

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific****Seventy-second session**

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**Management issues: report on the evaluation activities  
of the Commission during the biennium 2014-2015****Report on the evaluation activities of the Commission  
during the biennium 2014-2015****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The present report contains a summary of the main findings and recommendations of key evaluations conducted during the biennium 2014-2015 and the steps taken by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific to address those evaluation recommendations. It also includes details of the secretariat's efforts to strengthen the evaluation function, including through capacity-building, quality assurance and networking.

The Commission may wish to use the information contained in the report to guide the direction and focus of its future work.

**I. Introduction**

1. Through evaluation, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) seeks to generate evidence-based information about the results of its work to strengthen its accountability to the member States and to foster institutional learning for improving the quality of its delivery. In Commission resolution 66/15 on the strengthening of the evaluation function of the secretariat, it underscored the importance of reinforcing the evaluation function at ESCAP and requested the Executive Secretary to ensure that the secretariat's programmatic work, including the work of the divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions, be evaluated periodically. The General Assembly, in its resolution 67/226 of 21 December 2012 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, emphasized the importance for organizations of the United Nations development system of having independent, credible and useful evaluation functions, with sufficient resources, and promoting a culture of evaluation that ensures the active use of evaluation findings and recommendations in policy development and improving the functioning of the organization.

\* E/ESCAP/72/L.1.

2. The present report contains a summary of the main findings and recommendations of key evaluations conducted in 2014 and 2015, including the steps taken by the secretariat to address those evaluation recommendations. It also includes details of the secretariat's efforts to strengthen the evaluation function, including through capacity-building, quality assurance and networking.

3. During the biennium 2014-2015, and in line with the ESCAP evaluation plan, the secretariat commissioned two evaluations and seven evaluative reviews<sup>1</sup> (see the annex for more details). The ESCAP evaluation plan is prepared each biennium, in conjunction with the ESCAP biennial programme budget. Additionally, the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations completed an external programme evaluation of ESCAP in 2014.

## **II. Key findings and recommendations from evaluations and evaluative reviews of the Commission's work and related actions taken by the secretariat**

### **A. External evaluation conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services**

4. Three regional commissions, namely ESCAP, the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, were on the Office of Internal Oversight Services evaluation workplan for the period 2013-2014. The Office's programme evaluation of ESCAP, completed in July 2014, focused on the research, publications and analytical work of ESCAP and the roles and responsibilities of divisions and subregional offices. The evaluation found that a large majority of ESCAP member State interviewees confirmed that its research and analytical work had promoted useful intergovernmental dialogue and consensus-building. Specifically, the Commission's research and analytical outputs were used (a) as guidance documents for development-related activities; (b) as a means to access regional and subregional knowledge networks; and (c) to assist with national policy work. The evaluation noted that ESCAP research and analysis work had promoted regional cooperation and norm-setting related to transportation connectivity, social development and environmental issues. The evaluation also found that, within the secretariat, the lack of a strong corporate framework to support joint planning had led to inefficiencies in the implementation of research and analysis and other work. Furthermore, coordination was sometimes not sufficient to achieve the Commission's strategic goal to promote a multidisciplinary perspective and target its limited resources toward activities where regional cooperation was most critical. Also, monitoring and evaluation data on the utilization of ESCAP research and analysis, and other outputs, was not adequate to assess programme effectiveness. Despite this, the evaluation noted that the data collected by the Office indicated user satisfaction with ESCAP publications; the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific*, the *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific* and the *Asia-Pacific Regional MDGs Report* series were rated useful by the highest proportion of stakeholders and considered to be very authoritative in addressing economic and social development issues in the region. The Office's report recommended that ESCAP take action on the recommendations of the ESCAP Research and Publications Committee;

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<sup>1</sup> Evaluative processes at ESCAP are categorized into evaluations and evaluative reviews, according to their management arrangements. For further details, see the *ESCAP Evaluation Guidelines*, available at [www.unescap.org/partners/monitoring-and-evaluation/evaluation](http://www.unescap.org/partners/monitoring-and-evaluation/evaluation).

strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of ESCAP research and analysis work; include more evaluations that extend beyond a single project focus; develop and implement an ESCAP-wide outreach and common branding strategy for its outputs; and implement a framework that addresses the clarification of roles, responsibilities and authorities that relate to subregional offices. In response to the evaluation, the Executive Secretary established an ESCAP-wide Editorial Board to guide the Commission's research and publications and to align the Commission's publications programme with its programme of work. The Executive Secretary approved an evaluation plan for 2016-2017 which includes two subprogramme and thematic evaluations per year, in addition to project-level evaluations. ESCAP also formulated the ESCAP Institutional Results Framework to improve monitoring and evaluation of all its activities, including its research and analysis work. Since January 2015, ESCAP has also developed year-long strategic communications plan focused on results and core substantive areas. In addition, in September 2014, the Executive Secretary issued a new guidance note on relations between substantive divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions that clarifies their respective roles, responsibilities and authority.

