

MFAT Management Response to Evaluation of Business Opportunities Support Services Activity

About this document

This document describes the programme's response to the evaluation.

Evaluation report title:	Business Opportunities and Support Services Final Evaluation
File title of final pdf report:	Business Opportunities and Support Services Final Evaluation
AMS Activity Number:	A11113
Activity Manager:	Ali Carlin
Programme:	Timor-Leste
MFAT response approved by:	Tiffany Babington, Unit Manager Global Development
Approved date:	10/08/2017
Evaluation cost to MFAT:	\$0

Approval

Approval of the MFAT Management Response to Evaluation	
Approved by:	
Signature:	Anton Ojala
	Anton Ojala, Divisional Manager, Global Development and Scholarships
Date:	10 August 2017

MFAT Management Response

Evaluation team members

Members of the evaluation team were:

Name	Role
Matt Styslinger	Evaluation Lead – MarketShare Associates
Ben Fowler	Evaluation team member – MarketShare Associates

Key findings/conclusions of the evaluation

The key findings/conclusions of the evaluation are:

- The BOSS project should be viewed as an overall success as it was designed and resourced. Targets were largely met, sustainable results were achieved, and important lessons were learned. It is important, however, to keep BOSS’s achievements in perspective, as major challenges remain in the areas of program intervention.
- **Relevance:** The evaluation found the BOSS project focus to have been highly relevant to the context of Timor-Leste’s development needs, the livelihood needs of micro-entrepreneurs and the rural poor, and the business enabling environment needs of Timor’s fledgling and fragile private sector.
- **Effectiveness:** The BOSS program has been effective in meeting its targets of creating jobs and increasing sales in target value chains, significantly increasing access to need-based business development services, and building commitment and capacity for government mainstreaming of gender sensitivity in policies, programmes, and activities. In all three areas represented by the project’s Immediate Objectives, more progress is needed and major challenges remain
- **Efficiency:** BOSS has converted its resources into meaningful results reasonably efficiently. BOSS allocated a marked portion of its budget to technical assistance for capacity building, which is justified when considering the facilitation approach used by the project.
- The BOSS scope of interventions was ambitious, and results were achieved despite relatively limited resources. Evidence suggests

that much of what happened as a result of the BOSS project would not have occurred without it in the same timeframe.

- **Impact:** BOSS achievements contributed to the project's stated higher-level aspirational impacts, but broad impact on economic growth and quality employment is not measured.
- **Sustainability:** Sustainability was earnestly addressed in the project design, implementation, and exit strategy. Gaps and constraints exist, though, that could be a threat to the sustainability of some BOSS results.
- Not all of what has been accomplished through BOSS will be sustained, but capacities, incentives, and resources exist for institutions and market actors to champion initiatives started under the project.
- **Gender issues:** BOSS successfully ensured that gender was systematically considered in both project design and project management, and project results reflect this priority. The project also had significant influence on government prioritization of women in economic development.
- **Lessons learned and emerging good practice:** A number of lessons can be extrapolated from the findings and conclusions detailed in the Evaluation report. These include:
 - Shifting subsistence farmers to a more commercial oriented model is not a linear process
 - Shifting farmer behaviours is a long term investment
 - Thin markets affect support markets such as inputs supply
 - Informal rules and norms affect markets and cannot be underestimated
 - "Give aways" from government or other development activities cause reluctance among farmers to pay for inputs, impacting on value chain sustainability and commercialisation.
- Overall, the key lesson learnt by this activity is the need to learn and be adaptive to circumstances (which by and large this activity was). In the un-tested environment of Timor-Leste (at the time) it was difficult to predict how the interventions would work out and this adaptive approach was appropriate.

