

Strongim Bisnis (Phase 2) Program Independent Evaluation Report Management Response

This document outlines DFAT management’s response to the independent appraisal process for the design refresh for Strongim Bisnis Phase 3. It summarises the key recommendations made to address criterion assessed as requiring improvement.

Elements existing Program should be maintained

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan
1. Most elements of the existing program should be maintained into Phase 3. Strongim Bisnis has built long-term relationships and trust, established a solid reputation and brand and performed reasonably well despite very difficult circumstances.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design team and only approve a design which takes this approach.
2. Strongim Bisnis’ flexible and adaptive approach should remain a core feature of the program.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design team and only approve a design which takes this approach.
3. The program should continue to be guided by core MSD principles, while continuing pragmatic adaptations to the local context.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation. Over Strongim Bisnis Phase 2 we worked closely with the program to improve its adaptability.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design and implementation teams. DFAT work with the team to ensure a sensible and nuanced approach to implementation.

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4. Economic and social inclusion criteria should remain paramount in identifying partners and interventions, while acknowledging valuable side-benefits such as environmental improvement.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design team and only approve a design which takes this approach.
5. Most of Strongim Bisnis' current sectors remain appropriate but should be regularly reviewed. The Financial Services sector could benefit from a fresh approach.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design and implementation teams. DFAT work with the team to ensure a sensible and nuanced approach to implementation.
6. Strongim Bisnis should retain its twin-track approach to GEDSI, which is delivering strong results particularly for women and youth. Building on achievements to date, program outcomes for people living with disabilities could be strengthened through new partnerships, continued support for relevant events and collaborations, and improved access and inclusion in its own workplace.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design team and only approve a design which takes this approach. DFAT will also only approve a Phase 3 Gender and Social Inclusion Strategy which reinforces this approach.
7. Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 will inevitably retain its heaviest footprint in and near Honiara, but should seek cost-efficient opportunities to expand its direct and indirect geographic reach.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design team and only approve a design which takes this approach.
8. The program should continue to promote both export and domestic markets.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design team and only approve a design which takes this approach.

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan
9. Collaboration with other development partners and programs remains essential.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design and implementation teams and work actively to encourage collaboration across programs.

Elements of the existing program that should be changed

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan
1. Program communications need further attention. Good use is made of social and news media but additional messaging is needed around what Strongim Bisnis does, why, how and with whom. In particular, the rationale for supporting businesses of different sizes needs better articulation.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will require the design team to include a strategic communications specialist who will produce a Strategic Communications Plan for the program which directly addresses issues raised by the evaluation.
2. SIG stakeholders would welcome brief quarterly updates to improve visibility and avoid overlap.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation, though will take further advice on whether quarterly is the right frequency for such updates.	DFAT will recommend regular updates to SIG be a product included in the Strategic Communications Plan.
3. A clearer narrative can now be developed for each sector. Short sector briefs would serve multiple purposes including information flow to SIG agencies and outreach to potential partners.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will recommend regular updates to SIG be a product included in the Strategic Communications Plan. DFAT notes that a sector briefs approach was tested in the last six month report of Phase 2.

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4. Greater transparency and clarity around decision-making criteria is important both for accountability and to minimise negative perceptions around favouritism or lack of fairness.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design team and expect the Strategic Communications Plan to outline an approach to implementation.
5. The program must ensure adherence to the core private sector engagement guiding principles of additionality, fairness and transparency, drawing on recent DFAT guidance.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design team and only approve a design which outlines PSE principles.
6. Market system assessments (MSAs) for current sectors should be revisited early in Phase 3, giving particular attention to opportunities to increase job creation outcomes.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design and implementation teams and ask to see revised MSAs early in the next term.
7. Opportunities arising from temporary labour migration programs should be explored.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design team and only approve a design which outlines how the program will work to multiply the benefits of labour mobility programs.
8. Financial services (or business skills development) should be cross-cutting rather than a standalone sector. Closer collaboration with the Australian-funded Pacific Digital Economy Program (PDEP) delivered by UNCDF could be more effective than independent financial services interventions.	Partially Agree	DFAT agrees that inclusion of the financial services sector in Phase 3 as a standalone sector should be assessed, but is open to the sector being dropped altogether, kept, or becoming a standalone sector.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design team and ask it to assess the financial services sector, alongside all others, and make a recommendation about how it should be addressed moving forward.

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9. Further opportunities to harness digital technology should be explored.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design team and expect the final design to outline an approach to harnessing digital technology.
10. Construction warrants further consideration as an additional Strongim Bisnis sector, given its rapid recent expansion and DFAT's concurrent funding of infrastructure investments. Additional disability-focused partnerships would strengthen the program's inclusion portfolio. Informants also suggested livestock and small-scale fishing as further 'growth' and/or 'inclusion' opportunities.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design team and expect the design team to consider construction, other potential sectors, and the strengthening of the disability inclusion portfolio.
11. The design refresh should craft a simpler set of EOPOs linked to an updated program logic.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design team and only approve a design which includes simpler EOPOs.
12. Value for Money (VfM) reporting arrangements for Phase 3 should be agreed, building on recent preparatory work.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation.	DFAT will provide this recommendation to the Strongim Bisnis Phase 3 design team and the managing contractor in the new phase and work with both to land VfM reporting arrangements, linking these to performance measures.