

EXTERNAL EVALUATION - SHORT REPORT¹

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Project title **Increasing the use of quality-related services in Kyrgyzstan**

Country | Region: Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia

Project number: 2019.2129.5

Project term: 01 April 2022 until 31 March 2025

Lead executing agency: Ministry of Economy and Commerce, Kyrgyzstan

Executing agency(ies): National Metrology Institute | National Accreditation Body

PTB | Section: Q.31 (former 9.31)

PTB | Project Coordinator: Larysa Schijen

Date: 20 February 2025

This evaluation is an independent assessment. Its contents reflect the evaluator's opinion which is not necessarily equivalent to PTB's view.

¹The report should not exceed 7 pages.

List of abbreviations

BICSM	Bishkek Centre for Testing, Certification and Metrology
BMZ	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung
Calidena	PTB value chain approach. Combination from the Spanish words for chain (of value), 'cadena', and quality, 'calidad'.
DAKKS	Deutsche Akkreditierungsstelle GmbH
DC	Development Cooperation
CSM	Centre for Standardization and Metrology
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EQM	Export quality management
EU	European Union
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
GCI	Global Competitiveness Index
HACCP	Hazard analysis and critical control points
iKZE	Intermittent short-term expert
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KCA	Kyrgyz Center of Accreditation
MoEC	Ministry of Economics and Commerce
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources, Regional Development
OCSM	Osh Centre for Testing, Certification and Metrology
PTB	Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organisation

1. Executive summary of the project

The project ‘Increasing the use of quality-related services in Kyrgyzstan’ (referred to as ‘the project’) is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ). For the second phase of the project running from April 2022 until March 2025 the project has a total budget of EUR 2.2 million. It is an integral part of the German development cooperation (DC) programme, ‘Sustainable Economic Development’ (SED) aiming to facilitate sustainable economic development. The **project objective** is:

Private and state companies and institutions in selected regions of Kyrgyzstan use quality infrastructure services.

Selected **project regions** are, besides the capital Bishkek, Osh and Jalal-Abad region in the south and Karakol region in the north of the country.² The project activities will end in March 2025 due to the fact that the German DC with Kyrgyzstan officially ends in 2026. In order to achieve the objective, the project works in three **intervention areas** (outputs):

Output 1 ‚Capacities for QI services‘	Output 2 ‚Access to QI services‘	Output 3 ‚Relevance of QI services‘
Capacity building of public and private sector institutions in quality infrastructure to improve their service delivery.	Improving access to reliable quality infrastructure services in Bishkek and selected regions (e.g. Osh, Karakol).	Raising awareness among relevant stakeholders of the importance of QI services as a tool for developing the private sector.

The **policy partner** is the Ministry of Economy and Trade (MoEC) and its Department of Technical Regulation and Metrology. The project is mainly targeting key partners of the QI system - the national metrology institute, namely the Centre for Standardisation and Metrology (CSM) in Bishkek (including selected regional branches e.g. Osh, Karakol) and the national accreditation body, namely the Kyrgyz Centre of Accreditation (KCA). The core of the project is to support the selected 11 public laboratories (calibration laboratories of the CSM at national and regional level; 7 testing food laboratories). The public laboratories are under the authority of the MoEC, the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). The beneficiaries are all users of quality-related services, such as enterprises in the selected value chains of honey, dried fruits and nuts, milk, secondary laboratories and consumers.

2. Evaluation of the project

As specified in the ToR, the purpose of this evaluation is to assess the project’s performance, including the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency of related interventions, the sustainability of positive results, and the likelihood of overall impact in the near to long term future. The evaluation follows the guiding evaluation principles of the BMZ³ and the standards of the German Society for Evaluation: utility, feasibility, fairness, accuracy, independence and integrity. These principles ensure that evaluations are conducted ethically, transparently, and effectively. PTB evaluations are usually carried out before the end of a project term. The project was selected for the evaluation in 2024 based on defined PTB internal rules for an independent sampling procedure .

