

2020 Mid-Term Review

Humanitarian Horizons
Research Program

2018-2021

Summary Report

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OVERVIEW

This summary report presents findings from the independent Mid Term Review (MTR) of the Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) Humanitarian Horizons 2018-2021 Research Program (referred to in this report as the Research Program). The Research Program is funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of the Australian Government. The MTR was conducted between November-December 2020 by Fiji based development consultants Iris Low and Leaine Robinson.

The Research Program is the HAG's three-year strategic research program and aims to contribute evidence and progress thinking and action towards better humanitarian outcomes for crisis-affected populations in the Indo-Pacific region. The Research Program builds on the foundations laid in the 2017-2018 program which identified priorities for research, established governance structures, built new partnerships and produced initial research papers.

The Research Program includes four interlocking research streams designed to progress humanitarian reform in the Indo-Pacific. Each of the research streams has been identified as a priority by humanitarian practitioners worldwide and supports and builds on research conducted by others.

- 1. Intention to impact: localised humanitarian action** (referred to in this report as Localisation stream): the current momentum for supporting localised humanitarian action will only persist with evidence that demonstrates its impact. This stream addresses the localisation measurement gap. It will explore and test approaches to measuring the activity and impact of localised humanitarian action.
- 2. Drawing on our diversity: humanitarian leadership** (referred to in this report as Diverse leadership stream): Humanitarian leadership does not currently reflect the broad diversity of talent across gender, age, ethnicity and culture; anecdotal evidence suggests that this hinders humanitarian effectiveness. This stream focuses on

understanding the real and potential benefits to organisations and disaster-affected populations of diversifying humanitarian leadership.

- 3. Building a blueprint for change** (referred to in this report as Blueprint for change stream): this stream provides an evidence base to progress the implementation of transformative systemic change in the Pacific, in support of national government priorities. It will investigate what reform has been possible in the Pacific and how it occurred, and draw lessons to support selected national governments to plan for transformative systemic change for practical improvements to humanitarian action in the short term.
- 4. Partnerships and practice** (referred to in this report as Partnerships and practice stream): just as important as what is researched is how it is researched, communicated and debated. The Research Program will leverage its research outputs to influence policy and practice in the region and globally. It will amplify Australian and Indo-Pacific voices on humanitarian policy, build knowledge and collaboration, and communicate strategically for greater impact.

This MTR is focused on assessing the extent of progress in implementation of the Research Program as at October 2020.

Based on the evidence for the MTR, the review team finds the Research Program **is relevant** to meeting the needs of the target stakeholders and partners in supporting effective humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific region. All (25 out of 25) stakeholders interviewed and the 22 survey respondents report the Research Program is meeting the country and regional needs to support effective humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific region. The MTR found the Research Program is aligned in policy terms to the Governments' of the Indo-Pacific and Government of Australia's humanitarian action commitments, however stakeholders highlighted the need to enhance engagement with national governments in the Indo-

Pacific region to increase uptake of the research to influence policy making of national governments. The geographical focus of the Research Program is a region that is comparatively under-researched in the area of humanitarian action, and is also a region of focus for most Australian humanitarian organisations and the Australian Government's aid program. This context, which is providing the opportunity to support the region's humanitarian actors to address evidence gaps, also fits with the Research Program's overall theory of change around supporting the right stakeholders and partners to use evidence to inform action and change that support effective humanitarian action.

The MTR finds the Research Program **is coherent** and fits with the HAG's wider objectives of elevating the profile and effectiveness of humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific region. All HAG staff interviewed stated that the Research Program fits with the HAG's broader objectives of progressing effective humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific region, and described synergies with other HAG programs and projects, including bringing in additional work and collaborations with new partners for the organisation. All (25) stakeholders interviewed and majority (55%) of the online survey respondents report the Research Program is consistent with the humanitarian policies and priorities of key humanitarian actors in the Indo-Pacific region.

The MTR finds the Research Program is **performing satisfactorily on effectiveness**. The MTR revealed evidence of progress toward the Research Program end of program outcome. Stakeholders and partners are using the research to inform their own research, programming, and practice; and as an advocacy tool to engage with governments. The Research Program is working in a highly consultative and participatory way to develop research, and using methodologies and approaches that stakeholders and partners consider innovative, and also contextually appropriate.

The MTR finds the Research Program is **operating in an efficient way with opportunities to enhance efficiencies** in areas related to program management; adequate human resourcing to achieve the intended outcomes of the program; and communication to promote visibility and accountability to stakeholders and donors. There is satisfactory evidence that planned outputs have been delivered and stakeholders report being highly satisfied with the quality of the Research Programs outputs, particularly for Stream 1 on Localisation.

The MTR found the Research Program is **achieving impact at various levels and benefits will be sustained** due to the current approach and investments in this phase of the Research Program and should be built upon in the next iteration of the Research Program.

MID-TERM REVIEW PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

As per the MTR Terms of Reference (ToR), the overall purpose of the MTR is to assess implementation of the HAG's Humanitarian Horizons 2018-2021 research program, as at October 2020.

The MTR includes the following specific objectives:

- a. Assess progress using the theory of change articulated in the Humanitarian Horizons Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MEF).
- b. Assess whether the HAG met the objectives outlined in the original proposal, both in terms of **what** it aimed to achieve and **how** it was planned to be delivered.
- c. Findings from the MTR will also inform and strengthen the design of the HAG's next multi-year research Program: Humanitarian Horizons Re-imagined 2021-2024. The design process is underway, and due to be completed in December 2020.
- d. Identify lessons learned from program implementation to date to inform program improvement.

