META Evaluation Report

of

Action on Poverty's international program:

2020 to 2025

11 February 2026

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Monitoring, Evaluation, Transparency, and Accountability (META) Evaluation Report

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Funded by: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, via ANCP, plus Australian public and philanthropic partners

Cover image: Action on Poverty. See AOP website [here]

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Acknowledgements

Through this META evaluation, Action on Poverty has revealed itself to the independent consultants to be an innovative, live-giving organisation that partners with national partners and communities to enable disadvantaged people to rise above poverty. I applaud AOP CEO Meghal Shah for his commitment to transparency to inform continuous learning and evolution of AOP's approaches and competencies. AOP has a broad coverage of countries, partners, and development sectors and the scope of this META evaluation was ambitious. The complex process of undertaking it was made possible by AOP's Head of Program Operations, Praveen Lata's supportive oversight of the process, ever ready to respond to my queries and requests for additional information, and guidance on what content will be most useful. I praise the dedicated work of AOP's international development staff who sustain the relationship with implementing partners across the many countries and AOP's public-facing staff whose work enables the good work to continue.

I am grateful to the work of the many consultant evaluators across the world who conducted the 15 project evaluations whose reports formed the foundational insights for the following META evaluation report. I also give thanks to my evaluation officer, Janice Caza, who is K4Dev's international development and evaluation skills were a force-multiplier in making the scale of this META evaluation possible.

Peter Weston
Lead evaluator, K4Dev
11 February 2026

Acronyms

ADPlan	Annual Development Plan
ANCP	Australian-NGO Cooperation Program
ANGO	Australian-based Non-Government Organisation
AOP	Action on Poverty
APR	Annual Progress Report
BMJ	British Medical Journal
CBT	Community-based Tourism
CBF	Cluster-based Federations
CORDS	Community Research and Development Services
CTDO	Community Technology Development Organization
CWCC	Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre
DDF	District Development Fund
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DMEL	Design, monitoring, evaluation, and learning
EBd	Evidence-based decision-making
EoPE	End-of-project evaluation
EESL	Economic Empowerment and Sustainable Livelihoods
ESSP	Environmental and Social Safeguard Policy
FSPK	Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific, Kiribati Office
FWCR	Food, water, and climate resilience
GALS	Gender analysis and reflection process
GEDSI	Gender equality, disability, and Social Inclusion
HH	Household
HID	Health and inclusive development
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, plus
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
META	Monitoring, Evaluation, Transparency, and Accountability
MWEEP	Maasai Women Economic Empowerment Project
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OPD	Organisation(s) of people with disabilities
OFSP	Orange Fleshed Sweet Potato
p.a.	Per annum
PICS	Pacific Island country states
PRADET	Psychosocial Recovery and Development in East Timor
PRODUCT	Promoting Rural Opportunities with Digital Technologies and Upscaling Community-based Tourism
PSEAH	Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Harassment
QDPM	Quality Declared Planting Material
RDC	Rural District Council,
SAG	Social accountability and governance
SEEP	Socio-economic Empowerment Project
SROI	Social Return on Investment
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation
USD	United States dollar
VfM	Value for Money
VGP	Victory Gardens Project
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Association
WARM	Women’s Action for Safe Rural Migration
$	Unless otherwise stated, all currency amounts represent Australian dollars (AUD)

Details of the program

Evaluation Name	META evaluation of Action on Poverty's international program: 2020 to 2025
Country and locations:	Geo-Regions: Asia, Africa and the Pacific Islands Country States (PICS). Countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Kiribati, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Vietnam, Zimbabwe.
Implementation period of sample projects:	2020 - 2025
Program budget:	AUD 12.8 million (approximately)
Source of funding:	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, via ANCP, plus Australian public and philanthropic partners
Period of evaluation:	November 2025 – February 2026
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Executive summary

Since 1968, AOP has worked in partnership with changemakers across Africa, Asia, and the Pacific to co-create solutions that address the root causes of poverty. This report is an evaluation synthesis of 15 AOP projects, focusing on evaluations conducted between July 2020 and June 2025. Lessons learned will provide guidance on how to optimise outcomes with such partners. Project locations were in Asia, Africa and the Pacific regions where AOP operates, and cover the full spectrum of AOP's development sector strategies:

- Economic empowerment and sustainable livelihoods (EESL)
- Food, water, and climate resilience (FWCR)
- Health in Development (HID)
- Social accountability and governance (SAG)

The report also prioritises key cross-cutting issues of project sustainability, gender equality, and disability inclusion, plus consideration of unanticipated outcomes. The report is structured into three distinct analyses:

1. An assessment of the value-for-money of AOP projects' *processes* for informing sound evidence-based decision-making to design and manage projects to generate optimal results for partnered stakeholders.
2. A synthesis of *outcomes and impacts* of projects for intended beneficiaries.
3. A social return on investment (SROI) assessment of the AOP programs' outcomes and impacts.

Lastly, the report provides a summary of conclusions and recommendations for AOP to recognise and build on strengths and address past vulnerabilities to continuously improve the impacts of AOP partnerships with people that strive to free themselves from poverty.

Value for money of AOP's project processes for informing evidence-based decision-making

In relation to AOP projects' systems for evidence-based learning (monitoring, evaluation and adaptive learning), clear strengths (that assure sound value for money) and areas for improvement (where value for money is vulnerable) emerged.

AOP projects rated strong or acceptable on 12 of the 15 VfM criteria. Stand-out strengths related to:

- Financial control – with most projects spending within 90 to 100% of their budgets without overspending (cost consciousness as stewards of donors' funds)
- Incorporating evidence-based decisions into new designs by drawing on lessons learned from previous evaluations (evidence-based design)

- Carefully balancing trade-offs between coverage of intended beneficiaries with sufficient investment in each participant to ensure positive outcomes (proportionality).
- Ensuring that the ongoing costs for participants to maintain benefits beyond the project funding are affordable and accessible (cost consciousness to stakeholders).
- Protecting partnered populations by ensuring that PSEAH and child protection processes are in place (Do no harm).

Only two aspects of project processes were found to represent inadequate value for money and subsequent vulnerability to AOP's ability to make informed decisions to guide projects and programs. Both relate to performance and risk management. These were:

- Inadequate use of context-specific risk registers and subsequent risk tracking and management. Often initial risk assessments were carried out, but evidence available indicated these tended to be generic, narrow in focus, and not monitored for change over time.
- Low levels of on-site project monitoring by AOP portfolio managers. Evidence available indicated that AOP were adequately conducting monitoring visits to PICS projects, an almost adequate level of on-site monitoring in Africa, but almost no such monitoring in Asia.

Still, two additional processes should also be high priority for improvement:

- Project designs would benefit from more participatory input from intended community and institutional stakeholders (locally-led development).
- Projects generally require more robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems in place to provide accurate and timely insights to guide decision-making (results focus).

Overall outcomes and contributions

AOP has established proven models for attaining positive impacts in rural poverty reduction. To scale these contributions, the organization and its partners may now move beyond self-contained project interventions toward in-country partners becoming strategic technical partners. In so doing, AOP and its partners become bridges from grassroots successes to national-level policy and resilient market systems.

Findings demonstrate a high-impact program that excels in Economic Empowerment and Sustainable Livelihoods (EESL) and Food, Water, and Climate Resilience (FWCR). By re-analysing 15 evaluation reports, it is clear that AOP's most powerful contribution lies in its ability to transform subsistence activities into viable, surplus-based agricultural and tourism ventures, significantly enhancing household nutrition and financial resilience. Health programming achieves some very positive outcomes but lags in relation to sustainability.

A primary lesson from this evaluation period is that context-specific customization is a core strength of AOP's success for generating positive impacts. Whether through community-based tourism (CBT) in Vietnam or drought-resistant seed systems in Ethiopia, AOP's ability to adapt technical interventions to local realities has been a hallmark of its impact.

Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) emerged as the portfolio's most effective tool for sustainability – though is by no means its only effective tool. VSLA groups (under various contextualised association names) did not merely provide financial tools: they acted as platforms for social safety nets and women's leadership incubation.

The use of high-yield, disease-resistant, and bio-fortified crops—such as Irish potatoes in Ethiopia and Orange-Fleshed Sweet Potatoes in Malawi—directly resulted in the reduction of "hunger months" and improved household nutrition. Agricultural water initiatives like weir dams and solar boreholes successfully reduced physical labour for women, freeing their time for other productive pursuits.

The evaluation concludes that AOP's Social Accountability and Governance (SAG) strategic sector functions more effectively as a cross-cutting developmental principle than as a standalone sector, acting as a driver for the sustainability of results. The most significant outcomes in this theme involved improving the linkages between disadvantaged citizens and government duty-bearers, particularly in Asia where project-led advocacy successfully influenced national policies and local socio-economic development plans. In some such instances, coordinated citizen voices catalysed attitudinal shifts among local officials, moving them toward recognizing community-based models as viable public strategies.

While Asian projects excelled in explicit policy advocacy, African and PICS projects focussed more on informal integration with government departments, and traditional/indigenous leadership structures.

While the portfolio demonstrated strengths in improving gender equality, disability inclusion efforts were often missing, minimal or inconsistent – both in project activities and MEL systems.

Key challenges to optimising positive impacts were found to be:

- While projects' nurturing of community groups were excellent at start-up, their models became limited in helping livelihood cooperation groups (such as CBT associations and farmers' associations) once they reached formal status or maturing business models.
- Successes in some projects and gaps in others highlighted that projects that directly provide health services must include, from the beginning, plans to mainstream and institutionalise successful project models beyond the project and partner.
- While most projects had a positive impact on advancing gender equality in traditionally patriarchal communities, some women-focussed projects inadvertently increased the labour burdens for women by promoting new labour-intensive agricultural tasks or household sanitary practices for women without shifting pre-existing gendered roles/obligations.
- In Africa and PICS, to strengthen sustainability and scaling, AOP projects must continue to leverage their good practices of engaging indigenous leaders while simultaneously strengthening the capacity of implementing partners to engage in formal national policy dialogue.

The wider social value of AOP's program

To assess the value of AOP projects' and program's impacts, the evaluation applied a modified form of social return on investment (SROI) analysis. SROI is a value-for-money assessment approach that uses cost-benefit analysis to measure outcomes of a project against all inputs, including AOP's Australian and in-country expenditure and time and investment by community participants. It is designed to enable the quantification of the value of non-monetary as well as monetary outcomes to stakeholders. i.e. a comprehensive understanding of significant social, economic, cultural and environmental costs and benefits.

Across the entire 15-project portfolio, the analysis shows that the aggregate investment across AOP's international program from 2020 to 2025 was $12.8 million, and the present value of benefits generated by the program over this period was over $56.4 million. Accordingly, the SROI ratio is 4.4:1, which means that for every $1 invested in AOP's work by donors and community stakeholders, $4.40 was returned in social and economic value to intended beneficiaries.

Sector-by-sector analysis found that AOP's programming has remarkable consistency of quality of outcome across its different sectors, ranging from 4.0 to 4.8:1, clustered closely around the whole-of-portfolio ratio. The result for projects with a high Social Accountability and Governance (SAG) content is notable. While this AOP strategic sector was not the principal sector for any projects and SAG elements existed in almost every project, it was more pronounced in seven projects. The aggregate SROI ratio for these seven projects was higher than any other sector result at 4.8:1. This may be evidence of the positive influence of SAG content on the overall impact of other sectoral projects.

Comparing SROI results across the three geo-regions, highlights the comparative economic difficulty of working in the PICS: Timor-Leste and especially Kiribati. The high operational costs and/or low stakeholder numbers due to low and remote populations in these settings mean that successes in PICS are much harder-won by project implementers. Results are most consistent across the Asian countries of Bangladesh, Cambodia and Vietnam. The range of SROI ratios in Africa are quite wide, with highest results in the Zimbabwe project (8.3:1) a result of the high beneficiary numbers achieved. Results in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Malawi were clusters around 4 to 5:1.

Common enablers that contributed to higher social value included:

- Holistic and Multi-pronged Programming: The most successful projects did not rely on a single intervention but used a holistic approach that combined technical skills (e.g., agricultural training) with financial tools (micro-finance and VSLAs) and development of sustainable social support services/groups.
- Mobilisation of Community Groups and Solidarity Networks: Focussing on an aspect of the multi-pronged programming - establishing and strengthening community-led institutions, such as Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), livelihood solidarity groups, and farmer associations, was a primary driver of sustained value.

- Strategic Government and Stakeholder Collaboration: Value was significantly enhanced when projects trained and sensitised district and local government officials. Projects facilitated meaningful connections between them and community groups, and influenced the institutionalisation of project-promoted guidance into public policies.

Common constraints to optimising social value included:

- Low and inconsistent inclusion of people with disabilities: A pervasive constraint across the AOP portfolio was the inconsistent or entirely absent inclusion of people with disabilities, who are generally the most disadvantaged members of their communities.
- Spreading project resources thinly per context: A persistent challenge was the spreading of financial resources too thinly across wide geographic areas, resulting in more participants but "shallow" rather than profound impacts.

Conclusion

AOP has established proven models for attaining positive impacts in rural poverty reduction. Achieving a whole-of-program SROI ratio is 4.4:1 confirms that expenditure on AOP projects is a very effective investment for creating meaningful value in the lives of marginalised communities around the world. The consistency of results across AOP's four strategic sectors and gender equality projects, clustered closely around the whole-of-portfolio ratio, demonstrate that AOP's programming has remarkable consistency of quality. The comparatively low SROI ratio in PICs countries is evidence of the high operational costs and low and remote populations in these settings. Successes in PICS requires more determination by donors and implementers.

AOP and its partners have solid processes in place for informing evidence-based decisions. Immediate investment into a small number of priority processes would significantly boost project quality and subsequent value for money. Furthermore, to optimise sustainable and scalable outcomes for community partners, AOP and its partners could pursue longer-term development research and expertise into how to move beyond self-contained project interventions toward in-country partners becoming strategic technical partners. In so doing, AOP and its partners will become bridges from grassroots successes to institutionalised government practices and resilient market systems.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are categorised by theme and ordered by priority for action by AOP to address highest vulnerabilities or value-adding opportunities through to less urgent opportunities, to help AOP decision-makers reflect on the order in which to deal with them and level of investment to commit to each.

Chapter 5 presents each of these recommendations with significantly more detail, sub-recommendations, and background discussion.

Top priorities.

A. Risk management:

Research and establish processes and templates to make project risk management contextual and routine.

B. Monitoring and evaluation systems

Invest in the development of standardised, practical, and mandatory monitoring and evaluation system and tools for all projects. Pilot in one to two projects to refine and then provide formal training to local partners on how to develop and routinely update the tools, and use them for routine reflection on progress to inform adaptive management.

C. Adaptive management.

Ensure partners' internal management processes schedule routine internal meetings to adjust plans based on monthly or quarterly quantitative and qualitative data insights.

D. Participatory and evidence-based design:

1. Develop design-phase guidelines to ensure project directions are informed by intended participants and partners, and draft objectives are also reviewed by these stakeholders.

2. Encourage all project designs to draw on lessons and recommendations from related evaluations and ensure design documents explicitly cite how they were applied.
3. Encourage the ongoing evidence-based refinement of promising models for scaling as templates for replication in other districts or neighbouring countries.

E. On-site AOP monitoring:

In-project budgets, include sufficient allocation for a monitoring visits to each project one to two times every three years.

F. Protection safeguards.

Develop a template process that partners can adopt for a complaints/grievance reporting and redress mechanism to complement existing PSEAH processes.

Medium priorities.

G. GEDSI capacity.

1. Broaden gender-transformative approaches
2. Invest in mainstreaming disability inclusion capacity.
3. Consider incorporating a GEDSI readiness checklist into reviews of each EbD/MEL function and provide support where gaps are identified.

H. Optimising sustainability

1. Avoid geographically thin resource allocation
2. Ensure sufficient critical mass in budgets for national economic context.
3. Invest in country partner staff negotiation and engagement skills.
4. Establish Clear Exit Strategies from the outset.

'Patient' priorities (that won't mind waiting a bit longer)

I. Financial accountability:

Identify which partners need closer accompaniment for financial management.

J. Innovation:

Refresh sectoral project models by periodically scanning external development sector literature/research to identify contextually relevant approaches to AOPs' sectoral priorities in partnered countries.

Chapter 5 includes an additional list of recommendations related specifically to each AOP sector strategies: EESL, FWCR, HID, SAG, and gender equality project.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the evaluation

1. Overview

1.1. Focus of this study

Action on Poverty (AOP) is an Australian non-government organisation (NGO) dedicated to empowering communities to break the cycle of poverty through inclusive, innovative, and sustainable development programs. Since 1968, AOP has worked in partnership with changemakers across Africa, Asia, and the Pacific to co-create solutions that address the root causes of poverty.

- AOP's vision is a world where all people can thrive, free from poverty.
- AOP's mission is to be a catalyst for change, partnering with local leaders and communities to turn bold ideas into scalable, evidence-based, and cost-effective solutions.

Alongside project-based interventions, AOP also manages large-scale institutional grants such as ANCP, USDA, USAID, and P4G. These resources enable us to scale impact and deepen their engagement with local partners.

To continue building a strong learning culture, strengthen accountability, and ensure they deliver optimal value for communities, AOP commissioned this 'META' Evaluation (Monitoring, Evaluation, Transparency, and Accountability Evaluation). This independent review will bring together insights from across our portfolio, assess impact, and examine Value for Money (VfM) and Social Return on Investment (SROI). Ultimately, the evaluation will help AOP and our partners reflect, learn, and plan more effectively for the future.

This is report is an evaluation synthesis of 15 AOP projects, focusing on evaluations conducted between July 2020 and June 2025. These projects were prioritised because they were implemented by partners that AOP will have ongoing collaborations in coming years. Thus, lessons learned will provide guidance on how to optimise outcomes with such partners. Project locations were in Asia, Africa and the Pacific regions where AOP operates, and cover the full spectrum of AOP's development sector strategies:

- Economic empowerment and sustainable livelihoods (EESL)
- Food, water, and climate resilience (FWCR)
- Health in Development (HID)
- Social accountability and governance (SAG).

The report also prioritises key cross-cutting issues of project sustainability, gender equality, and disability inclusion, plus consideration of unanticipated outcomes.

Following this introduction, the report is structured into three distinct chapters.

1. The first chapter (chapter 2) assesses the value-for-money of AOP projects' *processes* for informing sound evidence-based decision-making in design and project management to generate optimal results for partnered stakeholders.
2. Chapter 3 describes resultant *outcomes and impacts* of program/project processes for intended beneficiaries.
3. Chapter 4 presents findings of a social return on investment (SROI) assessment of the AOP programs' outcomes and impacts. SROI quantifies the value for money of project results as *the equivalent monetary values of those outcomes and impacts for end beneficiaries*, relative to the economies of each project location.

Lastly, the report provides a summary conclusion and recommendations for AOP to recognise and build on its strengths and address past vulnerabilities to continuously improve impacts of AOP partnerships with people that strive to free themselves from poverty.

