

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COMPLETION REPORT

Division: ECSS

TA No. and Name TA No 5946-REG: Subregional Cooperation in Managing Education Reforms				Amount Approved: \$750,000			
				Revised Amount: n/a			
Executing Agency: Asian Development Bank (ADB)		Source of Funding: Japan Special Fund (JSF)		TA Amount Undisbursed \$238,423		TA Amount Utilized \$511,577 ¹	
Date		Completion Date		Closing Date			
Approval 20 October 2000		Signing n/a		Original 31 May 2002		Actual 31 October 2002	
Fielding of consultants 15 June 2001				Original 31 August 2002		Actual (Expected May 2004)	
Description							
Reforming education to enhance its relevance to new political and economic environments has been a priority of the Central Asian Republics (CARs) since they gained independence in 1991. ADB has been the main development partner supporting education reforms in the CARs, both in terms of volume of investment and policy advice. The TA was formulated to facilitate the exchange of reform experiences between six developing member countries (DMCs) of the ADB (Azerbaijan, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), while capitalizing on the comparative advantage of the ADB for fostering cooperation in the education sphere at the subregional level.							
Objectives and Scope							
Specific objectives of the TA included (i) identifying best practices in planning and implementing education reforms in countries in transition, (ii) promoting civil society participation in reform management, (iii) facilitating high-level policy dialogue between national decision-makers and their external partners, and (iv) identifying areas and programs for fostering cooperation at the subregional level. The TA scope comprised (i) the preparation of country studies on education reform management in each participating DMC by selected national institutions, (ii) two subregional technical workshops, (iii) a national policy seminar in each DMC, (iv) a final subregional policy conference, and (v) publication and dissemination of TA findings.							
Evaluation of Inputs							
The principal inputs included 10 person-months (pm) for international consultants, 6 pm for a research assistant position, budget provision for subcontracting national institutions for the purpose of undertaking the county studies, training and seminar expenses. The originally planned inputs were generally adequate to achieve the project outcomes and objectives.							
Changes in scope and implementation arrangements . At the initiative of the consultant, a virtual dissemination network, consisting essentially of a web site development, was added to the original scope of work at no extra-cost. One contract variation was processed to reflect minor adjustments in the personnel schedule, including supplementary workdays for the international consultant / team leader for document editing.							
Implementation schedule . The implementation of the TA activities up to the submission of the final report was completed slightly behind schedule given the organizational complexity of the TA and the need to go through several rounds of translation and editing to obtain documents of an acceptable quality. The final conference was held four months later than scheduled in the original workplan. The TA closing date has been extended to permit revision and editing of documents to the standard required of an ADB publication.							
Person-months inputs . The original allocation of 10 pm for international consultants did not include work for developing web-site specific content and may have been slightly underestimated in view of the duration of mission travel to Central Asia.							
Training and seminars . The two subregional technical workshops and the national policy seminars held in each participating DMC were well-attended and effective in enhancing analytical skills of national experts involved in the TA, and increasing participants' familiarity with reform experiences in transition economies.							
Final policy conference . The conference, organized in Bishek on 16-17 October 2002, was considered successful by participants (including about 80 representatives of the six DMCs, civil society bodies, and international agencies) and has proven particularly instrumental in developing prospects for other subregional cooperation initiatives. In particular, the conference directly resulted in the preliminary design of a joint ADB-Open Society Institute (OSI) initiative aimed at establishing the Central Asia Education Cooperation Network (CA -ECN), supported under a regional TA ² .							
Performance of consultants . Reports were delivered on time and their contents and scope were usually in accordance with the terms of reference. The consulting firm was effective in providing organizational and administrative backstopping to its subcontractors and consultants. However, its capacity to provide thorough technical support and to monitor the quality of outputs was inadequate. Overall, the performance of international consultants as a team is considered partly satisfactory with respect to their level of technical support provided to national institutions, and their contribution to the preparation of papers and presentations for the subregional workshops and the final policy conference. The quality of the research work carried out by national institutions, differed from country to country, reflecting their varying levels of familiarity with new concepts and ideas as well as their ability and readiness to express views that could appear critical of Government policies.							
Review missions . ADB fielded four review missions to participate in the inception and subregional workshops and in the final policy conference, which was appropriate for the supervision for the TA. ADB staff time devoted the preparation of papers, presentations and other background documents for the final policy conference was much higher than anticipated.							

¹ Pending payment of the final claim of the consultant and editing contract. Total commitments amount to \$740,100.

² TA No 6124-REG approved on 6 October 2003 in an amount of \$200,000 with OSI co-financing estimated at \$200,000. The main function of the CA -ECN is to share educational resources relevant to ongoing reform efforts (statistics, research, legislation, curricula, instructional materials, etc.) and to stimulate cooperation cross-border initiatives between network members.

