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Management issues

Evaluation of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific

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 Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific conducted by an external evaluation consultant and the conclusions and recommendations for enhancing the results-orientation, relevance, sustainability and efficiency of the Institute. 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.

* ESCAP/81/1.

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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 regional institution every five years. In line with that decision, the secretariat commissioned an independent evaluation of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific in 2024, five years after the previous evaluation of the Institute in 2019.

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 actions to be taken by the secretariat to address each of the 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 Institute 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 Institute 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 the evaluation would be independent, objective and of high quality. It was conducted from July to December 2024 by independent evaluation consultant, Mr. Tim Westbury.

5. The evaluation included a comprehensive review of relevant documents, as well as consultations and interviews with and an online survey of the Institute's stakeholders. The evaluation consultant conducted a mission to the Commission headquarters in Bangkok on 7 and 8 October 2024 and consulted with management and staff of the secretariat and with implementing partners of the Institute that were based in Bangkok. He also visited Chiba, Japan, on 9 and 10 October 2024, and conducted interviews and a focus group discussion with staff of the Institute and senior officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan. Online interviews were conducted with members of the Governing Council of the Institute and with officials from national statistical offices and partner organizations. The evaluation consultant gave a presentation on the outcome of the evaluation to the members of the Governing Council of the Institute at its twentieth session, held in Bangkok on 9 and 10 December 2024.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

6. The evaluation found that the Institute remained a very relevant and effective statistical training institute that was valued by the members and partner organizations that provided input to the evaluation. The training provided by the Institute was highly respected by member States of the

[1] See https://repository.unescap.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12870/7715/ESCAP-2024-RP-Evaluation-of-SIAP.pdf.pdf.

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

Commission, and the Institute was viewed as a trusted and credible partner. Demand for training offered by the Institute was high among member States. Similarly, there was a high demand to work with the Institute as a training partner from a diverse range of implementing partners. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had a profound impact on the work of the Institute over the period 2020–2022. Travel restrictions began in 2020 and continued in 2021, making it necessary to deliver all training programmes through e-learning. In-person training resumed in September 2022.

7. The relevance of the Institute is also supported by its clear mandate and function in responding to the training needs of the national statistical systems of member States of the Commission in the overall context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The areas of focus and competencies of the Institute are sufficiently broad to capture the different training needs of members and associate members of the Commission. However, it also needs to be recognized that the Institute has limited resources and cannot respond to all needs across the Asia-Pacific region. This high demand across a broad and diverse region makes strategic planning and priority setting very important. Both the strategic planning and the needs assessment process of the Institute can be further strengthened in this regard, leveraging the strong governance structure of the Institute, including the Governing Council and the Committee on Statistics.

8. The evaluation revealed several success stories demonstrating the effectiveness of the Institute's capacity-development efforts. Notable examples include the Institute's collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) on gender statistics, which is comprehensive in its approach, encompassing in-person short courses, support for training-of-trainers programmes and e-learning opportunities. Another significant achievement is the development of disaster statistics through a partnership between the Institute, the Disaster Risk Reduction Section of the secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme. This initiative is guided by the Disaster-related Statistics Framework within the broader context of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

9. The evaluation also revealed that the Institute was effective in the delivery of its mandate and institutional mission. A key dimension of that effectiveness is that the Institute's professional staff possess both technical expertise and teaching (pedagogical) experience. The Institute acts as a knowledge broker and is able to draw on partnerships to complement the areas of core competency of staff. The Institute is credited by partners and member States for being responsive and flexible, which requires it to manage what can be a difficult balancing act. It must remain sufficiently agile to respond to emerging needs and requests while also addressing persistent capacity constraints.

10. Based on the findings and conclusions of the evaluation, four recommendations addressed to the secretariat for improving the performance and results-orientation of the Institute were made. The secretariat welcomed the evaluation recommendations and appreciated the full cooperation accorded to the evaluation consultant by the host Government, other member States and the development partners of the Institute by engaging in constructive interviews and discussions and providing relevant information to address the evaluation issues.

Recommendations addressed to the secretariat

Recommendation 1

Strategic planning and priority setting are critically important to the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific and should continue to be strengthened and streamlined.