The MTR used a theory of change approach, informed by the Research Program's theory of change articulated in the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MEF). The theory of change approach was used to guide data collection, analysis, and reporting to assess the extent to which the intended outcomes and objectives of the research streams have been achieved; and to respond to the key review questions using the DAC criteria. As the research streams are in different stages of progress, with some streams

having advanced further than others. As a result, the MTR focused primarily on reviewing streams 1 and 4, and review of streams 2 and 3 to a less extent. A total of 21 Key Informant (KI) interviews were conducted reaching 25 people and an online survey administered, reaching 22 respondents. A total sample of 47 people were reached through the MTR. This sample is approximately 9% lower for the KI interviews and 40% lower for the online survey than the initial sample size. Interviews were not conducted with Government representatives in Fiji and Vanuatu and a key research partner in Vanuatu, and not all targeted respondents completed the online survey (22 out of 55). Interview content was recorded by the review team; and analysis of survey results were carried out through reports run by Survey Monkey. The review team debriefed daily, with data analysis occurring as data collection progressed. The review matrix and rubric were used for the formal data analysis to arrive at MTR ratings against the intended outcomes and DAC criteria. The review team ensured relevant ethical and culturally appropriate considerations were adhered to, and were guided by the Principles for ethical research and evaluation in development. The MTR team upheld principles of ethics, and cultural appropriateness by: ensuring interview times were organised according to what was most appropriate for the stakeholder group; obtaining informed and voluntary consent to ensure people were informed about the purpose of the MTR, and how findings will be used; and involving the HAG in the presentation of preliminary findings to validate and ensure these are appropriate.

FINDINGS: PERFORMANCE AGAINST DAC EVALUATION CRITERIA

The key findings from the MTR against the DAC Criteria are below:

Relevance

- ▶ The geographical focus of the Research Program is a region that is comparatively under-researched in the area of humanitarian action, and is also a region of focus for most Australian humanitarian organisations and the Australian Government's aid program. This context, which is providing the opportunity to support the region's humanitarian actors to address evidence gaps, also fits with the Research Program's overall theory of change around supporting the right stakeholders and partners to use evidence to inform action and change that support effective humanitarian action.
- ▶ Majority of the Research Program's stakeholders and partners find the research useful in influencing or informing humanitarian action in their organisation/country/region.

'I think I'd say when we are talking about relevance that all of the research that HAG does is very relevant. I feel like they have their finger to the pulse of what issues the humanitarian sector is grappling with and I think they are able to bring out timely research on some of the bigger issues' (KI17)

- ▶ The highest uptake of research to inform policy/programming/or other change is in the Localisation stream. Approximately 41% of survey respondents have used the Localisation research products to inform policy/programming/other change. This finding may also be reflective of how advanced the Localisation stream is in program implementation compared to the other streams, including how the Localisation agenda may be the most relevant to the needs and priorities of stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region. The second highest area of uptake of research is Practice papers stream (14%); and Guidance notes (14%). The Diverse leadership

and Blueprint for change streams have lower (5%) levels of research use, due to a number of factors internal to HAG related to personal resourcing and dealing with a complex project design and external factors such as impact of COVID-19 and political will of humanitarian actors to engage the topics of diversity and systemic change. In addition, work under these streams are specific to audiences, particularly the Blueprint for Change stream. This is unlike the Localisation stream which has a broader reach, and respondents targeted for the online survey were also more involved or aware of work under the Localisation stream. Given the varying stages of implementation of the streams and stakeholders being specific to streams, the MTR is unable to select a representative sample of respondents. Despite these factors, the MTR found strong examples of change in both the research streams. These are elaborated on in findings under effectiveness.

- ▶ Online survey respondents have read research under the Practice papers stream the most (41%) and these research products have been shared the most. Twenty-three (23%) of survey respondents have shared Practice papers with others, compared to Localisation research (14%); 9% for Diverse leadership and Guidance notes; and 5% for Blueprint for change. An indicator of relevance and effectiveness of the research is that people are aware, have read, and are using the research to inform their practice or change, including sharing research with others. The MTR found examples of change and usefulness of research under all research streams, positive indications that the research is relevant for people, and that they are using the research in some way to inform action and change.

- ▶ In response to the question: 'How useful has the research produced from the Research Program been to you/your organisation?', a majority of interview and online survey participants answered positively with examples of how the research has been relevant to their organisation.

'We are carrying out a Diversity and Inclusion review - so the Spotlight report is very helpful. It has been used to inform the development of the ToR for our global review. We are also looking at localisation approaches - so that report is very meaningful' (Survey respondent).

- ▶ The Research Program's design, scope, approach, and flexibility has contributed to its relevance for a range of stakeholders and partners. The MTR found there is overall agreement amongst stakeholders and partners interviewed on the relevance of a program to support humanitarian actors in the Indo-Pacific and activities that aim to build the evidence base about what effective humanitarian action looks like in the region, and promoting the voices and visibility of local humanitarian actors. Notably, partners interviewed highlighted how the Research Program's working with local partners, and use of localised and innovative methodologies is supporting locally-informed humanitarian research and has enabled partners to use the research as an advocacy tool to drive action and change, areas that partners identify as critical to supporting effective humanitarian action in the region.
- ▶ The scope of the Research Program, initial consultative design process, and learning approach adopted by HAG during program implementation has contributed to its relevance and appropriateness for stakeholders and partners.
- ▶ Mechanisms to sustain the relevance of the research to ensure research is locally informed, and needs driven require further development. Information gathered from MTR online survey responses and interviews highlight that there are

opportunities to sustaining, and ensuring ongoing relevance of the research, including how research is locally informed and demand driven.

