

## ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN POVERTY REDUCTION IN KYRGYZSTAN: CASES OF THE ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (ADB) AND THE UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (USAID)

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of international organisations, specifically the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), in reducing poverty in Kyrgyzstan, a developing nation with pervasive poverty issues. The study evaluates the impact and effectiveness of ADB and USAID projects in key sectors, such as infrastructure, education, health, and employment, by analysing case studies and conducting a SWOT analysis. The results suggest that international organizations' aid can have a positive impact on poverty reduction, but the effectiveness of these projects varies. Education, child health, infrastructure, and employment are key factors in poverty reduction, and policymakers should prioritise investments in these areas. Targeting the most vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups, such as women, rural youth, and underprivileged students, is essential to ensure inclusive and equitable access to education and training opportunities. The sustainability of development projects must be a key consideration in poverty reduction efforts, and governments and international organisations must prioritise and allocate resources to achieve lasting impact and promote sustainable poverty reduction. The findings of this study have important policy implications for poverty reduction efforts in Kyrgyzstan and other countries with similar socio-economic challenges.

**Keywords:** Poverty reduction, International organisations, Evaluation, ADB, USAID, Kyrgyzstan.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The eradicating poverty paradigm is currently being undertaken as a collective action, especially in the developing world, by a progressively like-minded group of organisations ranging from the World Bank and IMF, moving via UN agencies to bilateral development, and in collaboration with civil societies and NGOs (Porter & Craig, 2004). Collective global action ensures a comprehensive and integrated approach necessary to address the root causes of poverty (Croes & Rivera, 2015).

Extreme poverty fell from 38% to 8.4% worldwide between 1990 and 2019, thanks to 30 collaborative years of successful poverty reduction initiatives on a global scale. Defined as living on less than either \$1.90 per day (2011 purchasing power parities PPPs) or \$2.15 per day (2017 PPPs), 9.2% of the world's population, or 734 million people, lived in extreme poverty in 2020 (World Bank, 2020).

Poverty is a more complex and dynamic concept beyond just monetary terms. In this regard, Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) was introduced by Alkire and Foster (2011) to measure poverty by accounting for deprivation in ten different dimensions, such as standard of living, health, and education. Also, The World Bank introduced multidimensional poverty indices, which were constructed over the three elements: monetary poverty, education, and access to infrastructure. Then, the indices were added to two more dimensions: health & nutrition and security (World Bank, 2018a). Considering the multidimensionality of poverty, the percentage of people living in poverty was around 22.6% worldwide in 2020 (World Bank, 2020). Given the massive difference in percentage between people living in extreme poverty expressed just in monetary terms and in multidimensional poverty, traditional poverty-reduction programs that focus simply on income or consumption may fail to cover the issue of poverty eradication thoroughly. Multidimensional poverty has its own suggested literature of public policies and strategies which international organisations follow for poverty reduction, such as infrastructural development, education, health, and economic growth.

Albeit the efforts on a global scale, because 9.2% of the world's population lives in extreme poverty and 22.6% lives in multidimensional poverty, the effectiveness of those efforts and stakeholders could be better.

One of the countries where international organisations assist in combating poverty is Kyrgyzstan. Despite successful poverty reduction initiatives and long years of international organisations' engagement, Kyrgyzstan's poverty rate remains extremely high by global standards, which raises concerns about the efficacy of international organisations in reducing poverty in Kyrgyzstan, which is too similar to the worldwide situation.

Kyrgyzstan has achieved great success in poverty reduction since its independence. Notwithstanding these efforts, poverty still affects a considerable portion of its population, with a 33% of poverty rate in 2021 (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, n.d.), particularly in rural areas. At this point, international organisations step in to assist Kyrgyzstan in creating and implementing poverty reduction programs. Numerous international organisations operate in Kyrgyzstan on the issue of poverty alleviation. They provide technical assistance, financial resources, and expertise to tackle the underlying causes of poverty. The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, and the United States Agency for International Development are among the most

notable international organisations working in Kyrgyzstan to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development.

The research questions for this study are as follows: Do international organisations, as suggested in the literature, genuinely contribute to significant poverty reduction in Kyrgyzstan? If so, to what degree do they impact poverty reduction, and what are the strengths and areas requiring improvement?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1: Role of International Organisations in Poverty Reduction, particularly in Kyrgyzstan***

International organisations are shown to have a poverty reduction role, especially in low-income countries. They can contribute to poverty reduction by giving aid, supporting economic growth, and strengthening governance in developing countries. Collier (2007) claims that international organisations can mitigate the investment risks which private entrepreneurs tend to avoid in developing countries. They can reduce the risks resulting from political and economic instabilities through initiatives such as debt relief and trade deals, which eventually contribute to economic growth and poverty reduction. Sachs (2005) suggests that poverty can be addressed by collective international action. He argues that many developing countries lack the financial resources and expertise to create and implement investments, particularly in health, education, and infrastructure, in which international organisations can step and assist.

On the other hand, as an international organisation, the World Bank Staff (2001) also proposes that international organisations contribute to poverty reduction by providing financial support, technical assistance, knowledge sharing, advocacy, and partnership. The World Bank (2016) also states that international organisations have an essential role in poverty reduction by helping the provision of basic services such as education, healthcare, and clean water. As for the role of international organisations in poverty reduction, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, scholars emphasise the need for a holistic approach while acknowledging the positive role of international organisations in Kyrgyzstan. Reeves (2014) claims that international organisations have mixed success in poverty reduction in Kyrgyzstan. She suggests that international organisations should also consider poverty's social and political dimensions beyond the just economic dimension. She identifies the main problem of international organisations as their lack of understanding of the local context.

International organisations follow some strategies and public policies towards poverty, such as general economic development, rural development, infrastructural development, and improvements in education and, health & nutrition.

### ***2.2: Economic Development and Poverty Reduction***

Economic growth is considered one of the central dynamics for poverty reduction (Kouadio & Gakpa, 2022). "Growth really does help the poor: in fact, it raises their incomes by about as much as it raises the incomes of everybody else. In short, globalisation raises incomes, and the poor participate fully" (The Economist, May 27, 2000; p 94). According to the IMF, a rise in the income shares of the bottom 20% is linked to a sizable increase in GDP (Dabla-Norris et al., 2015). Consequently, income growth and the alleviation of poverty and inequality can go simultaneously (Lakner et al., 2014). Research has shown little chance of considerably alleviating poverty in underdeveloped countries without intense and sustained economic

growth (Rodrik, 2000; Adams, 2004; Dollar et al., 2013). Sustained growth is the pivotal way to achieve fundamental necessities of people such as poverty reduction, fruitful employment, education, and health (Hausmann et al., 2005). According to Dollar and Kray's periodic research (2002, 2013, 2016), 'growth is good for the poor', which they name their articles. They demonstrated the crucial role of economic growth in poverty reduction by periodically analysing a sample of more than 100 developed and developing countries. Similarly, Ravallion and Chen (1997) observed a strong relationship indicating the connection between growth and the decline in poverty by analysing the household surveys of 67 developing countries. According to the conclusion of the Human Development Report published by the UNDP (2003), low levels of economic growth accounted for the failure of the war against poverty in the 1990s in most countries. It also found that the fastest-growing economies reduced poverty the most.

