# EXTERNAL EVALUATION

**United Nations Development Account Project 1213AH, 8th tranche**

**Strengthening capacities in countries with special needs on designing and implementing economic and social development policies to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs**

**FINAL REPORT**

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# Acknowledgements

# List of Abbreviations

ADB      Asian Development Bank

CSN      Country with Special Needs

CSO      Civil society organizations

DA       Development Account

EDD      Environment and Development Division

IA       Indicators of Achievement

IPOA     Istanbul Programme of Action

LDC      Least developed countries

M&E      Monitoring and Evaluation

MDG      Millennium Development Goals

MPFD     Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development

NGO      Non-governmental Organizations

PD       Project document

RECI     Regional economic cooperation and integration

SDG      Sustainable development goals

SPMD     Strategy and Programme Management Division

TD       Transport Division

TOR      Terms of Reference

UNDESA   United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

UNDP     United Nations Development Programme

UNEG     United Nations Evaluation Group

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# Executive Summary

## Background

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) received USD 643,500 from the United Nations Development Account 8th tranche to implement the project on Strengthening capacities in countries with special needs on designing and implementing economic and social development policies to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs. The project specifically focused on eight Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in the region covered from Afghanistan to Timor-Leste. The Country with Special Needs (CSN) of the Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development Division (MPFD) implemented the project with support from the Environment and Development and Transport Divisions. ESCAP adopted the Commission resolution 66/1 (Incheon Declaration) and responded to the countries' request. The project commenced in November 2013 and closed at the end of June 2016, with a six-month extension.

## The Project

The project aimed to strengthen capacities in selected LDCs in the Asia-Pacific region to develop and implement economic and social policies and programmes so that they could accelerate progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through cross-sectoral approaches. It had two expected accomplishments (outcomes) to accelerate progress towards MDGs:

- Increased understanding and awareness of policymakers and other stakeholders, in selected Asia-Pacific LDCs of the benefits of cross-sectoral policies and
- Increased capacity of key national stakeholders in selected Asia-Pacific LDCs to develop, implement and strengthen partnerships and build a coalition of support among key stakeholders.

The project expected to achieve above two outcomes through a series of national and regional training and regional advocacy and knowledge sharing workshops.

## The Evaluation

ESCAP commissioned the evaluation with an aim to measure overall achievement of the project objectives and intended goals in line with the Development Account Guidelines and United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards. This is a forward-looking evaluation and the assessment follow on five key criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and gender mainstreaming. It, however, does not assess project's impact because the project duration is too short for impact assessment.

The evaluation covers the entire project duration from approval in November 2013 by the Development Account Secretariat to the end of project closing, 30 June 2016. It systematically assesses each of the five evaluation criteria based on available evidence and key informant interviews and contribution to individual and institutional capacity development in participating LDCs. The primary audience of this evaluation includes the project team, ESCAP and the Development Account Secretariat, New York. The secondary audience includes other development partners and the LDC Member States participating in the project. Evaluation findings are expected to serve valuable input to the next phase of ESCAP's work plan and projects geared towards supporting Member States in the adaptation of the 2030 Development Agenda and internationally agreed

development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Istanbul Programme of Action for LDCs.

## Approach, Method, and Data

The evaluation has adopted a mixed method approach comprising a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis of available data and information from various sources. Evaluation process involved five stages:

- Preparation: Drafting and finalizing the terms of reference for evaluation by the Evaluation Manager appointed for the evaluation in close consultation with the Evaluation Unit; recruitment of an independent evaluator; and compilation of relevant documents, reports, financial data and setting up interviews for evaluation by the project team at CSN Section;
- Document review: Desk review and content analysis of project documents, including published and unpublished project reports, meeting notes, mission reports, financial data, participants' lists, workshop presentation materials, and other documents related to project concept and development interventions;
- Inception: Preparation of an inception report based on initial document review and consultation with the evaluation manager, project team and evaluation reference group;
- Data collection through key informant interviews: Interviews (in person or over skype calls) with:
  - o the project team and the reference group appointed for the evaluation;
  - o relevant ESCAP staff at the Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development Division, Environment and Development Division, Transport Division, Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division, Strategy and Programme Management Division, and Strategic Publications, Communications and Advocacy Division;
  - o Former ESCAP staff involved in project design and implementation;
  - o resource persons and authors of project output; and
  - o selected participants at the national workshop on the localization of the 2030 Development Agenda held in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 6 May 2016.
- Report writing: Preparation of the draft report and its finalization based on feedback from relevant stakeholders.

## Evaluation Findings

### Relevance: High

The project remained highly relevant at the time of project formulation, during implementation, and at completion. It built on lessons from past interventions by ESCAP and fitted well with helping LDCs accelerate the pace of achievement of MDGs and achieve internationally agreed development goals. The project design complemented other efforts of ESCAP in supporting LDCs in their efforts to progress on MDG commitments. CSN took corrective measures to steer the project focus arising from regional focus instructions from ESCAP senior management and reverted to country level activities in the absence of less than satisfactory progress with regional economic cooperation and integration activities.

The project design closely followed ESCAP's overall MDG capacity development programme on "Capacity building in support of countries in the Asia-Pacific Region, particularly countries with special needs, to accelerate progress towards achieving internationally agreed development goals, including MDGs" implemented in partnership with the Asian Development Bank, United Nations Development Programme, and selected member States, including the Governments of Bangladesh and Cambodia. Both Bangladesh and Cambodia became the beneficiaries of the subject project

evaluated. The evaluation reaffirms the validity of project concepts for advocacy and capacity building in LDCs for MDGs as well as the 2030 Agenda. ESCAP's efforts need to continue in partnership with other development partners to ensure that the relevant SDGs are appropriately incorporated into the national development agendas of LDC Member States. The nature of support in the future needs to take into account the prominent role of information and communication technology which can not only cut down transaction costs associated with face-to-face meetings/gathering but also could provide innovative ways to collaborate across sectors and among the ESCAP Member States.

### Effectiveness: Medium

The evaluation rates the overall effectiveness of the project medium based on achievements of intended outputs and outcomes. The project was successful in bringing together policy makers from the LDCs and experts from ESCAP at the regional events for knowledge sharing which eventually increased understanding and awareness of the need for accelerating the achievement of MDGs as well as the need to adapt the 2030 Agenda into respective country's national development agenda. The participants benefitted from knowledge disseminated by ESCAP at both national and regional events. Both internal and external factors have had an adverse impact on the achievement of the second outcome of the project, that is, increased capacity to develop, implement and strengthen partnerships and coalition among stakeholders. Some of the countries could not participate in all events due to multiple factors but eventually, Afghanistan engaged in 2015 but Timor-Leste continued to have weak capacity in the national system and was unable to attend all the events.

The national workshops held in 2016 adjusted from the original intention of capacity development due to lack of adequate time and high staff turnover. The project activities had to be combined with other ESCAP events, including the launching of the 2016 CSN Report as well as the Socioeconomic Survey Report. To some extent, the project activities had to be withheld due to political disturbances in Bangkok, earthquake in Nepal and ESCAP Management's guidance to emphasize more on regional rather than national level project activities. The quality of the sector and country reports varied widely across the countries, partly reflected by the skill sets available at the time of report preparation. The participating LDCs did not own any of the recommendations from the studies. While problems were recognized, mitigation measures did not come through the efforts. The national focal persons, as well as the resource persons, reiterated that ESCAP could have done more to keep the national focal points and resource persons regularly engaged. This had been partly due to the movement of- key CSN staff.

### Efficiency: Medium

The project efficiency, in terms of human and financial resources and implementation delays, is assessed medium due to lack of availability of right expertise and high turnover of key staff, both in CSN and LDCs. For some time, project momentum stalled and project activities did not take place for nearly a year and five country workshops were all crammed in the last three months (April-June 2016) of the project without adequate time to reflect on the outcome of the workshops. The evaluation views that the activity and financial planning could have been better coordinated and done in a timely manner with national focal points for the project. At the end, the project utilized 92% of available DA funds. The result-based budgeting provided in the project document could have been used for planned activities. Some of the activities such as e-platform were not in the project document but had to be funded.

### Sustainability: High

The evaluation assesses project sustainability as high largely based on commitments expressed by the LDC Member States to the 2030 Agenda on SDGs and other internationally agreed goals. ESCAP

continues to play a key strategic role in promoting dialogue among key stakeholders. LDCs are better informed about the importance of cross-sector collaboration in achieving developmental goals in 2016 compared to 2013 and hence some of the countries (e.g. Lao PDR) have already taken proactive steps towards aligning their national development priorities with SDGs. While the prospects for sustainability is positive, capacity gaps continue to remain and would require substantial resource and technical expertise commitments from both private and public sectors as well as from the international community. The countries need to overcome institutional sector level rigidities to facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration, which would continue to remain basic tenants for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including SDGs.

### Gender mainstreaming: Medium

The project document did not spell out gender mainstreaming as a crosscutting issue in project implementation. While the LDC participants comprised about one-third of the total number of participants, no sustained effort occurred to enhance gender balance. The gender representation balance was skewed in favor of some countries – high in Lao PDR and low in Bangladesh and Nepal. Since the countries nominated the participants for attendance at the project-sponsored activities, ESCAP did not have control over adequate gender representation. The evaluation, however, noted that gender mainstreaming continued to feature prominently in policy dialogues at both national and regional levels. Gender mainstreaming challenge prominently featured in the project supported sector and country papers.

## Conclusions

Overall, the evaluation concludes that the project had been successful given its complementarity with other similar initiatives undertaken by ESCAP in LDCs and the countries with special needs. For the funding size, the evaluation also notes that the project design was over ambitious within the timeframe and given resources. The project design document could have benefitted from clarity in the roles and responsibilities of national focal points, ESCAP staff, and the consultants. While ESCAP staff tried to support the project, other competing on-the-job priorities limited the scheduling of project activities to some extent. This occurred partly also due to shift in ESCAP's priorities and direction in 2014-2015, which led to the scaled-down involvement of CSN staff. Project effectiveness suffered to some extent from both external and internal factors, but ESCAP could have managed some of them proactively.

The project could have benefitted from a better financial planning based on a clear set of achievable activities. Nevertheless, given the strong commitment from the Member States as well as the international community, project benefits are likely to be sustained over time as seen through proactive roles by some of the LDCs in aligning their national development plans with SDGs and other internationally agreed goals. Gender mainstreaming is likely to continue to gain prominence in the adaptation of the 2030 Agenda and the Istanbul Programme of Action and hence would require additional focus.

## Recommendations

Evaluation offers a set of seven key recommendations for ESCAP management's consideration in supporting LDCs. These recommendations require a tripartite partnership approach involving ESCAP, development partners, and LDCs.

### Recommendation 1

ESCAP should continue to focus on facilitating policy dialogue among the LDCs at the regional level ensuring the preparation for adaptation (localization) of the SDGs (action plans), implementation of relevant action plans, and tracking progress and reporting the achievement of agreed goals and associated targets.

### Recommendation 2

ESCAP Management should regularly review cross-Division collaboration of CSN/LDCs programme of work on SDGs on a quarterly basis to ensure that cross-sectoral collaboration is meaningful and effective within ESCAP. CSN's work in LDCs depends on what other Divisions do and achieve.

### Recommendation 3

ESCAP management could align its activities at the sub-regional and national levels under the Capacity Development Strategy 2016-2019 to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by LDCs in close consultation with UN Country Teams. There is a need for an active feedback loop between the LDCs and the regional body such as ESCAP, which can be achieved by establishing a National Coordination Committee in each LDC Member State.

### Recommendation 4

ESCAP should strengthen e-platform (hub) for knowledge solutions and knowledge exchange developed under the project by mobilizing additional resources. The hub can only be successful if the LDC Member States actively contribute to and participate in knowledge solutions and knowledge exchange. The regional hub will be meaningful if the subscribing members are connected with a similar hub in each LDC Member State. ESCAP may need to source additional resources from other sources. Consideration may be given to institutionalizing National Coordination Committees in each LDC Member State and establishing a dedicated staff to manage the national knowledge hub.

### Recommendation 5

With the relatively small size of funding, ESCAP should consider either supplement another similar project(s) with similar features rather than implementing a standalone project or creating a pool of sizable fund to address LDCs' capacity development requirements.

### Recommendation 6

While developing a project, ESCAP should prepare fully-osted projects and show ESCAP's contribution from its internal sources. A fully costed project proposal helps the effectiveness of project management and in ensuring realistic financial planning and resource deployment for intended purposes.

### Recommendation 7

ESCAP should delegate responsibilities to in-country counterpart partners for undertaking major part of in-country project activities to ensure country ownership.

## Lessons Learned

Evaluation provides number of lessons of which six stand out as follows:

o   Project design should be realistic based on national capacity constraint, potential risks, and ESCAP's implementation capacity.
o   The logical framework in the project document needs to be used as active live document, subject to periodic review so that pragmatic indicators are monitored over time and mid-course corrections can be planned and implemented for better development effectiveness
o   Adequate due diligence at the project formulation stage helps to strengthen project design document and it eases implementation process.
o   Technological advancement and rapid update of information technology (IT) solutions mean that the traditional approach of knowledge sharing through workshops is becoming less appealing.
o   Effective project implementation requires adequate staffing and resources so that planned project activities smoothly are implemented on time and intended outputs and outcomes attained.
o   ESCAP needs to foster cross-sectoral collaboration within the organization and lead by an example.

# Introduction

The United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) commissioned the evaluation of the United Nations Development Account (DA) project 1213AH (8th tranche) on "Strengthening capacities in countries with special needs on designing and implementing economic and social development policies to accelerate progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)". The evaluation commenced in April 2016 and completed in July 2016. Ganesh Rauniyar, an independent evaluator, conducted the evaluation.