'When this Research Program comes to Vanuatu it has changed so many things, even people working in INGOs are changing those ways when they use to say 'we are the boss, we say this you do this' but through the different research reports they are trying to take the localisation perspective here and they have started giving out more senior positions to local staff and listening more to local staff perspectives and you see this in their different reports how they talk about using local knowledge being more useful now- there was a panel discussion I was engaged on and INGO representatives were talking about appreciating local knowledge and that INGOs should be promoting more local participation and engagement; and especially with women because they are from the communities and have the local knowledge and they know people in and out. This is changing and I think HAG has contributed to changing this thinking. We all have good things and we don't have everything but we can put together our different ideas and resources to complement our work and respond effectively when there is a disaster' (KI5).

- ▶ In response to the question 'Do you think the program complements the needs and priorities of Indo-Pacific governments in relation to humanitarian action?' all stakeholders interviewed responded with broad consensus that the Research Program at this point in time is contributing to the aspirations of Indo-Pacific governments in relation to localisation and diversity agendas, and to a lesser extent in influencing transformative systemic change of country level humanitarian systems. Interview

participants also made the distinction that while it is important the Research Program aligns to national humanitarian commitments, policies and frameworks, it is also important that the Research Program generate research that promotes policy debate and challenges humanitarian actors to think and act differently. From this perspective, not being aligned to the positions of governments in relation to humanitarian action is seen as a strength of the Research Program in helping the program's research partners and stakeholders advocate a transformative humanitarian action agenda.

- ▶ The Research Program is complementary to HAG's mission and vision, has contributed to positive change within HAG as an organisation and closely aligns with HAG values in terms of supporting and working alongside national actors, being brave, enabling, and being ethical. During interviews, HAG staff noted how the Research Program not only aligns with HAG values, but has directly helped shape organisation practice.
- ▶ The limitation to findings on relevance to Indo-Pacific governments is that the MTR was unable to interview government representatives that the Research Program has engaged with, to be able to assess usefulness of the research directly from the perspective of government, including the extent to which the research has influenced the policy and practice of government.

Coherence

- ▶ Overall, stakeholders feel that the HAG coordinates well and is working with the right stakeholders and partners in the humanitarian sector. Working in partnership with stakeholders is viewed as a key approach the Research Program is taking that is contributing to coherence and coordination in the sector. Opportunities to enhance coherence include expanding partnerships to work with national governments, regional organisations in the Pacific, and academia for more joined up efforts to influence research and thinking in the sector, and as part of promoting the visibility and uptake of the research and the work of HAG.
- ▶ Overall, stakeholders feel that the HAG coordinates well and is working with the right stakeholders and partners in the humanitarian sector. Working in partnership with stakeholders is viewed as a key approach the Research Program is taking that is contributing to coherence and coordination in the sector.

"I think they coordinate well with other stakeholders, that comes through in their partnership approach in that they are not out doing research on a particular topic when another organisation might be doing that at the same time. So I think the partnership approach means that they are more coherent and coordinated. When you look at the other actors in this (localisation) space for example the ARC is doing a lot of research on localisation but they are choosing to do that with HAG because I think of what the HAG has done through this program is well considered by the sector, but I think also because of that coordination and coherence so that they are seen to be working together on the same issue at the same time' (KI17).

- ▶ The Research Program is enabling HAG to leverage additional work in areas such as localisation and climate change, which is expanding HAG's reach, influence, and visibility with other humanitarian actors.
- ▶ During interviews, HAG staff reflected on how the Localisation stream has positioned HAG to be at the forefront of the localisation conversation in the region and has brought additional client projects focused on localisation into HAG, and allowed the organisation to collaborate and partner with different organisations.
- ▶ The Research Program is seen as largely consistent and complementing the programs of humanitarian actors across civil society, donor partners and UN agencies working in the Indo-Pacific region. The Research Program responds to key humanitarian

commitments including the WHS, Agenda for Humanity and the Grand Bargain, commitments also shared by civil society, donor partners (in particular DFAT), and UN agencies.

- ▶ The Research Program is consistent with DFAT's agenda, and of humanitarian actors across the Indo-Pacific region, and during interviews HAG staff described how the partnership with DFAT has progressed and is now invited to contribute to DFAT policy discussions and decision making.
- ▶ There are mutual views expressed by HAG staff and external stakeholders and partners interviewed during the MTR, that there are gaps when it comes to coordination, and opportunities to broaden who the HAG coordinates and works with through the Research Program in order to increase influence and uptake of the research including bringing in more diverse perspectives to inform research products.
- ▶ Opportunities to enhance coherence include expanding partnerships to work with national governments, regional organisations in the Pacific, and academia for more joined up efforts to influence research and thinking in the sector, and as part of promoting the visibility and uptake of the research and the work of HAG.

