A. Summary of Findings

1. Sample selection. During 2007–2012, technical assistance completion reports (TCR) were prepared by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for 251 completed technical assistance (TA) projects. A 50% sample (125 TAs) was considered to provide a sufficient base to assess the TCRs. The sample was selected in a two-stage process. First, all 57 TCRs from the six case study countries were included. Thereafter, the remaining TCRs were selected randomly to reach the 50% sample target.

2. Evaluation criteria. An assessment of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of each TA project was conducted based on ADB’s guidelines for performance evaluation reports prepared by the Independent Evaluation Department’s (IED), using a simplified format. The combined assessment of the four criteria leads to an overall performance rating. This TCR validation rating was then compared with the TCR rating to identify any disconnect. In addition, a specific assessment was made of knowledge products and impact to contribute information to meet the wider TA interest in how TA projects contribute to knowledge growth and management for ADB and its partners. TCR quality was rated as well. However, the knowledge generated and TCR quality were not used in calculating the overall IED rating.

3. Limitations. TCRs do not usually include a rating of each evaluation criterion. Nevertheless, most TCRs contained sufficient information to generate a rating for each criterion, except for efficiency, which was rated in only some TCRs (for TA projects with approved amounts of more than $1 million). The efficiency rating was based on indicators of process efficiency, such as the TA being completed within the designed period and the disbursement rate. In most cases, TA projects were rated primarily on whether the intended outcomes were achieved or likely to be achieved, based on the evidence presented in the TCR. The validation relied on the available self-assessment and information contained in the TCRs. The TCRs contain subjective data, and this may influence the TCR rating. For this reason, IED reduced a project’s TCR rating if insufficient evidence was provided. Nevertheless, there is still a high risk of subjectivity in the TCRs due to the brevity of the reports and lack of supporting information. For this reason, the results of this assessment should be considered for learning and further investigation only rather than as conclusive data on TA performance.

4. Overall performance. The overall performance of TA projects, based on the TCR information, is largely successful (Table 1). The selected sample of TCRs have ratings of successful and highly successful for 84% of the completed TA projects. The validation downgraded 15 of the successful or highly successful ratings to less than successful, thus yielding a new overall success rate of 72% for the sample projects. The less than successful rating was generally applied to projects that did not achieve all of the intended outcomes or were not likely to achieve them. Ratings were also reduced in this way for projects for which TCRs failed to provide evidence of outcome achievement and focused their discussions only on outputs.

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1 Each project can be given an overall rating of highly successful, successful, less than successful, or unsuccessful.
5. **Knowledge management.** In addition to the main evaluation criteria for performance, the evaluation investigated the extent to which TA projects generated knowledge products or contributed to knowledge management within the implementing agencies or other stakeholders. TA knowledge products included workshops, training courses and manuals, conferences, study tours, technology (such as websites), and reports and other publications (Table 2). The most prevalent knowledge products was a specific technical report, including that of a project preparatory TA, or a publication. Publications included books, manuals, guidelines, and feasibility studies. Some TA projects (19) generated more practical knowledge products, such as operational guidelines and action plans. Only a few publications were produced both in English and in the local language. Of the TA projects, 96% have generated some form of knowledge products. Of these, most produced more than one type—for example, a website, workshop, and final publication. Five TA projects (4%) did not produce any form of knowledge products. All of these were incomplete or rated unsuccessful, with an IED rating of either 0 or 1. This result emphasizes the importance of TA in strengthening ADB knowledge management. The TA projects were rated based on actual knowledge outputs in relation to the knowledge management objectives specified in the design. The TA projects that were rated highly successful exceeded the design expectations, generating knowledge products that were either innovative, greater in number than expected, or disseminated more widely than projected. Those that were rated less successful did not generate expected knowledge products. The distribution of knowledge management ratings was highly successful, 9%; successful, 72%; less successful, 14%; and unsuccessful, 5%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number of TA Projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study tour</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report/publication</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidelines/plans</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>190</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Knowledge Product Type**

TCR = technical assistance completion report.

