



AUSTRALIA ASSISTS

END OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

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Report prepared by Alinea International

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Alinea International acknowledges that our Australian head office is on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation and their sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to their elders – past, present and emerging. We acknowledge and seek to champion the continued connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to land, waterways and community, and we pay our respects to all First Nations people whose communities we work in around the world.

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Abbreviations

ACC	Australian Civilian Corps
AHPSU	Australian Humanitarian Partnership Support Unit
AVP	Australian Volunteer Program
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EOPO	End of Program Outcome
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HPD	Humanitarian Partnerships Division
IP	Intellectual Property
KEQ	Key Evaluation Question
KII	Key Informant Interview
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Adaptation and Learning
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTR	Mid Term Review
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office
NEMO	National Emergency Management Office
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PER	Performance Evaluation Rating
PSEAH	Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNSBP	United Nations Standby Partnership
VfM	Value for Money
WHS	Work Health and Safety

Executive Summary

Australia Assists is an Australian Government funded program, implemented by RedR Australia, that deploys technical specialists to work with governments, multilateral agencies, and communities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters and conflict. The AUD 84.7m program¹ enables the mobilisation and deployment of specialists into geographic and thematic areas of priority in line with Australia's humanitarian responsibilities and national interests. Australia Assists was borne of two previous Australian Government deployment mechanisms: the Australian Civilian Corps (ACC), and the Australian Government's partnership with RedR Australia.

Alinea International was commissioned by DFAT to conduct an independent evaluation pursuant to DFAT's Aid Evaluation Policy. It has been conducted in 2022, in advance of the program's completion date of June 2024, such that findings may be used to inform decisions on the next phase of the program design. The evaluation focused on the effectiveness of the investment and achievement of outcomes, its relevance and value for money.

In summary, the evaluation has found Australia Assists is highly valued and performing well against most outcomes. It offers substantive value in humanitarian action and to Australia's relationships in the Indo-Pacific region and globally. The mechanism for delivering these outcomes however is not quite fit for purpose. The program lost some of the benefits Australia gained from the Australian Civilian Corps (ACC), which allowed it greater diplomatic influence on a government-to-government basis. The program would benefit from a clearer articulation of DFAT's objectives and an update to the program design and contract to better align with those objectives. Some key functional areas, particularly monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEAL), must also be improved.

Effectiveness: The Australia Assists program is on track to achieving most of its end of program outcomes. This is facilitated by the high quality of people recruited and deployed, and the training and deployment management provided by RedR. However, this finding is based upon less than robust evidence, in particular a lack of outcome orientated evidence, and End of Program Outcomes (EOPOs) that do not lend themselves to quantifiable measurement².

There is a gap in the program's ability to fully deliver end of program outcome EOPO 2, that states "Improved ability for Australia and partner countries to prepare for and respond to disasters, conflict and fragility". **The Australia Assists program has achieved outcomes for partner countries but has not delivered a rapid response deployment option (between 24 hours and 5 days) as compared to other United Nations (UN) Standby Partners and other deployment mechanisms.** A limited approach to deployment types and employee management are significant factors that constrain Australia Assists from providing rapid response capability.

The Australia Assists program has made progress on cross-cutting themes, including its gender and localisation strategies. Going forward, Australia Assists should accelerate its localisation action, strengthen disability inclusion, and formally incorporate climate change within the Theory of Change.

In terms of operations, there is an effective risk management architecture in place. RedR's Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment policy (PSEAH) is in line with DFAT's. There is however evidence that it could be strengthened, both through future contracts and in implementation.

Most of the recommendations made in the Mid-Term Review of Australia Assists are progressing. **One key area for improvement is implementation of recommendations to the program's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEAL)**

¹ As at 30 June 2022.

² The EOPOs are framed as goals rather than SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound) outcomes.

system. Although improvements have been made, the MEAL system is not collecting and reporting sufficient data to inform learning, accountability and decision making. The level of resourcing dedicated to MEAL is substantively below DFAT standards.

The evaluation team identified several contractual clause issues that will need to be rectified going forward (either during the current contract or for a new contract following the end of the current phase). These issues include **a lack of clarity in the contract around expectations relating to intellectual property and branding, and a gap in the contract reporting requirements regarding income-generation from Australia Assists funded activities.** Resolving these issues would enhance transparency and accountability and DFAT and RedR contract management.

Relevance: The **Australia Assists program is highly relevant to Australia’s humanitarian priorities and key policies such as the Foreign Policy White Paper and Partnerships for Recovery.** It is highly valued by Australia’s responding partners, and by DFAT staff. It is considered an important part of DFAT’s humanitarian toolkit and contributes to DFAT’s influence and relationships. The mechanism and contract however have not proved entirely fit for purpose to deliver maximum effectiveness and value for money in areas such as branding and the ability to leverage other donor funds.

Value for Money: Overall, the **Australia Assists program delivers value for money** when compared to previous and existing deployment mechanisms, though this may be attributed to relatively low deployee remuneration compared to Australia’s other deployments. The program’s value is also derived from its relevance and effectiveness as outlined above, its strong alignment with, and delivery against, Australia’s humanitarian priorities; its credibility among DFAT’s humanitarian partners; and its contribution to DFAT’s influence. In addition to the improvements recommended above, the design of the next Australia Assists program should consider alternative delivery models and an open approach to market to confirm the best Value for Money (VfM) for DFAT.

Going forward: This evaluation is well-timed to inform the design of the next Australia Assists program, that should see the program evolve to meet new challenges for Australia’s deployee response mechanism. The recommendations, summarised below, are intended to be forward looking to inform the design process, as well as the remaining 18 months of program implementation.

Recommendations

Recommendations for DFAT

1. The new design should progress the Australia Assists Deployment Framework towards a more sophisticated, multi-tiered approach that enables greater variability in deployment mechanisms including: enhanced rapid response (24–48 hours following signing of a mission directive from DFAT), increased in-country surge capability (including through an enhanced localisation approach), an advanced approach and focus on disability inclusion, incorporation of climate change mitigation and adaptation in the Theory of Change, and increased non-host organisation placements.³

Document References: Effectiveness in meeting intended outcomes; Effectiveness of management of Australia Assists (EOPO5); Effectiveness of thematic priorities; Alignment with DFAT's Requirements and Contribution to DFAT's humanitarian priorities and response capabilities; Fit for purpose: Capability; Encouraging competition; Experimentation and Innovation.

2. The new design for Australia Assists should include management models that provide DFAT with an enhanced bandwidth to engage with the implementing partner in contractual, technical, and strategic matters related to the program, and engage with international fora, regional organisations and with Posts (for example, by in-sourcing management support).

Document References: Effectiveness in meeting intended outcomes; Effectiveness of management of Australia Assists (EOPO5); Relevance for Australia's Global footprint and influence; Fit for purpose: Capability; Accountability and Transparency; Evidence-based decision making.

3. Utilise the opportunity afforded by the upcoming design process to develop a new Theory of Change and Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEAL) system (including a structured approach to adaptive management and continuous improvement) and conduct a baseline study. This will provide the new phase with a robust MEAL system, data sets and tools to begin implementation.

Document References: Effectiveness in meeting intended outcomes; Effectiveness of the Theory of Change (ToC); Effectiveness of the Monitoring, Evaluation, Adaptation and Learning System.

4. Conduct a review of DFAT's approach to branding humanitarian assistance across all humanitarian investments, with a view to the development of a strong and consistent brand going forward and consider drawing upon external communications expertise to facilitate the process.

Document References: Effectiveness in meeting intended outcomes; Branding and visibility of Australia Assists (EOPO4.3).

5. Ensure sufficient DFAT resourcing (time and human resources) of the design, tender, contract negotiations and implementation, to ensure the next phase has the right foundations to implement an enhanced deployment framework and management approach.

Document References: Proportionality.

³ Meaning deployee placements that do not rely upon an MOU with a host organisation.

Recommendations for DFAT and RedR

6. Current Contract: Strengthen the distinction between the Australia Assists program and RedR, and address issues that emerged through this evaluation (intellectual property, branding and MEAL) with a view to enhancing clarity, accountability, and transparency, and agree expectations through to contract end. This could be achieved through a series of facilitated discussions to negotiate a contract amendment between DFAT and RedR, with a contracts specialist to provide advice.

Document References: Effectiveness in meeting intended outcomes; Branding and visibility of Australia Assists (EOPO4.3); Fit for purpose contract; Accountability and Transparency.

7. Focus the current Australia Assists MEAL resourcing (and increase if needed), on collecting outcome data that will contribute to the End of Program Completion Report in 2023.⁴

Document References: Effectiveness in meeting intended outcomes; Effectiveness of the Monitoring, Evaluation, Adaptation and Learning System; Evidence-based decision making.

8. Strengthen complaints handling in line with emerging best practice through the introduction of an independent complaints handling mechanism and consider introducing one for DFAT's humanitarian assistance more broadly.

Document References: PSEAH (Recommendation Reference: 8); Performance and Risk Management.



⁴ The Australia Assists program team will need to draw upon M&E methods that do not rely upon historical outcome data and instead utilise methods such as outcome harvesting and most significant change to capture outcomes.

Introduction

Australia Assists is an Australian Government funded program, implemented by RedR Australia (RedR), that deploys technical specialists to work with governments, multilateral agencies, and communities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters and conflict. The 7-year, \$84.7 million⁵ program (2017-2024) program enables the mobilisation and deployment of specialists into geographic and thematic areas of priority in line with Australia's humanitarian responsibilities and national interests.

Australia Assists responds to sudden onset and emerging humanitarian needs as they arise, with a focus on the Pacific, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa regions. The program deploys technical specialists to Australia's global partners, including United Nations (UN) organisations, host governments, multilateral organisations, and non-government organisations (NGOs), to help them prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural disasters and conflicts. In doing so the program strengthens bilateral and multilateral relationships held by the Australian Government and enhances Australia's foreign policy and international diplomacy efforts.