Proposed actions

1. Consider the adoption of the two-year project document approach used by all other regional institutions of the Commission, developed after the joint meetings of the Governing Council and the Committee on Statistics. An alternative option is the adoption of a midterm review of the strategic plan and the inclusion of the review as a regular item on the agenda of the Governing Council.

2. Align strategic planning with the evaluation cycle so that evaluation findings and recommendations can adequately inform strategic planning.

11. With regard to recommendation 1, the secretariat agrees that strategic planning and priority setting are critically important to the Institute and should continue to be strengthened and streamlined. The Institute has a five-year strategic plan and annual plans, which are discussed and endorsed by the Governing Council. The Institute does not need an additional two-year project document. However, it will adopt a midterm review of the strategic plan and include the review as a regular item on the agenda of the Governing Council.

12. The secretariat also agrees with the proposed action on aligning strategic planning with the evaluation cycle so that evaluation findings and recommendations can adequately inform strategic planning. Using this approach, the five-year strategic plan and the annual plans, including the midterm review, can be evaluated, and the lessons learned can be used in preparing the next strategic plan.

Recommendation 2

The Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific and the Statistics Division of the secretariat should continue to find practical ways to expand and institutionalize collaboration.

Proposed actions

1. Engage in joint planning for the development of the strategic plan and other key planning documents.

2. Hold a management meeting following each Governing Council session to agree to follow-up actions.

13. With regard to recommendation 2, the Institute and the Statistics Division of the secretariat have already been collaborating on planning documents and management meetings. The Institute and the Statistics Division will continue to strengthen their collaboration moving forward.

Recommendation 3

Use existing platforms to help set regional, subregional and national training priorities to bring the collective programming strengths of the United Nations and development partners to national statistical systems.

Proposed actions

1. Continue active involvement in the Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training with a clear view of regional priorities and needs.

2. Continue to place an emphasis on networking and partnership development with training institutes, including academic organizations and other training providers (e.g. the United Nations, the Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre of the International Monetary Fund and the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century) at the regional, subregional and national levels.

3. Consider membership for the Institute in and review the approach to the working group on data and statistics with a view to expanding its support for a coordinated approach to statistical capacity development of national statistical systems and stakeholders of the national data ecosystem, in line with the working group's terms of reference.

14. The Institute has been using existing platforms to help set regional, subregional and national training priorities to bring the collective programming strengths of the United Nations and development partners to national statistical systems.

15. The Institute will continue to be actively involved in the Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training and to place an emphasis on networking and partnership development with training institutes.

16. With regard to action 3, the secretariat, through its Statistics Division, is already represented in the working group on data and statistics. Since the Institute is part of the Commission and works in close collaboration with the Statistics Division, separate membership for the Institute is unnecessary. Furthermore, the working group operates at the institutional level, making the additional membership of the Institute redundant.

Recommendation 4

Continue to foster a comprehensive approach to capacity development by building on good practices and opportunities to increase the Institute's multiplier effect.

Proposed actions

1. Identify opportunities for joint project development with the substantive divisions of the secretariat and with implementing partners to ensure a comprehensive and sustained approach to capacity development.

2. Support the capacity of national statistical training institutes, including for networking and strategic partnerships at the regional and subregional levels to promote South-South cooperation.

3. Continue to refine the approach to targeting specific subregions and countries with special needs using a cluster approach for countries with similar challenges and contexts.

4. Seek clear capacity-development expectations and ongoing support from the Strategy and Programme Management Division of the secretariat, in particular in the context of United Nations development system reforms.

17. With regard to recommendation 4, the secretariat agrees that a comprehensive approach to capacity development is important to increase the Institute's multiplier effect.

18. The Institute will continue: (a) to identify opportunities for joint project development with substantive divisions of the secretariat and with implementing partners; (b) to support the capacity of national statistical training institutes; (c) to refine the approach to targeting specific subregions and countries with special needs; and (d) to seek clear capacity-development expectations and ongoing support from the Strategy and Programme Management Division of the secretariat.

IV. Issues for consideration by the Commission

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