Effectiveness

- ▶ HAG is regarded as credible, impartial, and genuine, providing advice and guidance to promote more effective humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific region. Stakeholders and partners highlighted the need to further strengthen visibility and communication, particularly in reaching audiences outside of Australia, with more direct engagement with national government and local organisations in the region.
- ▶ The reach and uptake of research is strongest in the Localisation stream, and the research outputs produced under this stream is seen as a catalyst for supporting stakeholders and partners in the humanitarian sector with the tools and frameworks to measure localisation, and to achieve more

localised approaches to humanitarian action in the region.

- ▶ There was agreement from all non- HAG staff interview participants that HAG has the right approach to partnerships, in particular in working through local consultants and local partners organisations to develop research.
- ▶ There is good awareness and appreciation of the work done under the diverse leadership stream, and the thought leadership HAG is contributing to, through the research, to drive a more diverse and inclusive agenda in the sector.
- ▶ The Research Program is producing rapid and timely analysis on emerging issues in the sector through the Practice papers and while uptake of these vary, stakeholders value the provision of quality and real time analysis.

'It is timely and warranted research. It has the potential to change the way international organisations approach the way they interact with national bodies in humanitarian situations, including complex emergencies. I believe it is offering important empirical evidence to support needed new ways of responding to national humanitarian challenges' (Survey respondent).

- ▶ The Blueprint stream is the least progressed of the research streams, and experience delays as a result of staff changes within HAG; less than expected traction with national governments; and COVID-19 further hampered progress.
- ▶ The Research Program demonstrated its ability to adapt and be responsive to needs by providing partners during COVID-19, and developing specific research products to test and explore emerging ideas related to the impacts of COVID-19.
- ▶ The Research Program has made strong progress in producing research products, establishing partnerships with a range of organisations across Asia and the Pacific, and ensuring research is communicated with stakeholders and partners.

Since program inception, the Research Program has worked with 29 partners; developed 31 products; implemented work in 10 countries; and presented research at 67 forums.

- ▶ Fifty (50%) per cent of survey respondents think the research is meeting country specific and/or regional needs of humanitarian actors and affected populations to support effective humanitarian action.
- ▶ There is strong consensus amongst stakeholders and partners interviewed during the MTR that HAG, through the Research Program, has a strong partnership approach that is helping to build effective partnerships with a range of stakeholders and partners, and helping to bring depth and quality to the research, ensuring research is contextually relevant for partners and grounded in innovative and localised methodologies.
- ▶ HAG, is also working with DFAT in a strategic way, to share information about the research, working with other DFAT funded research partners as a way to further the reach and influence of the research (for example: Humanitarian Policy Group on localisation; Centre for Global Development through the Blueprint stream; and CDAC and Ground Truth Solutions on telecommunications focused research with NDMO). HAG staff also appreciate how the partnership and engagement with DFAT has evolved over time, with HAG now being invited into DFAT policy dialogue discussions and decision making.

Efficiency

- ▶ The MTE finds that overall, the Research Program is ***operating in an efficient way with opportunities to enhance efficiencies*** in areas related to program management; adequate human resourcing to achieve the indented outcomes of the program; and communication to promote visibility and accountability to stakeholders and donors. There is satisfactory evidence that planned outputs have been delivered and stakeholders report being highly satisfied with the quality of the Research Programs outputs, particularly for Stream 1 on Localisation.

- ▶ Based on review of project documentation and interviews with HAG staff and representatives from the Research Program's donor and the RAC, the Research Program is being implemented in line with its values and the approach outlined in the proposal. The HAG has remained true to its values of doing business with integrity and engaging ethically. Interviews indicate that the HAG is focused on quality of outputs, partnerships and relationships rather than profit making.

“Some things have blown out and some things have taken longer than we thought they would but that has been an investment worth doing and we wanted to contribute if that meant making less profit, it isn't about making profit but delivering excellent research that is useful.” (KI19)

- ▶ Based on review of project documentation and interviews with HAG staff and representatives from the donor agency and the RAC, the Research Program is tracking well in delivering the overall program budget. While some streams have not progressed as far as others, such as research stream 3: Building a Blueprint for Change, adjustments were made between research streams to cater for the change in context and longer timeframe needed in relationship building.
- ▶ All (25 out of 25) stakeholders interviewed and 86% of survey respondents indicate that the Research Program in the Indo-Pacific region is a good use of resources to contribute to effective humanitarian action.

Impact

- ▶ **Organisational level:** Having a multi-year program has provided the HAG with security and has built a solid and honest based relationship with DFAT as well as its local partners. Through the engagement in the various streams, HAG staff have gained more knowledge on the subject areas and have evolved as technical expert. HAG staff described the unintended impact to be the ability of the HAG to garner the research and establish

partnerships and use this to translate its work with other partners and clients.

- ▶ **Partnerships:** The partnership approach of working with local partners has had some significant impact. Through Streams 1 and 4, the local partners have been able to work with government on policies and regulations on localisation in humanitarian action, particularly in Bangladesh, Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.
- ▶ **Advocacy and Influence:** The HAG is well known to donors such as DFAT and humanitarian actors in the Indo-Pacific region and has been able to use the research products to advocate and influence effective humanitarian action. Local partners value the sphere of influence of the HAG and feel empowered when they see the HAG disseminating the research products. Intentionally documenting country specific issues, cost effects and impacts of inefficient humanitarian action can be used as leverage for humanitarian actors to influence and advocate for efficient humanitarian systems and processes. While government or partners may not agree or support the research findings and recommendations, the fact that the research outputs are generating conversations (negative or positive) about issues relevant to them is considered a positive impact.