The current Australia Assists program was built on the strengths of two previous Australian deployment mechanisms: the Australian Civilian Corps (ACC), and the Australian Government's partnership with RedR Australia. Through the United Nations Standby Partnership (UNSBP) and in consultation with DFAT stakeholders, the program funds temporary deployments to the UN to help boost their surge capability to respond to a humanitarian event at the national, regional, or global level. It draws on expertise from a stand-by roster of over 933 technical specialists, reflecting the skills and experience required in the multifaceted contexts of humanitarian preparedness, response, and recovery.

The long-term goal of the Australia Assists program is to 'save lives and alleviate suffering by building resilience and responding to disaster and conflict'. It does this through five end of program outcome (EOPO) areas: EOPO 1 Stability, Resilience and Risk Reduction, EOPO 2 Crisis Preparedness and Response, EOPO 3 Stabilisation, Recovery and Reconstruction, EOPO 4 Quality of Humanitarian Action, EOPO 5 Program Management.

Purpose

The evaluation is intended to serve DFAT's dual purpose: to account for Australia's investment in Australia Assists, and inform improvements to future investments. The evaluation will provide DFAT decision-makers with high quality performance information which will be used to inform management decisions, including on any potential future phases of the investment.

Scope

The evaluation covers five years of the investment's design and implementation, from October 2017 to June 2022. DFAT commissioned a mid-term review of the program in September 2019 – this evaluation will draw on the findings and recommendations of that report. It will focus on measuring the effectiveness, relevance, and value for money of the program, as well as capturing lessons learnt and provide options and recommendations for DFAT as future phases of the investment are considered.

The evaluation will examine Australia Assists and its implementation in terms of alignment with DFAT policies on localisation, gender, disability inclusion, child protection, prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH) and climate change mitigation.

⁵ As at 30 June 2022.

Methodology

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach, combining key informant interviews (KIIs), document review, focus group discussions (FGDs), a survey of deployees and data analysis.

Document Review

The document review has focused on primary literature provided to the evaluation team by DFAT and RedR. Relevant extracts from these documents have been coded and analysed against the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) and are reflected in the initial findings.

Key documents that are important points of reference for the reader are the Investment Design Document (2016); the contract between DFAT and RedR (amendment 3 and 4), the approved Evaluation Plan (2022), the Independent Mid-Term Review (2019), and the program logic (two versions – the original and an updated version from 2022 that was not finalised). Key documents also include DFAT policies, financial data provided by RedR, RedR reports (including deployee reports from the field plus deployee data statistics, annual reports and annual plans), and DFAT investment monitoring reports (IMRs). A full list of documents reviewed is contained in Annex 1.

Key Informant Interviews

A total of 40 KIIs and 6 FGDs have been completed (see Annex 2). Those interviewed include:

- DFAT Post and Canberra staff, past and currently responsible for managing Australia Assists.
- RedR staff, one Board member in Australia, and Australia Assists Regional Program Managers.
- Host organisations, including representatives from partner governments and the UN.
- A sample of RedR current and former deployees.
- Representatives of organisations with a similar surge mechanism (see Comparative Analysis).

Survey

A total of 243 Australia Assists deployees were requested to complete an online survey, with 136 responses received - a 56% response rate. Alinea used SurveyMonkey to collect and record informants' responses to the questionnaire. Analysis of survey data used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Demographic data was analysed quantitatively, to provide a profile and background of survey participants. Parts 3 to 7 of the database were analysed by identifying salient themes, sub-themes, and informative perspectives within informants' narratives.

Limitations

Limitations to the evaluation are concerned with access to data. Firstly, resources did not allow for in-depth studies with host organisations, partner governments, and beneficiaries (e.g., communities intended to benefit from Australia Assists). For example, outcome harvesting with partner governments and host organisations might have provided useful outcome data but is a resource intensive process. Drawing conclusions at the outcome level were difficult because:

- i. The Program lacks historical data at the outcome level, including a baseline to measure outcomes over time. Consequently, the evaluation team found it difficult to arrive at definitive conclusions regarding outcome achievement.
- ii. The ToC does not lend itself to measurable outcomes because its EOPOs lack specificity.

These limitations notwithstanding, the Evaluation Team had access to numerous documents that enabled the Team to draw conclusions from this secondary data.

Performance Rating Key

Rating: Good Performance is good, and no actions required

Rating: Reasonable Performance is reasonable however suggested actions are included to strengthen outcomes either now or in new phase

Rating: Weak Performance is less than desirable, and action required within current contract period

Findings: Effectiveness

Effectiveness KEQs	Rating
Effectiveness in meeting the intended outcomes	Rating: Reasonable
Strategic Objective 1: Reformed Global Humanitarian System (EOPO 4)	Rating: Reasonable
Strategic Objective 2: Reduced Disaster Risk (EOPO 1)	Rating: Reasonable
Strategic Objective 3: Enhanced Preparedness and Response (EOPO 2)	Rating: Reasonable
Strategic Objective 4: Prioritised Early Recovery (EOPO 3)	Rating: Reasonable
Branding and visibility of Australia Assists (EOPO4.3)	Rating: Weak
Effectiveness of the management of Australia Assists (EOPO5)	Rating: Reasonable
Effective deployee recruitment, mobilisation, and management	Rating: Good
Effectiveness of the Theory of Change	Rating: Weak
Effectiveness of the MEAL system	Rating: Weak
Progress on the recommendations from the MTR	Rating: Reasonable
Effectiveness of RedR in managing the policy and thematic priorities:	Rating: Reasonable

Effectiveness in meeting intended outcomes

Rating: Reasonable



Key Finding: Australia Assists is highly valued by its key stakeholders, particularly DFAT and UN Stand-By Partners (UNSBP). This evaluation cannot definitively conclude that Australia Assists is meeting its intended End of Program Outcomes (EOPOs) for two reasons:

- i. The Theory of Change does not lend itself to outcome orientated M&E and
- ii. There is a lack of MEL tools utilised to track outcome data.

It appears from limited available data that Australia Assists is mostly achieving its EOPOs. EOPO2 and Intermediate Outcome 4.3 have specific findings, detailed in this section. (Recommendation References: 1, 2, 3, 4, 7)

The Australia Assists mechanism is an important component of the Australian Government’s humanitarian toolkit and highly valued by DFAT in Canberra and at Post, across multi-lateral forums, by UNSBPs, by national government

disaster management organisations (NDMOs) and other host organisations. This finding is based on evidence from numerous stakeholder interviews including DFAT officers⁶ and host organisations.⁷

Australia Assists is a high profile and valuable addition to DFAT's multilateral engagement and bilateral engagement in countries where Australia's official development assistance (ODA) footprint is relatively small (e.g., Africa and the Middle East). Outside of the Indo-Pacific, Australia's development presence is relatively low compared to other OECD countries, however Australia's presence and influence is bolstered by Australia Assists and other humanitarian programs (for example through the Australian Humanitarian Partnership and Red Cross) and validates DFAT's seat at the table in bilateral and multilateral fora. Australia benefits from the reputation of high quality deployees and a focus on gender equality and disability inclusion. Deployees themselves also rated their contribution to achievement of the EOPOs highly.⁸


The training provided by RedR (partially Australia Assists funded), was rated highly, and has made a significant contribution to humanitarian capability in Australia, to the quality of deployees on the roster, and to the internal capability of DFAT, through continued upskilling of DFAT officers for humanitarian work. RedR delivers six core humanitarian training programs, and over 900 people have been trained over the life of the Australia Assists program.

Although Australia Assists is a highly valued program, the program has not proven its effectiveness in achieving progress against many elements of the Theory of Change (see Annex 3 for a copy of the Australia Assists Theory of Change). The rating of reasonable reflects the lack of quality outcome level data - including baseline and mid-line data – that makes it challenging (if not impossible), for the Evaluation Team to be definitive regarding the findings (see Effectiveness of the Monitoring, Evaluation, Adaptation and Learning System section for more details). The Evaluation Team notes that the Theory of Change is composed in a manner that contributes to the challenge of effective measurement of outcomes. Data sources supporting the rating of reasonable emerged predominantly from thematic reviews of deployments, KIIs and FGDs and a survey of deployees undertaken for this evaluation.

Australia Assists deployed 347 people across the four primary EOPOs (as noted, EOPO 5 relates to program management and is addressed separately) over the five years covered by this evaluation. Interviews with all stakeholders found that Australia Assists deployees had met their designated EOPOs. This was supported by survey data conducted with RedR deployees.⁹ Based on available data, the following factors enabled Australia Assists to meet its EOPOs:

- The high quality of its deployees, including soft and hard skills, experience, and contributions.
- The quality of the deployment life-cycle management by RedR.
- The high-quality training provided to roster members.
- RedR's stringent recruitment practices that identifies strong performers.

General findings notwithstanding, there are two elements of the Theory of Change that the Evaluation Team draws attention to, EOPO2 and Intermediate Outcome 4.3, and the next design of Australia Assists (expected 2023) should address.

 **Key Finding: Australia Assists has not fully realised achievement of EOPO 2: Improved ability of Australia and partner countries to prepare for and respond to disaster, fragility, and conflict. Australia Assists has contributed to the ability of Australia and partner countries to prepare for disaster, fragility, and conflict. However, it has not enhanced the ability of Australia and partner countries to respond to disaster, fragility, and conflict. (Recommendation Reference: 1)**

Rapid Response Capability: EOPO2 includes the intention for Australia Assists to provide Australia with a response

⁶ Humanitarian Division (HPD), multi-lateral engagements, and posted officers.

⁷ UN Agencies, National Disaster Management Offices (NDMOs), other partner country government agencies.

⁸ This finding needs to be caveated with the finding that many agencies conflate RedR with Australia Assists, meaning that it is in fact RedR that is valued. Given that vast majority of RedR deployments (over 90%) are in fact through the Australia Assists program, the finding is true for Australia Assists.

⁹ Most RedR deployees perceive their deployments to have a high or very high contribution to these program outcomes.

capability. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) identifies six stages in the humanitarian response cycle: prevention, mitigation, disaster event, response, recovery, reconstruction. Australia Assists' work with NDMOs demonstrates that it is collaborating with and supporting partner countries so they may better prepare for disasters. These efforts have contributed to the realisation of EOPO2 in part and this work is highly valued and could be extended, particularly in terms of length of deployments.

