

**DFAT Management Response
Ponlok Chomnes Independent Strategic Review**

Key Recommendations	Response	Explanation	Action Plan	Timeline
<p>1. The starting point has to be a re-articulation of the program’s strategic intent: everything else flows from this. The review recommends re-orienting the goal to the emergence of a culture of knowledge and evidence production, public policy debate, and contestation. Here, it is the process of evidence and knowledge production and policy making that is the strategic aim.</p> <p>An indicative Goal statement would be “to foster a culture of knowledge generation and inclusive policy dialogue and debate”</p>	Agree	<p>DFAT agrees that re-articulating the program’s strategic intent, including revising the program logic is the foremost priority for the program at this time, and that the indicative goal statement provided in the review is more feasible and realistic than the current articulation. This indicative program logic also aligns with DFAT’s priorities in Cambodia.</p> <p>DFAT also notes that this re-articulation would not cause major disruption to the current program approach: The current approach of supporting the creation and presentation of evidence generated by Cambodian knowledge sector organisations should continue, with a renewed focus on working to identify ‘windows of opportunity’ to engage decision makers who are keen to solve critical policy problems. DFAT and TAF will work collaboratively to reshape the goal statement to reflect priorities.</p>	DFAT will work with TAF to develop a Theory of Change workshop supported by a governance advisor external to the program (with both DFAT and TAF involvement) with the intention of developing a new ToC to strengthen the program’s logic.	September-December 2022
<p>2. This review has concluded that assuming there will be a phase 2 of the program, no changes should be made to the ability of the partners to choose their own research topics.</p>	Partially Agree	DFAT partially agrees with this finding but is also open to discussing TAF’s interest in pre-defining some broad topics which would be of mutual interest to DFAT and TAF and/or have greater relevance to contemporary Cambodian public policy.	DFAT will discuss this option with TAF to conclude a mutually agreeable path forward. To be agreed in a half to one-day workshop with TAF and DFAT on	September 2022

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			developing a path to implement the ISR Recommendations.	
3. It is recommended that Ponlok Chomnes develop a dissemination and communications strategy.	Partially agree	DFAT notes that the program has already developed a Branding Guide and Communications Strategy in collaboration with partners (approved by DFAT as of August 2021). However, DFAT will discuss with TAF how they can create a more strategic communications strategy that promotes a tailored response to sharing policy findings with policymakers based on their needs and interests, for instance, in supporting program partners to provide verbal briefings of findings to key decisionmakers (where relevant) and/or providing one-page policy briefs.	DFAT will discuss this option with TAF to conclude a mutually agreeable path forward. To be agreed in a half to one-day workshop with TAF and DFAT on developing a path to implement the ISR Recommendations.	September 2022
4. Some minor revisions to the TAC are proposed, making it more of a policy discussion and advisory body to TAF and to partners. There is much expertise in the TAC currently not being used.	Agree	DFAT welcomes the opportunity to discuss the function and administration of the TAC with TAF, including consideration of leveraging the members' collective expertise more.	DFAT will discuss this option with TAF to conclude a mutually agreeable path forward. To be agreed in a half to one-day workshop with TAF and DFAT on developing a path to implement the ISR Recommendations.	September 2022
5. Undertake a scoping study as soon as possible to gauge the feasibility of expanding the number of core partners. These could be Cambodian universities, other research institutions, or 'graduates' from the Emerging Partners program.	Agree	DFAT will consider and discuss with TAF whether expansion of the program to additional core partners is desirable in any successor program, including the possibility to undertaking a scoping study.	DFAT will discuss this option with TAF to conclude a mutually agreeable path forward. To be agreed in a half to one-day workshop with TAF and DFAT on developing a path to implement the ISR Recommendations.	September 2022 - February 2023

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6. As a part of the scoping study, investigate the feasibility of the program funding 10-15 Cambodian PhDs per annum, to be supervised by Cambodian university staff and returned Cambodian PhD alumni.	Partially Agree	DFAT will consider and discuss with TAF whether expansion of the program to include support to universities, fellowships, and/or PhD scholars should be included in any Ponlok Chomnes successor program.	DFAT will discuss this option with TAF to conclude a mutually agreeable path forward. To be agreed in a half to one-day workshop with TAF and DFAT on developing a path to implement the ISR Recommendations.	September 2022 - March 2023
7. Draft and implement a coherent strategy for networking – putting in place MoUs with both regional and Australian universities and/or research organisations.	Partially agree	DFAT notes that this included in the original program design and that the review accurately identified that progress has not been made on this objective to date, however, has decided that this objective is not a priority at the current time and should be paused in the current Ponlok Chomnes program, and reconsidered during the design phase of any successor program. As the program is not currently advancing activities in this area this should not pose a disruption. DFAT notes that the SheThinks network in the current program is a highly successful part of the program’s current networking approach, and will consider and discuss with TAF ways to improve linkages and capacity building opportunities in any successor program.	Any planned activity in this area to halt until further discussion.	September 2022
8. Clarify what is meant by research quality and provide clear guidance/support to partners to achieve it/take steps towards it	Agree	DFAT agrees that defining “research quality” is an important part of clarifying the program objectives and program logic so that program partners have a mutually agreed upon definition of what would constitute program success. DFAT	TAF to engage a research specialist experienced in policy research to draft these terms and share with DFAT for input.	September-December 2022

