



Australia-SPC Partnership evaluation 2022: FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

**Prepared for The Pacific Community (SPC) and
Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT)**

**University of Technology Sydney
CoLAB Consulting, Fiji**

October 2022

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Evaluation Team

- Dr Keren Winterford
- Anna Gero
- Iris Low
- Leaine Robinson

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Institute for Sustainable Futures
University of Technology Sydney
PO Box 123 Broadway, NSW, 2007
www.isf.uts.edu.au

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
ESC	Evaluation Steering Committee
FGD	Focus group discussion
GoA	Government of Australia
HLC	High Level Consultations (Australian-SPC)
ISF-UTS	Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney
KII	Key informant interview
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (New Zealand)
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Assistance Committee
PAF	Performance Assessment Framework
SPC	The Pacific Community
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN CRPD	The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
VfM	Value for Money

Executive Summary

Introduction

This Evaluation Report presents the synthesised findings of two parts of an evaluation exploring the contribution and impact of the Government of Australia (GoA) and The Pacific Community (SPC) Partnership (May 2014 - December 2023). The evaluations were conducted July – November 2022 and were jointly commissioned by the Australian Department of Foreign and Trade (DFAT) and SPC. The evaluation foci are:

Part 1: ‘Institutional strengthening and Partnership mechanisms’ focuses on contribution analysis of the Partnership towards strengthening institutional effectiveness in achieving better development outcomes across the Pacific. This part was carried out by University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and CoLAB Consulting.

Part 2: ‘Impact and Value for money’ exploring the contribution and impact of the current ten-year Partnership Agreement between Australia and SPC in terms of economic impact. Evaluation Part 2 has a clear focus on the value for money aspects of strengthening the corporate backbone of SPC. This part was carried out by the Strategic Development Group.

This report is prepared by the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF), University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and CoLAB Consulting and draws findings from both parts of the evaluation.

Evaluation purpose

The evaluation focuses on the Australian Government (GoA) - SPC ten-year Partnership (May 2014 – up until April 2023). Evaluation parts 1 and 2 explored the contribution and impact of the GoA and SPC Partnership. The purpose of each of the evaluations are:

Part 1 purpose:

1. Assess the contribution of the Partnership, including funding modalities to development impact through SPC.
2. Identify possible improvements to the design, management and evaluation mechanisms under of the Partnership, including how to monitor, assess and report the impact of Australia’s core contributions.
3. Identify whether the Partnership could further support key areas of SPC’s capabilities (people, systems and processes) that are of particular interest to Australia and SPC, such as gender and disability inclusion, and social and environmental responsibility.
4. Consider the impact that COVID-19 has had on SPC service delivery and processes and assess the contribution of flexible core funding to SPCs adaptations and pivots; and make recommendations on positive changes that resulted from COVID-19 that should be retained into the future.

Part 2 purpose:

5. Assess the value and impact of SPC’s unique contribution to the delivery of Pacific regional priorities, within the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP).
6. Assess what value and impact Australia is adding as a member and donor of SPC.
7. Consider options to embed value for money and impact assessments into SPC Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) practices.

Evaluation approach

Both parts of the evaluation employed a qualitative approach and used methods of multi-stakeholder key informant interviews (KII) and document review. The evaluation included a breadth and depth of inquiry through an extensive review of Partnership reporting and relevant documentation. More than 118 documents were reviewed for both evaluations. Sampling of participants was intentional to ensure diversity of perspectives and views from across SPC, SPC members, DFAT and development partners. 41 individuals were interviewed across Parts 1 and 2 of the evaluation.

Limitations

Limitations to the evaluation include limited engagement with SPC member countries (particularly CRGA), GoA representatives and other donors; tight schedule; and timing of field work meant some key informants were unavailable.

Evaluation findings – Part 1: - institutional strengthening and Partnership mechanisms

Partnership contribution to SPC institutional strengthening that enables development impact through SPC

The evaluation identified significant enhancements to institutional capabilities of SPC over the last eight-year Partnership period, across a range of different dimensions and with Partnership contribution described both in documentation and interviews and cited in Part 2 evaluation findings as well.

Partnership support to institutional capabilities of SPC has been multi-pronged, through core funding, Partnership relationships, as a member and through provision of technical support. Interestingly Partnership support to SPC institutional capacity is also described as shifting from an earlier operational focus to more strategic focus now.

Flexible, multi-year funding modality of core and program funding is meeting needs of SPC in multiple ways, most particularly core funding, though there are a few challenges associated with program funding arrangements under the Partnership agreement.

Core funding and program funding is meeting needs of GoA, though further clarity and opportunity may be realised through continued refinement of the Partnership arrangements and understanding and expectations of the Partnership with GoA.

Design, management, evaluation and communication mechanisms under the Partnership

Partnership arrangements: Various aspects of Partnership arrangements were described as effective to achieving shared outcomes of Australia and SPC, most notably the HLC, to a lesser extent focal points and Australia membership of the CRGA sub-committee. Whilst noting the value of these arrangements, DFAT and SPC stakeholders identified areas for improvement including senior staff equivalency in HLC, functionality of the focal point roles, clarity on Partnership principles and their operationalisation.

Monitoring, reporting, measuring and visibility: Strong and consistent recognition of the value of GoA using SPC annual results reporting to report on core funding was expressed by SPC and DFAT stakeholders. Parts 1 and 2 of the evaluation revealed the need for clarity about expectations of reporting, particularly in relation to program funding. SPC staff raised the issue about what types and level of questions should be asked, noting the need and value to consider macro – strategic level questions. Visibility plans are in place, integrated within Partnership agreements and viewed by both SPC and DFAT stakeholders positively, though there is recognition that their potential has not been fully realised and there is opportunity to strengthen visibility outcomes in the future.

Australia as member and donor of SPC: SPC stakeholders acknowledged that GoA balances well a complex relationship in the region and is both a valued partner and member. Similar views were expressed across both parts of the evaluation that Australia has the potential to realise more strategic gains from Partnership arrangements and membership of SPC. Whilst acknowledging the universal appreciation of Australia as donor and member, the evaluation also revealed mixed views within both sets of stakeholders (SPC and DFAT) and potential for future strengthening.

Gender and disability inclusion within SPCs operations and programming

SPC has made concerted contribution over the last eight-year Partnership period to operationalise its Social and Environmental (SER) policy and mainstream SER priorities, in particular gender equality and environmental responsibility. The evaluation found less evidence across documentation and interviews and Part 2 of the evaluation, of Partnership contribution to support SPC to operationalise disability inclusion across the organisation.

Concerted efforts by both DFAT and SPC through the Partnership period to support SPC to mainstream gender into policies and processes has strengthened SPC institutional capacity and capability to be able to implement DFAT's largest investment in gender equality, the Pacific Women Lead program.

Impact of COVID-19 on the Partnership

The evaluation identified less evidence of how COVID-19 has actually impacted the Partnership and management of the Partnership, though there is strong evidence that the Partnership did support SPC response. Core funding and the mature relationship between Australia and SPC through the Partnership, meant that SPC could be flexible, adaptable and responsive to the needs of the organisation as well as its members.

To a large extent the Partnership's flexible core funding contributed to SPC's COVID-19 response. The posture and maturity in which DFAT and SPC can have conversations has been a critical contribution during COVID-19, and enabled SPC flexibility to pivot quickly without spending too much time negotiating changes compared to other projects within SPC.

Evaluation findings – Part 2: - impact and value for money

Value and impact Australia is adding as a member and donor of SPC

SPC's work aligns with Australian aid, foreign policy and whole-of- government priorities and that of its other members. For Australia, regional organisations such as SPC are important vehicles for policy dialogue and for advancing its foreign relations, trade, security and development interests within the region. The Partnership allows Australia to establish mutual accountability and responsibility for its regional assistance, and it ensures that the assistance provided by Australia is tailored to the needs of the region and is delivered in a more coordinated manner than other modalities would allow.

The Partnership has contributed to SPC's Value for Money efforts and is providing Value for Money (VfM) to the region. Dimensions of VfM assessed in the evaluation include economy, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and ethics.

The Australia-SPC Partnership and most particularly core funding, has contributed to SPC to achieve value in the region in an efficient and effective manner. The Partnership is delivering value to the region. Stakeholders spoke of how core funds allow for wider scope of activities for the region, that core funding is also for short term initiatives before program funding comes online. The evaluation also identified strong evidence of strengthening of SPC's system, which has been enabled through contribution of core funding.

Options to embed value for money and impact assessments into SPC MEL practices

Part 2 of the evaluation prepared a Value for Money (VfM) matrix to guide the evaluation and reflected that whilst there were several positives in using this matrix to guide our assessment of value, there are certain challenges when applying the matrix. Part 2 of the evaluation identified that the VfM matrix would be useful for SPC, provided it is 'fit for purpose'. To ensure its utility it is important that the rubric developed is co-created with SPC to ensure that it truly reflects SPC's values and that it is therefore 'owned' by SPC. Using this tool, and the baseline measurement already provided, would be of value to SPC in helping it demonstrate its value to both its members and its metropolitan donors.

Recommendations

Part 1:

Recommendation 1: Within the Australia-SPC Partnership ensure senior equivalency between organisations within High Level Consultations and prioritise complementary Canberra-based meetings and online meetings within annual schedule

Recommendation 2: Within the Australia-SPC Partnership review and clarify functionality and expectations of Partnership focal point roles as part of, and to inform next phase of the Partnership (agreement).

Recommendation 3: Within the Australia-SPC Partnership, review, clarify and update Partnership principles as part of, and to enable next phase of the Partnership to be principles-led, ensuring that principles are reflective of the Pacific region.

Recommendation 4: Within the Australia-SPC Partnership, carry out annual Australia-SPC Partnership health check, with results to be presented at annual HLC to strengthen Partnership arrangements, as well as an effective means by which to measure contribution of GoA to SPC.

Recommendation 5: DFAT together with SPC, to review, clarify and adjust reporting expectations to broader GoA agencies associated with the Australia-SPC Partnership, in line with Partnership principles associated with flexible funding arrangements and socialise value and utility of SPC Annual Results Reports within GoA to inform next phase of the Partnership.

Recommendation 6: DFAT to continue efforts to improve strengthened coordination within DFAT and also across all GoA agencies associated with the Australia-SPC Partnership.

Recommendation 7: Australia-SPC Partnership to be informed by clarified principles, with GoA to prioritise focus on contribution to SPC through core funding and as a member contribute to strategic longer-term priorities of SPC and Members, emphasizing Pacific-led priorities and SPC leadership of coordinated delivery of regional public goods.

Recommendation 8: Within the Australia-SPC Partnership, review and strengthen visibility and profile of contribution of the Partnership to regional public goods to members and broader Pacific community, identify practical action for resourcing and targeted activities within SPC and DFAT, on behalf of GoA.

Part 2:

Recommendation 9: The importance remains of DFAT continuing to engage at a sufficiently senior level to support meaningful, strategic conversations [DFAT]

Recommendation 10: DFAT could better maximise the soft power garnered through the Partnership by having more senior people build stronger relationships with senior counterparts in SPC [DFAT]

Recommendation 11: A shift to a rolling 3-year arrangement would give greater visibility and certainty over future funding. If this is not possible given DFAT's systems, a longer arrangement period with the possibility of extension, such as a 5-year arrangement with the option for an additional 5-years would be preferable [DFAT to discuss with SPC at next HLC]

Recommendation 12: A Theory of Value Creation and an appropriate VfM Matrix need to be co-created with SPC and its members to ensure it fully reflects a collective understanding of value, and is hence owned by SP. [MeINET to lead within SPC, in conjunction with DFAT]

1. Introduction

This Evaluation Report presents the synthesised findings of two parts of an evaluation exploring the contribution and impact of the Government of Australia (GoA) and The Pacific Community (SPC) Partnership 2014-2023. The evaluations were conducted July – November 2022. The evaluations were jointly commissioned by the Australian Department of Foreign and Trade (DFAT) and SPC. The evaluation foci are:

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Part 2: ‘Impact and Value for money’ exploring the contribution and impact of the current ten-year Partnership Agreement between Australia and SPC in terms of economic impact. Evaluation Part 2 has a clear focus on the value for money aspects of strengthening the corporate backbone of SPC. This part was carried out by the Strategic Development Group

This report is prepared by the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF), University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and CoLAB Consulting and draws findings from both parts of the evaluation.

The evaluation report has five sections: 1) Introduction; 2) Background and context; 3) Evaluation Overview; 4) Findings and 6) Annexes. This evaluation report has been prepared in line with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) M&E Standards (Standard 6) (see Annex 1).

2. Background and context

2.1 SPC Partnership

The Pacific Community (SPC) is the principal scientific and technical organisation in the Pacific region, established 1947. It is an inter-governmental organisation owned and governed by 27 country and territory members, including Australia. It is the largest organisation within the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP), employing over 615 staff and with an annual operating budget of approximately EUR90 million through Member and voluntary core contributions, programme funding and project funding.

Australia is a founding member and key donor of SPC. As a member, Australia participates in SPC's governing bodies. SPC's governing body is the Conference of the Pacific Community, which is charged with establishing the high-level, strategic orientations of the organisation. It meets every two years at the ministerial level. In years when the Conference does not meet, the Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations (CRGA) is empowered to make decisions on governance issues. CRGA also has three sub-committees that report to it: the Sub-committee on the implementation of the Strategic Plan, the Pacific Board for Educational Quality and the Audit and Risk Committee. As a donor, the Government of Australia engages principally through the Partnership, including at annual High-Level Consultations (HLCs).

2.2 The Partnership

The evaluation focuses solely on the Australian Government (GoA) - SPC ten-year Partnership (here after referred to as the Partnership), specifically the period from May 2014 – April 2023. In 2014, the Australian Government and SPC signed a ten-year Partnership agreement. Three sequential grant arrangements of core funding sit under this Partnership (2014-2017, 2018-2020 and 2021-2023). This core funding is the largest contribution of flexible and predictable multi-year funding to SPC. Outside these core funding grants, Australia also provides programmatic and project funding.

In recognition of SPC's strategic value and strong performance, in 2020 Australia signed a new three-year, \$42.5 million core funding agreement (to 2023) and revised the existing 10-year Partnership agreement (also to 2023) with SPC to reflect evolving circumstances in the region.

The Partnership is set out in the document 'The Pacific Community (SPC) and Government of Australia (GoA) Partnership 2014-2023 (renewed November 2020).

The preamble (1.1) of the agreement states "This Partnership between the GoA and SPC establishes our shared vision to work in close cooperation to achieve improved development outcomes and sustainable improvements in the quality of life of all Pacific islanders"

Principles are set out which are described to "underpin all aspects of the Partnership between GoA and SPC":

- **Mutual respect and responsibility**, including openness to working together and exploring new opportunities together, and resolving through open discussion any issues that emerge;
- **Enhanced donor harmonisation**, including to simplify procedures, reduce the reporting and administration burden, and to avoid duplication;
- **A focus on improving results and understanding impact** through joint evaluation and learning; and
- **Visibility and transparency** to maximise communication and awareness of the Partnership within SPC and GoA and amongst other stakeholders.

In the renewed Partnership document (November 2020) three objectives are stated

- i. Effective and efficient regional service delivery
- ii. Enhanced SPC capabilities
- iii. A stronger relationship between GoA and SPC

3. Evaluation Overview

This section sets out the evaluation approach and covers both parts of the evaluation.

3.1 Evaluation purpose

Evaluation parts 1 and 2 explored the contribution and impact of the GoA and SPC Partnership. Specifically, the purpose of each of the evaluations are:

Part 1 purpose:

1. Assess the contribution of the Partnership, including funding modalities to development impact through SPC.
2. Identify possible improvements to the design, management and evaluation mechanisms under of the Partnership, including how to monitor, assess and report the impact of Australia's core contributions.
3. Identify whether the Partnership could further support key areas of SPC's capabilities (people, systems and processes) that are of particular interest to Australia and SPC, such as gender and disability inclusion, and social and environmental responsibility.
4. Consider the impact that COVID-19 has had on SPC service delivery and processes and assess the contribution of flexible core funding to SPCs adaptations and pivots; and make recommendations on positive changes that resulted from COVID-19 that should be retained into the future.

Part 2 purpose:

5. Assess the value and impact of SPC's unique contribution to the delivery of Pacific regional priorities, within the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP).
6. Assess what value and impact Australia is adding as a member and donor of SPC.
7. Consider options to embed value for money and impact assessments into SPC Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) practices.

3.2 Questions

Each part of the evaluation had key evaluations question to frame inquiry and write up. The set of key evaluation questions for each of the evaluations are set out in Table 2 and

Table 3 in Annex 2.

3.3. Evaluation approach

Both parts of the evaluation employed a qualitative approach, and both used methods of multi-stakeholder key informant interviews (KII) and document review. Part 1 conducted an online quantitative survey, but the response rate was too low to enable sufficient analysis.¹ The evaluation included both a breadth and depth of inquiry through an extensive review of Partnership reporting and relevant documentation. More than 40 documents were reviewed for both evaluations. Sampling of participants was also intentional to ensure diversity of perspectives and views from across SPC, SPC members, DFAT and development partners. 41 individuals were interviewed across Parts 1 and 2 of the evaluation².

Evaluation team for part 1 has been tasked to synthesis findings from both parts of the evaluation and present in this synthesized report. The final report of Part 2 has been used to write this report.

Case studies prepared for Part 2 are presented to capture linkages between institutional strengthening and SPC contribution to improved development outcomes in the Pacific drawing on data from document review and KIIs.

¹ For transparency of evaluation findings, survey results are provided in Annex 5.

² Part 1 – 22 interviews were conducted, Part 2 – 19 interviews were conducted

Part 1 data analysis and write up was framed by the evaluation questions as set out in the Evaluation plan. Document review and interview notes were analysed through Dedoose, online qualitative research software and thematic analysis generating 1,145 excerpts informed findings and recommendations.

Part 2 of the evaluation analysis was informed by two approaches, namely contribution analysis and Value for Money (VfM) analysis. As described by Part 2 evaluation team:

A light touch **contribution analysis** was done in order to account for what best accounts for our findings, and the extent to which the Partnership has contributed to these results. In so doing the team acknowledges that in many cases there are many different events and actors that have brought about change within SPC over the past ten years. Nevertheless, we have also identified instances where change has been introduced through specific contributions made by the Partnership.

The team also developed and applied a VfM matrix to guide our analysis of the merit and significance of the use of the Partnership's resources and a Theory of Value Creation. The rubrics within the VfM matrix helped shaped our evaluative judgement about the extent to which the Partnership is supporting SPC's efforts to deliver VfM (p.10)

The list of key informants for both evaluations can be found at Annex 3 and documents reviewed can be found at Annex 4.

3.4 Evaluation limitations

The evaluation plans for part 1 and 2 identified a number of potential limitations, some of which were realised and need to be acknowledged, since they will influence a reader's interpretation of the findings.

The evaluation had limited engagement with SPC members. Despite numerous invitations and also offers to provide input via email by the evaluation team and also follow up from DFAT, Part 1 was not able to meet with representatives from SPC members countries, most particularly CRGA attendees, due to difficulty in scheduling interviews during the data collection period. Some GoA representatives and also other donors were not available. Part 2 of the evaluation included representation from two SPC members. In total three development partners were included in Part 1 and Part 2 of the evaluation.

Part 2 of the evaluation identified limitations: "Limitations faced during the evaluation were primarily related to the tight schedule. Timing of the fieldwork also created challenges due to many key informants either being on leave or unavailable due to other commitments. The evaluation team mitigated these limitations using multiple approaches to data gathering" (p.10).

4. Findings

Evaluation findings are informed by document review and key informant interviews carried out for both parts of the Australia – SPC Partnership evaluation 2022: Part 1 - institutional strengthening and Partnership mechanisms and Part 2 - impact and value for money. Findings presented in this report are informed by primary data collected and analysis for Part 1 and review and synthesis of findings of an evaluation report which presented Part 2 findings, provided to the authors of this report by SPC and DFAT.

Findings are presented under evaluation objectives and evaluation questions relevant to the two parts of the evaluation. Objectives set out in 4.1 – 4.4 are for institutional strengthening and Partnership mechanisms (Part 1) and 4.5 - 4.6 (Part 2) are for impact and value for money.

4.1 Partnership contribution to SPC institutional strengthening that enables development impact through SPC.

This section provides evaluation findings relevant to evaluation questions:

- 1.1 How and to what extent has the Partnership supported SPC to enhance its institutional capabilities (people, systems and processes); specifically, its financial sustainability and leverage, MEL systems and institutional governance?
- 1.2 How and to what extent has the design of the predictable, flexible, multi-year funding modality supported the needs of both SPC and GoA?
- 1.3 Are there innovative funding modalities that could increase the effectiveness of the Partnership?

