



Report Number: ICRR0022513

1. Project Data

Project ID
P122039

Project Name
SOCIAL SAFETY NETS

Country
Tajikistan

Practice Area(Lead)
Social Protection & Jobs

L/C/TF Number(s)
IDA-61750,IDA-D2700,IDA-H7260

Closing Date (Original)
31-Dec-2015

Total Project Cost (USD)
6,647,125.09

Bank Approval Date
16-Jun-2011

Closing Date (Actual)
30-Jun-2020

	IBRD/IDA (USD)	Grants (USD)
Original Commitment	3,200,000.00	0.00
Revised Commitment	4,999,629.78	0.00
Actual	4,842,124.18	0.00

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Project ID
P123704

Project Name
Targeting & payment of social assistance (P123704)

L/C/TF Number(s)

Closing Date (Original)

Total Project Cost (USD)
1805000.91

Bank Approval Date
19-Jan-2011

Closing Date (Actual)



	IBRD/IDA (USD)	Grants (USD)
Original Commitment	0.00	2,200,000.00
Revised Commitment	0.00	1,805,000.91
Actual	0.00	1,805,000.91

2. Project Objectives and Components

a. Objectives

As per the Financing Agreement (July 13, 2011), the project development objective (PDO) was “to improve the capacity of the Government of Tajikistan to plan, monitor, and manage social assistance for the poor through the development of a national registry of social protection and the provision of training, equipment and related items for improving said capacity.”

The project objective was revised in 2018 as part of a restructuring and additional financing (AF; see Section 2e below) designed to align with an updated vision that was underpinned by implementation experience and legislation that supported a national rollout of the targeted social assistance (TSA) program to all 68 districts of the country.

The revised project objective was “to achieve national geographic coverage of the Targeted Social Assistance Program and to ensure integrated delivery of services.”

Despite the change in the PDO as part of the 2018 AF/restructuring, this ICR Review does not undertake a split rating. This is because the change in the PDO reflected a change designed to better capture the "spirit" of the project, which had already evolved in scope beyond the limits of the original PDO. The January 2018 Project Paper noted that from a pilot covering two districts in 2011, the new TSA program was expanded to 10 districts in 2013. Subsequently, the government approved expansion of the program to 15 more districts in mid-2014, and to another 15 districts in 2017. In February 2017, the TSA Law was passed, laying a solid foundation for the national TSA rollout planned in 2018. The Project Paper supporting the January 2018 AF/restructuring notes (p. 10): "The Project currently consists of three components which will remain the same, with additional financing added to Component 3, and a new Component 4 will be added as follows: Component 4: Supporting national roll-out of the Targeted Social Assistance Program, including the National Registry of Social Protection. Under this component, the proposed AF would extend activities that already constitute the core of the original project design and supplement them with some new but closely linked activities." As such, and as confirmed by the project team in conversation with IEG, the AF/restructuring was focused on extending the reach or scope of the project to the final 28 districts and not about more fundamental change that might merit a split rating approach.

b. Were the project objectives/key associated outcome targets revised during implementation?

Yes



Did the Board approve the revised objectives/key associated outcome targets?

Yes

Date of Board Approval

09-Jan-2018

c. Will a split evaluation be undertaken?

No

d. Components

The Project Appraisal Document (PAD, pp. 5-7) detailed three components. A fourth component was added with the introduction of Additional Financing (AF) in 2018 (as detailed in Section 2e below).

Component 1: Establishing the National Registry for Social Protection and Supporting Development of the Targeted Social Assistance (Appraisal US\$ 2.3 million; Actual US\$2.3 million). The first component was to establish a National Registry for Social Protection (NRSP) to help apply a proxy-means test to identify the poorest households eligible for receipt of social assistance. It was also to help manage, monitor, and oversee payments of social assistance and provide a registry platform that could be used by other social protection programs. This component was to supply goods, including computer equipment, printers, scanners, and electrical, telephone, and internet connections, to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MLSP) to implement a nation-wide system of poverty-targeted social assistance.

Component 2: Capacity Building for Launching and Initiating the Rollout of the Targeted Social Assistance Program (Appraisal US\$ 0.7 million; Actual US\$ 0.7 million). This component was to train government personnel at the central and local levels to implement and use the NRSP. It was also to build the capacity of the government to use the registry to control and audit payments of social assistance and support a small unit of local consultants, in the MLSP, to help plan for the national reform of social assistance.

