

Management Response to the Independent End-of-Program Evaluation Resilient Urban Centres and Surrounds (RUCaS) Program

July 2026

Recommendations	Implementing Partner Management Response	DFAT Management Response
Recommendation 1: DFAT should ensure that the program logic and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework for any future phase of RUCaS is clear, feasible within the given timeframe and resources (including with respect to GEDSI), and conforms with DFAT MEL standards.	Agree. <i>During the design phase, January-May 2026</i> The program logic and MEL framework for RUCaS Phase 2 (RUCAS2) has been developed by Monash University (MU) in close collaboration with DFAT to ensure they are feasible within the available timeframe and resources, including with respect to GEDSI, and conform with relevant DFAT standards and expectations. <i>During the inception phase, June – December 2026</i> RUCAS2 inception period will confirm activity selection, sequencing, annual workplans and MEL arrangements with country teams and implementing partners. MEL documents will be finalised in collaboration with DFAT, including how monitoring evidence will inform demonstration selection, guidance uptake, risk management and adaptive management. <i>During the implementation phase, January 2027 – June 2029</i> MEL Lead and Project Manager will continue working closely with DFAT to ensure DFAT requirements are met. The program’s annual MEL review will be held to assess indicator performance, update baselines and targets, and adjust workplans (with relevant partner approvals as required). Responsible: Project Manager, MEL Lead, supported by project team, country teams and partners, and oversight by Project Director	Agree. <i>During the design phase, January – May 2026</i> RUCAS2 design led by Monash University (MU) was developed in reference to DFAT Design and MEL standards and aligned with the Mekong-Australia Partnership (MAP) and Climate Resilient Communities (CRC) MEL frameworks. RUCAS2 program logic and MEL framework at design underwent a quality assurance in line with the requirements of the MAP Streamlined Design and Quality Assurance process, with inputs from: DFAT Mekong Posts; MAP Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser and Gender Equality Adviser; CRC Support Unit; and Design and Program Advice Section. These inputs have been incorporated into the RUCAS2 End of Program Outcomes (EOPOs) prior to contract signing. <i>During the inception phase, June – December 2026</i> DFAT program manager and MEL Advisor (including in close consultation with the CRC Support Unit) will work closely with MU to develop detailed MEL framework and MEL plan based on the agreed EOPOs. Simultaneously, in-country activity selection and annual workplans will be confirmed which will support verifying the program logic and feasibility of the outcomes. <i>During the implementation phase, January 2027 – June 2029</i> Within the first 12 months, MEL Plan will be fully operationalised in accordance with DFAT Design and MEL standards, and MU will continue receiving guidance from the MAP MEL Advisor as needed and be part of the MAP MEL Community of Practice. Responsible: Investment Manager, supported by First Secretary (Development) and MAP MEL Advisor

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Recommendation 2: The implementers of any future phase of RUCaS should progress at least one case study in each country from concept to a stage where it is fully constructed, commissioned, and monitored to demonstrate the financial costs and benefits of sustainable hybrid Nature-based Solutions (NbS) (even if this means having smaller case studies, and/or in fewer countries, that are fully funded by the program). Site selection for the case studies should be driven by local partners, and design should be done collaboratively and in accordance with locally relevant budgets.	Agree. <i>During the design phase, January – May 2026</i> RUCAS2 will ensure objectives shift from the demonstration of NbS value in principle towards building practical demonstrations that show the financial costs and benefits of sustainable hybrid NbS while continuing to support enabling environments for scaling. RUCAS2 will include support for practical application of local hybrid NbS in all four participating countries. <i>During the inception phase, June – December 2026</i> Site selection will be driven by local partners, and include assessments of site readiness, feasibility, approval pathways, delivery risk, co-funding or leveraged funding opportunities, local budget realities and alignment with the MEL framework. Each demonstration will have a clear delivery pathway and governance arrangements. RUCAS2 will generate evidence on performance, costs, benefits, financial viability, and GEDSI outcomes to inform future planning, budgeting, and scaling decisions. Governance arrangements will embed local decision making to ensure that designs are developed collaboratively and within locally relevant and realistic budget constraints. <i>During the implementation phase, January 2027 – June 2029</i> Arrangements for the full funding of demonstrations will be secured prior to commencement. This will include the source and scope of program funding, partner co-funding or leveraged funding, and the arrangements needed to support commissioning, operation, monitoring and operations and maintenance (O&M). Where partner or leveraged funding is required, commencement will be conditional on documented commitments and clear agreement on RUCAS2's contribution. Responsible: Project Manager, supported by project team, country teams and implementing partners, and oversight by Project Director	Agree. <i>During the design phase, January – May 2026</i> RUCAS2 intended outcome is that 'Mekong partners co-deliver and put in place arrangements to sustain inclusive local hybrid NbS demonstrations.' This will include the following actions. In the program's MEL framework, having a dedicated Intermediate Outcome (IO) requiring that: each demonstration site has local decision makers and/or asset owners grant approval for concept design to fully commissioned with clear resourcing plan. <i>During the inception phase, June – December 2026</i> During the site selection process, DFAT will ensure that: • RUCAS2 site selection is led by in-country staff and driven by local partners and stakeholders, with local knowledge, conditions, requirements and priorities be considered from the outset. • MU conducting assessment of the proposed demonstration sites with local stakeholders including on project feasibility, partner readiness, resourcing and implementation risks. There is clear governance arrangement with local partners on project delivery, O&M, and monitoring for each site. <i>During the implementation phase, January 2027 – June 2029</i> DFAT will ensure that: • In-country staff and implementing partners play leadership role in co-design planning process. • MU has local partners co-design and co-deliver of appropriate NbS demonstrations and in accordance with the plans and locally relevant budgets. • MU continues to monitor implementation risk and address any emerging challenges or barriers early. Responsible: Investment Manager, supported by First Secretary (Development) and Mekong Posts