The evaluation observes that the Australia Assists mechanism has not provided DFAT with the ability for *Australia to respond* to disaster, fragility, and conflict. *Response* is defined as that deployment of assistance 24-48 hours following the signing of a mission directive from DFAT. The Australia Assists mechanism is generally unable to send deployees for rapid response (response includes immediate lifesaving assistance such as evacuations, disaster assessments, health, and medical support,¹⁰ food, and shelter, logistics, etc). A response period can last from 2 days to 2 months depending upon the nature of the crisis. The ability for Australia to respond rests upon the in-country presence of Australia Assists deployees on assignment to pivot to disaster response at the time of an event. The Localisation Action Plan, designed to build capability in-country, further contributes to rapid response capability. RedR can deliver short-term surge capacity (3-month duration) through the Australia Assists mechanism, but it is not able to deliver it rapidly¹¹ (unless deployees are already in-country and therefore can pivot to response).¹²

UN host organisations interviewed for this evaluation noted that they were not able to secure rapid deployments through Australia Assists and turn to other UNSBPs to meet this need. The Evaluation Team notes that specific arrangements will need to be put in place in anticipation of rapid response, and the Australia Assists program could benefit from exploring in more depth the examples from other mechanisms (in Australia and overseas), and solutions should be integrated within the new design.

Option for DFAT Posts and/or DFAT funded programs in-country, to manage deployments directly

(Recommendation Reference: 2). DFAT (Canberra and Posts) are currently at arm's length from the work of deployees in-country; this is often helpful to DFAT officers who have limited time to invest in each investment whilst managing their workload. However, there are times when DFAT would prefer to have closer engagement and oversight of deployments, particularly in high risk or sensitive circumstances. DFAT should have the ability to manage the technical aspects of some deployments (rather than the administrative aspects and duty of care), and deployment teams. The number of types of host organisations (UN agencies, partner governments, and NGOs) could be expanded to include deployments to DFAT Posts for specific purposes, or to DFAT's development programs that may require Australia Assists expertise for specific assignments related to the EOPOs. This would have the added benefit of bridging the gap between humanitarian and development programming. Under the ACC, deployees were often managed (as teams or individuals) directly by DFAT. This enabled DFAT to deploy a multi-disciplinary team, with its own team leader, to work with a range of counterpart government agencies whilst still retaining a steering role at Post. This type of deployment approach was not picked up in the transition to the Australia Assists program which has, according to key informant interviewees within DFAT, left a gap in the humanitarian toolkit available to DFAT.

The current deployment framework requires RedR to have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with a host organisation (a UNSBP or a host government agency) and requires that deployee(s) be embedded within the organisation (like a secondment arrangement). RedR explains the MOU provides a framework for engagement that clarifies the legal status of deployees while on deployment (i.e., expert on mission or equivalent if the genesis is a Subsidiary Arrangement) and financial administrative arrangements. Comparative analysis with other deployment mechanisms demonstrates that this is not necessary in several circumstances (e.g. deployments where there is no

¹⁰ Beyond what Australian Medical Assistance Teams (AusMAT) provides.

¹¹ There is some tension regarding whether the contract had always intended a rapid response mechanism or whether this has been a more recent demand. Australia does provide rapid medical and urban search and rescue (USAR) response services through AUSMAT, and the QLD and NSW Fire and Rescue services. However, there is an increasing demand for Australia to provide a broader suite of rapid response services, particularly to the Pacific.

¹² RedR and the Australia Assists team management note that they were unaware of a demand from DFAT for such capability and has taken "response" to mean early recovery.

host organisations), and may contribute to the gaps in the breadth of deployment capability, as well as an inability to move rapidly. Development of such a capability should be explored in the new design and issues related to duty of care should be considered.

The table below shows that most deployments are to UN agencies through the UNSBP. Going forward, a shift in the balance towards other deployment placements would better serve DFAT priorities, reduce deployment capability gaps, and increase outcomes related to localisations objectives (e.g., direct support to NDMOs, WROs, DPOs). Such a shift would be best achieved by increasing deployments and deployment types overall, rather than reducing the UNSBP assignments which would diminish the influence of DFAT in multilateral fora.

Table 1: Deployments by Host Organisation over the life of Australia Assists

Type of partner	No. of deployments	Months deployed
UN Agencies	254 (73%)	1,629 (69%)
Partner Governments	72 (21%)	551 (23%)
Non-governmental Organisations	13 (4%)	74 (3%)
Intergovernmental Organisations	5 (2%)	97 (4%)
Total	347	2,350

 **Key Finding: Australia Assists has not fully realised its ambitions for EOPO4 – Quality of Humanitarian Action – noting that the program still has 18 months to completion. (Recommendation References: 2 and 4).**


EOPO4 speaks to the requirement of the Australian Government to ensure Australia Assists positively influences regional and global policy imperatives, advances Australia’s positioning, harmonises humanitarian efforts, and has visibility and recognition. Issues of visibility and recognition, and policy influence, are dealt with in separate sections (see Branding and Visibility of Australia Assists and Relevance for Australia’s Footprint and Influence).

Australia Assists has provided Australia with influence and visibility in international fora, however the RedR brand, and RedR engagement, dominates the space rather than Australia Assists. RedR has developed a large network of key stakeholders across the international humanitarian architecture, and Australia Assists benefits from this network. For example, progress against EOPO4 is reported in strengthening humanitarian diplomacy through RedR’s leadership position among the UN Standby Partnership Network (SBP) and RedR’s deployment of specialists within partner government departments to provide advice on executive level systems and legal frameworks required to meet global DRR standards. Similarly, RedR is facilitating work at regional levels including development of a disaster response framework and a network of responders across the Pacific and improving regional interoperability of emergency. DFAT should consider whether DFAT or the Australia Assists program should be the keeper of these relationships rather than RedR.

Harmonisation across Australia’s humanitarian efforts (EOPO4.2) could be strengthened through closer engagement between Australia Assists and the suite of other humanitarian contracts that DFAT manages, including the logistics contract, and the agreements with AusMAT and DART (QLD and NSW Fire and Rescue Services).

Branding and visibility of Australia Assists (EOPO4.3)

Rating: Weak

 **Key Finding:** The RedR Brand is very well known and associated with Australia. The Australia Assists brand is less well known and may not be serving the visibility of the Australian Government as originally intended. (Recommendation References: 4 and 6)

The Evaluation Team notes that Australia Assists has significantly less brand recognition than RedR. Results of KIIs with UN agencies, DFAT staff, and host organisations (such as NDMOs) demonstrate they are more familiar with RedR than with the Australia Assists brand.


RedR applies a limited approach to utilisation of the Australia Assists logo and the Australian Aid Identifier (the red kangaroo). The desk review found RedR annual reports and publications give little or no recognition to Australian Government and Australia Assists even though they rely heavily upon Australia Assists content (experience, stories and data). In addition, the outcomes and achievements of Australia Assists are not reflected in RedR communications products and are instead portrayed as the work of RedR.

The result of RedR branding over the past 5 years (including the conflation of Australia Assists work with the RedR brand) has resulted in poor brand recognition for Australia Assists and significant brand recognition for RedR. The RedR website refers to Australia Assists as a 'valued partner' at the bottom of the home page, and has a section devoted to Australia Assists that includes reports, but otherwise acknowledgement is not visible. From the available evaluation evidence, it appears the contract and DFAT branding guidelines are either not being appropriately adhered to or are not adhered to in the spirit intended by DFAT. In reaching this conclusion it is also noted that there has been a lack of clarity from DFAT on brand expectations and its application in different contexts.

DFAT originally intended that Australia Assists could be the brand for all of their humanitarian work, however the ambition for Australia Assists branding has not been realised. Given that DFAT is currently negotiating a number of its humanitarian contracts and grants, DFAT has a rare opportunity to revisit its whole-of-humanitarian branding and communications strategy, and then apply it more stridently through the next round of contracts and agreements with delivery partners. In so doing, DFAT could utilise the 18 months remaining on the RedR Australia Assists contract to conduct an in-depth review of its branding strategy across its humanitarian portfolio, with a view to the introduction of a single brand across the portfolio that is elevated in profile above the brands of implementers. The evaluation recommends that DFAT engage an external, professional communications organisation to facilitate and advise on the branding and communications approach going forward.

Effectiveness of management of Australia Assists (EOPO5)

Rating: Reasonable

 **Key Finding:** Effectiveness in relation to EOPO5 has mixed results. The operational management of deployments is working well, so too is the governance partnership between RedR and DFAT (operationalised through the Steering Committee). There are challenges in: management and reporting against outcomes; increasing the diversity of deployment mechanism options; branding and communications; and a head contract that, in some respects is not fit for purpose. (Recommendation References: 1, 2)

The evaluation team observes RedR's management of Australia Assists has delivered a rigorous recruitment process that identifies high quality and dedicated personnel and effectively supports their deployment and return from assignment. Training for the roster members is highly valued, and employees are provided with welfare support during their assignment.

Interviews with DFAT and RedR highlighted an established and respectful working relationship that supports the

management of Australia Assists. RedR has executed new packages and funding options;¹³ provides monthly deployment reports to DFAT; and RedR responds to ad-hoc requests for data from DFAT. RedR also manages a range of international relationships, particularly with UN agencies. It is noted, however, that whilst RedR maintains these relationships, the content that supports the rationale for the relationships is predominantly Australia Assists.


The formal governance arrangement is realised through the Australia Assists Steering Committee that meets quarterly and conducts a thorough review of the program. Meeting minutes demonstrate that key issues are being reported on and addressed on a regular basis by senior management of RedR and DFAT. For example, the minutes include action items and progress tracking against actions – with actions addressed in a timely manner. Standing items include updates from both DFAT and RedR, a quarterly overview of progress from RedR,¹⁴ reporting and discussion on recruitment, training, MEAL, budget and communications, and regional updates.

As is often the case with working partnerships, the day-to-day operations requires sustained attention, particularly given humanitarian deployments are by their nature challenging and stressful and are often high-profile. Continuing to enhance communication lines, share opportunities and challenges, and undertake joint problem solving, will foster a greater understanding of respective partner (DFAT and RedR) aspirations and limitations. A facilitated and ongoing discussion between DFAT and RedR to address issues brought to light through this evaluation, such as branding and MEAL, could provide greater clarity of expectations through to the end of the contract.

