

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific****Eightieth session**

Bangkok, 22–26 April 2024

Item 5 (c) of the provisional agenda\*

**Management issues****Evaluation activities of the Commission during the biennium 2022–2023****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

In its resolution 66/15, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific requested the Executive Secretary to ensure periodic evaluation of the secretariat's programmatic work, including the work of divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions.

Pursuant to that resolution, the secretariat has been conducting such evaluation activities and reporting on them to the Commission on a biennial basis. The aim is to strengthen accountability to member States and facilitate organizational improvement by providing evidence-based information on the performance and results of the Commission's work.

In the present document, the secretariat provides a summary of the main findings and recommendations contained in the evaluations conducted during the biennium 2022–2023 and of the steps taken by the secretariat to address the recommendations. It also contains an outline of the efforts made by the secretariat to further strengthen the evaluation function.

The Commission may wish to take note of the present document and identify actions to further enhance the performance and results of the secretariat's work and to strengthen its evaluation function.

**I. Introduction**

1. At the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, evaluations are carried out in compliance with the administrative instruction on evaluation in the United Nations Secretariat issued in August 2021, which stipulates that all programmes and subprogrammes should be evaluated on a regular, periodic basis,<sup>1</sup> and with Commission resolution 66/15, in which the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to ensure the periodic evaluation of the secretariat's programmatic work, including the work of

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\* ESCAP/80/1.

<sup>1</sup> ST/AI/2021/3, para. 2.2.

divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions. In addition, member States also mandate the secretariat through resolutions to conduct evaluations of specific themes or areas of work in support of the Commission's decision-making processes. Based on these evaluation activities, the present document has been prepared to provide the Commission with evidence-based information on the performance and results of the secretariat's work.

2. During the biennium 2022–2023, five subprogramme and thematic evaluations and 14 project evaluations were completed (see annex). The secretariat engaged external evaluators to conduct independent evaluations of the results and performance of its subprogrammes and projects.<sup>2</sup> Those evaluations were conducted in accordance with the annual Commission evaluation plans for 2022 and 2023.

## **II. Main findings and recommendations contained in the evaluations and steps taken by the secretariat to address the recommendations**

### **A. Subprogramme and thematic evaluations**

3. In 2022, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) completed an evaluation of subprogramme 4, on environment and development, and found that most stakeholders considered the areas of work under the subprogramme to be highly relevant to the needs and priorities of member States in the region. OIOS also found that the Environment and Development Division, which implements activities under the subprogramme, had responded satisfactorily to several requests for specific support from member States. Nevertheless, weaknesses were observed in terms of strategy, programming, monitoring and resource allocation, and it was found that some of the comparative advantages of the Division had not been fully realized. Moreover, the capacity-building activities carried out under the subprogramme lacked focus. OIOS recommended developing a technical assistance strategy to plan capacity-building projects in line with the identified niche areas of the subprogramme. It also recommended that the secretariat consider integrating the Disaster Risk Reduction Section into the Environment and Development Division given the substantive similarities between the two. The secretariat accepted the recommendations and has started to examine the programmatic, budgetary and organizational implications of integrating the Disaster Risk Reduction Section into the Environment and Development Division.

4. In its resolution 75/6, the Commission requested that priority be accorded to supporting the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Plan of Action on Space Applications for Sustainable Development (2018–2030) and that an evaluation be carried out of the implementation of its phase I (2018–2022). In line with those requests, in 2022 the secretariat commissioned an independent evaluation of phase I of the Plan of Action. The evaluation was designed to serve as input to the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Space Applications for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific, which was held on 26 October 2022. The evaluation confirmed that phase I of the Plan of Action was in alignment with the strategic development needs of member States. While it was found that tangible achievements had been made, it was also noted that the thematic areas were not all equally relevant to all member States, owing to geopolitical and economic differences. Knowledge had been gained and shared, however, and over 550 actions had been taken in six countries. The

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.unescap.org/monitoring-and-evaluation/evaluation/reports](http://www.unescap.org/monitoring-and-evaluation/evaluation/reports).

lack of information highlighted the need for a structured approach to assessing the Plan of Action's contributions to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. The recommendations resulting from the evaluation were: to leverage digital applications, prioritize actions based on local needs and enhance knowledge-sharing through regional cooperation.

