

Tetra Tech International Development

# Learning from Three Perspectives Report

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OFFICIAL

SPRING Monitoring and Evaluation: Learning from Three Perspectives Report

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SPRING Monitoring and Evaluation

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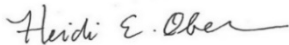
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- Performance Management and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E).



Heidi Ober

Project Director

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# Abbreviations and Acronyms

<b>BOP</b>	Bottom of the Pyramid
<b>BPE</b>	The Business Performance Evaluation
<b>DFAT</b>	The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development
<b>EP</b>	Evaluation Partner
<b>FCDO</b>	The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
<b>FCO</b>	The Foreign and Commonwealth Office
<b>HCD</b>	Human Centred Design
<b>IE</b>	Impact Evaluation
<b>IP</b>	Implementing Partner
<b>KPI</b>	Key Performance Indicator
<b>MEL</b>	Monitoring Evaluation Learning
<b>PPE</b>	Programme Performance Evaluation
<b>SRO</b>	Senior Reporting Officer
<b>ToC</b>	Theory of Change
<b>USAID</b>	The United States Agency for International Development

# Executive Summary

## The SPRING Context

SPRING was a five-year programme designed to transform the lives of adolescent girls by working with businesses to develop products and services that would help girls keep safe, learn, earn, save, and have greater wellbeing. The programme was complex, implemented across nine countries in two geographic areas, with three donors, two implementing partners and an external evaluator. It was also an adaptive learning programme; the businesses selected, and girls targeted by the programme were refined throughout implementation as lessons were learnt. The evaluation approach was also adaptive.

## The Purpose and Content of this Report

This report presents the key learnings regarding this complexity and adaptation, from the three perspectives of the donors, the implementing partners and the evaluation partner. It aims to inform future adaptive programme design, implementation, and evaluation, and programmes working with multiple implementing parties, and multiple donors. Specifically, the report presents what worked well between the three parties, what was not as successful, and identifies lessons for future adaptive programmes.

## Key Findings - What Worked Less Well?

Areas identified as working less well between the three parties are that while the overall purpose of SPRING was constant, the key rationale and implementation focus varied within and between the parties. Appetite for risk varied between the different parties impacting on the extent to which the programme could adapt and innovate, calling into question the donors' appetite for adaptation and innovation. The donors also had competing areas of geographical focus for programme implementation and varied evaluative emphasis.

Other challenges included building a working relationship between central implementing partners with different organisational cultures and styles. There was also overlap of roles between the internal monitoring team and the external evaluation partner. While the adaptive programme necessitated an adaptive evaluation approach, the evaluation partner was constrained in their ability to modify the evaluation methods due to contractual deliverables and rigid methodological requirements.

Finally, strong willed, committed individuals with powerful personalities, all of whom had tremendous passion for the work, wanted their often-competing objectives to be heard and implemented. This was both a strength and a weakness of the programme.

## Key Findings - What Worked Well?

Despite the programme's challenges, the programme is largely considered a success. Several factors contribute to this assessment.

Strong relationships of trust were developed between all parties involved in the programme and these were underpinned by both formal and informal, ongoing communication across three axes of communication. Physical proximity aided in some of these relationships, and face-to-face interactions throughout the implementation provided additional support. These relationships also generated compromise in spite of the competing visions and agendas, promoting programme integrity. Finally, a single contractual point of contact for both implementation and evaluation aided in simplifying programme reporting.

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The recommendations reflect these findings.

Passionate, committed individuals are central to a programme's success. Even in the event of their differing opinions, their commitment to programme integrity and their resultant willingness to compromise for this common goal are essential. Trusted relationships between these individuals and other parties are developed and sustained through regular, ongoing, informal and formal communication.

Adaptive programmes need time to reflect and learn from implementation before reiterating their implementation. The role of an external evaluation party to act as a critical friend can aid this reflective and learning process. Priorities for learning and the extent of adaptation need to be decided and communicated. While these can change during implementation, this needs to be decided collectively.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Purpose Of This Report

Increasingly, international development donors are calling for adaptive programme approaches to address complex development challenges and ultimately, to increase impact. However, designing, implementing and monitoring adaptive programmes is a complex undertaking for donors, implementers and evaluators and there is a recognised lack of practical case studies from which to draw best practice.<sup>1</sup>

This report highlights learnings from overseeing, implementing and monitoring an adaptive programme, by drawing lessons from SPRING. SPRING was a complex, adaptive learning programme implemented across nine countries in East Africa and South Asia, with three donors, two implementing partners (IP) and an evaluation partner (EP). The iterative nature of SPRING's implementation meant that the evaluation approach needed to be similarly adaptive.

All three parties on SPRING: the donors, the IP and the EP, were involved throughout the lifespan of the programme and each had a unique role in its completion. As such, there are valuable, transferrable lessons to be drawn from this experience. Specifically, this report identifies what worked well and what didn't between and within the parties; and what could be replicated and improved for future adaptive programme design, implementation, and evaluation.

