

strategic development group



FINAL EVALUATION REPORT - DFAT

Nabilan Phase III Mid-Term Review

Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Nabilan program is Australia's flagship initiative addressing violence against women and children (VAWC) in Timor-Leste, delivered in partnership with implementing agency, The Asia Foundation (TAF). Commencing in 2014, Nabilan seeks to take a comprehensive and evidence-based approach to addressing VAWC. Representing a bilateral commitment to resource and implement core components of the ten-year Timor-Leste National Action Plan for Gender-Based Violence (NAP-GBV) 2022-2032, Nabilan's official government partners are the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI) and the Secretary of State for Equality and Inclusion (SEI).

Implementing partner TAF provides grants funding and technical support to 10 civil society organisation (CSO) partners, while working directly with MSSI and SEI. The program combines support for essential service delivery for women and children experiencing violence, community-based prevention initiatives aimed at transforming harmful gender norms, and systems change through policy influence and implementation, social work sector professionalisation, and feminist movement-building. Nabilan also regularly generates and disseminates evidence, supporting national research as well as undertaking programmatic evaluation.

Currently midway through Phase III (July 2022–June 2026), the program seeks to build on the successes of its previous phases. Phase III has seen a focus on maturing, testing and expanding the portfolio of prevention interventions while improving the quality of essential services to improve appropriateness, efficacy and safety for women and child clients. During Phase III, Nabilan has also increased its focus on violence against children (VAC) and has laid the groundwork for deepening its responsiveness to women with disabilities. The program is anticipated to be extended to a Phase IV (July 2026–June 2030).

Nabilan's current **End of Program Outcomes (EOPOs)** are:

- EOPO1 (Services): Women and children experiencing violence are supported with consistently high-quality services
- EOPO2 (Prevention): Individuals, communities, and institutions act to prevent violence against women and children

Purpose, Scope and Approach of the Mid-Term Review

The purpose of this Mid-Term Review (MTR) is to assess the progress of Nabilan Phase III against its objectives and identify opportunities to enhance its impact, effectiveness, and sustainability. The review provides an evidence base to inform decisions on program adjustments for the remainder of Phase III and the design of Phase IV (2026–2030). The MTR also ensures accountability to DFAT, government stakeholders, program partners, and communities who stand to benefit from Nabilan.

A strategic investment-level evaluation, the MTR's scope includes:

- Evaluating the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of the program.
- Assessing progress against the program's Mid-Term and End-of-Program Outcomes and identifying key enablers and barriers.
- Offering actionable recommendations to strengthen the program in the short- and medium-term.

The MTR was undertaken from October to December 2024. The MTR team adopted a mixed-methods approach, and combined document analysis with 38 interviews, seven organisational roundtables, three workshops, and four site visits. Ethical considerations specific to VAWC research – in particular, do no harm – informed the evaluation design.

Key findings

Overall

In Phase III, ten years into the life of the program, this Mid-Term Review (MTR) finds that Nabilan continues to represent an **exceptional quality, high-value, critically relevant investment** in ending violence against women and children (EVAWC) in Timor-Leste. The program is very significant to the EVAWC policy, programming and the funding ecosystem in Timor-Leste. In the current context, with Australian Aid funding comprising approximately 70 per cent of all funding to essential violence against women and girls (VAWC) services, Nabilan is in effect indispensable to sustaining national effort to address VAWC.

The **holistic, comprehensive, integrated, ethical nature of the program is reflective of global best practice in the EVAWC field**, including the careful introduction and adaptation of evidence-based prevention models to the local context. The prevention and services pillars of the program each comprise multiple interventions and strategies that are interconnected and effect change at levels from the individual to the societal. The program's values-driven, ethical approach is consistent with good practice and has worked to propel program outcomes. Moreover, the momentum, optimism and joy reflected through the prevention pillar provide a useful balance to the difficult work of providing essential services to victim-survivors. In providing support to people presently experiencing violence as well as working on the root causes of gender-based violence, Nabilan represents a critical investment in women's and children's safety and in a future Timor-Leste with reduced VAWC and more equitable gender relations.

Evidence collected through the MTR process showed that in Phase III the Nabilan program has made significant achievements, including:

- **Services pillar:** Strengthened quality and accessibility of essential services, with more integrated and effective referral networks, adoption of standardised case management practices, and targeted professional skills development for social workers and counsellors.
- **Prevention pillar:** Community-level shifts in attitudes and norms have been documented and further evidenced through the MTR's consultations, with initiatives like KOKOSA! and Ne'on Nain Mudansa (NeNaMu) (adaptations of globally-evidenced SASA! and *Stepping Stones* prevention models) driving community momentum for transformed gender relations.

