

# EXTERNAL EVALUATION – SHORT REPORT

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## STRENGTHENING THE QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE IN ASEAN

Country | Region: Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Project No.: 2018.2055.4  
Laufzeit des Projekts: 1/2019 – 12/2021 – extended to 12/2022

Political partner: ASEAN Secretariat  
Implementing Partner: ASEAN Consultative Committee for Standards and Quality (ACCSQ)  
Executing Agency: Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt (PTB)

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Date: 05. June 2023

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**

<b>AB</b>	Accreditation Body
<b>ACCSQ</b>	ASEAN Consultative Committee for Standards and Quality
<b>AEC</b>	ASEAN Economic Community
<b>AFTLC</b>	ASEAN Food Testing Laboratory Committee
<b>APLAC</b>	Asia Pacific Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation
<b>AFTLC</b>	ASEAN Food Testing Laboratory Committee
<b>ASEC</b>	ASEAN Secretariat
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>ACRPP</b>	ASEAN Common Requirements of Pre-packaged Products
<b>AMS</b>	ASEAN Member States
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>CLM</b>	Cambodia, Laos PDR, Myanmar
<b>FTRL</b>	Food Testing Reference Laboratory
<b>GRP</b>	Good Regulatory Practice
<b>ILAC</b>	International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation
<b>MEDEA</b>	APMP/APMLF Metrology - Enabling Developing Economies in Asia
<b>MSME</b>	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
<b>NAFP</b>	National Accreditation Focal Point
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation
<b>QI</b>	Quality Infrastructure
<b>QuISP</b>	Quality Infrastructure for Sustainable Development
<b>PFPWG</b>	ACCSQ Prepared Foodstuff Product Working Group

**SANAP** Promoting regional accreditation networks in the Asia-Pacific region (APLAC)

**SB** Standards Body

**WG** Working Group

## 1. Project Description

Subject of the evaluation was the project ‘Strengthening the Quality Infrastructure of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN)’ (in short: the project). The project was implemented by *Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt* (PTB) on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation<sup>1</sup> together with the ASEAN Secretariat as political partner and the *ASEAN Consultative Committee for Standards and Quality* (ACCSQ) as implementing partner.

The overall project objective (impact) was to contribute to the ASEAN economic integration process to create a single market (ASEAN Community Vision 2025). The project activities were closely aligned to the *ACCSQ Standards and Conformance Strategic Plan 2016-2025* of the project aimed at promoting cross-border trade which in turn shall ultimately benefit the livelihoods of people in ASEAN Member States (AMS). The project addressed core challenges of the ASEANs economic integration process in the field of Quality Infrastructure (QI) including lack of harmonization at the regional level and insufficiently developed Quality Infrastructure Systems in some AMS. The lack of sufficient national capacities and quality assuring services are particularly pronounced in the three AMS Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar (in short: CLM countries).

To address the above-mentioned challenges, the project supported the ACCSQ and its subordinated sectoral bodies in developing regionally harmonized guidelines and mechanisms in the field of QI which are aligned with international standards and best practices. To enable practical implementation of regionally harmonized guidelines at the national level, the project provided capacity development measures such as information and experience-sharing, trainings, imparting-knowledge events. In terms of reducing heterogeneity, the project supported ASEAN’s efforts in narrowing down development gaps by providing specific trainings and consultancy services to Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar.<sup>2</sup> In addition, it organized awareness raising activities on QI for the private sector, regulatory authorities, and consumers. Apart from the geographic focus on selected AMS, the project had a thematic focus on food safety as the food sector is of economic importance for ASEAN.

The project was in its third implementation phase (2019-2022)<sup>3</sup>. The project objective was defined as follows: *ASEAN Member States are able to gear trade-relevant procedures of quality infrastructure to regional guidelines and international good practices, with special emphasis on Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar and on food safety.*

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<sup>1</sup> Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit, BMZ.

<sup>2</sup> Since early 2021, PTB fully adheres to the position of the German government on bilateral relations between Germany and Myanmar, which meant the suspension of the direct support for Myanmar, see also relevant policy article of the Federal Foreign Office of Germany: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/laenderinformationen/myanmar-node/bilateral/228658>

<sup>3</sup> First phase 7/2009 until 4/2014; second phase 5/2014 until 12/2018.