## Background

The regional MDG report 2011/2012[1] and activities under ESCAP's 6th tranche DA project revealed that limited access to basic services[2] remained critical in accelerating MDG achievement in the region, particularly in the least developed countries (LDCs). The project was an outcome of requests from selected countries for ESCAP's continued assistance. It also responded to UN system-wide initiative in crafting post-2015 UN Development Agenda.[3] The project also remained consistent with UNESCAP's priorities identified in the Strategic Framework for 2012-2013 and 2014-2015, specifically in supporting the capacity development of Countries with Special Needs (CSN) for achieving MDGs in the areas of development policies, trade, transport, and the environment.[4]

## Project Objective, Outcomes, and Outputs

The project document (p. 14) states the project **objective** to strengthen national capacities in selected Asia-Pacific LDCs to develop and implement economic and social policies and programmes to accelerate progress towards achieving MDGs through cross-sectoral approaches. The project had two expected **outcomes** (accomplishments) to accelerate progress towards achieving MDGs[5]:

1.  Increased understanding and awareness of policymakers and other stakeholders, in selected Asia-Pacific Least Developed Countries (LDCs) of the benefits of cross-sectoral policies, and

2.  Increased capacity of key national stakeholders in selected Asia-Pacific LDCs to develop, implement and strengthen partnerships and build a coalition of support among key stakeholders.

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[1] http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/MDG-Report2011-12_0.pdf
[2] Basic services implies health, education, water, sanitation, and rural paved road.
[3] Project document, p. 3.
[4] Project document, p.4.
[5] Project document, p. 15.

Table 1 summarises key outputs and associated activities planned at the project design stage.[6]

**Table 1: Key Outcomes, Outputs, and Activities Envisaged in the Project Design**

| Outcome/ Accomplishments | Output | Activities |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Increased understanding and awareness of cross-sectoral policies | a. Assessment/analysis of cross-sectoral strategies and policy options<br><br>b. Supporting national development strategies to facilitate cross-sectoral approach | • An inception workshop<br>• Five (5) in-depth inter-sectoral case studies<br>• Four (4) country studies<br>• Regional dissemination workshop |
| 2. Increased capacity of national stakeholders | a. Developed and implemented cross-sectoral policies and strategies<br><br>b. Strengthened partnerships among key stakeholders | • Two (2) advocacy/ workshops and seminars for capacity development<br>• Eight national/regional training workshops. |

Source: Project document (PD).

The primary stakeholders for the evaluation include ESCAP Secretariat senior management, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), and the relevant divisions, and Member States of United Nations. Evaluation is required for all DA projects. This is a forward-looking evaluation and covers project design, implementation, and completion, leading to the achievements of envisaged results, including outputs, outcomes and the objective of the project.

The report contains eight sections. The next sections provide an elaborated description of the project followed by Evaluation scope and objectives, evaluation approach and method, data analysis, findings and conclusions, recommendations, and lessons learned.

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[6] Details appear in the project document, p. 14-15.

# Description of the Project

The project stressed to focus on the achievement of the Internationally Agreed Development Goals, including MDGs and it responded to the Istanbul Programme of Action for the LDCs (2011-2020), MDG Summit (2010) and Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (2012). ESCAP responded to the requests to support CSNs to achieve MDGs. The project design included eight (8) LDCs in Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, Nepal and Timor-Leste with focus on strengthening these countries' capacities in designing and implementing specific, time-bound and measurable action-oriented policies and programmes to accelerate the progress towards achieving MDGs. The selection of LDCs for the project relied on their near bottom positions on human development indicators in the region. In particular, it noted wide rural-urban disparities in poverty in these countries. Aside from funding gaps, the project identified inadequate institutional capacities for planning, monitoring and delivery of services as important bottlenecks and recognized the importance of a cross-sectoral approach to accelerate the achievement of MDGs based on a report prepared by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).[7]

The exchange of experiences remained the main vehicle for capacity building work. The project design focussed on inter-linkages and cross-sectoral approaches in few key service delivery areas. Four ESCAP Divisions (Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development (MPFD), Transport (TD), Trade and Investment (TID), and the Environment and Development (EDD)) collaborated the project implementation and MPFD took the overall responsibility for the implementation. In addition, the project design envisaged involvement of (i) policy makers in planning, finance and line ministries/local governments in countries with special needs (e.g. LDCs), UN agencies and international organizations, non-governmental and civil society organizations involved in service delivery, the private sector, poor and vulnerable population and poor women.[8] The participation of these agencies involved attendance and discussions at different events organized by ESCAP. While the project document did not explicitly state assumptions, the underlying assumption was that the participating LDC officials would actively participate, learn from each other and adopt good practices in accelerating MDGs' achievement.

ESCAP did not recruit additional staff for the project but engaged a number of consultants for producing sectoral and cross-sectoral position papers and resource persons for leading and facilitating discussions at different events organized directly or as a side event during high-level ESCAP and UN events. The project brought together senior government officials and international experts at regional advocacy events organized by CSN Section.

The project had implementation period from November 2013 to December 2015. ESCAP requested UNDESA to extend the project closing date to 30 June 2016. The primary justification for the 6 months extension included accomplishments of activities that would enable the project to deliver more concrete and actionable results as envisaged in the project document. Unfinished project agenda included completion of a study on regional economic cooperation and integration (RECI) and eight national workshops.

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[7] UNDP (2010). Unlocking progress: MDG acceleration on the road to 2015 – lessons from the MDG acceleration framework, pilot countries, September.
[8] Project document, p.11.

The project activities during the November 2013 – December 2015 included:

- An inception workshop held in Bangkok on 15-16 May 2014, attended by 18 government officials from the Ministries of Planning and Finance, and representatives from academia and civil society organizations (CSOs) from seven target LDCs: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, and Timor-Leste.;

- The national consultants prepared four (4) of the five (5) planned in-depth sectoral studies[9]:

  - Gender equality in education in rural areas in Bhutan;

  - Improvement of water and sanitation in rural areas in Cambodia;

  - Physical accessibility to income earning activities in rural areas in Lao PDR; and

  - Linkage of health services and road access in rural areas in Nepal.

- The national consultants prepared three (3) of the four (4) planned country studies[10] on inter-agency organization and coordination of MDG related activities (Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Nepal).

- A cross-sectoral coordination workshop held in Siem Reap, Cambodia, 18-19 December 2014[11], with the participation of 25 government officials from the Ministries of Planning and Finance, and representatives from academia and CSOs from the eight target LDCs.

- An international consultant prepared a synthesis report based on the three national country and four sector studies.

A synopsis of these studies noted the following:

- The three country studies (Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Nepal) and four sector studies (Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Nepal) provide adequate evidence in support of cross-sectoral inter-dependencies in achieving MDGs. Some examples include road, electricity, and irrigation for increasing income opportunities in Lao PDR; road electricity for better health outcomes in Nepal; road access for education outcome in Bhutan; and access to clean water for health, education, and the environment in Nepal.

- National development plans need to prioritize equity, with a focus on vulnerable groups including women and those socially, economically and geographically disadvantaged. Examples include high out-of-pocket expenses for poor in accessing health services in Nepal, women socially discouraged from accessing formal health services in Nepal, high female dropout rate in girls in Cambodia due to lack of decent toilet facilities,

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[9] The fifth in-depth study planned did not materialize due to unavailability of a suitable national consultant and it was replaced by another water supply and sanitation case study.

[10] The fourth country study could not be completed due to unavailability of suitable national consultant and instead the participants shared national experiences on development strategies and plans executed by planning ministries to facilitate inter-sectoral coordination for achieving the MDGs and post-2015 development agenda in Asian LDCs, held in Siem Reap, Cambodia on 18-19 December 2014.

[11] The workshop was originally scheduled to be held on 13-15 November 2014 but had to be rescheduled due to ESCAP staff's other urgent work commitments related to the preparation of two flagship publications.

- Good public service delivery requires a high degree of local participation and decentralization plays an important role. However, service delivery tends to be less than satisfactory in LDCs. For example, Nepal suffers from a lack of coordination across different decentralized line agencies, Bhutan children face a hurdle in upward mobility due to limited education decentralization up to the district level.

- Achieving MDGs (also highly relevant for sustainable development goals (SDGs)), coordination requires cross-sectoral coordination in delivering desired development outcomes as well as strong civil society organizations (CSOs) and private sector involvement. Experience in LDCs shows that cross-sectoral challenges among other things include very low private sector participation and little if any role of CSOs in ensuring satisfactory social services delivery. Experience from Lao PDR's nutrition model shows detailed inter-sectoral costing supported by sector level strategies and a high-level coordination mechanism for multi-sectoral and thematic coordination. However, the arrangements focus mainly on service delivery through public sector and it requires a focus on equity and better integration of coordination mechanism with budgetary process[12].

The attainment of the second project outcome "increased the capacity of national stakeholders" relied on two (2) advocacy and eight (8) national/regional training workshops. The project organized a regional advocacy workshop in Siem Reap, Cambodia (4-6 March 2015)[13] and another one in Bangkok (3 December 2015).[14]

During the extension period (January – June 2016), the project conducted five national workshops – one each in Bangladesh (2 days), Cambodia (1 day), Lao PDR (1 day), Myanmar (1 day) and Nepal (half-day). These workshops largely focussed on the launching of MPFD's CSN 2016 report and demonstrated complementarities between SDGs indicators and international development goals. In addition, ESCAP organized two events in Vientiane, Lao PDR: (i) Regional Workshop on the Adaptation of the 2030 Agenda and the Istanbul Programme of Action at the national level for LDCs on 28-29 June 2016 and (ii) Regional Capacity-building Workshop on Sustainable Development Goals Modelling for the LDCs in Asia and the Pacific on 30 June 2016. Both events brought together senior government officials, CSO representatives, and academics. Altogether 70 participants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu, civil society organizations, selected development partners, and ESCAP Secretariat took part in the event.

According to ESCAP staff involved in the implementation of the project, country or sector study in Afghanistan proved challenging and the project could not identify a suitable consultant. Some initial work started in Bangladesh but the consultants became less interested in the project delivery on project terms. The project could not recruit suitable national consultants in Myanmar and Timor-Leste because qualified consultants were pre-committed to other assignments and not available for

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[12] S. Chatterjee (2014). Importance of Cross-Sectoral Impacts and Thematic Considerations to Achieve the MDGs and Future SDGs: Synthesis of ESCAP Studies, presentation delivered at the High-Level Asia-Pacific Policy Dialogue on the Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 6 March 2015.

[13] Organized during the High-Level Policy Dialogue on Designing and Implementing Cross-Sectoral Policies and Strategies for the Implementation of the IPOA and attended by 46 policy makers from eleven of the 12 Asia-Pacific LDCs.

[14] Organized as a side event during the third session of the Committee on Macroeconomic Policy, Poverty Reduction and Inclusive Growth on 3 December 2015 in Bangkok, Thailand. The workshop included a Round Table on LDCs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and a High-Level Policy Dialogue on the Strategic Regional-Level Partnership for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia-Pacific. In all, 28 senior officials, experts and civil society representatives from nine of 12 least developed countries in Asia and the Pacific attended the event.

conducting project-related studies. As a result, the bulk of activities concentrated in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Nepal in addition to one sector study in Bhutan.

The project commissioned two papers on how the Asia-Pacific RECI agenda can benefit LDCs in the region in their pursuit of unfinished MDGs and future SDGs, and how LDCs can fully leverage on the new opportunities created by RECI.[15]

The project expenditure does not include ESCAP staff salaries and allowances, although they actively involved in implementing the project on a staggered basis. ESCAP implemented the project with USD 643,500 from DA account. At the end of the project, total fund utilization stood at 92.3%, with the balance USD 49,765.43 not spent. The fund utilization, however, exhibited skewed pattern: 25.4% in 2014, 21.7% in 2015, and 45.1% in the first six months of 2016 (which accounts for 49.0% of total expenditure). Table 2 shows a comparison of budgeted amount and actual expenditure.

| Table 2. Project Budget, Expenditure, and Deviation (November 2013 – June 2016) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Budget Heading** | **Budget Allotment (USD)** | **Total Expenditure (USD)** | **Deviation Amount (USD)** | **Deviation from the Budget (%)** |
| General Temporary Assistance | 46,000 | 44,519 | 1,481 | 3.22 |
| Consultants and Expert Groups | 149,000 | 189,808 | -40,809 | **-27.39** |
| Staff Travel | 52,000 | 57,664 | -5,664 | **-10.89** |
| Contractual Services | 17,000 | 30,158 | -13,158 | **-77.40** |
| Operating Expenses | 12,500 | 10,462 | 2,038 | 16.30 |
| Furniture and Equipment | 0 | 2,166 | -2,166 | No budget |
| Fellowships/Grants/Contributions | 367,000 | 259,095 | 108,405 | **29.44** |
| **Total** | **643,500** | **593,872** | **49,767** | **7.73** |

Source: ESCAP UMOJA data (retrieved on 5 July 2016).

Several factors influenced the project implementation and delivery. These included:

- High staff turnover: Key ESCAP staff either retired or got transferred to UN Secretariat in New York which left somewhat vacuum in project leadership;

- Change in direction from senior management: The project activities were virtually put on hold for several months due to confusion created advice from ESCAP senior management not to only regional activities given the regional focus of the organization;

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[15] Implications and Benefits of Asia-Pacific Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration Activities for the LDCs, draft paper prepared by M.K. Mujeri and Drivers and Draggers of Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific, draft paper prepared by S. Madhur, February 2016.

- An activity planned in Nepal in 2015 had to be cancelled due to earthquake in April 2015;

- An activity planned in Bangkok in 2014 had to be cancelled due to demonstrations and disturbances;

- It took longer time for new staff on board to understand and undertake project activities.