1.2. Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

According to the evaluation's terms of reference (ToR), the overarching purpose of this META evaluation is "to help AOP and our partners reflect, learn, and plan more effectively for the future."

The ToR outlines five key objectives for the evaluation, which are as follows:

1. Estimate SROI for key programs, demonstrating the wider social value created.
2. Assess the overall outcomes and contributions of AOP's portfolio.
3. Review how well AOP's monitoring, evaluation, and adaptive learning systems support evidence-based decision-making.
4. Analyse value for money (VfM) with a focus on economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity.
5. Capture best practices, innovations, and lessons learned to inform future program design and delivery.

2. The program under evaluation

This AOP meta evaluation encompasses 15 projects across Asia, Africa, and the Pacific. AOP shared documentation of each projects that ended and was evaluated in the five years from 2020 to 2025. The following table presents the partnered countries, number of projects, and project sectors in each country. With gender found to be such a strong focus in many projects, it is also listed as a quasi-sector alongside AOP's 'official' strategic sectors. These projects were undertaken across 10 countries in Asia, Africa and the Pacific Islands Country States (PICS). Details about individual projects are listed under Appendix 1.

Table 1 - Number and sectors of projects per country and geo-region in the study's project sample

Country	Project	Sector
Asia	Five projects	
Bangladesh	One project (ended 2022)	HID Aspects of SAG (Disability inclusion)
Cambodia	Two projects (ended 2022 & 2025)	Gender equality (incl. protection) ESSL HID (psychosocial)
Vietnam	Two projects (ended 2021 & 2024)	EESL Gender equality Aspects of FWCR (Environment and climate change)
Africa	Six projects	
Ethiopia	One project (ended 2023)	EESL FWCR (incl. nutrition)
Malawi	Two projects (ended 2023)	EESL FWCR (incl. nutrition)
Mozambique	One project (ended 2023)	EESL FWCR (incl. nutrition)
Tanzania	One project (ended 2024)	Gender equality EESL
Zimbabwe	One project (ended 2023)	EESL FWCR (incl. nutrition)
Pacific Small-Island States	Four projects	
Kiribati	Two projects (ended 2020 & 2023)	FWCR HID (incl. water, sanitation, and hygiene) Aspects of EESL
Timor Leste	Two projects (ended 2022 & 2025)	Gender equality (incl. protection) EESL

3. Evaluation design and methodology

3.1. Design overview

Based on the evaluation purpose and objectives, this study is principally a summative evaluation to assess and evidence the extent to which AOP's programs has sustainably achieved the project's intended outcomes and outputs, with elements of formative learning to guide future programming.

3.2. Methodology

As outlined by the ToR, the study drew on existing monitoring, evaluation, and learning documentation of approximately 15 development projects. It compares and synthesises qualitative and quantitative findings to generate generalised evidence, conclusions, lessons, as well as identifying positive or negative outliers that inform contextual insights for future programming.

Relying on existing project documentation, the overarching methodology is an Evaluation Synthesis. This methodology "*captures evaluative knowledge and lessons learned on a certain topic from a variety of existing evaluations through aggregated and distilled evidence in order to draw more informed conclusions (and sometimes recommendations) on a specific topic or question.*"[1]

The evaluation approach is a fully independent evaluation. AOP granted K4Dev complete access to core project design, reporting, financial, and evaluation documentation for all 15 projects and granted complete independence to undertake its own analyses and reporting. Nevertheless, to ensure conclusions, lessons, and recommendations are useful and applicable to AOP, the lead evaluator routinely shared progress and sought AOP's feedback on the direction and report documentation approaches under development throughout the evaluation cycle.

Given the centrality of ANCP funding for all 15 projects, analysis criteria heavily incorporated DFAT standards for international development, drawn primarily from DFAT's *Design, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (DMEL) Standards*, the *ANCP Manual*, and DFAT's *International Development Performance and Delivery Framework (IDPDF),* plus cross-cutting guides such for gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI), Environmental and Social Safeguards, Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy, and child protection. K4Dev has consolidated and adapted these DFAT standards to the uniqueness of the AOP NGO program objectives and context.

3.3. Methods:

The methodology was constructed around the META evaluation's stated objectives (ToR, p.2). The evaluation primary methods were to:

- Conduct a VfM assessment of project processes and use findings to assess the utility of each project phase for informing sound evidence-based decision-making.
- Synthesise overall outcomes and impacts of AOP's portfolio,
- Construct and calculate the SROI for all projects and subsequently, the overarching global program.

Carrying out each of the three overarching methods included steps to identify cross-cutting themes, lessons, areas of strength, priorities for improvement, and recommendations.

Findings were also analysed in clustered subsets to identify any relevant trends or positive deviants/stand-out role models. Subsets related to geo-regions (projects in Asia, Africa, and Pacific Island Country States (PICS)), AOP sectoral themes (EESL, FWCR and SAG), and cross-cutting issues (especially gender equality, disability inclusion, and sustainability).

Detailed descriptions of each method are elaborated in their respective chapter.

Chapter 2: Assessment of the Value for money of AOP's project processes for informing evidence-based decision-making

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of this chapter

The following chapter presents findings for two objectives of the META evaluation[1], to assess:

- Objective 3: "How well AOP's monitoring, evaluation, and adaptive learning systems support evidence-based decision-making."
- Objective 4: "Value for Money (VfM) in a way that balances financial stewardship with fairness, inclusion, and long-term impact."

Whereas the SROI chapter assesses value for money in relation to final *outcomes and impacts* for intended beneficiaries by the end of each project, this chapter considers the value of the projects' and AOPs' *processes* for designing and executing projects to generate those end results. This approach assumes that sound processes that ensure economy, efficiency, effectiveness and ethics are more likely to result in positive impacts for a diversity of intended beneficiaries. The scope of this assessment considers AOP's project design processes, implementation processes, and MEL processes.

This primary outcomes of this assessment include:

1. Provide a value-for-money assessment of the program, and comparison across projects, regions and sectors.
2. Identification of common themes of what AOP's program has been doing well to generate the insights to guide future designs and near real-time project management decisions; and
3. Identification of what systems most urgently need strengthening to improve future decision-making.

A secondary outcome is the generation of partner-level insights and lessons with which AOP can develop targeted capacity-strengthening objectives and plans with each implementing partner.

1.2. Defining Value for Money principles and evidence-based decision-making systems.

Before presenting and interpreting findings, it is necessary to understand the concepts behind value-for-money and concepts that enable robust evidence-based decision-making for development programs and projects

Value for Money

Interpreting the application of VfM principles across AOP's 15 projects requires clarity on the principles being assessed. DFAT identifies eight VfM principles, aligned to four key pillars. Table 1 presents the summary of these principles.

Table 2 - DFAT Value for Money themes and principles

DFAT VfM	VfM principles
Economy	*1. Cost consciousness*
	*2. Encouraging competition**
Efficiency	*3. Evidence-based decision making*
	4. Proportionality
Effectiveness	*5. Performance and Risk Management*
	6. Results Focus
	7. Experimentation and innovation
Ethics	*8. Accountability and transparency*

* Among DFAT's eight VfM principles, "encouraging competition" is more relevant to DFAT and NGO procurement processes than NGO-community partnerships so is excluded from this analysis.

[1] Citing the Program META evaluation ToR Objectives 3 & 4.

Evidence-based decision-making (EbD) systems

Sufficiently accurate and timely evidence is required to inform decisions at every stage of AOP's global and sectoral programming, and throughout the lifecycle of each individual project. The following is a list of key insight-gathering systems over project life cycles that, when well-designed and executed, equip program and project decision-makers with knowledge to optimise projects' quality and subsequent benefit to intended beneficiaries and other stakeholders:

- Pre-design and design processes
- Project logic (including Outputs, Outcomes, and goal statements)
- Monitoring processes
- Evaluation processes
- Risk management
- Safeguards
- Project objectives vs. indicators
- Adaptive management
- Real time/near real time evaluative learning to inform adaptive management decisions.

Why use DFAT standards?

All 15 projects utilise DFAT ANCP as their foundational funding source. Because of AOP's accountability to DFAT for their application of DFAT funds, the META evaluation ToR's encouraged drawing on DFAT standards to assess performance. Consequently, K4Dev has analysed DFAT guides and standards to identify and utilise those which are specifically relevant to monitoring, evaluation, and adaptive learning systems. The central DFAT source documents for identifying relevant DFAT standards for program performance were:

- DFAT. 2024. Design and Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Standards [2]
- DFAT. 2024. ANCP Manual. [3]
- DFAT. 2023. Australia's International Development Performance and Delivery Framework. [4]
- DFAT. 2019. Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy[5]
- DFAT. 2025. Child Protection Policy[6]
- DFAT. 2019. Environmental and Social Safeguards Policy[7]

From these documents, K4Dev has synthesised a list of key standards for project and program effectiveness for NGO international development programs. For each DFAT standard, K4Dev defined 'good practice' criteria against which to objectively assess projects' performance, to build-up a profile of the program's and projects' strengths and areas for strengthening.

It is important to recognise that current DFAT standards were mostly published <u>after</u> the design and commencement of the projects under review. Therefore, it is not reasonable to 'judge' projects for their performance against these standards. However, reflecting on performance against these current standards will provide AOP and partners with insights into how best to meet these with future project designs and capacity investments.

1.3. VfM and EbD assessment methods

This chapter leads with assessment of the AOP program against each VfM principles to identify high-level system strengths and vulnerabilities using criteria related to NGO development projects. Under each of the VfM criterion findings, program and project performances are unpacked in detail, drawing on good development practice and DFAT standards to diagnose the system strengths and gaps, and what AOP may do to optimise systems in future programming.

To conduct the value for money assessments, K4Dev developed a multi-faceted VfM rubric framework. The Framework's 15 criteria provide pragmatic indicators of DFAT's four VfM themes and seven VfM principles. These criteria were formulated with a participant/beneficiary-centric lens and decision-optimisation lens more than a DFAT compliance lens. While these alternate 'lenses' are not incompatible, it explains why some elements like participant affordability and safeguards were elevated and others, like competitive pricing of inputs, were demoted.

The 15 criteria and their findings are provided under Section 3 below: 'Results per VfM theme, principle, and criterion'.

These criteria were applied to each of the 15 projects, and results were aggregate by program, sector, time period and implementing partner to identify trends and positive deviants/model partners for each.

These 15 criteria are not exhaustive. Many additional criteria could be added. Rather, they are the most practical compromise between data in source documents available to the evaluation and time available to complete the evaluation.

Summary findings of all projects against each of these 15 criteria to generate raw scores per project which were then aggregated into whole-of-program ratings. Under Section 3, accompanying narratives provide interpretation and useful, actionable insights, with consideration of the following project lifecycle stages and processes:

- Pre-design readiness
- Design stage
- Program delivery
- End-of-phase evaluation
- Adaptive management systems
- Ethical and risk management systems

In creating these simplistic categorisations of processes, it is important to recognise the significant overlap between them. For example, ethical and risk management systems are a vital contributor to adaptive management systems and the monitoring systems that sit within project delivery.

1.4. Limitations of this 'systems for evidence-based decision-making' chapter

The implementing partners' internal monitoring/progress tracking and risk management documents are not accessible to the evaluators. Therefore, assessments are based on contents of project design proposals, evaluation reports, and Annual Progress Reports that utilise DFAT's ANCP reporting template. It is, therefore, probable that some constructive processes are in place for some projects (or absences of some processes for other projects) that are not visible to this META evaluation process. Such documentary gaps may limit the extent to which the findings in this chapter reflect the complete range of practices across projects.

2. AOP's value-for-money and evidence-based decision-making performance

2.1. VfM across AOP's program

Aggregating the results of all 15 projects, we see from the following graphs that the AOP program had systems in place to provide adequate value for money against all four VfM themes, but is strongest in its processes to ensure sound economy.

Figure 1 - The AOP program's overarching ratings per VfM theme

2.2. VfM comparison by geo-region

We also see, in the following table, that overall results were consistent across all three geo-regions (between 61% and 67%), with minor differences per theme. African projects achieved comparatively higher results for efficiency and lower results for ethics (safeguards); and PICS projects were comparatively lower on their economy of results.

Table 3 - Value-for-money theme scores per geo-regional cluster of projects

	Whole-of-program (n=15 projects)	Asia (n=5 projects)	Africa (n=6 projects)	PICS (n=4 projects)
Aggregate scores per geo-region	64%	65%	67%	61%

Effectiveness	**56%**	62%	56%	56%
Efficiency	**71%**	71%	85%	65%
Ethics	**73%**	71%	58%	81%
Economy	**83%**	85%	85%	66%

2.3. VfM comparison by sector

Sectoral project clusters were also assessed for their aggregate VfM ratings. Results were consistent across the sectors, ranging only from 60% to 67%. This is not surprising given the overlap of more than one sector within most projects. For example, most livelihoods (EESL) projects have a predominant food production component and gender equality focus. SAG is a cross-cutting theme in around half the projects. None of the sector show signs of particular VfM vulnerability. Though, of course, within each sector some individual projects performed better than others to arrive at these averaged results. Project-by-project strength and weaknesses are scrutinised in Section 3 below.

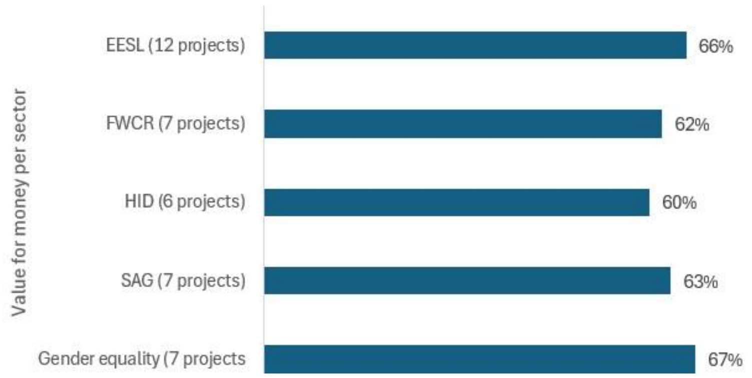

Figure 2 - Aggregate Value for Money score per sector cluster

2.4. VfM comparison by time of design/commencement (if relevant enough to retain)

A comparison of projects clusters was completed according to starting year to identify whether project quality/value for money improved or deteriorated over the five-year period.

Analysis considered three phases of project design and commencement:

- Pre-COVID commencement: circa 2017 to 2019
- Early COVID years commencement: all circa 2020
- Late and post-COVID years commencement: circa 2021 to 2022

The graph below shows that VfM remained relatively constant over this period. Still, it is encouraging that the most recent crop of projects shows a slightly elevated VfM score which may be a sign of continuous incremental program improvement.

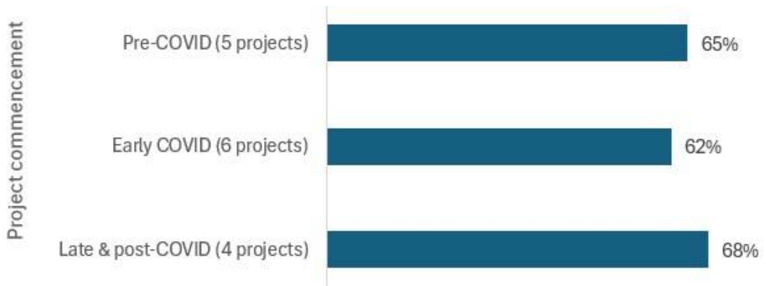

Figure 3 - Aggregate Value for Money scores according to when projects began

3. Results per VfM theme, principle, and criterion.

3.1. Results overview

The following tables presents a summary of aggregate results of which VfM criteria AOP rates highly, which rate as acceptable, and which criteria results indicate vulnerabilities.
These summary overviews are followed by criterion-by-criterion results, observations and lessons.

Table 4 - VfM criteria scoring high results

VfM criterion #	Consideration/Criterion	Aggregate scores of all projects
2	ECONOMY/Cost consciousness Did the project expend its budget to within 90% to 100% of its total funding?	92%
3	EFFICIENCY/Evidence-based decision-making Were lessons learned from past evaluations adopted into this project design?	85%
5	EFFICIENCY/Proportionality Is the project cost per direct participant consistent with other projects in the same country and sector?	77%
1	ECONOMY/Cost consciousness To what extent is maintenance of project outcomes AFFORDABLE and COST-EFFECTIVE for target participants?	73%
15	ETHICS/ Do no harm PSEAH and child protection standards to minimise risk of harm	73%

Table 5 - VfM criteria scoring acceptable results

VfM criterion #	Consideration/Criterion	Aggregate scores of all projects
10	EFFECTIVENESS/Results focus What proportion of project OUTPUT targets were achieved (achieved, overachieved or less than 10% under target)?	68%
8	EFFECTIVENESS/ Performance and Risk Management To what extent was project implementation accountable to its stakeholders?	65%
13	EFFECTIVENESS/ Experimentation and innovation Innovation: Were any components of the project DESIGN significant, evidence-based improvements over previous sector projects?	65%
11	EFFECTIVENESS/Results focus Sustainability: What proportion of outcomes are likely to endure two years after project funding has ceased?	63%
14	EFFECTIVENESS/Adaptive management Were any intended outcomes, approaches, or timelines of the project significantly REVISED DURING IMPLEMENTATION as a result of lessons learned during the project?	60%
12	EFFECTIVENESS/Results focus Scalability: What proportion of intended outcomes are likely to be expanded or replicated without ongoing project assistance?	55%
4	EFFICIENCY/ Evidence-based decision-making (locally-led development) Has the project design been informed by experiences or lessons of stakeholders?	52%
9	EFFECTIVENESS/Results focus Did the project have a robust M&E plan that tracks progress in Outputs and outcomes?	52%

Table 6 - VfM criteria with scores indicating VfM vulnerabilities

VfM criterion #	Consideration/Criterion	Aggregate scores of all projects
7	EFFECTIVENESS/Performance and risk management Did the project have and use a risk register?	45%

6	EFFECTIVENESS/Performance and risk management Did the Australian managing org. regularly conducts site visits to monitoring the project?	32%

3.2. VfM theme: Economy

VfM Principle: Cost consciousness

Criterion 1: To what extent is maintenance of project outcomes AFFORDABLE for target participants?

Program aggregate rating: 73%

This criterion considers cost consciousness from the perspective of community participants. Did the project designers and implementers consider the affordability of maintaining project benefits during and after the project lifecycle? This consideration overlaps with the 'sustainability' criterion.

Overall, we see that the AOP program performed well. No country or sectoral pattern is apparent for which projects were stronger or weaker. But the three top performers were all among the last projects to be designed and commenced (in 2021 and 2022). So, one might speculate that this is a sign of evolving learning by AOP and its partners.

Tanzania's MWEEP and the Vietnam's PRODUCT projects scored highest. Both had substantial evidence that the women participating in the projects were not only able to afford to continue the promoted income-generating but were also reinvesting their profits to expand their economic activities. Microfinance via the village banking models was clearly affordable to repay their loans.

