



**END OF
FACILITY
EVALUATION**

ASIRF Australia's
Solomon Islands
Resource Facility

Prepared for

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Australia Solomon Island Resource Facility (ASIRF) Program Completion Report

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Acronyms

AHC	Australian High Commission
ASIRF	Australia's Solomon Islands Resource Facility
AWP	Annual Work Plan
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DSS	Deployee Support Services
EoFE	End of Facility Evaluation
EOFO	End of Facility Outcome
FMT	Facility Management Team
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion
HoP	Heads of Program
HR	Human Resources
IO	Intermediate Outcome
LES	Locally Engaged Staff
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MIS	Management Information System
PAF	Performance Assessment Framework
SIG	Solomon Islands Government
SO	Service Order
VfM	Value for Money
WoW	Ways of Working

Executive Summary

The Australia Solomon Islands Resource Facility (ASIRF) is a multi-sectoral investment managed by DT Global¹, that supports the Government of Australia's development assistance to Solomon Islands. Established in January 2021 and running until 30 June 2023, ASIRF builds on the work of the previous facility, Solomon Islands Resource Facility, which ran from 2015 to 2020. The goal of the ASIRF is to support the work of the Australian High Commission (AHC) in meeting the objectives of the GoA in Solomon Islands, in an effective and efficient manner. ASIRF has two high level End of Facility Outcomes (EFOs), which together contribute to this objective:

- ASIRF advisors demonstrably add value to SIG and DFAT development agendas and policy dialogue.
- ASIRF consistently provides DFAT with flexible, responsive, and high-quality advice.

Objective and Approach

The objective of the final evaluation was to assess: 'the extent to which ASIRF was an effective and efficient model to support DFAT's development portfolio and associated programs in Solomon Islands.'

The End of Facility Evaluation applied a primarily qualitative approach involving Key Informant interviews (KIs) and group discussions and interviews. Secondary data available through six-monthly reports and other program deliverables were also utilised and assessed as part of the evaluation.

Key Findings

Relevance

ASIRF is a highly relevant program that continues to support and underpin DFAT investment and engagement with the Solomon Island Government (SIG) ministries and counterparts through Service Orders (SOs). A key feature of relevance is the 'economies of scale' that ASIRF brings to supporting DFAT and SOs. Relevance is enhanced as ASIRF continually reviews and refines its approaches, based on emerging needs and priorities. This shift in focus has reaffirmed ASIRF's primary role as a support function to SOs.

Effectiveness

Overall, ASIRF is effective in delivering its mandate and contributing to the Intermediate Outcomes (IOs) and associated EFOs. A key learning to date has been the need for ASIRF to ensure it maintains its focus as an 'enabling' delivery model. This is also supported by the 'grouping of support' to SOs. It was demonstrated that for this 'enabling' model to be most impactful and influential, effective management and clear communication across ASIRF is critical. The restructured Facility Management Team (FMT) contributed to this, with its focus on fostering a positive, proactive, and engaging work culture.

The application of multiple information systems (legacy and new systems) across the Facility, does to a degree, limit effectiveness. Effectiveness is also influenced by the ability of advisers and teams to work consistently and coherently. Most functions within ASIRF performing are well, however there were some imbalances in resourcing levels. Procurement is quite under-resourced and given the importance of procurement and its scale up, it is vital that appropriate and adequate resources are devoted to this function. Two areas recognised for their positive engagement and support were Deployee Support Services (DSS) and Security. Significant synergies have been realised and the application of the two streams of work, coupled with dedicated and experienced teams has meant that a high-quality level of service and support has been provided.

Efficiency

ASIRF management arrangements are appropriate and fit-for purpose. In reviewing ASIRF through an efficiency lens, it is evident that ASIRF operates efficiently and delivers services in a cost-effective manner when compared to alternative models. The findings have been supported by a Value for Money (VfM) assessment completed in July-September 2022.

¹ The program was managed initially by Cardno but the name was changed following a takeover of the company by DT-global from September 2022.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

Monitoring and evaluation on ASIRF have generally been quite weak and has not been an effective support mechanism for implementation and management decision-making. This is an area for improvement going forward. At present monitoring, MEL and gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) tend to only report on operational aspects of ASIRF through the Performance Assessment Framework (PAF). There is scope to increase the role of MEL and GEDSI to provide more technical support and guidance to SOs.

Agility, Adaptability and Lessons Learned

In assessing the agility and adaptability of ASIRF during the current implementation period, it is clear that ASIRF has responded well to changing and challenging contexts. COVID-19 provided a significant testing ground for ASIRF. Evidence from initial surveys and feedback sessions revealed a mixed response about how ASIRF handled the impact of COVID-19 and the decision to de-mobilise staff and advisers. Follow-up surveys and interviews revealed greater appreciation of the efforts of ASIRF, as advisers and staff reviewed and reflected on the period.

Future Directions

Based on these findings, ASIRF will continue to play a significant role in supporting DFAT and SOs going forward. Key guidance is summarised below:

- **Guidance 1:** ASIRF should continue to maintain its current focus of corporate support in the areas of finance, recruitment, and procurement.
- **Guidance 2:** ASIRF should progress its efforts to provide more strategic advice and guidance to SOs and not only rely on the responsive efforts across finance, recruitment, and procurement.
- **Guidance 3:** ASIRF should shift efforts towards the formation and use of technical advisory panels to manage challenges related to recruiting and mobilising suitable applicants.
- **Guidance 4:** Separate grant management from procurement.
- **Guidance 5:** As part of overall systems improvements, ASIRF needs to consider developing more robust, transparent, and accountable management information systems.
- **Guidance 6:** DSS and Security to remain important components of ASIRF. In addition to these core functions, ASIRF to take proactive steps to increase the role of risk assessment and management.
- **Guidance 7:** Adopt a more performance-based approach to assessing advisers and locally engaged staff.

Key Recommendations

Recommendation 1: DFAT to continue the process for the design and tender for the next phase of ASIRF implementation. Where possible, DFAT should engage with the current ASIRF team to employ a smooth transition and to discuss and confirm agreed priorities as part of a proposed new phase of implementation and management.

Recommendation 2: As part of the new phase, DFAT to consider including a fourth pillar of support (MEL, GEDSI, Communications) to complement existing pillars of corporate support (finance, recruitment, and procurement).

Recommendation 3: ASIRF and DFAT to discuss and agree a slightly revised role for ASIRF that sees it take a more proactive and strategic role to support SOs. This includes a series of consultations around developing more standardised templates and formats to help with planning, forecasting, budgeting, and reporting. As part of the revised approach, DFAT and ASIRF to consider engaging a short-term strategic engagement adviser for the next phase of implementation to continue this work.

Recommendation 4: ASIRF and DFAT to consider the separation of grants from procurement and to establish a separate grant management unit under ASIRF that assumes responsibility for design, screening, contracting, and overall management reporting. This approach minimises exposure to risks.

Recommendation 5: ASIRF and DFAT to consider broader approaches to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) that move away from assessing operational metrics of ASIRF, to consider and develop a broader MEL strategy that engages with SOs and looks to provide a 'whole of facility M&E' type approach that measures not only operational metrics but broader considerations around engagement, partnership, and technical support.

Recommendation 6: DFAT and ASIRF to agree on a formalised transition strategy during the course of the next phase to ultimately transition DSS roles and responsibilities back under DFAT.

1 Introduction

The Australia Solomon Islands Resource Facility (ASIRF) is a multi-sectoral investment managed by DT Global², that supports the Government of Australia's (GoA) development assistance to Solomon Islands. Established in January 2021 and running until 30 June 2023, ASIRF builds on the work of the previous facility, Solomon Islands Resource Facility, which ran from 2015 to 2020.

This End of Facility Evaluation (EoFE) covers the period January 2021 to 30 November 2022. The EoFE assesses overall progress towards defined outcomes and offers guidance as to the structure and focus of work as the facility completes its current phase in June 2023.

2 ASIRF Background

Australia has an enduring interest in a stable and secure Solomon Islands. ASIRF, or 'the Facility', is a new, multi-sectoral Facility managed by DT Global that supports the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to achieve the objectives of the GoA's development assistance to Solomon Islands. ASIRF builds on support provided under the Solomon Island Resource Facility – SIRF (November 2015 – June 2021) and was contracted for an initial 12-month term from January to December 2021, and extended for a further 18-months, up to June 2023.³

The goal of ASIRF is to support the work of the Australian High Commission (AHC) in meeting the objectives of the GoA in Solomon Islands, in an effective and efficient manner.

ASIRF has two high-level End of Facility Outcomes (EFOs), which together contribute to this objective:

- ASIRF advisors demonstrably add value to SIG and DFAT development agendas and policy dialogue.
- ASIRF consistently provides DFAT with flexible, responsive, and high-quality advice.

These objectives are agreed strategically between the GoA and SIG, as set out within the relevant sectoral program documentation. ASIRF supports the achievement of these objectives through delivery of management and support services across sector programs to agreed performance standards.

