# DFAT Management Response to QTAG’s MDI review recommendations

| Recommendations | Response (Agree, Agree in part, Disagree) | Explanation | Action Plan | Timeframe |
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| 1) Sub-national level expansion across more districts -  There is a strong case for expanding MDI’s work at the District and Provincial level. The power of Open MPs, including their control over DSIPs, is a noteworthy feature of the PNG context. But the existing media infrastructure, access, and generation of locally relevant content is still a challenge at the local level. MDI’s Talasea District Hub has allowed it to learn lessons and the program could usefully expand into other Districts.  *1.2) The balance between widening access/voice and increasing accountability:* it may be sensible to initially focus sub-national activities on improving the media infrastructure and the culture of using the media as a platform for public discussion and debate. This initial focus on increasing voice could provide the platform to do more accountability focused activities (e.g. pre and post 2022 election).  1.3) The balance between *supporting incumbent MPs and promoting accountability*: It appears that in Talasea work supporting the Open MP to promote his own activities has made more headway than supporting citizens to hold the MP to account. Securing the MP’s support and buy-in is likely sensible but striking the right balance between supporting incumbents and holding them to account will need careful ongoing consideration.  *1.4) Breadth vs depth*: Is there a case for working across one province, allowing for some comparisons on the performance of MPs between districts? Is it better to work in detail in a small number of further Districts, or to seek to work less intensively across a larger number? The Talasea work benefitted from the presence of the DCP adviser who was able to facilitate the district hub’s links to the broader community. | Agree | Agree to work at the subnational level where appropriate infrastructure and human resources are present along with supportive political leadership. This work will focus on creating space for citizens to engage with political and civil service leaders.  DFAT undertook a visit to Talasea District, West New Britain in October 2020. The purpose of the trip was to identify opportunities to create synergies with emerging subnational accountability programming for which the media could be a strong partner. Findings indicate that a strong political will, infrastructure, and trust (long-term relationship) and a functional media hub are prerequisites for such programs to be implemented in other parts of the country. | MDI will assess the viability of expansion to additional subnational locations and produce a report for DFAT’s consideration, aligned to DFAT’s subnational advisers. | March 2021 |
| 2) 2022 Election – initial focus on voice, followed by pre-and post- election focus on accountability.  How can MDI use the media in the run up to the election in a way which goes with the grain of the wantok relationships, but starts to make MP accountability more linked to the delivery of substantive benefits for communities (as opposed to cash or some other form of short-term vote buying)?  2.1) The media could be used to provide clear information on candidates, including potential funding relationships.  2.2) The media could be used to articulate the main local concerns during the campaign: for example, develop a focus on local issues, which motivate communities. A media focus on a small number of salient issues in the pre-election period (which may extract commitments from candidates) would then provide the basis of post-election accountability work. This could be a far more effective approach than the broad and unfocused use of promise trackers.  2.3) MDI could also seek to sequence activities over the coming few years and use the period over 2020/21 to focus on building up capacity for citizen voice in preparation for a focus on accountability in the more immediate run-up to the election 2022. | Agree | MDI had previous experience in the area of content and awareness and can play a role in electoral and civic education. In terms of the accountability aspects, the citizen perception survey will be applicable. The proposed activity will have to be implemented in close partnership with relevant stakeholders (PNG Electoral Commission, Australian Electoral Commission (AES), and International Foundation for Electoral System (IFES) etc.) | Consultations with relevant stakeholders will lead to an action plan for DFAT’s consideration. | Feb 2021 |
| 3) New partnership with the churches.  One option would be to focus on partnering with the church because of their current and potential media platform – so could MDI work with the churches as they expand their own media radio services? This may expand public access to trusted sources of information.  Another option would be to focus on partnering with the churches as potential influential advocates for change – who decision makers may listen to. Influential church figures could, for example, be linked to a strand of MDI work focused on particular “issues”. | Agree | MDI’s current work plan on Covid-19 includes collaboration with churches on awareness and messaging on COVID-19. | MDI to engage with the media arms of the seven mainline churches, explore options for joint work and provide an options paper for DFAT’s consideration. | June 2021 |