Constraints on affordability

Regarding lower performers, in Kiribati, Ethiopia and Mozambique, evidence indicated that home gardeners and farmers struggled with a shortage of seeds and high costs to acquire more themselves. In Kiribati, the disrepair of water pumps indicating that parts for repairs were not affordable either. The cost of garden tools may have been a further impediment. In Ethiopia, women especially, could not afford land required for agricultural production. In Mozambique, seed stock affordability was compounded by potatoes not coping well with weather hazards like high rain and flooding, requiring repurchase and replanting.

In Timor-Leste, reasons for low affordability of business start-ups were not made clear. But four out of seven sampled businesses had failed, indicating costs may have been exceeding their revenues.

Priority for AOP action: Medium-low

Related DFAT guidance document(s): DMEL Standards, ANCP Manual, Localisation and the ANCP (2019-20), DFAT Guidance Note on Locally Led Development.

Criterion 2: Did the project expend its budget to within 90% to 100% of its total funding?

Program aggregate rating: 92%

This criterion relates to project implementers' management of their budgets. Almost all projects successfully expended all funding by the end of the project. The two exceptions were both associated with PRADET in Timor-Leste.

Priority for AOP action: Priority: Low

Related DFAT guidance document(s): ANCP Manual

3.3. VfM theme: Efficiency

VfM Principle: Evidence-based decision making

Criterion 3: Were lessons learned from past evaluations adopted into this project design?

Program aggregate rating: 85%

This criterion relates to evidence in the project proposals that its designer applied lessons from previous evaluations. These may have been from a previous project phase, or previous project implementing similar objectives. By learning and incorporating what previously worked well and could be amplified, and where past projects struggled and can be improved continuously improves project use of resources (efficiency).

Most proposals explicitly cited what strengths and/or weaknesses had been learned from recent evaluations that informed the current designs. Projects in Kiribati and Timor-Leste were weakest, with vague indications that the implementing organisations had sufficient experience in the sector to know what they were doing right.

Priority for AOP action: Medium-low

Related DFAT guidance document(s): DMEL Standards

Criterion 4: Has the project design been informed by experiences or lessons of stakeholders?

Program aggregate rating: 52%

This criterion relates to the extent that project design processes consulted with intended beneficiaries and other stakeholders, ensuring objectives had a degree of being locally-led, and not merely informed by the knowledge and experience of the partners implementing the projects.

Generally, AOP project partners are not strong on participatory design processes.

'Positive deviants' partners were in South Eastern Africa: United Purpose, and CTDO, and to some extent, Vita and CORDS in equatorial east Africa. The best performing project designs conducted design consultations with intended participants and institutional partners such as relevant government departments. The next best performers consulted one or the other.

Other project designs relied on partner staff's experience of the target communities, and drawing on published research of relevant government bodies and development agencies. These are also important design processes (and hence, no project received a rating of zero) but are not substitutes for participatory design consultations.

Priority for AOP action: High

Related DFAT guidance document(s): DMEL Standards, ANCP Manual, Localisation and the ANCP (2019-20), DFAT Guidance Note on Locally Led Development.

VfM Principle: Proportionality

Criterion 5: Is the project cost per direct participant consistent with other projects in the same country and sector?

Program aggregate rating: 77%

This criterion compares project expenditure per direct participant to the average of all projects in each geo-region. Most projects used to calculate the average for each region were the AOP projects within the sample. Given the unique situation of Timor-Leste and Kiribati, they had their own country-level sample, each of which included a similar, ANCP-funded non-AOP project to increase the samples.

Projects that scored a 4/4 were more than 20% lower than the average. Those who scored 3/4 were within 20% of the average. A 2/4 was slightly more than 20% more expensive than the average and a 1/4 was much higher than the average.

With only a couple of exceptions, most projects clustered closely to the average, so scored quite highly.

Two of the four projects that rated low worked intensively with a few direct participants – because of the nature of the participants' highly individualised intervention needs. In Bangladesh, this related to physical medical treatment for a disability. In Timor-Leste, this related to intensive psycho-social support for people with trauma: survivors of domestic violence and prison inmates. These more sustained and intensive interventions required for such high needs participants reasonably justifies these higher costs – the outcomes of which are also discussed in the SROI chapter.

Priority for AOP action: Medium-low

3.4. VfM theme: Effectiveness

VfM Principle: Performance and risk management

Criterion 6: Did the Australian managing org. regularly conduct site visits to monitoring the project?

Program aggregate rating: 32%

This criterion considers how often AOP's program portfolio managers conducted in-country monitoring visits to each project. A visit every year scored a 4/4; twice in three years, a 3/4; once in three years, a 2/4. No visits: zero.

According to the monitoring reports available, almost half of all projects (7/15) received no monitoring visit over their lifecycle. This VfM criterion ranked as the lowest score and highlights a vulnerability for informed and adaptive decision-making by AOP.

The level of monitoring visits was acceptable in the PICS region, somewhat low among African projects with most projects receiving at least one visit in three years, and almost non-existent among Asian projects, with only one of the five projects having received a visit in the five-year period.

Priority for AOP action: High

Related DFAT guidance document(s): ANCP Manual. DFAT DMEL Standards. Performance Delivery Framework.

Criterion 7: Did the project have and use a risk register?

Program aggregate rating: 45%

This criterion assessed the evidence in project documents for whether a project created a context specific risk register, subsequent risk management plan, and whether project management periodically reviewed and updated risk assessments to inform implementation decisions. In aggregate this VfM criterion scored the second lowest result, highlighting another key vulnerability for informed and adaptive decision-making for AOP and project managers.

Projects in Africa and Kiribati generally performed the poorest in relation to this criterion, gaining a point for having stated (in their proposals) that they have conducted a risk assessment during design phase, but having only a few generic risks listed in their logframes and no evidence of reviewing and updating any risk register.

The partner, PRADET, in Timor-Leste generated surprising results, scoring the highest in its older 'Socioeconomic Empowerment Project' (SEEP) (circa 2019) but its seceding project, 'Empowering Survivors of Domestic Violence…' scored among the lowest. The evaluation report recorded that "PRADET has embedded the principles of performance and risk management. For instance, project documents outlining project risks and mitigation strategies." In contrast, the latter project presented no evidence of risk assessment, and the proposal left the formal declaration of having completed a risk assessment blank/un-ticked. It regained one point because AOP's generic introduction text in the proposal stated that AOP staff applied their standard risk assessment tool.

Priority for AOP action: High

Related DFAT guidance document(s): ANCP Manual Chapter 5. DFAT DMEL Standards. DFAT Environmental and Social Safeguard Policy.

Criterion 8: To what extent was project implementation accountable to its stakeholders?

Program aggregate rating: 65%

This criterion considers the extent to which project implementation plans and corrections were informed by feedback loops from participants and other key stakeholders. The highest rating was awarded to projects that had a formal and functional oversight committee comprised of project staff and representatives of communities and relevant government partner agencies. This was found in the Kiribati Food and Water project, and Zimbabwe's Improving Food Production and Market Linkages Project.

The positive lesson from this criterion is that all projects were found to have good rapport with participants, and most (9/15) used of those relationships to inform adaptive management decisions. Still, the majority (13/15) also have no evidence of a systemic and routine approach for sharing progress and seeking feedback guidance from key stakeholders.

Projects in Kiribati and Zimbabwe were the highest rated.

Kiribati's Pacific Food and Water project had evidence of having formal and functional oversight bodies, including Island Steering and Coordination Committees, Water Committees, and Farmers Associations that involved community representatives and local government. Unfortunately, this approach was not maintained over time. The evaluation report of the seceding 'Community Health Promotion' project noted a level of disconnect between the project staff and ordinary community members (e.g. see 'opportunities on pp. 26 - 27)

The evaluation report for Zimbabwe's 'Improving Food Security and Market Linkages…' project concluded that "Routine monitoring by project staff and frequent interactions with project participants has also attributed to the successes of the project." (p.44). Project staff maintained ongoing consultations with farmers, local leaders, and government stakeholders to guide implementation decisions such that core project decisions were made collectively by farmers, local leadership, and government stakeholders and Project staff collaborated with government agencies to manage safety nets and seed distribution. What's more, implementation included gender analysis and reflection process (GALS) to inform planning decisions.

Priority for AOP action: Medium

Related DFAT guidance document(s): DMEL Standards. ANCP Manual. ANCP Manual, Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy.

VfM Principle: Results focus

Criterion 9: Did the project have a robust M&E plan that tracks progress in Outputs and outcomes?

Program aggregate rating: 52%

This criterion considers whether each project has a functional system for tracking project progress over its lifetime. A well-functioning M&E system is considered to have (a) output AND outcome indicator tracking data, (b) defined numerical target values for indicators, (c) baseline values for indicators, (d) reporting-period values (e.g. for the quarter or the year just completed), and (e) project-to-date values.

This is a core function for evidence-based decision-making. The assessment found this to be the most severe vulnerability for AOP, and an area that AOP must invest in to improve. With only three exceptions, most projects performed poorly in their ability to track their performance against plans.

Generally, AOP projects do not undertake baseline studies to inform goal and outcome-level targets and track progress against them. Most projects did not have outcome targets in their logframes or the targets were unmeasurable (such as by aiming for a % increase above baseline values).

APRs and evaluation reports generally did not report results against indicators listed in the design documents' logframe of MEL framework, instead, inventing bespoke indicators to report on. Consequently, most evaluation reports that provided data as a cross-sectional, single-point-in-time study. Such data cannot reveal whether progress had been made.

Evaluations that provided quantitative findings, based on a participant survey, generally failed to report absolute numbers of project participants groups, rendering the reported percentages hollow. For example, (as a representation of most evaluation reports), the evaluation report for the food and livelihoods project in Malawi found that 55% of farmers produce orange flesh sweet potato (OFSP) under irrigation (p.26). Nothing in the report gives an indication of whether this is 55% of all farmers or 55% of OFSP farmers, or an absolute number of farmers. What's more, the figure does not tell us if this result is an improvement, stagnation, or deterioration over time.

AOP would benefit from analysing the M&E approaches of the two 'positive deviants' identified by this assessment.

Women's Economic Empowerment project in Cambodia. The proposal had a logframe and M&E Matrix with clear indicators and targets. Baseline data was not applicable because the project was undertaking completely new initiatives. The Evaluation Report (pp.21-22) presented indicator results against targets for all outputs. A credit to this evaluation. One of the beneficial lessons reported was CWCC staff's strong dedication to consistently monitoring and well-managing the project's implementation within the fixed timeframe (p.31).

Maasai Women's Economic Empowerment project in Tanzania. The evaluation report established that "The project has a robust M&E system in place to track progress and measure the project's effectiveness. The M&E system includes regular reporting, data collection, and analysis to ensure that the project is on track and achieving its objectives. The data collected is used to make informed decisions about project adjustments and improvements." "The reporting system for

CORDS is very effective since they provide regular updates to stakeholders, including AOP, implementing partners, and the target communities. The reports also include progress towards project objectives, challenges encountered, and recommendations for improvements." (p.21)

Priority for AOP action: High

Related DFAT guidance document(s): DMEL Standards, ANCP Manual

Criterion 10: What proportion of project OUTPUT targets were achieved (achieved, overachieved or less than 10% under target)?

Program aggregate rating: 68%

This criterion considered the extent to which each project accomplished its intended outputs. The scores are an amalgam of the proportion of outputs completed, and how much they were completed against their target numbers.

For most projects, this proved a challenging assessment, given the gaps in M&E tracking reported above. Consequently, most results are a best-guess by comparing objectives and targets in proposal design documents to some figures and mostly narrative descriptions in APRs and evaluation reports.

The analysis identified that, generally, project implementing partners in Asia and PICS achieved their targets by the end of their projects, and partners in Africa tended to fall somewhat short of their targets – despite generally generating good results for intended beneficiaries. These shortcomings primarily appear to be a result of setting unrealistic targets at design stage. Whether this is the result of poor reflection on past project results or intentional over-promising as a positioning strategy is unknown. For example, Ethiopia's 'Enhancing Food, Nutrition, Incomes…' project planned to benefit over 6,000 direct participants: 4165 men, 1915 women (proposal document). By end of project, it's actual reach was reportedly 1500 direct participant farmers, plus another 1,500 direct beneficiary recipients of 'passed-on' potato seed stock (eval rpt, p.11).

Priority for AOP action: High

Related DFAT guidance document(s): DMEL Standards, ANCP Manual

Criterion 11: Sustainability. What proportion of outcomes are likely to endure two years after project funding has ceased?

Program aggregate rating: 63%

As the question states, this criterion considers the evaluation evidence for the likelihood that intended outcomes of each project will be maintained by project participants and other beneficiaries beyond the project lifecycle. Since all projects were evaluated shortly prior to the end of the project, these are speculative findings. All evaluation reports provided a 'Sustainability' section. However, a significant minority of evaluation reports presented vague, non-committal contents, requiring careful cross-referencing with other evaluation sections and contents of the APRs.

The assessment found a high degree of consistency with most scoring that "Most intended outcomes show likelihood of being maintained by stakeholders," or that "Around half of intended outcomes show likelihood of being maintained…" which is still a respectable result.

Locally adapted versions of village savings and loans associations (VSLAs) consistently showed the highest likelihood of sustainability across all countries, due to the combination of community ownership; affordability of savings contributions, loans, and membership; and economically beneficial outcomes to sustain motivation of members.

In terms of general findings, most projects with an income generation and/or food production component were found to be likely to continue for around half or more of direct participants. Several key factors for sustainability were identified. The promoted crops and techniques met a perceived need and provided long-term food and income benefits. Sustainability was strengthened by formation or nurturing or farmer associations for collective action, active involvement of government agricultural extension and research institutions, and interconnections with village savings structures. For example, the evaluation report of the Ethiopian 'Enhancing Food, Nutrition, Income…' project (pp.12-13) found that the project set up good supply chains between potato research and seed multiplication producers to farmers, and strengthened extension services from government officers to farmers. The results were popular and sustainability of improved production and consumption of improved potatoes is highly likely among farmers with sufficient land. Similarly, the evaluation of Tanzania's Maasai Women's Economic Empowerment project noted that ""the project ... has led to an improvement in the overall well-being of the women and their families. They have become more self-reliant, and their businesses have generated profits, which are used for basic needs and improving their businesses further."

Active and targeted leadership training - especially for women – was found to be a common factor in assuring sustainability of project-supported associations, like livelihood clusters and VSLAs. This was found to be the case across Asian and African projects. Though, a vulnerability to sustainability persists due to inevitable turn-over of incumbent leadership after some time and the absence of training for future leaders.

Constraints on sustainability

Whilst generally sustainable in most cases, food production projects across the geo-regions tended to be undermined by relatively high or increasing price of quality seed stock and extreme weather impacts destroying crops, including cyclones, floods and dry-spells. When growers lost their project-promoted crops before reaching harvest sales, they were often dependent on the project to subsidise their reacquisition of new seedstock to plant – especially common to the African projects. What's more, where government agricultural extension staff lead farmer capacity-building, their engagement tends to decline from target communities when project funding no longer subsidises their work.

Projects that focussed on providing specialised health services showed little sign of sustainability without ongoing external donor support. For example, disability therapy in Bangladesh (for children with club foot) and psychosocial care in Timor-Leste (for survivors of domestic violence and prison inmates). The partner in Bangladesh, Glencoe Foundation, had undertaken steps to sustain their service via user-pays fees for families that can afford them. But, like AOP's Timorese partner, PRADET, their lack of progress in mainstreaming practices into government institutions results in services remaining out of reach to the most disadvantaged without foreign financial support. Still, for the individuals supported during the project, life/coping skills taught and livelihood options were found to have a high likelihood of ongoing benefit.

In Kiribati, household food production efforts of both projects faced the biggest barriers of any of the projects. Promoted food garden efforts were heavily undermined by the combination of remote-island barriers: the high effort and cost of buying and transporting new seed stock from the capital, the perennial scarcity of fresh water on low-lying atoll islands, and the extremely hard labour required to produce and transport sufficient soil and compost on atolls where fertile soil is also very scarce. The introduction of manually operated water pumps was also found to be unsustainable, most likely due to community members' reluctance to incur the high cost of procuring and transporting maintenance parts from the capital. Thus, the Food and Water project (circa 2017) recorded the lowest score. However, a later project that focussed on Community Health Promotion (circa 2020) scored much higher. While its food production component suffered the same barriers, its main focus on hygienic household practices and uptake of government health clinic services are less dependent on a steady supply of external inputs, so showed more sustainability overall.

Priority for AOP action: Medium

Related DFAT guidance document(s): DMEL Standards

Criterion 12: Post-project scalability. What proportion of intended outcomes are likely to be expanded or replicated without ongoing project assistance?

Program aggregate rating: 55%

Spontaneous scalability represents the next level of sustainability: when community and institutional partners are willing and able to independently expand project benefits after AOP's project's work has ended. The concept is heavily influenced by efforts towards 'localisation' and localised ownership of objectives and results.

Many of AOP's evaluation reports discuss the potential for scalability in their 'Sustainability' sections. This criterion considers evidence of outcomes and benefits growing and extending to new beneficiaries beyond the projects.

Given that achieving scalability is more difficult than sustaining/maintaining benefits to project participants, it should not be a surprise that aggregate results for this criterion are lower than for 'Sustainability'. Nevertheless, 11/15 projects still showed potential for at least some intended outcomes.

For economic development projects, the common thread tended to relate to evidence that many businesses started by project participants were expanding operations or reinvesting into additional businesses at the time of evaluation. For example, the evaluation of the SEEP project in Timor-Leste found that four of 18 interviewed women used their incomes to diversify and scale-up their business operations and a further three of the 18 used their business income to invest in other business opportunities. Such findings were common in women's economic empowerment projects.

The SEEP project is an example of another pathway for economic empowerment to scale: passing on business skills. Of the 18 women interviewed, half (9) reported sharing their business training content with family or neighbours. This same phenomenon was found in other evaluations too, such as in Cambodia. In FWCR projects, where food production processes were focussed on locally available materials and simple but effective techniques, spontaneous adoption was high. For example, the valuation report for the Malawi Victory Gardens found that "The VGP interventions have also impacted the neighbouring communities evidenced by the adoption of project activities by non-targeted farmers" (p.25).

The establishment or strengthening of livelihood associations like farmers' associations, CBT associations, and VSLAs improved scaling outcomes. Several reports noted that such groups were attracting new members who were not part of the initial project. As with all factors, this is context specific. The evaluation of the Malawi 'Improved Food Security and Economic Empowerment' project found that the farmer associations were a good conduit for extending OFSP farming to new growers, but the evaluation of the equivalent project in Mozambique found no evidence of attracting new members, and that even savings groups were only cited as a means for coping when crops are lost, rather than for reinvesting in business expansion.

'Pass-on' or 'pay-it-forward' schemes were common in food production projects, whereby recipients of improved seedstock had an obligation to give some of their harvest to non-participant farmers. These were found to generate at least one wave of scaling beyond the project, but the practice is unlikely to continue in the absence of a project compelling growers to do so.

The PRODUCT project in Vietnam achieved top ranking, in part because of its success in ensuring district governments recognise the contribution of CBT to the local economies. This motivated these governments to invest public funds into supporting the flourishing of such businesses. This stands as somewhat of a contrast to the more common experience of government extension workers engaging a project only for as long as the project is subsidising their efforts to do so.