Eventually, MPFD decided to undertake country-level project activities (workshops) in the first half of 2016, which resulted in the completion of five national and two regional workshops. However, with the expiration of MDG agenda and commencement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the focus of country level workshops changed and in a way combined with other MPFD activities, including the launching of 2016 CSN Report.[16]  To some extent, the renewed approach emphasized cross-sectoral policies to implement SDGs, partly reflected in the two draft papers on RECI (footnote 15).

The project adopted a simplified logical framework[17] using quantifiable indicators. It tagged the achievement of the first outcome (understanding and awareness) using two indicators: the number of participants from LDCs and the number of inter-ministerial meetings scheduled to discuss cross-sectoral policies and draft cross-sectoral policies tabled (first outcome). Likewise, the second outcome (increased national capacity) had another two indicators: the number of participating countries that have developed and implemented cross-sectoral policies and strategies to accelerate progress towards the MDGs, and the number of countries that have strengthened partnerships among key stakeholders to accelerate the progress towards MDGs and inclusive development through inter-sectoral coordination. The evaluation took note of the number of participants at each event. The logical framework did not call for gender-disaggregated reporting requirements.

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[16] ESCAP. 2016. Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2016: Adapting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the National Level, Bangkok.
[17] Project document, p. 17-19.

# Evaluation Scope and Objectives

## Scope of Evaluation

The evaluation covered the entire period timeframe (November 2013 to June 2016), encompassing original project duration and the six-month extension. The scope of evaluation included the project design process (including stakeholders' participation), the roles and responsibilities of the project staff and LDC officials in implementing the project, the quality of outputs produced and their application/use in formulating national economic and social policies in LDCs with a focus on efforts towards achieving MDGs.

## Evaluation Objectives

As stated in the Terms of Reference document (Appendix 1), the evaluation aimed to assess the overall achievement of the project objectives and intended goal. More specifically, to what it posed a key question: "To what extent did the project strengthen national capacities in selected Asia-Pacific LDCs to develop and implement economic and social policies and programmes to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs through cross-sectoral approaches."

## Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation is a forward-looking evaluation[18]. The evaluation framework encompassed the logical framework outlined in the project document (p. 17-19). The fundamental assumption was that knowledge sharing in the form of advocacy, training workshops or meetings strengthens their capacity to prepare better products - cross-sectoral policies in the project context and adoption of these policies would enable countries to accelerate their progress towards MDG achievement. The evaluation envisaged capacity development at three levels- individual, organizational and societal. It also sought to apply a mixed method approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods, to the extent permissible by available data.

## Evaluation Criteria and Evaluation Questions

The evaluation followed United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards and OECD-DAC criteria (ESCAP evaluation criteria in generic form) in compliance with para. 5 of the terms of reference document. The criteria included relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability parameters in the evaluation process.[19] It also assessed additional criteria of gender mainstreaming. Given the nature of support extended by ESCAP limiting to capacity development within a relatively short intervention period, the evaluation did not assess impact.

Table 3 outlines a list of evaluation questions along with indicators and data sources. The evaluator finalized the list of evaluation questions in consultation with the evaluation reference group at ESCAP.

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[18]TOR, para. 5.

[19] The ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Guidelines (Footnote 27), however states that for forward looking evaluation such as evaluation of capacity building, efficiency may not be appropriate criteria.

**Table 3: Evaluation Questions, Indicators, Data and Assumptions by Evaluation Criteria**

RELEVANCE: Appropriateness of design and formulation process and consistency with ESCAP and government policies and strategies and country priorities.

| Question | Indicator | Data Source | Assumption |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. To what extent were stakeholders engaged in project needs assessment and design? | Stakeholders' response | Project document (PD), other formulation documents at ESCAP; Interview with project team; Online survey/Tele-interviews | Analysis document exists; Project team has institutional memory; Stakeholders are available and willing to participate. |
| 2. Were the project outputs directly support national efforts to promote and implement the MDGs? | MDG national ownership | Country MDG reports | The MDG reports are available |
| 3. Was the project implementation arrangement satisfactory? | Stakeholder satisfaction | Online survey/Tele-interviews | Relevant respondents are available |
| 4. Do the participating countries find the project outputs and activities useful for enhancing national capacity to implement the MDGs? | Stakeholder satisfaction | Online survey/Tele-interviews Country reports Sector reports | Respondents are available and reports contain input from the project |
| 5. To what extent the project adjusted to the changing needs or priorities of participating countries? | Implementation flexibility | PD and interview with project team | Relevant respondents are available |

Effectiveness: The extent to which the project achieved or is likely to achieve its planned project objective and outcomes.

| Question | Indicator | Data Source | Assumption |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. To what extent did the project achieve its planned objective and expected accomplishments? <br> a. Did the project raise understanding and awareness? <br> b. Did the project enhanced national capacity? | Progress against the target | PD, progress reports and interviews with project team | The progress report is up-to-date |
| 2. What results did the project achieve beyond the stated outcomes? | Progress against the target | PD, progress reports and interviews with project team | The progress report is up-to-date |
| 3. What factors influenced the achievement of project objective and expected accomplishments (both positive and negative)? | Identification of implementation constraints or enabling factors | PD, progress reports and interviews with project team, stakeholder interviews | Project team retains institutional memory |
| 4. How effective were the project activities in promoting understanding | Client satisfaction | Online/Tele-survey | Relevant respondents are |

| | | | survey | | available |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5. | How effective were projected activities in guiding and supporting for building national capacity for accelerating MDG achievement? | Client satisfaction survey | Online/Tele-survey | Relevant respondents are available | |
| 6. | How satisfactory was the ESCAP monitoring and evaluation arrangement for the project? | Timely delivery of progress reports; Action on feedback; documentation system | Project team interview, progress reports | PD states that monitoring and evaluation requirements stated clearly | |
| 7. | What else could have been done to improve project effectiveness? | Reflection on effectiveness | Interviews with ESCAP staff and stakeholders | Availability of staff and stakeholders for interview | |

| Efficiency: The extent to which human and financial resources used in the best possible way to deliver activities and outputs, in coordination with other stakeholders. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Question** | **Indicator** | **Data Source** | **Assumption** |
| 1. To what extent the project delivery was cost-effective? | Project expenditure by key activities | Project finance data at ESCAP | Project-level financial data are available. |
| 2. To what extent the project delivery was within agreed period. | Time use in project delivery | Target and actual dates of project activities | No influence of external factors and country ownership |
| 3. What factors influenced the timely delivery of project activities? | Progress against the target Request for time extension | PD, progress reports and interviews with project team | The progress report is up-to-date |
| 4. What could have been done to avoid project implementation delays? | Reflection of project team | Interview with ESCAP staff | Availability of relevant ESCAP staff |

| Sustainability: Likelihood that project benefits will continue after June 2016 without ESCAP involvement. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Question** | **Indicator** | **Data Source** | **Assumption** |
| 1. To what extent selected LDCs have the capacity to implement SDGs on their own? | Evidence of continued deployment of existing human resources for SDGs | Stakeholder interviews | The country staff involved in the project are likely to continue in SDG agenda |
| 2. How likely would the LDCs require additional support from ESCAP and other development partners for enhanced capacity to implement SDGs? | Capacity deficits | Stakeholder interviews | Country ownership of SDG agenda |

| Gender mainstreaming: The extent to which gender mainstreaming has been incorporated in the design and implementation of the project | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Question** | **Indicator** | **Data Source** | **Assumption** |
| 1. To what extent did the project take into account gender mainstreaming into its design? | Evidence of gender analysis in PD | PD | Gender mainstreaming is recognised at a key issue in capacity development |
| 2. How did the project mainstream gender during implementation? | The number of participants by gender | List of participants at training /workshops, progress reports | The lists of participants available. |

Note: PD = project document
Source: Adapted from the Terms of Reference for the evaluation.


## Data Collection and Analysis

The evaluation was conducted within a short timeframe and limited resources with support from CSN Section/MPFD. While evaluation commenced in April 2016, a decision was made in consultation with the reference group to pause the evaluation process since several project related activities at the country level were taking place during May-June 2016 and it would be a better reflection of project achievement at completion. The completion date for the evaluation was deferred to 31 July 2016.

The data collection plan and analysis design involved:

- *Desk review of documents*: The evaluator received project related documents in prior to, during and after the field visit. The document review covered project document, progress reports, CSN reports, project progress reports for 2014 and 2015, available outputs of consultants and resource persons, project finance data, a list of participants and summary of different events organized under the project and other reports made available to the evaluator.
- *Focus group discussion (ESCAP):* Prior to his departure for ESCAP from home base, the evaluator received a briefing from the Evaluation Manager over a skype call. Upon arrival at CSN Section/MPFD, the evaluator held discussions with the project team involved in project implementation. The discussion focussed on project design, implementation, implementation constraints, and mission plan. In addition, he also met with the evaluation reference group and obtained additional insights in the project and expectations from the evaluation.
- *Inception report:* Based on the discussion with the project team and evaluation reference group along with the review of available documents and project outputs, the evaluator prepared a draft Inception Report for the evaluation. The evaluation reference group endorsed the Inception Report with minor changes.
- *Key informant interviews (ESCAP)*: The evaluator conducted face-to-face key informant interviews with relevant ESCAP staff members using the list of evaluation questions listed in Table 2 covering project design, implementation and expected completion. A list of interviews representing current and former project staff appears in Appendix 2.

- *Key informant interviews (other stakeholders)*: The evaluator also interviewed all the consultants who had prepared the sector and country reports as well as the synthesis report and participated in project events for an informed reflection of outputs produced and technical support provided under the project. In addition, the evaluator also interviewed former CSN staff responsible for project design and implementation, currently located outside ESCAP.
- *Participation at the Workshop on the Adaption of the 2030 Agenda in Lao PDR*: The evaluator participated and observed one of the project activities (in-country workshop) in Lao PDR on 6 May 2016. He took an opportunity to interact with key experts and participants and gain further insights into project activities.
- *List of participants, summaries of discussions of project events and results of project-related events' evaluations*: The evaluator received lists of participants, a summary of discussions and evaluation summaries of the evaluation events organized under the project. This facilitated a better understanding of issues discussed and decisions taken.

The evaluation follows the content analysis of documents, review of data collected by the project team, unit cost analysis of selected activities, and response analysis based on focus group discussion, key informant interviews and stakeholders' feedback, electronically or otherwise.

## Ethical Considerations

The evaluation process followed UNEG Norms and Standards for evaluation, adapted by ESCAP. The evaluation process was also transparent and inclusive and it maintained intentionality, impartiality, and independence. The evaluator had no conflict of interest in any form at any stage of project design, implementation, and completion. The evaluation maintained anonymity and confidentiality of individual respondents in the evaluation process where applicable. It helped the evaluator to triangulate views and responses from relevant stakeholders.

## Evaluation Process

The evaluation process involved four phases: (i) preparation, (ii) inception, (iii) fieldwork and data gathering, and (iv) report writing. The evaluator received guidance from the reference group appointed for the subject evaluation as and when needed. Subsequent follow-up steps would include ESCAP management response and implementation of an action plan for agreed recommendations. The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Unit/SPMD will disseminate the evaluation findings through established channels.

## Evaluation Team Composition

An independent evaluator conducted the evaluation and he was solely responsible for the preparation of inception report, data collection, interviews with key stakeholders, attendance at the Lao PDR national workshop and report writing. The CSN staff supported access to project related documents and data available from different sources.

## Limitations to the Evaluation

The evaluation relied on available data and information obtained through a desk review of available documents, complemented by a set of focus group discussions and key informant interviews, participation in one project workshop in Lao PDR, and details of events organized under the project, including lists of participants, discussion summaries, and event evaluation summaries. Given the nature of ESCAP support for capacity building, the analysis is largely descriptive with limited

quantitative information. Nevertheless, it provides a balanced assessment based on available evidence.

The evaluation inception report considered launching an online survey of CSN stakeholders in the participating countries. The evaluator encountered difficulties with limited information such as lack of email addresses for a large number of participants; the Cambodia workshop list of participants had most of the names in the Khmer language, and the list of participants across the countries had different sets of participants. For example, Lao PDR national workshop had a heavy representation from development partners, Nepal and Bangladesh national workshop participants were very senior government staff, and Myanmar had a very high degree of a mixed group. The evaluator discussed this issue with the M&E Unit/SPMD determined that it was not feasible within the given timeframe to conduct such a survey. Hence, the Evaluator agreed with M&E Unit/SPMD to use the available evaluation summaries of project related events compiled by CSN Section.

Given the limited set of activities and greater concentration primarily in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Nepal, the project findings may not give full a picture of sector or country challenges in cross-sectoral issues in representing all LDCs in the Asia-Pacific region.

# Evaluation Findings

This section of the report contains findings based on literature review, interviews with stakeholders, summaries of different events organized under the project, and data provided by CSN Section. The report covers evaluation findings along the evaluation parameters of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and gender mainstreaming.

