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Management issues

Evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present document is submitted pursuant to resolution 71/1 of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, in which the Commission decided to review the continued substantive relevance and financial viability of each regional institution. The document contains an overview of the independent evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management conducted by an external evaluation consultant and the conclusions and recommendations for enhancing the results-orientation, relevance, sustainability and efficiency of the Centre. It also contains a description of the actions to be taken by the secretariat to address the evaluation recommendations.

The Commission may wish to endorse the recommendations contained in the present document.

I. Background

1. In its resolution 71/1, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific decided to review the continued substantive relevance and financial viability of each of its regional institutions every five years. In line with that decision, the secretariat commissioned an independent evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management in 2024, four years after the previous evaluation of the Centre in 2020.

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2. The present document contains a summary of the purpose, methodology, key findings and conclusions of the evaluation. It also contains the evaluation recommendations and the secretariat response to each of these recommendations. The full evaluation report prepared by the consultant is available on the Commission's website.[1]

II. Purpose and method

3. The evaluation was aimed at informing the review by the Commission of the continued substantive relevance and financial viability of the Centre and providing recommendations to the secretariat and the Commission on suggested improvements in that regard. As part of the evaluation, the results achieved by and the performance of the Centre were assessed using the standard evaluation criteria. In addition, methods of enhancing the results-orientation of the Centre were determined.

4. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the norms, standards and procedures set out in the monitoring and evaluation policy and guidelines of the Commission[2] to ensure that it would be independent, objective and of high quality. It was conducted from July 2024 to January 2025 by independent evaluation consultant, Ms. Madhavi Malalgoda Ariyabandu.

5. The evaluation included a comprehensive review of relevant documents, as well as consultations and interviews with and an online survey of the Centre's stakeholders. The evaluation consultant conducted online and in-person interviews with over 50 stakeholders, including representatives from the host Government, other members of the Governing Council of the Centre and other member States of the Commission, as well as with the Centre's implementing partners. The evaluation also utilized several analytical tools to assess the performance of the Centre, including the theory of change and an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The evaluation consultant gave a presentation on the key findings and conclusions of the evaluation to the members of the Governing Council of the Centre at its ninth session, held on 22 January 2025.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

6. In its first five years of operation, the Centre has established itself as a relevant and effective entity, with a mandate and the potential to fill in some of the critical gaps that exist in the disaster risk reduction institutional setting, responding to disaster information management needs of member States and key stakeholders. The Centre's interventions have elevated disaster information management as a critically important component of disaster risk reduction and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by promoting risk data governance and policy, transboundary risk management and the effective use of disaster information to inform development planning. This was evident from the requests and demands expressed by member States, intergovernmental organizations and other development partners.

[1] See https://repository.unescap.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12870/7824/ESCPP-2025-RP-Independent-comprehensive-review-establishment-APDIM.pdf.

[2] Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "ESCAP monitoring and evaluation policy and guidelines" (Bangkok, 2023).

7. Having been appointed Co-Chair of the United Nations Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms on behalf of the secretariat of the Commission, the Centre has been placed on the global stage. The role provides the Centre with a significant opportunity for advancing transboundary disaster information management, thereby contributing to the regional cooperation agenda of the Commission. Holding the position during the 2025–2026 biennium is especially significant as it will allow the Centre as the Co-Chair of the Coalition to support the preparation of the plan to implement the United Nations Decade on Combating Sand and Dust Storms (2025–2034), in support of General Assembly resolution 78/314. The role builds on the results obtained by the Centre as a convenor for international cooperation with regard to transboundary hazards, as evidenced by the facilitation of the endorsement by the Commission in May 2022 of the Regional Plan of Action on Sand and Dust Storms in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/78/12/Add.1).[3]

8. The Centre functioned under significant constraints during the period 2020–2024, navigating adversities of a global nature, including the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and other challenges more specific to the Centre such as: (a) operating with a staff that was 50 to 60 per cent smaller than the planned capacity; (b) receiving financial contributions in an unpredictable manner; and (c) experiencing several changes in the institutional focal point in the host country. Consequently, each year, the Centre was compelled to scale down and exclude several priority areas of work from its strategic and annual programmes of work.