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Recommendation 3: The implementers of any future phase of RUCaS should ensure that any knowledge products, guidelines and/or roadmaps developed for specific countries or cities should a) be demand-driven by local partners, b) be co-designed with local partners, c) be field-tested and updated where appropriate, and d) include clear dissemination and implementation plans (which define stakeholders who are able to oversee implementation).	Agree. <i>During the inception phase, June – December 2026</i> RUCAS 2 will work with local partners to ensure knowledge products, guidelines, roadmaps and/or technical advice are demand-driven and co-designed. This will include consultation with local authorities and practitioners to identify existing obstacles to applying NbS in policies, planning, design, approval, budgeting and implementation processes. These consultations will help clarify the practical evidence and institutional entry points needed to support uptake. RUCAS2 will ensure these resources are supported by clear dissemination, and implementation plans that empower local stakeholders to oversee long-term results. <i>During the implementation phase, January 2027 – June 2029</i> Field testing and updating guidelines will be pursued in line with local partner priorities and in collaboration with other programs in the subregion. Follow-up technical support will be provided where needed to enable partners to apply the guidance, tools and evidence in planning, design, approval, budgeting and implementation processes. Dissemination and implementation plans will identify target users, institutional owners, accessibility needs, field-testing and/or follow-up actions. Responsible: Project Manager, supported by country teams and partners, project team, and oversight by Project Director	Agree. <i>During the inception phase, June – December 2026</i> DFAT will ensure that MU consults with local authorities and practitioners to jointly identify knowledge products that best address context-specific challenges, with clear dissemination and implementation plans to support local ownership and long-term outcomes. DFAT will ensure that in-country RUCAS staff and implementing partners play a leadership role in this process to ensure the program are informed by best possible local/contextual knowledge and awareness. <i>During the implementation phase, January 2027 – June 2029</i> DFAT will ensure that the work plan include: • Co-design/consultation arrangement with local partners and practitioners to ensure relevance and effectiveness. • Field testing and updating guidelines in line with local partner priorities. • Follow-up technical support where needed to enable partners can apply the guidance and tools in their planning and implementation processes. DFAT will ensure that in-country staff and partners play a leadership role in this process to ensure the program are informed by best possible local/contextual knowledge. Responsible: Investment Manager, supported by First Secretary (Development) and Mekong Posts
Recommendation 4: The implementers of any future phase of RUCaS should facilitate learning events for those involved	Agree. <i>During the inception phase, June – December 2026</i> RUCAS2 will broaden learning and engagement across the full NbS project cycle. While RUCaS1 worked primarily with design and planning agencies, RUCAS2 will deliberately involve	Agree. <i>During the inception phase, June – December 2026</i> In the program’s MEL framework, having a dedicated IO requiring that: finance and budgeting actors increase capacity to support integration of hybrid NbS into urban development,