## Relevance [High]

The project relevance assessed the appropriateness of design and formulation process and consistency with ESCAP and government policies and strategies and country priorities. As stated in Table 3 above, project relevance assessment covered on five key questions (Box A).

| BOX 1: Relevance Questions |
| --- |
| ❖  To what extent were stakeholders engaged in project needs assessment and design? |
| ❖  Did the project outputs directly aim to support national efforts to promote and implement the MDGs? |
| ❖  Was the project implementation arrangement satisfactory? |
| ❖  Did the participating countries find the project outputs and activities useful for enhancing national capacity to implement the MDGs? |
| ❖  To what extent the project adjusted to the changing needs or priorities of the participating countries? |

The evaluation assesses that the project design was highly relevant to the needs of LDCs at the time of project formulation because these countries lacked national capacity in achieving MDGs both at the country and sector levels. The key informants during the course of evaluation revealed that the countries needed support in terms of knowledge from other ESCAP member countries in accelerating MDG achievement and had a genuine interest in learning from each other. They expected to benefit from ESCAP-led knowledge sharing activities. This partly reflected in them seeking support from ESCAP.  The project design also adopted lessons from other MDG related activities including DA 6th tranche project on MDG-based Development Strategies through Integrated Action and regional tripartite initiative by ESCAP, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and UNDP. The LDCs were also the signatories to the MDG Agenda and had committed to achieving stated goals. The countries also had tried to adapt MDGs in their national strategies and policies by 2015, albeit to a varying degree due to national capacity limitations.

The project was also in line with the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPOA), the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), and the Report of the High-Level Panel on of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The 2011/12 regional report jointly published by ESCAP, ADB and UNDP and the 6th tranche DA project on MDGs had identified need to improve the level  as well as the quality of access to services (e.g. health, education, water sanitation and rural connectivity) for achieving MDGs in LDCs.

ESCAP rightly identified the gaps and responded to LDCs' needs by developing a concept paper in 2011, which took about two years for funding approval under the DA 8th tranche.  Even with delayed funding approval, the project remained highly relevant for the LDCs in making progress towards achieving MDGs. However, based on responses from the stakeholders and then existing capacities of participating countries, evaluation assesses that the second immediate project objective "increased capacity of key national stakeholders in selected Asia-Pacific LDCs to develop, implement and

strengthen partnerships and build coalition of support among key stakeholders to accelerate the progress towards MDGs" was over ambitious.

Given that the CSN Section remained the focal point for LDCs, the project design document assumed that the current staff would be able to take on added project-specific implementation responsibilities. However, the Evaluator learned that staff faced capacity constraint to handle required responsibilities. In addition, while cross-sectoral collaboration was conceptually desirable, it was not feasible in LDCs with ingrained sectoral 'patch protection' approaches and realities, and lack of coordination and cooperation among implementing agencies is quite common. The stakeholders consulted during the course of evaluation acknowledged that the cross-sectoral collaboration was a difficult expectation and less practical in most of the LDCs. Finally, it would have been desirable if the project design incorporated the need to maintain a core group of senior government officials and ESCAP staff to give continuity to the project related activities over the life of the project.

The project implementation arrangements assumed that CSN Section would lead the project with close cooperation across the MPFD, EDD, TD and TID of ESCAP and partnership with ADB and UNDP. It also assumed that the UN Country Teams and other relevant members of the Regional Coordination Mechanism would provide in-kind support. This assumption did not hold and often coordination across the ESCAP Divisions remained a major challenge. This was partly associated with lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities of respective Division. Furthermore, since the project document lacked the details on the nature and extent of contributions from other agencies and development partners, it did not generate additional resources to implement project activities in a coordinated manner. Similarly, the project document did not elaborate on the roles of LDCs in implementing the project activities. It should have clearly outlined the links and synergies with other ESCAP and development partners' programme of action related to MDGs. Based on the available evidence, evaluation assesses that the project implementation arrangement remained weak all along.

The project document contained a simplified logical framework. The framework contained indicators four indicators:

(i)     the number of participating policymakers from selected LDCs in Asia indicating that knowledge products contribute to the capacity building for designing and implementing cross-sectoral policy measures to accelerate the progress towards MDGs;
(ii)    the number of inter-ministerial meetings scheduled to discuss cross-sectoral policies tables;
(iii)   the number of participating countries that have developed and implemented cross-sectoral policies and strategies to accelerate progress towards the MDGs, and
(iv)    the number of participating countries that have strengthened partnerships among key stakeholders to accelerate the progress towards the MDGs and inclusive development through inter-sectoral coordination.

The above indicators did not adequately reflect MDG acceleration capacity outcomes. Physical target in terms of the number of participants/countries is less meaningful when an original number of countries was limited to eight, of which only four were active participants. These indicators do not gel well with the nature of support foreseen under the project, that is, workshops and case study reports. Moreover, the project interventions did not demonstrate continuity in carrying forward within and across LDCs.

With the expiration of MDGs in December 2015 and the onset of SDGs, the project change in direction to undertake advocacy of SDGs at the country level was a welcome initiative. These events

were timely as countries were transiting from MDGs to SDGs. In particular, the links between IPOA and SDGs was of considerable interest to workshop participants. However, the project did not foresee launch of the 2016 CSN report as the main event to sensitize respective LDCs about SDGs. One would have expected country level activities to focus on training workshops separate from the CSN report launch. According to one of the key architects of the project, design emphasised that original intention was to conduct three-day training and not to combine with other ESCAP initiatives. The CSN report launch, however, contributed towards better understanding and awareness raising about SDGs and IPOA.

# Effectiveness [Medium]

The project effectiveness assessment included the extent to which the project achieved or likely to achieve its planned project objectives and outcomes. It sought to respond to seven key questions (Box B).

| BOX B: Effectiveness Questions |
|---|
| ❖ To what extent did the project achieve its planned objective and expected accomplishments (raised understanding and awareness and enhanced national capacity)? |
| ❖ What results did the project achieve beyond the stated outcomes? |
| ❖ What factors influenced the achievement of project objective and expected accomplishments (both positive and negative)? |
| ❖ How effective were the project activities in promoting understanding and awareness about accelerating achievement of MDG? |
| ❖ How effective were projected activities in guiding and supporting for building national capacity for accelerating MDG achievement? |
| ❖ How satisfactory was the ESCAP monitoring and evaluation arrangement for the project? |
| ❖ What else could the project have done to improve its effectiveness? |

The project's objective was to strengthen national capacities in LDCs to develop and implement economic and social policies and programmes to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs through cost-sectoral approaches. To achieve this objective the project had envisaged accomplishments (outcomes):

(i)     increased understanding and awareness of policymakers and other stakeholders in LDCs of the benefits of cross-sectoral policies to accelerate progress towards MDGs, and

(ii)    increased capacity of key national stakeholders in selected Asia-Pacific LDCs to develop, implement, and strengthen partnerships and build a coalition of support among various stakeholders to accelerate the progress towards the MDGs.

These were expected to be through capacity building initiatives comprising a combination of workshops and studies at the country and sector levels. Table 4 lists key events organized under the project with the number of participants. Likewise, Table 5 lists key outputs produced by the consultants engaged in writing sector or country papers.

| Table 4: List of Events Organized by ESCAP under the DA 8th Tranche MDG Project | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. | Event, Date and Place | RPs | | LDCs | | ESCAP& DP | | All Participants | | |
| | | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | Total |
| 1 | Inception workshop - Development Account Project Strengthening capacities in countries with special needs to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs, 15 to16 May 2014, Bangkok, | 5 | 1 | 11 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 22 | 9 | 31 |

Thailand

| # | Activity | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | Regional Meeting on Financing Graduation Gaps of Asia-Pacific LDCs, 28-30 October 2014, Dhaka, Bangladesh | | | | Data not available | | | | | |
| 3 | Regional workshop on cross-sectoral policies and institutional coordination for achieving the MDGs and post-2015 development agenda in Asian LDCs 18-19 December 2014, Siem Reap, Cambodia | 5 | 3 | 12 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 19 | 10 | 29 |
| 4 | Regional Advocacy Workshop on Cross-Sectoral Policies and Coordination for Accelerating MDGs Achievement in the LDCs, 6 March 2015, Siem Reap, Cambodia | | | | Data not available | | | | | |
| 5 | Workshop on the Adaptation of 2030 Agenda in Cambodia, 29 April 2016, Phnom Penh, Cambodia | | | Data cannot be deciphered | | | | | | 42 |
| 6 | Workshop on the Adaptation of 2030 Agenda in Myanmar, 29 April 2016, Nya Pyi Taw, Myanmar | 0 | 0 | 11 | 35 | 15 | 3 | 26 | 38 | 64 |
| 7 | Workshop on the Adaptation of 2030 Agenda in Nepal, 3 May 2016, Kathmandu, Nepal | 0 | 0 | 26 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 28 | 5 | 33 |
| 8 | Workshop on the Localization of the 2030 Agenda, 6 May 2016, Vientiane, Lao PDR | 1 | 1 | 16 | 9 | 20 | 24 | 37 | 37 | 74 |
| 9 | High-level Midterm Review of the Istanbul Programme of Action on 27 May 2016, "Towards the implementation of the SDGs in the Asia-Pacific LDCs" Antalya, Turkey | | | | Details not legible | | | | | 30 |
| 10 | Workshop on the adaptation of the 2030 Agenda in Bangladesh, Co-organized by ESCAP and Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 15-16 June 2016 Dhaka, Bangladesh | 0 | 0 | 37 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 39 | 9 | 48 |
| 11 | Regional Workshop on the Adaptation of the 2030 Agenda and the Istanbul Programme of Action at the National Level for the Least Developed Countries in Asia and the Pacific *and* Regional Capacity Building Workshop on SDGs Modelling for the Least Developed Countries in Asia and the Pacific, 28-30 June 2016, Vientiane, Lao PDR | 2 | 1 | 39 | 14 | 9 | 4 | 50 | 19 | 69 |

Source: The project team at CSN Section/MPFD, ESCAP.

## Table 5: List of Outputs Produced Under the DA 8<sup>th</sup> Tranche MDG Project

| Project Output | Output Type | Coverage |
|---|---|---|
| Country Reports on benefits of cross-sectoral policies and interventions to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs: Case Study of Nepal | Country Paper | Nepal – National |
| Millennium Development Goals: Links and Institutions for Delivery – A Country Study for Cambodia | Country Paper | Cambodia – National |
| Lao PDR and its MDGs Implementation Framework and Progress | Country Paper | Lao PDR – National |
| Bhutan - Physical accessibility and affordability of education in rural areas: benefits of cross-sectoral policies to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs | Education Sector | Cross-sectoral linkages |
| Nepal – linkage of health services and access to roads and electricity in rural areas: benefits of cross-sectoral policies to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs | Health Sector | Cross-sectoral linkages |
| Lao People's Democratic Republic – physical accessibility to rural income earning activities to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs | Rural Access | Cross-sectoral linkages |
| Improvement of Water and Sanitation in Rural Areas: Benefits of Cross-Sectoral Policies to Accelerate Progress towards achieving the MDGs in Cambodia | Water Supply and Sanitation | Cross-sectoral linkages |
| Synthesis of Cross-Sectoral/Cross-Thematic Synthesis of Selected Least Developed Countries of Asia-Pacific | Sector Synthesis | Cross-sectoral linkages |

| Achieving the MDGs in the Least Developed Countries of Asia and the Pacific: Policies to Improve Cross-Sectoral and Cross-Thematic Synergies | Country Synthesis | Cross-sectoral linkages |
|---|---|---|
| Feasibility Study and Functional Requirements Document for the Development of ESCAP Knowledge E-Platform for the LDCs in Asia-Pacific | Feasibility Study | E-platform |
| Financing strategies for LDCs graduation in Asia and the Pacific: key sources, trends, and prospects, background paper for Regional Meeting on Financing Graduation Gaps of Asia-Pacific LDCs Dhaka, 28-30 October 2014 | Background paper | LDCs |
| South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Asia, Discussion Paper First High-Level Follow-up Dialogue on Financing for Development in Asia and the Pacific, Incheon, Republic of Korea 30-31 March 2016 (Author: Salahuddin Ahmed, 2016) | Discussion paper | South-South cooperation |
| Financing Development Gaps in the Countries with Special Needs in the Asia-Pacific Region, MPDD Working Paper WP/15/12 (Author M. Mujeri, 2015) | Working Paper | CSN |
| Financing strategies for LDCs graduation in Asia and the Pacific: key sources, trends and prospects, MPDD Working Paper WP/14/02 (Authors: S.R. Basu, S, Gui-Diby and Z. Jian, 2014) | ESCAP working paper | LDCs |

Source: The project team, CSN Section/MPFD, ESCAP.

Table 6 shows that majority of planned activities were completed with delays. The deviations from plan included one less sector and one fewer country studies largely due to unavailability of suitable consultants. Due to time limitation, the project was able to organize only five of the eight training country workshops and two regional events.

**Table 6: Project Activities Planned and Achieved (November 2013 – June 2016)**

| EA | Planned Activity | Planned Period | Status at Completion |
|---|---|---|---|
| EA1 | Inception Workshop (1) | 2013 | Done 2014 |
| | In-depth Sector Studies (5) | 2013-2014 | Done 2014 (4 out of 5) |
| | Country Studies (4) | 2013-2014 | Done 2014 (3 out of 4) |
| | Regional Dissemination Workshop (1) | 2014 | Done 2015 |
| EA2 | National/regional Training Workshops and Seminars on capacity building (8) | 2014-2015 | Done 2016 (5 of 8) |
| | Regional Advocacy Workshop (2) | 2015 | Done 2016 |
| External Evaluation | Project's External Evaluation | 2015 | Done 2016 |

EA = expected accomplishment; EA1 = understanding and awareness, EA2=national capacity building

Source: The Project team, CSN Section/MPFD, ESCAP.

The evaluation acknowledges that the DA funded project accounted for relatively small part of the efforts by the LDCs and development partners towards achieving MDGs, both at the country and regional levels. The national efforts focussed on achieving sector level targets and regional efforts including those from ESCAP helped in the process. In the project context, a six-month extension allowed CSN Section to accomplish 15 of the 20 planned activities.

