HUMANITARIAN HORIZONS 2021-24
End-of-program evaluation

Australian Aid

HUMANITARIAN ADVISORY GROUP

Contents

Acknowledgements

We would like to express sincere thanks to everyone who participated in the evaluation for their time and contributions.

Humanitarian Horizons 2021-2024

Humanitarian Horizons is a three-year research initiative that adds unique value to humanitarian action in the IndoPacific by generating evidence and creating conversations for change. It is supported by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The research program for 2021–24 builds on the achievements of the Humanitarian Horizons pilot phase (2017–18), the previous iteration of the program (2018–21) and Humanitarian Advisory Group's experience in supporting the sector for almost 10 years. The research is structured into three interlocking streams: 1) Power, People and Local Leadership, 2) Greening the System, and 3) Real-Time Analysis and Influence. It is underpinned by a fourth stream that considers governance, accountability, and monitoring, evaluation and learning processes.

Abbreviations

AI   Artificial Intelligence

DFAT   Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

GEDSI   Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion

GTS   Greening the System

HAG   Humanitarian Advisory Group

ICVA   International Council for Voluntary Agencies

INGO   International Non-Governmental Organisation

MEF   Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

NGO   non-Governmental Organisation

PPLL   Power, People and Local Leadership

RTA   Real-Time Analysis and Influence

Introduction

Humanitarian Horizons is a multi-year research program designed and delivered by Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) in collaboration with trusted national and regional partners and funded by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The latest iteration of the Humanitarian Horizons program was implemented between 2021 and 2024. This program built on the pilot year (2017) and previous program (2018–21), the contributions and learning from which were documented in the 2020 independent Mid-Term Review and final impact report of the program.

The program's long-term aim is to generate evidence and interventions that support a measurable contribution to more effective and ethical humanitarian action in Asia and the Pacific. HAG's partnership-based approach to research was foundational to the influence and reach of the first program, reflecting both organisational values and the shifts towards more locally grounded and relevant approaches to programming and research in the humanitarian sector. Humanitarian Horizons' five core partners are detailed in Box 1 below.

Box 1: Research Partners

 Collaborate Consulting Pty Ltd (CoLAB) is a Fiji-based development consultancy company with a vision to achieve localised responses to development that are inclusive and sustainable, enabled through genuine collaboration amongst all partners.

 GLOW Consultants (Private) Limited, based in Pakistan, is a leading national entity providing practice solutions and field implementation support to donors, their implementing partners and research institutions.

 inSights (the Institute of Innovation for Gender and Humanitarian Transformation) is a Bangladesh-based social enterprise providing insights that challenge the current ways of working in humanitarian aid and gender affairs.

 The **Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organisations (PIANGO)** is the major regional non-governmental organisation in the Pacific islands, with membership in its 24 countries and territories.

 The **Pujiono Centre** is a not-for-profit company established by disaster management practitioners in Indonesia as a new modality, institutional arrangement, and platform for obtaining, sharing and disseminating knowledge about disaster management by supporting evidence-based assessments for policymakers.

The program comprises three interlocking research streams and one underpinning governance stream:

1. **Power, People and Local Leadership (PPLL):** To support the shift to a more localised and equitable system that facilitates more ethical and effective humanitarian action;

2. **Greening the System (GTS):** To support the sector to measurably reduce the negative environmental impact of humanitarian response

3. **Real-Time Analysis and Influence (RTA):** To inform and influence humanitarian practice and policy in real time

4. **Governance, Learning, Sharing and Accountability:** Humanitarian Horizons is constantly learning and adapting to maximise impact of research findings.

The structure of the Humanitarian Horizons program is outlined in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Humanitarian Horizons (2021–24) program structure

Research Stream 1	Research Stream 2	Research Stream 3
People, Power and Local Leadership	**Greening the System**	**Real Time Analysis and Influence**
Objective	**Objective**	**Objective**
To support the shift to a more localised and equitable system that facilitates more ethical and effective humanitarian action	To support the sector to measurably reduce the negative environmental impact of humanitarian response	To inform and influence humanitarian practice and policy in real time

Governance Stream
Learning, Sharing and Accountability

Objective
Humanitarian Horizons is constantly learning and adapting to maximise impact of research findings

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The purpose of this End-of-Program Evaluation was to independently assess the implementation as well as the impact and influence of Humanitarian Horizons 2021–24 research program. Guided by the key evaluation questions outlined in the Humanitarian Horizons 2021–24: Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MEF), this evaluation examined the extent to which the program succeeded in achieving its intended overarching outcomes, as well as individual stream outcomes. Undertaken from June to August 2024, its geographical scope was primarily Asia and the Pacific; a global scan was included when relevant and feasible.

This evaluation assessed Humanitarian Horizons' impact across four key areas: *Effectiveness, Relevance, Efficiency, and Sustainability*. It sought to identify the outcomes for research partners and humanitarian actors, measure contributions to policy and practice change, and assess the program's alignment with Australian Government priorities, including localisation, climate resilience, gender equality and social inclusion.

EVALUATION APPROACH

Data collection was carried out from June to August 2024 using three research methods, and triangulated to develop findings.

Document Review

The evaluation team coordinated with HAG to determine the mix of documents (which HAG provided) to be prioritised. Documents subjected to analysis include samples of Humanitarian Horizons' Research Advisory Committee (RAC) meeting minutes and various frameworks, reports and other research outcomes covering the program's research streams.