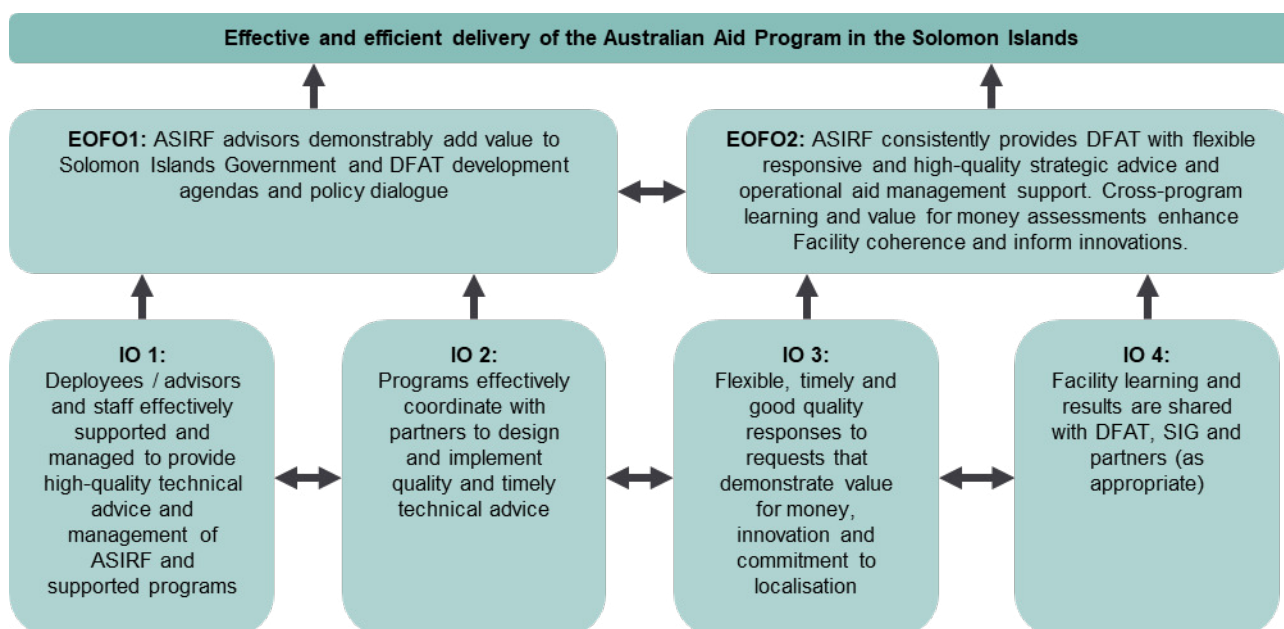
The focus of ASIRF is to continue the delivery of critical functions from the previous SIRF contract while also incorporating more learning and adaptation to both deal with COVID-19 impacts and improve development outcomes. The intent is for ASIRF to transition from being an 'enabling facility' with a focus on delivering disparate outputs, to a development facility with a focus on enhanced effectiveness of development outcomes.

This necessitates a change to a model where DFAT and ASIRF work together to achieve common goals, with the stated requirement for ASIRF to make decisions independently, allowing DFAT to step back from low-level decision-making and engaging more at a collaborative, policy level to manage for results. Figure 1 below provides an overall summary of ASIRF's EFOs and IOs.

² The program was managed initially by Cardno, which became part of the DT Global family of companies on 30 June 2022 and officially changed its name to DT Global effective 1 September 2022.

³ Scenario 1 is that DFAT elects to extend the ASIRF head contract. Scenario 2 is that the ASIRF head contract ends 31 December 2021, and a handover will be required.

Figure 1 End of Facility Outcomes and Intermediate Outcomes



3 EoFE Objective and Purpose

As part of good and effective practice, DFAT commissions end-of-program reviews and evaluations for all development initiatives. Evaluations play an important role within the development performance framework to support a high-quality development assistance program. Evaluations support:

- **Management:** presenting evidence and analysis to guide decisions about new and existing investments and development policies.
- **Accountability:** demonstrating the effectiveness of the development assistance program to stakeholders, including the Australian public, the Australian government, partner governments, implementing partners and the beneficiaries DFAT works with.
- **Learning:** contributing to knowledge about what does or does not work in a particular context and why.

ASIRF is scheduled to complete its current implementation in June 2023. An EoFE is required to assess overall effectiveness and quality to date. The EoFE documents the evolution of the facility’s objectives, assess its achievements, and more broadly investigate the extent to which the facility has contributed to the objectives of GoA’s development assistance to Solomon Islands. It also provides guidance, based on the evidence to inform future programming.

The objective of the final evaluation was to assess: ‘the extent to which ASIRF was an effective and efficient model to support DFAT’s development portfolio and associated programs in Solomon Islands.’

Underpinning the objective, the following evaluation questions guided the structure of the evaluation and associated approach and methodology. Overall key guiding questions included:

- The extent to which ASIRF has progressed towards achieving its EoFOs?
- To what extent has ASIRF demonstrated effectiveness and efficiency in delivering services to program leads, advisers, and programs?
- To support continued engagement within the Solomon Islands, what model would best serve programs and what lessons can be applied from the existing model to inform future directions?

A copy of the EoFE’s Terms of Reference (ToR) is included as Annex 1. The following section documents the approach and methodology applied to completing the EoFE.

4 EoFE Approach and Methodology

The EoFE applied a primarily qualitative approach involving Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and group discussions and interviews. Secondary data available through six-monthly reports and other program deliverables were also utilised and assessed as part of the evaluation. DFAT's M&E Standards were applied to guide the design and implementation of the EoFE.

KIIs and group interviews were held with ASIRF representatives, Heads of Programs (HoPs), Locally Engaged Staff (LES), and DFAT representatives, including Service Order (SO) managers. A total of 38 people were involved in individual and group interviews (14 men and 24 women).

The EoFE was guided by the guiding questions detailed in the previous section and a set of Key Evaluation Questions (KEQ) outlined below.

Relevance	How well has ASIRF adapted to the changing strategic context?
Effectiveness	How effective was ASIRF in achieving its expected outcomes?
Efficiency	How adequate were ASIRF governance, management, delivery approach and resourcing arrangements?
MEL	How and how well does ASIRF assess and learn from its performance?
GEDSI	To what extent has ASIRF implementation integrated gender equality, disability, and social inclusion?
Agility and adaptation	How and how well has ASIRF pivoted to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic?
Lessons Learned	What are the recommendations for policy, practice, and implementation for future funding?

4.1 Evaluation Limitations

All evaluations and reviews are limited by scope and resources. Specific limitations pertaining to this evaluation included:

Time and Resources: The rigour of the data gathering analysis was constrained to some degree by the time available and the availability of program heads, advisers, and associated counterparts during the EoFE. Effort was made to broaden the scope of engagement which enabled the reviewer to reach most stakeholders. The limitation was mitigated through careful planning and scheduling of interviews and consultations.

Judgements: The time limitations mean that professional judgements will need to be employed to interpret stakeholder perspectives.

Attribution: The programme operates in a fluid and dynamic environment and many factors influence performance and operational efficiency. Defining and identifying specific areas of attribution remain challenging. This issue was mitigated using various data collection methods and accessing a variety of documents and sources to align evidence to KEQs.

5 Key Findings

The following sections highlight key findings against the KEQs detailed above. The ASIRF Performance Assessment Framework (Annex 2) has also been included to highlight other key performance metrics and achievements in the period to date.

The section below also provides suggested guidance for the future of ASIRF.

5.1 Relevance

ASIRF is a highly relevant program that continues to support and underpin SOs and underpin DFAT investment and engagement with the Solomon Island Government (SIG) ministries and counterparts. ASIRF has continued to refine and adapt approaches, systems, and processes to maintain relevance despite key challenges including COVID-19 and subsequent lockdowns.

A key feature of relevance is the 'economies of scale' that ASIRF brings to supporting DFAT and SOs. ASIRF does differ slightly from other facilities given the support function nature that ASIRF provides but it has adapted as required. ASIRF provides a cost-effective mechanism that enables programs and SOs to maintain their own relevance and to maintain a focus on technical delivery and support.

Relevance continues to be enhanced as ASIRF seeks to review and refine approaches based on emerging needs and priorities. Evidence of this is a recent shift in focus away from a traditional top-down approach whereby SOs need to 'comply' and 'work within ASIRF systems' towards a more facilitating and supporting role which sees greater coordination and communication between ASIRF advisers and relevant heads of program. This shift in focus has softened the narrative against ASIRF and promoted a more conducive and collegiate approach.

This shift in focus has reaffirmed ASIRF primary role as a support function to SOs. This is an area of work that should continue. The Facility Management Team (FMT) needs to continually monitor the external environment and anticipate events and issues that have an impact on DFAT, and the work undertaken by SOs. This is discussed in greater detail later in the report.

