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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

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**MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

**EVALUATION OF THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION**

**Summary**

The evaluations programme of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is applied to subprogrammes, Development Account projects, business processes and intergovernmental meetings to promote accountability, credibility and continuous learning. This report provides an overview of the evaluation policy, actions taken to date and anticipated results.

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## **Introduction**

1. The evaluations programme of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is applied to:
  - Subprogrammes;
  - Development Account projects;
  - Business processes;
  - Intergovernmental meetings.
2. In recognition of developments in United Nations reform on accountability and management, ESCWA updated the evaluation policy to ensure the relevance of its evaluations programme and to align it with the norms and standards for evaluation of the United Nations Evaluation Group. The evaluation policy was approved in September 2010. A guide to evaluations for programme staff was developed as an annex to the policy to assist staff in implementing and following up recommendations made through the review of subprogramme activities at the broadest level, and to effectively manage and use evaluation findings in their work.
3. As mentioned in the new policy, the purpose of evaluations at ESCWA is to promote a culture of innovation and adaptation to the changing environment of the region. The new policy is built around three core principles: accountability, credibility and continuous learning.
4. The evaluation policy has introduced a systematic framework to enhance the organizational commitment of ESCWA to continuous learning and improvement. Central to this philosophy is increasing the independence of ESCWA evaluative processes, increasing accountability to ESCWA member countries, and clarifying the lines of responsibility for management response to evaluation recommendations and action to be taken to improve the performance of the subprogrammes.
5. ESCWA regularly reviews the extent to which the evaluation policy reflects internal work practices. Efforts to improve ESCWA evaluation activities will continue to be made and the resources needed to enhance the process for improving performance will be allocated during the development of the programme budget.
6. The evaluation policy was revised in conjunction with ongoing efforts to enhance ESCWA programme performance, building upon previous ESCWA policies and models of good practice in the United Nations and other international entities.

### **I. PROGRAMME MONITORING**

7. In order to validate and support the implementation of its new evaluation policy, ESCWA has implemented one of the most progressive programme monitoring systems. The ESCWA Performance Monitor allows for the real-time management of programme and financial commitments and establishes a clear relationship between resource use and progress in the implementation of programme commitments. Effective monitoring provides essential information to support the evaluation process, to validate the results and to assess action taken in response to evaluations.

### **II. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

8. In February 2011, ESCWA engaged the services of expert consultants to conduct training on monitoring and evaluation for staff across the organization. A project design module was also offered for the same audience to bolster the skills of substantive staff in creating effective project management models.
9. In November 2011, additional training on results-based management in planning processes was offered to improve the development of indicators, outcomes and impacts in preparing the 2014-2015 strategic framework.

10. The Programme Planning and Technical Cooperation Division (PPTCD) acts as caretaker and coordinator of the overall monitoring and evaluations policy of ESCWA.

### **III. SUBPROGRAMME EVALUATIONS**

11. ESCWA has initiated a series of improvements to the process of evaluating its planning processes and programme performance. External evaluations, notably by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight, have made a number of recommendations to strengthen the evaluation capacity of ESCWA.

12. In alignment with the newly revised evaluation policy, ESCWA aims to improve the performance of its programme of work by addressing a range of institutional and programmatic weaknesses. Specifically, the scope of the evaluations has been extended to cover the performance of all subprogrammes. In the 2010-2011 biennium, ESCWA engaged the services of expert evaluators and developed an evaluation methodology to employ a standardized approach to examining the substantive work of the organization one subprogramme at a time.

13. The methodology adopted is rigorous and involves review of existing information such as the planned programme of work and achievements, periodic performance reports from the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System (IMDIS) and the relevant programme performance reports for three bienniums.

14. The methodology also calls for the analysis of current planning processes undertaken by each subprogramme in formulating the programme budget and the strategic framework. The expenditures of the subprogramme and the budget allocations are studied against the reports provided by the subprogramme. Specifically, the reported achievements of the subprogramme are analysed using the programme performance reports (including project terminations/reformulations/not started).

15. The evaluation process calls for extensive review of prior evaluations and feedback provided by ESCWA member countries through various sources. It calls for the comparison of the strategic framework of ESCWA to relevant components of strategic frameworks of other regional commissions and the outcomes of relevant global thematic Commission meetings, to assess the extent to which the programmatic agenda of ESCWA is aligned and up-to-date with global practice and trends.