The project supported institutional capacities of QI institutions in ASEAN to better comply with international good practice in the fields of technical regulations, standards, accreditation, conformity assessment and legal metrology. The support included consultation on strategic orientation to ASEAN processes through ACCSQ and its sectoral bodies: a) WG-1 Standards; b) WG-2 Conformity Assessment; c) WG-3 Legal Metrology; and d) ACCSQ Prepared Foodstuff Product Working Group (PFPWG) and its ASEAN Food Testing Laboratory Committee (AFTLC). To achieve the objective the project was working in five **intervention areas** (outputs):

Output 1:	Output 2:	Output 3	Output 4:	Output 5:
ACCSQ Working Groups have drawn up ASEAN guidelines or policy papers and check the implementation of the guidelines.	The implementation of ASEAN guidelines and international good practices is promoted and strengthened in the Member States.	Deficits at the national level in the field of standardization and accreditation are overcome by means of consultation, coaching and training, particularly in the CLM countries.	Private economy, regulatory authorities and consumers are informed on the relevant topics of quality infrastructure .	Regional reference laboratories identify needs and requirements for support in the field of food safety in cooperation with the relevant ASEAN bodies.

## 2. Assessment of the project

The evaluation followed the standards set by the *OECD Development Assistance Committee* (OECD-DAC) for conducting final evaluations based on the six internationally recognized evaluation criteria as enlisted in the following chapter. Part of the evaluation was also to assess success factors of the German Capacity WORKS management model for cooperation systems in international contexts (see chapter 2.2).

### 2.1 Status of the change process

#### Relevance

The intervention's design is fully in line with the ASEAN economic integration process to create a single market (*ASEAN Community Vision 2025; Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Work Plan IV 2021-2025*)<sup>4</sup> , the cross-sectoral BMZ strategy *Aid for Trade* (2011), and the BMZ

<sup>4</sup> The IAI was launched in 2000, aiming to narrow the divide within ASEAN and enhance ASEAN's competitiveness as a region.

priorities for regional economic integration expressed in the *Strategy for Asia* (2015). The project design took into account the diversity of AMS in terms of level of international recognition as well as quantity and quality of QI services. The project design is assessed as plausible but highly ambitious given the complexity of the ASEAN context. Changes of the project design did not occur. Mark: 2,0<sup>5</sup>

### **Coherence**

Within the German Development Cooperation portfolio, the intervention was designed and implemented in a complementary manner, based on a division of tasks and comparative advantages (internal coherence). Due to COVID-19 pandemic circumstances, the overall level of communication, information and knowledge sharing among the German Development Cooperation projects (GIZ and PTB) as well as with other international development partners (e.g., EU ARISE Plus) was lower compared to the previous project phase. The intervention's design and implementation complemented the partner's own efforts and were coordinated with the activities of others to a limited extent (external coherence). Mark: 2,5

### **Effectiveness**

The project made overall good progress with its regional and national partners in ASEAN. Outcome indicator 1 'Guidelines and policy papers' is fulfilled to a large extent. Accomplishments of the other two outcome indicators 2 'Support for CLM countries' and 3 'Cooperation of Food Testing Reference Laboratories' are slightly lower. The intervention's activities, inputs and outputs were effectively implemented and contributed considerably to achieving the project's objective at outcome level. The way the project was implemented has contributed to achieving the project outcomes. The staff turnover in the lead project coordinator position posed challenges for the project. In particular, the institutional memory of project implementation is insufficiently developed. More capacities for overall management and steering purposes would have increased effectiveness. This relates mainly to the staff capacity of the lead project coordinator. Based on document analysis and interview findings the evaluation has not identified any leverage of unintended positive results by the project. During the evaluation mission there has been no indication that (unintended) negative results occurred in the project. Mark: 2,5

### **Efficiency**

The use of project resources was considered appropriate in terms of the results achieved (production efficiency). Allocation efficiency was appraised as adequate but could have been increased by more time capacities for the lead project coordinator and by identifying further