Going forward, the new design should consider how the Australia Assists management approach might be upgraded to align with an upgraded deployment framework (see: Comparative Analysis). In addition to delivering enhanced quality of the MEAL system and branding (across all communications mediums), the management framework should also deliver a broader array of deployment types and enhanced reporting against outcomes. A more sophisticated and expanded mechanism should look at the potential for safeguarding roles (particularly related to PSEAH and child protection), proactively identify and test new tools and approaches, and explore ways to promote continuous improvement across the sector (e.g., communities of practice).

Effective Deployee Recruitment and Deployment

Rating: Good

 **Key Finding: There are 933 members on the roster (as of August 2022). RedR has delivered a rigorous recruitment process that integrates essential humanitarian training, psychological assessment, selection, pre-deployment preparation, mobilisation, in-country management, and re-entry.**

RedR has delivered a rigorous recruitment process, contributing to high-quality deployees, and low rates of failed and unsatisfactory deployments, as demonstrated by an average deployee Performance Evaluation Report (PER) result of 4.3/5.

RedR has provided an efficient and effective deployment mechanism for DFAT, particularly through the UN Standby Partnership (UNSBP). The increasing number of requests from DFAT Posts has been managed well by RedR but puts a strain on resourcing. Approximately 50% of deployments are in the Pacific, which may be increased should the new design increase the quantity and types of deployments for Australia Assists (for example, in addition to UNSBP deployments).

Deployee survey responses rated RedR, on average, as having above 70% effectiveness in the provision of support and services throughout the deployment cycle; meaning an average of 30% of respondents rated RedR as either ineffective or neither effective nor ineffective (See Annex 4). These ratings are not as high as a deployment management agency might hope. RedR should explore in more depth how to improve deployment management

¹³ Peace and Stability funding package, Bangladesh funding package and some ad-hoc requests from Posts.

¹⁴ The quarterly reports do not report on progress towards the EOPOS, but do report deployment numbers against four EOPOS.

services, and track progress over time.

Employee survey responses mentioned several areas for improvement in the recruitment processes, including a strengthened whistleblowing and complaints handling mechanism, more specific pre-deployment briefings, access to information on lessons learned from deployments to the same organisation, engagement with employees previously deployed to the same country and/or organisation, and a more efficient recruitment and onboarding process.

Stronger relationships between deployees, regional managers, host organisations and DFAT Posts may improve alignment with Australian humanitarian policy priorities, and linking of lessons learned with DFAT humanitarian partnership managers, e.g., OCHA, WFP, UNFPA, etc. This, in turn, would provide an avenue for DFAT to better understand the organisational and country level implementation and coordination landscape. These are further detailed in Annex 4.

The ToRs negotiated between RedR, the host organisation and other parties should ensure the management lines, roles and responsibilities, and expected deliverables, are clear and aligned with the working context and organisational priorities. In addition, the budget to cover basic needs and administrative requirements (leave entitlements and other related expenses) should be clarified in the ToR (not only in the deployment contract) to ensure that the deployee is not put in the uncomfortable position of having to negotiate these directly with the host organisation.

The Evaluation Team noted that Australia Assists provides a sought-after pathway for people seeking a career in humanitarian work, with 48% of employees surveyed reporting that career opportunities were their primary reason for taking up a deployment.

Effectiveness of the Theory of Change (ToC)

Rating: Weak



Key Finding: The Australia Assists Theory of Change (ToC) provides for the breadth of deployments that DFAT requires and aligns well with Australia's humanitarian strategic priorities, however the ToC statements are too general, the ToC predominantly relies upon contribution related outcomes, and it lacks the specificity required for the purposes of outcome measurement. (Recommendation Reference: 3)

The Australia Assists Theory of Change (ToC) provides for the full continuum of humanitarian assistance from resilience and risk reduction, preparedness and response, stabilisation, recovery, and reconstruction. It also includes outcomes related to quality of assistance, policy engagement, and program management. This level of breadth is relevant to DFAT's requirements and fits within its humanitarian strategic priorities.

The ToC predominantly relies upon '*contribution*' to outcomes, and the outcome statements are broad and lacking in specificity. Contribution is difficult to measure, and contribution analysis has not been utilised in the MEAL to date. The outcome statements in the ToC are not based on the SMART methodology (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound), and therefore do not serve the MEAL requirements well.

There have been numerous attempts to improve the ToC (and the MEAL system) over the life of the program, but none of these attempts has led to an upgraded ToC. The new design brings an opportunity to re-imagine the ToC and the MEAL system. DFAT, RedR and the design team should together develop a new ToC and MEAL system and conduct a baseline study to gather data for the next phase of Australia Assists. This would ensure that the new phase starts with an effective system ready to be implemented, and a set of baseline data and tools that can be immediately deployed.

Effectiveness of the Monitoring, Evaluation, Adaptation and Learning System

Rating: Weak



Key finding: the Monitoring, Evaluation, Adaptation and Learning (MEAL) system needs to be strengthened.
(Recommendation Reference: 7)

The RedR MEL function has been able to produce several outputs to DFAT, including:

- Progress records against the Localisation Action Plan, Gender Action Plan, and Disability Inclusion Action Plan
- Submission of Annual Reports, Quarterly Reports, Calendar Year Reports
- Thematic evaluations
- Tracking of indicators additional to the MEAL framework, including PER ratings, numbers of local and regional specialists deployed, and the number of employees and training participants with disabilities

The MEAL framework outlines most outcome areas and contains indicators against which to measure and report activity. The 2019 MTR¹⁵ pointed to the need to strengthen the Australia Assists MEAL system, and to date the system does not meet DFAT expectations and its contractual obligations. DFAT and RedR attempted to update the ToC and MEAL between late 2021 and March 2022, but it was not completed (for various reasons), and this has contributed to poor quality data and challenges in meeting DFAT monitoring and evaluation standards.¹⁶ There have been several constraints to achieving an effective MEAL system including resourcing, management architecture, and consistent and quality outcome data for decision making and learning.

Resourcing: The resources devoted to MEAL are not enough to produce effective (i.e., evidenced-based) information for the purposes of accountability, decision making and continuous improvement. The resources devoted to M&E are below DFAT's quality standards that recommend 5-10% of total program costs. In addition, the salaries are too low to attract senior M&E specialists.

Management Architecture: The MEAL architecture has been too closely associated with communications products - this would inevitably impact M&E and result in blurring between accountability and communications functions. Key informant interviews, annual reports, and other published documents provide insights into the implications of blurring the lines between MEL and communication products.

The evaluation notes the MEAL system does not have a high level of independence and rigour as positive, negative, intended, and unintended consequences of the Australia Assists interventions are not shared openly and framed as learning opportunities. This is reflected in the annual reports, that demonstrate a lack of data beyond input / output level, and a lack of critical reflection and learning on the program implementation.

Based on the evaluation desk review of the existing contract, DFAT also holds responsibility for approving and using the existing MEAL system, such as through the Steering Committee meeting process. The lack of a MEAL Plan, and the lack of data produced against the indicators demonstrates that the MEAL system has not been implemented in a way that could fulfil the contracted requirements. This deficiency has a multitude of causes and cannot be solely assigned to either DFAT or RedR as the implementing contractor. However, it is problematic and should be rectified going forward.

Consistent and quality outcome data for decision making and learning: Australia Assists data capture includes the following:

- input data (e.g., number and duration of deployments, geography, etc),
- sporadic reviews of specific thematic and/or geographical issues (independent and in-house),
- case stories (as opposed to case studies)
- deployee reports (first month, end of deployment, and periodic reports where required),

¹⁵ See <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/aid/australia-assists-mid-term-review>

¹⁶ See <https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/dfat-monitoring-and-evaluation-standards>

- performance evaluation reports (completed jointly by the deployee and the host organisation),
- deployee debrief (conducted post-mission)
- observations from in-country MEAL missions (producing anecdotal evidence).

These methodologies do not provide consistent and quality outcome related data that can track changes and progress against the ToC over time and in aggregate, resulting in a lack of evidence to inform program learning and accountable decision-making. The methodologies are not particularly robust, for example, the PER is a relatively weak measurement of deployment success because it does not gather data on the knowledge and practices of host organisations, nor institutional and policy changes (also see [Performance and Risk Management](#)). There is also a methodological problem of host organisations and deployees completing the PER jointly.

The Evaluation Team found widespread agreement that the RedR training programs were very good and supported high quality deployees. Unfortunately, the outcomes of training programs (in terms of knowledge, practices, and behaviour change) are not collected or reported, and therefore its central role in ensuring the quality of the roster is not analysed and reported against EOPO5.

Several qualitative responses from the survey suggests a MEAL system should be in place to allow deployees access to information they need to prepare for a mission, and whilst on mission, including information regarding past deployments with the same host organisation to enable continuous progress on capacity building.

Progress on the recommendations from the MTR

Rating: Reasonable



Key Finding: Most recommendations from the mid-term review have been addressed. Exceptions include that RedR has not changed its deployment management approach to incorporate short-term surge capacity (meaning rapid response), issues with the MEAL system remain outstanding, and Australia Assists branding continues to be challenging (see [Branding and visibility of Australia Assists \(EOPO4.3\)](#)).


The evaluation assessed progress made from the mid-term review (MTR) (2019) findings and recommendations and has found most of the recommendations have been addressed. Although the regional strategies were not put in place, (recommendations 1 and 3), this was because DFAT decided to not proceed with this recommendation and instead focus on regional issues through the Annual Plan. Recommendation 2 (improved management structure within RedR) has been completed, and recommendation 4 has been progressed (integration of Australia Assists within multi-year response frameworks for protracted crises).¹⁷ The evaluation notes the advances made in terms of the development and implementation of strategies and action plans for localisation and disability inclusion (recommendations 5 and 6). As highlighted in this report, the MEAL system and framework (recommendation 8) requires focused attention for the remaining period of the current investment and the new design, and there is a need for DFAT to address branding across its humanitarian portfolio (recommendations 1 and 7). Annex 5 details further findings on progress being made against the MTR recommendations.