Ultimately, this report aims to capture the key learnings from SPRING's accomplishments from the perspectives of the donors, the IP and the EP to inform future adaptive programming.

## 1.2. What Was SPRING?

SPRING was a five-year programme, implemented between July 2014 and September 2019, funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)<sup>2</sup>, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Nike Foundation. Nike Foundation left the programme in the early stages of Cohort 2, opening an opportunity for Australian Aid to join. SPRING aimed to enhance the lives of adolescent girls aged 10-19 by working with businesses to develop products and services that would help them to: learn, earn, save, stay safe, stay healthy and improve their wellbeing.

SPRING provided businesses with mentoring support, limited finance for the development of product or service prototypes and expertise in business growth, design, innovation, and marketing. Human Centred Design (HCD) was also a core element of the programme, which enabled the businesses to conduct user-based research to develop a product, service or business model that met the needs of adolescent girls.<sup>3</sup>

The programme was implemented by a consortium of partners led by the Palladium Group, including Fuseproject, an international design and brand development firm, based in San Francisco. Tetra Tech International Development (formerly Coffey) was contracted as the independent EP for the programme. Programme evaluation was scheduled to end two years after implementation and is ongoing until the second quarter of 2022.

The manner in which businesses were selected by the programme were refined throughout implementation. Similarly, the classification of girls by the businesses targeted also evolved. In total, SPRING worked with 75 businesses across four cohorts. These businesses spanned nine countries in two geographic areas, Eastern Africa (Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda) and South Asia (Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Myanmar). By the end of the last cohort, SPRING had exceeded its goal of reaching 200,000 girls, by reaching 2,534,214 adolescent girls<sup>4</sup>. The businesses in the programme had also attracted almost £17m in SPRING-attributable business investment by September 2019.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.3. Evaluation Methodology

For this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from the donors, the implementing partners and the evaluation partner between April and May 2021. Six interviews were conducted with the donor representatives (3 with FCDO, 2 with USAID and 1 with Australian Aid); four with the Implementation Partner (IP) representatives, Palladium; and two with the Evaluation Partner (EP) representatives, Tetra Tech International Development. Thematic questions centred on relationships between the three parties, process applied during SPRING, challenges and implemented solutions as well as programme successes. These interviews underwent qualitative narrative analysis to draw out major themes and to identify shared and divergent experiences and

<sup>1</sup> See Helen Derbyshire & Elbereth Donovan. (2016). *Adaptive programming in practice: shared lessons from the DFID-funded LASER and SAVI programmes*.

<sup>2</sup> The programme was initially funded by the Department for International Development (DFID), which, during the course of SPRING, was merged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to form the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). For the purposes of this report FCDO will be used.

<sup>3</sup> See Tetra Tech's Summative Programme Performance Report March 2020, Section A.2.2

<sup>4</sup> The significant overachievement in this target is predominantly due to one business, Ubongo, whose TV show reached a total of 2,156,880 girls. However, even excluding Ubongo, SPRING surpassed its target by reaching 377,334 girls.

<sup>5</sup> Tetra Tech's Summative Programme Performance Report March 2020. This figure includes grant investment.

perspectives within and between the three parties. Relevant data from earlier SPRING reports and interviews were also consulted for further context.<sup>6</sup>

The two key challenges of this research were:

- 1) Changes in staff among all three parties which meant that some individuals who were once involved in the programme were not available for an interview; and
- 2) Issues with recall, as SPRING was a long, five-year programme, so while the most important information was retained, there were varying recollections of some information, particularly that pertaining to the early years of the programme.

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<sup>6</sup> Interviews were anonymised, and allocated reference numbers. The KIIs are referenced in footnotes according to their reference number.

## 2. What are the Three Perspectives?

### 2.1. Introduction

Each of the three sets of partners; the donors, the IP and the EP, had a unique role in the programme execution. Each brought with them unique skillsets, different institutional agendas, and expectations for the programme. These elements, amongst others, influenced the various partners' perspectives.

### 2.2. The Donors

FCDO, USAID and the Nike Foundation mandated and resourced SPRING to partner with businesses to address the economic empowerment constraints of adolescent girls in developing countries. Assisting girls to obtain economic assets was one of the key objectives in the original, pre-implementation design of SPRING and aligned with the broader USAID priorities of gender equality, female empowerment, and broad-based economic growth, for sustainable long-term development.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, economic empowerment of women and leveraging of private sector interests was a high priority for the FCDO. These objectives were pillars of FCDO's then Strategic Vision for Girls and Women.<sup>8</sup> This same vision spoke of the partnership between FCDO and the Nike Foundation in leveraging private sector involvement.