The influence and impact of COVID-19 and security concerns in late 2021, reaffirmed the importance and relevance of ASIRF in supporting and coordinating with DFAT and SOs. Surveys and interviews indicated a general approval of the performance of ASIRF in supporting demobilisation and associated changes because of COVID-19. While the feedback indicated a general positive assessment, there were some examples whereby ASIRF's communication and engagement were not seen as adequate. Again, this refers to the importance of effective communication and associated Ways of Working (WoW). The importance of security has also been elevated and ASIRF's support with regards to security is well acknowledged by all.

In addition to the challenges outlined above, there were some challenges around engagements with SOs and DFAT which tend to be more communication based rather than any systemic issue or lack of overall relevance. It is important to remember the need to ensure clear communication and to ensure shared visions and outcomes are articulated and shared and communication occurs on a regular basis.

To maintain relevance, ASIRF needs to continually look for ways to improve systems and processes and to strengthen and build on existing systems. There is scope for ASIRF to take on a more proactive and advisory role to SOs, particularly around important areas of security, communications, MEL and gender equity, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI). Details on this proposed approach are discussed later in the report.

5.2 Effectiveness

Overall, ASIRF has been effective in delivering its mandate and contributing to its Intermediate Outcomes (IOs) and associated EoFOs. A review of previous six-monthly reports and other key deliverables indicate that the Facility has made steady progress in the achievement of results and has accelerated improvements in delivery in the past 12 months. A review of PAF information and data suggests that key performance metrics are being met across the various service functions of the Facility.

It is acknowledged by the evaluation that effectiveness suffered during the COVID-19 lockdowns as demand for technical services and work slowed due to work from home arrangements and international border closures. Communication issues tended to dominate the feedback and consistency in messaging was raised as a concern through various reviews and assessments of ASIRF's response.⁴ Relationships have improved markedly since 2022, with the installation of new Facility Management Team and adjustments to approach and engagement with DFAT and SOs.

A key learning from the process has been the need for ASIRF to ensure it maintains its focus as an 'enabling' delivery model. This requires consistency in management and clear messaging. COVID-19 did impact ASIRF, as key advisory and management positions operated remotely. This created significant challenges for LES as they did not have direct supervision or engagement. LES shouldered significant responsibility and performed well during this period. Feedback from key LES representatives did reveal the

⁴ Please refer to the ASIRF COVID-19 Study and six-monthly report July-December 2021 which contained adviser feedback on ASIRF performance.

mental and physical strain of operating in this work environment. Working from Home arrangements, while manageable for international advisers and management, were not entirely helpful or productive for LES, particularly for critical functions such as finance and procurement.

Another key factor influencing effectiveness has been the application of standardised approaches and 'grouping of support' to SOs. This approach commenced with the arrival of a new FMT from January 2022, which identified some weaknesses and challenges from earlier responses and sought to adopt a more conducive, supporting and enabling approach that listened to the needs of SOs and adjusted systems and processes while at the same time maintaining quality, transparency, and accountability. The revised approach has been acknowledged and welcomed by HoPs and other key counterparts such as DFAT.

For ASIRF's 'enabling' model to be most impactful and influential, effective management, clear communication and decision making across the Facility is critical. Consultations with staff and DFAT indicated perceptions that previous management styles and DFAT systems and structures contributed to challenges, and that action should be taken early to address these in the future.

This leads to the importance of an effective work culture. ASIRF, as an 'enabling' facility can potentially be viewed only as a mechanism through which support is provided. This minimises the effectiveness of ASIRF and often limits its work to a series of functions to achieve a desired end. However, it is important to acknowledge that an effective work culture and a culture of performance have significant bearings upon the Facility and the type and quality of support provided to SOs. Currently management is defining and embedding a positive 'work culture' for ASIRF and this is something to support and encourage, particularly as ASIRF progresses to a new phase.

The following provides a summary of progress towards ASIRF's IOs, based on previous six-monthly reports, MEL deliverables and interviews.

IO 1: Deployee / advisers and staff are effectively supported and managed to provide high quality technical advice and management of ASIRF and supported programs.

- ASIRF continues to provide targeted and appropriate support to deployees and advisers across the Facility as evidenced by the Performance Assessment Framework. Please refer to Annex 2 for a summary of key performance metric achievement.

IO 2: Programs effectively coordinate with partners to design and implement quality and timely technical advice.

- ASIRF saw improvements in collaboration between programs with improved information and resource sharing through the HoPs fortnightly catchup.
- ASIRF engagement ensured COVID-19 responses were coherent and supportive of ASIRF partners' ability to implement quality and timely technical advice.

IO 3: Flexible, timely and good quality responses to requests, that demonstrate Value for Money (VfM) and innovation

- ASIRF is currently managing five grants and has worked proactively to develop revised work plans and budgets as required. It is likely that grant programs will expand and increase in the future.
- Marked increase in the number of procurement requests during 2022. A total of 191 requests were made since January 2022.
- ASIRF completed a VfM assessment, a COVID-19 impact follow-up study and presentation, and an Effective Adviser Practices study to identify and document adviser practices that support development effectiveness, capacity development and innovative practices to support SIG counterparts and institutions.

IO 4: Facility learning, and management processes provide insights on strategic programming, including cross-cutting issues (child protection, fraud management, climate change)

- An internal team reflection and learning event was facilitated in October 2022, with a follow-up survey with LES completed shortly after.
- ASIRF has also facilitated other learning and awareness events aimed at increasing engagement and involvement (GEDSI, safeguarding, etc).

While ASIRF demonstrates effectiveness overall, it does face current headwinds and challenges. The application of multiple information systems (legacy and new systems) across the Facility is acknowledged internally and externally as problematic. The risk is the application of siloed approaches that have the potential to promote uncoordinated responses leading to poor decision-making. Of greater concern, is the risk of a system failing whereby key data is either lost or not updated which in turn leads to questions around accountability and transparency. Multiple systems also lead to inconsistencies and inefficiencies, particularly for SOs. ASIRF still relies on considerable manual operations including paper approvals. The evaluation notes that steps are being taken to reduce this burden with a 20 per cent reduction in paper usage being applied.

Effectiveness is also influenced by the ability of advisers and teams to work consistently and coherently. Most functions with ASIRF are performing well, however there are some imbalances in resourcing levels. Procurement is quite under-resourced and given the importance of procurement and its scale up, it is vital that appropriate and adequate resources are devoted to this function. Any failing in procurement systems would have significant impacts across the entire Facility. Engagement with HoPs has improved in the current year (2022). Having most of the programs work together in a shared office environment enables greater opportunities to work together and collaborate on key elements of support. Two areas recognised for their positive engagement and support have been in Deployee Support Services (DSS) and Security. Significant synergies have been realised and the application of the two streams of work, coupled with dedicated and experienced teams has meant that a high-quality level of service and support has been provided.

Despite the benefits and achievements of DSS and Security, one significant influence on effectiveness has been the perception that ASIRF tended to work in silos. This meant that various components within ASIRF often worked independently and directly with program heads rather than as a coordinated and structured operation. Policies and procedures are in place but often these were not followed or adhered to. This led to uncoordinated responses and also raised the risk profile of ASIRF, particularly around finance and procurement, two areas that need to maintain adherence to strong systems and approaches.

Monitoring and Evaluation on ASIRF has generally been quite weak and has not been an effective support mechanism for implementation and management decision-making. This is an area for improvement going forward. Steps have been taken since 2019 to develop a PAF and also a VfM assessment framework which are now being applied. Prior to the current implementation phase, no formal M&E system was implemented. A critical area of support is to work with SO's and HoPs to '*inform a story*' about ASIRF and SOs as a whole. There is scope to employ a mix of methods including case studies, short communication pieces and public diplomacy efforts to promote work and generate a body of evidence to complement existing reporting functions.

The development of a localisation strategy to guide ASIRF operations is a significant achievement and a welcomed strategy to underpin future effectiveness and delivery. While the strategy has only recently been developed and approved it provides a strong foundation upon which to progress work into a possible new phase. Feedback from LES indicate that while the strategy is welcomed, there is a need to ensure it is socialised and operationalised in a manner that generates results and demonstrates a commitment to promoting better localisation across not only staffing and technical roles but in supporting private sector engagement through grants and procurement.

Flowing on from the localisation strategy is a need to develop a more formalised approach to capacity development. Many LES have worked in respective roles for extended periods of time but have often not received adequate standards of support and capacity development. This is a challenging situation as often workloads mean that there is limited time to engage but there is a need for ASIRF advisers to structure approaches that provide innovative approaches to supporting capacity. ASIRF has recently implemented its Professional Development Plans with the aim of steering staff on a career path, which includes opportunities for further education. On the job and mentoring components could be employed at relatively low cost. To support the process, capacity development should ideally be included as a formal component in all international adviser ToRs.

For effectiveness to continue, there should be regular check-ins and feedback loops established that allow for internal review and reflection. This is important for LES, as it enables them to feel engaged and an opportunity to present ideas and options for consideration by the FMT. Perceptions of inequality do exist within ASIRF and during the evaluation process, a feedback survey generated useful insights that have been accepted by the FMT and strategies employed to address these concerns.

