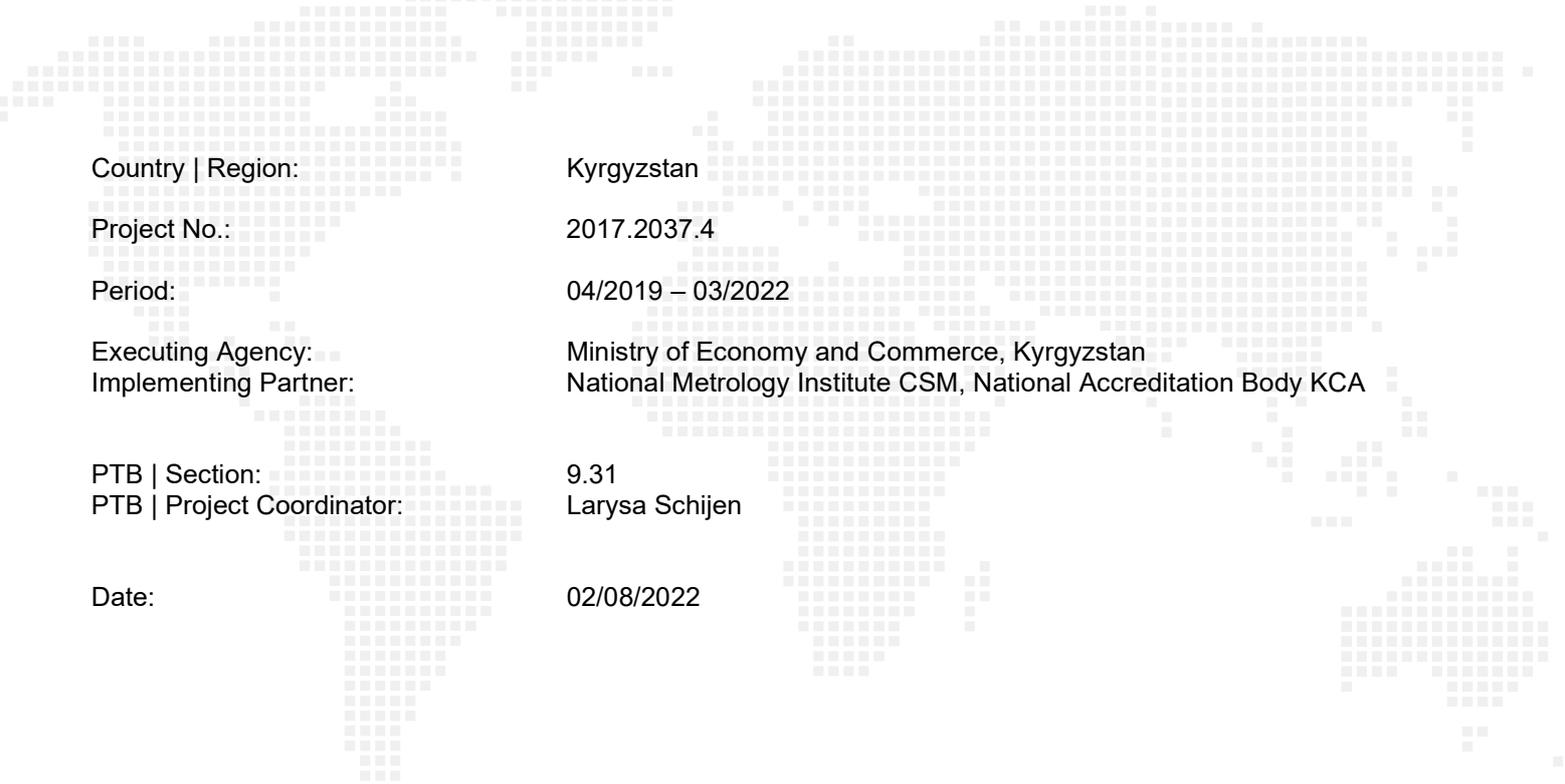


EXTERNAL EVALUATION – SHORT REPORT

Key evaluator: Ulrike Roesler

Technical evaluator: Ulrike Lechner

Increasing the use of quality-related services in Kyrgyzstan



Country | Region: Kyrgyzstan
Project No.: 2017.2037.4
Period: 04/2019 – 03/2022
Executing Agency: Ministry of Economy and Commerce, Kyrgyzstan
Implementing Partner: National Metrology Institute CSM, National Accreditation Body KCA
PTB | Section: 9.31
PTB | Project Coordinator: Larysa Schijen
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This is an independent evaluation. The contents represent the view of the evaluator and cannot be taken to reflect the views of PTB.