All donors were represented in the Donor Management Team, bringing a diversity of strengths. FCDO acted as the primary, coordinating donor for programme implementation and the contracting party with suppliers. USAID was the primary donor for the evaluation, but opted for FCDO to contract the EP. The Nike Foundation was a key player in the design of the programme, drawing on their experience in similar initiatives aimed at empowering adolescent girls, and funded the programme until their departure. Australian Aid then contributed financially to programme implementation.

While the key agency contacts with whom the programme interacted from USAID remained constant throughout implementation, there were three different Senior Responsible Owners (SROs) and programme managers involved from FCDO and several from Australian Aid over the course of their comparatively shorter-term involvement. The Nike Foundation representative remained the same throughout their programme participation.

### 2.3. The Implementing Partners

SPRING was implemented by a consortium between Palladium, a well-known private sector player in the international development field and Fuseproject, a San Francisco-based design and brand development firm and experts in Human Centred Design (HCD).

During Cohort 1, the core implementing group was based in Nairobi, with Country Managers in each of the focus countries. However, for the subsequent Cohorts 2, 3, and 4, the core implementing group was based in London with Country Managers in their respective countries. Regional Managers were added to the core team for Cohorts 3 and 4.

#### 2.3.1. Palladium

Palladium was the lead implementer and appointed core SPRING implementation staff, seconding some staff members for operational support. An office outside of the corporate headquarters was set up to house the core SPRING team and other consortium partners.

The core SPRING team were responsible for financial and contractual reporting to the donors, for operational and logistical support, and for collecting monitoring data. They also produced internal monitoring and evaluation guidance and tools to ensure consistent reporting. This included updating and reviewing the programme logframe and theory of change (ToC) after every cohort in collaboration with the EP.

SPRING supported businesses to develop their own key performance indicators (KPIs) such as sales revenue, profits, and girl beneficiaries; and work with each business to develop a business specific ToC, ensuring their understanding of intended girl impact. In collaboration with the EP, SPRING provided regular recommendations for programme adaptation to achieve the greatest impact on businesses, and ultimately, adolescent girls.

#### 2.3.2. Fuseproject

Fuseproject is an international design and brand development firm and experts in Human Centred Design (HCD), with headquarters in San Francisco. Fuseproject delivered SPRING's curriculum, using HCD as both a tool and a delivery

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<sup>7</sup> See Tetra Tech's Summative Programme Performance Report March 2020, Introduction

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, DFID, 2012, "DFID's Strategic Vision for Girls and Women: A move in the right direction?" <http://tiny.cc/7u2iuz>



methodology. HCD enables the design of products and services that meet customer's needs and wants<sup>9</sup>, increasing the businesses' understanding of their target market. The curriculum also analysed the businesses' constraints to ensure that their prototyped solutions were both viable and scalable. Fuseproject delivered the curriculum through a series of intensive, on site bootcamps, where they also provided business-bespoke branding and marketing support.

### 2.3.3. Additional expertise

In addition to Palladium and Fuseproject, the IP team comprised global thematic experts and professionals (e.g., legal, marketing, investment, gender advice) to support the businesses. Their involvement and commentary were central to the programme's success. While some of these individuals, including the Investment Director and Gender Advisor, had central roles in the programme, others, provided pro-bono or "low-bono" support, on an ad-hoc basis.

## 2.4. Evaluation Partner

Tetra Tech International Development (formerly Coffey) is the SPRING Evaluation Partner. They were responsible for conducting quality assurance checks on IP collected data and collected additional data from the businesses. They updated and reviewed the programme's logframe and ToC after every cohort in collaboration with the IP. As the learning and accountability partner, Tetra Tech is responsible for ensuring internal and external audiences learn what has and has not worked, and why, in promoting the wellbeing of adolescent girls. This learning is based on three core evaluation components undertaken by the EP:

- The Programme Performance Evaluation (PPE) which assessed the effectiveness of the programme, providing recommendations for programme adaptation between cohorts and summarised findings and lessons learned regarding programme design and delivery.
- The Business Performance Evaluation (BPE) which evaluated business performance (sales, investment readiness and number of girls reached), and how this changed due to SPRING participation. The BPE outlined lessons learned about what works and what doesn't for businesses to reach adolescent girls.
- The Impact Evaluation (IE) assessed the extent to which adolescent girls benefitted from SPRING business' products, services or income-generating opportunities. Two SPRING businesses were evaluated per cohort.

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<sup>9</sup> See Tetra Tech's Summative Programme Performance Report March 2020, Section A.2.2  
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## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Introduction

The findings from this research are based on the perspectives of the three SPRING partners: the donors, the IP and the EP. The first section reviews the aspects of the programme that worked less well, followed by findings on what worked well and enabled the programme's overall success in spite of its challenges.