Lessons and recommendations for MFAT

While there were no MFAT specific recommendations or lessons made by the Evaluation Report, the following are key recommendations / learnings that MFAT could consider in the design of future programmes:

No.	Lesson	Programme response
1	Ensure that projects are “evaluation ready” to maximize learning from an external evaluation. Above all, this requires a process of documentation throughout the project period with a final evaluation in mind, following a general principle that every project aims to contribute to the body of knowledge in development. The ideal scenario would involve recruiting the external evaluator to be engaged in a limited way throughout the project’s life cycle, so as to ensure the appropriate data is being generated to support evaluation.	We agree that all activities should be “evaluation ready” and that sufficient resources should be applied to monitoring and evaluation throughout life of an activity. Monitoring and evaluation should be seen as integral for activity implementation and formative programme development, not just for accountability purposes.
2	Key terminology for any project should be clearly defined, particularly for objective statements and indicators. Data collection and analysis methodologies should also be clearly defined.	Noted. The business of developing objectives, identifying indicators and setting targets is challenging. Much depends on the context of the activity. Programme team could work with DSE on assessing how the BOSS programme did this, learning lessons for future activity design and implementation both in Timor and elsewhere.
	An ex-post evaluation, at least one year after project end, may be prudent to better understand the lasting impacts of BOSS. To understand whether impacts have been sustained or even scaled – for example through imitation – requires that some time has passed.	In principle this is good practice and MFAT could consider undertaking an ex-post evaluation in 2018. Note that some of the challenges in data / documentation that the evaluator found would still remain and therefore possibly limit the usefulness of an ex-post review

No.	Lesson	Programme response
	BOSS's value chain work may have been spread too thin, correctly identifying constraints but not being able to address them as thoroughly as may have been needed to bring sectors across a threshold of sustainable development	Activity Designs need to be realistic. There can be a tendency for ambitious design (sectors, targets), in order to show value for money (and VFM was questioned throughout this activity) but clear signals need to be in place during appraisal that VFM is more than just about setting and achieving high targets.

Further programme response

The BOSS Activity was a complex activity implemented in a challenging environment. In our view, the specific challenges of value chain development in Timor-Leste were not adequately captured or reflected by the Review but we largely agree with its findings and recommendations.

Overall, the key lesson from this activity is the need to learn and be adaptive to circumstances. Reports on each of the value chains describe how the activities changed over time in response to circumstances. In the untested environment of Timor-Leste (at the time) it was difficult to predict how the interventions would work out and this adaptive approach was appropriate.

For MFAT this means we need to be flexible with our activity designs and implementation and acknowledge that implementing adaptive programmes requires sufficient budget for monitoring and evaluation.

MFAT follow up actions

This table lists actions that MFAT will undertake in response to the findings, lessons and recommendations of the evaluation.

Lesson learned / Recommendation	Action	Who will action	When	Resource Implications
Ensure that projects are "evaluation ready" to maximize learning from an external evaluation.	Share evaluation with DSE Results team in order to explore how aid programme can improve monitoring and results in activity design and implementation	Timor-Leste programme DSE	As soon as possible	Ensuring a programme is evaluation ready requires sufficient personnel, time and research resources.
An ex-post evaluation, at least one year after project end, may be prudent to better understand the lasting impacts of BOSS.	Share evaluation with DSE and discuss possibility and feasibility of ex-post evaluation.	Timor-Leste programme DSE	As soon as possible	Up to NZ\$50,000.
Key terminology for any project should be clearly defined, particularly for objective statements and indicators. Data collection and analysis methodologies should also be clearly defined.	Reflect on this for future MFAT designs.	Timor-Leste programme DSE	As soon as possible	Nil

Dissemination plan

The evaluation will be/has been shared with partner organisations, MFAT staff and other stakeholders in the following ways:

No.	Method of dissemination	Responsibility of	When
1	Evaluation placed on MFAT website	The Development Support Officer of the Evaluation Team (DSE)	By 31 August 2017

No.	Method of dissemination	Responsibility of	When
2	Evaluation report distributed to SED Agriculture team	Activity manager	By 31 August 2017

Report Release Checklist

Note: This checklist must be used for all evaluations that will be published in full on MFAT's website. Where the report has been commissioned by a partner organisation and is published on their website, MFAT should simply seek written permission from the partner to provide a link to the published evaluation from our website. Attach a copy of the partner's permission to this MFAT Response to Evaluation template in lieu of this Report Release Checklist.

