

An aerial photograph of a tropical island, likely in the Pacific region. The island is narrow and elongated, with a road running along its length. On the left side, there are several buildings, including a prominent one with a red roof. The island is surrounded by clear, turquoise water, and the coastline is visible with some vegetation and structures. The overall scene is bright and clear, suggesting a sunny day.

sustineo

PACER Plus Implementation Package Evaluation Report

**Report prepared for PACER Plus Members
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List of acronyms and abbreviations

Acronym	Description
A4T	Aid for Trade
ASYCUDA	Automated System for Customs Data
BSC	Budget Subcommittee
CTG	Committee on Trade in Goods, Rules of Origin and Customs Procedures
DEC Work Programme	Development and Economic Cooperation Work Programme
EOPOs	End of programme outcomes
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
GEDSI	Gender equality, disability and social inclusion
IOs	Intermediate outcomes
JC	Joint Committee
JC Members	Joint Committee Members
MDF	Market Development Facility
MELA	Monitoring, evaluation, learning and adaptation
MSMEs	Micro, small and medium enterprises
PACER Plus	Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations
PALM Scheme	Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme
PHAMA Plus	Pacific Horticultural and Agricultural Market Access Plus Programme
PICs	Pacific Islands Countries
PPIP	PACER Plus Implementation Package
PPIU	PACER Plus Implementation Unit
PPLMWG	PACER Plus Labour Mobility Working Group
PSRs	PACER Plus Product Specific Rules (PSRs)
ROO	Rules of Origin
SMEs	Small and medium enterprises
SMNPI	Committee on Services, Movement of Natural Persons and Investment
SPS	Sanitary and phytosanitary standards
TBT	Technical Barriers to Trade
TORs	Terms of Reference
UNCTAD	United Nations Commission on Trade and Development

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Key programme data

Table 1: PACER Plus Implementation Package general information

Term	Meaning
Member Countries of PACER Plus:	Australia, Cook Islands, Kiribati, New Zealand, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu. Nauru has signed but had not yet ratified the Agreement.
Activity Name:	Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER Plus) Implementation Package (PIIP)
Programme Type:	Development investment to support PACER Plus outcomes
Budget:	AUD 25 million
Term:	The PIIP commenced in 2020. Funding for the operations of the PACER Plus Implementation Unit (PIIU) as well as the management of the Development and Economic Cooperation (DEC) Work Programme was provided for a five-year period.
Counterpart Agencies:	The PIIP includes the PIIU and Development and Economic Cooperation Work Programme is owned and governed by Parties to the wider PACER Plus Agreement. All Parties are represented by their Ministry of Trade or equivalent.
Implementing Agency:	PACER Plus Implementation Unit (PIIU)
Managing Contractor	DT Global was contracted by DFAT in 2021 and supported the establishment and operations of the PIIU until June 2023. Since July 2023 the PIIU has operated as an independent agency.
Goal:	Participant countries utilise PACER Plus and the Arrangement on Labour Mobility to increase trade, investment, and economic opportunities for inclusive economic development
End of Programme Outcome (EOPO) 1	By 2030 PACER Plus Participants will increase the predictability, transparency, stability and value of trade and investment transactions in the Pacific Region.
End of Programme Outcome (EOPO) 2	By 2030 public and private sector market actors in PACER Plus Participant countries benefit from targeted and responsive trade-related technical assistance and related support.
Intermediate Outcome 1	Trade in goods: participants begin efficient and transparent implementation of Agreement commitments on rules of origin, customs, sanitary and phytosanitary measures and technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures.
Intermediate Outcome 2	Trade in services: participants adapt, improve and harmonise regulations for, reduce barriers to and facilitate trade in services.
Intermediate Outcome 3	Investment: participants increase investor awareness of PACER Plus opportunities, identify and resolve impediments to investment and improve the investment climate in their countries.
Intermediate Outcome 4	Labour mobility: regulatory reforms encourage more women and men to engage in labour mobility and remit savings to their families.
Intermediate Outcome 5	Private enterprise response: private sector enterprises increase the value, composition and number of trade transactions.

Term	Meaning
Intermediate Outcome 6	PPIU performance: The PPIU efficiently and effectively manages delivery of the DEC Work Programme.
DFAT Evaluation Managers:	Avi Baskar and Jason Naumovski
Evaluation Team:	Ben Miqueu (Services director), David Swete Kelly (Team leader), Douglas Smith (Evaluation and governance specialist), Mujaddid Mohsin (Business and trade specialist), Dr Asenati Chan Tung (GEDSI and culture specialist), Dr Daniela Medina (MELA and climate change specialist), Aly Miehlsbradt (Trade performance and outcomes specialist), Kate Lanyon (Evaluation and design coordinator).

Executive summary

Background

PACER Plus is a development-focused Free Trade Agreement aimed at reducing trade barriers, boosting exports, creating jobs, and improving living standards across Member Countries, in alignment with World Trade Organization standards. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has commissioned Sustineo to independently evaluate the PACER Plus Implementation Package (which embedded Australia’s funding package for the PPIU and the DEC Work Programme) from December 2020 to June 2025. This evaluation focuses on assessing the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, gender equality, disability and social inclusion, risk management, and monitoring, evaluation, learning, and adaptation of the programme. It has two main objectives: to ensure accountability by assessing the investment’s performance, and to provide insights and recommendations for future PACER Plus support based on lessons learned.

Key findings

Relevance

The PACER Plus Implementation Package (PPIP) has demonstrated broad relevance to Member Countries’ trade and development priorities by facilitating integration into global markets, improving trade processes, and aligning with national policy frameworks. The PPIP supported the PPIU and the DEC Work Programme with its wide-ranging scope—including goods, services, investment, and labour mobility—differentiates it from earlier regional agreements. However, relevance is uneven across stakeholder groups: while central trade ministries show strong engagement and ownership, awareness and participation by other government agencies and the private sector remain limited. Weak national coordination mechanisms and a lack of tailored, country-specific approaches further constrain sustained alignment with shifting national priorities.

The DEC Work Programme contributes meaningfully to regional economic integration and trade reliability by harmonising trade rules and supporting initiatives like labour mobility and customs reform. Yet, its visibility and differentiation from other Aid for Trade programmes is limited, leading to confusion and missed opportunities for collaboration. Although the PPIU and DEC Work Programme has begun engaging more with the private sector, stronger communication, clearer positioning, and improved coordination are needed to maximise its impact and ensure its continued relevance within the broader trade and development ecosystem.

Effectiveness

The PPIP has made meaningful progress toward its intended outcomes despite early disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing structural challenges. Key achievements include capacity building in customs, biosecurity, and trade facilitation; harmonisation of tariff schedules and rules of origin; and the implementation of systems like ASYCUDA and ePhyto. However, the programme’s effectiveness has been constrained by ad hoc activity planning, limited in-country capacity, and delays in implementing the Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Adaptation (MELA) framework. The End-of-Programme Outcomes (EOPOs) were found to be overly ambitious and lacked practical indicators, making it difficult to measure impact. While qualitative feedback suggests growing awareness and institutional improvements, data gaps and attribution challenges limit the ability to assess tangible trade and investment gains.

Progress across Intermediate Outcomes has been uneven. Trade in goods has seen the most advancement, particularly in customs and SPS measures, while trade in services and

investment reforms are still in early stages. Labour mobility initiatives have gained traction, including intra-Pacific arrangements, but gender inclusion and reintegration strategies require further development. Private sector engagement is increasing, though constrained by structural barriers and limited awareness of the PPIU and DEC Work Programme's broader mandate. The PPIU has managed delivery efficiently with a lean staffing model, but concerns remain around transparency, strategic focus, and sustainability. Improved coordination, clearer communication, and more robust outcome tracking are essential to enhance the programme's long-term effectiveness and ensure it delivers on its development potential.

Efficiency

The PPIP supported PACER Plus's established structure of governance and planning framework, with the PPIU playing a central role in coordination, financial oversight, and programme implementation. While the governance structure has enabled inclusive decision-making, it has also faced challenges. These include limited technical expertise within committees, over-reliance on representative membership, and a lack of strategic focus in some areas. Activity planning follows a defined annual cycle, but implementation is often hindered by limited national capacity, inconsistent coordination mechanisms, and political instability. Smaller Pacific Island countries face acute human resource constraints, leading to reduced capacity for stakeholder engagement and ownership. The absence of a phased strategic roadmap and delays in implementing the MELA framework have further constrained the programme's ability to adapt and prioritise effectively.

Transparency and communication within the PPIU have shown both strengths and weaknesses. Financial reporting and oversight mechanisms are well-established, and the expansion of the Budget Subcommittee has improved inclusiveness. However, visibility of the PPIU and DEC Work Programme activities at the national level remains limited, especially outside trade ministries, leading to fragmented coordination and reduced transparency. Stakeholders have called for clearer communication, standardised funding processes, and stronger public diplomacy to distinguish the DEC Work Programme from other donor initiatives. Donor congestion and overlapping programmes have also contributed to confusion and inefficiencies. To improve efficiency, the PPIP must support enhanced national coordination, clarified strategic objectives, and a more effectively leveraged MELA framework to support adaptive management by the PPIU and demonstrate impact for the DEC Work Programme.

Sustainability

The sustainability of the PPIP hinges on strong national ownership, effective localisation, and long-term institutional capacity. While Joint Committee members and national coordinators have shown commitment to the DEC Work Programme, broader engagement across government agencies and the private sector remains limited. This disconnect is partly due to inconsistent stakeholder coordination and a lack of strategic communication about the PPIU and DEC Work Programme's role and comparative advantage. Embedding reforms into national systems, fostering procedural change, and ensuring long-term, locally driven capacity building are essential for sustaining outcomes. However, the variability in coordination mechanisms and the absence of standardised engagement processes have hindered the consistent alignment of activities with national priorities and stakeholder capabilities.

The PPIU is widely valued for its coordination and advisory role, but its long-term sustainability is uncertain due to reliance on donor funding set to end in 2030. Strengthening the PPIU's strategic function and clarifying its mandate relative to other Aid for Trade initiatives is critical to avoid duplication and improve programme relevance. Improved harmonisation with regional and bilateral investments could enhance impact through co-investment, joint planning, and shared resources. However, limited awareness of the PPIU's distinct role has led to misaligned

activity proposals and missed opportunities for leveraging complementary initiatives. A more strategic, collaborative approach is needed to ensure the PPIP’s contributions are sustained and integrated into broader regional trade and development efforts.

MELA and risk

The implementation of the MELA framework has faced significant challenges, limiting its effectiveness in supporting decision-making, learning, and accountability. Delays in development, limited internal capacity, and a lack of strategic integration have resulted in a system that focuses more on compliance and outputs than on outcomes and impact. While tools and data collection mechanisms have been developed, their use has been inconsistent, and stakeholders often lack clarity on expectations and feedback. The absence of clear indicators, baselines, and disaggregated data further hampers meaningful monitoring. Although recent efforts, including the recruitment of an internal MELA specialist and support from an external partner, have improved access to information, the framework still lacks the strategic depth and national ownership needed to drive adaptive management and demonstrate the value of the PPIP.

Risk management under the PPIP has evolved but remains largely reactive rather than strategic. Limited financial and human resources have constrained both Australia and the PPIU in anticipating and mitigating emerging risks, such as coordination gaps and stakeholder disengagement. The absence of a comprehensive, forward-looking risk strategy—and the underutilisation of the MELA framework during the early years of implementation—has weakened the program’s ability to monitor progress, inform adaptive management, and respond to risks in a timely manner.

However, positive progress has been made in response to findings from recent audits and reviews, including the 2024 General Review of PACER Plus, the PPIU MELA Report 2023–24, and the DFAT Independent Monitoring Review (IMR). These have prompted practical changes such as in-country proposal clinics to strengthen activity design, improved coordination with other Aid for Trade and regional initiatives, and a concerted effort to embed the MELA system more effectively across program delivery. While several operational and strategic risks are still not fully reflected in the formal risk register, these recent reforms have significantly improved risk awareness and responsiveness.

Cross-cutting elements

The PPIP has made some progress in addressing cross-cutting priorities such as gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI), but integration remains inconsistent and under-resourced. While several countries have embedded GEDSI principles in their trade policies, practical implementation across the DEC Work Programme is often secondary to traditional trade priorities. The PPIU’s GEDSI Strategy remains in draft form, and awareness among Parties is limited. Stakeholders support inclusive growth, but some perceive GEDSI as donor-driven and misaligned with cultural norms. There is a need for clearer guidance, stronger follow-through, and more deliberate inclusion of GEDSI in programme design, particularly in labour mobility and private sector support. Capacity building, gender-sensitive policy development, and inclusive consultation processes are essential to ensure equitable benefits and long-term impact.

Locally led development and climate change are also critical to the sustainability of outcomes. While Joint Committee members show strong ownership of the DEC Work Programme, challenges such as political instability, staff turnover, and limited capacity hinder effective localisation. Stakeholders emphasised the need for tailored, country-specific approaches and better alignment with national priorities. Climate change, though widely acknowledged as a pressing issue, has not been systematically integrated into PPIP contributions. Stakeholders

called for more deliberate design of climate resilient trade strategies, better guidance on environmental regulations, and support for climate-proofing investments. As climate risks increasingly intersect with trade and development, embedding climate considerations into a new phase of PPIP is vital for ensuring competitiveness, and sustainability across the Pacific.

Lessons learned

Key lessons from the implementation of the current phase of the PPIP include:

Building capacity and long-term support

Building capacity within PACER Plus member countries is vital for effective implementation and should include sustained support for national coordinators, focal points, and trade ministries to ensure alignment with strategic goals. Embedding secondments, of Pacific Island professionals into the PPIU and technical experts from Australia, New Zealand, or regional agencies, can strengthen relationships, enhance technical expertise, and expand regional networks. To be effective, secondments must be guided by clear terms of reference, address specific technical needs, and include protocols for supervision, reporting, and conflict of interest management.

Leveraging existing partnerships and governance mechanisms

The presence of multiple donor programmes in the Pacific has created coordination challenges and risks of duplication. To address this, the PPIP should engage more actively with existing platforms and regional events and integrate into national coordination mechanisms like Tonga’s Growth Committees and Market Access Working Groups in Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu. This approach would enhance alignment, improve efficiency, and ensure the PPIP complements rather than competes with other initiatives.

Investing on strategic direction and clear communication

Since its inception, the PPIP has battled with unclear strategic direction, differing stakeholder expectations, and confusion with the broader PACER Plus agreement, resulting in fragmented implementation. To improve impact, the PPIP must enable a focused strategy with clearly defined boundaries, consistent messaging, and realistic, politically aware planning that enables meaningful private sector engagement. Establishing contingency plans and ensuring alignment with current political and economic contexts will help the PPIU guide more targeted and resilient activity delivery.

Recommendations

Criterion	Recommendation summary	Type
Relevance	Encourage countries to better utilise their forward planning and strategic priorities to establish clearer, nationally aligned criteria for DEC activity approval that also advance regional harmonisation. Prioritise activities that promote the harmonisation of trade rules, procedures, and policies over isolated initiatives that do not contribute to regional integration	Strategic
Relevance	Support government-led aid coordination and harmonisation efforts and work within existing country systems rather than creating parallel structures. Strengthen collaboration and information sharing across activities, investments, and workplans to identify overlaps and opportunities for collaboration or co-funding.	Operational
Relevance	Expand support for national digital trade strategies—including e-commerce platforms, digital payment gateways, and enabling regulatory frameworks—to improve access for informal sector actors and small vendors. This would enhance the relevance and inclusivity of the DEC	Strategic

Criterion	Recommendation summary	Type
	Work Programme by broadening participation and impact across a wider spectrum of businesses, particularly MSMEs.	
Relevance	Better align with existing national and regional forums and initiatives that convene the private sector to identify opportunities, build trade relationships, and surface priority issues—strengthening the relevance and responsiveness of PPIP supported activities. Additionally, clarify and differentiate the benefits and intended outcomes of the PPIP versus broader Aid for Trade initiatives supporting PACER Plus at all levels, ensuring private sector actors and national stakeholders understand how to fully engage with and benefit from the Agreement.	Strategic
Relevance	Strengthen opportunities for deeper regional integration and intra-regional trade facilitation among PACER Plus Member countries, rather than prioritising trade exclusively with Australia and New Zealand.	Strategic
Effectiveness	Support the reactivation or strengthening of National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs) to ensure coherent, cross-sectoral planning and prioritisation.	Operational
Effectiveness	Support the reactivation or strengthening of National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs) to ensure coherent, cross-sectoral planning and prioritisation. (Operational)	Operational
Effectiveness	Strengthen PPIU’s strategic role by shifting from a primarily operational focus to one that also provides high-level guidance and oversight, ensuring activities are aligned with long-term program goals.	Operational
Effectiveness	Clarify and formalise the roles of National Coordinators to improve in-country delivery, coordination, and stakeholder engagement. This includes providing adequate training, resources, and support systems to ensure continuity and effectiveness.	Operational
Effectiveness	Systematically engage technical specialists from within the PACER Plus membership such as DFAT, MFAT, MPI, DAFF, and regional organisations to provide targeted support, share best practices, and strengthen implementation across thematic areas.	Strategic
Efficiency	Implement a single software solution for tracking financial data, programming implementation, and technical assistance to replace the fragmented use of multiple platforms. Use the PPIU website to better articulate the application and approval process and consider the feasibility of online application process	Operational
Efficiency	Adopting a programmatic approach that clearly identifies impact pathways and interventions to ensure alignment with work plans and avoid ad hoc decision-making	Operational
Efficiency	Implement better strategic communications to promote programme achievements and transparency	Strategic
Sustainability	Ensure ongoing technical assistance and service agreements, especially for systems like ASYCUDA, to support licensing, troubleshooting, and development.	Strategic
Sustainability	Implement procedures around document management to address incomplete administrative and monitoring documentation issues. Consider how administrative support can be strengthened within the PPIU to allow better technical focus.	Operational
Sustainability	Develop and implement a public diplomacy strategy to improve how the PPIP is promoted and communicated to stakeholders (Ministerial,	Operational

Criterion	Recommendation summary	Type
	private sector, civil society), focusing on both the agreement's benefits and specific activities undertaken under the PPIP.	
Sustainability	Foster stronger collaboration between Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Chambers of Commerce, and national PPIU coordinators to create a more integrated approach to private sector support, while developing a strategy to harmonise and coordinate regional and bilateral Aid for Trade and economic development programs ensuring future initiatives align with national priorities, reduce duplication, and maximise impact.	Strategic
MELA and Risk	Include dedicated full-time resources for MELA implementation within the PPIU, including mapping country-specific data availability and sharing mechanisms to better monitor key trade and economic indicators in the long-term	Operational
MELA and Risk	Provide support to Parties so that they can better collect national data on the wider impacts of PACER Plus accession. Map country-specific data availability and sharing mechanisms to better monitor key trade and economic indicators in the long-term. This could include the integration of data at the regional level in partnership with other efforts such as the Pacific Data Hub.	Strategic
MELA and Risk	Develop a strategy to transform and utilise monitoring and evaluation data collected to improve learning and adaptive programme management. Ensure this data is aligned to strategic public diplomacy efforts	Strategic
MELA and Risk	Integrate in a more robust and meaningful way cross-cutting elements such as partnership development, locally led development, regional integration, gender equality, social inclusion and climate change with dedicated impact-, outcome- and output-associated indicators	Strategic
MELA and Risk	Refine the indicators, including clear communication in reporting around targets, baselines and means of verification.	Operational
MELA and Risk	Improve processes, procedures and communication of the processes for proposing, reviewing, and approving activities.	Operational
Cross-cutting elements	Ensure that GEDSI, locally led, youth skills pathways and climate change elements are core priorities rather than secondary considerations. This can be achieved by integrating these areas into the initial design of the DEC Work Programme and MELA framework.	Strategic
Cross-cutting elements	Establish clear targets for effective participation and inclusion of vulnerable groups in various activities, such as improving the rules and regulations around inclusion or improving access to trade services. This includes setting measurable goals and tracking progress to ensure that GEDSI objectives are met.	Operational
Cross-cutting elements	Confirm that support provided to the private always has a broader business enabling outcome aligned to a national priority (e.g GeoLab). Set criteria for businesses who receive direct support to demonstrate their impact on gender equality, youth development, social inclusion and climate change.	Operational
Cross-cutting elements	Provide better guidance on accessing climate funds to support private sector development. This includes helping stakeholders navigate environmental regulations around trade and climate-proofing investments.	Strategic

1 Findings and analyses

The evaluation findings are discussed below in relation to each key evaluation question. The analysis also includes responses grouped against themes that emerged through the evaluation process. A description of the programme and background to the evaluation is set out in Appendix A and B. Key Evaluation Questions are set out in Appendix A, and the list of stakeholders consulted and documents that informed the analysis are outlined in Appendix D.

