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**MANAGEMENT ISSUES: EVALUATIONS: REPORT ON EVALUATION  
ACTIVITIES OF ESCAP DURING THE BIENNIUM 2008-2009 AND  
OUTCOME OF THE EVALUATIONS OF APCICT AND SIAP**

(Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda)

**REPORT ON EVALUATION ACTIVITIES OF ESCAP DURING THE  
BIENNIUM 2008-2009**

*Note by the secretariat*

**SUMMARY**

The purpose of the present biennial evaluation report, the second such report prepared by the ESCAP secretariat, is to strengthen the accountability of ESCAP vis-à-vis the member States for its work in order to assist countries in achieving development results, through the provision of evidence-based information on the results of the work of the organization.

The report provides the Commission with information on findings and recommendations from key evaluations implemented by ESCAP during the biennium 2008-2009 and follow-up actions taken. It also provides an overview of continuing efforts to strengthen the evaluation function at ESCAP.

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

## Introduction

1. The purpose of the present biennial evaluation report is to provide the Commission with evidence-based information on the results of the work of ESCAP, holding the secretariat accountable to member States for its assistance in achieving development results and supporting the Commission in its efforts to guide the direction and focus of the work of ESCAP. The report summarizes the main findings and recommendations of key evaluations conducted in 2008 and 2009 and the steps taken by the ESCAP secretariat to implement those recommendations. It also provides an overview of initiatives taken during the biennium to further strengthen the evaluation function at ESCAP.

2. During the period 2008-2009, the ESCAP secretariat implemented 4 evaluations and 14 evaluative reviews<sup>1</sup> (see the annex for more details). The present report focuses primarily on the key findings and recommendations of evaluations, and related actions taken by the secretariat.

3. In its resolution 63/311 on system-wide coherence, the General Assembly reaffirmed the importance of strengthening evaluation across the United Nations system. Most recently, as a follow-up to this resolution and also bearing in mind earlier recommendations by the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence p.14, first para.),<sup>2</sup> the Secretary-General has put forth a proposal for a three-tier structured United Nations-wide evaluation system, as follows: (a) a new independent unit that would drive the programme of work for system-wide evaluations; (b) evaluation functions in each of the organizations of the United Nations system; and (c) the professional network of the United Nations Evaluation Group (see A/64/589, para. 39).

4. In line with the recommendations of the General Assembly, over the past two bienniums the ESCAP secretariat has focused efforts on establishing and further strengthening its evaluation function. The efforts have been pursued in collaboration with other regional commissions and the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), and through active membership in the United Nations Evaluation Group. The efforts concentrated on implementing and further developing the ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation System that was launched in 2007. In 2009, the secretariat revised the ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation System Overview<sup>3</sup> and launched the ESCAP *Evaluation Guidelines*.<sup>4</sup> Further, an information technology tool, the Evaluation Tracker, was developed with the purpose of monitoring the use of evaluations for improved performance. These undertakings are expected to improve the quality of evaluations and further institutionalize a culture of using information generated by evaluations to enhance learning for improved performance and accountability.

### **I. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ESCAP EVALUATIONS IMPLEMENTED DURING THE PERIOD 2008-2009 AND RELATED ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE SECRETARIAT**

5. The Commission, committed to ensuring that the needs and priorities of member States are met in the context of a changing regional environment, including

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<sup>1</sup> Evaluative processes at ESCAP are categorized into “evaluations” and “evaluative reviews”, according to their management arrangements. See the ESCAP *Evaluation Guidelines*, available at [www.unescap.org/pmd/evaluation.asp](http://www.unescap.org/pmd/evaluation.asp), for further details.

<sup>2</sup> See A/61/583, Chap. III, Sect. C, para. 87, third recommendation.