16. In addition to the review of available information, the methodology calls for first-hand gathering and assessment of a significant amount of data. Specifically, the evaluators use written questionnaires to obtain feedback and perspective from all member countries. A master interview guide is being used to conduct direct interviews with representatives of selected member countries, a variety of key stakeholders and partners including United Nations entities, international organizations and non-governmental organizations. Interviews are carried out with ESCWA staff and the staff of other United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to ensure all stakeholder groups are involved in the evaluation.

17. In line with the new policy, the main objectives of evaluation are to:

- Assess the effectiveness of each subprogramme in achieving its objectives and the expected accomplishments outlined in the strategic framework;
- Assess the efficiency with which each subprogramme utilized the financial and human resources available in achieving these results;
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of planning undertaken to develop the programme budget and the strategic framework;
- Measure the satisfaction of ESCWA member countries with the prioritization of workplans to serve their interests and needs;

- Provide good practice and lessons learned to feed into the broader work of ESCWA and future programme planning processes;
- Provide recommendations to improve subprogramme performance, including the recommendation of relevant programmatic areas which have not been included in the subprogramme's work.

18. During 2011, the new standardized methodology was employed to evaluate subprogramme 5 statistics for evidence-based policymaking. The results of the evaluation were analysed by senior management. To enhance future planning and management, a performance compact was created and signed by the Director of the Statistics Division and the Executive Secretary.

19. The recommendations from the evaluation of subprogramme 5 were categorized under five main areas including: strategic vision; management issues; institutional issues; priority programmatic areas; and coordination and partnership.

20. Recommendations for the strategic vision of subprogramme 5 include four key pillars: (a) to become a regional leader for technical excellence in statistics; (b) to expand its role for regional coordination and partnership; (c) to provide significant focus on gender and youth issues in line with regional priorities; and (d) to focus on Millennium Development Goals and international comparability of data. Recommendation (b) has been successfully implemented through the creation of the Regional Coordination Mechanism Task Force on Statistical Coordination.

21. The evaluator recommended that a job audit of the staffing table for the Statistics Division (subprogramme 5) be conducted. This job audit has now been completed (see paras. 41-44).

22. PPTCD has been tasked to provide continuing follow-up on the implementation of the commitments made in all evaluations compacts.

23. The policy calls for the evaluation of all subprogrammes every biennium. The evaluation of subprogramme 2 social development and subprogramme 4 information and communications technology for regional integration are being completed. All seven substantive subprogrammes will be evaluated during 2012-2013.

#### **IV. DEVELOPMENT ACCOUNT EVALUATIONS**

24. The Development Account guidelines require that all completed projects undergo a full project evaluation. Three development account projects were completed and evaluated in 2010 and 2011.

25. Development Account project "Strengthening national capacities in environment statistics, indicators and accounts in support of progress towards achieving the internationally agreed development goals in the ESCWA and ECLAC regions" 2008-2010 was evaluated from June to September 2010.

26. The aim of the evaluation was to provide guidance for the future activities in the area of capacity-building in environment statistics and accounts.

27. Key findings of the global evaluation report were as follows:

- During the construction of the logical framework of the project, well-known and specific procedures and rules for the preparation of logical frameworks should be followed;
- At the design stage of the project, time should be devoted to thinking through the various assumptions and risks for such projects;

- A mid-term evaluation should be conducted by an independent evaluator;
- When several agencies are implementing a project, they should jointly develop the overall terms of reference for the evaluation. The lead agency should oversee the implementation of the evaluation to ensure methodological consistency and generation of a single evaluation report. For future projects, additional funds need to be allocated for evaluation (about 2-5 per cent of total project funds);
- It is recommended to pursue new initiatives, such as the one proposed under the “workplan for Environment Statistics, Indicators and Accounts for the ESCWA region for 2010-2013” in order to ensure the sustainability of this project.

28. The Development Account project “Knowledge Networks through ICT Access Points for Disadvantaged Communities (KN4DC)” was completed in December 2010. The project was implemented from 2006 to 2010. The evaluation examined the contribution of ESCWA to the project, particularly its contribution as global coordinator of the project.