In addition to improvement M&E and the embedding of localisation strategies, there is also a need to undertake more rigorous assessments of adviser performance. This has not been done well to date and is an important component in assessing effectiveness overall. Steps have been taken to develop personnel management plans and professional development plans for LES but these need to have some form of assessment criteria to assess if these are being applied and how ASIRF is progressing in supporting these. For international advisers, annual adviser performance reviews are often not completed. An effective adviser practices study has also been completed which provided the following useful insights:

- The most critical component identified by advisers was the ability to build positive and proactive relationships with counterparts.
- Advisers also identified the importance of confidence building as another key skill to promote performance.
- In the context of capacity building, there is a need for effective listening, learning and general patience.
- Clear and consistent communication is also vital and identified by all advisers as critical to the success of adviser-counterpart relationships.
- Capacity building is a core focus of the adviser-counterpart relationship, but it is often how effectively it is delivered which is the most important feature.

Feedback from the interviews and engagements with advisers highlight several key findings that reinforce the importance of promoting soft skills, alongside technical capacity, and experience. Feedback from counterparts also indicated that they respond better to advisers who are respectful, listen and seek to understand and appreciate the context of Solomon Islands.

5.3 Efficiency and Management

ASIRF management arrangements are appropriate and fit-for purpose. Management turnover in 2021, together with COVID-19 created a period of uncertainty, while the introduction of new team members brought an opportunity to review and refresh implementation. An important element of the new FMT mentioned earlier has been to cultivate a shared vision of a positive work and performance culture. The focus on culture is a positive contribution and takes ASIRF away from traditional support functions to a model that is proactive and fosters staff performance and overall morale.

In reviewing ASIRF through an efficiency lens, it is evident that ASIRF operates efficiently and delivers services in a cost-effective manner when compared to alternative models.⁵ ASIRF also has the ability to further promote efficiencies through the streamlining of systems and processes. Further discussions on this are provided in the future guidance section.

ASIRF also completed a VFM assessment in July-September 2022.⁶ **The results of the VFM indicate that ASIRF rates well across key performance metrics and VFM consideration.** The key findings and recommendations of the VFM assessment are presented in the table below, with judgements made against the 'traffic light' standards provided as part of the VFM Framework.

⁵ An alternative model would be whereby all SOs are managed by individual managing contractors. This would create duplicitous efforts (i.e., each program having a procurement, finance, and human resource adviser). Management costs are also saved through less management fees. Costs are also saved by having less advisers in country which also places strains on other resources such as housing and accommodation, vehicles, and other consumer requirements.

⁶ Refer to ASIRF Value for Money Assessment Report Final

Table 1 Summary of VfM Assessment Results

Criteria and rating	Sub-criteria and rating	Description
Economy EXCELLENT ✓ ASIRF is a good steward of resources; procuring inputs of the appropriate quality, at the right time, for the right price. * *	Procurement EXCELLENT ✓	ASIRF adheres to sound procurement and recruitment policies and practices, ensuring they are of high quality and fit-for-purpose for the operating context.
	Unit costs for key cost drivers EXCELLENT ✓	ASIRF is currently providing reviews of unit costs for ASIRF's key cost drivers and frequently provides guidance on reasonable rates to ASIRF staff, programs and DFAT.
	Spend on operational costs EXCELLENT ✓	Spend on ASIRF set up, procurement and operational costs is within the allocated budget, allowing for changes to the budget when agree with DFAT. Processes are also in place for over or underspends on SOs and how it is communicated with DFAT.
Efficiency EXCELLENT ✓ ASIRF provides effective, high quality, demand-driven and timely services, working flexibly and within available resources. *	Maximising productivity EXCELLENT ✓	ASIRF continues to maximise productivity through demand-driven, responsive, proactive, and timely management, operational and logistic services; delivering key milestones and reports within agreed timeframes and of high quality; and has clear delineated roles and responsibilities within ASIRF and through various stakeholders.
	Adapting and improving EXCELLENT ✓	ASIRF systems and procedures enable flexible, adaptable, and scalable support to be responsive to changes in DFAT priorities, the operating environment, program needs and AHC deployee services and adviser welfare needs.
Effectiveness EXCELLENT ✓ ASIRF is continuing to progress on intermediate and end of Facility outcomes.	Achieving outcomes EXCELLENT ✓	ASIRF is delivering against expected outcomes on the agreed program logic, with progress towards the intermediate and end of Facility outcomes within the agreed budget.
	Organisational practices to enhance effectiveness EXCELLENT ✓	ASIRF implements good organisational practices to enhance effectiveness.
Equity ADEQUATE ✓ ASIRF has been able to proactively support diversity and inclusion within ASIRF's own workforce, its supply chain, and DFAT programs through the recently developed localisation strategy. However, there are suggested improvements to be made to improve outcomes within ASIRF and across Programs in gender equality, disability, and social inclusion. The newly recruited GEDSI advisor will work to improve these areas within the remainder of ASIRF's contracting period. * *	Organisational equity ADEQUATE ✓	ASIRF strongly supports the localisation agenda and gender equality, but there is limited information on inclusion of persons with disabilities, or disaggregated figures around men/women international/local staff in types of roles. A GEDSI advisor has been hired, so it is anticipated this will improve in the next reporting period.
	Supply chain equity GOOD ✓	ASIRF takes measures to enhance localisation in ASIRF's supply chain, including using local expertise, goods, and services where available and suitable.
	Program equity CHALLENGING!	At present, ASIRF is not systematic in providing strategic advice to support programs for diversity in recruitment decisions, other than the localisation strategy. Programs were unclear about ASIRF's implementation of diversity in recruitment decisions and how the Facility implements GEDSI and climate change strategies.

Criteria and rating	Sub-criteria and rating	Description
Ethics EXCELLENT ✓ ASIRF is accountable to, and transparent with key stakeholder groups.	Transparency and accountability EXCELLENT ✓	ASIRF is transparent and accountable in dialogue with and reporting to key stakeholders.
*	Stakeholder feedback EXCELLENT ✓	ASIRF collects feedback from key stakeholders regularly through informal mechanisms, with more formal mechanisms (survey) completed annually. ASIRF uses this to inform continuous improvement on managing the Facility.
*	Safeguarding EXCELLENT ✓	ASIRF actively assesses and managed safeguards in line with DFAT Environmental and Social Safeguards policies through the risk register process and ad hoc risks as they arise.

For management to function efficiently, there is a need for solid and reliable processes and structures, and these should be reviewed and updated as required. The Operations Manual was updated in April to June 2022 and has helped in identifying additional systems and processes that could also be reviewed and updated. The Operations Manual should ideally be reviewed and updated annually.

Engagement with HoPs has been somewhat problematic at the commencement of the current phase but since the start of 2022, more efficient systems have been implemented that underpin stronger working relationships. Engagement in this period has focused on how best to ‘support SOs and HoPs’. This is a proactive and positive step that promotes shared approaches and joint decisions, thus leading to more efficient outcomes and results.

However, interviews and a recent survey indicate more effort is required internally within ASIRF to clarify roles and responsibilities and reinforce approaches. Most LES in key positions have been with ASIRF for a considerable length of time. All demonstrate strong competencies, skill, and experience in their work. However, it is important to continually remind LES of systems and to inform them of changes in approach and management structures. Working from Home arrangements were deemed generally inefficient for LES as many staff had family responsibilities which meant less time to focus solely on work. Others do not have conducive work environments within private residences to continue work efficiently. LES also raised these points for consideration by FMT as part of a recent team event. FMT responded to the issues raised and strategies are being put in place to address these concerns.

As indicated earlier, the Facility’s multiple information systems are problematic and leave the facility somewhat exposed to data and information being lost or poor decisions being made due to the absence of current and reliable data and information. The adoption of a single centralised system will take time but the planning for such a system should be occurring in the remain period of time. A single Management Information System (MIS) is improbable but there should potentially be a single system for procurement, finance, and Human Resource (HR). To bring the three ‘systems together’ a simple excel based dashboard could be developed that draws on individual raw data generated through the systems.

5.4 MEL and GEDSI

As indicated in the effectiveness section, MEL and GEDSI have under-performed in the evaluation period. While ASIRF was not setup with GEDSI as a principal objective and budget was initially not allocated for GEDSI activities, attention to GEDSI and MEL functions in the current implementation period is limited. ASIRF had one MEL coordinator role and engaged an external MEL adviser in November 2021. An LES GEDSI adviser was appointed in August 2022. Importantly, ASIRF has designed and implemented a PAF and VfM Framework. However, while the frameworks are robust and useful, they have been implemented relatively late in the current phase of implementation.

There is potential to review and refine the approach for MEL and GEDSI going forward. The challenge to date has been to define key roles and the level and type of support required. At present GEDSI and MEL tend to only report on operational aspects of ASIRF through the PAF. There is scope to increase the role of MEL and GEDSI to provide more technical support and guidance to SOs. This would strategically align to the

proposed advisory role for ASIRF going forward. It also promotes opportunities for these cross-cutting themes to better engage and support SOs.

