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Technical Assistance to CIS countries

Case study of Kyrgyzstan

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Outline

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1. Country Background

Kyrgyzstan is small, landlocked mountainous country with the population about 5.1 mil. people and GDP per capita about USD550 at market exchange rate which makes it small market economy with poor population. The Kyrgyz Republic has small, poorly developed and hardly accessible deposits of mineral energy products, mostly relying on supply of energy from neighboring countries (oil and petroleum products from Russia and Kazakhstan, gas from Uzbekistan). The country is rich in hydro resources which it exports, while country itself is highly dependant on water and irrigation for its agriculture.

Table 1. Selected country indicators in 2005

	Surface area (thousand sq m)	Population density (people per sq. km)	Population, total, thou.	GDP per capita, PPP (current international $)
Kyrgyz Republic	200	27	5093	1,935

Source: World Development Indicators 2006

After the break-up of the Soviet Union the Kyrgyz Republic faced serious challenges related to the transition to market economy. Immediate effect of the economic reforms, exacerbated by unsustainable, inefficient policies and institutions of the communist system and disintegration of the common economic space, was deep recession which resulted in sharp decline of GDP which in 2005 was only 83.5% of the level in 1990 and widespread poverty (NSC). GDP started growing since 1996 with several stoppages related to domestic and external factors (economic crisis in 1998, accident at the Kumtor gold in 2002 mining and political turmoil in 2005). The sources of economic growth were not diversified, mainly based on mining and agriculture, but during last years the role of services has increased substantially.

The Kyrgyz Government managed to curb inflation and decrease huge fiscal and external deficits. However, it did not prevent the Republic from accumulation of considerable debt burden almost from zero in 1992 to 2.2 billion USD in 2006 because of inappropriate public borrowing at commercial terms and high level of concessional lending by the international financial institutions (UNDP 2005, NBKR 2007). The debt was restructured by the Paris Club several times (in 2002 and 2005 years) and this method of relief can not be used anymore.

Since 1993 and through the end of the nineties, the Kyrgyz Republic was the leader among CIS countries in the area of market reforms. The country was the first to introduce its national currency and access the WTO; it quickly implemented privatization, price deregulation, liberalization of economic relationships. The chose of the country development model (liberal) was based on the country's specific features: absence of strong sector to support, lack of domestic

investment, high level of poverty and narrow domestic market, etc. In spite of the fact that Kyrgyzstan was the best performer in launching reforms in the early 1990s, by the end of 1990s the reform process was running out of steam (UNDP 2005: 174). Data from table 2 shows that reforms stalled in large scale privatization, competitions policy, banking sector reform and reform of infrastructure sector.

The main reason for this was concentration of power and key economic sectors in those close to the regime, while society as a whole was excluded from the resource allocation process and faced the burden of partial reforms that led to the removal of the President Akaev from office in 2005 (UNPD 2005). Stalled reforms in the public administration, non-privatized natural monopoles, corruption, an unfavorable investment climate seriously limits country development (IMF 2007).

Table 2. Selected EBRD transition indicators

	1992	**1995**	**1998**	**2002**	**2005**
EBRD index of small-scale privatisation	2	4	4	4	4
EBRD index of large-scale privatisation	2	3	3	3	3.7
EBRD index of price liberalisation	2.3	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.3
EBRD index of forex and trade liberalisation	2	4	4	4.3	4.3
EBRD index of competition policy	1	2	2	2	2
EBRD index of banking sector reform	1	2	2.3	2	2.3
EBRD index of reform of non-bank financial institutions	1	1.7	2	2	2
EBRD index of infrastructure reform	1	1.3	1.3	1.7	1.7

Source: EBRD

Kyrgyzstan is heavily dependent on its neighbors and international community for access to the rest of the world, for security reasons and for its social-economic development. Kyrgyzstan joined almost all regional unions where the most important were Commonwealth of Independent States, Shanghai's Organization for Cooperation and Eurasian Economic Community. In spite of the common understanding that cooperation is important for the region[1], there are reasons that drive countries at different directions: different level of political and economic development, vested interests, integration is still considered with a sense of suspicion and the belief that it implies the loss of national independence and identity (UNDP 2005: 24). All this leads to the fact that very often regional unions have declarative nature and Kyrgyzstan has to solve many issues on bilateral basis where the Republic has weak leverage.

