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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 THE EVALUATION OF APCICT

Note by the secretariat

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT), located in Incheon, Republic of Korea, was established by the Commission in its resolution 61/6 of 18 May 2005. The agreements between the United Nations and the Government of the Republic of Korea regarding the headquarters of APCICT and administrative and financial arrangements were signed in January 2006. APCICT was inaugurated in June 2006.

2. The Commission, in resolution 61/6, requested the ESCAP secretariat to undertake a comprehensive review of the work of APCICT prior to its sixty-sixth session in 2010. As indicated in resolution 61/6, the review, the purpose of which was to provide a knowledge base for the Commission to assess the performance of APCICT at its sixty-sixth session in 2010, would serve as a basis for determining whether to proceed with the operation of the Centre. The review would take into account the findings of an earlier self-assessment of the Centre's performance, which was presented to the Commission at its sixty-fourth session, in 2008,¹ and include an assessment of its financial sustainability and the complementary and value-added contribution of its work to that of other international organizations.

3. On the basis of the request as set out above, an evaluation of APCICT was conducted during 2009-2010, and its conclusions and recommendations, as prepared by the independent evaluator, are transmitted to the Commission through the present document.²

¹ E/ESCAP/64/29.

² The complete evaluation report is available at <http://www.unescap.org/pmd/evaluation.asp>.

II. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

4. The purpose of the evaluation was to provide a knowledge base enabling the Commission to assess the performance of APCICT and determine whether to proceed with the operation of APCICT. The evaluation had the following objectives: (a) to assess the performance of APCICT against the objective set out in the statute of the Centre; (b) to determine the extent to which the work of APCICT was complementary and added value to the work of other relevant international organizations; (c) to assess the financial sustainability of APCICT; and (d) to formulate concrete, action-oriented recommendations based on the findings.

5. An independent evaluator was recruited to carry out the evaluation. In conducting the evaluation, the evaluator carried out the following activities: (a) documentation review; (b) structured interviews with key ESCAP secretariat stakeholders, selected members of the Governing Council of APCICT, senior representatives of the Government of the Republic of Korea and the Incheon City administration, the permanent representatives in Bangkok of selected member States and representatives of other organizations; and (c) web-based electronic surveys of members and associate members of the Commission, APCICT national partners, Governing Council members and key ESCAP secretariat stakeholders.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6. The conclusions and recommendations, as contained in the evaluation report prepared by the independent evaluator, are annexed to the present document. The Commission may wish to pay special attention to recommendations 1, 13 and 14, which call for its action.

IV. FOLLOW-UP

7. The response of ESCAP management to the evaluation and its recommendations, together with the secretariat's action plan for implementing the recommendations, will be issued as an addendum to the present document.

Annex

Evaluation of APCICT: Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

The establishment of the APCICT as a regional institution has been an effective and relevant collaboration between ESCAP and the Government of the Republic of Korea. In meeting the objectives of this evaluation, it is concluded that:

- APCICT is well on its way to meeting its objectives as set out in its statute.
- Its work, to the extent that it could be measured from several sources, has been complementary and added value to the work of other international organizations.
- Its financial sustainability is assured through verbal commitments made by the Government of the Republic of Korea for continued financial and in-kind support to be provided at present levels for at least the next five years, combined with reasonable potential for the raising of additional voluntary resources from other sources, including other member States.

On the first point above, APCICT has directly supported ESCAP's subprogramme 7 dealing with ICT training in terms of both policy direction and strategy. In fact, APCICT has exceeded its training results targets by a wide margin in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Of special note is the development and national roll-outs of the Academy, but also the development of the Virtual Academy, the e-Co Hub and Development Partnership Network (DPN), partnerships, the APCICT website and expansion into knowledge management.

On the second point above, it can be concluded that initial concerns over duplication of ICT training related work with other regional organizations can be allayed for the following reason: (a) no direct evidence of duplication could be found; (b) even if such evidence were to become evident, the regional demands for ICT training are seen to be very high and increasing, and the question becomes more one of coordination of service delivery rather than one of duplication; and (c) APCICT has taken extraordinary efforts to coordinate its work with other organizations through its many partnership arrangements, regional workshops and conferences and outreach initiatives, thus mitigating potential for duplication.

