Tajikistan: Education Sector Reform Project
ABBREVIATIONS

ADB – Asian Development Bank
EMIS – education management information system
ESRP – Education Sector Reform Project
GDP – gross domestic product
JFPR – Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction
MOE – Ministry of Education
NEDF – national education development framework
NSED – National Strategy for Education Development
PCR – project completion report
PMU – project management unit
PTA – parent–teacher association
TA – technical assistance

NOTE

In this report, “$” refers to US dollars.

Key Words

asian development bank, education, management information system, primary school, reform, school rehabilitation, sector, tajikistan, technical assistance, validation

The guidelines formally adopted by the Independent Evaluation Department (IED) on avoiding conflict of interest in its independent evaluations were observed in the preparation of this report. To the knowledge of IED management, there were no conflicts of interest of the persons preparing, reviewing, or approving this report.

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I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A. Rationale

1. Tajikistan’s education system was under significant pressure following (i) independence from the former Soviet Union and the consequent cessation of large subsidies, (ii) prolonged civil strife that caused physical damage to an estimated 20% of the school facilities, and (iii) sharply reduced financing to education resulting from an overall downturn in the economy. Per capita gross domestic product (GDP) declined to only $162 in 2001. The government was committed to reverse the trend with increasing support from several external funding agencies. There was an urgent need to institutionalize systemic reforms to make primary and general secondary education more affordable, efficient, relevant, and equitable within a coherent and affordable national education development framework (NEDF). The Asian Development Bank (ADB) earlier provided emergency-type physical reconstruction under a social sector rehabilitation project and undertook to reform education through a well-informed and participatory process. The Education Sector Reform Project (ESRP) combined top–down and bottom–up approaches in close collaboration with other development partners under the leadership of the Ministry of Education (MOE) to systematically address urgent reform priorities as part of the NEDF.
B. Expected Impact

2. The ESRP was expected to support the government’s reform priorities in primary (grades 1–4) and general secondary education (grades 5–11). The ESRP was to support the MOE at the national level by strengthening the education management information system (EMIS) to improve MOE’s capacity for planning, budgeting, and decision making. Management training programs were to benefit 10 MOE managers, 15 regional managers, 30 district managers, and 300 school managers; and contribute to strengthening management capacity at all levels. At the district level, about 50% of the 300 schools in pilot districts were to benefit from physical improvement and from school improvement funds to improve equitable access to better-quality primary and general secondary education. More than 6,000 teachers in pilot districts were to benefit from in-service training in modern teaching methods. About 90,000 schoolchildren in grades 1–11 were expected to have access to better-quality education. Schools in pilot districts were to benefit from more effective school governance, including formation of an effective support from parent-teacher associations (PTAs).

C. Objectives or Expected Outcomes

3. The main objective of the ESRP was to support the MOE in developing and initiating a prioritized NEDF with cost plan to achieve the outcomes of improved efficiency, equity, and quality of primary and general secondary education. The ESRP emphasized system efficiency and management improvement as a requirement throughout the education system to make education more affordable and sustainable. The ESRP sought to strengthen policy and planning capacity, encompassing key aspects of management efficiency—pedagogical renewal, financial management, and management reorganization. Improved efficiency in these systemic elements was expected to support enhanced access, completion, and improved quality of education.

4. The ESRP was to support the MOE at the national level to manage education reform; it supported five pilot districts for school improvement. The ESRP was expected to have a direct positive impact on Tajikistan’s poverty reduction strategy by improving equitable access to and completion of better-quality primary and general secondary education, and by improving gender balance in school participation in the five pilot districts.

D. Components and Outputs

5. The ESRP comprised the following three components: (i) education system efficiency and management with subcomponents of policy and planning, information system and monitoring and evaluation system, and management development; (ii) equitable access and completion of education with subcomponents of school mapping and school rehabilitation; and (iii) education quality improvement with subcomponents of teacher training, curriculum development, and teaching materials development.