Constraints on scaling

The scaling of some economic development initiatives was constrained by the limits of business training and support offered by the projects. In projects such as the Maasai Women's Economic Empowerment project in Tanzania and CBT projects in Vietnam, businesses started by women reached a level of maturity in good time. But to maintain complex operations (such as the flour mill business in Tanzania) or to expand into larger businesses (such as the homestay and other CBT enterprises) required a new level of training that was beyond the start-up-focussed training curricula developed by the AOP projects/partners.

Scalability was suppressed in some food production projects (especially in Ethiopia) due to the high costs of inputs and infrastructure that the project paid for or subsidised. Such high costs showed little likelihood of being replicated by project participants' or indirect beneficiaries' own funds. Examples included the purchase of infrastructure such as potato storage facilities (in many African countries) and weir dams (in Zimbabwe); and inputs like higher priced quality seed stock and water pump parts (in Kiribati). Maintenance of these facilities are probable, but establishing new ones is unlikely without external funding support.

Scalability for health support projects in Bangladesh and Timor-Leste is low. These are dependent on their services being expanded independently by partners and adopted by institutions beyond the partners. Neither was found to be likely.

In the remote island communities of Kiribati, scalability was constrained by geography. The Kiribati projects support populations of small, isolated islands. Being small communities surrounded by large ocean, the projects covered the entire populations within their lifecycles with no neighbouring communities to see and replicate.

Priority for AOP action: Medium-low

Related DFAT guidance document(s): DMEL Standards. ANCP Manual. Localisation and the ANCP (2019-20). DFAT Guidance Note on Locally Led Development.

VfM Principle: Experimentation and innovation

Criterion 13: Innovation: Were any components of the project DESIGN significant, evidence-based improvements over previous sector projects?

Program aggregate rating: 65%

This criterion explores whether any project interventions were especially innovative for the local or national contexts in which they took place. In some ways, this criterion is an amplification of criterion 3 which considered whether designs were informed by past lessons.

The overall score (65%) indicates reasonable success in projects' innovativeness, with 11/15 projects achieving a 'good or very good result. By their very nature, the types of innovations were diverse rather than forming clear trends, and cannot all be cited in this summary.

The MWEEP in Tanzania achieved the highest score because, as the Completion Report cited, "it integrated traditional Maasai practices with modern economic empowerment strategies, creating a unique approach that was both culturally sensitive and effective." Additionally, whereas the Maasai traditionally relied almost exclusively on livestock, the project was innovative in diversifying income sources into non-agricultural enterprises, such as retail trading of sugar, rice, fuel, and school uniforms. It addressed a major logistical challenge by drastically reducing the physical burden on women, who previously travelled long distances to grind maize; and successfully navigated social innovation by engaging men and male leaders as allies of women's empowerment in this traditionally patriarchal culture. This was a significant shift from more common "women-only" interventions. A similar shift was evident in other food production projects like in Zimbabwe and Malawi, where the project helped shift cultural production and food preferences around cereals that were nutritionally poor and climatically vulnerable towards more diversified and climate resilient production like root crops, home garden vegetables, fodder production and storing to cope with lean periods, and a fortified bean variety (NUA45 with higher zinc and iron content).

The PRODUCT project in Vietnam was the only other project to achieve the highest score. This project was found to nurture several innovations of potentially national significance. As described by its APRs, the project "designing [replicable] market-oriented service packages in CBT villages"; "New experiential tours were created" (such as around farming and cooking tourism); "travel-to-give products … [enabled] CBT products to actively engage in climate change mitigation in Vietnam"; and the project "developed digital VLSA tools that increased motivation for people to join VSLAs."

The work of Timorese partner, PRADET, is considered unique in the country, and therefore innovative, for its work supporting survivors of domestic violence with microbusiness development in addition to psychosocial support. Whilst innovative compared to other national programs, PRADET has been doing this work for over 20 years, so is no longer internally innovative.

The project in Ethiopia tried to confront its key sustainability constraint by introducing innovative shade houses for farmers to multiply their own OFSP seed stock, their own storage facilities to prolong the shelf life of their potatoes by an additional three months, and encouraged the incorporation of OFSP into bread production to increase dietary availability of β-carotene among the beneficiary population (as did the project in Malawi too).

The WARM project in Cambodia developed and launched a free mobile phone app to provide Cambodian women and men in Cambodia and already abroad with important advice and support about how to avoid being scammed by international work schemes and optimise their protection from exploitation.

Priority for AOP action: Low

Related DFAT guidance document(s): ANCP manual

Criterion 14: Adaptive management: Were any intended outcomes, approaches, or timelines of the project significantly REVISED DURING IMPLEMENTATION as a result of lessons learned during the project?

Program aggregate rating: 60%

Many systems and functions in and surrounding a project contribute to healthy adaptive management. Some are covered in earlier criteria such as good M&E systems, risk management, and participatory consultation approaches. This criterion does not so much consider what systems are in place but instead considers whether project documents contain evidence of adaptive management decisions having taken place.

The criterion's scoring is based on the theory that, given the unpredictability of human societies, any development project must modify its plans over its multi-year lifecycle, in light of new information and especially stakeholder feedback. Therefore, projects that undertook several adjustments scored highly and those with little to no evidence of revising plans since the original proposal/design (beyond adjusting to implementation delays or revised participant numbers) scored low.

With most projects operational during the COVID years, most projects had to adapt to challenges it created, especially in relation to travel restrictions and incorporation of health messaging. Other common reactive adaptations related to projects merging/incorporating budgets and participants from other projects that were closing, and reorienting food production projects around unforeseeable weather impacts of cyclones and droughts (especially in African projects).

More advanced examples referred to adapting to testing and responding to trials of new market chains, different varieties of food crops and livestock varieties. As well as customising their capacity-building approaches based on participant feedback and results.

Interestingly, the same projects that scored highest for innovation also scored highest for adaptive management: MWEEP in Tanzania and PRODUCT in Vietnam.

Priority for AOP action: High

Related DFAT guidance document(s): DMEL Standards

3.5. VfM theme: Ethics

VfM Principle: Do no harm

Criterion 15: PSEAH and child protection standards in place to minimise risk of harm.

Program aggregate rating: 73%

The theme of 'Ethics' could have many VfM criteria related to safeguards, and financial and managerial accountability and transparency. Prioritising one collective 'protection' criterion focuses on a core risk that could otherwise undermine the value of any project. Thus, the criterion assesses projects' processes to prevent sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment (PSEAH) and related protection responsibility. Hence, a focus on projects having minimum sufficient safeguards in place.

Consequently, a top score is achieved if available project documentation evidences four functions:

(a) The implementing partner has a PSEAH or safeguards policy,
(b) All project staff sign a Safeguards code of conduct,
(c) All staff attended Safeguards training,
(d) The project has a confidential complaints/grievance reporting and redress mechanism that all in partnered communities are aware of and know how to access.

A 'good' score' is achieved if evidence of three of these four safeguard functions are identified, and so on.

With only a couple of exceptions, results were promising, with most attaining a 'good' or 'top' score of three or above.

Only one project was found to explicitly have a complaints/redress mechanism in place: the Improving Food Security and Economic Empowerment project in Zimbabwe. The remaining 14/15 projects had no evidence of a complaints and redress mechanism. Such an omission reduces the transparency and accountability of project staff by making it difficult for vulnerable people, often in isolated communities to report any misdeeds by staff.

The other project to achieve a top score, Tanzania's MWEEP, did so by gaining an additional point for its vigilance in promoting community-based safeguards and child protection issues – though it was not part of the defined criterion scoring. Some other projects also gained a point for similar reasons.

It was clear from APR reporting that AOP was responsible for almost all safeguards/PSEAH training for partner/project staff. This is an important and admirable role as the program management organisation.

The META evaluation process did not have access to partners' safeguards or PSEAH policies or staff codes of conduct, or whether and how these were implemented throughout project lifecycles. Therefore, recording that project documents reported their existence provides no insights into their quality and functionality. AOP and its partners must remain vigilant in verifying their contents and use – in addition to developing and implementing safe, confidential and independent community complaints and redress mechanisms for every project.

Priority for AOP action: Medium-high.

Related DFAT guidance document(s): Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy 2019. Child Protection Policy

3.6. Gender equality, disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI).

DFAT's VfM principles do not include reference to inclusivity considerations of gender equality and inclusiveness of socially disadvantaged groups. Given the centrality of these values in all other aspects of DFAT's and the wider sector's guidance, consideration of steps for evidence-based decision-making would be incomplete without reflection on AOP's performance, DFAT guidance, and recommendations for how better enable GEDSI-informed decision-making.

Socially disadvantaged groups might include "diverse men, women, boys, and girls; people with disabilities; the poor and the near poor; ethnic or religious minorities; indigenous communities; the elderly; the sick or infirm; those with low levels of education; people that identify as LGBTQIA+, as well as cross-sections of these groups (e.g., women with disabilities)."[8]

Overview of AOP projects' performance

The Outcomes and Impacts chapter elaborates on the relative GEDSI-related strengths and gaps of AOP projects. Therefore, a rapid summary will suffice here.

Gender equality. Project designs and implementation were generally successful in enabling increased agency for women via income generation, leadership preparation and activation, women-focussed livelihoods and savings associations, and raising awareness and some action around gender-harmful social norms.

Key gender gaps identified were: some women-focussed initiatives increased work burdens for women without relieving their existing household and life responsibilities. Women's empowerment approaches tended to primarily engage women without accounting for the broader gendered enabling/constraining environment. Evaluation reports tended to lack sex-disaggregated data or failed to quantify the specific value of outcomes for women distinct from men.

Disability. Most evaluation reports identified little to no progress on disability inclusion. There were some positive exceptions. The proportions of project participants with disabilities were always much lower than their percentage of the national populations. The most significant gap in most projects was the failure to track or disaggregate data for people with disabilities at output and outcome levels. Secondly, most projects had no evidence of consultations, outreach, and adaptation of project activities to be inclusive. Partnered government services often also lacked the capacity and facilities to support people with disabilities, effectively rendering them inaccessible. These symptoms indicate that, in most or all project partner organisations, project designers and implementers lack knowledge and competencies for how to meaningfully include people with disabilities in programming.

Other disadvantaged minorities. Generally, all projects worked for the advancement of economically disadvantaged individuals, households and communities and in most cases, participants were indigenous majority groups. In addition, some projects explicitly served the needs of marginalised indigenous minorities: the Maasai Women's Economic Empowerment project in Tanzania and the two CBT projects in Vietnam. Other projects focused on highly vulnerable youths. The two projects in Timor included support for male youth prison inmates. The project in Ethiopia included support for unemployed youth. The two projects in Cambodia served the needs of vulnerable work migrants and deported returnees, and survivors of trafficking.

Importance: Essential

Priority for AOP action: Medium-High

Related DFAT guidance document(s): ANCP Manual. DMEL Standards, Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy (AIGES). Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy (AIDERS). Environmental and Social Safeguard Policy (ESSP).

4. Conclusion of the VfM and EbD chapter

This chapter assessed the value-for-money of AOP projects' *processes* for designing and executing projects to generate quality results. The following chapter will describe resultant *outcomes and impacts* of these processes for intended beneficiaries by the end of each projects, and the final chapter on social return on investment (SROI) quantifies the value for money of those projects as *the equivalent monetary values of those outcomes and impacts* for end beneficiaries, relative to the economies of each project location.

To summarise and conclude this chapter is to respond to the objectives set out under the 'purpose of this chapter':

- "Assess how well AOP's monitoring, evaluation, and adaptive learning systems support evidence-based decision-making."

- "Assess Value for Money (VfM) in a way that balances financial stewardship with fairness, inclusion, and long-term impact."

The answers to these two objectives are inter-related. Where project processes functioned well, generating sound evidence for decision-making for effective design and implementation, the value for money of the project is greater.
In relation to AOP projects' systems for evidence-based learning (monitoring, evaluation and adaptive learning), clear strengths (that assure sound value for money) and areas for improvement (where value for money is vulnerable) emerged. In relation to strengths, AOP projects rated strong or acceptably on 12 of the 15 VfM criteria. Stand-out strengths related to:

- Financial control – with most projects spending within 90 to 100% of their budgets without overspending (cost consciousness as stewards of donors' funds)
- Incorporating evidence-based decisions into new designs by drawing on lessons learned from previous evaluations (evidence-based design)
- Carefully balancing trade-offs between coverage of intended beneficiaries with sufficient investment in each participant to ensure positive outcomes (proportionality)
- Ensuring that the ongoing costs for participants to maintain benefits beyond the project funding are affordable and accessible (cost consciousness to stakeholders)
- Protecting partnered populations by ensuring that PSEAH and child protection processes are in place (Do no harm)

Aspects of project processes where value-for-money was found to be acceptable but have tangible opportunities to become stronger related to:

- Level of achievement of outputs against targets (results focus). This had more to do with overly ambitious design targets than underperformance
- Accountability to stakeholders throughout implementation (local ownership and accountability)
- Incorporating design elements that were significant improvements over previous designs (innovation)
- Likely sustainability of outcomes after project funding has ended (sustainability)
- Projects' capacity to adapt to changed circumstances during implementation (Adaptive management)
- The likelihood of project outcomes spontaneously expanding to new beneficiaries after project fundings has ended (spontaneous scalability)
- The extent to which the project design was informed by input from intended community and institutional stakeholders (locally-led development)
- Projects having a robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems in place to provide accurate and timely insights to guide decision-making (results focus)

The latter two points above were only just adequate in their value-for-money ratings and still represent priorities for future investment by AOP and its partners. Only two aspects of project processes were found to unambiguously represent inadequate value for money and subsequent vulnerability to AOP's ability to make informed decisions to guide projects and programs. Both relate to performance and risk management. These were:

- Inadequate use of context-specific risk registers and subsequent risk tracking and management. Often initial risk assessments were carried out, but evidence available indicated these tended to be generic, narrow in focus, and not monitored for change over time.
- Low levels of on-site project monitoring by AOP portfolio managers. Evidence available indicated that AOP were adequately conducting monitoring visits to PICS projects, an almost adequate level of on-site monitoring in Africa, but almost no such monitoring in Asia.

The VfM and EbD annex presents many recommendations as well as relevant DFAT standards to guide continuous improvements. Recommendations have been ranked in terms of the general importance of the related process for good EbD and also by the level of prioritisation/urgency for AOP to pursue improvements. The top priorities for near-term investment by AOP were found to be:

- Design-phase guidelines are needed to ensure project directions are informed by intended participants and partners, and draft objectives are also reviewed by these stakeholders.
- Future project budgets must include sufficient allocation for a monitoring visit to each project one to two times every three years. For better economy, it may be prudent to intentionally cluster projects in more concentrated

zones to enable multiple countries' projects to be visited in a single monitoring trip. AOP's current wide geographic spread for the size of its program increases inefficiencies.

- AOP may need to create a standard templates for a risk register, risk management plan, and periodic risk rating updates.
- Invest heavily in internal capacity and standardised processes for robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems to inform decisions throughout the project lifecycle.
- Setting processes in place to ensure implementing partners' internal management processes schedule routine meetings to adjust plans based on monthly or quarterly quantitative, qualitative, and participatory insights.

End of chapter.

Chapter 3: Synthesis report of Outcomes and impacts

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of this chapter and structure of this chapter

The following chapter assesses "the overall outcomes and contributions of AOP's portfolio,"[2] with consideration of "cross-cutting themes, lessons learned, and areas of strength or improvement." All 15 evaluation reports were re-analysed to systematically identify outcomes against AOP's sectoral and cross-cutting outcome objectives defined by AOP's 2020 – 2024 sectoral strategy documents.

The synthesis considers outcomes and impacts, and what lessons can be learned from them by sector and geo-region. Areas of notable impact will also be drawn from the SROI assessments.

Given the necessity for results to be long-lasting to be considered outcomes or impacts, this chapter also considers factors of AOP's programs that advanced or constrained sustainability of outcomes. The synthesis also reflects on unintended impacts: positive and negative impacts.

Lastly, this chapter presents a synthesis of recommendations from the evaluation reports of each sectoral theme, integrating the combined wisdom of all the evaluators who have assessed AOP's work over these five years.

1.2. Defining outcomes and impacts

To interpret the projects' outcomes and impacts achieved, we must be clear on what these terms mean.

'Outcomes' are "the expected and desired changes that occur *as a result of the project or program* interventions, and they are usually defined in terms of the target population or beneficiaries".[9]

'Impacts' are any "lasting or significant change – positive or negative, *intended or not* – in people's lives brought about by an action or a series of actions."[10]

K4Dev evaluation consultants consider that outcomes tend to be sustained changes in attitudes, practices or institutions brought about by the project. Whereas impacts are meaningful and lasting consequences of those outcomes on the lives of participants and the people around them. Specific impacts are sought by project designers and implementers, yet impacts can manifest regardless of a project's intent. As such, they can be positive or negative impacts, anticipated or unanticipated.

Both concepts seek to understand projects' longer-term influences on the lives of project participants and other stakeholders. AOP's sectoral strategies logically focus on achieving outcome-level changes. Consequently, for pragmatic lesson-learning, this chapter melds identification of longer-term results, only occasionally dividing them into one category of the other.

1.3. Limitations of this outcomes-and-impacts chapter

AOP's monitoring and evaluation reporting was inconsistent in how each project tracked and counted direct participants and other beneficiaries.

AOP did not consistently include its sector strategy indicators (referred to as outcome areas) in the projects' logframes, M&E plans and evaluations.

Without consistent indicator tracking tables monitoring results in each project, there was no capacity to aggregate or compare progress per intended outcome between projects. Consequently, though many of AOP's sector strategies aspire to capture numbers of people who experienced each intended outcome, the quantitative data available does not enable aggregation across projects.

[2] This statement is the META Evaluation TOR's Objective Two.

2. AOP's program outcomes and impacts

Considering the "the overall outcomes and contributions of AOP's portfolio," the following section presents a summary of the detailed assessment of outcome and impacts in the reports appendix, firstly by sectoral theme, and then by cross-cutting themes.

2.1. AOP's Economic empowerment and sustainable livelihoods (EESL) sectoral theme

EESL projects proved to be a core strength of AOP's programming – especially for women. While 12 of the 15 were primarily EESL projects, 14 had EESL components. Outcomes revolved around agricultural or community-based tourism ventures (in Vietnam). Their high-level objectives were to increase incomes, form or expand community-owned financial structures for participants to save incomes and access affordable credit, and instil financial skills to better manage incomes. These EESL outcomes resulted in positive impacts for the majority of participants in most projects. Savings and loans being reinvested by participants into expanded business ventures that further expanded incomes. Savings and affordable loans created social safety nets to enable participants' households to better recover from economic or climatic shocks without falling into burdensome debt. Incomes enabled participants to upgrade the quality and sanitation of their home and also invest in furthering children's education. Savings groups acted as a tool for women's empowerment, shifting women's historically marginal roles by increasing women's confidence to participate in community discussions and lead NGO projects.

