Four standards specific workshops.* • *Deep dive market reports.* • *Subject matter reports.* • *E-learning course.* • *Digital trade survey.* • *Policy brief.*

Diagram 1: Three phases of Initiative activities

The Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Plan (MELP) was developed throughout the course of Year 2, as part of a joint process between RMIT, Access Partnership, and DFAT, complemented by expertise and input from Clear Horizon. Drafting of the DTS GEDSI objectives commenced in December 2021 and was finalised in April 2022. It seeks to capture ASEAN and DFAT's strategies to advance gender equality, women's empowerment, and disability and social inclusion. Throughout Year 4 the program will mainstream GEDSI objectives, which will play an important role in the area of inclusion of women and persons with disabilities.

In early 2020 the global COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the implementation of social distancing and travel restrictions. Implementing partners were, as a result, unable to travel to facilitate workshops or provide in-person capacity building. While some activities were able to continue through online webinars and forums, face to face interaction limited the ability to strengthen relationships and outreach.

Designed to promote the use of agreed-upon international standards in trade, the Initiative is focused on promoting transparency and good economic governance, reducing barriers to entry, and supporting free and open trade, including enhanced digital trade. Box 2 provides a summary of standards, digital trade and digital trade standards to contextualise the trade and economic drivers underpinning the Initiative.

Standards

Standards are critical for the international compatibility of products and services. International standards have increasingly been taking on aspects of domestic regulation in recent years, allowing regulators to adopt a more market-driven, flexible, inclusive, and enabling approach to market growth. This has been particularly true in digital development because of the cross-sectoral nature of digital development issues, and the fast-moving domain knowledge required. [10]

When used inappropriately or unfairly, they can also act as trade barriers. The WTO technical barriers to trade (TBT) and sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS) agreements, as well as the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement, seek to limit the use of standards as trade barriers.[11]

Digital Trade

As a result of rapid digitalisation, trade is undergoing substantial transformation with the creation of new 'digital' trade opportunities. It involves digital goods and services, tangible goods and services that are delivered physically, digital enablers that facilitate access to new markets and products, and emerging technologies such as 3D printing and digital ledger technology.

The importance and economic value of digital trade has been steadily increasing in recent years. The pandemic accelerated digital transformation efforts of countries and underscored the crucial role of digital trade in kickstarting economic and social recovery, through the creation of jobs, increased productivity and wages, and higher standard of living. The value of ICT services' exports worldwide reached $676 billion in 2020 as the usage of communications services, computer services and software were boosted by the lockdown restrictions implemented in many economies. This took digitally deliverable services to nearly 64% of total services exports, as they contracted relatively little against the backdrop of an unprecedented decline in total services trade.[12]

In recent decades, ISO/IEC JTC 1 has been critical in shaping and influencing the international Information Communications and Technologies and digital trade environments by supporting the development, application and deployment of existing and new technologies worldwide.[13]

Digital Trade Standards

Rapid digitalisation will continue to increase as economies and communities become more interconnected and new technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), 5G mobile communications, and developments such as blockchain gain traction. Moreover, even traditional commodities and goods such as white goods need to be digitally standardised for the global trade in data to be enabled. For IoT and 5G to work at scale, fridges, toasters, hair irons, ice machines, and air conditioners need to be standardised in line with the communications protocols. [14] International standards can help establish more inclusive financial systems, information and technological infrastructure. Standards can serve as universal access benchmarks and provide guidance which is key in preventing future inequity or economic disadvantage caused by access barriers in digital transactions and ICT.[15]

Box 2. A summary of standards, digital trade and digital trade standards.

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[10] RMIT, 2022. "ASEAN-Australia Digital Trade Standards Initiative: Year 4 work plan".
[11] Ibid.
[12] UNCTAD, 2021. "Trade data for 2020 confirm growing importance of digital technologies during COVID19", https://unctad.org/news/trade-data-2020-confirm-growing-importance-digital-technologies-during-covid-19, accessed 4 May 2022.
[13] Ibid
[14] RMIT, 2022. "ASEAN-Australia Digital Trade Standards Initiative: Year 4 work plan".
[15] Ibid.

Analysis and Findings

Consideration of the Initiative's progress in achieving the EOPOs is analysed using the following "traffic light" evaluation system.

Evidence this is occurring and attributable to the program.

Some evidence this is emerging and partially attributable to the program.

Some evidence this is emerging but difficult to attribute to the program.

No evidence or indication this is emerging through the program.

1: HOW AND TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THE INITIATIVE BROADLY ACHIEVED THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM?

The Initiative is likely to partially achieve its EOPOs by the end of the current investment (2024). The Initiative's strength is its capacity to build knowledge and awareness on DTS, with the AMS being more aware of DTS development processes and how DTS can support digital trade and economic growth. Engagement in international DTS fora has increased and is partially attributable to the Initiative. Adoption of priority DTS is a slow process and is also impacted by many factors. The development of the Digital Trade Standards Conformance Working Group (DTSCWG) is a strong indicator that awareness, engagement and adoption of DTS has grown and this can partially be attributed to the Initiative.

#	End of Program Outcome	Rating
1	AMS being more aware of DTS development processes and how DTS can support digital trade and economic growth.	**Evidence this is occurring and attributable to the program.**
2	Better engagement in international DTS fora as well as between NSBs and digital trade agencies.	**Some evidence this is emerging and partially attributable to the program.**
3.	Greater advocacy for, and adoption of priority DTS by AMS.	**Some evidence this is emerging and partially attributable to the program.**

Table 2: EOPO ratings.

1A. HOW AND TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE DTS INITIATIVE INVESTING IN THE RIGHT AREAS?

(Criteria – Relevance and Coherence)

Evidence this is occurring and attributable to the program.

The Initiative is investing in the right areas. It is relevant to Australia's stated priorities, valued by AMS and well-integrated into ASEAN systems. Implementing Partners noted in interviews that Australia was a first mover in the sector for ASEAN when few partners were supporting digital trade or standards at that time, demonstrating that the investment was timely and innovative. The United Kingdom and United States have only recently been involved in DTSCWG meetings. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic created an even greater urgency for, and interest in, digitalisation and the role of standards.

The Initiative has strong alignment with the priorities of the 2017 Australian Government Foreign Policy White Paper, the Economic Recovery pillar of DFAT's Partnerships for Recovery policy and the ASEAN Economic Community pillar. In particular, it aligns strongly with Australia's Digital Trade Strategy (April 2022) which outlines Australia's pursuit of global digital trade rules to reduce barriers to digital trade including through advocating for cooperation with international partners on standards and supporting the implementation of digital trade rules.[16] Examples of the way the Initiative responds to these priorities include through capacity building workshops, research reports, and training courses.

Education and capacity building provided by the Initiative helped support the creation of the Digital Trade Standards and Conformance Working Group (DTSCWG) which has supported ASEAN to define its DTS priority areas. Of these priority areas, two of the three, Digital Transactions and Logistics and Delivery are the priority areas to which the Initiative responds. The Initiative also works across other sectoral bodies through formal and informal meetings with the following bodies:

- ASEAN Consultative Committee for Standards and Quality (ACCSQ) through formal meetings and workshops;
- ASEAN Consultative Committee on E-commerce (ACCEC);
- ASEAN Digital Senior Officials Meeting (ADGSOM);
- Working Committee on Payment and Settlement Systems (WC-PSS); and
- AMS, including National Standards Bodies (NSBs), and other government agencies.

The Initiative is supportive of and aligned to ASEAN structures. ASEC reported that the Initiative contributes to the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF). Broad Strategy 4: Accelerating Inclusive Digital Transformation appears the most applicable and relevant to the ACRF. The ASEAN ICT Master Plan 2020, ASEAN Agreement on Electronic Commerce, and the ASEAN Digital Integration Framework Action Plan 2019-2025 (DIFAP) Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, are other policy documents that promote sustainable and inclusive digital economy in the region. The extent to which the Initiative is aligned to these priorities demonstrates that the Initiative is investing in areas of interest and relevance to ASEAN.