5. An evaluation of subprogramme 2, on trade, investment and innovation, was completed in 2022 with the aim of providing actionable information to enhance the impact of the subprogramme. The high quality of the flagship publications issued and technical assistance provided under the subprogramme was recognized and the operationalization of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific was highlighted as a notable accomplishment. Nevertheless, it was observed that sections tended to work in silos and that the networks managed by the subprogramme were at a crossroads, as they were facing challenges in funding and continuity. To address those issues, it was recommended that a comprehensive subprogramme strategy be developed by holding extensive consultations, prioritizing the Investment and Enterprise Development Section's competitive advantage and revitalizing or sunseting networks.

6. In 2022, the secretariat also commissioned an evaluation of subprogramme 8, on subregional activities for development, with the aim of assessing the overall effectiveness of the subprogramme and of providing information to enable decisions to be taken on the future programmes of work of the subregional offices. It was found that the subregional offices had a positive impact on building subregional networks, transferring knowledge and engaging subregional leaders in monitoring the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, the subregional offices were particularly relevant in efforts to address subregional priorities. It was suggested that they could be even more relevant if they had a more focused mandate and if they improved their collaboration with other United Nations entities. The recommendations resulting from the evaluation were: to sharpen the subprogramme's mandate so that it had a narrower focus and was better aligned with the divisions operating on other subprogrammes and to strengthen the subregional offices' capacities, including in gender mainstreaming.

7. In its resolution 71/1, the Commission decided to review the continued substantive relevance and financial viability of each regional institution every five years. In line with that decision, in 2023 the secretariat commissioned an evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology. A summary of the findings and recommendations contained in the evaluation report and the secretariat's response to them has been submitted to the Commission at its eightieth session (ESCAP/80/24).

## **B. Evaluations of capacity-building projects**

8. The secretariat commissioned 14 project evaluations during the biennium 2022–2023. Of the 14 projects, two were funded from the regular budget of the United Nations Secretariat under the Development Account and 12 were funded from extrabudgetary sources. The key recommendations and lessons learned from those evaluations underscored the importance of:

(a) **Incorporating a theory-of-change methodology from the design stage and involving key stakeholders in project development.** The evaluations revealed that projects could be more results-oriented by incorporating a theory-of-change methodology from the early stages of project design. Theories of change help to further clarify the logic behind interventions,

leading to outcome-level results at the regional and national levels, thereby promoting a deeper understanding of the process. By involving key stakeholders, projects could ensure clarity in expected outcomes and alignment with broader development objectives, enhancing monitoring and evaluation throughout the project life cycle;

(b) **Empowering national institutions through training and collaboration.** The evaluations highlighted the important role that national institutions, including academic or research centres, can play in improving the sustainability and continued use of technical tools and methodologies developed through projects. It was recommended that the secretariat enhance its collaboration with relevant national institutions and provide capacity-building support for the introduction and dissemination of tools and methodologies. For example, the secretariat developed an innovative tool to assist cities in North and Central Asia in forecasting how many resources would be used as a result of urbanization. With more hands-on training on the forecasting methodology and the tool, national academic or research institutions could help the partner cities to apply the technology independently and potentially contribute to the tool's further development;

(c) **Tailoring technical assistance for countries with special needs.** The evaluations highlighted feedback from stakeholders from countries with special needs regarding their specific technical challenges, including issues related to gaining access to funding, developing macroeconomic models and fostering public-private partnerships. It was suggested that more could be done to address the distinct challenges faced by these countries and that tailored assistance be offered to bolster stakeholders' capacities to meet these challenges;

(d) **Fostering close partnerships with subregional organizations.** The evaluations highlighted the advantages of engaging more deeply at the subregional level with organizations like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the Economic Cooperation Organization. Strategic alliances should be fostered to enhance technical capacities, develop sustainable policies and replicate project successes in other subregions;

(e) **Better integrating gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion principles in project design.** Issues related to gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion should be considered at the design stage of projects and included in project objectives. More should be done to mainstream gender substantively and the capacities of project teams to intelligently integrate gender perspectives should be developed, including by engaging diverse stakeholders for inclusive decision-making.

