



## 1. Project Data

Project ID  
P121883

Project Name  
AF Strengthening Natl.Statistical System

Country  
Afghanistan

Practice Area(Lead)  
Macro Economics & Fiscal Management

L/C/TF Number(s)  
TF-98001

Closing Date (Original)  
29-Feb-2016

Total Project Cost (USD)  
14,000,000.00

Bank Approval Date  
20-Oct-2010

Closing Date (Actual)  
29-Feb-2016

	IBRD/IDA (USD)	Grants (USD)
Original Commitment	14,000,000.00	14,000,000.00
Revised Commitment	14,000,000.00	4,197,492.52
Actual	4,709,907.35	4,197,492.52

Sector(s)  
Other Public Administration(100%)

Theme(s)  
Economic statistics, modeling and forecasting(60%):Managing for development results(30%):Other public sector governance(10%)

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## 2. Project Objectives and Components

### a. Objectives

According to the Grant Agreement (p. 5), the project's objective was "to strengthen the Recipient's statistical capacity by operationalizing the Afghanistan National Statistical Plan ("ANSP")."

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

No



c. Components

The project contained five components:

A. Improve framework for institutional and capacity development (appraisal, US\$ 4.85 million, US\$ 4.98 million corrected; actual, US\$ 1.05 million). This component was to finance goods, consultants' services, and training to support improvement in the capacity of the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) to formulate, coordinate, and implement appropriate statistical policies and programs to address the country's needs. Capacity of Provincial Statistical Offices was also to be developed through a series of tasks of graduated difficulty, with a particular focus on field surveys. Sub-components focused on improving the institutional framework, improving dissemination and user-producer dialogue, strengthening of the organizational structure, development of the human resource framework, enhancement of skills through learning-by-doing and training, and improving the statistical infrastructure. A "twinning" arrangement with an experienced national statistical office was to support a significant portion of capacity development.

B. Improve data collection and analysis capacity (appraisal, US\$ 2.06 million, US\$ 3.41 million corrected; actual, US\$ 0.61 million). This component was to support the improvement of data collection, compilation, validation, and analysis, by CSO and the Statistical System of Afghanistan (SSA) as a whole, of the most needed official data in the country. It was also to support development of sectoral statistics on issues such as national accounts and price statistics. CSO staff were to be supported in skills development to produce tables and other forms of data presentation. Sub-components focused on development of a data quality assurance system, improving routine household surveys, improving establishment surveys, improving the National Accounts system, improving price statistics, and improving analytical functions.

C. Improve administrative data systems (appraisal, US\$ 0.77 million, US\$ 0.77 million corrected; actual, US\$ 0.03 million). This component was to finance goods, consultants' services, and training to enhance administrative and other data of SSA statistical cells in line ministries. A statistical audit was to be undertaken to take stock of available data from line agencies and examine whether these agencies could collect other data through their management information systems. Through this audit, CSO was to improve its administrative data collection method, and line ministries and the CSO were to harmonize definition and ensure consistency between administrative and survey data. Standardization issues were to be identified for administrative data, and upgrades to the management information systems in each line agency were to be recommended.

D. Improve the information and communication technology infrastructure (appraisal, US\$ 1.39 million, US\$ 1.50 million corrected; actual, US\$ 0.72 million). This component was to finance goods, consultants' services, and training to improve the information and communication technology infrastructure, including upgrading and expanding the stock of computers and related software at the CSO. A CSO data warehouse was also to be established, both for the databases for which CSO already serves as a repository, and for new databases that were to be created by surveys conducted under the project.

E. Project management (appraisal, US\$ 1.98 million, US\$ 1.98 million corrected; actual, US\$ 1.19 million). This component was to finance goods, consultants' services, and training and incremental operating costs. The CSO was to be the executing agency of the project, working with a Project Implementation and Coordination Team (PICT) and Monitoring and Change Management Committee (MCMC).

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

**Project cost and financing:** The project was to be financed by a US\$ 14 million grant under the Statistics for Results Facility Catalytic Fund (SRF-CF), a multi-donor trust fund administered by the Bank. Actual financing was US\$ 4.7 million. According to the Operations Portal, US\$ 9.3 million remains undisbursed and will be cancelled. The project costs by component as stated in the PAD did not add to total project costs; the CSO corrected the calculation when preparing the project's first Budget Plan.

