

Mid-Term Review

Gender Responsive Equitable Agriculture and Tourism Program (GREAT)

DFAT Management Responses to Recommendations

From January to June 2021, the Australian Embassy in Vietnam (the Embassy) commissioned a Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the Gender Responsive Equitable Agriculture and Tourism (GREAT) Program.

The primary purpose of the MTR was to assess the effectiveness of program implementation; to make recommendations for program improvements; and to inform DFAT's decision on whether to extend GREAT for an additional five years.

The MTR found that GREAT's results are beginning to contribute to the program's ambitious long-term goal to *improve the social and economic status of ethnic minority women living in two provinces of northwest Vietnam*. The Program has developed a large and diverse portfolio of 52 sub-projects in the tourism and agriculture sectors. GREAT is pioneering a delivery model that is new to government and other stakeholders in Vietnam and integrates both an inclusive Market System Development (MSD) and Women's Economic Empowerment /Gender Equality (WEE/GE) approach. The implementation of these approaches has been challenging, however GREAT has learned from experience and has been refining approaches to improve program effectiveness. A new theory of change (ToC) is under development and will provide GREAT with a clearer strategic focus by addressing women's constraints to engaging in priority sub-sectors. GREAT has succeeded in building government and stakeholder ownership over the MSD approach, but to date, support for WEE/GE remains mixed. Partly to address this issue, GREAT has also refined its WEE/GE approach, developing a "Reach, Benefit, Empower" framework tailored to the situation of ethnic minority women in Vietnam. These improvements, combined with learnings from phase one, captured in the Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL) system and qualitative research studies, provides a strong foundation from which GREAT can narrow its strategic focus and scale results to achieve significant future impacts.

The MTR made 15 recommendations against seven categories. All recommendations will inform the DFAT-led Phase 2 Design Update to be completed by June 2022.

DFAT's management response to these recommendations is informed by consultations with the Provincial People's Committees of Son La and Lao Cai and GREAT's Managing Contractor, Cowater.

Overall, DFAT agrees with all recommendations, including where the MTR has recommended further consultation with the Steering Committee.

DFAT was pleased to note recognition of the Program's overall effectiveness in the MTR, and significant achievements over five years of implementation. In particular, the Program's MSD approach has demonstrated important successes. This is shown by the uptake of certain measures by the Government of Vietnam, and by the provinces of Lao Cai and Son La. DFAT agrees with the analysis of the MTR that the relevance of GREAT has only increased in the COVID-19 context, recognising the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on ethnic minority women in the Northwest of Vietnam. Finally, DFAT is very conscious of the need to build local ownership, with a view to sustainability of outcomes.

1. Relevance

Recommendation 1: The Program to prepare a *position paper* for consideration by DFAT and the Steering Committee on the options (benefits and costs) for how the Program could be redefined around target sub-sectors, value chains, or thematic areas where there is the best potential impact for ethnic minority women. The paper should propose (a) a reduced number of sub-sectors on which to focus (where phase 1 evidence shows there is the most potential for systemic market change to benefit ethnic minority women) and (b) an appropriate inclusive MSD implementation approach. In developing this approach, the Paper could look at whether the Program would be more effective in achieving systemic sub-sector/ market change if it had the flexibility to operate beyond the current two provinces.

Response: Agree

Actions, responsibilities, and timeframe: **Managing Contractor** will develop the concept for target sub-sectors, value chains, thematic areas for incorporation into the **DFAT**-led Design Update (by June 2022) for the Program Steering Committee to consider. The position paper will be informed by broad consultation with relevant stakeholders. DFAT will also carefully consider the geographic reach of a future program as part of the Design Update.

Recommendation 2: The Program to review and re-design approaches and activities for building Vietnamese stakeholders' understanding of, and support for, women's empowerment, using the "Reach, Benefit, Empower" framework and the Program's other recently developed tools/approaches. For example, the Program could consider better aligning its approach with Vietnam's National Strategy for Gender Equality and creating more visible roles for the Vietnamese organisations responsible for its implementation, including the Women's Union, MOLISA, and DOLISA. The Program should seek to tactically support the subnational governments (Son La and Lao Cai) responsible for the implementation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality but maintain its current level of ambition for WEE/GE.

Response: Agree

Actions, responsibilities, and timeframe: **DFAT** has approved capacity building and awareness raising activities on WEE/GE, targeting partners (Women's Union, MOLISA, DOLISA) for immediate implementation by GREAT (Phase 1 until June 2022). More comprehensive approaches will be incorporated into the **DFAT**-led Design Update to support provincial and national implementation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality (during Phase 2 delivery, July 2022- June 2027), in addition to inclusive implementation of NTP-SEDEMA and NTP-NRD. It will be important for Phase 2 of the program to consider the long-term impacts of COVID-19, and implications for Vietnam's economic recovery, in the context of WEE/GE.

