

Cyclone Recovery Program - Independent Program Evaluation

DFAT Management Response

Category 5 Tropical Cyclone (TC) Yasa made landfall across Fiji's northern island of Vanua Levu on 17 December 2020. With wind gusts of up to 280km/hour, it was the strongest tropical cyclone to make landfall in Fiji since TC Winston in 2016, and the fourth most intense cyclone on record in the Southern Pacific Basin at the time. Six weeks after TC Yasa, on 31 January 2021, Category 2 TC Ana caused intense rainfall and extensive flooding, compounding the damage done by TC Yasa. Many schools sustained heavy damages to their classrooms and other school facilities. As a result, they had to set-up temporary learning spaces, utilising tents, community halls, and dormitories.

With Australia's strong focus on education in Fiji, on 15 March 2021, Australia's Foreign Minister approved an initial package of A\$12.5 million over April 2021 to June 2024 for the Cyclone Recovery Program (CRP), to support education recovery and rehabilitate damaged or destroyed schools. Since then, Australia has incrementally increased its financial commitment to a total of A\$37,396,000, included the rehabilitation of two sub-national hospitals, and extended the time for delivery by 1.5 years to end December 2025.

In November 2024, DFAT commissioned an independent evaluation of CRP to assess the overall performance of the CRP's school rehabilitation component. The evaluation criteria included relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability to determine program performance against the end of program outcomes and identify best practice and recommendations.

Based on the successes of CRP and at the request of the Fiji Government, in June 2024, Australia committed up to A\$45 million for a new Fiji Social Infrastructure Program (FSIP), to support further school and health infrastructure rehabilitation. The findings of this evaluation will inform implementation of the remaining CRP components (the two sub-national hospitals) and implementation of FSIP.

Key Findings:

The evaluation found CRP to be a highly successful initiative aimed at supporting Fiji's recovery from TC Yasa and TC Ana. The following key finding have been extracted from the evaluation report:

- The CRP was highly relevant to the needs of cyclone-affected communities and aligned with the priorities of the Fijian Government and the Australian Government. The program effectively addressed the urgent needs for the rehabilitation of the nine schools and contributed to longer-term disaster resilience.

- The CRP demonstrated significant effectiveness in achieving its intended end-of-program outcomes (EOPOs) and intermediate outcomes. All three EOPOs of better educational facilities, better WASH facilities and maximum local partner involvement were achieved.
- The CRP demonstrated a strong commitment to sustainability. The focus on social procurement and a community-centric approach helped. The community involvement, coupled with consultations to align the work with local needs and priorities, laid a solid foundation for long term care of the rebuilt infrastructure.
- The extent to which Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) and safeguards were integrated enhanced the success of CRP.

The evaluation identified several key lessons learned from the implementation of CRP relating to project management, community engagement, localisation strategies, sustainability and the integration of cross-cutting themes. The report notes that lessons and findings need to be viewed in the context of a highly effective program that delivered the EOPOs with strong community engagement and good prospects for sustainability.

Based on these lessons, the report made seven recommendations. DFAT accepts the evaluations findings, and agrees with four recommendations, partially agrees with two recommendations and disagrees with one recommendation. The recommendations and DFAT's management response are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Independent evaluation recommendations and DFAT management response

No.	Recommendation	Response	Action Plan	Timeframe
1	Prior to tendering, architectural and engineering designs should be externally reviewed to comply with best practice.	Agree	<p>DFAT agrees with this recommendation and had previously identified this as a quality assurance process to be implemented for remaining CRP activities.</p> <p>External reviews of the designs of the sub national hospitals under CRP were conducted in January 2025, prior to tendering for construction services.</p> <p>External review of architectural and engineering designs has been added as a quality assurance process for all infrastructure designs under our new FSIP.</p>	Implemented
2	DFAT platforms or facilities tendering out infrastructure projects to national contractors in similar setting as those in Fiji should develop and provide a Social Procurement Manual, setting out GEDSI and safeguards and how these can be implemented in infrastructure projects.	Partially Agree	<p>DFAT partially agrees with this recommendation. The Fiji Program Support Facility (now the Fiji Program Support Platform) included DFAT policies on Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) and Child Protection in tender documents for infrastructure work. GEDSI, safeguards and social procurement requirements were then refined and included at the contracting stage, and PSEAH, Child Protection and Social Procurement training was provided to the winner contractor.</p> <p>As DFAT implements FSIP, and the Platform tenders for infrastructure work, instead of development a manual, it will hold industry briefings and information sessions with bidders that covers Social Procurement, GEDSI and Child Protection requirements. These sessions will aim to</p>	Ongoing throughout FSIP implementation.