**Borrower contribution:** No Recipient contribution was planned or made.

**Dates:** The project was approved on October 7, 2010 and became effective on March 24, 2011. The mid-term review took place in June 2014, three months later than scheduled. The project closed as planned, on February 29, 2016. The Bank considered project extension at several points but did not do so because of remaining high risk of achieving the project's objective and low levels of disbursement and implementation of planned activities.



### 3. Relevance of Objectives & Design

#### a. Relevance of Objectives

At project appraisal, Afghanistan's statistical system and capacity had been degraded throughout years of war and destruction. The lack of institutional and human capacity to carry out statistical work was negatively impacting evidence-based planning and decision-making processes across government ministries and departments. Although some progress had been made through the building and strengthening of the CSO, including the creation and endorsement of the ANSP in 2010, challenges persisted with donor fragmentation and alignment of all relevant entities around that single national statistical plan. The project was therefore substantially relevant to country conditions and to government strategy at appraisal. The ANSP at closing (2016-2020) is based largely on its predecessor, reflecting continuing low capacity in the CSO, lack of coordination with line ministries, key data gaps, limited application of key data sources to national accounts data, and irregular undertaking of necessary surveys. The project's objective therefore remains substantially relevant to government strategy at project closing. The project's objective was also relevant to the Bank's strategy at appraisal (Interim Strategy Note, FY 2012-2014), which explicitly cited the need for improved statistical capacity and monitoring and evaluation improvements, as well as strategy at closing (FY 2016 Systematic Country Diagnostic, prepared upstream of the planned FY 2017-2020 Country Partnership Framework), which cites continued data limitations, including both availability and quality, as "serious constraints to important economic and social analyses" (pp. 66-67).

Rating

Substantial

#### b. Relevance of Design

The project's technical design, and therefore its choice of planned activities, was based on a detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the national statistical system undertaken with the assistance of the European Union. This same analysis was also used to prepare the ANSP and its Action Plan for 2010-2014. Project design was therefore aligned with the ANSP. Insufficient attention, however, was placed on the recommendations made in that analysis regarding prioritization of tasks and activities in a context of limited technical assistance resources, limited time, and low initial capacity. No prior training, transfer of knowledge and experience from more experienced partners, or capacity-building prior to implementation was planned. A large scope of project resources was concentrated under a twinning arrangement for which there was insufficient preparation. The project's over-ambition and complexity, coupled with the lack of effective planned measures to address insufficient technical capacity (especially of the CSO), result in negligible relevance of design.

Rating

Negligible

### 4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)

#### Objective 1

Objective

Strengthen statistical capacity

Rationale

The ICR (p. 13) notes that there were many parallel donor initiatives in the area of statistics capacity building, making it difficult to attribute results to this project.

Outputs:



According to the ICR (p. 34), the project was insufficiently selective in trying to cover too many of the ANSP's many capacity strengthening needs. As a result, the CSO was unable to manage such a large array of activities and tasks, and therefore few of them were implemented completely or well.

550 staff at the CSO (out of a total of 750, including 142 in provincial offices) and in line ministry statistical cells completed training supported by the project, including a formal undergraduate qualification program for 33 staff and visits to Tajikistan and Bhutan under a South-South Knowledge Exchange Program.

The CSO's website was improved in terms of data accessibility and regularity of updates. Outreach events were held to raise awareness for data collection and official statistics. A library was developed for the Statistical Training Center.

The twinning arrangement provided some support in compilation methodology and data sources for both the production and expenditure sides of the GDP, though this arrangement was not nearly as productive as anticipated. Support was provided for producing quarterly GDP estimates using mechanical projections based on decomposition of annual data with seasonal effects. National Accounts Department staff visited the Iran Statistical Bureau in 2015 to develop skills to expand the coverage of price statistics to all provinces in the country and reweight the Consumer Price Index basket. A Business Establishment Survey, collecting data from 9,000 establishments in urban areas country-wide, was implemented in late 2015, though data analysis and reporting from this survey have not been completed.