Remote Semi-Structured Interviews

Twenty-seven research participants representing senior and middle management of Humanitarian Horizons' organisational partners were engaged in this activity. Research participants who provided information and insight into the mid-term impacts of the research program included HAG staff, DFAT staff and partners and end-users of the research based in the Pacific (Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu), Asia (Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia), and Australia. A few global actors were included to shed light on the state of humanitarian practice and key gains and challenges in recent years. The team based its informed consent process on that used in previous HAG research and ensured compliance with Australian standards for human research ethics, as outlined in Australia's National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

Quantitative Survey

The evaluation team planned a brief quantitative survey with a minimum of 30 respondents (to address generalisability and representativeness) as a complement to the document reviews and semi-structured interviews. However, only 16 respondents completed the questionnaire, including some who participated in semi-structured interviews. HAG emailed potential respondents from various Humanitarian Horizons partners and stakeholders to introduce the evaluation team. The evaluation team also encouraged interviewees to complete the questionnaire at the end of each interview and sent a final reminder to all interviewees. Given that only 16 respondents completed the survey, the results are discussed where relevant, to triangulate interview data and reported using raw numbers instead of percentages, so as not to give the impression of generalisability.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected via the three research techniques were initially organised and analysed separately using Google Forms' tabulation functions. Data from interviews and documents were coded using thematic analysis to develop the initial key themes and sub-themes. In the third week of July 2024, the evaluation team sent HAG a bullet-point draft report detailing the preliminary interview findings to obtain initial feedback and guidance on additional themes. On 22 August 2024, the evaluation team conducted an in-person data analysis workshop to triangulate the findings from the three research techniques. Figure 2 below provides an overview of the evaluation methodology.

Figure 2: Evaluation Methods

27 Key informant interviews

Ethical research principles

25 Documents reviewed

16 Survey responses

Limitations of the Evaluation

The survey sample size of 16 respondents reduced the generalisability and representativeness of the findings, as did (to a lesser extent) the 27 interviews conducted (30 were planned). The integration of more grassroots perspectives would have provided a better picture of Humanitarian Horizons' research impact. However, the accuracy and validity of the findings were bolstered by efforts to diversify interview participants and survey respondents based on organisation type, geographical focus, stream focus, and organisational role, as well as by triangulating results from the three research techniques.

While the evaluation reveals multiple dimensions of significant program impact, establishing a full picture of research impact will take time given Humanitarian Horizons' ambitious targets. As such, and in the context of research findings on impact beyond the MEF, the research team included expanding impact measurement areas in the recommendations.

Photo: Ali Jeet on Pexels

Overview of Findings

The evaluation yielded seven key findings with respect to Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency and Sustainability.

RELEVANCE

Key Finding 1: The Humanitarian Horizons research program stands out as substantially relevant in terms of participants' overall perspective.

The evaluation demonstrated that Humanitarian Horizons was substantially relevant to country research partners, regional and national actors as well as stakeholders, particularly through its alignment with Australian Government priorities.

Key Finding 2: Through the work of HAG's in-country research partners, humanitarian organisations and national governments in the Asia-Pacific and beyond benefited from the findings and platforms generated through Humanitarian Horizons.

The program contributed to the development of evidence-based policy reforms in the Asia-Pacific region, aiding national governments in areas such as disaster response, sustainability and humanitarian coordination. Crucially, it also empowered local actors to advocate for reforms and influenced national localisation discussions, demonstrating the potential for the program to drive long-term policy change in diverse contexts. The relevance of the program was enhanced by its collaborative approach, which encouraged trust, flexibility and agility throughout the many research projects of the program.

EFFECTIVENESS

Key Finding 3: The Humanitarian Horizons research program treated its country research partners with dignity and flexibility, which was viewed as crucial for inclusive and successful research implementation.

In terms of effectiveness, the program fostered respectful and equitable partnerships, allowing country research partners to shape research agendas and integrate local knowledge into humanitarian practices.

Key Finding 4: Humanitarian Horizons resulted in valuable outcomes related to the decentralisation of power and the dissemination and adoption of practical knowledge.

This inclusive approach decentralised power within the humanitarian sector, elevating Global South voices and fostering greater participation in decision-making among regional actors. The program also raised awareness of critical issues such as localisation and climate action while advancing gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI). While challenges remain in fully integrating GEDSI across all research streams, the program laid the groundwork for future efforts.

The evaluation highlights the need for the Humanitarian Horizons program to strengthen mechanisms for localisation, particularly through local capacity building, widespread dissemination of research findings and continued coordination and engagement with local actors and national governments.

EFFICIENCY

Key Finding 5: Evaluation participants regarded the Humanitarian Horizons program as efficient, particularly in terms of producing high-quality research outputs, flexibility, timeliness, transparency, resourcing, and inclusive and collaborative research.

The program's research was praised for its deep understanding of local challenges and ability to shape discourse, although some partners faced difficulties in meeting deadlines due to resource constraints.

SUSTAINABILITY

Key Finding 6: Humanitarian Horizons research findings are expected to produce long-term impact in terms of shaping humanitarian policies and practices in Asia and the Pacific. However, efforts to disseminate research findings, maintain international partnerships, and identify emerging issues and potential research themes are needed to sustain the momentum generated by the program.

Evaluation participants noted that the impact of research findings on policy and practice will likely continue beyond the program's conclusion, but ongoing dissemination and engagement efforts are necessary to maintain relevance. Country partners emphasised the need for tailored publications for international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and multilateral organisations to maximise research impact. Recommendations for the program's sustainability highlight the need to diversify funding, expand outreach through accessible and translated publications, and maximise policy reform impact across climate, disaster risk reduction, and humanitarian sectors through ongoing engagement with national and international bodies and partner networks.

Key Finding 7: The increasing scale and complexity of the humanitarian landscape is influencing donor focus and resource allocation, reducing funding for humanitarian research initiatives.

DFAT and INGO participants noted that escalating crises, often overlapping with environmental disasters, demand recalibrated donor resources and focus. While these crises make it difficult for donor staff to stay abreast of research, the protracted nature of these emergencies highlights the need for Humanitarian Horizons to pivot towards the humanitarian–development nexus to be more sustainable. To sustain impact amidst shifting funding priorities and compounded humanitarian crises, the program will benefit from futures thinking[1] that integrates the humanitarian–development nexus.

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1 Futures thinking involves creative thinking about future possibilities and systematic analysis of patterns that affect change; it seeks all possible answers and acknowledges uncertainty. It differs from analytical thinking, which uses convergent thinking to reduce uncertainty and seek a single answer. Definition adapted from New Zealand Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (n.d.), 'Futures thinking.' Date accessed 16 September 2024, https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project/policy-methods-toolbox/futures-thinking; S. Forchheimer (2022), 'What Exactly is Futures Thinking?' Institute for the Future (IFTF), 28 June, https://www.iftf.org/insights/what-exactly-is-futures-thinking/

Key Findings

RELEVANCE

Key Finding 1: The Humanitarian Horizons research program stands out as substantially relevant in terms of participants' overall perspective.