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<sup>5</sup> Marking Scale: 1 (very successful) = very good result, far above expectations, 2 (successful) = good result, entirely meets expectations, 3 (successful to a limited extent) = satisfactory; results are below expectations, but mainly positive, 4 (rather unsuccessful) = unsatisfactory result; below expectations; negative results prevail despite several positive results, 5 (mainly unsuccessful) = negative results clearly prevail despite several positive partial results, 6 (entirely unsuccessful) = the project has failed completely; situation has rather deteriorated.

synergies with other PTB projects. However, this was more difficult during this project term due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Mark: 2,5

### **Impact**

The project has contributed plausibly to ASEAN policies and initiatives which aim at ensuring its development towards a coherent ecosystem of standards and conformance. Results achieved at the outcome level contribute to higher-level changes in the future. The project has contributed to the development of a series of critical, technically sound, and recognized QI elements in the field of standardisation, accreditation, and metrology, as well as enhancing food testing capacities in ASEAN. Mark: 2,3

### **Sustainability**

The peer-to-peer approach provided support on the individual level (knowledge and skills), as well as triggered an institutional partnership between advanced AMS and the CL(M) countries. The trainings focused primarily on technical requirements and, on increasing technical competencies of staff. The project has not taken a market-based approach to strengthening national food testing laboratories (e. g. make use of market analysis to understand what laboratory services clients need). That would have been beneficial. Emphasis was put on the development of laboratory testing services from a scientific and regulatory point of view. Positive project achievements regarding professional expertise are likely to be durable, as they are aligned to partners' strategic goals. From the institutional point of view, instability of resources (budget, personnel) might jeopardise the success of accomplished changes (e. g. financing of trainings identified in the PTB-AFTLC Technical Training Concept for CLM Countries by the advanced AMS). Mark: 2,6

## **2.2 Capacity WORKS success factors for the observed results and change processes**

### **Strategy**

The project strategy is very broad and the complexity of the various layers of partner interests (at regional and national level) are high. Some envisaged change processes are very complex and go beyond available project resources. To address all QI areas simultaneously – metrology, standards, accreditation, and food testing – the project needs a more coherent strategic approach and additional resources. However, the strategy fits the politically sensitive situation and balances the cooperation with the regional organisation with the specific interests of partners in the involved AMS. Overall, a more comprehensive approach to project implementation - looking more at the interlinkages of the sectoral bodies; working on standards in the food sector, etc. - would have helped to increase effectiveness. Level of achievement: 80 %

### **Cooperation**

A stakeholder map was produced by the project. It depicts well the different stakeholder groups and responsibilities. Generally, the majority of actors are pre-determined by the ASEAN structure. In particular, the level of interaction with actors from the private sector was moderate. Level of achievement: 80 %

### **Steering structure**

The steering structure was outlined in the implementation agreement and is based on existing ASEAN structures. Key strategic and political steering took place during the so called 'dialogue sessions' in conjunction with the regular ACCSQ and WG meetings. These meetings were clearly structured along the overall objective regarding status of indicator achievement and the PTB-WG workplans to monitor project progress. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, communication, and interaction with ASEC were shifted to online formats as well as intensified (regular online calls and updates). Level of achievement: 75 %

### **Processes**

An explicit process analysis (process map) has not been conducted. The core processes are rather diverse and very output-specific (component, activity, and host country/major partner organization). The project team stated that it generally looks at activities and not the underlying processes. Processes concerning the consultation and decision-making processes within the ASEAN structures are known to a certain degree (e. g. principle of unanimity, coordination done by ASEC, rotation of WG chairs, communication via ASEC, etc.). Some interview results show different descriptions of the role of ACCSQ and its decision-making rules (e. g. whether guidelines do have to be approved or endorsed, different opinions on how national/regional FTRL are nominated). Level of achievement: 70 %

### **Learning and innovation**

The project has not explicitly defined any learning objectives during the project term. For preparing the follow-on project phase the project team (project coordinators, local consultant and key experts) conducted a self-assessment of the Capacity WORKS success factors in 2022. This exercise was supported by an external consultant and produced valuable insights for designing the fourth project phase. The project partners ability to steer and implement the project under COVID-19 pandemic conditions has been strengthened through more interaction and involvement in preparing interventions. Important lessons learnt were documented in the monitoring system on an annual basis between 2019-2021. Level of achievement: 90 %

## **3. Learning processes and learning experience**

**Learning processes**, (in the sense of systematic processes that were planned and initiated throughout the intervention and within the scope of which new knowledge has been acquired or shared within the scope of the project) have not been observed by the evaluation team.