² Kyrgyzstan has by definition 7 administrative regions or ‘oblasts’: Chui, Talas, Issyk-Kul and Naryn in the northern region of the country, and Batken, Osh, Jalal-Abad in the southern region. The capital Bishkek and Osh in the south of the country are independent administrative units.

³ BMZ, 2021. Grundsätze der Evaluierung. Evaluierungskriterien der bilateralen Entwicklungszusammenarbeit – Orientierungslinien des BMZ. Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, Bonn. August 2021. 14 Seiten. www.bmz.de/resource/blob/92894/evaluierungskriterien.pdf

The project was evaluated using a **theory-based evaluation design** that used the project's theory of change as the basis for analysis. The theory of change was constructed on the basis of relevant planning and implementation documents and visualised as an outcome model (impact logic) showing the if-then logic of the project design. Given the limited resources available in terms of budget and time, alternative evaluation approaches were rejected. For example, the quasi-experimental approach of analysing cause and effect relationships using control groups was ruled out. Instead, a contribution analysis was carried out. This consists of analysing the contribution of a project and investigating the extent to which observed outcomes (positive or negative) can be attributed to the project. In assessing efficiency, a follow-the-money approach was used to assess production efficiency and overall allocation efficiency.

Interviews with partners, stakeholders and selected representatives of the target group were conducted, using semi-structured interviews. The evaluation combined using virtual conference platforms and in-person interviews and/or focus groups with partners and stakeholders in Bishkek (field mission from 21 until 25 October 2024). A key set of guiding questions was used in a conversational format to collect insights from involved partners. The guiding questions were adjusted according to the background and context of the respective interviewee. A key element of data analysis is triangulation of results, i. e. comparing information from different sources, such as documentation and interviews, or interviews on the same subject with different stakeholders, were used to corroborate or check the reliability of evidence.

The six **OECD/DAC criteria** were used as an evaluation basis for this evaluation:

- Relevance: Is the project doing the right things?
- Coherence: How well does the project fit?
- Effectiveness: Is the project achieving its objectives?
- Impact (higher-level development results): What difference does the project make?
- Efficiency: How well are resources being used?
- Sustainability: Will the results last?

The following marking scale was used for the evaluation:

1	2	3	4	5	6
very successful	successful	successful to a limited extent	rather unsuccessful	mainly unsuccessful	entirely unsuccessful

Overall, the project received the mark: 2.4 (successful).

Relevance

The project is well aligned with BMZ and partner priorities and generally responded to the needs of partners and the target group: In-depth capacity assessments of training needs and testing capabilities of the supported laboratories have been done. The project design is assessed as satisfactory. Most indicators comply with the SMART criteria but are rather measuring activities than results (e.g. indicator 3.2 relates only to the number of annual exchanges). Given the fact that the project builds on experiences with partners during the first implementation phase the level of ambition has been set too moderately (e.g. outcome indicator 3). The project has successfully adapted to challenges in the course of the 2nd phase.

Overall, the criterion received the mark: 2

Coherence

Within German development cooperation (internal coherence), the project is designed and implemented in a complementary manner on the basis of a division of labour. There is sufficient coordination and cooperation with GIZ at the operational country level. Coordination at the international level (external coherence) is also satisfactory. In both cases, it is recommended to establish a more regular exchange - also at management level - in order to keep track of support from other development partners. This will enable the project team to

identify potential synergies, for example with the EU's Team Europe Initiative project, which started in 2024 and will run beyond the current project term. Opportunities in this regard have not yet been sufficiently explored.

Overall, the criterion received the mark: 2.5

Effectiveness

The project is very likely to achieve its objective (at outcome level) by the end of the project period in March 2025 according to the agreed indicators. The project's contributions to the outcome indicators have been largely confirmed. The achievement of outcome indicator 1 (increase in calibration and testing services) is due to the more accurate and valid services of the QI institutions supported by the project (outputs 1 and 2). However, external factors strongly influence this contribution (e.g. support from other development partners, market dynamics, etc.). Trained laboratory staff have the knowledge of new testing methods, but whether they apply their newly acquired knowledge depends on their individual skill levels and daily routines, as well as the regular demand for the new services. Awareness raising activities have also contributed. Evidence of uptake by enterprises ('systematic use' of services) is moderate. A more sophisticated monitoring system (see chapter 4.2) would have provided better evidence of the attribution of results to project interventions.