Kyrgyzstan has continued to play an active role in the coalition against terrorism by hosting coalition air forces at Manas airport. Russia countered US presence in Kyrgyzstan by establishing, in the framework of the Collective Security Treaty, a rapid deployment force at its first-ever airbase outside Russian territory at Kant airport in 2003.

[1] According to the survey of the 2004 World Bank Public Opinion Survey, 71 percent of respondents in Central Asian countries maintained that regional economic cooperation in Central Asia is either somewhat or very good (UNDP 2005).

Main economic partners for the Kyrgyz Republic are Russia and Kazakhstan which accounted for 40% of export and 50% of import of the Kyrgyz republic in 2005. Other major trade partners are Germany, Switzerland, and Great Britain where Kyrgyzstan mainly exports gold. Russia and Kazakhstan also play important role for Kyrgyzstan as host countries for labor migrants whose remittances play important role in the country. From the point of view of FDI, the most important partners are Kazakhstan (40% of total FDI in 2005 according to NSC), Russia, Germany and Great Britain. Kazakhstan and Russia are also interested in investment into hydrological sector of the Kyrgyz Republic. Kazakh and Russian companies agreed to prepare preliminary feasibility study for the construction of Kambarata stations Construction of these stations will allow to control almost all water in Naryn river flowing to downstream countries.

2. Demand for Technical Cooperation in the Country

2.1. *Attitude of the Government and the Society towards Democracy and Market Economy*

In the beginning of the transformation process the Kyrgyz Republic faced tremendous challenges related to the lack of financial resources and expertise to cope with piling economic and social problems. In addition, the country has to set up new institutions literally from scratch while having limited capacity of political and intellectual elite. Faced with these conditions, lacking the natural resources enjoyed by some of its neighbors and facing political isolationism from them, Kyrgyzstan has chosen a different path: the rapid construction of a market economy and building of a democratic society. Actually, the country did not have many other choices at that moment. This decision was supported by international financial institutions, donor countries and foreign aid helped the country to smooth the transformation process (Koichumanov, Otorbaev and Starr 2005: 21).

The country was extremely open for any type of aid and there was no strong opposition to conducted reforms. Demand from the country was supported by huge supply from donors while little attention was given to the absorption capacity of the country. The lion share of aid went to support the government budget and balance of payment, development of road and energy infrastructure, development of health care, education, financial sector, etc. The government was more interested in big investment projects rather than technical assistance, but they benefited a lot from TA as well. New institutions were established, staff of new ministries and agencies was trained at home and abroad, many officials participated in projects with high remuneration rates.

Basically, the Kyrgyz Government accepted all suggested projects and reforms, even if it was not interested and did not have capacity to implement them. Very often the design of the TA projects was not coordinated with the Government and other donors, without identification of clear country needs. Co-financing from the country side was not requested in most of the projects that

seriously questioned the sense of ownership. All these problems led to evaporation of reform enthusiasm, corruption and nepotism, parasitic exploitation of TC projects for specific group interests and distorted incentives for both project staff and personnel of beneficiary agencies (Cukrowski et al. 2002).

Strong hierarchical and centralized state started considering international assistance as a mechanism allowing them to get more power and to increase their income. Technical assistance transformed into hidden form of subsidising administration (Cukrowski et al. 2002). The attitude to donors aid is changing now mostly because of the accumulated debt burden and lack of trust to international community. As a result main donors changed their approach to assistance towards more coordinated, targeted projects (The Joint Country Support Strategy) based on strategic country documents (e.g. Country Development Strategy).