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[16] Australian Government 2022, *Digital Trade Standards Report*

1B. HOW AND TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE AMS ENHANCED KNOWLEDGE OF KEY INTERNATIONAL DTS THAT SUPPORT DIGITAL TRADE AND THEIR NATIONAL PRIORITIES IN THIS AREA?

(Criterion – Effectiveness)

Evidence this is occurring and attributable to the program.

The Initiative has effectively helped enhance knowledge of key international DTS that support digital trade and national priorities. The Initiative has effectively increased AMS knowledge of key international DTS through a variety of high-quality workshops, research, reports, and communications. These activities have enhanced knowledge of key international DTS across a variety of stakeholders and covering a variety of issues pertaining to digital trade and standards.

In 2021, the Initiative hosted capacity building workshops on themes such as 5G, smart cities, and artificial intelligence. Attendees included NSBs, private sector representatives and other government agency representatives. DTS knowledge has been enhanced by high levels of engagement and participation in these activities by AMS government agencies. Workshop feedback summarized in Figure 1 show at least 75 per cent of all workshop participants were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the knowledge gained.
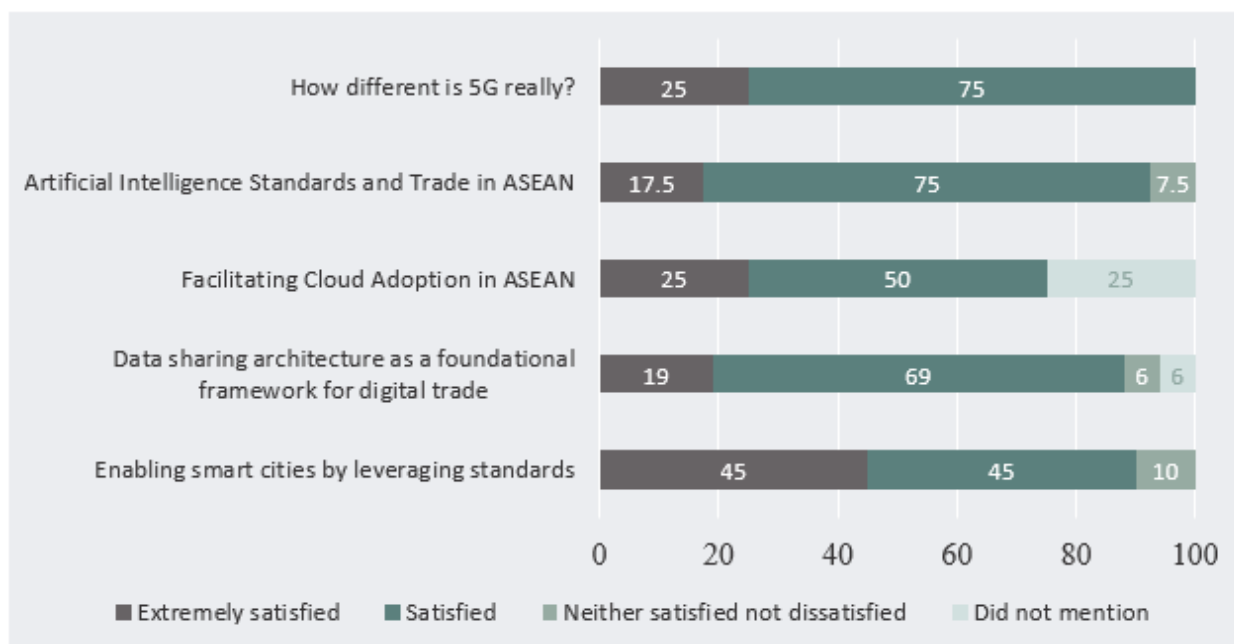
Figure 1: Workshop survey responses to the question 'How satisfied were you with knowledge gained in the workshops?' [17]

While it is difficult to assess the ongoing impact of these workshops, post-workshop survey feedback highlighted a range of intended actions including strengthening advocacy to regional governments, educating other stakeholders, presenting their own webinars, and conducting further research. Further planned actions are outlined in Annex 4.

Research through market reports and standards briefs has built the capacity of NSBs to develop international standards of most relevance to their own priorities.

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[17] No participants reported they were dissatisfied with the knowledge gained in the workshops.

- *Playbooks*: The playbooks, developed for each AMS, provide a 'roadmap' of actions to be taken forward and built upon. As well as applying a criterion for progressing, accelerating, and developing both digital trade and DTS, each playbook sets out and addresses three focal areas: stakeholders, frameworks and next steps.
- *Market reports*: Market reports provide a deeper analysis of each country and build on the content of each playbook.
- *Subject matter reports*: Specialised subject matter reports were developed in year 3 on Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital transactions, and e-invoicing. These reports were driven by ongoing conversations with ACCSQ, DTSCWG and AMS government agencies.

The earlier market reports helped the ASEAN Consultative Committee for Standards and Quality (ACCSQ) to define ASEAN priorities on DTS and supported the development of the DTSCWG (discussed further below). Since then, the playbooks and reports have also formed the basis for Access Partnership's presentations to meetings of the DTSCWG as well as informed the development of capacity building workshops in terms of what and where to focus. In this way, this body of work has helped to enhance AMS' knowledge of key international DTS that support digital trade. The development of a website is the subject of Year 4 activities and will also help provide further information and communicate more broadly to build AMS knowledge on DTS. Some of these reports will be made available on the website.

1C. TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE AMS AGENCIES BEEN ADVOCATING FOR ADOPTION OF PRIORITY DTS, AND PRIORITY DTS BEEN ADOPTED BY AMS?

(Criterion – Effectiveness)

Some evidence this is emerging and partially attributable to the program.

While the extent to which AMS agencies are advocating for adoption of priority DTS has been mixed across AMS and across standards, the development of the DTSCWG demonstrates a greater emphasis on DTS adoption. While AMS are engaged in the DTS program and increasingly view the program as a priority, the adoption of DTS by AMS is a slow process and will take more time than the initiative's life span. It was noted that although the DTSCWG increased participation of AMS agencies in discussing digital trade standards, standards reform can take decades and accordingly a longer time horizon is needed to see the adoption of DTS. Standard capabilities still need to be built and significant resources will be required to see changes in AMS adoption of DTS. It was suggested by ASEC in interviews that further basic work needs to be done on harmonizing and defining standards before AMS can advocate on a wider range of priority DTS. The Initiative should ensure it responds to these concerns by maintaining its focus on the priority areas identified for Australia by the DTSCWG.