### 3.2. What Were The Challenges?

#### 3.2.1. The overall purpose of SPRING remained constant, but there were differences about what this meant

SPRING's focus on empowering girls was consistent throughout the programme. However, there were differences amongst the donors and between implementing partners and donors about what this meant and how to achieve this objective. Some of the donors were more rigid in defining girl "empowerment", while others were flexible in how they saw the definition and how empowerment was delivered. Within the IP consortium there was also varied understanding of the programme's rationale, which ranged from SPRING being a business accelerator programme leading to girl empowerment, to an HCD programme empowering businesses to empower girls, to a girl impact programme<sup>10</sup>. This variety of understanding is illustrated in the quote below:

*"But I do think that there were changes in terms of where people felt the main focus of the programme was, so some people thought it was ultimately a development programme, which was to impact the lives of adolescent girls. Some people sort of accepted that as the overall impact, but really felt that it was actually about supporting businesses."<sup>11</sup>*

The lack of a unified vision or clarity of what was meant by girl empowerment and how to achieve it resulted in frequent differences of opinion for the selection of businesses, about methodologies for girl reach, and measurements of programme success. Against a background of a flexible, adaptive and responsive programme, these central aspects of the programme often had to be regularly restated and to some extent renegotiated between the parties during implementation.

#### 3.2.2. While empowering girls remained the central purpose of SPRING, the targeted girls changed

Conceptualisation of girls targeted by the programme and what was meant by "girl empowerment" changed during implementation to meet the programme's logframe targets. Initially, SPRING was designed to target Bottom of the Pyramid (BOP) girls<sup>12</sup>; However, these girls had limited economic power and influence and so were not a viable target market for businesses, making it difficult to reach them at scale. This impacted on the programme's ability to reach their contractual logframe targets.

*"[The] vehicle for SPRING is the business, you would always have to consider profitability. And I think that would be a constraint on reaching vulnerable girls."<sup>13</sup>*

As a result, the programme's focus was broadened from BOP to 'vulnerable' girls. After discussions, the programme did not try to explicitly define 'vulnerable', recognising that vulnerability may relate to a wide-ranging set of factors including socio-economic status, religious beliefs, and cultural environments. The lack of a fixed definition of 'vulnerable' girls led to frequent discussions about girl reach between the parties. The EP reflected that if they were to implement the programme again, they would have pushed harder for an agreed definition of 'vulnerable' girls, maintaining that this might have made the selection of businesses more explicit and in line with the original project purpose.

*"But I would have made them sit down and say you're not leaving this room until you give me the definition of vulnerable girls."<sup>14</sup>*

Additionally, the initial focus of the programme solely on economic empowerment of adolescent girls (earn and save) was broadened due to barriers impeding adolescent girls' entry and success into the workforce, and business' abilities to support these girls. In cohort 1, some businesses which placed girls in the value chain were selected. However, it became apparent that focusing on these kinds of businesses meant that the girl-reach targets set in the SPRING

<sup>10</sup> See SPRING Cohort 2 PPE Report, March 2018, Section 2.1.2

<sup>11</sup> Tetra Tech, KII094

<sup>12</sup> The exact measure of Bottom of the Pyramid (BOP) depends on the definition of absolute poverty, but many researchers use those living between \$1 and \$2 dollars a day as an approximate measure See Chien, S., & Ravallion, M. (2001). How did the world's poorest fare in the 1990s? *Review of Income and Wealth*, 47(3), 283-300.

<sup>13</sup> Tetra Tech, KII096

<sup>14</sup> Tetra Tech, KII094

logframe would not be achieved within the programme's lifespan. This was because including girls in the value chain was more effort intensive for the businesses and meant they could reach fewer girls. Moreover, the Nike Foundation had some concerns over their reputational risk linked to girls in the value chain, particularly in Myanmar. As such, focus shifted to businesses using prototypes that benefitted girls as end users, either as direct decision makers or beneficiaries. By cohort 2, empowerment themes extended beyond earn and save, to include wellbeing, learn, and stay safe. This broadening of empowerment added to the partners' debate regarding girl empowerment and whether this reach constituted 'empowerment'.

*"And I know that [in] Cohort 1, it was quite hard to [get girls in the value chain], though, it's really hard to give girls part time jobs...[The] programme did quite a big pivot in Cohort 2 onwards [by] reaching girls through [the] business model, so less about making girls economic (sic) active, and more about making girls learn, stay safe and stay healthy, or improving their like holistic wellbeing rather than specifically improving their economic empowerment..."<sup>15</sup>*

### 3.2.3. Differences between donors

As presented above, SPRING was a multi-donor programme, and while some differences between institutional partners are to be expected in any venture, some types of differences between SPRING donors were notable. Emphasis on programme evaluation, implementation and overall engagement differed between donors.