2.2. *Technical Capacity of the Country*

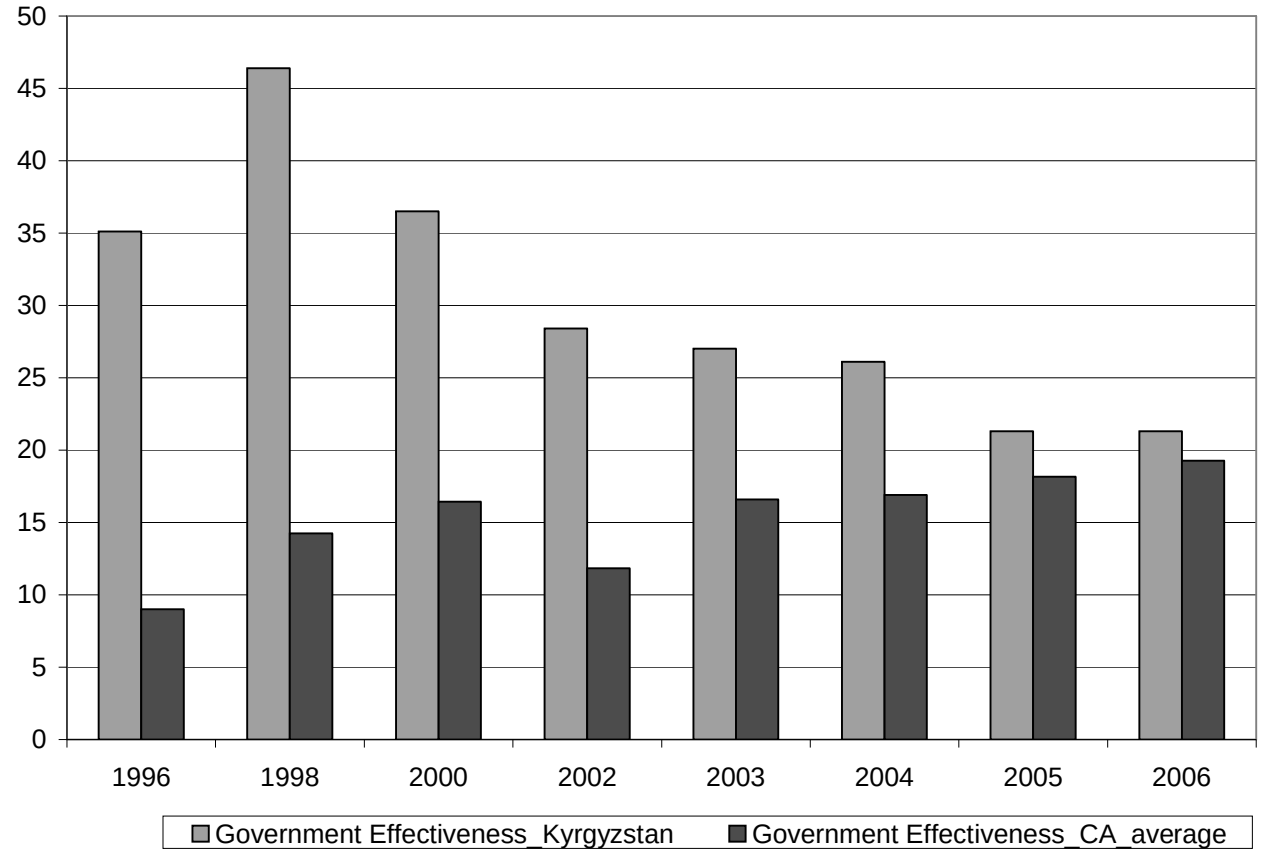
It is widely recognized that successful implementation of many donors projects in the republic was hindered by lack of capacity of the Government to absorb such a big amount of money (Koichumanov, Otorbaev, Starr 2005, World Bank 2007). World Governance Indicators developed by the World Bank will help to see how the capacity of the country has been changing during the time and it will be possible to compare Kyrgyzstan with neighboring Central Asian countries. Unfortunately, the data is only available from 1996, but in any case this data will help to asses the different dimensions of technical capacity of the country.

One indicator of particular interest for us is government effectiveness which measures the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies (Kaufmann, Kraay, Mastruzzi 2007).