This is of particular importance to GEDSI which has an opportunity to align with SO2 (Gender). Clarity is required as to the role and function of both roles and how they can be used to serve not only DFAT but to provide appropriate cross-cutting support to all SOs.

MEL and GEDSI should be viewed as critical support functions across all SOs. There is scope to strengthen these approaches to provide a higher degree of consistency and standardisation and to act as a technical resource to support and advise SOs, even those that already have designated MEL and GEDSI functions.

5.5 Agility, Adaptability, Lessons Learned

In assessing the agility and adaptability of ASIRF during current implementation period, it is clear that ASIRF has responded well to changing and challenging contexts. Prior to COVID-19, there was a perception that ASIRF was quite rigid and inflexible with SOs. This was particularly evident in finance and procurement components where SOs were viewed to 'adhere to systems, policies and procedures' without adequate understanding or appreciation of the level and type of support required by SOs.

COVID-19 provided a significant testing ground for ASIRF. Evidence from initial surveys and feedback sessions revealed a mixed response about how ASIRF handled the impact of COVID-19 and the decision to demobilise staff and advisers. It is acknowledged that this was a critically uncertain time and feedback was not always reflective of the reality on the ground. Many advisers were facing uncertainty and dealing with the challenges of having to demobilise and the impacts it would have not only on work but on personal lives as well. Feedback indicated a range of emotions and concerns. The main concern appeared to be around communication (refer to effectiveness section) and the approaches taken by ASIRF at the time to effectively consult and communicate with advisers and staff as to why decisions were being made and who was ultimately responsible for these decisions.

To collect important information and data on ASIRF's response to COVID-19 and overall support to DFAT and SO, a COVID-19 study⁷ was undertaken in 2021, with follow-up data collection in March 2022. Key findings from the first data collection round included:

- The development of a Deployment Decision Framework (DDF) to guide COVID-19 processes and provide clarity to advisers and DFAT on rationale for decisions was a positive product.
- Advisers were almost evenly split in reporting significant stress associated with the combined management response to COVID-19. A total of 45 per cent agreed that relocating from Solomon Islands or remaining there caused them significant stress. Advisers with dependents reported more significant stress than those that did not have dependents.
- The most frequently cited cause of significant stress related to finances. This included the loss of allowances, the loss of tax-free status, and the costs associated education, childcare, and short-term accommodation.
- Advisers who reported significant stress also reported higher levels of dissatisfaction with ASIRF's communication. Concerns cited included a perceived lack of transparency; lack of empathy; lack of timely and complete responses to questions; and delays in organising adviser communication sessions.
- Advisers indicated that it was more challenging and demanding, professionally and personally, to perform effectively while working remotely, but noted that, over time, they could adjust and perform effectively within this unavoidable context.
- Advisers working remotely identified a range of factors that together improved performance and effectiveness. These included having strong, pre-existing relationships of trust with counterparts and relationships with important individuals in counterpart agencies; the willingness of counterparts to engage

⁷ The assessment included a survey of long-term advisers undertaken in May-June 2021, and interviews with a small number of purposively selected advisers, ASIRF management staff, and staff from Cardno. For the first data collection round, 22 of the 44 long-term advisers employed as of April 2020 responded to the survey (12 male, 7 female and 3 who did not reveal gender). For the second data round, a total of 26 advisers (13 male, 11 female and two who did not reveal gender) responded to the survey. The same approach was used as the first data collection round. No advisers were interviewed in the second round.

through online platforms; and the presence of other (in-country advisers) in the counterpart agency who are able to provide support to advisers working remotely with the same counterpart agency.

Findings from the second data collection round:

- Advisers who are based in Honiara were more than likely to state that the perceived risk of COVID-19 is high or very high for them and their dependents. This was far more than those advisers in Australia (or in other international locations) given the long-term exposure to travel restrictions and lockdowns. Responses from advisers aged over 40 indicated higher perceived risk of COVID-19.
- A total of 96 per cent of advisers surveyed indicated they were currently coping well with the impacts of COVID-19.
- A total of 35 per cent of advisers indicated they were somewhat concerned about their own health while 30 per cent were either very or extremely concerned. Advisers based in Honiara were more than likely to be more concerned about their own health than those working remotely.
- A total of 50 per cent of advisers were concerned to extremely concerned about maintaining connections with counterparts.
- During the second data collection round, 73 per cent of advisers agreed / strongly agreed that ASIRF's response to COVID-19 was adequate and appropriate.
- A total of 69 per cent of advisers indicated that support from Cardno was adequate.

Follow-up surveys and interviews have revealed greater appreciation of the efforts of ASIRF as all advisers and staff have had a chance to review and reflect on the period. Advisers and staff have also learned to adapt to new ways of working as well.

In response to COVID-19 and as a direct result of the feedback received, ASIRF has been reviewing its recruitment and employment practices. As indicated earlier, the implementation of a localisation strategy is an important step in the process and demonstrates a commitment to using locally engaged staff and resources as a priority. It also commits ASIRF to promoting more local leadership and strengthening local responses to needs. To complement this approach, ASIRF is also strengthening recruitment processes and assessing the 'soft skills' of potential advisers to adequately respond and adapt to changes, in support of the proposed work under the localisation strategy.

During the evaluation, ASIRF held a 'team retreat', which presented an opportunity to review and assess key lessons learned. A copy of the key lessons learned is influenced in Annex 3. Key learnings centred around ASIRF's response to COVID-19 and working from home arrangements. Key lessons also focus on the need for clear communication and guidance with regards to strategic intent and direction and to ensure adaptive management and ways of working approaches are clearly discussed and communicated. The ASIRF team also identified key learnings around internal efficiencies due to systems and the need to update systems and processes to respond to these issues. Capacity development, support for LES and the promotion of effective work-life balance arrangements that maintain a focus on healthy lifestyles were also key learning points.

Additional points identified through the evaluation and can be classified as key lessons include:

- The need to promote ASIRF more and to raise the visibility of the Facility as a whole with SIG partners and the broader region, particularly as Australia increases its effort to proactively engage and enhance relationships with the Pacific region.
- The need for more consistent financial management and strategic management support across all SOs. Evidence suggests that previous approaches were quite ad hoc and focused on SOs following systems rather than ASIRF responding to needs. Consultations with HoPs indicate a need for consistency and standardisation for budgets, reporting, and forecasting.
- Reporting lines between DFAT, SOs and ASIRF need to be consistently reviewed and tested. The WoW arrangements only go so far in providing the broad parameters and framework under which engagement will occur. There is a need for on-going consultations during implementation, review, and adjustment as required.

5.6 Future directions

In considering the evidence presented above, ASIRF has a significant role to play in supporting DFAT and SOs going forward. There is no need to fundamentally change the system or structures it

stands, however, there is scope to tweak components and approaches to ensure ASIRF maintains its relevance and continues to promote effectiveness and efficiency. The following guidance is presented based on consultations with HoPs, ASIRF advisers and LES. The guidance is not definitive but does provide opportunity for further engagement and consultation. Key guidance includes:

Guidance 1: ASIRF should continue to maintain its current focus of corporate support in the areas of finance, recruitment, and procurement. One additional consideration is to introduce a 'fourth pillar' which incorporates MEL, GEDSI and communications under one stream of work. The intention here is not to replace or duplicate resources on other SOs but rather pool resources to provide support services and functions to SOs. For example, the proposed MEL role could provide technical support and guidance to existing M&E advisers. There is also the scope to undertake quality assurance of MEL products and deliverables. Finally, there is potential to utilise the MEL support to develop ToRs for reviews, evaluation and conduct internal evaluations.

The same applies to GEDSI whereby support can be provided across SOs to ensure alignment to DFAT policies, priorities, and strategies. There is also an opportunity for technical support and guidance to harmonise SOs efforts. For communications, it is recommended that ASIRF centralise communication support for SOs, including to develop short briefs, public diplomacy, and social media efforts. This would minimise costs and ensure consistent approach and messaging.

Guidance 2: ASIRF should progress its efforts to provide more strategic advice and guidance to SOs rather than rely on the responsive efforts across finance, recruitment, and procurement. This work has commenced in recent months but should continue under the new phase to enable ASIRF to provide more direct strategic advice to SOs for planning, budgeting, and reporting. To complement this approach, ASIRF can develop and present standardised tools and templates to help SOs prepare plans which can then be monitored and reported against. To support this proposed function, ASIRF should consider the engagement of a short-term strategic management/business planning advisers.

Proposed work as part of the strategic advice provided to SOs could include standardisation of work plans; MEL frameworks and reporting; budgets; and forecasting. Investing time with SOs in these functions will support not only the SOs but ASIRF itself when assessing progress, performance and overall VfM.

In addition to these strategic functions, ASIRF needs to take a more proactive role and anticipate changes and requests that will come from SOs and DFAT. Strategic advice and guidance should include advisory support, but it is important for ASIRF not to lose focus of core service functions to SOs.