### ***2.3: Role of Rural Development in Poverty Reduction***

Analysing the harmonised household data from 89 countries, Castañeda et al. (2018) found that approximately 80% of the extremely poor and 76% of the moderate poor live in rural areas. Among the rural dwellers, about 18% are extremely poor, while 27% are moderately poor. These numbers are notably higher among rural dwellers than urban dwellers, which are 5.5% and 10.7%, respectively. Compatible with the higher poverty rates in rural areas, poverty is deeply rooted in the agricultural sector. About 65% of extremely poor workers serve in the agricultural sector, and within the agricultural industry, nearly 20% of the workers are extremely poor, while the ratio is 4.6% in the non-agrarian sector. Striking findings of research clearly show that rural development is not worthless enough to be neglected. In this regard, scholars have two views. One group of scholars think that finding work in the urban or peri-urban non-farm sector is the only realistic option for poor rural dwellers. They see urbanisation as the key factor for poverty reduction. Even they tend to oppose any rural anti-poverty intervention, believing that it will distort the anti-poverty policies through urbanisation.

On the other hand, the other group thinks that the rural economy could be a significant source of growth and that growth is more likely to reduce poverty in rural areas. They claim that excessive urbanisation leads to the emergence of urban slums and urban unemployment and poverty. Instead, some policies supporting rural development, such as access to knowledge and agricultural inputs, will yield economic growth and poverty reduction (Ravallion, 2016). For example, China owns its success in poverty reduction since 1980, primarily for rural development. Agriculture played a substantially more significant role than the secondary or tertiary sources of GDP. Rural economic growth was significantly more vital to national poverty reduction than urban economic growth (Ravallion & Chen, 2009). There are also impact evaluation reports indicating the positive role of efforts in line with rural development in poverty reduction (Duflo et al., 2008; Beaman et al., 2014).

### ***2.4: Role of Infrastructure in Development and Poverty Reduction***

Physical infrastructure, such as transportation, communication, and power, enables growth through forward and backward connections. In contrast, social infrastructures, such as education, health, sewage, water supply, sanitation, and so on, are essential services that significantly influence the quality of life. The progress of infrastructure indicates the state of a country's economy (Chotia & Rao, 2017). A lack of adequate infrastructure causes elevated

transaction costs, which could impede the economy from reaching its full potential. Poor infrastructure hinders development by rendering it slow and difficult (Mo, 2016). Sachs (2005) contends that in order to combat poverty and stimulate economic development, developing countries ought to invest in their infrastructure. He emphasises the significance of constructing roads, electrical networks, and other types of infrastructure to link people to markets, schools, and healthcare services. Calderon & Serven (2008) argues that infrastructure investment is critical to fostering African economic growth. They claim that a considerable obstacle to economic progress and poverty eradication is a lack of infrastructure, particularly in rural regions. Besides roads and bridges, clean energy infrastructure also has a poverty-reducing impact. Stiglitz (2011) claims that investment in clean energy infrastructure, such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, and public transit, generates employment and lowers energy prices, especially for low-income households. Clean energy infrastructure can lessen the impact of energy price shocks which disproportionately affect the poor. This is because it reduces reliance on fossil fuels. He also points out that investment in clean energy infrastructure supports long-term economic growth, particularly in emerging nations. Clean energy infrastructure increases energy security and minimises trade deficit by reducing the reliance on imported fossil fuels. In short, the level of infrastructure has linkages with poverty.

### ***2.5: Role of Education in Development and Poverty Reduction***

Education is an essential basis for economic growth and poverty eradication. It increases the welfare of individuals (Villalobos et al., 2021). Education raises socioeconomic position via enhancing cognitive capacities and skills that increase worker productivity and wealth (UNHCR, 2002; para 1 & 40). Thus, investment in both time and money in children's education, especially early education, yields a high return on income in the future (UNHCR, 2002; para 17, 45, 46). Education is one of the best strategies to fight poverty. It can raise labour standards generally, provide impoverished people with the tools they need to escape poverty, and stop the poverty cycle from passing down from generation to generation. Education teaches and equips poor people to find ways to get rid of the poverty cycle (Beegle, 2000). There is a close relationship between education and economic growth. According to Hanushek and Woessmann (2021), 75% of the increase in GDP per capita across countries can be attributable to increased math and science skills. Education bridges the gap between the rich and poor; thus, it is a factor of equaliser within society (Oxfam, 2018). Education is also related to the improved state of health. Educated women tend to have safer pregnancies and healthier babies (World Bank, 2017, August 22). Education lowers the risk of diseases like HIV and AIDS (Jukes et al., 2008). International experience too demonstrates that education against poverty may result in significant flexibility in reducing poverty. According to a World Bank study, the likelihood of poverty is more than 16% if the household's primary wage earner has less than six years of education. It falls to 7% for those with 6 to 9 years of education and even further to 2.5% for those with 9 to 12 years of education. Poverty is virtually unheard of in households where the primary wage earner has more than 12 years of education (Eryong & Xiuping, 2018). According to UNESCO, if all children have primary and secondary education worldwide, extreme poverty could be cut by half (UNESCO, 2017). Earnings are estimated to increase by about 10% for men and up to 20% for women with each additional year of education (UNESCO, 2013; UNESCO, 2016). Thus, the global fight against poverty includes education as a key component.

## **2.6: Role of Health in Poverty Reduction**

Health risks, especially those exposed by the poor, are among the most vital causes of perpetual poverty—they barrier economic flourishing. One of the most important elements determining the intergenerational transmission of poverty is the parents' health (Bird, 2013). Parental health has a direct and strong effect on the children's socioeconomic status. Children whose parents confront poor health states are much more vulnerable to long-lasting socioeconomic downward mobility pressure and face a high probability of exposure to economic deprivation and poverty (Wagmiller et al., 2008). The underlying rationale that poor health conditions worsen poverty is that the lack of a health insurance system and associated health hazards may distort the poor's economical habits, such as lowering investments in children's education (Cohen, 2000). They have to direct their already low economic resources to medical treatment costs and may lose their labour income in case of a health shock (Harper, 2004). Access to necessary medications will help people improve their quality of life and lessen their poverty level (Spicker et al., 2007). It is already accepted that access to health care and essential medications is crucial for maintaining good health, allowing the poor to live better lives, and ultimately reducing their poverty (Weil, 2007). In this regard, the UN recognises several essential components for realising the right to health as part of a strategy to combat poverty. Governments are expected to increase the availability and accessibility of personal health care for people living in poverty. This can be accomplished by providing services directed towards the needy and ensuring the distribution of resources. Prioritising maternal and child health care, the WHO's list of essential medicines must be provided. Diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS that specifically affect the poor must be identified, and programs must be devised and implemented with a focus on assisting the poor. Moreover, governments should reduce the financial burden related to preventative and treatment healthcare, such as lowering user fees (UNHCR, 2002) which discourage poor access to healthcare (Ravallion, 2016). The health insurance system covering the poor is another strategy that decreases the health risks to the economy and contributes to poverty reduction (Liao et al., 2022). In short, health is also one of the key elements for fighting against poverty.

## **3. SOCIOECONOMIC LANDSCAPE OF KYRGYZ REPUBLIC**

### **3.1: Macroeconomic Outlook of Kyrgyzstan**

The Kyrgyz Republic is a land-locked, lower-middle-income, ex-Soviet country that gained independence in 1991. It is a multi-ethnic country dominated by the Kyrgyz, which comprises 73%, the Uzbeks 14.5%, and Russians 6% of the total 6.7 million populations. 63% of the total population dwells in rural areas, which is above 44% of the world's ratio as well as 57% ratio of the lower-middle-income countries (The World Bank, n.d. a). Being a highly mountainous country, Kyrgyzstan has abundant natural resources, including arable land (7%), pastures (48%), a significant amount of forests, and minerals. So, it has great natural endowments for the growth of its agricultural sector, hydroelectricity generation, and tourism business.