<sup>3</sup> The ESCAP *Monitoring and Evaluation System Overview* (ESCAP/PMD/M&E/1/Rev 2) is available at [www.unescap.org/pmd/documents/me/ESCAPMESystemRev26Oct09.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/pmd/documents/me/ESCAPMESystemRev26Oct09.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> The ESCAP *Evaluation Guidelines* (ESCAP/PMD/M&E/2) are available at [www.unescap.org/pmd/evaluation.asp](http://www.unescap.org/pmd/evaluation.asp).

the continuing United Nations reform efforts, indicated during the period 2006-2007 the need to revise its conference structure. In response, the ESCAP secretariat facilitated a review of the conference structure, which was considered by the Commission at its sixty-fourth session, held in 2008. Recommendations from a series of evaluations, including the 2006 organization-wide evaluation of ESCAP<sup>5</sup> and the 2007 inspection on results-based management practices at ESCAP,<sup>6</sup> which was carried out by OIOS, were taken into consideration during the review of the conference structure. The review led to the adoption in 2008 of resolution 64/1 on the restructuring of the conference structure of the Commission. Resolution 64/1 strengthened the intergovernmental machinery of ESCAP to address key and emerging issues confronting the Asia-Pacific region in the twenty-first century in a focused manner through an issue-based subsidiary structure.

6. The above structural change at the intergovernmental level led to changes at the programmatic and organizational levels to ensure alignment. The strategic framework for the period 2010-2011 reflected an organization repositioned as a leading regional hub for inclusive and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific<sup>7</sup> with a new and more issue-focused programme structure. Technical changes were also made throughout the results frameworks at the subprogramme level to implement earlier OIOS recommendations on ensuring regional emphasis and more direct links between ESCAP activities and the achievement of the results included in the programme framework. Also at the organizational level, recommendations to move from a thematic to an issue-based structure were fully implemented, in alignment with resolution 64/1.

7. A number of project reviews, including the review of the ESCAP-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-Asian Development Bank (ADB) Regional Millennium Development Goal Partnership, as well as the evaluation of the Japan-ESCAP Cooperation Fund and the review of the approach of ESCAP to capacity development pointed to areas requiring improvement in the operations of the ESCAP secretariat. Recommendations pointed to the need for the secretariat to continue to strengthen the quality of its planning, implementation and follow-up to technical cooperation projects with a view to enhancing overall development effectiveness. In response, the secretariat is taking measures to shift its technical cooperation work towards a programme approach, aligning it better with the priorities and emerging needs of member States as reflected in the ESCAP work programme. In the context of an ongoing Organizational Effectiveness Initiative, practices and procedures related to the appraisal and approval of technical cooperation activities are being reviewed, and mechanisms to strengthen the multidisciplinary approach at ESCAP through interdivisional collaboration and partnerships are being put in place.

8. To further strengthen partnerships, synergies and coherence with United Nations entities operating at the regional, subregional and national levels, the secretariat has actively promoted and strengthened the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism, which is chaired by the Executive Secretary of ESCAP. Bearing in mind a recommendation of the Japan-ESCAP Cooperation Fund evaluation to strengthen the gender dimension of the work of the secretariat, ESCAP paid particular attention to and advocated the strengthening of the Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. ESCAP partnerships with

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<sup>5</sup> Available at [www.unescap.org/pmd/evaluation.asp](http://www.unescap.org/pmd/evaluation.asp).

<sup>6</sup> Available at [www.unescap.org/64/pre\\_session\\_docs.asp](http://www.unescap.org/64/pre_session_docs.asp).

<sup>7</sup> See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-third Session, Supplement No. 6 (A/63/6/Rev.1)*, para. 15.9.

subregional organizations, not least with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, were also strengthened during the period 2008-2009.

9. In the context of the Organizational Effectiveness Initiative, the secretariat made efforts to improve the planning process for the formulation of the ESCAP strategic framework for 2012-2013. The focus was on improving the comprehensiveness and depth of related consultations and dialogue and on initiating the process in a timely fashion. The importance of these aspects of the process had been pointed out by the United Nations Board of Auditors in a 2009 audit. A comprehensive and participatory approach was applied in the development of the strategic framework to strengthen the utility of the programme of work as a management tool during programme implementation. Emphasis was placed on reflecting the multidisciplinary comparative advantage of ESCAP in the framework, including through the formulation of organization-wide development results. The efforts are expected to contribute to an enhanced coherence and impact of ESCAP programmes.