The program was particularly appreciated for the relevance of the topics it explored and the way it was conducted and co-produced with regional, national and local partners. Humanitarian Horizons had high relevance to DFAT because it addressed Australian Government priorities. For example, the PPLL stream supported DFAT's focus on locally led action, while the GTS stream addressed the government's renewed emphasis on climate change, even sparking discussions about becoming a state supporter of the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations. The RTA stream was also found to be highly relevant; for example, the Practice Paper focusing on anticipatory cash in Pakistan (Just in time: Advancing anticipatory cash in Pakistan) reflects DFAT's evolving priorities. An evaluation participant confirmed the wide-ranging relevance of the program:

> The research program was not just for the humanitarian sector, but it has added value that is working in the priorities of the government and DFAT.

The strong relevance of Humanitarian Horizons underpinned its success in disseminating findings and ensuring that research end users understood the practical applications of research outputs and processes, and demonstrates its potential for expansion. Several evaluation participants commended the responsiveness of the Humanitarian Horizons' three research streams to the evolving humanitarian contexts and priorities in the Asia-Pacific region. They highlighted the program's emphasis on climate-related issues and the greening of the system, noting that these areas have gained significant prominence in recent years.

> I'm sure it was by design, but also by the way the thematics and the trends have moved in the system that each of the three areas was very relevant to the general direction of travel in the humanitarian system. And I would say, that's both in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond as well.

Another interviewee praised the RTA stream's responsiveness and feedback mechanism, which have made it contextually relevant.

> Real Time Analysis [...] has become very very relevant in terms of the questions around being responsive and providing feedback loops [...] to make research contextualised and relevant to operational practice.

Finally, a representative from one of the country research partners shared that the PPLL stream was particularly relevant to national governments as they fulfil their mandate to engage local organisations, shifting towards an approach focused on locally driven capacity development.

> Of course [PPLL is relevant], the government has amended the humanitarian assistance [guidelines that encourage] local organisations to be capacitated by the international organisation [because] the local organisation should be the lead.

The insights presented above underscore Humanitarian Horizons' multi-scale and multidimensional significance to a range of humanitarian stakeholders across diverse contexts. The survey findings reinforce these qualitative insights, revealing a consensus about the program's distinctiveness. Eleven participants (8 strongly agreed, 3 agreed) considered the program unique in its research topics. Fourteen respondents (9 strongly agreed, 5 agreed) recognised its uniqueness in its collaborative and co-produced research approach with regional, national and local partners. Additionally, 12 respondents (5 strongly agreed, 7 agreed)

that Humanitarian Horizons had a unique way of communicating and presenting findings and evidence.

Key Finding 2: Through the work of HAG's in-country research partners, humanitarian organisations and national governments in the Asia-Pacific and beyond benefited from the findings and platforms generated through Humanitarian Horizons.

Governments that are starting to strengthen or reform disaster, climate and humanitarian policies clearly benefited from the frameworks and findings produced through the program, specifically in relation to GTS (Framework for Greening Humanitarian Action in the Pacific) and RTA (Treading Gently: Building on positive environmental practice in the Tonga volcano response). One of the program's country research partners in Bangladesh used a policy brief based on several localisation studies (PPLL stream) to mobilise multiple local humanitarian actors to promote national humanitarian reform. According to an interviewee:

> On the eve of 2023 World Humanitarian Day, inSights, together with the NAHAB [National Alliance of Humanitarian Actors in Bangladesh], a nationwide platform of approximately 72 local humanitarian aid organisations), we actually developed a policy brief. It is only a three-page "Humanitarian Localisation in Bangladesh" policy brief that was actually based on our studies. This policy brief, I would say, shook the country's localisation discussion.

The interviewee elaborated that after they gave a briefing about the content of their policy overview to some Bangladesh government officials, the state's Humanitarian Coordination Team began reforming its humanitarian localisation process and procedures. These examples demonstrate Humanitarian Horizons' potential to embed localisation, greening and agility practices within national governments' humanitarian policies.

Another evaluation participant emphasised how the research findings and platforms produced through Humanitarian Horizons enabled them to reflect on their country's philosophy and way of life, facilitating the "indigenisation" of humanitarian values.

> In November 2023, at the second Indonesian Humanitarian Congress, we quoted our findings from the Horizons [Program] to say that this is now the time for Indonesia to develop our own humanitarian framework. While for the last couple of decades we have been parroting what the global North was talking about humanitarian principles, humanitarian space, humanitarian action. So, in that Congress we had our own reflection. What are Indonesian philosophy, way of living, ideology, and values that ... provide a drive, format, and space for action and principles in Indonesia? So, in a way, we are sort of indigenising it, but also simply reconfirming the humanitarian values exactly when such values are being trampled, violated, disregarded in most parts of the world ... so we thought that was a very important step that we took in Indonesia.

These evaluation findings reveal how the program's relevance to national and organisational contexts encouraged the country research partners to enhance Humanitarian Horizons' responsiveness to evolving conditions.

In the last three years, Humanitarian Horizons' reach and uptake expanded to include conflict and crises in countries such as Ukraine, Lebanon and Yemen (building on recommendations from the mid-term review of the previous iteration). In both Ukraine and Yemen, HAG's previous work under the Humanitarian Horizons program supported establishment of localisation baselines that were key to the creation of NGO forums and the registration of membership in global humanitarian organisations, such as the International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), expanding the influence of local actors. An attendee at the April 2024 Research Advisory Council Meeting commented:

> It's like [HAG] threw a stone in the Pacific all those years ago and now seeing the ripples wash up in different places, in relation to the ICVA baselines, it has galvanised the conversation in Yemen and been taken to another level in Ukraine.

EFFECTIVENESS

Key Finding 3: The Humanitarian Horizons research program treated its country research partners with dignity and flexibility, which was viewed as crucial for inclusive and successful research implementation.