“Without research or looking deeply in what’s going on you don’t know if you are making a change, HAG has such a great gender equality lens and I really appreciate the feminist analysis in the reports, really filling a gap in research in terms of feminist humanitarian research.” (KI6).

Sustainability

- ▶ **Support towards capacity building and ownership of research by local partners:** the approach of working with local partners and local researchers supports ownership of the research and tools which are free to be used by anyone,

are accessible on the HAG’s website and can be replicated in different countries. The relationship with HAG is two-way, whereby the HAG benefits from the local knowledge and networks of the local partners who then benefit from the HAG’s research capacity development.

- ▶ **Remote support prior to COVID-19 means that the research work and partnerships can continue:** the Research Program’s approach towards strengthening local partners and working remotely (from Australia) to support data analysis and report writing meant that the impact on local partners ability to continue the work was not curbed.
- ▶ **Collegial approach to partnerships and ways of working is a platform for sustained engagement:** majority of partners interviewed spoke to the HAG’s professionalism and friendly way of working with partners.
- ▶ **Focus areas are responsive to country specific priorities:** The HAG has committed to research that is continuously informed by practitioner needs and priorities and while research have a limited shelf life, the research focus areas are linked to international and national priorities such as localisation coming out of the WHS.
- ▶ **The HAG’s sphere of influence supports sustainability of its investments:** Influencing humanitarian action depends on global, bilateral and multilateral relationships and the relationship the HAG has with global partners, academia, CSO, UN and in particular donors such as DFAT should be capitalised.
- ▶ **Diversification of funding base:** DFAT is the only donor for this Research Program and having one donor, is a risk to program sustainability. Diversifying the Research Program’s funding base through fundraising efforts will help manage risks associated with reliance on only one funding source.

LEARNING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Building effective partnerships for research impact takes time and requires long term investment and appropriate resourcing

Lessons Learned:

- L1** Resources (budget and time) needed to build partnerships was underestimated and under budgeted. Resourcing should not only include resource for the research, but resources to support research capability development as well as resourcing to attend conferences and meetings to have impact on building up the research.
- L2** The research program's accountability could be strengthened to enable partners to feed into decision making amongst stream leads and decisions at the RAC.
- L3** Need to diversify with partners that are representative of the humanitarian sector
- L4** Lack of formal process after the research with the local partners to support research capacity as well as how to use the research to engage at different levels for advocacy and awareness.
- L5** The program has established diverse and strategic partnerships that is contributing to effectiveness. Increased partnerships with government, regional agencies, and local actors can further enhance research impact.

Recommendations:

Applied to future program design:

- R1** Working within the HAG's mandate and capacity, build in enough time to work on relationships and provide more support and tools to national partners to develop institutional research capacity.
- R2** Establish accountability mechanisms to enable partners, stakeholders in the humanitarian sector as well as communities to contribute to how the Research Program is being implemented.
 - 2.1** Build in structured processes that promote joint planning and direction setting by partners
 - 2.2** Regular forums that bring partners together to promote safe spaces for critical discussion
 - 2.3** The accountability process should also include how the HAG can strengthen its accountability to the public by publishing an overview of funding sources and how funds are allocated on its website
- R3** Through a procurement process, develop a database of local partners with different skills and capabilities who can contribute to different research products. The local partners should be representative of the humanitarian sector and who can support research.
- R4** Develop a twinning approach for partnership whereby local partners can be a partner through a research stream contracted to conduct research as well as for capacity building and training for research.
- R5** Develop a strategy for engaging with diverse and strategic partners that contribute to the research program's effectiveness.

Increased focus on communications and engagement

Lessons Learned

- L6** A lack of strategic communication plan impacted on the traction received with certain products
- L7** Communication and outreach cost were not included in the Research Program budget and impacted on research reach, visibility and uptake

Recommendations

Applied to current program:

- R6** In order to achieve greater impact, the HAG must strengthen its communications strategy to ensure that its products are receiving traction.

Applied to future program design:

- R7** To enhance research reach, visibility and update, communication must be resourced through budget allocation for dissemination, visibility and personnel costs.

Strengthened process for program management, monitoring and evaluating impact

Lessons Learned

- L8** While a MEF exists for the Research Program, there was inadequate budget allocated for tracking and monitoring research impacts. This has been flagged as a top priority for DFAT hence the program has started to collect and track impacts of the Research Program.
- L9** Lack of program management processes when there is a gap or vacancy in the streams impacted the Research Program's efficiencies.
- L10** The absence of a dedicated role to ensure systematic and intentional interconnections between the different streams impacted the Research Program's ability to produce cross stream products and enable cross learning.
- L11** Consult and include program stakeholders and research partners to develop/refresh the next iteration of the program's MEF. This joint process will help promote ownership, define what success looks like for the program, and enhance overall rigour in tracking impact

Recommendations

Applied to future program design:

- R8** To enhance M&E tracking and reporting, costs associated for M&E must be included in the program budget.
 - 8.1** Ensure that there are deliverables associated with M&E in the future program design
 - 8.2** Dedicated M&E personnel would ensure efficiencies in M&E
- R9** Consult and include program stakeholders and research partners to develop/refresh the next iteration of the program's MEF. This joint process will help promote ownership, define what success looks like for the program, and enhance overall rigour in tracking impact

Applied to current program and future program design:

- R10** Identify backstops for each of the stream leads to ensure that each stream is not left vacant and no hindrance to program implementation.
- R11** Incorporate into a current role, overall oversight of the Research Program to ensure systematic and intentional interconnections between the different streams and develop cross stream products.
- R12** Build in structured processes that promote joint planning and direction setting by partners. Regular forums that bring partners together to promote safe spaces for critical discussion.