2. Effectiveness

Recommendation 3: The Program to finalise:

- a) development of the new Program-level ToC. The current version is a work-in-progress but is on the right track. In particular, the MTR supports the focus on targeted sub-sectors, and supporting ethnic minority women to engage in these sub-sectors through an approach that seeks to combine MSD and WEE/GE; and
- b) development of sub-sector strategies, using an MSD approach (with theories of change), to nest under the new program ToC. The sub-sector strategies will:
 - focus on the "triggers" for systemic, inclusive market change that promotes WEE/GE for sub-sectors that have the potential to scale up
 - contain explicit objectives and strategies to promote synergy and learning between complementary projects
 - consider how men need to be engaged in the Program, especially in terms of their role in, and contribution to, women's economic empowerment and gender equality
 - as a part of determining the sub-sector focus, review all the Program's sub-projects to identify those with the best potential for scale-up in phase 2
 - articulate aid delivery modalities that are more supportive of these strategies (see efficiency).

NOTE: In developing the sub-sector strategies, GREAT could benefit from assistance from a professional who is independent or semi-independent from the program team who brings relevant technical expertise and could provide a fresh set of eyes.

Response: Agree

Actions, responsibilities, and timeframe: DFAT and **Managing Contractor** to workshop and revise the Program-level ToC as part of the DFAT-led Design Update (by June 2022). Furthermore, the **Managing Contractor** will engage independent consultants with relevant technical expertise to support the development of select sub-sector strategies for **DFAT's** approval. Sub-sector strategies will be informed by sub-sector ToCs and gendered studies (over Phase 1 and the Phase 2 inception period).

Recommendation 4: The Program to:

- a) propose to DFAT more realistic phase 1 targets for current indicators, by updating Cowater's February 2019 assessment of the original program and contractual targets, and by using the same methodology, to identify what partners are realistically able to achieve in the remainder of phase 1 (for subsequent discussion and agreement with DFAT)
- b) following the finalisation of the new Program ToC, propose new phase 2 indicators and targets. DFAT to discuss and agree to these with the MC.

Response: Agree

Actions, responsibilities, and timeframe: Revised contractual targets and indicators were approved by **DFAT** in October 2021 and included in the no-cost extension between DFAT and Cowater.

Managing Contractor will propose new indicators and targets for **DFAT** approval as part of phase 2.

3. Efficiency

Recommendation 5: The Program to strengthen allocative efficiency by revising processes to allocate funding to sub-projects consistent with MSD and a sector-based theory of change. Provide grants to fewer partners within a balanced sector-sub portfolio approach. This could include a mix of:

- larger grants to take proven concepts to scale/achieve more predictable results
- smaller grants for innovative projects with more unpredictable but potentially transformative results.

The grant selection mechanism to make greater use of a “managed” selection process: where partners are identified through a purposeful selection rather than an open and competitive process, though competitive processes may be appropriate in some situations

Response: Agree

Actions, responsibilities, timeframe: **Managing Contractor** will develop revised funding allocation processes to be incorporated into the **DFAT**-led Design Update for approval. Competitive calls may still be useful in some instances but a partnership approach to developing projects with contract partners will be the primary approach for phase 2 (by June 2022).

Recommendation 6: The Program to strengthen dynamic efficiency by:

- revising management processes to facilitate quicker, evidence-based decisions on whether a sub-project should be continued, changed, or stopped. The evidence for these management decisions could include information on whether assumptions are sound, as well as progress on key indicators
- developing more flexible grant arrangements, including a) facility for an initial pilot phase, with progress dependent on demonstrated results; and b) making funding available to support partners to design projects (including assessing WEE issues for new sectors)

Response: Agree

Action, responsibilities, and timeframe: **Managing Contractor** to revise the contracting modalities to be included in the **DFAT**-led Design Update (by June 2022). A rigorous process to monitor and evaluate ongoing projects to be finalised and incorporated into the revised Operational Manual for **DFAT**'s approval over the phase 2 inception period.

Recommendation 7: The Program to review and revise the management team structure to:

- ensure the right skills to play the role of facilitator and broker (consistent with an MSD approach)
- strengthen the Program Team's current levels and structuring of GESI expertise, building capacity and confidence to promote and support gender-inclusive MSD across the whole team, with a strong GESI adviser to lead and support staff

Response: Agree

Actions, responsibilities, and timeframe: **Managing Contractor** will revise the program's staffing structure for **DFAT**'s approval and incorporate these changes in the Design Update. Additional gender expertise will be included in the team (during the phase 2 inception period). Capacity

building for all Program staff and partners on WEE/GE will be ongoing including specific induction training.