**Experiences**, (in the sense of findings that took place within the scope of the project but were not planned). The outgoing lead project coordinator had comprehensively summarised experiences in the monitoring system. The evaluation team highlights the following project experiences:

- Baseline surveys of laboratories required considerable time and effort for defining the scope of the exercise and to balance diverging expectations between all involved partners (ASEAN, AMS, project coordinator, key experts). Having in-depth understanding of whether the action is in line with/beneficial for the strategic planning of ACCSQ and for the work of the Working Groups and especially for the AMS, is key.

- Indicators and how to achieve them should be clarified during the scoping mission. When these are not yet clear, it has to be done at the latest during the planning workshops.
- Create better understanding of the ASEAN structures: There is a need to first clarify how ASEAN (structure, functions) works to further support its development. This is a challenging but necessary step and must be done together with partners.

#### **4. Recommendations**

##### **Recommendations to the project partners:**

- (1) Partners contributions to the project at the ASEAN-level and at the CL(M) country level should be quantified in the implementation agreement to support shared responsibility for implementation.
- (2) Partner institutions (at ASEAN and individual AMS level) should ensure a higher level of information sharing among all project partners concerning the areas of cooperation for planning (planning workshop and preparing concept notes) in order to save time and resources (efficiency), help to avoid possible misunderstandings (communication) and most likely enhance effectiveness of the joint efforts.
- (3) Improve the process of drafting, consulting, and agreeing on concept notes for joint actions (see chapter 5.1.3). Concept notes are a good tool to involve all relevant stakeholders and to build a common understanding of the intervention. However, concept notes should address the content and method of implementation of a complete work package and not just single activities.
- (4) Agree on providing information on the status of documents (such as concept notes, reports). These documents require information on who wrote or is responsible for the document; the status of the version (draft vs final version), version number and date; when it was accepted or when content was added to by an organisation (such as ACCSQ).
- (5) Institutionalize a mechanism for knowledge sharing of trained staff with their colleagues (cascading of knowledge).

##### **Recommendations to the PTB project team:**

- (6) Defining indicators in line with intended outcomes for each QI sectoral body / national partner is crucial. Having indicators that are specific guides implementation and helps to develop a common understanding of project targets and the course of implementation to be taken.
- (7) The result matrix should cover achievements made by the previous project phase. Thus, it is recommended to define baseline values which relate to achievements made in the previous phase (if appropriate).
- (8) Continue with the regular online exchange between the PTB project coordinators and ASEC. Additionally, regular visits of the lead project coordinator to ASEC should be reintroduced, ideally twice a year.
- (9) Set-up a quarterly online meeting between project coordinators and all key experts to identify potential synergies among the different activities with the sectoral bodies of the ACCSQ.
- (10) Resume and intensify regular coordination and information exchange with other donor projects (German Development Cooperation, EU etc.), as done before the COVID-19 pandemic. This also applies to PTB internal exchange meetings with other relevant PTB projects in the ASEAN region.