1.1 Relevance

Key Evaluation Question 1: How relevant was the PACER Plus Implementation Package (PPIP) to the policy and operating context?

Alignment with national trade and social priorities

PACER Plus stands out as the most comprehensive and actively implemented free trade agreement in the Pacific. Unlike previous regional agreements such as the Melanesian Spearhead Group Trade Agreement, the Pacific Islands Countries Trade Agreement, and the South Pacific Regional Trade Economic Cooperation Agreement, which primarily focus on trade in goods, PACER Plus covers trade in goods, services, investment and the movement of natural persons. It offers a structured, rules-based framework that supports integration into global trade, particularly for non-World Trade Organization members.

The agreement's simplified rules of origin help smaller economies meet trade obligations and access benefits. Its institutional support mechanisms, including the JC and the PPIU ensure ongoing monitoring, compliance and addressing implementation challenges that have limited effectiveness in other regional trade agreements.

PACER Plus's Implementation Arrangements stipulate both the built-in development assistance and Secretariat roles delivered through the PPIU. As such, the PPIP supports the wider objectives of PACER Plus. These objectives align closely with the trade policy frameworks of member countries, which aim to integrate trade into national development strategies, enhance export capacities, increase foreign investment, and improve the business environment. By focusing on economic cooperation, trade facilitation, investment promotion, and capacity building, the PPIP is well positioned to support the national priorities and development goals of its member states, helping them to become more active and competitive participants in regional and global trade.

Central Ministries of Trade in participating countries showed strong ownership and active participation in the DEC Work Programme, through their roles within the Joint Committee. When consulted, stakeholders from other relevant Ministries such as Agriculture and Industry or private sector representatives such as chambers of commerce and enterprises showed a lower level of awareness and familiarity with the programme and its relevance. Many member countries also lack a cohesive national trade committee that coordinates, harmonises views and activities, and integrates all relevant stakeholders, making it difficult to maintain a high level of ownership across all stakeholders and alignment of the PPIU and the DEC Work Programme with emerging priorities especially with ongoing political and staffing changes.

The relevance of the PPIP is further challenged by its ability to deliver support for a work programme that balances a regional scope with the need to address individual country contexts and priorities. To enhance its alignment to national priorities, it is essential to adopt a more strategic and phased approach to implementation, considering the foundational policies and

development stages of each country. This approach should focus on building capacity in areas critical for trade readiness while also contributing to the achievement of broader development goals. Table 2 presents a summary of the latest trade policy framework, priorities and goals for PACER Plus member countries.

Table 2: Summary of trade policy frameworks, goals and priorities of PACER Plus Countries

Country	Trade Policy Framework	Priorities	Goals	Timeframe
Cook Islands	Trade Policy Framework	Economic resilience, sustainable growth, inclusive prosperity, trade in services	Integrate into regional/global economy, support private sector, address economic disparities	2015 onwards (reviewed 2024)
Kiribati	Trade Policy Framework	Strengthen trade, support private sector growth, integrate into regional and global markets	Promote value addition, trade diversification, adherence to international standards	2017–2027
Niue	Trade Policy Framework	National resilience, sustainable development, labour mobility, trade infrastructure	Promote economic development, support private sector growth, ensure inclusive growth	2016 onwards
Samoa	Trade, Commerce and Manufacturing Sector Plan (TCMSP)	Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and building resilience, improve productivity and supply, increase trade, investment and employment generation, enabling environment for economic development.	To achieve the full potential of trade, commerce and manufacturing	2024/2025–2028/2029
Solomon Islands	Trade Policy Framework	Build productive capacity, sustainable trade and investment, poverty reduction	Transform into a competitive economy, integrate trade policies into national development strategies	2015 onwards
Tonga	Tonga Trade Policy Framework	Industrial and investment development, export development, trade facilitation, inclusivity	Enhance business environment, build export capacity, leverage trade agreements, improve customs	2017–2025
Tuvalu	National Trade Development Strategy	Identify trade commodities, boost economy, improve living standards, create jobs	Develop trade in goods and services, leverage regional trade agreements, enhance labour mobility	2022–2026

Country	Trade Policy Framework	Priorities	Goals	Timeframe
Vanuatu	Trade Policy Framework Update	Mainstream trade into national development, enhance exports, guide trade negotiations	Increase exports of goods and services, improve business environment, sustain economic growth	2019–2025

Stakeholders also identified a clear need to strengthen private sector engagement to identify opportunities to unlock trade and drive economic growth and improve the relevance of the programme. Small businesses continue to face costly, time-consuming barriers—particularly in biosecurity, certification, and export procedures. To support inclusivity and poverty reduction, the PPIP should deepen its engagement with private sector stakeholders and leverage existing coordination mechanisms to identify critical trade constraints for discussion within the PACER Plus membership, thereby enhancing the relevance of activities under the DEC Work Programme.

Regional economic integration

The PPIP has the potential to enhance economic integration between Pacific Islands Forum countries (FICs) and Australia and New Zealand as well as promote intra-Pacific trade—all essential to the effectiveness of PACER Plus. Greater economic integration in the region can enhance the value of current exports, reduce the cost of imports, and increase the access (by PACER Plus parties) to higher quality, and more affordable, goods and services from within the region.

The PPIP’s aim of improving the predictability, transparency, and stability of trade within the region are highly relevant to capitalising on new trading opportunities as well as making current trade more valuable, for exporting and importing countries alike. For example, the implementation of single window systems for both goods and services are meant to streamline trade processes by connecting export and import entries between countries, facilitating smoother and more efficient trade operations. A predictable, transparent, and stable trading environment could also contribute to building on opportunities for regional value chains across products that the region has a comparative advantage in.

Greater trade integration would also generate more data on current trade values and volumes that would be valuable in informing improvements to the trade environment as well as identify new opportunities for trade within the region. Parties raised opportunities to use the PPIP as a platform to achieve better standardisation of systems and processes across the Region. These included the coordination of a regional trade data system and standardised code tariffs to harmonise classification and valuation of goods. Additionally, creating a regional price index to guide customs on the value of goods traded within the region would ensure fair and consistent pricing.

One example mentioned during consultations was Solomon Islands’ active involvement in intra-Pacific labour mobility. Solomon Islands signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Niue to pilot a program specifically for the aged care sector, focusing on employing retired nurses. This initiative is particularly noteworthy as it addresses the surplus of nurses in the Solomon Islands by providing opportunities for retired nurses to work in Niue, thereby creating space for new graduates to enter the workforce. This pilot program is the first managed labour mobility initiative in the region and could serve as a model for other countries looking to

optimise their labour resources and or the supply and demand for goods and services. The PPIP could also have a more meaningful impact around regional integration by organising strategic initiatives to bring businesses together across the region to explore common challenges and map market access opportunities.

The Pacific Labor Mobility Annual Meeting was highlighted as a critical platform supported by the PPIP, where stakeholders discuss labour mobility issues, including worker welfare. This mechanism is recognised for its role in regional economic integration. By participating in forums and activities around labour mobility under PACER Plus, countries can better coordinate, advocate for and address common challenges, ensuring a more cohesive approach to workforce management across the Pacific.

Similarly, national stakeholders highlighted the benefit of PACER Plus as a regional forum that allows for sharing of lessons learned and best practices across the Region. This has been highlighted as one of the most impactful aspects of the agreement, particularly in terms of engagement and collaboration between the Pacific Island countries and Australia and New Zealand.

Reliability of trade relations between members

Trade reliability in the Pacific is shaped by a variety of factors associated with the broader development context in the Region. The long distances between islands and major trading partners often result in higher transportation costs and longer shipping times. Additionally, the quality of infrastructure, such as ports and roads, plays a crucial role leading to delays and increased costs for businesses. The region's susceptibility to disasters like tropical cyclones and earthquakes further complicates trade and economic development, as these events can disrupt routes and damage essential infrastructure such as in the case of the recent earthquake in Vanuatu.

The PPIP has been a relevant vehicle for enhancing the reliability of trade relations between Members. Work carried out through the PPIP in this area includes harmonising trade rules, procedures, and policies rather than focusing on providing individual support to businesses. An example provided was through the updating of crop pest surveys and standard trade procedures. While available data collected and consultations did not provide tangible evidence that the agreement has led to significant quantifiable gains in trade volumes, it has laid the groundwork for addressing structural constraints that hinder trade. By focusing on improving the enabling environment, such as through legislative and policy reforms, capacity building and addressing structural constraints, the PPIP is helping member countries build a more robust foundation for reliable trade relationships in the future.

While stakeholders have highlighted the relevance and benefits of PPIP investments such as improving customs processes, they have also mentioned concerns regarding the sustainability of this support after the currently agreed period ends in 2030.

Stakeholders widely recognise the significant benefits of labour mobility programs, particularly in terms of skills development and reducing unemployment. However, private sector actors—especially in Samoa and Tonga—have raised concerns that the high demand for workers under seasonal labour schemes is exacerbating labour shortages in local industries, undermining consistent production in both export and service sectors. Additionally, the development of parallel labour mobility strategies by the Pacific Islands Forum and PACER Plus has created risks of duplication and confusion, particularly given the Forum's broader membership base. Greater relevance and impact could be achieved by harmonising these strategies to ensure complementarity and alignment across the region.

Relevance of the PPIP can be maintained, or enhanced, if the Parties carefully manage the trade–offs within components of the PACER Plus agreement, for example by ensuring that labour mobility initiatives include strategies for the reintegration and effective economic participation of returning skilled migrants. The PPIP has been effective in fostering stronger engagement and relationship building among Member countries.

Compatibility with other investments

The PPIP is one of several investments aimed at improving market access, private sector growth and the trade–enabling environment that wholly or partially contribute to the PACER Plus Agreement. While Australian and New Zealand programmes such as Strongim Bisnis¹, the Market Development Facility (MDF)², the Pacific Horticultural and Agricultural Market Access Plus Programme (PHAMA Plus)³ and Pacific Trade and Invest (PTI) focus more directly on market development and private sector engagement, the PPIP primarily supports countries to implement the PACER Plus Agreement and strengthen the enabling environment for trade between Parties. Where the different domains of these programmes intersect around PACER Plus, their combined support is crucial for countries to fully benefit from the Agreement and achieve their social and economic development goals. However, due to the interconnected nature of trade and economic development activities, there are several areas of overlap among these investments, particularly in biosecurity, customs systems, private sector development, and labour mobility (which also intersects with initiatives like the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme).

Initially, the PPIP was perceived as heavily focused on public sector reforms. Over time, however, the programme has also pivoted toward supporting the private sector. This includes helping businesses meet export standards, obtain certifications, and access new markets. Initiatives such as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) certification and training in tourism and agribusiness have been well received. Yet, the programme’s visibility among private sector actors remains limited. Many businesses are unaware of the PPIP (which includes support for the PPIU and DEC Work Programme), are unclear about its relevance to their operations, and unsure how it relates to broader Aid for Trade initiatives. This has prompted calls for a more deliberate private sector engagement strategy, one that includes clearer communication, stronger partnerships with chambers of commerce, and more consistent presence at trade and business forums.

The evaluation observed poor differentiation from stakeholders between PPIP and other Aid for Trade (A4T) initiatives. For example, multiple stakeholders were appreciative of the work done by programmes like MDF and PHAMA Plus with the private sector and wanted PPIP to do the same, even though the PPIP has a distinct mandate different to those of other A4T programmes. This poor differentiation of PPIP within the broad A4T architecture dilutes the relevance of the PPIP amongst stakeholders and limits the ability to leverage existing programmes effectively. Instances of coordination that have occurred are often ad hoc rather than part of a consistent, strategic approach. Limited strategic engagement and coordination between different programmes have led to missed opportunities for reinforcing the impacts from each A4T investment.

¹ Solomon Islands but focused on both domestic as well as all export markets (not just Australia and New Zealand).

² Solomon Islands, Tonga, Samoa, and Vanuatu (as well as Fiji, Timor Leste and Sri Lanka) but focused on both domestic and all export markets (not just Australia and New Zealand).

³ All PACER Plus Parties as well as Fiji but focused on trade based on agricultural products to all international markets (not just Australia and New Zealand).

Encouragingly, the PPIP has engaged with and attempted to leverage existing forums, events and nationally relevant governance and coordination mechanisms and agencies to engage with the private sector and other development partners, rather than creating new ones. This approach is more likely to reduce the burden on stakeholders and ensure better integration with ongoing initiatives acknowledging that each country operates differently and has its own set of regional and bilateral investments.

However, Government stakeholders highlighted that coherence and coordination across the multiple DFAT-funded investments best placed to be driven from DFAT itself. Other alternatives to improve coordination included organising regular meetings among all agencies involved in the implementation of different investments to provide updates on ongoing projects and discuss plans that help reduce duplication and improve alignment. However, the PPIP operates as a focused mechanism for implementing the PACER Plus Free Trade Agreement and is only one part of the broader trade and A4T landscape. It is not best positioned to lead coordination or harmonisation across wider aid programmes or investments. Instead, this role is better suited to DFAT, MFAT, and in-country focal points, who are better placed to navigate and align efforts within each national aid context.

Improved communication and a stronger focus on results could enhance integration with existing programmes. For example, participants in consultations highlighted cases in which businesses sought support from multiple programmes for the same activities. Hence, thematically there is recognition that investments are well placed for complementarity but the specific mechanisms and provisions for effective coordination and strategic collaboration have not yet been put in place in a cohesive manner.

Stakeholders' perceptions

What do stakeholders think about the PPIP's relevance?

'...in terms of fostering stronger engagement and our relationship building, absolutely, definitely, it's possibly the most effective and impactful of the trade agreements we have when it comes to engagement...' — **JC Member**

'...They (PPIU) have been very helpful because we give them our needs, and they say we can do this or we can't do that. For example, we got an incinerator from PACER Plus, but they can't help with the incinerator shed, in so that is limited to infrastructure, well that's our partnership, then our Ministry would have to build that and then the equipment will come to [country], which is good, you know. So, it means there's partnership. We're not just asking for help. We have to do some work too...' — **Stakeholder from Ministry of Agriculture**

'...I definitely see the potential for it [collaboration between multiple investments], but due to a lack of awareness about what's happening under PACER Plus in [country] there hasn't really been, yeah, that ability to leverage existing programmes and activities here...' — **Stakeholder from DFAT Post**

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Encourage countries to better utilise their forward planning and strategic priorities to establish clearer, nationally aligned criteria for DEC activity approval that also advance regional harmonisation. Prioritise activities that promote the harmonisation of trade rules, procedures, and policies over isolated initiatives that do not contribute to regional integration. (Strategic)

Recommendation 2: Support government-led aid coordination and harmonisation efforts and work within existing country systems rather than creating parallel structures. Strengthen collaboration and information sharing across activities, investments, and workplans to identify overlaps and opportunities for collaboration or co-funding. (Operational)

Recommendation 3: Expand support for national digital trade strategies—including e-commerce platforms, digital payment gateways, and enabling regulatory frameworks—to improve access for informal sector actors and small vendors. This would enhance the relevance and inclusivity of the DEC Work Programme by broadening participation and impact across a wider spectrum of businesses, particularly MSMEs. (Strategic)

Recommendation 4: Better align with existing national and regional forums and initiatives that convene the private sector to identify opportunities, build trade relationships, and surface priority issues—strengthening the relevance and responsiveness of PPIP supported activities. Additionally, clarify and differentiate the benefits and intended outcomes of the PPIP versus broader Aid for Trade initiatives supporting PACER Plus at all levels, ensuring private sector actors and national stakeholders understand how to fully engage with and benefit from the Agreement. (Strategic)

Recommendation 5: Strengthen opportunities for deeper regional integration and intra-regional trade facilitation among PACER Plus Member countries, rather than prioritising trade exclusively with Australia and New Zealand. (Strategic)

1.2 Effectiveness

Key Evaluation Question 2: How effective was the PPIP in achieving its intended design EOPOs and IOS?