A consultative approach to research partnerships proved vital to creating a safe and transparent collaborative environment. It also enabled research partners to integrate their contextual knowledge, stakeholder networks, and ability to navigate bureaucratic procedures into Humanitarian Horizons' diverse research projects. As one of the country research partners noted,

> " I participated in shaping the whole configuration of the partnership between HAG and our organisation. I must acknowledge that they have a unique practice ... We agreed that this partnership is an equitable partnership. The leadership will be joint leadership ... We are a small organisation. As such, we agreed that the work would involve not only technical but also institutional involvement and that the work is not treating us as manual labourers to collect data. But we're part of shaping, lining up the agenda.

This insight highlights the significance of ethical, inclusive processes as well as mutual trust between research partners. It is essential to continuously explore potential mechanisms and structures through which research partners can be equipped to drive country-level agendas, such as those in the localisation and greening spaces.

This positive assessment of partnership processes and their link to program success is confirmed by the survey findings. All 16 respondents said the program at least partially achieved its aims. Ten respondents indicated that Humanitarian Horizons fully achieved its target outcome of supporting more effective and ethical humanitarian action, while six respondents said this goal was partially achieved but only because the targets are ambitious and research impact takes time.

Key Finding 4: Humanitarian Horizons resulted in valuable outcomes related to the decentralisation of power and the dissemination and adoption of practical knowledge.

4.1. Humanitarian Horizons reframed the localisation agenda as a transfer of power.

Instead of reducing localisation discussion to financial concerns, the research supported local networks in advocating for greater involvement in decision-making. This created a shift in power dynamics within humanitarian spaces traditionally dominated by international organisations. Specifically, the PPLL stream was viewed as a departure from the traditional practise of bringing in external actors to conduct research. More generally, localisation understood as a transfer of power has wide-ranging influence on the humanitarian sector's various actors, including encouraging researchers from the Global North to cultivate equitable engagements with researchers from the Global South, providing local networks with evidence to advocate for localisation, introducing a lens from which to analyse systemic gaps, and showing how transparency and accountability can be operationalised within humanitarian research and humanitarian action. A research partner elaborated on the usefulness of localisation as an overarching focus of the program:

> " Through the knowledge and evidence-based products, [Humanitarian Horizons] supported a lot of thinking and provided guidance on how local organisations will engage in the process or different stages of the project cycle, as well as in actually doing localisation. It [the program] has been useful in the sense of learning, hearing, and seeing the gaps in the system.

The research program's focus on highlighting the voices and experiences of the Global South as a dimension of localisation also changed perceptions of who should be counted in humanitarian research and practice, even among partners already working in the Global South. Furthermore, an evaluation interviewee from a country research partner confirmed that those engaging with the PPLL research stream felt that Humanitarian Horizons staff

were the first international collaborators to treat their experiences and views as significant:

> **In testing localisation, what people shared with us is that they have a lot to say, but nobody comes to them and asks them. They really wanted to tell us their problems, issues and challenges, and they want to see the report and recommendations from the research conducted with them.**

The interviewee elaborated that local actors can confidently share their perspectives because the program's research projects value confidentiality. Moreover, the interviewee shared that community actors appreciate seeing international research in which they have participated published on HAG's website, because this visibility confirms that their voices are being heard.

Decentralising power in humanitarian action was also evident in efforts to integrate GESDI into program's research. Within Humanitarian Horizons, GEDSI was recognised as a cross-cutting focus rather than a standalone stream, particularly with respect to participant representation and accountability. The MEF includes indicators that demonstrate how GEDSI can be operationalised throughout the program, and the evaluation revealed multiple efforts to incorporate GEDSI into the research. The emphasis on GEDSI varied across research areas; some highlighted GEDSI, such as capturing gendered perspectives in psychosocial support research in Afghanistan and examining intersectionality in Myanmar. The evaluation also found, however, that there remains room for improvement, especially in adopting more intentional GEDSI lens in future research that accounts for the local contexts of country research partners.

4.2. Humanitarian Horizons created awareness about a wide range of humanitarian issues. There was high consensus on the program's contribution in bringing more attention to topical areas such as localisation and greening of the humanitarian sector and filling gaps in evidence for policy and advocacy and improving humanitarian operations. For example, according to several evaluation participants, many experts interested in implementing localisation within

communities are not fully aware of what this entails. The research papers produced by the PPLL stream, which offer concrete evidence on these challenges and potential solutions, had a significant impact not only among humanitarian actors but on raising awareness among a wider audience.

One evaluation participant from a country research partner stressed how heightened awareness of localisation issues allows them to engage more effectively with subject matter experts during program interviews while simultaneously raising the awareness of their interviewees as they introduce humanitarian topics for discussion.

> **So that it [new localisation knowledge] would not only provide us the required input when we are doing the KIIs [key informant interviews] with them [experts], but it will also raise more understanding and awareness [among the experts interviewed]."**

The example above illustrates that raising awareness and disseminating knowledge within the program did not only happen after research reports were produced. The data gathering process itself can increase awareness and spread knowledge about essential and cutting-edge topics in humanitarian action.

4.3. Humanitarian Horizons facilitated appreciation for the multiple functions of humanitarian research. Evaluation participants expressed that the program reiterated the value of humanitarian research. First, humanitarian research provides a common language for various actors of the sector to use when navigating challenges, particularly when they have no prior experience of working together. Second, humanitarian research yields valuable information that is crucial to influencing policy. *"If we do not have research, we cannot influence policy,"* an interviewee stated. Finally, research produced by the program was used to confirm the humanitarian knowledge gained in other spaces and through other means. One participant in the evaluation elaborated on how the program's research outputs are useful for their own practice and personal efforts to cross-validate information:

> I myself am a humanitarian policy researcher. And so I use the [Humanitarian] Horizons outputs to inform my own research, especially on localisation and the work they've been doing or the reflections they've been having around local knowledge production ... Integrating their research into my own research work, which is policy-oriented policy relevant, so, I would say that I'm usually using their research as a way to provide other examples, other research to triangulate my own findings with the hope to influence humanitarian policy and practice.

These findings show that researchers of the program and end-users of the research do not consume the findings in a vacuum but seek ways to connect the research to other humanitarian actors and to produce new knowledge about humanitarian practices. This signposts the importance of continuing the expansion of HAG partnerships and networks to fully maximise research application.