The extent to which AMS agencies advocate or engage in DTS and DTS discussions is also variable across AMS. While there would be many factors that impact workshop attendance, the variable attendance across AMS at workshops is notable. Figure 2 shows that some AMS are more engaged than others. Interest in specific standards is also variable with not all countries focused on the same standards due to their different levels of economic development and specific economic drivers and industries.
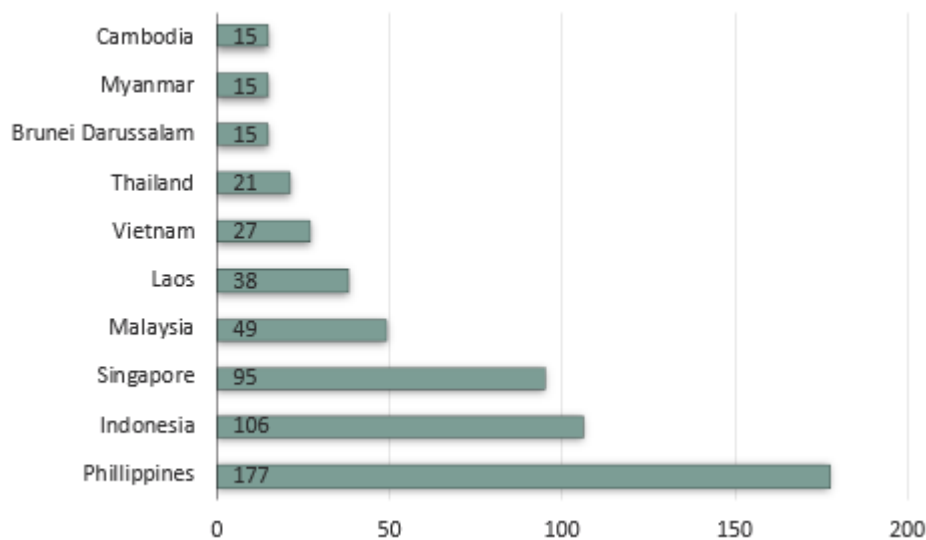
Figure 2: Number of attendees at the ten workshops from ASEAN Member States

The degree to which AMS agencies have been focused and engaged on the adoption of priority DTS is evident through the formation of the DTSCWG which is arguably the single largest working group ASEAN has established, and in part, catalysed by the initiative. Box 3 provides a short case study of the way in which the Initiative helped create the need and demand for the DTSCWG.

Digital Trade standards conformance working GROUP (DTSCWG) Case Study

Context

The Digital Trade Standards Conformance Working Group (DTSCWG) was established in March 2020 to exchange information on standards, regulations, procedures, policies, best practices, technical requirements and governance. It was designed to identify areas for harmonisation of standards, regulations, technical requirements, procedures, and best practices. This case study is relevant to the MTR because it helps demonstrate the impact the Initiative had on the creation of the DTSCWG.

What was the situation before the DTSCWG?

Prior to the establishment the DTSCWG, the body responsible for standards was the ASEAN Consultative Committee for Standards and Quality (ACCSQ). Established in 1992 its purpose was to eliminate technical barriers to trade related to Standards, technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures through information exchange, harmonisation, and cooperation.[18]

Significance – what was the change?

The DTSCWG is arguably the single largest working group ASEAN has ever established. Aimed at the working level, unlike the ACCSQ, it provides the practicality needed to affect real change on DTS. It helps coordinate capacity building and technical assistance, engage industry, relevant regulatory institutions, private sector organisations, ASEAN sectoral bodies and develops and implements its own work program. It also serves as a means of shepherding developments in the DTS space forward in a coordinated fashion across AMS. It has nominated its phase 1 work program for 2021-2023 focused on three pillars:

- Facilitating digital transactions

- Facilitating digital trust

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[18] ASEAN 2021, DTSCWG Infographic,https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/DTSCWG-Infographic-final.pdf

- Facilitating digital trade, logistics and delivery

The DTSCWG convenes formal engagement of state representatives from a variety of sectors including e-commerce, telecommunications, and national standard bodies, to progress dialogue on DTS, providing Australia with access at the Senior Economic Officials level.

Activities - what caused the change?

Establishing a Digital Trade Working Group was the first recommendation of Standards Australia's initial scoping study and recommendations report *ASEAN-Australia Digital Trade Recommendations Report*. The second recommendation of the report was to map and outline the international standards supporting digital trade. This standards mapping report (completed by Access Partnership[19]) in 2019[20] was an instrumental activity that helped precipitate the creation of the DTSCWG. It highlighted the potential growth of digital trade and how this would be accelerated across the ASEAN region through leveraging digital trade standards. The report also included a prioritization of ISO/IEC JTC 1 subcommittees for participation and International Standards for adoption. It provided a list of priority standards for adoption among AMS to guide the terms of reference for a potential Working Group on DTS.

The initial presentation on key findings from the standards mapping report to ACCSQ by the Access Partnership Team Leader (as part of formal meetings) provided the evidence base and final push for signing the DTSCWG terms of reference. The standards mapping report is still referenced by the DTSCWG and the priority areas identified in this report shaped the current DTSCWG three pillars of focus.[21]

Another crucial aspect was the culmination of relationships developed with both ASEC and ACCSQ members by Access Partnership through the inception phase, building trust and enabling Access Partnership to identify the needs of the ACCSQ. Additionally, these relationships helped provide the opportunity for Access Partnership to undertake the presentation of the standards mapping report which helped launch the DTSCWG into being.[22]

Key actors in this policy development were Access Partnership together with other implementing partners, as well as ASEC, ACCSQ and DFAT. In the lead up the ACCSQ meeting, the core relationship was with the Assistant Director and Technical Officer of the Standard and Conformance Division, ASEC. These interlocutors played a key role in shaping the agenda of ACCSQ (and now DTSCWG), and this enabled Australia (through Access Partnership) to be invited formally to give updates and presentations as a dialogue partner.

Informal meetings were often held throughout the year before and after formal engagements (to prep and then debrief), as well as at other points throughout the year. This relationship with Assistant Director and the Technical Officer then carried over to each Chair and Vice Chair of the DTSCWG.

What else may have contributed to this change?

Australia's engagement with ASEAN as part of the broader DTS agenda was much more progressed and focused on outcomes for ASEAN, AMS, and regional harmonisation (including with Australia's digital priorities) than any other actors, particularly in 2019 and 2020.

Other contributors to the creation of the DTSCWG were AMS themselves who were becoming more aware of the opportunities afforded by digital trade to their growing economies. China had been supporting digital trade for many years but not digital trade standards per se. Other development partners such as the UK and US have only contributed recently to ASEAN DTS. The United Kingdom for example, after becoming a dialogue partner to ASEAN in June 2021, interacted with ACCSQ through its British Standards Institution (BSI) as part of a broader one-off research project mapping adoption of standards across ASEAN. The UK first interacted with the DTSCWG at high-level and introductory-focused 8th DTSCWG meeting held 17-18 March 2022. The UK largely used the opportunity to understand more about DTSCWG, outline the work that the UK is involved in across the region on digital

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[19] Was known formerly as TRPC
[20] Access Partnership 2018, Standards Mapping Report.
[21] Access Partnership correspondence 5 May 2022
[22] Ibid.

standards/the UK's overarching approach to digital standards, and propose areas for future collaboration on digital standards. BSI offered to deliver a high-level policy workshop on a digitalisation toolkit that they've developed, and which is being piloted in Indonesia. United States' interaction with the ASEAN DTS agenda has been led by the US ASEAN Business Council (US-ABC), commencing with a two-day workshop in 2021 and more recently presenting at the DTSCWG meeting in March 2022.[23]

Outcome

The establishment in 2020 of the DTSCWG has enabled ASEAN a better platform to exchange information on standards, identify areas for harmonisation, outline needs for capacity building and technical assistance, engage industry and develop and implement its work program. The creation of the DTSCWG has given the Initiative an avenue and opportunity to engage and collaborate with AMS on a formal and routine basis. It provides the opportunity for active participation and presentations. For example, in 2021 Australia participated and presented at two DTSCWG meetings and was subsequently asked to formally cooperate on two of the three key pillars (facilitating digital transactions and facilitating digital trade logistics and delivery).

Implications for future cooperation

Going forward, the establishment of the DTSCWG not only provides the opportunity for increased AMS engagement on DTS but also increased engagement by Australia on DTS in cooperation with ASEAN. Providing the opportunities for discussion and networking on DTS, it is important that Australia remains engaged to demonstrate its interest and commitment to capacity building and collaboration on DTS and as a vehicle to drive adoption of priority DTS that can help promote economic prosperity and security in the region.

This case study serves as an example of how Australia can help propel activities in ASEAN through providing the catalyst - in this case research, reports and recommendations – to inspire ASEAN to take ownership and bring together key stakeholders to determine their own agenda.

Box 3: DTSCWG Case Study. Source: DTSCWG Work Program 2021-2025; ASEC interviews and correspondence with Access Partnership.