The project achievements fall into two broad groups along the two stated outcomes: (i) understanding and awareness raising and (ii) capacity building for accelerating achievement of MDGs in LDCs. Available documentary evidence and inputs from key informant interviews lead the evaluation to conclude that the project successfully enhanced understanding about need to achieve MDGs and raised awareness about their achievements

Based on available evidence and opinions of key informant interviews including resource persons, evaluation concludes that the project successfully delivered the first outcome and raised understanding and awareness about the accelerated achievement of MDGs by LDCs. This achieved comprised three spheres with the participation of senior government officials from respective countries:

(i) All eight LDCs participated in two or more regional events organized by ESCAP, either under direct project activities or in conjunction with other ESCAP events[20];

(ii) Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Nepal shared their sectoral and country experience at regional events, while Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Timor-Leste took part in these regional events; and

(iii) In 2016, five country-level workshops (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Nepal) organized by ESCAP helped the countries to take note of and understand the need for adaptation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals.

The post-workshop evaluation, self-administered by the project team, demonstrated an overall reasonable satisfaction from attending these events, both at the regional and country, which reflected project team's efforts in knowledge sharing.[21] For example, responses from five country level workshops in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Nepal indicated that 42% of respondents gained very much, 54% gained somewhat and 4% gained very little from these events. Similarly, 15% of respondents attending the Internalising the Framework/Model event held in Lao PDR in June 2016 gained very much, while 66% gained somewhat and 19% gained very little knowledge from their attendance. The varying degree of responses across the five countries and between the regional events also reflect complexities of discussion and limited absorptive capacity of the participants. Nevertheless, evaluation affirms adequate evidence in support of project's success in enhancing understanding and raising awareness about the acceleration of MDGs achievement as well as sensitization country representatives for the adaptation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals.

The evaluative evidence in support of the second outcome increased the capacity of key national stakeholders to develop, implement, and strengthen partnerships and build a coalition of support among various stakeholders to accelerate the progress towards the MDGs is mixed. Events organized under the project and/or organized as a side event to other major ESCAP or UN events brought together senior officials from LDCs who had the opportunity to exchange their experiences. However, it is not clear to what extent these exchanges served to strengthen the national agencies in achieving the stated outcome. Different sets of participants attended each event limiting the knowledge exchange and adoption of good practices. Furthermore, the involvement of resource persons engaged by the project had been limited to the preparation of sector or country papers and presentation during the regional advocacy workshops. The outputs produced by the consultants engaged by the project largely remained with CSN Section with limited circulation and some of them made available more recently for a wider audience. The recommendations brought forward by these papers remained unimplemented.

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[20]With the exception of Afghanistan, all seven LDCs attended the Inception Workshop in 2014 and with the exception of Timor-Leste, all other seven LDCs attended MPDD Committee meeting in 2015..

[21] The post-workshop evaluation results across the five countries are not directly comparable due to wide variation in the mix of participants in attendance and the length of session.

The achievement of MDGs by design impinged on cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration. The project tried to promote this through advocacy workshop in Cambodia and the national representatives at different events became aware of such need. However, given institutional rigidity along the sector lines along with weak implementation capacity restricted the efforts in cross-sectoral collaboration. The regional economic cooperation and integration agenda also got side tracked and lost steam, although the project commissioned two draft papers to external consultants.

High staff turnover in CSN Section, interim guidance from ESCAP management to focus on regional activities and not to undertake country-level activities, and earthquake in Nepal in April 2015 collectively contributed one-year hold on project related activities. According to Evaluator's interviews with key informants, this led to confusion among the participating LDCs about the future direction of the project including ESCAP's commitment and some of the concerned officials lost interest in the project activities. Since the country-level training workshops (each supposed to be held for three days) had not commenced and RECI activity had not commenced, ESCAP requested for a six-month no additional cost implication extension, which UNDESA endorsed.

Despite project extension, activities did not move much well until March 2016 and that is when CSN Unit decided to scale down planned eight country level workshops to only five to be implemented during April-June 2016. Limited time and availability of CSN Section staff resulted in merging project activities with other CSN activities. For example, joint activities by the project team included the launching of the 2017 CSN Report and/or Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific along with the 2030 Adaptation Agenda. According to CSN Section, this was done to strengthen the knowledge and capacity of policymakers to better understand the cross-sectoral linkages among various sectors and their implications for development outcomes. Overall, evaluation notes that the participation of Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Timor-Leste remained limited to attendance at the regional events, more prominently in June 2016 in Vientiane, Lao PDR, where corresponding delegates delivered their presentations and the policymakers interacted with the other delegates and enhanced their knowledge and shared their experiences.

The inclusion of knowledge e-platform for LDCs was not in the original plan. While it was a good initiative, it required active participation from all LDCs. The platform is ready but requires contributions from LDCs.

The CSN Section subcontracted for a feasibility study and development of a knowledge e-platform for LDCs, although it was not in the original project design. It emerged as a viable option for knowledge dissemination and sharing among LDCs due to rapid growth in information technology. The evaluation took note that the platform is ready for going live, but at the time of fieldwork, it was waiting for contribution from the member LDCs. By design, it's success will be governed by active participation and contribution by the member States' national agencies. However, the capacity of LDCs to contribute and use the platform actively remains unassessed. As noted in the feasibility document, the knowledge platform is content-driven and is dependent on the (i) availability of abundant relevant content, (ii) ease of use in finding required content within a reasonable timeframe, and (iii) repeated visits of actively engaged and interacting registered users.[22] These factors largely depend on the active participation of LDC focal points both in submitting/sharing useful contents for which the system needs to be user-friendly.

At the end, about 250 senior government officials and policymakers from eight LDCs participated in the knowledge events organized by ESCAP under the project's banner. An overwhelming majority of

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[22] Har van der Van. 2015. Feasibility study and functional requirements document for the development of the ESCAP knowledge e-platfrm for the LDCs in Asia-Pacific, Consultant's report submitted to the project.

them either agreed or strongly agreed that the events enhanced their understanding of the importance of cross-sectoral coordination in accelerating the achievement of MDGs. However, it is not clear, how many of them used the knowledge products in implementing designing and implementing cross-sectoral policy measures. The evaluation did not find evidence related to inter-ministerial meetings to discuss cross-sectoral policies, draft cross-sectoral policies tabled. It also did not come across any cross-sectoral policies and strategies developed and implemented to accelerate progress towards the MDGs.

. Likewise, project related documents did not contain any evidence to support that it strengthened partnerships among key stakeholder to accelerate the progress towards the MDGs and inclusive development through inter-sectoral coordination.

These limitations in achievements are the results of the change in focus, delayed implementation of national workshops due to factors beyond the control of project team, both ESCAP and government staff turnover, different sets of participants at each event, and non-continuity after each event to ensure continued engagement with core focal groups in LDCs. In addition, although the project envisaged collaboration from four ESCAP divisions – SPMD, EDD, TD and TID, the project was largely implemented by MPFD, and TD participated in only one event and TID did not participate in any activity. EDD participation was limited as well. Both EDD and TD advised that their views that they were not aware of 6-month extension granted to the project until the evaluator met with them for respective interviews. Statistics Division participated in the June 2016 regional event in Lao PDR and shared information on statistical indicators for LDCs.

Selected key informants also harvested knowledge benefit from the project and these include resource persons, ESCAP staff, and project team members who learned the importance of cross-sectoral coordination. More specifically, one example is a 2013 "discussion paper on Development Financing for Tangible Results: A Paradigm Shift to Impact Investing and Outcome Models- the Case of Sanitation in Asia".[23] The authors of sector and country studies gained new knowledge during regional workshops and interactions with other participants.

## Efficiency [Medium]

The evaluation assessed project efficiency in resource use and it covered the extent to which the project used human and financial resources in the best possible way to deliver activities and outputs, in coordination with other stakeholders. It addressed four key questions (Box C).

| BOX C: Efficiency Questions |
| --- |
| ❖ To what extent the project delivery was cost-effective? |
| ❖ To what extent the project delivery was within agreed period? |
| ❖ What factors influenced the timely delivery of project activities? |
| ❖ What could have been done to avoid project implementation delays? |

Table 2 above contains the budgeted amount, total expenditure, and deviation from the allocation. Due to slow progress in the first two years and a six-month project extension resulted in contractual services overrunning allocation by 77%. Likewise, the consultants and expert groups expenditure overran by 27% and staff travel by 11%. On the other hand, the project underspent

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[23] UNESCAP. 2013. Development Financing for Tangible Results: A Paradigm Shift to Impact Investing and Outcome Models The Case of Sanitation in Asia, Bangkok.

fellowships/grants/contributions budget by 29%. While the project document contains a detailed breakdown of project budget by accomplishment and activity (Table 7), actual comparative figures are not available and hence direct comparison is not feasible. Overall, the project managed within the given budget available from the DA funds.

| EA | Activity | N-R/C | IC Fees | IC Travel | Staff Travel | WS | CS | GTA | GOE | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Table 7: Result-Based Budget Allocation for the 8th Tranche DA MDG Project (USD '000)** | | | | | | | | | | |
| EA1 | A1.1 | 5.0 | 5.0 | 5.0 | 0.0 | 45.0 | - | - | - | 60.0 |
|  | A1.2 | 25.0 | 20.0 | 9.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | - | - | - | 54.0 |
|  | A1.3 | 16.0 | 12.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | - | - | - | 28.0 |
|  | A1.4 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 10.0 | 0.0 | 67.0 | - | - | - | 77.0 |
| **Sub-total** | | **46.0** | **37.0** | **24.0** | **0.0** | **112.0** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **219.0** |
| EA2 | A2.1 | 20.0 | 11.0 | 5.0 | 42.0 | 155.0 | 10.0 | - | - | 243.0 |
|  | A2.2 | 0.0 | 5.0 | 5.0 | 10.0 | 100.0 | 7.0 | - | - | 127.0 |
| **Sub-total** | | **20.0** | **15.0** | **10.0** | **52.0** | **255.0** | **17.0** | **-** | **-** | **370.0** |
| Common to EA1 and EA2 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Evaluation | A3 | 0 | 10.0 | 2.0 | - | - | - | - | - | 12.0 |
| Other | A1-A3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 30.0 | 12.5 | 42.5 |
| **Total** | | **66.0** | **63.0** | **36.0** | **52.0** | **367.0** | **17.0** | **30.0** | **12.5** | **643.5** |

Note: N-R/C = national/regional consultant, IC = international consultant, WS = workshop, CS = contractual services, GTA = general temporary assistance, GOE = general operating expenses, EA1 = expected accomplishment 1 (understanding and awareness), EA2 = national capacity building, A.x.x = activities as outlined in the project document.

Source: Project document.

The project has had a tangible contribution to raising understanding and awareness about MDGs, but implementation delays led to little contribution towards LDCs attaining MDGs. Nevertheless, national workshops held in 2016 led to tangible interest and understanding about SDGs and IPOA; although the workshops were held much later after the expiry of MDGs. This called for a shift in focus from accelerating the achievement of MDGs to the adaptation of the SDGs. The project efficiency hence is assessed medium because adaptation (localization) of the 2030 Agenda (SDGs) was a relatively small part of the larger programme. It would have been better to dedicate more time to adaptation agenda without combining with the launching of other ESCAP reports.

The project efficiency suffered from initial delays caused by the insecurity related to the political situation in Thailand in 2014, including the preparation of the inception meeting.[24] This was beyond the project control. However, ESCAP should have taken the initiative to organize the inception workshop soon after the funding approval. ESCAP should have taken proactive measures to properly plan and execute the regional and national workshops in line with original project document.

The project implementation also stalled for about a year due staff turnover and confusion due to new direction from senior management. ESCAP should have provided clear guidance for completing ongoing project activities particularly those planned at the national level. Furthermore, the project was a small part of MPFD's work programme and hence the availability of staff hampered the timely execution of project activities.[25] The project efficiency would have been greater with regular communication between ESCAP and LDC focal points. Interrupted communication also contributed to confusion and lack of interest on the part of LDCs.

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[24] Inception workshop took place six months after the project approval and hence valuable time foregone in implementing the project (Project Progress Report 2014).
[25] MPFD staff were overstretched with their workload and the project activities had to fit in with the availability of staff.

# Sustainability [High]

The assessment of the sustainability of project benefits included the likelihood of sustaining these benefits without external support. The assessment posed two specific questions (Box D).

| BOX D: Sustainability Questions |
| --- |
| ❖ To what extent the selected LDCs have the capacity to implement SDGs on their own? |
| ❖ How likely would the LDCs require additional support from ESCAP and other development partners for enhanced capacity to implement SDGs? |
| ❖ To what extent the project likely to be replicable? |

The evaluation finds that most of the project LDCs continued to lag behind other countries in achieving MDGs at the end of 2015 due to several factors, including inadequate capacity, MDGs not fully compatible with national plans and priorities, or funding shortfalls. These countries continued to face capacity limitations in the post-MDGs era. During the national workshop evaluations, low implementation capacity continued to remain one of the key area requiring support from development partners, including ESCAP.

One of the main challenges ahead of SDGs achievement is inadequate institutional support in LDCs as almost all SDGs require cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration, which the project aimed to promote in LDCs. As discussed earlier, the project achieved in improving understanding and awareness about the International Development Goals, including MDGs and SDGs.

Substantial work is required by respective governments to recognize SDGs as cross-sectoral goals and put in place appropriate mechanism with adequate capacity to implement relevant development programmes. In addition, LDCs would require continued support from development partners including ESCAP for sustain the gains under the project. The twin-pronged approach of advocacy and capacity building action plans supporting appropriate policy directions will help in scaling up and replicating in LDCs. At the end of the project, LDCs had been better informed and aware of what is needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda. This would be possible only if ESCAP has adequate capacity and political commitments from respective governments.