Overall, the criterion received the mark: 2

Efficiency

The total budget amounts to EUR 2.2 million, including EUR 800,000 remaining from the first implementation phase, which was not spent due to, among other things, the mobility restrictions of Covid-19. Thus, the project is significantly better funded compared to the average bilateral three-year PTB project. As would be expected for a technical cooperation project, a significant proportion of the funds is allocated to project management staff and the provision of international knowledge to partners through short-term expertise (74%), as well as to training activities (human capacity development budget line: 13 %). The results of the project (at output level) could have been increased (maximum principle) by increasing the number of supported companies and using a more multiplier approach in cooperating with sector associations or by deploying more technical experts from South-East Europe or Caucasus countries. The use of resources by the intervention deemed reasonable with regard to the outputs achieved (production efficiency). Allocation efficiency is appraised as appropriate but could have been increased by defining more ambitious targets.

Overall, the criterion received the mark: 2.5

Impact (higher-level development results)

The intended higher-level development changes – competitiveness, higher product quality and the reduction of technical barriers to trade are plausible. However, the project's contribution is rather punctual. Changes in product quality are taking place in some individual enterprises (monitoring data), but scaling up results remains a challenge. In addition, a broad impact in the long term can only be achieved under certain conditions (economic dynamics, harmonisation of QI responsibilities of food testing laboratories, legal framework, public funding of primary laboratories, etc.). No negative unintended changes have been observed; on the contrary, QI reinforces positive changes in all dimensions of sustainable development.

Overall, the criterion received the mark: 2.8

Sustainability

In summary, the financial and human capacity at the national level (CSM and KCA) appears to be sufficient to sustain the results achieved. A detailed assessment of the financial sustainability of the supported food testing laboratories is not possible due to a lack of data on the income situation. Financial and human resources are most scarce in the regional branches of CSM, which do not receive support from the national budget; BICSM and OCSM seem to be in a privileged position and are trying to find funding for their work (e.g. other donors, government funds). All laboratories lack funds for reference materials, consumables, test kits, reagents and resources to participate in ILCs or PTs. Thus, even in those partner organisations that receive government

funding, the situation is far from robust and resilience in terms of ability to respond to unforeseen events is limited.

Overall, the criterion received the mark: 2.7

3. Learning processes and experiences

Learning processes (in the sense of systematic processes that were planned and initiated throughout the intervention and through which new knowledge was acquired or shared within the intervention) were documented in the monitoring file, such as starting procurement as early as possible or clearly defining the responsibilities of the project team (e.g. the local expert, the short-term experts and the project coordinator).

Regarding the trainings for the calibration and food testing laboratories a lesson learned raised by the interviewees was to have longer sessions for practical training and to pursue a more train-the trainer approach (TOT). To ensure sustainability, incorporate TOT activities should be integrated into project initiatives whenever possible, e.g. develop a pool of certified trainers within the organization who can deliver ongoing training; foster knowledge transfer through equipping staff with the skills to train their peers, to ensure continuity of expertise. This will strengthen the institution's ability to independently conduct high-demand trainings on topics such as (e.g. measurement uncertainty, method validation for GC and HPLC, ISO/IEC 17043 standard implementation, service engineering for laboratory equipment. These lessons are fully supported by the evaluation team. Moreover, bringing in technical experts from countries with similar transformation experience is very welcome by partners and conducive for learning processes (e.g. Russian language skills, knowledge about 'poverka' system).

Policy advice for line ministries needs time and effort (resources) by the project team. Working relationships have to be build up and a mutual understanding of the scope of work is needed. This requires a clear responsibility of a technical expert with profound knowledge in working with line ministries and a clear strategy (goals, interventions, clearly aligned to policy processes of the partner).

