

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COMPLETION REPORT

Division: ERDI

TA No. and Name TA 3937-TKM: Improving the Statistical Methodology of the National Institute of State Statistics and Information			Amount Approved: US\$ 265,000	
			Revised Amount:	
Executing Agency: National Institute Of State Statistics and Information		Source of Funding: TASF	TA Amount Undisbursed \$60,258.18	TA Amount Utilized \$204,741.82
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			Closing Date	
			Original 31 March 2004	Actual 25 June 2005
Description <p>1. In November 2001, the Government of Turkmenistan requested technical assistance (TA) from ADB for strengthening the national statistical system, identifying several areas where assistance was most needed. Based on discussions with concerned officials of the National Institute of State Statistics and Information (TurkmenMilliHasabat—TMH) and representatives of international agencies, and taking into account the assistance being provided or to be provided by other funding agencies, it was decided that ADB assistance to TMH would focus on strengthening the capacity of TMH to assess standards of living of the population through the implementation of a living standards survey. A previous living standards survey, the Turkmen Living Standards Survey (TLSS), was implemented by TMH in 1998 with the assistance of the World Bank. Since the 1998 TLSS was conducted, significant structural changes had occurred in the economy of Turkmenistan. Existing sources of data did not provide a comprehensive and updated profile of the standards of living in Turkmenistan. A second round of the TLSS would be able to provide this information.</p> <p>2. While the new round of the TLSS would provide an updated and comprehensive profile of the conditions of living in Turkmenistan, the complexity, relatively high cost, and low frequency of implementation (approximately once every 5 years), mean that the TLSS is not an appropriate tool for high frequency monitoring of living standards. A workable monitoring system—with data provided on an annual basis—must be based on lighter and cost-effective surveys. Since 1935, TMH has been conducting the Family Budget Survey (FBS) on a monthly basis. However, TMH's own assessment was that FBS data is not fully reliable. A key problem is the high rate of non-response (most better-off households refuse to participate in the survey, causing a bias in the data). Thus, the survey is of limited use for monitoring standards of living. To make it more useful and relevant, the sampling methodology and survey questionnaire must be re-assessed.</p> Objectives and Scope <p>3. The TA had two specific objectives: The first objective was to conduct a TLSS in 2003 in order to provide an up-to-date and comprehensive assessment of the standards of living in the country. The production and dissemination of an updated socioeconomic profile of the households by TMH was a key output expected from this activity.</p> <p>4. The second objective was to advise TMH on the possible use of the FBS for monitoring standards of living, based on an in-depth assessment of the sampling methodology and questionnaire design. The output of this activity was expected to be a set of technical recommendations, with an estimate of the cost of their possible subsequent implementation by TMH.</p>				
Evaluation of Inputs <p>5. The TA provided a total inputs of 7.5 person-months of technical and advisory services through the engagement of three international consultants composed of a statistical analysis expert (4.5 person-months), a survey data processing expert (1 person-month) and a data processing expert (2 person-months). With regard to the TLSS 2003, the international consultants' (i) assessed the sample frame available at TMH; (ii) provided instructions for updating the sample frame and sample areas; (iii) assisted in the development of sampling methodology and drawing of survey samples; (iv) trained TMH staff in sampling techniques; (v) prepared a technical manual which documented in detail the computation of key sampling related statistics; (vi) assisted and trained TMH staff in data entry, data editing, and data processing using specialized software such as CsPro and SPSS. The consultants also produced technical documentation that could be used by TMH as reference material for future survey design and data processing. One of the international consultants also assisted TMH in assessing the current survey design used for FBS and suggested improvements in the survey design. The international consultant prepared a technical manual describing his proposed design for improving the FBS. The TA also provided \$15,000 worth of computer and peripheral equipment needed for survey-related processing.</p>				

6. The performance of consultants was judged to be very satisfactory by both the TA Project Officer as well as TMH staff. A total of 12 TMH staff were directly provided training on sampling methodology; 10 staff were directly provided training on data entry and editing procedures; 8 staff directly received training on SPSS software. TMH staff who received training subsequently shared their knowledge with their colleagues working in regional statistical offices.

7. However, it should be noted that (i) delays in starting the survey of households and (ii) cumbersome and unpredictable procedures for obtaining visas to Turkmenistan created difficulties in having all three international consultants work with TMH with optimal synchronization and sequencing. The delays in survey work were on account of difficulties encountered in transferring TA funds from ADB to TMH. Due to the peculiarities of Turkmenistan's financial system it was necessary to transfer funds through UNDP New York and UNDP Turkmenistan as per an agreement entered into by ADB and UNDP for this TA. Unfortunately, timely transfer of funds between UNDP New York and UNDP Turkmenistan did not always take place.

8. The TA also funded a study visit by three statisticians/officials of TMH to Manila. The objectives of the study visit were to: (i) to hold in-depth discussions with ERDI staff on the measurement of living standards based on TLSS data; and (ii) hold discussions with statistical and policy-making agencies in the Philippines on the effective interface between statistical and other data collecting agencies and policy-making agencies.

9. While the TA project has been an important one for TMH and TMH displayed considerable enthusiasm in carrying out the various TA activities including learning new methodologies, there is one area in which TMH's inputs have displayed considerable weakness. In particular, there appears to be a serious lack of a culture of openness at TMH which prevents TMH staff from carrying out an unbiased analysis of data.

Evaluation of Outputs

10. The high-quality and commitment of the international consultants to this project, along with willingness to learn amongst TMH staff, have contributed to a useful transfer of knowledge. TMH technical staff have received training in more advanced survey design techniques and survey implementation methods; they have also gained knowledge of specialized software such as CsPro and SPSS in order to carry out data entry, data editing, and data analysis tasks. Finally, the reports generated by the international consultants on (i) survey methodology and sampling issues for TLSS 2003 and the FBS; and (ii) manual for data entry and editing procedures (Keyer's Manual), as well as the various statistical programs written for data entry and editing, are of good quality and have been useful for TMH.

11. The analytical report on living standards in Turkmenistan, prepared by TMH based on TLSS 2003 data, is not of good quality. One factor has to do with the translation of the report from Russian into English. Getting a high-quality translator who was also very familiar with statistical terminology and statistical analysis proved to be difficult. But a more serious issue has been the apparent inability of TMH staff in carrying out unbiased and scientific analysis of data. This inability has been displayed in two ways: (i) communication from the international consultants that data analysis was not being carried out in an unbiased and scientific manner; and (ii) data presented in TMH's analytical report which showed what appeared to be unrealistically low estimates of poverty and, especially, inequality.

12. In view of the above, attempts were made to obtain the TLSS 2003 data and have the data analyzed independently of TMH. These attempts were unsuccessful. However, it was possible to have one of the consultants write an independent analytical report based on a preliminary version of the data that he had obtained during the time of data entry. The analytical report of the consultant is far less sanguine about living standards conditions in Turkmenistan than the official report of TMH.

Overall Assessment and Rating

13. The TA was partly successful. The main reason for not rating this TA as successful has to do with the apparent inability of TMH staff to report findings as revealed by the data.

Major Lessons Learned

14. A careful assessment of the political environment in which an executive agency operates is needed before embarking on a project which aims to collect data and report findings based on it accurately.

Recommendations and Follow-Up Actions

15. TMH should not be the recipient of any other TA project which involves the collection and analysis of data unless it can be ensured that data analysis can be carried out in an open and scientific manner.