

MFAT Cambodia-Lao PDR Young Leaders Programme Evaluation Report

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– Alinea International

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Alinea International (Alinea) was commissioned by Aotearoa New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) to undertake an evaluation of MFAT's Cambodia-Lao PDR Young Leaders Programme. Alinea is a dedicated international development consultancy providing high-quality technical, strategic, and operational expertise to development programmes and organisations across the Asia-Pacific region.

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Since 2009, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) has partnered with UnionAID to deliver the Young Leaders Programmes (YLPs). The first programme commenced in Myanmar and was subsequently introduced in Eastern Indonesia in 2018 (the Indonesia Young Leaders Programme, also known as INSPIRASI) and in Mindanao in the Philippines in 2019 (the Mindanao Young Leaders Programme, MinYLP). Most recently, a combined YLP programme for the Kingdom of Cambodia and the Lao PDR People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) commenced in 2023 as a two-year pilot phase (the Cambodia and Lao PDR Young Leaders Programme, CLYLP). 11

The YLPs target emerging civil society leaders, generally aged 20–35, who work on a paid and/or significant but voluntary basis for with non-government organisations (NGOs), trade unions or labour rights organisations, or other community-based institutions. The programmes use an intensive, model combining study, exchange, and mentoring, with the aim of strengthening participants' knowledge, skills, networks, and leadership competencies. The programmes support participants to apply their learning throughout delivery, including through the design and implementation of community-based "action projects". 11

The overarching objective of the YLPs is to contribute to sustainable development and good governance in participating countries by strengthening and connecting civil society. The YLPs form a long-standing and valued component of New Zealand's International Development Cooperation (IDC) Programme in Southeast Asia. 11

After lengthy delays resulting from the Covid pandemic, the CLYLP pilot commenced implementation in October 2023. For the first time, the CLYLP delivery model brings together participants from two countries within a single programme structure. This approach tests and refines a combined model intended to support cross-country learning, strengthen regional civil society networks, and generate efficiencies in programme design and delivery. The pilot also enables assessment of the relevance and suitability of a shared programme framework across two distinct country contexts, while maintaining local partnership arrangements to support country specific contextualisation and implementation. 11

The pilot included an inception phase (October 2023–April 2024) to establish programme systems and partnerships, followed by an implementation phase comprising two annual intakes (cohorts) of 10 participants each in 2024/25 (Year 1 cohort) and 2025/26 (Year 2 cohort). UnionAID implements the programme in coordination with local partners in each country; Khmer Farmer Products (KFP) in Cambodia and the Participatory Development Knowledge Agency (PAKA) in Lao PDR. The programme also draws on contributions from New Zealand-based partners, including Auckland University of Technology (AUT) for academic course content, as well as civil society and trade union practitioners and organisations, mentors, host families, and mana whenua who support participants’ learning and experience. 11

EVALUATION PURPOSE AND SCOPE 11

This evaluation is a formative evaluation of the CLYLP pilot, focused on learning and improvement, and includes actionable recommendations to strengthen the programme. MFAT and UnionAID will use the evaluation to: 12

- understand the extent to which the CLYLP achieved its stated objectives and outcomes during the pilot phase, including progress against intended short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes. 12
- identify lessons and areas for strengthening that can be applied to the CLYLP and the wider YLP portfolio as MFAT moves toward a consolidated YLP model; and 12
- inform decisions on the potential inclusion of the CLYLP in a future consolidated YLP. 12

This evaluation builds on the broader evaluation of the INSPIRASI and MLYP undertaken in 2025. The portfolio evaluation excluded the CLYLP pilot as the programme had yet to complete a full year of

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Abstract

This Evaluation Report details an assessment of the effectiveness, objectives, and delivery model of the Pilot Young Leaders Programme in Cambodia and Lao PDR (CLYLP). Commissioned by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), the evaluation was independently led by Alinea International.

MFAT has partnered with the Unions Aotearoa International Development Trust (UnionAID) since 2009 to deliver the Young Leaders Programmes (YLPs). The YLPs target emerging civil society leaders aged 20-30, who work and/or volunteer for NGOs, trade unions or labour rights organisations



or social enterprises. The overall objective of the programmes is to contribute to sustainable development and good governance in participating countries through a stronger and more connected civil society.

The evaluation is a formative review which includes recommendations for improvement. This evaluation builds on the 2025 evaluation of Young Leaders Programmes in Indonesia (IYLP) and Mindanao (MinYLP). The evaluation was informed by a desk review key strategic document, extensive consultations with 20 CLYLP alumni and participants, programme staff and MFAT.

The evaluation finds that CLYLP has effectively built on the YLP foundations in two difficult contexts. Implementing partners have applied learnings to build more flexible, localised and risk aware programmes, that continue to offer transformative individual learning experiences. CLYLP is highly inclusive, culturally attuned and has effectively built strong people-to-people ties across New Zealand, Cambodia and Lao PDR. The operating model has been well adapted, though challenges remain to ensure workloads are appropriate, young leaders are supported by host organisations and that action projects are achievable.

The evaluation affirms that ongoing organisational reforms in lead implementing partner, UnionAID have been progressed. Further organisational development continues to be important to further strengthen and support the sustainability of CLYLP. The evaluation also finds that the integrated model – bringing together cohorts from Lao PDR and Cambodia – has worked well. Cross-cultural learning was valued, while extensive use of English language encouraged growing confidence and proficiency. The model will become less efficient as the CLYLP alumni network grows, with hybrid approaches likely to be most appropriate longer-term.

An overview of key findings and recommendations are contained in the Executive Summary.

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Executive Summary

The Pilot Young Leaders Programme in Cambodia and Lao PDR (CLYLP) Evaluation Report presents a comprehensive assessment of the programme's effectiveness, relevance, and delivery model. The evaluation highlights key findings regarding the effectiveness of the establishment of the pilot, the formative outcomes already achieved, and the appropriateness of the model in place. While challenges exist, the programme is well positioned to apply learning and build a quality and sustainable activity.

Effectiveness

Programme outputs have largely been effectively delivered to date, despite resource constraints arising from the delayed start of the project (with costs increasing in the intervening years). The programme has been well set up, clearly applying experience and good practice lessons from other YLPs.

Working more directly through CSO host organisations has been appropriate in the operating context (particularly in Lao PDR), though challenges to this model remain.

There is evidence of progress across almost all YLP short term outcomes. Progress towards medium term outcomes is, understandably more formative. However, there has been clear evidence of collaborative relationships across national boundaries. The increased use of English across cohorts—bringing together participants from both countries—was widely credited with enhancing English language proficiency, while engagement with Māori traditions and perspectives contributed to heightened cultural pride and enriched cross-cultural relationships for several participants.

Despite these successes, at least half of the first cohort of CLYLP struggled to manage the

time and financial pressures of balancing work commitments alongside programme participation

The programme has proactively and effectively worked to ensure accessibility for individuals representing a range of abilities, ethnicities, religions, genders, and sexual orientations, gender identities and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). The programme has been highly inclusive of the views, perspectives and insights of young leaders, though there is opportunity to enhance youth leadership as the program progresses. There is also an opportunity to further promote the programme beyond urban centres to continue encourage more diverse inclusion.

Relevance

CLYLP is highly relevant to New Zealand's regional priorities and has been appropriately designed within the limited civil society space available in both Cambodia and Lao PDR. The programme has also been well designed to support locally led development, with active partnerships through local partners in both Lao PDR and Cambodia – opportunities to deepen this localisation could be considered.

PAKA is a particularly relevant and values-aligned local partner, with an interest in playing a deeper role in the CLYLP. The partnership with KFP has been more exploratory and may be appropriate to review in any new funding cycle.