Evaluation of Outputs

Country case studies and synthesis papers. Overall, the initial quality of the country case studies did not fully meet expectations. The multi-disciplinary approach was difficult to implement, in part because national experts were still insufficiently familiar with research methods and concepts. Comparability across countries of information generated by national institutions was another constraint. Nevertheless, the country studies provided significant insight into the socio-political factors driving national reforms. They remain the most recent and accurate source of information on post-independence education reforms in the CARs. To address the uneven quality of country studies, four synthesis issues papers on (i) access, (ii) quality, (iii) finance, and (iv) governance were prepared for presentation at the final policy conference. The issues papers were considered very helpful in extracting the findings of the case studies, comparing country experiences in particular reform areas, and identifying best practices.

Identification of best practices. The participatory process of country study preparation and discussion that involved both Government officials and independent experts stimulated frank assessments and exchanges of opinions about reform experiences. Most informative were the identification of lessons derived from country experiences in decentralization, rationalization, cost-sharing, legislation, and privatization in the education sector.

Web-site and virtual dissemination. The TA web site was effectively maintained until June 2003; most of its contents will remain accessible through the web site to be developed in the framework the CA-ECN. The web site has proven a useful tool for disseminating information on the TA, accessing documents, and facilitating communication between the project partners. It did not emerge, however, as a forum for exchanging opinions and experiences, primarily because of lack of staff time and resources for facilitating a discussion forum.

Publications and dissemination of TA findings. TA findings were disseminated through a publication in a book on education reforms in Central Asia³ and presentations in major education conferences including the 2003 Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society. Other manuscripts based on TA materials are being reviewed by specialized journals. An ADB book containing the abridged versions of the country studies is expected to be published in March 2004.

Further subregional cooperation initiatives. The TA activities contributed to a better understanding among participating officials of the benefits of cooperation in the education sector and directly led to the development of further subregional initiatives. As a result of the TA, the partnership between ADB and OSI in support of subregional cooperation in education was strengthened and formalized through the CA-ECN (see footnote 2). Another regional TA is being processed to strengthen cooperation in curriculum modernization and examination systems, identified by the TA among key cross-country concerns.

Overall Assessment and Rating

The TA is rated as successful. Despite partly satisfactory performance of consultants and initial over-estimation of domestic analytic capacities, the TA was eventually effective in (i) providing insight on constraints and opportunities in reforming education, thereby assisting in better focusing strategies for ADB and other donors' support to education in the CARs, (ii) disseminating best practices and experiences on particular sector reform areas, (iii) giving an impetus, at the subregional level, for education cooperation. Through its participatory approach and as a result of its findings, the TA contributed to develop awareness among national decision-makers of the benefits of opening education reform processes to civil society. The TA was also useful to develop sector consultations between ADB and other key agencies (OSI, World Bank, and European Training Foundation).

Major Lessons Learned

The economic and social benefits of improved policy coordination and cooperation in the education sector are considerable. ADB, because of its accumulated experience in the education sector and visibility in the CARs can play a critical role in fostering subregional cooperation. To this end, a long-term commitment is required, involving funding of 'visible' cross-border projects as well as facilitation of policy dialogue at the subregional and regional levels. Civil society bodies, including national and international NGOs, universities, think tanks, and research centers, are a critical driving force of subregional cooperation that should be better integrated into new initiatives. Subregional policy-oriented research work carried out by operational departments can effectively strengthen ADB's visibility, especially vis a vis the academic community, international NGOs, and other development institutions. To maximize the benefits of such work, however, adequate staff time must be made available for subsequent dissemination tasks (writing / review of papers, liaison with editors, and publishers, presentations at conferences, etc.). While the TA was able to initiate a process of subregional cooperation outside the ADB formal subregional strategy (and therefore without the resources and the platform provided by the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program), such a 'parallel' process had significant resource implications, in particular in terms of staff time..

Recommendations and Follow-Up Actions

Direct follow-up activities include (i) finalization of the ADB publication, (ii) implementation of the CA-ECN jointly with the OSI, and (iii) preparation of the regional TA on curriculum modernization and examination systems. To facilitate access to high-level government decision makers and to provide platform to effectively disseminate information on issues of common concern to the CARs, the education sector could be more closely associated with the Subregional Cooperation Strategy and Program for the Central Asia Region, along the lines of strategic directions proposed by the TA, particularly with respect to civil society participation and public-private partnership.

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³ In Stephen P. Heyneman and Alan J. DeYoung (Eds.), *Challenges for Education in Central Asia*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing. Forthcoming, 2003.