#### The risk appetite amongst donors differed

The sole private sector donor, Nike Foundation, was more risk averse than USAID and FCDO due to concerns over reputational risk. This was notably in the placing of girls within business value chains, and in particular, in working with businesses in South Asia. This was difficult to align with the adaptive and learning mandate of SPRING, which necessitated an appetite for risk:

*"The Foundation was the one partner who was a bit of an outlier...And there was also quite a defensive posture and that their main goal was to avoid anything that could challenge their reputation...So once they dropped out, I would say that probably the other three donors, as you would expect, had a more aligned sense of what this [programme] was here to do."<sup>16</sup>*

#### Donors had different expectations regarding implementation and evaluation

The donors had divergent evaluative lenses, which the EP found challenging and resulted in the need for a multi-dimensional evaluation to satisfy these different lines of enquiry. While USAID were focused on risk, girl impact and innovation, FCDO's focus tended towards learning and girl reach. USAID put more emphasis on learning from failure, echoing their higher appetite for risk, while FCDO as the contracting party needed to report on programme performance and attainment of targets. This explains the FCDO's focus on girl reach and lower appetite for risk.

*"[The donors were] interested in looking at the programme and the evaluation through different lenses. And of course, that kept us on our toes, because it meant that we weren't delivering an uni-dimensional evaluation, we needed to be able to answer the questions from different donor representatives."<sup>17</sup>*

The donors also had different areas of geographical focus. For instance, the Nike Foundation were concerned about implementing SPRING in Bangladesh because of labour-related issues in Bangladeshi factories. Australian Aid identified Myanmar as a target country for them, but this was not a priority country for USAID or FCDO. USAID had a preference for targeting West African countries, while FCDO favoured East Africa. Navigating these competing interests was a challenge for the IP, yet these competing interests in countries benefitted the programme in terms of the diversity included in the programme.

#### Differences in extent and depth of donor engagement

USAID specific personnel involvement in SPRING remained constant throughout programme implementation and evaluation, and there was relative consistency from FCDO with three individuals over the programme.<sup>18</sup> Australian Aid's involvement in SPRING, in contrast, was affected by internal organisational change, which meant that they had inconsistent and unclear expectations of the programme and ultimately, limited traction:

*"There was another challenge because DFAT used to be ... like FCO (sic) and Australian Aid. And they merged. And that happened while SPRING was happening, so for Australian Aid, SPRING kind of got*

<sup>15</sup> Tetra Tech, KII093

<sup>16</sup> Tetra Tech, KII086

<sup>17</sup> Tetra Tech, KII095

<sup>18</sup> Internal FCDO policies allow for personnel to cycle through programmes after a set number of years.

*bounced around a lot within various departments within Australian Aid for quite a long time, before finally finding a home. And it went through quite a few SROs.”<sup>19</sup>*

### 3.2.4. Differences between implementation partners

The consortium partners within SPRING were very different. Fuseproject is a commercial company based in San Francisco with a client list including global commercial giants. Palladium is an international aid company working with a long track record of working with donors in the development sector. As such, there were challenges balancing competing working styles and implementation approaches. While Palladium was used to the developmental agenda, Fuseproject was less familiar working with governmental donors and their requirements, and the margins for development projects versus those with corporate donors.

*“[Fuseproject] were very innovative, were quite keen to think of how to monetise the programme in a way that was like, good for development, but also like, [they were] not used to working with governments. So, the idea of ... you could just invest in this, you're - “No, that's not how it works, you know”, but it was always very exciting and interesting to hear what they wanted to do.”<sup>20</sup>*

Additionally, Palladium recruited experienced, independent experts in gender and impact investing to serve as resources in the SPRING executive. These independents, while instrumental in the programme's success, were highly vocal in their comments, criticisms and choices. At times, this strained the IP consortium's relationship and willingness to compromise.

### 3.2.5. Some role confusion between internal monitoring and evaluation providers

There was some early duplication of roles between the EP and the IP's internal monitoring team. This was partly because the EP was involved from inception and drafted the programme's first ToC. This was done before the IP's internal monitoring team was fully established. The internal monitoring team was fully operationalised shortly before Cohort 2 and this late engagement meant that their role had to be carved out while implementation was being done, and evaluation by the EP was ongoing. This resulted in some initial duplication of roles. However, it also benefitted the programme as it meant that the initial learnings and recommendations from the EP were taken on board:

*“But when we started feeding into the MEL team, that's when things I think they started seeing the value of us and really taking the sort of learnings and recommendations on board.”<sup>21</sup>*

Once the internal monitoring team was established, the IP and EP were supposed to share data and analysis to pivot and adapt the programme after every cohort, with the EP acting in the role of a “critical friend”. While some EP suggestions were applied, other EP feedback and recommendations were not taken on board by the IP, often without reasons provided. This feedback would have been useful for the EP to refine their future feedback, ensuring that suggestions and lessons were appropriate and targeted for the IP's needs.