2.2. AOP's Food, water, and climate resilience sectoral theme

FWCR projects mainly focussed on the 'food' component – incorporated into 14 of the 15 projects. An impressive aspect of AOP's food production component was how customised approaches were to each specific context. These projects transformed subsistence activities into viable agricultural producers, significantly improving household nutrition and financial resilience. Across the countries, participants' households registered improved nutrition and reduced hunger.

Eight out of the 15 projects explicitly included a focus on water management: half (those in Africa) focussed on water for agriculture, and the other half (in Asia and PICS), focussed on household water and sanitation. Agricultural water initiatives consistently reduced the distance to livestock drinking sites and allowed for year-round crop irrigation. Though, communities already in drought found that learning water conservation management techniques were too late to be fully useful, compared to learning and preparing ahead of time. Only one project in remote islands of Kiribati directly sought to introduce new water supply infrastructure. Whilst it was found to increase safe water supply during the project, its results were not sustained by community stakeholders without project support. Household and community sanitation promotion was more successful due to not relying on purchasing and transporting parts from the main island, its results were still undermined by a lack of access to clean water. By contrast, community-based tourism projects in Vietnam had more sustainable impacts on water and sanitation due to it being a result of:

a) Homestay owners needing to provide safe water and sanitation in their homes to be commercially viable
b) Incentive for collective management of environmental water sources and garbage management to maintain tourism
c) Project and community advocacy for better public investment in community water and sanitation

Climate resilience was not a primary objective of any projects, so much as an important consideration. Thus, elements of climate resilience were incorporated into 11 of the 15 projects. Such elements related to adoption of climate smart agriculture and resilient crop varieties, water conservation, appropriate renewable energy sources, and disaster mapping and preparedness. Thus, these components contributed to sustained impacts of other projects – especially livelihoods and food production projects.

2.3. AOP's health and inclusive development (HID) sectoral theme

Health projects were a minor part of AOP's portfolio, with only two dedicated health projects. The Bangladesh Walk for Life project enabled life-changing impacts by permanently restoring children's physical and subsequently their social and employment opportunities, as well as for parents, the intervention saves time and money every day that would otherwise be spent caring for a disabled child. Kiribati's Community Health Promotion project generated more informed health-seeking behaviours towards actively seeking professional clinical care – but without undermining or diminishing local knowledge on traditional medicines. Three additional projects, all focussed on women's protection challenges (in Timor-Leste and Cambodia) included components that successfully improved participants psychosocial health by incorporating counselling and life skills among income-generation activities and peer support networks. Most other non-health-related projects enabled positive health projects, for example: food security projects increasing awareness and increased access to nutritious foods, income generation projects enabling women and their children to afford to access clinical health care and/or including education on locally relevant health issues.

2.4. AOP's Social accountability and governance (SAG) sectoral theme

Social accountability and governance best understood as an AOP principle for good development rather than a development sector in its own right. None of AOP's projects were primarily focused on the SAG objective, but most projects contained elements of its intended outcomes. Almost half of the projects (seven of 15) contained outcomes that improved linkages between the needs of disadvantaged citizens and government service providers. These were primarily focussed in the Asia region. In Vietnam and Cambodia, frequent direct engagements by project staff to relevant government departments, and mobilisation of community interest groups led to positive developments among government partners. Local governments incorporated community-based tourism objectives into their Socio-Economic Development Plans. Project-trained women successfully advocated for their rights within their local Commune Committees. The project directly influenced Cambodia's National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women to include specific support for migrant women. In Timor-Leste, collaboration between the project and other NGOs created a mechanism to hold the justice system accountable for the lawful treatment of inmates, while also providing support for female prisoners to advance their court cases.

While most projects in Africa collaborated with local government agricultural departments, only one project in Africa (in Ethiopia) incorporated explicit advocacy to government policies and frameworks. This project facilitated the formation of Quality Declared Planting Material (QDPM) committees to work alongside local government agricultural officers to inspect seed production, ensuring that the government and seed multipliers remained accountable to quality standards.

In relation to indigenous approaches to civic participation, only one project (in Tanzania) was specifically designed for indigenous communities with integrated traditional leadership structures and customary land management in its governance model. At least two other project evaluations established explicit incorporation of indigenous systems. Still, it was common for almost all projects to include community leaders in consultations and decision-making, which, especially in African and PICS contexts is synonymous with traditional village chief and elders.

3. Cross-cutting themes and unanticipated outcomes

3.1. Gender equality and disability inclusion outcomes

In relation to AOP's gender equality objectives under the four sectoral themes, projects generally increased women's economic capacity and successfully increased women's agency to meaningfully participate in the economy, formal associations, and public decision-making forums. The best examples of gender transformation worked with both men and women to learn, reflect on, and reform gender roles underlying power imbalances. However, most projects focussed primarily on working with women, perhaps under the undeclared assumption that empowered women will assert their rights to overcome entrenched inequalities. Some practical outcomes reduced women's traditional work burden, such as by increasing quantities or access to natural resources close to home. Yet, several projects also unintentionally increased women's work burden by promoting additional agricultural and sanitary activities that fell into women's existing traditional responsibilities.

Disability inclusion was, at best, inconsistent and generally weak across AOP's portfolio. For the most part, project implementation was disability blind, not having consulted or considered how activity design and conduct might enable people with disabilities to participate. Most project MEL systems did not track disability inclusion at output or outcome levels.

3.2. Sustainability

Enablers. AOP's key strengths related to Investing in participants' Financial Independence; encouraging buy-in of related government authorities; mobilising sustainable collective economic groups and interest groups (such as VSLAs and livelihood committees); and investing in nurturing local expert advisors (such as lead farmers and community health volunteers) to retain and pass on practical knowledge even in the absence of project staff and activities.

Constraints. Factors that constrained sustainability tended to be very context specific. In Vietnam, the otherwise successful CBT model remained relevant only for new businesses and lost relevance once businesses began to mature. In Cambodia, group leaders were often government appointed and built-capacity was undermined by frequent turn-over. In southern Africa, frequent waves of cyclones, droughts and floods continually reversed agricultural gains being made. In Ethiopia, traditional land ownership by men kept women marginalised from project participation and agricultural advancement. In Kiribati, the distance and cost of purchasing inputs from the main island/capital undermined community continuity of food production and water supply initiatives. In Timor-Leste and Bangladesh, continuity of service provision by implementing partners remained heavily reliant on external project fundings.

3.3. Unanticipated outcomes

Unanticipated beneficial outcomes were found to include:

- The Creation of standardised and modular programming tools will enable efficient roll-out of future microfinance and CBT projects.
- A multiplier effect was taking place in several projects, whereby vocational skills learned by participants was being shared or copied by other neighbours and family members, thus expanding projects' indirect reach.
- Leadership incubation, whereby women trained in project areas, such as VSLA management gained skills and confidence to move into local government and NGO management.
- National policy influence – whereby projects in Cambodia and Bangladesh had some influence on national strategies.

Unanticipated negative outcomes were found to include:

- Increased Work Burdens for Women: As noted under 'gender equality'.
- Potential to exacerbate climate change vulnerabilities where projects expanded annual cropping, thereby leaving cleared land bare for much of the year and vulnerable to soil erosion and landslides.
- Social Envy, whereby the provision of material support to specific groups or winners of competitions caused some resentment among non-recipients and put staff in awkward positions.
- Market saturation in Vietnam whereby project success in promoting CBT led to an over-supply of homestay providers in some villages.
- Misuse of Resources in Kiribati, whereby government agricultural officers reportedly germinated and sold seeds that were intended for free distribution.
- Market-values eroded community-spirit in Vietnam, whereby local businesses became more competitive at the expense of community-wide benefit sharing, and external businesses and investors started moving in, eroding the "community-based" spirit of the project.

4. Lessons learned and Conclusion

This conclusion responds to the purpose stated at the beginning of this chapter: to assess "the overall outcomes and contributions of AOP's portfolio,"[3] with consideration of "cross-cutting themes, lessons learned, and areas of strength or improvement".

Findings demonstrate a high-impact program that excels in Economic Empowerment and Sustainable Livelihoods (EESL) and Food, Water, and Climate Resilience (FWCR). By re-analysing 15 evaluation reports, it is clear that AOP's primary contribution lies in its ability to transform subsistence activities into viable, surplus-based agricultural and tourism ventures, significantly enhancing household nutrition and financial resilience. Health programming achieves some very positive outcomes but lags in relation to sustainability.

A primary lesson from this evaluation period is that context-specific customization is a core strength of AOP's success for generating positive impacts. Whether through community-based tourism (CBT) in Vietnam or drought-resistant seed systems in Ethiopia, AOP's ability to adapt technical interventions to local realities has been a hallmark of its impact.

[3] This statement is the META Evaluation TOR's Objective Two.

Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) emerged as the portfolio's most effective tool for sustainability – though is by no means its only effective tool. VSLA groups (under various contextualised association names) did not merely provide financial tools: they acted as platforms for social safety nets and women's leadership incubation.

The use of high-yield, disease-resistant, and bio-fortified crops—such as Irish potatoes in Ethiopia and Orange-Fleshed Sweet Potatoes in Malawi—directly resulted in the reduction of "hunger months" and improved household nutrition. Agricultural water initiatives like weir dams and solar boreholes successfully reduced physical labour for women, freeing their time for other productive pursuits. As a caveat to this conclusion, other women-focussed projects increased the labour of women by promoting new labour-intensive agricultural tasks for women (including water-fetching for irrigation or compost production) without shifting pre-existing gendered roles/obligations. A similar outcome was found in relation to introducing new household sanitary tasks.

The evaluation concludes that Social Accountability and Governance (SAG) functions more effectively as a cross-cutting developmental principle than as a standalone sector, acting as a driver for the sustainability of results. The most significant outcomes in this theme involved improving the linkages between disadvantaged citizens and government duty-bearers, particularly in Asia where project-led advocacy successfully influenced national policies and local socio-economic development plans. In some such instances, coordinated citizen voices catalysed attitudinal shifts among local officials, moving them toward recognizing community-based models as viable public strategies.

While Asian projects excelled in explicit policy advocacy, African and PICS projects focussed more on informal integration with government departments, and traditional and indigenous leadership structures. To ensure long-term legitimacy and the "handover" of results, AOP must continue to leverage these indigenous governance models while simultaneously strengthening the capacity of implementing partners to engage in formal national policy dialogue.

While the portfolio demonstrated strengths in improving gender equality, disability inclusion efforts were often missing, minimal or inconsistent – both in project activities and MEL systems.

Some additional lessons are:

- While projects' nurturing of community groups were excellent at start-up, their models became limited in helping livelihood cooperation groups (such as CBT associations and farmers' associations) once they reached formal status or maturing business models.
- One project's outcomes indicated that project designers and staff must balance agricultural expansion with environmental assessment and planning. The promotion of expanded annual cropping in mountainous terrains like Ethiopia's risks accelerating soil erosion and landslides.
- One project in Tanzania affirmed a shift toward gender-transformative strategies that actively involve men and traditional leaders as allies instead of bystanders in promoting women's economic and social empowerment. This model project is supported by external research literature that involving men in awareness, reflection, and community actions both accelerates positive change to gender norms and reduces risk of household tensions compared to engaging with women.
- Successes in some projects and gaps in others highlighted that projects that directly provide health services must include, from the beginning, plans to mainstream successful project models beyond the project and partner. This will most often take the form of providing technical advisory roles and nurturing policy advocacy to institutionalise project-proven concepts and practices into the processes of related government agencies and national frameworks.

In conclusion, AOP has established proven models for attaining positive impacts in rural poverty reduction. To scale these contributions, the organization and its partners may now move beyond self-contained project interventions toward in-country partners becoming strategic technical partners. In so doing, AOP and its partners become bridges from grassroots successes to national-level policy and resilient market systems.

End of chapter

Chapter 4: The Social Return on Investment report

1. Introduction to the Social Return on Investment chapter.

To continue building a strong learning culture, strengthen accountability, and ensure they deliver optimal value for communities, AOP commissioned this social return on investment (SROI) assessment of its international development program. This independent analysis contributes to interpreting the value for money of investment in AOP programming, where its strengths lie, and identify where and how to further improve their development work. Ultimately, this SROI analysis will help AOP and its partners learn, reflect, and plan more effectively for the future.

1.1. What is Social Return on Investment?

The SROI methodology was first developed in the 1990s in the USA by the Roberts Enterprise Development Fund. Since 2009, SROI has been championed and refined by Social Value UK and Social Value International, producing and updating 'The SROI Guide' and associated analysis tools. Their SROI guide is globally recognised as the reference point for any SROI analysis.

SROI is a value-for-money assessment approach that uses cost-benefit analysis to measure outcomes of a project. It is designed to enable the quantification of the value of non-monetary as well as monetary outcomes to stakeholders. i.e. a comprehensive understanding of significant social, economic, cultural and environmental costs and benefits. Defining and calculating value preferably engages diverse stakeholders involved in the project to lead the identification of most important changes that occurred because of the project and, using monetary/financial proxies, assigning their value to each change. The sum of the value of all outcomes is compared to the costs invested by the implementing agency and intended beneficiaries to generate the benefits. That comparison produces an SROI ratio.

1.2. Methodology: How SROI has been adapted for this multi-project program synthesis review

What outcomes were of value and how much tangible and intangible benefits are worth should be defined by intended beneficiaries. Therefore, conventional SROI requires a deep development process followed by intensive consultation sessions with intended beneficiaries. A conventional SROI assessment of a single project requires as much or more resourcing as a conventional project evaluation. The scope of this evaluation calls for a desk-based approach of multiple projects, utilising existing project evaluation and reporting documentation.

The following are the six SROI steps and how K4Dev has adapted them. See Appendix 16 for a more detailed description of each step:

1. Establish scope and identify stakeholders.
2. Map outcomes.
3. Evidence the outcomes and give them a value.
4. Establish impact.
5. Calculate the SROI.
6. Report, use and embed the findings.

To achieve this, K4Dev has drawn from and adapted the six essential steps of a SROI[11] to create a fit-for-purpose, desk-based quasi-SROI assessment framework for AOP's 15-project portfolio. Hence, the methodology for this study is referred to as a 'quasi-SROI' analysis. This approach has produced meaningful learning insights, while declaring the process's limitations.

Following an adapted application of these six steps for each of the fifteen projects, this report synthesises the total investment across all projects, and the combined values of all social returns to present a whole-of-organisation/program SROI ratio. Key observations and comparisons of ratios between sectors, geo-regions, countries, or time phases (e.g. earlier vs. more recent projects) were considered to identify lessons on where to build on strengths or reinforce areas needing improvement.

1.3. Limitations of the SROI study

In addition to the above-mentioned compacted and secondary-data based approach to conducting SROI analyses, the following factors were encountered and mitigated in the conduct of this study.

Table 7 - Limitations encountered by the quasi-SROI study

Limitation	Mitigation measures
Sufficiency of available data to inform quasi-SROI analyses. The available project evaluation reports, progress reports were not formulated to provide the types and depth of participatory quantitative and qualitative data required for an accurate SROI analysis. Consequently, under-reporting of the value of benefits and costs of projects is likely, and until each project was analysed, it was not clear which projects' documentation would provide sufficient minimum requirements to complete a quasi-SROI analysis.	Following K4Dev's analysis of each project, using available reports, the evaluators filled some data gaps via online investigation of country data and by seeking direct contact with AOP portfolio managers and AOP's in-country implementing partners. These partners provided some missing data and/or contributed advice on appropriate proxy benefits and their monetary value in the local/national economy. Where data were insufficient, assumptions have been declared in the *Considerations* and/or *Insights* sections of affected SROI Report appendices. Assumptions always erred on the side of conservatism meaning under-claiming is more likely than over-claiming results.
Timing and availability of AOP and in-country partners to provide inputs. The SROI analysis took place in the lead-up and during the Christmas and new-year holiday period. Consequently, AOP and implementing partner representatives were unavailable for some of the analysis period.	Given that Christmas and new year in the southern hemisphere coincides with longer summer holidays, initial projects analysed were those in southern hemisphere countries. This fast-tracked contact with national staff before they commenced their Christmas and summer holidays, which worked well. Northern hemisphere countries were analysed in early January, in anticipation of a sooner return to work by personnel in those countries. Though, no contact was required for these.

2. Summary SROI results

The first section of this chapter presents the aggregate investment (costs), value of benefits, and SROI ratio for each project assessed. This is followed by a section outlining the whole-of-program/organisation SROI ratio. The following Chapter 3 provides a narrative on the trends and outliers behind the high-level findings and SROI ratios to guide AOP reflections on where it may reinforce strong outcomes and identify where to invest in further capacity-building.

Calculation of investment costs cover three core expenses:

- AOP's in-Australia costs for administering each project and the overall program
- All in-country expenditure, including project staff, materials, and administration
- The equivalent monetary value of time and other resources invested by each project's intended beneficiaries.

By incorporating the third component - investment of intended beneficiaries, the analysis ensures a highly realistic and conservative calculation of the social return.

The analyses of the value of meaningful project outcomes are robust and applied conservative calculations to avoid overclaiming. Identification of impacts only considered evidenced, material outcomes in line with SROI principles. Conservative judgements were used throughout the analysis to estimate duration of outcomes, attribution to other services or people, and consideration of what may have happened anyway in the absence of a project.

More detailed project-by-project SROI analyses are presented in Annex 4.

2.1. Summary results of individual project SROI assessments

Table 8 - Summary of SROI investments, value generation, and SROI ratios per project

Ref.	Project years	Country	Project	Implementing partner	Investment costs (AUD)	Net value created (AUD)	SROI ratio
1	3 yrs: 2018 - 2021	Vietnam	Building Capacity and Access for Community Resilience and Sustainable Livelihoods, Phase 2	AOP Vietnam	2,188,656	$8,850,429	4.04 :1
2	5 yrs: 2015-2020	Kiribati	Pacific Regional Food and Water Security Project, Kiribati	FSPK	$535,277	$715,268	1.34 :1

3	6 years: 2016 - 2022	Timor Leste	Socio economic Empowerment Project (SEEP), Timor Leste	PRADET	$371,170	$682,481	1.84 :1
4	4 years: 2018 - 2022	Cambodia	Women's Economic Empowerment Project, Cambodia	Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre (CWCC)	$579,212	$3,431,209	5.92 :1
5	3 Yrs: 2020 - 2023	Ethiopia	Enhancing Food, Nutrition, Income Security, and Livelihoods of Smallholder Farmers in Ethiopia	Vita, with CTDO	$568,982	$2,916,719	5.13 :1
6	3 Yrs: 2020 - 2023	Malawi	Improving food security and economic empowerment for smallholder farmers in Malawi	United Purpose	$778,389	$2,821,322	3.62 :1
7	3 Yrs: 2020 - 2023	Mozambique	Improving Food Security and Economic Empowerment for Smallholder Farmers	United Purpose	$491,650	$779,976	1.59 :1
8	3 Yrs: 2020 - 2023	Zimbabwe	Improving Food Productivity and Market Linkages in Zimbabwe	CTDO	$834,344	$6,943,676	8.32 :1
9	3 Yrs: 2021 - 2024	Tanzania	Maasai Women's Economic Empowerment in Tanzania	Community Research and Development Services	$659,317	$3,064,525	4.65 :1
10	3 Yrs: 2020 - 2023	Malawi	Victory Gardens in Malawi	Face-to-Face	$1,721,633	$7,179,985	4.17 :1
11	3 Yrs: 2020 - 2023	Kiribati	Community Health Promotion Project in Kiribati	FSPK	$636,642	$751,839	1.18 :1
12	4 Yrs: 2018 – 2022	Bangladesh	Walk For Life in Bangladesh	Walk for Life	$283,336	$3,311,814	11.69 :1
13	3 Yrs: 2021- 2024	Vietnam	Promoting Rural Opportunities with Digital technologies and Upscaling Community-based Tourism (PRODUCT)	AOP Vietnam	$2,142,562	$10,421,377	4.86 :1
14	3 Yrs: 2022- 2025	Timor Leste	Empowering Survivors of Domestic Violence and Trauma	PRADET	$448,131	$721,520	1.61 :1
15	3 Yrs: 2022- 2025	Cambodia	Women Action for Safe Rural Migration	CWCC	$566,498	$3,779,536	6.67 :1

2.2. Whole-of-program SROI ratio

The application of the SROI methodology was able to illustrate the social and economic benefits that are being created by AOP and its in-country implementing partners. The analysis shows that the aggregate investment across AOP's international program from 2020 to 2025 was $12.8 million, and the present value of benefits generated by the program over this period was over $56.4 million. Accordingly, the SROI ratio is 4.4:1, which means that for every $1 invested in AOP's work by donors and community stakeholders, $4.40 was returned in social and economic value to intended beneficiaries.