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			<p>increase the understanding of contractors on how to tender for Australian Government projects and address these elements of the tender in their bids. Winning contractors will then be assisted to develop social procurement manuals and will be provided with GEDSI and safeguard training.</p>	
3	<p>Development programs that extend well beyond immediate disaster relief, should, generally follow good development practice and include recipient governments in the delivery process, including supporting capacity building aspects that improve sustainability.</p>	Agree	<p>DFAT agrees with this recommendation. CRP commenced when Fiji was recovering from the impact of TC Yasa and TC Ana, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These events strained Government systems. Therefore, the Fiji Government requested DFAT to play a stronger role in implementation of school construction.</p> <p>The Fiji Government remained involved in program decision making processes for the program through the Steering Committee, and schools were provided with training and manuals on how to care for and maintain their new infrastructure.</p> <p>This program also operated in the broader context of our <i>Vuvale Partnership</i> and was complemented by our existing health and education programs. These programs support broader systems strengthening and capacity building of the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS).</p> <p>Going forward, DFAT has explicitly included capacity building activities under FSIP focused on strengthening the</p>	<p>To be implemented from the second half of 2025 under FSIP.</p>

No.	Recommendation	Response	Action Plan	Timeframe
			Asset Management Units at the MOE and MHMS to support the Fiji Government to maintain and rehabilitate its health and education infrastructure assets.	
4	Consider having a contingency process in place to provide for essential items after completion that may not have been anticipated at the design stage. An example of this, as mentioned by a range of stakeholders at each school, was the need for the provision of ceiling fans to improve airflow and cooling in classrooms.	Disagree	<p>Retaining a contingency fund for further infrastructure upgrades after an infrastructure project is complete is high risk from a project management perspective, particularly ensuring projects are delivered on budget and on time.</p> <p>However, DFAT recognises the need for robust design processes and has already included external peer reviews of infrastructure designs that should help pick up essential items not picked up by the original design.</p>	
5	While the modality is effective and valued in a Fiji context, consideration should be given to ways to strengthen national systems and build capacity within line ministries and strengthen the recipient government's ownership of similar infrastructure development projects in line with "best development practice".	Agree	<p>CRP commenced when Fiji was recovering from the impact of TC Yasa and TC Ana and the COVID-19 pandemic. These events strained government systems, and the Fiji Government therefore requested DFAT to play a stronger role in school construction.</p> <p>This program operated in the broader context of our <i>Vuvale Partnership</i> and was complemented by our existing health and education programs that support broader systems strengthening and capacity building of the MOE and MHMS.</p> <p>Going forward, DFAT has explicitly included capacity building activities under FSIP focused on strengthening the Asset Management Units at the MOE and MHMS to support</p>	Capacity building activities to be implemented from the second half of 2025 through FSIP.

No.	Recommendation	Response	Action Plan	Timeframe
			the Fiji Government to maintain and rehabilitate its health and education infrastructure assets.	
6	Where GEDSI programs are implemented across multiple sites, it is important to have in place mechanisms for monitoring and following up to ensure all women have equal opportunity to participate.	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation and will continue to apply contextually relevant monitoring and follow-up discussions and activities to ensure women have equitable opportunities to participate.	To be implemented for CRP hospital construction and throughout FSIP.
7	Social safeguards and GEDSI measures should be contextualized and include a degree of flexibility that takes account of the cultural practices and traditions of local communities, while safeguarding women and children.	Partially Agree	<p>DFAT partially agrees with this recommendation. Given the high-risk nature of SEAH, child protection, and safeguarding related incidents in infrastructure projects conducted in remote areas and in schools where children are present, strict measures need to be place.</p> <p>In recognition of local cultural practices and traditions (particularly kava consumption for ceremonial purposes) DFAT will consider mechanisms to assess/approve contractor personnel attendance and full participation in school and community events upon invitation, and on a case-by-case basis.</p>	To be implemented for CRP hospital construction and throughout FSIP.