6. **Quality of technical assistance completion reports.** In addition to rating the performance of the TA, the study rated the quality of TCRs. The assessment was based on the extent to which the TCR authors clearly articulated the design, implementation progress, outputs, outcomes, and challenges within the two pages allowed for the TCR. The assessment included the coherence of the report, the extent to which ratings were justified with verifiable data, and the realistic assessment of challenges and how they were addressed. Some allowance was made for the required TCR format, which does not allow for detailed explanation of performance. About 82% of the TCR had highly satisfactory or satisfactory quality (Table 3) The TCRs that were rated less than satisfactory contained insufficient evidence for the ratings and raised major questions on performance that were not adequately addressed in the TCR.
Table 3: Technical Assistance Completion Report Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly satisfactory</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than satisfactory</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>128</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


B. Synthesis of Lessons

7. Lessons from studies completed during 2003–2014 by the Independent Evaluation Department (IED) of ADB related to TA underscore the importance of several factors to achieving good TA performance and results. These are strong country ownership and commitment; good quality design; active engagement of stakeholders, particularly executing agencies, during preparation and implementation; sufficient project processing time and resources; a greater role for resident missions during implementation; the right human resources skills mix (staff and consultants); and adequate supervision and follow-up.

8. Lessons most frequently identified in past evaluation studies underscore key factors affecting the success of ADB technical assistance and projects in general. These lessons are largely consistent with findings from country case studies for this evaluation study and interviews and discussions with ADB staff and management.

9. **Country ownership.** Ownership is an important determinant of project success. A high level of ownership and commitment correlates closely with TA success and contributes to better outcomes. More time should be spent developing project ownership at all levels of government during project preparation. Adequate consultation with government agencies, development partners, and nongovernment organizations also helps ensure that TA design promotes country ownership. More government involvement during recruitment of consultants can also help build ownership and produce better results.

10. Building solid relationships with the executing or implementing agency to shield the TA from the effects of personnel changes should also be considered as important as the delivery of the project’s technical content.

11. **Alignment.** The country partnership strategy should include a clear strategy and program for TA with a long-term framework and measurable indicators of expected outcomes. ADB should consider formalizing a discussion on knowledge products and services strategy in the annual country programming review exercises.

12. **Quality-at-entry.** Good design includes prior solid diagnostic analysis and clearly stated objectives. It is important to ensure that project components serve the same overall purpose. Focus should be more on project quality and readiness than on meeting the deadline for Board approval. Combining different objectives in one project leads to disconnects in outcome and impact statements as well as indicators and targets.

13. **Country conditions** (e.g., political context and government absorptive capacity) should also be reflected in project design, without losing sight of international best practices. Sustainability issues must also be given more serious attention during project formulation through risk identification and mitigation.
14. **Role and use of consultants.** The effectiveness of TA depends greatly on the TA consultants’ competence, skills, and degree of familiarity with local conditions. Consultants must not only have the required technical expertise for the assignment, but also be able to adapt to local context and be mindful of cross-cultural sensitivities.

15. **Capacity building.** Developing capacity incrementally over a longer period of time has succeeded in strengthening capacity, whereas ambitious single interventions have not. A programmatic approach—a long-term process that assists ongoing capacity development, with each intervention forming part of a longer-term agenda to build capacity—has a better chance of success than an isolated technical assistance project. Such a long-term sustained support for capacity building is particularly important in fragile and conflict-affected situations.

16. More focused design was also found to achieve better results in capacity development. Generic capacity building is less likely to be sustainable in the long term. For the institutions to benefit from capacity development programs, training should be linked to organizational and institutional needs and not just the individual. Sustained capacity development is required.

17. Capacity-building approaches should incorporate the following guiding principles: (i) flexibility, (ii) sustainability, (iii) integration, (iv) interactivity, and (v) innovation. Key determinants of the sustainability of capacity-building programs include strong government commitment and ownership, presence of an overall capacity-building strategy (with careful examination of institutional gaps and staff needs), well-sequenced reforms, and sustained long-term engagement.

