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**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION**

**RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF INTERNAL
OVERSIGHT SERVICES ON ITS AUDIT OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONS**

Summary

This document supplements the Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on its audit of the regional commissions, which has been circulated to the members of the Commission.

The Commission is invited to note the progress made by the secretariat in implementing OIOS recommendations, in pursuance of increased efficiency and effectiveness of programme and administrative management.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. As mandated by the General Assembly, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluated the efficiency and effectiveness of programme and administrative management of the five regional commissions during the period 2001-2003. The outcomes of this evaluation and OIOS recommendations were presented to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session in 2004.¹ The secretariat has circulated, for information, a copy of the relevant General Assembly report to the members of the Commission. The present document provides supplemental information on the follow-up actions taken in response to the recommendations directly relevant to ESCWA, since the issuance of the referenced General Assembly report. The Commission is therefore invited to review this document, together with the General Assembly report.²

B. ACTION TAKEN BY THE ESCWA SECRETARIAT

2. In its report to the General Assembly, OIOS made nine recommendations for consideration of the five regional commissions and the Regional Commissions New York Office (RCNY). Eight recommendations addressed issues common to the regional commissions, while one pertained to the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and ESCWA. The Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions have been jointly considering those common issues, with coordination assistance from RCNY, through regular meetings and video conferencing. Moreover, the regional commissions have been working closely together by sharing knowledge in programme management. Those efforts produced tangible results in several areas. The progress so far achieved has been reported to the relevant intergovernmental and advisory bodies, including the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) and the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly, as appropriate.

3. The status of the implementation of the OIOS recommendations, pertaining to ESCWA, is reported as follows:

OIOS recommendation ^{a/}	Status of implementation by ESCWA
<p>Recommendation 3: The Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions should undertake an overall re-assessment of their intergovernmental machinery to streamline the processes and avoid duplication. Recommendations to revitalize and support those entities that could be useful and a change in the focus of others that have been inactive should be presented to the member States for their consideration. The Executive Secretaries should specifically review the overall coherence and effectiveness of their respective intergovernmental bodies, with particular emphasis on: (i) standardizing rules and procedures for the establishment of those bodies (including subsidiary bodies); (ii) regularly reviewing and monitoring participation by members of the regional commissions; (iii) clarifying mandates to avoid overlap among different bodies; (iv) revisiting mandates of non-functioning bodies; (v) aligning those bodies and the substantive divisions servicing them; and (vi) regularly reporting and following-up on the recommendations made by intergovernmental bodies...</p> <p>(AN/2003/459/01/003)</p>	<p>ESCWA is committed to reassessing its intergovernmental machinery with a view to streamlining the processes. ESCWA is in the process of undertaking an overall assessment of the existing intergovernmental bodies in order to ensure coherence and effectiveness. It is envisaged that the results of this assessment will be presented to the Commission at its twenty-fourth session, to be held in 2006, subject to the Commission's approval at the present session to change the timing of legislative sessions, and pending the completion of the evaluation.</p>

¹ See "Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on its audit of the regional commissions", 6 May 2004 (A/58/785).

² OIOS performed a separate audit of ESCWA, which was completed in 2004 after its audit of the regional commissions. A number of OIOS recommendations concerning ESCWA in the earlier audit were successfully implemented by ESCWA.