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[23] Ibid.

1D. HOW EFFECTIVELY ARE AMS PARTICIPATING IN INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS FORA AS WELL AS BETWEEN NSBS AND DIGITAL TRADE AGENCIES?

(Criterion – Effectiveness)

Some evidence this is emerging and partially attributable to the program.

The participation of AMS in international standards fora has increased in recent years and this is partially attributable to the Initiative. Fifteen new ASEAN members have joined international standards committees, as shown in the Figure 3, as either participating members or observer members since 2019 and can be partially attributed to the Initiative, noting a range of factors inform AMS decisions to join international fora. The Initiative's work with AMS on standards may have potentially developed or supported their interest in joining these committees but the degree to which the Initiative has contributed to this outcome is difficult to determine.

Figure 3: Number of members across all international standards committee designations Source: Standards Australia correspondence, April 2022.

One challenge identified during consultations for AMS participation in international fora is the limited resources available for DTS in some AMS, limiting participation in fora that require membership fees. A future iteration of the Initiative could explore the possibility of resourcing fora membership for certain countries on an understanding that they would consider self-funding after 1-2 years if they found participation worthwhile.

The extent to which AMS are engaging and communicating among themselves and with Australia on DTS adoption is also evident through the development of the DTSCWG, discussed above. The DTSCWG provides the platform for routine engagement on DTS and so while AMS participation in international standards fora remains relatively low, coordination efforts between NSBs and digital trade agencies has been increasing through this vehicle since its inception.

2 HOW EFFICIENTLY IS DTS MANAGING ITS RESOURCES? IS THE PROGRAM MAKING APPROPRIATE USE OF AUSTRALIA'S TIME AND RESOURCES TO ACHIEVE OUTCOMES?

(Criterion – Efficiency)

DTS is managing its resources efficiently, particularly in terms of management arrangements and financial administration but there is more work to be done on communications and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) implementation and further development of governance arrangements is required.

The current implementation and management arrangements are seen to be efficient to deliver on the Initiative's objectives. The specific expertise and capabilities of each implementing partner are being used effectively. While early interactions between the parties were not always smooth, current arrangements and personnel work well together, better systems are in place and partner contributions were recognised as important and complementary. Implementing partners meet regularly, communicate frequently and respected each other's expertise to enrich the overall Initiative. Standards Australia provides expertise on standards while Access Partnership provides technical capability on digital trade. RMIT is seen as playing an important oversight and management role in articulating requirements and advocating on behalf of the other partners. RMIT is also regarded by Standards Australia and Access Partnership as being adept at recognising its role as representing the Initiative and not as Australian Government representatives. Opportunities for improvement relate to RMIT's management of the MEL component of the Initiative and communications. While Year 4 activities involve the development of communications activities such as a website, RMIT could also focus on policy translation of the Initiative for a less technical audience.

The governance framework for the Initiative has been relatively weak to date. It was initially envisaged the Initiative would be a pillar of an earlier and suspended ASEAN Connectivity Program. The current governance structure has not been able to provide the oversight and guidance sought by DFAT, ASEAN or implementing partners.

The Initiative is currently managed by DFAT's ASEAN Mission which has responsibility for liaising with implementing partners and attending relevant ASEAN meetings such as DTSCWG meetings. Continuing as a standalone program, governance systems could be strengthened through more senior engagement and closer linkages with DFAT Canberra, particularly digital trade specialists. For example, the Initiative would benefit from a deeper, more structured relationship with the Regional Trade Division. This would bring to the Initiative greater technical input and direction and better linkages into other Australian programs and activities.

Consideration could be given to integrating any future phase of the Initiative into the Aus4ASEAN Initiative. Integration into this program would provide the Initiative with access to MEL, GEDSI and communications experts. This would not only help plug some of the gaps identified by this review, but also help socialize the program through ASEAN systems and increase ASEAN buy-in through the Joint Planning and Review Committee (JPRC) mechanism.

The MELP was developed with guidance from Clear Horizon throughout the course of Year 2 and approved by DFAT in November 2020. Feedback on implementation of the MELP noted from Access Partnership and DFAT is that it is not delivering the information required by implementing partners and DFAT. Improvements could be made to ensure data is comparable across activities and year on year and the information collected promotes learning and improvement more effectively. DFAT and implementing partners should provide advice to RMIT on what further information, timeline or format they require to ensure improvement and learning opportunities are taken up appropriately, as well as considering whether more resourcing is required for MEL activities, especially to assist with implementing new Gender Equity Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) considerations.

Interviews identified a need to scale communications activities for a non-technical audience. While the MTR acknowledges several communications activities are scheduled for Year 4, these are largely aimed at a technical audience. The current Year 4 budget estimates communication resourcing at $140,933 for Access Partnership's communications plan and digital platform development and a further $97,570 for case study development. Interviews highlighted that the translation of technical information into a more accessible format will be paramount to ensure that information can be easily communicated through diplomatic and trade channels. A focus on a wider, policy audience across Australia and ASEAN, is required. Translation of technical information will also benefit DFAT counterparts working in AMS on DTS and other trade issues. Interviews highlighted that DFAT counterparts in ASEAN negotiating FTAs need more support which could be a future area of capacity building.[24]

The Initiative is using its modest resources relatively efficiently and for a small investment, the program is delivering well. The budget is being utilised effectively, on balance, with spending impacted by COVID-19 and the introduction of GEDSI and MELPs in subsequent years. The total spend by Standards Australia in the inception

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[24] DFAT interview, April 2022.

phase was $0.4 million. As of December 2021, the total spend for Years 2 and 3 was 80 per cent of the total budget ($2 million). It is estimated to be higher than that as of April 2022. A budget of $900,000 for Year 4 of the financial year 2021/22 was released in May 2022. The remaining budget of $1.1 million will be released for Year 5 using financial year 2022/23. It is likely the entire budget will be fully expended on completion of the Initiative in Year 5.

Year	Expenditure
Year 1	$1,000,000
Year 2	$384,116
Year 3	$1,615,731
Year 4	$900,000
Year 5	$1,100,000 (est.)

Table 3: Initiative Budget Year 1-5

There are lessons to be learned for future investments on the lack of a clear work plan, goals, MEL and GEDSI. It is important to appropriately resource for scale of ASEAN activities and systems. Clear ownership in DFAT of the investment and communication of multilateral activities to country programs would improve the value, efficiency and effectiveness of investments. Having said that, many of these challenges have been addressed and a work plan aligned to the MELP established. This has revealed the opportunity to more fully utilise the capability that has been built in the Initiative to complement Australia's interest in digital trade bilaterally and regionally.

3. IS THE PROGRAM MAKING PROGRESS IN EFFECTIVELY PROMOTING GEDSI IN THE PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION?

(Criterion – GEDSI)

The program is beginning to promote GEDSI more effectively.

During the review period, despite not having a specific focus on GEDSI, the Initiative has effectively promoted GEDSI in several ways. It has played a role in acknowledging and highlighting the gender digital divide across AMS, with some notable standouts having specific programs in place (e.g., Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia). Through highlighting positive initiatives as part of research reports and capacity building exercises, the DTS Initiative has sought to raise awareness of the potential for women's empowerment, gender equality and disability and social inclusion through digital trade.[25]

It has also effectively encouraged the participation of women in workshops and as presenters or facilitators. Across all ten workshops in 2021, 49 per cent of attendees were women and 40 per cent of facilitators or speakers were women. Figures 4 and 5 shows the distribution. Female attendance and facilitation therefore are only marginally lower than male attendance and facilitation. While opportunities for improvement exist, particularly with respect to female presenters, (over which the Initiative has substantial control), it indicates that the program's greater interest in mainstreaming GEDSI will be effective in achieving equal participation.