Component 3: Project Management (Appraisal US\$ 0.2 million; Actual US\$ 0.5 million). This component was to support project management and coordination, as well as the carrying out of fiduciary tasks (including procurement, financial reporting and accounting activities, audit) and other reporting for the project.

Component 4: Supporting National Roll-out of the Targeted Social Assistance Program, including the National Registry of Social Protection (Original US\$ 1.5 million; Actual US\$ 1.5 million): This component was designed to support the establishment of an effective system to manage the delivery of unified social assistance as a new and consolidated TSA program in the country and its national rollout. It extended activities – e.g., establishing additional regional coordination centers; upgrading work places to ensure connectivity and stable electricity supply, and office logistics; conducting public awareness and information campaigns; introducing improvements in the mechanisms of TSA beneficiary selection and benefit delivery; and strengthening the grievance redress mechanisms that were already under way and core to the original project design, building on them with some additional but closely linked activities in support of the overall project objectives. The component also supported the design and development of a



new mechanism and database of electronic disability certification for the State Medical-Social Expertise Service (SMSES).

e. Comments on Project Cost, Financing, Borrower Contribution, and Dates

Project Cost

Project cost at appraisal was US\$3.2 million. AF of US\$1.8 million increased the project budget to US\$5.0 million, of which US\$4.84 million was disbursed.

Financing

The PAD (pp. viii) stated that the project would be supported with an IDA grant of US\$3.2 million. At restructuring (see below) further IDA grants in the amount of US\$1.8 million were added.

Borrower Contribution

There was no planned or actual borrower contribution.

Dates

The project was approved on June 16, 2011 and became effective on October 11, 2011, with a planned closing date of December 31, 2015. The Mid-Term Review took place on February 2, 2015. Given extensions, actual project closing was on June 20, 2020.

The project underwent a series of restructurings because of changes in its institutional context, as detailed below. The original PDO indicators were revised under the first restructuring in July 2014 and revised once again as part of a January 2018 restructuring and AF, at which stage the PDO was also revised and new indicators added.

The first restructuring (August 6, 2014) reflected key changes made by the government based on a World Bank-implemented review of project performance. This reassessment involved a shift in all responsibilities for implementation from the Executive Office of the President to the line ministry as well as the transfer of the social protection function from the MLSP to the Ministry of Health, which was renamed the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population (MHSP). To improve autonomy and implementation, a new structure called the State Agency for Social Protection (SASP) was created within the MHSP's Division for Social Protection of Population (DSPP). As well as allowing for changes at the institutional level, this first restructuring also involved changes in the PDO indicators (three of the four PDO indicators were dropped, the fourth was retained, and five new ones were added), as well as changes in components and costs, disbursement arrangements, legal covenants, financial management, and procurement. The project closing date was also extended by six months to June 30, 2016. This restructuring introduced a target to achieve coverage of 30 districts, noting there was no target for district coverage in the original appraisal document.

The ICR noted (p. 12) that subsequent project restructurings were designed to keep the project active while a delayed AF was being processed. In that regard, the second to fifth restructurings, dated April 4, 2016, March 9, 2017, September 28, 2017, December 15, 2017, related solely to changes in the project closing date.



The sixth restructuring and AF were introduced on January 9, 2018. The AF was intended to provide financing to support expansion of coverage of the TSA program to all 68 districts in the country, with a view to reaching a far greater number of poor and vulnerable families and ensuring sustainability of the reform efforts. The January 9, 2018 Project Paper in support of the AF noted that from a pilot covering two districts in 2011, the new TSA program was expanded to 10 districts in 2013. Subsequently, the government approved expansion of the program to 15 more districts in mid-2014, and to another 15 districts in 2017. In February 2017, the TSA Law was passed, laying a solid foundation for the national TSA rollout planned in 2018. The restructuring also included plans for other social programs to leverage the social registry (NRSP) and establish an electronic mechanism for disability certification as a separate module of the management information system. Under the restructuring, the PDO was revised and five of the PDO indicators in effect as of July 2014 were changed, a sixth was retained unchanged, and four new indicators were added. The three original components remained unchanged although funds were added under Component 3. The fourth component was added.

A final restructuring (December 18, 2019) was provided to extend the project by six months, until June 30, 2020, as the project awaited a delayed decree for national rollout of the TSA program (to an additional 28 districts to reach all 68 districts in the country) and to allow the project to complete required activities around the disability certification to attain its development objective, fully utilize project funds, and achieve project indicator targets.