The programme has been largely well tailored and fit for purpose. There is wide appreciation for the opportunity for practical learning, and a desire among participants for this to be further strengthened. Participants value the CLYLP curriculum and find it relevant and high quality, but many found

the programme as overly compressed and fast paced. The intensity of delivery limits time for reflection, absorption and application of learning.

Delivery model

Organisational reforms in UnionAID will be the most important determinant on the sustainability of CLYLP. UnionAID continues to prioritise its governance, policies and structures to ensure the ongoing success of its YLP portfolio. This process should continue to be prioritised.

The combined country model has delivered clear benefits, including cost efficiencies, cross-cultural learning and strengthened English-language proficiency. However, the approach also carries drawbacks, particularly reduced ability to tailor content to each country context and the added complexity of managing a cohesive alumni network across two countries.

The benefits of the current model will however likely become more difficult to manage over time. Consideration should be given to options for hybrid alumni models to better enable in-person collaboration while also maintaining cross-national linkages.

The CLYLP pilot, and broader YLP evaluations, provide strong lessons for considerations of a future consolidated YLP model/s. CLYLP demonstrates the value of integrated cross-country delivery for applied learning and network-building, while highlighting the need for careful context selection and strong localisation.

A summary of recommendations is included in Table 1. A full overview of recommendations is included in Section 6 (Evaluation Recommendations)

Table 1: Summary of evaluation recommendations

#	Recommendation
1	CLYLP should be considered a priority investment in any future funding cycle
2	Integrated YLP model is still appropriate if funding is not available to establish stand-alone country programmes in Lao PDR and Cambodia
3	Agree a medium-term funding pathway for CLYLP (or its inclusion in any consolidated YLP), reflecting decisions on whether the pilot is extended, scaled, or transitioned into the consolidated YLP portfolio.
4	Review budget assumptions to reflect real operating costs in Cambodia and Lao PDR, including delivery, partner staffing, duty of care, and alumni/network costs.
5	Seek to strengthen and formalise local partnership arrangements, including reviewing KFP's fit for a future phase and exploring other potential Cambodia implementing partners, while supporting PAKA to play a deeper role in delivery and learning and continuing to enhance coordination with their training programs.
6	Consider Resourcing local partners to contribute beyond delivery—including contextual appropriate pastoral care and support for participants, continuous monitoring of action projects and other MERL inputs, alumni coordination, and quality assurance to enhance locally-led development.
7	Seek to reduce employment and financial risk for participants by setting clearer expectations with host organisations, improving scheduling flexibility where possible and embedding minimum standards for workplace support.
8	Review curriculum pacing and intensity to improve retention, application and reduce burnout including fewer sessions per day where feasible, more reflection time, and stronger emphasis on practical (rather than academic theoretical) learning and action projects.
9	Maintain and expand English “bridging” pathways to protect inclusion of potential participants experiencing heightened barriers to inclusion. This can include pre-departure English language training support, in-programme support and mentoring.
10	Resource a fit-for-purpose MERL function for CLYLP (and ideally across YLP), including a unified results framework, clear outcome indicators, and alumni tracking beyond the pilot period. This can both provide an evidence base for the program’s impact story and act as a risk mitigation function.
11	Introduce a structured approach to action-project quality and learning, including providing clear guidance on expectations and timelines, enhancing safeguards and verifying outputs and outcomes through monitoring and in-person support from local implementing partners.
12	Strengthen civic space and political risk management, including scenario planning, risk triggers, clear partner protocols, and contingency planning if operating conditions tighten in either country (especially relevant for Lao PDR).

13	Develop a scalable alumni model that reflects cohort growth and cross-border constraints, potentially using hybrid engagement, cohort-based structures, and periodic convening rather than large annual conferences.
14	Use CLYLP learning to shape consolidated portfolio options, including criteria for when multi-country models are appropriate, and a “stairway model” via local partners to broaden access (including for candidates with lower English capacity, people with disability, ethnic minorities and people of diverse SOGIESC).
15	Develop and embed a GEDSI strategy for CLYLP (and ideally across YLP), with clear objectives, practical minimum standards for delivery partners, and measurable indicators integrated into the MERL framework.

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Background

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Since 2009, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) has partnered with UnionAID to deliver the Young Leaders Programmes (YLPs). The first programme commenced in Myanmar and was subsequently introduced in Eastern Indonesia in 2018 (the Indonesia Young Leaders Programme, also known as INSPIRASI) and in Mindanao in the Philippines in 2019 (the Mindanao Young Leaders Programme, MinYLP). Most recently, a combined YLP programme for the Kingdom of Cambodia and the Lao PDR People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) commenced in 2023 as a two-year pilot phase (the Cambodia and Lao PDR Young Leaders Programme, CLYLP).

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The overarching objective of the YLPs is to contribute to sustainable development and good governance in participating countries by strengthening and connecting civil society. The YLPs form a long-standing and valued component of New Zealand's International Development Cooperation (IDC) Programme in Southeast Asia.

After lengthy delays resulting from the Covid pandemic, the CLYLP pilot commenced implementation in October 2023. For the first time, the CLYLP delivery model brings together participants from two countries within a single programme structure. This approach tests and refines a combined model intended to support cross-country learning, strengthen regional civil society networks, and generate efficiencies in programme design and delivery. The pilot also enables assessment of the relevance and suitability of a shared programme framework across two distinct country contexts, while maintaining local partnership arrangements to support country specific contextualisation and implementation.

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EVALUATION PURPOSE AND SCOPE

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- understand the extent to which the CLYLP achieved its stated objectives and outcomes during the pilot phase, including progress against intended short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes.
- identify lessons and areas for strengthening that can be applied to the CLYLP and the wider YLP portfolio as MFAT moves toward a consolidated YLP model; and
- inform decisions on the potential inclusion of the CLYLP in a future consolidated YLP.

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KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The key evaluation questions (KEQs) for this review are detailed in Table 2. The evaluation report is structured to address each KEQ in the key findings section.

Table 2: Key Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Objective	Key Evaluation Questions
Objective 1: To examine how the CLYLP has been set up to ensure progress towards achieving intended short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes and successful delivery of the programme (Effectiveness).	• Have programme outputs been delivered to time, to the expected quality and within budget? • Has the programme been set up to deliver effectively and efficiently, and to progress intended outcomes? • What evidence is available to ensure progress towards achieving intended short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes? • What, if any, have been the unintended outcomes? (Positive or negative; for communities involved if possible) • How well has the MERL framework performed during the pilot? • How youth led is this programme? • How inclusive is this programme?
Objective 2: To assess the extent to which the CLYLP is relevant to the needs of participating countries and the priorities of New Zealand's IDC Programme and the ASEAN Plan (Relevance, Coherence).	• Are these programmes appropriate for New Zealand's strategies and participating countries' (Cambodia and Lao PDR) contexts? • To what extent has the programme been set up to support locally led development? What options exist to strengthen this? • To what extent is the established curriculum and programme content fit for purpose, culturally appropriate, and context appropriate?
Objective 3: Lessons learned for improvement – to assess the delivery model of the CLYLP (Efficiency, Effectiveness, Sustainability) and identify key learnings to increase positive impact in the future.	• What factors are enhancing or constraining sustainability of this programme, including consideration of delivering a single programme with participants from two neighbouring countries? • Within the current model, will the benefits endure? If not, what steps need to be considered to strengthen sustainability? • What learnings from the delivery model of the CLYLP (both strengths and weaknesses) can inform a future consolidated delivery model for the YLP?

DESIGN

Methodology

After inception meetings between the evaluation team, MFAT, and UnionAID, a detailed evaluation plan was developed, leading into the desk review and consultation process, as detailed below.

Desk review

The evaluation was informed by a thorough desk review, including the Activity Design Document, Annual Progress Report, Independent Evaluation, selection reports, financial records, details on curriculum, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) documentation, the grant funding arrangement, and risk assessments.