List of abbreviations

BCSM	Bishkek Centre for Testing, Certification and Metrology
BMZ	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung
CSM	Centre for Standardization and Metrology
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
iKZE	Intermittent short-term expert
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KCA	Kyrgyz Center of Accreditation
OCSM	Osh Centre for Testing, Certification and Metrology
PTB	Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt
QI	Quality infrastructure
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals

1. Project Description

Evaluation object is the project '*Increasing the use of quality-related services in Kyrgyzstan*' (referred to as 'the project') financed by BMZ with an overall budget of 1,6 million EUR and a duration from 04/2019 to 03/2022. **Project objective** (outcome) was that 'private and public sector actors use quality-related services in important Kyrgyz regions.' This is to be achieved through three outputs, namely:

- (1) Consolidation and extension of services provided by quality infrastructure institutions;
- (2) The Kyrgyz Centre for Standardization and Metrology passing on technical competencies to calibration laboratories in Kyrgyz regions, and
- (3) Improving the cooperation between the private sector and quality infrastructure (QI) institutions.

Target groups were all users of quality-related services such as companies, public and private test laboratories and, finally, consumers. **Political partner** was the Ministry of Economy and Commerce. **Implementing partners** were the Centres for Standardization and Metrology (CSM) in Bishkek and in the regions and the National Accreditation Body KCA in Bishkek. Furthermore, private and public food-testing laboratories were addressed.

2. Assessment of the project

2.1 Status of the change process

Relevance

The project was aligned with donor and partner country strategies. It also responded to the needs of partners and the target group: In order to export their products, Kyrgyz companies need access to affordable and - from their point of view, possibly nearby - testing and calibration services to meet market requirements.

The project design would have been clearer if more than three outputs had been defined. A separate output for the support to food laboratories would have allowed to better describe and assess the capacity building with the relevant partners. The same applies to the support in accreditation that was not part of the project concept and indicators, even though it absorbed quite some resources. Indicators were not fully SMART and, in some cases, too ambitious. The project has adjusted its implementation adequately to the Covid 19 crisis.

In spite of the shortcomings with regard to the project design, relevance was assessed with grade 2 (entirely meets expectations).

Coherence

Within the German system of Technical Cooperation (dimension 1), the project has coordinated and cooperated well with GIZ (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*). Coordination at the international level (dimension 2) was also satisfactory, and coherence was assessed with grade 2 (entirely meets expectations).

Effectiveness

All **objective indicators** were achieved, with the reservation that the basis for measuring the indicators should have been clearer. The project's **contribution** to the outcome could be confirmed for the most part: The increased demand for calibration services (outcome indicator 1) is due to an increasing demand for new calibration services supported by the project. Further supportive factors are market requirements and political pressure. The contribution to outcome indicator 2 (new calibration services in the regions) is weaker, as not in all cases a strong link to the project could be made. The implementation of quality assurance processes in companies (outcome indicator 3) is clearly deriving from output 3.

In spite of impediments and shortcomings (e.g., Covid-19 pandemic, frequent change of project coordinator, lack of operational plan), the **quality of project implementation** is still assessed as satisfactory, notably due to the good partner integration and participation. There was no risk monitoring,

but the project responded adequately to the pandemic. Effectiveness was assessed with grade 2 (entirely meets expectations).

Efficiency

The assessment of **production efficiency** was hampered by a lack of financial data. However, almost all outputs were (probably) achieved with less funds than initially budgeted. Results in two outputs might have been higher using a different approach. Whether the use of the entire budget would have allowed more or better results at outcome level (**allocation efficiency**) was difficult to assess. The quality (not the quantity) of results might have been better, as on-site training is more effective than on-line training, notably when it comes to laboratory techniques and their application. On the other hand, low absorption capacities of partner institutions also have to be taken into account, so that 'more input' might not necessarily have brought about more outcome. However, a more systematic approach to output 3 (cooperation between QI institutions and private sector) might have shown better results. Efficiency was assessed with 2,5.