Administrative data systems and other statistics from line ministries have been developed, with improvements focusing on simplification of questionnaires, signing of MOUs between the CSO and several line ministries for regular data reporting, and workshops on data collection.

The basic information and communication infrastructure in CSO was improved, including purchasing computers and other equipment, setting up internet access in CSO headquarters and all 34 provincial offices, and acquiring GIS and SPSS software packages. This project was the only intervention supporting information technology improvements for the CSO. The planned Statistical Data Center was not constructed, though full technical specifications for the center were prepared in 2015.

#### Outcomes:

According to the Project Appraisal Document (PAD, p. 2), "statistical capacity" is defined as sustained improvement in production, availability, quality, and use of statistics for managing and measuring development results.

The Statistical Capacity Indicator (SCI) (production, availability, and quality) for the CSO increased from 33 in 2010 to 51.1 in 2016, achieving the target originally stated in the PAD (45) but not the target noted in the ICR (60). However, the ICR notes that the SCI methodology was revised during the project's lifetime, recalculated at a score of 52 in 2010 and 51 in 2015. By this new methodology, there was no progress during the project period.

The number of Afghanistan National Development Strategy and Millennium Development Goal indicators supported by the CSO (production) increased from 17 in 2010 to 24 in 2016, not reaching the targets noted in the ICR (26) or in the PAD (28).

The average number of months it takes for Afghanistan National Statistical Plan surveys to be published (availability) decreased from 15 in 2010 to 13.5 in 2016, not reaching the target of 8.

The number of surveys/studies with proper metadata (quality), based on metadata documentation and cataloguing, was four, not reaching the target of eight.

The percentage of users saying they were satisfied or very satisfied with statistical products and services (quality and use), based on three user surveys conducted by the CSO, was 62% in 2014 and 77% in 2015. No target was set.

Rating  
Modest

## 5. Efficiency

The PAD (pp. 17-18) noted that the project was not amenable to cost-benefit analysis because national statistical offices have little significant



cost recovery. The economic benefit of the project was to derive from enhanced potential for evidence-based decision making at the policy, program, and project levels; improved capacity to measure and track results of the national budget and assistance efforts; and better allocation of resources and more effective implementation of planned and ongoing programs. The PAD also noted that project costs would be higher in Afghanistan than in traditional statistical support operations because of higher direct costs of doing business (higher salaries demanded by consultants and security costs), and because of the long learning curve implicit in the learning-by-doing approach that requires more coaching and training time from consultants.

The ICR reports that robust analysis of cost effectiveness of the project is not possible due to limited data. It observes, however, that while the Bank team consistently monitored the cost efficiency dimension of project activities, there were aspects of implementation that reduced efficiency. In particular, delays in the large-scale "twinning" contract with the German partner had not only a significant direct negative impact on efficiency, but also a "domino" effect on other planned activities, preventing them from being launched or completed. The project team later stated that, while the project overall did not achieve significant efficiency, there was high attention to value-for-money for those funds that were disbursed and activities that were completed, but no evidence was provided. It is noted that fiduciary compliance was rated MU and U for FM and procurement respectively, which suggests inefficiency in the use of project resources.

#### 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

Relevance of the project's objective is rated substantial due to its responsiveness to country conditions, Bank strategy, and government strategy. Relevance of design, however, is rated negligible, as insufficient attention was placed on prioritization of tasks and activities in a context of limited technical assistance resources, limited time, and low initial capacity, and a complex twinning arrangement was inadequately prepared. Achievement of the project's objective to strengthen statistical capacity is rated modest, with targets along several dimensions of capacity development not met. Efficiency is also rated modest due to delays primarily cascading from challenges with the twinning arrangement. Taken together, these ratings represent major shortcomings in the project's preparation and implementation, and therefore an outcome rating of Unsatisfactory.