The figure 1 shows the percentile rank[2] of the Kyrgyz Republic and average rank for three Central Asian countries[3]: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan based on the indicator of governance effectiveness. The data shows that in 1996-1998 Kyrgyzstan had better government capacity than in average Central Asian Republics (this is mainly related to very low position of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan). For instance, in 1998 46.2% of countries ranked below Kyrgyzstan, according to governance effectiveness, while the average rank of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan was 14.2%. Later situation has changed and the rank of Kyrgyzstan started getting down and now its position is almost the same as the average position of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. This was due to the worsened situation in Kyrgyzstan and improvements in Kazakhstan (33.6% rank in 2006) and Tajikistan (14.2% rank in 2006).

[2] Percentile rank (0-100) indicates the percentage of countries that rank below the selected country.

Figure 1. Percentile rank, according to governance effectiveness indicator for Kyrgyzstan and average for three Central Asian Republics (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan)



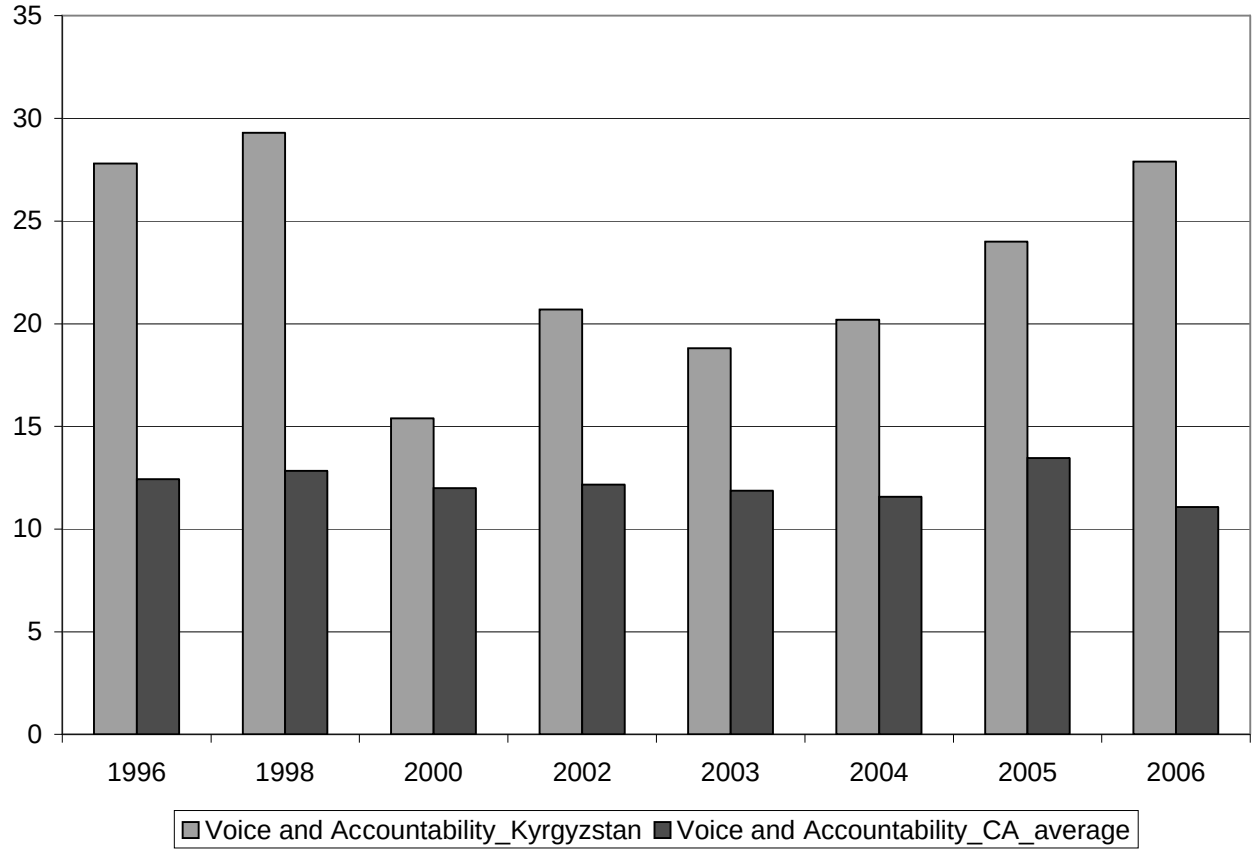
Source: World Governance Indicators, author's calculation.