10. During the biennium 2008-2009, comprehensive, institutional-level evaluations or performance reviews were initiated for three regional institutions, namely the United Nations Asian and Pacific Centre for Agricultural Engineering and Machinery (UNAPCAEM), the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT) and the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP). The evaluations of APCICT and SIAP were ongoing at the time the present report was being prepared. The performance review of UNAPCAEM pointed to a number of themes that may be common across all five ESCAP regional institutions, including the following:

(a) The secretariat should enhance awareness within the region about the role of the institution;

(b) There is an urgent need to identify additional financial resources and a sustainable strategy for financing the operations of the institution;

(c) There is a need to strengthen partnership strategies, particularly in view of the current level of financial and human resources available to the institution. In this regard, regional synergies could be leveraged through partnerships to ensure the continued relevance and sustainability of the institution;

(d) In terms of governance, the role of the Governing Council should be strengthened, which would also be dependent upon strong ownership by participating member States;

(e) Improved communications and support between the Bangkok-based ESCAP headquarters and the institution are necessary.

11. During the biennium 2008-2009, ESCAP was involved in several evaluative reviews of projects funded through the United Nations Development Account. The Development Account is managed by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and funds projects aimed at developing capacities in the priority areas of the United Nations development agenda. The projects are implemented by the departments of the United Nations Secretariat, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the regional commissions. Although several reviews were ongoing at the time the present report was being prepared, a few lessons of relevance across the United Nations Secretariat regarding the formulation and implementation of future United Nations Development Account projects have emerged:

(a) First, as is common with many projects, the United Nations Development Account projects have been ambitious in setting out their expected achievements in the project documents, particularly in the light of the resources available for implementing the projects. The project reviews hence reflected that it was challenging to assess the results of the projects against their original results frameworks;

(b) Next, some projects of the regional commissions have focused on fostering inter- and intraregional collaboration and have been implemented jointly by two or more regional commissions. While underscoring the importance and benefit of sharing ideas across regions, related evaluative reviews pointed out that not all activities of such projects need to have an interregional dimension. On the contrary, it was found that activities often need to be tailored to the specific regional context;

(c) Finally, some project reviews pointed to the need for better coordination across the implementing entities, which points to the need to allocate additional human and possibly financial resources.

12. Advice on how to address some of the above-mentioned issues was included in the draft guidelines for joint Development Account projects, which were prepared by the regional commissions and submitted to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in September 2008.

## II. STRENGTHENING EVALUATION AT ESCAP

13. In line with the recommendations of the OIOS Inspection on Results-based Management Practices at ESCAP (2007) and the Japan-ESCAP Cooperation Fund evaluation (2008), the secretariat revised the *ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation System Overview* to further strengthen evaluation at ESCAP. The revisions to the *Overview* emphasized the enhanced use of information generated by ESCAP programme evaluations for organizational learning and improved performance. In addition, mechanisms to respond to the Commission's request for systematic monitoring and evaluation of the conference structure of the Commission, including its link to the programme priorities of ESCAP,<sup>8</sup> were put in place.

14. The *ESCAP Evaluation Guidelines* were launched in November 2009. They were designed in conformity with the regulations and rules of the United Nations Secretariat as put forth by the Secretary-General<sup>9</sup> and the ESCAP evaluation framework contained in the *Overview*. Furthermore, they were guided by the principles for evaluation developed by the United Nations Evaluation Group of which ESCAP is a member.<sup>10</sup> The *Guidelines* provide ESCAP staff members with practical guidance on how to manage and conduct evaluative processes in accordance with the existing regulations, rules and principles for evaluation at the United Nations. The *Guidelines* are structured along a 10-step process of planning, managing and using the findings of an evaluation or evaluative review.

15. During the biennium 2008-2009, ESCAP developed the Evaluation Tracker, an information technology tool for improving the use of information generated from ESCAP evaluations. The Evaluation Tracker works to enhance learning from

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<sup>8</sup> Commission resolution 64/1, para. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Secretary-General's bulletin, "Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation" (ST/SGB/2000/8) of 19 April 2000.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Evaluations Group, "Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the United Nations System", April 2005 (available online at [www.uneval.org](http://www.uneval.org)).

evaluations and to strengthen external and internal accountability for achieving development results. The Evaluation Tracker will be used by the secretariat as the main entry point for staff to retrieve information on completed evaluations at ESCAP. It is both a repository for evaluation reports and other related documents, and a tracker for the implementation of evaluation follow-up actions. The Evaluation Tracker was launched in February 2010 through a series of trainings for staff.