Consultation process

Consultations for the Cambodia–Lao PDR Young Leaders Program were conducted in Luang Prabang from 21–24 November 2025 simultaneously to the CLYLP conference that brought together all CLYLP participants for reflection, learning and network building activities. Consultations included 10 participants from Cambodia and 10 participants from Lao PDR. The evaluation team also had the opportunity to observe participant engagement in the conference, attend field visits and hold in-depth discussions with participants and stakeholders across cohorts and countries. A detailed breakdown of participants engaged in included in Annex 1.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In line with the evaluation principles of the New Zealand International Development Cooperation Programme, the evaluation aimed to deliver useful and credible findings relevant to its purpose. Recommendations were designed to be pragmatic, actionable, and future-focused, presented in a manner to promote learning.

The ethical considerations for this evaluation included a commitment to respect and protect the rights, welfare, and confidentiality of all participants. Adherence to relevant policies and good practices, including child protection standards, was paramount to ensuring the dignity, safety, and protection of all individuals involved in the evaluation process. Consultations were conducted using a semi-structured but organic interview approach—designed to be open-ended and participant-driven, while remaining aligned with the key evaluation questions. The timing of the consultations was flexible to ensure they did not disrupt key scheduled activities.

All consultations were voluntary. Participants were informed that they could choose whether to answer any question, end the interview at any time, and that their responses would remain confidential. They were also briefed on the purpose of the evaluation and invited to ask questions. The qualitative and quantitative analysis of participant inputs forms a key component of this evaluation.

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Overarching Findings

Objective 1: To examine how the CLYLP has been set up to ensure progress towards achieving intended outputs and outcomes, and the successful delivery of the programme (Effectiveness).

Have programme outputs been delivered to time, to the expected quality and within budget?

KEY FINDING 1.1: Programme outputs have been effectively delivered to date, despite resources constraints

The CLYLP has been well-managed, with the roll-out of the pilot largely in accordance with key expectations stipulated in the Grant Funding Agreement. The programme has however been somewhat constrained with original design scoping and costings (initially from 2019 and revised in 2022) being out-dated by the time implementation commenced in 2024. Unforeseen post Covid cost increases in Cambodia and Lao PDR, coupled with the YLP approach becoming increasingly hybrid with a more intensive action project component, meant the pilot's budget has been stretched from the programme's outset. UnionAID's programme costs in Cambodia and Lao PDR are reportedly higher than those in Indonesia.¹ UnionAID has credibly managed these changes, ensuring quality activities have been consistently delivered. The implementation of the first cohort's action projects has also progressed more slowly than initially planned; however, this pace is considered appropriate as it allows implementing partners the necessary space to trial support for the first time.

Budget pressures have been absorbed without impacting programme delivery but will not be sustainable longer-term. One local implementing partner noted that resourcing has been tight, with staff volunteering time to ensure the programme delivery has been effective "We donate our time because we believe in the project, but operational expenses should be higher, otherwise we risk losing our staff". Funding the establishment and delivery of the alumni network will place an additional strain on the CLYLP budget. While MFAT has increased the programme's budget for Year 3, the appropriateness of the budget will need to be considered as part of any programme extension.

Has the programme been set up to deliver effectively and efficiently, and to progress intended outcomes?

KEY FINDING 2.1: The programme has been well set up, clearly applying experience and good practice lessons from other YLPs

The programme has evolved from its initial design to ensure contextual relevance and support meaningful outcomes for participants. As with other YLPs, the programme approach in Cambodia and Lao PDR was fundamentally changed through Covid, with the revised design sensibly incorporating a more a hybrid approach with a greater role for in-country partners. UnionAID has also demonstrated responsiveness to the findings of the evaluation of YLP programmes

¹ KII007

in Indonesia and Mindanao. The programme has clearly prioritised risk management (working diligently through local partners), mental health wellbeing (with regular check-ins and adapting workload expectations to suit individuals), and a schedule of activities more tailored to the needs of individual participants (particularly regarding timings for action projects) to support sustainable delivery. In addition, the programme has also demonstrated a high-level of adaptability; with an extended selection process adopted for the second cohort and flexible English language bridging support to maximise participant inclusion.

KEY FINDING 2.2: The integrated model brings savings compared to stand-alone country models, but with added complexity [considered further in KEQ 12]

The integrated model has yielded positive and efficient outcomes to date. These outcomes are considered more fully in Key Finding 12. Of note however, the integrated mode has (somewhat unintentionally) supported increased proficiency of English language skills and (more expectedly) a rich cross-cultural learning environment. The longer-term efficiency of this model will however be tested with the establishment of the CLYLP alumni network.

KEY FINDING 2.3: Working more directly through CSO host organisations has been appropriate in the operating context (particularly in Lao PDR), though challenges to this model remain. This includes pressures on young leaders to commit to their organisations, narrowing the pool of candidates to those in permanent roles, and delegating risk without full due diligence processes possible.

CLYLP has a carefully considered approach to CSO partnerships. CLYLP has been determined to ensure programme participants have an established CSO sponsor, who actively sign-on to the programme. While this has been a long-standing requirement of YLPs, local CLYLP partners have been particularly proactive in meeting and engaging host CSOs to build a more formal relationship. This has helped navigate some of the political risks of operating in Lao PDR, while also providing a more accountable avenue to direct funding for action projects (in Cambodia). This approach is, in this pilot phase at least, considered appropriate. However, the tensions of this model will need to be reviewed. The obligation (both real and felt) for young leaders to remain in-situ with their original CSO has already been difficult for some. While the requirement for formal endorsement from a CSO also limits the field of eligible candidates (while noting UnionAID has tried to approach this with some flexibility).

What evidence is available to demonstrate formative progress towards the intended short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes?

KEY FINDING 3.1: There is evidence of progress across almost all YLP short term outcomes. STO 6 has – appropriately – been less of a focus (due to political sensitivities), while it is too early to assess progress towards STO 7 [Communities are benefitting from young leaders' participation in the programme]

The early outcomes from the CLYLP pilot are on-track at the time of this evaluation. UnionAID and implementing partners have been highly effective in establishing the programme and delivering proof of concept through the first cohort of young leaders. The programme has been delivered respectfully, safely and already seen examples of transformative individual experiences.

"It's been wonderful. It's been very helpful in my journey in development. Project management, proposals in particular. I'm so much better working with my team and just more confident"
- CLYLP female alumni

The initial programme design outlined four short-term outcomes, which have since been superseded by the YLP program logic in CLYLP reporting. The evaluation has therefore considered progress against the outcomes reported against by UnionAID:

- STO1: Alumni develop more diverse and wider personal and professional networks
- STO2: Personal growth of alumni increased by developing leaders and advocates of social justice and democracy
- STO3: Increased knowledge and skills in research and writing, critical thinking and communication
- STO4: Improved knowledge, skills, and self-confidence in organisation and community leadership and project management
- STO5: Improved knowledge and understanding of sustainable development
- STO6: Improved knowledge and understanding of good governance practice and democratic processes
- STO7: Communities are benefitting from young leaders' participation in the programme

Formative progress is evident across almost all YLP STOs. The development of soft-skills and confidence among young leaders was highlighted in interviews, which has particular significance in these cultural contexts.

"At first, I was very sensitive and shy. But they really encouraged me to share and be open...I feel more confident to speak up and discuss the things that are important to me"
- CLYLP female alumni

The knowledge-base of sustainable development practice, research and reporting and good governance has also improved across the first cohort. While starting from different levels, interviewees indicated broad appreciation of the learning gained through their participation in the programme, particularly in practical organisational skills such as proposal writing, inclusion principles and participatory design.

"I was able to get a formal role after coming back from New Zealand. Its helped me a lot in my workplace. Writing proposals, coordinating projects. I really feel like a leader now where I work."
- CLYLP male alumni

KEY FINDING 3.2: Progress towards medium term outcomes is, understandably more formative. However, there has been clear evidence of collaborative relationships across national boundaries.