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[25] Clear Horizon, 2022, DTS Initiative GEDSI strategy
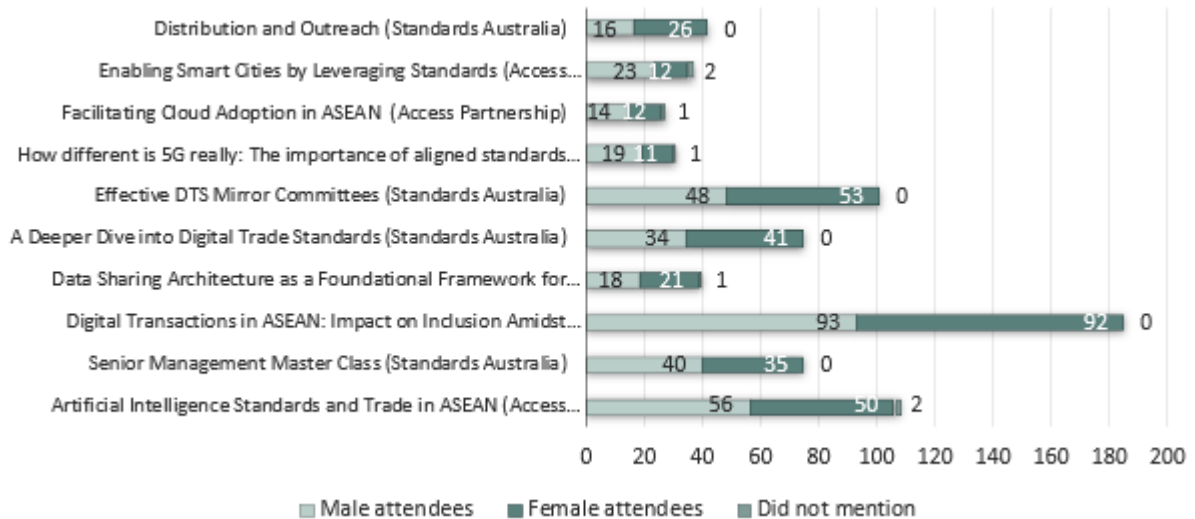
Figure 4: Male and female attendees at capacity building workshops
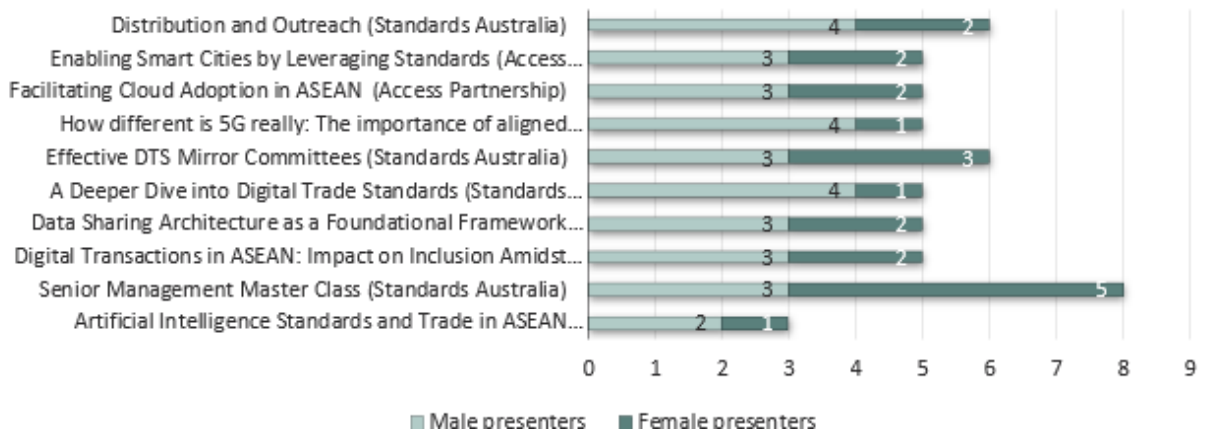
Figure 5: Male and female facilitators at capacity building workshops

These workshops have also played a role in raising awareness about GEDSI issues. Feedback from five workshops highlighted that the participants at the workshop had, to some degree, found the workshops were GEDSI responsive and/or increased awareness on gender and diversity issues. That said, most responses demonstrated a general uncertainty on whether the workshop had increased their knowledge of GEDSI. Figure 6 provides a summary of the feedback from five workshops held in 2021. This information highlights the need for greater consideration of the way in which GEDSI is discussed and integrated into workshops.
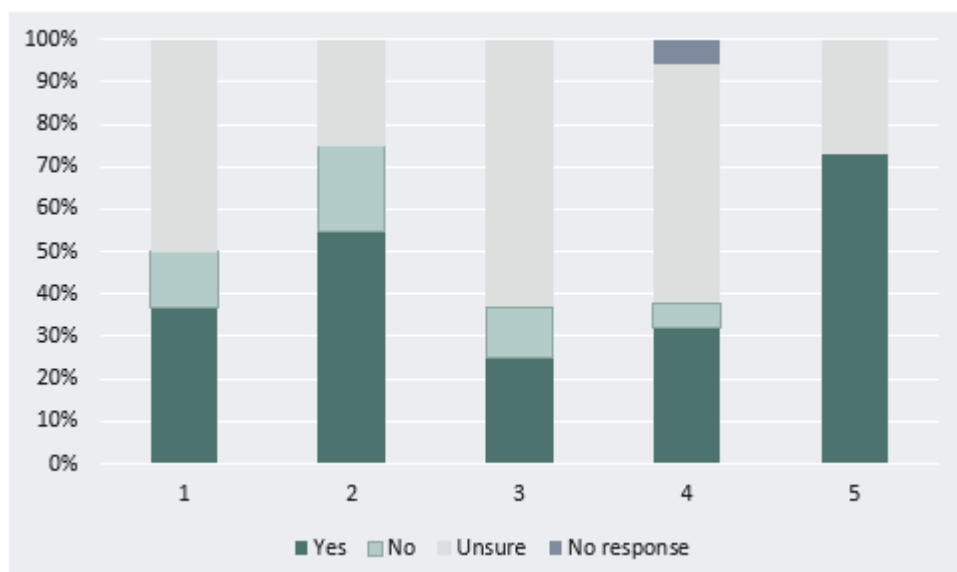
Figure 6 Were the discussions and content of the course responsive to gender equality/women's empowerment and generally accessible to persons with disabilities? Are you now more aware of how your organisation can address gender equality, disability and social inclusion?

ASEC and implementing partners are supportive of the incorporation of GEDSI objectives into the Initiative, but care needs to be taken in navigating the inclusion of GEDSI in a manner appropriate for the scale, scope and context of this program. Early, frequent and both formal and informal engagement with ASEAN on these issues can be helpful. Some implementing partners highlighted the important role of innovative approaches to standards development on GEDSI. For example, promoting standards related to hearing could provide hearing impaired persons with digital access and creating common interfaces and communications could provide hearing impaired persons with improved access to work opportunities, information, and entertainment.

Balancing a focus on GEDSI with technical direction is important to strike the right balance for all partners involved in the Initiative. Implementing partners may require further guidance on GEDSI inclusion and it is recommended that DFAT continue to work closely with RMIT to ensure the effective communication of key messages. Engaging with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and other DFAT programs to mainstream GEDSI should help identify the gaps and opportunities for GEDSI within the Initiative.

4. WHAT ARE THE KEY PROGRAM RISKS THAT MAY AFFECT SUCCESSFULLY ACHIEVING END OF PROGRAM OUTCOMES AND HOW EFFECTIVELY IS THE PROGRAM MANAGING THESE RISKS?

(Criterion – Risk)

The Initiative and DFAT are monitoring key risks with notable challenges that may impact achieving the Initiative's EOPOs include the introduction of other partners entering the ASEAN DTS space.