Evidence of progress towards the achievement of the outcomes

As the PPIP approaches the end of its initial phase, reflections from stakeholders involved in the consultations and data provided in annual reports, the MELA report and data extracts from project management systems reveal a nuanced depiction of its effectiveness in achieving progress towards end-of-programme and intermediate outcomes. The programme has made some tangible progress in several areas, while also grappling with structural and contextual challenges that have shaped its trajectory.

The initial years of the PPIP were marked by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly constrained mobility, disrupted supply chains, and diverted national attention toward health and crisis management. Despite these challenges, the PPIU managed to establish core governance structures, initiate technical assistance, and begin building relationships with national stakeholders.

One of the PPIP's most widely acknowledged contributions has been its efforts on capacity building. Across the region, ministries and agencies have benefited from targeted technical assistance in areas such as customs modernisation, biosecurity, metrology, rules of origin and standards development. Countries like Vanuatu and Solomon Islands have used PPIP support to advance automation systems, update legislation, and improve trade facilitation processes. However, stakeholders consistently emphasised the need for this support to be more sustained and embedded. Short-term technical inputs, while valuable, often lack continuity. Stakeholders highlighted the need for longer-term, in-country technical expertise to ensure that reforms and the knowledge gains from trainings are institutionalised and not lost to staff turnover or shifting political priorities.

However, the effectiveness in the delivery of the DEC Work Programme has been hindered by several elements. The activity selection process is often seen as ad hoc and reactive, lacking strategic focus and transparency, which has led to mismatches between activities and country needs. Additionally, the MELA framework has faced delays and implementation issues, hindering the ability to measure outcomes and adapt effectively. Limited in-country capacity, high staff turnover, and inconsistent data collection further constrain the programme's ability to deliver and sustain results.

End of Programme Outcomes [2020–2030]

The programme comprised the following two EOPOs.

- › **EOPO 1:** By 2030 PACER Plus Participants will increase the predictability, transparency, stability and value of trade and investment transactions in the Pacific Region.
- › **EOPO 2:** By 2030 public and private sector market actors in PACER Plus Participant countries benefit from targeted and responsive trade-related technical assistance and related support.

Key indicators reported against the EOPOs

The Programme has produced two rounds of reports to date that follow the MELA framework and report against outcomes. The first, covering the 2023–2024 financial year, aggregates progress across the four technical committees. Additional MELA outcome reports were also prepared for each technical committee and presented at the Joint Committee meeting in May 2025. However, none of these reports have directly addressed the indicators or provided reporting against the EOPOs. This aligns with stakeholder feedback, which consistently highlights that the EOPOs were set at an aspirational level that exceeds the realistic scope, resourcing, and timeframe of the programme. Moreover, the original design did not include practical mechanisms or metrics for tracking progress toward these outcomes, making it difficult to assess impact in a meaningful or measurable way.

Table 3: PPIP performance example highlights

EOPO1 - Predictability, transparency, stability and value of trade and investment	EOPO2 - Targeted and responsive trade-related technical assistance and related support
<p>Harmonisation of tariff schedules and rules of origin (ROO): All Parties have adopted the HS 2022 classification and transposed PACER Plus Product Specific Rules (PSRs), with most countries incorporating these into their customs regulations and standard operating procedures. This harmonisation reduces uncertainty for traders and investors by clarifying the conditions under which goods qualify for preferential treatment.</p>	<p>Sanitary and phytosanitary measures: Facilitated the implementation of the Generic ePhyto National System (GeNS) for automated phytosanitary certification and procured fumigation and IT equipment to support SPS infrastructure in countries like Samoa, Kiribati, and Tuvalu.</p>
<p>National trade information portals: These portals, supported by UNCTAD and PPIU, provide public access to trade-related laws, procedures, and updates. While usage analytics remain limited, the infrastructure is in place to support greater transparency.</p>	<p>Technical Barriers to Trade: Supported the development of National Quality Policies and standards implementation roadmaps (e.g., Tonga, Kiribati). And partnered with Standards Australia and the British Standards Institute to deliver strategic planning and capacity building.</p>
<p>Supporting legislative and policy reforms: Countries have updated or are in the process of updating key legislation related to customs, biosecurity, investment, and trade in services. These reforms provide a more robust legal foundation for trade and investment.</p>	<p>Investment and services support: Delivered regional and national workshops to build capacity in investment facilitation, promotion, and aftercare and supported legislative reviews and drafting (e.g., Samoa’s Citizenship Investment Act, Solomon Islands’ Foreign Investment Act).</p>
<p>Labour mobility linkages: The facilitation of intra-Pacific labour mobility pathways, such as the agreement between Niue and Solomon Islands, demonstrates how the PPIP is creating new economic opportunities aligned with national development priorities</p>	<p>Labour mobility capacity building: Delivered regional workshops on bilateral labour migration agreements, reintegration, and superannuation. Developed communications products and implementation roadmaps for remittances and reintegration strategies.</p>

A key limitation in assessing the impact and substantive attributable value of the PPIP lies in the persistent data gaps, particularly the lack of up-to-date and disaggregated trade and investment statistics across many participating countries. These data constraints hinder the ability to conduct robust quantitative analysis or track changes in trade flows, investment patterns, or sector-specific outcomes attributable to the Agreement. While anecdotal evidence and qualitative feedback suggest that businesses are increasingly aware of the PACER Plus Agreement and are beginning to explore its potential, there is currently no clear empirical basis to link these developments to measurable increases in exports, investment, or broader development outcomes. This challenge is compounded by the fact that many of the Agreement’s benefits, such as improved trade readiness, institutional reforms, and capacity building are inherently long-term and diffuse, making attribution complex and requiring sustained monitoring and evaluation over time and investing in the capacity of the PPIU to focus on tracking these impact pathways.

The PPIU operates within an ecosystem of complementary and overlapping initiatives that support regional trade, making it challenging to attribute specific trade outcomes directly to the PPIP. Future outcomes should be structured around domains where the PPIU has clear agency and direct influence.

Evidence of contribution of the DEC work programme to the IOs

IO 1 Trade in goods: participants begin efficient and transparent implementation of Agreement commitments on rules of origin, customs, sanitary and phytosanitary measures and technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures

Under this IO, the most notable progress has been achieved in improving customs procedures, particularly through the implementation of systems like the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA), which has enhanced efficiency and standardisation across member countries. SPS measures have also seen steady advancement, reflecting growing capacity in managing biosecurity and food safety standards. In contrast, TBT have posed more significant challenges due to their complexity and the technical expertise required. However, efforts in this area have led to valuable collaborations with regional partners such as the Pacific Quality Infrastructure Initiative, opening new avenues for capacity building and harmonisation of standards across the region.

The widespread adoption of the ASYCUDA customs management system across Parties has significantly improved customs efficiency, reduced clearance times from days to minutes in some cases and enhanced the accuracy of tariff revenue collection. Figures cited in a report produced by New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade include average customs clearance times reduced from 11 days to two days in Tuvalu and clearance times dropped from three days to three hours in Kiribati. Similarly, the implementation of the ePhyto system has streamlined biosecurity certification processes, reduced trade delays and improving product quality upon arrival. These system upgrades, supported by targeted capacity building and technical assistance under the DEC Work Programme, have laid critical foundations for trade facilitation and regulatory compliance.

IO 2 Trade in services: participants adapt, improve and harmonise regulations for, reduce barriers to and facilitate trade in services

Progress toward facilitating trade in services under the PPIP has been more gradual compared to trade in goods, reflecting the relative novelty and complexity of services liberalisation for many Parties. Several countries have initiated or are planning legislative and regulatory reforms to align with their commitments under the Agreement, particularly in areas such as foreign investment and the movement of natural persons. While implementation remains uneven, the DEC Work Programme has supported foundational capacity-building efforts, including awareness-raising and technical assistance to improve understanding of services-related obligations. Notably, some Parties are advancing mutual recognition of qualifications and exploring reforms to improve the investment climate, which are essential for enabling cross-border service flows. However, challenges remain, including limited technical capacity, resource constraints, and low familiarity with services trade frameworks. In several countries, there is limited visibility of the potential of the services sector and few established national strategies, reflecting the historic reliance on commodity and agriculture-based trade. While initial foundations are being established, dedicated resources within the PPIU and sustained engagement will be essential to accelerate regulatory reform, reduce barriers, and realise the full potential of services trade under PACER Plus.

IO 3 Investment: participants increase investor awareness of PACER Plus opportunities, identify and resolve impediments to investment and improve the investment climate in their countries

Targeted activities aimed at enhancing investment outcomes under the PPIP have been limited in scope, with several Parties initiating reforms starting with improvements in their investment climates and alignment with the Agreement's obligations. Many countries have undertaken, or are planning, legislative reforms to modernise foreign investment laws—aimed at improving clarity, transparency, and investor protections. These reforms are considered foundational for attracting higher-quality, targeted investment. However, some Members noted they are at

different stages in the development of investment promotion agencies. Those in earlier stages of establishing investment promotion agencies felt that broader PPIU activities did not always align with their specific needs—and that it was ‘too early’ to focus on legislative reform. While direct increases in investment flows attributable to the PPIP have not yet been observed or systemically quantified, partly due to the early stage of implementation and broader economic constraints, there is growing awareness among government agencies of the need to identify and address impediments to investment. The DEC Work Programme has supported this shift by funding capacity–building initiatives and encouraging dialogue on investment facilitation.

IO 4 Labour mobility: regulatory reforms encourage more women and men to engage in labour mobility and remit savings to their families

The Arrangement on Labour Mobility has focused primarily on the facilitation of movement of unskilled and semi–skilled workers, primarily to Australia and New Zealand. The PPIU’s role in fostering country engagement on labour mobility has been widely acknowledged and appreciated, especially in relation to improving the capacity of parties to negotiate bilateral labour mobility agreements. More recently, the PPIU has begun supporting dialogue on labour mobility between labour–sending and labour–receiving countries beyond Australia and New Zealand. For example, the PPIU has more recently supported intra–Pacific labour mobility, with countries like Niue and the Cook Islands exploring bilateral arrangements with Solomon Islands for aged care and hospitality workers.

While regulatory reforms specifically aimed at encouraging broader participation among women are still emerging, the groundwork is being laid through initiatives focused on skills recognition and reintegration. For example, efforts are underway to align qualifications with mutual recognition frameworks, which could help returning workers transition into higher–skilled roles or entrepreneurial ventures in their home countries. While gender–disaggregated data and targeted strategies to increase women’s participation are not yet prominent, the recognition of these needs within the ALM framework signals a shift toward more inclusive labour mobility policies.

The ALM Review highlighted the need for stronger worker protection, welfare, and reintegration, calling for a more inclusive and coordinated approach to labour mobility. These priorities are beginning to be reflected in PPIP supported activities. While further targeted reforms are needed to fully achieve IO4—particularly around gender equity and remittance facilitation—the PACER Plus framework, supported by the PPIU and Labour Mobility Secretariat, is progressively evolving to better support inclusive economic empowerment through safe and productive labour mobility pathways for both women and men.

IO5 Private enterprise response: private sector enterprises increase the value, composition and number of trade transactions

Progress toward increasing the value, composition, and number of trade transactions by private enterprises supported by the PPIP has been foundational rather than transformational. While quantifiable evidence of expanded or diversified exports under PACER Plus is still emerging, businesses are likely already benefiting from streamlined export processes, reduced trade–related costs, and faster processing times—making existing trade more efficient and accessible. The absence of measurable trade expansion at this stage aligns with the early phase of implementation, the long–term nature of the PACER Plus Agreement, and the recognition that broader A4T programmes are better positioned to drive export growth.

Private sector engagement is increasing, albeit from a low base. Businesses are beginning to explore how the PPIU and DEC Work Programme can support their commercial goals, particularly as awareness of PACER Plus grows through outreach and capacity–building.

However, many MSMEs remain unaware of the PPIU’s broader mandate—especially in services and investment—amid a crowded A4T landscape.

The private sector’s ability to respond remains constrained by structural challenges, including limited access to finance, infrastructure deficits, and small domestic markets. These issues are beyond the scope of the PPIP support to resolve but are being partially addressed through complementary donor support. Looking ahead, deeper engagement with the private sector, particularly through targeted outreach, demonstration of success stories, and potentially a regional business forum, will be critical to unlocking the commercial potential of PACER Plus. As market access commitments begin to take effect and businesses become more trade-ready, the conditions will be in place for a more robust private enterprise response.

IO6 PPIU performance: The PPIU efficiently and effectively manages delivery of the DEC Work Programme

The MELA reports do not include targeted indicators or tracking of progress against effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation of the programme. Stakeholder consultations indicate that while administrative processes—such as proposal development and procurement—have improved over time, they still require greater clarity and consistency. Some Parties expressed concerns about transparency in funding decisions and the need for clearer communication around what types of activities are eligible for support. Importantly, the PPIU has maintained a lean staffing model, which has helped maximise the proportion of funding directed to on-the-ground activities. However, this efficiency comes with risks, including key person dependencies, limited bandwidth during peak periods, and pressure on PPIU to balance effort on administrative actions over more strategic discussions. Further insights into the efficiency of processes and governance of the PPIU are found in the efficiency section of this report and the governance review.

What do stakeholders think about PACER Plus’s effectiveness?

‘...The programme has been effective in supporting trade facilitation agencies but faces challenges in other areas. Trading services and investment have been particularly challenging due to a lack of awareness and understanding...’ — National coordinator

‘...I believe [the governance structure] does improve it [effectiveness] where the different committees and where JC sits, and then you have the budget committee. I think everyone contributes to the whole operations of the PPIU, and where the decision making is made at the JC. When you get to that level, you already have consulted everyone, and you get the point of view from all the different expertise in different fields...’ — JC Member

‘...I think with just two years of implementation it is quite challenging to measure [progress towards outcomes] like I said, if I'm just looking at the components and the activities, some of it, yes, we have touched on, and now we're going back to do refreshers on, but some of it we haven't at all, such as definitely SMNPI, needs more work and more attention...’ — JC Member

Country and component-specific progress towards outcomes

Detailed and disaggregated information by country, status, and type of activity was not systematically available or compiled prior to the financial year 2024–2025. Comprehensive tracking and reporting mechanisms were progressively introduced during this period, enabling more granular analysis and monitoring of activities across components and participating countries from FY2024–2025 onward. The following graphs present the activities currently monitored by the PPIU for the most recent financial year. This includes both newly initiated activities and those that have continued from previous years. While the dataset used to generate these visuals does not capture the full scope of the programme, it provides a representative snapshot of the distribution of activities by component, country, implementation

status, and type. As such, it offers a useful estimate of the overall balance and focus of programme implementation.

Most of the activities currently tracked by the PPIU are regional in scope, with Tonga standing out as the individual country with the highest number of activities. In contrast, smaller island nations such as Tuvalu and Niue have the fewest, highlighting the capacity constraints these countries face in developing and implementing proposals (Figure 1). A significant proportion of activities are either in progress or yet to commence, reflecting the programme’s recent emphasis on accelerating implementation in its latest financial years (Figure 2). When disaggregated by component, most activities fall under SPS measures, followed by technical regulations and standards, and trade in services. However, most of these activities remain in progress or have not yet started (Figure 3), aligning with stakeholder feedback that work under trade in services has been slower to advance and more difficult for countries to progress. This trend also suggests that the PPIU is starting to take steps to address this imbalance.

To better understand the nature of the work being delivered, activities were categorised based on PPIU–provided descriptions. The majority are focused on capacity building, followed by direct technical assistance and the review of technical guidelines, policies, and regulations (Figure 4). It is important to note that cross–cutting activities such as governance, communication and outreach, GEDSI, MELA, and support for national coordinators are tracked as single ongoing activities. This is due to the reporting structure being aligned with budget lines. As such, the figures presented do not necessarily reflect the full scale of investment or effort dedicated to these areas.

