

EXTERNAL EVALUATION – SHORT REPORT

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Project title: Strengthening Accreditation Networks in Asia-Pacific (SANAP)



Country | Region: Asia Pacific
Project No.: 95263/2012.2296.7
Period: April 2015 – March 2018
Executing Agency: Asia Pacific Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (APLAC), Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (PAC), German National Metrology Institute (PTB)
Implementing Partner: See above
PTB | Working Group: Asia
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Date: 16.09.2018

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List of abbreviations

AB	Accreditation Body
APAC	Asia Pacific Accreditation Cooperation
APLAC	Asia Pacific Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
MLA	Multilateral Recognition Agreement
MRA	Mutual Recognition Arrangement
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PAC	Pacific Accreditation Cooperation
PTB	German National Metrology Institute (Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt)
SANAP	Strengthening Accreditation Networks in Asia-Pacific
SRB	Specialist Regional Body

1. Project Description

The PTB project “Strengthening Accreditation Networks in Asia-Pacific 1 (SANAP 1)” of the German National Metrology Institute (PTB) has been implemented from April 2015 to March 2018 with funds from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The aim of the project was to support two Specialist Regional Bodies (SRBs) – the Asia Pacific Laboratory Cooperation (APLAC) and the Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (PAC) – in their ability to support the establishment, inter-linking and international recognition of accreditation systems in the developing and emerging economies within the Asia-Pacific region. The need for better accreditation systems became particularly important due to the economic dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region, where some economies are growing at a rapid pace, while others cannot keep pace with this development in the region. Many developing countries in the region suffer from missing or poorly functioning accreditation institutions and subsequently intra-regional trade falls short of its potential since accreditation cannot fulfil its harmonising and trust-building function here. A crucial change in project context conditions occurred in mid-2016, when APLAC and PAC decided to merge and to create the Asia Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (APAC) from 2019.

Various project activities have been carried out by APLAC and PAC in cooperation with the PTB project team. The most important ones were those that were related to:

- The introduction of needs surveys to adapt the services of APLAC and PAC to the needs of developing and emerging economies.
- The introduction and implementation of innovative instruments which are particularly useful for new or emerging accreditation bodies (e.g. attachment training and the preparation for evaluation as part of the knowledge sharing programme).
- Financial support for members and potential members from developing and emerging economies to participate in training courses, workshops and conferences offered by APLAC and PAC.

The role of the PTB in the project was that of a facilitator and as a source of ideas for achieving the objectives of the project. Consequently, no directly PTB-initiated and PTB-organised training was provided to APLAC’s or PAC’s members. A Project Steering Committee consisting of three members of APLAC and three members of PAC with the involvement of the PTB project team, was responsible for the implementation of the project. An intermittent short-term expert was appointed to support the planning and implementation of the project. In addition, regional experts from advanced ABs served as trainers and mentors to the targeted ABs.

2. Assessment of the project

2.1 Status of the change process

Relevance

The relevance of the project is rated as good (2). The strategies applied as such (e.g. needs surveys and introduction of innovative concepts) can support APLAC and PAC to improve their services towards developing and emerging economies’ Accreditation Bodies (ABs). Moreover, innovative concepts that are highly appreciated by the beneficiaries have been introduced. Last but not least, development goals of participating countries have been addressed by SANAP 1 and the project objectives are consistent with BMZ strategies. However, it seems that quality infrastructure is not a priority in many target countries.

Effectiveness

The project’s effectiveness is considered good (2). APLAC and PAC have improved their services towards ABs from developing and emerging economies (module objective). Three out of four indicators of success have been fully achieved. Moreover, the various impact levels (outcome and outputs) are designed according to requirements of the BMZ. However, a mechanism to continuously monitor the level of development of targeted organisational members was not established. Without such a mechanism, the specific needs of members or aspiring members from developing economies cannot be fully identified.

Impact

The impact of the project is rated as satisfactory (3). Project activities carried out strengthen the position of the accreditation bodies and are important for ensuring quality requirements. However, the selected training participants are not always capable to implement the acquired skills in their home institution and some have difficulty following the training (both in terms of content and language). Some of the newly developed concepts have the potential to be scaled up to other regions and projects.

Efficiency

Efficiency is assessed as satisfactory (3). Due to the use of regional and local consultants, the project activities have been carried out in a cost efficient manner. However, many project activities were delayed. Without these delays, the SANAP project could probably have achieved even better results. Cooperation with other donors took place occasionally. There is also internal cooperation within PTB, but it seems to have some weaknesses.