a. Outcome Rating  
Unsatisfactory

## 7. Rationale for Risk to Development Outcome Rating

Some of the project's outputs have been institutionalized and are likely to be sustained. The library for the training center is now operated by the CSO, and two staffers are assigned to update the improved CSO website on a regular basis. Improvements in data collection systems, compilation methodology and data sources of National Accounts, expansion in coverage of the Consumer Price Index, and some other capacity



developments are likely to be sustained. Inter-ministerial coordination is reflected in a Memorandum of Understanding between the CSO and several line ministries to facilitate data reporting. Further risks, however, depend on the level of interest and leadership exhibited by the CSO, in particular on whether trained staff remain with the agency, and on the level of resources allocated to the CSO through the government's operating budget. Shortcomings remain in data quality and coverage, with pathways for rectifying those shortcomings unclear. A Bank-executed technical assistance project has been approved by the SRF-CF to build on some topics and training activities launched by this project, but overall international assistance to the country is declining, economic growth has slowed, the security situation remains extremely challenging, and fiscal pressures are mounting due to increased security-related expenditures.

- a. Risk to Development Outcome Rating  
High

## 8. Assessment of Bank Performance

a. Quality-at-Entry

The PAD (pp. 7-8) cited lessons learned from previous project experience, including the need for realistic financing of and prioritization within the country's statistical master plan, the need to take sequencing and implementation capacity into account in project design, the need to focus on effective coordination among the CSO and key donors, and the potential effectiveness of "twinning" arrangements between the CSO and a well-developed national statistical office (rather than use of consultants). Key risks were identified at Substantial or High (PAD, pp. 14-16), including lack of reliable funding, turnover in the position of President General of the CSO, security challenges throughout the country, weak institutional capacity of the CSO at the national and provincial levels, lack of qualified personnel, financial management risk and weak internal controls, and weak procurement capacity; mitigation measures were identified. It was assumed that implementing a new performance-based pay scale system at the CSO would incentivize increased effort and capacity. The PAD extensively detailed planned project activities, implementation arrangements, and financial management/procurement arrangements. Consultation with other stakeholders, including key development partners, was extensive during project preparation.

However, there were significant shortcomings. There was inadequate expertise on the preparation team related to fragile environments and limited country operational experience. Project design underestimated the level of risk inherent in carrying out a large, complex, multi-faceted capacity building program, and overestimated the CSO's initial capacity level. The project was therefore excessively ambitious and did not realistically reflect conditions on the ground. Although the PAD's proposed risk mitigation measures were appropriate in the abstract, they were not tailored adequately to the challenging implementation context in the country. There was no back-up plan in the event that the twinning arrangement encountered difficulties. Planned project activities were not appropriately prioritized and sequenced. The results framework had significant shortcomings (see Section 10a). The project's budget and some initial targets for key outcome indicators were not specified correctly in the PAD.

Quality-at-Entry Rating  
Moderately Unsatisfactory

b. Quality of supervision

The Bank team attempted to bring implementation challenges to the attention of the Ministry of Finance and other government entities. The mid-term review, conducted essentially on schedule in mid-2013, suggested numerous measures to facilitate implementation progress. Just before the mid-term review, a field-based task team leader was appointed, improving the consistency of technical support and the quality of dialogue. A Quality Assurance mission in mid-2015 analyzed implementation shortcomings in a straightforward manner. However, procurement supervision was reactive rather than proactive, not "sufficiently focused on early identification and resolution of emerging issues," and a lack of high-level dialogue with counterparts meant that the mid-term review's recommendations for project restructuring and other implementation improvements were not followed (ICR, p. 18). Given the challenges with the contract for the twinning arrangement, the Bank team could have been more proactive and persistent in ensuring twinning with a national statistical office, as originally planned, rather than with a general purpose contractor. Project ratings in implementation status reports did not fully reflect early challenges, and Bank management was not sufficiently reactive to the project's implementation difficulties.