Figure 1: Proportion of activities per country

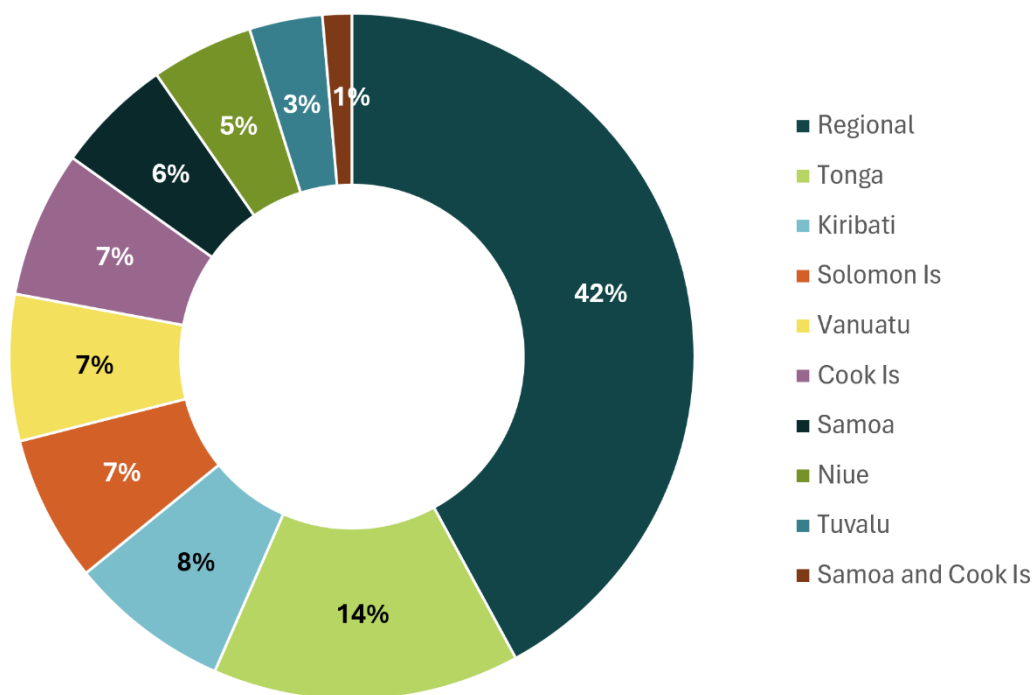


Figure 2: Proportion of activities per status of implementation

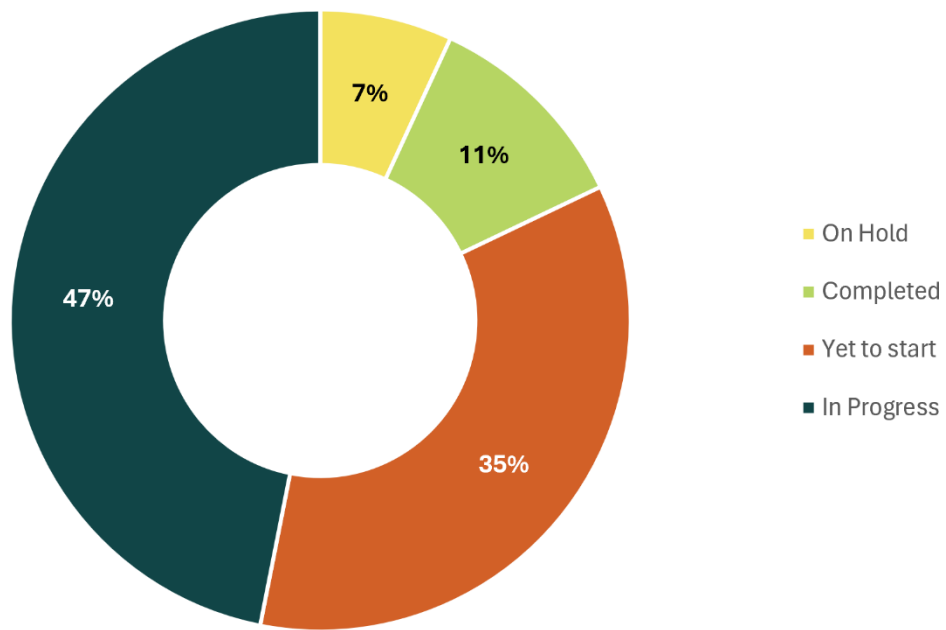


Figure 3: Number of activities by component and status of implementation

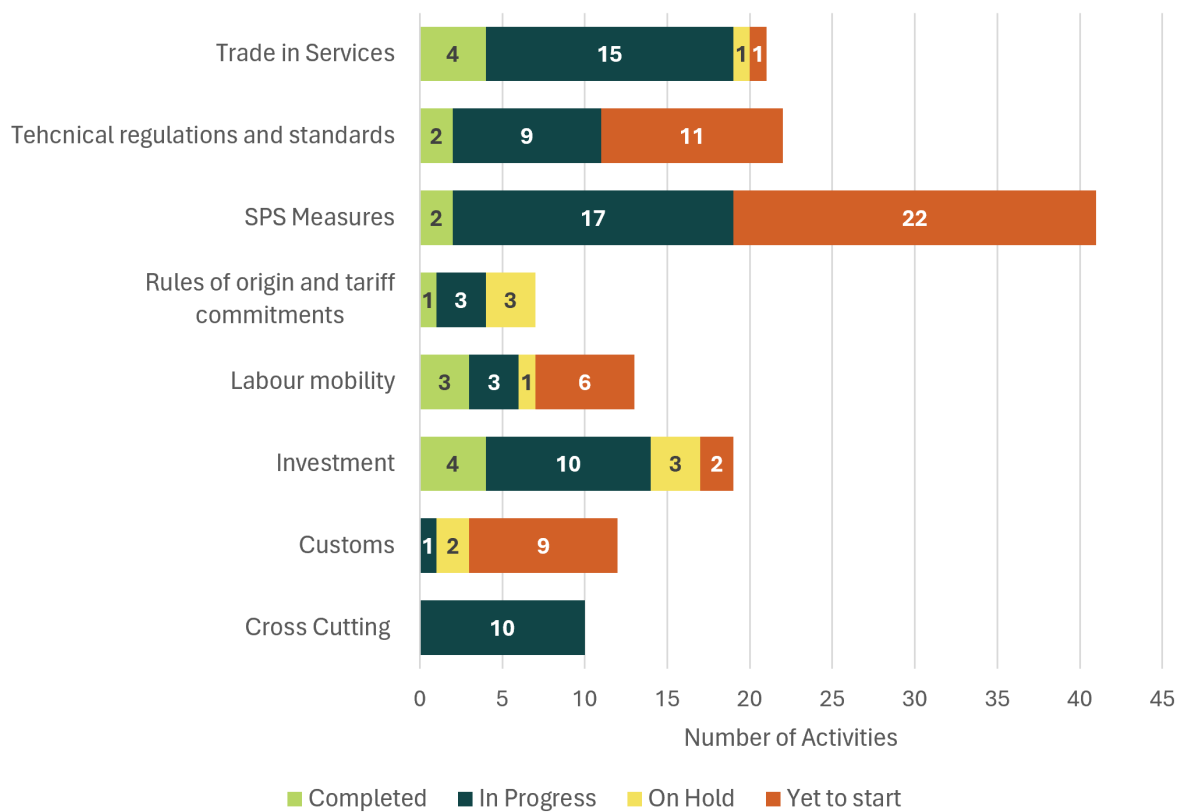
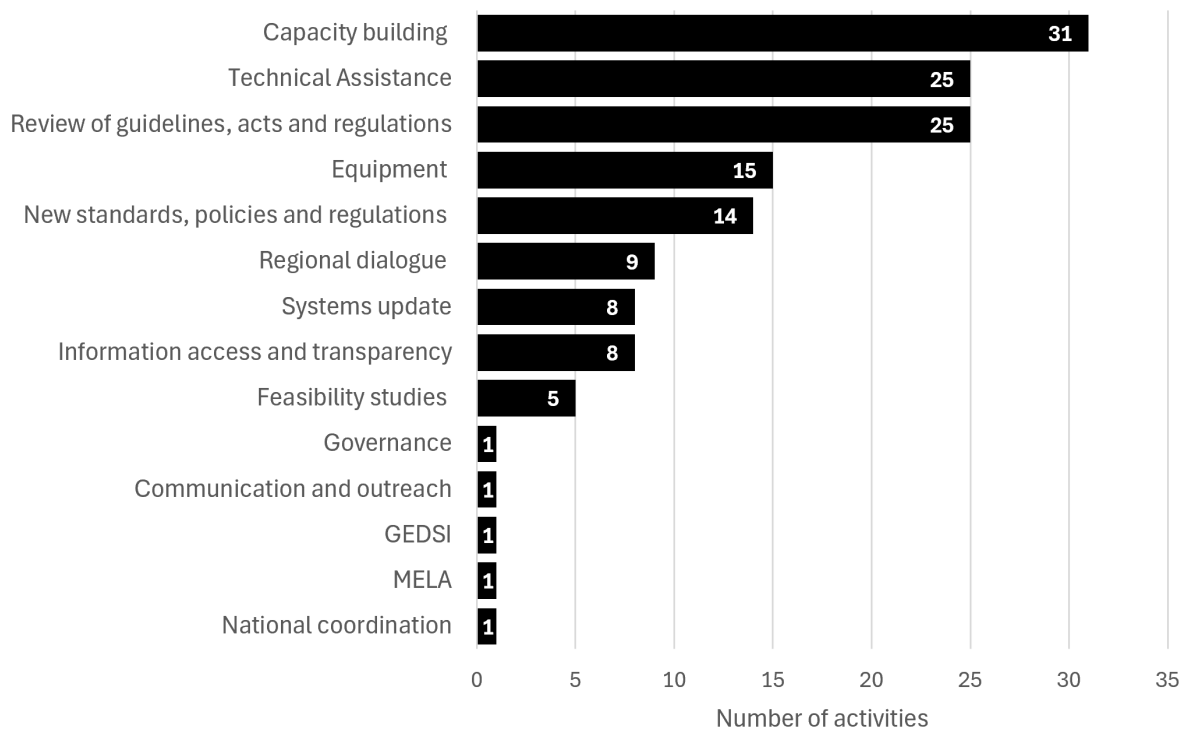


Figure 4: Number of activities by type



While activity tracking offers valuable insights into the scope and nature of work being delivered through the DEC Work Programme, it provides limited visibility into the outcomes and long-term impact of these efforts. As outlined in the MELA and Risk section of this report, systematic monitoring of outcomes and impact is a relatively recent development for the PPIU, and there are still challenges in ensuring that activities are consistently followed through in a way that enables strategic and evidence-based learning.

Improving this aspect of monitoring is essential, not only to assess effectiveness, but also to highlight the multiplying potential and broader development co-benefits of key interventions that address critical gaps in the trade-enabling environment. The case studies below illustrate examples of activities implemented through the programme that demonstrate strong potential for generating such multiplier effects.

Examples of innovative and strategic activities

Case Study 1: Private sector support to improve the trade enabling environment

One of the standout examples of effective private sector support under the DEC Work Programme was the assistance provided to GeoLab in Vanuatu. The company benefited from targeted investment in equipment needed for sanitary and phytosanitary testing. This initiative exemplifies the kind of nimble, responsive engagement that the PPIP was designed to enable. The process was streamlined and efficient: the PPIU made a direct payment to GeoLab, which then procured and installed the necessary equipment without delay. The implementation was swift, with materials delivered promptly and site visits conducted to verify the setup. This approach not only ensured that the support was delivered effectively but also minimised administrative overhead and delays.

What makes this case particularly compelling is its multiplying effect. By equipping GeoLab with the tools needed to develop testing to support sanitary and phytosanitary standards (SPS), the intervention directly enhanced the country’s capacity to conduct tests in-country without

needing to rely on laboratories overseas. This, in turn, contributes to broader trade facilitation goals, supporting compliance with export requirements and improving the overall trade readiness of the private sector. The success of this model demonstrates how well-targeted, practical support to individual businesses can have ripple effects across the sector, strengthening supply chains and building confidence in regional trade systems. It also highlighted the value of direct engagement with the private sector, showing that when support is aligned with real operational needs, the outcomes can be both immediate and far-reaching.

Case Study 2: Development of food standards in Tonga

The development of standards for the import of healthy food in Tonga has been an innovative area of progress supported under the PPIP initiative. Tonga, which does not yet have a dedicated national standards body, has been working toward establishing a robust framework for standards and metrology. With support from the PPIP (delivered through the PPIU and DEC Work Programme) and in collaboration with Standards Australia, Tonga developed a national standards roadmap aimed at improving awareness and implementation of standards, including those relevant to food imports.

This roadmap was launched with strong backing from both the Australian High Commission and the PPIU, marking a clear commitment to its implementation. The initiative has focused on building local capacity through training and access to Australian Standards, and it has included regional collaboration through the Pacific Island Metrology Committee. These efforts have helped Tonga begin to address regulatory gaps and align its import standards with international expectations, particularly in areas like food safety and consumer protection.

The work has also emphasised the importance of standards not only for exports but also for imports, recognising that healthy food imports play a critical role in public health and consumer confidence. This dual focus ensures that trade facilitation efforts support both economic and social outcomes, particularly in priority areas such as the reduction of non-communicable diseases and food and nutrition security. The initiative is ongoing, with continued technical support helping to build a more coherent and effective regulatory environment for food standards in Tonga.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Support the reactivation or strengthening of National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs) to ensure coherent, cross-sectoral planning and prioritisation. (Operational)

Recommendation 2: Refine the role of subcommittees to focus more on strategic oversight and less on nominally approving proposals. This includes a more strategic use of the Budget Committee, focusing on high-level financial oversight rather than micro-level scrutiny. (Operational)

Recommendation 3: Strengthen PPIU's strategic role by shifting from a primarily operational focus to one that also provides high-level guidance and oversight, ensuring activities are aligned with long-term program goals. (Operational)

Recommendation 4: Clarify and formalise the roles of National Coordinators to improve in-country delivery, coordination, and stakeholder engagement. This includes providing adequate training, resources, and support systems to ensure continuity and effectiveness. (Operational)

Recommendation 5: Systematically engage technical specialists from within the PACER Plus membership such as DFAT, MFAT, MPI, DAFF, and regional organisations to provide targeted

support, share best practices, and strengthen implementation across thematic areas.
(Strategic)

1.3 Efficiency

Key Evaluation Question 3: Has the PPIP made appropriate and efficient use of donor, regional and partner resources in progressing the EOPOs?

Management arrangements and structures

PACER Plus is governed by a multi-tiered structure designed to support trade and development, with the PPIU serving as the secretariat and central coordination body. Based in Samoa, the PPIU is responsible for facilitating committee functions, managing communications, preparing documentation, and supporting programme implementation. It acts as the primary liaison for member countries and plays a vital role in maintaining continuity, particularly in the face of frequent staff turnover within national agencies. However, consultations have highlighted a growing expectation for the PPIU to elevate its role beyond coordination. Stakeholders have expressed a desire for the PPIU to provide stronger technical and strategic leadership, particularly in supporting the technical committees and line Ministries with activity design and prioritisation. This would help ensure that activities are more effectively targeted to address key opportunities and challenges within the trade-enabling environment and are better tailored to the specific contexts and needs of each country.

The other building blocks of the PACER plus governance framework includes several key committees. The Joint Committee (JC) serves as the primary decision-making body and meets at least once a year. It comprises representatives from all member countries and oversees the implementation of the PACER Plus agreement and the DEC Work Programme. The Budget Subcommittee Committee (BSC) initially was a smaller group and was later expanded to include all parties. The BSC reviews and endorses financial plans and expenditures.

Additionally, there are four subsidiary technical committees aligned with the agreement's core components: Committee on Trade in Goods, Rules of Origin and Customs Procedures (CTG), Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and Technical Barriers to Trade (SPS and TBT), Committee on Services, Movement of Natural Persons and Investment (SMNPI) and PACER Plus Labour Mobility Working Group (PPLMWG). These committees provide technical oversight and review component-specific activities. Some technical committees, such as the SPS committee, have been criticised for maintaining the status quo rather than identifying strategic, forward-looking priorities. The scope of the SPS and TBT Committee is too broad, which has contributed to its limited effectiveness; it is recommended that the committee be split to ensure more focused and active engagement. Similarly to the case with the JC, the technical committees are also expected to provide more in-depth technical guidance to increase the relevance of activities being implemented.

Although not formally part of the governance structure, ministerial meetings play a significant role in providing political oversight and strategic direction. These meetings have occasionally made key decisions, such as endorsing future funding phases. Committee membership under PACER Plus is primarily based on country representation rather than specific expertise, although the terms of reference (TORs) do outline some skill-based expectations for members. This representative model offers certain benefits, such as fostering stronger engagement from member countries and ensuring alignment with national priorities in the DEC Work Programme.

However, this approach also presents several drawbacks. It limits the range of technical skills available within the committees, particularly for smaller countries where some individuals may serve on multiple committees simultaneously. This can constrain the diversity of perspectives,

as committee discussions are often confined to government agency viewpoints, excluding valuable input from the private sector, civil society, and regional or international organisations. Additionally, the model can give rise to actual or perceived conflicts of interest, especially when committee members are closely tied to the implementation of the activities they are overseeing. Further detailed recommendations and insights around the governance of the programme have been outlined in the Governance Review Document.

Activity selection, implementation and reporting

The programme operates under a structured annual planning cycle that begins in October with a call for proposals from member countries. These proposals are reviewed by the PPIU and assessed for alignment with national priorities and trade policy frameworks. In February, the relevant technical committees review and endorse the proposed activities, followed by the BSC's review in March or April. The JC then provides final approval in May, enabling implementation to commence with the new financial year. To maintain flexibility, an intersessional decision-making process allows for approvals to be made between formal meetings through circulated papers and email correspondence. However, in some cases, due to the dynamic nature of governance and political instability in the Member Countries, the process of activity approval means that local political and institutional contexts change while the approval processes are being followed, resulting in implementation issues.

Despite this well-defined process, the programme faces several persistent challenges. Many countries lack the institutional capacity to fully engage with the programme, resulting in delays and under-implementation. National coordination mechanisms, such as trade facilitation committees, are often inactive or under-resourced, limiting cross-sectoral collaboration and integration. To address these issues, countries are encouraged to revitalise, establish or engage with national trade facilitation committees to improve coordination across government ministries and with the private sector. Strengthening these mechanisms would enhance the quality and coherence of proposals submitted for funding.

Smaller Pacific Island Countries face acute human resource constraints, which restrict their ability to develop and implement proposals. As a result, proposals are often prepared by national coordinators rather than through inclusive stakeholder engagement, reducing the potential for stronger relevance and local ownership. Not all countries have a dedicated national coordinator, which means that the level of support received to harmonise the programme at the national level and to engage in effective stakeholder and priority mapping and consultation is highly variable between countries. Another significant challenge is the duplication and congestion of donor programmes operating in the same space. This overlap creates confusion and inefficiencies, despite the PPIU's efforts to coordinate with other initiatives once activities have been approved.

Furthermore, the original programme design did not incorporate a phased strategic roadmap, and the intermediate outcomes were overly ambitious given the foundational capacity gaps across many participating countries. These limitations have been compounded by delays in the implementation of the MELA framework, as well as the absence of standardised, detailed guidelines for proposal development. As a result, the programme has not been able to maximise the potential to proactively identify areas requiring adjustment or prioritisation. Data collection on activity implementation remains inconsistent, and the MELA framework is not being strategically leveraged to support adaptive management or inform decision-making. These governance and management shortcomings have direct implications for the efficiency in the delivery of the DEC Work Programme.

Transparency in implementation

The implementation of the PPIP, by the PPIU, demonstrates mixed outcomes in terms of transparency, with both commendable practices and areas requiring improvement. On the positive side, the programme has established clear financial reporting and oversight mechanisms. The PPIU regularly prepares financial reports for the BSC, which are reviewed and discussed in formal meetings. These processes are underpinned by a delegation of authority framework and an operations manual, ensuring accountability and clarity in financial decision-making, procurement and tracking of expenditures. Additionally, committee documents, including meeting papers and outcome summaries, are declassified after meetings and made available to member countries, with some published on the PACER Plus website. This practice supports openness in budget and financial management.

The expansion of the BSC to include all member countries has also enhanced inclusiveness and transparency in financial oversight. Furthermore, the MELA framework has started to be implemented in the financial year 2024–2025 to track committee performance, monitor country compliance with commitments under the agreement, capture recommendations and inform operational adjustments, contributing to a culture of learning and adaptation.

