



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

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Management issues: report on the evaluation activities of the Commission during the biennium 2018–2019 and outcomes of the evaluation/review of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization and the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management**Report on the evaluation activities of the Commission during the biennium 2018–2019****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The purpose of the biennial reporting on the evaluation activities of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific is to strengthen accountability to member States and facilitate organizational improvement by providing evidence-based information on the performance and result of the Commission's work. The present report includes a summary of the main findings and recommendations contained in evaluations conducted during the biennium 2018–2019 and the steps taken by the secretariat to address those recommendations. It also contains an outline of the efforts made by the secretariat to further strengthen the evaluation function.

The Commission may wish to review the report and recommend actions to further enhance the performance and results of the Commission's work and to strengthen its evaluation function.

I. Introduction

1. Evaluation at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) complies with the rules and regulations of the United Nations, which mandate that all programmes should be evaluated on a regular, periodic basis. It also responds to Commission resolution 66/15, in which the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to ensure periodic evaluation of the secretariat's programmatic work, including the work of divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions. Moreover, member States also mandate the secretariat through resolutions to conduct evaluations of specific

* ESCAP/76/L.1/Rev.1.

themes or areas of work in support of the Commission's decision-making processes. Based on these evaluative activities, the present biennial report has been prepared to provide the Commission with evidence-based information on the performance and results of its work.

2. During the biennium 2018–2019, six subprogrammes and thematic evaluations and six project evaluations of the Commission's work were undertaken (see annex for more details). The secretariat engaged external evaluators to conduct an independent assessment of the results and performance of the projects. ESCAP evaluation reports are accessible through its website. The above evaluations were conducted in accordance with an ESCAP evaluation plan.¹

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

A. Subprogramme/thematic evaluations

3. In 2018, the secretariat commissioned an evaluation of the subprogramme on social development aimed at supporting efforts to improve the overall effectiveness of the subprogramme and generate information on its achievements and results. The evaluation found that the subprogramme was effective in creating a neutral space to discuss social development issues in the region, as it resulted in the establishment of a regional consensus and joint positions on various thematic areas. In the area of disability, the evaluation recognized that the subprogramme's support contributed to 43 States parties ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and multiple countries revising their laws to be more inclusive of persons with disabilities. The evaluation confirmed that the subprogramme's capacity-building activities were relevant since they were provided within the framework of an international convention or regional agreement, although in general they were too short and limited in inputs to foster country ownership and sustainability. Furthermore, the evaluation found that the subprogramme had been very effective in mainstreaming gender equality concerns throughout all the thematic areas and was consistently raising gender equality aspects at intergovernmental and regional expert group meetings and in its knowledge products. The evaluation recommended that the subprogramme move towards a programme of work with fewer and more focused thematic areas, improve dissemination of its knowledge products, work more closely with the United Nations country teams and subregional offices and systematically collect data on its results. The secretariat accepted these recommendations and made appropriate adjustments to the work programme of the subprogramme for 2020 in line with these recommendations.

4. In resolution 71/1, member States 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 Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology in 2018 and of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific in 2019. Two other ESCAP regional institutions, namely, the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization and the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management, were also evaluated in 2019 and their reports were expected to be completed during the first quarter of 2020, thus the results of these evaluations are not covered in the present report.

¹ www.unescap.org/partners/monitoring-and-evaluation/evaluation/reports.

5. The evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology found that the relevance of the Centre was ensured by giving priority to activities specifically requested by several countries at the sessions of its Governing Council. The evaluation confirmed that the Centre helped to enhance technology transfer capacities of over 3,000 stakeholders through demand-driven training programmes. Its capacity-building activities had benefited Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand. It noted that the Centre had delivered its capacity-building activities efficiently through partnerships to enhance existing services and reduce costs. However, under the current financial and human resource limitations, the evaluation pointed out that the effective operations of the Centre could not be sustained in the future. The evaluation offered action-oriented recommendations to enhance the financial and human resources of the Centre through: (a) renegotiating the host country agreement; (b) pursuing the implementation of previous Governing Council decisions on funding arrangements for the Centre; and (c) developing multi-stakeholder partnerships, including with the private and non-government sectors. At the seventy-fifth session of the Commission in May 2019 in which the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology evaluation results were deliberated, the representatives of the host Government announced that their Government would double its annual voluntary contributions to strengthen the Centre.

6. The evaluation of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific found that the Institute had adapted to the changing context in terms of changes in the international development agenda and its data requirements; managed to tap into the expertise from a variety of partner organizations through joint statistical training activities and moved towards a more systemic approach to statistical capacity development through partnerships with national statistical training institutes. In terms of geographical coverage, the evaluation found that a relatively large number of participants in the Institute's training sessions came from South-East Asia. The Institute was found to be less successful in adapting training to fit the requirements of Central Asian and Pacific countries. Furthermore, the evaluation found that the training provided by the Institute was not sufficient in terms of capacity development for Sustainable Development Goal monitoring at the country level.

