

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COMPLETION REPORT

Division: SEAE

TA No., Country, and Name			Amount Approved: \$750,000	
TA 6171-REG: Reviewing the Poverty Impact of Regional Economic Integration in the Greater Mekong Subregion			Revised Amount: \$850,000	
Executing Agency: Asian Development Bank		Source of Funding: Cooperation Fund in Support of the Formulation and Implementation of National Poverty Reduction Strategies (NPRS)	Amount Undisbursed: \$36,915.52	Amount Utilized: \$813,084.48
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Description Regional integration is expected to contribute significantly to economic growth in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) and improve the livelihoods of the people. However, to ensure that the poor benefit fairly from regional integration, appropriate regional, national, and local strategies are needed. Such strategies are particularly important for communities in the front line of border interactions and likely to be directly affected by regional integration. The strategies and the related policies must be based on systematic information on the regional dimensions of poverty. The technical assistance (TA) was prepared to provide a more comprehensive base of information about cross-border livelihood interactions and poverty. It would consider how regional integration could be managed to maximize the benefits to the poor in the cross-border areas while addressing the negative impact.				
Expected Impact, Outcome and Outputs The overall objective was to determine how increased connectivity between the GMS countries through infrastructure and communications development could be managed to significantly improve the economic and social status of the poor. The immediate objective was to assess the distribution of benefits and costs of cross-border interactions among different groups, and identify ways of maximizing the benefits to the poor and minimizing the negative impact. This initiative was to form the basis for (i) strengthening regional, national, and local dialogue and collaboration to manage the process of regional economic integration in such a way as to benefit the poor as much as possible; (ii) intensifying networking and information exchange between national institutions that collect, process, and analyze quantitative and qualitative data; and (iii) informing key decision makers, stakeholders, and ADB about the benefits and issues involved in cross-border interactions. The key outputs and deliverables were: (i) quantitative data and qualitative information on the benefits and issues related to cross-border interactions; (ii) recommendations for maximizing the benefits to the poor and minimizing the negative impact; (iii) increased national capacity to collect, process, and analyze quantitative and qualitative data; (iv) a better understanding of cross-border livelihood strategies of the poor, as complementary inputs to the formulation or modification of national poverty reduction strategies; and (v) recommendations for ADB operations in the provinces covered by this initiative. Country reports and an executive summary comparing the country findings were to be produced. Other deliverables were data sets on poverty issues in selected cross-border areas in the four countries, which would be made available to national and external researchers for further analysis. The TA was designed to center on cross-border interactions related to trade in goods and services (which has perhaps the highest impact on local living standards, employment, and other income-generating activities), community and resource interactions (i.e., agricultural activities, use of natural resources, and social ties), social services, information exchange, and other issues identified by the participating countries. As planned, the TA would consider men's and women's role as traders and laborers, the impact of cross-border interactions on youths, and the cultural impact of such interactions. The TA was expected to assist in the formulation and modification of national poverty reduction strategies insofar as regional issues affect national efforts to reduce poverty. It was not an attempt to establish a new poverty line or to measure the incidence of poverty since other national initiatives, such as the household expenditure and consumption surveys, already do those things. Furthermore, the TA was to have limited geographic coverage, and build on other studies on specific regional issues such as the trafficking of people and illegal migrant workers.				

Delivery of Inputs and Conduct of Activities

During implementation it became clear that the project formulation, while adequately addressing the issues, had not fully taken their sensitivity into account. Therefore, it became necessary to use participatory and qualitative research methods as well, rather than rely purely on quantitative methods. However, the research teams required a good deal of training in participatory research. The consulting services were suitably modified to allow for the inclusion of a participatory research specialist to train the teams, and develop shared research guidelines and instruments. An anthropologist was also added to the team to provide greater clarity to the concepts and notions underlying qualitative research methods and analysis. The time of the regional coordinator had to be considerably increased to address the complex management and monitoring tasks of the project.

The consulting teams and research institutes did extremely well and came up with excellent analyses and reports. Several review missions were carried out to provide training as well as inputs into the research design, do the actual research, and review and analyze the research results. Seven workshops—four national and three regional—were held at various stages..

Evaluation of Outputs and Achievement of Outcome

The TA project generated a regional report, four national reports, and a research guide. It built the capacity of research institutions to undertake qualitative research, as well to codify and analyze quantitative data. The project achieved its objectives as defined in its design and monitoring framework. It produced a research framework, methodology, and research instruments that were acceptable to all and used by all research institutes, and it generated all the reports it was supposed to produce.

Overall Assessment and Rating

The TA project was rated highly successful.

Major Lessons

In a fairly complex research exercise of this kind, more resources need to be provided for capacity building, and management and coordination.

Recommendations and Follow-Up Actions

The regional report should be edited and published.

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