- (11) Conduct comprehensive planning workshops with the various sectoral bodies. After conducting the planning workshops for the sectoral bodies, a consolidation workshop among the project coordinators and key experts is recommended for information sharing and coordination.
- (12) Deploy more QI experts from AMS for project planning and implementation. Ideally couple international and ASEAN-based experts for joint assignments/missions.
- (13) Given the complexity of the ASEAN project, a full-time lead project coordinator ('one face to the customer') for implementation and steering is considered beneficial for consistent project implementation.
- (14) Set-up an advisory expert team of one ASEAN-based and one international expert to support the lead project coordinator in strategic overall guidance and project steering. At the same time, this team would also be in charge of providing technical and/or strategic advice to the ACCSQ.
- (15) Having a qualified project officer as a liaison person at the ASEC is of paramount importance. It is recommended to expand the competencies of this position (e. g. handing over responsibilities for an activity such as organising an awareness event, etc.). To allow this, it is also recommended to reinforce the PTB project staff at the ASEC by a part-time staff for monitoring and reporting purposes (50%) to pay stronger attention to the uptake of trainings at the various partner institutions.
- (16) Focus the bilateral support in phase 4 of the project on two IAI countries only: Cambodia and Lao PDR and effectively use existing synergies with regional and bilateral PTB projects.
- (17) Clarify cooperation with partners from Brunei as the country does not belong to the group of least developed countries. Further cooperation is possible using Brunei's own financial resources (as it has been the case in the third project phase). This must be communicated clearly and in a diplomatic manner.
- (18) Reconsider linkages with the bilateral project in Cambodia. Capacity development measures for the national partners financed by the ASEAN-PTB project should be steered by the bilateral PTB projects as they have closer working relationships with their partners (principle of subsidiarity).
- (19) WG 1 Standardisation: Continue to support stakeholder engagement as this is key to increase credibility and support for a well-functioning QI system.
- (20) WG 2 Accreditation: NAFFP concept should be prolonged until the departments of accreditation in CL(M) countries are settled securely. A national legal framework e. g. defining to establish QI bodies or provide legal powers is conducive to developing a functioning accreditation system.
- (21) WG 3 Legal Metrology: Continue with the support for the WG 3/EGM Action-Plan as this document provides an important step for a continued institutional cooperation. Technical expertise should be provided for partners in Cambodia and Lao PDR to draw a baseline of the metrology infrastructure by using tools like the Rapid Diagnostic Toolkit and to form ideas through direct discussions with local partners.
- (22) AFTLC: Concerning the PTB-AFTLC Technical Training Concept for CLM Countries (pay more attention to sustainability issues of how all involved stakeholders could contribute to mobilize the financial resources needed for conducting the training and monitoring tasks. Commitments by other stakeholders (e. g. more advanced AMS) to provide financial support

for trainings beyond the two trainings already granted to be financed by PTB should be achieved as part of the concept.

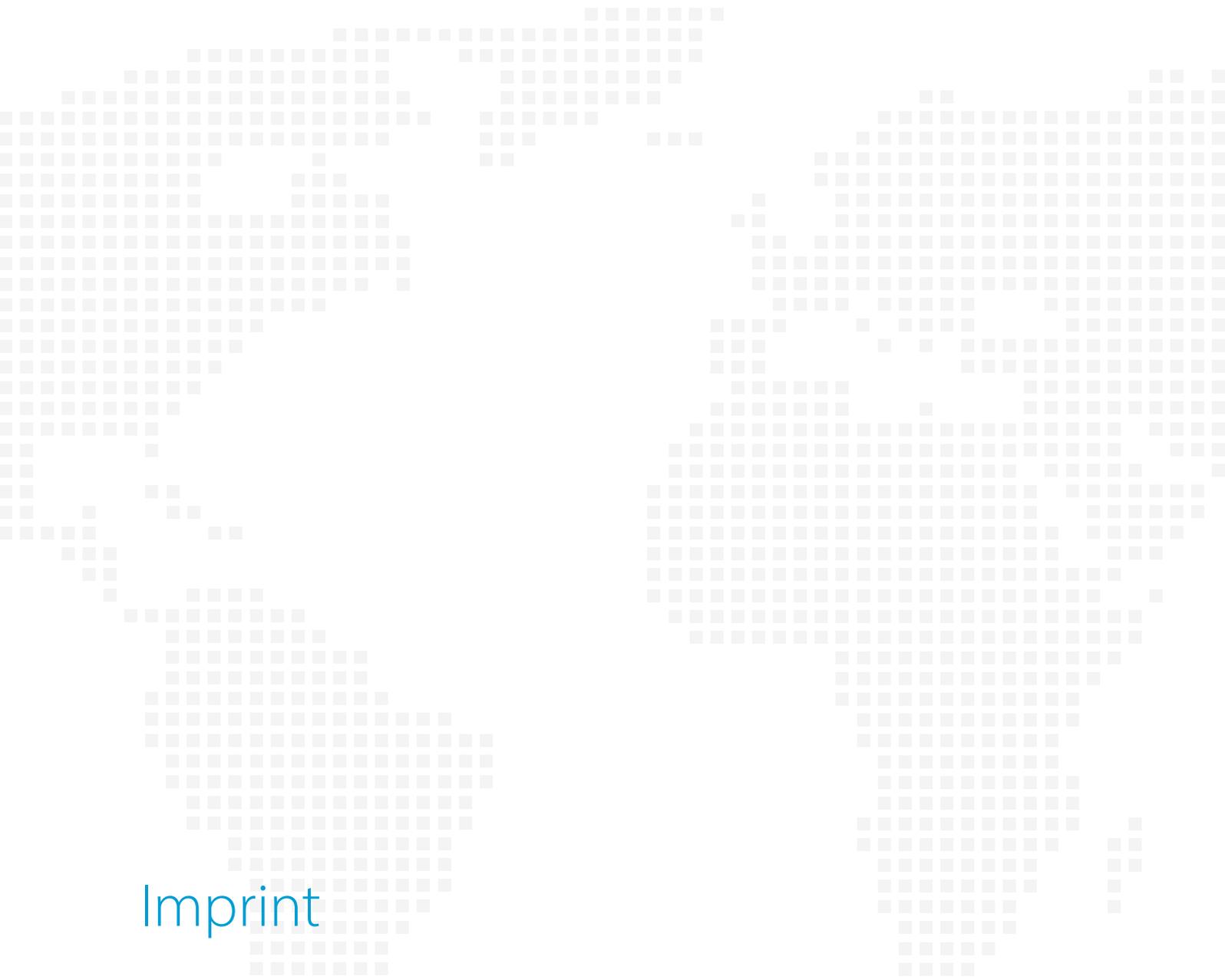
**Recommendations to the PTB International Cooperation Department (Group 9.3):**