16. During the period 2008-2009, the ESCAP secretariat learned several key lessons on evaluation processes. The key lessons pertain to: (a) the establishment of a reference group; (b) the skill set of the evaluator; and (c) the management response.

17. On the issue of the reference group, it has been demonstrated that the establishment of such a group, which is involved throughout the evaluation process and can be comprised of the key stakeholders of the programme or project under review, contributes to strengthened ownership and transparency of the evaluation process. In turn, it increases the probability that the findings and recommendations will be accepted by the key stakeholders, leading to active follow-up actions for improved performance. Hence, the establishment of reference groups for evaluations and reviews is recommended and encouraged in the *Evaluation Guidelines*.

18. On the second issue, while the secretariat encourages the recruitment of external consultants to support the impartiality of evaluators and the independence of evaluation findings, identifying consultants with an appropriate balance of substantive knowledge of the particular subject area of focus and technical evaluation skills continues to pose a challenge. Most often, the evaluation budget does not allow for a team of evaluators to be recruited to mitigate the problem. Because of experiences to date, combined with a continued focus on strengthening the quality of the evaluations implemented at ESCAP, technical evaluation skills will be prioritized in future evaluations.

19. Finally, with respect to the management response, ESCAP has learned that the formulation and approval of this key document, which ensures accountability and action by all entities involved, is time-intensive and complex, requiring consultation among entities from across the organization. The lack of a timely completed management response and follow-up action plan has, in some cases, hindered the sharing of evaluation reports with external stakeholders, thus compromising a main purpose of the exercises, namely external accountability. Internal procedures have been revised to address this issue, and in future evaluation processes, ESCAP evaluation officers will coordinate the formulation of the management response.

20. The ESCAP secretariat is an active member of the United Nations Evaluation Group, which is a professional network that brings together the units responsible for evaluation in the United Nations system. The Evaluation Group aims to strengthen the professionalism, independence, effectiveness and visibility of the evaluation function across the United Nations system and advocates the importance of evaluation for learning, decision-making and accountability. During the biennium 2008-2009, the ESCAP secretariat was an active member of the United Nations Evaluation Group Evaluation Quality Standards Task Force, which was tasked with the development of standards and good practices at all stages of the evaluation process. Under the Task Force, the ESCAP secretariat, together with the United Nations Environment Programme, co-chaired the Working Group on Follow-up to Evaluations, which drafted guidelines on the follow-up to evaluations based on good practices within the United Nations system. The draft guidelines will be considered at the United Nations Evaluation Group Annual General Meeting in 2010.

21. The recently established United Nations Evaluation Development Group for Asia and the Pacific (UNEDAP) became more active and expanded its membership during the biennium, reflecting an increasing demand for a regionally based network for evaluation professionals. The purpose of the Group is to promote an evaluation culture in the Asian and Pacific region and to strengthen regional evaluation capacities. While many United Nations entities and other institutions in the region are engaged in evaluation and monitoring activities, UNEDAP, through networking, is expected to provide mutual opportunities for further enhancing and growing the capacities of the United Nations system and development partners. In 2009, ESCAP, together with UNDP and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), planned and organized a regional UNEDAP training course entitled "Evaluation in the Context of United Nations Reform: What is evaluation and how to design and manage the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and joint evaluations in Asia and the Pacific". A total of 35 United Nations staff representing 12 different entities located in 12 countries from across Asia and the Pacific participated in the training. In addition to ESCAP, the current members of UNEDAP include UNICEF, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the International Labour Organization, UNDP, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the United Nations Population Fund. During 2010, UNEDAP is being coordinated by UNICEF and ESCAP.

