

DFAT's Management Response to the Mid-Term Review of the South Asia Water Security Initiative (SAWASI)

Context

Australia's \$20 million (2021-2025) South Asia Water Security Initiative (SAWASI) aims to strengthen urban water governance and improve access to safe water and sanitation services for disadvantaged communities in South Asian cities, particularly women and girls. The initiative builds on Australia's previous investments in water infrastructure and governance, focusing on enhancing the capacity of local governments and service providers to deliver sustainable water services with an emphasis on promoting Australian expertise in urban water management and water sensitive cities (WSC).

The program consists of three components:

- Community Demonstration Projects (CDPs) - in four disadvantaged communities in India and Pakistan using a WSC approach to improve water and sanitation security at household level.
- Demand-driven, government-to-government technical assistance (TA) – to address key urban water management issues in India, Nepal and Pakistan.
- Learning workshops – to promote program-wide collaboration, dialogue and sharing of best practices and learning related to WSC.

An independent contractor was also engaged to provide monitoring evaluation and learning services.

The mid-term review

The mid-term review (MTR) was conducted by FH Designs to assess the program's performance and progress towards its objectives, and to identify areas for improvement. The review team visited project sites in India and Pakistan, and interviewed key stakeholders in the region face to face and virtually. The team did not visit Nepal as the project was in the early stages of implementation.

Overall, the MTR report found that rather than being a regional program as intended by design, SAWASI was a multi-country funding mechanism in three South Asian countries, unified loosely by variable applications of the WSC concept, and supported by one regional workshop. While both CDPs had responded to community needs, including fostering the empowerment of women to participate meaningfully in community-level management, the India CDP was around 18 months behind schedule. It was also challenging for both CDPs to replicate and maintain sustainability of project successes and interventions.

The TA investments had delivered important and potentially strategic results in their respective contexts, but collectively had not contributed to the wider intent of the SAWASI regional modality and had not explicitly promoted WSC with a discrete project implementation approach independently of CDPs. No mechanism to foster ongoing collaboration between implementing partners or Australia experts hindered the value of the regional workshop.

Despite these shortcomings, programming had been effective and relevant to local needs and broadly aligned with Australia’s policy settings. Projects had been well regarded by the respective counterparts and beneficiaries.

The report represents the independent views of the consultants and not necessarily the views of DFAT or the SAWASI implementing partners. DFAT recognises the importance of its partnership with all implementing partners. DFAT considers this review as an important opportunity to reflect on how SAWASI can evolve and strengthen in the remaining period of the program.

Response to recommendations:

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action Plan	Timeframe
1: DFAT should consider negotiating a no-cost-extension with the World Resources Institute (WRI) India consortium to enable completion of the CDP scope and to position for replication/scale-up with counterparts.	Agreed	CDP in India has faced delays, especially delayed approvals from local governments. These delays have significantly impacted the delivery of necessary infrastructures within the expected timeframe.	Discussions are underway between DFAT and WRI to negotiate a no-cost extension of the grant agreement to finalise activities.	March 2025.
2: WRI (India) and WWF (Pakistan) should prioritise positioning of successful CDP interventions for replication and/or scale-up by relevant counterparts, including through engaging professional knowledge product and policy advocacy capability.	Agreed	Although replication and/or scale up is not within the current scope of work, replication by counterparts may be possible. DFAT will support WRI and WWF to create knowledge products and communication material for dissemination and policy advocacy.	WRI and WWF are developing knowledge products and papers to demonstrate sustainable concepts and promote replication. DFAT is currently negotiating contract extensions with both WRI and WWF to deliver this.	Ongoing for the rest of the project period
3: The Australian High	Agree	AHCs can help create an enabling environment for the	In India, AHC New Delhi and WRI will devise a communications plan and	Ongoing for the rest of the