4. Recommendations

Recommendations to partners:

(1) MoEC

- **Form a national QI platform:** Strengthen the work of the introduced 'Scientific and Entrepreneurial Platform and the National Quality Infrastructure' to have a multi-stakeholder engagement mechanism to facilitate coordinated policy development and implementation in quality infrastructure.

(2) KCA

- **Strengthen recognition and enhance expertise:** Promote accreditation benefits through success stories, social media, and the internet. Build MRAs with other accreditation bodies for easier market access. Invest in training for assessors and experts in emerging areas, and develop new accreditation services, such as ISO/IEC 17043 and standards in food safety (ISO 22000) and quality management (ISO 9001).
- **Sustain PTB momentum:** Use PTB knowledge to create post-project plans, expand ToT programs, and evaluate GOST to ISO transitions. Collaborate with stakeholders and committees to ensure alignment with their needs.

(3) CSM

- **Strengthen recognition:** Promote CSM services via social media and websites to educate stakeholders. Engage in multi-stakeholder dialogues to address metrology needs and gaps, and use platforms like the Laboratory Club and MoEC Technical Committees to attract clients and share best practices.

- **Expand services:** Obtain ISO 17020 accreditation for pressure gauges, dispensers, and meters, and maintain ISO 17025 for existing services. Explore local and regional supply of reference materials and develop PT/ILC schemes with ISO/IEC 17043 procedures. Ensure calibration traceability through certified reference materials from international labs.

(4) **Food testing laboratories:**

- **Expand services to meet market demand:** Diversify testing parameters, especially for pesticides and microbiological analyses, and explore organic certification testing. And upgrade methods for meeting requirements of the international market: Transition from GOST to ISO methods gradually, prioritizing high-demand tests.
- **Continuing engagement in Lab-Club activities:** Support the institutional strengthening of the Lab-Club in future for the joint benefit of the QI system.

Recommendations to the project team:

- (5) **CALIDENA activities - monitor impact of the Food Logistica fair:** Track the outcomes of the participation in Fruit Logistica 2025 to measure and amplify its impact on exports and KCA's reputation.
- **Develop sustainability concept for the Laboratory Club:** Develop/update the charter focusing on statute to allow membership for all types and sectors of laboratories, including private and public organizations. This should encompass industrial (in-house labs), scientific research, educational, and other types of laboratories. Define benefits to members: Promote the club among various potential member organizations. Clarify member contributions: fees and/or in-kind contributions (e.g. collegial visits between labs, exchange meetings, identification of common challenges, and collaborative problem-solving. Try to build collaboration with international and regional organizations: exchange experiences with their member national associations, e.g. Georgian Laboratory Association (GeLab). Long term: establish partnerships with similar organizations/networks like Eurolab and Eurachem.

Recommendations to the International Cooperation Department (Group Q.3):

- (6) **Project design:** For projects where there will be no extension, it is important that the project design clearly specifies the phase-out and sustainability path.
- (7) **Policy level interventions:** A more targeted approach to advising on policy and developing QI systems is recommended.
- (8) **Training Programs:** Alongside theoretical training, greater emphasis should be placed on practical training sessions, allocating sufficient time to ensure the mastery of analytical methods up to accreditation standards. Planning training programs in consultation with potential participants to ensure their relevance and effectiveness. Training materials should be provided to participants in advance (e.g., at least 10 days before a 1-day training) to allow adequate preparation for the sessions.
- (9) **Procurement:** Procurement of equipment should take place earlier in the project implementation period (e.g. within the first year). There is a need to speed up the procurement process. A challenge arose regarding the customs clearance process, as the contract between the government and PTB/GIZ did not specify which laboratories the shipments would be sent to (it generally mentioned 'support for labs'). This issue should be addressed in future projects.

Recommendations to the evaluation unit of Working Group Q.01:

- (10) Organizing the on-site evaluation mission back-to-back with a project activity (e.g. training, working group meetings, etc.) is a good way to reach out to many project partners. As a standard procedure the evaluation team should be given a time slot to present the purpose of the evaluation. This ensures that all participants do have the same level of knowledge about the evaluation mission.