

Mekong Thought Leadership and Think Tanks Program Mid-term Evaluation Report
Management Response to Midterm Evaluation Recommendations

No.	Key Issue	MTE's Recommendations	Implementing Partner's Management Response	DFAT Management Response
1	<p>The focus on research-policy interfaces being robust and inclusive that is expressed in the EOPO statement is relevant and appropriate.</p> <p>However, the EOPO indicators might need to be restructured to focus on policy interfaces, to avoid some ambiguity as to whether the focus is on policy interfaces or policy outcomes.</p>	<p>The EOPO indicators should be restructured to represent the commitment to these interfaces being robust and inclusive. Doing so requires clear explanations of what is meant by policy interfaces, and in what ways such interfaces might be considered robust and inclusive.</p>	<p>Agree.</p> <p>The program acknowledges that its focus on robust and inclusive research-policy interface is highly valued. To further improve the program EOPO, we will review EOPO indicators, ensuring alignment with policy interface focus. Where appropriate, new/revised indicators will be reflected in the program MEL framework and plan, subject to DFAT's consideration and approval.</p>	<p>Agree.</p> <p>DFAT will work with SEI to review indicators and ensure these are fit for purpose. DFAT will task SEI to update its MEL framework and plan by first quarter of 2025.</p>
2	<p>The MTT Program has been successful in building a coalition of diverse KBPIO partners across the countries of the Mekong region.</p> <p>It is essential the program is framed in such a way as to allow for viable policy entry points, and that they have the necessary technical and managerial capacities.</p>	<p>The MTT program should plan future activities to continually enhance the necessary capacities for the KBPIOs to engage in research-policy interfaces more effectively beyond considering the experience of the alliance members and lessons from project implementation.</p>	<p>Agree.</p> <p>Experience of the alliance members and lessons from project implementation will be taken into consideration into the design of our future activities, including capacity-building capacity for KBPIOs, regional policy forum and other knowledge sharing platforms.</p>	<p>Agree.</p> <p>DFAT will task SEI to assess capacity gaps of KBPIOs in engaging with research-policy interfaces and implement necessary capacity building interventions to address gaps.</p>
3	<p>The framing of the MTT program around the Water-Energy-Climate (WEC) nexus has been a core organising principle for the program in responding to the DFAT MAP-WEC's call, but the long-term traction for this framing might require re-evaluation.</p>	<p>Beyond the current program, the MTT program and partners should consider alternative framings that might prove to be more effective, for example, focusing on climate change and water, and perhaps placing centre stage commitments to issues of equity.</p>	<p>Agree.</p> <p>We will consult this with DFAT personnel, including their Performance and Quality Adviser, PSC and alliance members on the WEC nexus, and refine our approach to this focus.</p>	<p>Agree.</p> <p>DFAT will discuss with SEI on the appropriate framing of ongoing programs with due consideration of Australia's international development policies and MAP priorities. DFAT will consider current and emerging policy approaches to determine the framing of future activities.</p>

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4	The strong coalition of core implementing partners, and the growing membership of the network and alliance provide an important platform for long-term support to evidence-based policy making in the region.	In the remaining period of the program, it will be important for the MTT to continue refining its strategy for Alliance members, together, including FS&RR implementing partners, to maximise the networking and collaboration opportunities through Alliance Meetings, Regional Policy Fora, National Policy Workshops, etc., while allowing for some degree of experimentation in appropriate approaches and formats, drawing on the experience of the FS and RR projects, and the capacity among the MTT Fellows.	<p>Agree.</p> <p>A refined strategy for event implementation will be developed, incorporating lessons from FS and RR projects, with room for experimentation in format and approach. This will be reflected in the upcoming event design.</p> <p>(This is also linked to Recommendation 2).</p>	<p>Agree.</p> <p>DFAT will task SEI to refine its strategies in organising future networking and collaborative events. DFAT will also task SEI to develop a document outlining what it will do to ensure the platforms and processes that it has established will continually be utilised in the future.</p>
5	The FS and RR projects are central to the MTT Program's overall strategy. The MTT Program has been successful in providing sub-grants to 4 Flagship Studies and 7 Rapid Response projects that are addressing policy issues that are relevant and have potential for impact.	In order to capture and synthesise learning within and across these projects, the MTT program team needs to provide more support to their implementation. This also will require more direct engagement from the GEDSI technical advisors. It is recognised that such a shift has cost implications that the MTT program will need to address considering available resources.	<p>Agree.</p> <p>We will provide more support to the project grantees at the realistic level considering our available resources. We will however not engage in the project implementation ourselves as we would like to ensure that our grantees and partners have full ownership and their lead the activities (with our support).</p> <p>At this stage, we are planning advisory supporting mechanism: MTT advisors to be assigned to have regular meetings and provide inputs to the FS&RR implementation, with engagement from GEDSI advisors. This aims at maximizing grants' potential impacts, toward alignment with MTT objectives. The National Policy Workshop in Vietnam is being planned as a pilot country</p>	<p>Agree.</p> <p>DFAT will continue to provide technical assistance to SEI, with the help of the MAP MEL and GEDSI advisers. DFAT will discuss with SEI to ensure advice provided to research grantees, fellows, and partners are context-relevant and proportionate to each partners' capabilities.</p>