3. Relevance of Objectives

Rationale

In 2010, the government addressed poverty, in part, through two main social assistance programs, the largest of which was for electricity and gas compensation, and the other for needy families whose children attend school. Referencing a World Bank report that underpinned the rationale and design for this project - *Tajikistan: Delivering Social Assistance to the Poorest Households* (December 30, 2010, Report No. 56593-TJ) – the PAD noted that these programs exerted almost no downward influence on poverty rates given, *inter alia*, the low rate of government expenditure on the programs as well as poor targeting. The PAD also noted that a lack of accurate and accessible information on recipients of social assistance weakened budgeting, management, and financial controls, and that there was no national electronic registry of beneficiaries and very limited human resources working with (often out-of-date and inaccurate) paper files in district offices. These weaknesses in targeting, information management, monitoring, oversight, and controls undermined the credibility of the social assistance system.

The European Union (EU), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the World Bank were supporting policy actions to reform the social assistance system through budget support. Reforms underway prior to the start of this project included an EU-supported pilot for the reform of social assistance in two districts that sought to consolidate the two largest social assistance programs into a single benefit, and to use a proxy-means test to target benefits to the poorest 20 percent of the population. The World Bank had mobilized a grant from the Rapid Social Response (RSR) Multi-Donor Trust Fund to support the implementation and evaluation of that pilot. The World Bank also planned to conduct an evaluation study of the pilot of poverty-targeted social assistance that would draw on a household survey to allow for an estimation of the extent of



success of the pilot in delivering social assistance to the poorest households, as well as changes in household consumption and health status.

The PAD noted that the project would help to offset some of the worst consequences of poverty and could contribute to addressing the impact of shocks (e.g., financial crises and droughts) and would also, through enhanced complaints procedures and targeting, ensure greater accountability and efficiency in the use of public funding. As such, the project supported the first objective of the Country Partnership Framework (CPF, FY15-18), reducing the negative impact of the crisis on poverty and vulnerability.

The ICR (p.18) noted that the project at design was well aligned with the National Development Strategy (NDS) 2006–15 (e.g., focused on improving public administration and developing human potential) as well the Poverty Reduction Strategy III for 2010–12 which included a social "block" and cross-cutting themes on institutional reforms. The project remains relevant and is well aligned with the World Bank's increased emphasis on human capital, a focus area of the three pillars in the current CPF (FY19-23) and among the key themes of the country's long-term National Development Strategy 2016–30 (NDS 2030).

Rating

High

4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)

OBJECTIVE 1

Objective

Improve the capacity of the Government of Tajikistan to plan, monitor, and manage social assistance for the poor through the development of a national registry of social protection and the provision of training, equipment and related items for improving said capacity / Achieve national geographic coverage of the Targeted Social Assistance Program and ensure integrated delivery of services

Rationale

A theory of change (ToC) was developed in diagrammatic form for the ICR (there was no ToC in the PAD). Realization of the desired outcomes was predicated on sustained political will and financial commitment from government, steady support for systems reform, and sufficient capacity to implement reform. The ToC was that the purchase of information technology and software coupled with the development of the architecture for a national registry and training of officials (at national, regional, and district levels) would deliver a system that would be populated, maintained, and updated and that would, in turn, allow for improved government capacity to plan, monitor, and manage social assistance for the poor. The project sought to maximize reforms to the system of social assistance that were being supported by the EU, the ADB, and the World Bank through budget support. The project built on a pilot in two districts supported by the EU that was seeking to consolidate the two largest social assistance programs into a single benefit, and which used a proxy-means test to target benefits to the poorest 20 percent of the population, noting that the World Bank had mobilized a grant from the RSR Multi-Donor Trust Fund to support the implementation and evaluation of the pilot. The



project would contribute to reduced poverty and improved income distribution through, for example, better targeting, and would mitigate the longer-term effects of energy tariffs for beneficiaries.

Intermediate Results

At project design there were no legal and operational materials in support of the rollout of the TSA and management information systems, and the aim was to have a full set of administrative rules and regulations and the draft social assistance law in place by project close. These administrative aspects were in place at project close, the TSA Bill was signed into law in February 2017, and the TSA rollout decree was approved in May 2020. The project supported preparation of the TSA operations manual and various directives guiding implementation of the new program at central and local levels.