- (23) Set clear management priorities to realise interlinkages between bilateral and regional PTB projects (e. g. setting clear targets for coordination, reporting on synergies realised, etc.).
- (24) Revise structure of the reports for (key) experts. Parts of the report template with general descriptions of the project should be reduced. More emphasis should be on analysing activities implemented (effectiveness, coherence with planning, intended changes, etc.) and recommendations for the way forward. Also, an additional chapter for the management reaction by the project coordinator should be added at the end of the report template to document reactions, decisions, and developments over time.
- (25) Key recommendations made by (key) experts concerning the course of action to be taken should be monitored in the existing project monitoring system (follow-up on status and reasons for complying or rejecting recommendations made).
- (26) Promote more joint Capacity WORKS Self-Assessments of the project team. This has produced valuable insights. It would be good to promote such an assessment done by the project coordinator and key expert(s) at least once during the term of a project.
- (27) The new project coordinator should present and discuss the evaluation findings with ASEC in-person during his first visit to ASEC or during the next ACCSQ meeting. This would provide the opportunity to discuss in-depth the evaluation findings (utility of evaluation findings) and the way forward.

**Recommendations to the evaluation unit of PTB Working Group 9.01:**

- (28) There should always be a meeting between the evaluation team and the key political and/or implementation partner for preparing the evaluation and to learn about partner interests in the evaluation findings.
- (29) Activity monitoring tools and the data provided for the efficiency chapter (financial monitoring data) are important sources for assessing efficiency. Thus, the evaluation unit should ensure the quality of this data in regard of timeliness and completeness.
- (30) A combination of international and national evaluation expertise from the respective partner countries would increase the understanding of the partner context. Therefore, in the case of the PTB-ASEAN QI project, it is recommended to use more regional technical evaluators from advanced AMS countries. And in case of bilateral PTB projects national evaluators should be assigned.
- (31) A self-assessment of the Capacity WORKS success factors by the project team (project coordinator and key experts) should become a general input for evaluations. Such an analysis should be facilitated by an external consultant.

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# Imprint

**Published by**

Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt  
Bundesallee 100  
38116 Braunschweig  
Germany

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9.01 Processes of International Cooperation  
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