Given the pilot was in its early implementation stages, assessment of medium and long term outcomes were not prioritised in this evaluation. However, evidence of progress was apparent through interviews with CLYLP alumni. Three medium term outcomes were identified in the CLYLP design:

- MTO1: Alumni demonstrate application and sharing mindsets, skills and knowledge gained through CLYLP participation
- MTO2: Alumni collaborate across gender, social group, ethnic and national boundaries
- MTO3: Ongoing links between alumni and their New Zealand network.

Cooperation, and cross-cultural learning among alumni was the most significant MTO advanced in among the initial cohort. While online delivery components and natural language preferences somewhat limited opportunities for connections, a majority of alumni spoke highly of the collaborate and learning across genders, ethnic groups and national boundaries. The application of inclusion principles and approaches was also notable among several alumni. There is evidence of

a shift in understanding around how to design and implement an inclusive and accessible activities, particularly for those marginalised by their identity, or those living with a disability.

"My perspective is very different now. In projects before we don't consider engaging with PLWD, ethnic groups; we just run our programme. Now, we think about the people being left behind. I do that in my action project too."
- CLYLP male alumni

"Often programmes are chosen on who can speak good English. Now I want to find people who have never had those experiences before"
- CLYLP female alumni

KEY FINDING 3.3: While early progress is encouraging, it is too early to attempt to fairly assess the long-term outcomes of this pilot.

As a two-year pilot, the CLYLP is still in an early stage of implementation and maturation. While there is emerging evidence of strong participant engagement and appreciation of practical learning, leadership development and cross-cultural exposure, these results primarily reflect short-term outcomes. Longer-term outcomes—such as sustained leadership practice, organisational change, or wider community-level impacts—require more time to consolidate and, in turn measure and evaluate.

This is particularly relevant given the programme's theory of change, which depends on participants applying learning in their workplaces and communities over time, supported by ongoing networks and alumni engagement. A more reliable assessment of long-term outcomes will require additional time, ongoing monitoring and tracking and evidence, particularly regarding outcomes regarding action projects, beyond the pilot period.

What, if any, have been the unintended outcomes of the programme to date (positive or negative)?

KEY FINDING 4.1: The increased use of English across cohorts—bringing together participants from both countries—was widely credited with enhancing English language proficiency

The development of English language proficiency has emerged as a significant and widely valued programme outcome, particularly among the Lao PDR cohort. The integrated programme required far more use of English than other YLPs, with young leaders from Lao PDR and Cambodia having to communicate in English to work and socialise together.

"Living in different countries, different cultures, different language. But we can learn from each other – it has forced us speak in English and improve our language skills"
- CLYLP female alumni

Although included as a stand-alone STO in the initial CLYLP design, its importance and effectiveness have surpassed expectations. Three of the five Lao PDR cohort members interviewed identified increased confidence in using English as the most significant outcome of their participation. UnionAID and its implementing partners have also invested considerable effort and resources in bridging language gaps for preferred candidates, recognising that English proficiency is generally lower than that of young leaders from Indonesia, the Philippines, and Myanmar.

KEY FINDING 4.2: Engagement with Māori traditions and perspectives contributed to heightened cultural pride and enriched cross-cultural relationships for several participants

Young leaders from ethnic minorities spoke of their growing appreciation and pride in their identities and cultures. In ethnically diverse—and at times divided—national contexts, fostering cultural understanding and strengthening inter-cultural cohesion is especially important. The programme has been effective at both encouraging respect and sensitive engagement across cultures, while also fostering pride among those from more marginalised ethnic groups. Witnessing and engaging Māori traditions and perspectives were particularly impactful for several young leaders. While the emergence of cooperation and friendships across ethnic divides was evident, and genuinely transformative for individuals. While this has been an intentional objective in the original conception of the YLPs, it was highlighted as an ‘unintended’ by two individual participants.

“I’d never really spoken to many [ethnic minority] Hmong people before, now she’s my best friend”

- CLYLP female alumni

KEY FINDING 4.3 At least half of the first cohort of CLYLP struggled to manage the time and financial pressures of balancing work commitments alongside programme participation

The intensity and scheduling demands of CLYLP created significant pressure for participants attempting to complete programme requirements alongside full-time work. These pressures were particularly acute during the online phase, where the schedule conflicted directly with workplace responsibilities. One participant described the delivery load as a “big challenge,” noting that at times, commitments were “4–5 days per week” and felt that the program at times “forgot the leader is a leader now in their own workplace” (Male CLYLP participant).

While study in New Zealand was universally appreciated, it also caused some tensions in workplaces. Almost all young leaders took leave without pay to undertake this phase of the programme, with at least two having to return in different substantive positions after their roles were backfilled. CLYLP was proactive in communicating these expectations to both young leaders and host organisations at the commencement of the programme, but navigating the reality of these pressures remains an ongoing challenge of the model.

This finding reinforces the need to continue to pursue stronger mitigation measures, including greater flexibility in scheduling, continuous engagement regarding time commitments, and—critically—stronger host organisation buy-in so participation is actively supported and does not create avoidable employment or financial risks. Similar tensions have been observed in MINLYP and INSPIRASI.

KEY FINDING 4.4: The programme has generated positive unintended outcomes for implementing partners—particularly PAKA—by strengthening organisational credibility, building staff capability, and expanding local training and resource networks.

CLYLP has proactively and effectively supported local implementing partners. The benefits of CLYLP extend beyond its participants and helped strengthen the wider environment for civil society and youth leadership in Lao PDR. For PAKA, involvement in CLYLP has strengthened its standing with both government counterparts and civil society organisations. As one PAKA representative noted, “our credibility has grown with government and among CSOs. We are getting more respect.” Participation has also supported organisational learning and capability development, with PAKA reporting that elements of the UnionAID curriculum have been integrated into its own work: “Some of UnionAID curriculum we are able to bring into our own training. We integrate some things which is very helpful.” This reflects a broader spillover benefit in which programme approaches and materials are adapted and reused locally, potentially strengthening the quality and consistency of leadership and community development training delivered beyond the CLYLP participants.

PAKA also identified a potential multiplier effect through alumni becoming a future resource base for local training and learning. As noted, “Alumni will become resource person for [our] students,” suggesting a pathway through which CLYLP may contribute to strengthening local capability and networks over time. This type of partner-level benefit is particularly relevant in the Lao PDR context, where trusted local intermediaries can help sustain programme values and approaches in ways that are contextually safe and locally legitimate.

How well has the Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning (MERL) framework performed during the pilot?

KEY FINDING 5.1: Although MERL practices require additional resourcing, they have nonetheless been effectively integrated within the CLYLP pilot, with partners working closely to monitor and respond to emerging issues and lessons.

The programme has been particularly effective in continuous and collaborative learning, while longer-term strategic evaluation tools and approaches remain embryonic. CLYLP participants describe strong informal MERL practices—especially providing routine feedback to implanting partners and post-session delivery through feedback forms. Alumni report that feedback loops are built into delivery and that suggestions do lead to adaptation in program implementation.

“[We] provided input about how sessions could be improved through the feedback form after each session. The feedback was taken on board and the program changed as a result of that”

-Female CLYLP alumni

Other alumni similarly noted that while the overall program curriculum was predetermined, participant input was still sought and used to adapt the program. This indicates functioning monitoring and learning loops. CLYLP has also commissioned – similar to other YLP programs – an evaluation of 2024 cohort participant experiences, with alumni reflecting on their experience in the program and influencing shifts in program delivery.

KEY FINDING 5.2: While it is premature to assess MERL effectiveness at a programme level, the function has historically operated with limited resourcing within YLP, presenting an opportunity to strengthen its role in driving evidence-based impact.