At project design, a target was set to ensure that Policy and Operational Units within the MHSP and SASP were staffed and functioning. At project close, the SASP was set up, including a new data center. The SASP was fully staffed, and its Director was given responsibility for the rollout of the TSA. A team of technical consultants was supported to assist SASP in managing the TSA rollout. The ASIST Management Information System (MIS) was developed to automate TSA programming and administration, and it is now a core mechanism for monitoring and budgeting at all systems levels. The MIS also allows for developing and integrating other modules beyond TSA, including cash transfers and other non-cash benefits. A new Information Technology division was established within the SASP and separately staffed to institutionalize the function of information system management.

Against a baseline of 0 and a target of 950, by project close 998 staff of MHSP, SASP, and SMSES, including at regional and district levels, were provided with training. A set of comprehensive training and awareness materials was developed. Training on basic computer literacy was provided to data entry operators at the district level, and information seminars were organized for workers at the municipality level. As a result of COVID-19 restrictions, some of the staff trainings went online during the last six months of the project.

Against a baseline of 0 and target of 4, at project close there were 5 fully established and functioning Regional Program Coordination Centers. The regional centers serve to provide program implementation monitoring, technical support to the district offices of the SASP, data entry, and selective data verification. The regional centers were fully supported by the project with trained staff, computer hardware, software, and high-speed internet connections.

Against a baseline 0 and a target of 3, by project close 3 non-TSA programs used the NRSP to register and monitor beneficiaries.

Certification of disability was fully automated and operated through the NRSP.

Against a baseline of 0 and target of 75 percent, by project close 98 percent of TSA beneficiaries were satisfied that the TSA program interventions responded to their needs (established by a survey undertaken close to project close).

Outcomes



Against a baseline of 2 districts and a target of 35 districts, 68 districts were covered by the TSA program at project close.

Against a baseline of 0 beneficiaries and a target of 1 million, there were 1.283 million beneficiaries of safety nets programs (unconditional cash transfers) by project close, of whom 646,00 were female (against a target of 500,000).

Against a baseline of 850 and a target of 1,500, by project close there were 5,150 TSA beneficiaries who were elderly women living alone.

Against a baseline of 39,000 and a target of 65,000, by project close there were 130,000 TSA beneficiaries who were women heads of households.

Against a baseline of 0 and a target of 200, by project close there were 460 municipalities where training and awareness had been provided on mechanisms of the new TSA program

Against a baseline of 0 and a target of 145,000, by project close there were 146,00 certified disabled individuals registered in NRSP. Against a baseline 8,000 and a target of 20,000, by project close there were 23,800 certified disabled individuals registered in NRSP who had also been provided with TSA benefits

Rating
High

OVERALL EFFICACY

Rationale

The project achieved its objective as evidenced through the realization of all outcome indicators. Targets for seven of the outcome indicators were exceeded and targets for the other three were met. A national system of coverage was delivered that allowed for integration of other social protection measures. New institutions were established with trained staff and computerized systems, and new laws were enacted to support reform. The project was technical in nature and built on policy reform efforts that were supported by the EU, ADB, and the World Bank. As such, the project added value through support implementation to ensure enhanced delivery of critical social protection measures.

Overall Efficacy Rating

High

5. Efficiency



The PAD (p.11) noted that the project would improve the efficiency of the social assistance system by increasing its effectiveness in reducing poverty and that it would save scarce public resources by enabling the Ministry of Finance (MoF) to reduce reallocation of social assistance for other purposes at the district level, and by reducing errors and fraud. The economic analysis set out in the PAD (p. 11) noted that the above-referenced 2010 World Bank study on social assistance in Tajikistan that informed the design of the project had identified significant inefficiency in the system. The study identified acute coverage and targeting issues. It showed, for example, that in 2009 social assistance covered only 20 percent of the poorest quintile of households, and only 23 percent of social assistance payments reached the poorest quintile. The study used simulations based on a scoring formula to show that, if the public administration applied the formula, targeting accuracy would increase to 54 percent. The study also found that the MoF did not have adequate control over the funds that it transferred to districts for payment of benefits (e.g., a system of paper registries pertained at the district level, which complicated audit).