7. The evaluation concluded that the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific's role as a regional level training provider had served the region relatively well over the previous decades, when statistical capacities were overall comparatively low. In the current context, the evaluation found that that approach had become increasingly less appropriate, as capacities had increased and national-level training institutes had been established in some of the subregions. In that regard, the evaluation advocated an approach that would shift the focus of the Institute towards playing multiple roles in statistical capacity development in the region. The evaluation proposed six recommendations for improving the results and performance of the Institute: (a) working on a variety of approaches to bring statistical capacity development to focus more on the organizational level; (b) further developing the approach to e-learning; (c) staying informed of the developments relating to the Sustainable Development Goal indicators for tiers II and III and providing related practical training for countries in the region; (d) deciding on the human resources set-up of the Institute for the following strategic plan period; (e) enhancing results-based management in the implementation of its strategic plan; and (f) developing a resource mobilization strategy.

8. In line with resolution 71/12, the secretariat made significant efforts to deepen its cooperation with regional mechanisms, such as the ESCAP/World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Typhoon Committee and the WMO/ESCAP Panel on Tropical Cyclones. In that context, ESCAP and WMO commissioned a joint independent evaluation to assess the effectiveness of their partnership for strengthening regional platforms on tropical cyclones. Completed in April 2019, the evaluation found that ESCAP-WMO cooperation had been limited to attendance at annual meetings, with limited joint project planning, implementation and monitoring. There had also been no reporting on achievements and joint outputs. The evaluation noted that a continuing challenge for both ESCAP and WMO had been how to enhance financial support for large and joint projects in support of the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. The evaluation viewed the work of the Typhoon Committee and the Panel on Tropical Cyclones as relevant to the needs and priorities of their member countries and deserving of the support and cooperation of ESCAP and WMO. The evaluation recommended that ESCAP and WMO should: (a) strengthen their partnership in terms of coverage and geographic areas to include Pacific countries; (b) support and assist the Panel on Tropical Cyclones, including by strengthening the Panel on Tropical Cyclones secretariat; and (c) develop and implement joint and multi-year projects in support of the Typhoon Committee and the Panel on Tropical Cyclones.

B. Capacity development project evaluations

9. The secretariat commissioned nine project evaluations during 2018–2019. Out of the nine projects, six were funded from the United Nations secretariat regular budget under the United Nations Development Account and three were funded from extrabudgetary sources. Key recommendations and lessons drawn from those evaluations are:

(a) **Emphasizing communication and dissemination of knowledge products and other outputs to strengthen effectiveness and impact.** Evaluations found that ESCAP projects were effective in generating new knowledge products and creating innovative platforms for information-sharing and providing technical advice. Stakeholders, in particular policymakers and technical experts, considered those products and platforms relevant and useful. However, ESCAP projects should focus more on communicating and disseminating those outputs to the intended users, such as policymakers, senior government officials and technical experts, to increase their outreach and maximize impact. Evaluation recommendations highlighted the need for the secretariat to monitor access to and use of knowledge platforms developed through its technical cooperation projects, by target users. The secretariat should also integrate appropriate communication and dissemination activities at the design phase and allocate the required budget in its technical cooperation projects;

(b) **Maximizing synergies through partnerships.** Inter-agency collaboration for project implementation faced challenges, especially in administrative processes, but could be successful when appropriate modalities and suitable partners with relevant expertise were identified and brought together. Evaluation recommendations highlighted the need for the secretariat to develop, continue and strengthen its multi-stakeholder partnerships to facilitate the participation of subregional and national organizations, private sector and civil society organizations in the implementation of activities. At the country level, evaluations found that most of secretariat's successful projects had involved highly productive partnerships. Evaluations recommended that the secretariat should work closely with United Nations resident agencies to enhance country-level engagement and promote the sustainability of projects;

(c) **Better targeting of countries and customizing delivery to specific needs.** In some evaluations, it was suggested to reduce the number of target countries of a project to allow for better customization of project deliverables to suit the specific needs of member States. This would allow the secretariat to identify and focus on its key areas of internal expertise and comparative advantage to produce relevant and high-quality deliverables in those areas. Prioritization and optimization of resources would also be better achieved with a limited number of target countries;

(d) **Designing projects that match available human resources and expertise within the secretariat.** Project evaluations identified that the human resources allocated to ESCAP projects were too limited to deliver many outputs. Even with additional human resources, the ability of the secretariat to provide focused assistance would be limited by the expertise of project staff. Additionally, continuity of expertise would need to be considered to allow for changes and movements of staff, so that it would not impact the overall ability of the secretariat to sustain its services to member States;

(e) **Ensuring sustainability beyond the project.** Evaluations found that many ESCAP projects generated outputs that continued well beyond the project duration. For example, the El Niño assessment tools and methodologies developed under a Development Account project were used well beyond the project completion by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries as part of their high-impact risk assessment carried out under the recently adopted Association of Southeast Asian Nations-United Nations Joint Strategic Plan of Action on Disaster Management. Evaluations identified that strategic linkages with established mechanisms at the regional and national levels were a critical factor in ensuring the sustainability of outputs beyond the project duration;

(f) **Incorporating gender and human rights dimensions.** Human rights and gender approaches needed to be considered throughout the whole project cycle, from project design to implementation and evaluation to ensure the needs of women and other disadvantage groups were not overlooked. While projects sometimes had such cross-cutting issues addressed at the project design stage, their implementation was relatively weak. Project evaluations recommended that the secretariat should further strengthen efforts to mainstream gender and human rights dimensions in project design and implementation.