However, several challenges persist. At the national level (outside the Ministries of Trade), there is limited visibility into the activities enabled by the PPIP, particularly regional and strategic initiatives. This lack of awareness can hinder coordination and reduce the perceived transparency of the programme. Stakeholders have also noted inconsistencies in communication and information sharing. There is also some confusion around the funding process, including how proposals are assessed and approved. Stakeholders have called for more transparent and standardised procedures to enhance confidence in the programme's operations.

In some countries, the Ministry of Trade or other lead agencies do not have full oversight of all PPIP-funded activities, leading to fragmented coordination and reduced transparency. Moreover, the programme has not consistently communicated its strategic objectives or the rationale behind its activities, contributing to confusion about its role and how it differs from other donor initiatives like MDF or PHAMA Plus. There is often insufficient coordination among stakeholders at the national level. This has led to uneven awareness of the programme and limited engagement from the private sector, which is a key intended beneficiary of PACER Plus. The region is experiencing donor congestion, with multiple agencies and programmes operating in overlapping spaces. This creates confusion, duplication, and inefficiencies, particularly in areas like trade facilitation and e-commerce.

To address these issues, several opportunities for improvement have been identified. These include strengthening public diplomacy through regular communications (for example newsletters and press releases), enhancing national coordination mechanisms, clarifying and standardising funding processes, and increasing the use of the MELA framework to track and communicate progress. Additionally, improving strategic messaging would help distinguish the PPIP support from other programmes and provide a better mechanism for Trade Ministers and other stakeholders to appreciate the positive contribution of PACER Plus to trade and development in the region.

Stakeholders' perceptions

What do stakeholders think about PACER Plus's efficiency?

'...what I expected from them [the BSC] is not exactly what I'm getting. Most of what I'm getting is nitpicking details of things that I felt don't really warrant the level of the Budget Committee...'

would ask myself, whether the questions they've asked would contribute to any well-informed decisions...' — **PPIU Stakeholder**

'...a project database is an immensely useful tool, and would be great if at Post we could log into the PPIU website and look for any project proposals put forward by or involving [country]., we could then at least see what has been done in the past or has been approved for the future, so that we can proactively reach out and make sure that we're not either overlapping or we're helping...' — **DFAT Post Stakeholder**

'...One, I think of the major challenge for us as a small party, is that (we) have a very constrained or limited capacity to make the most of the PACER Plus assistance. So, you note that in terms of funding that has been provided to each of the parties, I think we are one of the parties with the smallest amount of assistance that has been provided, and that's mainly due to our limited human resources, we've tried our best to reach out to our stakeholders in terms of developing the activity proposal. Ideally, we would like for them to give us their proposals rather than us writing it ourselves...' — **JC Member**

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Implement a single software solution for tracking financial data, programming implementation, and technical assistance to replace the fragmented use of multiple platforms. Use the PPIU website to better articulate the application and approval process and consider the feasibility of online application process (Operational)

Recommendation 2: Adopting a programmatic approach that clearly identifies impact pathways and interventions to ensure alignment with work plans and avoid ad hoc decision-making. (Operational)

Recommendation 3: Implement better strategic communications to promote programme achievements and transparency (Strategic).

1.4 Sustainability

Key Evaluation Question 3: How sustainable are the outcomes of the PPIP investment for PACER Plus members?

Ownership and localisation of the DEC Work Programme

Joint Committee (JC) Members consulted have expressed strong ownership of the PPIU and DEC Work Programme, enabled by the PPIP, highlighting their active involvement in the negotiations of the Agreement and the initial design of the PPIP. The governance structure of PACER Plus has created a platform for countries to take proactive ownership in prioritising activities. However, it was noted that committees can sometimes become overly focused on ensuring activities get through the pipeline and funds are allocated, rather than emphasising performance requirements and strategic technical leadership in line with national development goals.

In the initial stages of implementation, some countries experienced tension between what the PPIP was designed to achieve and its comparative advantage versus what some countries wanted it to do. This issue has been partly attributed to insufficient strategic communications around the PPIP and where the programme is best positioned to achieve long-term and sustainable impacts. These issues were also attributed to a lack of standardised processes, best practices or guidelines for in-country stakeholder engagement to ensure suggested activities are mapped against strategic national trade and development priorities, private sector

needs, or the capabilities of different stakeholders to effectively implement the nominated activities.

There is a clear willingness among member countries to actively contribute to the implementation of the PPIP, through the PPIU and DEC Work Programme. This commitment is evident in their proactive involvement in policy development, legislative changes, and capacity-building initiatives. However, this sense of ownership and commitment tends to diminish among wider government bodies and the private sector, who are more distanced from the direct negotiation of the DEC Work Programme. The activity selection process requires member countries to suggest activities. In some countries this process is heavily supported by National Coordinators, but we found different levels of coordination and interaction and awareness of the programme when consulting stakeholders outside of the Ministry of Trade with most interview participants having limited knowledge and experience with the programme beyond their specific involvement in activities.

The sustainability of activities within the DEC Work Programme is best achieved through long-lasting transformation in the trade enabling environment and embedding reform into governance and procedures that are owned by countries. Additionally, capacity building and training activities should be long-term and locally driven, ensuring that local offices and ministries can implement learnings that lead to procedural and organisational change. Effective coordination among different ministries and stakeholders is essential to create a cohesive and enabling environment. This includes enhancing visibility and integration of activities across various government bodies, industries and businesses and effectively communicating the long-term impacts and benefits of improvements in standards, policies, and systems.

Role of the PPIU

There is increasing appreciation and ownership amongst Parties of the role of the PPIU and a general desire to see its role continue. The PPIU not only manages the implementation of the DEC Work Programme but also provides strategic advice on trade and acts as the Secretariat for PACER Plus more widely.

Yet the future sustainability of the PPIU is unclear as it is currently tied to ongoing donor funding with firm commitments due to end in 2030.

Developing and retaining in-country trade skills

Implementation has been effective in Parties where the NC role, especially where dynamic NCs have worked with motivated focal points. This connection is likely important as well for sustaining the changes enabled by the PPIP and leaving behind the capacity that the programme built for Parties to use in PACER Plus as well as the broader trade context. Currently, significant churn within the Parties as well as lack of clarity around the place of NCs in the PPIU is hampering a more strategic, long-term approach to sustaining PPIP's impact.

Leverage of additional investments

All PACER Plus Parties acknowledge the challenges in harmonising and building on the various trade and economic development activities occurring in the Pacific. The PPIU has been encouraged to function as a trade specialist advisory body and to leverage the Work Programme as a mechanism to enhance and expand other trade and economic development initiatives while also being responsible to monitor progress across its own EOPOs and IOs. Although this can be strengthened within the PPIU, the areas of overlap with other initiatives are often limited to trade between member countries, other trading partners such as the European Union and Regional Platforms like the Pacific Islands Forum.

DFAT and MFAT can facilitate improved structural and programmatic collaboration across their Pacific Aid for Trade portfolio through dedicated technical oversight, joint planning sessions, in-country strategic coordination, co-investment, sharing of activity databases and resources, incentives in the prioritisation of activities that demonstrate co-development and cost sharing and regular communication of progress, challenges and opportunities. Further efforts are needed to strengthen harmonisation and coordination with regional and bilateral initiatives to reduce duplication and enhance regional integration.

Limited awareness and a more nuanced differentiation of the PPIU's mandate from broader development-funded trade and investment programmes have led to activities being proposed in the Work Programme that are better suited to other regional initiatives (like MDF or PHAMA Plus) or bilateral programmes (like *Strongim Bisnis*, Tautai). Enhancing stakeholder understanding and improving consultation would ensure activities align with appropriate programmes, thereby increasing relevance and efficiency and making sure initiatives build on each other to achieve more meaningful impacts. Examples provided in which activities were implemented leveraging support from multiple investments were limited and were not purposefully recorded in MELA reports with the intention to highlight effective coordination and complementarity between investments.

Stakeholders' perceptions

What do stakeholders think about PACER Plus's sustainability?

'...I feel our concerns when we organise regional consultations or even workshops or meetings, our concerns and also our positions and reflections are well taken on board by the PPIU...'—

Stakeholder from Department of Labour

'...So, if I were to think about trade in general, we are looking at I'd say tourism, I'd say agriculture, fisheries. You know, so each of these groups have separate growth committees or authorities...those would be the best ways to engage with the private sector...'— **Private sector stakeholder**

'...When proposals come in, they're coming from each Ministry, and that's approved and goes into our annual plan. But then with implementation of each activity, we're always advised (by PPIU) to check with other donor partners if anybody else is doing anything on that, and then we can collaborate...'— **National coordinator**

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Ensure technical assistance and service level agreements are ongoing rather than one-off, particularly for systems like ASYCUDA that may require continued support for licencing, troubleshooting and software development. (Strategic)

Recommendation 2: Implement procedures around document management to address incomplete administrative and monitoring documentation issues. Consider how administrative support can be strengthened within the PPIU to allow better technical focus. (Operational)

Recommendation 3: Develop and implement a public diplomacy strategy to improve how the PPIP is promoted and communicated to stakeholders (Ministerial, private sector, civil society), focusing on both the agreement's benefits and specific activities undertaken under the PPIP. (Operational)

Recommendation 4: Foster stronger collaboration between Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Chambers of Commerce, and national PPIU coordinators to create a more integrated approach to private sector support, while developing a strategy to harmonise and coordinate regional and bilateral Aid for Trade and economic development programs ensuring future initiatives align with national priorities, reduce duplication, and maximise impact. (Strategic)

1.5 MELA and risk

Key Evaluation Question 3: Have the PPIP's MELA and risk management systems been fit for purpose in progressing the outcomes?

Use of the MELA system for decision making, learning and accountability

The PPIU has faced significant limitations in delivering the MELA system. Due to COVID-19 delays and the complexity of setting up the PPIU and systems, the work delivered through the PPIU has been focused on developing finance and administrative systems, as well as the piloting, testing, and iterative development of processes that are key to delivering effective MELA functions. Although many tools and resources for data collection and reporting have been created and implemented, the MELA framework implementation has lacked resourcing, coordination, and strategic management which has limited its ability to look beyond activities and outputs. This situation was largely driven by the decision at the start of the PPIU to not include MELA expertise as a core PPIU function but instead sub-contract the development of the MELA to an external firm.

Regular monitoring and evaluation executed with strong stakeholder involvement has the potential to increase the effectiveness of activities. Through the development of products from the MELA framework, it is expected that the PPIU and PACER Plus committees could identify areas for improvement and adapt strategies to better meet the needs of the countries involved. However, stakeholders who were responsible for implementation of activities highlighted that there was not clear guidance or explanation around monitoring and evaluation expectations and purpose. While national coordinators were provided with initial trainings and supported the validation of the MELA framework with national stakeholders, their involvement was limited to the coordination of data collection efforts. Likewise, stakeholders implementing activities were tangentially involved in supporting data requests but were not provided with adequate follow-up or feedback after data had been requested. Consequently, parties do not have a clear picture of progress made in their countries or outcomes that have been achieved, nor are they always incentivised to provide data.

The MELA framework should also facilitate knowledge sharing among member countries. By documenting and disseminating best practices and lessons learned, it could help countries learn from each other's experiences and improve their own implementation strategies. So far, only one learnings-centred product has been developed. The learning piece focused on two areas: private sector engagement and capacity development. Since this learning report and the first MELA report have only been recently delivered to members, it is not possible to assess if the learnings captured have been useful in supporting decision-making and adaptive management of the programme.

The products provided through the MELA framework have primarily focused on accountability, emphasising compliance with the terms of the Agreement. However, the presentation of outcome indicators in the reports does not facilitate an understanding of the success factors or the reasons behind the achievement of these indicators. For instance, outcome-level indicators such as *'PACER Plus Private Sector ROO-Tariffs/Customs Procedures training materials are available online'* do not adequately measure outcomes, as merely depositing learning materials online is an output. Similarly, for capacity-building activities, it would be more valuable to measure the application of knowledge gained rather than self-perceived changes in knowledge. Additionally, the graphs depicting changes in knowledge in the reports lack essential details such as response rates, sampling values, and response counts. This omission makes it challenging to interpret and draw meaningful conclusions about the actual value of the capacity-building activities.

Compliance reporting under the Trade Agreement is currently self-reported by member countries and primarily focuses on the existence of standards, policies, and frameworks. However, the reports do not indicate or assess whether these measures are actively implemented or whether they effectively address key issues within their respective contexts. Furthermore, the indicator reference sheets lack clarity and rigour. They do not provide disaggregated indicators or include essential elements such as implementation measures, targets, baselines, means of verification, or identifiable data sources or limitations with data. This limits the ability to monitor progress meaningfully and undermines the effectiveness of the monitoring and evaluation framework in supporting evidence-based decision-making and adaptive management.

Another critical element missing in the revised MELA documents is the inclusion of strategies to monitor the adoption and implementation of recommendations, as well as approaches to address identified challenges. It is essential not only to report recommendations but also to track the changes and strategies implemented in response to these recommendations. This added layer of accountability and transparency will enhance the effectiveness of the programme's implementation.

MELA design, tools and implementation

The MELA framework experienced significant delays in development, primarily due to its external development, poor internalisation within the PPIU, and the extensive consultations and negotiations required to get agreement from all participating countries and the Joint Committee. Several stakeholders consulted expressed that the framework was still not fit-for purpose, was not being used for effective management of the Programme and was not being implemented in a way that allowed them to easily articulate to Government officials and other stakeholders the impact and value of the PPIP, let alone the contribution of broader A4T initiatives to PACER Plus Parties. A consistent criticism was that reporting was focused on tracking expenditure levels rather than demonstrating value for money and robust evidence of progress towards the achievement of outcomes.

In the implementation of the framework the PPIU has struggled to define clear indicators, targets, and baseline data. This has led to activities being implemented with a reactive approach rather than a strategic one. Furthermore, limited resources for implementation at the national level have affected the ability to properly implement the MELA framework, including data collection synthesis and communication. For example, information gathering from countries without national coordinators or through periods when a national coordinator is not active has been challenging, affecting the ability to track progress effectively and consistently.

MELA for trade and development impact should be a shared responsibility between the PPIU and member countries. While the PPIU plays a central role in coordinating the framework,

effective implementation, particularly for high-level indicators such as changes in trade value and volume, relies heavily on the active contribution of Parties. National governments should ideally take ownership of collecting, managing, and reporting this data, as they are best positioned to ensure accuracy, consistency, and relevance to their specific trade contexts.

Stakeholders also mentioned the need to tailor the MELA framework to each country's national context. One of the participants recalled an attempt to develop a national-level MELA framework which was then discontinued. The PPIU has provided technical support to national coordinators to help them understand how to target applications effectively to align with MELA outcomes. However, there is no direct guidance or requirements through the application process around how activities should be monitored and reported to help provide evidence of effective implementation or impact of activities.

The financial year 2023/2024 marked the first full year of implementation using the revised MELA Framework. To enhance the MELA functions, the PPIU has recruited an MEL Specialist (0.6 FTE) who commenced in February 2025 for an initial six-month period. This specialist's role has been internalised, based in Samoa, providing direct access to PPIU systems and procedures, which has led to improvements in accessing information and engaging staff to prioritise MELA functions.

Additionally, the PPIU has continued its engagement with the external MELA partner, Moonshot Global. Over the past nine months (July 2024–April 2025), Moonshot Global has supported the PPIU. They have also supported the PPIU in conducting a data quality assessment of DEC programme management information. However, there has not been a clear strategy to build capacity and streamlined systems to allow the PPIU to be able to continue to undertake those functions without the external support. The external MELA partner will finalise their inputs under the current agreement in April 2025. Any further support from Moonshot Global will be task-based, addressing identified needs or technical skill shortages not covered by current staffing arrangements.

To ensure the continued effectiveness of the MELA framework, it is crucial to maintain adequate resourcing for data collection, collation, analysis, and reporting. Furthermore, increased resourcing will be necessary to roll out capacity-building support for Parties, ensuring that the programme's objectives are met and sustained and national stakeholders have the capabilities to effectively support monitoring and evaluation efforts of implemented activities.

Risk management procedures

While the PPIU has made progress in delivering technical assistance and coordinating regional trade efforts, its ability to proactively manage risks is constrained by limited financial and human resources. Current risk management practices are largely reactive, with a strong focus on implementation rather than strategic foresight. This limits the PPIU's capacity to anticipate and mitigate emerging risks related to coordination, stakeholder engagement, data systems, and political dynamics.

Several Party stakeholders anticipate that the MELA Framework will provide clear and comprehensive data on the impact that PACER Plus accession has had for their country. In effect the MELA framework focuses on the subset of activities under the DEC Work Programme and does not capture any data on the contribution of national programmes, broader Aid for Trade investments, or broader initiatives of the private sector.

Absence of a deliberate and strategic approach to coordination and collaboration leads to a risk of duplication due to multiple programmes working in the same space, leading to inefficiencies and conflicts in resource allocation. Weak coordination and communication between the PPIU and country focal points increases the risk of engaging the wrong stakeholders for specific

activities and misaligning the DEC Work Programme with a country’s evolving political economy. These gaps heighten the risk to effective delivery of the Work Programme.

Another critical aspect is the responsiveness and commitment of national stakeholders. Delays in responses can lead to activities being carried over from one financial year to the next, affecting timely implementation and increasing risk. Political instability is also a significant concern, as changes in government can disrupt the implementation of activities. For instance, changes in government can necessitate the re-approval of activities, leading to delays and heightened risk.

The MELA framework has not currently been maximised to track progress and ensure that activities are being delivered to support strategic objectives. The programme has made some recent progress in using MELA more actively, including through short-term outcome surveys and the development of knowledge products—such as the Private Sector Engagement and Capacity Development study. These efforts represent important steps toward evidence-informed decision-making. However, they need to be expanded and sustained in the next phase to support earlier identification and management of emerging risks. Additionally, there is a need for better strategic planning to ensure that activities are relevant and aligned with national priorities, which can help manage risks by ensuring effective use of resources. Effective communication with stakeholders is another crucial element for risk management. Regular updates and clear communication can help manage expectations and reduce uncertainties.