Guidance 3: ASIRF should shift efforts towards the formation and use of technical advisory panels to manage challenges related to recruiting and mobilising suitable applicants. The recruitment of individual advisers is time consuming and resource intensive. ASIRF should offer a strategic and support function for SOs through providing access to a pool of talent following screening and selection. ASIRF's recruitment should focus on working with SOs to define their priority needs. Evidence suggests that SOs require a mix of technical and specialised support as well as support and guidance across cross-cutting themes such as M&E, GEDSI, communications and climate change. The thematic panels can be an effective means to access a pool of talent that has been pre-screened and 'selected' and can potentially be mobilised quickly through service orders and/or tasking notes. Thematic panels also allow for the promotion of diversity in terms of adviser age, gender location and experience. It has a real opportunity to align with the ASIRF localisation strategy.

Guidance 4: Separate grant management from procurement. Indications from consultations during the evaluation indicated that grants would form a higher proportion of funding and work going forward. While this is positive and proactive and represents a deeper commitment in development assistance, it does present some possible risks for ASIRF. At present the procurement section manages the procurement process and grants. This may work for a small portfolio of grants but given the potential growth in size, scope, and complexity, it is advised that ASIRF look to separate functions out and create a specialised grant unit (potentially as a fourth pillar). This would be a more appropriate approach as the grant component would be managed by a designated team that reports directly to the Facility Director.

Guidance 5: As part of overall systems improvements, ASIRF needs to consider developing more robust, transparent, and accountable management information systems. As indicated in the report, this

is a potential risk to the Facility going forward. A maximum of three systems should be considered for procurement, finance, and recruitment. Ideally this number should be less, but the evaluation acknowledges the complexity of the system overall and the confidentiality of information. One benefit of a streamlined approach will be the ability to generate information and data for public diplomacy efforts and generate information for short communication pieces. ASIRF should also continue its commitment to reduce paper-based approaches and models and streamline processes to online portals.

Guidance 6: DSS and Security to remain important components of ASIRF. In addition to these core functions, ASIRF should take proactive steps to increase the role of risk assessment and management. DSS and Security are strong contributors to the overall success of ASIRF and are well positioned to continue support to both SOs and DFAT. Both streams of work have proven their value and provide essential services that contribute to overall effectiveness and efficiency. For DSS, it is likely that this function will eventually transfer to DFAT to merge with existing systems and reduce potential duplication. However, the transfer process should be slow, staged and based on a formalised and agreed transition strategy that is agreed between ASIRF and DFAT. There is no immediate rush, but the transition will generate more efficiencies for DFAT and allow ASIRF to focus on other support functions for SOs. One potential area for increased visibility is for DSS and Security to take the lead in driving a greater focus on risk assessment and risk management.

Guidance 7: Adopt a more performance-based approach to assessing advisers and LES. As part of a commitment towards streamlining recruitment processes and procedures, ASIRF should adopt a more proactive culture to performance management. This means focusing on using existing DFAT adviser performance mechanisms for international advisers but also establishing criteria and metrics for LES as part of professional development plans.

6 Key Recommendations

As part of the evidence and findings derived from the evaluation process and the suggested guidance provided above, the following recommendations are made for the consideration by ASIRF and DFAT. Key recommendations include:

Recommendation 1: DFAT to continue the process for the design and tender of the next phase of ASIRF implementation. Where possible, DFAT should engage with the current ASIRF team to employ a smooth transition and discuss and confirm agreed priorities as part of the new phase of implementation and management.

Recommendation 2: As part of the new phase, DFAT to consider including a fourth pillar of support (MEL, GEDSI, Communications) to complement existing pillars of support (finance, recruitment, and procurement).

Recommendation 3: ASIRF and DFAT to discuss and agree a slightly revised role for ASIRF that sees it take a more proactive and strategic role to support SOs. This includes a series of consultations around developing more standardised templates and formats to help with planning, forecasting, budgeting, and reporting. As part of the revised approach, DFAT and ASIRF to consider engaging a short-term strategic engagement adviser for the next phase of implementation to continue with the work.

Recommendation 4: ASIRF and DFAT to consider the separation of grants from procurement and to establish a separate grant management unit under ASIRF that assumes responsibility for design, screening, contracting, and overall management reporting. This approach minimises exposure to risk.

Recommendation 5: ASIRF and DFAT to consider broader approaches to M&E that move away from assessing operational metrics of ASIRF to consider and develop a broader MEL strategy that engages with SOs and looks to provide a more 'whole of facility M&E' type approach that measures not only operational metrics but broader considerations around engagement, partnership, and technical support.

Recommendation 6: DFAT and ASIRF to agree on a formalised transition strategy during the course of the next phase to ultimately transition DSS roles and responsibilities back under DFAT.

Annex 1 Terms of Reference

Title	End of Facility Evaluation of ASIRF
Purpose	The objective of the final evaluation is to assess ‘the extent to which ASIRF was an effective and efficient model to support DFAT’s development portfolio and associated programs in the Solomon Islands.’
Reporting To	DFAT – Kellie Raab
Location	Home-based with travel to Honiara
Commencement	August 2022
Completion	November 2022

Background

Australia’s Solomon Islands Resource Facility (ASIRF) is a multi-sectoral investment managed by DT Global Asia Pacific Pty Ltd (new owners of Cardno International Development) that supports the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to achieve the objectives of the Australian Government’s (GoA) development assistance to the Solomon Islands. Established in January 2021, ASIRF is a 30-month investment that builds on the previous facility. The Facility itself is an enabling mechanism that supports sector programs to deliver development outcomes in the Solomon Islands through the provision of corporate support in recruitment, procurement, and financial management support services across all sector programs, as well as core operational support (Deployee Support Services (DSS – management of security services residential properties) to the Australian High Commission (AHC).

ASIRF supports Australia’s 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper commitment to support the Solomon Islands and the Pacific to respond to COVID-19 through the Partnerships for Recovery: Australia’s COVID-19 Development Response. ASIRF’s overarching objective is ‘effective and efficient delivery of the Australian Aid Program in the Solomon Islands. The Facility has two high-level end-of-facility outcomes (EOs), which together contribute to this objective:

- ASIRF Advisers demonstrably add value to Solomon Islands Government (SIG) and DFAT development agendas (policy dialogue and sectoral outcomes); and
- ASIRF consistently provides AHC with flexible, responsive, and high-quality strategic advice and operational aid management support. Cross-program learning, and VfM assessments to enhance Facility coherence and inform innovations.

Purpose of the Review

As part of good and effective practice, DFAT commissions end-of-program reviews and evaluations for all development initiatives. Evaluations play an important role within the development performance framework to support a high-quality development assistance program. They support:

- **Management:** presenting evidence and analysis to guide decisions about new and existing investments and development policies.
- **Accountability:** demonstrating the effectiveness of the development assistance program to stakeholders, including the Australian public, the Australian government, partner governments, implementing partners and the beneficiaries DFAT works with.
- **Learning:** contributing to knowledge about what does or does not work in a particular context and why.

ASIRF is scheduled to complete its current implementation and support phase in June 2023. An End of Facility Evaluation (EoFE) is required to assess the Facility’s effectiveness and quality to date. The EoFE will document the evolution of the program’s objectives, assess its achievements, and more broadly investigate the extent to which the program has contributed to the objectives of the GoA’s development assistance to the Solomon Islands. It will also synthesise lessons learned from SIRF and ASIRF, identify gaps and priorities, and make recommendations for future programming.

The objective of the final evaluation is to assess: ‘the extent to which ASIRF was an effective and efficient model to support DFAT’s development portfolio and associated programs in the Solomon Islands.’

Underpinning the objective, the following evaluation questions will guide the structure of the evaluation and associated approach and methodology. Overall key guiding questions include:

- The extent to which ASIRF has progressed towards achieving its End of Facility Outcomes (EFOs)?
- To what extent has ASIRF demonstrated effectiveness and efficiency in delivering services to program leads, advisers, and programs?
- To support continued engagement within the Solomon Islands, what model would best serve programs and what lessons can be applied from the existing model to inform future directions?

Based on an initial briefing and key document review, the EoFE team will unpack these questions, possibly develop sub-questions, and suggest an analytical framework to guide their answer – submitted to DFAT as an Evaluation Plan.

Approach and Methodology

The evaluation proposed a mixed-method convergent parallel design process incorporating quantitative and qualitative elements. A detailed evaluation plan will be prepared in the lead-up to the evaluation. DFAT's M&E Standards will be used to guide the design and implementation of the evaluation.

The intention is to use an online survey form to seek input and feedback on key elements of the ASIRF approach and assess the quality and timeliness of service delivery and support. The survey will be sent to program leads, advisers and DFAT. There will also be scope to include ASIRF representatives as part of a 'self-assessment.'

Complementing the survey will be a series of semi-structured interviews with a sample of participants from the survey process. This will cover ASIRF reps, program leads, a sample of advisers, DFAT, and Solomon Island Government (SIG) officials and counterparts.

The survey and interviews will be analysed in parallel to identify key themes issues and trends that will be consolidated into an evaluation report.