Enhance research rigour and approval process

Lesson Learned

- L12** Lack of formal peer review process for longer research pieces adversely impacts the quality and rigor of the research product, decreasing the relevance of the research to meet stakeholder and partner needs.

Recommendation

Applied to current program and future program design:

- R13** Invest in a formal peer review process for longer research projects to ensure there is an assessment of quality of piece.

Diversification of donor base

Lesson Learned

- L13** DFAT is the only donor for this Research Program which places the HAG at risk of having its programming affected (or ceases) if donor policy and budget allocation shifts. Having a single donor also places the program at risk of always being skewed toward a single donor interest.

Recommendation

Applied to future program design:

- R14** Develop a fundraising strategy or plan to diversify its funding base either through funding from other donors or through fundraising.

Function and membership of the RAC

Lessons Learned

- L14** The role of the RAC is unclear and its membership is not representative of the humanitarian sector.

Recommendations

Applied to current program and future program design:

- R15** HAG to determine the intention of the RAC through a review of the HAG's Terms of Reference and membership to ensure that the role of the RAC is toward strategic oversight of the Research Program. Having diverse membership that is representative of the sector will support the HAG to meet some of the research program's inefficiencies.

CONCLUSION

The findings from the MTR demonstrate the positive contribution the Research Program is making in building an evidence base for action towards effective humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific region since implementation in 2018. The examples shared by the HAG staff themselves, stakeholders and partners interviewed and online survey respondents representing organisations across Asia and the Pacific, about how their humanitarian related programming, practice, and policies have improved as a result of the Research Program is to be celebrated. The Research Program is developing research that is responsive, diverse, informative and transformative to support effective humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific region, one that is grounded in localised methodologies that promote the voice of local actors. As evidenced by the examples shared during interviews with key stakeholders and partners, and online survey respondents, the research products, and knowledge and information the Research Program has introduced into the region is bringing fresh thinking and challenging the sector to think and act differently toward effective humanitarian systems.

The Research Program is performing well with some challenges to program implementation and measuring the impact of research, challenges that are to be expected of interventions aimed at influencing action and change at policy levels, all of which takes time. The Research Program is relevant to supporting effective humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific region; the humanitarian commitments of actors at global, regional and national levels; and for HAG's aspiration to thought leadership on humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific region. The HAG is building strong partnerships with diverse stakeholders and partners, actors that are working at community and policy levels, and through the Research Program building HAG's status as a partner of choice, and organisation that is committed to supporting the right stakeholders and partners advance effective humanitarian action.

The MTR finds that overall, the Research Program is performing well in progressing toward intended

outcomes ensuring research is responsive to stakeholder and partner needs; developing research in partnership using innovative and localised methodologies; and in achieving the planned objectives and intended outcomes of the individual research streams, both in what it aimed to achieve, and how it was planned to be delivered. The MTR found strong examples of how the Research Program is being responsive to regional needs, including helping agencies in the humanitarian sector adapt to COVID-19 related challenges to their humanitarian programming and organisational functions. For online survey respondents, research has been used to inform their own organisation research; information sharing and awareness raising; and programming and policy. Majority of interview participants were able to clearly describe an example of how they have used the research to inform action and change. There were few participants who have not used the research as they did not agree with the findings of the research; they have read and are aware of the research but have yet to apply the research to their practice; and some stakeholder was not aware of examples of how the research has informed change in their country. While these views are not representative, they indicate that not all research is making an impact, and the need for the Research Program to ensure it continues to build diverse and representative partnerships and enhance communication and visibility of research with stakeholders and partners.

The reach and uptake of research has been most visible in the Localisation stream with the research products developed under this stream making significant contribution to raising awareness of the Localisation agenda and the profile of local actors in the Pacific, including influencing stakeholders in Asia and globally. Stakeholders interviewed during the MTR and those who responded to the online survey highlight the important role the Localisation research is making to help communities define Localisation, advocate with policy and decision makers, and establish baseline evidence and tools for the sector to measure Localisation in a practical and useful way.

The limitation is assessing the extent to which the research is being used to inform the practice and policy of national actors, in particular government. Stakeholders and partners interviewed highlight the need to increase the Research Program's visibility and communication, particularly in reaching audiences outside of Australia.

Despite setbacks in program implementation related to factors beyond the HAG's control, the MTR found examples of positive progress in the Diverse leadership and Blueprint for change streams. The State of Diversity global sector survey, the largest of its kind in the sector, reached over 1,400 staff and continues to inform, challenge, and open up conversation in the sector about inclusive leadership. The Blueprint for change stream is the least progressed research stream. The flexible and adaptive nature of the Research Program has been tested under this research stream, and during COVID-19 the research stream was able to pivot and conduct key activities in partnership with the Pujiono Centre, in particular in assisting the Pujiono Centre in developing new and innovative ways to improve the effectiveness of COVID-19 response in Indonesia. The organisational and technical capacity development provided to the Pujiono Centre, including support to establish the SEJAJAR network helped elevate findings from the Blueprint stakeholder workshops and plans to enhance training and capacity gaps in the sector.