Such sharp changes in governance effectiveness in Kyrgyzstan may be attributed to massive donors' aid which in the beginning was more effective and help to establish and improve government institutions, but due to stalled reforms the situation has worsened later allowing other countries (especially Kazakhstan) to catch up.

A bit different picture is observed with the voice and accountability indicator[4], Kyrgyzstan position was always better in comparison with average position of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, and in spite of some worsening in 2000-2003, situation has improved by 2006. This may considered as a factor that helped the government to implement reforms. However, relative high position of Kyrgyzstan may also be attributed to donors' support of the civil society in the Republic.

[3] Turkmenistan is deliberately excluded from consideration as a very specific case with very dictatorship regime.

Figure 2. Percentile rank, according to voice and accountability indicator for Kyrgyzstan and average for three Central Asian Republics (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan)



Source: World Governance Indicators, author's calculation

In sum, technical capacity of the Kyrgyz Republic was not high at the beginning of the transformation process, but it was much better than the situation in other Central Asian republics in average. Massive aid government effectiveness has improved government effectiveness in 1996-1998, but later stalled further reforms worsened government effectiveness significantly, especially against improvements in Kazakhstan.

3. Supply of TA to the Country

3.1. *Dynamics of TA Flows*

There is no comprehensive database on technical assistance available for the Kyrgyz Republic. One of the most important sources of information is OECD database which shows Official Development Assistance (ODA) by donors, countries, type of aid. This source of information can be used for cross countries comparison; however some donors are not reflected in it.

[4] Voice and accountability measures the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media.

Another source of information about donors' projects is the database maintained by the National Coordination Unit supported by European Commission. However, this database is also not comprehensive because in many projects some data is missing (amount, sector, date, etc.). This database may be used to have a sectoral picture of donors' aid.

The total dynamic of TA flows to Kyrgyzstan is presented in table 3 along with the data for three neighboring Central Asian countries.

Table 3. Total flows of technical cooperation to Central Asia countries, mln. USD

	Technical cooperation, average year amount, mln. USD			Total accumulated technical cooperation for the period from 1992-2004, mln. USD	Total technical assistance in the period 1992-2004 to GDP[5]	Share of accumulated technical cooperation to accumulated ODA	Total accumulated technical assistance per capita, USD
	1992-1995	1996-1999	2000-2004				
Kazakhstan	22.0	72.4	91.8	737.3	2%	45%	55.8
Kyrgyz Republic	12.6	38.4	65.8	514.8	24%	20%	104.7
Tajikistan	4.2	10.7	34.6	291.0	11%	16%	36.2
Uzbekistan	10.9	37.1	69.7	561.2	5%	31%	20.6

Source: OECD, World Development indicators, author's calculation

The data shows that the flow of technical assistance to Kyrgyzstan was sharply increasing in the second part of 1990s and slowed down in 2000-2004. This pattern is similar almost in all countries in the region (except Tajikistan because of the civil war) and may be explained by the donors' level of understanding of country problems.

Relative figures show that Kyrgyzstan is the largest recipient of TA in the region per capita and in % to GDP. However, TA does not hold a high share in the total amount of ODA to the country as in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

3.2. *Technical Cooperation by Donor*

Statistics on TA flows by donor (bi- and multilateral) is presented in the table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of technical cooperation flows

	1992-1995	**1996-1999**	**2000-2004**	**Total, for the period from 1992 to 2004**
Biletaral technical cooperation	71%	73%	93%	85%
Multileteral technical cooperation	29%	27%	7%	15%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: OECD, author's calculation

The data shows that the role of multilateral institutions in providing technical cooperation has diminished after 2000.

Donors' composition in the structure of bilateral technical cooperation is presented in the table 5. The data shows that in the beginning of the transformation Japan, Turkey and USA played

[5] GDP for 2004.

important role providing technical cooperation, while later donors composition has changed and in 2000-2004 more than half of all technical cooperation flows have their origin in the USA.