The evaluation identified significant enhancements to institutional capabilities of SPC over the last eight-year Partnership period, across a range of different dimensions and with Partnership contribution described both in documentation and interviews, and also cited in Part 2 evaluation findings.

Partnership support to institutional capabilities of SPC has been multi-pronged, through core funding, Partnership relationships, through provision of technical support, and through Australian membership of SPC. Partnership support to SPC institutional capacity is also described as shifting from an earlier operational focus to more strategic focus now.

As noted by numerous interviewees, it is not possible, nor is there interest to discern attribution of the Partnership to institutional changes, rather there is recognition of Partnership contribution together with SPC membership and leadership and management of SPC.

Core funding was described as providing SPC senior leadership with the ability to carry out institutional reform. Prioritisation of resources for institutional strengthening could not have been achieved through project funding alone. Examples of SPC institutional reforms described during the evaluation included the set-up of Audit and Risk Committee; CRGA sub-committee; participatory member processes to inform recent strategic plan development; and strengthened whole of organisation MEL processes. This key finding and theme described by multiple stakeholders is illustrated by a DFAT representative:

I think by Australia delivering so much of our funding through core funding has given the organisation that ability to reshape itself, to reinvent itself and given it the scope to make some decisions to improve the overall system and architecture of the system which I think if it was in drips and drabs,,,project funding that doesn't lend itself to that overhaul. (DFAT 3)

The GoA through the Partnership has also demonstrated a commitment to institutional strengthening outcomes for SPC. The role of the Partnership in enhancing SPC institutional capabilities was both described by DFAT and SPC and demonstrates the shared commitment to action and valued role of the Partnership and contribution to SPC. Core funding not only supported institutional capacity but helped to change the dynamics of the Partnership, fostering trust rather than a relationship focused on compliance. Key quotes from interviews illustrative this shared perspective:

I think that Australia as well has been very committed to institutional strengthening and so they have over the life of the Partnership put funding to specific things, including our MERL. Back in the day, they had panel members in consultants they were able to draw from, to supplement our own team. They also supported the audit and risk committee to get off the ground and put organisational structure in place. They supported compliance systems. They came in to assist institutional strengthening in that particular space and they have visibility of that due to the close relationships that have developed over time. (SPC 1)

I guess we were supportive of the work that SPC was doing in this regard. As there are a couple of ways the Partnership supported SPC- firstly Australia being an active member of the governance, attending the conference, CRGA, subcommittees- and being part of the sub committees (HR, budget, finance, M&E) bringing our ideas and sign off and supporting the ideas when they come up.

Then the mechanisms that support the Partnership each year like when we have brought in different parts of DFAT/areas of expertise to talk about the Partnership.

Then just the principles that sit behind this which is not about Australia dictating to SPC what its priorities should be or what it should be doing but really saying that this is a regional organisation that is led by its members and Australia is just one of those and so I guess Australia supporting that M&E that SPC wants to do or supporting what its members want to do rather than Australia trying to dictate those. (DFAT 4)

Shifts in the how the Partnership has been managed was also described as a contributor to SPC institutional strengthening. As described in Part 2 of the evaluation “Initially the Partnership agreement included a separate Performance Assessment Framework (PAF), which was used to assess the performance of the Partnership, this was gradually done away with and SPC’s own annual *Pacific Community Results Report* is now the only report used to report on performance” (p.17) This shift in the Australia – SPC Partnership approach is demonstrative of increased trust in SPC and focus on SPC to prioritise and lead institutional capabilities reforms.

The evaluation identified strong evidence of enhanced institutional capabilities of SPC in financial sustainability, governance arrangements, and MEL.

1. Improvements to financial management. Examples of improved institutional capabilities include improved business processes including for procurement and better management of SPC reserves, and cost recovery imperatives across the organisation. A critical aspect of SPCs improvement has been the strengthening of its auditing and accountability processes under the oversight of the Audit and Risk Committee. Strong financial management of SPC was evident in response to the COVID-19 pandemic with financial reserves maintained and cited as evidence of strong institutional capacity.

Part 2 of the report described how stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation noted that the value of the Partnership’s strong support to the Audit and Risk Committee “includes contributing to strengthening a culture of internal audit and risk within SPC (this included ensuring a clearly defined internal audit function being established in SPC) ensuring that SPC has a cautionary mechanism which helps to ensure SPC reflects before acting” (p.21)

2. Institutional strengthening of MEL. This evaluation highlighted significant improvements in SPC MEL, described in Partnership documentation, consistently by multiple stakeholders and early evaluations. MEL improvements in MEL were described in earlier Partnership agreements as a priority area of focus. DFAT sought to support the SPC priority. DFAT provided resources such as through the Regional Assistance Scheme (RAS)³ to support strengthening in this area. Improvements have been previously described:

The monitoring, evaluation and learning system has been strengthened. The improvements in reporting and a greater focus on achieving higher-level, more sustained results, have been supported by a strengthened monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system. The results reports indicate a sustained, cross-organisation programme of work to better assess progress and improve

³ The DFAT Regional Assistance Scheme (RAS) was a panel of consultants available to regional organisations to support reform efforts across a range of topics, from budgeting, reporting, and monitoring and evaluation. DFAT concluded the RAS in 2016 due to budget pressures and difficulty clarifying the benefits of the scheme

learning in order to provide direction to SPC, which in turn enables priorities, programming and business planning to better reflect member country needs. Internal MEL capacity was strengthened, with MEL advisors in many divisions, MEL budgets allocated to programmes, and a strong focus on learning processes to inform direction⁴.

Further details on institutional strengthening for SPC MEL and Partnership contribution are provided in Case Study 1).

3. Institutional governance arrangements and processes have been strengthened. Commonly cited examples are the establishment of (i) CRGA subcommittee to support realisation of the SPC strategy, and (ii) establishment of the Risk and Audit committee. The development of the most recent SPC strategic plan benefitted from the new committee processes to provide a participatory and inclusive process to inform the plan. As described by stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation, the process enabled SPC to convene Member inputs to have an increased role and voice to decide SPC priorities. Strengthened capacity of SPC has strengthened the leadership role and also accountability and transparency to members in the region. This shift in SPC practice has strengthened Pacific-led focus of SPC and members. As described by a SPC representative

Without a strong relationship with members through sub-committee (the CRGA sub-committee), we would not have a platform to co-design and co-create a strategic plan. In the past, it was designed by the Secretariat, then Secretariat presents it to members and the members considered it. This time we had a mechanism, we had trusted relationship that we could work together (Australia and NZ also part of the subcommittee, under the Chair of New Caledonia). We would facilitate participatory processes, we would develop something iteratively (done all in lock down) to then have a Strategic Plan that is co-written by the members, has Pacific languages for the first time, it has metaphors, and imagery now, which are all of the things the sub committees have told us in our meetings are necessary for a Pacific organisation with multiple languages so how can we speak to everyone when it's very technical and is only in English or French? How can we demonstrate that our value proposition is different to other development partners in the region that aren't member owned?

This speaks volume to the Strategic Plan being approved in November and most recently our Heads of Fisheries, our FAME division presented their Business Plan (which cascades down from the strategic plan) and it has its own metaphor, it tells its own Pacific story and they used a video to launch that. This division is our most scientific technical division, filled with very high level expertise and when I joined they were talking about their division, their role and their science but now they talk about their role in the region to help support the Pacific meet its own aspirations using Pacific story telling which would not be possible if we had to pitch that as a project and get someone to fund that – but it's about culture change, mindset change, ownership, about being Pacific led – for the Pacific, by the Pacific and that that flexible modality and Partnership funding gives us the opportunity to work in those ways. (SPC 2)

⁴ Evaluation of SPCs Strategic Plan 2016 2020 Capstone Report

CASE STUDY 1

Leading learning in the Pacific

Introduction and background

This case study illustrates Partnership contribution to strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) capacity within SPC. The case study is informed by interviews with DFAT and SPC stakeholders and Partnership related reporting and documentation.

Strengthening MEL practice within SPC has been a clear long-term priority for both GoA and SPC. Priority was reflected in past Partnership agreements, as illustrated in the 2014-2017 Partnership Agreement which stated an objective, “Development of an SPC-wide planning, monitoring, evaluation and accountability systems which enables demonstration of results to members and donors and improved development effectiveness” (p.17). Strengthening MEL capacity has been a high priority for SPC. In 2017 and 2018 Pacific leaders and SPC’s governing council called for “more evidence, including the capacity for evidence generation, analysis and uptake that is required to support innovation” and “strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) capacity in order to supply and increase the demand for evidence to support decision-making” (SPC 2020, p.1).

The case study describes the trajectory within the Partnership to mobilise and equip MEL practice to be a core function and contribution of SPC. Strengthened MEL capacity provides a significant contribution to efficiency and effectiveness of SPC as well as improved accountability and visibility of SPC results and contribution to regional public goods for its members and donors alike.

Motivations for change

The shift in MEL capacity has been catalysed by multiple agendas including through the Australia – SPC Partnership.

- There has been growing demand for improved MEL practice and outcomes. As described by a SPC staff member “we had gone on for too long without MEL capacity, and this was recognised by donors, partners (such as Australia, New Zealand, EU) and members” (SPC 16).
- Whilst partners and members were asking for more information beyond project level, there was limited whole of organisation reporting on outcomes and impact. SPC had experience and capability to collect data but less capability to manage, share and demonstrate contribution of delivery of services and goods to the region.

- Increased demand, better understanding of the value of MEL over time, has in turn fuelled further demand and advocacy for strengthened MEL practice within SPC. As described by a SPC staff member, “providing increased information to members, has enabled them to be more informed and helps them to advocate for information, to know how we have performed and worked with them” (SPC 16).
- Dedicated MEL expertise in the former EDD division, demonstrated the value of MEL to FAME and flow on from there to PHD and divisions within SPC.
- The SDGs and need for substantive reporting in the region also heightened the need for strengthened MEL practice. The need to measure progress against the SDGs put on the radar for members issues of capability and capacity of MEL in the region.

Strengthened institutional capacity of MEL

Significant change in MEL capacity has been realised over the last eight years, as evidenced through Partnership related reporting, staffing, networks and engagement across SPC and the region with members. As described by one SPC staff member, ‘it has been a transformation’ (SPC 16). Importantly changes are institutionalised across the organisation and have informed cultures and practices which value MEL for SPC and SPC members, recognising its support to SPCs contribution to regional public goods. Strengthened institutional capacity is evident in key dimensions as outlined below.

Increased staffing. MEL staffing has substantially increased from two central MEL positions and a further four-five sitting in divisions seven years ago, to 15 specific staff dedicated to MEL and increased numbers at division, program and project level. A community of practice of MEL staff in SPC, the MELNet has 77 members across the organisation. The network contributes to ownership of MEL practice and outcomes and learning and provides a means to understand organisational MEL needs. As described by a SPC staff member, “connected to MEL is a broader group of SPC staff who also operationalise and champion MEL, including division directors, project managers, communication and information staff.” (SPC 16)

Whole of organisation approach. There has been a cultural shift in the organisation with increased demand and recognition of the utility of MEL by SPC staff and also members. SPC instituted a performance management policy (Planning, evaluation, accountability, reflection, and learning [PEARL]) in 2016.

The Annual Results Report (Pacific Community Results Report)⁵ has been prepared through leadership of SPC since 2016. Importantly the reporting provides the basis for reporting to members and donors alike, for GoA and MFAT who provide core funding.

The CRGA subcommittee which oversees implementation of the SPC Strategic Plan has been central to oversight and advocacy of MEL. As a key audience group of the annual results report, they have provided review and directions on ways to improve the reporting, with continuous improvement over recent years.

Member demand and meeting member needs for MEL. As noted above SPC member demand for MEL has been reinforced by improved capacity of MEL, and in turn has required SPC to be more responsive to growing demand for evidence. This virtuous cycle was described by one SPC stakeholder,

“Support has enabled us to improve results reporting and to be able to service the sub-committee with that evidence and then their input in how to improve that contributes us to be more responsive to member needs, to be more evidence driven in the region, demonstrates what you can do with those capacities, and this is helping assist with demand of those capabilities.” (SPC 2)

Pacific-led MEL. SPC continues to champion strengthening Pacific-led evidence and learning and there is strong evidence that SPC will build from its solid basis to continue to strengthen MEL capacity in the region. SPC is leading Pacific-led MEL capacity in the region. For example, in 2020 the ‘Pacific Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Capacity strengthening *Rebbilib*’⁶ was published which provides a road map for Pacific-led MEL practice.

Contribution of the Partnership

The Australia – SPC Partnership has provided key contributions to improved capacity of MEL in SPC. The 2016 independent evaluation of the Partnership by the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) noted “SPC and DFAT recognise that the support Australia has provided to SPC for monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) development through the Partnership has been a useful model for building capability and securing organisational change” (p.4).

- Short-term technical support provided under the Regional Advisory Services (RAS) program was described by multiple SPC and DFAT stakeholders as a key contributor to

strengthened MEL practice. For example, input into results framework to accompany the strategic plan was provided by technical support under the RAS program. Importantly, SPC SPL were described by those interviewed as knowing how they wanted to use consultants and how to strategically inform work and plans for the future via technical support.

- DFAT as also been a champion of improved practice. As described by SPC staff, ‘DFAT has been long-term advocates for MEL. Even at sectoral level, they have an awareness of MEL as DFAT staff have requirements for MEL. DFAT has also demonstrated a willingness to support, they don’t just say do better, but also put resources in as well.’ (SPC XX)
- Doing things differently was also a necessity for both Australia and SPC, recognising the diversity of reporting requirements. “With lots of different programs there was also a growing recognition of the reporting burden for both DFAT and SPC. Shifting to the Results Report has balanced requirements. DFAT support has supported robust MEL but minimised the reporting burden. For the Partnership this has been a real strength” (SPC 16).

An important element of the support through the Australia – SPC Partnership has been a whole of organisation approach to support. As noted by an SPC staff member, “it lifts to higher level aspirations to support whole countries, whole regions. We want to have principles that support ways of working at the regional level.” (SPC 15)

Strengthened institutional capacity in MEL has provided a foundation for ongoing organisational development as well as extension work by SPC to work with local governments to improve Members MEL capacity. “Without initial investment and now having the MEL capacity, we would not have been in a position to now be thinking about how we localise it and make it an extension for local governments” (SPC 15).

⁵ First produced by RAS in 2013/14 and then subsequent years by SPC.

⁶ Marshall Island term referring to journey and references a road map for SPC

Flexible, multi-year funding modality of core and program funding is meeting needs of SPC in multiple ways, most particularly core funding, though there are a few challenges associated with program funding arrangements under the Partnership agreement.

To a large extent the multi-year core funding is valued as providing flexible funding which provides certainty and autonomy for SPC to plan strategically and effectively and deliver to its Pacific members. This evaluation finding was evidenced through numerous interviews with DFAT, SPC, project documentation and also Part 2. Core funding provides the basis on which program and projects can be implemented – described by stakeholders as the ‘scaffolding’ and others as the ‘front-end-loading’ to institutional strengthening. Others described ‘resiliency’ of the organisation due to multiple year flexible funding. As demonstrated through the recent COVID response, core and program funding has enabled SPC to be responsive to regional issues. See Case Study 2 for more details about the COVID-19 response. Flexible, multi-year funding was valued as critically important to SPC and described by multiple representatives, as illustrated by one example below:

DFAT is just incredibly valuable to SPC in the way it engages. Having DFAT embrace the fact that its core funding leverages and impacts so much, because it provides the base that all program and project funding has - if it's just projects and programs – there would be gaps. The core provides that certainty. (SPC 1)

Core funding and program funding enables SPC to leverage project-based funding and minimise risks associated with short-term fixed funding. Core and program funding ensures that SPC can maintain staff to support institutional priorities and is not dependent on cyclical nature of project funding. Risks associated with reliance on project funding are evidenced from relevant documentation and also interviews. For example, the organisation can't be responsive to emerging needs; can't plan long-term strategically, there are high transaction costs; can't retain staff; and increased fragmentation across the organisation. Project funding priorities are also often set by the donor and don't necessarily align with organisational priorities. Themes associated with dependence on project funding is illustrated through one example of SPC stakeholder perspective:

One of the hardest things of project-based funding is you never get the funds when you really want them and often that gestation period of developing the project approval and disbursement is not well aligned with your existing funding to keep staff in place who are working on those kinds of things. (SPC 15)

Core funding enables SPC to focus on organisational reform agendas and institutional strengthening activities. The value of core funding to support institutional strengthening agendas of SPC have been long recognised and evident in various earlier reviews and evaluations. For example, SPC independent review in 2012 and 2016 ODE evaluation Institutional strengthening reforms are described above.

Core funding and agreed reporting to donors such as GoA and MFAT through the annual ‘Pacific Community Results Report’ reduces burden of reporting and supports development effectiveness through member and partner harmonisation. Whilst harmonised reporting on core funding is valued by SPC, there are still issues in duplication of reporting across divisions more particularly related to program funding.

Significant effort has been made by SPC to prepare annual reporting which services interests of members and donors alike. This reduces huge transaction costs for SPC in terms of multiple reporting requirements. The reporting is also described as elevating the Partnership beyond transaction to shared interests.

Reduced reporting burden/requirement- this is probably the dogma of the Pacific. Every individual partner that requires us to do reporting, according to their format, requires the staff to learn to do that and dedicated staff to do the monitoring, reporting and evaluation and to keep up with the schedule that is not aligned with the rest of the organisation's budget process, annual reporting, and mid year reporting to members. So the harmonisation of reporting with our own annual reporting is a really good donor harmonisation and aid effectiveness element that I think comes out of this Partnership and core programmatic funding approach under the Partnership (SPC 15)

Whilst Program funding is also valued by SPC, the evaluation revealed limitations associated with program funding.

The evaluation revealed that some GoA agencies working under the Partnership are not following Partnership principles. For example, SPC stakeholders described program agreements proposing reviews and reporting which are considered beyond the agreed reporting frameworks and requirements under the Partnership. SPC staff are put in positions where they feel the need to 'call out' agencies or organisations to uphold principles of the Partnership.

There is also potential fragmentation of SPC divisions, as division directors seek to gain program donor funding. Funding can be informed by existing relationships and there is potential for some divisions not to gain new funding. As described by a divisional director, there is limited funding from 'core funding' to cover the scope of work within divisions, and so there are efforts made to access program funding externally from donors. This means that divisions are more accountable to donors than members and divisional directors are sourcing funding, not necessarily coordinated with each other; *"There's a bit of undermining of our accountability to the members, including the Pacific Island members, by the fact that Australia is giving program funds directly to me rather than going via core"* (SPC 6).

This finding highlights the importance of SPC coordination across all types of funding. The role of a strengthened secretariat was proposed to *"build a resource mobilisation and Partnerships capability that can more ably direct investment from donors into the priorities of the organisation and push back on where we already have enough investment or its not a priority of the vast majority of the member countries at the time"* (SPC 7). This view was also described by another SPC stakeholder:

I don't see robust discussion between member countries and donor to say- wait these are the priorities we have for investment across the board and these areas are vastly under-funded. Perfect example is culture- traditional knowledge and culture is the mandate of SPC but that is something that has never been funded because it is not something that is really attractive to donor partners and yet when we as a science institution we know that traditional knowledge and culture practice fills the gaps that we don't have science for. If we were able to spend as much money on capturing traditional practice and knowledge in fisheries management, we would vastly improve our complete dataset of information with science and traditional knowledge to help members make informed decisions. And we don't have that because it is not area that received funding. (SPC 4)

Core funding and program funding is meeting needs of GoA, though further clarity and opportunity may be realised through continued refinement of the Partnership arrangements and understanding and expectations of the Partnership with GoA.

1. The Partnership is meeting national interests of GoA as evidenced within national policy. The Partnership aligns to the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper and more particularly the Pacific Step-up, cited as one of Australia's highest foreign policy priorities, highlighted in Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper. The Partnership also supports the DFAT Pacific Regional Aid Investment Plan.

In the context of aid effectiveness, supporting regional service delivery through SPC contributes to Australia's commitments to development effectiveness agendas. Commitment to regional development policy and practice is also in line with the new (2022) Labor government stance about listening and working with Pacific countries and territories and regional bodies.