<p>Commissions (AHCs) in India and Pakistan should proactively seek out public diplomacy and policy influence opportunities in support of CDP replication and scale-up by government counterparts.</p>		<p>replication and/or scale up of the successful CDP interventions, by leveraging their diplomatic channels.</p>	<p>calendar with a focus on advocacy. The AHC will explore opportunities for socialising the knowledge products in forthcoming events.</p> <p>In Pakistan, public diplomacy efforts have been in place since project inception. AHC Islamabad is planning a national-level workshop to engage stakeholders including government on replication and scale-up of CDPs, and promotion of the TA flood management feasibility study findings.</p>	<p>project period</p>
<p>4: DFAT should consider rephrasing End of Program Outcome (EOPO) 1 to reflect an explicit contribution to climate resilient cities in support of streamlined international climate finance reporting.</p>	<p>Not Agreed</p>	<p>As the program is near completion, a redesign or rephrase of EOPO 1 would be time consuming, not practical and could be confusing for stakeholders.</p>	<p>Maintain the existing EOPO 1 given climate resilient activities and budget are not new to SAWASI and have already been included in project implementation.</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>
<p>5: AHCs in India and Pakistan should utilise the CDP scale-up advocacy as an opportunity for access and influence with strategic counterparts associated with TA projects, noting the critical issue of water and sanitation for both federal governments, and</p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>TAs in India and Pakistan have been implemented independently and in separate locations from CDPs creating barriers for integration and impact on national strategic policy and financing. While the TA investments in each country have delivered important and strategic results in their respective contexts, collectively they have not contributed to the</p>	<p>In Pakistan, public diplomacy and policy efforts have been in place since Project inception. National level workshop(s) have been planned to discuss replication and scale up of CDP interventions in other cities and target policy makers. They will also include promotion of the TA feasibility study findings and encourage participation by government stakeholders.</p> <p>AHC New Delhi will work with partners to identify</p>	<p>Ongoing for the rest of the project period</p>

Australia's accepted expertise in the sector.		wider intent of the SAWSI regional modality.	relevant opportunities to share learnings and tools from the CDPs with relevant stakeholders.	
6: DFAT should reconsider the format of a second regional workshop in favour of an in-country project consultations by a Technical Advisory Group. If a regional workshop is planned, ensure that participants are consulted well ahead of time about their priorities for the workshop.	Agreed	Given the program is in its last year of implementation, instead of conducting a Regional Workshop, DFAT will support technical advisory visits to India and Pakistan by consultants with facilitation, M&E and WSC technical expertise.	The technical advisory visits will be country targeted with workshops and forums at national/local working level to maximise legacy and impact delivered by SAWASI, and to assist with water sensitive approaches promotion and replication. The visits will contribute to work in response to MTR recommendations 3, 5 and 8.	May 2025
7: South and Central Asia Development Section (SDV) should consider delegating program administration to AHCs in recognition that SAWASI is in practice a portfolio of bilateral projects, thereby reducing the management burden.	Partially agreed	DFAT SAWASI locally engaged managers in India and Pakistan were recruited as water specialist with job roles focused more on project technical issues. Given the program is more than halfway through, it is not practical and efficient to reposition job roles which involves extensive training and monitoring.	While Post has already been taking the lead in project implementation and monitoring, they will be involved more in invoice and supporting document assessment to ensure value for money of project deliverables and legality of claims.	Ongoing for the rest of the project period
8: DFAT should consider reprioritising the program-wide Monitoring and Evaluation (MEL) budget to streamline	Partially agreed	MEL has proven to be challenging with an intended regional program but fragmented and independent country specific projects in reality.	A Gender Equality Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) Action Plan has been prepared to set the country context and to address some of the MEL issues in a practical way including setting revised indicators to measure GEDSI in a more	February 2025

<p>implementing partner reporting to AHCs in direct support of Final Investment Monitoring Report (FIMR) reporting, knowledge product development and policy advocacy.</p>			<p>feasible way. The in-country visits to India and Pakistan as outlined under management response to recommendation 6 above will provide suggested actions to improve MEL work including discussion with Post and grantees on knowledge and policy advocacy products.</p>	
<p>Note: Correction to in-country implementation budget in the MTR report.</p>		<p>Information provided in Figure 2 “In-country implementation budget” pie chart on page 14 of the MTR report is incorrect.</p>	<p>The correct in-country implementation budget figures are as below (in AUD):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India CDP – 4,966,755 • Pakistan CDP – 5,000,000 • India TA -4,000,000 • Pakistan TA – 1,198,787 • Nepal TA -730,130 • Regional Workshop – 526,528 • SAWASI M&E – 620,691 	