*“But I don't think that they fully exploited the independent voice that they had at their disposal. They were already trying to adapt and iterate before they'd look to us for feedback...So when they did come to us for reflection, they took the ideas that would fit with their already gathered momentum, moving forward. But if some of our ideas, if the opportunity had passed for them, then they couldn't make use of them.”<sup>22</sup>*

### 3.2.6. Flexible and adaptive programming demanded flexible and adaptive evaluation methods

SPRING's flexible and adaptive programming demanded a flexible and adaptive evaluation approach. However, there was no opportunity for reflection and adjustment built into the evaluation timelines. Additionally, while the evaluation was expected to be both robust and adaptive, the EP were constrained in their ability to adapt their evaluation methodologies in line with changes to the programme, owing to their contractual deliverables, and the fact that impact assessments often have longer timeframes and rigid methodological requirements.

*“So, I think the expectation of the evaluators was somehow on the one hand to do a very rigorous and robust job, despite the tremendous amount of variability, but also to run alongside as you put it, the implementation team and observe what was going on...I think it was sometimes a bit challenging for the evaluation team, because [of] the standards they were being held to...”<sup>23</sup>*

The shortened timeframes of later cohorts, reduced from one year to nine months, also challenged the EP's ability to produce timely feedback that fed into the design of future cohorts. Due to the fast-moving nature of the programme,

<sup>19</sup> Tetra Tech, KII094, The merger between AusAID and DFAT happened in 2014, but the effects of it were still being felt when Australian Aid started funding SPRING

<sup>20</sup> Tetra Tech, KII091

<sup>21</sup> Tetra Tech, KII094

<sup>22</sup> Tetra Tech, KII095

<sup>23</sup> Tetra Tech, KII086

the ongoing interaction between the IP and the EP, and the limited time available for building in reflection on the programme and adjustment, the IP sometimes adapted and iterated prior to receiving official feedback from the EP. Although the EP provided informal feedback, the in-depth data analysis, report drafting, and signoff often took longer than the time available for iterations. This resulted in missed opportunities for the EP to officially feed into programme design and delivery iterations.

*“The evaluation changed over time, we had to adapt. So, one of the, I think, most obvious things is the shorter timeframes...is compressing the cohorts from one year to nine months. And so, we had to basically essentially do rapid evaluation. If we were going to have enough time from one cohort to feed into the next one. It felt like we were always running. It felt very, very, very fast and very, very busy.”<sup>24</sup>*

### 3.2.7. Limits to innovation

Despite SPRING being an innovative and adaptive programme, the donors' appetite for innovation and adaptation was limited. By Cohort 4, the programme's girl-reach logframe targets had been met, and the IP looked to provide greater support to a smaller number of businesses. However, contractual obligations prevented the donors from agreeing to the change. This curtailing of the level and type of innovation allowable to the IP, calls into question the donors' appetite for innovation and adaptation and whether they truly understand and are able to support adaptive programming.

### 3.2.8. Strong personalities and passion for the work

Within all three parties there were very strong personalities, all of whom expressed passion and commitment for the work. All parties brought this passion and their expertise to their roles, and all wanted their often-competing objectives to be heard and implemented. At times, this led to tensions within and between the parties. In particular, the IP comprised two very different organisations, as discussed in [Section 3.2.4](#), above. As a result, there were challenges over the programme's implementation strategy and design.

*“There were some very strong personalities in terms of the leadership in the consortium. And I think they had lots of differences of opinion that then led to sort of, you know, irreconcilable professional differences of opinion, which just makes it really hard to run a programme in all sorts of ways. There were absolutely disagreements in terms of programme strategy. Fuse was a completely different type of partner with different ideas about how to design and run an accelerator, and we were a development programme, which also is a very different way of doing things.”<sup>25</sup>*

This impacted relationships between IP partners, and between the IP and donors, and between the IP and the EP. For the donor, the IP's divergent interests were particularly difficult to manage during the programme extension. For the EP, Fuse's inexperience with independent evaluation made data collection with them challenging. Hindsight reflections suggest that this might have been avoided through specific, focused conversations, early in implementation.

*“[There should have been] a full conversation at the beginning saying, we're coming from different cultural perspectives, not only geographic but organisational, what are some of the things we need to bear in mind, how do we ensure that we are constantly checking in, this isn't something you just tick off at the beginning, this is something that is going to require ongoing work.”<sup>26</sup>*

## 3.3. What Worked Well

Despite these abovementioned challenges, the programme is largely considered a success. This is a result of five major success factors, outlined below.