2. The Partnership is in line with Australia's commitment to aid effectiveness and to the principles of regionalism. This has supported its choice to work through SPC as a Pacific-owned and run organisation accountable to members. For DFAT, the Partnership is complementary to the White Paper (2017) and Partnerships for Recovery. The Partnership has been consistently aligned to GoA priorities as reflected in Part 2 of the evaluation which documented that the Pacific Regional Situation Analysis (RSA) (December 2012) determined that DFAT's regional programming should be focused on delivering regional public goods. The RSA identified four areas in which there is a clear regional public good: managing shared natural resources; promoting economic integration; providing specialised services; and promoting region-wide norms and standards. SPC contributes to all four of these areas. (AQC 2014)

3. As member of SPC, Australia has ability to engage with other members and leverage SPC's convening power in the region. SPC is a vehicle for policy dialogue on regional development efforts and offers an opportunity to have conversations with ministers across the region. This contribution for GoA was described by both SPC and DFAT stakeholders:

From the Australian side I think its enabled Australia to influence and to have conversations around tables they may not been able to have. SPC has huge convening power – in all sectors – we are able to convene, to get Ministers together, we have that convening power. That allows impact through core funding, to regional public good, instead of the bilateral public good. By having that consistent convening power it's probably helped Australia message and understand particularly in very difficult times, when there was challenging conversations that were being had between Australia ministers and Pacific Ministers, but Australia was still providing a lot of support to the Pacific. (SPC 1)

It is important for GoA/DFAT to be a provider of such core funding because it means we can have the kind of conversations at the whole of organisation level, gives us an entrée as well in terms of the GoA relationship and SPC as well that might not exist in the same way perhaps if we weren't such significant funders within the setting of the Partnership, and this is important. (DFAT 3)

4. A challenge for DFAT is reporting on contribution of core and program funding – and how to demonstrate value for money. This view was expressed by both SPC and DFAT staff, there is a shared recognition of the challenge for DFAT. Core funding was described as fundamental to functioning of the organisation, though its hard to distinguish that. It was described as somewhat easier to 'draw a dotted line to projects or programs. Numerous SPC staff encouraged DFAT to be more broad in reporting on contribution:

One of the things I think is significantly important is that DFAT is conservative when they take credit for our results, 'cause as far as I'm concerned, core funding contributes to everything that SPC does. If we didn't have core funding, we wouldn't have a director general, we wouldn't have a procurement system, a HR, any of these particular things (SPC 3)

I think an important part of this evaluation, is drawing out, if you took that core funding away from us, the organisation is going to grind to a very painful halt. That's the value in coming in supporting those areas that are not that exciting. (SPC 1)

4.2 Design, management, evaluation and communication mechanisms under the Partnership

This section provides evaluation findings in three parts: (1) Partnership arrangements; (2) Monitoring, reporting, measuring and visibility; and (3) Australia as member and donor of SPC.

Findings are relevant to evaluation questions as below:

- 2.1 How effective and efficient have the Partnership's management arrangements been?
- 2.2 How could these Partnership's management arrangements be improved?
- 2.3 How could DFAT and SPC better measure the contribution of Australia's flexible core and program funding?
- 2.4 How could the MEL system be improved to enhance the monitoring and reporting of the Partnership (and other forms of investment) achievement of results?
- 2.5 How and to what extent has Australia been engaging effectively as a member and donor of SPC?
- 2.6 How could Australia improve its engagement as a member and donor of SPC?
- 2.7 How is the Partnership perceived amongst SPC members?
- 2.8 How could visibility of the Partnership's achievements be improved?

Partnership arrangements

Various aspects of Partnership arrangements were described as effective to achieving shared outcomes of Australia and SPC, most notably the HLC, to a lesser extent focal points and Australia membership of the CRGA sub-committee. Whilst universally valuing these arrangements, DFAT and SPC stakeholders identified areas for improvement including senior staff equivalency in HLC, functionality of the focal point roles, clarity on Partnership principles and their operationalisation

It's also important to note that Partnership arrangements have been severely affected by COVID over the last few years, so whilst evaluation findings are relevant to the here-and-now, they may not be reflective of Partnership management arrangements over the last eight years. Six key findings were described by stakeholders in relation to Partnership arrangements.

1. HLC are extremely valuable to Partnership management. These meetings deepened the relationship between SPC and the Government of Australia, not only from a funding perspective, but also from a more strategic perspective, supporting outcomes of the Partnership for both GoA and SPC. The Partnership through the HLC has strengthened the relationship as described by SPC and DFAT stakeholders, as a mature relationship.

I think the high-level consultations work pretty well. They've managed to stay at a reasonably high level, which is good in terms of this there's a strategy. The discussions on various things that actually are outside of this the mandate, but feed into regional intelligence and regionalism, and some of the multilateral processes that are ongoing, and how we can jointly contribute to those. So that's very, very positive, I think, and that's a sign of the maturing relationship that there is between the Government and SPC. (SPC 5)

The relatively small group offers space for 'frank and fearless' conversations especially within face-to-face meetings, and also conversations on 'margins' which in turn strengthens trust and strategic value of the meetings. The tripartite meetings with SPC-GoA-MFAT is cited as being very successful, and brings a new dynamic to conversations and ensures complementarity of donors in the region.

HLC were cited by both GoA representatives and SPC as extremely effective to supporting the Partnership, though most particularly from SPC representatives, "the relationship needs be recalibrated" reflected through strengthened engagement of higher-level positions in DFAT "that allows us to have the kinds of strategic conversations we need to have given the issues and the opportunities in the region at the moment." (SPC 7)

Whilst both (i) and (ii) evaluations revealed issues in how HLC operate and need for improvement, the long-term investment of all organisations in the HLC is valued, scaffolding of the framework is present to enable future shifts. As described by SPC stakeholders, HLC were previously complemented with in-Canberra consultations with senior SPC and senior DFAT staff which hasn't been possible over last period due to

COVID. This has limited the potential of HLC. In the past, HLCs were also augmented by various meetings at other forums and events within the Pacific which further deepened relationships and enabled ongoing conversations. These additional interactions have not been possible due to COVID-19.

So I think we have lost some of that natural connection. It's not anyone's fault, it's just consequence of zoom meetings. It means that the director general, current and former ones, are not connecting with an equivalent hierarchy. (SPC 1)

As described below, there is opportunity to leverage relationship for both SPC and DFAT with higher level engagement in part through the HLC. Evaluations (i) and (ii) both identified this theme, though with different understandings of why this has happened and ways to address. Evaluation (ii) described 'over time less engagement of SPC with less seniority' with example of most recent HLC. This was viewed as giving 'mixed signals to SPC regarding how seriously DFAT take the Partnership' (p.6). Evaluation (i) also identified more recent challenges of DFAT engagement, cited as due to COVID and illness for the most recent HLC.

2. Principles as set out in the Partnership agreement are not commonly described as core to Partnership arrangements. The Partnership principles set into agreement at the inception were relevant to the Paris Declaration. One DFAT representatives when mentioning the principles noted:

"Elements of dev principles remain but not over riding...principles have shifted, and they aren't as hard and fast as they once were. The donor environment has shifted and possibly we need to re-look at what that looks like." (DFAT 1)

SPC stakeholders interviewed for Part 1 of the evaluation identified examples where they draw on principles as means to 'push back' on what it considers to be additional expectations beyond the Partnership agreement and principles. Informed by the lack of clarity and prominence of the principles in current Partnership arrangements, and insights provided by DFAT and SPC on the current operationalisation, **there is a need to refine principles for next phase.**

3. There is a lack of clarity in the management arrangements within DFAT and also coordination of GoA, with acknowledgement from both SPC and DFAT that this was an issue. This issue of lack of clarity in coordination was described in reporting on the Partnership as well as by DFAT and SPC stakeholders. For example, as described in minutes of HLC "DFAT looking to clarify management arrangements for the Partnership as they remain confusing." (DATE) SPC and DFAT stakeholders acknowledge there are layers of hierarchy within DFAT that SPC needs to engage through, and that this can be frustrating for SPC. View from SPC and also recognised by DFAT that it may be an issue for SPC.

Arrangements with SPC and MFAT were cited, though recognised that MFAT is a smaller organisation (less layers – hierarchy) and also does not engage whole of government which is the case with the GoA-SPC Partnership. Considerations offered on whether coordination of Partnership should be managed at Noumea Post or in Canberra. Recognition that coordination roles in Noumea "don't hold money pen" with bigger hierarchy there is a need to go through multiple layers. Issues of continuity in coordination arrangements was described, impacting lack of clarity. This informs serious consideration about where coordination is based, though also continuity is not guaranteed Canberra or Noumea since there is a high turnover of staff in government roles. The coordination role of DFAT (focal point) was valued by some since it offers strategic input, beyond funding arrangements and provides opportunity for GoA via DFAT to share Australian perspective. For some staff in SPC the focal point coordination role creates challenges as it rotates every three years, needing to regularly establish new working relationships, also the role is not at the same level as reciprocal roles in SPC as noted by a SPC stakeholder "I'm not saying for DFAT to put more senior on it, but its one of the aspects which be a bit of challenge from the operational side of the Partnership' (SPC 1). There was a view expressed that coordination from divisions to GoA was positive, often informed by long-term established relationships and more detailed engagement and the programmatic level.

A consistent interest expressed by SPC stakeholders was to be treated holistically by DFAT. An example offered to both parts of the evaluation was described to highlight duplication in administrative reporting and the need for stronger coordination. Whist it was shared by SPC, specific to COVID-19 response, the view was that this example was indicative of broader coordination issues. All 15 divisions were asked to complete an update on COVID-19 response, and same questions were asked across all parts of the organisation. A coordinated process through SPC would have reduced duplication of reporting for SPC.

Mixed views were expressed on what might be a better approach. Importantly the recognition offers opportunity to shift practice in the future as expressed by DFAT stakeholder, “So it is a complex web, I think it works pretty well I think that we should be open to new ideas on how to evolve it and innovate it if there are some good ideas out there” (DFAT 3). No clear solutions evidenced but it’s clear from the evaluation that more discussion is required for SPC and DFAT to improve current status

4. The importance of continuity in roles/ personnel was described as critical to efficiency and effectiveness in Partnership arrangements. The three-year cycle of the ‘DFAT focal point’ role was cited as requiring fresh relationships to be developed. *“I think one of the things of the Partnership, which is important, is continuity. It’s not straight forward to bring people into SPC, slightly unusual organisation, slightly unusual architecture. Regional architecture”* (SPC 1). This arrangement was contrasted with the divisions who have more established relationships, *“the Divisions that have had best engagement with counter parts are where there has been long term continuity, because know and trust the relationships there. In the pacific relationships are critical. That’s just it* (SPC 1)

5. Partnership mechanisms are not the only means through which GOA engages and engagement as a member highlights future potential engagement. Partnership engagement has also enabled this increased engagement as a member and also the leadership of SPC to convene spaces and process for its members

Through building up trust through the Partnership and using the modality like that subcommittee (just the one I know and I am sure there are other modalities used by the divisions) has meant that we are less transactionally engaged now as partners now rather than as a donor beneficiary and through that process, with included the engagement of Australia and New Zealand, Australia was a voice to help shape the strategic plan but was not a dominant voice or one that started with Australia’s own objectives that we had reverse engineer but it was about coming together through all the members and finding those shared aspirations. (SPC 2)

Monitoring, reporting, measuring and visibility

Strong and consistent recognition of the value of GoA using SPC annual results reporting to report on core funding was expressed by SPC and DFAT stakeholders. Benefits were cited, that it reduces reporting burden for SPC (and also DFAT), enabling them to be member centric and operationalises development effectiveness and aid harmonisation principles.

Both evaluations (i) and (ii) revealed the need for clarity about expectations of reporting, particularly in relation to core and program funding. Further orientation is required particularly for DFAT staff and GoA representatives recognising staff movements across the organisation. This is also relevant to the challenges of DFAT reporting, as described by one individual *“The bad side for us there is that it’s really difficult to extract the information in our very rigid reporting systems”* (DFAT 5).

There have been staff changes in DFAT, portfolio changes etc but there is not a great awareness from DFAT side in relation to project and programming funding therefore how do we get on the same page to tell the story better, not just about putting in a system and indicators – it still needs people understanding the context and how it relates to their funding. (SPC 2)

An example of lack of coordination in reporting on COVID-19 response was described to both evaluation teams and highlights issues related to program reporting and lack of coordination within the GoA and DFAT across SPC divisions. As described by evaluation (ii)

An example, that several key informants cited, was the instance when SPC’s divisions were sent an identical survey from multiple sources within DFAT asking about the SPC’s pivot in response to COVID-19. The majority of questions were corporate focused, whilst a couple were project focused, which suggests that the survey should rather have gone to one focal point, with projects responding to a couple of specific questions only. This does raise the vexed question of how best to ensure effective coordination when funding is coming from different places (p.24)

SPC staff raised the issue about what types and level of questions should be asked, noting the need and value to consider macro – strategic level questions.

Numerous SPC staff raised recognition and concern that DFAT reporting requirements are not solely aligned to SPC reporting within the Partnership, and there is ongoing conversation.

I know that DFAT really want to be able to do this traceability, but the burden on that, is a planning burden and then tagging all of that funding in advance is enormous and I just do not know what the strategic question is that that kind of thing would answer. (SPC 2)

Visibility plans are in place, integrated within Partnership agreements and viewed by both SPC and DFAT stakeholders positively, though there is recognition that their potential has not been fully realised and there is opportunity to strengthen visibility outcomes in the future.

Key stakeholders within both SPC and DFAT highlighted the need for increased SPC profile in the region of its work and contribution. Increased visibility and profile with members, donors and other regional actors will provide a benefit to increase the Partnership profile and contribution of GoA as member and donor of SPC. In line with how GoA engages as a member within SPC, a holistic perspective of visibility of SPC contribution to regional public good is preferred than bespoke comms activity. Evaluation (i) highlighted opportunity for SPC to strengthen communication activities such as campaigns, blogs and ensuring high level engagement with DFAT communications,

Australia as member and donor of SPC

Findings are limited in this area due to lack of engagement of the evaluation team with SPC members, most particularly CRGA sub-committee members who were identified as primary stakeholders for this evaluation. Despite numerous invitations and follow up no PIC representatives were available to participate in interviews, survey or respond to emailed questions.

SPC stakeholders acknowledged that GoA balances well a complex relationship in the region and is both a valued partner and member. Aspects which were appreciated include the long history of listening and adapting to regional expectations, the ability to have difficult conversations and also being valued as a donor based in the region, who shares understanding of regional dynamics and local interests. Minimisation of bespoke donor reporting was also valued and was cited as demonstrative of development effectiveness agenda. This approach ensures that SPC is orientated to donor reporting but focused on contribution to members and delivery of regional public goods. This was also reflected in donor harmonisation with MFAT. Whilst this evaluation had limited capacity to assess other donor perspectives, our findings echo earlier assessment that there is less harmonisation with other partners, perhaps due to other donors' project focus. Different types of relationships were cited and valued both at Partnership and also divisional level, with sector specialist in GoA agencies. One SPC stakeholder highlighted that Australia as a donor and member of SPC enabled it to transcend politics, as relevant to the previous Australian government (prior to 2022 election). As described, whilst politics associated with Australian climate change policy were evident in the region, another clear message was that "Australia is providing a significant amount of support to development aspirations of Pacific, it remains a friend of the region because of this business, and we would not have been able to accomplish a number of things without the support of Australia" (SPC 5).

I think Australia understands the region most, probably more than most partners. And that's for a range of reasons and that they have been involved in all the governance arrangements in regionalism from a regional level - from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat through to the technical agencies. They also have the biggest capability and presence in our countries at a bilateral, long-term Partnerships.

The influence and knowledge of Pacific priorities should be well and truly entrenched in their systems to be able to influence how they deliver that funds as well as where they deliver those resources. I think their Partnership in shaping what the ideal type of development partner engagement should be overstated.

This is where I expect Australia to be the most flexible and that they are willing to take on risks that other development partners may not willing to do and to take a level of responsibility in paving the way and encouraging other development partners to follow a similar pathway. (SPC 15)

Similar views were expressed across both evaluation (i) and (ii) that Australia has the potential to realise more strategic gains from Partnership arrangements and membership of SPC. A number of SPC stakeholders described the potential for more two-way learning and exchange between Australia and SPC at the Partnership level. Stakeholder views and evidenced from evaluation (ii) are noted:

Whilst SPC is an apolitical organisation, its footprint across the region sees its operations affected by local politics. Stronger, consistent relationships at more senior levels within DFAT may provide Australia with a different, local perspective of developments across the region that could help strengthen bilateral ties and programs as well as a deeper understanding of the regional politics at play (p.21)

Whilst acknowledging the universal appreciation of Australia as donor and member, the evaluation also revealed mixed views within both sets of stakeholders (SPC and DFAT). For example, both SPC and DFAT stakeholders raised concerns of donor influence:

I think we are still very heavily donor driven because of the way our Partnerships with the big key donor(s) is- short-term heavily driven by interest of the donor. I don't see robust discussion between member countries and donor to say - wait are these the priorities we have for investment across the board and these areas are vastly under-funded. (SPC 15)

We have a pretty good relationship. I think the struggle is as a donor and member, is managing the desire to step in and control things and say we should do things this way, balancing that out by taking a step back and listening to what the other 26 members are saying particularly the smaller island countries what their priorities are and what they really want- something that Australia really needs to be conscious of. (DFAT 4)

Other DFAT staff described prioritisation of the member role and also valued SPC similarly treating Australia as an equal member.

We are a member. I don't think of Australia as a donor – I think we are a member. That's an important principle for me...I always prioritise membership over everything. That's why we sit at the table. If you are sitting around the table with other members, you're all equal members...The money side is important but it's the relationships and working together as equal members that I see as more important. (DFAT 1)

For SPC, Australia's voice is equal to the voice of PICS, or any other member. We're all treated the same...I think SPC coordinates that quite well. It gives every member the equal opportunity to say what they wish and to talk about and give space for discussion. Our funding is everywhere within all SPC operations. But we're trying really not to talk about the money side, but the actual value that we're working together on" (DFAT 5)

Further practical considerations of roles of donor coordination have already been stated above in section 4.1.

4.3 Gender and disability inclusion within SPCs operations and programming

This section provides evaluation findings relevant to evaluation questions:

3.1 How and to what extent has the Partnership supported SPC's efforts to operationalise its Social and Environmental (SER) policy and mainstream SER priorities, including gender equality and disability inclusion, and social and environmental responsibility, across the organisation?

3.2 How could the Partnership promote gender and disability inclusion in SPCs operations and programming in the future?

3.3 How and to what extent do the Partnerships monitoring, evaluation and learning system capture data (including disaggregated data) to inform gender and disability inclusive policies and programs?

The evaluation found that SPC has made concerted contribution over the last eight-year Partnership period to operationalise its Social and Environmental (SER) policy and mainstream SER priorities, in particular gender equality and environmental responsibility. The evaluation found less evidence across documentation and interviews and Part 2 of the evaluation of Partnership contribution to support SPC to operationalise disability inclusion across the organisation.

Mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion is a key sub-objective of the Partnership. Across interviews with both DFAT and SPC representatives there is strong recognition that the Partnership has supported SPC to build its capacity and capability to mainstream gender across the organisation. Gender is a sub-set of SPC's people-centred approach which includes mainstreaming social (gender, youth, culture and human rights) and environmental issues in the organisation's programming and policy. The support ultimately helps SPC achieve its strategic objectives in inclusive and equitable social development outcomes for the Pacific.

However, the evaluation found based on interviews, documentation and cited in Part 2 of the evaluation, that Partnership support and subsequent impact on SPCs efforts to enhance gender and social inclusion has been mixed, with examples of Partnership support more evident in SER Policy development and mainstreaming gender equality, compared to disability inclusion.

Partnership support to SPCs SER Policy has been through core funding, Partnership engagement and Partnership principles that value environmental and social safeguards. Support within the Partnership period has helped SPC to develop, refine, and evolve its whole organisation to better meet the needs of the organisation. Flexible core funding and additional program resourcing in gender equality was described as providing SPC the ability to strengthen and embed SER in a more strategic way as described by SPC representatives:

I think the other area I have seen Australia progress a lot is the gender equality and social inclusion- the Pacific Women Lead investment shifting to SPC, women in leadership, relatively new investments are going to enable the greater realisation of these gender equality and women in leadership social inclusion objectives not just with the finance that Australia is investing but that capability of entrenching those gains across all investments that SPC has because it is supporting our SER policy and ensure gender and social inclusion is mainstreamed. The way that they are supporting this will help to embed gender and social inclusion across SPC and this is really positive. (SPC 15)

The SER Policy, first developed in 2018, and strengthened in 2020 was done through a participatory process that helped to build a shared understanding and ownership of SER across the organisation, as highlighted by SPC representatives:

Overall – there was no policy eight years ago. The interesting part of the way the policy was structured – it has been designed in a participatory manner. We worked with a lawyer on the definition of the policy. We consulted with every staff on environment and social risks and what is the extent of the policy to make sure it put the right conditions and addressing what the staff think are appropriate. Now we have a SER Policy and it is great. We are making sure everyone at SPC is using it. The Partnership is a way to ensure that by having due diligence and investment in core services, making sure that we progress and have a line / comply with our SER Policy. The

Partnership does value Environment and Social safeguards – that is critical. That would make sure we are moving to a coherent and cohesive SER standard. Important we all talk the same language – building trust and making people understand where their work interacts with SER, this shared understanding. (SPC 14)

One of the SER Policy priorities that has received significant attention and is described as one of the more visible areas of the Partnership, is gender equality. Described below is how the Partnership support enabled a greater focus on gender equality within SPC over the eight-year Partnership period, as a result of consistent advocacy from DFAT to prioritise gender equality, and the potential for further gender equality related results in the future, through key DFAT gender equality investments like Pacific Women Lead.