COVID-19 has imposed a risk to the Initiative making it more difficult to complete the Initiative's scheduled activities and develop effective and important relationships and networks. In response, the Initiative effectively pivoted to an online platform and is well placed to adopt a hybrid model with the budget adequately resourced in Year 4 for in-person workshops and meetings. As travel opportunities open again, the Initiative should seek to increase in-person engagement where possible, as suggested by ASEC in interviews.[26] Should the COVID-19 travel restrictions return, the Initiative will need to consider other options of communicating and networking to overcome the risks associated with online-only delivery of workshops. This could include routine meetings with small groups

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[26] ASEC interview, 6 April 2022.

of key stakeholders and regular online check-ins with ASEC and DTSCWG members on DTS developments and priorities.

Difficulties in demonstrating impact and communicating achievements have presented a risk to the Initiative. Monitoring, reporting and socializing the impact of the Initiative requires further focus. Improved and strengthened MEL implementation and increased resources for communications are required to ensure the Initiative can report on its impact effectively.

Lacking more connection with DFAT Canberra means the Initiative lacks sufficient technical input and oversight from Canberra. It also means that its outputs are not being leveraged sufficiently across Government programs and this risks the sustainability of the Initiative. Currently, the DFAT ASEAN post updates DFAT Canberra on a needs-dependent basis without routine and strategic oversight from Canberra. A more formal governance structure such as a Steering Committee is recommended to provide sufficient oversight and ongoing support.

In interviews ASEC requested more visibility and engagement by the Australian Government, reflecting the priority and value they place on Australia's role in DTS. The unique position Australia has established in relation to ASEAN's digital trade agenda will require more attentive management, senior and official engagement, given competing interests and donor entry into the digital trade policy area, to retain the trusted position Australia has built through the DTS Initiative with ASEAN.

Increased interest in DTS demonstrated by other development partners, particularly in recent years, amplifies this challenge and poses a risk that ASEAN DTS may become a more crowded and contested space. Other partners may take a more commercial or political focus as compared to Australia's development focused approach which should be acknowledged and maintained as a key Australian value to ASEAN. Some partners have indicated they would like to explore collaboration opportunities with Australia. A stronger governance framework will help facilitate more effective future collaboration with donor or dialogue partners.

Further risk analysis and mitigation strategies are provided in Annex 5.

5. HOW EFFECTIVELY HAS THE PROGRAM PIVOTED TO ADDRESS THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 AND CONTRIBUTED TO COVID-19 RECOVERY EFFORTS?

DTS has proven highly adaptive and relevant in response to COVID-19.

At the implementation level, the impact of COVID-19 on the Initiative was to prohibit in-person workshops and other face-to-face meetings. In response, the Initiative was able to effectively shift away from in-person workshops to online workshops and seminars, to continue delivering project activities. These created opportunities to reach a broader audience and participation and engagement remained high online. A more diverse audience was also reached through online options.

At the same time however, the strength of some relationships was affected. This impacted the effectiveness of the program as it did not provide the opportunity for in person engagement, relationship building and networking – all of which are vital to working effectively in the ASEAN context. Interviews suggested a hybrid model with some in-person and some web-based capacity building and training options in the upcoming years of the Initiative 2022 and 2023-24. ASEAN noted the importance of Australian Government officials attending DTSCWG and other relevant meetings in-person where possible to develop those relationships further and to see evidence of Australia's interest in DTS and the Initiative.

The program also contributed to COVID-19 recovery efforts (both *Australian Partnerships for Recovery – Australia's COVID-19 Development Response* and ASEAN's *COVID-19 Development Response Plan*) through providing the platform and environment for increased digital trade. COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of DTS through speeding up the process of digitalisation in sectors like health, finance and education services. It has also accelerated the adoption of digital payments.[27] At a regional level, the pandemic has threatened to increase

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[27] DTS 2021, DTS Year 4 Workplan

inequalities within and among AMS and without targeted policies to reach, vulnerable and marginalised groups, more people in ASEAN could be left behind.[28]

The extent to which the Initiative has helped these recovery efforts is difficult to estimate, however, it is evident that demand for greater regional digital integration has been hastened by the onset of COVID-19 and the timing of the Initiative, in particular the creation of the DTSCWG, has meant that it has been well placed to contribute to these recovery efforts.

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[28] Ibid.

Recommendations

The Initiative is assessed as being likely to achieve most of its EOPOs by the end of the current program. The Initiative's strength is its capacity to build knowledge and awareness on DTS. The development of the DTSCWG is a good indicator that awareness, engagement and adoption of DTS has grown in recent years and this can be attributed in a large part to the Initiative. Engagement in international DTS fora has increased and while it is difficult to attribute this growth exclusively to the Initiative, there is evidence of extensive activity by the Initiative in support of this outcome. Slow progress in adoption of priority DTS is to be expected given that standard development is a long process that can take anywhere from ten to 15 years to see adoption. As such, the MTR rates achievement against the end of program outcomes in Table 4.

#	End of Program Outcome	Rating
1	AMS being more aware of DTS development processes and how DTS can support digital trade and economic growth.	**Evidence this is occurring and attributable to the program.**
2	Better engagement in international DTS fora as well as between NSBs and digital trade agencies.	**Some evidence this is emerging and partially attributable to the program.**
3.	Greater adoption of priority DTS by AMS.	**Some evidence this is emerging and partially attributable to the program.**

Table 4: EOPO ratings.

Australia should support a further phase of the Initiative once the current phase finishes in 2023-24. It would strengthen Australia's commitment to ASEAN particularly in terms of promoting trade in the region as well as position Australia as a key leader and collaborator on digital trade. Close consideration would be required on the areas for improvement and recommendations (provided in Table 5) to ensure the next iteration incorporated past lessons learned. Consideration should also be given to whether this Initiative would better fit into the Aus4ASEAN program and the value of moving the Initiative under this umbrella.

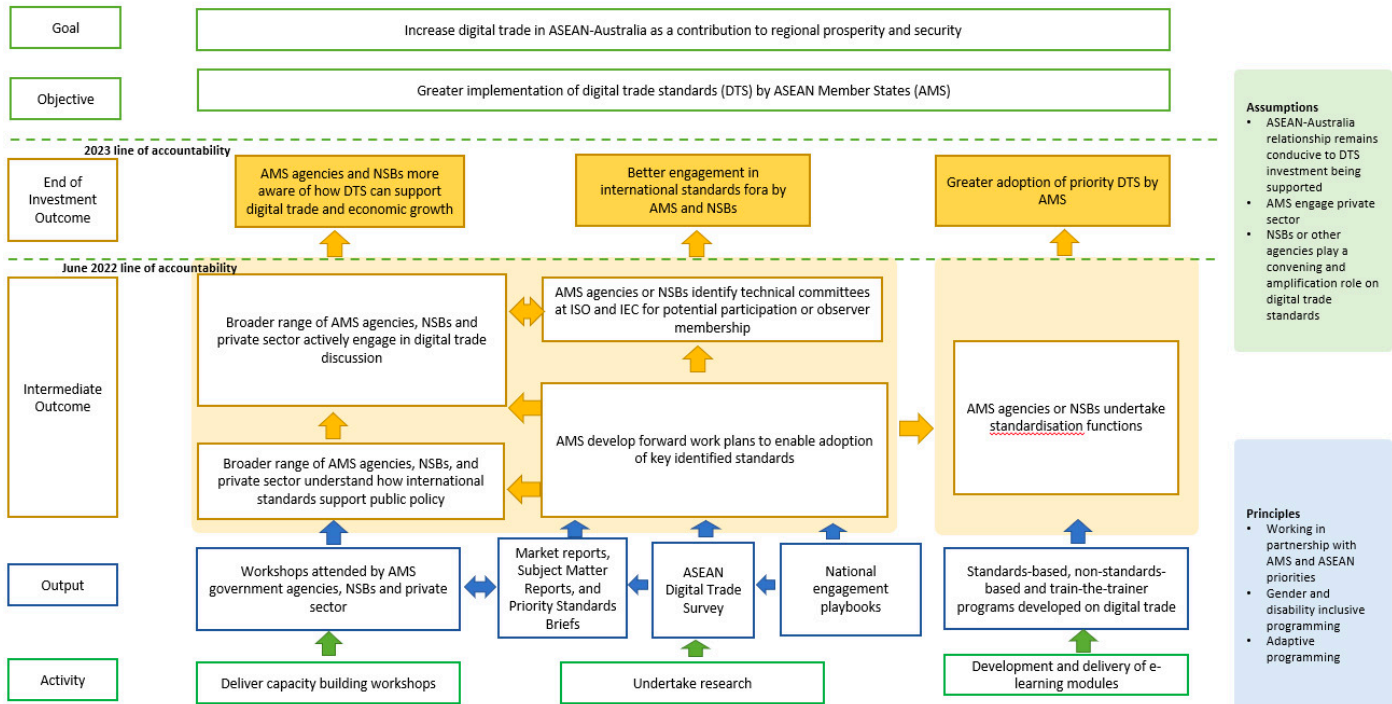**Recommendations for Australia's current support to DTS:**