4.4. Humanitarian Horizons materialised policy reform and supported advocacy.

The evaluation showed that the program's research outcomes aligned strongly with its country research partners' priorities and needs, such as humanitarian response, disaster resilience and climate adaptation. The program's research was relevant to policy reform and advocacy at both regional and national scales and to various degrees. The high level of engagement within the RTA stream, for instance, made its impact immediately noticeable, especially in when the research was integrated into ongoing humanitarian response and policy reform advocacy. Within the RTA stream, the Mainstreaming of Rural Development Innovation (MORDI) Tonga Trust, a research country partner, reported that the research findings from the practice paper on reducing plastic and waste in humanitarian response, Treading Gently: Building on positive environmental practice in the Tonga volcano response, gave them confidence to identify and try to fill gaps in Tonga's humanitarian policy. The availability of solid evidence empowered stakeholders to advocate for policy changes and design new interventions. Regarding the benefits of practice papers in Tonga, one stakeholder noted,

> We can keep advocating, but the good thing is we have this solid evidence, scientific research. It was done, and it's proven ... If there is a need for policy, or if there's a need for designing a new intervention going forward.

This evaluation finding affirms the crucial role of rigorous research in real-time humanitarian response and strategic policy advocacy. It also suggests that sharing research findings with key stakeholders – such as policymakers, humanitarian practitioners, and development activists – enhances the program's long-term impact.

4.5. Humanitarian Horizons enhanced and leveraged regional and local capacities.

Several evaluation participants acknowledged that the program's research activities and outputs strengthened and built on their organisations' capabilities, particularly in conducting quality research and developing policy and practice frameworks. For example, the GTS stream offered valuable insights into the operationalisation of greening humanitarian logistics. Drawing on these findings, the team at DFAT's Humanitarian Logistics Capability (managed by Palladium as the logistics partner) gained the knowledge and skills to develop a comprehensive greening strategy for its humanitarian logistics operations. One evaluation participant explained the direct benefit they gained from the program.

> We drafted our greening strategy in reference to that greening paper [the 'Vision for a Green Humanitarian Future' paper], looking at the sort of goals and targets for the sector, and what best practice would look like [if] we use that as a way to adapt our own program investment strategy for greening underneath that saying, okay, if this is what is being achieved, you know, looking to be achieved on a sector level.

HAG-facilitated consultations on the greening initiative guided and supported Palladium's efforts. A mutual learning process occurred, wherein the framework and initial ideas presented at the HAG-convened consultations influenced Palladium's internal strategies, and Palladium's subsequent work

contributed to the broader development of sector-wide greening initiatives.

Meanwhile, the Philippines and Bangladesh cases under the project Pathway to Localisation Impact underscore how local researchers were able to find the local conceptual equivalences of humanitarian concepts, therefore making it easier to collectively prioritise localisation domains. In Bangladesh, HAG's research partner inSights simplified the process for testing the framework, thus increasing the likelihood that it will be adopted by other organisations. Similarly, SHIFA Welfare Association in Pakistan, working with GLOW Consultants, used Humanitarian Horizons' A pathway to localisation impact: Testing and learning in Pakistan research project to strengthen their monitoring and evaluation skills. The pathway therefore enabled local actors to articulate their aims clearly, establish causal links between priority domains of impact and planned activities, and identify methods, techniques and capabilities needed to assess impact.

In summary, Humanitarian Horizons produced research findings that translate to capacities that are immediately applicable to real-world settings, highlighting the practical value of the program at both regional and local levels.

EFFICIENCY

Key Finding 5: Evaluation participants regarded the Humanitarian Horizons program as efficient, particularly in terms of producing high-quality research outputs, flexibility, timeliness, transparency, resourcing, and inclusive and collaborative research.

5.1. Research quality. Evaluation participants defined research quality in terms of the following attributes: a deep understanding of practical problems, the ability to adapt research processes to local dynamics, and the capacity to redefine and reshape the discourse in the field. Fourteen of the 16 survey participants characterised the research as rigorous, evidence-based and of high quality (10 strongly agreed, 4 agreed). Most survey participants (9 strongly agreed, 5 agreed) viewed Humanitarian Horizons research as innovative. Additionally,

several interviewees noted that the final products are clear and accessible, allowing them to be easily shared with those who participated in the research. The survey results reinforced this finding, with all 16 participants affirming that the research was contextually appropriate and presented in accessible formats (12 strongly agreed, 4 agreed).

5.2. On-time delivery. With respect to on-time delivery, 15 of 16 survey participants indicated that the research was conducted in a timely manner (9 strongly agreed, 6 agreed). However, some of the country research partners interviewed highlighted the challenge of balancing the program's strategic agenda with their own resource limitations and institutional demands, which, at times, led to difficulties in meeting deadlines. HAG's flexible approach to program implementation was generally well received by most country research partners, proving essential in navigating their diverse capacities and resource constraints.

Some evaluation participants identified areas for improvement. One evaluation participant pointed to the difficulties of managing the volume of research outputs, "There's a lot of research products, and [our organisation] is involved in several of them. It's already quite challenging to keep up with all that." The interviewee also expressed a desire for more substantial involvement in the research process:

> **"** There are also times when HAG has already designed and developed the research, and [our organisation] was just asked for comments and feedback, instead of collaborating from the start. It felt like we lost the opportunity to contribute our own thinking into the design when a pre-existing framework was presented.

These seemingly contradictory but closely linked perspectives underscore the need to recognise the varying capacities and levels of commitment across organisations involved in Humanitarian Horizons. As another evaluation interviewee emphasised:

> Some partners have been explicit about their limitations in engaging with the research process. Many are busy and stretched thin in terms of human resources. Not all partners have the same bandwidth. Some desire greater involvement in the research process, while others, although constrained, were still engaged in key decisions around design, methodology, and research uptake.

These findings highlight the importance of acknowledging and accommodating the diverse capacities, resource constraints, and varying levels of engagement among country research partners, and integrating this diversity in program planning.

5.3. Resource allocation. Some partners emphasised that the current level of resources dictated what could be achieved. According to them, Humanitarian Horizons research outputs are commensurate with the resources and data available. Evaluation participants expressed no major concerns regarding the handling of resources, but some suggested that resources be allocated for activities that could enhance program impact.