Table 9 - summary presentation of the aggregate investment, value generated, and SROI ratio for the entire AOP portfolio

SROI Summary	
Total present value created	$56.4 million
Total Investment by AOP & stakeholders	$12.8 million
Social Return on Investment (SROI) ratio	4.4:1

3. Observations and lessons behind the high-level results

The following chapter present summary findings and insights of the quasi-SROI analyses and synthesis of the 15 projects in the portfolio by presenting the following sections:

- Aggregate SROI ratios per sector
- Aggregate SROI ratios per geo-region (Africa, Asia, and PICS)
- Observations by sector – successes, enablers, and constraints (grouped under Livelihoods, Food Security and Nutrition, Health, and Gender Equality)

3.1. Aggregate SROI ratios per sector

The following table presents the aggregate SROI ratios for each cluster of sector-related projects[4]. These results demonstrate that AOP's programming has remarkable consistency of quality of outcome across its different sectors, clustered closely around the whole-of-portfolio ratio of 4.4:1.

The table also shows that, within all sectors, a wide range of outcomes exists. These are the result of differences by geo-region more than sector-related factors.

The result for projects with a high Social Accountability and Governance (SAG) content is notable. While this AOP strategic sector was not the principal sector for any projects and SAG elements existed in almost every project, it was more pronounced in seven projects. The aggregate SROI ratio for these seven projects was higher than any other sector result at 4.8:1. This may be evidence of the positive influence of SAG content on the overall impact of other sectoral projects.

Table 10 - Summary of aggregate SROI ratios per development sector in the AOP portfolio

Sector	Number of projects	SROI ratio	Range (upper and lower project SROIs)
All projects and sectors	15	**4.4:1**	11.7 to 1.3 : 1
EESL	12	**4.55:1**	8.3 to 1.6 : 1
FWCR	7	**4.0:1**	8.3 to 1.2 : 1
HID	5	**4.0:1**	11.7 to 1.2 : 1
SAG	7	**4.8:1**	11.7 to 1.2:1
Gender	7	**4:45**	6.7 to 1.6 : 1

3.2. Aggregate SROI ratios per geo-region

The following table presents the aggregate SROI ratios for each cluster of projects per geo-region. These results highlight the comparative economic difficulty of working in the small-island developing states of the PICS: Timor-Leste and especially Kiribati. The high operational costs and/or low stakeholder numbers due to low and remote populations in these settings mean that successes in PICS are much harder-won by project implementers.

Results are most consistent across the Asian countries of Bangladesh, Cambodia and Vietnam – with the Bangladesh project's high SROI ratio (11.7:1) being the standout high outlier for the whole portfolio.

The range of SROI ratios in Africa are also quite wide, with highest results in the Zimbabwe project (8.3:1) a result of the high beneficiary numbers achieved. Results in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Malawi were clusters around 4 to 5:1. The project in Mozambique recorded a substantially lower SROI ratio than other African projects. The following findings may be contributors to Mozambique's low result. Significant gains in agricultural yields were achieved during Phase 1 of the project but this evaluation focussed only on Phase 2 which served primarily to solidify and sustain those existing benefits rather than generating new leaps in productivity. Mozambique's report provided poor quantification of beneficiary numbers and used vague terms like "some farmers," which forced the SROI analysis to use conservative estimates that likely understated some actual value. While the project saw high yield increases (reaching 15–20 tonnes of Irish potato

[4] With many projects having incorporated more than one development sector, many projects are counted in more than one sector calculation.

per association), when these revenues were distributed among the 203 members, the additional income per household resulted in a relatively low figure of approximately AUD 73 each. Farmers struggled to accurately record production data, profits, and costs so may have under-claimed their own returns. Factors external to the project's influence may further explain why projects in Mozambique generally face steeper development challenges. During the project lifecycle, partnered communities were battered by the Category 5 tropical cyclone Freddie, which significantly reversed gains. 'Freddie' was part of a climatic trend with Mozambique routinely experiences higher destruction from cyclones and droughts compared to landlocked neighbours like Zimbabwe or Malawi. Mozambique has a higher extreme depth of poverty, corruption, and socio-political fragility[12] and very low levels of education in the labour pool[13] compared to all other countries in the Africa portfolio except Ethiopia. Yet, even compared to AOP's Ethiopia project, the Mozambique evaluation found lower access to government agricultural extension services[14].

Table 11 - Summary of aggregate SROI ratios per geo-region in the AOP portfolio

Geo-region	Number of projects	SROI ratio	Range (upper and lower project SROIs)
All projects and sectors	15	**4.4:1**	11.7 to 1.3 : 1
Asia[5]	5	**5.2:1**	11.7 to 4.0 : 1
Africa	6	**4.7:1**	8.3 to 1.6 : 1
PICS	4	**1.4:1**	1.2 to 1.8 : 1

3.3. Observations by sector – successes, enablers, and constraints

Overview

The following section summarises the findings of successful outcomes, enablers, and constraints identified through conducting SROI analyses of the 15 projects. Before considering these factors sector-by-sector, the following points outline the most common enablers and constraints in AOP's projects, regardless of sector.

Common enablers:

Holistic and Multi-pronged Programming: The most successful projects did not rely on a single intervention but used a holistic approach that combined technical skills (e.g., agricultural training) with financial tools (micro-finance and VSLAs) and development of sustainable social support services/groups. By addressing multiple dimensions of sectoral needs simultaneously, projects allowed participants to adopt the specific improvements that best suited their household needs.

Mobilisation of Community Groups and Solidarity Networks: Focussing on an aspect of the multi-pronged programming - establishing and strengthening community-led institutions, such as Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), livelihood solidarity groups, and farmer associations, was a primary driver of sustained value. These groups created business or social support ecosystems that provided mutual motivation, learning, networking, and a collective voice for advocacy toward government departments.

Strategic Government and Stakeholder Collaboration: Value was significantly enhanced when projects trained, sensitised district and local government officials, facilitated meaningful connections between them and community groups, and influenced the institutionalisation of project-promoted guidance into public policies. This engagement not only improved the ability of officials to respond to community needs but also mobilised **public investment in infrastructure**, such as roads and tourism facilities, which further boosted local economic outcomes.

Common constraints:

Low and inconsistent inclusion of people with disabilities: A pervasive constraint across the AOP portfolio was the inconsistent or entirely absent inclusion of people with disabilities, who are generally the most disadvantaged members of their communities. In several projects, such as those in Kiribati and Malawi, the analyses found no indication in the evaluation reports that the project design or implementation were inclusive. Where participation did occur, it was often insufficient in scale or duration; for instance, in Mozambique, people with disabilities represented only 3.1% of

[5] The Bangladesh 'Walk for Life' project is the extreme outlier. Excluding this project, the remaining four Asia projects cluster more tightly between 6.7 and 4.0:1

participants, and the vast majority of those were included only in the final year, missing the multi-year guidance required to effectively reinforce their capacities. Furthermore, even in projects where outcomes were perceived to be positive for people with disabilities, many reports failed to keep records or quantify benefits related to people with disabilities, resulting in these meaningful social returns being understated or excluded from the final value calculations.

Spreading project resources thinly per context: A persistent challenge was the spreading of financial resources too thinly across wide geographic areas, resulting in "shallow" rather than profound impacts. Additionally, in high-operating-cost environments (such as Kiribati) or sectors requiring high-intensity individual investment (such as psychosocial care for traumatised survivors), annual budgets often struggled to achieve the "critical mass" needed for durable change.

Livelihoods

Consistent successful outcomes and regional distinctions:

Across AOP's 12 livelihoods projects, the most consistently successful outcomes involved economic empowerment and enhanced financial resilience facilitated by Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and microfinance initiatives. These mechanisms allowed participants to secure incomes, manage household economies, and build social safety nets.

The specific focus of these successes varied by geo-region. In Asia, success was frequently linked to market-driven services, specifically Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and formalised financial packages for ethnic minority women. In Africa, success was predominantly measured through agricultural productivity and food security, achieved by introducing disease-resistant, high-yielding crop varieties such as Orange Fleshed Sweet Potato (OFSP). In contrast, the PICS region (specifically Timor-Leste) achieved unique livelihoods success by strengthening psychosocial wellbeing of survivors of violence and prison inmates to pursue a more prosperous future.

Enabling factors for livelihoods projects:

The primary factor enabling successful outcomes across all regions was the use of holistic programming, which combined technical livelihoods training, financial literacy, solidarity groups, and social support. The establishment of community-led institutions, such as VSLAs and farmer associations, created self-sustaining business ecosystems that fostered high levels of local ownership. While these factors were consistent, the specific enablers were tailored to regional contexts.

In Asia, AOP utilised refined institutional models (like the AOP Programme of Microfinance) and digital knowledge hubs to scale impact. In Africa, the "lead farmer" and "pay-it-forward" models were essential for cascading knowledge and seeds through rural communities. For the PICS region, success was enabled by high-intensity individual investment in psychosocial care, which was necessary to lift survivors out of extreme vulnerability. Across all regions, proactive engagement with government officials was a vital enabler for securing public infrastructure investment and institutionalising project models.

Challenges per geo-region:

Projects in Asia were significantly hampered by COVID-19 travel restrictions and, in some cases, the market saturation of service providers.

African projects faced environmental shocks during project lifecycles, such as droughts and cyclones, as well as persistent barriers in connecting smallholder farmers to profitable, higher-value markets. Additionally, in some African contexts, irrigation and agricultural intensification led to unintended workload increases for women more than men.

In PICS, the primary challenge was the high cost per participant and the risk of social tension when providing differentiated material support in resource-poor environments.

Food security and nutrition

Consistent successful outcomes and regional distinctions:

Across the seven projects with food security and nutrition components, the most consistent successful outcomes achieved improved household dietary diversity and a reduction in hunger months. In Africa, where five of the seven projects took place, the introduction of disease-resistant, high-yielding, and biofortified crop varieties—specifically Orange Fleshed Sweet Potato (OFSP) and Irish potato—was a primary driver of success. Projects in Ethiopia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe reported increased agricultural productivity that translated directly into improved nutrition and, in many cases, increased household income through the sale of surplus produce. A notable spontaneous replication effect was also observed in Africa, where non-participating neighbours adopted promoted techniques and crop varieties after seeing the success of direct participants.

In Africa, outcomes were often large-scale—such as the Victory Gardens project in Malawi reaching 28,000 households—and focused on market engagement and livestock accumulation. In Mozambique, the project reportedly eliminated food deficit months for participating households. Conversely, in the PICS region (Kiribati specifically), successes were modest and short-term: while the project improved food and water security initially, it struggled to achieve the level of community ownership necessary for long-term adoption, resulting in social returns that tapered off toward the end of the project cycle.

Enabling factors for food security and nutrition projects:

As was the case for livelihoods projects (which have a significant overlap with food security projects) consistent enabling factor for successful outcomes was the use of holistic, multi-pronged programming. Successful projects combined technical agricultural training with nutrition knowledge, financial management, and the strengthening of community institutions like farmer associations and VSLAs. The recruitment and training of local community facilitators and "lead farmers" served as a vital extension model, providing ongoing motivation and troubleshooting at the village level. Additionally, technical enablers such as water-saving techniques (e.g., mulching and sack gardening) were crucial for extending production during rain-deficit periods.

Regional variations in enablers were distinct. In Africa, as noted under the 'Livelihoods' section above, the "pay-it-forward" model of seed distribution doubled the number of beneficiaries and ensured local access to quality planting materials. Sustainability in Africa was further enabled by cascading training models through established farmer associations and cooperatives. In the PICS region/Kiribati, the enabling strategy focused on strengthening the relationship between communities and government line ministry officers, though the reports suggest these efforts were often hampered by insufficient budget and resources to maintain high-frequency engagement.

Challenges per geo-region:

In Africa**,** a primary challenge was market linkage gaps, where farmers increased production but sold at low "farmgate prices" due to a lack of connection to profitable markets. Additionally, projects in Malawi noted unintended workload increases for women, as dry-season irrigation required extensive water carting on top of existing household chores. Agricultural sustainability was also threatened by climatic hazards such as cyclones and droughts.

In PICS (Kiribati), challenges were primarily structural and cultural. The high operating cost environment meant that limited budgets could not achieve a "critical mass" of activities for durable impact and lack of locally-available inputs. Key barriers included a lack of local seed supply, broken water infrastructure. Participant motivation was also tempered by the cultural norm of *bubuti*—a traditional expectation to share resources that was found to stifle individual households' efforts to accumulate assets or increase production.

Health

AOP's health-related programming is very diversified across the four health-focussed projects, according to its other country priorities and each unique community context. In Bangladesh, the Walk for Life project focussed on a highly specialised medical intervention to treat clubfoot in children to prevent lifelong disability. In the PICS region (Kiribati), health programming was centred on community responses to infectious diseases and nutritional health via water management, hygiene practices, and home gardening. In Cambodia, the WARM project addressed health from a psychosocial and protection perspective, focusing on the safety and wellbeing of women vulnerable to unsafe migration, trafficking, and exploitation. In Africa, projects successfully increased food intake, reducing "hunger months" and increased dietary/nutrient diversity by introducing higher-producing, disease-resistant, and more nutritious crop varieties. These nutrition results across Africa are already reported above, under 'Food security and nutrition' so are not repeated in this section – though remain relevant to AOP's health-related accomplishments.

Consistent successful outcomes and regional distinctions:

Across the portfolio, consistent successful outcomes include significant increases in community awareness and knowledge regarding health risks—ranging from clubfoot and COVID-19 to safe migration and communicable diseases. Additionally, projects across all three countries successfully protected participants from economic disadvantage by reducing the costs associated with health crises or failed migration attempts.

In Asia, the outcomes were often transformative and systemic. In Bangladesh, the restoration of physical mobility provided the highest social return of any project by ensuring future employability and reducing lifelong stigma. In Cambodia, the project achieved substantial policy influence, impacting the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women. Conversely, in the PICS region (Kiribati), successes were more modest and short-term: while hygiene and sanitation knowledge improved, the outcomes often failed to achieve the long-term community ownership required for sustained impact.

Enabling Factors for health projects:

The most consistent enabling factor for success was the capacity building of local human resources, including health personnel, community leaders, and government officials, to monitor and respond to health hazards. Another shared enabler was the use of community-based networks, such as taskforce committees in Kiribati or Community-Based Protection Networks in Cambodia, to institutionalise health and safety practices. Regional variations in enablers were distinct. In Bangladesh, success was enabled by a highly specialised and simple clinical approach that offered permanent physical restoration. In Cambodia, the primary enabler was the mainstreaming safer migration knowledge and practices and incentivising local income generation over risky migration. In Kiribati, success was most achievable when promoting behaviours with low barriers to uptake, such as household sanitation and hygiene, which required fewer external resources than agricultural activities.

Challenges per geo-region:

PICS (Kiribati): Challenges included a high-operating-cost environment that diluted the impact of budgets. Additionally, water scarcity, physical labour requirements for gardening and a lack of local seeds hampered nutritional outcomes.

Asia: In Bangladesh, the primary challenge related to maintaining continuity of treatment for socio-economically vulnerable families during the pandemic.

Gender Burden: In several countries, health-related outcomes often placed a disproportionate labour burden on women, who were primarily responsible for food production, preservation, and sanitation activities.

Gender equality (including protection)

Consistent successful outcomes and regional distinctions:

Across all geo-regions, the most consistent successful outcome has been the economic empowerment of women as a catalyst for social change. The establishment of VSLAs, micro-finance loans, and small business training has consistently enabled women to secure independent incomes, which in turn improved their social status and intra-household decision-making power. Another cross-cutting success is the reduction in community tolerance for violence and exploitation: projects in Timor-Leste and Cambodia successfully increased the willingness of community leaders to intervene in domestic violence and improved awareness of safe migration to prevent trafficking. Furthermore, projects consistently improved community amenity and social cohesion, generating value for entire households through shared infrastructure or improved social networks.

In Asia, successes were heavily linked to market-based livelihoods and influence on formal policy, such as integrating safe migration into Cambodia's National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women. In the PICS region (Timor-Leste), success was defined by psychosocial healing and relational skills, where survivors and inmates gained the emotional intelligence to navigate healthy relationships. In Africa (Tanzania), among Maasai women, successes were more practical and labour-oriented, such as time-saving outcomes through mechanised flour mills that reduced the physical burden on Maasai women.

Enabling factors for gender equality projects:

A primary factor enabling successful outcomes was, once again, the holistic programming approach, which combined women-focussed economic structures (like VSLAs) with rights-based education and self-mobilising/sustainable solidarity and livelihood groups created business ecosystems for women's mutual benefit, networking, and collective advocacy. Another consistent enabler was government sensitisation and networking: by training district officials and linking them with community groups, projects successfully mobilised public investment in infrastructure that supported women's businesses. Additionally, long-term project durations (four years in Cambodia) were advocated as crucial for firming the durability of outcomes.

Regional enablers were tailored to local governance and social structures. In Asia, AOP utilized refined institutional models like the AOP Programme of Microfinance (APM) and digital knowledge hubs to sustain and scale impacts for women. In Africa, success was enabled by including men in gender education, which was vital to mitigate cultural "backlash" against women's empowerment in such patriarchal societies. Still, the level of male participation remained a challenge. In the PICS region/Timor-Leste, the primary enabler was a high intensity of individual investment in psychosocial care in each participant, which, although costly, was necessary to generate change among highly traumatised and disadvantaged groups.

Challenges per geo-region:

Asia: Projects in Vietnam faced market saturation (i.e., an over-supply of homestay providers) and the disruptive impact of COVID-19, which constrained visitors during peak tourism activities.