## **B. Evaluations commissioned by the secretariat**

5. At the thematic and subprogramme level, the secretariat commissioned two evaluations. The evaluations were of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management and of non-reimbursable loan services at ESCAP. Their objectives were to assess the relevance and effectiveness of, on the one hand, the establishment of the Centre, and on the other hand, the non-reimbursable loan modality against its stated purpose.

6. As mandated by Commission resolution 67/4, the evaluation on the establishment of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management was finalized in 2015. Its purpose was to assess the need for, and benefit of, establishing the Centre as a subsidiary body of the Commission for the development of disaster information management. The key findings showed the need for establishing a regional centre to support vulnerable member States to bridge their disaster information management gaps. The evaluation presented several conclusions: concerns over duplication with other regional organizations could be allayed as the Centre can deliver unique services and products; the financial viability of the Centre was contingent on voluntary contributions from ESCAP member States, which in the first phase consisted solely of contributions from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran; and the process of establishing a regional institution in accordance with the rules and regulations of the United Nations could be a lengthy process and the Centre would benefit from a dedicated management team for that process. In the light of these conclusions, the evaluation recommended, *inter alia*, that the Commission consider establishing the Centre as a regional institution operating under the auspices of ESCAP and that a dedicated management team for the Centre be established. The Commission considered the results of the evaluation at its seventy-first session, and, in its resolution 71/11 on the establishment of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management, *inter alia*, endorsed all evaluation recommendations; decided to establish the Centre as a regional institution of the Commission; and requested the Executive Secretary to take all necessary measures to ensure that the Centre is established promptly, to report on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution to the Commission at its seventy-second session, to assess the performance of the Centre and to determine continuation of operations of the Centre as a regional institution of the Commission

thereafter. In the process of implementing that resolution, the secretariat held several consultations with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, including by means of an ESCAP mission to Tehran in November 2015, to agree on a detailed road map for the implementation in the region, which includes the establishment of an interim management team for the Centre, to be funded through extrabudgetary contributions from the host government.

7. The evaluation of the non-reimbursable loan services at ESCAP was finalized in 2014. Non-reimbursable loan services are one way United Nations gratis personnel are provided, by governments or organizations. Within ESCAP, the purpose of engaging non-reimbursable loan expert services is to assist with technical cooperation programmes. Two of the key findings of the evaluation were that the use of the non-reimbursable loan modality was steadily narrowing and reducing and that, among the member States, there was mixed awareness of and interest in the modality. The evaluation identified, inter alia, two potential strategic development opportunities of the modality, for ESCAP (a) to take the lead in communicating to a wider group of member States and stakeholders why, where and how seconded skills would assist in achieving priorities and (b) to implement a strategically focused effort to explore a wider pool of potential non-reimbursable loan partners. The evaluation recommendations were, inter alia, that ESCAP should actively and transparently promote the modality and that the process through which non-reimbursable loans of personnel are identified, selected and appointed should be strengthened. As a result, ESCAP is in the process of issuing new internal procedures for the engagement of non-reimbursable loan services, which are as follows: (a) the secretariat will conduct an ESCAP-wide assessment of demands for non-reimbursable loan services for each biennium, based on its strategic priorities, programme of work and capacity-development strategies and the specific needs of divisions/offices to implement capacity-development projects and (b) ESCAP will create a list of priority non-reimbursable loan positions for the biennium, the terms of reference for which will be circulated to all ESCAP member States and other relevant stakeholders through official communication channels and the ESCAP website, with a request for nominations. ESCAP will review applications for non-reimbursable loan services and select the candidate that is best suited to the position.

8. During the biennium 2014-2015, ESCAP led evaluative reviews of six projects funded through the United Nations Development Account and one project funded through extrabudgetary contributions (see the annex for more details). The Development Account is a capacity-development programme of the United Nations Secretariat which is aimed at enhancing the capacities of developing countries in priority areas. The projects concerned were implemented by the relevant ESCAP division or office, working in close collaboration with a range of partners, including, inter alia, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations and other regional commissions. These reviews made systematic assessments of the key results and outcomes of the projects and derived lessons learned in order to formulate recommendations for follow-up projects and actions to improve future project implementation. A few common observations and recommendations have emerged from these reviews:

(a) For the success and sustainability of joint project interventions, strong partnerships, streamlined management and accountability arrangements, and clarity on the various roles of the partnering organizations are essential;