> I would love to see that resources, as I said earlier, be allowed to bring forward the research process, to organise an additional workshop, focus group discussion, you know, application, and so on. The research would go a long way. The one that's done by HAG has its own audience. And our other colleagues in the partnership would have their own, right? That allocation of resources would have brought the research farther and broader, would that allocation have been made.

The survey results revealed mixed opinions regarding research dissemination activities. When asked about the efficiency of disseminating research to a range of stakeholders using appropriate methods, four respondents strongly agreed, seven agreed, and five remained neutral.

5.4. Collaboration with local partners.
Stakeholders noted that HAG excels in treating local partners with dignity and flexibility, which they believe is crucial for successful research outcomes.

One country research partner praised the ethical and inclusive research process of the program.

> Research [activities] were conducted in an ethical way, inclusive, safe, grounded in principles, conducted by people who are personally committed, ethical and want to bring that to the research process.

The consensus on HAG's respectful and inclusive approach to partnership validates HAG's intentional approach to building trust in the context of the program's long-term scope. As an interviewee from HAG explained:

> … We were able to go through more intentional partnership brokering process with them; because of the long-term nature, because we knew it was three years of funding and there were different streams of work that they could engage on so that was something that we tried to intentionally build in when we did the program design.

HAG's intentional approach to building partnership and trust with country research partners translated into solidarity with HAG given the challenge of financing the next iteration of Humanitarian Horizons. Research partners expressed that funding is not HAG's responsibility alone, and that they could contribute to finding ways to continue the program. According to a research partner interviewed for the evaluation, *"HAG and partners need to identify other opportunities. We need to gather for the funding. We can communicate better for new opportunities. There is still hope."*

SUSTAINABILITY

Key Finding 6: Humanitarian Horizons research findings are expected to produce long-term impact in terms of shaping humanitarian policies and practices in Asia and the Pacific. However, efforts to disseminate research findings, maintain international partnerships, and identify emerging issues and potential research themes are needed to sustain the momentum generated by the program.

6.1. Efforts in context-responsive dissemination and engagement to continually maintain and build partnerships must continue. The evaluation participants highlighted that the uptake of research findings to influence policy and practice is expected to continue after Humanitarian Horizons ends. The enthusiasm for the sustainability of the program is mirrored by the survey findings, with 14 of 16 respondents agreeing that the impact of Humanitarian Horizons research will continue beyond the end of the program. However, HAG needs to maintain ongoing active research dissemination and expand partnerships with humanitarian INGOs and multilateral agencies to ensure the findings remain relevant and impactful. These measures are essential because determining the impact of research and policy takes time. In addition, some country research partners acknowledged the value of HAG's published outputs but noted that INGOs and multilateral organisations have distinct audiences who would benefit from materials specifically tailored to their needs.

> " "I [am] particularly involved in conferences and so everywhere we promote the findings from those studies. [Other partners] were also attending various conferences and promoting and disseminating all our funding and discussions to the national, international level, academics and practitioners. We take the opportunity to get into the already existing conferences and seminars, but the limitation is that in [our country] there are not many conferences happening [but we need to] take those findings to our people. So, I will stress [that] if we get an opportunity next time [in] designing Humanitarian Horizons, dissemination needs to be stronger in national languages to involve stakeholders at the grassroots level."

This example, alongside others, highlight the need for more targeted dissemination strategies to enhance the impact of Humanitarian Horizons research across diverse contexts. An interviewee from a country research partner organisation echoed this crucial insight:

> " ... I think it's important, especially if you're going to the community level. You want to take and repackage, whatever the study, to resolve the study and give it back to the community, definitely should go in the local language.

Another evaluation participant emphasised the significance of convening informal platforms, as opposed to structured workshops, that allow humanitarians to interact and discuss issues they encounter and offer their thoughts freely. According to a research participant:

> " If we want to connect with more people to the research, there should be a concrete intention to engage people, physically. It could be an informal gathering [where] humanitarians sit together ... This could be another approach when people are coming together. Sit, having a cup of coffee, and discuss their issues, discuss challenges. That also can be a good option to disseminate this kind of research, information and research analysis to the local humanitarian actors.

These insights on the need for context-sensitive approaches to research dissemination highlight the necessity of leveraging and translating outputs when returning findings to communities and when engaging with grassroots organisations, as well as with other humanitarian stakeholders. In addition, the sustainability of the Humanitarian Horizons program is closely linked to securing new funding to enhance contextual relevance as well as strengthening and expanding partnerships and networks.

6.2. Emerging research opportunities. A few research partners framed sustainability in the context of recent technological developments that aid in enhancing efficiency within the research process and strengthening the quality of research reports. These research partners identified artificial intelligence (AI) as particularly useful for their research operations. Research partners have been using AI to overcome language-related problems within research projects, such as English translation. This shows the potential of the technology to assist Global South researchers in transmitting local perspectives to organisations in the Global North. The translation functions and

other capabilities of AI also help research partners reduce manual work and the associated costs and therefore focus on analysis. AI is also seen as an equaliser – a tool that Global South organisations can use to produce reports that match the quality of those produced in the Global North. According to a research partner:

> We are using a lot for transcription, translation – these are now done through AI. Analysis, infographic is also being done by AI. Proposal writing, report writing also with AI. Local NGOs will benefit more from this because currently INGOs produce more quality reports.

The research partner interviewees were generally optimistic about the impacts of AI on local humanitarian organisations. However, they cautioned that a researcher using AI must still be knowledgeable about the research topic given that the data analysis capabilities of AI platforms currently being used (e.g., ChatGPT) are still limited. Still further, they acknowledge that there are biases embedded in AI technologies and these have ethical implications. They recognise the lack of knowledge about AI use and the technology's implications for the humanitarian sector and regard the latter as a potential research area for the program. *"I see AI as a positive. This is [a suggestion] going forward because the study on AI is what is lacking right now,"* said one interviewee. *"If HAG is a trendsetter for AI, this will be a big plus. When we are talking about AI, it is not about development [of the technology] but as a solution,"* added another evaluation participant.

Key Finding 7: The increasing scale and complexity of the humanitarian landscape is influencing donor focus and resource allocation, reducing funding for humanitarian research initiatives.