Lead Advisors are particularly constrained in performing their core strategic roles due to being overstretched with operational tasks. This situation poses a risk to the overall strategic direction of the programme, as it limits the capacity for high-level planning and prioritisation. Stakeholders also expressed concerns regarding the transparency, clarity, and consistency of the processes for proposing, reviewing, and approving activities. This lack of clarity can lead to confusion and frustration, which in turn increases the risk of miscommunication and misalignment of activities with strategic priorities. Capacity building activities—such as proposal clinics with National Focal Points and trade-related stakeholders—have helped improve understanding of how to design appropriate activities for the Work Programme and prepare stronger proposals. This, in turn, supports more informed decision-making by the JC. These clinics should be sustained in the next phase of the PPIP and complemented by ongoing dialogue between trade advisers and National Focal Points to ensure alignment with strategic priorities.

Many of these operational and strategic risks identified throughout the implementation of the programme are not currently reflected in the formal risk register. This omission limits the PPIU’s ability to proactively manage and respond to emerging challenges. To strengthen the effectiveness and resilience of the programme, there is a clear need to adopt a more comprehensive and forward-looking risk management strategy. This should include regular updates to the risk register, integration of risks related to coordination, stakeholder responsiveness, political shifts, and data limitations, and the development of mitigation plans that are aligned with both national contexts and regional priorities.

Stakeholders’ perceptions

What do stakeholders think about PACER Plus’s MELA and risk?

‘...We need to really look at in terms of, you know, the impact, because it is the questions that I’m also getting from, especially from our politicians. You know, when I talk about the PACER Plus return...and this is a question, what is the impact? ...If we can have a MELA for our national context, so we can really understand the current bill, because now I am only sharing the activities rather than the impact...’ — JC Member

‘...Coming from a background where there is stringent MEL, you have to show that you’re performing, otherwise there’s no funding...It surprised me at the beginning to not have templates, to not know your reports and what you want? Is it a narrative? Is it this? Is it that?...’— Stakeholder from Chamber of Commerce

‘...What’s more overwhelming is understanding the outcomes but not having indicators. So that has been my issue, so understanding what the outcomes are, but then have indicators that are linked to the outcomes at every level, as well as the outputs. And then have targets that we can work towards, whether they’re annual targets, but those annual targets work towards something that is more longer-term, so that we are very clear on what we’re working towards and how we’re being measured...’— Stakeholder from PPIU

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Include dedicated full-time resources for MELA implementation within the PPIU, including mapping country-specific data availability and sharing mechanisms to better monitor key trade and economic indicators in the long-term. (Operational)

Recommendation 2: Provide support to Parties so that they can better collect national data on the wider impacts of PACER Plus accession. Map country-specific data availability and sharing mechanisms to better monitor key trade and economic indicators in the long-term. This could include the integration of data at the regional level in partnership with other efforts such as the Pacific Data Hub. (Strategic)

Recommendation 3: Develop a strategy to transform and utilise monitoring and evaluation data collected to improve learning and adaptive programme management. Ensure this data is aligned to strategic public diplomacy efforts (Strategic)

Recommendation 4: Integrate in a more robust and meaningful way cross-cutting elements such as partnership development, locally led development, regional integration, gender equality, social inclusion and climate change with dedicated impact-, outcome- and output-associated indicators. (Strategic)

Recommendation 5: Refine the indicators, including clear communication in reporting around targets, baselines and means of verification. (Operational)

Recommendation 6: Improve processes, procedures and communication of the processes for proposing, reviewing, and approving activities. (Operational)

1.6 Cross-cutting elements

Key Evaluation Question 3: To what extent did the PPIP deliver results on cross-cutting design elements such as GEDSI, locally led development and climate change for PACER Plus Members?

Gender equality, disability and social inclusion

Several countries have trade policies or strategies that include significant references to GEDSI and are embedded throughout the policy rationale and implementation strategies⁴. The level of integration and prioritisation of GEDSI varies across different countries and sectors. In Niue, gender equality is not seen as a major issue, with many women holding leadership positions in government and other sectors. The focus in Niue is more on localising efforts to meet national needs. In Tonga, there is recognition of the need for gender equality, but practical implementation is often hindered by political and social dynamics. The involvement of women

⁴ See for example: *Tonga Trade Policy Framework (TTPF) 2017–2025*; *Kiribati Trade Policy Framework (TPF) 2017–2027*; *Vanuatu Trade Policy Framework Update 2019–2025*.

in business and entrepreneurial activities is highlighted as a positive aspect. Vanuatu places a strong emphasis on supporting women in business through organisations like the Chamber of Commerce and Women in Business Development Inc., which provide business plans and training to women entrepreneurs.

There is general agreement that GEDSI elements are relevant to ensure that benefits are shared equally across society. Overall, there seems to be widespread enthusiasm from Party stakeholders that the DEC Work Programme consider relevant drivers of economic exclusion be they related to gender, ethnicity, religion, remoteness, or disability. Perspectives and approaches to GEDSI however vary across members, reflecting their distinct political, cultural and social contexts. Parties view a country-led, context-sensitive approach as an appropriate and sustainable way forward. Donors can support this by facilitating dialogue and reflection, while recognising that the pace and nature of inclusion will be determined by what each party thinks is important, acceptable and viable.

The PPIU's GEDSI Strategy has been slow to develop and is still in draft form - it is possible that most Parties are not yet aware of it. Limited clarity has meant that the integration of GEDSI elements across DEC components the Parties appears to be inconsistent. In many instances, these elements are treated as secondary considerations rather than core priorities. For example, while there are attempts to mainstream GEDSI through clauses in Terms of Reference that require consultants to provide advice on gender principles, the follow-through on these initiatives is often inconsistent. GEDSI considerations often fall behind the immediate concerns of completing work and meeting traditional trade outcomes. Limited resources mean that GEDSI analysis and implementation frequently take a back seat to other country activities. In MELA reporting, GEDSI considerations are limited to reporting disaggregated numbers of participants attending capacity-building activities.

Key areas to strengthen include:

- There is a need for the PPIP to support advocacy for more balanced gender participation in Labour mobility programmes which inevitably face significant challenges in achieving gender equality due to employer preferences and competition among sending countries.
- Private sector support programmes must ensure inclusivity and promote resilience by setting criteria for businesses to demonstrate their impact on gender equality and social inclusion. Future investments should intentionally include gender equality and social inclusion components, setting specific targets and outcomes.
- Strengthening policies and legislative frameworks to support gender equality and social inclusion is crucial. This includes advocating for gender-sensitive policies and ensuring that national initiatives align with GEDSI goals.
- Enhanced advocacy promoting the value of GEDSI and ensuring it is prioritised alongside other institutional functions. Public sector agencies often face resource constraints, competing priorities, and high staff turnover. Advocacy efforts, such as trainings or raising awareness, can help sustain attention on GEDSI and encourage ongoing investment in building relevant skills across both public and private stakeholders.

Principles of locally led development

The PPIP is a regional investment that is expected to deliver significant national-level impacts, delivered through the PPIU. This generates a clear tension between favouring standardised regional approaches while maintaining the capacity to target activities to achieve locally tailored solutions. Stakeholders emphasised the need to create space in the DEC Work Programme to allow them to navigate country-specific investment needs, noting the significant

differences between Solomon Islands and other countries like Fiji and Vanuatu and even more with the smaller atoll countries like Tuvalu. While regional standardisation and harmonisation are important goals, the preamble of the Agreement acknowledges the differences in development that need to be considered in implementation.

There is strong evidence of JC members' ownership of the DEC Work Programme. JC Members highlighted the necessity for activities to be designed and implemented with significant input from local stakeholders. They view the DEC WP as a valuable tool to enhance trade readiness, improve trade conditions, and build essential skills. This view is encouraging, as it signals a shift toward country-led efforts to shape their own trade pathways. The capacity built through PPIP support is also seen as valuable for navigating the broader trade landscape beyond PACER Plus.

Applying locally led development principles is critical for ensuring the sustainability and relevance of development initiatives and to think beyond 2030, when the PPIP may end. Parties must progressively take greater responsibility for managing the PACER Plus trade agreement. Strengthening their role in the DEC Work Programme prioritisation and implementation is essential to prepare for this transition—and to avoid the risk of PACER Plus becoming another underperforming trade agreement.

However, several challenges are noted in the implementation of locally led development initiatives. These include political instability, turnover of staff, and varying levels of capacity among local stakeholders. A way forward would be aligning DEC Work Programme activities with national priorities and ensuring that there is a clear plan for how activities will be implemented and sustained over the long term. Policy alignment and stakeholder engagement are identified as a critical element for the success of locally led development. The PPIP could enable more technical support to make sure countries can conduct effective consultations and are effectively mapping country-level areas of opportunity and priority in an inclusive manner.

Climate change and resilience integration

Consulted stakeholders acknowledge the significant impact of climate change on development and the necessity of integrating climate resilience into various initiatives. There is a recognition that climate change can exacerbate social and economic inequalities, making it crucial to consider climate resilience in development programmes to ensure they are sustainable. Additionally, an increase in trade and productive capacity can lead to higher greenhouse gas emissions. This presents a unique opportunity to identify alternatives that can foster green growth and reduce fossil energy dependency, supporting the expansion of productive capacity in countries. More broadly, stakeholders in the Ministry of Trade highlighted the need to enhance their capabilities to meaningfully engage in global discussions around environmental provisions and trade. Yet a review of activities across the DEC Work Programme shows limited mainstreaming of measures that respond to climate change or resilience challenges.

Integrating climate change considerations into the PPIP activities is essential for enhancing resilience and sustainability and is a priority development issue for all PIF Countries. Several stakeholders emphasised the importance of incorporating climate change considerations into their planning and implementation processes. This includes ensuring that infrastructure development projects are designed to withstand climate-related impacts and that agricultural practices are adapted to changing climate conditions. Vanuatu, for example, is highly sensitive and exposed to disasters.

One stakeholder provided the example that labour mobility has the potential to affect disaster recovery. When visiting villages, it is common to see only children, women, and elderly people, as all the able-bodied men are part of labour mobility programmes. This example illustrates

potential trade-offs that can occur while trying to achieve multiple goals and the need to adapt recovery strategies to such changing circumstances.

Stakeholders also highlighted the need for better guidance on responding to environmental regulations around trade, climate-proofing investments, and accessing climate funds to support private sector development. Many trade opportunities and priority sectors are tied to activities that are highly vulnerable to climate change and variability, such as tourism and agriculture. Additionally, some countries are moving towards more ambitious emissions reduction targets and enforcing environmental standards on trade. Environmental trade regulations like the anti-deforestation policy from the European Union can have unintended negative implications by further limiting the capacity of smallholder farmers to meet additional traceability and compliance mechanisms without adequate support. To meet adaptation and mitigation targets, the agricultural sector must adopt climate-resilient development approaches to stay competitive in emerging high-value markets. It is essential to integrate these considerations into current and future investments and build in-country capacities to understand how to climate-proof their trade and investment strategies.

This involves aligning national policies and strategies with climate adaptation and mitigation goals and ensuring that there is a clear plan for how climate change impacts will be addressed in various sectors. Stakeholders are already working on these issues internally, but there is a need to increase public discussion and awareness about climate change and private sector development. Some participants have been exposed to training sessions focused on climate change, noting that it is cross-cutting and affects multiple development objectives.

Stakeholders also highlighted the difficulty in effectively mainstreaming climate change elements into private sector development programmes when there are already other programmes specifically focused on climate change, expressing that it can be challenging to modify interventions to include climate change elements solely based on DFATs request. For climate change to be effectively integrated, it requires deliberate design elements that directly incorporate climate change into PPIP supported activities from the onset and provisions to measure progress towards alignment with national climate strategies and plans.

Stakeholders' perceptions

What do stakeholders think about PACER Plus's cross-cutting elements?

'...When you go to those [rural or remote] villages, you will only see children and women and old people, yeah, and people with disability. So, all the strong men are now part of labour mobility programme, and that is already an issue. And then in recovery, you will need those strong people to support in our recovery [after disasters]...' — **Stakeholder from Labour Department**

'...Getting work contracted, getting people paid, the quality of their output to meet their traditional trade outcomes comes first, and then the hierarchy is like, do we have any inclusive outcomes from that input? Is this the next thing down the list? So? Well, no, it falls down the list. That was the case with the GEDSI analysis that we're trying to do. It was either doing the GEDSI analysis that none of the countries had asked for from the work plan...so it [GEDSI analysis] has consistently taken the back seat to country activities...' — **Stakeholder from PPIU**

'...We have been exposed to some trainings [about climate change and trade] and this work going on right now for the next intake, where it actually looks into infrastructure development. I think the last session was on climate change, and it's cross cutting, because it covers every other sector as well...it was a great exposure, because it actually gets you to see what is in practice in other Pacific Islands in terms of climate change ...' — **Stakeholder from Ministry of Trade**

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Ensure that GEDSI, locally led, youth skills pathways and climate change elements are core priorities rather than secondary considerations. This can be achieved by integrating these areas into the initial design of the DEC Work Programme and MELA framework. (Strategic)

Recommendation 2: Establish clear targets for effective participation and inclusion of vulnerable groups in various activities, such as improving the rules and regulations around inclusion or improving access to trade services. This includes setting measurable goals and tracking progress to ensure that GEDSI objectives are met. (Operational)

Recommendation 3: Confirm that support provided to the private always has a broader business enabling outcome aligned to a national priority (e.g GeoLab). Set criteria for businesses who receive direct support to demonstrate their impact on gender equality, youth development, social inclusion and climate change. (Operational)

Recommendation 4: Provide better guidance on accessing climate funds to support private sector development. This includes helping stakeholders navigate environmental regulations around trade and climate-proofing investments. (Strategic)

1.7 Future opportunities

Key Evaluation Question 3: What future opportunities exist for PACER Plus to drive regional economic integration (that may lead to improvements in a future investment)?

Developing an aid for trade coordination mechanism

To enhance coordination among different trade-related programmes and initiatives, it is essential for donors to develop, resource and manage a formal mechanism that brings these efforts together. This mechanism should include a centralised platform for sharing information, tracking progress, and identifying synergies between various programmes. Ideally this process should drive investment conceptualisation and not simply try to retrofit existing investments that have been developed in isolation. Beyond merely avoiding duplication, the mechanism should emphasise mapping out which programme is best positioned to support specific initiatives, ensuring that investments are complementary and build on each other. This approach will foster a more strategic and cohesive effort, maximising the impact of each programme and driving more effective outcomes.

Align with sustainable development strategies and policies

To maximise the impact of PACER Plus, it is essential to support the integration of trade and economic development within national sustainable development strategies—including those related to climate change. This integration will help ensure that trade policies and initiatives are aligned with broader national priorities, such as environmental sustainability, social inclusion, and economic resilience. By harmonising trade and development strategies with sustainable development objectives, the PPIP can help member countries achieve more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient growth.

This approach also facilitates better coordination among stakeholders, enhances the effectiveness of trade-related interventions, and ensures that investments contribute meaningfully to long-term national development goals.

To support this alignment, the DEC Work Program should include annual rapid needs assessments to ensure that PPIU support remains responsive to country-specific priorities.

These assessments will help maintain alignment with national trade, sustainable development, economic inclusion and climate change policies. They will also enable the identification of cross-cutting opportunities where multiple investments can be leveraged to unlock key trade, investment, and economic empowerment outcomes. In doing so, the PPIU can more effectively target its resources, strengthen coordination, and maximise the overall impact of the PPSP.

Enhance private sector engagement

Effective engagement with the private sector is vital for the success of the PPIP. Stakeholders recommended the PPIU work closely with chambers of commerce, exporters' associations, and manufacturers' unions to understand their needs and provide targeted support. It is also important to raise awareness about PACER Plus and ensure that private sector stakeholders understand how to leverage the agreement for their benefit. To achieve this, the programme needs to develop a robust private sector engagement strategy. In addition, enhancing regional economic integration and private sector development requires improved communication and coordination with private sector partners. This can be achieved through regular stakeholder meetings and feedback sessions, ensuring that the private sector's perspectives and needs are consistently integrated into the planning and implementation processes. By aligning training programmes with market demands, the PPIU can improve re-integration strategies and ensure that returning workers possess the skills required by the local job market. Additionally, providing more information to the service industry about the PPIP investment is vital. This includes educating service providers on how they can engage with and benefit from the support available through the PPIP. By increasing awareness and understanding of the programme, the service sector can better leverage the opportunities it offers, contributing to overall economic growth and development.

The role of the PPIP in enabling direct funding for private sector activities needs careful consideration as the PPIP is not currently resourced or structured to manage the mutual obligations inherent in best practice private sector development or market systems development approaches. As such, the PPIP should only directly fund the private sector in areas that helps demonstrate the utility of the PPIP supported core work on the enabling environment. These investments would thus be an 'exemplar' for others to follow.

Provision of strategic trade and economic development support

The PPIP has the potential to not only focus on supporting the implementation of commitments under PACER Plus (delivered through the PPIU) but also to support countries on broader trade strategies and the role of development partners in addressing various trade and investment challenges. This more strategic role can support countries in their efforts to improve standards, procedures and regulations that influence the enabling environment for trade in services and goods, drive investment, and design better provisions within labour mobility programmes to ensure inclusive sustainable development. The agendas of the Budget Committee and various subcommittees have become dominated by operational issues, limiting their role in setting, considering, and confirming strategic priorities. A future investment should emphasise the strategic and technical support that the PPIU can provide to countries.

2 Lessons Learned

What lessons are emerging from the implementation of the DEC Work Programme?

Building capacity and long-term support

Building capacity within member countries is essential for effective implementation of PACER Plus. This includes providing long-term support to key touchpoints in member countries, such as national coordinators, focal points and Ministries of Trade. Strengthening these roles will help ensure that proposals are strategic and aligned with the broader goals of PACER Plus. Additionally, embedding short-term secondments for Pacific Island professionals within the PPIU can help build relationships and enhance understanding of the agreement. Secondments of key technical specialists from Australian, New Zealand, FIC or regional agencies can also build regional networks, while increasing the capacity of PPIU to deliver more specialised capacity building. However, the experience of previous secondments highlights the need for the PPIU to contribute to the development of terms of reference and for secondments to have clear guidelines on conflict of interest, supervision, and reporting responsibilities. Secondments must also meet a specific technical or operational need.