E. Provision of Inputs

6. The estimated project cost at appraisal was $9.38 million, of which $4.18 million (45%) was the foreign exchange cost and $5.19 million (55%) was the local currency cost. ADB was to finance 80% of the total project cost. The Government of Tajikistan requested ADB to mobilize cofinancing in the form of grants from other development partners to substitute for the loan

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These were Roshkala in Gorno Badakshan Region, Aini and Gorny in Sughd, Garm in Region of Republic Subordinate, and Kulyab in Khaion Region. All selected districts were mountainous areas.
allocations for training, consultancy services, and project management. The school improvement component of the project was supported by a JFPR project in education sector.\(^2\)

F. Implementation Arrangements

7. The Office of the President of Tajikistan was the executing agency. The implementing agency was the MOE. The MOE, along with its five pilot district departments of education, was responsible for the day-to-day planning, management, and implementation of project activities in the field.

8. According to the project completion report (PCR), during the pre-inception mission in April 2004, ADB approved the government’s recommendation to separate the project administration unit of the ESRP and the Health Sector Reform Project for more effective functioning. Each of the five pilot districts also established their own subproject administration unit comprising two staff members. An international consultant was engaged to assist the project management unit (PMU) in project management and civil works procurement for 6 months, which was less than the original plan at appraisal of 20 months. The Office of the President, as the executing agency, felt that the consultant was not able to transfer core skills in project planning, management, and monitoring to the project staff and decided not to retain his services. The revised arrangements were adequate, but the high turnover of staff, especially the chief accountant, meant that financial records were not properly managed, resulting in a 1-year delay in the loan closing date.

G. Technical Assistance

9. The project was assisted by one stand-alone technical assistance (TA) grant\(^3\) and one attached TA grant.\(^4\) The stand-alone TA focused on strengthening education planning and financial management whereas the piggybacked TA for Strengthening Planning and Policy Dialogue for Education Reform provided links between project design and implementation, and also impetus for building EMIS for informed policy dialogue, decision making, and monitoring. The education reform TA was designed to serve as a central policy tool to improve MOE’s annual planning, budgeting, and overall decision making to address key policy priorities. In its completion report dated 31 August 2009, the TA project was assessed successful. The completion report for the other TA project has yet to be undertaken.

II. EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE AND RATINGS

A. Relevance of Design and Formulation

10. The PCR\(^5\) assessed the project as highly relevant at appraisal and stated that it continued to be so. The PCR reported that the project was highly relevant at appraisal and remained so during and after implementation. The project was designed within the framework of the government’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and also in line with the poverty partnership agreement signed in December 2002 between the Government of Tajikistan and

\(^2\) ADB. 2003. *Proposed Grant Assistance to Tajikistan for the School Improvement Project*. Manila (JFPR 9040-TAJ). The JFPR implementation completion memorandum has not been prepared so far.


ADB. These service delivery improvements were to be coupled with the rationalization of expenditures to ensure equitable access in these sectors. It was also agreed that the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All goals would be the basis for monitoring project performance. Within this broad strategic context, details of the project components were identified following a thorough sector analysis and consultation with key stakeholders. The project design was thus fully consistent with and supportive of the government’s development priorities and strategies in the education sector, including the National Strategy for Education Development (NSED), 2006–2015.

11. This validation concurs that the project was consistent with the government’s development plans, ADB country operation strategy, and sector policies at appraisal and continues to be so. However, the PCR did not adequately assess the other important sub-criterion for assessing relevance—adequacy of project designs that covers an assessment of the quality at entry issues at the time of appraisal and any significant changes. The project as implemented, achieved some of its designed outputs but some important components like education policy, organization reforms, and the EMIS could not be developed to their full potential largely because of the project design and implementation that focused excessively on individual outputs instead of on the education system as a whole.