Humanitarian crises are intensifying. Many environmental disasters overlap with conflicts and magnify the latter's effects. Some evaluation participants stressed that escalating crises have prompted institutions to prioritise risk management in geographical focus and allocation of institutional resources. One evaluation participant stated:

> [We are] constantly in the cycle of responding and reacting to various different crises and emergencies. It is responding to five to six crises at a time. And given [our] resources and capacity, we have to manage and prioritise.

The need for multi-stakeholder cooperation to maintain peacebuilding and peacekeeping and to ease the burden off humanitarians was mentioned in the same interview:

> Given the polycrisis, peacebuilding and conflict should be at the centre of the discussions of humanitarian systems, not just about responding and reacting but what can we do within peacebuilding and peacekeeping to prevent crises from occurring and getting involved. How to work better with development actors, government actors, with all the political sides as well. Research would be interesting on what could have been done in that space. Then all of the actors will be involved, not just the humanitarian actors will sort of manage everything.

As with the interviewee above, another evaluation participant from an INGO raised concerns about resource constraints in the context of protracted crises in highly insecure countries, which lead to increasingly blurred distinctions between humanitarianism and development. An interview excerpt follows:

> **INTERVIEWER:** How would you very roughly estimate the split between humanitarian and development funding?
>
> **INGO INTERVIEWEE:** … let's say 20 [per cent - humanitarian]), 80 [per cent - development]. Maybe even less.
>
> **INTERVIEWER:** Based on your experience, do you see this 20/80 split being maintained in, say, the next 10 or 20 years?
>
> **INGO INTERVIEWEE:** So, it's kind of a complicated question, because … humanitarian and development [are] becoming less separate. The concerning trend is that [donor] ability to fund in protracted settings, protected crises in high security [risk] countries has

rapidly, rapidly diminished, unless there is some reform to counterterrorism, financing laws, and sanctions laws, which the sector is asking for. The amount of funding that goes to those countries, particularly through civil society organisations, is concerningly low.

So, I think that's the main question of, you know, whether it's development or humanitarian. You can kind of argue either way that a disaster risk reduction program is both, and a shelter program is both. But the funding is not going to the places where it is most needed.

Given the protracted nature of contemporary humanitarian crises, the boundary between humanitarian action and development is softening. A third evaluation participant expounded on the need for humanitarian actors to collectively reflect on how to better respond to crises, the implications of complex and lingering crises on local humanitarian actors, and possibilities for changing current approaches to humanitarian action:

" "Most of the funding goes to long, lasting crises and I think, as a sector we still haven't got haven't understood what is a good way to respond to protracted crises. And I wonder… what would a localised protracted crisis-slash-nexus response model look like from the perspective of local and national actors? What would they ideally do with it? That could shift the practice and offer a different model than the current model that clearly doesn't work".

Humanitarian multi-crises highlight the opportunity – and need – for further iterations of Humanitarian Horizons to pivot to include the humanitarian–development nexus and integrate issues related to peace and conflict for continued relevance and program sustainability. Meanwhile, partnerships with INGOs and multilateral organisations mentioned in Key Finding 6.1 not only contribute to the immediate success of the program but also create opportunities for future collaborations that will be crucial to preventing and containing emerging complex and protracted crises that have wide-ranging implications for the humanitarian-development nexus.

Photo: Yoksel Zok on Unsplash

Recommendations

Expand mechanisms for coordinating and institutionalising localisation efforts. The evaluation revealed that it is important for Humanitarian Horizons' country research partners to improve the coordination, consolidation and institutionalisation of existing localisation initiatives.

R1. Enhance local engagement through accessible publications and engagement of national governments. Allocate funding for local publication, translation and dissemination of research outputs. This will increase accessibility and help local stakeholders, grassroots communities act on the findings. The translation and dissemination of research findings could enhance efforts to "indigenise" humanitarian values and processes, aligning them more closely with local contexts and practices.

R2. Continue to advocate for national government processes and national-level policy reform to scale up the institutionalisation of localisation and sustain the momentum generated by Humanitarian Horizons.

R3. Formally integrate GEDSI principles into Humanitarian Horizons to bolster the program's localisation efforts. The formal integration of GEDSI in research designs across various streams would need to be done in consultation with country partners about their available staff, time and resources, and consider how GEDSI can be operationalised within local definitions of equality, inclusion and humanitarian justice.

R4. Study the resource implications of expanding and formalising localisation efforts. Research partner organisations differ in inclination and capacity to expand localisation activities. As such, a bigger push for localisation, via continued consultation with country research partners, needs to integrate (and accordingly, fund) HAG partners' commitments.

Strengthen potential for policy influence. The evaluation showed Humanitarian Horizons' potential to influence national governments that are reforming climate change, disaster risk reduction, and humanitarian reform laws and policies, and how the PPLL, GTS and RTA streams provided valuable guidance to local actors.

R5. Review regional- and country-level policy maturity and congruence at the intersection of localisation and decentralisation, climate change and humanitarian action. The review can start with regions and countries in which HAG is already present, and leverage INGO partners in other regions. A review of policy congruence in the mentioned areas would also reveal how each stream can build on each other to optimise resources and maximise impact.

Consider measuring changes in attitude and organisational capacities when addressing impact. The evaluation captured changes in attitudinal and institutional capacity dimensions that were not explicitly articulated in the program's MEF.

R6. Incorporate changes in knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and institutional relationships in indicators used to measure the program's impact. It is essential for country research partners to show how Humanitarian Horizons' short-term outcomes and long-term impact can include changes in attitudinal dimensions, organisational capacities and institutional relationships. While these elements are implicitly included in the program's MEF, capturing dimensions of change, outcome and impact explicitly would enable HAG to identify areas and procedures that require improvement and adjust partnership strategies for better research collaboration.

Adapt to shifts in funding priorities. The resource constraints of the humanitarian sector underscore the need for HAG to adapt strategies to secure future research funding within a rapidly changing landscape.

R7. Expand and diversify funding sources. Establish a broad and diverse range of clients from various regions to reduce dependency on particular sources of funding. Diversification increases the resilience of research programs and improves their sustainability.

R8. Increase engagement with INGOs and multilateral agencies to strengthen Humanitarian Horizons' impact. Proactive engagement with organisations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the United Nations can strengthen alignment with broad policy objectives, and enable better assessment of how the PPLL, GTS, and RTA streams have informed existing humanitarian policy or practice frameworks.