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			(considering highest number of grantees), to enhance cross-organizational learning and grantees' networking with respective national policy agencies.	
6	The MTT Program has made very significant contributions to understanding the linkages between the WEC nexus and GEDSI and has clearly built capacity of partner organisations that is much appreciated.	The GEDSI strategy should further consider how research processes can support more meaningful engagement and ownership according to gender and disability, and intersectionalities of poverty, marginalisation and vulnerability. Policy recommendations emerging from the FS and RR projects should be GEDSI-proofed as an integral part of disseminating lessons and findings.	<p>Agree.</p> <p>GEDSI strategy is a living document. It is continuously improved to reflect ongoing program and its granting portfolio implementation, challenges and emerging opportunities. It aims at providing practical recommendations for inclusivity of our collective efforts for influencing policies.</p> <p>MTT program continues providing training and technical supports on GEDSI integration at project level. In addition to that, the program will continue engaging with project GEDSI focal points to deliver support effectively while facilitating opportunities to exchange knowledge and experience among project's GEDSI focal points. MTT GEDSI team will review the policy recommendations emerging from the FS and RR projects to ensure they are GEDSI proofed.</p>	<p>Agree.</p> <p>DFAT will task SEI to develop a GEDSI work plan to strengthen GEDSI mainstreaming within the remaining program duration, including reviewing and updating the GEDSI strategy, as necessary.</p>
7	Knowledge co-production is also fundamental to the overall strategy of the MTT Program as a mechanism for ensuring buy-in from policy actors as well as representation from marginalised groups.	MTT Program Component 2 in cooperation with Component 3 should include developing strategic guidance and building capacity on knowledge co-production processes to be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of	<p>Agree.</p> <p>We have recently organised the Workshop on Inclusive Knowledge Co-Production for impact, as part of the MTT collaborative space event,</p>	<p>Agree.</p> <p>DFAT will task SEI to develop, implement, and monitor guidance and capacity support to partners on inclusive knowledge co-production.</p>

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		vulnerable, marginalised and at-risk peoples.	<p>10 October 2024. This workshop is specifically customised to improve knowledge co-production activities of FS & RR implementing partners, taking into account the findings from MTE field visits and interviews with these grantees.</p> <p>The process and results of this workshop will be synthesized into guidance notes to be disseminated to MTT FS & Rapid Response, fellowship grantees.</p>	
8	The MTT Program is generating lessons on policy influence and has a commitment in Component 3 to move beyond dialogues. Current strategies to influence and engage in policy processes in FS and RR projects are somewhat limited in scope.	<p>Components 3 and Component 1 are in a strong position to provide additional support across the Flagship Studies and Rapid Response projects under Component 2 to develop policy-oriented strategies, and to strengthen their effectiveness.</p> <p>In addition, Component 3 should pursue more comprehensive assessment of national and policy landscapes to identify appropriate entry points and framings, while steering dialogue activities towards specific policy areas.</p>	<p>Agree.</p> <p>Same as recommendation no. 5. The learning from these activities will be incorporated into our design and mechanism of future regional policy fora, among other strategic events and activities.</p> <p>MTT Program is facilitating country-level policy dialogue, the pilot case will be Vietnam policy dialogue, considering that most supported MTT projects engage with Vietnam national and subnational policy processes. The program will learn from this first country-level policy dialogue to guide how we may further apply to other events or at regional level if additional resources are available.</p>	<p>Agree.</p> <p>DFAT will task SEI to develop a document outlining effective research-policy pathway models, based on the project's experience, that can guide future research activities and/or similar initiatives. DFAT will also explore opportunities where research findings can be shared to support evidence-based policymaking.</p>
9	The delays in the program are recognised by the MTT Secretariat, SEI and DFAT and can be seen as indication	The MTT Secretariat should continue to monitor progress carefully and assess the need for a no-cost extension beyond	<p>Agree.</p> <p>Progress will be closely monitored to ensure timely deliverables of the</p>	<p>Agree.</p> <p>Given the progress in program implementation, DFAT has discussed</p>

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	of the complexity of the program. Addressing these challenges can also be seen as a significant achievement of the MTT Secretariat that puts the program in a strong position for future engagement.	the current end of program date of October 2025.	grants. Approaching the final year of MTT implementation, we shall revisit and assess our progress, including grantees' delivery, against program workplan, to determine the timeframe of the program extension. We will consult with the PSC and DFAT for consideration and approval as appropriate.	extension options with SEI. DFAT has tasked SEI to review achievements toward EOPOs, remaining activities to be completed, and budget status to better inform decisions related to extension requests.
10	The MTT Program has established a strong network and alliance of partner organisations across the Mekong region and established the management structures and processes for leading and coordinating such an ambitious program. The MTT program has established momentum and is now creating a regional platform for alliances across KBPIOs and state boundary partners.	Decisions on future funding should be made well in advance of the planned closure of the MTT program. Given the ambitions of the MTT program and the widely identified challenges associated with strengthening evidence-based policy processes in the Mekong region, future funding should consider the potential for long-term engagement.	<p>Agree. We take note on the positive feedback on the current achievement of the MTT Alliance.</p> <p>The recommendations on continue seeking investment for the Alliance activities beyond program cycle are appreciated and considered for our planning of future funding and supports.</p> <p>The program team will develop sustainability plan in consultations with the relevant stakeholders in 2025.</p>	<p>Agree. DFAT has tasked SEI to develop its sustainability plan/exit strategy.</p>