The CLYLP program remains in its pilot phase with no action projects complete and an alumni cohort of only 10. It is therefore premature to assess MERL effectiveness. However, there is no resourcing for a dedicated MERL team within the CLYLP program or wider YLP portfolio. As the program continues to expand, the number of alumni and action research projects increase, sufficient dedicated resourcing to proper MEL functions will be required to ensure the programmes track progress, learn from evidence, adapt in real time, support inclusion, inform future decision-making and importantly provide outcome level evidence as to the impact of the program and participants’ action projects.

How youth-led is the program? Are the perspectives of young leaders being centred in this pilot?

KEY FINDING 6.1: The programme has been highly inclusive of the views, perspectives and insights of young leaders, though there is opportunity to enhance youth leadership as the program progresses.

The pilot has clearly been implemented as an inclusive participatory learning environment. This is a cultural departure for many in the programme, more familiar with hierarchical and structured spaces. Multiple alumni reported having meaningful influence over

specific elements of programme delivery, particularly meetings and conferences. One alumnus highlighted a strong sense of participant ownership, noting that:

"[CLYLP] let us shape the conference and the outcomes... everything is for us, made by us".

- Male CLYLP alumni

Alumni also valued that their feedback was actively sought and observed that it was incorporated into programme delivery, reinforcing perceptions of responsiveness and shared ownership.

"I learned how to give feedback. Culturally we are not confident to share our thoughts, but we have gained that confidence through this project and have been comfortable to give feedback"

- Female CLYLP alumni

However, some challenges were experienced. Some Cambodian alumni noted that they faced initial difficulties in their interactions with KFP as the implementing partner. They felt parts of the approach were more hierarchical and not fully aligned with youth-led ways of working. These issues created some early communication difficulties, but Alumni also noted that this improved over time as KFP adapted its approach during implementation.

How is the program considering and supporting equity in representation and participation?

KEY FINDING 7.1: The programme has proactively and effectively worked to ensure accessibility for individuals representing a range of abilities, ethnicities, religions, genders, and sexual orientations, gender identities and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). There is also an opportunity to further promote the programme beyond urban centres to continue encourage more diverse inclusion.

The programme has clearly sought to achieve balanced gender representation among participants while proactively encouraging and supporting the inclusion of people with disabilities and individuals of diverse SOGIESC. Gender representation in the first Cambodian cohort was slightly skewed toward males, with four male and one female participant, following the withdrawal of a selected female participant due to competing commitments. While no formal mechanisms are currently in place to actively target Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) or Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) during recruitment, disability inclusion was nonetheless demonstrated through the selection of a participant with a physical disability.

"I was so surprised to be selected for the project. It wasn't just about how I answer questions. They are thinking about people who maybe cannot share in words how they feel. They chose us not on a test, but who we are as people."

- Female CLYLP participant

Beyond representation, there was near-universal appreciation of how inclusive and supportive the programme was for all participants. The programme clearly prioritises consideration of diverse identities, and has strengthened participants' understanding of inclusive programming.

"There was a lot of talk about PWLD. I never thought about it before."

- Male CLYLP alumni

However, a dedicated GEDSI strategy with clear indicators, for both the CLYLP and the wider YLP portfolio, would help to systematically guide inclusive programme design and delivery, strengthen accountability for equity outcomes, and enable more consistent monitoring of participation, experience, and benefit across diverse groups.

"[The] Program very careful pays attention to inclusivity...[with] Christian, Muslim, Buddhist [participants]... halal food... fasting... Some people in the rainbow community... every activity thinks about the participant with a disability"

- Female CLYLP alumni

CLYLP has so far engaged a comparatively more urban and predominantly Buddhist cohort. This pattern is partly reflective of the smaller population size compared with other YLP countries, country rather district-based approach, and comparatively lower levels of religious and ethnic diversity within the participating countries. Nonetheless, there remains an opportunity to further strengthen outreach and recruitment approaches to broaden participation, including by engaging more rural and remote communities and individuals from minority ethnic and religious groups.

Objective 2: To assess the extent to which the CLYLP is relevant to the needs of Cambodia and Lao PDR and aligned with the priorities of New Zealand's IDC programme and the ASEAN Plan (Relevance, Coherence).

Are the programme's objectives and design appropriate to New Zealand's strategies and to the contexts of the participating countries (Cambodia and Lao PDR)?

KEY FINDING 8.1: New Zealand's ASEAN IDC programme maintains a balance between those least-developed countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar) and middle-income countries of Indonesia, Philippines and Viet Nam, where there is focus on the most marginalised communities. MFAT's commitment to the region's less developed countries contributes to ASEAN's key objective of closing the development gap between and within member states.

The objectives and design of the CLYLP programme are broadly appropriate to New Zealand's development strategy in Southeast Asia and align well with ASEAN's regional priorities. New Zealand's ASEAN International Development Cooperation (IDC) programme deliberately balances support between least-developed countries (including Cambodia and Lao PDR) and middle-income countries, while maintaining a consistent focus on marginalised populations. This reflects MFAT's strategic intent to contribute to inclusive growth, regional stability and long-term partnerships in Southeast Asia, and directly supports ASEAN's core objective of closing development gaps between and within member states. By prioritising countries (and regions within countries) where development needs are greatest, New Zealand's engagement adds clear value and reinforces ASEAN integration efforts, rather than duplicating interventions already well resourced by other development actors.

Within Cambodia and Lao PDR, the CLYLP programme's emphasis on youth, inclusion and capability development is well matched to national development contexts. Both countries remain characterised by structural constraints in human capital development, limited access to quality education and skills pathways. A programme that focuses on youth leadership, participation and pathways into opportunity is therefore relevant and timely. The regional design of CLYLP further strengthens its appropriateness by recognising that challenges facing young people in Cambodia and Lao PDR are shaped by regional dynamics as well as national conditions.

s6(a), s6(d)

s6(a), s6(d)

To what extent has the programme been set up to support locally led development in these countries? What options exist to strengthen this?

KEY FINDING 9.1: The programme has been well designed to support locally led development, with active partnerships through local partners in both Lao PDR and Cambodia. However, resource constraints limit the role these partners are able to play.

A clear strength in the CLYLP programme's design is that it is structured to support locally led development through active partnerships with local organisations in both Lao PDR and Cambodia and through engaging local youth leaders. The local partners bring essential contextual knowledge, local networks and credibility, enabling the programme to operate effectively in constrained civil society environments and to engage youth and marginalised groups in culturally appropriate ways. This partnership-based approach aligns with good practice for programming in restrictive contexts and supports relevance and responsiveness at the local level.

However, the role local partners are able to play is constrained by limited resourcing. While partners are central to implementation, current resource limitations restrict their capacity to engage beyond delivery to support functions core. There is an interest – and opportunity – to engage partners more fully in MERL, planning and management.

KEY FINDING 9.2: PAKA is a particularly relevant and values-aligned local partner, with an interest in playing a deeper role in the CLYLP. The partnership with KFP has been more exploratory and may be appropriate to review in any new funding cycle.

As noted already, there is an opportunity to continue to explore closer integration and bridging opportunities with PAKA. While resources have been tight, PAKA has operated diligently and consistently to support young leaders. KFP has become an increasingly effective partner, though is less aligned in its orientation and experience. KFP is somewhat distinct from other YLP implementing partners as it operates as a consultancy and community development services provider, rather than a traditional NGO focused on civil society capacity or youth empowerment. As noted, some participants reported communication challenges with KFP early in the implementation phase and perceived its operating style as more formal or aligned with older professional norms, which may not resonate with youth participants or the peer-led ethos the programme seeks to foster. There would be merit in reviewing the partnership model to ensure alignment with CLYLP's values and participant experience.

To what extent is the curriculum and programme content fit for purpose – is it culturally and contextually appropriate for Cambodia and Lao PDR?