18. **Project preparatory technical assistance.** A continuously increasing list of issues and responsibilities to be addressed during project preparation has not been matched by a concomitant increase in the funding provided for project preparatory technical assistance (PPTA) consultants to address these issues. On the contrary, the share of resources provided for project preparation has declined, even if this is arguably the most important step in the whole project cycle to ensure project quality at entry and subsequent project performance. The real issue is not an overall shortage of funding but the allocation of resources between PPTA, advisory technical assistance, and regional technical assistance projects.²

19. The critical and crucial step of PPTA fact finding needs more attention. This is when the project scope is initially formulated and the terms of reference and budget for the PPTA consultants are prepared, as well as when lessons learned would be considered and incorporated (footnote 2).

20. **TA cluster.** There is a need for one ADB officer to manage the overall cluster instead of different officers being responsible for different components, which contributed to administrative inefficiencies and lack of synergy among components.

21. **Support for middle-income countries.** ADB support can make significant contributions to the development process, not only through financial resource transfers, but more importantly through support for project design and implementation, introducing best practices for project management, procurement, and financial management; and through policy dialogue and associated capacity-development assistance for the identification and implementation of appropriate policy options.³

22. **Delegation to resident missions.** Periodic supervision missions from ADB headquarters stand less of a chance than regular interaction with resident mission staff to generate that trust. Resident missions are close to the scene of action and can better appreciate the context and dig deeper into possible sources of implementation difficulties. Greater delegation to resident missions will boost client

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responsiveness.\textsuperscript{4} Involvement of the resident missions has the potential to improve supervision and continuity, which helps address the negative effects of high headquarters staff turnover.

23. Delegation of project implementation to a resident mission has had a significant beneficial impact on efficiency, allowing timely response to implementation issues as they arise. The presence of local technical experts able to engage in dialogue and respond to ad hoc requests for advice has enhanced ADB's role as a source of advice to governments.

24. \textbf{Technical assistance implementation.} Performance monitoring requires a formal feedback mechanism, monitorable indicators, and post-completion follow-up to encourage the effective implementation of recommendations after TA completion. Frequent dialogue with TA counterparts can improve project performance.

25. Features common to highly successful TA implementation include (i) realistic design and relevant identification of risks, (ii) active involvement of the executing agency from start through implementation and in the evaluation of the TA results, (iii) consultants who are respected for both their technical knowledge and their style, and (iv) training manuals provided in formats that encourage updating and revision.

26. \textbf{Technical assistance evaluation.} Clearly defined performance criteria are needed for a rigorous and objective evaluation to be undertaken. Criteria for judging TA success should be based more on its impact than the quality of the documents or the completion of a forum. Moving toward a results-oriented assessment would shift incentives toward how to follow up on recommendations and beyond the mere completion of a polished written product. This would require recalibrating expectations.

27. \textbf{Achieving results.} ADB assistance was most effective when it was part of a long-term engagement and integrated with government reform initiatives that were supported by all relevant stakeholders. Improving TA outcomes requires more strategic selection of objectives to be supported by TA, increasing executing agency ownership of TA projects, improving ADB supervision, and recruiting better consultants.

28. The most frequently occurring factors affecting project performance were deficient capacity-building and ownership measures during project design, insufficient or deficient supervision by ADB during project implementation, less than rigorous ADB internal review, and inadequate technical analysis or inappropriate project design.

29. While evidence exists of client satisfaction with and positive results from some TA projects, weaknesses were also identified, raising questions about the usefulness, impact, and sustainability of some outputs. These weaknesses, which are the flip side of the factors of success, include poor strategic TA program management; lack of local knowledge, reflected in the design of TA projects; overambitious objectives and terms of reference; and lack of ADB supervision and follow-up to enable outputs to be turned into an outcome.

30. \textbf{Dissemination of technical assistance results.} A clear strategy for dissemination of findings of an evaluation report needs to be developed at the outset. TA projects that serve as demonstration or pilot projects should include in their design mechanisms to disseminate the results and findings to a wider audience countries.