The ICR (pp. 25-28) undertook an efficiency analysis along a number of dimensions. With reference to preparation and implementation efficiency, the ICR acknowledged that the timeframe for the project was long and the Bank's preparation and implementation support budget was significant relative to the IDA allocation. The plan was for the project to be implemented between June 2011 and December 2015, although it ultimately ran until June 2020 albeit in an expanded form. Implementation delays due to institutional weaknesses and the capacity of available personnel were significant - there was no procurement for the first year - and meant that the implementation of reforms and the associated benefits to the system and citizens were delayed. Annex 2 of the ICR (p. 59) identified staff time and costs to be \$1.549 million, which is the equivalent of about 31 percent of the actual cost of the project. The ICR argued that significant effort was required to build political ownership of planned reforms, coupled with sustained technical support, and that the Bank provided such support. Overall there were 34 supervisory and technical missions between 2012 and 2020, and the ICR suggested that these were cost-effective given that there was typically considerable cost-sharing across missions for other projects.

With reference to the cost-effectiveness of the infrastructure that the project built – the ASIST MIS developed in 2015 – the ICR noted that the initial cost of around US\$375,000 and overall cost of just under \$1 million compares favorably with international experience, e.g., a 2016 review of MIS expenditure on social protection in Latin America had initial costs ranging from US\$1.7 million in Costa Rica, US\$10 million in Colombia, US\$17 million in Chile, US\$83 million in Argentina, to US\$90 million in Mexico. The system was procured from an experienced vendor who had earlier developed a well-functioning system in the Kyrgyz Republic. About \$21 million was disbursed over five years through the system on three categories of assistance (targeted social assistance, compensation for electricity and gas, and school allowances). The ICR suggested that the system was efficient given, for example, that the initial MIS cost worked out at an average of US\$0.29 per beneficiary at project completion, and that the cost amounts to just 0.7 percent of the social assistance actually disbursed, even as the efficiency of the disbursement increased. With reference to efficiency of the social safety net system, a 2012 evaluation of a 2011–12 pilot program undertaken in two districts found that the objective scoring mechanism of the proxy means test achieved better targeting than preceding programs. Only 23 percent of the beneficiaries of the legacy programs fell among the poorest 20 percent nationally compared to 48 percent for the pilot. The evaluation also found that although the transfers remained inadequate overall, there were notable gains to beneficiaries represented in increased food consumption at the household level, fewer missed school days among children, and no negative impact on the number of women seeking work. On the other hand, a 2014 analysis of safety nets found key inefficiencies in the hybrid manual-automated program administration model. Finally, an analysis of the effectiveness of TSA done using a large-scale household sociological survey in 2019 found evidence of effectiveness of the project and its beneficiary targeting mechanisms as well as room for improvement. Positive findings included near-universal (98 percent) acknowledgment of the importance of the cash transfers, relative ease of application, awareness of the objectivity of the decision to refuse benefits.



However, the survey also identified a lack of awareness of the centralized nature of decision-making. For example, about 60 percent of participants were unaware of the other types of social support they were entitled to. In addition, there were delays between filing and receipt of the first allowance due to the quarterly payment schedule, and instances of inequity in benefit distribution.

Efficiency Rating

Modest

a. If available, enter the Economic Rate of Return (ERR) and/or Financial Rate of Return (FRR) at appraisal and the re-estimated value at evaluation:

	Rate Available?	Point value (%)	*Coverage/Scope (%)
Appraisal		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
ICR Estimate		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable

* Refers to percent of total project cost for which ERR/FRR was calculated.

6. Outcome

The relevance of the objectives is rated high, as the project directly engaged with critical aspects of public policy, and the objective remains highly aligned with ongoing analysis and strategy as well as future projects. Efficacy is rated high for the achievement of objectives. All intermediate and outcome targets were met, with many exceeded. Efficiency is rated modest reflecting the long timeframe for project delivery and the high level of administrative costs associated with the project. The combined ratings result in an overall outcome rating of Moderately Satisfactory, indicating that there were moderate shortcomings in the project's preparation and implementation.

a. Outcome Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

7. Risk to Development Outcome

The ICR (pp. 42-43) rated risk to development outcome as modest reflecting ongoing government commitment to reform of the social assistance system, yielding what the ICR described as a fully functional targeted national social assistance system as well as a first NRSP whose inherent flexibility is already benefitting other programs, including facilitating utility reforms and, most recently, rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The ICR (p. 30) noted that over the project cycle, significant improvements in institutional capacity had been achieved within central and local government that had increased uptake and accountability of the TSA program. The project contributed to building capacity at the MHSPP and was



instrumental in the creation of the SASP staffed by a cadre of trained professionals who are now also familiar with World Bank systems and procedures. At the regional level throughout the country (given the program's national expansion), well trained personnel run the TSA program and provide a solid base of human resources through which future initiatives can be rolled out. Five regional service centers have improved quality of client services by considerably shortening the time of TSA application processing.