29. In January 2011, ESCWA led all the regional commissions in an evaluation assessing the global impact of this interregional project. The evaluation focused on determining the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of implementation by the five regional commissions in pursuit of the objective of the project measured against the indicators outlined in the project document. The global evaluation synthesized the results and recommendations of the regional evaluations, and evaluated the global component of the activity.

30. Key findings of the global evaluation report were as follows:

*Project design, monitoring and evaluation*

- In the design stage, more time should be devoted for the identification of the most probable assumptions and risks;
- Projects should include a mid-term evaluation to identify any weaknesses in the design of the project and to propose modifications to the remaining activities if needed;
- A detailed system of monitoring and evaluation should be in place to allow easier follow up and assessment of the achievements.

*Project management*

- Strengthen the communication strategies of the different regional commissions to enhance the visibility of regional commissions in their role as the coordinator and executor of projects;
- Allocate funds to adequately cover day-to-day administrative costs of running knowledge networks, the secretariat of the network, steering committee meetings, and so forth.

*Knowledge networks: goals, strategy, facilities and activities*

- More focus should be placed on influencing policy on poverty alleviation and the empowerment of women and a more accurate targeting of beneficiaries.

*Project impact and sustainability*

- Identify and integrate new areas of partnership and operational strategy between potential partners to extend the impact coverage of the project to targeted beneficiaries at large;

- Pursue new but complementary initiatives/projects in partner regional commissions in order to ensure the sustainability of the project results.
31. The Development Account project “Participatory Human Development in Post-Conflict Countries” was implemented over the period 2009-2011 to promote the concept of participatory development, the practice of social dialogue and popular participation in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Yemen.
32. The project evaluation took place from August 2011 to February 2012 and focused on measuring the overall achievement of the project objectives and intended goal, and to consolidate the main findings, limitations, critical reflections on the project outcomes and the way forward.
33. The main recommendations proposed by the evaluator were:
- Agreements with concerned United Nations agencies should be confirmed, documented and secured at the time a concept paper is prepared;
  - At the design stage, more time should be devoted for the identification of the most appropriate assumptions and risks;
  - At the design stage, exit strategies should be identified that maximize the sustainability of the project;
  - Allocate funds to adequately cover most of the administrative costs related to project coordination and implementation;
  - A mid-term evaluation should be conducted by an independent evaluator as part of the monitoring and evaluation procedures;
  - If the “real impact” of the project is to be determined, a full impact analysis (based on field surveys in the targeted countries) must be carried out in an appropriate and timely manner.

## **V. AD HOC EVALUATIONS OF BUSINESS PROCESSES**

### *Divisional job audits*

34. ESCWA is embarking on a programme of job audits designed to ensure that critical human resources issues can be objectively identified and systematically addressed to help the organization optimize the use of human resources. This will be the first full job audit since 2005.
35. So far, job audits for the Administrative Services Division (ASD) and the Statistics Division (subprogramme 5) have been completed. The job audit of the PPTCD is underway.

#### **A. JOB AUDIT OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES DIVISION**

36. The job audit process commenced with ASD, with work conducted by an external consultant between October and December 2011. ASD contributes to and is affected by the programme management of the entire organization.
37. The job audit began with substantial background investigation to ensure that the activities and performance of ASD were properly contextualised. In particular, background research was undertaken to compare ESCWA performance against that of other regional commissions. This comprised two main elements: (a) the comparison of resources used, based on information in the proposed programme budget documents for the bienniums 2010-2011 and 2012-2013; and (b) the assessment of outputs achieved, based

on information from recent senior manager's compacts for each of the regional commissions for the biennium 2010-2011.

38. A clear pattern emerged from these comparisons, indicating that the performance of ASD is in line with that of the equivalent operations in other regional commissions. The conclusion was further validated by more recent internal audit reports and evaluations.

39. In February 2012, the auditor made recommendations to improve practice within the Division. These improvements should further improve the services that ASD provides to ESCWA as a whole.

40. The recommendations followed two main messages:

- The efforts of the Executive Secretary to improve the quality and effectiveness of ESCWA administrative support should continue;
- ESCWA should continue to undertake efforts to improve the ratio of resources dedicated to programme implementation to resources dedicated to programme support.