12. Project design is considered to have been weak in generating an integrated and cohesive education perspective, lacking cohesion among the activities of different institutions and funding agencies. The project could not retain and pursue the NEDF, which got replaced by NSED, 2006–2015. The original project implementation design of having a common PMU with a parallel health project was found to be infeasible and the implementation arrangements had to be disentangled from the health project. The PCR sidesteps some of these limitations that have been repeatedly cited in different project documents. For these reasons, this validation does not agree with the PCR’s assessment of this project being highly relevant but instead rates the project relevant.

B. Effectiveness in Achieving Outcomes and Outputs

13. The PCR rated the project effective as it achieved its intended outcomes and outputs. It also reported that the project’s intended outcomes—improved efficiency, equity, and quality of primary and general secondary education—have been generally well achieved. For example, the rehabilitation of selected schools was satisfactorily completed. Similarly, the supply of furniture and equipment was achieved satisfactorily. Although increases in enrollment were not as high as the unrealistic expectation of 10%–0 e, the rate of 6.4% increase were much higher than the national average of 2.1%, and completion of the schooling cycle among girls improved significantly. As stated in the PCR, total enrollment among girls—specifically for grades 10 and 11—as a proportion of the national gross enrollment rate for girls, increased by 18% during 2004–2005 and 2008–2009. In the pilot districts, this increased by 51%, which was also much higher than the targeted increase of 10%–25%. The development of curriculum and production of teaching and learning materials were carried out satisfactorily, although in only two predetermined subjects. The project was successful in engendering effective community participation through PTAs, which was supported under the JFPR project.

14. The PCR in its summary pointed out that the required outputs have been achieved for each of the project subcomponents.

15. **Policy and planning.** In some sense, this was the most important aspect of the project in terms of its relevance. However, it did not fare well; the PCR that assessed this
subcomponent noted that it was partly achieved. The ESRP was expected to establish the NEDF, which would have guided the medium- to long-term development of education in Tajikistan. However, the ESRP was slow in starting up. It did not seize the initiative, and the government, along with donors ended up replacing it by another variant called NSED, 2006–2015. Project documents suggest that the NSED did not succeed in providing coherence to the overall education policy of the country. Institutionalization of education policy reforms and planning has, thus, fallen short of the ESRP objectives.

16. **Information system and monitoring and evaluation system.** Despite the attention to the design and implementation of the EMIS, the achievements fell short of expectations. Many intermediate outputs were generated, such as a conceptual framework of EMIS and hard copy outputs of EMIS. Other donors also joined in the effort to produce or to make the system work.\(^6\) However, a full-fledged and computer-based functioning EMIS that could be used in decision making, monitoring and evaluation, and assessing of outcomes did not fully materialize and was still eluding the education system of Tajikistan till 2009. It is now being developed with the support of the World Bank.

17. **Management development.** This component focused on providing training to 355 managers using 14 training modules. Of the targeted 355 managers, only 325 managers completed the training. The training was well received and trainees expressed their satisfaction through feedback. It is not known whether this one-time training was adequate to bring about a perceptible change in the management practices of educational institutions in Tajikistan, especially with the absence of financial incentives to the training personnel, and the inadequate resources for the education system as a whole.

18. **School mapping.** The ESRP laid the foundation for surveying the schools in the five focal districts, and in identifying 76 schools for physical rehabilitation. Two sets of indices were used (poverty index and rehabilitation index) to prioritize support to such identified schools. School mapping output in the form of a printed report also served as an input to the related project, Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR), and for identifying variables for the EMIS. However, the exercise did not result in the rationalization of the schools in Tajikistan, which school mapping should have targeted to render the Tajikistan education system affordable.

19. **School rehabilitation.** Of the 76 schools that were rehabilitated, 50 were generally upgraded while the 26 were provided new classrooms. Rehabilitated premises also included two schools that were damaged by earthquake. New classrooms augmented the capacity of the rehabilitated schools by about 4 thousand seats (16%). Furniture and equipment, including computers, science laboratories, and generators were provided to the rehabilitated schools. Except for six schools in Roshkala district, the program was accomplished satisfactorily and on time. This subcomponent overlapped with the JFPR support.