The ICR identified two key risks: continued government interest to improve efficiency of the interventions, and longer-term fiscal sustainability to cover and potentially expand benefits. With respect to the former, the ICR stated that reforms to date have catalyzed a shift in the government's perception of the social sectors, and heightened interest in further dialogue on social protection policies among the donor community. This became even more evident in the face of increasing economic threats and vulnerabilities triggered by the COVID-19 crisis. With respect to ensuring ongoing fiscal support and sustainability, the ICR suggested that the systems put in place by the project are taking on far greater urgency in light of the pandemic, which is likely to have an impact on the already limited fiscal space and domestic resource mobilization with potential implications for the TSA. The ICR concluded that the crisis gives rise to an uncertain economic outlook, as well as a potential increase in the share of the vulnerable requiring expanded social protection benefits, coupled with a likely decline in sources of funding. As such, an important achievement of the project is that the tools are in place to more effectively provide protection for those most at risk who are eligible for assistance.

8. Assessment of Bank Performance

a. Quality-at-Entry

Project design was strategically relevant, drew upon a solid evidence base provided by prior analytical work, and was well aligned with government priorities. Engagement with government was informed by the World Bank's 2010 report - *Tajikistan: Delivering Social Assistance to the Poorest Households* - that was prepared as an in-depth exploratory piece in response to a request from the government to support improvement of the social assistance system. The ICR noted that the project team also benefited from in-depth dialogue on related work led by the EU. Funding from the RSR Trust Fund supported effective collaboration between the MLSP, the World Bank, and EU on a small-scale pilot in two districts through which it was possible to develop, pilot, and evaluate targeting, registry, and payments mechanisms for channeling social assistance benefits to the poor.

On the downside, the team significantly over-estimated government capacity to deliver the project within the planned timeframe, despite acknowledged weaknesses in the capacity of the administration to deliver. Implementation arrangements at approval under the Project Coordination Group (PCG, the implementation body under the Executive Office of the President) were weak with knock-on effects for procurement and overall sequencing of activity in the early stages that delayed implementation. The ICR (p. 33) noted that there was a delay in the PCG withdrawing the advance on the IDA grant for the project due to a delay in the government's internal processing of the project operations manual and complications with processing of the Manual of Procedures in the Executive Office of the President. As a result, there was no procurement under the grant for a full year. Other aspects directly under the control of the PCG were also delayed by a full year, including the household survey to improve the proxy means test and the registry/MIS tender.



Quality-at-Entry Rating
Moderately Satisfactory

b. Quality of supervision

A total of 34 missions (implementation support and technical missions) were undertaken between 2012 and 2020, during which time the TTL for the project changed only once (2012) ensuring continuity for most of the extended project cycle. The team also followed up virtually with the client and coordinated closely with the country office. The relative costs of such intensive supervision were significant. Overall project administration (World Bank staff input) cost for this \$5 million project was US\$2.023 million (ICR, p. 59), of which Bank supervision was US\$1.549 million (inclusive of ICR costs). Almost 45 percent of supervision costs were consumed during FY12 and FY13, which coincides with the period during which both development outcome and implementation progress ratings dropped below moderately satisfactory in management assessment (ICR, pp. 3-4). The midterm review was completed in February 2014, and this helped inform implementation decisions and provided the basis for strategic changes – e.g., change in the implementing agency - that had a positive impact on implementation and increased disbursement as broadly reflected in management ratings. The ICR also noted that the team was proactive in working with the government to develop time-bound action plans to better structure the project rollout and to provide timelines to control undue slippages in implementation, although IEG notes that this realignment and the overall cost and intensity of support were a function of initial overestimation of government capacity to deliver. The team also supported large-scale IT-related procurement to reduce scope to avoid potential risks of contract mismanagement. With reference to supporting the effectiveness of the project in the broader social protection context, the team worked closely with government and other donors. The Bank worked closely with the EU in the early stages of the project on a pilot that provided proof of concept. Later the Bank worked with UNICEF to explore synergies on using the registry developed under the TSA program for shock response measures in disasters. The ICR also noted that the impact of the social protection work helped revitalize the Social Protection Working Group within the Donor Coordination Council.