KEY FINDING 10.1: The programme has been largely well tailored and fit for purpose. There is wide appreciation for the opportunity for practical learning, and a desire among participants for this to be further strengthened

The curriculum and programme content are largely fit for purpose and appropriately tailored to the cultural and contextual realities of Cambodia and Lao PDR. Participants value the emphasis on experiential and practice-based learning, particularly opportunities to explore development in practice in New Zealand. The programme's focus on applied leadership, teamwork and community engagement resonates with participants lived experiences, ambitions and supports relevance across diverse social, educational and rural-urban backgrounds.

At the same time, participant feedback indicates a strong desire for the practical components of the curriculum to be further strengthened. While the overall structure is appropriate, there is scope to deepen hands-on learning through extended field experience and hard skills, mentoring and real-world problem-solving that reflects local economic, social-cultural conditions and operating conditions in Lao PDR and Cambodia.

Compared with youth leadership programmes that place a stronger emphasis on campaigning and advocacy, CLYLP gives these areas less prominence, reflecting the cultural and political sensitivities in Cambodia and Lao PDR. This is an appropriate and deliberate curriculum adaptation, and the programme has taken care to ensure its content is context-sensitive and responsive to local norms. As the programme progresses, local partners may continue to consider how to support participants' interest in influencing change in ways that remain safe, relevant, and appropriate to the operating environment.

KEY FINDING 10.2: Participants value the CLYLP curriculum and find it relevant and high quality, but many found the programme as overly compressed and fast paced. The intensity of delivery limits time for reflection, absorption and application of learning.

Participants consistently highlighted the strength of the content, particularly research skills, Māori perspectives and practical learning. One participant noted that although "it felt a bit cramped and rushed," the New Zealand components such as "Parliament and maori" were highly valued (Male Alumni CLYLP).

Concerns about pace and workload were, however, recurrent. Alumni described schedules that were "too packed... a lot of homework... should be more relaxed" (Female CLYLP Alumni) and recommended fewer sessions per day, noting "up to 4 courses [were delivered a day]... 3 months [was] too short" (Male CLYLP Alumni). New participants also flagged the online load as challenging, alongside calls for stronger English language support to improve accessibility (Cambodia New CLYLP Participant Interviews 2 and 5).

Objective 3: Lessons for improvement – To assess the delivery model of the CLYLP and identify lessons and good practices to increase its positive impact in the future (Efficiency, Effectiveness, Sustainability).

What factors are enhancing or constraining the sustainability of this programme (e.g. benefits continuing after participation)?

KEY FINDING 11.1: The YLP focus on individual skills and knowledge building is inherently sustainable, particularly when applied through practical learning. However, the programme could do

more to localise its implementation through horizontal learning, and more fully resourcing the CLYLP alumni model.

As noted in previous evaluation reports, the YLP model is highly sustainable. By emphasising practical, applied learning, the programme equips participants with competencies they can continue to use, adapt, and share long after the formal training ends. This approach also supports longer-term impact, as participants are able to transfer their learning into their personal, community, and professional contexts without relying on ongoing external inputs.

"The soft skills stay with them. The confidence they share with their family, their friends, their colleagues. Their knowledge and experience will always stay with them even if they move jobs or careers. They are active citizens – that is what is needed"

- Local implementing partner

Further building on the localisation of the programme would continue to strengthen the sustainability of CLYLP. Deepening the role of local partners in shaping content, delivery methods, and contextual adaptations would ensure the programme continues to reflect local priorities, cultural norms, and operating realities. Over time, this could also build greater local ownership and capacity, reducing reliance on external support and enabling the programme to remain responsive and relevant within Cambodia and Lao PDR. Ongoing localisation also helps reduce the overarching risk associated with the tightening space for international actors to support civil society development, by ensuring the programme is increasingly led and sustained by trusted local organisations. This finding does not diminish the importance of learning in New Zealand – a universally valued experience among interviewees. Rather, consideration should be given how to continue to foster this hybrid model with more local input and ownership.

s6(a), s6(d)

KEY FINDING 11.3: Organisational reforms in UnionAID will be the most important determinant on the sustainability of CLYLP

As noted in the YLP portfolio evaluation, UnionAID is undergoing a period of organisational and operational reform. There is evidence that recommendations from this evaluation are being considered and applied that will benefit the long-term sustainability of CLYLP. The consolidation of YLPs as recommended – including CLYLP – will further support appropriate resourcing, governance and operational approaches, in accordance with measures considered through the negotiated partnership model.

What have been the lessons so far from the combined country model? How relevant may this be for other YLPs?

KEY FINDING 12.1: The combined country model has been cost effective, encouraged cross-cultural learning and supported English language proficiency. However there remain drawbacks, especially in tailoring content and managing an integrated alumni network

Delivering the CLYLP through a single programme structure has reduced administrative and coordination costs and has enabled meaningful interaction between cohorts from Cambodia and Laos, enriching the learning experience. However, the model also presents inherent limitations. With only ten participants distributed across two countries, the programme reaches fewer young leaders per location each year compared with other YLPs, which typically deliver to ten participants per country. Managing an integrated alumni network across two distinct country contexts and two local partners also increases complexity, stretching resourcing to maintain coherence, relevance, and ongoing engagement.

The combined model is widely viewed as high-value for exchange and perspective broadening. But lessons include the need to manage language equity, social segmentation, travel burden, and design features that intentionally foster cross-country integration over time. When asked whether participants would prefer a single country or combined model, the majority voiced preference for a combined approach, though a significant minority suggested a single country approach would be better suited.

Many participants emphasise shared culture and relationship-building as major benefits of the two-country program.

"I Love the way it has been combined with Lao PDR ... [we have] a similar culture... [it is] helpful to learn about other countries"

- Female CLYLP alumni

KEY FINDING 12.2: The combined country model has provided an element of risk management, enhancing programme resilience in politically constrained environments where civic space is narrow and operating conditions can change unpredictably.

Delivering the programme across both Cambodia and Lao PDR reduces reliance on a single country context and limits the risk of complete programme disruption. If government intervention, regulatory tightening or political sensitivities constrain or close operations in one country, the combined structure allows the programme to continue elsewhere, preserving momentum, institutional knowledge and partnerships and reducing impact of country-specific shocks (such as the possibility of a broadening Thai-Cambodia conflict). A combined country or regional model can provide strategic flexibility, enable adaptive rebalancing across countries, and support sustained delivery without increasing political exposure. While not a substitute for careful risk management at country level, the model enhances overall programme robustness and is particularly relevant where civic space is uneven or subject to sudden change.

Within the current model (a single programme serving two neighbouring countries), will the benefits likely endure? If not, what steps could be taken to strengthen sustainability?

KEY FINDING 13.1: The benefits of the current model will likely become more difficult to manage over time. Consideration should be given to options for hybrid alumni models to better enable in-person collaboration while also maintaining cross-national linkages

While the combined country model offers clear benefits, these will become harder to sustain as the programme matures and the alumni cohort expands. Each new intake increases the size and complexity of the alumni network, driving up the cost and logistical burden of meaningful engagement. Annual in-person alumni convenings, though valuable, are likely to become increasingly resource-intensive and less feasible to deliver at scale over time.

As alumni numbers grow and the time since participation increases, connectivity and engagement are likely to dilute. Alumni risk becoming more loosely connected to the programme and to one another as the time between their engagement with the program grows longer, weakening peer exchange and collective identity. This is not unique to CLYLP, but a common sustainability challenge and question across YLP with expanding alumni bases.

What learnings from the delivery model of the CLYLP (both its strengths and weaknesses) can inform the design of a future consolidated YLP covering multiple countries?

KEY FINDING 14.1: The CLYLP pilot, and broader YLP evaluations, provide strong lessons for considerations of a future consolidated YLP model/s. CLYLP demonstrates the value of integrated cross-country delivery for applied learning and network-building, while highlighting the need for careful context selection and strong localisation.