20. **School improvement.** Under the JFPR project, schools were provided grants to upgrade their facilities including setting up PTAs and developing school improvement plans. The JFPR project covered minor repairs, teaching aids, basic equipment, school attendance and retention schemes, and school-managed livelihood projects. A total of 226 grant proposals for school improvements at a cost of $1.08 million were approved and implemented.

21. **Community mobilization.** This activity was also undertaken under the JFPR and encouraged the participation of the communities in supporting schools and their operations with

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\(^6\) The World Bank provided hardware and software for setting up the EMIS.
the help of PTAs (237 PTAs were established out of the total 294 schools). Such participation succeeded in bringing about a positive attitudinal change in parents toward getting involved in the education of their children and in the affairs of their children’s schools. It also led to increased contribution from the communities in the running and maintenance of schools.

22. **Teacher training.** As a part of nonmonetary pedagogical reforms, a district action plan for teacher training was developed and implemented using a cascade model. All 6,000 teachers received in-service training in primary school class teaching, mathematics, informatics, chemistry, biology, geography, history, law, and technology, as well as Tajik, Russian, and foreign languages. Training was well conducted and the trainees’ feedback was positive.

23. **Curriculum development.** Curriculum in two selected subjects (physics and Tajik language) was revised and developed for grades 5–11. The revised curriculum was tested and further revised according to the findings of the trial run. These have been approved by the MOE and are now used nationally. However, no master plan was developed to undertake further curricular improvements whether in these subjects or in others.

24. **Teaching and learning material development.** This process underpinned the curriculum development and was focused on two selected subjects. It sought to formulate a strategy for developing textbooks, including a competitive scheme for selecting new textbooks/materials. Developed textbooks were intended to demonstrate the applicability of MOE’s textbook rental scheme. However, as these activities were undertaken only in two subjects, their wider application did not take place in the system. PCR notes that the approach and lesson learned were not produced in a written form to guide similar developments in other subjects as was indicated during appraisal.

25. While the physical components of the project have been generally delivered, the most important component—system efficiency and management under the ESRP that aimed to reform the education sector—has shown weak performance in several fronts. For instance, NSED did not succeed in providing coherence to the overall education policy of the country. The institutionalization of policy reforms and planning has fallen short of the ESRP objectives. A functioning EMIS was still to be set up. It is not known whether the one-time training of school managers was effective to bring about a perceptible change in the management practices of educational institutions in Tajikistan. The teacher–pupils ratio was also expected to improve, but it did not. As a result, the restructuring of the education system of Tajikistan on a sustainable path has continued to elude the country. Considering both the strong and weak achievements together, this validation considers the project less than effective, with clear scope for improvement in the areas of education policy planning and management.

C. **Efficiency in Achieving Outcomes and Outputs**

26. The PCR rates the project efficient. The project did not use economic internal rate of return at appraisal or while preparing the PCR. Actual disbursements were $7.67 million, or 97% of the loan amount of $8.00 million equivalent at the time of the actual closing date on 3 June 2010. The undisbursed balance of SDR220,268 ($324,748) was cancelled in June 2010. The project was physically complete on time on 31 December 2008, but the loan account was financially closed on 3 June 2010, a year later than the original closing date due to PMU delays in settling accounts. There was high turnover of PMU staff, especially for the position of chief accountant because of low salary levels. This meant that financial records were not properly managed, resulting in a 1-year delay in the loan closing date. Project implementation generally
proceeded according to the schedule, and there were no major problems in the implementation process. Hence, this validation also rates the project efficient.

D. Preliminary Assessment of Sustainability

27. The PCR rates the ESRP likely sustainable. Education is deemed a high priority activity. The Government of Tajikistan is fully committed to it and is willing to make necessary budgetary allocation, notwithstanding the fact that the overall GDP level is extremely low. The share of education expenditures to GDP rose from 2.1% in 2001 to 3.5% in 2008 (PCR, Appendix 1). If the rationalization exercise based on school mapping were carried out, it would have further improved the sustainability of reform efforts. The MOE displayed full commitment to implement the different aspects of the ESRP. Managers and teachers who underwent training programs provided encouraging feedback that endorsed a broad-based commitment to carry out education reforms. Community participation through PTAs was particularly encouraging and promises to form the basis for sustainability of education reforms in the medium to long term. This validation also rates the project likely sustainable.