(b) Regarding the planning of projects, ESCAP should strengthen its sustainability designs and enhance its mechanisms to mainstream gender to ensure gender issues are appropriately addressed in future project design and implementation;

(c) ESCAP should place more focus on using modern and open online communication and advocacy tools to strengthen effectiveness and outreach and explore ways of being more responsive to changing circumstances in project management, by introducing more flexibility in implementation;

(d) ESCAP should ensure the linkage between capacity-building and the implementation of intergovernmental resolutions agreed by ESCAP members is very clear and that policy interventions under capacity-development projects are well informed and strategic;

(e) ESCAP should leverage its comparative advantages, particularly its convening power, when designing meeting approaches, which should use processes to increase the effectiveness of the results.

9. As part of the efforts to address these recommendations, the secretariat issued the ESCAP Capacity Development Strategy 2016-2019 in December 2015, which provides the basis for aligning the capacity-development work of ESCAP with its new strategic direction for increased effectiveness and impact. The secretariat also strengthened results-based management in programme and project formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation by conducting a series of results-based management training programmes and participatory strategic programme planning sessions for secretariat staff.

10. An evaluative review of the project entitled “Network for knowledge transfer on sustainable agricultural technologies and improved market linkages in South and South-East Asia (SATNET Asia)”, funded by the European Commission, was conducted between December 2014 and April 2015. The project, implemented by the Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Development, aimed to develop a regional network of relevant actors to facilitate regional trade and to share knowledge about suitable technology for sustainable agriculture. The evaluative review focused on assessing the project activities and results in terms of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, partnerships, aid effectiveness, gender mainstreaming and environmental sustainability. The evaluative review concluded that SATNET Asia had achieved its expected results to a large extent; the project provided value for money, was relevant to regional and national priorities and efficiently dealt with implementation issues; it had effectively developed good partnerships and engaged and consulted with its stakeholders; the participation of women in its capacity-building events was lower than expected; and the SATNET Asia experience was instrumental in setting up the Asia Pacific Agricultural Extension and Outreach Network, which was launched in December 2014. The key recommendations were that SATNET Asia should be supported for a further period of three years to build upon the momentum generated; the information about best practices and training manuals should be made more accessible to a broader audience; efforts should be made to expand the network geographically and increase the number of information recipients; SATNET Asia’s future activities should focus on a broad validation of the identified best practices and additional technologies; and sustained efforts should be made to specifically address gender issues. In response, ESCAP has already made information about best practices and training manuals more accessible to stakeholders via the SATNET Asia website and has developed an online discussion platform called the SATNET

Social Hub to allow registered users to exchange information and documents. The other recommendations will be addressed in due course.

### **III. Strengthening evaluation at the Commission**

11. On the basis of Commission resolution 66/15, the secretariat continues to strengthen the evaluation function at ESCAP. In 2012, a dedicated Evaluation Unit was established under the Strategy and Programme Management Division. The Unit ensures that ESCAP evaluations are managed in an effective and timely manner, are conducted in accordance with the *ESCAP Evaluation Guidelines* and the standards and principles developed by the United Nations Evaluation Group, and are used in an effective manner for accountability and organizational learning. The Unit is also responsible for improving the capacity of ESCAP staff to plan, manage and implement evaluations.

12. Continuously improving the quality of evaluations is one of the overarching aims of the evaluation function at ESCAP. In January 2015, the Executive Secretary issued revised procedures for planning and conducting evaluations. Accordingly, each evaluation conducted at ESCAP is guided by a reference group, which performs a quasi-oversight function for the evaluative process, to ensure transparency and quality and generate a sense of ownership. The ESCAP Evaluation Unit participates in each reference group, while also offering quality assurance and technical support to colleagues who commission and manage evaluations at the working level. In furtherance of the secretariat's ongoing pursuit of good practice in mainstreaming gender into the programme and project management cycle, the United Nations Evaluation Group's guidance documents on the integration of gender equality into evaluations are being promoted among staff members for use in carrying out evaluative activities. For each evaluative exercise, ESCAP prepares a management response and follow-up action plan, which is signed by the Executive Secretary. ESCAP uses biannual reporting on follow-up actions to evaluation recommendations to track and use evaluation results and to strengthen accountability for achieving development results.

13. To continue to build evaluation awareness and capacity among ESCAP staff, evaluation matters are routinely part of internal briefings on programme matters. ESCAP co-organized the annual regional workshop on evaluation in the United Nations context, which was conducted by the United Nations Evaluation Development Group for Asia and the Pacific, within which ESCAP is a very active participant.