### 3.3.1. Communication

Regular communication between all three parties was critical to the programme's success. There was a policy of ongoing communication between the IP, the EP, and the donors, and between the EP and IP, which meant that communication was not limited to contractual obligations, such as emails, reports and virtual meetings:

*“I think the frequency of communication was valuable. We were not restricted to a, you know, a once-a-year meeting with the donor. We had, not quite an open-door policy with the donors, but we had an open email policy, most of donors, we could reach out to them and ask them questions. In some cases, it was because of adaptations that needed to take place. But as a result of that, we built up a relationship.”<sup>27</sup>*

<sup>24</sup> Tetra Tech, KII094

<sup>25</sup> Tetra Tech, KII088

<sup>26</sup> Tetra Tech, KII089

<sup>27</sup> Tetra Tech, KII095

Furthermore, communication between the parties was not siloed; there was regular and ongoing, multilateral communication as well as two-way bilateral communication along the three axes of communication: donor-EP, Donor-IP, and IP-EP. There were no gatekeepers for these interactions and communications were fast and fluid:

*“The other thing that worked well, was the fact that, that we didn’t have a siloed relationship with the donor. In other words, we had opportunity to meet with a donor on our own. And we were able to report back to the donor as the evaluation partner. But there was also opportunity to meet the donor and the implementing partner together. So, we had these three-way meetings as well...”<sup>28</sup>*

### 3.3.2. Relationship building

Communication between the parties was further aided by the fact that there were established opportunities, such as bootcamps, where all stakeholders were brought together to participate in programme events. This helped to ensure that communication moved beyond traditional silos and provided the opportunity for open, multilateral communication, sense checking and understanding. Residential bootcamps also facilitated informal communication between parties and aided in the cementing of relationships between the three groups.

Building collaborative relationships and trust between the three parties was instrumental to the success of the evaluation, as it ensured that information was shared freely and honestly between all parties. This was particularly important given SPRING’s pressurised delivery timeframe. The IP provided the EP with ongoing access to their programme data and facilitated communications with their businesses. The EP respected the IP-business relationships and did not interfere but observed unobtrusively. Moreover, while maintaining independence, the EP always sought IP feedback and ‘grounding’ of their reports before submission to the donors. This open, two-way dialogue between EP and IP helped to build relationships of trust between the two parties.

*“Investing in building those trusting relationships was so important, both between Tetra Tech and Palladium...And also, you know, among the donors, I mean, because the more that we were able to establish that trust and just to be open and sharing information. I mean, yeah, the evaluation is only as good as the information that is shared, and provided, honestly, by the implementing partner, I think and the businesses.”<sup>29</sup>*

### Relationships within parties

The building of relationships within and between all three parties early on in the programme is identified as being one of the foundational aspects of SPRING’s success.

This is particularly true for the IP consortium who had strong differences of opinion regarding the programme’s focus, design and delivery, in addition to trying to build a cohesive programme across a diverse geographic and cultural spectrum. The East African and South Asian IP teams were brought together after Cohort 1 for a planning meeting in Dubai. The trust and collaborative relationships fostered through this process are credited in large part for the success of implementation despite the parties’ creative differences.

### 3.3.3. Collaborative decision making

Despite strong personalities, the above mentioned open communication and relationship building, coupled with a mutual respect for parties’ different roles, allowed for creative tension that ultimately benefitted the programme by bringing in diverse perspectives. Indeed, powerful opinions, if properly managed, are a valuable tool and should not be shied away from.

*“It was hard, we were a fractious family, we had fallings out, people were banished, there was blood on the floor, but we were all personally wounded and injured but the programme benefitted...All of that conflict and creative energy from very different zones of genius, I think was absolutely critical.”<sup>30</sup>*

Collaborative decision making in spite of creative tension was strongly tied to the recognition of delineation of responsibility and compromise that enabled an effective implementation process. Once a decision was made, all supported it regardless of their earlier views. Ultimately, all parties were hugely invested in the success of the programme. This personal commitment is seen in individuals within the IP leveraging personal connections to support SPRING and SPRING businesses.

Collaboration was further aided by the consistency of individuals in key positions. USAID’s staff remained the same throughout the programme, FCDO staff were engaged with the programme for lengthy periods, key implementers from Palladium were involved for core project implementation and the EP’s Team Leader has been involved since midway through Cohort 1:

<sup>28</sup> Tetra Tech, K11095

<sup>29</sup> Tetra Tech, K11086

<sup>30</sup> Tetra Tech, K11097

*“I think the fact that the individuals remained relatively constant, was incredibly valuable. And that means that we developed a personal relationship. In other longitudinal evaluations, your counterpart on the donor side, often changes. Whereas for us, our counterpart only really changed once with DFID [FCDO], and with USAID has remained constant. So, I think that was that was valuable.”<sup>31</sup>*

This also ensured that institutional knowledge was maintained and facilitated the onboarding of newcomers onto what was a very long, dynamic and complex programme.

#### 3.3.4. Donors' conducive contractual arrangement

Despite there being multiple donors on SPRING, the FCDO acted as the contracting party with all suppliers. This meant that the suppliers were meeting their contractual needs, such as reporting, reviews and financial year ends, on the same timeline, which greatly simplified the reporting and contractual processes. Had this not been the case, ensuring that suppliers met their contractual deliverables would have been a much more complicated and time-consuming process.