#### B. JOB AUDIT OF THE STATISTICS DIVISION (SUBPROGRAMME 5)

41. As a result of the recommendations of the evaluation of subprogramme 5, a job audit was conducted to review and verify job classifications within the Statistics Division and make recommendations on optimal use of human resources. The job audit was undertaken during November and December 2011.

42. The core functions of the Statistics Division are to: (a) act as the center of reference for statistics in the region to support ESCWA member countries and provide essential statistical services to all ESCWA subprogrammes; and (b) act as coordinator of statistical services for regional United Nations organizations and point of entry to a large number of international organizations and institutions.

43. The subprogramme evaluation conducted earlier in 2011 highlighted the difficulty of effectively coordinating all ESCWA statistical work. Improvements in the management of human capacity are required if the subprogramme is to successfully meet that challenge.

44. Improving the structure and operation of the Statistics Division would offer ESCWA significant performance improvement opportunities. The job audit supported the recommendations of the subprogramme evaluation, further highlighting the need to develop new ways of working and ensure that the structure of the Division is consistent with the services it is intended to provide to a wide variety of clients. A plan to reorganize some of the sections in the Division is currently under review.

### **VI. EVALUATION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL MECHANISM OF ESCWA**

45. The evaluation was carried out pursuant to resolution 291 (XXV) concerning the frequency of the sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies. The resolution called for "an in-depth evaluation of the intergovernmental structure of ESCWA in the light of both programme priority, as identified by member countries and ongoing United Nations reforms". It was decided that ESCWA would "review the outcome of the in-depth evaluation at the twenty-sixth session", held in May 2010.

46. The evaluation exercise began in late 2009 and an interim report was presented by the consulting evaluator during the twenty-sixth session of the Commission. The final report was presented to ESCWA in July 2010 and the report and its recommendations were presented to the fifth meeting of the Technical Committee in April 2011.



47. ESCWA has reviewed the evaluation of its intergovernmental mechanism (IGM). The Commission has acknowledged and accepted the majority of the findings of the report and distilled recommendations for the consideration of the session, taking into account the operating environment and rules of procedure of ESCWA. The review and options proposed herein are supported by qualitative and quantitative evidence which was gathered by the consultant and is available in the annexes of the full evaluation report (E/ESCWA/2011/C.5/CRP.1).

48. The actionable recommendations presented in this report are as follows:

*Recommendation 1: Further strengthening of the current intergovernmental structure*

Whenever possible, ESCWA recommends that there be synergies in membership between the Technical Committee and the Technical Cooperation Committee.

*Recommendation 2: Improved cooperation between ESCWA and other United Nations entities*

The secretariat supports all efforts to enhance relationships and joint activities with United Nations agencies with specialized mandates. Currently, cooperation agreements are in place with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and with all regional commissions (agreement 2005-2015) and during 2011 memorandums of understanding and/or letters of agreement were signed with United Nations agencies and other regional and international institutions to boost collaboration. ESCWA will continue exerting efforts to sign memorandums of understanding with a number of United Nations agencies at the regional level on specific areas of mutual interest. At the same time, ESCWA also reinforced its leadership role in the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) and bolstered the profile and role of the RCM at the regional and global level.

*Recommendation 3: Improved cooperation between the IGM of ESCWA and the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council and Arab financial institutions*

Rule 66 of the Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of ESCWA stipulates that “Representatives of intergovernmental organizations accorded permanent-observer status by the General Assembly and of other intergovernmental organizations designated on an ad hoc or continuing basis by the Council or the Commission, may participate, without the right to vote, in the deliberations of the Commission, on questions within the scope of activities of the organizations”. As such, the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation are invited to participate as observers in the sessions of ESCWA. A five-year joint plan of action on strategic priorities is currently being negotiated with the League of Arab States. ESCWA has a standing memorandum of understanding with the Islamic Development Bank, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the League of Arab States.

Arab financial institutions and other regional institutions, in particular those that already have observer status in the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, should be encouraged to obtain observer status for the sessions of ESCWA.