14. The ESCAP evaluation function benefits from a broad network of evaluation professionals located globally and in the region. The Evaluation Unit co-chaired the United Nations Evaluation Development Group for Asia and the Pacific in 2014. It is a member of the United Nations Evaluation Group and is part of the Development Account Evaluation Task Force. ESCAP facilitated the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation network, which links up the focal points for monitoring and evaluation from the five regional commissions. The aim of this network is to share resources on and experiences in monitoring, evaluation, and incorporating monitoring and evaluation norms and standards developed by the Department of Management of the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Evaluation Group and the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

15. ESCAP hosted the annual meeting of the United Nations Evaluation Group, which was held in Bangkok from 31 March to 4 April 2014. It was the first time that this meeting and associated evaluation workshops were

held in the Asia-Pacific region. It was a rare opportunity for ESCAP to enhance its visibility among the global United Nations evaluation community and to promote an evaluation culture among ESCAP staff. The overall theme of the meeting was “Strengthening the quality and use of evaluations at the national and regional levels and ensuring accountability to the people we serve”. The first two days of the meeting were dedicated to an evaluation practice exchange. One of the events was a high-level panel on evaluation and the post-2015 development agenda, with the objective of sharing and deepening the understanding of the importance of evaluation in guiding decision-making and ensuring accountability for senior officials from Governments and their development partners, including the United Nations, in the context of the post-2015 development agenda. Mr. Kazi Intiaz Hossain, at the time Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Bangladesh to Thailand and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to ESCAP, was one of the panellists. Members of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission were invited to attend. The Annual General Meeting of the United Nations Evaluation Group was held during the three remaining days.

#### **IV. Coordination mechanisms with regional and subregional organizations**

16. In resolution 67/14, the Commission requested the secretariat to provide a summary of the manner in which it carries out its mandate and coordinates its work with regional and subregional organizations operating in Asia and the Pacific; to describe the functioning decision-making and results of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism, including how the secretariat leverages synergies and other efficiencies that could serve as a model for coordination; and to present the results to the Commission as part of the biennial reporting on the secretariat’s evaluation activities. The summary for the biennium 2014-2015 is contained in the notes by the secretariat on the overview of partnerships and extrabudgetary contributions<sup>2</sup> and on the overview of partnerships, extrabudgetary contributions and capacity development.<sup>3</sup>

#### **V. Conclusion**

17. As outlined in the present report, evaluations and evaluative reviews undertaken during the biennium 2014-2015 continued to provide evidence-based information on the performance and relevance of ESCAP operations at the programme, subprogramme and project levels. The information facilitated performance enhancement and guided structural changes at ESCAP, particularly regarding its research and analytical work, and the establishment of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management. Key follow-up actions to evaluation recommendations are being implemented with a view to strengthening results-based orientation and reporting, increasing collaboration and cooperation internally among substantive units of ESCAP and externally with other regional and subregional organizations, and mainstreaming socioeconomic issues, such as gender, into its work programme. For each evaluation conducted by ESCAP, the Executive Secretary signs a document containing an evaluation management response and follow-up actions. The secretariat has also put in place an internal system for tracking the progress of those actions. Both of

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<sup>2</sup> E/ESCAP/71/32.

<sup>3</sup> E/ESCAP/72/28.

those practices reinforce the accountability of ESCAP management in implementing follow-up actions.

18. The Commission may wish to decide that progress on the implementation of resolution 67/14 is henceforth reported annually in the document entitled “Overview of partnerships, extrabudgetary contributions and capacity development”.

## Annex

### Evaluations and evaluative reviews implemented during the biennium 2014-2015

<i>Title</i>	<i>Category of evaluation<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Year completed</i>
Office of Internal Oversight Services programme evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)	External evaluation	2014
Evaluation pursuant to resolution 67/4, establishment of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management	Evaluation	2015
Non-reimbursable loan services at ESCAP	Evaluation	2014
Development Account project: strengthening capacity in mitigating the impact of the financial crisis and sustaining dynamic and inclusive development in Asia and the Pacific	Evaluative review	2014
Development Account project: strengthening social protection	Evaluative review	2014
Development Account project: strengthening South-South cooperation to increase the affordability of sustainable energy options in Asia and the Pacific	Evaluative review	2014
Development Account project: improving disaster risk preparedness in the ESCAP region	Evaluative review	2014
Development Account project: developing a regional financial and monetary architecture in the Asia-Pacific region in support of global financial reforms	Evaluative review	2015
Development Account project: capacity-building for control authorities and transport operators to improve efficiency of cross-border transport in landlocked and transit developing countries	Evaluative review	2015
Network for knowledge transfer on sustainable agricultural technologies and improved market linkages in South and South-East Asia (SATNET Asia) Project	Evaluative review	2015

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