On the third point above, APCICT's sustainability cannot be assured through the provision of needed *financial* and staff resources alone. The *economic* sustainability of APCICT is assured through an expanding regional market and demand for ICT training and related human resources development, provided that its products and services remain focused, relevant, timely, current, of high quality and demand-driven. APCICT's *institutional* sustainability depends on striking the balance between ICT training and related demands be met on the one hand and, on the other hand, against an adequate base of internal capacities, especially those dealing with staff resources and sound ICT policy and institutional linkages with the ESCAP secretariat and the host country.

The many findings contained in section 3 of the report^a present an APCICT start-up story based on an initial sound vision that was implemented through a focused

^a The complete evaluation report is available at <http://www.unescap.org/pmd/evaluation.asp>.

strategy and entrepreneurial management. Contributing to APCICT's positive performance were the application of sound development principles of national ownership, a programme-approach to demand-driven service delivery, focus, responsiveness, inclusiveness and broad-based participatory and consultative approaches. APCICT is broadly seen by its many stakeholders and partners as a success story and as a credit to both ESCAP and the Government of the Republic of Korea, and as having established itself as a credible regional hub for the delivery of ICT training and human resources capacity-building services to member States.

Bringing all this together and supported by the observations by many of those closest to its operations, it can be concluded that the main factors explaining APCICT's positive performance are:

- **Vision.** The initial vision for ICT training for development was translated into the APCICT as an ESCAP-Government of the Republic of Korea collaboration, bringing together their comparative strengths and synergies.
- **Strategy.** The APCICT vision and mission was reflected in flexible implementation strategies and programmes of work based on sound needs analyses, demand-driven service delivery, focus, partnerships, participation and quality.
- **Host country commitment.** This was expressed primarily through substantial financial and in-kind support and the facilities and accommodation made available in Songdo, combined with ongoing interaction and communication between APCICT and the Republic of Korea entities on substantive matters dealing with ICTs.
- **Teamwork.** A small but dedicated core group of staff and contract resources exhibited a high degree of professionalism, morale, commitment, dedication and organizational values leading to a focus on results and "client-satisfaction".
- **Leadership.** As measured through the entrepreneurial managerial style of the Director of APCICT in terms of communicating and "marketing" the APCICT vision and services, setting direction and priorities, motivating staff, inspiring and leading by example, perseverance, organizing, seeking out partnerships, and setting up feedback/learning loops.

From the above general conclusions, it should be stated that APCICT's continued effectiveness and relevance are not necessarily assured simply through the provision of funding at current levels. An excessive emphasis on financial sustainability could result in over-looking other challenges of sustainability from a broader perspective. In this light, corollary conclusions and lessons include:

- **The Academy.** APCICT's flagship programme, the Academy, is proving to be a real success. However, additional demands from ESCAP members to add more and more modules could end up diluting the effectiveness of the Academy by spreading its content over too diverse a range of ICT issues, and by diverting attention and resources from the need to routinely review, amend and update its curriculum and existing modules. Priorities for and the nature of ICT training will shift and change as the broader ICT sector itself quickly evolves and grows over time, and in different ways across member States. The Academy itself needs to be dynamic and flexible, even to the point where different "Academies" might be designed over time to address broadly different sets of ICT training requirements.

- **ICT training as a dimension of broader national capacity development.** At the national socio-economic development level, ICT training is but one of many dimension's of human resources capacity development. And human resources (HR) is but one dimension of broader organizational and system-wide capacity (others include the legal and policy frameworks, financial frameworks, etc.). ICT training delivered outside of and/or de-linked from the context of broader national HR and institutional capacity development initiatives could risk non-relevance in the longer term even if participants of the day find the content to be relevant. For example, ICT related capacity-building is usually part of a larger national capacity-building programme and must be coordinated and sequenced with other types of training and capacity building (e.g. development policy frameworks, governance and service delivery reform, etc.). APCICT is cognizant of these challenges, but positioning ICT-training delivery within the context of more comprehensive and system-wide capacity development programmes would go a long way in ensuring long-term sustainability of ICT training results. The right methodologies are needed to do this.
- **APCICT's advisory services.** These, as noted, are as yet still under development and thus far are more directly aligned to specific training/workshop types of events, including the Academy. There is the risk that APCICT may be seen by its client countries and/or that it might position itself as having expertise in training and human resources development that go beyond its focus areas. There was the suggestion that this pillar of the APCICT model is better called (training) technical or professional support. Care must be taken in positioning itself as a training policy *adviser* or a *provider* of training technical services/support. This comes down to managing mutual expectations as to what is and can be delivered in terms of such support.
- **ESCAP secretariat – Republic of Korea balance.** The Government of the Republic of Korea has brought essential and visible support to the APCICT, and the ICT policy linkages between the two sides are strong and mutually reinforcing. There has been no evidence of any undue influence by the Government of the Republic of Korea on APCICT's programme agenda. The ESCAP secretariat has provided less visible though important programme, financial and administrative backstopping support. The ESCAP secretariat's United Nations and ICT policy role has also been less visible in the APCICT operation (e.g. in the area of United Nations development principles, discussed in the preceding section). A strong Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division (IDD) back-stopping role to APCICT and two-way communication are seen as important for both sides.
- **ICT understanding and awareness.** The importance of ICTs in helping countries to achieve national socio-economic development goals and the MDGs is well researched and documented. The awareness and understanding of this importance is slowly expanding beyond the technical and professional levels within government organizations, to the higher executive, political and even legislative levels. But this is seen as a slow process as national attention is focused on usually more pressing concerns (employment, poverty, fiscal and monetary constraints, etc.) and the linkages to ICTs is often subordinated to competing priorities. The relevance of ICTs from the ESCAP secretariat's viewpoint and the role of APCICT could be under some risk if sound ICT policy, programme, funding and institutional frameworks are not developed by the ESCAP secretariat.