Kyrgyzstan is the second poorest country in Central Asia after Tajikistan. According to the World Bank's most recent data, its GDP was \$8.5 Billion, and GDP per capita was \$1276 in 2021 (World Bank, n.d. b). Kyrgyzstan has been experiencing robust but highly volatile economic growth since 2000. The real GDP growth rates oscillate between -0.5% (in 2010) and 10.9% (in 2013), excluding the Coronavirus affected year 2020. As for unemployment rates in

Kyrgyzstan, 4.8% of the total labour force was unemployed, and youth and female unemployment rates were 22% and 5.2%, respectively, in 2021. Unemployment rates among people with primary and higher education were the same at 6% in 2018 (World Bank, n.d. c).

The COVID crisis caused a severe recession, with output falling by 8.6% in 2020, state debt increasing by 16.5% to 68% of GDP, and the national currency, Kyrgyz som, losing 19 % of its value against the US dollar. The Kyrgyz economy shrank by 8.4%. Such a massive rate of economic downsizing was recorded 26 years ago in Kyrgyz Republic history. Even though the economic recovery started in 2021, it is forecasted that a great deal of uncertainty will blur the growth, and the recovery may be postponed if downside risks occur (IMF, 2021).

Gold exports have mainly triggered economic growth; the growing service sector, construction, as well as consumption relied upon remittances (World Bank, 2018b; p 7).

The Kyrgyz economy is heavily dependent on agriculture [15% of the GDP (Statista, n.d.)], remittances [33% of the GDP (World Bank, n.d. d)], gold production [10% of the GDP (World Bank, 2021)], and foreign aids [5.7% of the GDP (World Bank, n.d. e)]. Furthermore, its access to the global capital markets is very limited (IMF, 2021). Thus, the Kyrgyz economy is highly vulnerable to external shocks and natural disasters (World Bank, n.d. f). For instance, the 2008 Financial Crisis and an accident at the largest gold mining area in Kumtor in 2012 badly affected the Kyrgyz economy.

### ***3.2: Poverty in Kyrgyzstan***

Kyrgyzstan began shifting from a planned to a market-oriented economic system after the fall of the Soviet Union. This trend caused Kyrgyzstan, like many of its neighbours, to first face a steep decline in economic growth, significant changes in the economic structure, increased unemployment, shrinking real wages, and rising levels of poverty and inequality. Since the middle of the 1990s, economic growth has resumed, but despite these growth variations, poverty and inequality levels have yet to improve immediately. It has only been since 2000 that poverty rates in Kyrgyzstan have begun to drop (ILO, 2008).

The Kyrgyz Republic had done a very well job, especially in the first decade of the 21st century. Poverty rates have generally been descending trend, except for the period between 2009 and 2012. The poverty rate had steadily decreased from 60% in 2005 to 31.7% in 2008; however, it headed to 38% until 2012. Curbing poverty, Kyrgyzstan managed to decrease the rate to 20% in 2019. However, seriously hit by the Coronavirus pandemic, Kyrgyzstan's poverty rate rose to 33.3% in 2021. The poverty rate had decreased from 60% to a historical low of 20% in 2019; nonetheless, these rates are still quite high compared to the world poverty rates (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, n.d.).

An essential characteristic of Kyrgyz poverty is that rural poverty is much higher than urban poverty. According to the World Bank, approximately 70% of the poor live in rural areas in Kyrgyzstan. Besides, high mountainous areas include more poverty than semi-mountainous and flat grounds (World Bank Group, 2014). Rural poverty could be explained by the fact that even though nearly two-thirds of the population dwells in rural areas, urban cities play a dynamo role in the country's economy. Furthermore, rural areas' main economic activities are agriculture, which is made up of small-scale farms and animal husbandry. Rural people confront problems of insufficient livestock, low levels of agricultural productivity, and limited access to markets and machinery services. Most of them live in remote mountainous pasture

areas with few assets, preventing them from reaching economic opportunities. The geography and topography that Kyrgyz rural people live in also make them vulnerable to natural disasters such as droughts, floods, and river erosions (IFAD, 2020). In addition to all these challenges, rural people lack sufficient training in agricultural practices, veterinary care, animal husbandry, and farming methods. As a result, the land can no longer sustainably produce food and supplies for animals, and plenty of people cannot survive only on their agricultural endeavours (Bradley, 2017).

Another aspect of poverty in Kyrgyzstan that is worth mentioning is that poverty rates vary substantially across oblasts and years. Although it substantially varies yearly, Jalal-Abad and Batken have been the highest poverty rate measured oblasts in general (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, n.d.).

Poverty rates in Kyrgyzstan show strong seasonal fluctuations, which means a high risk of being exposed to poverty for most Kyrgyz people. For example, while only 22% of people never experienced poverty for all quarters of 2005, the data improved to nearly 50% in 2009. However, the improvement has stagnated since then, and a stable pattern oscillating between 37% to 48% continued. Besides, 10% of the population has been chronically poor, so they can never escape poverty. On the other hand, many people live just around the poverty line, either slightly above or below it. Thus, many people are considered non-poor because they are slightly above the poverty line and face the risk of falling into poverty by even a shaky shock. For instance, possible inflation in food prices could bring about a remarkable increase in poverty rates (World Bank, 2018a).

As for how Kyrgyzstan managed to achieve success in poverty reduction, it has made significant strides toward maintaining macroeconomic stability. The Kyrgyz Republic's relatively strong overall economic growth, supported by remittance-fuelled spending and considerable growth in the services sector, was the primary driver of poverty reduction and shared prosperity (World Bank, 2018a). Fortunately, overall economic growth has improved the poor's conditions more than the non-poor. The rural poor population has obtained the largest gains from economic growth. Moreover, the Gini index of Kyrgyzstan, which illustrates the income inequality is well beyond most countries in the world.

In elaboration on nexuses of poverty, Kyrgyzstan has 2.1 Million school-age children. Fortunately, school attendance for poor and non-poor students is quite high, over 97%. Elementary education is mandatory until the 9th grade, but secondary education is optional. Both elementary and secondary education is free at public schools in Kyrgyzstan. However, children from poor households continue less in secondary and above levels of education. Poor households especially cannot afford to pay for preschool education and university education fees. Thus, even though almost all children have a basic elementary education level, students from low-income families are more prone not to get preschool and university-level education. What is more, this trend is more apparent in rural areas. As for health, the poor get less use of healthcare facilities when compared to the non-poor, even though they need more healthcare than the non-poor. Poor quality of healthcare services and the issue of accessibility can be considered reasons for the poor's low usage of healthcare. Furthermore, ignorance and self-medication are widespread among the poor, resulting in low healthcare demand. Regarding housing unit type, low-income families mostly live in single-family houses with more people per house than non-poor families. Low-income families commonly share one bedroom. These



dwelling conditions impact their housing maintenance calibre and susceptibility to health issues. The poor have less access to infrastructural utilities such as telephone, gas, sewage, central heating, etc. Furthermore, the utilities they have access to are often low in quality, which can be concretised by the frequency of supply disconnects. Regarding consumer durables, the ownership of a refrigerator, vacuum cleaner, car, and washing machine is the most significant distinction. Livestock is a valuable possession for a household in rural areas (World Bank, 2015). A number of causes are proposed for causes of poverty in Kyrgyzstan. The first cause of poverty is the lack of financial resources. The GDP per capita is so low that while the world's average GDP per capita was \$12230 in 2021, it was \$1276 in Kyrgyzstan. Along with the monetary shortage, financial institutions such as functional banking infrastructure, investment potential, microfinance, and personal finance management are also weak. Especially in rural areas, people have limited access to banks. At the national level, money is mostly mismanaged. Thus, weak institutions, especially financial ones, are one of the causes of poverty. Economic growth is one of the milestones for poverty eradication. Highly volatile and shaky economic growth impedes the comprehensiveness of poverty reduction in Kyrgyzstan. Another cause of poverty is insufficient agricultural development. Because almost two third of the Kyrgyz people live in rural areas and their main livelihood is agriculture and stockbreeding, it is vital to attach importance to sustainable agricultural development. Kyrgyzstan has natural resource stocks such as gold and water, but unequal access to those natural resources is a barrier to poverty reduction. Besides, poor infrastructure is too one of the causes of poverty because infrastructural utilities such as electricity, heating, clean water and sanitation are still inadequate, especially in rural areas (Bradley, 2017).