E. Impact

28. The PCR reported the project’s impact to be significant both at national and local levels, and supported this with the following details. At the national level, the project supported the development of the NSED and helped provide the MOE with a platform to pursue prioritized education reform strategies and institute good management of resources, assisted by performance-based monitoring and management systems through the EMIS. Through the task teams, the project also engendered a strong sense of ownership at the higher level of the hierarchy, just as it did at the community level through the support of the PTAs. The project’s impact on the quality of education in the pilot districts is also evident, according to the PCR. The improved physical environment is now more conducive to learning. The new curriculum, the textbooks and learning materials, and better-trained teachers were able to improve the quality of education. Similarly, the principals and school officials have been trained in educational management and are able to contribute to improving learning achievements by being able to access quality data through the EMIS. The school mapping exercise produced a poverty index and provided a tool for the effective targeting of assistance to the most needy schools and communities. The project was also timely in stopping the general deterioration in the delivery of social services like education in Tajikistan, following the country’s independence from the Soviet system, and the subsequent social conflict in the country.

29. This validation generally confirms the claimed positive impacts. The poor and the rural population had disproportionately suffered the decline in the standard of services during the transition, and the project was a step in the right direction to shore up services for them, through piloting the changes in five districts. Although small in terms of financial magnitude, the project had impacts at both national and local levels. Although there is scope for further improvement, the general positive impact on the quality of managing various education systems is also noted. Therefore, this validation rates the impact significant.

III. OTHER PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS

A. Performance of the Borrower and the Executing Agency

30. The PCR rates the executing agency’s performance satisfactory. The project implementation account narrates the active and prompt support to ESRP from the Office of the
President—the executing agency, and the MOE—the implementing agency. The government was ready and willing to undertake reforms and played its part in full, although it did not have much experience of donor-funded projects in this sector. To some extent, this reflected in problems with the management of loan accounts and disruptions in disbursements. This validation also assesses the borrower’s performance satisfactory.

B. Performance of the Asian Development Bank

31. The PCR rates ADB’s performance satisfactory. The PCR pointed out certain shortcomings that could have been avoided. The high turnover of project officers, and the fact that there was no review mission fielded for more than 2 years between April 2006 and August 2008 created discontinuities in supervision and affected to some extent the effectiveness of implementation in timely identifying problems and issues and the necessary corrective actions. The PCR also noted that such supervisory gaps were bridged somewhat through constant requests for data and reports, and electronic communication. ADB, however, showed flexibility by approving requests for reallocation of loan proceeds as necessitated by actual conditions on the ground. There were problems in disbursements due to noncompliance with ADB accounting guidelines and procedures, which delayed disbursements. While noting the shortcomings related to implementation, this validation also rates ADB’s performance satisfactory, considering that the overall project performance is rated positively.

C. Others

32. All covenants were complied with. Progress reports were submitted regularly. Audited financial statements were also submitted on time, except for some minor modifications that were, for some time, due for fixing.

IV. OVERALL ASSESSMENT, LESSONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Overall Assessment and Ratings

33. In summary, the ESRP was an important project that sought to carry out sector reforms in Tajikistan. The government had inherited a nonviable educational system from the former Soviet Union. With the sharp decline in the country’s GDP and cessation of subsidies, the sustainability of the system was in question. The ESRP sought to address some of these concerns with a view to make education more pro-poor and in support of girl students. The reforms included policy reforms and planning, setting up of the EMIS, reorganization and restructuring of the MOE, upgrading of curriculum and textbooks, training of teachers and managers, physical upgrading of school premises, provision of furniture and equipment, and promoting community participation through PTAs. The project did generally well in upgrading the physical infrastructure of selected schools, and in providing furniture, equipment, computers, and laboratories. Likewise, ESRP’s performance in terms of training of teachers and managers was satisfactory. Training was well received, although the extent of its impact is yet to be verified. ESRP’s achievements in improving policy, planning, rationalization of schools, and restructuring the MOE were only partial. In this sense, the institutional development aspects did not perform as expected and could have done better. The preparations for a follow-up project in the education sector were undertaken by ADB with the help of a project preparatory technical assistance but were abandoned midway.