Sustainability

Interviewed representatives of APLAC and PAC credibly stated their willingness to continue providing improved services. As far as the new organisation APAC is concerned, in the long run it will probably be stronger and more efficient than the two separate network organisations. However, in the past, lack of ownership on the part of APLAC and PAC was identified as one of the main obstacles in project implementation. Sustainability of positive effects on the national level will mainly depend on national priorities and resources. The sustainability of the project is rated as satisfactory (3).

2.2 Success factors for the observed results and change processes**Strategy**

The success factor "strategy" is rated at 72%: All relevant project partners were involved in analysing the situation (through discussions about the evaluation findings of a previous regional PTB project which also contained accreditation components) and in developing options for action and strategies. However, the project partners were not included in designing the project indicators. In addition, over the course of the project, the specific project objectives became unknown to new Project Steering Committee members. The project strategy was not systematically implemented.

Cooperation

The right actors were involved in the project. These actors have proven that they can provide effective training. It was clear who the project partners were, but their roles and responsibilities within the project were not defined and there have been no documents that clarifies them. The SANAP 1 has not created a conflict between APLAC and PAC but a feeling of unfairness with regard to the allocation of training funds among representatives of APLAC. After weighing up the various aspects, the success factor "cooperation" is rated at 52.5%.

Steering structure

Existing structures were sufficiently considered for the steering of the project. The complexity of the steering structure was also appropriate. A relatively small steering committee can usually drive things forward more quickly. However, the flow of information from the Project Steering Committee to the management of APLAC and PAC was restricted. No operational plans but action lists were discussed jointly with Steering Committee members. The impact monitoring was limited to the irregularly provided feedback from training participants. The driving force for project achievements in the Steering Committee was the PTB staff. These findings led to an appraisal of 72.5% regarding the success factor "steering".

Processes

Overall, the processes of the partner organisations were known to PTB and used where possible. But the change of project coordinators combined with an insufficient transfer of project information from one project coordinator to another generally affected the processes. Project-specific processes have been established and were functional in regard to the communication among the members of the Project Steering Committee. However, an introduced useful form, which clarified the different financial contributions, was not strictly applied. The success factor "processes" is therefore rated at 80%.

Learning and innovation

Important learning experiences have been made through the project activities and were incorporated into the new project (SANAP 2). However, more could have been learned if impact monitoring had been carried out, and if more active knowledge management had taken place. The achievement of the success factor "learning and innovation" is therefore rated at only 43.3%.

3. Learning processes and learning experience

There were a number of knowledge gains and experiences. The most important ones were related to:

- The introduction of criteria for training participation. The need to introduce training criteria was highlighted by PTB staff and the partners alike. The selection of not always eligible training participants was identified as an obstacle to project success by some interviewed persons.
- The need for more individually tailored support according to the needs of the targeted ABs. The attachment training, which can be regarded as a training on the job for a specific AB, was highly appreciated and considered as more effective than the general centralised training.
- The introduction of an impact monitoring and better feedback mechanism. Over time, all partners (PTB as well as APLAC and PAC) became aware that in order to optimise the support it needs more knowledge about the specific weaknesses of individual ABs. Therefore, the "Four-Level Training Evaluation Model" by Kirkpatrick may be introduced under APAC.
- Representatives of PTB and of partners alike increasingly questioning the classification of the targeted ABs according to the OECD-DAC list of ODA – recipients. This list includes also developed ABs from an accreditation perspective that are already signatories for many of the scopes within the APLAC MRA and/or PAC MLA (e.g. China, India, Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka etc.)

4. Recommendations

The evaluation results led to different recommendations to PTB and its respective partners. One of the main recommendations is to improve project ownership among APLAC and PAC (in the future: APAC) by allocating clear responsibilities to them as well as by an equal involvement of all partners into project management processes. Another important recommendation is the establishment of documents that clarify the roles of each partner. This will facilitate the assignment of responsibilities and thus also promote ownership among all partners. As far as APLAC and PAC are concerned, there is a general need for a clearer decision to support ABs from developing and emerging economies. In the event APLAC and PAC or APAC (from 2019) clearly chooses to do so, a systematic strategy to address the needs of the developing ABs is required.