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in funding, planning, designing and constructing NbS in the region that exhibit (either virtually or through in-person site-visits) examples of working NbS in a range of contexts, budgets and scales of impact (in addition to examples from China and Thailand).	agencies and stakeholders responsible for policy, approvals, financing, budgeting, implementation, operation and maintenance. This will help ensure learning events support not only technical design, but also the institutional and financial decisions needed to move NbS from concept to delivery and sustained operation. <i>During the implementation phase, January 2027 – June 2029</i> Specific capacity development activities, including on GEDSI-informed NbS and financing NbS will be developed. Learning events include technical workshops, peer exchange, webinars and site visits, with a stronger focus on working examples, implementation lessons, approvals, O&M, costs, benefits and financing pathways. Building on Phase 1, RUCAS2 will prioritise local and Mekong-based NbS examples across different contexts, budgets and scales, while drawing on regional experience where relevant. RUCAS2 will collaborate with aligned programs in urban resilience, ecosystem-based adaptation, wetland restoration, and inclusive climate resilience through information sharing, joint events and complementary technical engagement. These partnerships will help scale NbS implementation across diverse budgets, contexts and impact levels. Responsible: Project Manager, supported by country teams and partners, project team, and oversight by Project Director	climate and/or disaster resilient policies and/or practices. DFAT will ensure MU conduct assessment and consultation with local partners to identify the whole-cycle stakeholders in each country and design appropriate approach to facilitate learnings and collaboration. <i>During the implementation phase, January 2027 – June 2029</i> DFAT will ensure that the work plan include: • Tailored learning events and materials for different stakeholders and contexts. • Demonstration lessons in a range of contexts, budgets and scales of impact that are packaged into usable materials appropriate for different stakeholders and contexts. Responsible: Investment Manager, supported by First Secretary (Development)
Recommendation 5: DFAT and the implementing team should ensure that Gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) is resourced and included from the very	Agree. <i>During the design phase, January – May 2026</i> GEDSI will be integrated as a foundational element of RUCAS2 and reflected through relevant intermediate outcomes including: • Women, people with disabilities and other underrepresented groups participate at defined entry points and inform	Agree. <i>During the design phase, January – May 2026</i> GEDSI will be embedded and applied across all stages of RUCAS2, from planning to delivery to learning. In the program's MEL framework, having a dedicated IOs requiring that: • Women, people with disabilities and other underrepresented groups participate at defined entry points and inform

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beginning of any future phase of the RUCaS program. This includes the definition of clear and feasible GEDSI-related EOPO/IO in the program design, conducting in-depth GEDSI analysis prior to detailed design, and the development of a clear and feasible GEDSI strategy.	decision-making across scoping, design and monitoring of local hybrid NbS demonstrations. National and local authorities and practitioners increase capacity to support integration of GEDSI responsive hybrid NbS into policies and practices These outcomes are supported by measurable indicators and appropriate budgetary and monitoring arrangements. <i>During the implementation phase, January 2027 – June 2029</i> GEDSI analysis, including separate gender equality and disability equity analyses, will be developed to inform the GEDSI Strategy. GEDSI will be built into demonstration scoping, design, monitoring, O&M, communications, and learning from the beginning, with the GEDSI Lead and GEDSI Advisory Committee involved at key decision-making points to review GEDSI integration, implementation risks and practical adjustments. Responsible: Project Manager, supported by country teams and partners, project team, and oversight by Project Director	decision-making across scoping, design, and monitoring of local hybrid NbS demonstrations. - National and local authorities and practitioners increase capacity to support integration of GEDSI responsive hybrid NbS into policies and practices. <i>During the implementation phase, January 2027 – June 2029</i> - MAP Gender Equality Adviser will work closely with MU's GEDSI Lead to develop GEDSI analysis (including disability inclusion analysis) and GEDSI strategy. - The program's GEDSI governance will be set up with clear roles and adequate resource to support the GEDSI strategy implementation. Implementation of the GEDSI strategy will be tracked and periodically reviewed to ensure its effectiveness. The MAP Gender Equality Adviser will be consulted to assess integration, identify risks and recommend necessary adjustments. Responsible: Investment Manager, supported by MAP Gender Equality Adviser
Recommendation 6: The implementing team of any future phase of the RUCaS program should hire staff to be responsible for implementing the program GEDSI outcomes (preferably separate roles for gender equality, disability inclusion and representation of other marginalised groups) who have expertise in GEDSI,	Partially agree. <i>During the inception phase, June – December 2026</i> RUCaS Phase 1 had a dedicated GEDSI Lead with transdisciplinary experience, and RUCAS2 will strengthen this approach and allocates additional resources to implement GEDSI outcomes through the continued appointment of a GEDSI Lead and establishment of a GEDSI Advisory Committee. While separate staff roles for gender equality, disability inclusion and other marginalised groups are not feasible with the resources available, budget is allocated to ensure these perspectives are represented by the membership and function of the GEDSI Advisory Committee, which includes women's rights organisations, organisations of people with disabilities,	Partially agree. <i>During the inception phase, June – December 2026</i> RUCAS2 should be adequately resourced to ensure effective implementation of GEDSI outcomes. However, having staff with separate roles for gender equality, disability inclusion and other marginalised groups who have expertise in GEDSI, community development and technical fields may not be feasible within the program resources. Moreover, RUCAS2 will place greater emphasis on co-delivery with local partners who have diverse GEDSI capacity. Rather than adopting specialised roles, an integrated and capacity-building approach is proposed. Alternative approach could be a combination of:

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community development and technical fields such as engineering (that is, experts who can work across these disciplines).	and social inclusion experts. Guided by the GEDSI Lead, the Committee will support GEDSI analysis, strategy development and implementation. GEDSI responsibilities will be built into relevant positions, partnerships and workplans, with practical support provided to technical specialists and implementing partners. Responsible: GEDSI Lead, supported by Project Manager, project team, country teams and partners, GEDSI Advisory Committee, and oversight by Project Director	• GEDSI Lead working closely with multidisciplinary teams and partners to ensure GEDSI embedded across activities. • Local GEDSI experts resourced by the Program engaging actively with technical practitioners to strengthen cross-disciplinary expertise. • The work plan includes GEDSI capacity building support for local NbS practitioners. DFAT will work with MU to design appropriate approach for delivering GEDSI outcomes. Responsible: Investment Manager, supported by MAP Gender Equality Adviser
Recommendation 7: The implementing team of any future phase of the RUCaS program should facilitate GEDSI capacity development, firstly for the implementing team (and implementing partner organisations) and then for NbS champions, planners and implementers in the region.	Agree. <i>During the inception phase, June – December 2026</i> RUCAS2 will integrate GEDSI capacity development into relevant intermediate outcomes, GEDSI analysis and strategy. <i>During the implementation phase, January 2027 – June 2029</i> GEDSI capacity development will first focus on the program and country teams, and partner organisations and then extend to local and national authorities and practitioners. RUCAS2 will clarify the role of implementing partners in applying GEDSI in day-to-day delivery and decision-making through the inception period and beyond. GEDSI capacity development and expected transformational change will be guided by the program’s GEDSI analysis and strategy which will be regularly monitored. Responsible: GEDSI Lead, supported by Project teams, country teams and partners, GEDSI Advisory Committee, and oversight by Project Director	Agree. <i>During the inception phase, June – December 2026</i> DFAT will ensure that GEDSI capacity development, including the articulation of expected transformational change, is clearly embedded within the program’s GEDSI analysis and strategy. <i>During the implementation phase, January 2027 – June 2029</i> DFAT will work closely with MU to ensure that RUCAS2 integrates practical and context-relevant GEDSI capacity development across key stakeholder groups, including: • Program management and country teams • Implementing partners with clearly defined GEDSI-related roles and responsibilities to ensure inclusive delivery and decision-making • NbS champions and broader stakeholders, to strengthen inclusive practices across planning and implementation Responsible: Investment Manager, supported by MAP Gender Equality Adviser

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Recommendation 8: The implementers of any future phase of the RUCaS program should aim to have most of its implementation team based in the target countries and comprise staff who have local language skills and understanding of local culture and political economy as well as NbS technical capacity.	Agree. <i>During the inception phase, June – December 2026</i> RUCAS2 will build on Phase 1 by increasing the role of locally based staff and partners with local language skills, cultural knowledge, political economy understanding and NbS expertise. RUCAS2 will use a locally led delivery model that shifts decision-making authority to country teams and implementation partners, while MU retains accountability for quality, safeguards, financial management, MEL and reporting. Within available resources, a larger share of implementation funding will be directed to locally based roles and partners. The MEL framework and work plan will further define how local knowledge and leadership are incorporated into planning, delivery, monitoring and adaptive management. A country-specific localisation approach will be developed to clarify decision-making roles, support needs and opportunities to strengthen local leadership over the life of the program. Responsible: Project Manager, supported by Country teams and partners, project team, and oversight by Project Director	Agree. <i>During the inception phase, June – December 2026</i> DFAT will work closely with MU to ensure that RUCAS2 will bolster the role of in-country teams and implementing partners with the aim of directing a significant proportion of implementation resourcing toward locally based delivery. The program will define and formalise contractual arrangements with the local in-country teams, explicitly recognising both country-based staff and implementing partners. These arrangements will ensure clear roles, responsibilities, and resourcing, reinforcing a model of locally led and context-responsive delivery. Responsible: Investment Manager, supported by First Secretary (Development)