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

This study primarily employs the case study evaluation method, a research approach that involves an in-depth examination of specific instances or examples to gain a comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon (Yin, 2013). By focusing on individual cases, the study aims to uncover patterns, relationships, and insights that may not be apparent through other research methods. This approach enables the researcher to explore the complexities and nuances of the subject matter, providing a rich and detailed analysis of the role international organisations play in poverty reduction within the context of Kyrgyzstan (Flyvbjerg, 2006). To this end, case studies of projects and programs aimed at poverty reduction, implemented by international organisations operating in Kyrgyzstan, were selected. These international organisations were identified using OECD/ODA statistics based on their financial contribution and relevance to poverty alleviation. By examining these prominent organizations and their respective projects and programs, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact and effectiveness of these international organizations in addressing poverty in Kyrgyzstan. According to the OECD/ODA data (2023), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) was the largest donor to Kyrgyzstan, contributing \$90.41 million, followed by the EU Institutions collectively at \$56.76 million, and the United States with \$46.59 million, out of a total of \$394 million in average ODA aid during 2019 and 2020. Due to the dispersed structure of EU Institutions, the study selected the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for this research. The rationale for choosing these prominent international organizations was to examine their role in poverty reduction and glean insights from their experiences for smaller organizations seeking to

implement similar projects in Kyrgyzstan. The availability of project evaluation reports was another factor in selecting ADB and USAID as representative international organizations. The exclusion of samples from other international organizations was due to limitations in the availability of high-quality impact evaluation reports for development projects in Kyrgyzstan.

In this study, five case studies – evaluation reports, were selected for analysis:

**Table 1:** Overview of Selected Case Studies on Poverty Reduction in Kyrgyzstan

Case #	Organization	Project Name	Project Goals
1	ADB	Power Sector Rehabilitation Project	Enhance the power sector, particularly electricity provision
2	ADB	First Vocational Education and Skills Development Project	Improve the vocational education and skills development system
3	ADB	Second Vocational Education and Skills Development Project	Further improve the vocational education and skills development system
4	ADB	Community-Based Early Childhood Development Project	Improve access to and quality of early childhood development services
5	USAID	Women's Leadership in Small and Medium Enterprises (SME)	Support women entrepreneurs in the country and improve their participation in the economy

There are limited numbers of evaluated project reports in education, health, and employment sectors, while numerous infrastructure-related evaluation reports are available. For the infrastructure-related project, the most recent report was chosen. The ADB implemented two consecutive Vocational Education and Skills Development projects in the education field. To observe the progress and experience-gaining process, both projects were chosen and analysed.

The rationale for using evaluation reports instead of the projects themselves was to observe the actual impacts of these projects beyond the expectations of the implementers. The impact evaluation reports were accessed online via ADB's and USAID's websites.

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis has been conducted for each project to further assess their overall performance and potential for poverty reduction.

## 5. FINDINGS

### 5.1: Case samples Analysis

*Case No: 1 – Infrastructure Related Project*

*Project name: ADB Kyrgyz Republic: Power Sector Rehabilitation Project (ADB, 2021, November 11)*

Project description:

Two-thirds of the energy produced is from hydropower, which accounts for 4% of the GDP and 16% of industrial production. Although Kyrgyzstan does some oil and gas and coal extraction, most hydrocarbons are imported. In fact, it imports more than half of the oil and gas it uses, especially in the winter when hydropower output is at minimum level. Kyrgyzstan's energy sector is plagued by outdated infrastructure and large losses resulting from a lack of investment. Over 50% of the system is estimated to be in need of repair or replacement. The significant depreciation of energy assets and weak sector development are caused by substantial subsidies, particularly for electricity use, which diverts funds away from system upkeep and investment. Seasonal factors (winter peaks) and dry years in terms of

precipitation directly influence the amount of electricity that needs to be imported from neighbouring countries because hydropower accounts for more than 90% of domestic electricity production in Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, despite being occasionally constrained by power interruptions, the amount of electricity consumed per capita increased by more than 45% between 2010 and 2018 (IEA, 2020; p 3-5).

Approximately 92% of the Kyrgyz Republic's electricity production since 2002 has been generated by hydropower plants in Toktogul and further downstream in the Naryn cascade. With its potential for a yearlong storage and 50% of the average energy production, the Toktogul Hydroelectric Power Plant (HEPP) has been essential for electricity exports and as a frequency regulator for Central Asia's power grid. Consequently, the government prioritised hydropower plant renovation.

Having been in operation for over 35 years, the Toktogul HEPP experienced significant equipment failure, resulting in an availability drop to 80% and a further decline anticipated without rehabilitation. Technical losses, caused by power assets nearing the end of their economic lives, accounted for approximately 15% of net supply. Furthermore, the industry faced substantial commercial losses of around 25% of the net supply.

#### Developmental Impact:

The project is rated as having satisfactory developmental impact. The project's two impact indicators were that net exports would be maintained at the 2001-2010 average of 2,000 GWh per year by 2021, and domestic supply would be increased to 8,500 GWh in 2019. The first indicator was not met. The additional 2,000 GWh that was supposed to be exported was most likely utilised for domestic purposes. The second indicator was met with a 10,540 GWh rise in domestic supply. Nonetheless, the Kyrgyz Republic has abundant hydropower resources, and electricity generation from hydropower facilities is one of the significant components of the economy. Since 2002, hydropower facilities in the country have generated 92% of total electricity output, with Toktogul HEPP producing by far the most. Thus, the evaluation report assesses the development impact as satisfactory.

#### SWOT Analysis

**Strengths:** The project increased access to electricity in Kyrgyzstan by increasing the domestic supply. The project increased electric efficiency by deploying modern and efficient equipment, which reduced energy losses. Increase in electricity supply and exports may support the government's insistence not to increase electricity tariffs, which benefits households to enjoy cheap electricity bills. The project also created jobs for the power plant's construction, maintenance, and operation.

**Weaknesses:** The project may fail to significantly improve the poor's access to affordable electricity if government discontinues subsidising electricity. The project did not directly target the rural areas where most of the poor people live. Its contribution was not enough to solve the problem of energy access in rural and remote areas. The benefits of the project were not evenly distributed, albeit it contributed to the energy sector infrastructure in general. The project had delays and cost overruns, which may hinder its influence on its ability to reduce poverty. Delays in project completion might result in continuous power shortages during the project implementation period, which can have a negative impact on the poor. The project's sustainability is unsatisfactory due to its poor financial state and government budget deficits.

As a result, the improvements made by the project may not be sustained in the long term, which will limit the overall poverty reduction impact of the project.

**Opportunities:** The project can be extended in such a way that it can include renewable and sustainable energy development. This will decrease the country's dependence on fossil fuels and increase energy security, which will enhance the poverty reduction impact of the project. The project can offer possibilities for private sector involvement and investment in the electricity industry, which can broaden job and income opportunities for the poor. The project can develop new partnerships with other international organisations to complement its shortcomings.

**Threats:** The project was operating in an unstable political and economic climate, which might have influenced its sustainability and contribution to eradicating poverty. Political instability, corruption, and economic shocks can all have detrimental influences on the project's achievements, posing new challenges to the country's poverty reduction efforts. The project is subject to the effects of climate change, such as changes in rainfall patterns and extreme weather events.