The evaluation found gender equality has received significant attention over the eight-year Partnership period with enhancements to SPC’s institutional capacity and capabilities to embed gender equality across the organisation, including the provision of technical support for gender equality work in member countries and other CROP agencies.

There is recognition of Partnership contribution together with SPC management and leadership commitment to operationalise gender equality across SPC.

Partnership support to operationalise gender equality across the organisation has been in the form of core funding, Partnership advocacy (particularly from DFAT as a donor partner) and through additional program funding and provision of technical support. The Partnership itself, and provision of funding is seen as key to enhancing gender equality efforts across SPC, as described by SPC representatives:

[The core] funding has encouraged SPC to consider the way that gender equality, that we should be responding to gender equality and mainstreaming it within the organisation and is part of a people-centred approach in the social and environmental and responsibility policy and then also investing in some of those capabilities within the organisation. (SPC 8)

Taking a step back from the operational stuff. I’m tempted to think about Pacific Women Lead, and women in leadership, negotiations and the development of that. I get the sense that the Partnership was really involved in that as well. It gives me the sense that those sort of discussions, those perhaps bigger discussions, would not have landed where it did if that you hadn’t had that Partnership mechanism in there. (SPC 3)

The evaluation found that gender equality and social inclusion has been a consistent priority in SPC, demonstrated through SPC establishing and implementing various mechanisms and initiatives that promoted gender equality over the eight-year Partnership period.

As evidenced in documentation, early into the Partnership period, over 2014-2015, SPC had a Gender Policy in place; a dedicated gender program with a gender advisor accessible to the organisation; the Director General was Chair of the CROP gender working group (a key mechanism of influencing gender equality at a regional level); a Gender Mainstreaming Committee (established in 2011); and gender equality was referenced in SPCs Corporate Plans.

The prioritisation process in 2016 identified gender mainstreaming as a priority for SPC and the Partnership was contributing core and additional program funding to support gender equality.

For example, in 2017, the Social Development Program (of which PGEP is part) received approximately 30% of its funding through core. There was increasing awareness and discussion of how gender issues should be addressed by SPC, including through internal gender training in 2016 and a Gender Mainstreaming in Aquaculture Workshop (FAME), with almost all participants reporting seeing the benefits of using simple gender analysis tools six months after the workshop (Title: INL322_AQC18_AID_QUALITY_CHECK_2018.PDF)

SPCs success in promoting gender equality at a regional level was also highlighted in interviews:

Greatest success has been the work around the Triennial Conference of Pacific Women. Been the most visible, convening women and organisations coming together...to have sustained the triennial

over the years has been a great achievement (14 of these so far). Cannot underestimate bringing people together in that space every three years. Relationships with governments in gender space has been a big success and one of the reasons why DFAT made decision to bring Pacific Women Lead to SPC because of the relationship SPC has in gender space with the government machinery. (SPC 11)

However, as evidenced in documentation, most particularly DFAT reporting on the Partnership, there were still limited resources within SPC to assist each division in ensuring that all programs take adequate account of gender. Progress to prioritise gender equality in SPC has therefore been mixed over the eight years, stemming from lack of resources, SPC commitment to implement gender equality actions, varying degrees of acceptance of gender equality in member organisations and within SPC, and differing perspectives amongst SPC and DFAT on suitable measures (indicators/targets) of gender equality progress.

Through the Partnership Australia has demonstrated its commitment to support SPC to operationalise gender equality through core funding, additional program resources and being a consistent advocate for gender equality over the Partnership. Australia's influence and advocacy has had a direct impact on shaping SPC's direction to mainstream gender equality across the organisation and subsequent creation of the SPC Gender Flagship program, as highlighted by SPC representative, documentation and cited in Part 2 of the evaluation. An illustration of this evidence is provided below:

Another area, I think Australia's been really critical is in gender equality. How many women and girls, really helping us think very carefully about where we've got some gaps, and where we need to improve. Australia has pushed us especially harder to look at our organisation-wide approach to gender quality and the empowerment of women and girls which has pushed the organisation in a positive direction as well. (SPC 8)

DFAT's strong focus on gender equality has led to perceptions amongst SPC representatives interviewed that gender equality has been a DFAT donor driven agenda within the Partnership. While not uniform of all stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation, there were views expressed by SPC representatives that gender equality has received considerable attention over the Partnership because it is a key priority for the GoA. During interviews representatives also expressed that initially, the Partnership did not provide the appropriate resourcing for SPC to effectively mainstream gender equality at an organisational level:

With things like gender, this is the weakness of DFAT approach. They said do better at gender, but we said yes but working on all these other things that you are also saying do better on, and there was no traction. In other things, risk committee, results and reporting, the rest of the agenda there were other support, and they came with support for MERL, finance systems etc. now they have come in support through Pacific Women Lead. Eventually they did that for gender, they said this is important to us and here is funding. But to say here is core, but here is the new minister's hot idea, but we are already doing a lot with the core. With gender, they gave us gender audits, but felt it was forced on us. (SPC 1)

Despite challenges, as evidenced in interviews and documentation, both DFAT and SPC have remained committed to promoting gender equality, and the Partnership has supported positive progress in gender equality, at organisational and programming levels (See gender case study for examples of gender equality results). Achievements in gender mainstreaming at a country level in the region however are more likely to be the result of other DFAT funded programs (such as the Pacific Gender Equality Program, and the *Pacific Women Program*), rather than as a result of core funding to SPC as described in Part 2 of the evaluation.

During interviews, both DFAT and SPC representatives see the newly launched Pacific Women Lead as a key mechanism to support SPC to achieve further progress in gender equality, as an organisation and for regional country members.

Concerted efforts by both DFAT and SPC through the Partnership period. to support SPC to mainstream gender into policies and processes has strengthened SPC institutional capacity and

capability to be able to implement DFAT's largest investment in gender equality, the Pacific Women Lead program.

The Pacific Women Lead program is a five-year, AUD 170 million regional program and represents one of the largest global commitments to gender equality. SPC serves as the secretariat to the program's Governance Board, and provides technical, convening and funding support to key partners including government and civil society. SPC will receive approximately AUD 56.8 million of the Pacific Women Lead funding. SPC's key role in delivering key regional aspects of Pacific Women Lead demonstrates the organisation's role in supporting a Pacific led gender equality agenda in the region. The addition of Pacific Women Lead in SPC is already gathering gains for SPC, and the broader Partnership, in advancing SER Policy objectives, and enabling SPC's leadership role as a CROP agency promoting gender equality in the region.

I do believe that the creation of this position (Principal Strategic Lead- Women and Girls) within SPC has really leveraged the Partnership to another level. This and the inclusion of the Pacific Women Lead program. There is this nexus between gender and their (SER team) work, and for them to see that we (Pacific Women Lead program) have a role to play in the SER policy and how we can work together to achieve the aims of the SER policy. (SPC_10)

The influence of SPC on gender equality and social inclusion across the region is already starting to change through SPC's leadership and oversight of the Pacific Women Lead (PWL) Program. PWL will complement SPC's work in the region and allow it to have a more effective engagements with other CROP agencies to collectively strengthen gender equality across the Pacific. (cited in evaluation (ii) report, page 16)

Further details on institutional strengthening and results achieved by SPC in gender equality and Partnership contribution are provided in Case Study 2.

Promoting environmental responsibility

The evaluation found examples of progress to operationalise environmental responsibility across SPC at a program level and institutionally over the eight-year Partnership period. At a programming level SPC has played a key role in supporting the Pacific's climate change agenda including in disaster risk and resilience.

In 2016, SPC contributed to the finalisation of the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP) and organised discussions on implementation of the Plan at the Pacific Platform for DRM hosted by SPC and UNIDSR. SPC assisted with the developments of policies, plans and institutional strengthening across the region to improve evidence-based decision-making in the case of a disaster. The INTEGRE and RESCCUE projects worked with local Melanesian communities in New Caledonia to increase resilience to climate change by re-planting seedlings, controlling wild animal populations and introducing an erosion monitoring system to improve soil quality. (Title: GoA-SPC Partnership AQC 2017- draft post-moderation)

In addition to sustained support for its members' implementation of climate change adaptation and mitigation policies, SPC has made several advances at the institutional level to progress its own environmental responsibility. For example, initiating greening incentives and building climate change policies in SPC's corporate services is a key focus of the SER Policy implementation (SPC_14). Results reporting in 2020 describe how the organisation is implementing its own emissions reduction strategy to help achieve climate neutrality and contribute to the goals of the Paris Agreement (COP21).

In 2020, SPC made a major shift towards reducing its carbon footprint by introducing a solar energy system to power its headquarters in Noumea. The decision was based on a comprehensive energy audit in 2013[LR5] that assessed the site's energy efficiency performance and recommended improvements. Transitioning to renewable energy by installing a photovoltaic (PV) energy generation system was identified as the most efficient way to lower SPC's carbon footprint. In terms of environmental and financial benefits, it is expected to lead to a 30% drop in emissions and to reduce

energy bills by 40%, with a payback period of six to seven years. (Title: Pacific Community Results Report 2020.pdf

Based on documentation and interviews the evaluation found less evidence of Partnership support to operationalise disability inclusion across the eight-year Partnership period. DFAT aid quality reporting in 2018 and an independent evaluation of SPCs Capacity Building highlighted challenges within SPCs systems to plan for, implement and monitor disability inclusion. As a result, there has been limited/low visibility of disability inclusion in SPC policy and programming. A Due Diligence Assessment (DDA) conducted in July 2021 also identified disability as high risk for DFAT. The report assessed SPCs' ability to deliver in line with the policy and legislative requirements of the Australian aid program. The report noted:

“SPC has a nascent and limited approach to disability inclusion and safeguards that does not align with DFAT’s approach and requirements, reflected in an SPC report that recommended SPC develop a whole of organisation policy and strategy for enabling participation by people with disabilities” (p.7)

The evaluation identified examples of where disability inclusion is evident. For instance, reporting within 2019 – 2021 aid quality reporting. One of the performance stories featured in SPC results 2020 results reporting describes how SPC is ensuring reach to persons with disabilities who have lost their livelihoods as a result of COVID-19. The Pacific Women Lead also integrates disability inclusion as the program targets women and girls in all their diversity, including women and girls with disabilities. Disability inclusion is also included in SPC’s new Strategic Plan (2022-2031) under Key Focus Area 4, acknowledging that current development efforts are inadequate and created inequities exacerbated by climate change and COVID-19, particularly for people with disability.

However, there were views shared across both DFAT and SPC stakeholders during interview that disability inclusion was not prioritised as strongly over the Partnership compared to gender equality, and could be more integrated across SPC:

There’s more scope to improve in this space. I don’t think DFAT is as well-resourced as gender in disability inclusion. Not enough resources put in over time to make sure it was part of the Partnership (DFAT_4)

For disability inclusion and staff within SPC – very little, our campus is not a disability friendly campus. I think we (GOA and SPC within the context of the Partnership) have not given disability the priority it deserves. – probably not – so have not given disability the priority it deserves (SPC_11)

Based on documentation and interviews and the part 2 of the evaluation, the evaluation finds that the Partnership can continue to promote gender and disability inclusion in SPC’s operations and programming by supporting SPC to operationalise its SER policy, with more focused efforts to operationalise disability inclusion and prioritise core funding to sustain institutional capacity.

As highlighted by both DFAT and SPC representatives during interviews, the SER Policy is considered a strategic commitment, one that is enabling SPC to implement its people-centred approach across the organisation, and mainstream social and environmental issues across the organisation. Gender equality and disability inclusion remain key mutual priorities for Australia and SPC and as illustrated above, the Partnership has made important contributions to strengthening SPCs capacity and capability in this area.

The partners are therefore well placed to build on positive progress over the eight-year Partnership period, to support SPC efforts to implement its SER Policy, progressing gender equality drawing on the additional resources provided through the PWL and WIL initiatives. As evidenced in documentation and interviews, SPC is making progress in disability inclusion, however it is an area that both Australia and SPC acknowledge has received less attention and resourcing in the Partnership compared to disability inclusion.

The Partnership can continue to support SPC to promote gender and disability inclusion in SPC by prioritising core funding that directly supports SPC achieve its SER Policy objectives, and leveraging

resources from PWL and WIL to accelerate implementation of the policy particularly in gender equality.

So our strategy for implementing what has come out of the women in leadership audit is to start with Human Resources (HR) and draw up an action plan to address the recommendations and findings. Just starting this good working relationship- and this is only recent. Just last week the Director for HR was in and I managed to sit and talk with her. And she mentioned that the lack of resources is a challenge to address the gender issues emanating from the SER policy- which is something that we (PWL and WIL investment) can assist with. (SPC_10)

The Partnership can continue to support SPC to promote disability inclusion in SPC by supporting SPCs current efforts in disability inclusion mainstreaming (for example, SPCs Partnership with PDF, progress in disability disaggregated reporting and development of disability inclusive corporate policies), and identifying opportunities in the Partnership to strengthen consideration of disability inclusion.

As evidenced in interviews, both DFAT and SPC representatives acknowledge that disability inclusion has not received as much prioritisation in the Partnership compared to gender equality. A number of opportunities exist to prioritise disability inclusion in the Partnership. These were identified during interviews and document review. This includes establishing a baseline of the status and extent to which disability inclusion is integrated in SPC; provision of dedicated disability inclusion expertise; and actioning recommendations of the x due diligence report.

Maybe this (disability inclusion) is something if SPC feels they need abit of a boost on this front in terms of technical assistance, need to employ someone, I wonder if that is something we (DFAT) can look at (DFAT_3)

As a future recommendation, during the next SPC-GoA Partnership (commenced in January 2021), DFAT could consider conducting a disability inclusion review of relevant SPC strategies and policies. This will help identify gaps in resources or expertise. The review could also assess the effectiveness of data disaggregation and identify what resources are needed to meet current gaps. Funding such a review would have to be discussed with relevant line areas within the Office of the Pacific. (Title: INL322_AIMR_ANNUAL_INVESTMENT_MONITORING_REPORT_2021.PDF).

Prioritising disability inclusion also complements Australia's commitment to disability inclusion in its aid programs and Partnerships and DFAT has the opportunity to prioritise core funding to support SPC mainstreaming efforts. It will be important for DFAT to support SPCs efforts to mainstream disability inclusion in a way that enables an SPC led approach grounded in member priorities. This Partnership approach is important to mitigate any perceptions of disability inclusion being a donor driven agenda, noting perceptions that surfaced during the evaluation that while positive, gender equality has been a **DFAT driven agenda** over the Partnership.

This women in leadership project is an example of a not helpful approach from a donor, in that because they (donor) has a political interest in that they are on the organisation to turn out deliverables in an unrealistic timeframe is just unhelpful. This kind of investment we need to avoid because if it is come in as a one off then we certainly shouldn't impose more burdensome reporting requirements than what we have established under the Partnership (SPC_15).

The Partnerships can continue to support SPC to promote gender and disability inclusion in SPCs operations and programming by prioritising core funding to sustain change over the long-term.

Achieving gender equality and disability inclusion requires long-term, sustained support to continue to build SPC as an organisation that can support delivering of gender and disability inclusion outcomes in the region. This includes within SPC's operations and programming; supporting member countries gender and disability inclusion commitments; and with other CROP agencies. As evidenced in other areas of institutional strengthening, the concerted support in MEL, finance and reporting has helped SPC build its organisational

capacity and capability in a sustainable way over the Partnership period, demonstrating the value of core funding to organisational reform.

I think it's reasonable to suggest that SPC has this (gender and disability inclusion) focus, I don't think it's reasonable to assume that SPC can deliver within existing funding envelopes. Of today or 10 years ago. Any change program, across an organisation, it takes additional resources. If you give us core. You trust us with core. You sit on the CRGA, subcommittee, you know all that. For core, you need to trust the Director General to follow the Strategic Plan. (SPC_1)

Strengthening SPC capacity and capability in gender and disability inclusion directly helps support SPC to achieve its aspirations set out in its Strategic Plan- KRA4- social systems that deliver equitable outcomes, supporting SPC deliver its mandate as a CROP agency supporting regional leaders implement their gender and disability commitments to address the complex inequalities the region is faced with.

Everything you see is program funded. Until we see gender in the core funding Partnership, where we have core positions allocated, paid for by SPC, then it is not sustainable. We should be looking as the program as a finite thing and we must build an organisation that can sustainably carry gender for the region forever basically and the only way to do that is to create and fund core positions in gender. (SPC_10).

The evaluation found that over the last eight-year Partnership period SPC has enhanced institutional capability to capture data to inform gender and disability inclusive policies and programs. Evidence of Partnership contribution to support SPC to capture sex disaggregated data was described in documentation and interviews.

The investment in SPC MEL systems strengthening over the Partnership has enabled SPC to provide statistics and data at country and regional levels. These provide an important source of information for informing member countries and other CROP agencies programming and policy decision-making. For example SPC's online [Pacific Data Hub](#) provides a suite of data and knowledge across key development issues and priorities in the region.

The significant improvements in MEL as described previously in Section 4.1 has also enabled SPC to strengthen its ability to capture disaggregated data to report on outcomes, including for vulnerable groups. Supporting SPC to strengthen its MEL system was a key area DFAT supported through the Partnership as described by a DFAT representative:

I think one of the principles of the Partnership that Government of Australia very much supported was SPCs M&E system and its own production of annual reports, stories of success and using it as a way to judge the success of the Partnership in conjunction with SPC and I would say that during my time there SPCs own M&E system was definitely getting better- for example FAME M&E model was spreading across the organisation and becoming the norm and that was definitely leaning to a much better ability to report on outcomes. (DFAT_4)

This enhanced institutional capability in MEL also supports SPC to deliver on its role at the regional level in the production and delivery of official statistics in the Pacific:

SPC plays a central role in coordinating and supporting the development, production and delivery of official statistics in the Pacific, providing policy-makers and analysts with demographic, economic and social indicators for evidence-based planning and decision-making. SPC's core statistics activities involve data collection, analysis and dissemination, with a particular focus on economic and social statistics, and the intersectional areas of gender, poverty, education and disability. Title: Pacific_Community_Results_Report_2020.pdf

As highlighted by DFAT aid quality reporting and Pacific Community Results Report documentation, there is evidence of gender and disability integration in results achieved:

Finalisation of disability monographs for Fiji and Tuvalu and production of core suit of disability indicators.

Strategic foresight webinars were attended by 147 staff (75 women, 72 men) and 21 youth and disability representatives.

Title: Pacific_Community_Results_Report_2020.pdf

DFAT also uses information generated from SPC MEL systems in their internal annual M&E reporting, as cited in the eight Aid Quality Check reports reviewed for the Partnership period, DFAT referenced examples from SPC results reporting, HLC meeting minutes, and independent review and evaluations to demonstrate progress against Partnership objectives, and broader development effectiveness criteria⁷.

The revised SER Policy (2020) which incorporates a people centred approach with particular focus on embedding gender and human rights across SPCs operations and programmes. During interviews representatives across both DFAT and SPC described examples of how the SER Policy is providing a strong policy foundation for SPC to develop more inclusive policies and programs, supported by SPC's organisational systems which are capturing sex and disability disaggregated statistics on SPC staff.

The following examples from documentation and interviews demonstrate how SPC is using disaggregated data to inform more inclusive corporate policies, particularly in gender equality:

Other achievements in 2019 include the establishment of a social and environmental responsibility help desk, with a focus on mainstreaming gender, rights based approaches and environment across the SPC, as well as a revised set of draft staff policies that more purposefully embed gender equity principles. Title: INL322_AQC20_AID_QUALITY_CHECK_2020 - 22 May

Just this week, the Social Environment Responsibility (SER) team are in a retreat and one of the outcomes is to finalise indicators to help us measure mainstreaming outcomes across the KFAs. We had trailed a cross market tool which would have been funded by core funding and SER positions and with additional expertise and a different SP, we will do much better at planning, design, monitoring and reporting (SPC_2)

And we have just finalised a leadership audit to map where the women are in SPC as an organisation- not only number wise but ranking wise- where are they in leadership positions. And it's come up with very interesting findings- 16 findings altogether, and recommendations on how to address the findings. One of the findings of the women in leadership audit and made us think to go into SER was the recommendations pointed a lot to SER and other policies in SPC like HR. (SPC_10)

Gaps in overall monitoring of SER in the Partnership were identified in the lack of disability inclusion as highlighted previously, and views that the Partnership's learning system could more effectively assess value of the Partnership at a macro level. While there is good focus on capturing data and information at programming levels as a way of measuring contribution of the Partnership, some stakeholders expressed that this may be at the expense of taking a more strategic view to measure the value of the Partnership at a macro-level, and creating space for a more strategic assessment of SER.