Leveraging existing partnerships and governance mechanisms

The presence of multiple donors and programmes in the region creates congestion and coordination challenges. Rather than creating new forums, the PPIP should encourage leveraging existing platforms and partnerships to promote its objectives. This includes participating in events organised by other donor programmes and regional organisations, such as PHAMA Plus, MDF, the Pacific Community and the Pacific Islands Forum. By aligning with these initiatives, the PPIP can limit duplication and enhance coordination, ensuring that its efforts complement rather than compete with other programmes. Countries also have different market development and business coordination governance committees in which the PPIP could facilitate a more active engagement. Examples of these are the multiple sectoral Growth Committees in Tonga and the Market Access Working Groups in Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu.

Strategic direction and clear communication

From its outset the PPIP has faced challenges due to the widely differing expectations of its stakeholders, the lack of clear strategic direction, and its conflation with the broader purpose and impact of PACER Plus as a free trade agreement. The initial approach was too broad and lacked focus, leading to fragmented efforts. Moving forward, it is crucial to establish clearer boundaries and a coherent strategy that maximises the potential for the PPIP to invest in activities that contribute to the work needed to unlock key barriers for inclusive economic development. This includes consistent messaging about the benefits and opportunities provided by PACER Plus so that the private sector including small businesses can engage with the DEC Work Programme and broader A4T initiatives in a more meaningful way. This will also help frame the consultations and prioritisation of specific PPIP supported activities. Political instability and changes in government can disrupt the implementation of activities. In the process of planning and implementation of PPIP supported activities, it is important to develop contingency plans to address political changes. Part of the strategic role of the PPIU is to ensure activities are realistic and aligned with the current political and economic environment.

Appendix A Background, purpose and approach

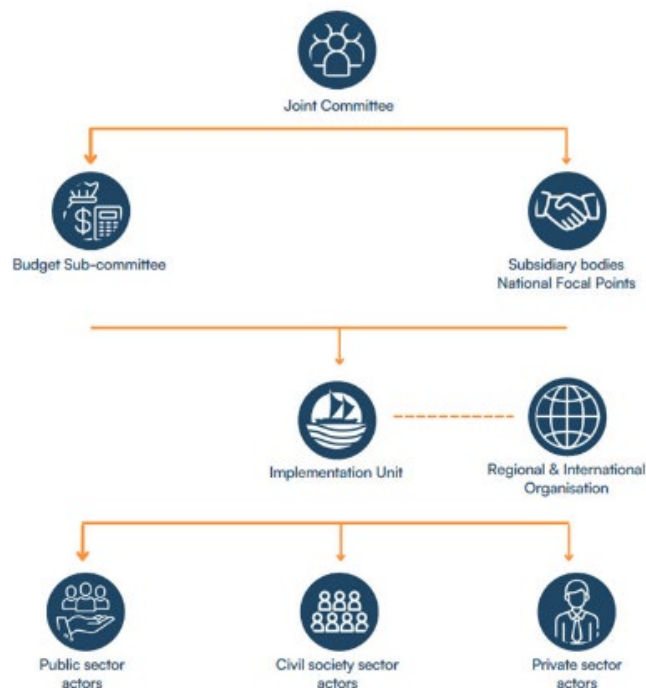
History and structure of the programme

PACER Plus is a development-focused Free Trade Agreement (FTA) designed to lower trade barriers, enhance business certainty, create jobs, raise living standards, and boost exports across the Pacific region. Aligned with World Trade Organization (WTO) standards, it establishes a predictable trading environment for goods, services and investment⁵.

Enacted on 13 December 2020, PACER Plus has been signed by Australia, Cook Islands, Kiribati, New Zealand, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Nauru has signed but has yet to ratify the agreement.

PACER Plus is owned and governed by its Signatory Members (Members), with governance arrangements set out in the Agreement. Each Member is represented by their Minister of Trade or equivalent, supported by a hierarchy of official-level committees. These governance structures are outlined in Figure 5.

Figure 5: PACER Plus Governance arrangements



Background to the evaluation

DFAT has engaged Sustineo to evaluate the success and challenges of the PPIP investment for the period from December 2020 to 31 June 2025. Findings from the evaluation will support the design of the next phase of the PPIU.

⁵ Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus | Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Evaluation purpose and approach

The purpose of the evaluation is to:

- inform the Final Investment Monitoring Report (FIMR) for the PPIP, with a focus on relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, GEDSI, risk management, and MELA
- analyse findings from the PACER Plus governance review and the broader PPIP evaluation to identify lessons, insights, and opportunities to enhance Pacific trade under PACER Plus.

The evaluation has the following two key objectives.

1. To provide accountability to stakeholders, including Australian Government decision-makers, by assessing the effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the five-year PPIP investment.
2. To assess the current implementation arrangements and future opportunities, offering analysis, options, and recommendations for a potential future iteration of PACER Plus support based on lessons learned.

The evaluation covers all activities delivered between December 2022 and June 2025.

Key evaluation questions

The following key evaluation questions (KEQs) were developed in consultation with DFAT.

Criteria	Key interview questions (KIQ), sub-questions and guidance (in <i>italics</i>)
Relevance	KEQ 1 How relevant was the PPIP to the policy and operating context?
Relevance	1a) Has the PPIP been a relevant mechanism to address Members' trade and social priorities (including any changes over the duration of the programme)? <i>Probe for mechanisms, perspectives and priorities of private sector actors and their role informing the relevance of the PPIP.</i>
Relevance	1b) Has PACER Plus supported regional economic integration? <i>Probe for mechanisms to stay informed and updated on priorities of members and Australia and New Zealand business counterparts. Probe for specific arrangements for regional integration.</i>
Relevance	1c) How compatible are the activities of PACER Plus with other related DFAT and MFAT activities and with the related activities of other donors? <i>Examples could be PHAMA Plus or Market Development Facility. For stakeholders from categories 9 to 11 probe for knowledge of other related activities they identify compatibility with and note them. Probe for specific mechanisms used to identify and address overlaps with other DFAT investments. Probe for issues around donor dependency, market distortion, over subsidies and risks associated with the small pool of private sector actors.</i>
Relevance	1d) How relevant are the qualitative and quantitative indicators for the EOPOs and IOs to the context? <i>For Category 4 and 5 Stakeholders, include probing questions around capacity to track and report against indicators. If stakeholders are not familiar with the indicators make note of that and ask follow-up question about relevant metrics to track. Probe for relevance of indicators for all categories and sizes of private sector actors and capacity to capture changes in trade in the short, medium and long-term.</i>
Relevance	1e) Are there any factors that have contributed to PPIP's relevance and adaptability? <i>Probe for specific examples in which changes or adaptations were made and in response to which challenges. Probe for examples in which adaptations have been responsive to the dynamic factors influencing the private sector (including smaller businesses), such as COVID, high freight costs, demand.</i>
Effectiveness	KEQ 2 How effective was the PPIP in achieving its intended design EOPOs and IOs? <i>If stakeholders are not familiar with the EOPOs and IOs make note of that and ask follow-up question reinstating the outcomes.</i> <i>Probe for enablers or factors that hindered effectiveness based on nature of response. Probe for scope of the outcome achievements in terms of influence between large businesses vs medium to small ones and aspiring importers and exporters.</i>
Effectiveness	2a) To what extent is the PPIP on track to achieve each EOPO?
Effectiveness	2b) What evidence is there that the DEC Work Programme effectively contributes to each IO?
Effectiveness	2c) Do these outcomes cover the notable achievements of PPIP since its inception, or are there other outcomes of note? <i>Probe for unintended consequences. Probe for tracking of underlying changes that hinder or support the capacity of the private sector to engage with the PPIP support.</i>
Effectiveness	2d) What factors do you see as major risks for the effective implementation of the PPIP? <i>For each factor probe for recommendations that can lead to the improvement of future design. Probe for logic and coherence between outcomes such as trade-offs</i>

Criteria	Key interview questions (KIQ), sub-questions and guidance (in <i>italics</i>)
	<i>between trade of good and services and labour mobility. Example: Trade-off between promoting net movement of PIC to ANZ and a shrinking workforce.</i>
Efficiency	KEQ 3 Has the PPIP made appropriate and efficient use of donor, regional, and partner resources in progressing the EOPOs?
Efficiency	3a) How efficient is the PACER Plus and the PPIU's delivery of the DEC Work Programme? <i>Clarify that this includes: The governance model including decision-making and delegated authority, and the roles, arrangements and interactions between the various subcommittees, subsidiary bodies, and national coordinators. The PPIU in their role as the Secretariat and implementers of the DEC Work Programme including their internal organisational, management and governance structures' effect on accountability, transparency, and financial sustainability (i.e., administration and financial structures and capacities, human resourcing practices, operating manuals, risk management, policies and processes etc.).</i>
Efficiency	3b) Can you think of any examples of efficiencies that the PPIU has been able to realise by complementing the DEC Work Programme to other Australian investments, and those by other partners? <i>Probe for specific examples of joint work with PHAMA Plus such as ePhyto, or work that was started by another programme and how has collaboration been enabled.</i>
Sustainability	KEQ 4 How sustainable are the outcomes of the PPIP investment for PACER Plus Members?
Sustainability	4a) To what extent has the DEC Work Programme contributed to building a stronger domestic enabling environment (i.e., improved regulation, policy, planning and decision making), including measures to support localisation and local leadership of the DEC Work Programme for Members? <i>If response is critical probe for elements that need emphasis in the re-design stage to improve sustainability of initiatives. Probe for sustainability of work with the private sector, including a more engaged role of the private sector in supporting the sustainability of programme investments and approach taken to support capacity to maintain investments.</i>
Sustainability	4b) Did the DEC Work Programme enable PACER Plus Members to leverage additional support from other bilateral and / or multilateral investments by Australia and other donors? <i>Probe for concrete measures to track resources leveraged from other stakeholders like businesses or the public sector.</i>
Sustainability	4c) Is there evidence of satisfaction and / or ownership of the priorities and results of the DEC Work Programme among Members? <i>For categories 9 to 11 re-phrase the question, to include ownership and satisfaction within respective industries and areas of engagement. For all categories, probe for what DFAT can do in a future investment to enhance the benefits. Probe for any trends in resources leveraged that can be indicative of buy-in level from stakeholders.</i>
Crosscutting elements	KEQ 5 To what extent did the PPIP deliver results on cross-cutting design elements such as GEDSI, locally led development and climate change for PACER Plus Members?
Crosscutting elements	5a) To what extent did the DEC Work Programme contribute to gender equality (GE) and women's empowerment, as well as disability equality (DE) and social inclusion? <i>Probe for specific examples, if response is negative probe for ways in which these could be addressed in future investments.</i>
Crosscutting elements	5b) Did the PPIU use GEDSI analysis to inform implementation of the DEC Work Programme and allocate appropriate budget for supporting GE and DE? <i>If response is negative probe for reasons and potential barriers. If response is positive probe for specific examples. Probe for underlying analysis that informed GEDSI work in a</i>

Criteria	Key interview questions (KIQ), sub-questions and guidance (in italics)
	<i>comprehensive way including different groups such as microenterprises, women led businesses and or businesses in remote locations.</i>
Crosscutting elements	5c) Did the PPIU adequately collect disaggregated data to monitor progress and make management decisions on outcomes for GE and DE? <i>If response is positive probe for levels of disaggregation and examples and if response is negative probe for barriers to either data collection or utilisation.</i>
Crosscutting elements	5d) To what extent did the DEC Work Programme adhered to principles of locally led development? <i>Probe for specific examples, if response is negative probe for ways in which these could be addressed in future investments.</i>
Crosscutting elements	5e) To what extent did the DEC Work Programme considered climate change in the design and implementation of activities? <i>Probe for specific examples, if response is negative probe for ways in which these could be addressed in future investments. Probe for differentiated approaches based on business sizes or capacities.</i>
Crosscutting elements	5f) How can a future investment do more to advance GEDSI outcomes for PACER Plus Members?
Future Opportunities	KEQ 6 What future opportunities exist for PACER Plus to drive regional economic integration (that may lead to improvements in a future investment)? <i>Probe for broad considerations which may include addressing trade environment, climate change, growing PACER Plus membership, leveraging digital development through digital trade considerations. Probe for changes and innovation in terms of design, governance and implementation of activities. Probe for what is the most relevant entry–point and impact potential from the perspective of the agency or organisation represented.</i>

Methodology

Our approach is consultative, participatory, and co–designed, prioritising transparency and collaboration at every stage. The team engaged directly with key stakeholder groups, fostering an open dialogue to ensure their insights and feedback are fully integrated into the process. This methodology built a shared understanding and sense of ownership, ensuring that the outcomes reflect the collective priorities and goals of all involved parties.

Key methodological limitations

Several limitations affected the evaluation methodology including:

- › Reliance on self–reported data have associated response bias, as participants may have exaggerated successes or underreported challenges in surveys and interviews.
- › Time and availability of stakeholders to participate in evaluation interviews, might have skewed the responses elicited, and resulted in selection bias, with only those individuals with available time responding to consultations and making themselves available for interviews.
- › The selection of stakeholders for consultation was organised by either Trade Ministries and or national coordinators, which could result in selection bias towards stakeholders that are more aware and or in favour of the programme.
- › In some cases, both DFAT staff and national coordinators were present in the interviews, which could compromise the capacity of stakeholders to speak openly and freely about the programme.

- › There is a risk of bias in responses if stakeholders think that unfavourable evaluations could lead to reduction in funding and support.
- › Challenges in scheduling and engaging with stakeholders from Small Island countries have resulted in data that disproportionately represents larger member states like Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.
- › Reliance on data provided by the PPIU, instead of multiple independent sources, may introduce the risk of bias and limits the robustness of the findings.

This report should therefore be read with consideration of these influencing factors, which have shaped both the available data and the conclusions drawn.

Stakeholder consultations

The below list provides details of the categories for the major stakeholder groups.

List of Consulted Stakeholders Categories

- DFAT Managers and Staff (Canberra) including the Activity Manager
- DFAT Managers and Staff (Posted)
- Other donors and agencies (MFAT, EU) and other Australian Government representatives including from the Department of Industry, Science and Resources and Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
- PPIU
- PPIU National Coordinator
- Joint Committee Members
- Sub-committee Members
- In-country Counterparts – National Government Agencies and regulatory bodies (current)
- In-country counterparts – Industry leaders and the private sector
- In-country counterparts – civil society leaders
- Informed third parties – other development programmes or academics associated with the PPIP

The full stakeholder list of key PPIP stakeholders is included in Appendix F. The names of stakeholders included in the list correspond to those who agreed for their names to be included in this report.

Appendix B Programme logic

The goal, objectives and planned outcomes of the PPIP are set out below.

Goal: That participants use PACER Plus trade, investment and development / economic cooperation opportunities for inclusive economic development.

Objective: Enhanced trade capacity of public / private actors in PACER Plus Members translates into increased participation in, and benefits from, global and regional trade and investment opportunities.

End-of-programme outcomes (EOPOs)

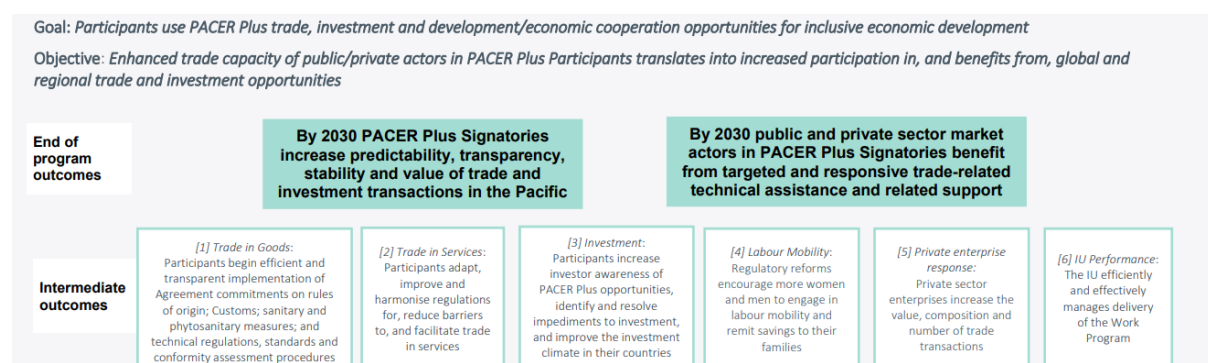
- *EOPO 1:* By 2030 PACER Plus Participants will increase the predictability, transparency, stability and value of trade and investment transactions in the Pacific Region.
- *EOPO 2:* By 2030 public and private sector market actors in PACER Plus Participants benefit from targeted and responsive trade-related technical assistance and related support.

Intermediate outcomes (IOs)

- *IO1: Trade in goods:* Participants begin efficient and transparent implementation of Agreement commitments on rules of origin; Customs; sanitary and phytosanitary measures; and technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedure.
- *IO2: Trade in services:* Participants adapt, improve and harmonise regulations for, reduce barriers to, and facilitate trade in services.
- *IO3: Investment:* Participants increase investor awareness of PACER Plus opportunities, identify and resolve impediments to investment, and improve the investment climate, in their countries.
- *IO4: Labour mobility:* Regulatory reforms encourage more women and men to engage in labour mobility and remit savings to their families.
- *IO5: Private enterprise response:* Private sector enterprises increase the value, composition and number of trade transactions.
- *IO6: PPIU Performance:* The PPIU efficiently and effectively manages delivery of the DEC Work Programme.

The development of a coherent Theory of Change (TOC) and its associated Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Adaptation (MELA) framework has been a gradual process. Earlier in 2025, the PPIU conceptualised how these outcomes are expected to drive change.