34. The PCR rated the ESRP successful with criteria ratings of highly relevant, effective, efficient, and likely sustainable. This validation also rates the project successful, but
downgrades the relevance rating to relevant because of some limitations in project design, and the effectiveness rating to less than effective because of the weak achievement in the system efficiency and management component, which is central to the sector reform project. It concurs with PCR, however, in the project being efficient and likely sustainable. These assessments are detailed in the table below.

### Overall Ratings

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>PCR</th>
<th>IED Review</th>
<th>Reason for Disagreement and/or Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Highly relevant</td>
<td>Relevant</td>
<td>The ESRP had design limitations that had to be modified during implementation and precluded achievement of policy goals and the reorganization of MOE (paras. 11–12).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness in achieving outcomes</td>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>Less than effective</td>
<td>While the physical components of the project have been generally delivered, the most important project component of system efficiency and management under this education sector reform project that aimed at reforming the education sector has shown weak performance in several fronts (para. 25).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Efficiency in achieving outcome and outputs</td>
<td>Efficient</td>
<td>Efficient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary assessment of sustainability</td>
<td>Likely sustainable</td>
<td>Likely sustainable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall assessment</td>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>Successful</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrower and executing agency</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance of ADB</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Refer to para. 29.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Significant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of PCR</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
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ADB = Asian Development Bank, ESRP = Education Sector Reform Project, IED = Independent Evaluation Department, MOE = Ministry of Education, PCR = project completion report.

Note: From May 2012, IED views the PCR's rating terminology of "partly" or "less" as equivalent to "less than" and uses this terminology for its own rating categories to improve clarity.

Source: ADB Independent Evaluation Department.

### B. Lessons

35. The PCR derived some useful lessons from the implementation of the project. This validation finds them useful and concurs with these. More specifically, the PCR suggests a holistic approach to education development. This validation concurs with this as the ESRP missed the opportunity to making education system in Tajikistan affordable. It is further noted that immediately after the midterm review, ADB was not able to field loan review missions. As a result, much of the project was implemented without the benefit of ADB’s advice. This can be
detrimental especially for a new borrower and executing/implementing agency, which should have been avoided.

C. Recommendations for Follow-Up

36. There are no specific recommendations.

V. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS AND FOLLOW-UP

A. Monitoring and Evaluation Design, Implementation, and Utilization

37. A survey was conducted to gather information on the effectiveness and impact of the project in the five pilot districts after the project was completed. The ESRP established a system for education statistics for better monitoring. However, it is not clear as to what extent these education statistics are computer-based and if these are capable of supporting the decision-making functions of education policy, monitoring, and evaluation. The ESRP was being driven by consultants. The design and monitoring framework indicates that for a number of categories, the baseline data under the EMIS is yet to be established, and is now being completed by the World Bank.

B. Comments on Project Completion Report Quality

38. The PCR quality is rated satisfactory. It presents a candid view of ADB’s performance in the ESRP. It was also prepared based on the information gathered from the survey. One weakness noted was that the PCR did not adequately follow the project performance evaluation report guidelines and project administration instruction for assessing relevance criterion on the project designs.

C. Data Sources for Validation

39. The validation used the project reports and recommendations of the President (RRP), PCR, back-to-office reports, progress reports, consultancy reports, memorandums of understanding, and aide-memoires.

D. Recommendation for Independent Evaluation Department Follow-up

40. No follow-up is recommended by the Independent Evaluation Department.