Strategically integrate the humanitarian–development nexus in future research to strengthen its relevance amidst increasingly protracted and compounded crises. This evaluation showed that the complex nature of contemporary humanitarian crises places donor staff in constant crisis mode, and that intensifying crises prompt many organisations to reassess humanitarian priorities and resource allocation.

R9. Integrate futures thinking into the program design of subsequent iterations of Humanitarian Horizons. A future-oriented approach to subsequent research programs would consider the implications of the humanitarian–development nexus, especially in the context of lingering polycrises and escalating conflict and enable HAG and country research partners to anticipate and prepare for emerging challenges within various time horizons. It would also promote effective adaptation to the evolving data, research and communication needs of the sector, and enable HAG to understand how technological developments (such as AI) might affect humanitarian research practice methodologically, logistically, and ethically as innovations are introduced and adopted. By considering evidence-based scenarios, HAG can develop strategies that are more proactive, ultimately improving its ability to diversify funding sources, refine its research agenda, manage risk within rapidly changing political, economic, social, and technological landscapes, and manage partnerships more effectively, thereby ensuring that "horizons" thinking continues to be the foundation of the Humanitarian Horizons program.

Photo: Pexels

Annex 1: Where to from here?

HUMANITARIAN ADVISORY GROUP'S MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO THE EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Making sense of recommendations for HAG going forward, and for whatever comes next for the Humanitarian Horizons Programme.

We were so thrilled to work with Dr Pamela Gloria Cajilig, Dr Redento B. Recio and Ms. Leigh Donaire-Dastas and are grateful for their commitment, quality and clear communication throughout the process of this end of programme evaluation. We worked closely with the team to understand what the recommendations mean for us moving forward. We find that most of the recommendations resonate, and for us the task at hand is how we take them forward into what is at present, an uncertain future for Humanitarian Horizons. We are committed to the future of the programme and ensuring that the learning and recommendations from this process are integrated into what comes next.

Categories of agreement

Spot on – we love this, and will throw everything at achieving it

We hear you – we agree, but think there may be a few different ways of getting there, or question the feasibility of making this a reality

Through to the keeper – we're not on the same page, and won't look to progress this further (though none of these fall into this category)

Recommendation	Making them a reality
R1. *Enhance local engagement through accessible publications and engagement of national governments.*	**Spot on** We completely agree that we need to further localise our approaches to dissemination. We need to be budgeting better for communications, such as translation and more localised dissemination, including at the grassroots and community level. Moving forward, more intentional budgeting for such activities from the outset, and including this in conversations with national research partners will help to integrate this more consistently into our processes.
R2. *Continue to advocate for national government processes and national-level policy reform to scale up the institutionalisation of localisation and sustain the momentum generated by Humanitarian Horizons.*	**Spot on** We agree that our influence with national governments has been less than with other stakeholder groups in the humanitarian system, and we recognise this as a gap. We saw the critical influence that the Framework for Greening Humanitarian Action in the Pacific has had at the national government level and believe this experience gives us even more drive to put this into action. As with the recommendation above, this needs to be better structured into planning from the outset and discussed with national partners to ensure that we are appropriately centralising national governments as key stakeholder groups we are speaking to, with the intent of shifting policy and practice.

Recommendation	Making them a reality
R3. *Formally integrate GEDSI principles into Humanitarian Horizons to bolster the program's localisation efforts.*	**🦻 We hear you** We agree that there are opportunities to strengthen GEDSI approaches in the programme, though we also believe that the programme has been intentional about integrating GEDSI considerations in our research approaches, as well as our research outputs. We do agree that this needs to be better resourced, and that we can go further in defining what GEDSI means in local contexts.
R4. *Study the resource implications of expanding and formalising localisation efforts.*	**🦻 We hear you** We are completely on board with the recommendation to support our partners in collectively expanding our localisation efforts. Our work in this space is far from over; we're just getting started. However, we aren't sure whether studying the resource implications is the first step – we believe we know what the resource needs are, we just have to proactively seek out these resources to ensure we can keep the momentum. We feel this is the next step for us.
R5. *Review regional- and country-level policy maturity and congruence at the intersection of localisation and decentralisation, climate change and humanitarian action.*	**🦻 We hear you** We love the idea of looking at the intersections between the various streams, particularly PPLL and GTS, and considering what an infused research agenda could look like. This thinking has already started, and we look forward to building on this off the back of this recommendation. However, policy congruence might not be the only thing for us to consider – policy is one component, but we also want to consider research and evidence gaps and needs, and strategic value add and positioning.
R6. *Incorporate changes in knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and institutional relationships in indicators used to measure the program's impact.*	**🎯 Spot on** This is great – we have come a long way in measuring the impact of our research, but haven't landed on a way to systematically capture such changes. We feel that it will be time and resource intensive, but can look for opportunities in the future of HH to consider how this data can consistently be captured to build a better picture of impact and influence.
R7. *Expand and diversify funding sources.*	**🎯 Spot on** We wholeheartedly agree – this has been a big limiting factor for us. We will continue to strategically approach other prospective partners to build a Humanitarian Horizons (2024 -?) with as many diverse partners as we can find.

Recommendation	Making them a reality
R8. *Increase engagement with INGOs and multilateral agencies to strengthen Humanitarian Horizons' impact.*	**We hear you** We agree that we have had significant momentum with some of the agencies mentioned and can better align the future Humanitarian Horizons with the specific needs of international and multilateral organisations. We do however feel that this is only one part of the puzzle, though acknowledge that influence on this scale is important, and this may also correlate with a diversified partner and donor base. We feel that seeking influence at the national government (see recommendation 2) and national and sub-national humanitarian sector stakeholders are equally important.
R9. *Integrate futures thinking into the program design of subsequent iterations of Humanitarian Horizons.*	**Spot on** Futures thinking for Humanitarian Horizons is an exciting prospect, and one we look forward to putting into practice. We agree that we also need to consider a re-frame, or pivot of the programme to appropriately address the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in the programme thinking and framing, and potentially unlock a broader donor and partner base.

Beth Eggleston and Jess Lees

HAG Directors