4. Impacts

Recommendation 8: The Program to consider strategies to better incentivize businesses to engage on WEE by identifying and promoting successful business models of WEE engagement that other businesses could adopt.

Response: Agree

Actions, responsibilities, and timeframe: **Managing Contractor** has assisted six partners in building and implementing more gender-responsive business plans. Lessons learnt from the implementation of these plans will inform approaches to scale up the gender-responsive business to be considered as part of the Design Update, and for the remainder of phase 1.

Recommendation 9: For the End of Program final report, the Managing Contractor to provide more qualitative information on the significance of the change, pulling together and summarising the rich information in the three qualitative studies. For example, not just whether there has been an increase in incomes, but further details (ie. Significant) of the level of increase in different sub-sectors. (See also recommendations under MERL below.)

Response: Agree

Actions, responsibilities, and timeframe: **Managing Contractor** will incorporate qualitative information, which is available from the project level midline, longitudinal study and systemic change study into Phase 1's completion report (by June 2022).

Recommendation 10: The Program to continue piloting current projects in digital technology and financial access for incorporation in phase 2.

Response: Partly Agree

Actions, responsibilities, and timeframe: **GREAT** (Managing Contractor) to conduct an evaluation of current initiatives (by June 2022). Findings will inform cross-cutting sub-sector strategies in digital technology and access to finance for **DFAT's** approval (during phase 1 and Phase 2 inception).

5. Risk management

Recommendation 11: The Program to review and update the Procedures Manual to ensure compliance with DFAT's social and environmental safeguards policies.

Response: Agree

Actions, responsibilities, and timeframe: **Managing Contractor** has reviewed and updated the Program's Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). The SOPs will be further revised following the completion of the Design Update for **DFAT's** approval and assurance that SOPs fully comply with DFAT's environment and social safeguards policies (Phase 1 and Phase 2 inception period).

6. Sustainability

Recommendation 12: In line with the Program's new sector-based ToC, the Program to review and revise GREAT's Policy and Advocacy strategy to a) identify key government counterparts at different levels (national, provincial, district) that are central to Program objectives b) assess their current levels of understanding and support for WEE/GE and other Program elements (eg MSD) c) define broadly expected outcomes (in terms of changes in attitudes and behaviours of key government counterparts) d) develop specific influencing strategies (with different roles for the managing contractor, sub-project partners, DFAT, etc) and e) develop a measure to assess policy change outcomes.

Response: Agree

Actions, responsibilities, and timeframe: **Managing Contractor** to revise the Policy and Advocacy Strategy for **DFAT's** approval to complement the **DFAT-led** Design Update (by June 2022).

7. Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning

Recommendation 13: The Program to:

- provide data and analysis at the End of Program Report (from Program qualitative studies) to the extent possible on how men have been integrated into the Program and how their behaviours are changing (or not)
- develop new indicators and targets for phase 2 and sector ToC's to assess how men's behaviours and gender norms are changing

Response: Agree

Actions, responsibilities, and timeframe: The Program has this information and will consider how this can best be reported to keep the focus on women but demonstrate the increasing participation and engagement of men in addressing WEE (Phase 1's completion report in June 2022). **Managing Contractor** to suggest new indicators and targets addressing men's change on gender norms to be included in the **DFAT-led** Design Update and phase 2 contract (by June 2022).

Recommendation 14: The Program to develop criteria to define what good value for money looks like for phase 2, and how the Program will be assessed against these criteria. (NB. DFAT's new Performance Assessment tool provides useful guidance).

Response: Agree

Actions, responsibilities, and timeframe: **Managing Contractor** will engage a Value for Money Consultant to support the Program to develop these criteria (by June 2022).

Recommendation 15: The Program to restructure the MERL system around the new Program-level ToC as well as sub-sector level ToCs. The MERL system to include:

- at the Program and sub-sector levels: mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators that enable measurement of the significance of change and provide the flexibility and adaptiveness required for an MSD program
- at the sub-project level: measures to inform decisions on whether to stop, continue or scale-up

- at the Program level: clear alignment of indicators that are used for different purposes (for overall managing contractor program performance, the annual Performance Assessment Framework and the ToC)

Response: Agree

Actions, responsibilities, and timeframe: Program-wide restructured MERL system that meets DFAT's M&E standards will be incorporated into the DFAT-led Design Update (by June 2022). **Managing Contractor** will then further work on the MERL system (over the phase 2 inception period) to make it operational.