*Case No: 2 – Education Related Project*

*Project name: ADB Kyrgyz Republic: (First) Vocational Education and Skills Development Project (ADB, 2014, December 29)*

**Project description:**

The government of Kyrgyzstan recognised the need for a skilled workforce to support private sector expansion and foster sustainable economic growth. To address this, they implemented a project to revitalise and upgrade the vocational education system, targeting primary vocational education (PVE), secondary vocational education (SVE), and advanced technical and vocational training. The main objectives were to make the system more adaptable, cost-efficient, and accessible to individuals across the country.

**Developmental Impact:**

By increasing the number of highly skilled workers, the project aimed to increase the job prospects and earnings of primary vocational school graduates and support private industry-led economic growth. Upon course completion, employers expressed satisfaction with the graduates' skills and the minimal time required for retraining. Primary vocational education graduates and trained unemployed individuals secured jobs within six months of completing their courses. Companies saved money and skilled labour efficiency rose as the requirement for new hire training was reduced. No statistical information was supplied, although accessibility for those in wheelchairs, those who are economically underprivileged, and those who live in rural places were mentioned as societal implications. However, the goals of reducing youth unemployment and increasing the contribution of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to the GDP are unlikely to be achieved.

**SWOT Analysis:**

**Strengths:** The project increased the access and quality of education and skill training in Kyrgyzstan. The project provided vocational education and skills training to students such as girls, rural residents, and people with disabilities who were generally out of access to those training. The project led to the creation of some official institutions, such as the National Skills

Development Council, which enhanced the sustainability of the project. The project established links to the private sector, which integrated the demands of the labour market and education and skill training. Therefore, the project contributed to its beneficiaries boosting their employability and potential incomes.

**Weaknesses:** The project had a limited reach. It did not reach all the low-income households that could benefit from it. The project could not increase the quality of training significantly. The project did not sufficiently address the underlying issues in the education system, such as corruption and inefficiency. These reasons may limit the poverty reduction impact of the project in the long run.

**Opportunities:** The scope of the project could be expanded to include more specialised training programmes that fit the requirements of specific companies or sectors. The project could be backed by collaborating with the industry and business cycles. These would increase the employability of graduates and lower poverty much more. The project could develop new partnerships with other international organisations to strengthen its weaknesses.

**Threats:** Political instability in Kyrgyzstan may restrict the effectiveness of the project in decreasing poverty by creating implementation difficulties, influencing demand for vocational education and training programmes, and impacting budget allocations.

#### *Case No: 3 – Education Related Project*

Project name: ADB Kyrgyz Republic: Second Vocational Education and Skills Development Project (ADB, 2021, September 13)

#### Project description:

In response to Kyrgyzstan's economic rebound in 2011, the government committed to foster growth and employment opportunities in seven crucial sectors. Despite this effort, a significant skills gap among the workforce presented a substantial obstacle to the success of the development programme. To tackle this issue, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) initiated the second Vocational Education and Skills Development Project in 2012, building upon the accomplishments of its predecessor. The project aimed to modernise the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system and prepare middle-level skilled workers for immediate employment in the prioritised industries.

#### Developmental Impact:

The project is rated as highly satisfactory in terms of developmental impact.

Overall, the project has had a remarkable impact on fostering growth by increasing employment opportunities for those with TVET qualifications. The initiative has been particularly successful in boosting the representation of women and rural workers in the workforce.

The 2020 targets for the rise in employment of TVET graduates were set at 25% for males and urban graduates and 30% for females and rural graduates. Remarkably, the percentage of female employees with TVET credentials has already surpassed the 2020 target by 2017. The share of rural workers also experienced a significant increase, nearing the target. However, progress for male and urban workers was less promising, with the former unlikely to meet the target.

Economically, the project has made a substantial contribution by improving the employability of its graduates, the majority of whom found jobs within six to nine months of finishing their courses. The advanced skills acquired by graduates made them more attractive to employers, resulting in higher wages. Furthermore, the project broke down gender barriers by training women for higher-paying, traditionally male-dominated professions.

On a social level, the project has widened access to TVET and job opportunities for disadvantaged groups such as females, rural youth, and adults, as well as providing accommodation for those who require it. A significant portion of students in primary and secondary vocational schools were from low-income backgrounds. The successful execution of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) has further enhanced girls' access to TVET and expanded their opportunities. However, provisions for disabled students were minimal.

Regarding institutional impact, the project has established and consolidated vital components for a contemporary TVET system. To support the ongoing development of this framework, the abilities of associated organisations and vocational schools have been augmented. In summary, the project has played a crucial role in advancing the TVET system in Kyrgyzstan, cultivating a skilled workforce ready to contribute to the country's economic development.

#### SWOT Analysis

**Strengths:** The project had a strong focus on inclusive growth, in addition to increasing access and quality of education and skill training as well as the partnership with the private sector. The project increased the employability of low-income households and addressed the underlying structural factors contributing to poverty, such as inequality and lack of access to finance. The project significantly enhanced the institutional capacity of the vocational education system, which is crucial for long-term sustainability and impact. It also introduced sustainable financing for vocational training schools via its entrepreneurial approach, which substantially boosted the project's sustainability. The project led its beneficiaries to find a job in great percentage, albeit it has yet to be precisely known how much of that percentage can be attributed to the project itself. The project also enhanced women's potential earnings and employability by bringing in new job skills beyond the traditional jobs where women had been working dominantly.

**Weaknesses:** The project had limited coverage. It did not reach all the low-income households that could benefit from it. The project primarily focused on the progress in technical abilities, with little emphasis on the development of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Lack of soft skills development may limit the employability of its beneficiaries. Although considerable progress by the project in addressing gender gaps in access to vocational education and training has been achieved, there are still steps to take in order to boost female employability.

**Opportunities:** The project might be expanded to include additional specialised training courses that meet more demands of private sectors and businesses.

**Threats:** Political instability in Kyrgyzstan may limit the efficacy of the project in reducing poverty by disrupting implementation, affecting demand for vocational education and training programmes, and influencing financial allocations.

The reason for choosing two consecutive education projects was to observe changes and improvements in design, as well as to assess whether international organisations apply the

experiences they gain from previous similar projects. To this end, Case 2: The ADB Kyrgyz Republic: (First) Vocational Education and Skills Development Project and Case 3: The ADB Kyrgyz Republic: Second Vocational Education and Skills Development Project are compared and contrasted:

The first project increased access to vocational education and training for poor and vulnerable groups, particularly in rural areas. The second one continued to focus on improving access with a more targeted approach. The main target of the first project was to boost the employability of its graduates. The second one went beyond just boosting employability to addressing the labour market skills mismatch, a key obstacle to employment and poverty reduction. Both projects aimed to increase the institutional capacity of the Kyrgyz Republic's vocational education system. But, the second one has achieved significant progress in this area by assisting in the establishment of policies and plans, the reform of governance and administration, and the upgrading of teaching and learning materials. The first project faced challenges in terms of sustainability since there was a lack of continued investment and support for the vocational education system. The second one tried to resolve the sustainability issue by creating institutional capacity, which is critical for sustainability and long-term impact. The second project emphasised collaboration with the private sector more, which is vital for ensuring that project graduates have enough skills and boost their employability. The scope of the project in terms of money and beneficiaries expanded significantly in the second project. Therefore, the impact of the second project on poverty reduction was greater than the first one, although both of them contributed to the fight against poverty in Kyrgyzstan.

*Case No: 4 – Health & Nutrition-Related Project*

*Project name: ADB Kyrgyz Republic: Community-Based Early Childhood Development Project (ADB, 2011, December 1)*

Project description:

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, early childhood development (ECD) initiatives in Kyrgyzstan experienced a substantial decline. State-run ECD services underwent reorganisation based on market principles, leading to a reduction in social welfare programmes. Public funding for child services also decreased, resulting in the closure of preschools and day care facilities and the discontinuation of funding for children's meals. Between independence and the 2000s, preschool education participation plummeted by 76% (Chino, 2003). This challenging environment adversely affected the education, health, and nutrition of children aged 0-8, particularly those from impoverished rural families. Mothers struggled to find time for work due to childcare responsibilities. Consequently, the widespread deprivation risked burdening the nation with an unhealthy and unskilled labour force, reduced productivity, and poverty passed down across generations. To address these issues, the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Community-Based Early Childhood Development (ECD) Project sought to support children's nutrition, health, and education in rural areas to establish robust and sustainable solutions.