Effectiveness of thematic priorities

This section discusses the effectiveness of thematic priorities in gender equality, disability inclusion, and localisation. This section also considers DFAT's broader priorities and policies in DRR and climate change, child protection and PSEAH, and adapting to COVID-19.

¹⁷ This achievement was made possible through bi-lateral funded initiatives from the Bangladesh development program.

Rating: Reasonable

 **Key finding: The Gender and Localisation Strategies are progressing well, however the Disability Inclusion Strategy needs work and the Localisation Strategy could be more ambitious.¹⁸ (Recommendation Reference: 1)**

 **Key Finding: Attention to Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Harassment (PSEAH) is evident in RedR's policy settings, however given the high-risk factors in humanitarian settings, some deployee survey results, and the very limited utilisation of RedR's formal Whistle Blower mechanism, the current PSEAH system (prevention and response) is not as robust as it should be. (Recommendation Reference: 8).**

Gender Equality

The Australia Assists Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan (GAP) was launched in September 2018. The strategy is consistent with DFAT's Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy as well as the gender equality priorities established within the DFAT Humanitarian Strategy. There is evidence that RedR has made progress against the gender equality objectives outlined in the GAP since its launch. Achievements include increasing the number of gender specialists on the roster, increasing the number of gender-targeted deployments and increasing the number of deployment ToRs with specific gender equality objectives (see Table 2). Deployment data indicates that the numbers of men and women on both the roster and deployments are generally well balanced, with 48% of roster members in 2022 reporting their gender as female.

Table 2: Indicators of actions to progress gender equality

Year	% of roster members with gender/GBV skills	No. of gender-targeted deployments	% of ToRs with gender-specific objectives
FY18	NA	NA	NA
FY19	10.59%	15	NA
FY20	11.11%	12	41%
FY21	11.18%	13	40%
FY22	NA	16	51%

Several host organisations and DFAT stakeholders noted the contributions made by Australia Assists deployees in term of gender inclusion. DFAT stakeholders indicated there was strong evidence the Australia Assists program was mainstreaming gender, and that the program possesses a critical ability to influence humanitarian programming regarding gender aspects.

The Australia Assists program was particularly noted for high-impact gender-focused deployments. These opinions were reflected in the survey of deployees distributed through the evaluation, with 44% of survey respondents indicating they perceived they had contributed to gender equality over the course of their deployment.

Interviewees noted that there is high demand for gender-targeted positions through the Australia Assists program,

¹⁸ Progress made by the Gender Action Plan, Disability Inclusion Plan and Localisation Action Plan is assessed and reported on in Australia Assists Steering Committee meetings, annual reports and monitoring documents.

and there had been certain circumstances where this demand was not always met. Stakeholders from DFAT, RedR, and host organisations described gender expertise as a critical gap across the board and highlighted the need for greater gender-specialist positions through Australia Assists. The Gender Action Plan (GAP) does not include gender targets beyond an “increase in the % of gender specialists on the roster”. The GAP could improve outcomes for gender equality were it to set more ambitious targets.

Australia Assists deployed a Gender and Protection Support Advisor to UN Women in Vanuatu, following volcanic activity on the island of Ambae, to strengthen the Gender and Protection Cluster (GPC), which had not been active during a previous humanitarian emergency. In addition to strengthening the Gender and Protection Cluster and coordination between partners, the Advisor also contributed to the development and strengthening of systems and operating procedures to ensure that gender and protection is mainstreamed within the Department of Women’s Affairs (DWA) and across other sub-clusters. A key enabler was the deployees’ effort to mainstream community-centred approaches for gender and protection, at a local, sub-national and national level. It is likely that the length of the deployment (over 20 months) has also contributed to these successes. (from: *Australia Assists’ Gender and Protection Outcomes Desk Review – Sept 2020*).

Disability Inclusion

The Australia Assists Disability Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan (DAP) of October 2018 is consistent with DFAT’s Disability Inclusion Strategy (Development for All 2015 – 2020)¹⁹ and contains an action plan and a MEAL framework. Since the launch of the DAP, RedR has implemented several activities to advance disability inclusion, including: actively recruiting disability inclusion specialists to the roster, facilitating targeted deployment roles for disability inclusion specialists, building capacity of RedR personnel to support partners on strategic disability inclusion objectives, encouraging partners to consider disability inclusion in deployment ToRs/MoUs, signing a five-year MoU with the Pacific Disability Forum (2019), providing reasonable accommodations to facilitate the inclusion of people with disabilities in trainings and deployments, and conducting an annual organisational self-assessment.

Although there have been meaningful efforts to advance disability inclusion, evidence from deployee data and interviews suggests progress may be lagging in some areas. For example, one of the DAP targets is to recruit at least five disability inclusion specialists to the roster annually. Whilst this target was met in the first year of the program, in subsequent years this has not been the case, (see Table 3).

Interviews with RedR and DFAT stakeholders suggested that a shortage of disability inclusion specialists remains an ongoing challenge and was compounded by travel barriers since the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviewees also pointed to concerns around the language and approach used in the DAP, in that the indicators appear to represent outdated approaches to disability inclusion. For example, the DAP focuses on serving the needs of people with disabilities, rather than meaningfully engaging with people with disabilities to inform the work of the Australia Assists program.

Localisation

RedR has made steady progress towards achieving their ambition for greater localisation of the Australia Assists program. Australia Assists has 15 Pacific Island nationals and 9 Indonesians on the roster (to Nov 2022). The Localisation Strategy and Action Plan (LAP) was launched in October 2020 and has three priorities:

- Priority 1:** RedR Australia’s new and existing partnerships build on, and support, the capacity of local and national actors working across the humanitarian continuum.
- Priority 2:** RedR Australia’s training and roster are responsive to, and representative of, the needs and priorities of local and national humanitarian actors.
- Priority 3:** RedR Australia offers an enabling environment that reflects and supports organisational commitments to localisation.

Progress against these priorities is measured against localisation-specific MEAL metrics detailed in the LAP. Data

¹⁹ DFAT have announced that there will be a new Development for All strategy launched in mid-2023.

suggests that RedR made early progress against commitments in the LAP, meeting 40% (12/30) of LAP targets in the first nine months of the Strategy implementation. It has steadily increased the number of local and intra-regional deployments and has deployed two specialists specifically working on localisation outcomes in the two years since the launch of the LAP (see Table 4 below). It has also delivered training in the regional hubs of Suva and Amman, increased the number of deployable Pacific Islanders on the roster, implemented regionally aligned salary scales for the Pacific nationals deployed locally to reduce pull factors that can undermine local organisations, and established a bilateral agreement with RedR Indonesia (2020).

Numerous stakeholders interviewed through the evaluation, including senior members of DFAT's HPD, posted officers with responsibility for engaging deployees in-country, and host organisations (UN and NDMOs), were enthusiastic with the progress towards localisation, noting that the approach should continue to be expanded. These sentiments were reflected by deployees themselves through the deployee experience survey.

Despite evident progress on localisation, findings from KIIs provided useful suggestions for improvements to the Australia Assists localisation approach. There are currently no targets in the Localisation Action Plan, and numbers could be increased significantly with ambitious targets, including by training people within partner governments, CSOs, and private sector. Interviewees suggested that there should be greater focus on building the capacity of both the in-country roster and supporting those roster members to continue the work of international deployees after their deployments end, to reduce reliance on deployment extensions and ensure sustainability of deployment outcomes. Interviewees also suggested that the localisation strategy should be broadened to regions outside of the Pacific in future, as localisation models have so far focused largely on the Pacific region.

Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change (Recommendation Reference: 1)

The Australia Assists ToC for EOPO1 pertains to disaster risk reduction (DRR) and resilience, with implications for action on climate change adaptation. The program seeks to contribute to climate action by deploying specialists globally to support climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts in a number of ways, including by strengthening organisational leadership in risk management, assisting with the development of early warning systems, and supporting Pacific NDMOs and NEMOs to become more effective in leading disaster preparedness and response, including through the development of government policy. Moving forward, there is an opportunity to increase the program's contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation by incorporating these themes into a revised ToC through the upcoming design process (recommendation reference: 1).

In 2021, RedR undertook a Pacific DRM analysis aimed at examining the extent of Australia Assists' contribution to building institutional DRM capability across the Pacific. Results from the analysis indicate that deployees operating in this area provided high quality technical assistance to host organisations, and that advancing localisation is critical to sustaining DRR institutional reform efforts. Interviews with RedR, DFAT and host organisation stakeholders indicated a continuing demand for greater expertise in the areas of environment, climate change mitigation and DRR: *"Going forward, climate change mitigation should be given more focus."* Interviewees stressed the need for greater focus on climate change mitigation in future deployments.

Child Protection

In reviewing the results of the deployee survey, 23 per cent of the survey respondents claim their placement made an explicit contribution to child protection. This work includes strengthening the coordination between UN agencies and partners on child protection issues and expanding mainstreaming protection with NDMOs to their work in emergency response and recovery plans. Continued support for specialist deployments that directly address protection issues and/or mainstream protection through all deployments, should continue to be a strong focus of Australia Assists. In particular, deployees require substantial capability to prevent, respond to and mainstream child protection and PSEAH in humanitarian action.

PSEAH (Recommendation Reference: 8)

RedR maintains a policy on Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH), which is consistent with DFAT's own PSEAH policy. In keeping with its policy, RedR reports all SEAH complaints to DFAT. However, there is evidence to suggest that PSEAH and reporting of SEAH needs to be strengthened. Concerns regarding PSEAH were raised through the survey and in some interviews, and deployees noted that PSEAH training could be strengthened by assisting deployees to learn how to deal with PSEAH incidents during deployments.

Results from the survey and analysis of RedR's contract with DFAT and RedR training materials, indicate that there are opportunities to strengthen PSEAH. For example, PSEAH could be strengthened through conducting behaviour based PSEAH training for deployees prior to their departure, strengthening the messaging to deployees regarding the importance of PSEAH, and strengthening the complaints handling mechanism and its promotion, etc.