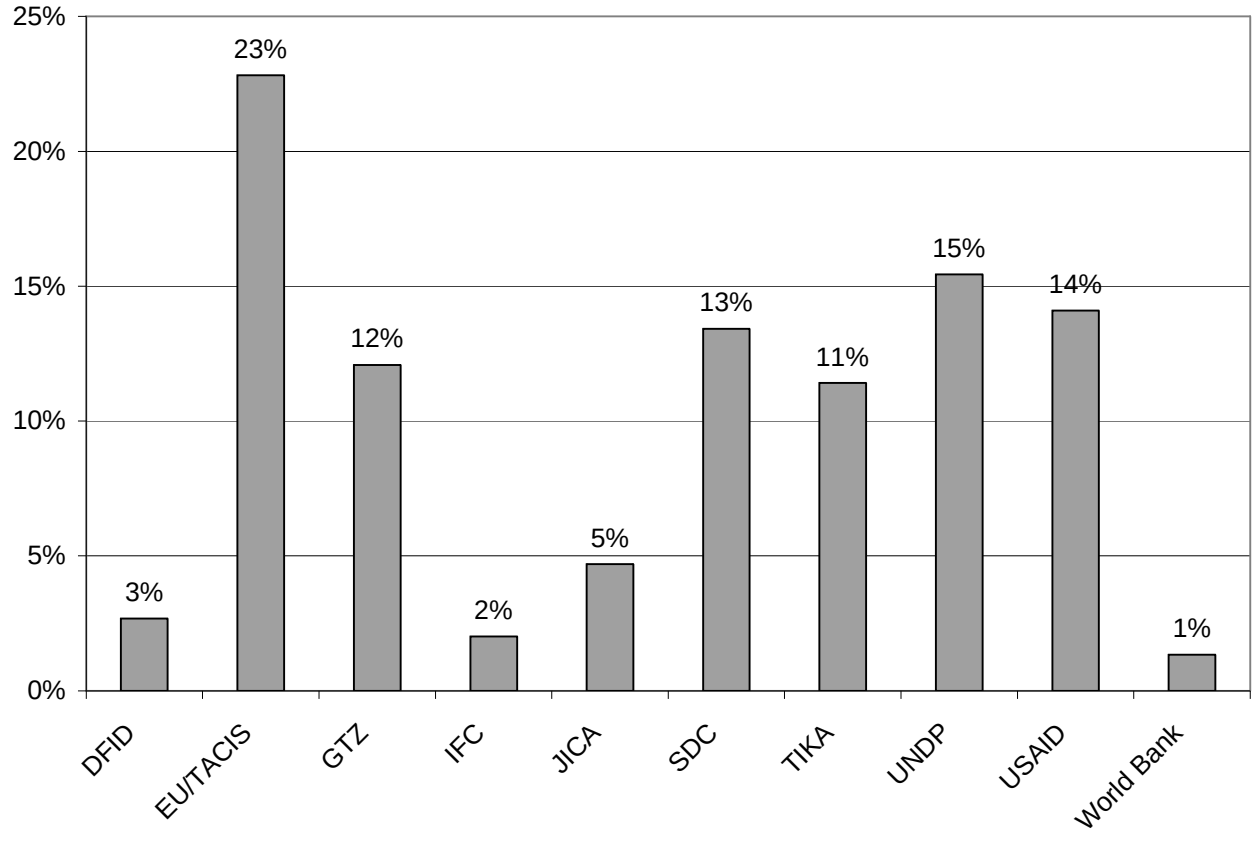
Table 5. Main bilateral donors

	1992-1995	1996-1999	2000-2004	Total
Japan	30%	23%	10%	14%
United States	11%	25%	54%	43%
United Kingdom	5%	4%	7%	6%
Turkey	12%	7%	13%	11%
Other bilateral donors	42%	42%	17%	25%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: OECD, author's calculation

As it was mentioned above, OECD database does not present comprehensive picture. For having broader picture the database of donors' projects was analyzed. This database has its shortcomings: information about many projects is not complete (date, amount, sector information is missing), but as a supplementary source it can be useful.