Participants valued learning alongside peers from a neighbouring country and developing confidence through practical research and engagement. As noted, the model also reinforced English language development through its use as a medium of collaboration between Lao PDR and Cambodia participants. These strengths suggest that consolidated delivery can add value beyond efficiency, but only where the design intentionally supports interaction, equity and inclusion across cohorts and countries.

The pilot also highlights opportunities to expand reach through remote and hybrid delivery to improve access beyond urban centres and established networks. There is demand to strengthen outreach into under-served areas: "We want to get into more remote areas. Facebook, some people can access... We want to do more field visits to promote the program." While A "stairway model"—working through trusted local partners such as PAKA—could strengthen accessibility, including for candidates facing English language barriers, by building readiness before entering the full programme.

Importantly, experience across the wider YLP portfolio suggests that a combined-country approach would not necessarily be feasible or appropriate in all contexts. Alumni experiences from MINYLP and INSPIRASI indicate that where countries or regions have sharper differences in identity, language, political context and lived experience, integration may reduce relevance and increase delivery complexity. The combined model has worked in this instance partly because Cambodia and Lao PDR share geographic proximity and overlapping cultural, historical, ethnic and religious characteristics, making cross-country exchange more feasible and meaningful. A combined multi-country model may be well suited in some cases (for example, East Indonesia and Timor-Leste may be possible) but would likely be more challenging in others (such as East Indonesia and Mindanao). Future consolidated YLP design should therefore treat integration as a context-dependent option rather than a default model, guided by proximity, cultural fit, operating context and the intended outcomes of exchange.

5

Evaluation Conclusions

This the Cambodia–Lao PDR Young Leaders Programme (CLYLP) has established a strong foundation and is effectively delivering meaningful outcomes in two complex operating environments. The programme has built on the wider YLP model while adapting appropriately to local political, cultural, and organisational realities. Its emphasis on practical learning, inclusion, and cross-cultural exchange has supported transformative individual growth and strengthened people-to-people connections between New Zealand, Cambodia, and Lao PDR.

Implementing partners have shown commitment and adaptability, applying lessons from earlier YLP evaluations to create a more flexible, localised, and risk-aware programme. The integrated two-country model has been particularly valuable in fostering cross-cultural understanding and enhancing English language confidence, though its efficiency will diminish as the alumni base expands—suggesting hybrid alumni approaches will be more viable over time.

However, several challenges require continued attention. Participant workloads and the demands placed on host organisations need careful management, action projects must remain achievable and context-appropriate, and further organisational strengthening within UnionAID will be important for long-term sustainability. Continued localisation—both in delivery and in supporting local partner capacity—remains central to programme resilience, particularly amid constrained civic space in both countries.

The evaluation finds that the pilot is progressing well and remains highly relevant to MFAT’s strategic objectives. With targeted refinements and sustainable resourcing, CLYLP is well positioned to consolidate its impact and contribute meaningfully to a stronger, more connected civil society landscape in Cambodia and Lao PDR.

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Evaluation Recommendations

#	Recommendation	Lead	Priority	See findings
1	CLYLP should be considered a priority investment in any future funding cycle	MFAT	High	
2	Integrated YLP model is still appropriate if funding is not available to establish stand-alone country programmes in Lao PDR and Cambodia	MFAT	High	
3	Agree a medium-term funding pathway for CLYLP (or its inclusion in any consolidated YLP), reflecting decisions on whether the pilot is extended, scaled, or transitioned into the consolidated YLP portfolio.	MFAT	High	3.3, 11.1, 13.1
4	Review budget assumptions to reflect real operating costs in Cambodia and Lao PDR, including delivery, partner staffing, duty of care, and alumni/network costs.	MFAT & UnionAID	High	1.1, 9.1, 13.1
5	Seek to strengthen and formalise local partnership arrangements, including reviewing KFP's fit for a future phase and exploring other potential Cambodia implementing partners, while supporting PAKA to play a deeper role in delivery and learning and continuing to enhance coordination with their training programs.	UnionAID (MFAT oversight)	High	9.2, 9.1, 6.1, 4.4
6	Consider Resourcing local partners to contribute beyond delivery—including contextual appropriate pastoral care and support for participants, continuous monitoring of action projects and other MERL inputs, alumni coordination, and quality assurance to enhance locally-led development.	UnionAID	High	9.1, 5.2, 11.1, 4.4
7	Seek to reduce employment and financial risk for participants by setting clearer expectations with host organisations, improving scheduling flexibility where possible and embedding minimum standards for workplace support.	UnionAID	High	2.3, 4.2, 10.2
8	Review curriculum pacing and intensity to improve retention, application and reduce burnout including fewer sessions per day where feasible, more reflection time, and stronger emphasis on practical (rather than academic theoretical) learning and action projects.	UnionAID & AUT	High	10.1, 10.2, 4.2
9	Maintain and expand English “bridging” pathways to protect inclusion of potential participants experiencing heightened barriers to inclusion. This can include pre-departure English language training support, in-programme support and mentoring.	UnionAID	High	4.1, 10.2, 14.1
10	Resource a fit-for-purpose MERL function for CLYLP (and ideally across YLP), including a unified results framework, clear outcome indicators, and alumni	UnionAID (MFAT support)	High	5.2, 5.1, 3.3

	tracking beyond the pilot period. This can both provide an evidence base for the program's impact story and act as a risk mitigation function.			
11	Introduce a structured approach to action-project quality and learning, including providing clear guidance on expectations and timelines, enhancing safeguards and verifying outputs and outcomes through monitoring and in-person support from local implementing partners.	UnionAID	High	1.1, 3.1, 5.2, 11.1
12	Strengthen civic space and political risk management, including scenario planning, risk triggers, clear partner protocols, and contingency planning if operating conditions tighten in either country (especially relevant for Lao PDR).	UnionAID (MFAT)	High	8.2, 11.2, 12.2
13	Develop a scalable alumni model that reflects cohort growth and cross-border constraints, potentially using hybrid engagement, cohort-based structures, and periodic convening rather than large annual conferences.	UnionAID	Medium	13.1, 12.1
14	Use CLYLP learning to shape consolidated portfolio options, including criteria for when multi-country models are appropriate, and a "stairway model" via local partners to broaden access (including for candidates with lower English capacity, people with disability, ethnic minorities and people of diverse SOGIESC).	MFAT & UnionAID	Medium	14.1, 12.1, 9.1
15	Develop and embed a GEDSI strategy for CLYLP (and ideally across YLP), with clear objectives, practical minimum standards for delivery partners, and measurable indicators integrated into the MERL framework.	UnionAID	High	7.1, 6.1, 5.2, 10.1

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Annex 1. Key findings

Consolidated Key Findings – CLYLP Evaluation

Have programme outputs been delivered to time, to the expected quality and within budget?

KEY FINDING 1.1: Programme outputs have been effectively delivered to date, despite resource constraints.

Has the programme been set up to deliver effectively and efficiently, and to progress intended outcomes?

KEY FINDING 2.1 The programme has been well set up, clearly applying experience and good practice lessons from other YLPs

KEY FINDING 2.2 The integrated model brings savings compared to stand-alone country models, but with added complexity [considered further in KEQ 12]

KEY FINDING 2.3 Working more directly through CSO host organisations has been appropriate in the operating context (particularly in Lao PDR), though challenges to this model remain. This includes pressures on young leaders to commit to their organisations, narrowing the pool of candidates to those in permanent roles, and delegating risk without full due diligence processes possible

What evidence is available to demonstrate formative progress towards the intended short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes?

KEY FINDING 3.1 There is evidence of progress across almost all YLP short term outcomes. STO 6 has – appropriately - been less of a focus (due to political sensitivities), while it is too early to assess progress towards STO 7 [Communities are benefitting from young leaders' participation in the programme]

KEY FINDING 3.2 Progress towards medium term outcomes is, understandably more formative. However, there has been clear evidence of collaborative relationships across national boundaries.