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		<p>agrees that the provision of standardised guidance or minimum standards to track and monitor improvements in the process (potentially including guidance to cite multiple sources and triangulate data) followed by partners would be a useful contribution to clarifying the program outcome and supporting partners.</p> <p>DFAT's preference is that this guidance be drafted by a policy research specialist in a simple and easy to use format appropriate for program partners.</p>		
<p>9. Most importantly, the program logic and its ToC should be revised following agreement on the revised strategic intent of the program (the Goal statement). It is recommended that a practitioner deeply experienced in Theories of Change and familiar with DFAT's latest guidance on program logic (February 2022) be contracted to co-lead a workshop with support from DFAT advisors on these issues as soon as possible.</p>	Agree	<p>DFAT appreciates and agrees with the indicative program logic included in the review and agrees that it should form the basis of discussion in a co-led DFAT and TAF workshop on the program logic and theory of change.</p> <p>DFAT recognises the review finding the current MEL approach is conceptually elegant but too complex for the current program team to implement and requests that TAF propose an approach to adequately resource program MEL on an ongoing basis prior to the MEL redesign as the current model is not sufficient. This may include consideration of whether a permanent MEL team member is required.</p>	<p>Co-led DFAT/TAF workshop to be held on the program logic by the end of 2022.</p> <p>MEL resourcing strategy to be proposed by TAF.</p> <p>Revised and simplified MEL structure to be developed in first two months of 2023.</p>	<p>September - December 2022</p> <p>December-January 2023 (prior to the program logic workshop).</p> <p>January-February 2023</p>
<p>10. The program should consider establishing a protected funding stream for gender and social</p>	Agree	<p>DFAT will discuss with TAF and ask TAF to propose strategies to explicitly incentivise</p>	<p>DFAT will discuss this option with TAF to conclude a mutually agreeable path forward. To be agreed in a half</p>	<p>September 2022</p>

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inclusion research. While there has been research on gender and inclusion issues, this has come about by happenstance rather than design.		GEDSI research in Ponlok Chomnes, including consideration of a protected funding stream.	to one-day workshop with TAF and DFAT on developing a path to implement the ISR Recommendations.	
11. The program must align its emerging MEL framework with the current MIS framework. The Henderson report of March 2021 remains the vision but it needs simplifying following reworking of the program logic and ToC. It is unlikely to be even partly implemented in its current form. The MEL training currently being undertaken by the Ponlok Chomnes team should halt until the new Theory of Change is developed and the MEL strategy is directly aligned. The program should also considering hiring a specialist MEL advisor.	Agree	<p>DFAT will discuss with TAF the need to align its MEL framework with the current MIS framework in order to better capture program performance, assess progress towards the EOPOs, and identify areas of programming that need adaptation.</p> <p>DFAT can provide some feedback on where and how the current program MEL and reporting has not met DFAT requirements and how TAF can acquire the ongoing technical support they need to address this.</p>	DFAT's Aid Effectiveness Advisor will work with the TAF team and MEL advisor to clarify requirements going forward.	September-December 2022
12. Separate the capacity building objective from the networking objective and plan activities accordingly. The two are different and not natural bedfellows (see Figure 15). Consider also separating capacity building in relation to research capacity and organisational strengthening as program objectives as each requires a different strategy	Agree	DFAT agrees that greater clarity on program objectives and related activities would strengthen the program and will discuss with TAF how best to ensure this clarity.	DFAT's Aid Effectiveness Advisor will work with the TAF team and MEL advisor to clarify requirements going forward.	September-December 2022

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and approach and require that performance is tracked separately.				
13. As indicated in the 2022 Ponlok Chomnes Aid Investment Monitoring Report, DFAT should consider allocating more resources (staff time) to the oversight and management of the program (see paragraphs 6.21 – 6.22). DFAT should also consider reallocating responsibility for overseeing the program from A-based staff in the Political team to the Development team where staff have existing development program management skills, are more directly incentivised to ensure program performance, and are better positioned to coordinate with and learn from other parts of the aid program.	Agree	DFAT is exploring available options to ensure adequate internal management arrangements for Ponlok Chomnes, noting ongoing constraints on internal staffing resources.	Post’s Management to discuss and decide on management arrangements.	September 2022
14. Finally, DFAT and TAF should sit together to clarify levels of delegated authority, DFAT to TAF and TAF to core partners. It is recommended that this include DFAT empowering TAF to reduce the intensity of financial and activity-level scrutiny, where appropriate to do so, to free up staff time to enable greater efficiency and to focus on more strategic aspects of program management.	Accept	DFAT and TAF plan to discuss and clarify levels of delegated authority between DFAT, TAF, and Ponlok Chomnes core partners to increase efficiency and reduce unnecessary oversight burdens.	Post and TAF to develop a Ways of Working Agreement to clarify expectations and divisions of responsibility.	September-December 2022