Quality of Supervision Rating  
Moderately Unsatisfactory



Overall Bank Performance Rating  
Moderately Unsatisfactory

## 9. Assessment of Borrower Performance

### a. Government Performance

Government commitment to the project's objectives and activities was inadequate. Although the Ministry of Finance expressed full support for the project and the ANSP in 2010, none of the country's broader development initiatives and national priority programs have included an explicit commitment to the development of the country's statistical systems. Government budget support for the CSO has been minimal; the CSO has been weakly represented and/or marginalized in key national fora on the development agenda; there has been insufficient fostering of collaboration between ministries and agencies for data production and facilitation of CSO's leading role in this area; and the enabling environment for data collection, analysis, dissemination, and communication has been weak. At several points during implementation, the Ministry of Finance was unresponsive at the ministerial level to implementation challenges, and it did not attend regular supervision meetings or wrap-up meetings. The ICR (p. 20) notes that government support for the CSO has recently improved, including its representation at a number of key national councils responsible for the development agenda.

Government Performance Rating  
Unsatisfactory

### b. Implementing Agency Performance

The CSO was the implementing agency, with the PICT charged with executing the project (responsible for coordination, financial management, and procurement) and the MCMC guiding implementation (responsible for monitoring, advising on capacity development, and acting as a change management agent). DfID provided an in-country Donor Statistician, and the German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ) served as the twinning partner. The PAD had envisaged a well-developed national statistical office (or a consortium of such offices) to be the twinning partner; the ICR does not fully explain why this promising approach did not materialize and a general contractor was used instead.

Overall, CSO senior and middle management and staff lacked familiarity with Bank procedures and principles, and it was a challenge throughout the project period to attract qualified staff. Some of the implementation challenges were outside the control of the project. For example, the President General of the CSO fell ill in July 2013 and passed away in November of that year. Also in 2013, the project coordinator and procurement and financial management specialists resigned (for family and health reasons), resulting in declining performance of the PICT.

At the same time, the MCMC's agenda departed from its original terms of reference, resulting in decreased effectiveness. Work with the Donor Statistician stagnated in mid-2013, and the twinning relationship with GIZ (which took two years to select and negotiate) also became ineffective around this time. The recommendations of the mid-2013 mid-term review were not formalized and implemented. The twinning arrangement was particularly problematic, as the CSO lacked capacity to provide appropriate supervision, and the GIZ itself did not adequately engage with CSO and other statistical offices. In some cases, the GIZ delivered unsatisfactory services. As a result, the contract with GIZ was terminated in December 2015, leaving half of the contract value unused and a large number of planned activities unlaunched or unfinished. Planned quarterly meetings of a statistical task force that would bring together donors and other stakeholders were not held regularly, leaving the PICT without clear guidance. Most of the Bank team's recommendations for mid-course adjustment were not implemented. Procurement and financial management experienced major shortcomings (see Section 11b). The challenging security situation on the ground led to delays in many technical assistance activities and weakened coordination. It should be noted, however, that after the mid-term review, the CSO managed to implement some important activities outside the stalled twinning arrangement.

Implementing Agency Performance Rating  
Unsatisfactory

Overall Borrower Performance Rating  
Unsatisfactory



## 10. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization

### a. M&E Design

The PICT was to monitor regularly a set of outcome and intermediate results indicators, covering progress across the country's entire statistical system. Quarterly progress reports were to be produced by the project coordinator, assessing progress of activities against the ANSP work plan and on project outputs and outcomes. These reports were also to describe progress from other donor-funded projects, in order to flag any deviation from alignment on the ANSP. After review, these reports were to be submitted to the CSO President General, who would lead their review at quarterly progress meetings of all CSO department heads, representatives of key line ministries, the Bank, and the UK Department for International Development (as lead donor). The PICT was also to report every quarter to the Bank on implementation progress.

However, there were shortcomings. Many of the indicators were not adequate measures of achievement of the project's objectives, baselines and targets were lacking, and adequate provision was not made for collecting some of the data (for example, there had been no previous survey for tracking the percentage of users satisfied with the CSO's statistical products and services, leaving this indicator with no baseline data or target, and ultimately data only for two later years of the project). Targets on some indicators were incorrectly specified in the PAD and were adjusted informally during implementation.