Figure 3. Structure of main donors according to the number of projects during the period from 1994 to 2006



Source: www.donors.kg, author's calculation.

Table 6 shows that EU had the highest number of projects through TACIS programme, on the second place is UNDP, and on the third USAID. Many projects were implemented by SDC, GTZ and TIKA. It is necessary to mention that such an important donor as ADB is missing in this database. Since joining ADB in 1994, Kyrgyzstan has received loans worth $588.50 million and

technical assistance grants through 65 projects worth about $38 million. The main focus of ADB was on transport and communications sector (ADB 2007).

3.3. *Technical Cooperation by Sector*

For having picture about sectoral distribution of TA projects, it is possible to use the database compiled by UNDP. Unfortunately this database covers only the period from 1992 to 2000. Main sectors of the technical assistance are presented in table 6.

Table 6. Structure of technical cooperation flows by sector in two periods 1992-1995 and 1996-2000

	1992-1995	1996-2000
Economic management	20%	13%
Development administration	6%	10%
Human resources development	27%	16%
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	7%	13%
Industry	3%	7%
Communications	11%	3%
Social development	1%	6%
Health	10%	13%
Other	14%	19%
Total for the considered period	100%	100%

Source: UNDP

The data shows that in the considered periods the structure of technical cooperation flows has changed. In the beginning of the transformation process the focus of technical assistance was on economic management, human resources development, and communications. Later on, when relative macroeconomic stabilization was achieved, other issues as social development, health, agriculture, development administration were supported by donors.

3.4. *Role of Non-Traditional External Sources of Technical Expertise*

Russian Federation, China and Turkey actively cooperate with the Kyrgyz republic in the military sphere. These countries support the Ministry of Defense. Kyrgyz cadets and military offices study for free in military colleges in Russia and China.

Russia and Turkey opened their universities in the Kyrgyz Republic, investing in education. Especially active was Turkey which opened several universities and colleges in the republic which provide education of reasonable good quality. There are quotas for students from Kyrgyzstan to study in Turkey, Russia, and Japan.

4. Impact of Technical Cooperation on the Country Development

It is a difficult task to measure the impact of technical cooperation on the country development, but it is possible to distinguish broad spheres where TA should have an impact:

changes in policies, institutional development, technical capacity of the government and civil society.

Regarding technical capacity, there are many examples where TA was successful. In general, TA helped the country to create a basic stratum of specialists able to conduct social-economic reforms through trainings, seminars, and internships for government officials. This was extremely important because the knowledge of market mechanisms at the beginning of transformation was almost zero. As positive examples of technical assistance with long-term effect one can consider American University in Central Asia, Kyrgyz Russian Slavonic University, Kyrgyz Turkish Universities "Manas" and "Ala-Too", Management Academy under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic. .

It is a different story if all trainings for government officials were successful and their results were sustainable. This was very often the case that internships and trainings abroad were tourist's events rather than studying. In addition, high personnel turnover in state agencies very often reduced to zero the effect of expensive foreign studies (Cukrowski et al. 2002).

Many TA projects were directed towards the development of government organizations which did not exist at the beginning of the transition period (Ministry of Finance, National Bank, etc), however TA projects should be supported from inside and reforms should not stall which was not always the case in the Kyrgyz Republic. One of the most infamous example – Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Processing Industry, which was one of the main recipient of TA (Cukrovsky 2002), but without any positive effect.

Technical assistance has been used for developing main laws of the Kyrgyz republic and strategic development documents (Tax Code, Water Code, Child Code, Comprehensive Development Framework, Country Development Strategy, etc.). Technical Cooperation helped Kyrgyzstan during the process of WTO accession. TA also helped to organize institutions providing access to information. Famous examples are IREX resource center and Resource Center of the Soros Foundation. One additional positive example is the National Scholarship Test supported by USAID, to create a transparent and fair way for high school graduates to compete for government-funded college scholarships. USAID also created the Center for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods (CEATM), which now conducts the test. The test is considered one of the largest and most successful anti-corruption projects in the sector of education; it was used as a model for similar testing initiatives in Georgia and Ukraine.