Impact

With regard to **the intended impacts that have taken or are expected to take place**, the project contributes plausibly to the reduction of non-tariff barriers and to industry development and innovation, even though impact will materialize only in the long term and under certain preconditions. As regards impacts on employment or income (SDG8), the external negative effects notably due to the Covid-19 pandemic in the project period were too strong and the project's outreach too small to expect an impact. With regard to the project's **contribution to impact**, the impact mentioned above only materializes if QI services are used by companies. As the project has only piloted very few QI applications in companies, the results at this level appear insignificant. The use of QI services needs to be scaled-up in order to make a change. This can be addressed in the successor project. No **negative unintended changes** could be observed. QI rather reinforces positive changes in all dimensions of sustainable development. Impact is assessed with 3, satisfactory.

Sustainability

As regards the **capacities of partners to sustain the results**, the financial and human capacities at national level (CSM and KCA) appear sufficient, and the veterinary laboratories too seem to be on a good way to sustainability. Resources of any kind are most lacking in the regional CSM centres that have no support from the national budget. All laboratories lack the funds for consumables, test kits, reagents and travel costs, and resilience is only given to a limited extent. The project has **strengthened the capacities** in all partner organizations, notably in terms of human capacities, however an in-depth needs analysis in the beginning would have been useful. Whether the **results will be durable in the long term** depends on the development of demand for QI services and on political willingness, as most institutions will not be able to be fully self-financed. Sustainability is assessed with 2,7, between good and satisfactory.

2.2 Success factors for the observed results and change processes

Strategy

When developing the project, partner requests were taken into account as were existing strategies. The project set-up (outputs, indicators) was discussed with partners prior to the project proposal. Partners that take part in the steering committee or the working group were aware of the project strategy; others were not so well informed. A more profound analysis of supply and demand of QI services at the beginning of the project would have been useful. Level of achievement: 73%

Cooperation

The project has no stakeholder map, but important partners were taken into account. The choice of food testing laboratories could have been stronger oriented on their capacities and company needs. The accreditation body being invited as member to the laboratory club appeared problematic, and internal

conflicts in the project could not be resolved satisfactorily. In terms of responsibilities (this also includes communication), the delimitation of tasks between the international and the national and short-term experts appeared in some cases not clear; internal communication and coordination could have been better. Level of achievement: 70%

Steering structure

The steering structure consisted of a steering committee and a working group. The working group is setting the main impulses for project implementation; however how the decisions come about is not transparent. The results-based monitoring was not of good quality and an operational plan was non-existing. Level of achievement: 58%

Processes

The project does not dispose of a process map. The main shortcoming is the lack of steering and support processes (monitoring and planning). Important administrative support seems to have been partly unavailable (e.g. witnessed by a lack of updated financial data). Level of achievement: 50%

Learning and innovation

Learning objectives were defined in the BMZ module offer, but not further defined later on. The project mainly focussed on strengthening technical skills and the link between QI and private sector. Other elements such as strengthening communication skills for service and training provision or advice at macro level were not put in place, partly due to a lack of demand. Lessons learned were not documented, but are manifested in the strategy of the successor project. Level of achievement: 63%

3. Learning processes and learning experience

The project started in 2019 and suffered rather early on from the Covid-19 pandemic as well as from several staff rotations. This could be the reason why no systematic 'learning processes' were established. Therefore, there was little in terms of conscious learning in the project. The involvement of (previously trained) staff from partner organisations (in this case, CSM) in training other partner organisations, that was already integrated in the project's concept, was beneficial by increasing efficiency and in contributing to visibility and ownership of the partner organisation.

Experiences made in the course of project implementation was that instruments that were successful in other projects are not necessarily equally successful in another contexts. This applies in particular to the laboratory club that has worked very well in Myanmar, but did not so in Kyrgyzstan. Another learning was that being very opportunity driven and needs-oriented can dilute a strategic approach. This concerns the project activities in the context of output 1 (laboratory club) and partly also in output 3 (ad hoc support and activities that were not linked). A thorough assessment of partner capacities and needs of the private sector at the beginning of a project would have been essential for orientation. Level of achievement: 63%

4. Recommendations

Recommendations to partners:

- As bilateral technical Kyrgyz-German cooperation will end by 2026, the sustainability of the supported QI structure should be in the focus of policy makers. Not all CSM centres will be sustainable in the long term. A solution would be to concentrate on selected centres and on services that respond to private sector needs. Even QI organisations that can be considered as strong have difficulties to finance maintenance, replacement or even small expenses such as travel costs. This should be remedied.
- Even though there is a saying that 'competition revives business', the issue of overlapping responsibilities between different laboratories under the auspices of different ministries (performing the same tests) is not necessarily conducive to sustainability in a small country. With each lab

focusing on their core tasks and competencies, much could be won. For this, an in-depth analysis and coordination among ministries is recommended.