Figure 6: PACER Plus Implementation Package Theory of Change



Source: Draft PPIU MELA Framework 2025

Appendix C Consultations with stakeholders

Table 4: List of Stakeholders consulted during the evaluation

Name	Position	Organisation
Nicholas Saundersson	Trade Negotiators	DFAT, Solomon Islands
Emily Flahive	Trade Negotiators	DFAT, Solomon Islands
William Rowell	Trade Negotiators	DFAT, Solomon Islands
Alison Gow	Economic Development	DFAT, Tonga
Kalepi Baba	Economic Development	DFAT, Tonga
Cameron Reid	Director Governance for Growth	DFAT, Vanuatu
Zachary Lombardo	First Secretary	DFAT, Vanuatu
Luke Marston	Design and Development Adviser	PPIU
Ida Tifitifi Fuimaono	Executive Governance Coordinator	PPIU
Alastair Molioo	Programme Accountant	PPIU
Roy Lagolago	Head of PPIU	PPIU
Dr. Alisi Holani	ALM, TiS, and Investments Adviser	PPIU
Wame Valentine	Communications	PPIU
Alipate Tavo	Trade Adviser	PPIU
Laisinia Tugaga	Operations	PPIU
Ofusina Toamua	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learnings	PPIU
Tristein Zutu	National Coordinator	PPIU
Fofonga Ola Kivalu	National Coordinator	PPIU
Henry Tunupopo	Assistant Chief Executive Officer, Trade Division	MFAT, Samoa
Maselino Enoka	Officer	MFAT, Samoa
Theresa Penn	Officer	MFAT, Samoa
Olivier Fernandez	Owner, Vanuatu	Gaston Chocolate
Michael Louze	Owner, Vanuatu	Kava exporting business
Kimi Afeaki	Owner, Tonga	Tinopai Farm
Jennifer Bogiss	CEO, New Zealand / Tonga	Heilala Vanilla
Phoebe Preuss	Owner, Australia / Samoa	Living Koko
Dr Seuseu Tauati	CEO, Principal Biosecurity Officer	Samoa Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
Jacinta Matulino	Assistant Chief Executive Officer, Investment Promotion and Industry Development	Samoa Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour
Hermine Raeli McCarthy	Assistant Chief Executive Officer, Policy Planning and Project Management	Samoa Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour
Max Leelo	Principal Officer, Fair Trading and Codex	Samoa Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour
Cedrela Tamati	Assistant Chief Executive Officer, Industrial Relations, Employment	Samoa Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour

Name	Position	Organisation
	Permit, Occupational Safety and Health	
Talaitupu Lia	CEO	Samoa Ministry of Customs and Revenue
Lealataua Sophia Laifai-Oloapu	Deputy CEO	Samoa Ministry of Customs and Revenue
Venus Tupai	Assistant Chief Executive Officer	Samoa Ministry of Finance, Labour & Employment Export Programme
Keity Tuiloma	Principal Officer	Samoa Ministry of Finance, Labour & Employment Export Programme
Kitiona Pogi	Acting CEO	Samoa Tourism Authority
Tracy Ling-Warren	Manager (Policy)	Samoa Tourism Authority
Kaitye Tuiloma, Venus Tupai	Senior Policy Officer and Manager	Samoa Ministry of Finance Labour and Employment Export Programme
Christina Marau	Director Labour Mobility	Solomon Islands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade
Jhon Lagi	Deputy Comptroller, Customs and Excise Division	Solomon Islands Ministry of Finance and Treasury
Jean Eroa	Director Agriculture, Biosecurity Division	Solomon Islands Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock
Jaime Reibel	Team Leader	Strongim Bisnis
Lynette Dawheya	Director (Foreign Investment), Foreign Investment Division	Solomon Islands Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour, Immigration
James Dolarii	CEO	Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce
Joe Pakoa Lui	Director	Vanuatu Department of External Trade
Murielle Meltenoven	Commissioner	Vanuatu Department of Labour
Raymond Vuti	CEO	Vanuatu Foreign Investment and Promotion Agency
Joanna Spencer	Acting GM	Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce
Michael Ligo	Director	Vanuatu Department of Customs
Suitoni Tupou	Head of Quarantine	Tonga Ministry of Agriculture
Peioneti Lui	Senior Agriculture Officer	Tonga Ministry of Agriculture
Malina Malolo	Principal Agriculture Officer	Tonga Ministry of Agriculture
Savia Atuekaho	Head of Food Division	Tonga Ministry of Agriculture
Sam Vea	President	Tonga Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Natilima Tupou	Secretary	Tonga Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Name	Position	Organisation
Alifeleti Lynch	Acting Deputy CEO, Trade Division	Tonga Ministry of Revenue and Customs
Aytron Tatui	Head of Economic Development, Planning and Trade	Niue Ministry of Finance and Planning
Frank Sioneholo	Head of Economics Planning and Trade	Niue Ministry of Finance and Planning
Mr Afaaso Aperamo	Director (Business and Investment)	Government of Tuvalu
Angoango Fakaua	Senior Trade Officer	Kiribati Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Cooperatives
Tendai Gumbe	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learnings	Moonshot Global
Stephen Musubire	Trade Adviser	SPIRIT Project EU
Maile Tu-itavueka	Former National Coordinator and Business Advisor	Tonga Market Development Facility

Joint Committee

Name	Position	Organisation
Natalia Patternot	Director and JC member	Solomon Islands Ministry of Foreign Affairs & External Trade (JC Member)
Distaquaine Tuihalamaka	CEO and Contact Point for JC	Tonga Ministry of Trade and Economic Development (JC Member)
Kathleen Walters	Senior Policy Analyst–Trade Negotiation and Facilitation Division and JC member	Tonga Ministry of Trade and Economic Development (JC Members)
Kolotia Fotu	Deputy CEO, Labour Division and JC member	Tonga Ministry of Trade and Economic Development (JC Members)
Poinisetia Paongo	Deputy CEO, Business Registry, Investment and Intellectual Property Division and JC Member	Tonga Ministry of Trade and Economic Development (JC Members)
Sandra Fifita	Deputy CEO, Consumer Awareness Division and JC member	Tonga Ministry of Trade and Economic Development (JC Members)
Pauline Siasau	Deputy CEO, Business Support Division and JC member	Tonga Ministry of Trade and Economic Development (JC Members)

Appendix D List of documents that informed the evaluation

Document category	Document name	Key takeaways	Relevant key evaluation questions
Members' trade policies	Cook Islands Trade Policy Framework 2015	This was the national trade framework, or policy for Members.	KEQ 1 – Relevance; and KEQ 6 – Future opportunities
Members' trade policies	Kiribati Trade Policy Framework 2017–2027	This was the national trade framework, or policy for Members.	KEQ 1 – Relevance; and KEQ 6 – Future opportunities
Members' trade policies	Niue Trade Policy Framework 2016	This was the national trade framework, or policy for Members.	KEQ 1 – Relevance; and KEQ 6 – Future opportunities
Members' trade policies	Samoa Trade Policy	This was the national trade framework, or policy for Members.	KEQ 1 – Relevance; and KEQ 6 – Future opportunities
Members' trade policies	Solomon Islands Trade Policy Framework	This was the national trade framework, or policy for Members.	KEQ 1 – Relevance; and KEQ 6 – Future opportunities
Members' trade policies	Tonga Trade Policy Framework 2017–2025	This was the national trade framework, or policy for Members.	KEQ 1 – Relevance; and KEQ 6 – Future opportunities
Members' trade policies	Tuvalu National Trade Development Strategy 2022–2026	This was the national trade framework, or policy for Members.	KEQ 1 – Relevance; and KEQ 6 – Future opportunities
Members' trade policies	Vanuatu Trade Policy Framework 2012	This was the national trade framework, or policy for Members.	KEQ 1 – Relevance; and KEQ 6 – Future opportunities
Members' trade policies	Vanuatu Trade Policy Framework Update	This was the national trade framework, or policy for Members.	KEQ 1 – Relevance; and KEQ 6 – Future opportunities
PACER Plus design documents	PACER Plus Agreement	This is the legal agreement of PACER Plus.	Background
PACER Plus design documents	PACER Plus Implementation Package Design	The Package Design outlines DFAT's plans to deliver PACER Plus and potential risks. It also discusses the relevance of PACER Plus to the region's needs.	KEQ 1 – Relevance
PACER Plus design documents	PACER Plus Implementation Package Investment Concept Note	This is PPIU's Concept Note as of 2019. It includes an overview of the regional context, and the	KEQ 1 – Relevance

Document category	Document name	Key takeaways	Relevant key evaluation questions
		rationale for why Australia should invest in PACER Plus.	
PACER Plus design documents	Implementing Arrangement for Development and Economic Cooperation Under the PACER Plus	This includes a Pacific countries' trade-related assessment. It details the specific assistance for the Pacific members under each of the six PPIU component.	KEQ 1 – Relevance; and KEQ 6 – Future opportunities
PACER Plus design documents	DEC Work Programme	High-level goal of each PACER Plus component for each financial year between 2021–22 to 2024–25	n/a
PACER Plus design documents	PACER Plus Development and Economic Cooperation Work Programme	This document provides information on the management structure of the PPIU. It outlines the assistance provided for each member country, and outcomes of implemented activities.	Background
PACER Plus design documents	Arrangement on Labour Mobility	Arrangement to strengthen Pacific labour mobility cooperation between the Governments of PACER Plus.	Background
PACER Plus design documents	Presentation: PACER Plus Proposal Planning and Development Clinic (September 2023)	The presentation outlines some pre-empted challenges and opportunities of PACER Plus. It provides recommendations on how PACER Plus can incorporate GEDSI.	KEQ 5 – Cross-cutting
PACER Plus design documents	GEDSI Strategy	The Strategy summarises PACER Plus' GEDSI plan and provides an indicative GEDSI Workplan for the PPIU between 2021–2025.	KEQ 5 – Cross-cutting
PACER Plus design documents	Joint Committee Rules of Procedure	Terms of Reference (TOR) of PACER Plus Subsidiary	Background
PACER Plus design documents	Budget Committee TOR	TOR of PACER Plus Subsidiary	Background
PACER Plus design documents	TOR for the Committee on Trade in Goods, Rules of Origin and Customs Procedures	TOR of PACER Plus Subsidiary	Background

Document category	Document name	Key takeaways	Relevant key evaluation questions
PACER Plus design documents	TOR for the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and Technical Barriers to Trade	TOR of PACER Plus Subsidiary	Background
PACER Plus design documents	TOR for the Labour Mobility Working Group	TOR of PACER Plus Subsidiary	Background
PACER Plus design documents	TOR for the Committee on Trade in Services, Movement of Natural Persons and Investment (and Sub-Working Groups for TiS and MNP and Investment)	TOR of PACER Plus Subsidiary	Background
MELA Policies	DFAT Design and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Standards	DFAT's requirements for MELA	Background
MELA Policies	PACER Plus MELA Framework	The Framework outlines the PACER Plus Programme Logic, including intermediate outcome, short-term outcomes and outputs.	Background
Investment Monitoring Reports	Internal Annual Investment Monitoring Report 2022	The report includes ratings and a review of PPIU activities in 2022 with regards to effectiveness, efficiency, gender equality, disability, and risk and safeguard	All KEQs
Investment Monitoring Reports	Internal Annual Investment Monitoring Report 2023	The report includes ratings and a review of PPIU activities in 2023 with regards to effectiveness, efficiency, gender equality, disability, and risk and safeguard	All KEQs
Investment Monitoring Reports	Internal Annual Investment Monitoring Report 2024	The report includes ratings and a review of PPIU activities in 2024 with regards to effectiveness, efficiency, gender equality, disability, and risk and safeguard	All KEQs
PPIU Annual and Six-monthly Reports	PPIU Annual Report 2021–22	A yearly snapshot of activities and priorities. The report includes an assessment of the PPIU's GEDSI and risk management progress.	All KEQs

Document category	Document name	Key takeaways	Relevant key evaluation questions
PPIU Annual and Six-monthly Reports	PPIU Annual Report 2022–23	A yearly snapshot of activities and priorities. The report includes an assessment of the PPIU’s GEDSI and risk management progress.	All KEQs
PPIU Annual and Six-monthly Reports	PPIU MELA Report (July 2023 – June 2024)	The reports details of outputs delivered by the PPIU against the short-term outcomes articulated in the MELA Framework. Initial findings against the intermediate-term outcomes are also described, however the evidence towards these outcomes will only fully be known at least within 5–10 years of PACER Plus entry into force.	All KEQs
PPIU Annual and Six-monthly Reports	PACER Plus Six-Monthly Report Jul–Dec 2024	A six-monthly snapshot of activities and priorities. The report includes an assessment of the PPIU’s GEDSI and risk management progress. The report also provides a list of PACER Plus activities between July–December 2024.	All KEQs
PPIU Annual and Six-monthly Reports	PPIU Comprehensive Due Diligence (Draft for Discussion)	An assessment of organisational capacity based on financial information as of 30 June 2023. Specifically, the assessment focuses on these aspects: Risk assessment and safeguards; Financial viability; Results and Performance Management; Value for money	KEQ 3 – Efficiency
PPIU Design, Implementation, and Arrangements	PPIU Constitution and Implementing Arrangement for the Development and Economic Cooperation (DEC) Work Programme	This document governs PPIU’s actions and its governance and accountability processes at a high level (e.g., PPIU reports to Joint Committee).	Background
PPIU Design, Implementation, and Arrangements	PPIU and Samoa Host Country Arrangement	Agreement between PPIU and Samoa in the establishment of PPIU as an independent organisation.	Background
PPIU Design, Implementation, and Arrangements	PPIU Operations Manual	The Manual provides the background to PPIU’s governance, authority, key personnels	Background

Document category	Document name	Key takeaways	Relevant key evaluation questions
PPIU Design, Implementation, and Arrangements	Post-2025 Strategic Priorities for the Labour Mobility Work Programme	The document describes the proposed strategic priority, justification and anticipated impact for the labour mobility programme administered by PPIU between 2026-2030.	KEQ 1 – Relevance
PPIU Design, Implementation, and Arrangements	PPIU GEDSI Plan	PPIU GEDSI Action Plan	KEQ 5 – Cross-cutting
Recent reviews and assessments	General Review of PACER Plus (2024)	Some key findings of the Review include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is evidence of indirect gains of PACER Plus for Parties but not so much direct gains • The implementation of PACER Plus is progressing well. • Absorptive capacity constraints are the key challenge for implementation. • PPIU is seen as generally responsive and helpful in delivering the DEC Work Programme. 	All KEQs
Recent reviews and assessments	Presentation: PACER Plus Overview	This presentation by MFAT includes key statistics of New Zealand trade with Pacific members during PACER Plus.	KEQ 1 – Relevance, and KEQ 2 – Effectiveness
Recent reviews and assessments	PACER Plus 7th Joint Committee Adopted Outcomes Summary – May 2024	The document summarises key outcomes adopted from the 7th Joint Committee.	Background
Recent reviews and assessments	Revised Draft PACER+ GEDSI Analysis	The analysis examines the anticipated impacts of implementing PACER Plus on GEDSI, and provides recommendations for key GEDSI indicators for MELA.	KEQ 5 – Cross-cutting
Recent reviews and assessments	Inception Report to the Independent Corporate Assessment of the PPIU (Prepared by KPMG)	The report provides the background, scope of work and timeline of the Independent Corporate Review.	Background
Recent reviews and assessments	Independent Corporate Assessment of the PPIU (Prepared by KPMG)	The Assessment outlines key recommendations to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of PACER	KEQ 3 – Efficiency

Document category	Document name	Key takeaways	Relevant key evaluation questions
		Plus' organisational structure. It also includes a review of the PPIU Operations Manual.	
Recent reviews and assessments	360 Feedback Survey Report	360 Feedback on PPIU Head, Roy Lagolago	Background
Recent reviews and assessments	Performance Self Evaluation of Head of PPIU (2023–24)	Self-evaluation of PPIU Head, Roy Lagolago	Background
Recent reviews and assessments	Performance Self Evaluation of Head of PPIU (2021–23)	Self-evaluation of PPIU Head, Roy Lagolago	Background
Recent reviews and assessments	Performance Assessment Consolidated Report 2023–2024	Performance assessment of PPIU Head, Roy Lagolago	Background
Recent reviews and assessments	Performance Assessment Consolidated Report 2021–2023	Performance assessment of PPIU Head, Roy Lagolago	Background
Recent reviews and assessments	PACER Plus Framework Indicator Reference Sheets (as of October)	Review by Moonshot Global of progress against PACER Plus indicators (Not complete)	All KEQs
PPIU Activities and Plans	PPIU Financial Statement for the year ended 30 June 2024	PPIU's financial statement in FY2023–24	KEQ 3 – Efficiency
PPIU Activities and Plans	PPIU Financial Report for the 8 months ended 28 February 2025	PPIU's financial statement between July 2024 – February 2025	KEQ 3 – Efficiency
PPIU Activities and Plans	Report on MELA Outcomes 2025	The report describes the progress of each member country against the immediate and short-term outcomes of each PACER Plus subsidiary. It also outlines the key challenges and recommendations.	KEQ 2 – Effectiveness KEQ 5 – Cross-cutting
PPIU Activities and Plans	PACER Plus Learning Agenda Report: Private Sector Engagement and Capacity Development Study 2025	This report combines findings from two learning exercises conducted under the PACER Plus. First was the Private Sector Engagement Study, to assess the extent to which the private sector derived benefits from PACER Plus supported activities and identify measures to deepen PACER Plus engagement with the private sector. Second was the Capacity Development Study, to identify	All KEQs

Document category	Document name	Key takeaways	Relevant key evaluation questions
		effective approaches and modalities adopted in the design and delivery of PACER Plus capacity development activities	
PPIU Activities and Plans	PPIU Annual Plan FY 2024–2025	Annual Plan and Budget FY 2024–2025	Background
PPIU Activities and Plans	Capacity Building Master Spreadsheet	The spreadsheet includes the number of participants across workshops in FY 2023–24.	Background
PPIU Activities and Plans	Master Knowledge Level	Summary of data from pre- and post-workshop knowledge surveys.	KEQ 2 – Effectiveness
PPIU Activities and Plans	PACER Plus Data Quality Assessment Report (March 2025)	Moonshot Global’s audit on the completeness of information on the PPIU SharePoint	KEQ 3 – Efficiency
Other documents	One Region, One Family, One Future: Deepening relations with the Pacific nations through trade (Prepared by the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia)	This report outlines the role Australia may be able to play in the region, through improved and more open trade relations with Pacific nations.	KEQ 1 – Relevance KEQ 6 – Future opportunities
Other documents	PACER Plus Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA): Final Report (Prepared by the University of Adelaide)	The RNA identifies the most common and highest priority needs of the Pacific Island Countries under PACER Plus.	KEQ 1 – Relevance KEQ 6 – Future opportunities
Other documents	PHAMA Plus’ PACER Plus Engagement Strategy	The Engagement Strategy defines a process by which the PHAMA Plus Programme will provide support to Small Island States that are signatories to the PACER Plus Agreement.	KEQ 1 – Relevance