9. Such exclusions, while approved yearly by the Governing Council, hampered the full attainment of the endorsed multi-year strategic programme of work for the period 2021–2030. In particular, the exclusion of activities related to floods, earthquakes and capacity-building has raised concerns by member States regarding the Centre's mandate in addressing disaster information needs related to critical hazards affecting multiple member States and subregions. It has also created the impression that the plans have not been fully achieved.

10. The evaluation has revealed a sizable discrepancy between the expectations of member States and the mandate and capacity of the Centre to respond. The needs of member States are diverse and specific. In addition, member States have high expectations for direct support and implementation support. Member States have drawn attention to the fact that strategic guidance and tools alone are not sufficient to make headway in disaster risk reduction. Their expectations regarding direct support may require a dual-prong approach that involves: (a) clarifying the remit of the Centre mandate and the possibilities within it; and (b) utilizing secretariat-wide mechanisms and exploring partnerships with the relevant national entities, such as the United Nations country teams in the region.

11. The evaluation has revealed that the economic sanctions on the host Government led to uncertainty regarding its financial support for the Centre. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has reaffirmed the commitments made in the administrative and financial support arrangement at consecutive Governing Council meetings and has contributed a total of $4.6 million during the period 2021–2024.

12. Financial and in-kind contributions provided by the host Government were the primary sources for sustaining the operation of the Centre during the

[3] ESCAP/78/35, para. 125.

period covered by the evaluation. To fill in the resource gaps for implementing the programme of work, the Centre worked in partnership with relevant external organizations. In-kind contributions generated through strategic partnerships for the period 2021–2025 amount to an estimated $425,230. This management strategy constitutes a significant strength of the Centre, which demonstrates an effective application of its mandate to convene multiple stakeholders.

13. While the Centre achieved success in mobilizing in-kind support in amounts aligned with the assumptions made in the multi-year strategic programme of work for the period 2021–2030 endorsed by the Governing Council, efforts made to mobilize direct financial support to the Centre have remained largely unsuccessful. There is a strong likelihood that external and internal circumstances preventing the Centre from attracting extrabudgetary funding would persist beyond the period of the evaluation. This context needs to be a key consideration in setting expectations for mobilizing resources and planning the next phase of the Centre.

14. It is clear from the evaluation that the commitment expressed by the host Government to continue to provide financial and in-kind support to the Centre is a condition of its future sustainability. A review of the resource mobilization challenges the Centre has faced over the evaluation period indicates that moving forward, the Centre would also need to take into account geopolitical factors in its resource mobilization strategies.

15. Considerable gaps were flagged in the areas of integration and mainstreaming of social inclusion issues in the substantive work of the Centre, as well as in collaborations across the secretariat's organizational units in the planning and implementation of the Centre's work. This observation refers to disaster risk, gender and social inclusion, which are key parameters in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

16. In moving forward to the next period, the Centre is expected to develop products and services that are further aligned with the priority disaster information management needs of member States. Addressing multi-hazard transborder disaster information management and providing guidance for disaster risk data governance at the national level as a medium for integrating disaster risk into development planning processes are niche focus areas for the Centre to pursue in the next period.

Recommendations addressed to the secretariat

Recommendation 1

Review the multi-year strategic programme of work for the period 2021–2030 of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management, including by conducting stakeholder consultations, developing an annual or biannual programme of work with a view to achieving short- and medium-term impacts, focusing on specific services needed in the next period and aligning the Centre's efforts with available resources.

Proposed actions

1. Conduct stakeholder consultations placing member States on centre stage, clarifying the needs and expectations under the three long-term outcome areas of the Centre's multi-year strategic programme of work.

2. Develop realistic annual or biannual programmes of work focused on achieving short- and medium-term impacts with clear progress indicators.

3. Identify outputs under the long-term outcome area on capacity-building, in line with the priority needs of member States.

4. Balance the activities and outputs among the three long-term outcome areas, considering the obligations of the Centre in its role as Co-Chair of the United Nations Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms.

5. Formulate tangible outputs and services to further enhance the Centre's visibility and identity within the Asia-Pacific region.

6. Incorporate emerging advancements in the area of disaster information management into the workplan delivery modalities, including the use of artificial intelligence.

7. Carry out a stringent assessment of financial resources and staffing, closely aligning the programme of work with committed, predictable funding that can support the staffing and expertise required.