The MTR finds that overall, the Research Program is: operating in an efficient way with further opportunities to enhance efficiencies in areas related to program management; adequate human resourcing to achieve the intended outcomes of the program; and communication to promote visibility and accountability of the Research Program to stakeholders and donors. There is satisfactory evidence that planned outputs have been delivered and majority of stakeholders report being highly satisfied with quality of the Research Programs research outputs, particularly for the Localisation stream. The Research Program is being implemented in line with its values and the approach outlined in the proposal the HAG has remained true to its values of doing business with integrity and engaging ethically. The HAG was quite

clear at the proposal development stage that the Research Program had to have that flexibility and adaptability in its planned deliverables, as these would shift in line with the context and partnerships. The flexibility and understanding of DFAT as the donor is appreciated and valued by HAG. Feedback from interviews indicate that one of the strengths of the program is that the Research Program is able to strategically adapt to the context as needed. Working in partnership is fundamental for the Research Program, however as expressed during interviews with HAG staff, developing effective partnerships takes time, and requires appropriate levels of resourcing. HAG staff indicate one of their key learnings is that the effort and work that goes into partnership and relationship building was under budgeted or underestimated. These learnings are important to inform the next iteration of the Research Program in trying to be more precise in how the HAG approaches planning and budgeting.

The Research Program is achieving impact at various levels: at an organisational level having a multi-year program has provided HAG with security, and also the ability to build an effective partnerships with DFAT, as well as key stakeholders and partners. HAG staff themselves have gained more knowledge and skills on the various research topic areas and are being recognised as technical experts on the same. At a partnerships and advocacy and influence level, the strong partnership approach of the Research Program is allowing significant partnership building and impacts, in particular raising the profile and visibility of local organisations as humanitarian actors in the region. The HAG staff, and stakeholders and partners are using the research to advocate and influence effective humanitarian action, and the fact that research is generating conversations amongst stakeholders who both agree and disagree with the research is supporting the Research Program's rationale of pushing the boundaries and stimulating thought, discussion and debate in the sector.

The MTR findings indicate that the Research Program's benefits will be sustained due to the Research Program's partnership approach, in particular working with local organisations and local research partners

which is helping to support capacity development and promote ownership of the research and tools. In addition, research tools and frameworks developed by the Research Program to date, are accessible on the HAG's website and available for anyone to access. During interviews local partners did express that research capacity in the Pacific is still quite low and that local partners would still benefit from research capability from the HAG to continue to build local humanitarian expertise in the region, in addition to supporting local organisations post research with tools and guidance on using the research to influence government and decision makers at national levels. DFAT being the only donor of the Research Program is seen as a risk to sustainability of outcomes.

The HAG's focus on research and on building a credible evidence base to inform more effective humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific region through the Research Program is helping to address key gaps in the sector in understanding what effective and inclusive localised humanitarian action looks like and introducing innovative and fresh perspectives on issues relevant to building an effective humanitarian system. Supported by HAG's mission and vision to thought leadership on humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific region, the HAG, through the Research Program is laying important foundations to ensuring stakeholders and partners are equipped with evidence they can use to inform action and change that supports effective humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific region.

"When we have groups like HAG doing localisation research, they are contributing a lot to the Vanuatu response sector and also opening up to what people are used to which is that it is only the INGOs or the internationals or the outside expert. We use to just rely on their knowledge and expertise but through this program it starts off with so many eyes opening and thinking that no, we as locals also have the knowledge and expertise that is also good. We use to think down on how we respond to cyclones in our own traditional ways but through this program and the research we start to appreciate our own ways and traditions, start to appreciate what we know and what we have is also very important compared to outside knowledge. Not only outside knowledge is important but it is both coming together to complement each other and in so many ways this program has opened peoples' eyes to appreciate and know that we (local communities and actors) also have the knowledge and expertise and skills that we should not look down on" (KI5).

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

(Humanitarian Advisory Group's management response to mid-term review recommendations)

Making recommendations a reality in our Humanitarian Horizons Programme

We loved working with Co-Lab and are so grateful for their energy and enthusiasm for this review. We found the recommendations incredibly helpful, evidenced by the fact that we found almost all 'spot on' and for the remainder we heard and understood the recommendations with caveats. There were no recommendations that fell on deaf ears.

Categories of agreement

Spot on - we love and will throw everything at achieving it

We hear you - we agree but think there may be a few different ways of getting there

Deaf ears - NONE of these!

Recommendations	Making them reality
<p>R1</p> <p>Working within the HAG's mandate and capacity, build in enough time to work on relationships and provide more support and tools to national partners to develop institutional research capacity. <i>(Applied to future program design)</i></p>	<p>→ Spot on</p> <p>We completely agree that we can be more strategic with our partnerships and have really wanted to do this more. The plan is to identify partners at the start of HH and develop a 3-year plan with them that will include 2-way research capacity strengthening.</p>
<p>R2</p> <p>Establish accountability mechanisms to enable partners, stakeholders in the humanitarian sector as well as communities to contribute to how the Research Program is being implemented. <i>(Applied to future program design)</i></p>	<p>→ Spot on</p> <p>We plan to directly engage and fund partner time to participate in the research design and implementation process including the development of tools and approaches.</p>
<p>2.1. Build in structured processes that promote joint planning and direction setting by partners</p>	<p>→ We will make sure that communities know and understand how to provide feedback on the research process where they are engaged.</p>
<p>2.2. Regular forums that bring partners together to promote safe spaces for critical discussion</p>	<p>→ We love the idea of bringing partners together and will explore ways to do this in the next program that are not too demanding on partner time and resources.</p>
<p>2.3. The accountability process should also include how the HAG can strengthen its accountability to the public by publishing an overview of funding sources and how funds are allocated on its website</p>	<p>→ We are committed to having a stand-alone web page on the program and have established this in our recent website refresh. We will be transparent about donors to program and track our commitment to providing 25% of research funding to local partners.</p>

