

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COMPLETION REPORT

Division: ERDI

TA No. and Name RETA 5917: Building a Poverty Database			Amount Approved: US\$600,000		
			Revised Amount:		
Executing Agency: Development Indicators and Policy Research Division (ERDI)		Source of Funding: TASF	TA Amount Undisbursed US\$129,096.02	TA Amount Utilized US\$470,903.98	
			Completion Date		
Approval 25 May 2000	Signing -	Date 23 May 2001	Fielding of Consultants	Original 30 April 2001	Actual September 2004
			Closing Date		
			Original 30 April 2001	Actual 10 November 2004	
Description					
<p>The shift of ADB's focus to poverty reduction in 1999 necessitated expanded data collection, particularly on poverty related indicators, to monitor poverty in the region as reflected in ADB's statistical data collection and capacity-building programs. RETA 5917 was implemented to enhance ADB's poverty monitoring capacity through a well-structured database system. Initially, the RETA intended to cover 15 Developing Member Countries (DMCs) selected on the basis of the following: (i) magnitude and depth of poverty, (ii) relative size of ADB's assistance program, and (iii) availability of statistics or supporting primary data. Three other DMCs affected by the Asian financial crisis were later included in the RETA.¹ While the intention was to cover only 15 DMCs, in its final stage the RETA produced poverty related indicators of 42 DMCs.</p>					
Objectives and Scope					
<p>The RETA supports ADB's commitment to strengthen its statistical database on poverty. The specific objective is to build a poverty database system in ADB, based on available data from ADB's poverty assessment activities in the DMCs and from other international organizations. The database will be organized as a computerized system that ADB staff can easily access. It will enable users to better analyze the poverty situation in the DMCs and make necessary program planning.</p>					
Evaluation of Inputs					
<p>In implementing the RETA, ERDI worked closely with other divisions. It collaborated with the Poverty Reduction Unit (now Poverty Reduction and Social Development Division, RSPR), in identifying poverty related indicators and with the Office of the Information Systems and Technology (OIST) in developing the poverty database. The RETA engaged the services of an international consultant for eight person-months, domestic consultants and administrative assistants for 55.3 person-months, and a consulting firm for 9 months. In addition 12 country participants from national statistics offices participated. The domestic consultants and country participants collected data and metadata, and at the same time ensured that only the most reliable and up-to-date data were provided to ADB.</p>					
<p>The RETA was designed appropriately. The consultants' terms of reference were well formulated and specific. ERDI developed a template on how countries can provide data inputs to ADB. The inputs included poverty related indicators, concepts and definitions of the indicators, and a list of surveys and studies related to poverty. The template is most useful for delivering the required information to ADB. The domestic consultants and country participants provided most of the data for 18 countries. ERDI collated the data for the other 24 countries from various sources. With ERDI's close supervision and OIST's cooperation, the consulting firm developed the poverty database. ERDI and OIST further improved the database, particularly the data entry module and its user-friendliness. OIST provided significant contribution in developing and improving the poverty database. Other divisions in ADB (e.g. RSPR) actively participated in identifying poverty-related indicators. Three workshops (inception, review and concluding) and two missions provided valuable inputs to the RETA.</p>					

¹ Originally the RETA was meant to cover 15 ADB Developing Member Countries (Bangladesh, People's Republic of China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam). Three crisis-affected countries, namely Korea, Malaysia, and Thailand were added to the RETA.

Evaluation of Outputs

The individual consultants, consulting firm, and country participants worked satisfactorily. The consultants and country participants submitted well-written final reports and country reports.

The RETA major outputs include (i) the Poverty and Development Indicators Database and (ii) papers and monograph. The database enables a comprehensive understanding of poverty in each DMC, poverty comparison across DMCs and the estimation of region-wide poverty indicators. The RETA enabled the country participants to increase their knowledge and understanding on various aspects of poverty measurement and poverty-related indicators.

The database was launched for ADB staff in May 2004 and is now operational. It now has data for 42 ADB DMCs and covers 121 indicators. Unlike other (similar) databases developed by other international organizations, the poverty database presents statistical data from multiple sources (national and international), thereby giving the user a range of estimates and supplementary information. It also contains metadata on concepts, definitions, sources and methods, description of the construction of poverty lines in 19 DMCs, and a reference list of poverty studies. The metadata will contribute to a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the country data. Further data updating, cleaning and system improvement are in process.

The database has been used as one of the main data sources of ADB publications, such as *Basic Statistics 2004 and Key Indicators 2004* and the data source of ADB internal users, e.g. for supplying the information to Strategy and Policy Division for ADF IX meeting. A monograph for internal use, covering poverty estimates and country poverty line descriptions, and one work-in progress paper on aid and poverty have used indicators from the database. Five working papers on poverty (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Philippines) were published as ADB working papers. Due to staff transfer and the expansion of the RETA coverage to include 42 DMCs, instead of 15 DMCs, the RETA took longer time to complete.

Overall Assessment and Rating

The RETA accomplished its major objectives: (i) producing a web-enabled, comprehensive, and user-friendly poverty database containing 121 indicators for 42 DMCs; (ii) allowing the comparison across DMCs and the estimation of region-wide poverty indicators; and (iii) producing one monograph, one research paper, and five country papers. Given the usefulness of the RETA outputs, it is rated as successful.

Major Lessons Learned

A major lesson learned from the RETA is the importance of the country participants' commitment to deliver the required inputs to ADB. This commitment was developed through their understanding of the usefulness of the information to both ADB and the participating countries. Another lesson is ERDI needs to closely cooperate with OIST in developing the database as long-term support from OIST will be required to maintain and upgrade the database. In developing the database, close and frequent communications and interactions with the consulting firm were required and essential. As the consulting firm was stationed overseas, it was difficult and expensive to supervise its work. The RETA also pointed out that caution should be taken when analyzing region-wide poverty based on national poverty indicators since the figures across DMCs are not strictly comparable. Likewise, social indicators in the DMCs, a major component of the poverty data base, are not as developed as economic indicators as most of these are derived from administrative reporting systems.

Recommendations and Follow-Up Actions

The database has been found very useful as one of the data sources to support ADB activities. Further refinements will make it more user-friendly, such as enabling access to data presented as charts, graphs, diagrams, and multi-dimensional tables. The database could also be developed into a CD-ROM version and distributed to the DMCs' statistical offices for use and for updating the country information.