My fear is that we are spending all of our time, more of our time answering these granular level details that then actually get absorbed up into a macro-level thing anyway. And get lost. And so you're actually so thinking, what was the value of this? Is it even the right questions (we are asking) as opposed to a more macro strategic contribution question to the Pacific. To me would be great if we could get to a point where we're having a conversation around. What is the macro level value? (SPC_3)

⁷ Aid Quality Checks (AQC) are a management tool to assess DFAT's aid investments. An AQC involves rating investment performance against aid quality criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, M&E, gender, risk and sustainability) using a six-point rating scale (1-6).

This view also extends to DFAT's own capacity and capability to effectively monitor, and engage with SPC on SER related issues. As highlighted by both DFAT and SPC representatives during interview, having complementary levels of experience in DFAT and SPC can help promote more shared understanding and mutual learning in the Partnership, which helps create more space for strategic discussions on SER:

I don't think it (SER) feels like a joint exercise. I think about social and environment policy, which is, you know, a lot of our politicians are actually really robust. I think there's a huge amount of really like deep and expert knowledge in SPC which I think it could feed back into DFAT. But I think sometimes we often get the kind of feeling that DFAT doesn't have the capacity to receive that. And I think sometimes, if you actually had that coming back in the other direction that would also increase understanding (in the Partnership). In terms of project and programming everything we plugged in at some point. I don't necessarily think it's the same in DFAT (SPC_3)

Important that the focal point person within DFAT has this skill set as well so that they are able to understand the purpose of all the reporting. Maintaining the M&E and learning system and not letting things slip (DFAT_4).

CASE STUDY 2:

Focused consideration of gender equality in the Pacific

Introduction and background

This case study illustrates the contribution of the Partnership between Australia and SPC (the Partnership) to strengthening gender equality within SPC. This case study is informed by interviews with DFAT and SPC stakeholders, and Partnership related reporting and documentation.

Progressing gender equality is a mutual priority for Australia and SPC, reflected as a key pillar in Australia's aid program and is one of the key result areas of SPCs Strategic Plan (2022-2031). The case study describes the journey within the Partnership to embed gender equality within SPC, one that has resulted in the strengthened capacity, leadership and advocacy of SPC in gender equality focused work in the region. The strengthened focus on gender equality has also enabled SPC to support enhanced gender equality outcomes and deliver regional public goods for its members.

Gender equality has featured in SPCs corporate plans since 2013 with several programming and institutional mechanisms in place to progress gender equality within the organisation. In 2014 SPC had a gender policy, a gender mainstreaming committee, introduced a new Social and Environmental Responsibility Policy; and was supporting Pacific countries to mainstream gender and human rights through key DFAT funded initiatives such as the Progressing Gender Equality in the Pacific (PGEP) program and the Regional Rights Resources Team (RRRT) program. While gender equality was a key objective of its work, consecutive Australian aid performance reporting, and the 2016 independent evaluation of the Partnership by the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) found that SPC was not reporting as effectively as it could on work done to promote gender equality, and that implementation of gender related commitments had been ad hoc, largely due to a lack of clear systems and structures and lack of appropriate resourcing to embed gender equality across the organisation. The 2016 ODE evaluation also found that while Australia and SPC had consistent dialogue on gender equality, the Partnership was yet to achieve the desired change by both partners.

Australian aid performance reporting in 2020 acknowledged the concerted efforts of SPC to strengthen its mainstreaming of gender equality at an organisational and programmatic level and stated that the Partnership continued to improve in making a difference to gender equality.

Australia's consistent advocacy for gender equality, and the provision of additional financial resourcing has helped enable SPC to operationalise gender equality in a more strategic way within the Partnership. As reflected by a SPC stakeholder during interview, SPC is also now in a stronger position to progress the gender equality aspirations of its members:

"In the past eight-nine years ago, there was a real risk that the gender mandate would be removed from SPC...but in the end SPC members said to keep it in. Now we have gone past that conversation and the Human Rights and Social Development division is now the third biggest within SPC (five years ago it was one of the smallest), building on the past and maintaining the flame has meant that we have said to SPC senior management that it belongs here and we have continued that work. We didn't have the resourcing before to keep it going, now we are able to scale it up and the realisation that gender and human rights is a key part of the work we do at SPC" (SPC 11).

Strengthened institutional capacity for inclusion of gender equality

There is a range of evidence in SPCs results reporting which demonstrate SPCs efforts to strengthen its capacity and capability in gender focused work over the eight years of the Partnership. SPCs prioritisation process in 2016 identified gender mainstreaming as a priority, with program Divisions demonstrating greater commitment to gender mainstreaming by resourcing gender mainstreaming activities. For example, in 2016 the Progressing Gender Equality in the Pacific (PGEP) program provided technical support to projects implemented by key divisions (Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystem (FAME); GeoScience; and Land Resources) and worked with six out of the 10 divisions and programs, covering 27 initiatives across statistics, climate change and biosecurity, reaching 18 Pacific countries.

However, the path to change has not been a linear one. SPCs 2017 results report found that progress to implement its gender mainstreaming strategy (2015-2017) remained uneven, with no to

limited evidence of progress on 14 of the 31 actions of its gender mainstreaming strategy. Progress was further hampered by a lack of appropriate financial and human resources for gender mainstreaming, with existing resources at the time (one gender equality adviser, one half-time gender adviser and one gender officer), insufficient to progress a whole of organisation gender mainstreaming strategy.

Despite this, SPC as an organisation remained committed to change. In 2018 SPC conducted domestic violence and child protection training for all staff; was chair of the Council of Regional Organisations (CROP) gender working group; and commenced the process to develop its people centred approach strategy which includes a specific focus on gender mainstreaming. Significant results were achieved in 2019. At a programmatic level SPC conducted nine gender audits, and good progress was reported within Divisions. For example, FAME developed a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion handbook for coastal fisheries, and integrated gender issues in its Business Plan and new coastal fisheries strategy (A New Song for Coastal Fisheries). As an organisation, SPC established a social and environmental responsibility help desk with a specific focus on supporting mainstreaming of gender and rights-based approaches and environment across SPC; and revised staff policies to embed gender equity principles. In response to SPCs identified need for gender mainstreaming in its public health programming, Australia supported a gender audit of SPCs Public Health Division's Business Plan. The review found there was strong policy and executive commitment to gender equality and social inclusion within SPC.

In 2020 gender equality continued to feature more as a key consideration within the organisation. For example, SPCs Georesources, Energy and Maritime Division developed a gender mainstreaming and capacity development plan to guide its work in implementing the regional Pacific Energy and Gender Network Strategic Plan. As highlighted in SPCs 2020 results reporting, "this work is paving the way for increasing women's participation and employment in the energy sector". SPCs Human Rights and Social Development Division continued its leadership role as the secretariat of the Pacific Regional Working Group on the Implementation of Domestic Violence and Family Protection Legislation, a member driven network that was a

key source of data and identifying innovative practices to improve protection services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2021 was a turning point in the Partnership when Australia announced Pacific Women Lead, an AUD 170 million, five-year program aimed at promoting women's leadership, realising women's rights, and increasing the effectiveness of regional gender equality efforts. SPC is a key implementing partner within the program, with more than AUD 55 million dedicated to its work. SPC serves as the secretariat to the program's Governance Board, and provides technical, convening and funding support to key partners including government and civil society. SPCs key role in delivering Pacific Women Lead signals the importance of Pacific priorities and Pacific leadership in driving gender equality in the region.

"We have gone from a place where we [SPC] may have been underperforming, at the start of the Partnership to a place where SPC is recognised as a leader, now that the Pacific Women Lead program is housed at SPC" (SPC 8).

In 2022, gender equality became SPCs fourth flagship program, affirming the central role of gender equality in SPCs work. Central to this is the Pacific Women Lead and Women in Leadership programs, two DFAT funded initiatives that aim to complement and build on SPCs existing gender equality work across its Divisions.

The creation of the Principal Strategic Lead-Pacific Women role under Pacific Women Lead also signifies the prominence of Pacific women in leading SPC to support gender equality and improved status of women and girls in the Pacific region. A SPC representative stated during interview that as a result of the ongoing Partnership between Australia and SPC, and the investment in Pacific Women Lead, the potential for system wide change to further embed substantive equality in SPCs work, and support regional gender equality efforts, has never been stronger.

Contribution of the Partnership

Partnership support has consisted of a variety of support delivered over the eight-year Partnership period, including funding, advocacy and short-term advisor inputs. Program and core funding has supported key programs like PGEP and RRR; and SPCs internal mainstreaming efforts. According to SPC stakeholders, the financial resources and consistent advocacy from DFAT

within multiple phases of the Partnership, combined with right management and leadership from SPC, has had a real impact on shaping SPC leadership in this area.

“It is a priority for Australia and Australia has been a consistent advocate for HR and gender equality – one consistent message from the Australians. Australia played a key role in the development of the strategic plan, they were in the discussion with Members, and Australia has always come out to say that gender equality needs to be embedded in the strategic plan so that advocacy role cannot be underestimated” (SPC 11)

“We will leap frog in the next 12 months, investment into SPC Partnership and the Human Rights Social Development Team, Pacific Women Lead and Women In Leadership – had there not been the focus and work done around our gender mainstreaming of our own policies and processes, we would not have been in a position to take on that additional funding from DFAT so I feel like the investment and requirements of the Partnership to report on those things (gender) have enabled us to strengthen our system and process to be in a position now to host amazing programs like Pacific Women Lead and Women in Leadership” (SPC 2)

Both DFAT and SPC stakeholders interviewed regard the investment of Pacific Women Lead through SPC as a key success in the Australia SPC Partnership. The success demonstrates DFAT’s ongoing commitment to support SPCs gender equality objectives, and SPCs concerted efforts over the Partnership to mainstream its policies and systems. The success also demonstrates trust and maturity in the Partnership, positioning SPC as a key strategic partner to deliver one of DFAT’s biggest commitments to gender equality in the region.

Progressing gender equality in the Partnership has not been without challenges. These were highlighted during interviews and documentation. Whilst DFAT advocated for many years on SPC taking on more work re gender, SPC had to balance this priority with others and do this ‘prioritisation’ within existing funding envelopes. This was challenging and gains were eventually realised through broader institutional strengthening of SPC as well. Short term technical input was provided by DFAT, for example, to do gender audits. This was good but it was ad hoc, and SPC did not have the internal organisational infrastructure and staffing to maximise this

potential to its full effect. The program funding now through Pacific Women Lead and Women in Leadership initiatives means that the prioritisation of gender equality is effectively resourced to achieve change and contribution in the region.

Progressing gender equality, the Pacific way

These positive gains in gender equality through the Partnership ultimately results in SPC being better equipped to support Pacific countries and members achieve their gender equality commitments, as a region, and as national states, to achieve more equitable development outcomes.

“Every three years we have triennial and leaders meeting we have an outcomes document that speaks to what our women leaders want to see changed across the region in the gender space. Until this year SPC didn’t have the capacity to implement this and now with Pacific Women Lead we have the resources, we are calling for grants from member countries to put in what they want aligned to the outcomes document. So SPC plays a critical role in this space” (SPC 10).

The Pacific region has some of the highest rates of violence against women and girls, and harmful social norms continue to reinforce inequalities that women and girls face. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated inequalities and setback efforts made over the past decades to increase gender equality. The Pacific region is also recognised for its strong leadership and commitment to gender equality, evidenced by government commitments to international frameworks including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs; a vibrant women’s movement, and key development partners.

The Australia SPC Partnership is therefore well placed with the timely contribution of funding through Pacific Women Lead, and SPCs strengthened institutional capacity, to support members to continue to advance regional commitments and to achieve their own gender equality goals, all of which aim to increase the effectiveness of regional gender equality efforts and ensure the rights of women and girls in all their diversities in the Pacific are realised.

4.4 Impact of COVID-19 on the Partnership

This section provides evaluation findings relevant to evaluation questions:

4.1 What impact has COVID-19 had on SPC's service delivery and processes, and the management of the Partnership

4.2 How and to what extent did the Partnership's flexible core funding contribute to SPCs COVID-19 response

4.3 What changes SPC service delivery and processes, or the management of the Partnership, which resulted from COVID-19 that should be retained?

The evaluation identified less evidence of how COVID-19 has actually impacted the Partnership and management of the Partnership, though there is strong evidence that the Partnership did support SPC response. Core funding and the mature relationship between Australia and SPC through the Partnership, meant that SPC could be flexible, adaptable and responsive to the needs of the organisation as well as its members.

While some work was postponed, SPC's ability to continue delivering the majority of its joint scientific and technical work, and achieve results, was due to collective efforts, the strength of existing relationships and the flexibility of some Partnerships such as the Partnership with Australia.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted on SPC's usual way of doing business and had significant impact on the nature of work. Strong member engagement and collaboration was critical to the relevance and effectiveness of SPC's work which took a different form in 2020, with most of its work with members and partners being carried out virtually. The need to respond to a rapidly evolving situation resulted in SPC making operational improvements which can be retained post pandemic. By February 2020, SPC had started to limit its staff from travelling and a month later as countries began to close their borders and impose country lockdowns, SPC staff were required to work from home. The Pacific culture of face-to-face meetings, to *talanoa*, transitioned to virtual meetings, which was the only means available to work.

To ensure business continuity and delivery of needs-based support, SPC's business services were delivered through digital channels and SPC provided the technical support and equipment to enable staff to work from home efficiently. Working remotely was a transformation for SPC and incurred extra costs to enable staff to set up their workspaces at home. SPC invested in licensing for security and zoom, learning management systems, portals, and data portals. This investment was critical to enable SPC to deliver services to its members. SPC's ability to adapt and establish itself virtually gained interest in Australia and across the Pacific as SPC provided technical assistance and supported networks in other countries. The innovative work was described by SPC:

we supported networks of other countries, advising and troubleshooting the local telecoms networks, we could tell them which equipment was broken to help the entire island and managed to get the service provider level hook up with the island's networks which is quite rare, so this is really the ICT space and what you are now seeing in zoom in terms of interpretive meetings, some of that thinking comes from SPC, or at least my team. (SPC 4)

Policies were developed to support staff safety during the COVID-19 outbreak such as the SPC response framework and SPC COVID-19 surveillance system. As evidenced in evaluation (ii) the change process also included SPC finance processes moving to paperless processing of payments. The strengthening of financial systems and capacity allowed SPC to maintain a relatively strong financial position throughout the COVID-19 period with reserves largely intact. This bodes well for the long-term financial sustainability of the organisation given the significant difficulties faced by all organisations during this period. The Audit and Risk Committee noted that there were no major financial issues arising out of the COVID-19 period which is a good result for SPC (p.17).

The investment in local services expanded SPC's business model. For example, a new panel of vendors was procured to provide virtual translation and interpretation services for the membership. This panel allows SPC access to an organisation that can provide focused support within a short time frame. An interview with SPC representative revealed that in 2021 for example, SPC translated 2.2 million words which is the equivalent of six freelancers working full time every day however with a wide network of vendors, SPC is able to get the work done quicker. COVID-19 has proven without a doubt that anybody can work from

anywhere in the world, and therefore SPC's long-standing desire to decentralize throughout the Pacific, and have agents in-country hire local agents, is now very possible and should be further explored through CRGA.

To enable efficiencies and effectiveness in SPC's support to its members and staff, the flexibility in working arrangements and meeting arrangements should be maintained. Virtual engagement with members presents a cost-effective balance between in-person and virtual consultation, a finding also echoed from evaluation (ii). Not travelling contributed to reducing the travel carbon footprint and therefore there are some significant advantages of bringing people together virtually noting that not all discussions and negotiations can happen virtually.

The investments in digital engagement with members will need further investment of linking how SPC coordinates across sectors and the experiences during COVID-19 and the understanding of the need of development partners like Australia can inform this investment. SPC will need to continually adapt how it delivers in response to changing circumstances as during the life of the Partnership, there will be unanticipated things that come up and the flexibility and adaptability of the Partnership is important.

SPC was able to pivot quickly to respond to member needs and remain relevant in the region because of the flexible funding provided by Australia as well as program funding from other donors. Despite the challenges, members participated in regional heads of sector meetings, peer-to-peer exchanges, and meetings of CRGA, the CRGA Subcommittee on the Implementation of the Strategic Plan, and the Pacific Board for Educational Quality. SPC also worked with members to overcome connectivity challenges where possible, and to support engagement and full participation, including providing interpretation services for virtual meetings for the first time. The COVID-19 pandemic enabled SPC to develop individual approaches with each member via virtual engagement without the need for teams to travel across the region.

To a large extent the Partnership's flexible core funding contributed to SPCs COVID-19 response. The posture and maturity in which DFAT and SPC can have conversations has been a critical contribution during COVID-19, and enabled SPC flexibility to pivot quickly without spending too much time negotiating changes compared to other projects within SPC.

For other projects, a lot of time was spent during COVID-19 negotiating changes which does not benefit and address real-time needs of Pacific people. Core funding was particularly useful to fund programs while programs were being redesigned and negotiated with donors because the pandemic impacted on the initial scope of these programs. This was a strong finding demonstrated across both evaluation (i) and (ii).

Years of work and investment by Australia in SPC resulted in SPC efficiently responding to member's needs. SPC's response to COVID-19 fell on the core capacities to pivot and not on new initiatives. Where SPC was able to pivot quickly was due to the momentum of a regional public good. SPC has its key areas of expertise that it provides to its member countries: strengthening health systems, strengthening labs, improving surveillance and clinical services capacities, as well as dealing with risk communications.

Core funding also ensured that SPC had the appropriate infrastructure and systems in place to receive pandemic related funding and act as a conduit to support regional needs. An example of SPC's role can be seen in the work of the Public Health Division (PHD) in which SPC is the lead agency in the region for laboratory testing and laboratory surveillance for COVID-19 which is described in evaluation (ii). The PHD provided much needed testing services, one of the key components in the fight against COVID-19 as it allows countries to identify people who have the disease and to scale-up their health-care services if needed. Relevant statistics collected by SPC (such as morbidity and mortality data) were then made available through a single point of access on the SPC website: COVID-19: Pacific Community Updates. The PHD also conducted a regional Intensive Care Unit survey to understand the capacity of PICTs to manage COVID-19 patients. The results highlighted an urgent need for upskilling of nurses to enable them to provide the intensive care that could be needed. Project funding from DFAT (as opposed to flexible funding under the Partnership) provided the opportunity to upskill PICT nurses. A total of 114 nurses from 17 PICTs enrolled in the programme. SPC worked closely with Pacific Heads of Nursing, midwifery officers and clinical supervisors to provide continuous support to the nurses (p.19).

The COVID-19 context changed the relationship and conversation between Australia and SPC. A two day in-person meeting became two hours and that enabled senior management who are usually time poor to

participate in meetings. Australia should continue to maintain this high-level of engagement. Now in a post COVID-19 environment, resources and capacity to engage are strained as people are still sick, so it may take time for re-engagement at that level, particularly as travel increases and more face-to-face meetings are enabled.

CASE STUDY 3:

How flexible core funding helped to ensure SPC was able to move quickly to support the organisation and also its members to adapt to COVID-19 – some practices will continue.

Introduction and background

This case study illustrates how the Partnership between Australia and SPC enabled SPC to support its organisation and the needs of its members during the COVID-19 pandemic. This case study is informed by interviews with DFAT and SPC stakeholders, and Partnership related reporting and documentation. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted on SPC's usual way of doing business and had significant impact on the nature of its work. The case study describes how the long-standing, positive relationship and flexible funding in the Partnership, built over time, enabled SPC to pivot quickly to respond to the changing context in the region.

The Partnership has enabled SPC to provide highly valuable service in delivering both country-specific and regional public goods. While some planned activities either slowed or stopped, others progressed, and new activities and Partnerships were developed in direct response to the pandemic and members' changing priorities. In 2020 the Biketawa declaration was invoked by the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) Leaders and the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 (PHP-C) was established to collectively prepare for and respond to the pandemic.⁸ Australia placed clear priority in the Pacific where it has the most extensive Partnerships and can make the most impact. Working closely with regional institutions such as SPC and supporting the PIF Humanitarian Pathway with other Forum members is an example of Australia's joined-up approach to tackling COVID-19 in the region.