Africa: Environmental factors - specifically prolonged drought - severely suppressed outcomes in Tanzania by reducing crop yields and increasing the distance women had to walk for water. There was also a risk of male resistance if gender projects were perceived as antagonistic to men's culturally ingrained self-perception of household authority.

PICS: In Timor-Leste, as with other sectors, the primary challenge was the high cost per participant required for psychosocial work, which, while transformative, resulted in a lower SROI ratio compared to broader community-based interventions.

4. Conclusion

Achieving a whole-of-program SROI ratio is 4.4:1 confirms that expenditure on AOP projects is a very effective investment for creating meaningful value in the lives of marginalised communities around the world. For every $1 invested in AOP's work by donors and community stakeholders, $4.40 was returned in social and economic value to intended beneficiaries. The consistency of results across AOP's four strategic sectors and gender equality projects, clustered closely around the whole-of-portfolio ratio, demonstrate that AOP's programming has remarkable consistency of quality. The higher SROI ratio in Asia highlights the comparatively higher enabling environment in Asia and broad structural challenges in Africa. The comparatively low SROI ratio in PICs countries is evidence of the geographic and economic isolation of these countries and resultant high operational costs and low and remote populations in these settings. Successes in PICS are much harder-won by project implementers and requires more determination by donors and implementers.

End of chapter

Chapter 5: Lessons, conclusions and recommendations

With summary results of each section (and by implication, the META evaluation's key objectives) already captured in the executive summary, this final chapter synthesises the key lessons, overall conclusion about AOP's program, and a synthesise of the recommendations presented under each chapter's detailed annex.

1. Best practices, innovations, and lessons

Considering its four strategic sectors (EESL, FWCR, HID and SAG). AOP's most powerful contribution lies in their EESL sector's ability to transform subsistence activities into viable, surplus-based agricultural and tourism ventures, significantly enhancing household nutrition and financial resilience. Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) emerged as the portfolio's most effective tool for sustainability – though is by no means its only effective tool. VSLA groups (under various contextualised association names) did not merely provide financial tools: they acted as platforms for social safety nets and women's leadership incubation.

AOP's Social Accountability and Governance (SAG) strategic sector functions more effectively as a cross-cutting developmental principle than as a standalone sector, acting as a driver for the sustainability of results. The most significant outcomes in this theme involved improving the linkages between disadvantaged citizens and government duty-bearers, particularly in Asia where project-led advocacy successfully influenced national policies and local socio-economic development plans. This was further evidenced by the higher SROI ratio scored by projects with strong SAG components.

While the portfolio demonstrated strengths in improving gender equality, disability inclusion efforts were often missing, minimal or inconsistent – both in project activities and MEL systems.

Common enablers that contributed to higher social value included:

- Context-specific customization is a core strength of AOP's success for generating positive impacts. Whether through community-based tourism (CBT) in Vietnam or drought-resistant seed systems in Ethiopia, AOP's ability to adapt technical interventions to local realities has been a hallmark of its impact.
- Holistic and Multi-pronged Programming: The most successful projects did not rely on a single intervention but used a holistic approach that combined technical skills (e.g., agricultural training) with financial tools (micro-finance and VSLAs) and development of sustainable social support services/groups.
- Mobilisation of Community Groups and Solidarity Networks: Focussing on an aspect of the multi-pronged programming - establishing and strengthening community-led institutions, such as Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), livelihood solidarity groups, and farmer associations, was a primary driver of sustained value.
- Active and targeted leadership training - especially for women – was found to be a common factor in assuring sustainability of project-supported associations, like livelihood clusters and VSLAs. This was found to be the case across Asian and African projects. Though, a vulnerability to sustainability persists due to inevitable turn-over of incumbent leadership after some time and the absence of training for future leaders.
- Strategic Government and Stakeholder Collaboration: Value was significantly enhanced when projects trained, sensitised district and local government officials, facilitated meaningful connections between them and community groups, and influenced the institutionalisation of project-promoted guidance into public policies.

Common constraints to optimising social value included:

- Low and inconsistent inclusion of people with disabilities: A pervasive constraint across the AOP portfolio was the inconsistent or entirely absent inclusion of people with disabilities, who are generally the most disadvantaged members of their communities.
- Spreading project resources thinly per context: A persistent challenge was the spreading of financial resources too thinly across wide geographic areas, resulting in "shallow" rather than profound impacts.

In relation to strengths, AOP projects rated strong or acceptably on 12 of the 15 VfM criteria. Stand-out strengths related to:

- Financial control – with most projects spending within 90 to 100% of their budgets without overspending (cost consciousness as stewards of donors' funds)

- Incorporating evidence-based decisions into new designs by drawing on lessons learned from previous evaluations (evidence-based design)
- Ensuring that the ongoing costs for participants are affordable and accessible to maintain benefits beyond the project funding (cost consciousness to stakeholders)
- Protecting partnered populations by ensuring that PSEAH and child protection processes are in place (Do no harm)

Only two aspects of project processes were found to represent inadequate value for money and subsequent vulnerability to AOP's ability to make informed decisions to guide projects and programs. Both relate to performance and risk management. These were:

- Inadequate use of context-specific risk registers and subsequent risk tracking and management. Often initial risk assessments were carried out, but evidence available indicated these tended to be generic, narrow in focus, and not monitored for change over time.
- Low levels of on-site project monitoring by AOP portfolio managers. Evidence available indicated that AOP were adequately conducting monitoring visits to PICS projects, an almost adequate level of on-site monitoring in Africa, but almost no such monitoring in Asia.

Two additional processes were consistently found to have elevated vulnerability and should also be high priorities for improvement:

- Projects generally require a more robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems provide accurate and timely insights to guide decision-making (results focus)
- Project designs would benefit from more participatory input from intended community and institutional stakeholders (locally-led development)

2. Conclusion

To close this report, the following chapter synthesises the conclusions of preceding chapters to summarily respond to the stated purpose of the META evaluation:

"To help AOP and our partners reflect, learn, and plan more effectively for the future."

AOP has established proven models for attaining positive impacts in rural poverty reduction. Achieving a whole-of-program SROI ratio is 4.4:1 confirms that expenditure on AOP projects is a very effective investment for creating meaningful value in the lives of marginalised communities around the world. For every $1 invested in AOP's work by donors and community stakeholders, $4.40 was returned in social and economic value to intended beneficiaries. The consistency of results across AOP's four strategic sectors and gender equality projects, clustered closely around the whole-of-portfolio ratio, demonstrate that AOP's programming has remarkable consistency of quality. The higher SROI ratio in Asia highlights the comparatively higher enabling environment in Asia and broad structural challenges in Africa. The comparatively low SROI ratio in PICs countries is evidence of the geographic and economic isolation of these countries and resultant high operational costs and low and remote populations in these settings. Successes in PICS are much harder-won by project implementers and requires more determination by donors and implementers.

AOP and its partners have solid processes in place for informing evidence-based decisions. These include financial controls, safeguard protections, evidence-based project designs, optimising cost structures to optimise sustainability post-project. Immediate investment into a small number of priority processes would significantly boost project quality and subsequent value for money. Top priorities include investment in more systematic risk management; more frequent on-site monitoring by AOP officers; more robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems; and systematic and routine project-level consultation and feedback mechanisms. Beyond these, many less urgent opportunities exist for continuous improvement.

Furthermore, to optimise sustainable and scalable outcomes for community partners, AOP and its partners could pursue longer-term development research and expertise into how to move beyond self-contained project interventions toward in-country partners becoming strategic technical partners. In so doing, AOP and its partners will become bridges from grassroots successes to institutionalised government practices and resilient market systems.

3. Recommendations

Each of the chapter-specific annexes contain recommendations that respond to the specific topics and findings of each chapter. With many similar themes emerging across the chapters, the following recommendations synthesises all into a single, summary list. All recommendations should be considered 'important' to address. Still, the list is ordered by priority for action by AOP to address highest vulnerabilities or value-adding opportunities through to less urgent opportunities. This is to help AOP decision-makers reflect on the order in which to deal with them and level of investment to commit to each.

The list of priority recommendations is followed by a second list of recommendations related specifically to each AOP sector strategies: EESL, FWCR, HID, SAG, and gender equality project.

3.1. Top priorities

A. Risk management:

Recommendation: Research and establish processes and templates to make project risk management contextual and routine.

Discussion: Ensure every project has a:

- ✓ Risk register
- ✓ Risk management plan
- ✓ Spreadsheet template for periodically reassessing the risks

AOP may consider creating a standard template based on DFAT guidance.

Ensure project design guidance compels designers to consider context-specific risks in each pre-defined category (e.g. see ANCP Manual section 5.1 – Risk Management) and participatory review of potential risks with community and institutional stakeholders. Plus, ensure risk monitoring explicitly includes DFAT's Environmental and Social Safeguard Policy (ESSP) areas: environmental protection, children, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, displacement and resettlement, Indigenous peoples, health and safety, climate/disaster risks, and potential barriers to inclusion.

Ensure specific individuals/roles are nominated for responsibility for risk monitoring, risk management, and reporting.

Ensure every project's MEL plan includes quarterly reviews and updating of risks.

Ensure AOP's internal monitoring systems check on partners' risk management performance.

B. Monitoring and evaluation systems

Recommendation: Invest in the development of standardised, practical, and mandatory monitoring and evaluation systems and tools for all projects. Pilot in one to two projects to refine and then provide formal training to local partners on how to develop and routinely update the tools, and use them for routine reflection on progress to inform adaptive management.

Discussion/sub-recommendations:

1. Establish a core set of AOP sectoral indicators: From design stage logframes and MEL/results frameworks, projects must incorporate clear, easy-to-measure quantitative indicators for all high-level outcomes. AOP should consider developing a small number of standardised indicators for each development sector. New projects in that sector can choose which of the standardised indicators suit their design and context, and then add their own project or context specific indicators. These metrics should be integrated into baselines and end-of-phase evaluations to ensure the scale of change is objectively measured.
2. For each project, define a single, unified set of project objectives under a single project goal statement for each project: Several projects presented its hierarchy of objectives inconsistently, with different objectives between proposals, progress reports and evaluation report. Some core project documents presented up to three different and conflicting sets of objectives in the one document. Secondly, while most documents presented outcome objectives early in the design document, project goal statements were usually difficult to find, buried in the proposal's annexes. As a remedy, every design document should feature a single goal or purpose statement supported by a small number of specific impact indicators. This prevents implementation objectives from overshadowing the intended overarching impact. Additionally, AOP should ensure that every

implementing partner is familiar and competent with the structure and consistent use of a project's logframe (or whatever AOP's preferred structuring of project objectives and indicators is) and its consistent usage as the reference language across all project documentation.

3. Qualitative monitoring: Encourage the development and adoption of project activity reporting formats that capture brief feedback from activity participants and stakeholders about the activity's utility, how it could be improved, and overall impressions of progress. Such content can be used to inform periodic management review meetings.

4. Improve and standardise multi-year data tracking: AOP should develop and implement a multi-year indicator tracking template that can be adapted per sector and per project. Partners must be trained to maintain these throughout the project lifecycle to avoid tracking results in annual isolation, which currently obscures long-term learning and accountability.

5. Systematic data disaggregation: All evaluation analyses and reports must present data disaggregated by gender and participant type. Aggregate reporting currently prevents an accurate understanding of how initiatives affect different vulnerable groups.

6. Improve baseline and multi-phase capture: For multi-phase initiatives, AOP should analyse combined costs and outcomes across all phases. This will help to account for, and justify dynamics that enable rapid results in a first phase and a slower consolidation in subsequent phases. Or they may account for the inverse: the need for a longer start-up phase to mainstream new concepts before they are rapidly taken up in a second phase. Consistency in indicators and measurement methods and data presentation must be maintained from one phase to the next to accurately track progress that may level off or peak in later stages.

7. Mandatory inclusion reporting: Evaluations must explicitly measure and report on gender performance and disability inclusion outcomes as per DFAT donor standards. Currently, the omission of such data represents a significant oversight in reaching (or unfairly under-representing the project's service to) most marginalised stakeholders.

8. Create an AOP review checklist for project portfolio monitoring of partner M&E performance at each stage of the project life cycle. It may include the following checks:

   Proposal/design review template:

   1. Is the design informed by a logical and sequential program logic (or theory of change)?
   2. Is there a small number of indicators per outcome?
   3. Does each output have an indicator that can be measured and tracked every 3 to 6 months?
   4. Are outcome indicators really outcome-level or just output level results?
   5. Are indicators genuinely measurable and comparable over time?
   6. Does the project/partner have an indicator progress tracking format that can capture each phase as well as cumulative outputs? i.e. differentiating multi-year beneficiaries as the same person, not double or triple counted.
   7. Are tentative targets established for all outcome and output indicators? (these should be updated after the baseline is completed)
   8. Are targets gender disaggregated and disability disaggregated?
   9. Is a quantitative baseline study (for outcome indicators) budgeted for?
   10. Is a quantitative baseline study scheduled in the Year 1 implementation plan? Who will be accountable for it happening?
   11. Is the updating of baseline and target values for each outcome into design docs and indicator progress tracking tables scheduled? Who will be accountable for it happening?
   12. Does the design/implementation plan include the formation and periodic meetings with some form of project progress review committee (comprised of representatives of inclusive participant groups and stakeholders and project staff)?
   13. Does the partner and project have a:
       - ✓ Risk register
       - ✓ Risk management plan

- ✓ Spreadsheet template for periodically reassessing the risks

For progress monitoring, include the following routine checks:

1. Does the partner's internal monthly, quarterly, semi-annual, and annual progress tracking count progress against the design's logframe/M&E matrix outputs and indicators?
2. Is the partner updating the cumulative totals as they track numbers for each reporting period?
3. For near real-time evaluation and learning: do the partner's internal reporting processes capture numerical data (e.g. # of people trained) and qualitative feedback from community participants and other active stakeholders?
4. Does the ANCP APR present progress of outputs against the design's logframe/M&E matrix output indicators and targets?

For evaluation and mid-term review ToR guidance and evaluation quality assessment:

1. Does the ToR and evaluation plan (or did the report) assess effectiveness and impact directly against design-stage logframe and M&E matrix objective indicators (outputs, outcomes, and goal-level) and their specific baseline and target values? (and not just presenting stand-alone cross-sectional data)
2. Will (or did) the evaluation report provide explicit data on actual beneficiary numbers – and not just % of survey respondents, or not just qualitative descriptions?
3. Will (or did) the evaluation report include assessment and findings about the project's risk management approaches?
4. Will (or did) the evaluation report include assessment and findings about the quality of the project's progress tracking and its use to inform adaptive management decisions throughout the lifecycle?
5. Does the evaluation provide practical guidance for future projects?

C. Adaptive management:

Recommendation: Ensure partners' internal management processes schedule routine internal meetings to adjust plans based on monthly or quarterly quantitative and qualitative data insights.

Discussion: Such data to inform reviews should be drawn from:

- ✓ Improved monitoring systems progress tracking results
- ✓ Mechanisms for hearing participants' feedback
- ✓ Other stakeholders' feedback
- ✓ The project's risk management tracking

In AOP's proposal review criteria, include higher ranking for proposals that include the formation and periodic meetings with some form of project review committee. Such a committee should comprise of gender and inclusion-balanced representatives of intended beneficiaries, institutional stakeholders, and project staff.

D. Participatory and evidence-based design:

Recommendations:

1. Develop design-phase guidelines to ensure project directions are informed by intended participants and partners, and draft objectives are also reviewed by these stakeholders.
2. Encourage all project designs to draw on lessons and recommendations from related evaluations and ensure design documents explicitly cite how they were applied.
3. Encourage the ongoing evidence-based refinement of promising models for scaling as templates for replication in other districts or neighbouring countries.

Discussion: Pre-design consultations with intended beneficiaries should take place to collaboratively refine its contents. Such content might include revising the objectives to fit community aspirations and obligations; ways of working with communities; ensuring that proposed inputs will be locally accessible and affordable after the project closure; and scheduling activities in harmony with community and seasonal calendars. Design phase should leverage indigenous and local knowledge of seasons, ways of communicating, potential conflicts between different participants groups, and identification of cultural norms that may undermine intended outcomes and adapt plans. Appreciative Inquiry-style consultations are one way to facilitate stakeholder discussions on where culture and project objectives may clash and how households can advance their wellbeing without abandoning cultural identity or collective coping mechanisms. Pre-design and design-phase consultations should seek out and consult especially disadvantaged groups to ensure objectives and activities are modified to enable meaningful participation of otherwise marginalised groups.

Drawing on pioneering efforts of AOP Vietnam and CWCC in Cambodia, encourage all partners to review and refine structures and tools designed to be adopted and adapted by participants, independently of project engagement. Current proven 'packages' have advanced women's equality or protection such as Cambodia's safe migration app and Vietnam's CBT and microcredit models,

E. On-site AOP monitoring:

Recommendation: In-project budgets, include sufficient allocation for monitoring visits to each project one to two times every three years.

Discussion: For better economy, it may be prudent to intentionally cluster projects in more concentrated zones to enable multiple countries' projects to be visited in a single monitoring trip. AOP's current wide geographic spread for the size of its program increases inefficiencies.

F. Protection safeguards:

Recommendation: Develop a template process that partners can adopt for a complaints/grievance reporting and redress mechanism to complement existing PSEAH processes.

Discussion: A complaints/grievance reporting and redress mechanism needs to be:

- ✓ Accessible to all community members including more marginalised members via several communication pathways.
- ✓ Safe/confidential for community stakeholders to use without repercussions.
- ✓ Have an investigation function that is independent of project staff.
- ✓ Have its reporting hierarchy, and pathways for redress if a complaint is verified.

The mechanism should be widely and permanently publicised in partnered communities and have multiple contact options, such as phone number, text, email, website portal, or in-person. Before each project commences, implementing partner staff should consult community leaders and disadvantaged members of society to adapt the template mechanism to ensure its suitability and accessibility to all – incorporating customary procedures as required.

Establish mandatory steps in each project for implementing partners to ensure all community participants and stakeholders know about the complaints reporting process and know how to access it. These should include incorporation into presentations as well as permanent display somewhere prominent in partnered communities, and documentation among community leaders.

3.2. Medium priorities

G. GEDSI capacity:

Recommendations:

1. Broaden gender-transformative approaches: To ensure durability, even projects that aim to prioritise women's advancement should be male-inclusive and gender-transformative (as was demonstrated by the MWEEP). Literature indicates that focussing on women in isolation risks cultural "backlash" if men perceive the project as antagonistic to their culture or household authority[15,16]. This does not imply ensuring equal benefit or participation, but sufficient consultation and voice to ensure equal understanding.
2. Invest in mainstreaming disability inclusion capacity: Project designers and implementing staff must be better equipped with the technical guidance and training required to meaningfully include people with disabilities in pre-design assessment and design consultations, practical activities and methods to ensure meaningful participation in design, and mobilisation and facilitation in implementation.
3. Consider incorporating a GEDSI readiness checklist into reviews of each EbD/MEL function and provide support where gaps are identified. Checklist items may include:

   Design phase:

   1. Do any members of the design team possess the competencies to assess context-specific gender equality priorities and challenges the project must address AND design inclusions to ensure they are addressed?