OIOS recommendation	Status of implementation by ESCWA
<p>Recommendation 4: The Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions should ensure that the calendars of their annual/biennial sessions are harmonized with the submissions of the biennial programme plan (a component of the strategic framework) or the proposed programme budgets to the Headquarters Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts (AN/2003/459/01/004)</p>	<p>In light of the recent changes introduced to the programming cycle by the General Assembly, the secretariat reviewed the issue and decided to request the Commission to consider changing the timing of ministerial sessions to even years, so as to facilitate the Commission's review of the draft strategic framework in even years. Subsidiary intergovernmental bodies to the Commission will review the draft programme of work pertaining to their subprogrammes, which will be developed within ESCWA's strategic framework approved by the General Assembly. The Commission, at the present session, will deliberate on this issue under the agenda item 12.^{b/}</p>
<p>Recommendation 5: The Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions should agree on a common policy with respect to self-evaluations so that: (i) evaluation approaches and procedures can be harmonized, especially with respect to the planning and selection of the entity to be evaluated, the scope of the evaluation, its methodology, conclusions, timing and costs; (ii) their cycle and depth are sufficient to cover all the programmes of work and their component parts periodically; and (iii) the recommendations arising out of those evaluations may be monitored and reported to the Executive Secretaries in order to achieve specific process improvements. In accordance with the guidance provided by OIOS on programme monitoring and reporting, self-evaluation findings should be incorporated into the regular reporting under the results-based budgeting framework (AN/2003/459/01/005)</p>	<p>OIOS has established a global policy and measures with respect to evaluation, which will be fully implemented in the biennium 2006-2007. To that end, ESCWA has made provisions in its 2006-2007 programme budget submission for adequate resources. ESCWA has scheduled its self-evaluations, covering all subprogrammes in accordance with the global policy. Additionally, ESCWA participates in regular videoconference meetings of the United Nations programme focal points for sharing of experiences and good practices with the other United Nations entities. Since 2003, the Programme Planning Chiefs of Regional Commissions meet every year to address priority issues pertaining to programme and project management, including monitoring and evaluation. Self-evaluation findings for the biennium 2004-2005 are being incorporated into the regular reporting under the results-based budgeting framework.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6: OIOS recommends that in the areas of fund-raising, there should be a focal point within each regional commission to: (i) follow up on all fund-raising meetings, contacts and activities; (ii) coordinate, prepare and follow up on the pledging conference; (iii) maintain a database of all projects in need of fund-raising; (iv) prepare a quarterly report on the progress of fund-raising activities for the Executive Secretaries, with circulation to all divisional heads; and (v) exchange best practices and lessons learned in fund-raising efforts (AN/2003/459/01/006)</p>	<p>Within ESCWA, the Programme Planning and Technical Cooperation Division (PPTCD) has been designated as the focal point for fund-raising and building up project pipelines. ESCWA has developed a new technical cooperation strategy for the period 2005-2007, which addresses the key fund-raising issues identified by OIOS. The Commission, at the present session, is invited to review the technical cooperation strategy under agenda item 7(c).^{c/} ESCWA has, to the extent possible, integrated those issues into the work of PPTCD, and aims to enhance further this approach in the promotion of a partnership development strategy.</p>
<p>Recommendation 7: The Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions should exchange best practices with respect to the recruitment of regional advisers, the development of work plans and the monitoring, reporting and evaluation of all regional advisory activities, so that their respective regional advisory services can be better integrated into their substantive divisions' work programmes and thereby achieve maximum thematic impact (AN/2003-459/007)</p>	<p>In addition to the new technical cooperation strategy, ESCWA has developed a set of regional advisory services policy guidelines, based on good practices and lessons learned as shared by other United Nations entities, particularly ESCAP and ECA. ESCWA had already decentralized the substantive management of the work of regional advisers from the then Technical Cooperation Division to the chiefs of the substantive divisions in 1999. This approach has produced better results in harmonizing the work of regional advisers and the substantive divisions and in enhancing the programme results.</p>