III. Strengthening evaluation at the Commission

10. All evaluations are intended to be used to improve performance and promote accountability to member States and other stakeholders. The secretariat commits to address the findings and recommendations of each evaluation through a management response and follow-up action plan. This ensures that appropriate actions are undertaken to address relevant evaluation recommendations. Effective monitoring of implementation of follow-up actions to evaluation recommendations is an important element of the Commission's evaluation function. For this purpose, the secretariat launched in 2019 an online dashboard providing the status of implementation of follow-up at any given time. Some examples of follow-up actions undertaken by the secretariat are outlined in section II of the present report.

11. To continue to build evaluation awareness and capacity among ESCAP staff, the secretariat conducts internal training on monitoring and evaluation, including results-based management and theory of change. In December 2018, the secretariat organized a series of training sessions involving the majority of staff at the Professional level on results-based management and theory of change to enhance the quality and effectiveness of ESCAP capacity development

projects. This was followed by targeted training on monitoring and evaluation for regional institutions, including the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development and the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, held in 2019 and early 2020. In addition to these internal training activities, the secretariat also co-organized the annual regional workshop on evaluation in the United Nations context conducted by the United Nations Evaluation Development Group for Asia and the Pacific. The regional workshop effectively built the capacities of United Nations staff in designing and managing evaluations and enhanced the quality and effectiveness of evaluations in the United Nations system, including at ESCAP.

12. The ESCAP evaluation function benefits from a broad network of evaluation professionals located in the region and worldwide. The Evaluation Unit of ESCAP represents the secretariat in the United Nations Evaluation Group, which holds annual knowledge-sharing workshops, organizes task forces to undertake specific evaluation projects and conducts coordination meetings.

IV. Coordination mechanisms with regional and subregional organizations

13. Commission resolution 67/14 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; describe the functioning decision-making and results of the regional coordination mechanism, including how the secretariat leverages synergies and other efficiencies that could serve as a model for coordination, and present the results to the Commission as part of the biennial reporting on the secretariat's evaluation activities. Such a summary for the biennium 2018–2019 is contained in document ESCAP/76/27.

V. Issues for consideration by the Commission

14. As outlined in the present report, evaluations undertaken during the biennium 2018–2019 continued to provide evidence-based information on the results and performance of the Commission's work to strengthen accountability to its member States. The information also facilitated performance enhancement and guided structural changes at ESCAP. Key follow-up actions to address evaluation recommendations were undertaken with a view to strengthening the results orientation of the Commission's capacity development work, including at the national level, promoting sustainability and gender mainstreaming and creating strategic partnerships with national and regional development organizations.

15. The Commission may wish to use the information contained in the present report to recommend actions to further enhance the performance and results of the Commission's work and further strengthen its evaluation function.

Annex

Evaluations implemented during the biennium 2018–2019

	<i>Title</i>	<i>Year</i>
Subprogramme/thematic evaluation		
1	Evaluation of the ESCAP subprogramme on social development	2018
2	Evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology	2018
3	Evaluation of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific	2019
4	Evaluation of the ESCAP-WMO partnership for strengthening regional platforms on tropical cyclones	2019
5	Evaluation of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization	2019 ^a
6	Comprehensive review of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management	2019 ^a
Project evaluations		
1	Evaluation of the Development Account project (ninth tranche): Enhancing the contribution of preferential trade agreements to inclusive and equitable trade	2018
2	Evaluation of the Development Account project (ninth tranche): Financing strategies for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development in the Asia Pacific	2018
3	Evaluation of the Development Account project (ninth tranche): Strengthening the connectivity of countries in South and Central Asia, particularly landlocked and least developed countries, with a view to linking with subregional and regional transport and trade networks	2018
4	Evaluation of the project: Strengthening multi-hazard risk assessment and early warning systems with applications of space and geographic information systems in Pacific island countries	2018
5	Evaluation of the project: Towards the Incheon Strategy to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific	2019
6	Evaluation of the Development Account project (tenth tranche): Evidence-based policies for the sustainable use of natural resources in Asia and the Pacific	2019
7	Evaluation of the Development Account project (tenth tranche): Innovative climate finance mechanisms for financial institutions in the Asia-Pacific region	2019 ^a
8	Evaluation of the project: Strengthening connectivity for the implementation of the Asia-Pacific information superhighway	2019 ^a
9	Evaluation of the Development Account project (eleventh tranche): Strengthening statistical capacity to achieve SDG 14 (oceans) in ESCAP member countries	2019 ^a

^a To be completed in early 2020.