Adapting to COVID-19

The evaluation acknowledges deploying specialists during the COVID-19 pandemic posed a challenge to navigate the health risks to deployees and to beneficiaries, and reputational risk when there were perceptions associated with international travel potentially bringing COVID-19 to vulnerable populations in country. This situation pushed RedR to offer an online/remote surge model and using this as an opportunity to strengthen the localisation agenda.

Since the pandemic, RedR has adjusted the deployment modes to allow remote deployments. Between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2021, 63 per cent of deployments (69 specialists) worked in-country, while 37 per cent (40 specialists) worked remotely. Between 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2022, 59 per cent of deployments (60 specialists) worked fully in-country, while 11 per cent (11 specialists) worked remotely and 30 per cent (31 specialists) began remotely before moving in-country. The high proportion of hybrid work modalities reflects the program's agility to continue supporting partners despite COVID-19 travel barriers. In addition, Australia Assists shifted from regular 3 – 6 months into longer deployments during the pandemic, with 522 months of deployments for 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021, a 15 per cent increase on FY 2020. While between 1 July 2021 – 30 June 2022, there is 571 months of deployments, almost 10 per cent increase on FY 2021.

Findings: Relevance

Relevance KEQs	Rating
Alignment with DFAT’s requirements and contribution to DFAT’s humanitarian priorities and response capabilities	Rating: Good
Alignment with Australian Government policies	Rating: Good
Relevance for Australia’s footprint and influence	Rating: Good
Fit for Purpose: Capability	Rating: Reasonable
Fit for Purpose Contract	Rating: Weak

Alignment with DFAT’s Requirements and Contribution to DFAT’s humanitarian priorities and response capabilities

Rating: Good



Key Finding: Interviews and surveys demonstrate the Australia Assists mechanism is an important part of the humanitarian toolkit available to DFAT in Canberra and at Post and is highly valued by partner organisations such as UN agencies, NDMOs and other host organisations. A lack of a rapid response mechanism is a limiting factor. (Recommendation Reference: 1)

The most significant limitation is the inability to provide rapid response capability. There have been some instances of rapid response provided through the Australia Assists program,²⁰ but it is not a capability that is a service offering to DFAT.

Interview data highlights both convergence and sometimes tensions between the alignment of Australia Assists with humanitarian principles, and the strategic priorities of the Australian government in the Indo-Pacific region. These two aspects could potentially contradict each other (for example if a deployment is seen as ‘politically’ important but is not aligned with humanitarian imperatives), however the Evaluation Team did not find any examples of deployments that did not fit within the Australia Assists mandate. Some Posts noted that Australia Assists does not provide the level of bilateral profile that the ACC brought:

There are multiple expectations of the Australia Assists mechanism from different parts of DFAT, particularly in terms of its flexibility and adaptive capacity, and rapid response capability. Australia Assists is meeting Australian Government strategic intent but lacks agility to adapt with changes in demand and rapid response as envisaged in the original design and contract. To meet DFAT’s current and future requirements, the deployment mechanism and

²⁰ Three examples were provided to the Evaluation Team (a fourth was provided but was outside of the evaluation period): Cyclone Harold in Vanuatu 2020 – WFP Logistics Specialist (deployed within 8 days of crisis); COVID-19 response in PNG 2020 – WHO Public Health Specialist (on contract just over 1 month of first case detected); PNG Earthquake 2018 - UN Women Gender and Protection Specialist (deployed within 1.5 month of crisis)

management framework will need to evolve and become more sophisticated (see Effectiveness in meeting intended outcomes and Comparative Analysis).

Alignment with Australian Government Policies

Rating: Good



Key Finding: The Australia Assists mechanism demonstrates effective alignment with the Australian Government's humanitarian priorities and is highly relevant to Australia's strategic policy frameworks. Alignment and complementarity of the Australia Assists mechanism has been assessed against three policies identified in the evaluation TOR.

The **Partnerships for Recovery** policy²¹ acknowledges the contributions person to person connections make towards saving lives "in countries that are highly dependent on regional connectivity." Personnel deployed through Australia Assists are specifically noted in the policy.

In the Foreign Policy White Paper²² states Australia Assists reinforces Australia's capability to deploy Australians overseas to support Australia's response to natural disasters and disaster preparedness.

A review of the **Defence White Paper**²³ indicates Australia Assists complements rather than directly aligns with defence policy commitments to humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific region. This is supported by interviews with DFAT staff who take note of the two related objectives that DFAT manages: humanitarian priorities in the Indo-Pacific region, and the peace and security deployments and that these overlap at times, for example in Bougainville or the Solomon Islands.

The evaluation further notes the Partnerships for Recovery policy has expired and there is a new development policy currently being drafted, and Australia Assists will likely remain highly relevant.

Relevance for Australia's Global footprint and influence

Rating: Good



Key finding: In addition to being reputed for high quality deployees, Australia Assists is appreciated by Australia's multilateral partners, and is important to Australia's relationships and influence both bilaterally and across the global humanitarian architecture, and contributes to Australia's credibility internationally (Recommendation Reference: 2)

"We work with RedR to make sure people are placed... where we might have more limited humanitarian investments and few other resources available to us. Being pragmatic, the host agency has an acute need which we can respond to and leverage in broader discussions." (KII 17)

This finding notwithstanding, it is apparent that the Australia Assists brand is conflated with RedR; Australia Assists is constantly referred to as RedR. This may limit Australia's influence in cases where stakeholders do not know that the program is Australian Government funded, however KIIs suggest that stakeholders assume it is.

²¹ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/development/australias-development-program/partnerships-recovery-australias-covid-19-development-response> p.4

²² <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/minisite/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper/fpwhitepaper/index.html> p.87

²³ <https://www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/2016-defence-white-paper> p.34

Fit for purpose: Capability

Rating: Reasonable



Key Finding: Australia Assists is seen by Posts and Canberra as providing high-quality deployees and an option to deliver humanitarian responses in high-risk contexts. The current supply has largely met the demands from UN and partner governments but needs some improvements to meet the demands from DFAT.

(Recommendation Reference: 1)

Australia Assists deploys technical specialists to Australia's global partners, including host governments, United Nations (UN) organisations, multilateral organisations, and non-government organisations (NGOs), to help them prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural disasters and conflicts.

Compared to other humanitarian deployment mechanisms (such as NORCAP, CANADEM, the Centre for Health Security Initiative, the DRC Humanitarian Response Roster, and the Humanitarian, Stabilisation Operation Team), Australia Assists has a lower percentage of deployments that are initiated at the donors' request and a higher percentage of deployments initiated through UN agencies, with the implication that Australia Assists may be less aligned with Australia's humanitarian priorities and more aligned with global humanitarian action through UN agencies. (See Annex 7).

Many respondents noted that Australia Assists provides high quality deployees who bring both soft skills and technical expertise. However, when UN agencies require rapid deployments, they rely upon other UNSB partners because although Australia Assists can deliver short-term surge capacity, it has not been able to deliver that capacity rapidly. Survey responses suggest that the recruitment and onboarding process (e.g., ToR, visa, etc) could be more efficient.



Key finding: The Australia Assists mechanism has been able to adapt and respond to most emerging issues to date, including the COVID-19 pandemic. There are increasing expectations that it will respond more quickly to surge demands by its key stakeholder, DFAT. (Recommendation Reference: 1).

Surges and Changes in Demand

Data from interviews demonstrates there are multiple and sometimes conflicting expectations of the Australia Assists mechanism, particularly in terms of its flexibility and adaptive capacity. Interviews with DFAT respondents indicated general satisfaction with the responsiveness of RedR to requests, even if ultimately those requests were not able to be met.

"RedR is a high performer as there's a consultation process with Post regarding priorities. Once that is complete, RedR takes the lead and Post doesn't need to be involved in recruitment, managing personnel issues..." (FGD)

The evaluation observes that Australia Assists is responsive and flexible up to a point, but the lack of ability to deploy rapidly is a drawback.

"We have AUSMAT, but we don't have a mechanism that can deliver for us other humanitarian experts... into the field to do an assessment of need." (KII)

Staff turnover within DFAT, and a lack of human resources to manage Australia Assists, is challenging for RedR because it results in repeated loss of institutional memory and inconsistent approaches to rapid surge response across DFAT. The Evaluation Team notes that the upcoming design provides an opportunity for DFAT to define and articulate a future deployment framework to deliver rapid response, in-country surge capability and non-hosted placements, as well as incorporate responsiveness to Post needs and strategic deployments. This will require a greater investment in management and governance of Australia Assists from DFAT. This may be achieved by increasing the FTE (full time equivalent) human resourcing within DFAT to 4 FTEs, and/or the appointment of a small support unit to expand DFAT's capacity. (Recommendation Reference: 2).

Fit for purpose contract

Rating: Weak



Key Finding: The current head contract is no longer fit for purpose and needs to evolve to better align with DFAT emerging priorities, and DFAT standard contract conditions particularly on issues such as branding and communications, intellectual property, a strengthened delineation between RedR and Australia Assists, and updated transparency. (Recommendation Reference: 6)

The shift from a Grant Agreement (whereby DFAT provides a grant to RedR to contribute to what it is already doing), to a Contract (whereby DFAT buys a specific set of services from a provider) is a significant shift in the nature of the relationship, and in standard contract conditions. Currently, some contract clauses are not clear and have caused some confusion, which has created an unnecessarily high administrative burden in managing the contract. Going forward, and as noted in previous sections, accountability and transparency could be strengthened by clarifying issues of privacy, intellectual property, and ownership of assets between DFAT and RedR. Other issues include how UN Cost Contributions are reported and utilised, and revenue from training programs (see Accountability and Transparency section).

Looking to the future, it will be important for DFAT to ensure the head contract is fit for purpose for a contracting arrangement and supports an upgraded deployment framework and management approach. The head contract will also need to offer clarity and transparency across income generation, separation of the Australia Assists program from RedR, an appropriate management fee, clear branding, and MEAL requirements.

Findings: Value For Money

Value for Money KEQs	Rating
Cost consciousness	Rating: Good
Encouraging competition	Rating: Reasonable
Evidence-based decision making	Rating: Weak
Proportionality	Rating: Good
Performance Risk Management	Rating: Good
Results Focused	Rating: Reasonable
Experimentation and innovation	Rating: Weak
Accountability and Transparency	Rating: Weak

DFAT applies a set of four principles to its assessment of value for money, each of the principles align to critical elements for value for money in aid management: economy, efficiency, effectiveness and ethics.

