

Independent End-of-Phase Evaluation of Partnerships for Social Protection: DFAT Management Response

In June 2024, DFAT commissioned an independent evaluation of the Partnerships for Social Protection (P4SP) program against key evaluation questions related to effectiveness, efficiency, gender equality, disability equity, and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), as well as identifying lessons for future programming. The evaluation report assessed overall program performance across the life of the program from September 2021 to end 2024.

The evaluation report was completed in January 2025. The report includes a number of useful findings and practical recommendations to help inform the new phase of the P4SP investment, which are summarised in the table below. The lead recommendation was to extend the program into a second phase. The program has been extended by another four years until September 2029.

Recommendations are in the table below. DFAT agrees or partially agrees with all fifteen of the recommendations.

#	Recommendation	Supported (Y/N)	Comments
1	The program should be extended into a second phase.	Y	Agree. DFAT recognises the high value offered by P4SP to counterparts in the region and has extended the program into a second phase.
2	DFAT could leverage P4SP for broader Australian regional objectives.	Y	Agree. In Phase II of P4SP, the program and DFAT will build stronger links between social protection and broader regional objectives such as climate financing, labour mobility, and broad based inclusive growth.
3	Where there is momentum and appetite, the program should scale up bilateral investments.	Y	Partially agree. In Phase II, P4SP and DFAT will need to balance scale up in existing bilateral engagements with responding to requests from new bilateral engagements. Resources will be determined jointly with partner governments, DFAT Canberra and Post.
4	Increase the spend on research, training and influencing.	Y	Agree. In Phase II of P4SP, the program will build upon the significant progress and momentum from Phase I in delivering regular, bespoke training for Pacific audiences. Investing in research will continue to be a priority in Phase II, with research topics determined by DFAT and the program on an annual basis, in consultation with partner governments.

#	Recommendation	Supported (Y/N)	Comments
5	DFAT to consider new approaches to bilateral engagement in PICs with no/limited formal social assistance.	Y	Partially agree. DFAT will engage in providing technical advice on social protection to new country partners when there is demand by partner governments and our Posts.
6	DFAT and P4SP could be more ambitious and focused on gender equality.	Y	Agreed. This is a priority for DFAT and P4SP. Within the program's theory of change, an intermediate outcome focused on gender equality has been included for Phase II. This will increase the program's attention to gender equality and improve reporting on this dimension of program performance.
7	Continue the focus and ambition on disability equity in social protection.	Y	Agreed. It is a high priority for DFAT and P4SP to continue focusing on disability equity in social protection. Social protection is one of the six preconditions for disability equity and inclusion within <i>Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy</i> and the <i>Implementation Plan for the Pacific Island Forum 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent</i> .
8	DFAT and P4SP could invest in pursuing locally led development more intentionally.	Y	Agreed. In Phase II, DFAT and P4SP will ensure appropriate resources to support meaningful localisation.
9	Allow the program to continue to increase its annual spending rate.	Y	Agreed. Increasing the annual spending rate will be a key aspect of the planning for the next phase of P4SP. DFAT and P4SP are developing a budget strategy to guide the allocation of funds across the remaining financial years. This will inform DFAT's forward procurement plan.
10	Consider taking Timor-Leste out of the program.	Y	Agreed. The independent evaluation of P4SP demonstrated that there is increasing demand for support from P4SP across the Pacific and that resources within the program are finite. This aligns with DFAT's Development Partnership Plan (DPP) with Timor-Leste.

#	Recommendation	Supported (Y/N)	Comments
11	Consider including an Intermediate Outcome on climate change.	Y	Agreed. Increasing P4SP's focus on the linkages between social protection and climate change is a key priority for the program moving forward. An additional intermediate outcome on climate change would enhance this focus, including for disaster response and for climate financing. It also brings the program into line with <i>Australia's International Development Performance and Delivery Framework</i> .
12	Expand the investment in MEL and maintain some independence.	Y	Agreed. Investment in MEL will increase in Phase II of the program. DFAT and P4SP have agreed to bring MEL services in-house in the extension phase. DFAT will consider whether additional oversight is required, for example through a technical advisory group.
13	Where there is a sizable bilateral investment, Country Engagement Plans could include intended outcomes / country level theories of change and a MEL framework.	Y	Agreed, particularly for sizeable bilateral engagements.
14	DFAT and P4SP could explore opportunities to coordinate and collaborate more intentionally with other development partners.	Y	Agreed. DFAT and P4SP will continue to look for opportunities to coordinate and collaborate with other development partners, including through relevant regional fora.
15	Explore opportunities to engage more intentionally with CSOs.	Y	Agreed. Priority CSOs to engage with include gender equality and disability inclusive CSOs at the bilateral and regional level.