Audiences are described as either primary – those who will make decisions based on the evaluation and so it is designed to meet their information needs – or secondary – those who may have an interest in information generated by the evaluation and so this information could be shared in some form. Key primary audiences include DFAT; ASIRF management; and Program Leads. Secondary audiences include SIG representatives, and Cardno corporate.

The EoFE should answer the following key evaluation questions.

Relevance	How well has ASIRF adapted to the changing strategic context?
Effectiveness	How effective was ASIRF in achieving its expected outcomes?
Efficiency	How adequate were ASIRF governance, management, delivery approach and resourcing arrangements?
MEL	How and how well does ASIRF assess and learn from its performance?
GEDSI	To what extent has ASIRF implementation integrated gender equality, disability, and social inclusion?
Agility and adaptation	How and how well has ASIRF pivoted to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic?
Lessons Learned	What are the recommendations for policy, practice, and implementation for future funding?

Based on an initial questions and document review, the EoFE team will unpack these questions, possibly develop sub-questions, and suggest an analytical framework to guide their answer – submitted to DFAT as an Evaluation Plan.

Activities

The EoFE team will develop an Evaluation Plan that will describe the methodology to answer the KEQ. This methodology will include the following activities:

- Desk Preparation: Briefing session, document review, preparation of Evaluation Plan (including analytical framework and consultation plan)

- Data collection and analysis: Consultations with key stakeholders (e.g., key government counterparts, advisers), analytical workshop to synthesise key findings, preparation, and presentation of aide-memoire or alternatively a briefing presentation to DFAT.
- Report Drafting: Draft EoFE report, reception of feedback, finalisation of EoFE report

As part of the data collection and analysis phase, it is expected the following sources of information be consulted:

- Relevant Literature: background documents including list
- Consultations with key stakeholders in the Solomon Islands (including advisers, program leads and SIG representatives. DFAT Post will also be consulted).
- Consultations with stakeholders in Australia

Deliverables

The EoFE team is expected to produce and submit the following deliverables:

1. **An Evaluation Plan:** Before the consultations start, no longer than two weeks after EoFE commencement.
2. **An Aide Memoire (max five pages) with preliminary findings:** At the end of the analytical workshop, to be presented to Post and key stakeholders
3. **A draft EoFE report⁸:** Within three weeks of the presentation of the Aide Memoire
4. **A final EoFE report (max 25 pages excl. annexes):** Within 15 working days of receipt of DFAT comments on the draft report

Team and Inputs

The EoFE team will be led by ASRIF's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) adviser, with the support of a local national consultant to support the evaluation process and participate in interviews and overall data analysis.

The evaluation will provide regular briefings and updates to DFAT on progress. To ensure independence and transparency, a DFAT-nominated representative will be appointed to support the evaluation process and provide oversight. The EoFE team will be responsible for the technical quality of the evaluation and the preparation and writing of all deliverables including the Evaluation Plan and Draft and Final Reports.

The key responsibilities for each position are:.

- Evaluation Team Leader
 - Lead and manage the evaluation team, including overseeing the inputs of a national consultant.
 - Develop the review plan including the overall approach and evaluation methodology.
 - Lead and attend meetings with key stakeholders.
 - Develop and present an aide-memoire, with input and assistance from national consultant as required.
 - Produce a draft and final report in accordance with the agreed Evaluation Plan; and
 - Ensure overall quality of deliverables and appropriate communication with DFAT.
- National Consultant
 - Provide inputs into the development of the Evaluation Plan, including the overall approach and review methodology.
 - Attend key meetings and/or lead consultations with implementing partners.
 - Contribute to the analytical workshop and the development and presentation of the aide memoire to DFAT; and
 - Contribute to producing a draft and final report in accordance with the agreed Evaluation Plan.

⁸ The Report is required to meet DFAT Aid Program Monitoring and Review Standards ([Independent Review Reports - Standard 6](#))

The table below provides an indication of the level of effort for key tasks required for each position.

Estimated inputs (please indicate time unit)

Activity	Review Leader	National Consultant
Desk preparation	5	2
Data tool development (surveys and interview guides)	5	1
Data collection and analysis (remote and in-country)	15	8
Draft and Final Reporting	10	4
Total number of days	35	15

Timeline

The Evaluation will start on 1 August 2022 and be finalised at the latest by 30 November 2022.

Roles of respective parties

The EoFE team will be responsible for the proper conduct of the evaluation and meeting all requirements under the contract.

DFAT will hold regular meetings with the contractor to provide advice and respond to emerging issues.

ASIRF will support the contractor by providing key documentation; a list of stakeholders and their contact details and provide other contextual information relevant to the evaluation.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting this review, the EoFE team should:

- Comply with:
 - the Australasian Evaluation Society code of ethics, available at [this link](#), and
 - DFAT Aid Evaluation Policies.
- Obtain informed consent in writing from review participants after they have been advised of what information will be sought and how the information will be recorded and used.
- Treat all information and findings as confidential.
- Reference appropriately all published or unpublished documents used in the review.

Annex 2 PAF Results

Performance Elements	Intermediate outcomes/performance expectations	Type of Indicator	#	Evidence	Comments on overall performance/Notes for presentation
Stakeholders and Partnership / Collaboration and engagement	The Facility engages other actors (including ASIRF-supported DFAT programs and private sector suppliers) to build solid relationships, networks and partnerships that advance the Facility's objectives and/or increase efficiency.	# of ASIRF partners by type	Donor Agencies 1, ASIRF Programs 12, Grantees Local 3, Grantees INGO 4, Local suppliers 127, Australian Suppliers 13. Total 140	LTB, Grant Summary and Supplier Listing	There has been an increase in the use of local suppliers in accordance with ASIRF localisation initiatives.
*	*	ASIRF partners (programs and private sector partners) report satisfaction with relationship promoting communication and collaboration.	To be assessed at end of 2022	Performance survey	To be assessed at end of 2022.
*	The facility makes operational decisions based on a sound understanding of the political economy and local context, effectively communicating operational decisions to stakeholders.	Annual plans and six-monthly reports and progress reflections demonstrate context analysis has informed ASIRF operational decisions.	Context included in SMPR and Annual Plan. COVID-19 impact study	Project reports and key deliverables.	COVID-19 impact study prepared and results presented in February 2022
*	N/A	ASIRF stakeholders (DFAT and Programs) report satisfaction with communication of key operational decisions and understand ASIRF policies/processes related to their engagement with the Facility.	To be assessed at end of 2022	Performance survey	To be assessed at end of 2022.
*	The roles of the facility and DFAT in policy engagement are clear and both regularly review progress and the need for any adjustment to engagement strategies.	Ways of working charter outline roles and responsibilities between program partners that are adhered to and revised as required.	1	1	The Ways of Working Charter has been updated to show the changes in the operating context. It has also taken in lessons learnt from previous years to be more responsive to the needs of the client and programs. WOW health checks will be held in the next reporting period to better reflect the needs of the new DFAT SO Managers and well as the FMT.

Performance Elements	Intermediate outcomes/performance expectations	Type of Indicator	#	Evidence	Comments on overall performance/Notes for presentation
*	*	# of new contracts/grants	140	A total of 140 requests were made compared to 57 in the July-December 2021 period. A total of 114 of the 140 procurements were requested in the January - April 2022 period.	None
*	*	% of new contracts/grants that subject to VFM assessment and approvals process	100%	Procurement documents	All subcontracts are assessed through a VfM lens prior to final approval, even if no formal assessment has been undertaken due to nature or size of the contract. The new MIS and VfM Framework will allow ASIRF to capture more data around this indicator and report on it accordingly in future periods.
*	*	% of major contracts issued within 45-day limit (from need identification to signature)	60%	Procurement documents	Of the 134 procurements processed, 6 per cent took longer than 45 days to finalise due to the shortage of supplies and delays in the global supply chain caused by the pandemic. The average time to turnaround a procurement (from request to the signing of contract) is 13.69 days. Of the 134 procurement requests in this reporting period, two saw significant delays, being SISNet and the delivery of morgue containers. The SISNet tender was purposely extended to allow sufficient time for vendors and panels to assess the tender submissions. Several panel meetings and interviews were held during this tender process that were beyond the minimal required under the Commonwealth Procurement Rules. The signing of the delivery of morgue containers was delayed due to complex contracting arrangements enforced by the supplier.