The Nabilan program demonstrates strong alignment with **Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI)** principles:

- Prevention and feminist leadership interventions target harmful gender norms and promote the rights, leadership and collective organising of women, including those experiencing intersectional forms of disadvantage and exclusion.
- The program has made good progress in disability inclusion through the success of the third phase of *Bin Alin Hakbi'it Malu* (BAHM), which included a cohort of women with disabilities. During the past two years, Nabilan has also undertaken disability inclusion reviews and consultations to improve access to appropriate service provision for women with disabilities in the second half of Phase III. Nevertheless, disability inclusion requires a concerted effort in the remainder of Phase III and into Phase IV.
- Efforts to engage groups experiencing other intersectional forms of social exclusion and disadvantage, including LGBTIQ+ individuals, are evident through the program's partnership and intersectional feminist leadership models.

Relevance

In Phase III, Nabilan continues to respond effectively to the vast contextual need to sustain service infrastructure and support effective, quality responses to gender-based violence. Moreover, the program continues to diversify and strengthen pathways out of cycles of violence through its



multifaceted prevention strategies, with this prevention work highly valued by both partners and communities. Extensive consultations during the Phase III design ensured that Nabilan's core interventions reflect the priorities of beneficiaries, CSOs, and government stakeholders, and Nabilan's priorities and partnership ways of working were found through the MTR to be deeply valued.

[The Nabilan team] see the whole situation in supporting victims, including staff self-care and stress management. This is very risky work, and we have trauma and stress but the system that Nabilan uses really helps us with this. Counselling training, Certificate III, routine training – it's all really helped us; it's excellent. I personally am really grateful because there are lots of things I didn't understand and I've learned a great deal ... They are like family. – Shelter senior leadership

The program also demonstrates responsiveness to changing needs, emerging evidence, openness to new ideas, and an interest in horizon-scanning to respond to contextual change. The key tenets of the Phase III program largely continue to have enduring relevance in the current context. Moving forward, the program will need to be attendant to the forthcoming introduction of high-speed internet from 2025 and its likely significant impact on the VAWC context.

Coherence

The Nabilan program has clear alignment to – and influence upon – Timor-Leste and Australian Government policy, plans and priorities, and effectively utilises key systems leverage points to amplify and accelerate change. By bridging the prevention and services pillars, and investing in initiatives that act as systems connectors, the program fosters a comprehensive approach to addressing VAWC. Learning forums, collaborative workshops, and regular partner engagements enhance internal program coherence and build local capability, with some room to improve a sense of shared purpose across Nabilan partners.

Effectiveness

Phase III implementation has occurred largely as planned, with a large body of work achieved. The program is achieving strong results, with evidence of progress against all six Mid-Term Outcomes. Notable successes include significant improvements in providers' service and documentation quality and increased maturity of prevention efforts. Another key strength of the Phase III program has been a focus on program quality, evidence and learning, which in turn has supported partner ownership of key interventions and assisted the program to remain responsive to emerging learning and risks.

The investment modality with TAF as an NGO implementing agency funded through a DFAT grants mechanism is found to be highly effective, efficient and appropriate. TAF is a high-performing, ethical and well-regarded implementing partner. TAF's partnership approach has supported systematic improvements in service outcomes, the effectiveness of prevention approaches, and contributed markedly to the development of local leadership to address VAWC. While the evidence collected through the MTR process attested to the strength of Nabilan's partnership approach, opportunities to enhance Nabilan's in-country profile and to increase coordination and collaboration in the EVAWC sector were identified.

Efficiency

Resources are being effectively utilised, with investments in core funding, technical assistance and accompaniment, and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) yielding high returns in terms of transformative change. Program management practices are strong and effective, including between the Australian Embassy and TAF.

Impact

The program's impact is evident at multiple levels, from individual beneficiaries to national systems. Prevention models like KOKOSA! are demonstrating promising results in terms of encouraging gender-transformative norms change in communities; notably in Phase III, supporting hard-to-achieve change regarding sexual decision-making and consent norms in intimate relationships.

This isn't an easy change in mindset for men – in our patriarchal culture, women belong to them. [In KOKOSA!] we focus on the benefits and consequences and this moves them to change over time. For men, sexual consent is good because if they decide together, then there is good sexual connection and enjoyment together ... It's better to respect [women] and value them not just as sexual objects. For women, if there is sexual consent and they decide together, it gives them a sense of value and respect from men, and they can also feel love and romance together in their relationships. For us all, it shows us that we care about each other, including health and family planning – it creates harmonious relationships. – KOKOSA! partner staff

Strengthened service quality is improving outcomes for victim-survivors at points of crisis and into recovery while allowing service partners a sense of transparency and pride about their improved service response:

In the past, we just attended to the work, but we were not having the space to analyse our work, so this has really helped us. Nabilan saw the areas where our work wasn't that good or could be improved, and then they helped us work together to improve. And they ... walked with us constantly together and gave us lots of ideas. This gave us the spirit to work; previously, we just thought work, work, work, and we couldn't necessarily see the results, but now we have a strong system. When we saw our improved results and progress, we were really surprised and happy. – Shelter senior leadership

In addition to intended impacts regarding prevention and services outcomes, the MTR determines that there is good evidence that the program is contributing to a positive impact at a systems level. Nabilan works with 10 diverse civil society organisational (CSO) partners and two government partners, with the program's approach highly effective in nurturing local prevention and service response leadership, capabilities and sectoral integration. Further, the MTR process found strong evidence that Nabilan is a critical investor in sustaining the VAWC workforce through Phase III's people-centred, trauma-responsive wellbeing and peer support initiatives.