The strong commitment from all relevant stakeholders for the 2030 Agenda provides a sound basis for building on the achievement of project benefits. ESCAP as a regional body is well positioned to engage national and regional players in productive dialogue, including policy reforms to facilitate cross-sector collaboration at different levels. The evaluation assesses that with limited resources ESCAP can also play a key catalyst's role and help countries to introduce needful environment to facilitate achievement of relevant SDGs. Furthermore, ESCAP also has the inherent capability to engage LDCs in not only cross-sectoral but also cross-country knowledge exchange through the effective network. The sustainability of project benefits will ultimately hinge on a collaborative effort by both national governments and development partners, including ESCAP.  Initial preparatory work to align country-appropriate SDGs in national plans is a welcome sign and provides positive steps towards sustaining project's achievements. Looking forward, evaluation assesses that project sustainability appears high.

# Gender mainstreaming [Medium]

Gender mainstreaming is a crosscutting theme and the evaluation assessed the extent to which gender mainstreaming had been incorporated in the design and implementation of the project. It relied on two specific questions (Box E).

| BOX E: Gender Mainstreaming Questions |
|---|
| ❖ To what extent the project took into account gender mainstreaming into its design? |
| ❖ How did the project mainstream gender during implementation? |

The project document did not explicitly identify any specific gender mainstreaming activities in pursuit of fulfilling outcomes and objectives. However, gender mainstreaming remained an important agenda, particular MDG 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women with a specific target in education, employment, and representation in the parliament. Likewise, SDG 5 "Achieve Gender Equality and Empower Women and Girls" which broadens the scope of the MDG 3 for gender mainstreaming and equality.[26]

The project's focus on gender issues appears in two ways – outputs produced by resource persons and participants in different events. Table 5 shows a list of 10 outputs and 9 of the 10 outputs demonstrate gender disparity in access to economic and social services requiring appropriate policy and cross-sectoral interventions. Women comprised 30% of resource persons under the project, 34% of LDC participants at project events, and 37% of ESCAP and development partners' staff (Table 4).[27] Overall, female participation in various events organized under the project stood at 29%. This figure could have increased if the project document strived to set a pragmatic target. Nevertheless, the achievement is respectable in the project LDCs as socio-cultural constraints do not encourage female participation in some of the countries. One of the nine authors of sector/country/feasibility study was a woman.

The sector (Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Nepal) and country (Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Nepal) reports prepared under the project identified gender mainstreaming related issues associated with access to education, health, water supply and sanitation, and economic services and some options. However, the respective national and sector agencies have not owned the findings and recommendations. Gender continues to remain a powerful crosscutting theme for the achievement of cross-sectoral development interventions and continued sustained efforts from all stakeholders will be required while addressing adaptation of the 2030 Agenda and monitoring and reporting progress at both national and regional levels. Overall, evaluation assesses gender mainstreaming as medium.

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[26] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5
[27] Figures are bases on available statistics. Statistics for some events by gender was not available for some events (Table 4).

# Conclusions

This evaluation report is an outcome of an in-depth document review, consultants' reports, minutes of various meetings, list of participants are various project-led events, meeting with relevant ESCAP staff, skype calls with former project staff and consultants, project expenditure data, and an analysis of available evidence up to the second week of July 2016.

## Relevance: High

The evaluation concludes that the project was highly relevant at the time of concept stage and at approval stage. The project concept remains valid at the time of evaluation in the changing context of LDCs' transition from MDGs to SDGs. The results framework was, however, weak with relatively inferior indicators without specific targets. The aim to promote cross-sectoral coordination was appropriate in terms of concept but given weak institutional capacity in participating LDCs and relatively rigid sector level intervention, the expectation for cross-sector coordination within the original 2 years (or 2.5 years after extension) was too ambitious.

## Effectiveness: Medium

The evaluation assesses project effectiveness medium due to both external and internal factors. External factors included disturbances during the initial stage, which delayed inception workshop by seven months. Internal factors included instructions from ESCAP management to focus on regional instead of national activities leading to nearly a year delay in implementing national workshops. The MPFD Division rightly took the decision to steer the project focus on adaptation or localization of 2030 Agenda on SDGs due to the expiry of MDGs at the end of 2015. The implementation plan was for an adaptation of SDGs along with other ESCAP reports' launches did not permit adequate room for capacity development and hence largely was limited to advocacy role. The commissioning of the feasibility study of a knowledge e-platform for LDCs emerged during the course of implementation. Since it is a part of larger ESCAP knowledge platform and based on low capacity in LDCs, evaluation finds that LDCs are yet to derive meaningful benefit from it. Moreover, capacity and commitment to contribute and access the e-platform at this stage remain low.

The project-led workshops at the regional and national are deemed successful in improving understanding and enhancing awareness of cross-sectoral coordination and has been widely appreciated by all stakeholders. The second expected achievement of strengthening national capacity towards achieving MDGs remains an unfinished agenda. It requires substantial support in localizing SDGs. ESCAP's continued engagement in supporting the adaptation of the 2030 Agenda along with other ESCAP-led activities and in partnership with other national and international development partners is likely to help LDCs in better adapting the SDGs to their national contexts.

Project outputs were limited to four sectors and three country studies supplemented by two regional workshops. Unavailability of relevant consultant in Myanmar and Timor-Leste and lack of interest from Bangladesh consultant resulted in only four of the five sectors and three of the four country studies completed. The quality of reports produced by consultants on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration (RECI) resulted in MPFD could have been better with timely feedback

and further work. This was one of the two outputs planned as a justification for the six-month project extension remained incomplete.

## Efficiency: Medium

The project efficiency has been assessed medium based on delays in implementation of key project activities and inadequate resource planning. Fund utilization was less than 50% at the end of the original completion date, that is, December 2015. At the end of June 2016, the project used up 92% of the funds with two less national workshops and one less each of country and sector studies. The project could have avoided implementation delays with advance planning and ESCAP designating CSN staff with targeted responsibilities.

## Sustainability: High

At the current level, the achievement of project outcomes, which is mostly advocacy will continue to play an important role in LDCs moving into the adaptation process of the 2030 Agenda on SDGs. An stronger commitment to SDGs, both at the national and international levels, and catalytic role of ESCAP are likely to play important role in sustaining project-led benefits in the coming years. ESCAP has *niche* advantage to play an honest broker between the LDCs and donor communities in ensuring national priorities, plans and policies are conducive to the achievement of SDGs. There is a great need to invest more in ensuring national capacities are built based on sound understanding and advocacy coming out of this project.

## Gender Mainstreaming: Medium

The project did not have explicit gender mainstreaming target. However, it managed to ensure that one-third of resource persons, participants, and ESCAP and development partners were women. This is not by any design, but by default. Women participants' representation was quite high in Lao PDR. It is, however, noteworthy that the sector and country papers along with the synthesis reports highlighted key cross-sectoral challenges and offered suggestions, which are yet to be owned and adopted by the national bodies in respective LDCs. On the hind side, better gender mainstreaming plan at the outset and implementation of such plan would have added additional impetus towards helping LDCs in effectively implementing project-based activities in conjunction with other initiatives in respective countries.

# Recommendations

ESCAP directly implemented the project and ESCAP commissioned this evaluation. The report offers a set of recommendations for ESCAP based on evaluation findings and conclusions. Some recommendations would require ESCAP staff working closely with LDCs. These recommendations relate to LDCs but these could be adapted for similar work in the other Member States as well.

## Recommendation 1

ESCAP should continue to focus on facilitating policy dialogue among the LDCs at the regional level ensuring the preparation for adaptation (localization) of the SDGs (action plans), implementation of relevant action plans, and tracking progress and reporting the achievement of agreed goals and associated targets. This would require:

(i)     ESCAP working closely with UN Regional Coordination Mechanism for Asia and the Pacific (RCM), UN Development Group, and UN Country Teams to identify capacity needs/gaps and chart out a coordinated approach;

(ii)    ESCAP to strengthen CSN/MPFD with adequate expertise and operational funds so that staff  able to coordinate programme of action on SDGs;

(iii)   ESCAP to mobilize tangible resources from existing and emerging donors as a pool of funds to undertake regional collaborative initiatives; and

(iv)    Strengthen e-platform for knowledge sharing among LDCs and with other ESCAP Member States.

## Recommendation 2

ESCAP Management should regularly review cross-Division collaboration of CSN/LDCs programme of work on SDGs on a quarterly basis to ensure that cross-sectoral collaboration is meaningful and effective within ESCAP. CSN's work in LDCs depends on what other Divisions do and achieve. This will ensure:

(i)      Complementarity and synergies in ESCAP's work particularly at the regional and sub-regional levels;

(ii)     Achievement of tangible outputs and outcomes through collaborative efforts;

(iii)    Better value for money; and

## Recommendation 3

ESCAP management could align its activities at the sub-regional and national levels under the Capacity Development Strategy 2016-2019 to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by LDCs in close consultation with UN Country Teams. There is a need for an active feedback loop between the LDCs and the regional body such as ESCAP, which can be achieved by establishing a National Coordination Committee in each LDC Member State.  A National Coordination Committee headed by the Head of National Planning body (Ministry/Commission) with active participation by sector agencies and key development partners can be an effective mechanism. The primary role of the Committee will be to promote cross-sectoral collaboration in achieving SDGs, monitoring

progress and reporting achievements. The National Coordination Committee will also oversee implementation of Capacity Development Strategy for the 2030 Agenda. ESCAP will benefit from working with the National Coordination Committees for policy dialogue and knowledge exchange among and beyond LDCs.

## Recommendation 4

ESCAP should strengthen e-platform (hub) for knowledge solutions and knowledge exchange developed under the project by mobilizing additional resources. The hub can only be successful if the LDC Member States actively contribute to and participate in knowledge solutions and knowledge exchange. The regional hub will be meaningful only if it is connected with a similar hub in each LDC Member State. ESCAP may need to source additional resources from other sources. Consideration may be given to institutionalizing National Coordination Committees in each LDC Member State and establishing a dedicated staff to manage the national knowledge hub. The e-knowledge platform developed under the project will be effective only if the LDCs have adequate capacity to establish and maintain knowledge hubs in respective countries. Through the knowledge hubs, countries can contribute and also retrieve knowledge products and benefit from cross-country collaboration. For this to happen, each LDC need to have a dedicated agency such as national planning bodies (supported by similar sectoral knowledge hubs). ESCAP should enter into dialogue with other development partners and potential private sector actors for this to happen. With the rapid uptake of technology across the globe, this is feasible which will cut down costs associated with conferences and meetings aimed at knowledge sharing. The evaluation does not propose to replace events with knowledge hubs, but to complement as much possible and reduce transaction costs involved in communication and knowledge sharing.

## Recommendation 5

With the relatively small size of funding, ESCAP should consider either supplement another similar project(s) with similar features rather than implementing a standalone project or creating a pool of sizable fund to address LDCs' capacity development requirements. ESCAP under CSN/MPFD implemented a larger project (USD2.76million)[28] along the same theme in partnership with ADB, Bangladesh and Cambodia entitled "Capacity-building in support of countries in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly countries with special needs, to accelerate progress towards achieving internationally agreed development goals, including MDGs" which was implemented from January 2013 to December 2015. Both Cambodia and Bangladesh took part in both projects. Evaluation suggests that UNDESA and ESCAP need to revisit DA project approval and implementation modalities that can enhance development effectiveness and lower transaction costs. The DA project took nearly two years for approval leading to less effective outcomes.

## Recommendation 6

While developing a project, ESCAP should prepare fully cost projects and show ESCAP's contribution from its internal sources. A fully costed project proposal helps the effectiveness of project management and in ensuring realistic financial planning and resource deployment for intended

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[28] Project ID 2220-JCE11004

purposes. It also gives confidence in funding agencies and other development partners that the funds are used transparently. In this project, evaluation noted that financial planning was weak largely due to changes in the nature of project activities.

## Recommendation 7

ESCAP should delegate responsibilities to in-country counterpart partners for undertaking major part of in-country project activities to ensure country ownership. Often externally organized programmes or activities tend to lack country ownership unless the national counterparts are given due responsibility and control over resources, subject to fiduciary risk assessment. Since CSN Section implemented the project from Bangkok, LDCs did not own the process, outputs and outcomes in this project, leading to a period of discontinuity in project activities for various reasons, both internal and external to the project.

# Lessons Learned

The evaluation has derived following six key lessons for ESCAP and its staff in considering design, implementation and successful completion of the projects. These lessons are based on evaluation findings.

Project design should be realistic based on national capacity constraint, potential risks, and ESCAP's implementation capacity. All LDCs taking part in the project had the inadequate capacity and limited availability of national consultants in three of the eight countries, which limited the completion of intended country and sector studies. In addition, the project did not identify risks and plan mitigation measures. Since the project was initially due to end in December 2015, ESCAP staff turnover could have been foreseen at the inception stage given that one senior staff was retiring in mid-2015 and another leaving for New York posting. The project encountered a vacuum period in 2015, which exacerbated project implementation delays. In addition, the second expected accomplishment with planned project activities, that is, capacity strengthening of LDCs in designing and implementing specific, time-bound and measurable action-oriented policies and programmes to accelerate the progress towards achieving MDGs proved over ambitious for the given short implementation period, including the six-month extension.

The logical framework needs to be used as an active document, subject to periodic review so that mid-course corrections can be planned and implemented for better development effectiveness. The project rightly took the decision to focus country level workshops aimed at enhancing understanding and awareness of the 2030 Agenda on SDGs. It was timely, right after the expiration of MDGs in December 2015. However, an earlier decision to shift the project's focus on RECI emerged as a result of ASCAP senior management's directive and it formed one of the two bases for seeking a six-month extension to the project. However, a planned activity, RECI study was completed but it was not shared with the project constituents within the project timeframe. Apparently, within CSN Section, staff were not sure if the study had been completed and some felt that the quality of the paper was poor leading the output to be dropped from the list of achievements. The evaluation noted that this decision partly led to a period of uncertainty in project implementation. On the hind side, ESCAP should have allowed the country level activities to continue for the approved project. The project amended the results framework while seeking the extension to the project. The project document

provided costing details of each planned activity and expected accomplishments. However, it was not revised with the change in scope of the project.