NAME OF THE REPORT: BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORT SERVICES FINAL EVALUATION

AUTHOR(S): MATT STYSLINGER

REPORT MONTH AND YEAR: NOV 2016 (FINALISED FEB 2017)

All evaluation reports should be able to be publicly released in accordance with the principle of availability (Section 5 of the Official Information Act (OIA)). However, this principle can be overridden if there is 'good reason' (as set out in the OIA) to withhold information. Use this checklist to help you decide if sections in the evaluation report should be withheld.

If any of the answers to these questions is 'yes' then:

- A hard copy of the report should be marked up with brackets around the information to be withheld, and the OIA section under which the information is to be withheld noted (refer to MFAT Style and Practice Guide OIA Requests)*
- The PDF copy of the report that is submitted to the Development Support Officer (DSE) for the library and public release will have the withheld information whited out and the reasons for withholding noted in the margins. The following note should be placed in the report: Certain information in this report has been withheld in accordance with the Official Information Act and the grounds for withholding, as at the time of publication, are noted in the margins.*

If you are unsure whether a good reason to withhold exists seek advice from the PDG staff member responsible for OIAs or the MFAT corporate legal team.

OIA Section 6 Conclusive Reasons: Are there words in the evaluation that are likely to:

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|--|
| a) Prejudice the security or defence of NZ or NZ's international relations? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| b) Prejudice the entrusting of information to the Government of NZ on a basis of confidence by (i) the Government of any other country or (ii) any international organisation? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| c) Prejudice the maintenance of the law? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| d) Endanger the safety of any person? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| e) Damage seriously the NZ economy? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

OIA Section 7 Special Reasons: Are there words in the evaluation that are likely to:

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|--|
| a) Prejudice the security or defence of the Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau or the Ross Dependency? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| b) Prejudice relations between the governments of NZ, and governments of the Cook Island and Niue? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

c) Prejudice the international relations of the governments of the Cook Islands or Niue

Yes No

OIA Section 9 Other Reasons: Are there words in the evaluation that need to be withheld to:

(Note: There is need to balance Section 9 grounds for withholding against 'public interest considerations'. Consider the negative consequences from release, and whether or not these consequences are outweighed by the public interest in access to the information.)

- a) Protect the privacy of natural persons? Yes No
- b) Protect trade secrets and commercial positions? Yes No
- c) c)Protect information that is subject to an obligation of confidence where release of the information would be likely to i) prejudice the supply of similar information from the same source and it is in the public interest that such information should continue to be supplied or (ii) otherwise damage the public interest? Yes No
- d) Avoid prejudice to measures protecting the health or safety of members of the public? Yes No
- e) Avoid prejudice to the substantial economic interests of New Zealand? Yes No
- f) Avoid prejudice to measures that prevent or mitigate material loss to members of the public? Yes No

- a) Maintain the constitutional conventions including the confidentiality of advice tendered by ministers and officials? Yes No
- b) Maintain effective conduct of public affairs through free and frank expressions of opinion and protection from improper pressure or harassment? Yes No
- c) Maintain legal professional privilege? Yes No
- d) Enable a minister department or organisation holding information to carry out commercial activities without prejudice or disadvantage? Yes No
- e) Enable a minister, department or organisation holding the information to carry on negotiations without prejudice or disadvantage? Yes No
- f) Prevent the disclosure or use of official information for improper gain or advantage? Yes No

Other Reason: Is there any other reason for withholding information?

- If the answer is yes then seek advice from the PDG staff member responsible for OIA or the MFAT corporate legal team. Yes No

RECOMMENDATION

- Withhold selected parts, noting sections of the OIA applying to these in a copy of the report that is filed, and white-ed out in the copy of the report to be forwarded to the Development Support Officer (DSE) for public release and the library
- Release entire report

Signed by Ali Carlin (Activity Manager)

Signed by Tiffany Babington (Unit Manager Global Development)

Date: 10/08/2017