Quality of Supervision Rating
Highly Satisfactory

Overall Bank Performance Rating
Moderately Satisfactory

9. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization

a. M&E Design

The PAD (p. 10) noted that the PCG was to assemble and report on progress towards achieving outcome targets as well as intermediate outcome targets. The PCG was to collect information from the MLSP, and in



particular from its operational arm, the Agency for Social Protection. The project was to finance local consultants who would assist the MLSP in gathering information. The project was also to finance surveys to assess the effectiveness of the NRSP-based system in assessing the eligibility of applicants. As noted in the ICR (p. 36), project design envisaged a "from the ground up" approach, beginning with a learning pilot and moving on incrementally from there to overhaul outdated processes and procedures within the system.

b. M&E Implementation

The ICR stated (pp. 36-37) that at project approval processes were not automated, and an interim MIS was used to input data from beneficiary applications with most processes in the legacy system mostly manual and lacking guidance documentation or standard operating procedures. The 2011 pilot provided lessons that helped improve processes (e.g., data entered in a stand-alone MIS). From 2015 onwards, the SASP took on an increasingly active role in monitoring TSA performance aided by the ASIST MIS that automated and streamlined TSA program delivery. The SASP had a dedicated M&E specialist responsible for developing procedures and guidelines and for data entry verification. A Monitoring Division was also established to oversee implementation of all social programs and, as the program expanded, the SASP took on more initiative, regularly conducting stakeholder meetings focused on operational monitoring of TSA performance. At the district level, enrollment and verification procedures improved through project-supported training. The ICR noted that the World Bank team worked closely with the project team and the staff of the SASP on elaborating the TSA monitoring framework. Ultimately, all reports on program performance were being generated electronically by project closing, with customization possible. This allowed for expansion and controlled rollout of the program across all 68 districts.

c. M&E Utilization

Data on project indicators were regularly collected and reported, and the information was used for decision-making and planning purposes. The online ASIST MIS routinely produced reports. Programming and decision-making benefited from the various assessments and evaluations undertaken during the course of implementation, including a 2012 impact evaluation of the targeting pilot, a 2014 study on analysis of safety nets in Tajikistan and the policy options available, and various rounds of beneficiary analyses throughout 2018 and 2019. Project M&E also informed Bank engagement decisions. For example, all decisions on costing surrounding the Tajikistan Emergency COVID-19 project (2020-2022, US\$11.3 million) were based on up-to-date statistics from the ASIST MIS and NRSP. Referring to the 2014 policy-based report, the ICR identified strong examples of evaluation influencing program design. One recommendation was to include additional categorical criteria for vulnerable women in the system. This was reflected in the Results Framework under the AF. As a result, the project introduced two PDO-level indicators (under the January 2018 AF) to trace performance of the TSA program with regard to households with distinct social and economic gender disadvantages (female-headed households, elderly women living alone).

M&E Quality Rating

High



10. Other Issues

a. Safeguards

The project was originally classified as category C but, as the ICR (pp. 38-39) noted, the environmental assessment category switched to Category B (partial assessment) during implementation given small-scale civil works and renovation and refurbishment of premises (SASP moved to a new building with renovation of office space and rehabilitation works including for establishment of the data center within the SASP, as well as for the five regional data centers). The environmental category was subsequently switched back to category C when all public works were completed. In all cases, the scope of works was limited enough to not require the development of a separate environmental framework. The ICR (p. 38) stated that the project complied with the World Bank's safeguards requirements.

b. Fiduciary Compliance

The PAD (p. 13) noted that the PCG within the Executive Office of the President had a satisfactory history in procurement and would be responsible for all procurement, which would be based on draft terms of reference and technical specifications that the project's technical working group (TWG) would submit. The main procurement risk identified in the PAD was the potential for delay in the preparation of quality bidding documents. To mitigate this, the Executive Office of the President reviewed documents for consistency with guidelines and provided specialized support, especially on IT issues, through hiring a qualified consultant. However, in the initial stages of implementation, weak capacity impacted the timeliness and quality of overall financial management support delivered. The TWG was not effective, and as a result, procurement required for IT contracts was stalled as was procurement for the firm to evaluate MLSP capacity. This had knock-on impacts on decisions on procurement of training services and computers for the ministry that were to be based on recommendations of the capacity assessment report. The 2014 restructuring saw visible improvements, with the new line ministry actively working to revitalize the procurement function. With time, the procurement staff produced robust procurement plans and handled large and complex procurement packages.