#	Review Finding	Recommendation	Discussion

1	Governance: Lack of a governance structure reduces strategic coherence and leverage.	The establishment of a steering committee comprised of:
		
		» Chair of DTSCWG or representative
		» Director, Market Integration Directorate, ASEAN Secretariat
		» Head of Mission (HOM) and/or Deputy Head of mission (DHOM)
		» DFAT Canberra representative possibly from Regional Trade Division and/or Digital Trade Section
		» Implementing partners including
		   o RMIT's APEC Study Centre
		   o Access Partnership
		   o Standards Australia
		
		The steering committee could meet periodically to provide routine engagement the Initiative requires. Meeting agendas may cover Initiative updates, Australian Government, ASEAN and AMS activity relevant to the Initiative, with a particular focus on outcomes achieved and related communication activities.
			A stronger governance framework will support the Initiative by providing ASEAN and DFAT with better oversight of the Initiative and greater technical input to help steer it forward.
			
			It would also help ensure the Initiative is appropriately leveraged across other Australian Government programs. It would drive consistency, connect the program to other relevant Australian activities such as regional trade initiatives. This will also ensure more effective coordination with other donors to maintain Australia's valued and trusted position in relation to DTS and avoid duplication and tensions.
			
			Stronger governance of the Initiative would also help maintain Australia's status as a committed, trusted and engaged partner on ASEAN trade and economic issues.
			
			It will be important for the Initiative to be recognized as an ASEAN program, aligned with ASEC's criteria, process, and governance systems. The establishment of a steering committee would help the program meet ASEC governance requirements.[29]

2	Communications: Lack of non-technical communications.	It is recommended that communications for a non-technical audience be enhanced through RMIT's own communications team. This will ensure outcomes are communicated in a practical way and to a wider audience. Potentially, more resources may be needed to leverage the full benefit of the Initiative from a policy translation perspective.	Better communication of project outcomes will help improve program visibility and recognition. The creation of tangible narratives will promote the Initiative's value both externally to ASEAN Member States and the ASEAN Secretariat and other interested parties through HOM and other senior leader communications and inwardly to other Australian programs and posts.
3	MEL: MEL implementation not delivering the information required by implementing partners and DFAT.	DFAT and implementing partners should provide advice to RMIT on what further information, timeline or format they require to ensure improvement and learning opportunities are taken up appropriately, as well as considering whether more resourcing is required for MEL activities, especially to assist with better mainstreaming GEDSI.	More effective MEL capacity will ensure the program's overall impact is being monitored and documented adequately. It will enable clearer insights into what are the good practices and lessons emerging from the implementation.
4	GEDSI: GEDSI principles are yet to be fully incorporated into the implementation of the Initiative.	Care needs to be taken in navigating the inclusion of GEDSI in a manner appropriate for this program. It is important to recognise that GEDSI considerations are new to the investment and their inclusion takes time. DFAT should work closely with ASEC and implementing partners to ensure the appropriate and balanced incorporation of GEDSI principles through the Initiative.	Early, frequent and both formal and informal engagement with ASEAN on GEDSI can be helpful. DFAT's greater involvement in the Initiative (as per recommendation #1), will help provide the routine contact to enable these conversations. It will also help clarify how GEDSI can appropriately and proportionally be applied to the program with implementing partners.
5	COVID-19 travel restrictions reduced	A return to Australian Government representation at key meetings to demonstrate support and leadership is	Travel and movement restrictions inhibited Australian Government attendance at key meetings. A return to in-person attendance will demonstrate

[29] Refer ASEAN Cooperation Projects Design and Management Manual https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/ASEAN-Cooperation-Projects-Design-and-Management-Manual.pdf, 6.5.2 Governance Mechanism, p 48

#	Review Finding	Recommendation	Discussion
	opportunities for networking and relationship building by Australian Government officials and implementing partners.	recommended now that COVID-19 restrictions have eased. Capacity building workshops and training should take place in person, where possible.	Australia's support and leadership in the DTS space. It will also provide the opportunity to better understand the needs of specific AMS. COVID-19 travel restrictions also impacted the delivery of in-person workshops. Although it presented some benefits catering to a wider audience, it also presented challenges for established relationships. A return to in-person training at workshops is important to strengthen relationships and networks. .

Table 5: Recommendations

Annex 1 Program Logic

Goal	Increase digital trade in ASEAN-Australia as a contribution to regional prosperity and security
Objective	Greater implementation of digital trade standards (DTS) by ASEAN Member States (AMS)

2023 line of accountability

End of Investment Outcome	

- AMS agencies and NSBs more aware of how DTS can support digital trade and economic growth
- Better engagement in international standards fora by AMS and NSBs
- Greater adoption of priority DTS by AMS

Assumptions
- ASEAN-Australia relationship remains conducive to DTS investment being supported
- AMS engage private sector
- NSBs or other agencies play a convening and amplification role on digital trade standards

June 2022 line of accountability

Intermediate Outcome	

- Broader range of AMS agencies, NSBs and private sector actively engage in digital trade discussion
- AMS agencies or NSBs identify technical committees at ISO and IEC for potential participation or observer membership
- AMS develop forward work plans to enable adoption of key identified standards
- Broader range of AMS agencies, NSBs, and private sector understand how international standards support public policy
- AMS agencies or NSBs undertake standardisation functions

Principles
- Working in partnership with AMS and ASEAN priorities
- Gender and disability inclusive programming
- Adaptive programming

Output	

- Workshops attended by AMS government agencies, NSBs and private sector
- Market reports, Subject Matter Reports, and Priority Standards Briefs
- ASEAN Digital Trade Survey
- National engagement playbooks
- Standards-based, non-standards-based and train-the-trainer programs developed on digital trade

Activity	

- Deliver capacity building workshops
- Undertake research
- Development and delivery of e-learning modules

Annex 2 Documents

Date	Document	Type
May 2015	Development for All 2015–2020. Strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in Australia's aid program	Policy
February 2016	Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy	Policy
April 2017	DFAT Monitoring and Evaluation Standards	Policy
September 2018	Accelerating Digital Trade: Prospects for Closer ASEAN and Australia Standards Cooperation and Collaboration	Issues Paper
November 2018	ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	Plan
December 2018	ASEAN – Australia Digital Trade Standards Cooperation Initiative -	Recommendations report
March 2019	DTS investment concept note	Concept note
2020	ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework	Policy
February 2020	ASEAN-Australia Digital Trade Standards Initiative: Progress Report	Progress report
May 2020	DFAT Partnerships for Recovery – Australia's COVID-19 Development Response	Policy
September 2020	Australia-Singapore Digital Economy Cooperation on Standards	Research Report
December 2020	Indonesia Market Report	Market report
December 2020	Myanmar Market Report	Market report
2021/2022	Digital Trade Standard Initiatives – Twitter's records	Media product
2021	Annual Investment Monitoring Report	Monitoring report
March 2021	ASEAN Member States (AMS) Playbooks	Market report
March 2021	AI Standards and Trade in ASEAN	Workshop Outcomes Report
June 2021	Data Sharing Architecture as a Foundational Framework	Workshop Outcomes Report
June 2021	Digital Transactions in ASEAN—Impact on Inclusion Amidst COVID-19	Workshop Outcomes Report
June 2021	Monitoring, evaluation and learning plan for the ASEAN-Australia digital trade standards initiative	MEL
June 2021	ASEAN-Australia Digital Trade Standards Initiative Workplan Year 3	Work plan