### b. M&E Implementation

Quarterly progress reports were produced regularly by the project coordinator through mid-2013, based on financial information from the PICT and inputs from technical consultants, heads of CSO departments, the MCMC, and donors. After the project coordinator resigned, the quality and timeliness of progress reporting was poor. Only three out of eight output indicators were reported in the Operations Portal and monitored in Implementation Status Reports. A 2014 evaluation of the SRF-CF made a set of recommendations that led to a proposal for a streamlined set of results indicators for this specific project, but no formal revisions were implemented. As a result, the project's results framework never provided an adequate basis for project monitoring or for assessment and attribution of achievements. The ICR team found that, overall, documentation reflecting project progress is not on record (ICR, p. 10).

### c. M&E Utilization

The ICR (p. 10) indicates that a project monitoring culture has never been introduced in the CSO. The ICR does not report instances of M&E utilization for course correction during implementation or for overall policy development.

M&E Quality Rating  
Negligible

## 11. Other Issues

### a. Safeguards

The project did not trigger any safeguard policies and was rated environmental category "C."

### b. Fiduciary Compliance

Financial management: Low capacity was identified during preparation, and risk was rated high. Experienced consultants were brought on board, resulting in satisfactory performance from project onset. However, the CSO dismissed the project's financial management specialist in early 2014, degrading quality of performance and resulting in several Interim Financial Reports having to be submitted several times before they were accepted by the Bank. At the final stage of implementation, financial management performance was rated Moderately Unsatisfactory. The



last Implementation Status Report lists issues in preparation of financial reports, replenishment applications, liquidation, and reconciliation of petty cash. Audits were clean and timely. The project team later stressed that there were no instances of misuse of funds.

Procurement: Performance was rated Unsatisfactory in the final stages of project implementation. No major procurements were completed, procurement of small activities was carried out without proper incorporation into the procurement plan, a proper inventory system was not maintained, procurement files were incomplete, and there was a lack of proactivity in managing the only active contract with the twinning partner. The Bank team did not propose supportive measures to resolve these issues.

c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)

None reported.

d. Other

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## 12. Ratings

Ratings	ICR	IEG	Reason for Disagreements/Comment
Outcome	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	---
Risk to Development Outcome	High	High	---
Bank Performance	Moderately Unsatisfactory	Moderately Unsatisfactory	---
Borrower Performance	Moderately Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	The government did not provide adequate support to the CSO and to the project. Leadership turnover within the CSO and severe shortcomings in the twinning arrangement with GIZ created major implementation challenges.
Quality of ICR		High	---

Note

When insufficient information is provided by the Bank for IEG to arrive at a clear rating, IEG will downgrade the relevant ratings as warranted beginning July 1, 2006.

The "Reason for Disagreement/Comments" column could cross-reference other sections of the ICR Review, as appropriate.

## 13. Lessons

The ICR (pp. 21-23) provides a comprehensive set of insightful lessons, including:

Capacity development in a fragile environment requires relatively simple, straightforward project design, with activities appropriately prioritized and sequenced, with high-level dialogue over the entire project lifetime to ensure consistent ownership. In this case, the implementing agency's low capacity was not adequately taken into account, and it became overwhelmed with activities, especially when the twinning arrangement failed and circumstances outside the project's control created leadership turnover.

Flexibility of project design is appropriate when initial conditions are unstable. In this case, excessively overloaded and rigid project design, with early definition of all components and fund allocation, worked poorly. A less structured and more sequenced design, with triggers to be met before proceeding to a next stage and opportunities for restructuring in the event of unforeseen difficulties, would have drawn more focused attention to roadblocks and may have prompted more timely and successful course correction.

The Bank's operational procedures can provide important opportunities to identify and elevate implementation issues. In this case, early formal



assessments of the results framework, ratings in implementation status reports, and the mid-term review findings should have raised flags about current and looming challenges.

#### 14. Assessment Recommended?

No

#### 15. Comments on Quality of ICR

The ICR is clear, candid, and concise. It contains a straightforward assessment of the project's challenges and limited achievements. Its analysis of the counterfactual is insightful and analytically sound. The activities of the large number of implementing and partner entities are clearly delineated. The main text of the document efficiently presents the project's main storyline and data, while supporting details and evidence are appropriately contained in well-organized annexes. Lessons are well derived from the project's preparation and implementation experience, and they should prove useful to future efforts in low-capacity environments.

- a. Quality of ICR Rating  
High