Core funding and the mature relationship between Australia and SPC through the Partnership, meant that SPC could be flexible, adaptable and responsive to the needs of the organisation as well as its members and that there was trust in the Partnership that SPC were best placed to decide how to use the core funding to meet these needs. This approach is in line with Australia's commitment to strengthen Partnerships in its

Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response strategy.

The need to respond to a rapidly evolving situation resulted in SPC making operational improvements that will have long-term benefits. From early in the pandemic, SPC leadership and management focused efforts on contingency planning, monitoring, and a commitment to maintain a balanced budget under these times of unusual and extreme operating and financial pressure. This resulted in higher operating reserves and contributed to SPC's financial viability during the pandemic.⁹ SPC's capacity to pivot to meet the challenges of COVID-19 relied on its institutional capacity and technical capacity and capability to plan, adapt and innovate through prioritisation of activities, programmes and budgets and using online platforms for capacity building and engagement, including for High Level Consultation (HLC) meetings.

To ensure business continuity, almost all of SPC's business services were delivered through digital channels. Staff met these challenges while also dealing with their own difficulties due to the pandemic, such as family separation and other personal and economic impacts. SPC provided the technical support and equipment to enable staff to work from home efficiently. Policies were developed to support staff safety during emerging infectious disease outbreaks such as the SPC response framework; algorithm for COVID-19 self-assessment; terms of reference for wardens and marshals as part of the COVID-19 response framework; COVID-19 surveillance system for SPC; and protocol for deployment of the SPC technical team. The change process generated positive results with the availability of the short-term monitoring indicators providing national and regional policy-makers, donors and development partners access to timely information with which to develop appropriate policies and budgets and also provided opportunities for the development of new Partnerships. SPC finance processes have previously required hard copy paper-based documentation however lockdowns in SPC's host countries prompted more practical and efficient operational changes, including a move to paperless processing of payments.

⁸ Evaluation of SPCs Strategic Plan 2016.2020. Capstone Report.

⁹ Pacific Community Results Report 2020

Evidence of Change Outcomes

Engagement and support to members

Strong member engagement is critical to the relevance and effectiveness of SPC's work. Engagement and collaboration took a different form in 2020, with most of its work with members and partners being carried out virtually. While some work was postponed, SPC's ability to continue delivering the majority of its joint scientific and technical work, and achieve results, was due to collective efforts, the strength of existing relationships and the flexibility of the Partnership with Australia. Despite the challenges, members participated in regional heads of sector meetings, peer-to-peer exchanges, and meetings of CRGA, the CRGA Subcommittee on the Implementation of the Strategic Plan, and the Pacific Board for Educational Quality. SPC also worked with members to overcome connectivity challenges where possible providing guidance on best arrangements for Telecommunication companies. SPC also worked with zoom to create innovative solutions to support engagement and full participation. With zoom it worked to include interpretation services for virtual meetings for the first time. In addition to the engagement with members, SPC worked with over 50 strategic partners on specific projects or programmes and the subregional offices in Melanesia and Micronesia also provided extensive support on the ground to member countries.¹⁰

SPC was able to pivot quickly to respond to member needs and remain relevant in the region because of the flexible core and program funding provided by Australia as well as project funding from other donors. As a result, SPC was able to very swiftly start to procure testing equipment, personal safety equipment, develop training for protocols at airports or for quarantine, allowing governments to anticipate protocols for when a COVID case might arrive, in what circumstance and what to do.

Flexible funding allowed SPC to pivot rapidly to respond to what was a threat, *"there's quite a good marriage there between the flexible modalities that we have with the government of Australia and some of our other partners, and the management decisions that are made under specific circumstances, able to pivot and also*

keep many of the services that we were able to. Now everything that we're doing in countries has a COVID lens put over the top of it, so that it not only responds to a food security challenge or a health challenge or a rights challenge. It also contributes to a country's post, covid response, and in in setting them back up and in again regaining the development ground that was lost for many countries" (SPC 5)

As part of its response to the pandemic, The Pacific Health Division of SPC conducted a regional Intensive Care Unit survey to understand the capacity of PICTs to manage COVID-19 patients. The results highlighted an urgent need for upskilling of nurses to enable them to provide the intensive care that could be needed. Project funding from DFAT (as opposed to flexible funding under the Partnership) provided the opportunity to upskill PICT nurses. The training was developed for Australian nurses only however due to the rapid increase in COVID cases in the Pacific and limited number of intensive care nurses in PICTs, it was anticipated that other nurses would be called on to provide critical care if there was a surge in the number of seriously ill COVID-19 patients. A total of 114 nurses from 17 PICTs enrolled in the surge critical care training for nurses programme. SPC worked closely with Pacific Heads of Nursing, midwifery officers and clinical supervisors to provide continuous support to the nurses. Overall, 84 nurses (74 percent) from 15 PICTs completed the training. Feedback from PICT nurses who completed the course was positive, with 90% of them rating the training as excellent or very good.

The course was delivered online so PICT nurses were able to undertake the required upskilling while travel restrictions were in force. SPC worked with nursing leaders in-country and partners including WHO to assist the training. For instance, a Solomon Islands nurse reported that she had no access to a computer and internet use was expensive. With the help of SPC's Regional Director, Melanesia, and WHO's Country Office in Solomon Islands, nurses were able to use the WHO facility to complete their training.¹¹

SPC's long-term commitment to supporting regional public goods enabled a strong response to COVID-19. For example, as the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) lead in public health, SPC was able to

¹⁰ Pacific Community Results Report 2020

¹¹ Pacific Community Results Highlights 2020

provide timely reporting of epidemic and emerging diseases via the existing Pacific Public Health Surveillance Network (PPHSN) which meant SPC and its partners were able to be proactive in providing tailored assistance to members and COVID-19 testing capacity to all PICTs. Since the onset of the pandemic, SPC's Public Health Division was working closely with members and partners to support COVID-19 prevention, preparedness and response. SPC is part of the PHP-C, providing regional leadership, direction and coordination to enable the provision of medical and humanitarian assistance from regional and international organisations in a timely, safe, effective and equitable manner.¹² The regional COVID-19 response is managed through the WHO-led multi-agency Incident Management Team (IMT), in which SPC is a part of and includes partners such as the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), the Pacific Island Health Officers' Association (PIHOA), SPC and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).¹³

What is the change that occurred and is likely to remain?

High level engagement by DFAT – the COVID context changed the relationship and conversation completely to a virtual setting which enabled senior management who are usually time poor to participate in these meetings. GoA is encouraged to maintain this level of engagement as more face-to-face meetings are enabled.

SPC's actual budget spending decreased due to lower expenditure. SPC's 2020 revised budget was EUR 77 million, while actual expenditure was EUR 62.8 million. Programme and project execution, totalling EUR 49.4 million against the budget of EUR 61million, stood at 81% due to the impacts of COVID-19. Net core expenditure reduced by EUR 2.6 million, from EUR 16 million per the 2020 revised budget to EUR 13.4 million, due to lower expenditure, mainly on salaries and travel.¹⁴ The Partnership allowed the flexibility to maintain capability even though execution rates dropped in the first years of COVID and projects were extended, SPC would have to realign project timelines and budgets. The risk to SPC is that a large part of its

capability are staff on project budgets that are being paid beyond the timeframe for the project and therefore the flexible funding from Australia would have been drawn on to plug those gaps to keep staff on so they can continue to deliver delayed outputs from these projects¹⁵.

The core and Partnership funding modality

The posture and maturity in which DFAT and SPC can have conversations has been critical during the COVID pandemic, which enabled SPC the flexibility to pivot quickly without spending too much time negotiating changes compared to other projects within SPC that spent almost all of the COVID lockdown negotiating changes which does not benefit the people on the ground at the end of the day.

"The thing that is exciting about the Partnership is that it changes the 'dance' if SPC was to step back and consider what are we learning about the Partnership with DFAT and then how can it change its dance with the Partnership with other members – does that mean we could embed more staff into government systems because we are taking a more Partnership approach and the flow on effects that has on building capacity sustainability in national governments machinery and how to how to maintain Partnership to have the big brother for mentoring/exchanges etc. When I look at the 2050 strategy and hear what members are saying, then we have to be able to apply the learning, use COVID as opportunity to serve the region better." (SPC 2)

Years of work and investment by Australia in SPC resulted in SPC efficiently responding to member's needs. SPC's response to COVID-19 fell on the core capacities to pivot quickly and draw from the momentum of a regional public good. SPC has its key areas of expertise that it provides to its member countries: strengthening health systems, strengthening labs, improving surveillance and clinical services capacities, as well as dealing with risk communications. If there was no PPHSN for example, surveillance on COVID could not have been established as quickly as was done in terms of the laboratory, surveillance, communication, statistics.

¹² COVID-19: Pacific Community Updates, 5 September 2022. Accessed from: <https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/2022/09/covid-19-pacific-community-updates#Response>

¹³ Pacific Community Results Highlights 2020

¹⁴ Pacific Community Results Report 2020

¹⁵ Interview: SPC 15

4.5 Value and impact Australia is adding as a member and donor of SPC

Findings in this section are informed solely from Part 2 of the evaluation.

SPC's work aligns with Australian aid, foreign policy and whole-of- government priorities and that of its other members.

For Australia, regional organisations such as SPC are important vehicles for policy dialogue and for advancing its foreign relations, trade, security and development interests within the region. Engaging with, and working through, regional organisations enhances Australia's standing in the Pacific. Working through regional organisations to deliver development aid, in line with the Paris Declaration, ensures all member countries engage around key regional collective action initiatives. As one key informant within SPC noted *'the support by Australia represents the gold standard of how to do development in the Pacific when compared to other like-minded partners'*. The Partnership also allows Australia to establish mutual accountability and responsibility for its regional assistance, and it ensures that the assistance provided by Australia is tailored to the needs of the region and is delivered in a more coordinated manner than other modalities would allow.

The Partnership is based on a shared vision between GoA and SPC to achieve improved development outcomes and collaborate on mutual priorities. The core funding that underpins the Partnership, by being predictable, enhances the ability of both partners to engage in addressing priorities over the longer term. Moreover, the Partnership has also been of tremendous benefit to Australia. Key informants noted a range of mutual benefits including that the Partnership:

- Enhances Australia's strategic positioning/ enhanced visibility of Australia as SPC's key supporter
- Helps Australia contribute more effectively to regional priorities such as Climate Change
- Deepens Australia's strategic dialogue with PICTs on regional priorities
- Improves coordination of Australia's policy priorities in the Pacific (e.g. on gender through SPC hosting Pacific Women's lead)

This evaluation finding echoes a key finding of the 2016 ODE report, which found that:

Australia has played an active role in Pacific regionalism, and its membership of Pacific regional organisations is an important means for it to transparently and collegiately advance its national interests in significant foreign relations, regional stability and economic growth. To the extent that regionalism, defined as collective action between Pacific Island countries, is served by the improved performance of regional organisations, the Partnership's focus on supporting SPC's organisational reform agenda, including its performance management, is very relevant (p.2)

The Partnership has contributed to SPC's Value for Money efforts and is providing Value for Money to the region.

An assessment of the extent the Partnership is supporting SPC in its Value for Money (VfM) efforts is provided in Table 1 below. Detailed scorecard rating is provided in Annex 5. Part 2 of the evaluation also cited the SPC's assessment of the recently completed 2016-2020 Strategic Plan which resonate with the evaluation findings. SPC identified key results¹⁶:

- During the period 2016 – 2020 Business processes and systems were upgraded to improve financial management, oversight, and accountability. Information technology infrastructure was improved, and a full cost recovery model implemented.
- The appointment of an Integration and Resource Mobilisation Director and the development of a deliberate strategy around resourcing are important steps, as is diversifying the donor base.
- SPC has played an important role in supporting the strengthening, implementation, and delivery of regional frameworks.
- SPC's approach to regional service delivery reflects an overall shift towards greater coordination and integration, and centres on SPC's technical and scientific expertise

¹⁶ SPC (2022) *Synthesis Evaluation of SPC's Strategic Plan 2016 – 2020*, March 2022.

Table 1: Summary assessment of the Partnership's contribution to VfM

Dimensions of VfM	Our findings
<p>Economy:</p> <p>Options being selected by the program offer the optimal mix of costs and benefits, and ensure the program is taking reasonable opportunities to leverage the use of resources in the most cost-effective way possible</p>	<p>Leadership, management and governance arrangements of the Partnership are working to ensure the Partnership supports demonstrable changes in the regional service delivery by SPC (as discussed above), but as also noted earlier a perception does exist within SPC that the importance of the Partnership to DFAT is waning.</p> <p>SPC is leveraging its comparative advantage, with support from the Partnership, in the provision of scientific and technical expertise to enhance its regional service delivery (as discussed above).</p>
<p>Efficiency:</p> <p>Organisational systems and processes eliminate inefficiencies and duplication, and enhance benefits in a timely and economic way</p>	<p>Partnership has provided predictable, multi-year funding which has enhanced SPC's efforts to optimise the planning and allocation of these funds</p> <p>Predictable, multiyear funding has contributed to continuity of SPC's work between project funding cycles (as noted above).</p> <p>Core funding provided by the Partnership has ensured timely and predictable funding, and is helping to enhance SPC's efforts to optimise the allocation of these funds to its priorities</p> <p>SPC, with support from the Partnership, has instituted wide ranging efforts to ensure more efficient practices (e.g. Internal audits, revamped HR processes, strengthened MEL, improved procurement)</p> <p>SPC, with support from the Partnership, has adopted strategies and measures to ensure transparent financial budgeting and reporting).</p> <p>Whilst the Partnership has contributed to progress with regards to implementing full cost recovery practices across its operations, certain metropolitan members have not shifted on contributing the full cost of managing projects (By way of comparison, Australia and New Zealand have agreed to a 15 % management fee. The average from all other donors to SPC is around 10-11%).</p> <p>Funding of mutual priorities, supported by flexible and predictable funding, has enhanced collaboration between SPC and Australia (as discussed above)</p>
<p>Effectiveness:</p> <p>Performance and risk management must be continuously reviewed for quality to ensure objectives are being met and delivering maximum impact</p>	<p>Partnership has enhanced SPC's efforts to continuously review performance (as discussed above)</p> <p>SPC, with support from the Partnership, has adopted strategies and measures to learn from experience, adapt delivery, and manage risks</p> <p>Processes are in place, supported by the Partnership, to routinely discuss and review risks</p>
<p>Sustainability:</p> <p>The extent to which the net benefits of the investment continue, or are likely to continue</p>	<p>Partnership is contributing to sustainability in multiple ways, including having put mechanisms in place to enhance sustainability (such as the lobbying of metropolitan donors to provide predictable multi-year funding)</p> <p>Partnership is being used as a guide, but SPC still needs to convince development partners to provide predictable multi-year core and flexible program funding</p>

Dimensions of VfM	Our findings
Ethics: Holding partners accountable and ensuring transparency allows for honest dialogue about the overall impact of investments	The Partnership has helped hold partners to account and has contributed to effective dialogue between partners (as noted above) The Partnership has contributed to ensuring greater transparent budgeting and reporting (as noted above)

The Australia-SPC Partnership and most particularly core funding, has contributed to SPC to achieve value in the region in an efficient and effective manner.

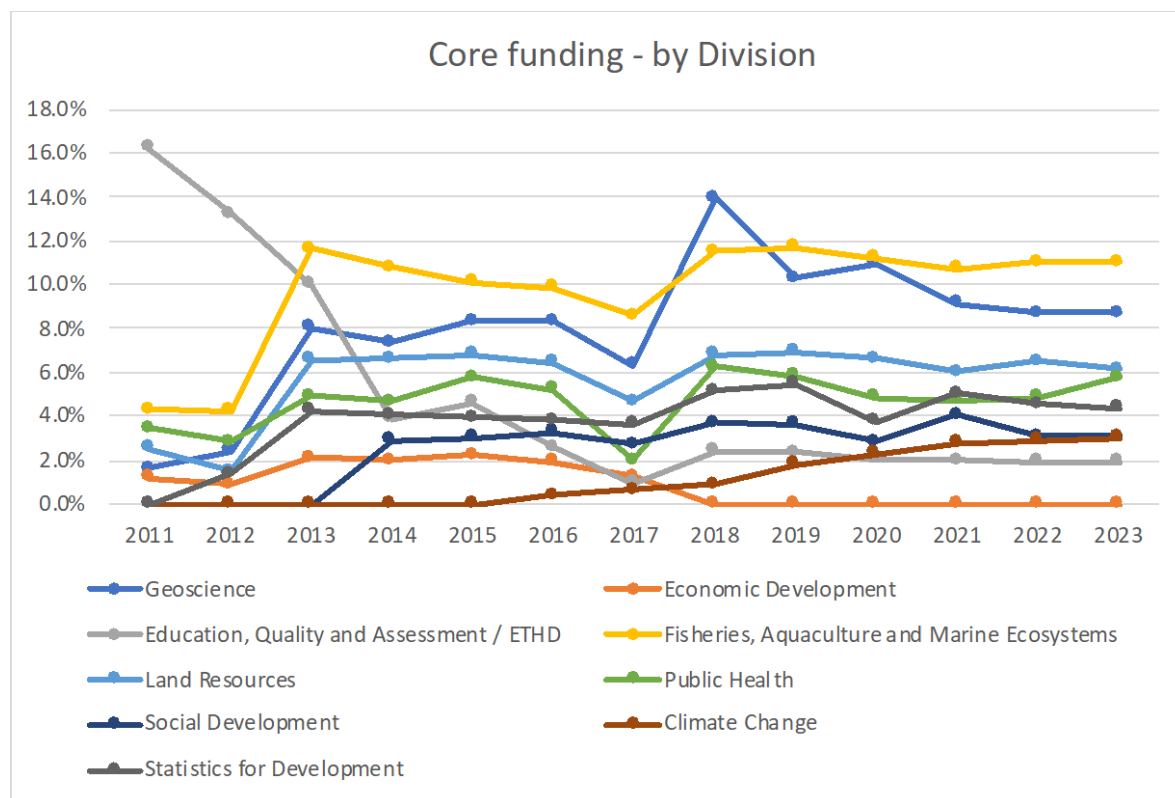
As noted earlier in the evaluation, the Partnership is delivering value to the region. Stakeholders spoke of how core funds allow for wider scope of activities for the region, that core funding is also for short term initiatives before program funding comes online. The report also noted earlier how core funding has allowed SPC to be both responsive and flexible in shifting core funding to address regional issues in a timely fashion (as noted for instance with respect to COVID-19). Key informants also spoke of core funding enables SPC to be more strategic in its planning of regional interventions, which then contribute to both effective and efficient delivery of these interventions. The development of internal transparent processes has also ensured that members of the CRGA feel sufficiently briefed in what has happened and what is being planned.

The evaluation identified strong evidence of strengthening of SPC’s system, which has been enabled through contribution of core funding. The strengthening of the corporate architecture of SPC has contributed to the development of a stronger program funding stream for SPC as donors gain confidence in individual Division business plans. Prior to this development, funding was either core to the entire organisation or project based. Stronger organisational structures and systems have flowed down to more robust Divisional plans which have provided a funding stream for SPC that is more flexible than project funding, while allowing donors to align their funding with their interests if they wish to.

Figure 1 below highlights that Australia’s core funding, as well as providing critical support to the corporate architecture of SPC, also was used to support the work of SPC’s Divisions. A significant jump in the proportion of funding allocated to sectors that closely align with Australia’s interests, such as Fisheries, Geosciences (disaster and climate resilience, water security, ocean science and energy security), and Land Resources (food security, sustainable agriculture and landscapes and markets for livelihoods) is noted in 2013, which as noted earlier is when Australian contributions began to be treated as voluntary core contributions. It should also be noted that all technical Divisions received an increased share of core funding in the years just prior to and just after Australia’s core funding started.

The significant decline in funding to Education represents a shift in the structure of SPC, whereby the Education, Training and Human Development Division was split in two, becoming the Education, Quality and Assessment Program and the Social Development Division. Allowing for changes in accounting practices between 2016 – 2018 which affected the amount of core funding allocated to operations expenditure and therefore had an impact on the proportion of core funding allocated to technical Divisions, the level of core funding allocated to the technical areas has remained very stable from the increased 2013 levels through to the budgeted 2023 levels. Technical divisions have benefited from the increased voluntary core contributions from Australia.

Figure 1: Core funding by Division (Technical Divisions only)



4.6 Options to embed value for money and impact assessments into SPC MEL practices

Part 2 of the evaluation prepared a VfM matrix to guide the evaluation and reflected that whilst there were several positives in using this matrix to guide our assessment of value, there are certain challenges when applying the matrix.