*Recommendation 4: Improved implementation of intergovernmental meetings, enhanced negotiation and adoption of programme-related resolutions at all levels and effective management of meetings*

As indicated under section VII of the current report, ESCWA has established a new process for the evaluation of intergovernmental meetings. The Fifth Meeting of the Technical Committee approved an adjusted timetable to enable its members to contribute more proactively in the development of the strategic framework and programme budget as well as other planning and monitoring processes.

*Recommendation 5: Establish regular meetings of the Commission bureaus of ESCWA and other regional commissions to promote cooperation and coordination*

Formal and informal coordination currently takes place at all levels including the meetings of the executive secretaries, meetings of Chiefs of Programme Planning as well as through the role of the Regional Commissions New York Office (RCNYO).

At the member country level, RCNYO also facilitates the participation of member countries at Economic and Social Council, as well as representing the regional commissions at United Nations headquarters.

The secretariat concludes that the current level of coordination between the five regional commissions is both sufficient and effective.

*Recommendation 6: Ownership of the decision-making process of the IGM of ESCWA*

The scope of functions of the Technical Committee could be expanded to become a technical negotiation body and a “preparatory committee” for the Commission sessions that reviews and transmits decisions taken by subsidiary committees to the Commission session.

*Recommendation 7: Increase efforts to expand ESCWA membership to the eight additional countries which are members of the United Nations Development Group and the League of Arab States*

The secretariat concurs with the benefits of increased membership to include the countries of the Maghreb.

*Recommendation 8: There is a need to have an effective standing body from the Advisory Committee of Ambassadors for intergovernmental sessions at all levels*

Given the current mandate of the Advisory Committee of Ambassadors and the frequency of its meetings (twice per year), ESCWA recommends the creation of a task force comprising the first secretaries of embassies accredited to Lebanon to assist the Advisory Committee of Ambassadors in carrying out its mandate and follow up with the secretariat on issues or prime concern to member countries and challenges they may face.

*Recommendation 9: Establish a policy manual for the intergovernmental processes to help the secretariat in preparing substantive documentation and assist stakeholders in understanding the respective roles of the IGM and the secretariat*

While ESCWA has terms of reference and rules of procedures, it does not have a handbook of protocols and practices specifically designed to support delegates and staff in their work in intergovernmental processes. ESCWA proposes the development of such a guidebook to be used by country delegates. To facilitate this task, the United Nations Delegate’s Handbook may be used as a reference.

*Recommendation 10: Training of representatives of Governments and new ESCWA staff in conference diplomacy should be mandatory*

Training on diplomacy and conduct during intergovernmental meetings can be provided in conjunction with meetings of the Technical Committee and Commission sessions. Training should be tailored to the roles of delegates and ESCWA staff members to ensure that both are prepared for their roles in the sessions. As such, ESCWA will work with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research on designing a special training module to be provided to staff and delegates. This module will be initiated in November 2012 in conjunction with the seventh meeting of the Technical Committee.

## VII. ASSESSMENTS OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETINGS

49. ESCWA organized eleven intergovernmental meetings during the 2010-2011 biennium.

50. In 2011, in response to concerns raised by member countries and delegates to subsidiary committees, ESCWA revamped the assessments of intergovernmental meetings to ensure that delegate feedback was effectively addressed. In 2011, the assessment process for intergovernmental meetings was modified to ensure proper evaluation and follow up. This process was carried out within the framework of the ESCWA evaluation policy to uphold the principles of accountability, credibility and continuous learning.

51. The following process was adopted in agreement with the Office of the Executive Secretary and was managed by PPTCD:

- Analyse questionnaires completed by heads of delegations;
- Share and discuss results with Executive Secretary and directors of concerned substantive divisions of the Commission;
- Seek additional clarification on the feedback received from member countries when deemed necessary and in coordination with the Executive Secretary;
- Review clarifications received from member countries;
- Discuss with concerned substantive division in order to address identified gaps;
- Report results of the assessment and action taken in the next meeting of the committee.

52. Implementation of the newly adopted follow-up mechanism started with the seventh session of the Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization and Financing for Development.

53. The upcoming session of the Committee on Transport, to be held on 24-26 April 2012, will be the first opportunity under the new process for ESCWA to report on the results of the assessment of a previous committee session.

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