Cost consciousness

Rating: Good



Key Finding: RedR is cost conscious, largely due to income generation from Australia Assists activities and relatively low deployee remuneration.²⁴

RedR has demonstrated cost consciousness in:

- Successfully urging the UN to contribute to the cost of deployments, and this contribution funded 63 additional deployments in 2019.
- Delivering additional deployments with supplementary DFAT funding and through budget rationalisation over and above the original contract without an increase in personnel or a commensurate increase in management fees.
- Drawing income from training fees to support RedR overheads.
- Relatively low remuneration to deployees.

These measures have reduced costs for deployments and/or increased deployment months. Caveating this data are two factors:

²⁴ DFAT contractually enabled RedR to draw income from its training programs through the head contract. Whilst this is an unusual practice, there is no suggestion of impropriety.

- Data regarding the UN cost contributions is only available for 2019 (the first year they were accrued) and are not reported in following years (RedR has no contractual obligation to report this income).
- Remuneration of deployees is well below current market rates for senior specialists and advisors.²⁵ The extent to which this impacts the seniority of the roster members was not within the scope of this evaluation.²⁶

A cost comparison between Australia Assists deployments and other Australian aid program deployments demonstrates that Australia Assists is less costly.²⁷

Table 3: Comparative Remuneration rates

RedR Data	Comparative data
Average remuneration of a single deployee per month = 10,983K	Average Short-Term Adviser (STA) remuneration for one month = AUD 22,000 ²⁸
An average cost of a deployment per month (includes remunerations and support costs) is AUD 14,339 per month. ²⁹ ()	An average cost of a STA per month (includes remuneration, accommodation and per diems) is AUD 32,500 per month ³⁰
516 months of Australia Assists deployments per annum costs 7.43m (includes funds from Posts).	516 months of STA deployments per annum would cost an average of AUD 16.77m

The multiplier effect deployees bring to their host organisations may offer considerable value for money, but there is limited evidence of this presented in reporting.³¹ It is evident that RedR makes substantive effort to be efficient and keep costs low through its remuneration policies and salaries. With the changing demand profile for deployees, it is not clear whether the remuneration will continue to deliver value for money because it may be difficult to attract more senior advisory staff.

Encouraging competition

Rating: Reasonable



Key Finding: Going forward, a competitive tender process will likely deliver greater VfM to DFAT.

RedR demonstrates competition in relation to the recruitment of Australia Assists program personnel and personnel for the deployment roster. Personnel are selected based upon a competitive selection process. It is uncertain if the

²⁵ Source: comparative analysis between RedR Remuneration Framework and its application vis-à-vis the Adviser Remuneration Framework (no longer in use for new DFAT contracts but remains a useful market price-point).

²⁶ There is no data to suggest that low remuneration has had a negative impact on the seniority of the pool of deployees. However, remuneration usually reflects level of expertise and seniority, going forward, it may be difficult to continue to deliver value for money if the remuneration rates cannot attract the required skills to deliver outcomes.

²⁷ Does not account for effectiveness.

²⁸ Based on a 22-day month at a rate of AUD 1000 per day.

²⁹ Average from years 1 to 5 of Australia Assists implementation

³⁰ Based on an average rate of AUD 1000 p/day, for a 22-day month, plus average of AUD 350 p/day for accommodation and per diems.

³¹ This conclusion has been drawn from KILs with host organisations and UNSBP.

number and/or quality of applicants (knowledge, experience, and technical expertise) is reduced by the low remuneration rates on offer to deployees which may lead many to opt out of Australia Assist deployments.

DFAT has not yet undertaken a competitive tender for the management of the Australia Assists program and therefore the market price for these services has not been tested. The management fee provided to RedR for the services appears to be market orientated.³² Testing the market through a competitive tender will provide DFAT with greater information regarding the market price, and likely bolster value for money for DFAT.

Alternative models

Comparative analysis is a common methodology used to assess value for money and was a requested component of this evaluation. There are a range of organisations providing deployment services across the Indo-Pacific region for comparison. Management costs associated with delivering these services was not available to the evaluators to inform the value for money analysis (due to the commercial-in-confidence nature of contracts). This analysis is therefore provided for the purpose of demonstrating that there are options for providing humanitarian deployment expertise in the region should DFAT choose to test the market through open tender. Different models include deployment of experts to be hosted by UN agencies, partner governments, NGOs, and donor governments. The options here are indicative rather than exhaustive; there are many more organisations providing these services.

There are approx. 50 UN Standby Partner organisations³³, some of them deploy only to UN agencies, whilst others deploy to partner governments and other humanitarian actors. NORCAP, CANADEM and DRC have all deployed roster members to the Indo-Pacific region.

Examples of managing contractors and NGOs providing expert deployments in the Indo Pacific include:

- A private sector managing contractor (MC) manages deployments of health experts to national governments for DFAT's Centre for Health Security Initiative
- A private sector MC (UK) manages humanitarian surge capacity for FCDO, including (a) FCDO humanitarian experts, (b) administering FCDO contributions to four UNSBPs and (c) a rapid response capability.
- A private sector MC (Australia) manages DFAT's humanitarian logistics capabilities that includes the deployment of advisors for the purpose of facilitating logistics and employment of local staff.
- An Australian NGO manages the Australian Volunteers Program and deploys Australians to 26 countries globally.

Each model provides similar services but with different advantages and services sought by DFAT. Annex 7 provides an overview and comparative analysis of services offered by these various mechanisms.

Evidence-based decision making

Rating: Weak



Key Finding: Evidence based decision making is not adequately structured into the management of Australia Assists in a systematic way, largely due to a lack of quality evidential data and the absence of a learning and adaptation cycle. (Recommendation References: 3 and 7).

The lack of a robust M&E system has resulted in poor quantity and quality of data to form an evidence base upon which to launch organisation learning and evidence-based decision making³⁴ (for more information see Effectiveness of the MEAL system). The most substantial pieces of data emerge from thematic reviews that have been conducted

³² Comparative analysis conducted with limited information due to the commercial-in-confidence nature of contracts, however Alinea has priced numerous designs for DFAT and utilised this knowledge to form the assessment.

³³ <https://www.standbypartnership.org/partners>

³⁴ Please see Effectiveness of Monitoring, Evaluation, Adaptation and Learning System section for more detailed information.

for several significant deployment events, such as the Rohingya Crisis. However, these reviews do not have the benefit of baseline data, or ongoing monitoring data, to draw conclusions regarding the extent of change attributable to Australia Assists. Previously mentioned limitations of the ToC (see Effectiveness of the ToC), and the MEAL system are largely responsible for the rating of weak in this category. A review of Australia Assists reports, minutes from Steering Committee meetings, and thematic reviews, illustrates the heavy focus on deployment numbers, sectors, geographies, recruitment stats, and related input information. Going forward, a focus on outcomes and a robust MEAL, will provide the foundation for regular learning and action that will embed continuous improvement.

Proportionality

Rating: Good



Key Finding: The Australia Assists management by RedR is proportional to the size of the Program, however the DFAT management resources assigned to the Program are less than adequate. (Recommendation Reference: 5).

The AUD \$12 million per year cost of Australia Assists to DFAT³⁵ has delivered an average of 516 deployment months per annum and utilised minimal resourcing from DFAT to manage the program overall, and each deployment. In comparison, the previous Australian Civilian Corp (ACC) required an entire DFAT branch to manage the program, plus several sub-contracts to providers for training, administrative and logistics support, etc. There were numerous aspects of the management arrangements of ACC that explain its high cost (such as the requirement for all deployees to hold status as an Australian Government official). In addition, whilst ACC was envisioned to provide rapid response capability, its governance arrangements made that challenging to deliver (for example, all deployments had to be approved by Cabinet, all deployees had to be security cleared and travel on Australian Official Passports, DFAT was required to manage each deployment, and held the duty of care for deployees). RedR now manages most of the roles that were previously held in-house by DFAT and has provided considerable cost-savings to DFAT in so doing.

Significant internal savings were made by integrating ACC within Australia Assists, however DFAT may have gone too far in reducing their own human resourcing for managing the contract and the program. The current level of DFAT resourcing is too low to enable DFAT to get the most out of Australia Assists strategically and contractually. There are currently two DFAT officers managing the contract, and 0.2 FTE input from the section director. This is not adequate to ensure: (a) contractual requirements are being met, (b) engagement in international fora is optimised, (c) DFAT is engaged strategically in continuous program improvement, (d) communications and branding, MEAL and cross-cutting issues are adequately resourced and managed, and (e) the partnership with RedR and other stakeholders is adequately resourced. Going forward, DFAT should consider doubling the resources devoted to managing the Australia Assists program, particularly if it likely to be expanded. The resourcing should be commensurate with the high-profile nature of the program, risks associated with the program, its global coverage, and to take greater advantage of the opportunities to leverage the program for engagement and representation internationally, regionally, and bilaterally.

Performance and Risk Management

Rating: Good



Key Finding:

- 1. There is an effective risk management architecture in place for the Australia Assists mechanism, including a**
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³⁵ Does not include additional deployments funded by DFAT Posts.

complaint handling mechanism. There is a need to review the approach to complaints handling, assess its independence, and promote its utilisation more forthrightly to ensure deployee confidence in reporting. (Recommendation Reference: 8)

2. Performance and risk management are well-managed within the scope of deployment types that Australia Assists currently offers, largely because many of these risks are transferred to UN Standby Partners.

The evaluation team was provided with the suite of risk management policies for the Australia Assists program, including the following specific to the Australia Assists mechanism: Australia Assists Incident Reporting Guidance, Australia Assists Risk Management Overview, and the Australia Assists Risk Register. Regular risk management activities include reviewing and updating the Australia Assists risk register quarterly and annually; undertaking annual business planning and priority setting (RedR and DFAT); and reporting and discussing of risk issues at quarterly steering committees as a standing agenda item.