8. Identify and map both internal secretariat collaborations and external strategic partnerships, including with relevant national level entities that can effectively support the priority needs of member States and serve as catalysts for enhancing their capacities.

17. The secretariat agrees with recommendation 1. The Centre will review its multi-year strategic programme of work for the period 2021–2030, taking into consideration the above-mentioned proposed actions, and will submit the results of the review to the Governing Council of the Centre for endorsement at its tenth session.

Recommendation 2

Initiate negotiations on the revision of paragraph 2 of the administrative and financial support arrangement with a view to enabling predictable financing for the effective functioning of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management in the next period.

Proposed action

Initiate a dialogue between the focal institutions for the Centre in the host Government and the secretariat of the Commission to address issues raised concerning the institutional collaboration and management aspects of the Centre in the next period.

18. With regard to recommendation 2, the secretariat will initiate a dialogue with the host Government with a view to concluding negotiations on revisions, if needed, to paragraph 2 of the administrative and financial support arrangement before the tenth session of the Governing Council of the Centre.

Recommendation 3

Strengthen strategic collaborations between divisions of the secretariat, other regional institutions and the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management to enhance results-orientation, impact and resource efficiency.

Proposed actions

1. Enhance substantive collaborations with relevant divisions of the secretariat, prioritizing the Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division, the Environment and Development Division and the Social Development Division, moving beyond activity-level collaborations.

2. Include joint programmes, projects and deliverables with relevant divisions of the secretariat, regional institutions, intergovernmental platforms such as the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction, and initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals Help Desk.

3. Enhance the outreach of the Centre's capacity-development initiatives and knowledge products using the implementation mechanisms of the divisions of the secretariat with a view to connecting with mainstreaming instruments such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and the nationally determined contributions in support of reform of the United Nations development system.

4. Address requests for support from member States, United Nations country teams and intergovernmental organizations in collaboration and coordination with relevant divisions of the secretariat and regional institutions.

19. The secretariat agrees with recommendation 3 and will put in place measures, including quarterly meetings, to ensure closer strategic collaborations between divisions of the secretariat, the Centre and the other regional institutions.

Recommendation 4

Review the business model of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management based on the experience learned from the 2021–2024 period and develop a feasible business model for implementing the programme of work in the next period.

Proposed actions

1. Build appropriate alternative approaches into the business model for resource mobilization.

2. Focus on strengthening the proven approaches that supported deliverables and sustenance of the Centre and confirming predictable core funding from the host Government.

3. Develop a partnership strategy centred on institutional collaborations, including substantive collaborations with divisions of the secretariat, and resource requirements of the programme of work.

4. Incorporate joint projects and options for resource-pooling with the relevant divisions of the secretariat and regional institutions into the business model.

5. Adjust the staffing structure and programme delivery approaches based on the history of voluntary contributions received by the Centre, focusing on resource-efficient modalities.

6. Utilize the Junior Professional Officer and United Nations Volunteers programmes as a staff management strategy with a view to gaining the ownership of countries in various subregions.

7. Consider securing the expertise of professionals from member States.

20. The secretariat agrees with recommendation 4 and will ensure that the Centre's business model, as advised in the evaluation, will be reflected in its revised multi-year strategic programme of work.

Recommendation 5

Proactively explore the unique positioning of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management, as a regional institution of the Commission, to overlay the domain of disaster information management with gender and social inclusion by making strategic and operational linkages with the work of the secretariat in this area.

Proposed actions

1. Identify and incorporate gender and social inclusion needs identified in the multi-year strategic programme of work from secretariat-wide perspectives, engaging with the Social Development Division. This is recommended as a step up from approaching gender and social inclusion through knowledge products and deliverables alone, as practiced during the period covered by the evaluation.

2. Connect with and leverage the secretariat-wide commitments and guidance for addressing inclusion issues in programme planning, implementation and monitoring in support of General Assembly and Commission resolutions on gender equality and social inclusion.

3. Incorporate relevant elements from the guidance provided in the gender action plan to support the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 into the Centre's strategic planning and implementation, supported with relevant indicators to measure progress.

21. The secretariat agrees with recommendation 5 and will ensure closer collaboration between the Centre and relevant divisions of the secretariat, aligned with the implementation of recommendation 3 above.

IV. Issues for consideration by the Commission

22. The Commission may wish to endorse the recommendations contained in the present document.