Date	Document	Type
July 2021	Philippines Market Report	Market report
July 2021	Malaysia Market Report	Market report
September 2021	ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021–2025	Plan
2022	Mid-term review (MTR) of the ASEAN-Australia digital trade standards (DTS) initiative	Terms of Reference (ToR)
Jan 2022	ASEAN-Australia Digital Trade Standards Initiative – Progress Report 3	Progress report
February 2022	ASEAN-Australia Digital Trade Standards Initiative – Year 4 work plan	Work plan
April 2022	DTS workplan Y4 and slide presentation to DTSCWG	
April 2022	DTS Initiative Slide Deck	Slide Deck
April 2022	ASEAN Digital Trade survey and technical brief.	Brief
April 2022	AMS feedback on the workplan	Feedback brief
April 2022	Plan of Action and the draft of the Plan of Action matrix	Matrix
April 2022	DTS Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion Strategy	Strategy Paper
April 2022	Australian Government Digital Trade Strategy	Strategy Paper

Table 6: Documents reviewed

Annex 3 Consultations

Name	Position	Organisation
Will Nankervis	Head of Mission	Australian Mission to ASEAN, DFAT
Caroline Scott	Deputy Head of Mission	Australian Mission to ASEAN, DFAT
Adrian Gilbert Siti Fitriyanti	First Secretary (Economy) Senior Program Manager	Australian Mission to ASEAN, DFAT
Timothy Smith Bia Puspita	Program Director AADCP II Senior Regional Portfolio Manager, ASEAN-ACT	Australian Mission to ASEAN, DFAT
Amber Cernovs	Assistant Director, Myanmar Taskforce, Development Section	DFAT Canberra
Kerry Sillcock	Assistant Director, Digital Trade Section, RTD	DFAT Canberra
Teresa Barnes	Assistant Director, ASEAN and Regional Programs, US and Indo-Pacific Strategy Division	DFAT Canberra
Charles Thursby-Pelham	First Secretary (Economy)	Australian Embassy, Vietnam
Bonnie Rivendell Roslyn Zakaria Jack Gelveson	Program Director Senior Advisor Project M&E officer	Australian APEC Study Centre (AASC) at RMIT
Peter Lovelock Grace Gown Faiza Saleem	Head, Fair Tech Policy Head, Global Government Advisory Manager, Global Government Advisory	Access Partnership
Karen Batt Clare Hobern Abbey Dorian	Head of International Senior Manager, International Engagement Manager International Engagement Manager	Standards Australia
Bui Thanh Hung Ichwan Makmur Nasution	Chair (outgoing) Chair (incoming)	Digital Trade Standards and Conformance Working Group (DTSCWG)
Isagani C. Erna B. Lusia Herwahyu S.	Assistant Director, Standard & Conformance Division Technical Officer, Standard & Conformance Division	ASEAN Secretariat ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Department

Table 7: Consultations

Annex 4 Workshop feedback on planned activities

#	Workshop	Following the workshop participants reported they plan to do the following -
1	How different is 5G really: The importance of aligned standard to accelerating industry	» Strengthen advocacy to regional governments for new 5G policies. » Reach out to SMEs to encourage adoption of latest technology and increase business productivity » Assist young entrepreneurs to build their skills base. » Incorporate 5G modules into tertiary curriculums, and share the knowledge gained with government officials and colleagues.
2	Artificial Intelligence Standards and Trade in ASEAN	» Strengthen AI policy advocacy. » Provide more advisory services to SMEs on the initiatives and programs available to facilitate AI adoption. » Educate others on AI standards and push for more stakeholder engagement. » Push for more AI driven software that removes regulatory burdens on businesses.
3	Facilitating Cloud Adoption in ASEAN	» Review company policies and long-term strategic planning. » Explore the possibility of cooperating with new organisations and interest groups. » On-board SMEs by leveraging cloud service platforms and programs which accelerate technology adoption.
4	Data sharing architecture as a foundational framework for digital trade	» Conduct their own DTS webinars for local stakeholders and colleagues to share the knowledge gained. » Reach out to SMEs and encourage a greater adoption of technology. » Learn more about the available software for data sharing and evaluate existing workplace regulation. » Incorporate the knowledge gained into workplace advocacy and presentations, write better policy papers using this knowledge and conduct further research. » Enhance the digital infrastructure of individual workplace systems, and better advise colleagues and government accordingly.
5	Enabling smart cities by leveraging standards	» Stay up to date with APEC movements. » Develop workplace plans which implement relevant policies and procedures to address the knowledge gained and apply this knowledge in research paper writings. » Identify the relevant stakeholders in this space, including from the government and private sectors. » Set up roundtable discussions on pathways forward, and share the knowledge gained about smart city standards with colleagues.

Table 8: Post-workshop summary feedback on intended actions. Source: Summarised from MELP outputs 2021/22.

Annex 5 Risks

Risk	Risk type	Description	Risk level	Potential Response	Updat-ed risk level	Current treatment
COVID-19	Inability to complete the Initiative's scheduled activities and develop important relationship and networks.	The inability to have face to face meetings/workshops reduces their effectiveness and therefore the program's ability to meet its outcomes.	Medium	As travel opportunities open again, the Initiative should adopt a hybrid model of workshop delivery, with a mix of in-person and online engagement. If restrictions return, the Initiative should consider alternate ways to maintain communication with key stakeholders such as through routine small group meetings and regular check-ins with DTSCWG and ASEC members on DTS developments.	Low	Initiative effectively pivoted to an online platform and is well placed to adopt a hybrid model with the budget adequately resourced in year 4 for in-person workshops and meetings.
Demonstrating impact	The Initiative struggles to report on its impact effectively.	A key weakness of the Initiative is socialising the impact of DTS adoption.	Medium	Improved and strengthened MEL implementation and increased focus on communications are required to ensure the Initiative can report on its impact effectively.	Low	MEL information is collected on a routine base and shared with partners. Communications activities scheduled for Year 4.
Sustainability risks	Lack of governance and strategic oversight.	The Initiative lacks sufficient oversight from Canberra. Outputs are not being leveraged sufficiently across Government programs.	Medium	A more formal governance structure such as a Steering Committee is recommended to provide sufficient oversight of the Initiative including from DFAT Canberra.	Low	ASEAN post updates DFAT Canberra on an as needed basis.
Geopolitical/ Geoeconomic	Political risk	Capacity building and advocacy on DTS may become overcrowded with other partners more focused on corporate objectives.	Medium	Australia coordinates with donors to ensure space exists for Australia's important role to engage with ASEAN on DTS and continue partnership. Ensure continued capacity building and encouragement of AMS to participate in standards setting and	Low	Australian Government engages through implementing partners and more recently on a routine basis with ASEC and DTSCWG. Coordination with other

Risk	Risk type	Description	Risk level	Potential Response	Updat-ed risk level	Current treatment
				international cooperation mechanisms. Creation of Steering Group would provide greater oversight and could act as a vehicle for donor coordination and collaboration.		donors limited to ad hoc basis.

Table 9: Risks, responses and treatment.