Developmental Impact:

The project is rated as significant in terms of developmental impact.

The project considerably supported institutional development by enhancing the government's capacity to finance the Expanded Program on Immunisation (EPI) independently. It

established a national network of Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) supervision and increased access to pharmaceuticals and medications. A clear supply chain for essential medications has been established across the country. The Mandatory Health Insurance Fund had recently begun adding new medicine packages to subsidise essential medications at the project's appraisal. However, only a few of these drug packs were available in rural areas. The project specifically contributed to ensuring the availability of vital medications in remote regions through public-private pharmacies.

#### SWOT Analysis

**Strengths:** The project targeted the most vulnerable children, especially in rural areas from low-income families. Focusing on the most vulnerable increases the inclusivity of the poverty reduction agenda and helps ensure that no one is missed out. The project empowered communities to own early childhood development services. Parents, teachers, and community members were trained to provide early childhood development services, which helped to build community capacity. The project also formed a partnership with UNICEF; furthermore, the Ministry of Education and Science has adopted the project's preschool component. These are critical for long-term sustainability. The project had a holistic approach. It aimed to enhance children's health, nutrition, and cognitive development. A holistic approach is critical for breaking the poverty cycle and ensuring that children have the skills and talents needed to thrive. The project successfully created a supply chain for pharmaceuticals, ensuring the availability of medications in rural areas. The project not only targeted one single sector but also merged the education and healthcare sectors for children, reinforcing the project's holistic approach and comprehensiveness.

**Weaknesses:** The project had a limited reach. It was implemented in a few selected communities and did not reach all the vulnerable populations in Kyrgyzstan. The project had a limited emphasis on child protection. It did not sufficiently tackle issues like child abuse and neglect, which can profoundly influence a child's growth and chances in the future. The project did not prioritise girls, who might be more vulnerable to deprivations in childhood than boys. Because of its restricted scope, lack of attention on child protection, and limited emphasis on gender equality, the project's overall influence on Kyrgyzstan's poverty reduction might be limited.

**Opportunities:** The project could expand its scope by including maternal health and education. The project could also extend its scope by including children older than six in the program. By improving the health outcomes of mothers along with more children, the project's impact on poverty reduction could be improved through lowering healthcare expenses and increasing mother productivity.

**Threats:** Political instability may cause the government's unwillingness to maintain involvement in the project. Because child health, nutrition, and education are not one-shot tasks, they require strong commitment. Any external shock jeopardising the project's sustainability could limit its impact on poverty.



*Case No: 5 – Employment Related Project*

*Project name: USAID Women's Leadership in Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) Activity in the Kyrgyz Republic (USAID, 2018, May 8)*

Project description:

The Women's Leadership in Small and Medium Enterprises (WLSME) project, supported by USAID, aim to address the under-representation of women in the SME sector by providing financing and innovative ideas to expand and develop women-led SMEs in developing nations. In Kyrgyzstan, WLSME efforts focused on addressing two key barriers faced by Kyrgyz women: (i) agency constraints that impede the development of proper human and management capital, and (ii) relationship constraints that limit women's access to information and hinder the establishment and utilisation of social capital.

Carried out between September 2013 and September 2015, boasting a budget of \$2 million, the initiative was designed to support 960 high-promise female entrepreneurs in the fields of garments, tourism, and agro-processing, all of whom employed at least one non-relative. The scheme was composed of three distinct elements: (i) business management training (BMT), encompassing topics such as negotiation techniques, commercial strategy, brand development, fiscal planning, efficiency, and personnel management; (ii) market linkages (ML), comprising stakeholder gatherings, industry exhibits, value chain and subsector workshops, biannual value chain stakeholder conferences, digital materials, and an annual promotional strategy contest; and (iii) technical skills/financial accessibility (TS/AF), where exclusively the finalists and semi-finalists from the business proposal contests were offered tailored assistance, including specialised instruction, concentrated technical support, mentorship, and observational trips. Participants in this ultimate element also had the chance to request small grants, varying from \$200 to \$2000.

SWOT Analysis

**Strengths:** The project had a strong focus on women. It boosted women's economic involvement and improved access to financial services and markets. The project built training and mentoring program capacity for women entrepreneurs. Capacity building helped to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of women-owned businesses. The project established partnerships with local organisations, which ensured that the project was responsive to the requirements of local communities. The project improved women's access to finance, which enabled them to invest in their businesses and expand their operations. The project led more people to have jobs. All these strengths contributed positively to poverty reduction in Kyrgyzstan.

**Weaknesses:** The project had a limited reach. It was implemented in a few selected regions of Kyrgyzstan and did not reach all women entrepreneurs in the country. The project had a limited emphasis on the informal sector, a significant source of income and employment for many women in Kyrgyzstan. The project's sustainability is questionable due to limited government support, insufficient local resources, reliance on external funding, and social and cultural barriers. Additionally, it did not address the root causes of poverty, such as corruption and inefficiencies in the financial sector. All these weaknesses may prevent the project from significantly impacting poverty reduction in Kyrgyzstan.

**Opportunities:** The project could discover new ideas and innovative solutions to the difficulties women entrepreneurs in Kyrgyzstan confront, such as online marketing. The inclusivity of the project could be expanded by admitting more female entrepreneurs to the project. Incentives in the project, such as cash assistance, could be increased to attract more female entrepreneurs into the programme.

**Threats:** The project largely depends on external funding, making it sensitive to shifts in USAID's priorities and fund allocations. Any financial cutback might seriously affect the program's capacity to continue running, which would restrict its potential influence on reducing poverty. Due to its small scalability, the project might not be prioritised to be maintained in case of any external shock.

## **6. DISCUSSION**

The evaluation of five development projects in Kyrgyzstan demonstrates that international organisations' aid can have a positive impact on poverty reduction, although the effectiveness of these projects varies.

Education is a crucial factor in reducing poverty, and vocational education and TVET play a significant role in providing people with the necessary skills and knowledge for decent employment and livelihoods. Projects 2 and 3 had a considerable impact on vocational education and TVET in Kyrgyzstan by enhancing graduates' employability, improving access for underprivileged and socially disadvantaged students, and increasing women's earning potential and employability. The positive impact of these projects on vocational education and TVET can contribute to reducing poverty and inequality in Kyrgyzstan in the long run.

Project 4's impact on child health and nutrition services is also significant in terms of poverty reduction. Child health and education are critical determinants of human capital development and are necessary for breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Improving the availability and quality of child health and nutrition services can enhance children's cognitive development and school performance, leading to better employment prospects and higher incomes in the future.

The findings of the evaluated projects highlight the importance of targeting the most vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups, such as women, rural youth, and underprivileged students, to ensure inclusive and equitable access to education and training opportunities. The projects that successfully addressed the needs of these groups had a more significant impact on poverty reduction and human development.

Several crucial factors contribute to the efficacy of international organisations' aid in reducing poverty, as revealed by the study's findings. One of these factors is the necessity of national government and international organisation collaboration in the design and implementation of developmental projects. Analyses show that initiatives with open lines of communication, coordinated efforts, and shared monitoring and evaluation procedures have a greater chance of success because their partners are able to build on one another's ideas and knowledge to increase the effectiveness of their actions.