### III. Strengthening the evaluation function of the secretariat

9. As part of efforts to strengthen its evaluation function, in January 2023 the secretariat issued an updated version of the *ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and Guidelines*. The update took into account the 2021 administrative instruction on evaluation in the United Nations Secretariat and the new requirement to integrate disability inclusion principles in the evaluation process. It was also made more concise and accessible by focusing on key policies and guidelines and keeping the tools, templates and operational details separate.

10. The evaluation function of the secretariat benefits from a broad network of evaluation professionals worldwide. The Evaluation Unit 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. Mechanisms for coordinating with regional and subregional organizations**

11. In its resolution 67/14, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary: to assess the manner in which the secretariat carried out its mandate and coordinated its work with regional and subregional organizations operating in Asia and the Pacific; to describe the functioning, decision-making and results of the regional coordination mechanism, now known as the Regional Collaborative Platform for Asia and the Pacific, including how the secretariat leveraged 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 note by the secretariat on the overview of partnerships, extrabudgetary contributions and capacity-development work carried out by the secretariat in 2023 (ESCAP/80/22) was prepared in response to those requests.

#### **V. Issues for consideration by the Commission**

12. As outlined in the present document, evaluations undertaken during the biennium 2022–2023 have continued to provide evidence-based information on the results and performance of the secretariat's work to strengthen accountability to member States. The information has also facilitated performance enhancement and guided structural changes within the secretariat. Key follow-up actions to address evaluation recommendations have been undertaken with a view to making the secretariat's capacity-development work more results-based, including at the national level, promoting sustainability and gender mainstreaming and creating strategic partnerships with national and regional development organizations.

13. The Commission may wish to take note of the present document and identify actions to further enhance the performance and results of the secretariat's work and to strengthen its evaluation function.

## Annex

## Evaluations completed during the biennium 2022–2023

<i>No.</i>	<i>Subprogramme/thematic evaluation</i>	<i>Year</i>
1.	Evaluation of subprogramme 2, on trade, investment and innovation	2022
2.	Evaluation of subprogramme 4, on environment and development (conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services)	2022
3.	Evaluation of subprogramme 8, on subregional activities for development	2022
4.	Evaluation of phase I (2018–2022) of the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Plan of Action on Space Applications for Sustainable Development (2018–2030)	2022
5.	Evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology	2023
<i>No.</i>	<i>Project evaluation</i>	<i>Year</i>
1.	Evaluation of the project entitled “Supporting countries with special needs in the Asia-Pacific region in meeting the challenge of resource mobilization for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (funded under the Development Account, eleventh tranche)	2022
2.	Evaluation of the project entitled “Closing the loop: scaling up innovation to tackle marine plastic pollution in ASEAN cities”	2022
3.	Evaluation of the project entitled “Reducing inequality in Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation member countries: innovative policymaking that leaves no one behind”	2022
4.	Evaluation of the project entitled “Evidence-based innovation policy for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Asia-Pacific region” (funded under the Development Account, eleventh tranche)	2022
5.	Evaluation of the project entitled “Developing a public-private partnerships and infrastructure financing network in Asia and the Pacific”	2022
6.	Evaluation of the project entitled “Forecasting sustainable urbanization: support for sustainable infrastructure planning in cities”	2022
7.	Evaluation of the project entitled “Capacity-building on trade facilitation and the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement: promotion to strengthen intraregional cooperation (phase III)”	2023
8.	Evaluation of the project entitled “Strengthening regional cooperation to tackle air pollution challenges in Asia and the Pacific”	2023
9.	Evaluation of the project entitled “Improving the use and sharing of geospatial information for resilient and sustainable development in selected pilot countries”	2023

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| 10. | Evaluation of the project entitled “Supporting countries in Asia-Pacific to meet commitments to the Paris Agreement”   | 2023 |
| 11. | Evaluation of the project entitled “E-Commerce capacity-building for women-led SMEs in South Asia”   | 2023 |
| 12. | Evaluation of the project entitled “Enhancing regional cooperation and integration among ESCAP member States in East and North-East Asia and with the rest of the Asia-Pacific region for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, 2019–2023” | 2023 |
| 13. | Evaluation of the project entitled “Supporting improvements to civil registration and vital statistics systems in Asia and the Pacific”  | 2023 |
| 14. | Evaluation of the project entitled “Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards and snow leopards in North-East Asia”  | 2023 |
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