The ICR noted that the project overcame initial financial management capacity constraints through the first restructuring in 2014, when two clear lines of administering the project— technical and fiduciary— were established, with two corresponding lead positions supervising them. Financial management functions improved with a new fiduciary team, under the oversight of a full-time project officer. Capacity was also strengthened through hiring an experienced consultant as well as two additional accounting/disbursement consultants. Once the updated systems and processes were in place, the financial management arrangements progressed satisfactorily and the MHSPP was able to generate timely quarterly interim financial reports. Project audit reports were generally presented without issue, and the audited financial statements were assessed as acceptable to the World Bank.

c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)

The ICR noted (pp. 30-31) that the status of being a TSA beneficiary has become "highly valued" in Tajikistan, as this status opens up access other benefits -- funeral allowance, reduced school tuition,



access to medical services, and reduction of public transportation costs -- and has become the criterion to receive official status of being a low-income family.

The ICR also asserted that the project has established a solid foundation to revive discussions on devising compensating mechanisms to offset the adverse impact of energy reforms on the poor. The TSA has been recognized as a dominant instrument to address increased costs of electricity for the poor. Another Bank project, Tajikistan Power Utility Financial Recovery Program (2020-2026, US\$134 million), uses the TSA rollout as an important results indicator; the project aims to mitigate the impact of increasing electricity tariffs on vulnerable consumers through a combination of payments under the TSA and a lifeline/block tariff structure.

Finally, the Tajikistan Emergency Covid-19 Project (2020-2022, US\$11.3 million) has used the systems developed through the project in the delivery of emergency cash transfers. Between June and December 2020, a total of US\$3 million in emergency assistance was delivered to 64,469 vulnerable families with children under the age of three.

d. Other

11. Ratings

Ratings	ICR	IEG	Reason for Disagreements/Comment
Outcome	Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	IEG rated as high both relevance and efficacy in line with the ICR. However, IEG rated efficiency as modest reflecting the long timeframe for project delivery and the high level of administrative costs associated with the project.
Bank Performance	Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	IEG ratings differed from ICR ratings which assessed both quality at entry and supervision as satisfactory. IEG rated quality at entry moderately satisfactory reflecting weak estimation of capacity and weak initial implementation arrangements. IEG rated supervision as highly satisfactory given the Bank's tenacity in staying with the project and ultimately guiding it towards delivery of important outcomes.



Quality of M&E	High	High
Quality of ICR	---	Modest

12. Lessons

The ICR provided a long list of lessons under three headings – Policy, Implementation, and Sustainability – the most important of which from IEG’s perspective are:

Social assistance reform can be a long process, particularly in a setting with weak implementation capacity, but can ultimately deliver far-reaching benefits and consequences for both the government and citizens. In this case, policy reform efforts preceded the project, and the project itself ran significantly over time, largely as a result of weak implementation capacity. However, improvements to the social protection system ultimately delivered a more sustainable and efficient system that better met the needs of citizens through more accurate targeting. As also noted in the ICR, better targeting has both an equity and an efficiency dimension: those most in need receive benefits, and there are social protection system-level savings associated with better targeting.

In line with IEG’s discussion of the conditions underpinning successful scaling up in *Selected Drivers of Education Quality: Pre- and In-Service Teacher Training* (2019), the design of a pilot intervention should always have scalability in mind. It is important that pilot projects clearly communicate their objective as a building block for a national program, to ensure sustainability of the effort. This requires stakeholder commitment and capacity.

Fiscal and operational sustainability beyond project closing is a concern, particularly as it relates to financing the MIS/IT systems operation, retention of staff, and ensuring adequate and predictable budget allocations from the government. Ongoing "maintenance" needs to be built into all scaling-up efforts to ensure sustainable development.

13. Assessment Recommended?

No

14. Comments on Quality of ICR

The ICR was reasonably well organized and well argued, providing detail on various aspects including project design and project restructurings. The ICR also developed an easy-to-understand theory of change that was presented in diagrammatic form. A number of well-articulated lessons under various headings were developed, some of which were specific to the project, others of which have more general resonance. In supporting the achievements of the project, the ICR drew on M&E data as well as beneficiary surveys and impact evaluation carried out under the project. However, the ICR’s efficiency discussion focused more on sectoral rather than project efficiency. Also, although the PAD did not provide a traditional, quantitative cost benefit analysis, the



ICR might have considered constructing such an analysis, particularly given the duration of the project and the breadth of expansion in coverage delivered. The split rating mechanism was applied by project time periods rather than, as per the guidelines, achievement of each objective over the entire lifetime of the project.

a. Quality of ICR Rating

Modest