2. Do any members of the design team possess the competencies to assess context-specific disability inclusion priorities and challenges the project must address AND design inclusions to ensure they are addressed?
3. Will people with disabilities, or their most local OPD representatives be consulted about the draft/proposed design and risk assessment for input?
4. Do the gender equality design objectives ensure men as well as women are incorporated as allies – even if outcomes are women-focussed?

Implementation:

5. Are representatives of local people with disability and other identified socially disadvantaged groups consulted in routine project progress reviews?
6. Are any project outcomes and outputs adapted to enable inclusion and benefit of people with disabilities? (or will they only be included if they can personally adapt to activities that assume no disabilities?)
7. Is progress in incorporating people with disabilities and any other identified disadvantaged minorities explicitly tracked in reporting?

Evaluation:

8. Has the inception report considered people with disability?
9. Do evaluation design and tools plan for consultations with people with disabilities as well as women and men, and any other identified disadvantaged minorities?
10. Will qualitative and quantitative data be analysed and presented with gender and disability disaggregation?

H. Optimising sustainability:

Recommendations:

1. Avoid geographically thin resource allocation: Financial resources should not be spread too thinly across geo-regions, countries, and wide project-area populations. Investing smaller budgets across multiple projects can lead to minimal engagement between project facilitators and intended beneficiaries, leading to shallow impacts rather than profound change in concentrated areas.
2. Ensure sufficient critical mass in budgets for national economic context: In high-operating-cost environments like Kiribati, project budgets must be allocated to achieve a "critical mass" of resources to achieve intended outcomes, accepting that the cost-per-participant will be higher than other countries. A case in point includes ensuring sufficient staffing, travel budget and accountability to enable facilitators to reside in partnered communities or visit partnered communities at least monthly.
3. Invest in country partner staff negotiation and engagement skills: Where project staff will be required to routinely engage with government officials, designs should factor in sufficient budget, time, and nurturing of negotiation skills to be effective. This would optimise project influence on mobilising relevant public investment in infrastructure and institutionalising project models to sustain project outcomes.
4. Establish Clear Exit Strategies from the outset.
    - Develop specific roadmaps and exit strategies at the start of every partnership to ensure local ownership, identified partner capacity-building requirements, and clear phase-out plans that begin from Year 1.
    - For partners who have been delivering a similar project service for many years, reorient future designs to transition from Service Delivery towards Technical Advisory Roles.
    - Where partners are providing direct health or clinical services, assist them to develop comprehensive business plans and seek public-private partnerships to fund free services for the marginalised. This may include researching and trialling models where a portion of revenue from paid health services is diverted to fund free treatment for poor patients.

3.3. Less urgent priorities

I. Financial accountability:

Recommendation: Identify which partners need closer accompaniment for financial management.

Discussion: While almost all projects successfully acquitted all project funds by end-of-project without overspending, the year-on-year performance was less fluid. Inevitably some country partners will be superior financial managers and some emerging grass-roots partners may be comparatively less experienced at handling international donor funds, with fewer accountability systems in place.

J. Innovation:

Recommendation: Refresh sectoral project models by periodically scanning external development sector literature/research to identify contextually relevant approaches to AOPs' sectoral priorities in partnered countries.

Discussion: Most project partners demonstrate proficiency at learning from their past experiences to refine their intervention models. AOP should encourage them to continue to learn from previous projects' successes and constraints to inform continuous improvement. However, continuous focus on refining existing models may miss opportunities to learn from innovations in other countries or agencies addressing similar development challenges.

3.4. Sector-specific recommendations

The following are recommendations collated from project evaluation recommendation sections. Here, they are synthesised under the relevant AOP sectoral strategy.

K. EESL and FWCR project recommendations:

Based on the evaluation reports for eleven AOP projects in the livelihoods, food security, water, and climate sectors, the following synthesized list combines similar recommendations into a comprehensive framework for future programming.

1. Strengthen Business Models and Economic Value Chains

   Reshape and Formalise Business Models: Transition informal community groups into registered entities, such as formalizing Community Development Funds (CDFs) into microfinance programs (APM). For Community-Based Tourism (CBT), develop stage-specific intervention packages and revenue-sharing models that suit the maturity of the community.

   Enhance Value Addition and Processing: Intensify training on value addition for crops like Orange-Fleshed Sweet Potato (OFSP) by promoting low-cost, local equipment (e.g., brick ovens) and training local artisans to maintain them.

   Strengthen Market Linkages: Develop private sector partnerships to act as market chains for community products. Revitalize market linkage components using digital tools where possible and establish collective marketing platforms to negotiate better prices.

   Support Business Adaptation: Allow beneficiaries to adapt or change failing businesses to better align with their strengths and local market demand.

   Conduct market assessments pre-design: For livelihood projects, to ensure relevance of proposed income generation activities or to avoid market saturation, AOP or in-country partners should conduct market assessments either during the design phase or at the beginning of the project during Year 1 planning. to estimate how many service providers a local economy can realistically absorb.

2. Advance Agricultural Productivity and Climate Resilience

   Decentralise Seed Production: Support local and backyard seed multiplication to ensure timely access to quality, disease-free seeds (e.g., Irish and sweet potatoes). Upscale technologies like greenhouses to stabilise seed supply and prices.

   Invest in Water and Infrastructure: Prioritize access to affordable irrigation (e.g., drip kits, solar pumps) to reduce the labour burden on women. Construct weir dams for horticultural production and livestock watering to mitigate drought.

   Diversify Livelihoods and Climate-Proofing: Mitigate climate risks by introducing crop rotation, perennial cropping for soil stabilisation, and diversified activities such as fish farming or small livestock production.

   Design in "Crisis Modifiers", with associated budget flexibility parameters: Incorporate flexible funding and activities that allow communities to respond quickly to observed crises (e.g., floods or pests) while maintaining long-term development goals.

3. Foster Social Accountability, Advocacy, and Governance

   Explicit Policy Advocacy: Invest in advocacy of implementing partners and community organisations to influence national programs and local decision-making to replicate successful community models using public resources.

Strengthen Community Governance: Ensure community-based management structures lead project interventions to maintain quality and social cohesion. Facilitate horizontal learning between different project districts to share best practices.

Develop Clear Exit Strategies at the Beginning: Establish roadmaps for exit and sustainability from the project's inception, focusing on local ownership, diversified funding, and the gradual handover of results to government or local partners.

4. Enhance Inclusion and Gender Transformative Approaches

Transition to Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE): Move beyond "women-centred" approaches toward comprehensive WEE strategies that prioritize ethnic minority women and address underlying gender inequalities.

Engage Men and Community Leaders: Actively involve men and traditional leaders in gender equality and savings initiatives to foster community support and reduce household tensions.

Proactive Disability Inclusion: Increase outreach to people living with disabilities (for example, using the CRPD[6] framework), provide technical support to government partners on facility access, and showcase success stories to reduce community stigma.

Address Specific Vulnerabilities: Consider interventions that address critical non-livelihood needs, such as secure housing for domestic violence survivors or healthcare access for remote communities.

5. Improve Organizational Management and Impact Tracking

Upgrade Technical Expertise: Invest in "business-minded" staff and external experts to deepen technical depth in areas like business development, policy advocacy, and agricultural science.

Finetune Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E): Move beyond output reporting to define, track, and substantiate outcomes and impacts. Incorporate participatory monitoring, beneficiary feedback, and disaggregated data to track mental health progress or dietary diversity.

Formalize Knowledge Management: Accelerate the documentation of guidelines and "know-how" to avoid institutional memory loss and ensure consistent intervention quality across countries.

Refine and institutionalise proven intervention models: (Related to the previous recommendation) in countries like Vietnam where successful project models have been 'codified' (i.e. the APM and CBT packages), move toward design using a "Product-Based Approach" (PBA) with minor adaptations to differences in context.

L. Health in Development (HID) project recommendations:

The following combines recommendations from four projects related to bodily and psychosocial health. These projects were in Timor-Leste, Kiribati, and Bangladesh.

1. HID with Social Accountability and Governance (advocacy and Policy Influence)

Strengthen Government Engagement: Deepen partnerships with national and district-level health departments to integrate specialised services (such as clubfoot treatment) into government hospitals and referral mechanisms.

Influence Policy and Guidelines: Use research evidence to advocate for the implementation of national health guidelines and encourage the adoption of project-developed approaches by state agencies.

Advocate for Resource Allocation: Lobby for government budget allocations for health treatments and the development of "Master Trainers" within the public sector to address capacity gaps.

Transition from Service Delivery to Technical Leadership: Shift the organisational focus from direct service provision toward providing technical support and policy contributions to government agencies tackling issues like gender-based violence (GBV).

2. Disability Inclusion and Social Accountability

Proactive Inclusion and Outreach: Use frameworks like the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) to increase outreach to people living with disabilities, ensuring participation rates align more closely with national prevalence data.

[6] Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities

Stigma Reduction: Create opportunities for participants with disabilities to share success stories and network, which helps challenge community discrimination and stigma.

Technical Support for Access: Provide technical assessments and training to government partners to improve the physical and systemic accessibility of their facilities for people with disabilities.

Early Engagement with Disability Representatives: Partner with community structures, such as Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs), early in the programme to ensure long-term sustainability and effective referral pathways.

3. Broaden Recognition of Health Determinants

Address Holistic Vulnerabilities: Beyond direct health topics, consider what other factors undermine physical and mental health (such as absence of secure housing) and advocate for or provide referrals for vulnerable groups, such as survivors of domestic violence.

Education on Social Norms: Identify and increase community-wide education on gendered norms that undermine women's (or men's or youth's) health and promote support services to change underlying behaviours and attitudes.

5. Programme Design and Monitoring

Design for Wellbeing of Frontline Staff: Integrate "self-care" and mental health support for local partner staff directly into the project's capacity-building components.

M. Gender equality projects:

The following combines recommendations from eight projects whose main objective or intended participants focused on women. These projects were in mainly in Asia and PICS countries, with one in Africa (Tanzania).

Based on the evaluation reports for AOP projects focused on gender equality, the following synthesised list combines similar recommendations into a strategic framework for future programs.

1. Advance Women's Economic Empowerment and Market Integration

Support Adaptive Entrepreneurship: Provide technical and financial assistance that allows women to adapt or change failing businesses to better suit their individual strengths and local market demands.

Invest in Technical Training: Provide continuous capacity building in financial management, marketing, and business development, including specialised training for women-managed assets (like flour milling plants in Tanzania).

2. Shift Toward Gender-Transformative and Inclusive Approaches

Transition to Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE): Move beyond a "women-centred" approach (prioritising women for inputs) toward a comprehensive WEE strategy that explicitly targets ethnic minority women and addresses underlying power imbalances.

Engage Men and Community Leaders: Actively involve men and traditional leaders in supporting women's businesses and equality initiatives to foster community social cohesion and reduce household tension.

Protect Vulnerable Groups: Strengthen Community-Based Protection Networks by involving village leaders and savings group members. Revisit intervention strategies among highly disadvantaged participants to include guidance for psychosocial care and safe migration tools (like the Golden Dream App).

3. Strengthen Advocacy and Policy Influence

Research and Advocate for Holistic Rights: Expand advocacy to include non-livelihood needs that impact gender equality, such as access to healthcare facilities and secure housing for survivors of domestic violence.

End of report

Annex A: Details of all projects included in the META evaluation

The following table presents the countries, sectors and intended outcomes of the 15 projects in the meta evaluation's sample.

Table 1 – AOP projects selected for meta evaluation

Country	Project	Sector	Intended Outcomes
Bangladesh	**Walk for Life**	Social accountability (Disability inclusion)	1. Mass awareness raised about the health impact, protection and treatment options, of both clubfoot and COVID-19 (when it appeared in Bangladesh from 2020) socio-economically vulnerable clubfoot patients and their families are protected from COVID-19 infection. 2. Socio-economically vulnerable clubfoot patients and their families maintaining continuity of clubfoot treatment 3. Socio-economically vulnerable clubfoot patients and their families (taking the treatment under the project) are not becoming economically disadvantaged by the cost of treating clubfoot disability 4. COVID-19 risk management promoted within and through the project, protecting frontline health workers, patient families, and children
Cambodia	**Women's Economic Empowerment Project**	Gender equality, livelihoods	1. Empowered women are able to generate income through group businesses and small enterprises 2. Social safety nets are in place in target areas to support vulnerable women to curb financial crises and all forms of violence 3. Girls of underprivileged families who are members of savings groups are able to access vocational/professional training and generate income by using the acquired skills 4. Target community adopts COVID-19 prevention and adaptation throughout all project activities including preventative measures and utilisation of digital tools.
Cambodia	**Women Action for Safe Rural Migration**	Gender Equality (protection against trafficking), Health (psychosocial)	1. Community members in target area gained knowledge on issues related to migration and migrate safely 2. Community members, survivors of trafficking and/or exploitation and deportees in the target area have access to resources (including for soft and hard skills development) that help them to improve their livelihoods 3. Increased effectiveness of implementation of legal procedures and policy measures put in place by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) to combat unsafe migration and human trafficking
Ethiopia	**Enhancing Food, Nutrition, Income Security, and Livelihoods of Smallholder Farmers in Ethiopia**	Livelihoods, food security (incl. nutrition)	1. Improved and sustainable access to locally produced potato and sweet potato quality seed of improved varieties 2. Improved nutrition and food security through increased productivity and consumption of farmers for potato and sweet potato 3. Improved farmer incomes arising from improved and diversified market access for OFSP and potato
Kiribati	**Pacific Regional Food and Water Security Project**	Food security Water and sanitation	1. Improve food security 2. Improve water security 3. Improve relationships between government and communities 4. Induce technical support for local partner NGOs

Kiribati	Community Health Promotion Project	Health (systems preparedness: emergencies of infectious diseases)	Year 1 1. Development of community plans of action for health promotion programs 2. Identification of communities' knowledge, attitude and behaviour towards critical issues of health, message content, placements and medium for information dissemination 3. Through advocacy, awareness, support and counselling, increased numbers of women and children can seek health services 4. Increased production and supply of locally available nutritious food in target communities 5. Increased technical support to Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific – Kiribati (FSPK) Year 2 1. Increased community knowledge of targeted diseases and preventative behaviours 2. Increased awareness, knowledge and support for local disease outbreak response and prevention efforts at the community level 3. Community representation at all levels of health planning, promoting good governance; increased responsiveness of service providers to community need; and increased retention of health workers in remote locations 4. Increased Technical Support to FSPK Year 3 1. Improved preparedness for potential future outbreaks and other highly infectious diseases 2. Improved prevention and communication on epidemic diseases and other public health threats 3. Well-informed and empowered communities, including women and youths, leading to increased health service-seeking behaviour, rights to services, and informed and timely decision-making skills
Malawi	Improving Food Security and Economic Empowerment for Smallholder Farmers (MTE)	Livelihoods	1. Improve and sustainable access to locally produced seed 2. Improve nutrition and food security through increased productivity and consumption of farmers for potatoes and sweet potatoes 3. Improve farmer incomes arising from improved and diversified market access for orange fleshed sweet potato (OFSP) and potatoes.
Malawi	Victory Gardens in Malawi - The Face-to-Face Project	Food security (incl. nutrition)	1. Improved food security 2. Improved nutrition 3. Increased income 4. Improved livelihoods
Mozambique	Improving Food Security and Economic Empowerment for Smallholder Farmers - Phase 2 (MTE)	Livelihoods Food security (incl. nutrition)	1. Improved and sustainable access to locally produced seed. 2. Improved nutritional and food security through increased productivity and consumption of farmers for Irish potato and sweet potato 3. Improved farmer incomes arising from improved and diversified market access for Orange fleshed sweet potato (OFSP) and Irish potato.

Tanzania	**Maasai Women's Economic Empowerment in Tanzania**	Gender equality Livelihoods	1. Determine efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, risks and sustainability, including progress towards project outcomes. 2. Assess Value for Money of the project. 3. Assess the impact that the project has made. 4. Identify lessons learnt and best practices from the project which could be applied to improve the project as well as other similar projects in the region.
Timor Leste	**Socio economic Empowerment Project (SEEP), Timor Leste**	Gender equality Livelihoods	1. To reduce and empower women experiencing domestic violence in six municipalities in Timor Leste to enable them to develop their own business and therefore more economic independence. 2. Engaging new community groups to do agriculture activity (especially livestock raising). 3. To provide psychosocial support and education to women and young prisoners in both Gleno and Becora prison. 4. Do advocacy for the release of those prisoners whose sentence is already finished but they are still detained in prison.
Timor Leste	**Empowering Survivors of Domestic Violence and Trauma**	Gender equality (protection)	1. Improved quality of live for survivors of domestic and sexual violence and their families 2. Increased access to and coordination of quality care services for women in Gleno prison and young men in Becora Prison 3. Increase wellbeing support for local partner staff
Vietnam	**Building Capacity and Access for Community Resilience and Sustainable Livelihoods, Phase 2** (one of four related projects with diverse donors)	Livelihoods Environment and climate change	1. Increased capacity enables farmers, especially youth and women, to secure incomes and make informed choices on migration. 2. Sustainable livelihood alliances secure stable sources of income for local communities. 3. Inclusive growth enabled via broadened participation and access to quality public services for local people. 4. COVID-19 risk management promoted within and throughout the project.
Vietnam	**Promoting Rural Opportunities with Digital technologies and Upscaling Community-based Tourism (PRODUCT)**	Livelihoods (digital and tourism)	1. Improving social and economic status of rural women through engaging in CBT, with business models and market products 2. Promoting inclusive businesses partnerships on CBT and rural products 3. Promoting inclusive governance and perspectives for CBT development and ethnic minority inclusion
Zimbabwe	**Improving Food Productivity and Market Linkages in Zimbabwe**	Livelihoods Food security (incl. nutrition)	1. Improved community access to water for all year-round productivity through the establishment of weir dams and installation of a solar powered borehole. 2. Enhanced household food and nutrition security through improved access to Irish potato and bio- fortified crop seed 3. Increased household income through strengthened social safety nets and access to markets 4. Enhanced livestock management through livestock breed improvement and fodder production and preservation

All other annexes are in a separate document.

Other annexes are:

Annex B: Detailed study of the Value-for-Money chapter, and chapter-specific recommendations.

Annex C: Detailed study of the Outcomes and Impacts chapter, and chapter-specific recommendations

Annex D: Individual project-level SROI reports, lessons and SROI-related recommendations

Annex E: Declarations of the consultant

Endnotes

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[12] Mozambique scored as the 25th most fragile/failed state out of 179, with a fragility index of 92.5/120, compared to, for example, neighbouring Malawi, ranked 52nd, Tanzania (62nd), and Australia (169th). (See the Fragile States Index at https://fragilestatesindex.org/2025/)

[13] Mozambique has a mean of 4.6 years of schooling compared to, for example, 6.1 in Tanzania, 6.8 in Bangladesh, and 12.9 in Australia. (See Human Development Index data at https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI)

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