The Australia Assists Incident Reporting Guidance Note includes mandatory reporting on suspected child abuse or exploitation, sexual abuse, exploitation or harassment and fraud. This is aligned with DFAT's incident reporting protocols, particularly concerning the reporting timeframes. Other documents provided by RedR include the RedR Global Safety & Security Policy, RedR Risk Management Policy, and RedR Incident Reporting Policy. While the Australia Assists mechanism isn't explicitly identified as being part of these policies, it is assumed to be included.

Interview notes highlight there is a proactive approach to effective risk management by both DFAT and RedR and sound evidence of investment in proactive risk management through policies and processes, demonstrated through documentation (policy documents, reports, meeting minutes) as well as interviews.

Complaints Handling and Whistleblowing

RedR maintains a 24-hour emergency phone line and a whistleblowing line that is available to anyone to report fraud, corruption, harassment, and other unethical behaviour. Reports are collated and submitted by a third party ("STOPLINE") to the Disclosure Officer (Head of People and Culture) at RedR. RedR's Code of Conduct and Whistleblowing policies are publicly available on the whistleblowing website.

An emerging question is the extent to which the Complaints Handling Mechanism should be independent of Australia Assists management (both RedR and DFAT), to encourage deployee reporting. Currently, complaints received through the whistleblowing facility are collated and submitted to RedR to manage but are not acted upon by the independent facility. To date, only one complaint has been made through this facility. This is lower than expected and gives rise to concerns for the validity of the approach. RedR and DFAT should explore the reasons for a very low reporting rate, including whether the power imbalance between RedR as the employer, and an individual deployee deter deployees from reporting? The same is true of the option for deployees to report directly to DFAT.

Given knowledge of extensive SEAH in humanitarian settings, there may be benefit for DFAT to introduce an independent complaint handling mechanism for Australia Assists, and/or for humanitarian programs more broadly. This would need to be proactively promoted, on an ongoing basis, amongst the roster members, and may provide a more effective pathway for deployees to voice their concerns. Given the nature of deployments (i.e., individuals hosted by organisations with different standards for compliance and often in challenging contexts), an independent complaint handling mechanism might provide safe options to deployees, host organisations and others to lodge complaints. It would also provide greater incentive for contractors to strengthen preventive and proactive measures to address compliance.

Performance Management

Performance management of deployees is conducted through the recruitment process for the roster, the training programs, and through the selection process for each deployment. RedR staff provide remote support to deployees throughout their assignment, however this is not generally performance management. Performance management whilst on assignment is for the host organisation to manage and this minimises the role of RedR and associated performance management risks whilst deployees are on assignment. A Performance Evaluation Report (PER) is

conducted at the end of the assignment, jointly between the deployee and the host organisation representative.³⁶ M&E visits conducted by regional managers has strengthened performance oversight in recent years. However, the formal approach to performance evaluation may be confronting for host organisations should they have negative commentary and potentially be seeking further deployee assignments through Australia Assists. A strengthened approach to performance assessment and evaluation throughout the deployment would provide valuable lessons and feedback that could contribute to effectiveness.

Results Focused

Rating: Reasonable

A review of Australia Assists reports and reviews, and KIIs and FGDs conducted for this evaluation, demonstrates that the Program (particularly the Australia Assists team) is concerned with achieving results and outcomes, and this has contributed to effectiveness (see Effectiveness in meeting intended outcomes). Unfortunately, the MEAL system does not capture results very effectively and therefore results are less visible in aggregate and over time. Australia Assists has produced numerous case stories that reflect positive results; however, the case stories are too few to aggregate for the purposes of evidence, and do not speak to achievement of results-chains over time. There is a good deal of input data for deployments which is useful to understanding what the Australia Assists mechanism is doing and where, but less useful to understanding results. Please see findings in relation to outcome achievement against the ToC, and findings related to MEAL.

Experimentation and Innovation

Rating: Weak



Key Finding: Experimentation and innovation have not been a feature of the Australia Assists program to date. (Recommendation Reference: [1](#)).

RedR has tended to apply a formulaic approach to deployment management, and it has served them well for UNSBP deployments and mostly for deployments requested by Posts. However, Australia Assists could have achieved more through experimentation and innovation, including by looking at a range of international deployment models (in Australia and elsewhere) to adopt new ideas and practices.

For example, KIIs with DFAT Posted officers expressed concern that deployee mobilisation took a longer than hoped for time. There are several reasons for this, including the time taken to negotiate MOUs with host organisations, the time taken by DFAT to review and approve ToRs, the deployee selection process, and visa arrangements. Many of these factors could be overcome by developing a rapid response mechanism with stand-by arrangements that circumvent these issues (e.g., in-country stand-by deployees, standing ToRs, visa agents, etc). Other deployment mechanisms do not rely upon a MOU to place deployees, and there is no reason that Australia Assists could not do likewise.

The Evaluation Team notes that Australia Assists deployment types have not evolved enough to incorporate an increased demand for different types of deployments such as rapid response and non-hosted deployments. This notwithstanding, surge capacity has been provided by RedR when requested and at a pace that is achievable with host organisations.

³⁶ The PER data is not aggregated to enable an overall picture of performance.

Accountability and Transparency

Rating: Weak



Key Finding: Accountability at the input level is strong, however the head contract arrangement could be strengthened in relation to accountability and transparency going forward. Strengthened adherence to the VfM principles through the head contract and encouraging competition may deliver greater VfM to DFAT. (Recommendation Reference: [6](#)).

As previously noted, the Australia Assists contract was developed from an earlier grant agreement and this has resulted in a lack of clarity on some issues. One of the consequences has been a weaker than hoped for rating for accountability and transparency. Issues of accountability and transparency are different between a grant agreement and a contract. Going forward, accountability and transparency could be strengthened by clarifying issues of privacy, intellectual property, and 'ownership' of assets between DFAT and RedR.

The contract between DFAT and RedR allows for the provision of training to be (at least partially) funded from the DFAT budget. RedR is not required to report on the revenue it receives from training, nor how it is spent. This was negotiated specifically for the RedR contract and is an unusual aspect to a DFAT contract that reflects the transition between a grant and a contract. It would be timely for DFAT to clearly articulate its intent in the next contract.

Similarly, the UN Cost Contribution in FY2019 totalled \$777,000 and RedR reported that these funds were applied directly to delivering a further 63 deployment months in FY19. Since 2019, UN Cost Contributions (including the amount and how it is expended) have not been reported because the contract with DFAT does not require it to be reported. This too is an unusual arrangement and therefore the contract should clearly reflect DFAT's intent (particularly given the high turn-over of DFAT staff managing the contract).

There is a lack of clarity with regards to the separation between RedR and Australia Assists. Typical DFAT contracting practice sees a distinction between the managing contractor and the program they deliver, and separation between the staffing and financing of each. The Australia Assists contract and its implementation has seen many staff partially financed by Australia Assists, and all staff are identified as RedR staff, including in email handles and signature blocks. This contracting approach was put in place when RedR took on management of Australia Assists and shifted from a grant agreement to a contract; with the contract sitting somewhere between both. With 18 months left on the current contract, now may be an opportunity for DFAT and RedR to jointly map out and enact a transition to a clearer separation between the Australia Assists program and RedR, enabling RedR time to position itself for the future. This change would be in keeping with standard practice across DFAT contracts (as opposed to grants to NGOs).

Conclusion

Australia Assists is an important and highly valued program that is making a significant contribution to Australia's response to international humanitarian crises. The Australian Government has established a comprehensive suite of options to deliver humanitarian action globally, with a special focus on its regional Indo-Pacific neighbourhood. The findings of this Evaluation reaffirm Australia Assists meaningful role within Australia's humanitarian action portfolio.

The Evaluation has comprehensively collated, reviewed and analysed a wide range of primary and secondary data sets to arrive at its key findings and recommendations. In reporting findings of the past six years, the Evaluation Team has focused on the future, looking at shifts in the Program that would strengthen Australia Assists going forward. A noteworthy limitation to this evaluation is the lack of outcome data collected over the life of the program, a consequence of a Theory of Change and MEAL system that are not fit for purpose but can be rectified for the new design.

Australia Assists training programs provide the sector with a valuable service that is otherwise difficult to access in Australia. The benefits of this training have accrued to employees, DFAT and other Australian Government officers, NGOs, and the broader development sector. In turn, the expertise and quality of Australia's humanitarian civilian employees is widely well-regarded and noted for drawing attention to issues of gender equality.

Australia Assists provides DFAT with a specialised capability to respond to global humanitarian challenges, and this provides DFAT with a platform to engage more meaningfully with multi-lateral fora that seeks to continuously coordinate and continuously improve the international humanitarian architecture. This is also true of bilateral engagements in countries and regions where Australia has a relatively small ODA footprint.

The UN Stand by Partnership has benefited from Australia Assists globally, including across the Indo-Pacific region. Australia Assists has responded to calls from Posts for deployments across the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in support of partner government needs for ongoing support to prepare for and respond to disasters. This capability should be enhanced going forward in response to increased demand.

The Evaluation has brought to light limitations and issues for improvement that can be addressed either in the current phase or the next phase, including: i) the deployment framework offers limited options in terms of deployment types, and limited capability for rapid response, ii) the Australia Assists program has not produced data that enables progress towards outcomes in the Theory of Change to be mapped and understood, and iii) the Australia Assists brand is not well-known (relative to the RedR brand) and therefore branding has under-served the interests of the Australian Government.

The top priorities for the next iteration of Australia Assists (noting a new design process will begin in 2023) are:

1. Development of a more sophisticated mechanism that can offer a broader array of deployment options to the Australian Government (including a rapid response capability), particularly to address increasing demand across the Indo-Pacific for both a broader range of deployment types, and an increase in deployment numbers.
2. Ensure the new design brings to Australia Assists a Theory of Change that is more specific in its outcome statements and a MEAL framework that is more focused on measuring progress towards achieving outcomes.
3. RedR and DFAT should work together to sort through issues brought to light in this Evaluation including issues of IP and Branding.

The overall finding of this Evaluation is that Australia Assists is a valuable component of Australia's humanitarian action toolkit and there are no critical issues that should cause the program to be abandoned. Indeed, Australia Assists should be strengthened so that it can enhance Australia's humanitarian actions.



End of Program Evaluation of Australia Assists