| 4) Increasing national decision maker responsiveness –an “issue based” approach.  In contrast to programming that focuses largely on organisational capacity building, an issue-based approach starts from a consideration of which issues have the potential for change. It is possible to achieve *more meaningful* *capacity building* by adopting a learning through doing approach rather than a more traditional workshop and training-based model. Issue-based programming requires partnerships with a wider range of partners, beyond the media.  Having selected the issue, the mix of tactics and activities adopted to influence policy makers would vary. In some cases, public advocacy using the media would be important. It might be, for example, that a social media campaign was deemed to have the right potential pressure decision makers. In other cases, achieving change may require a mix of public advocacy and more private or informal forms of policy influencing. | Agree in part | This recommendation will be considered as part of the accountability design process. The accountability design, beginning implementation in April 2022 will incorporate MDI. |  | April 2022 |
| 5) Shift towards social media, but clarity on rationale and purpose.  The expectation is that internet usage continues to grow rapidly. Some leading politicians are clearly using social media and there are signs that MPs and government are concerned about it.  Overall, there is an obvious case for MDI focusing more on social media. But the pace and purpose of that shift may require careful thought. One point worth considering is adopting a differentiated use of social media at the national/elite vs. local levels.  For urban middle class it maybe that the focus is more on using social media to mount campaigns which pressure decision makers – on some policy issues, which motivate a younger and urban demographic – social media maybe the best medium. This could be linked more to “issue-based” programming. | Agree | MDI to incorporate social media strategies in all areas of focus. | MDI support for social media engagement will need to be strategic with clear rationale and resourced adequately (TA). | Ongoing |
| 6) Better understand decision maker’s media consumption.  MDI has excellent data on PNG citizens’ media use and views on governance. It has less evidence on what media decision makers consume and consider important. One option to consider would be a survey of MPs/PNG elites, which assessed decision maker media use/attitudes. There are methodological challenges, particularly with the most senior policy makers, but some pollsters/survey companies are able to get some insights into this question, or more informal approaches could be used to assess what the PNG media landscape looks like “looking out from positions of power. | Agree | Future media usage surveys will incorporate this analysis. |  | Ongoing |

| Implications of next phase of programming (Design options) | Response (Agree, Agree in part, Disagree) | Explanation | Action Plan | Timeframe |
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| Option 1: A refocused MDI, but improved links to wider DFAT government programming.  This would involve MDI objectives being rationalised with a focus on extending citizen voice, but also clearer links between MDI and other governance programs. MDI could still adopt some useful reforms/evolutions to its work, including (i) expansion at the sub-national level, (ii) developing a partnership with the Churches, and (iii) deepening the social media focus. But for example, programs working with civil society organisations/interest groups could help generate the content on salient/topical issues which MDI and its media partners pick up and use. Achieving responsiveness from decision makers would be the goal of a wider suite of programs, rather than just that of MDI. | Agree | MDI annual workplan to reflect and to be incorporated into the new Accountability Program. |  | Jan 2021 |
| Option 2: Splitting MDI and Development of new “issue-based” policy influencing program.  Recognising the Australian and PNG national interest element of the ABC’s work with NBC, MDI would be split into two separate activities. One would remain focused on achieving “voice” through the media, essentially a continuation of the traditional MDI work building on its current expansion to the broader PNG media. The second activity would be a specific governance/voice and accountability activity working with the key civil society organisations to bring about improved decision maker responsiveness. Both projects would be required to collaborate closely but would not necessarily be managed by the same entities as a question surrounds ABC’s core skill set to undertake a more extensive voice and accountability activity. | Disagree | MDI will be an integrated component of the new Accountability Program. |  | 2022 |
| Option 3: An expanded MDI with specific accountability and policy influencing expertise.  Recognising the difficulty of achieving responsiveness from decision makers, MDI could be expanded. An increased budget and reforms to the team structure could allow for the deepening of MDI’s partnerships with non-media organisations, including for example civil society organisations and interest groups with influence in PNG (the churches, NGOs such as Transparency International, think tanks etc.) Developing this wide range of partnerships would allow for a more comprehensive approach to influencing decision makers. | Agree in part | MDI budget will be considered against computing priorities on an annual basis. |  | Ongoing |