#### 3.3.5. Physical proximity

Physical proximity between the core IP and the EP, which are both located in London, aided the relationships between the two parties, as communication was not limited to scheduled obligations:

*“The fact that the implementing partners offices and our offices were relatively close together, I think also aided us to be able to take up opportunities of “can I just drop by and pick this up or chat to you about this” or something like that? So, I think that aided as well. So yeah, how would I describe the relationship, consistent regular communication, not just limited to the contractual [arrangements]”<sup>32</sup>*

The physical proximity between the IP, the EP, and FCDO was also reportedly helpful in maintaining a good relationship. USAID, while not physically close, was still able to meet virtually due to accommodating time zones. Contrary to this, a lack of physical proximity and time zones was a challenge for Australian Aid. They were unable to join meetings with the IP, EP, FCDO and USAID. As a result, Australian Aid had to put significant trust in their donor partners and relied on them to lead decision making in meetings.

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<sup>31</sup> Tetra Tech, KII095

<sup>32</sup> Tetra Tech, KII095

## 4. Lessons and Recommendations

Eight lessons and recommendations emerged from the findings presented above. They are presented in this section.

### **Lesson 1: Invest in building relationships early and on an ongoing basis.**

Relationship building strengthens the opportunity for programme success, but this needs to begin early on in a programme. It also needs to involve all parties to avoid siloed relationships. Similarly, communication in building these relationships needs to be honest and frank, recognising institutional and individual strengths and weaknesses.

Relationships are also not built only on formal communication and facilitated interaction, but evolve and develop, given informal opportunities (e.g., catch up meetings, coffee and chat, etc.). Allow for these opportunities throughout implementation. In the case of SPRING the building of relationships between all three parties early on in the process is identified as being one of the foundational aspects of the success of the SPRING programme. Additionally, ongoing relationships need to be regularly invested in, especially when there is staff turnover, which is to be expected on multi-year programmes, should be made an essential part of the onboarding process to ensure continued effective collaboration.

### **Lesson 2: Encourage (but manage) diverse opinions and thinking to benefit the programme.**

Diverse opinions, differences and disagreements are not necessarily to be avoided in building a strong programme. Providing opportunity for these views to be expressed and managed allows for a programme to explore alternatives. However, it is vital that these differences are professionally expressed, and that, on making a decision, the whole team agree to implement the agreed course of action.

### **Lesson 3: Programme integrity is central.**

Compromise, even in light of strong personalities, is essential for adaptive programmes with complex management structures. Despite varying interpretations of SPRING's purpose, all parties agreed on a course of action and worked towards it, as they were genuinely invested in the programme's integrity and success. Additionally, on adaptive programmes there needs to be a genuine commitment to learning among all parties. On SPRING, two-way sharing of internal and external data and reports by the IP and EP, with both parties sharing feedback on the reports before sign-off, enabled innovation and adaptability.

### **Lesson 4: Communication is key.**

Ongoing, frequent communication, both bilateral and multilateral between all parties, is central to fostering collaborative relationships and ultimately, programme success. Scheduling regular interactions, as well as enabling ad-hoc, open lines of communication is key. Multilateral interactions between all parties, while an investment if done in-person, are a major contributor of effective communication and collaborative relationships. At the very minimum this should be done once at the beginning of the programme, but ideally annually on a multi-year programme.

### **Lesson 5: Donors should decide how much adaptation and innovation is desired.**

While SPRING was an adaptive programme, there were limits to the level of innovation allowed by the donors. This called into question the donors' appetite for innovation and adaptation, and the extent to which they allowed the programme to be innovative. Thus, it is important for donors to understand, and clearly articulate what innovation and adaptation means to them – including whether this is to be reactive adaptation in the face of crisis, or proactive adaptation that seeks to increase programme impact throughout implementation. This is particularly true for multi-donor programmes, as a unified conceptualisation of what is meant by 'adaptive programming' will need to be reached.

### **Lesson 6: Donors must decide their priorities.**

Different donor priorities can add value to a programme by bringing in different perspectives. On SPRING, this resulted in new target countries being added. However, donors need to navigate their priorities, and coordination among donors - to ensure that everyone has a shared understanding of the programme's aims and expectations from inception- is useful. This is particularly true if there is high staff turnover overseeing the programme.

### **Lesson 7: Have a central donor contact point for programme reporting.**

In spite of multiple donors, SPRING IP and EP reporting was largely confined to one donor timeline. This allowed the programme to focus on its implementation and scheduling its contractual reporting obligations without competition. Reporting in multiple donor timeframes or using multiple reporting formats would have detracted from programme implementation.



**Lesson 8: Build in time for reflection and programme adjustment.**

For adaptive and innovative programmes, it is important to ensure that there is sufficient time allocated for programme reflection and adjustment not only for implementation but also for the evaluation. On SPRING, the pressurised implementation schedule, meant there were missed opportunities for the EP to add value to programme adaptation. Allocating dedicated time for programme reflection and adjustment will better ensure that learning, from both parties, is reflected in programme iterations.