How the Value for Money (VfM) matrix was appropriate and useful for this evaluation:

- It is a systematic attempt to measure perceptions of whether the Partnership is providing value, and it has shied away from ‘providing mathematical proof’ of this value.
- The rubric helped guide the judgement process and provided useful signposts in making judgements.
- The Matrix helps begin a conversation regarding what is valued, how that value will be measured, and what the results of such an assessment will look like.
- The Matrix provides a useful, simple, easily understood set of measurable dimensions which do not require complex economic analytical methods.
- As King (2018) has argued that by emphasising VfM an organisation is emphasising that the way in which scarce resources are allocated matters, thus signalling to investors and development partners that the organisation is serious about deriving considerable value from all its resources.

How the Value for Money (VfM) matrix was challenging for this evaluation:

- Whilst the design of the matrix encapsulates helpful suggestions from both DFAT and SPC, it was neither co-created with partners nor has it attempted to integrate the values of SPC.

- The development of the rubric for the matrix was highly subjective and challenging to measure. Whilst the evaluation team triangulated findings from different sources (both documentary and in interviews) the team does recognise that we have provided a qualitative assessment whereas there may well be future investors in SPC (such as those from the private sector) who may wish for a more quantitative measure of value.
- The matrix has drawn on earlier work done both by the evaluation team and others in conducting VfM assessments, but could possibly been more innovative had time allowed (e.g. there may well be other aspects of value that were not measured, could be measured in a different way, and might have been articulated differently or in greater depth).

Despite the challenges listed above, Part 2 of the evaluation identified that the VfM matrix would be useful for SPC, provided it is 'fit for purpose'. To ensure its utility it is important that the rubric developed is co-created with SPC to ensure that it truly reflects SPC's values and that it is therefore 'owned' by SPC. Using this tool, and the baseline measurement already provided, would be of value to SPC in helping it demonstrate its value to both its members and its metropolitan donors.

Part 2 of the evaluation also developed a theory of change creation to articulate 'the mechanisms by which the intervention should use resources efficiently, effectively and create sufficient value to justify'¹⁷ the resources committed by the GoA to SPC" (p.32). The inferred theory of change creation prepared within Part 2 of the evaluation is provided in Annex XX.

¹⁷ King, J. (2021) 'Expanding theory-based evaluation: Incorporating value creation in a theory of change', *Journal of Evaluation and Program Planning*, 89: 101963

5. Conclusion

The overall evaluation conclusion is that value of the Partnership has been validated. The relationship between the two entities remains strong, and there remains high demand for the Partnership to continue.

The resources provided by the Partnership have been used both effectively and efficiently to enhance both the performance of SPC and contribute to its sustainability and contribute to public goods in the region. The Partnership has provided predictable, multi-year funding which has enhanced SPC's efforts to optimise the planning and allocation of these funds. The modality has contributed to effective and efficient use of resources both internally (in terms of, for instance, supporting significant reforms to processes and systems) and externally to SPC (e.g. in SPC strengthening its delivery of regional goods, and also in its contribution to enhancing collective and coordinated efforts by CROP to address regional challenges).

The Partnership mechanisms are largely effective to support the continued function, though both SPC and DFAT stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation identified areas for improvement. Recommendations reflect areas for improvement in relation to Partnership management; coordination and reporting; visibility of partnership achievements and value for money.

A clear justification can be made for the way in which resources provided by the Partnership are being used. However, the fact that the Grant is re-negotiated every 3 years lessens the impact of the cornerstone of the Partnership, namely predictable, multi-year funding. A shift to a rolling 3-year arrangement would give greater visibility and certainty over future funding.

6. Recommendations

The evaluation recommendations are intended to inform the next phase of the Partnership and are informed by both Parts 1 and 2 of the evaluation. Recommendations 1-8 are informed by Part 1 and 9-12 by Part 2 of the evaluation. The recommendations focus on a Partnership approach to action.

Part 1:

Recommendation 1: Within the Australia-SPC Partnership ensure senior equivalency between organisations within High Level Consultations and prioritise complementary Canberra-based meetings and online meetings within annual schedule.¹⁸

Recommendation 2: Within the Australia-SPC Partnership review and clarify functionality and expectations of Partnership focal point roles as part of, and to inform next phase of the Partnership (agreement).

Recommendation 3: Within the Australia-SPC Partnership, review, clarify and update Partnership principles as part of, and to enable next phase of the Partnership to be principles-led, ensuring that principles are reflective of the Pacific region.

Recommendation 4: Within the Australia-SPC Partnership, carry out annual Australia-SPC Partnership health check, with results to be presented at annual HLC to strengthen Partnership arrangements, as well as an effective means by which to measure contribution of GoA to SPC.

Recommendation 5: DFAT together with SPC, to review, clarify and adjust reporting expectations to broader GoA agencies associated with the Australia-SPC Partnership, in line with Partnership principles associated with flexible funding arrangements and socialise value and utility of SPC Annual Results Reports within GoA to inform next phase of the Partnership.

Recommendation 6: DFAT to continue efforts to improve strengthened coordination within DFAT and also across all GoA agencies associated with the Australia-SPC Partnership.

Recommendation 7: Australia-SPC Partnership to be informed by clarified principles, with GoA to prioritise focus on contribution to SPC through core funding and as a member contribute to strategic longer-term priorities of SPC and Members, emphasizing Pacific-led priorities and SPC leadership of coordinated delivery of regional public goods.

Recommendation 8: Within the Australia-SPC Partnership, review and strengthen visibility and profile of contribution of the Partnership to regional public goods to members and broader Pacific community, identify practical action for resourcing and targeted activities within SPC and DFAT, on behalf of GoA.

Part 2:

Recommendation 9: The importance remains of DFAT continuing to engage at a sufficiently senior level to support meaningful, strategic conversations [DFAT]

Findings: A perception exists within SPC that the importance of the Partnership to DFAT is waning. This is due to no AS level person attending the last HLCs. DFAT needs to be mindful of the impression this creates and ensure senior staff are investing sufficient time in the Partnership and demonstrating the value they place upon the Partnership with their counterparts. Difficult to ensure continuity with the turnover of DFAT staff.

Recommendation 10: DFAT could better maximise the soft power garnered through the Partnership by having more senior people build stronger relationships with senior counterparts in SPC [DFAT]

Findings: Whilst SPC does not have a political mandate, its footprint across the region sees its operations affected by local politics and can provide Australia with a different, local perspective of developments across

¹⁸ To note that at the time of preparing the final report, and in response to presentation of draft findings, conversations are already underway between DFAT and SPC in response to this recommendation, It is expected that the management response will provide more detail.

the region that could help strengthen bilateral ties and programs as well as a deeper understanding of the regional politics at play

Recommendation 11: A shift to a rolling 3-year arrangement would give greater visibility and certainty over future funding. If this is not possible given DFAT's systems, a longer arrangement period with the possibility of extension, such as a 5-year arrangement with the option for an additional 5-years would be preferable [DFAT to discuss with SPC at next HLC]

Findings: Grant is re-negotiated every 3 years which lessens impact of predictable, multi-year funding.

Recommendation 12: A Theory of Value Creation and an appropriate VfM Matrix need to be co-created with SPC and its members to ensure it fully reflects a collective understanding of value, and is hence owned by SP. [MeINET to lead within SPC, in conjunction with DFAT]

Findings: Theory of Value Creation and VfM matrix has initiated a conversation about the value of the Partnership and has helped illustrate the breadth and depth of the value of the Partnership, but such tools need to be developed collectively to ensure a shared understanding of value.

7. Annexes

List of Annexes:

- Annex 1: DFAT Standard 5 - Independent Evaluation Plans
- Annex 2: Evaluation questions
- Annex 3: Documents to be reviewed
- Annex 4: Stakeholder consultations
- Annex 5: Online survey results (Part 1 of evaluation)

Annex 1: DFAT Standard 6 - Independent Evaluation Reports

Introductions

No.	Element	Reference in Evaluation Report
6.1	A background to the evaluation summarises: the total value of the initiative; the number of years of the initiative; the stage of initiative implementation; key outcomes of the initiative; and the key issues identified in the terms of reference.	Section 2
6.2	A brief summary of the methods employed is provided.	Section 3.3
6.3	Key limitations of the methods are described and any relevant guidance provided to enable appropriate interpretation of the findings.	Section 3.4
6.4	The executive summary provides all the necessary information to enable primary users to make good quality decisions.	Executive Summary

Findings and Analysis

6.5	The evaluation report clearly addresses all questions in the Terms of Reference.	Section 4
6.6	The relative importance of the issues communicated is clear to the reader.	Section 4
6.7	There is a good balance between operational and strategic issues.	Section 4
6.8	The report clearly explains the extent to which the evidence supports the conclusions and judgments made.	Section 4
6.9	Alternative points of view are presented and considered where appropriate.	Section 4
6.10	Complicated and complex aspects of issues are adequately explored and not oversimplified.	Section 4
6.11	The role of context and emergent risks to initiative performance are analysed.	Section 4
6.12	The text uses appropriate methods/language to convince the reader of the findings and conclusions.	Section 4
6.13	There is an adequate exploration of the factors that have influenced the issues identified and conclusions drawn.	Section 4
6.14	The implications of key findings are fully explored.	Section 4
6.15	The overall position of the author is clear and their professional judgments are unambiguous.	Section 4

Conclusions and Recommendations

6.16	The conclusions and recommendations logically flow from the presentation of findings and any associated analyses.	Section 5
6.17	Individuals have been allocated responsibility for responding to recommendations.	Section 5
6.18	Where there are significant cost implications of recommendations, these have been estimated (financial, human and materials costs).	N/A
6.19	The recommendations are feasible.	Section 5

Annex 2: Evaluation questions

Objective 1: Assess the contribution of the Partnership between the Australia and SPC to the institutional strengthening that enables development impact through SPC.

Past-focused questions

1.1 How and to what extent has the Partnership supported SPC to enhance its institutional capabilities (people, systems and processes); specifically, its financial sustainability and leverage, MEL systems and institutional governance?

1.2 How and to what extent has the design of the predictable, flexible, multi-year funding modality supported the needs of both SPC and GoA?

Future-focused questions

1.3 Are there innovative funding modalities that could increase the effectiveness of the Partnership

Objective 2: Identify possible changes to the design, management, evaluation and communication mechanisms under the Partnership.

Past-focused questions

2.1 How effective and efficient have the Partnership's management arrangements been?

2.5 How and to what extent has Australia been engaging effectively as a member and donor of SPC?

2.7 How is the Partnership perceived amongst SPC members?

Future-focused questions

2.2 How could these Partnership's management arrangements be improved?

2.3 How could DFAT and SPC better measure the contribution of Australia's flexible core and program funding?

2.4 How could the MEL system be improved to enhance the monitoring and reporting of the Partnership (and other forms of investment) achievement of results?

2.6 How could Australia improve its engagement as a member and donor of SPC?

2.8 How could visibility of the Partnership's achievements be improved?

Objective 3: Assess the Partnerships' contribution to gender and disability inclusion within SPCs operations and programming, and opportunities for future contributions in this area

Past-focused questions

3.1 How and to what extent has the Partnership supported SPC's efforts to operationalise its Social and Environmental (SER) policy and mainstream SER priorities, including gender equality and disability inclusion, and social and environmental responsibility, across the organisation?

3.3 How and to what extent do the Partnerships monitoring, evaluation and learning system capture data (including disaggregated data) to inform gender and disability inclusive policies and programs?

Future-focused questions

3.2 How could the Partnership promote gender and disability inclusion in SPCs operations and programming in the future?

Objective 4: Assess the impact of COVID-19 on the Partnership and identify positive impacts that the Partnership should seek to continue into the future.

Past-focused questions

4.1 What impact has COVID-19 had on SPC's service delivery and processes, and the management of the Partnership

4.2 How and to what extent did the Partnership's flexible core funding contribute to SPCs COVID-19 response?

Future-focused questions

4.3 What changes SPC service delivery and processes, or the management of the Partnership, which resulted from COVID-19 that should be retained.

Table 2: Summary of evaluation questions connected to evaluation focus (objectives) for Evaluation 2

Objective 1: Assess the value and impact of SPC's unique contribution to the delivery of Pacific regional priorities, within the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) enabled through the Partnership and related Government of Australia investments.

- a) To what extent does the Partnership have clear, relevant and realistic objectives that focus on the desired impacts?
- b) To what extent is the Partnership having a transformational, positive and lasting impact on the delivery of regional public goods in the Pacific?
- c) To what extent is SPC delivering through its comparative advantage and unique contribution towards Pacific regional priorities, within the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP)? How is the Partnership (relational and funding) enabling (or not)?
- d) To what extent are Partnership resources being leveraged so as to work best with others and maximise impact?

Objective 2: Assess what value and impact Australia is adding as a member and donor of SPC.

- a) what is the alignment of SPC's work with Australian aid, foreign policy and whole-of-government priorities and that of its other members?
- b) Because of the Australian Partnership, what has SPC been able to achieve in the region in an efficient and effective manner?
- c) What is the value for money of the Partnership to the region?

Objective 3: Consider options to embed value for money and impact assessments into SPC MEL practice

- a) Given the finding, the organisational structure and culture, the funding modalities and regional context, what are better practices SPC could embed into its PEARL Policy and MEL system to institutionalise value for money and impact assessment

Annex 3: Stakeholder consultations

Organisation	Evaluations Part 1	Evaluation Part 2
SPC	Male: 5 Female: 8	Male: 5 Female: 3
Government of Australia	Male: 3 Female: 4	Male: 1 Female: 3
PICT Government	N/A	Male: 1 Female: 1
Other Donors	Male: 1 Female: 1	Male: 1 Female: 1
Other key informants	N/A	Male: 2 Female: 1
Total	22	19

Organisation	Number of participants across Evaluations Parts 1 and 2
SPC	Male: 10 Female: 11
Government of Australia	Male: 10 Female: 7
PICT Government	Male: 1 Female: 1
Other Donors	Male: 2 Female: 2
Other key informants	Male: 2 Female: 1
TOTAL	41

TABLES FOR EACH EVAL:

Evaluation Part 1 - KII

Organisation	Number of participants
SPC	Male: 5 Female: 8
Government of Australia	Male: 3 Female: 4
PICT Government	N/A
Other Donors	Male: 1 Female: 1
TOTAL	22

Evaluation Part 2 - KII

Organisation	Number of participants
SPC	Male: 5 Female: 3
Government of Australia	Male: 1 Female: 3
PICT Government	Male: 1 Female: 1
Other Donors	Male: 1 Female: 1
Other key informants	Male: 2 Female: 1
TOTAL	19

Annex 4: Documents reviewed

Evaluation Part 1: 44 documents reviewed

Partnership Visibility Plans (5)

Name of document	Author	Approval	Date / Year
Visibility Plan January 2018 – December 2020 for the Government of Australia represented by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	GoA and SPC	Approved by Dr Colin Tukuitonga, DG SPC, and Paul Wilson, Consul-General Noumea	on 27 April 2018
Visibility plan 2022 Australia-Pacific Community (SPC) 6.2 SPC-GOA Visibility - Att A 6.2 SPC-GOA Visibility - Att B		<i>No formal approval - This plan contains a list of proposed activities, as discussed during the initial coordination meeting that took place in March 2022.</i>	March 2022
Visibility Plan January 2021 – December 2023 for the Government of Australia represented by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	GoA and SPC	Approved by Dr Stuart Minchin, DG SPC, and Alison Carrington, Consul-General Noumea	16 December 2020.

Strategic Plans (3)

Name of document	Author	Date / Year
Pacific Community Strategic Plan 2016–2020: Sustainable Pacific development through science, knowledge and innovation	Pacific Community (SPC)	2015
Pacific Community Strategic Plan 2022-2031: sustainable Pacific development through science, knowledge and innovation	Pacific Community (SPC)	2022
Synthesis evaluation of SPCs strategic Plan 2016-2020	Susan Cook, Nanise Young, Shaun Foley	31 March 2022
SPC Evaluation of Capacity Building	Gill Westhorp Charles Darwin University	November 2019
Meeting Of The CRGA Subcommittee on the Implementation Of The Pacific Community Strategic Plan Agenda Item No. 5: Mid-Term Review of the Pacific Community Strategic Plan 2016–2020	Pacific Community (SPC) Paper presented by the Secretariat	29–30 May 2018
Independent External Review of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community	Report prepared by the Independent External Review team	June 2012
Pacific Community Strategic Plan Mid-Term Review Partnership Survey Executive Summary	Sustineo in collaboration with SPL.(SPC)	2018
Evaluation of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community – Government of Australia Partnership ODE Brief	ODE DFAT	August 2016
Evaluation of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community–Government of Australia Partnership: Final Report	ODE DFAT	August 2016

SPC Results Report + CRGA records (3)

Name of document	Author	Date / Year
Pacific Community Results Highlights 2020	Pacific Community (SPC)	2021
Pacific Community Results Report 2020	Pacific Community (SPC)	2021
<u>Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations</u>	N/A	N/A

Partnership and Grant Agreements (12)

Name of document	Date / Year
Agreement SPC-GoA 2014-2023 (2014-2017),	signed 140 March 2012
Agreement SPC-GoA 2014-2023 (2018-2020) - renewed	Signed 24 May 2017
Agreement SPC-GoA 2014-2023 (2021-2023) - renewed, November 2020	Signed 16 November 2020
2014-2016 - 20140526 - 69294.1 - GoA Core Grant Agreement (see amendments for further)	N/A
7. Attachment 1 - PAF_Amendment 1	N/A
2014-2018 - Amendment 5 - Core funding agreement - 2017 - not countersigned	N/A
20150115 - Amendment 1 GoA_SPC Partnership Contribution countersigned - b	N/A
20160504 - Amendment 2 - Regional contribution to core services	N/A
20160602 - Amendment 3 - Regional contribution to core services	N/A
20170131 - Amendment 4 - Co-signed	N/A
2018-2020 Agreement - 69294.39 -	N/A
2021-2023 Grant Arrangement between the Government of Australia & SPC - Signed 13 November 2020	N/A

High Level Consultations (9)

Final HLC 2021 - Minutes

Joint Minutes_Nov 2014 HLCs_draft_DFAT edits_18 Feb 2015 (2)

SPC GOA HLC Meeting Outcomes FINAL

HLC Outcomes Statement December 2016 FINAL

SPC - GoA HLC June 2016 - Outcomes Statement FINAL

20170525 - Summary of Outcomes - Pacific Community- GOA HLC May 2017.fin...

180604 Draft outcomes of May 2018 SPC GOA HLC

Outcomes of April 2019 SPC GoA GoNZ HLCs - final 150519

Outcomes of April 2019 SPC GoA GoNZ HLCs - progress

DFAT Annual M&E reporting (6)

AQC 2015

ACQ 2018

ACQ 2019

ACQ 2020

INL322_AIMR_ANNUAL_INVESTMENT_MONITORING_REPORT_2020_final

SPC QAI-AQC core funding 2014

Evaluation part 2 – 74 documents reviewed

1. DFAT Annual M&E Reporting (10)

AQC's IMRs

6.4 Taking stock of the Partnership - Att B (2)

INL322_AIMR_ANNUAL_INVESTMENT_MONITORING_REPORT_2021

INL322_AQC16_AID_QUALITY_CHECK_2016

INL322_AQC17_AID_QUALITY_CHECK_2017

INL322_AQC18_AID_QUALITY_CHECK_2018

INL322_AQC19_AID_QUALITY_CHECK_2019_final

INL322_AQC20_AID_QUALITY_CHECK_2020 - 22 May

SPC AQC 2015_FINAL

SPC QAI-AQC core funding 2014

2. High Level Consultation Records (23)

HLCs

2014

Joint Minutes_Nov 2014 HLCs_draft_DFAT edits_18 Feb 2015 (2)

2015

SPC GOA HLC Meeting Outcomes FINAL

SPC HLC Revised draft program TBC by Canberra

2016 Dec

HLC Outcomes Statement December 2016 FINAL

SPC Goa HLC Agenda Nov 2016 FINAL

2016 June

8.1-MOU ACIAR-SPC - signed 20160329

SPC - Australia High Level Consultations Program 16 - 17 June 2016 (2)

SPC - Australia HLC June 16 Agenda

SPC - GoA HLC June 2016 - Outcomes Statement FINAL

2017

20170525 - Summary of Outcomes - Pacific Community- GOA HLC May 2017.fin...