Performance Elements	Intermediate outcomes/performance expectations	Type of Indicator	#	Evidence	Comments on overall performance/Notes for presentation
*	*	% of international staff mobilised within 60-day limit from appointment	100%	HR document	<p>In this quarter, ASIRF provided support to a total 22 advisers who were mobilising for the first time into Honiara or returning from Annual Leave. ASIRF processed 7 work permits, 6 visas and 10 visa currently pending with Immigration. ASIRF supported 9 advisers returning from annual leave across the Programs and is currently supporting 2 advisers repatriating to their home locations.</p> <p>A challenge experienced this quarter, is the prolonged delays in getting visa exemption for advisers. This is even more complicated for advisers who are not attached a particular Ministry. An example is the case for the Facility itself, where visas have been pending with Immigration since March. There have been efforts to resolve the matter however now the Dept of Immigration is determined to maintain its stance that Facility staff are not covered under the DFAT SIG MOU which allows for project personnel to be issued an Exemption Visa. We continue to look for options to resolve this.</p> <p>ASIRF has managed to meet expectations in processing Visa within the 60-day limit where advisers are attached through a Ministry. So far 100 per cent of all new incoming advisers attached to a Ministry has received their exemption visas.</p> <p>ASIRF has unable to mobilise the DFD within the 60-day limit.</p>
*	*	% of new grants/contracts (by value) in period issued to local organisations/ individuals	72 per cent of contracts issued in the period to Jun 22 were to local entities	See Grant Summary	None

Performance Elements	Intermediate outcomes/performance expectations	Type of Indicator	#	Evidence	Comments on overall performance/Notes for presentation
Operations / Financial and Resource Management	Financial systems produce accurate budget forecasts.	% variance of expenditure and budget for each outcome area (or SO) in the period	24.4 per cent overall – see attached spreadsheet for breakdown by SO	LTB	None
*	Technical and finance/operations teams coordinate effectively to enable flexible programming and implementation in a controlled and managed manner	Examples of budget or staff reallocation to better deliver facility outcomes.	5	HR records	S07 amendment 2 signed with budgetary allocation increased to \$7,156,054 amendment 2 signed with the budgetary allocation increased to \$3,000,000 DSS - D2 Amendment of Service Order (Jim & Brian - DFAT) Contract Amendments for SO7 Health
*	Budget implications of adaptation / variation from plan (including grantees/sub-contractors) are managed efficiently.	# and nature of financial updates provided to ASIRF and program teams leading to effective coordination on resource allocation and management.	4	Changes to forecasts in LTB monthly financial reports	Monthly Financial report Forecast estimates Management Finance Presentation Tables and ratio calculations on Utilization and Burn ratio
*	Administration costs (including those of sub-contractors and grantees) are clearly identified and monitored/managed.	Cumulative % supply chain costs (direct delivery)	77.70%	LTB	None
*	*	Cumulative % supply chain costs (indirect delivery)	9.69%	LTB	None
*	*	Cumulative % administration costs	3.90%	LTB	None
*	*	Cumulative % spend	23.95%	LTB	None
*	*	% non-performance-based fee payments to date	5.27%	LTB	None
*	*	% performance-based fee payments to date	0.83%	LTB	None
*	*	% procurement fee payments to date	0%	LTB	None
*	*	% management (non-procurement) fee payments to date	1.46%	LTB	None

Performance Elements	Intermediate outcomes/performance expectations	Type of Indicator	#	Evidence	Comments on overall performance/Notes for presentation
Operations / High Quality Leadership and Teams	Leadership (DFAT and Facility) promotes an open and cooperative performance culture within the Facility and the programs its supports	# and nature of regular meetings between DFAT, ASIRF and Programs	1	ASIRF Support Management Unit Meeting to be held twice annually July and January prior to IPR submissions.	None
*	*	*	13	Fortnightly meeting held between DFAT Counsellor and Cardno Regional Manager	None
*	*	*	11	Weekly Management Meeting held between Facility Director and DFAT Activity Manager, and between DFAT Contractor rep and Activity Manager	None
*	*	*	13	Fortnightly Program Leads meeting which includes Heads of Programs, Facility Director, Cardno Contractor Reps, Cardno Regional Manager. Meetings facilitate cross program learning, innovation, strategic risk management.	None
*	*	*	31	Monthly or weekly meetings between Facility Director and Heads of Programs - depending on program requirements. Meetings discuss program specific issues and focus on problem solving, planning and operational risk management.	None
*	*	ASIRF and Program staff report satisfaction with cooperation and collaboration between and within teams (including DFAT)	To be assessed at end of 2022	Ways of Working Paper	None

Performance Elements	Intermediate outcomes/performance expectations	Type of Indicator	#	Evidence	Comments on overall performance/Notes for presentation
*	High-quality facility staff efficiently recruited and mobilised to fill vacancies, with preference to locally engaged personnel and ensuring gender balance (including in leadership).	% of program stakeholders who report ASIRF leadership demonstrates openness, flexibility, and cooperation in managing ASIRF program	To be assessed at end of 2022	Performance survey	None
*	Facility staff incentivised and empowered to: 1 deliver on intermediate outcomes (not activities/outputs), 2. work closely with counterparts, facility staff and DFAT on iterative problem identification and resolution; 3. Raise and flexibly respond to opportunities and constraints to furthering delivery of outcomes; 4. Proactively share learning.	Average # of days between advertising and onboarding staff.	54	Locally Engaged Staff – 54 days (total open rec days = 108/2 x open rec process	None
*	*	*	41.75	Advisers (LTA and STA) – 41.75 days (total open rec days =334 /8x open recruitment process	None
*	*	% of female staff recruited (by position type)	56.60%	* LTA - 6 x rec process, 3 x female recruited * STA - 23 x rec process, 13 x female recruited * LES - 21 rec process, 7 females recruited - 33.3 per cent	None
*	*	ASIRF staff report increasing empowerment of locally engaged personnel in management/leadership tasks	To be assessed at end of 2022.	Performance Survey	None
*	*	% Of technical/management (non-PSS) staff locally recruited	23%	*6 x technical staff (national STA) locally recruited out of 29 recruitment processes.	None
*	*	% of project support staff for the program are locally recruited	100%	100 per cent all LES locally recruited from the 18-recruitment process	None

Annex 3 Lessons Learned

ASIRF Key Lessons Learned	Strategies to Mitigate and/or Replicate Lesson
Strategic	*
To support implementation and management, ASIRF needs to employ relevant and appropriate strategies to mitigate regular staff turnover and differences of opinion that emerge from DFAT. This requires close consultation and engagement to prioritise and confirm agreements and approaches.	Formalised meetings established with DFAT, and clear guidance documented, and support provided to ensure a consistent approach to mobilisation, inductions, and support.
Communication is essential amongst program leads (internally) and with DFAT (externally). Regular formalised meetings are required to share information and provide regular updates on key emerging issues and priorities.	ASIRF to continue bi-weekly meetings that engage programme leads. Formal discussions that document approaches and agreements.
Political economy analysis is a critical component of on-going implementation and management and should be implemented jointly as a shared approach to assess emerging issues and trends that influence not only individual programme performance but the aid programme overall.	Consider the option of developing joint political economy analysis that covers all programme interventions. This would save time and resources and support a joint approach to analysis (and implementation).
The Ways of Working (WoW) charter is a useful tool but needs to be fully appreciated and implemented. Arrangements need to be established and confirmed with DFAT to ensure a full commitment to the Charter and its key principles.	Renew commitments to WoW and identify shortfalls and address specific issues as they relate to each programme.
Programme inductions should be streamlined to avoid duplication, confusion and/or mixed messages. An agreed approach should be confirmed with DFAT and communicated to another program leads	ASIRF to consider the application of standardised inductions. Review existing approaches and strengthen where appropriate.
Technical	*
To support implementation, programmes need to continue drawing on ASIRF experience and insights for job selections and for other strategic inputs that complement existing technical advisory support.	Through coordination meetings, identify opportunities for further ASIRF engagement.
To support grant management, ASIRF needs to be fully resourced and take a leadership role to coordinate with programmes who may not have the necessary capacity to implement such schemes	Grant management functions fully resourced and supported for implementation and management.
Programs should actively promote cross programme learning in a formal way. This should complement existing internal reviews. There is scope to promote cross-program learning across programmes which can then feed into overall performance updates and assessments.	ASIRF to consider bi-annual learning and reflection events across the portfolio of programmes in addition to internal learnings.
To strengthen implementation of GEDSI considerations, there is scope to promote joint implementation arrangements and consider joint approaches across programmes to generate efficiencies and consistent approaches.	Discussion with DFAT on how best to apply GEDSI across all programmes to support unified and consistent approaches.
Operational	*
To support harmonisation and overall efficiency, programs need to meet regularly. Often programmes act as individual entities which results in a non-harmonised approach with differing messages from DFAT. Need to harness the synergies of working together for political economy analysis, risk, resource sharing and VFM. Structured approaches are required that are documented and agreed before proceeding.	Continue bi-weekly meetings with programme leads.
To remain flexible and responsive, ASIRF needs to seek on-going opportunities with programme through formal and informal means to identify areas of support, gaps in implementation and management and recommend suggested approaches to harmonise efforts.	ASIRF to refresh approaches around technical and admin support. A current stocktake of current work and pipeline of activities (i.e., scale of deployments with the easing of restrictions).
On-going learning is critical and ASIRF needs to recognise what is being learned from programs. Engagement and learning drives efficiencies and innovation. The heads of programs are good at sharing, but engagement needs to cut across all elements of programme implementation and management	Ensure learning and reflection events are built into respective programme workplans/annual plans and coordinated through MEL teams.