Adequate due diligence at the project formulation stage helps to strengthen project design document and it eases implementation process. The project inception workshop decided on the list of country and sector studies, which could have been done at the time of project formulation stage. This would have helped in identifying key consulting inputs for different studies and potentially avoided difficulties in sourcing national consultants much later. In addition, the project document did not identify key risks associated with the project. Non-availability of national consultants in some countries such as Myanmar and Timor-Leste, for example, could have been flagged as a potential risk and mitigation strategy could have been identified *a priori*. Likewise, regular communication between the project team and a core group of national focal points during the life of the project would have helped in accelerating project implementation.

Technological advancement and rapid update of information technology (IT) solutions mean that the traditional approach of knowledge sharing through workshops is becoming less appealing. Knowledge sharing, knowledge management and knowledge dissemination over last five years have changed dramatically. With the rapid uptake of information technology and ease of IT applications, the format for knowledge requires another look. While it was not conceived at the beginning, the project adopted and commissioned a feasibility of e-platform for LDCs. This was a timely response from the project. However, the platform depends on feed it gets from the national knowledge outlets. There is a need to strengthen national knowledge e-platforms in LDCs and linking them through ESCAP's e-platform for LDCs so that relevant stakeholders are able to access, contribute and disseminate knowledge products for mutual benefit.

Adequate staffing and resources need to be planned and provided to implement project activities smoothly. There is a need for reassessing CSN staff workload that is commensurate with the level and intensity of activities planned by CSN Section, including the adaptation of the 2030 Agenda and the Istanbul Programme of Action. Staff reported overworked and stretched out in delivering their commitments, which led to some slack in project activities.

ESCAP needs to foster cross-sectoral collaboration within the organization and lead by an example. In the project context, the project activities were implemented by CSN Section, while other Divisions had very limited involvement. Staff from other Divisions in ESCAP considered their availability for the project based on CSN requests and were not kept informed on the status of the project. While CSN tried to engage staff from other Divisions at some of the events, including most recently in June 2016 from the Statistics Division, more could have been done to ensure collective ownership of the project.

# Appendix 1:  Terms of reference for the evaluation

**Development Account Project**

**"Strengthening capacities in countries with special needs on designing and implementing economic and social development policies to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs"**

**BACKGROUND**

1.      ESCAP is implementing a UN Development Account project entitled "Strengthening capacities in the country with special needs on designing and implementing economic and social development policies to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs," which commenced in November 2013, initially for a little over 2 years until the end of 2015.  The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted on 25 September 2015, aims at ending extreme poverty and hunger, protecting the planet from degradation, among others. In light of this new development, ESCAP has subsequently requested the project to be extended to 30 June 2015 and activities to be adjusted towards a framework for the adaptation of the 2030 Agenda.  The request was approved as per UNDESA's interoffice memorandum dated 8 October 2015.

2.      The project aims: (1) to increase understanding and awareness of policymakers and other stakeholders of the benefits of cross-sectoral policies to accelerate progress towards achieving the "unfinished business" from the MDGs and adaptation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development; and (2) to increase capacity of key national stakeholders in selected Asia-Pacific LDCs to develop, implement and strengthen partnerships and build coalition of support among key stakeholders to accelerate the progress towards the MDGs.  These objectives will be pursued by preparing knowledge products, including analytical reports, case studies and country/sector specific training materials for national policymakers and disseminating them through various channels, including the workshops and the knowledge platform.

**PURPOSE**

3.      The end-of-cycle evaluation of the project will cover the period since its actual inception date in November 2013. This evaluation, which will be undertaken in line with the Development Account Guidelines and UNEG norms and standards, seeks to measure the overall achievement of the project objectives and intended goal, and shall consolidate the main findings, limitations, as well as critical reflections on the project outcomes. It will target to following audiences: the project team, ESCAP, and the Development Account Secretariat.

**OBJECTIVES**

4.      This evaluation is forward-looking, in terms of assessing the project according to four key criteria: **relevance, effectiveness, efficiency** and **sustainability (where relevant, the evaluation may look at additional criteria, such as gender mainstreaming, human rights-based approach, environmental sustainability, and "UN Coherence", cooperation between different United Nations agencies)**. It will consider whether the project was able to fulfil its primary goal "To strengthen

national capacities in Selected Asia-Pacific Least Developed Countries (LDCs), to develop and implement economic and social policies and programmes to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs and the adaptation of SDGs through cross-sectoral approaches."

## SCOPE

5.      This evaluation will serve as a time-bound exercise aiming at assessing systematically and objectively the project design, as well as the processes and mechanisms put in place for its functioning, management, and monitoring. It shall address the relevance of the outcomes of the project, as well as determine the extent of its success in terms of impact and sustainability and its contribution to individual and institutional capacity development.

## ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

6.      The evaluation should address the extent to which the project was successful in reaching its expected accomplishments by reviewing existing information.

**Indicators of Achievement**:   As stated in the project document, the following Indicators of Achievement (IA) will be used in the assessment of the project:

> IA1 Number of participating policymakers from selected LDCs in Asia indicating that the knowledge products contribute to the capacity building for designing and implementing cross-sectoral policy measures to accelerate the progress towards the MDGs;
>
> IA2 Number of inter-ministerial meetings scheduled to discuss cross-sectoral policies and draft cross-sectoral policies tabled.
>
> IA3 Number of participating countries that have developed and implemented cross-sectoral policies and strategies to accelerate progress towards the MDGs;
>
> IA4 Number of participating countries that have strengthened partnerships among key stakeholders to accelerate the progress towards the MDGs and inclusive development through inter-sectoral coordination.

In line with the theory of change approach, the evaluation may also develop and use proxy indicators as an indirect measure of the success of the project to meet its expected accomplishments and objective.

7.      **Evaluation questions**: Based on the inception report, specific evaluation questions for each criterion will be developed by the consultant, in consultation with the reference group. By way of example, the questions contained in the document "ESCAP Evaluation questions by criterion: suggestions and examples" may contribute to the process.

8.      **Data Collection Methods**: This evaluation may use the following data collection methods as a means to assess the work of the project:

   a) **Desk review and secondary data collection analysis**, including the review of official records/documents, technical materials, case studies, meeting reports, monitoring and progress reports, as well as the project document;

   b) **Self-administered surveys** comprised of beneficiaries such as policymakers, local government officials, private sectors, civil society, and technical staff.

c) **Interviews:** Interviews will include top and senior management of ESCAP, project or working level staff involved in the project, and government officials and other stakeholders in the participating countries. Interviews will include both men and women when applicable.

d) **Field visits:** The external evaluator is expected to travel to at least one or two sub-regional/national workshops organized under the project.

All methods used above should take into account the differences and similarities between men and women.

In addition to any already existing and available information, the consultant will undertake new information gathering and assessment.

9. **Analysis:** Based on the information gathering and assessment, the analysis will include a qualitative and quantitative approach which will be reflected in the evaluation report (the use of charts and direct quotations is encouraged). These two approaches should be gender sensitive and include an analysis of differences and/or similarities between men and women towards the project. They will feed into the findings, the conclusions and will be the basis for the recommendations, which will be addressed in separate sections to a) the project team, b) ESCAP, and c) the Development Account Secretariat.

10. **Engagement of stakeholders:** The consultant will work with the evaluation/project manager in Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development Division (MPFD) in selecting beneficiaries, stakeholders, and partners at regional and national levels from all aspects of the project. They include Policy makers in planning, finance and line ministries/local governments in LDCs; UN agencies and international organizations; non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)/Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) involved in service delivery; the private sector; poor and vulnerable population; and ESCAP project staff. The evaluation/project manager is responsible for providing contact details for stakeholders, and for setting up meetings and/or facilitating communication between the consultant and the stakeholders, as required.

## EVALUATION ETHICS

11. The evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNEG 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation'; all the rights and confidentiality of information providers will be safeguarded (see UNEG 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation' under www.unevaluation.org/documentdownload?doc_id =102&file_id=548 )

## GENDER PERSPECTIVE

12. The evaluation will incorporate the gender perspective into the evaluation. It will: 1) use an evaluation approach and data collection and analysis methods that are gender responsive (data disaggregated by sex is required where applicable); 2) use gender sensitive language; and 3) assess the extent to which the project evaluated incorporated a gender perspective into its design and implementation.

**DELIVERABLES & EVALUATION TIMEFRAME**

13.     This evaluation will result in a substantive report (no more than 30 pages excluding annexes) that provides an assessment of the **relevance, effectiveness, efficiency** and **sustainability** of the project, as well as determines actions and recommendations to validate the project activities, and reflect how they can be better strengthened to meet the core needs of member countries and ESCAP priorities in future instances. It will also include a two-page executive summary, and a two-page evaluation brief.

14.     ESCAP reserves full intellectual property rights over the output delivered by the consultant.

15.     The evaluation will require 20 days of consultant work within the period from 1 April 2016 to 15 June 2016, following the below schedule of deliverables:

| | |
|---|---|
| 20 April 2016: | Develop evaluation framework and detailed work plan, after discussing them with the reference group (see annex I for inception report outline). This will be followed by data collection, completion of interviews and thorough analyses. |
| 30 May 2016: | Submission of the <u>draft</u> report to reference group for factual review (see annex II for an outline of evaluation report) and obtain initial feedback. |
| 13 June 2016: | Submission of the final report, incorporating final comments and inputs. |
| 15 June 2016: | Evaluation brief to the reference group. |

**MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS & RESOURCES**

16.     **Evaluation manager:** The evaluation will be directly managed by the project manager in Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development Division (MPFD).

17.     **Reference Group:** The evaluation will be supported and guided by a reference group, which shall comprise the evaluation/project manager (chair of the reference group), a representative of the Evaluation Unit, and other stakeholders, resource persons, and/or experts in the technical topics covered by the evaluation, as appropriate. The role of the reference group is to: provide technical and methodological guidance to the evaluation process; review and approve by consensus the selection of the evaluation consultant and the Terms of Reference (TORs); provide quality control to the draft and final evaluation reports; and help ensure that the evaluation adheres to the relevant policy (ESCAP Evaluation Guidelines, and any applicable UNEG norms, standards, and/or guidelines). Overall, the work of the reference group shall contribute toward transparency and a sense of ownership among stakeholders.

18.     ESCAP human resources needed for the evaluation process includes staff members' time from both MPFD and SPMD (depending on the reference group membership, others as well). The evaluation will be directly managed by the project manager in MPFD, who will act as the focal point of this exercise and who will closely coordinate with the evaluation officers in SPMD, and with the reference group. The Consultant will undertake the said assignment and present the requested evaluation services to ESCAP in compliance with the above Terms of Reference (TOR). The project manager in MPFD will act as a liaison in this assignment between the consultant and the reference group. The reference group will monitor the Consultant's achieved work, and follow-up on the

course of work and deliverables, as well as convene periodical meetings with the Consultant (where applicable) in order to ensure full compliance with the TOR and timely completion of the work. In addition, MPFD will directly furnish the Consultant with the available documentation for the desk review.

19. An amount of US$12,000 is allocated for this evaluation consultancy as formulated at the conceptualization stage of the project.

**Travel costs**: Paid by ESCAP separately.

**Payment:** Payment in 3 installments (one payment after evaluation framework/work plan, followed by payment after submission of the draft report and another after submission of final report).

## CONSULTANT PROFILE

20. The selected consultant should have:

- Previous experience in programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation within the UN context.
- Good technical knowledge of the evaluation components, including evaluation design, data collection, data analysis and reporting.
- Knowledge of the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs, and the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development is desirable.
- Excellent oral and written communication skills and the ability to effectively convey complex information in a clear and concise manner to both governmental and UN audiences.
- A high level of expertise in the analysis, communication and reporting of findings, recommendations, best practices and lessons learned, particularly within a politically sensitive environment.
- English and French are the working languages of the UN Secretariat. Fluency in English is required for this consultancy.
- Knowledge of human rights and gender issues is desirable.