Sustainability

Long-term investments in partner and community engagement, a trauma-responsive, person-centred model of support and care for the VAWC workforce, evidence generation, and policy alignment are strongly positioning Nabilan for sustained impact. Investments in professionalising social work and fostering feminist leadership also provide important foundations for enduring change at sectoral and civil society movement levels, while the Nabilan program's approach to supporting government priorities enables influence of national policy. However, challenges related to financial sustainability and reliance on Australian Aid funding for essential VAWC services remain. Continued engagement by all actors will be needed to fully fund the NAP-GBV.

Conclusion

Midway through Phase III, the Nabilan Program continues to deliver excellent value, addressing urgent service needs while driving systemic and transformative change in Timor-Leste. It balances innovative prevention strategies with robust service delivery, ensuring both immediate and long-term impacts. The program has shown significant progress in shifting harmful gender norms that underpin VAWC, strengthening survivor support systems, and fostering collaborative partnerships with government, CSOs and local communities.

Looking forward, retaining and scaling the program in Phase IV, including increasing Australian investment, will be essential to consolidate these gains. Additional investments in strategies to address violence against children, disability and social inclusion, a systems orientation to the program design, and impact evaluation will enhance the program's sustainability and effectiveness. Moreover, the program faces an opportunity to leverage its sound investment in prevention interventions and expertise by positioning as a prevention leader in Timor-Leste and the broader region, expanding its potential for influence and impact.



Recommendations

Detailed recommendations are presented in the main body of the report; key recommendations domains are summarised here.

#	Recommendation area
1.	Retain the program and its core components for Phase IV: Given the program's systemic impact and continued relevance, Nabilan should be retained and further strengthened in Phase IV (2026–2030). Maintaining the program's focus on VAWC prevention and response will ensure ongoing alignment with Timor-Leste's national priorities and Australia's commitment to gender equality.
2.	Increase the quantum of investment for Phase IV: To deepen and scale the program's impact, additional resources will be required. The program has demonstrated the capacity to systematically build over time and use resources efficiently to successfully implement an ambitious agenda. Priority areas for increased investment include: • Expanding VAC-specific initiatives and strategies. • Supporting further service specialisation, including in terms of supporting child clients, women with disabilities, and clinical oversight and support • Positioning Nabilan as a national and regional prevention leader, through establishment of an independent prevention organisation that can incubate, scale up, quality assure, train, advise and evaluate, and facilitating Nabilan's connection to key regional platforms. • Enhancing monitoring and evaluation frameworks and resources to track systemic impacts, undertake robust impact evaluation, and adapt to emerging challenges. • Supporting approaches to address new forms and patterns of violence and backlash to primary prevention gains that may emerge from a changing online environment.
3.	Prioritise disability inclusion in service provision: Nabilan should determine a services disability inclusion strategy for 2025 to 2030, based on the analyses undertaken in early Phase III. Consideration of utilising BAHM alumni as lived experience advisors and a co-design approach to generating this strategy would be a useful way of leveraging the program's existing disability inclusion strength.
4.	Strengthen systems approaches: Develop an integrated Theory of Change which elucidates how Nabilan works as an integrated system of interventions and interconnections, identify broader systems change leverage points for future program focus, and anticipate challenges such as the impact of forthcoming high-speed internet.
5.	Expand focus on VAC: Develop and implement a VAC-specific strategy. This should leverage insights from prevention initiatives to determine an appropriate prevention approach to VAC moving forward and the Phase III play therapy testing learning. Gaps in service provider capabilities and confidence to provide appropriate services to children should be prioritised.
6.	Enhance collaboration and learning: Foster enhanced shared purpose amongst Nabilan partners, sustained GoTL engagement and increased external development partner awareness of Nabilan through structured approaches to coordination and engagement and cross-learning opportunities.
7.	Amplify evidence and influence: Invest in impact evaluations, elevate program evidence and learning visibility through national, regional and global forums, and use a systems analysis to determine where best to utilise evidence to influence policies and practices. As a mature flagship initiative yielding high value, Nabilan would be well-placed to be linked to, and provide regional advice through, DFAT's Southeast Asia Gender-Based Prevention Platform.