Technical assistance helped to strengthen the civil society in Kyrgyzstan. By the beginning of 2007 there were 12053 NGOs registered in Kyrgyzstan. They are dealing with a wide range of issues: remedial, education, health protection, gender equality, advocacy and law advice. These

institutions provide a feedback for state bodies and this has a positive impact on their activities (Цукровски и Могилевский 2002).

In general, TA to the Kyrgyz Republic helped to solve many issues especially at the early beginning of the transformation process. However, taking into account how much was invested, effectiveness and sustainability of this assistance is questionable.

5. Problems in Technical Cooperation

The most typical problems in TA delivery can be grouped into three main parts: relevance, sustainability and quality.

Relevance issues:

- The first problem is a premature provision of services. Establishment of the Kyrgyz Stock Exchange before enterprises become ready to be listed can be considered as an example.
- Support of law development, but lack of attention to law implementation and enforcement. Kyrgyz Tax Code, Water Code can be considered as examples of focus on law development rather than implementation. In addition, very often the law which sets the broad framework is developed, but supplementary legislation is not in place that makes its implementation problematic (Child Code).
- TA is very often supply-driven and this leads either to oversupply when the country can not absorbs the aid (several departments in one agency implementing one project) or under-supply, when country does not receive adequate support in areas it is needed (environment, engineering).

Sustainability issues:

- High turnover of staff in government institutions because of low salaries does not allow organization to benefit from trained people who left for other better paid jobs where they will not be able to apply obtained knowledge. This issue was mentioned is several evaluation reports. For instance, sustainability of the numerous training programs of the World Bank was challenged by high turnover (partly as a consequence of low pay) in the beneficiary institutions (World Bank 2001).
- Very often artificially created structures immediately disappear when the funding is over. Numerous databases compiled and maintained in the framework of TA projects can be considered as an example. The same can be said about numerous NGOs established in the republic, when only 10% of them are active.

Quality:

- Very often TA reports are written in a very technical language, very long and do not have concise readable versions for policy makers. The same problem is related to technical

trainings when beneficiaries very often do not have capacity to absorb new and difficult information. This problem can be exacerbated by poor translation. In the sphere of technical advice experts very often do not know local language which undermines effectiveness of the assistance. For example, ADB implemented an influential technical advisory assistance in the President's Administration where it directly advised the President on policy matters. However, in the follow-up project the Russian speaker from the first TA was replaced with a non-Russian speaking one. The latter was unable to respond quickly enough to the requests of the President, nor discuss issues with him, and became marginalized (Adhikari and Dunkan 2007).

- In many projects international experts do not have necessary experience and skills; do not understand country peculiarities that lead to mechanical importing of institutions from developed countries. As an example can be considered launching complicated social assistance programs based on monetary income as an eligibility criterion which is hardly measurable in poor agrarian countries.
- Poor coordination between donors may lead to the fact when different donors have different views on the same issue.
- Foreign studying is very often a hidden subsidizing of government officials to make them more collaborative with TA projects.

6. Ways to Increase TA Effectiveness

The first and the most important way to increase TA effectiveness is to enhance cooperation between donors to eliminate duplication and overlapping in their activities and advice. Additionally, coordination with the government and involvement of local stakeholders in the TA agenda and design for better identification of country needs is essential.

Sustainability of the projects can be achieved by increasing sense of ownership by the government. This can be stimulated through co-financing of the projects, involvement of executing agencies into the design and evaluation of TA, and availability of real interest, commitment and leadership to implement projects and conduct reforms. One option for establishing commitment before the start of a TA, especially in new areas of support, would be to start TA support on a small scale, and then provide further TA once criteria to demonstrate commitment have been met (Adhikari and Dunkan 2007). In addition, TA projects should have clear exit strategy and results of TA should be reader-friendly and widely disseminated.

Small TA projects with narrower defined agenda staffed with Russian speaking international experts familiar with transition economies, supported by competitively recruited local experts and staff will be more effective (Cukrowsky et al. 2002).

Efficiency of TA project can hardly be achieved without serious changes in the Kyrgyz system of public administration. Effective, merit based system of public administration with clear and transparent tendering procedures will help to use TA projects in the most effective way.

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