# Appendix 2:  List of People Interviewed

**Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development Division, ESCAP (MPFD)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Mr. Aynul Hasan | Director, MPFD |
| Mr. Sudip Ranjan | Officer-in-Charge, a.i., Country with Special Needs (CSN) |
| BasuAlberto Isgut | SectionOfficer-in-Charge, a.i., Development Policy Section ) |
| | |
| Mr. Maylin Oo | Economic Affairs Officer, CSN Section |
| Mr. Yasuke Tateno | Economic Affairs Officer, CSN Section |
| Ms. Gabriela Spaizmann | Programme Assistant, CSN Section |
| Ms. Nucharat Tuntiwigit | Team Assistant, CSN Section |
| Ms. Woranooch Thiusathien | Staff Assistant, CSN Section |
| Ms. Sukanitt Jarunveshsuti | Finance Assistant, MPFD |
| Mr. Syed Nuruzzaman, | Former Chief of Country with Special Needs (CSN)  Section |

**Strategy and Programme Management Division (SPMD)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Mr Edgar Dante | Chief, Evaluation Unit, SPMD |
| Mr. Devin Bin | Associate Programme Officer, Capacity Development, and Partnership Section, SPMD |
| Ms. Rebecca Quereshi | Associate Programme Evaluation Officer, Evaluation Unit, SPMD |

**Environment and Development Division (EDD)**

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|---|---|
| Ms. Aida N. Karazhanova | Economic Affairs Officer, Energy Security and Water Resources Section, EDD |

**Transport Division (TD)**

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|---|---|
| Mr. Madan Bandhu Regmi | Economic Affairs Officer, Transport and Policy Development Section, TD |

**UNDESA, New York**

Mr. Clovis Freire

**Strategic Publications, Communications and Advocacy Division**

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|---|---|
| Ms. Laura Lopez | Director, Strategic Publications, Communications and Advocacy |
| Mr. Ilpo Survo, | Knowledge Management Officer, OES |

**Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division (IDD)**

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|---|---|
| Ms. Shamika N. Sirimanne | Director, IDD |

**Consultants**

| | |
|---|---|
| Mr. Shiladitya Chatterjee | Lead Consultant, Sector and Country Synthesis Reports |
| Mr. Ugyen Pelgen | Consultant, Bhutan Sector Report |
| Mr. Nou Keosothea | Consultant, Cambodia, Sector Report |
| Mr. Syviengxay Oraboune | Cambodia, Country Report |
| Mr. Saygnasak Sengaloun | Cambodia, Country Report |
| Mr. Rabi Shanker Sainju | Consultant, Nepal Country Report |
| Ms. Binjwala Shrestha | Sector Report, Nepal |

**Workshop Participants at the National Workshop on 2030 Agenda Adaptation of SDGs**

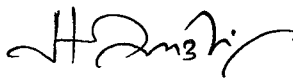| | |
|---|---|
| Several participants | During pre-workshop/lunch/coffee breaks, Vientiane, Lao PDR |

# Appendix 3: List of Documents Reviewed

| S. No. | Document Name |
| --- | --- |
| 1 | Final Project Document approved by UNDESA Secretariat |
| 2 | Project progress reports 2014 and 2015 |
| 3 | Project finance data from CSN Section and SPMD |
| 4 | PowerPoint presentations delivered at the Inception and Regional Advocacy Workshops |
| 5 | Summaries of meeting notes of in-country workshops held in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Nepal |
| 6 | Summaries of workshop evaluation conducted at the end of the events (Inception, Advocacy, the Adaptation of 2030 Agenda) held in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Lao PDR, Nepal and High-Level Side Event held in Antalya, Turkey. |
| 7 | Letter of approval from UNDESA Secretariat for extension of the project duration by six months |
| 8 | List of participants at inception, advocacy, and the 2030 Agenda adaptation workshops |
| 9 | CSN Staff mission reports for Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Nepal |
| 10 | Implications and Benefits of Asia-Pacific Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration Activities for the LDCs (M. Mujer) |
| 11 | Thoughts from the Islamic Capital Market for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific, Discussion Paper First High-Level Follow-up Dialogue on Financing for Development in Asia and the Pacific Incheon, Republic of Korea 30-31 March 2016 (Obiyathulla Ismath Bacha) |
| 12 | South-South Triangular Cooperation in Asia, Discussion Paper First High-Level Follow-up Dialogue on Financing for Development in Asia and the Pacific Incheon, Republic of Korea 30-31 March 2016 (S. Ahmed) |
| 13 | Corporate Bond Market in Asia and the Pacific- Its Role in Financing for Development, Discussion Paper First High-Level Follow-up Dialogue on Financing for Development in Asia and the Pacific Incheon, Republic of Korea 30-31 March 2016 (S. Hwang) |
| 14 | Financial Inclusion in Asia and the Pacific, Discussion Paper First High-Level Follow-up Dialogue on Financing for Development in Asia and the Pacific Incheon, Republic of Korea 30-31 March 2016 (Md. E. Islam) |
| 15 | List of consultants for DA project |
| 16 | Consultant's Terms of Reference for e-Platform feasibility study |
| 17 | Feasibility Study and Functional Requirements Document for the Development of ESCAP Knowledge e-Platform for LDCs in Asia and the Pacific (Harm van der Veen) |
| 18 | E-platform final mock-ups |
| 19 | Project document for Capacity Building in Support of the Countries in the Asia-Pacific Region, Particularly Countries with Special Needs, to Accelerate Progress towards Internationally Agreed Development Goals, including the MDGs (Project. 22200-JCE11004) |
| 20 | Terminal Report - Capacity Building in Support of the Countries in the Asia-Pacific Region, Particularly Countries with Special Needs, to Accelerate Progress towards Internationally Agreed Development Goals, including the MDGs (Project. 22200-JCE11004) |
| 21 | Concept Notes for Regional Advocacy Workshops |
| 22 | Country Studies – Synthesis Report (S. Chatterjee) |
| 23 | Sector Studies – Synthesis Report (S. Chatterjee) |
| 24 | Cambodia – Water Supply and Sanitation (Sector Report) |
| 25 | Bhutan – Access to Education(Sector Report) |
| 26 | Nepal – Access to Health (Sector Report) |
| 27 | Lao PDR – Access to Income-Earning Opportunities - (Sector Report) |
| 28 | Country Report - Nepal |
| 29 | Country Report - Cambodia |
| 30 | Country Report – Lao PDR |
| 31 | Drivers and Draggers of Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific (Srinivasa Madhur) |

# Management Response and follow-up Action Plan

| Title of Evaluation | Strengthening capacities in countries with special needs on designing and implementing economic and social development policies to accelerate towards achieving the MDGs |
|---|---|

|  | Signature | Date |
|---|---|---|
| Ms. Shamshad Akhtar<br>Executive Secretary, ESCAP | X | 30 June 2017 |
| Mr. Adnan Aliani<br>Director, Strategy and Programme Management Division |  | 6 June 2017 |
| Mr. Hamza Malik<br>Officer-in-Charge, MPFD |  | 31 May 2017. |

## General Remarks by Management

Overall, ESCAP agrees with the findings and recommendations of the evaluation. With regard to the sustainability of the project, ESCAP will continue to support national efforts in achieving internationally agreed goals, particularly the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, through technical assistance and South-South Cooperation. This work has recently been enhanced through the renewed partnership programme of ESCAP, ADB and UNDP on SDGs that will, over the next 15 years, produce high-quality knowledge products to support follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. With regard to the relevance of the project, ESCAP appreciates the findings that the project responded and met the needs of member States by identifying effectively the capacity gaps of LDCs in 2011 prior to the development of the project and incorporating them in the project design and implementation.

ESCAP recognizes the various challenges faced by the project during its implementation, including critical changes in implementation strategies. These adjustments were necessary to allow ESCAP to address the emerging needs of target beneficiaries and cope with internal and external factors, such as high staff turnover, natural disasters in the target countries and the transition from MDGs to SDGs.

The evaluation contains valuable recommendations for future work and performance improvement in the context of the 2030 Agenda. These recommendations are generally in line with ongoing efforts and strategies for moving forward and sufficiently addressed in existing programme and partnership documents, including the new ESCAP/ADB/UNDP partnerships on SDGs.

| Title of Evaluation | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Report Recommendation | Management Response | Follow-up Action | Lead Unit | Collaborating Units | Expected Completion Date |
| **1. ESCAP should continue to focus on facilitating policy dialogue among the LDCs at the regional level ensuring the preparation for adaptation (localization) of the SDGs (action plans), implementation of relevant action plans, and tracking progress and reporting the achievement of agreed goals and associated targets.** | We agree with the recommendation to continue facilitating policy dialogue among the LDCs at the regional level, while acknowledging the important roles of regional partners, including the members of the UNDG and UN Country Teams as well as the key stakeholders in LDCs for the adaptation, implementation, and tracking and reporting of achievement of agreed goals and associated targets. | ESCAP will implement this recommendation through the following mechanisms:<br><br>1. ESCAP-ADB-UNDP SDG partnership<br><br>2. Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group on SDG1<br><br>3. Capacity building activities, such as DA 11th trance "Supporting the CSN in Asia Pacific in meeting the challenges of resource mobilization for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"<br><br>**ESCAP will report on activities relevant to this recommendation through the above mechanisms by December 2017.** | MPFD | EDD, RCM-TWGs | December 2017 |
| **2. ESCAP Management should regularly review cross-Division collaboration of CSN/LDCs** | We agree with the recommendation to review complementarity and synergies | MPFD will discuss with other ESCAP substantive divisions and subregional offices how | MPFD | ESCAP substantive Divisions and | December 2017 |

| | | | | SROs | |
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| programme of work on SDGs on a quarterly basis to ensure that cross-sectoral collaboration is meaningful and effective within ESCAP. CSN's work in LDCs depends on what other Divisions do and achieve. | in ESCAP's work on SDGs for CSNs at the regional and subregional levels across divisions, subregional offices, and that it should ensure cross-sectoral collaboration within ESCAP. This is evidenced by the regional workshop on SDGs in June 2016 where staff members from five substantive divisions participated and substantively contributed to the discussion. | to strengthen collaboration of CSN/LDCs programme of work on SDGs across divisions and **agree on collaboration principles and modalities. A note capturing the key issues and agreement will be prepared and submitted to the Evaluation Unit as evidence of completion.** | | | |
| **3. ESCAP management could align its activities at the sub-regional and national levels under the Capacity Development Strategy 2016-2019 to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by LDCs in close consultation with UN Country Teams. There is a need for an active feedback loop between the LDCs and the regional body such as ESCAP, which can be achieved by establishing a National Coordination Committee in each LDC Member State.** | We agree with the recommendation and recognize the importance of capacity development for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by LDCs. This is in line with ESCAP's strategic direction for 2015-2020 and Capacity Development Strategy 2016-2019, which emphasizes the need to increase the effectiveness and impact of our capacity development work by employing a variety of modalities and utilizing technology such as electronic platforms to provide an active feedback loop by the LDCs. In terms of seeking feedback from LDCs, ESCAP convenes annually the Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked | Based on request from member States, and availability of funds, MPFD will support LDCs for setting up a national coordination committee based on request. In past, MPFD/ESCAP supported Samoa and Maldives in their efforts to set up a national focal point that oversaw the graduation process. | MPFD | SPMD | December 2017 |

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| | Developing Countries and Pacific Island Developing Countries as part of its annual Commission session. | | | | |
| 4. ESCAP should strengthen e-platform (hub) for knowledge solutions and knowledge exchange developed under the project by mobilizing additional resources. The hub can only be successful if the LDC Member States actively contribute to and participate in knowledge solutions and knowledge exchange. The regional hub will be meaningful if the subscribing members are connected with a similar hub in each LDC Member State. ESCAP may need to source additional resources from other sources. Consideration may be given to institutionalizing National Coordination committees in each LDC Member State and establishing a dedicated staff to manage the national knowledge hub. | We agree with the recommendation to further promote and strengthen the use of e-platforms (hubs) for knowledge solutions and knowledge exchange. | This recommendation is currently addressed through the development of the following platforms:<br><br>1. Asia-Pacific SDG Partnership site at https://data.unescap.org/sdg<br><br>2. Asia-Pacific Knowledge Platform for Sustainable Development at https://sustdev.unescap.org/<br><br>3. Urban SDG knowledge platform at http://www.urbansdgplatform.org/service/index.do<br><br>As this is a continuing work and is subject to availability of funds, no further actions are required. | | | Completed |
| 5. With the relatively small size of funding, ESCAP should consider either supplementing other similar project(s) with similar features rather than implementing standalone projects or creating a pool of sizable fund to address LDCs' capacity development | We agree with the recommendation that ESCAP project(s) and related activities should complement each other. During the project implementation, other ESCAP projects/activities with similar objectives complemented this | As part of the internal knowledge sharing session, in MPFD organized to share the outcome of the project and the results of the evaluation, a discussion on integrated modalities and approaches for LDCs capacity | MPFD | SPMD | Completed |

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| **requirements.** | project, including the ESCAP-ADB-UNDP project on supporting the achievement of the MDGs in Asia and the Pacific and Capacity development workshop for the Government officials of Lao PDR in preparation for the Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2016 (including the creation of awareness of the agreed development goals). | development requirements, which took place in November 2016.<br><br>The issues related to capacity development on integrated modelling and approaches is available at: Report on the Regional Capacity-building Workshop on Sustainable Development Goals Modelling for the Least Developed Countries in Asia and the Pacific (E/ESCAP/73/2)<br><br>https://www.unescap.org/commission/73/document/E73_2E.pdf | | | |
| **6. While developing a project, ESCAP should prepare fully-costed projects and show ESCAP's contribution from its internal sources. A fully costed project proposal helps the effectiveness of project management and in ensuring realistic financial planning and resource deployment for intended purposes.** | We agree with the recommendation on realistic financial planning and resource deployment for intended purposes. However, as DA does not fund post, it is an established practice in the UN secretariat to deploy regular budget staff resources for project management. Thus, in principle, DA projects are approved with fully-costed staff resources from regular budget to manage them.<br><br>With regard to this project, the deployment of staff was affected | As explained, DA projects are approved with fully-costed staff resources from regular budget. Thus, no further action is required. | | | Not applicable |

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| | by the transition from MDGs to SDGs, requiring critical re-alignment and prioritization of the work of the division, which affected the implementation of the remaining project activities. In addition, there was a significant staff movement and turnover during the project implementation period. | | | | |
| **7. ESCAP should delegate responsibilities to in-country counterpart partners for undertaking major part of in-country project activities to ensure country ownership.** | While we agree with the recommendation, it should be noted that the project focussed on supporting national efforts to achieve the MDGs and implemented in close cooperation with member States, including through the ESCAP intergovernmental bodies, such as the Commission and ACPR, to ensure country ownership. Furthermore, as a regional organization, ESCAP's capacity development activities at the country level focusses on organizing high level policy dialogue, knowledge sharing, advisory services and to some limited extent on seminar and training activities. | This is a current practice and thus no further action is required. | | | Completed |