SPC-GOA HLC 23 Feb 17 Agend DRAFT

2018

180604 Draft outcomes of May 2018 SPC GOA HLC

SPC-GOA HLC Agenda - May 2018 180509

2019

6.2 SPC-GOA Visibility - Att A

6.2 SPC-GOA Visibility - Att B

6.4 Outcomes of 2018 HLC - tracking updated March 2019(Taking stock of the Partnership - Att A)

6.4 Taking stock of the Partnership - Att B (2)

Outcomes of April 2019 SPC GoA GoNZ HLCs - final 150519

Tripartite HLC - v9 agenda

2020

Aid Quality Check for DFAT Partnership funding 2019 + 2020

Outcomes of April 2019 SPC GoA GoNZ HLCs - progress

Tripartite HLC 2020 - final agenda

2021

Final HLC 2021 - Minutes

3. Partnership and Grant Agreements (21)

2016 ODE Evaluation

ode-brief-secretariat-pacific-community-gov-of-aus-Partnership-review

secretariat-pacific-community-gov-of-aus-Partnership-review (1)

Grant Agreements

2014-2016 - 20140526 - 69294.1 - GoA Core Grant Agreement (see amendments for further)

2018-2020 Agreement - 69294.39 -

2021-2023 Grant Arrangement between the Government of Australia & SPC - Signed 13 November 2020

2014-2017 Grant Amendments

7. Attachment 1 - PAF_Amendment 1

2014-2018 - Amendment 5 - Core funding agreement - 2017 - not countersigned

20150115 - Amendment 1 GoA_SPC Partnership Contribution countersigned - b

20160504 - Amendment 2 - Regional contribution to core services

20160602 - Amendment 3 - Regional contribution to core services

20170131 - Amendment 4 - Co-signed

2021-2023 Amendments

Amendment 1 - Letter DFAT to SPC - Peak to Diver - April 2021

Amendment 1 - Letter SPC to DFAT amended grant arrangement - April 2021

Amendment 2 - 20220310 Letter OTP to SPC - amendment to core funding arrangement to cover independent evaluation in 2022

Amendment 2 - 20220314 - Return EoL - Amendment to core funding arrangement

Grant Arrangement between the Government of Australia & SPC - Signed 13 November 2020

Partnership Agreements

Agreement SPC-GOA 2014-2023 (2014-2017), signed 140312

Agreement SPC-GOA 2014-2023 (2018-2020) - renewed, FM signed - 20170524

Agreement SPC-GOA 2014-2023 (2021-2023) - renewed, FM Signed - 16112020

4. SPC Results Report + CRGA records (3)

Pacific_Community_Highlights_Results_2020

Pacific_Community_Results_Report_2020

SPC Results Reports + CRGA records

5. SPC Reviews (6)

Capacity_Development_Evaluation_Final_Report_004 (1)

CRGA_Subcom_29_30May2018_Agenda_5_Paper_3_Mid_term_review_w_Annexes

Independent External Review of SPC 2012

Signed Pillar Assessment for SPC - EU - 2017

SPC_Strategic_Plan_mid_term_review_Partnership_Survey_Executive_Summary

Evaluation of SPC's Strategic Plan: 2016 – 2020 Capstone Report

6. SPC Strategic Plans + Capstone report 2016-2020 (3)

Evaluation_of_SPCs_Strategic_Plan_2016_2020_Capstone_Report___E

Strategic_Plan_2016-2020

Strategic_Plan_2022_2031

7. Visibility Plans (8)

Australia visibility plan 2022

SPC-GoA Visibility Plan 2018-20 final

SPC-GoA Visibility Plan 2020-23 - FINAL

Visibility reports

2016 DFAT Visibility Report

2018 Visibility report - presented at HLC (6.2 SPC-GOA Visibility - Att A)

2019 DFAT-visibility

2020 Online Visibility Review-DFAT

2020 -Visibility Report

Annex 5: Value for Money Scorecard rating

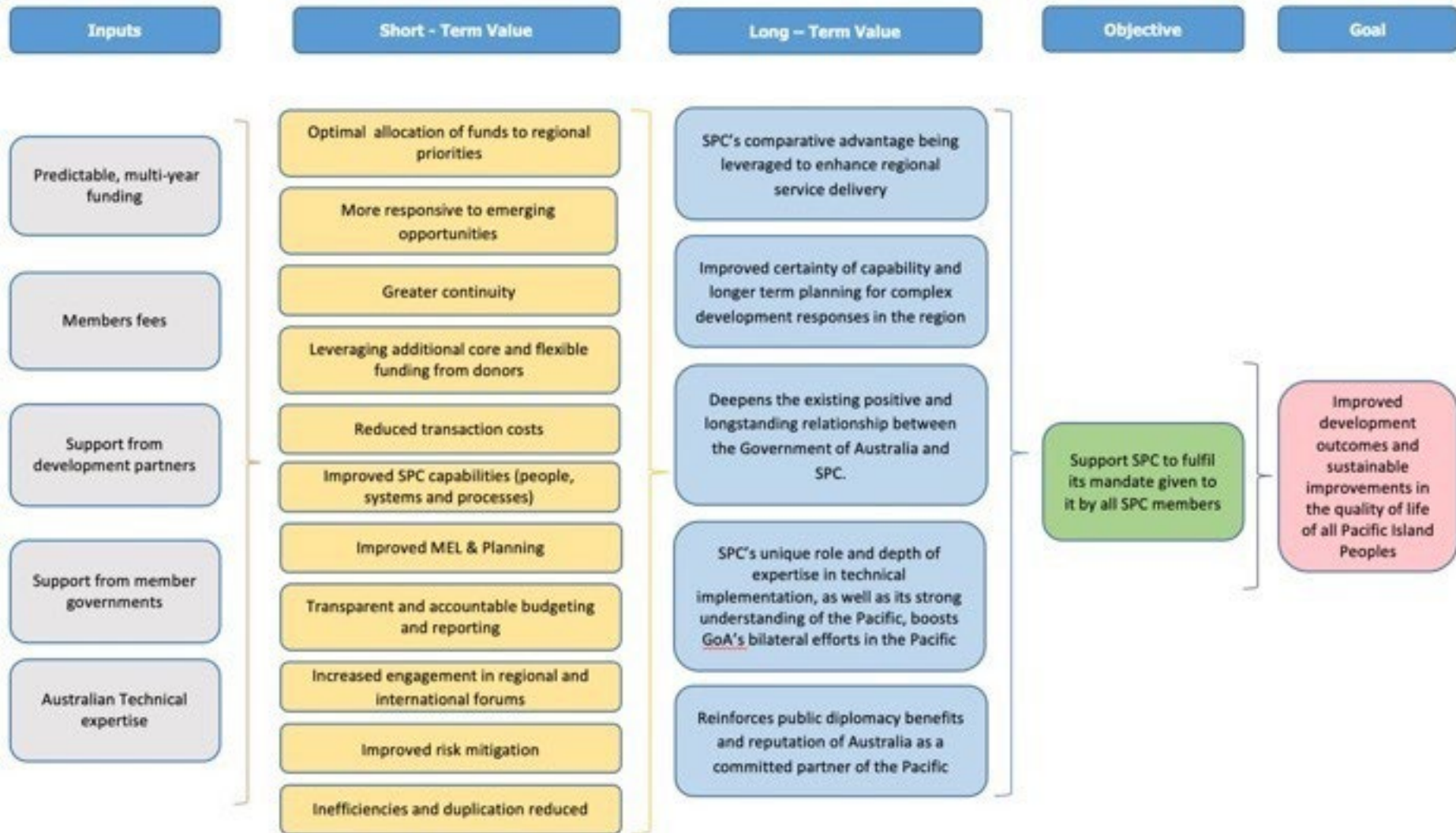
Dimensions	Criteria	Rating	Performance Standard	Evidence
<p>Economy:</p> <p>Options being selected by the program offer the optimal mix of costs and benefits, and ensure the program is taking reasonable opportunities to leverage the use of resources in the most cost-effective way possible</p>	To review whether appropriate leadership, management and governance arrangements exist to ensure the Partnership supports the delivery of regional services by SPC	Adequate to Good	Leadership, management and governance arrangements of the Partnership are working to ensure the Partnership supports demonstrable changes in the delivery of regional services by SPC	<p>The report provides a number of examples of SPC playing an important role, with support from the Partnership, in both coordinating and delivering regional goods either directly or in conjunction with sister CROP Agencies</p> <p>However, we also noted earlier that there is a perception within SPC that the importance of the Partnership to DFAT is waning</p>
<p>Economy:</p> <p>Options being selected by the program offer the optimal mix of costs and benefits, and ensure the program is taking reasonable opportunities to leverage the use of resources in the most cost-effective way possible</p>	To assess the extent the Partnership is supporting SPC to leverage its comparative advantage in the provision of scientific and technical expertise to the delivery of regional services	Good	<p>The Partnership has helped SPC to leverage its comparative advantage in the provision of scientific and technical expertise to the delivery of regional services</p> <p>Processes are in place, supported by the Partnership, to routinely discuss and review how best to leverage SPC's comparative advantage</p>	<p>The report notes that through support from the Partnership SPC developed strong systems and processes, which in turn has increased opportunities for the region to secure funding from multi-lateral agencies to address regional issues.</p> <p>HLC meets as scheduled to discuss ongoing support to the delivery of services by SPC to its members in the region</p>
<p>Efficiency:</p> <p>Organisational systems and processes eliminate inefficiencies and duplication, and enhance benefits in a timely and economic way</p>	To assess the Partnership's contribution to improved practices and systems to support people and programmes, including monitoring, evaluation and learning, and improved planning within the SPC	Good	<p>The Partnership has contributed to efforts by SPC to ensure more efficient practices and systems, continuous improvement, and learning from past experience</p> <p>The Partnership has contributed to efforts to gather, collate and analyse evidence to inform practices and systems within SPC</p>	Business processes and systems were upgraded to improve financial management, oversight, and accountability. Information technology infrastructure was improved, and a full cost recovery model implemented
<p>Efficiency:</p> <p>Organisational systems and processes eliminate inefficiencies and duplication, and enhance benefits in a timely and economic way</p>	To assess the extent to which the Partnership is supporting transparent financial budgeting and reporting, including implementation of full cost recovery practices within SPC	Good	<p>SPC, with support from the Partnership, has adopted strategies and measures to ensure transparent financial budgeting and reporting.</p> <p>SPC, with support from the Partnership has implemented full cost recovery practices across its operations</p>	A critical aspect of SPC's improvement has been the strengthening of its auditing and accountability processes under the oversight of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC). The ARC has been strongly championed by Australia, providing the initial funding to establish the committee, with ongoing running costs now covered by core funding

Dimensions	Criteria	Rating	Performance Standard	Evidence
			Processes are in place, supported by the Partnership, to routinely discuss and review good practice financial management of SPC	Whilst the Partnership has contributed to progress with regards to implementing full cost recovery practices across its operations, certain metropolitan members have not shifted on contributing the full cost of managing projects (By way of comparison, Australia and New Zealand have agreed to a 15 % management fee. The average from all other donors to SPC is around 10-11%).
Efficiency: Organisational systems and processes eliminate inefficiencies and duplication, and enhance benefits in a timely and economic way	To assess the extent to which the Partnership provides predictable, multi-year GoA funding	Good	The Partnership has provided predictable, multi-year funding which has enhanced SPC's efforts to optimise the planning and allocation of these funds Predictable, multiyear funding has contributed to continuity of SPC's work between project funding cycles Core funding provided by the Partnership has ensured timely and predictable funding, and enhanced SPC's efforts to optimise the allocation of these funds to its priorities	SPC managed to grow its income in the past 10 years, it has also managed to grow the proportion of that income that is core funding SPC, with significant support from the Partnership has instituted wide ranging efforts to ensure more efficient practices (e.g. Internal audits, revamped HR processes, strengthened MEL, improved procurement) A stronger focus on regional service delivery – including prioritising and consolidating SPC programs that leveraged SPC's comparative advantage with regards to providing scientific and technical expertise, and enhancing a more coherent and coordinated approach with other CROP agencies and other development partners operating in the region;
Efficiency: Organisational systems and processes eliminate inefficiencies and duplication, and enhance benefits in a timely and economic way	To assess the extent to which flexible funding provided through the Partnership promotes close collaboration on mutual priorities	Adequate	A strategy has been adopted to allocate funding to mutual priorities, but has yet to be applied across all priorities	SPC's own reports, and the recent Capstone Evaluation Report, note that prioritisation remains an ongoing challenge and that the approach to priority setting has not received sufficient guidance (<i>Synthesis evaluation of SPC's Strategic Plan 2016-2020</i> , p.7)
Effectiveness: Performance and risk management must be continuously reviewed for quality to ensure objectives are being met and delivering maximum impact	To assess the extent that the Partnership has enhanced SPC's science and technical capability for effective regional service delivery	Good	The Partnership is contributing to ensure effective regional service delivery by SPC through the provision of its science and technical capability The Partnership is having a transformational, positive and lasting	A number of examples have been provided in the report of SPC, with support from Australia (both directly as a result of the Partnership, but also as a result of its longstanding relationship with many different agencies in Australia) engaging in leveraging resources (both financial and technical) to coordinate, and address, efforts to across a wide range of regional issues

Dimensions	Criteria	Rating	Performance Standard	Evidence
			impact on the delivery of regional services in the Pacific	
<p>Effectiveness:</p> <p>Performance and risk management must be continuously reviewed for quality to ensure objectives are being met and delivering maximum impact</p>	To assess the extent risks are being managed to maximise results	Good	<p>SPC, with support from the Partnership, has adopted strategies and measures to learn from experience, adapt delivery, and manage risks</p> <p>Processes are in place, supported by the Partnership, to routinely discuss and review risks</p>	<p>As noted above the Partnership has contributed to the effective functioning of the ARC, a key component in helping SPC to monitor and manage risk.</p> <p>Core funding has also contributed to SPC reporting on a broad spectrum of risks (not just financial, but also for instance social, environmental, and occupational risks) in, for example, its annual Pacific Community Results Reports</p>
<p>Sustainability:</p> <p>The extent to which the net benefits of the investment continue, or are likely to continue</p>	To assess the extent to which the Partnership has put in place mechanisms which are likely to ensure the long-term sustainability/ viability of SPC	Good	<p>Partnership is contributing to sustainability in multiple ways, including having put mechanisms in place to enhance sustainability (such as the lobbying of like minded donors to provide predictable multi-year funding)</p> <p>Efforts to ensure long-term sustainability are being monitored and reported upon</p>	<p>Partnership is contributing to sustainability in multiple ways, including having put mechanisms in place to enhance sustainability (such as the lobbying of metropolitan donors to provide predictable multi-year funding)</p> <p>Partnership is being used as a guide, but SPC still needs to convince development partners to provide predictable multi-year core and flexible program funding</p> <p>SPC leveraged resources from major funding partners and other key donors (e.g., Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT], EU, GIZ, Government of France, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade [MFAT], USAID, World Bank and others) and UN agencies to support its multi-sectoral programmes in all member countries.</p>
<p>Sustainability:</p> <p>The extent to which the net benefits of the investment continue, or are likely to continue</p>	To assess the extent to which the Partnership has contributed to SPC leveraging additional core and flexible programme funding from other donors	Adequate	Partnership used as guide, but other models of financing secured that include increased cost recovery mechanisms	Whilst the Partnership has contributed to securing both core and flexible program funding, not all metropolitan donors (due to their own policies and regulations) have contributed directly to core funds
<p>Ethics:</p> <p>Holding partners accountable and ensuring transparency allows for honest dialogue about the overall impact of investments</p>	To assess the extent that the Partnership is accountable and transparent in all its transactions	Good	The Partnership has helped hold partners to account and has contributed to effective dialogue between partners	As noted above the Partnership's support to the ARC has contributed to SCP strengthening its auditing and accountability practices which has helped enhance SPC's accountability and transparency to its members

Dimensions	Criteria	Rating	Performance Standard	Evidence
			The Partnership has contributed to ensuring greater transparent budgeting and reporting	Regular HLC meetings between SPC, DFAT and MFAT have ensured dialogue between these partners

Annex 6: Inferred Theory of Value creation.



Annex 6: Online survey results

Summary of survey results

ISF sent the survey to 97 staff from DFAT, SPC and other governments in the Pacific. ISF received 21 responses (21% response rate) however 4 responses were mostly incomplete. Survey respondents were predominantly working for DFAT:

11 DFAT (58%)

2 SPC (10%)

2 Governments in the Pacific (10%)

4 other (21%).

63% of respondents identified as female and 32% identified as male.

31% of respondents had participated in high-level consultations.

None of the respondents worked in communications, SPC Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Programme or SPC RRRT.

For the following questions there were 10 respondents from DFAT, 2 from SPC, 1 from another government in the Pacific and 2 from other organisations. The results therefore predominantly reflect DFAT staff's opinions.

65% of respondents (n: 11; 6 DFAT, 2 SPC, 3 other org) said the SPC-Australia Partnership has been **relevant to and coherent** with the interests and needs of their organisation to a very large extent. 29% (n:5; 4 DFAT, 1 Government in the Pacific) said to a large extent, and 1 respondent said they don't know or prefer not to say. (Total 17 responses).

53% of respondents (n: 9; 6 DFAT, 1 SPC, 1 Government in the Pacific, 1 other org) said the SPC-Australia Partnership has been very **effective at achieving its objectives**. 12% (n:2; 1 DFAT, 1 SPC) said extremely effective, 6% (n:1, from other org) said moderately effective, 6% (n:1, from DFAT) said somewhat effective, and 23% (n: 4) said they don't know or prefer not to say. (Total 17 responses).

53% of respondents (n: 9; 7 DFAT, 1 SPC, 1 other org) said **resources** in the SPC-Australia Partnership have been used very well. 18% (n: 3; 2 DFAT, 1 other org) said somewhat well; 12% (n: 2; 1 DFAT, 1 SPC) said extremely well; 12% (n: 2) said they don't know or prefer not to say; 6% (n: 1, Government in the Pacific) said neutral. (Total 17 responses).

59% of respondents (n: 10) said the SPC-Australia Partnership has had an **impact on development outcomes** in the Pacific to a large extent. 24% (n: 4) said to a very large extent and 18% (n: 3) said they don't know or prefer not to say. (Total 17 responses). The two SPC respondents said to a large extent and to a very large extent.

47% of respondents (n: 8) said the benefits of the SPC-Australia Partnership are very **likely to last in the long term**. 24% (n: 4) said extremely likely; 24% said they don't know or prefer not to say; and 6% (n: 1, from DFAT) said very unlikely. (Total 17 responses). The two SPC respondents said very likely and extremely likely.

35% of respondents (n: 6; 5 DFAT, 1 SPC) said the SPC-Australia Partnership has **supported SPC's overall institutional capabilities** to a very large extent. 24% (n: 4; 1 SPC, 1 DFAT, 1 Government in the Pacific, 1 other org) said to a large extent; 18% (n: 3; 2 DFAT, 1 other org) said to a medium extent; and 24% (n: 4) said they don't know or prefer not to say. (Total 17 responses).

For the following questions there were 9 respondents from DFAT, 2 from SPC, 0 from another government in the Pacific and 2 from other organisations. The results predominantly reflect DFAT staff's opinions.

57% of respondents (n: 8; 6 from DFAT, 1 from SPC, 1 from other org) said Australia has **engaged with SPC as a donor** very effectively. 14% (n: 2; 1 DFAT, 1 SPC) said extremely effectively; 7% (n: 1, from other org) said moderately effectively; 7% (n: 1, from DFAT) said somewhat effectively and 14% (n: 2) said they don't know or prefer not to say. (Total 14 responses).

43% of respondents (n: 6; 4 DFAT, 1 SPC, 1 other org) said Australia has **engaged with SPC as a member** very effectively. 21% (n: 3; 2 DFAT, 1 SPC) said extremely effectively; 21% (n: 3; 2 DFAT, 1 other org) said moderately effectively; and 14% (n: 2) said they don't know or prefer not to say.

How could Australia improve its engagement as a member and donor of SPC?

- Clarifying for ourselves what the differences between engaging as a member and as a partner are (DFAT respondent)
- By explaining to SPC teams what the role of the Consule in charge of the Partnership is and how important it is to communicate with him/her (DFAT respondent)
- Improve on the ground monitoring and HLC engagements (DFAT respondent)
- Continue efforts to align all Australian government funding under the common reporting arrangements for the Partnership. (SPC respondent)
- Australia may need to diversify its investments across other CROPs and non CROP agencies. SPC is seen as an entry point to engagement with PICs but sometimes it seems that relationship between SPC and its members is not what it needs to be in order to be truly effective in capacity building. (DFAT respondent)
- Plug into existing mechanisms to understand SPC more (eg for reporting) (DFAT respondent)
- Be representative of Pacific interests on the world stage (DFAT respondent)

Which changes to the Partnership that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic should be retained?

- Flexible/hybrid engagements (DFAT respondent)
- Regular virtual catch ups with SDD to supplement face-to-face meetings (DFAT respondent)
- Closer working relationships with UN offices/staff in the region (DFAT respondent)
- Flexible use of hybrid meetings for regular connection at high level (SPC respondent)



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