OIOS recommendation	Status of implementation by ESCWA
<p>Recommendation 8: ESCWA and ECA should review whether the re-establishment of separate statistics divisions, with a minimum critical mass of statisticians, would strengthen their statistical strategy and outputs and better guarantee methodological standards in their respective regions (AN/2003/459/01/008)</p>	<p>Based on the recommendation of the twenty-first Ministerial Session, the management of subprogramme 6 (Comparable Statistics for Improved Planning and Decision-Making) was decentralized in early 2003 in order to strengthen the statistics subprogramme, while eliminating duplication.</p> <p>In its audit of ESCWA in 2004 and after taking into consideration the response of the Commission on the matter, OIOS recommended "ESCWA evaluate the effects of the decentralization of the Statistics Division".^{d/} Responding to this recommendation, the chiefs of substantive division and team leaders were requested to assess the advantages and disadvantages of the decentralization of the Statistics Division. The responses, which were discussed in several cabinet meetings, confirmed that the majority was in favour of maintaining the decentralized structure.</p> <p>ESCWA consulted with the Programme Planning and Budget Division (PPBD) in the United Nations Headquarters and OIOS on the matter. PPBD recommended consolidating staff and non-staff resources under the statistical subprogramme. In line with PPBD's recommendation and to ensure the proper management and monitoring of statistical activities, ESCWA proceeded to pool the resources under subprogramme 6, in close consultation with statisticians in substantive divisions, chiefs of division and team leaders. Moreover, it was agreed that a senior statistician would ensure the efficient management of ESCWA's statistical activities. The main purpose of this realignment was as follows: (i) to maintain the statistical expertise within substantive divisions (as recommended by the majority of statisticians, chiefs of division and team leaders); (ii) to ensure the proper management and monitoring of statistical activities by pooling the resources under subprogramme 6; and (iii) to optimize the use of these resources for statistical activities.</p> <p>PPBD has realigned the resources for statistics and issued a revised allotment for 2005, taking into account that ESCWA had already reflected this approach in the programme budget submission for the 2006-2007 biennium.</p> <p>ESCWA reported to OIOS on 13 January 2005 on the completion of this exercise. Accordingly, OIOS will include ESCWA's final comments in its semi-annual report to the Secretary-General on the status of implementation of its recommendations.</p> <p>ESCWA shall continue monitoring and evaluating ongoing performance of its statistics programme to determine subsequent action in this regard.</p>

OIOS recommendation	Status of implementation by ESCWA
<p>Recommendation 9: The Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions should establish a mechanism for: (i) assessing the quality of publications; (ii) categorizing a publication as a “flagship”, (iii) harmonizing the timing of the issuance of flagship publications; (iv) implementing peer-review exercises; (v) assessing the composition of the readership; and (vi) exchanging best practices and lessons learned... (AN/2003/459/01/009)</p>	<p>The “Guide to ESCWA conference and publishing services” (E/ESCWA/CSS/2003/2) informs and advises the staff of the secretariat on all aspects involved in the production of publications. Four ESCWA publications have been designated as flagship publications. Starting in the biennium 2006-2007, those publications will be reviewed by a group of experts with a view to ensuring their relevance and quality. The other publications will be subjected to internal peer-reviews for quality assurance. The secretariat already commenced the implementation of internal peer-review mechanism during the present biennium. The Executive Secretaries of the five regional commissions hold regular consultations on issues related to flagship publications and improvement in information dissemination. Recommendations arising from those meetings are implemented by ESCWA. Continued consultation is envisaged.</p>

a/ The numbering of the recommendations reflects and follows those of the “Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on its audit of the regional commissions”, 6 May 2004 (A/58/785).

b/ See “Date and venue of the twenty-fourth session of the Commission and of subsidiary bodies of ESCWA”, 5 April 2005 (E/ESCWA/23/9).

c/ See “The technical cooperation programme and regional advisory services: technical cooperation strategy”, 7 March 2005 (E/ESCWA/23/5/Part. III/Add.1)

d/ Final audit report (AN/2003/46/1).

4. The Commission may wish to note that increased coordination and cooperation among the regional commissions at policy and working levels has contributed towards harmonizing programme management and increasing effectiveness and efficiency. Moreover, replication of good practices reduced the risk of some regional commissions reinventing the wheel and thus wasting scarce resources. In 2005, the secretariat aims to intensify the exchange of information on the management of technical cooperation projects and extrabudgetary resource mobilization with those regional commissions that have been successful at enhancing their programme impact through the mobilization of extrabudgetary resources.