The significance of capacity development for local governments and communities, in which international organisations play a crucial role, is another noteworthy aspect of the findings. The examined projects demonstrate that when foreign organisations collaborate closely with

local governments to improve governance, financial management, and service delivery, communities are given the tools they need to take charge of their own development and make significant contributions to alleviating poverty. This highlights the importance of international organisations decentralising decision-making authority and investing in programs that build local capacity.

The study also emphasises the importance of aligning development initiatives with national development strategies and priorities. A closer examination of the projects reveals that projects led by international organisations, that are well-integrated into the broader policy landscape, and that are aligned with the government's poverty reduction objectives are more likely to yield favourable results. Incorporating such initiatives within national development plans and policy frameworks allows foreign organisations to contribute their knowledge and resources, which in turn promotes coherence and synergy among diverse efforts.

In the process of reducing poverty, in which international organisations play a pivotal role, policy learning and knowledge exchange arise as additional crucial elements. The findings suggest that international organisations can facilitate the exchange of experiences, lessons learned, and best practises between nations. International organisations facilitate the discovery of effective policy approaches and encourage decision-making based on evidence by engaging national governments in policy dialogues and developing relationships with key stakeholders.

The research also emphasises the need to tackle poverty's multidimensional character and the crucial role that international organisations play in developing and putting into practise all-encompassing strategies. The analysed projects demonstrate that the initiatives of international organisations, which include education, health, and employment, have more lasting and far-reaching effects on poverty reduction. The findings highlight the significance of international organisations in creating and executing comprehensive policy interventions that target different aspects of poverty so that no one is left behind.

One possible explanation for the effectiveness of Project 3 in achieving its goals and developmental impact could be seen through Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA). Sen argues that poverty is not only a lack of income or material resources but also a deprivation of basic capabilities, which are the substantive freedoms that allow people to lead the kind of life they value. Project 3 focused on technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to improve the employability of its graduates and provide underprivileged and socially disadvantaged students with access to TVET and job opportunities, thus enhancing their capabilities to participate fully in society.

Another explanation of the findings is suggested by the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA). The SLA emphasises the importance of diversifying livelihoods and building assets to achieve sustainable poverty reduction. Project 4, which aimed to improve child health and education programs, contributed to building assets by strengthening the government's capacity to finance these programs. By improving access to high-quality preschools and child health and nutrition services, the project also helped to diversify livelihoods by enabling parents to work while their children received care, contributing to sustainable poverty reduction.

However, the sustainability of Project 1, which was rated as less than likely, can be explained through the theory of Political Will (Carothers, 1999). The project's sustainability was less than

likely due to the government's unwillingness to raise tariffs and the HEPP's poor financial state. This highlights the importance of political will in achieving sustainable poverty reduction. Governments must prioritise and allocate resources to poverty reduction efforts to achieve lasting impact.

## **7. IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY, EVALUATION THEORY, AND PRACTICE**

The findings of this study have important policy implications for poverty reduction efforts in Kyrgyzstan and other countries with similar socio-economic challenges. It is critical to recognise the government's central role in designing, implementing, and financing programmes to alleviate poverty, in conjunction with international organisations.

First, the evaluation demonstrates that education, especially vocational education is one of the crucial factors in reducing poverty. Investing in education is a top priority for policymakers in order to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary for decent employment and livelihoods. Such investments can be modelled after Projects 2 and 3, which had a substantial impact on vocational education and TVET in Kyrgyzstan. The effectiveness of vocational education and skill-building opportunities in enhancing graduates' employability, improving access for underprivileged and socially disadvantaged students, and increasing women's earning potential and employability has been demonstrated in Projects 2 and 3. To promote inclusive and equitable economic growth, governments must ensure that vocational education and TVET are accessible to all, including marginalised groups.

Governmental organisations should take the lead in developing and putting into effect vocational education policy. This requires not only the formulation of policy objectives and the establishment of priorities, but also the establishment of regulatory frameworks, the creation and implementation of curricula, and the allocation of resources for infrastructure and teacher training. It is imperative that these policies are sensitive to the local context and labour market demands, taking into account the particular requirements and opportunities of the communities they serve. To ensure the effectiveness and relevance of vocational education policies, collaboration with international organisations and the private sector is crucial. International organisations can provide valuable resources, expertise, and best practises, whereas the private sector can provide insight into current and future labour market needs, ensuring that education and training programmes align with industry requirements. Government agencies can establish a more comprehensive and responsive vocational education system through dialogue and collaboration with these stakeholders. It is also critical for the government, international organisations, and the corporate sector to forge solid relationships in order to better discover financing possibilities and pool resources for vocational education initiatives. Partnerships between the public and commercial sectors, cost-sharing agreements, and the creation of endowed funds for vocational education and training programmes are all viable options. Such collaborations can ensure that sufficient financial resources are available to support high-quality, accessible, and inclusive programmes in vocational education.

Furthermore, enhancing child health and education programmes must be a top priority, as child health and education are crucial determinants of human capital development and are necessary for breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty. The positive impact of

Project 4 on child health and nutrition services demonstrates the significance of expanding access to high-quality preschools and child health and nutrition services in order to diversify livelihoods and enable parents to work while their children are being cared for. To promote sustainable poverty reduction, governments must prioritise investments in child health and education programmes, including preschools.

Governments must allocate adequate funds to child health and education programmes, including preschools, in order to ensure their successful implementation. This involves allocating resources towards building up necessary infrastructure, recruiting and training competent personnel, and providing a wide range of services to serve kids and their families. Policymakers should develop well-informed and evidence-based policies, taking into account the specific requirements and contexts of the communities they serve. To develop policies that address the fundamental causes of poverty and promote inclusive development, thorough research, data analysis, and engagement with local stakeholders are required. It is essential to implement interventions that target the most vulnerable and marginalised populations. The effectiveness of these initiatives can be improved by identifying and targeting at-risk populations, such as children from low-income households, rural regions, or those with impairments. Regular surveillance and evaluation of programmes for the health and education of children are essential for assessing their efficacy and making any necessary adjustments. Governments should establish robust monitoring and evaluation systems to assess progress, identify areas for refinement, and guarantee the continued effectiveness and relevance of their programmes. To leverage additional resources and expertise, it should be pursued to actively engage with a wide variety of stakeholders, including international organisations, NGOs, and the private sector. Working together has the potential to increase efficiency, disseminate knowledge, and harmonise child health and education initiatives with wider development objectives.

Moreover, the findings also emphasize the need to target the most vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups, such as women, rural youth, and underprivileged students, to ensure inclusive and equitable access to education and training opportunities. Projects that effectively addressed these groups' requirements had a greater effect on poverty reduction and human development. Therefore, governments and international organisations must prioritise the needs of these groups in their policies and programmes to advance inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction.

Governments must develop and implement targeted interventions in collaboration with international organisations, the private sector, and civil society in order to meet the needs of these groups and promote inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction. In order to ensure that all citizens have equitable access to quality education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and social services, governments should perform in-depth research and analysis to determine the unique requirements of these marginalised groups as well as the special obstacles and constraints they encounter. In order to ensure the effective design, implementation, and monitoring of targeted interventions, it is also essential to foster inter sectoral collaboration between government agencies and various stakeholders. The government's ability to track the effects of specific policies and programmes on vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups, and make the necessary modifications to enhance efficacy, depends on the existence of systems for monitoring, assessment, and learning. As a result of

their participation in the policymaking process, disadvantaged groups and communities will develop a sense of trust and ownership over the outcomes, resulting in more successful and long-lasting policies and programmes. Governments can create inclusive economic growth and more effectively address poverty alleviation by concentrating on specific policies and interventions for the most vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups, thereby contributing to a fairer society from a public policy standpoint.