- Even though experience with the Laboratory club was mixed, it could become a useful platform for exchange of information, learning and even attracting donor funding. In order to fulfil these functions, it is recommended to improve the management. This includes a revision of the club policy with a view to sustainability and establishment of clear cooperation / communication structures (e.g. preparation of agendas, minutes, regular meetings). If possible, private laboratories should be included. The main benefit of the Club could come from inputs e.g. from KCA, CSM or private companies (e.g. on company needs), joint training could be organized, etc.
- CSM at national level is very knowledgeable and open to sharing knowledge. Their inputs could be used by the laboratory club or individual laboratories. CSM could also - as new service – check the status of QI related equipment in companies or in laboratories.
- Before introducing a new service, laboratories should explore the demand for it. An investment in human resources, equipment etc. is only worthwhile if there are sufficient customers.
- QI institutions should take the lead in awareness raising and marketing their services.

Recommendations to the project team:

- The project strategy should be revised in a way that supported services and organisations are based on an assessment of private sector needs. Interventions should be more focused.
- Alternatives approaches should be systematically explored. For instance, instead of equipping and training laboratories in each region for all parameters / calibrations, it might be more sustainable to support selected laboratories in improving methods for which a significant demand exists. It could also be an option to support laboratories individually and select e.g. only one lab for honey analyses and build its capacities with one selected technical expert.
- It will not be possible to establish in each region a fully equipped laboratory for testing and calibration; this can neither be afforded nor would it be sustainable. An alternative for instance in the Issyk-Kul region might be to install a reliable transport to bring instruments for calibration to Bishkek.
- If the partner structure remains diverse, more technical experts are necessary to answer to the different needs. For each partner or output, it is recommended to establish road maps, e.g. for the implementation of analytical methods for selected products. All provided trainings should be according to internationally accepted methods.
- Support to KCA could be reduced to a minimum as the main goals were achieved. If the project intends to further support KCA in enlarging the scope of accreditation, the demand for services such as ISO 17043 should be assessed.
- In working with the private sector, the project should go into upscaling as quickly as possible. Even though the private sector in Kyrgyzstan is small and export capacities are limited, supporting just a few companies is neither efficient nor sustainable. For this, the CALIDENA activities should be implemented in a well-structured and transparent way, by establishing work plans with clear responsibilities and due dates. This would strengthen the links between the private sector and QI institutions and would facilitate communication and coordination.
- Besides CALIDENA, awareness creation for QI services should be further increased in cooperation with private sector organisations, but also with export or investment promotion bodies. If possible, the QI institutions should take the lead and be able (or enabled) to do awareness raising and market their services.
- Positive experience with QI services (the benefits thereof) should be documented and be shared with other companies, for instance in the form of testimonials in meetings/ events.

- To improve learning in the partner system, also the policy level should be involved. It was for instance proposed that MoEC representatives should also participate in trainings or visit laboratories to familiarize with conditions 'on the ground'.
- There was a strong wish by almost all parties to visit calibration and testing laboratories in other countries. This is a standard request and it could be examined whether and on which topics / which country a study tour could be useful. Study tours can have a strong impact on cooperation among participants, if well designed.
- Communication and coordination between the project coordinator, the experts and partners should be improved. Clear rules of communication and 'who does what' should be established, as the outputs are interlinked. It should be ensured that external experts are well informed about the objective, indicators and strategy of the project.
- Leadership and responsibilities should be clear, between project coordinator and local coordinator and also including the iKZE.
- Steering requires an operational plan that is regularly (e.g., quarterly) updated. Reserving time for reflexion and documentation of lessons learned would be helpful.
- Monitoring must be improved. This contains establishing a clear understanding of the indicators and of what to count, the setting of milestones / interim targets jointly with the partners, a regular assessment of progress, and also a proper documentation.
- Overall, transparency should be improved, for instance concerning criteria for supporting companies or decision taking in the working groups.

Recommendations to the International Cooperation Department (Group 9.3):

- The documentation of best practice or good examples should be done more systematically. For instance, in the case of the laboratory club (that was proposed by an external short-term expert), it would have been helpful to have a documentation that describes the tool, including criteria and requirements for its implementation (e.g., that laboratories should be at a similar level in terms of equipment and human resources).