Recommendations

Making them reality

R3

Through a procurement process, develop a database of local partners with different skills and capabilities who can contribute to different research products. The local partners should be representative of the humanitarian sector and who can support research. *(Applied to future program design)*

→ We hear you

However, we need to balance this with R1 and the need to invest in deeper relationships with selected organisations and invest in their institutional capacity. It is a question of depth versus breadth. We recognise diversification of partners will also be important at a rate that means we can provide strong partnership practices across new and existing partners. We need to scale at a pace that allows us to remain true to values and commitments.

R4

Develop a twinning approach for partnership whereby local partners can be a partner through a research stream contracted to conduct research as well as for capacity building and training for research. *(Applied to future program design)*

→ Spot on

We plan to identify 2-3 key partners in the next Humanitarian Horizons programme on a multi-year basis to ensure they can be involved in all stages of the research process, this includes institutional capacity support, organisational development, and they would receive an administration budget line to support their engagement.

R5

Develop a strategy for engaging with diverse and strategic partners that contribute to the research program's effectiveness. *(Applied to future program design)*

→ Spot on

Yes we are planning to develop an engagement strategy for the next program that will include reaching out to governments, think tanks and academic actors in particular. We also hope to provide greater support to our partners to extend reach to their networks as appropriate.

R6

In order to achieve greater impact, the HAG must strengthen its communications strategy to ensure that its products are receiving traction. *(Applied to current program)*

→ Spot on

We have already started on this one - we have launched a new website, developed a whole of organisation communications strategy

R7

To enhance research reach, visibility and update, communication must be resourced through budget allocation for dissemination, visibility and personnel costs. *(Applied to future program design)*

→ Spot on

Exploring a diverse range of communications products across a range of platforms and modes. The new budget will have specific line items to resource this properly.

Recommendations

Making them reality

R8

Applied to future program design:

To enhance M&E tracking and reporting, costs associated for M&E must be included in the program budget. *(Applied to future program design)*

8.1. Ensure that there are deliverables associated with M&E in the future program design

8.2. Dedicated M&E personnel would ensure efficiencies in M&E

→ Spot on

This has been covered in the new budget and there will be M&E members of the team with specific responsibilities for tracking and reporting

R9

Consult and include program stakeholders and research partners to develop/refresh the next iteration of the program's MEF. This joint process will help promote ownership, define what success looks like for the program, and enhance overall rigour in tracking impact. *(Applied to future program design)*

→ Spot on

Yes, we have proposed an approach to the MEF in the proposal but if funding is secured once partners are selected the details of the MEF will be developed together.

R10

Identify backstops for each of the stream leads to ensure that each stream is not left vacant and no hindrance to program implementation. *(Applied to current program and future program design)*

→ Spot on

Our team has doubled in size from when we started the first HH program and we will have designated teams on each stream, with at least three staff members for our two main research streams.

R11

Incorporate into a current role, overall oversight of the Research Program to ensure systematic and intentional interconnections between the different streams and develop cross stream products. *(Applied to current program and future program design)*

→ Spot on

We have written an overarching coordinator role into the proposal.

Recommendations

Making them reality

R12

Build in structured processes that promote joint planning and direction setting by partners. Regular forums that bring partners together to promote safe spaces for critical discussion. *(Applied to current program and future program design)*

→ We hear you

We agree that we should promote joint planning and direction setting.

We are yet to determine with partners if regular forums are the best way to promote safe space for discussion - we need to consider their preference.

R13

Invest in a formal peer review process for longer research projects to ensure there is an assessment of quality of piece. *(Applied to current program and future program design)*

→ Spot on

Yes we think this would be a great idea. We will explore whether members of the RAC with specialist knowledge are linked to streams in a peer review function and will strive to have one RAC member and one external representation provide peer review on all products. This is in addition to the red flag review by donors into the program.

We will give clear guidance and support on the peer review process.

R14

Develop a fundraising strategy or plan to diversify its funding base either through funding from other donors or through fundraising. *(Applied to future program design)*

→ We hear you

We agree that we need to diversify our funding base and we are being proactive about this. We have already shared the findings of the reimagining process with potential donors and stakeholders. This will be followed with sharing the final programme proposal and having formal conversations

R15

HAG to determine the intention of the RAC through a review of the HAG's Terms of Reference and membership to ensure that the role of the RAC is toward strategic oversight of the Research Program. Having diverse membership that is representative of the sector will support the HAG to meet some of the research program's inefficiencies. *(Applied to current program and future program design)*

→ Spot on

We will review the TOR and composition of the RAC. Areas in the new proposal include involvement in ethics review, peer review functions and stream champions. We will explore the idea of having a RAC Chair.

Kate Sutton and Beth Eggleston

Co-founders and Directors