Lastly, attempts to reduce poverty must take into account the long-term sustainability of development programmes. Political will, government support, and local resources can influence the sustainability of programs like Project 1. Hence, in order to have a long-term impact and promote sustainable poverty reduction, governments and international organisations must prioritise and dedicate resources to poverty reduction programmes. To promote lasting change, they should also strengthen local governments' ability to maintain and expand effective programmes.

Governments should prioritise the allocation of adequate funds to development initiatives. This includes establishing sustainable financing mechanisms, such as budget lines dedicated to poverty reduction initiatives, and mobilising domestic resources via effective tax policies and public expenditure management. Public-private partnerships, social impact bonds, and blended finance are just a few examples of creative funding methods that governments can look into to increase the effectiveness of their anti-poverty programmes. In addition, it is crucial for governments to improve local financial management capabilities. This entails providing training and capacity-building support for local government officials and employees in financial planning, budgeting, and reporting to ensure the transparent and efficient use of funds. The financial sustainability of development projects can be improved by the strengthening of financial management systems and procedures, which will assist reduce the likelihood of corruption, mismanagement, and inefficiencies. Also, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) should be an integral component of project design and implementation, with a particular emphasis on measuring financial performance and sustainability indicators. Governments will be better equipped to determine which development initiatives are viable financially, where the greatest threats lie, and how best to use their resources, if they have access to reliable M&E systems.

The findings of this study have several key implications for evaluation theory and practice, particularly in the context of international development. Firstly, the evaluation of the five development projects in Kyrgyzstan highlights the importance of conducting comprehensive and rigorous evaluations of development projects to ensure that they achieve their intended outcomes and have a positive impact on poverty reduction. This is consistent with the literature on evaluation theory and practice, which emphasises the importance of conducting systematic and rigorous evaluations to inform decision-making and improve program effectiveness (Rossi et al., 2018).

Secondly, the study highlights the importance of taking a multidimensional approach to poverty reduction, which involves addressing the various dimensions of poverty, including education, health, and employment. This is consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which call for a comprehensive and integrated approach to poverty reduction that addresses the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). Thirdly, the findings of the study underscore the importance of

targeting the most vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups in poverty reduction efforts, such as women, rural youth, and underprivileged students. This is consistent with the literature on social inclusion, which emphasizes the importance of targeting interventions to the most vulnerable and marginalized populations to ensure that they are not left behind (World Bank, 2013). Fourthly, the study highlights the importance of ensuring the sustainability of development projects, particularly through building the capacity of local governments and communities to sustain and scale up successful projects. This is consistent with the literature on sustainability, which emphasises the importance of building local ownership and capacity to ensure the long-term impact and sustainability of development projects (Chambers & Conway, 1992). Finally, the study emphasises the importance of using appropriate evaluation methods and tools that are tailored to the context and goals of the project. This is consistent with the literature on evaluation theory and practice, which emphasises the importance of using appropriate evaluation methods that are suited to the program's objectives, context, and stakeholders (Patton, 2008).

### **7.1: Limitations**

This study has a number of limitations that must be taken into account when interpreting the findings and drawing broader conclusions. Principal limitations result from the nature of the data sources, the case-study methodology itself, the scope of the study, and the availability of evaluation reports and quantitative data:

**Reliance on secondary sources:** The study relies solely on secondary sources from the ADB and USAID, omitting primary sources like interviews and direct observations. This may result in potential biases, inconsistencies, or omissions in these reports being transferred to the findings and discussions of the study. In addition, the secondary data sources utilised are restricted to evaluation reports, potentially omitting essential aspects of project implementation and expectations. Future research may benefit from the incorporation of primary data collection techniques, such as interviews with key stakeholders, to validate and supplement secondary data sources.

**Inherent limitations of the case-study methodology:** This study employs a case-study evaluation method that has limitations in terms of generalisability, validity, and reliability. The analysis of five development projects in Kyrgyzstan, including four ADB projects and one USAID project, yields insightful information. However, the relatively small sample size and focus on specific projects may limit the applicability of the findings to other socio-political, economic, and cultural contexts. The qualitative and interpretive nature of the case-study method could introduce researcher bias and jeopardise the validity and reliability of the conclusions. To improve generalisability and validity, future research could employ comparative studies, more extensive quantitative analyses, and the merging projects from a broader range of international organisations.

**Scope of the study:** The scope of the study is limited to developmental projects in Kyrgyzstan, investigating the role of international organisations in reducing poverty in this particular context. This limitation hinders the ability to generalise the findings to other countries or regions with distinct socioeconomic and political environments. Expanding the scope of research to include other countries or regions could provide a deeper understanding of the factors that influence the success of international organisations' efforts as well as of the public policies to reduce poverty.

Availability of evaluation reports: The availability of evaluation reports is considerably limited, as not all international organisations evaluate their projects, as well as not all ADB and USAID projects in Kyrgyzstan have been evaluated. This limitation impacts the representativeness of the sample and may affect the generalisability of the study's findings. Other sources of evaluation reports should be investigated in future studies, as it could be expanding the scope of the study to incorporate projects carried out in Kyrgyzstan by other international organisations.

Limited quantitative data: Because of the lack of quantitative data in the sampled evaluation reports, the study is confronted with significant limitations. This limitation could make the findings less reliable and make it harder to establish clear causal links between the programs' effects and their results. Future research could integrate additional quantitative data from other sources or employ more sophisticated statistical techniques to analyse existing data, thus further strengthening the evidence base for comprehending the role of international organisations in poverty reduction efforts.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

This study has provided important insights into the function of international organisations in the alleviation of poverty in Kyrgyzstan. The study examined the impact and effectiveness of Asian Development Bank (ADB) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) projects in Kyrgyzstan, with a particular focus on infrastructure, education, health, and employment. The study found that aid from international organisations can have a positive effect on poverty reduction, although the efficacy of these programs varies. The projects that effectively addressed the requirements of the most vulnerable and socially marginalised groups had a greater effect on poverty reduction and human development.

The study also identified the need for collaboration between the government, foreign organisations, and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) in order for poverty reduction programmes in Kyrgyzstan to be more successful. In addition, future efforts should concentrate on rural areas, infrastructure, education, employment, and health, with solutions tailored to the specific needs and problems of the country's complex poverty environment. In their initiatives, international organisations should continue to promote inclusive methods that address the requirements of vulnerable groups and encourage equal treatment. Additionally, they should investigate opportunities to expand and improve the scope of initiatives, such as introducing more specialised training programmes or focusing on maternal health and education. To maintain the long-term viability and effectiveness of poverty reduction initiatives in Kyrgyzstan, international organisations must minimise risks such as political instability, funding limitations, and other external variables. This study emphasises the significance of investing in education, particularly vocational education and TVET, in order to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge required for respectable employment and livelihoods. To foster inclusive and equitable economic growth, governments must prioritise investments in education. Enhancing child health and education programmes must also be a top priority, as child health and education are crucial determinants of human capital development and essential for breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. To guarantee inclusive and equitable access to education and training opportunities, the study highlights the need to target the most vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups, such as women, rural



adolescents, and disadvantaged students. Lastly, governments and international organisations must prioritise and allocate resources to accomplish lasting impact and promote sustainable poverty reduction in order to ensure the sustainability of development initiatives. By implementing these policy recommendations, Kyrgyzstan and other nations confronting comparable socioeconomic challenges will be able to effectively combat poverty and achieve inclusive economic growth. Moreover, this study's findings have significant implications for evaluation theory and practise, particularly in the context of international development. These implications include the significance of undertaking exhaustive and rigorous evaluations, adopting a multidimensional approach to poverty reduction, focusing on vulnerable and marginalised groups, ensuring the sustainability of projects, and employing appropriate evaluation methods and tools. By considering these factors, development practitioners and policymakers can design and implement poverty reduction programmes that have a positive impact on the lives of individuals.

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