

Joint Management Response (DFAT, MFAT and Oxfam):

Evaluation of the Wan Smolbag Theatre Community Partnership (2021)

Purpose of the evaluation

The three core donors to the Wan Smolbag Theatre Community Partnership (WSB) – Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), New Zealand’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), and Oxfam – commissioned an evaluation of WSB in late 2020 in order to inform the next phase of funding. The purposes of the evaluation were for the evaluation team to work collaboratively with WSB and key partners to:

1. Evaluate WSB’s programming from 2015 to present to gauge the effectiveness – and to a lesser extent the relevance, efficiency, and sustainability – of WSB’s programming;
2. Complete a preliminary gender analysis of WSB which identifies efforts and achievements to date as well as opportunities for further action in promoting gender equality; and
3. Review and refresh WSB’s Roadmap for Change 2014-2025 and associated documents, to inform and guide WSB’s future programming.

Review team

The evaluation was led by Heidi Tyedmers (working remotely) with the support of three researchers in Vanuatu. Ms Tyedmers was mutually agreed by donors and WSB as an appropriate lead evaluator due to her skill set (including Bislama) and familiarity with WSB.

Key findings

The evaluation found that WSB performed a unique role – described as a ‘public good’ – in improving understanding among diverse groups on critical social issues which affect them. It found WSB had been highly effective in contributing to outcomes in areas including (i) health; (ii) nutrition; (iii) environment and resource management; (iv) waste management; (v) youth participation; (vi) human rights; and (vii) gender equality. In relation to gender equality, WSB was found to foster inclusion, model women’s empowerment and leadership and challenge harmful gender norms.

The evaluation further found WSB’s work to have high relevance for individuals (particularly young people), families and communities in Vanuatu and to the Government of Vanuatu’s own priorities. WSB was found to offer very strong value for money, with some inefficiencies identified around project management for non-core funding. Challenges were identified for WSB in relation to the existing monitoring and evaluation framework and reporting. As previous evaluations and two separate business reviews had found, the evaluation concluded that financial sustainability and cost recovery were not appropriate or realistic goals for WSB.

Overall response to the evaluation

MFAT, DFAT and Oxfam welcome the evaluation’s findings and agree with the evaluation’s recommendations, particularly the recommendations for donor partners, as detailed further below. These recommendations will inform the next phase of donor support.

Management response to the recommendations for the consideration of core donor partners

	Recommendation	Donors' Response	Explanation	Donor Action plan	Timeframe
1	WSB should continue working in the same manner, building on existing strengths where possible.	Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evaluation found WSB to be a mature and effective organisation, with a context-appropriate and flexible 'way of working' that responds to the evolving needs and realities of the communities it supports. • Donors agree WSB is a unique and important organisation and should be supported to continue their existing, flexible 'way of working' as an effective mechanism for change. • Donors note that more reflection/learning space would be useful to enable WSB to adapt and build on their strengths. 	<p>Donors will support creation of a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system that enables WSB to regularly reflect on their strengths and areas for improvement and adapt the program accordingly.</p> <p>Donors will do this by MFAT engaging external advisory support to collaborate with WSB to develop an accessible and useful MEL system that works for WSB and donors and creates space for reflection/adaptation.</p>	Work commenced late 2021, to be completed by May 2022.
2	Any further work around gender equality at WSB should be preceded by more focused consultation.	Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evaluation found WSB was highly effective in promoting gender equality, although it was not an explicit focal area for the organisation. • The evaluation identified potential 'optional' areas for strengthening in relation to gender equality, but recommended WSB should lead any change in this area. • Donors agree and support WSB to continue to promote gender equality, as well as further strengthen their work in this regard, acknowledging this needs to be well-contextualised and 'owned' by WSB. 	As above, noting the revised MEL system should capture WSB's work on gender equality, and support WSB's own reflection to drive positive change.	As above.
3	WSB should consider expanding their management capacity (as funding allows).	Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evaluation found WSB appeared to be under-resourced in the broad management space and suggested an additional 2-3 staff at management level. • Donors agree that the existing, dedicated WSB management team are very stretched across a range of tasks. 	Donors will encourage WSB to develop and implement an appropriate management team structure.	Complete (with ongoing review).
4	WSB should consider expanding work in their Nutrition Centre (as funding allows).	Agree, subject to WSB's priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evaluation found WSB's Nutrition Centre to be exceptionally effective in promoting food security, health, and well-being. It noted any expansion would need additional infrastructure. • Donors agree WSB's Nutrition Centre has achieved important health outcomes for individuals. • Donors understand (via Project Coordination Committee discussions) that WSB is still weighing up whether to expand this 	Donors will encourage WSB management to consider this recommendation and take it forward if they deem appropriate in light of their range of activities and resources.	Ongoing.

			work further given the strain on human resources in the Nutrition Centre.		
5	DFAT, MFAT and Oxfam should continue their core funding support for WSB through a five-year joint funding relationship (at a minimum), at the same or increased levels.	Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evaluation noted that its very positive findings presented a strong case for donors to continue core funding at, or above current levels. • Donors acknowledge the effectiveness of WSB's work to date and the alignment of WSB's work with their key priorities. • MFAT and DFAT note any commitment of public funds needs to be approved by the appropriate financial delegate. 	DFAT and MFAT will each progress a design update of further 4-5 year phase of support to WSB at the same or increased levels for consideration by the relevant financial delegate.	First quarter 2022.
6	WSB's core donor partners should support focused work early in the next phase of funding to strengthen WSB's monitoring and evaluation reporting in a way that is also effective for WSB.	Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In recent years a donor-funded technical advisor has worked with WSB's M&E officer to develop an M&E framework and reporting format with a focus on end-of-program outcomes. The M&E officer subsequently departed WSB. • The evaluation suggested that this reporting framework is now not effective or manageable for WSB, does not capture all WSB's efforts and does not create space for WSB's reflection and learning. • Donors agree the M&E system needs to be accessible and useful for WSB, while fulfilling donors' accountability requirements and supporting program improvement. 	<p>1. As above (rec. 1), donors (MFAT on behalf of all) will engage external advisory support to collaborate with WSB to develop an accessible and useful MEL system that works for WSB and donors and creates space for reflection/adaptation.</p> <p>2. Donors will outline and align their reporting requirements where possible and work with WSB and the MEL advisor to ensure quality, useful MEL Framework and products are agreed.</p>	Work commenced late 2021, to be completed by May 2022.
7	WSB's core donor partners should ideally seek to resolve questions around financial sustainability and cost recovery in relation to WSB in a more enduring way.	Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evaluation noted that previous evaluations and two pieces of in-depth analysis by business advisors all found that financial sustainability and cost recovery are not viable options for WSB. It found WSB's work to be sustainable across a range of (non-financial) variables. • Donors acknowledge the inherent value of WSB's work as a public good and that financial sustainability and cost recovery are not viable options. 	<p>1. Donors will maintain open communication with WSB about funding cycles, any constraints and risks or any opportunities to ensure that WSB is able to plan effectively for the future.</p> <p>2. WSB and donors (particularly in-country managers) and should continue to engage seniors within donor stakeholders (e.g., through events and visits) to maintain their visibility and understanding of WSB's work.</p>	Ongoing.