22. The ESCAP secretariat has benefited greatly from its involvement with OIOS and the professional evaluation networks, United Nations Evaluation Group and UNEDAP. The partnerships have been invaluable in terms of the advice and guidance received from other evaluation professionals, including on the development of terms of reference for evaluations, and on the exchange of experiences and good practices in strengthening the evaluation function. Through the collaboration, ESCAP has also gained access to an increased pool of qualified evaluation consultants. In addition, in 2009, OIOS facilitated the recruitment by ESCAP of an associate programme evaluation officer who had successfully passed the United Nations National Competitive Recruitment Examination in programme evaluation.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

23. As outlined in the present report, evaluations during the period 2008-2009 continued to provide evidence-based information on the performance and relevance of ESCAP operations at the strategic and activity levels. The information facilitated performance enhancement and guided organization-wide changes at ESCAP. Key results of follow-up to strategic evaluation recommendations include the development of an issue-based governing structure and programme of work that better reflect the needs of the region, improved planning and implementation processes, a better reflection in the programme of work of the multidisciplinary strength of ESCAP and stronger partnerships with other development actors. These changes are an indication of the credibility of evaluation processes that result in relevant and timely recommendations as well as the commitment of the Executive Secretary and other programme managers to respond to such recommendations to ensure that ESCAP remains relevant and provides effective, efficient and sustainable services to its membership.

24. The ESCAP secretariat is committed to continuing to strengthen its evaluation function, producing high-quality evaluations through methodological rigour. More systematic use of information generated by evaluations will be prioritized to intensify organizational learning and further strengthen accountability to the member States for results achieved.

*Annex*

**EVALUATIONS AND EVALUATIVE REVIEWS IMPLEMENTED BY  
ESCAP DURING THE PERIOD 2008-2009**

**Evaluations<sup>a</sup>**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Type of evaluation</b>	<b>Year completed</b>
ESCAP flagship publication: <i>Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific</i>	Thematic	2008
Japan-ESCAP Cooperation Fund 1996-2006 <sup>b</sup>	Project	2008
Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP)	Subprogramme	Ongoing
Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT)	Subprogramme	Ongoing

**Evaluative reviews<sup>c</sup>**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Type of evaluative review</b>	<b>Year completed</b>
ESCAP Approach to Capacity Development	Other	2008
United Nations Asian and Pacific Centre for Agricultural Engineering and Machinery (UNAPCAEM)	Other	2008
ESCAP-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-Asian Development Bank (ADB) Regional Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Partnership	Project	2008
ESCAP conference structure	Other	2008
Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT)	Other	2008

<sup>a</sup> In accordance with the ESCAP evaluation dissemination policy, reports of evaluations, generally conducted for external accountability purposes, are made public upon the inclusion of a response by ESCAP management to their recommendations. ESCAP evaluation reports are accessible at [www.unescap.org/pmd/evaluation-reports.asp](http://www.unescap.org/pmd/evaluation-reports.asp).

<sup>b</sup> It was agreed with the funding entity that the outcome of this evaluation would be shared internally only.

<sup>c</sup> In accordance with the ESCAP evaluation dissemination policy, reports of evaluative reviews, generally conducted for internal learning purposes, are normally shared within the secretariat only.



<b>Topic</b>	<b>Type of evaluative review</b>	<b>Year completed</b>
ADB/ESCAP Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)	Other	2008
Multi-Donor Voluntary Trust Fund on Tsunami Early Warning Arrangements in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia	Project	2008
Development Account Project “Capacity Building in Trade and Environment”	Project	2008
Project on Housing the Poor in Urban Economies	Project	2009
The Forum for Comprehensive Development for Indochina	Project	2009
Baseline Study on the Capacity and Organizational Structure of Global Compact Local Networks in Asia and the Pacific for Investors for Development Project	Project	2009
Asian Highway	Other	2009
Trans-Asian Railway	Other	2009
Activities of the Secretariat for the Promotion of the Green Growth Approach 2005 to 2009	Other	2009
Development Account Project “Interregional Cooperation on the Measurement of Informal Sector and Informal Employment”	Project	Ongoing
Omnibus Development Account project 06/07B “Strengthening Social Inclusion, Gender Equality and Health Promotion in the Millennium Development Goals”	Project	Ongoing
Development Account Project (06/07/D): “Public-Private Partnership Alliance Programme for Capacity-Building in Infrastructure Development and Provision of Basic Services”	Project	Ongoing

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