

# **Strengthening The Asean Secretariat Project Management Framework (Phase I)**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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*The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, and not necessarily those of the ASEAN Secretariat and/or the Australian Government.*

## Executive Summary

### i. Background

The recommendations included in this report are the result of the diagnostic needs assessment of the ASEAN Secretariat's (ASEC's) project management framework (PMF) that was undertaken in Jakarta by the review team from 23 January to 24 February 2012. The purpose of the diagnostic needs assessment was to identify (ASEC's) existing program and project management framework and identify the performance gaps within the existing PMF.

During the diagnostic assessment phase the review team met with 93 stakeholders including ASEC senior management and staff, Committee for Permanent Representatives (CPR) staff, and dialogue partner representatives. The review team met with stakeholders individually and also through three focus group discussions with ASEC desk officers (DOs) and a focus group discussion with CPR staff.

The purpose of this Final Report is to identify recommendations that will eliminate or reduce the performance gaps identified in Annex 1 of this report. Implementing the recommendations will drive the overall recommended design of an enhanced ASEC PMF that is schematically presented in Annex 2 of this report. As ASEC weighs the advantages and considerable dedication (and resources) that will be required to implement and sustain the recommendations included in this report, it also needs to decide exactly what it wants to achieve. Should it merely remain an organisation that is process-driven or should it make the effort to be an organisation that acknowledges that positive results are as important as how things are done?

It is obvious to the review team that ASEC, and all key PMF stakeholders, want ASEC's PMF to eventually be the kind of system that other organisations use to compare and benchmark how they want their project management frameworks to operate. Stakeholder needs and expectations will have to be realistic – all stakeholders including ASEC need to understand and accept that developing a well-functioning project management framework is an evolving process that will likely take years to achieve.

### **Key issues affecting the relationship between the existing PMF and actual ASEC project management practice**

- There is no one ASEC division that is responsible for enforcing existing PMF rules and guidelines like the importance of meeting deadlines.
- Established processes and procedures are used on an *ad-hoc* basis and their effectiveness is highly dependent on the competency and diligence of individual managers and officers.
- A performance gap is defined as a PMF process, procedure or component that is currently hindering ASEC from efficiently and effectively implementing its overall PMF. The gaps have been used to drive the recommendations in this Final Report and to address the following key issues that were identified during the diagnostic assessment phase of the assignment:

Consistency (standardised tools, templates and reporting formats) and transparency are not built into ASEC's current PMF. Manuals have been produced in the past but some of them are outdated and a more recent manual have not been endorsed by ASEC.

- ASEC technical divisions are not encouraged to share innovative or constructive ideas with colleagues that could help reduce redundant activities and make ASEC's PMF more efficient and effective.
- The current main PMF processes have too many checks and balances – it is process-driven and embeds inefficient practices simply because they are part of the way things have been done at ASEC for the past several years.
- Accurate information about projects is not maintained in a properly functioning electronic database.
- ASEC does not prepare a human resource development plan which means any PMF training provided by dialogue partners is not aligned with a centrally conceived and approved capacity development strategy. Dialogue partners, over several years, may duplicate training initiatives and the impact of training is not measured and used to identify new training needs.

### **Key recommendations**

Section 4 of this report discusses the assignment's recommendations. Discussions with the project's Internal Working Group (IWG) culminated in an agreement to stage the recommendations according to the review team's assessment of the priority for implementing the recommendations.

The overarching recommendation resulting from the assignment is the need for a strong level of commitment from senior management and CPR to reform ASEC's project management framework. Senior management and CPR will have to be the drivers of change. They will have to agree which recommendations should be implemented, and they will have to adequately resource

Neglecting to do this could result, as with earlier reform efforts, in recommendations only being partially implemented or not implemented at all.

Two key recommendations that should immediately be considered for implementation are as follows:

- ASEC should enhance the way it monitors and evaluates projects; and
- SPCD should be granted the mandate to monitor all PMF components and enforce PMF project guidelines, rules or instructions.

Agreeing and implementing the two key recommendations as soon as possible will send a signal to all PMF stakeholders that senior management and CPR are serious about serving as drivers of change by making PMF more efficient and effective. Moreover, successfully implementing the two key recommendations will provide realistic or measurable reform indicators. It will also lay the foundation to agreeing and implementing the remaining recommendations.

The recommendations in this report are categorized into three stages. Stage I recommendations should be considered and implemented immediately to ensure the long term sustainability of ASEC's enhanced project management framework. The recommendations in Stage I relate to the key project management framework issues that discussed above.

Stage II recommendations, while also important to any new project management framework, can be considered over the medium-term. Stage III recommendations refer to longer-term HR and database issues which may take some time to agree, especially taking into account the resources and funding required to implement these recommendations.