KEY FINDING 3.3 While early progress is encouraging, it is too early to attempt to fairly assess the long-term outcomes of this pilot.

What, if any, have been the unintended outcomes of the programme to date (positive or negative)?

KEY FINDING 4.1 The increased use of English across cohorts—bringing together participants from both countries—was widely credited with enhancing English language proficiency

KEY FINDING 4.2 Engagement with Māori traditions and perspectives contributed to heightened cultural pride and enriched cross-cultural relationships for several participants

KEY FINDING 4.3 At least half of the first cohort of CLYLP struggled to manage the time and financial pressures of balancing work commitments alongside programme participation

KEY FINDING 4.4 The programme has generated positive unintended outcomes for implementing partners—particularly PAKA—by strengthening organisational credibility, building staff capability, and expanding local training and resource networks.

How well has the Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning (MERL) framework performed during the pilot?

KEY FINDING 5.1 Although MERL practices require additional resourcing, they have nonetheless been effectively integrated within the CLYLP pilot, with partners working closely to monitor and respond to emerging issues and lessons.

KEY FINDING 5.2 While it is premature to assess MERL effectiveness at a programme level, the function has historically operated with limited resourcing within YLP, presenting an opportunity to strengthen its role in driving evidence-based impact.

How youth-led is the program? Are the perspectives of young leaders being centred in this pilot?

KEY FINDING 6.1 The programme has been highly inclusive of the views, perspectives and insights of young leaders, though there is opportunity to enhance youth leadership as the program progresses.

How is the program considering and supporting equity in representation and participation?

KEY FINDING 7.1 The programme has proactively and effectively worked to ensure accessibility for individuals representing a range of abilities, ethnicities, religions, genders, and sexual orientations, gender identities and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). There is also an opportunity to further promote the programme beyond urban centres to continue encourage more diverse inclusion.

Are the programme's objectives and design appropriate to New Zealand's strategies and to the contexts of the participating countries (Cambodia and Lao PDR)?

KEY FINDING 8.1 New Zealand's ASEAN IDC programme maintains a balance between those least-developed countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar) and middle-income countries of Indonesia, Philippines and Viet Nam, where there is focus on the most marginalised communities. MFAT's commitment to the region's less developed countries contributes to ASEAN's key objective of closing the development gap between and within member states.

KEY FINDING 8.2 CLYLP has been appropriately designed within the limited civil society space available in both Cambodia and Lao PDR. While the smaller footprint of the programme reduces some political exposure for participants and partners, it also limits opportunities for institutional uptake, scale and longer-term systemic influence

To what extent has the programme been set up to support locally led development in these countries? What options exist to strengthen this?

KEY FINDING 9.1 The programme has been well designed to support locally led development, with active partnerships through local partners in both Lao PDR and Cambodia. However, resource constraints limit the role these partners are able to play.

KEY FINDING 9.2 PAKA is a particularly relevant and values-aligned local partner, with an interest in playing a deeper role in the CLYLP. The partnership with KFP has been more exploratory and may be appropriate to review in any new funding cycle.

To what extent is the curriculum and programme content fit for purpose – is it culturally and contextually appropriate for Cambodia and Lao PDR?

KEY FINDING 10.1 The programme has been largely well tailored and fit for purpose. There is wide appreciation for the opportunity for practical learning, and a desire among participants for this to be further strengthened

KEY FINDING 10.2 Participants value the CLYLP curriculum and find it relevant and high quality, but many found the programme as overly compressed and fast paced. The intensity of delivery limits time for reflection, absorption and application of learning.

What factors are enhancing or constraining the sustainability of this programme (e.g. benefits continuing after participation)?

KEY FINDING 11.1 The YLP focus on individual skills and knowledge building is inherently sustainable, particularly when applied through practical learning. However, the programme could do more to localise its implementation through horizontal learning, and more fully resourcing the CLYLP alumni model.

KEY FINDING 11.2 The ongoing political and cultural context in both Cambodia and Lao PDR will clearly remain key variables affecting long-term sustainability that cannot be managed.

KEY FINDING 11.3 Organisational reforms in UnionAID will be the most important determinant on the sustainability of CLYLP

What have been the lessons so far from the combined country model? How relevant may this be for other YLPs?

KEY FINDING 12.1 The combined country model has been cost effective, encouraged cross-cultural learning and supported English language proficiency. However there remain drawbacks, especially in tailoring content and managing an integrated alumni network

KEY FINDING 12.2 The combined country model has provided an element of risk management, enhancing programme resilience in politically constrained environments where civic space is narrow and operating conditions can change unpredictably.

Within the current model (a single programme serving two neighbouring countries), will the benefits likely endure? If not, what steps could be taken to strengthen sustainability?

KEY FINDING 13.1 The benefits of the current model will likely become more difficult to manage over time. Consideration should be given to options for hybrid alumni models to better enable in-person collaboration while also maintaining cross-national linkages

What learnings from the delivery model of the CLYLP (both its strengths and weaknesses) can inform the design of a future consolidated YLP covering multiple countries?

KEY FINDING 14.1 The CLYLP pilot, and broader YLP evaluations, provide strong lessons for considerations of a future consolidated YLP model/s. CLYLP demonstrates the value of integrated cross-country delivery for applied learning and network-building, while highlighting the need for careful context selection and strong localisation.

Annex 2: CLYLP participant engagement details

Cambodia participants

A total of 10 participants from Cambodia were consulted (5 from the 2024 cohort and 5 from the 2025 cohort, covering all current participants and alumni of the program). Consultations included 6 male and 4 female participants.

Religious affiliation among Cambodian participants was largely consistent: 9 participants identified as Buddhist/Buddhism, while 1 participant identified as Muslim/Islam.

Participants were drawn from a broad geographic spread across Cambodia. The largest group was from Phnom Penh (4 participants), followed by Battambang (3 participants). Other locations represented included Preah Sihanouk (1), Stueng Treng / Ratanakiri (1), and Stueng Treng / Preah Vihear / Kampong Cham (1).

Ethnic identity among Cambodian participants included Khmer (8 participants), with one participant identifying as Vietnamese Cantonese and one participant identifying as Cham.

Lao PDR participants

Again, a total of 10 participants from Lao PDR were consulted (covering all participants from the 2024 and 2025 cohorts). Documented consultations included 5 male, 3 female, and 2 gender-diverse participants.

Religious affiliation among Lao PDR participants was more varied than the Cambodian cohort. Five participants identified as Buddhist/Buddhism, while five participants identified as Animist.

Participants were drawn from a geographic spread across Lao PDR. The largest group was from Vientiane Capital (5 participants), followed by Xiengkhouang (2 participants). Other locations represented included Luang Prabang (1), Houaphanh (1), and Vientiane Capital / Sekong (1).

Lao PDR participants identified with a range of ethnic groups. The largest group identified as Lao Tai (4 participants), followed by Hmong (3 participants). Other ethnic groups included Katu (1), Yang (1), and Khmu (1).

Summary across both countries

In summary (see Table 3), a total of 20 participants of CLYLP across both countries. 55.0% of participants identified as male, 35.0% as female, and 10.0% identified as gender diverse. In terms of religion, 70.0% identified as Buddhist, 25.0% identified as Animism, and 5.0% identified as Muslim.

Table 3. Consultation participation summary (Cambodia–Lao PDR YLP)

Category	Cambodia	Lao PDR	% of Total
Total participants	10	10	100
Male	6	5	55.0
Female	4	3	35.0
Gender diverse	0	2	10.0
Buddhist / Buddhism	9	5	70.0

Animism	0	5	25.0
Muslim / Islam	1	0	5.0

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