Recommendations

This section presents the main recommendations of the evaluation, based on the findings and conclusions drawn in the preceding sections.^a First, a number of strategic yet action-oriented recommendations are made with respect to the APCICT, which is the fourth objective of this evaluation. These are made in a logical sequence of the sorts of policy and management decisions that would be required by the Commission, member States, the ESCAP secretariat or by the APCICT, as the case may be. Second, a number of operational recommendations of a more operational nature are made with respect to the APCICT and its relationship with the ESCAP secretariat, in no particular order of priority. Third, some recommendations of a technical nature are made for the APCICT and for broader consideration by the ESCAP secretariat. The recommendations have been developed through discussion and consultation with the APCICT and the Reference Group set up for this evaluation.

1. Strategic recommendations

No. 1. That APCICT continue as a regional institution of ESCAP

Based on the evaluation findings and conclusions in respect of APCICT's performance, it is strongly recommended that the Commission decide that APCICT continue to operate beyond its existing five-year mandate. As a continuing institution, APCICT will no doubt strengthen ESCAP's capacity, visibility and credibility in implementing its regional ICT-for-development policy and strategy.

No. 2. That APCICT develop a comprehensive 5-year business strategy and plan

To support its continuation as a regional institution, it is recommended that APCICT develop a comprehensive business strategy and plan covering the next five years of its operation, as was also recommended by the GC during its fourth session. Knowing that the regional ICT training market is growing and evolving, the business strategy would identify those aspects of training and related areas of demand that might be met by APCICT. Further, the APCICT business strategy would update and determine the APCICT business model in terms of optimal mix of training and related products and services, internal capacities needed to develop and deliver those products and services, and the financial resources to do so. The strategy and plan would cover APCICT's short-term (1-2 year) and medium-term (3-5) planning periods, but also look to the longer term as well. It should be updated on an annual basis, and constitute the base for its annual programme of work.

The APCICT business strategy and plan should be developed for submission to the GC at its fifth annual meeting in late 2010. The plan would also look at all statutory, institutional (covering both the ESCAP secretariat and APCICT), governance, coordination, ICT policy and other requirements that would need to be met or put in place to allow for optimal continuation beyond the current five-year mandate. The primary focus of the strategy should be on *what* APCICT should be delivering (i.e. the main pillars and associated clear set of objectives and priorities), and then *how* it should be delivered (i.e. form to follow function, internal capacities). Critical components of the "how", of course, would cover, inter alia, financing and human resourcing. The strategy and plan should therefore include a strong conventional *business case* for financing and other resources, and for the diversification of its funding base.

No. 3. That APCICT develop an action plan and methodology for strategy development

An “action plan” to develop the business strategy should be developed and work should begin by no later than May of 2010, to allow for sufficient time through consultative and participatory mechanisms, much as had been done by APCICT during its initiation phase. A proper strategic planning methodology should be adapted, much of which could be based on the aforementioned “Guidebook for ESCAP Regional Institutions on Resource Mobilization”. The finished APCICT business strategy and plan could serve as a model for other regional institutions (RIs). The action plan will determine the process, scope, key issues, timing, target design of the envisaged strategy, review and approval mechanisms and resources needed.

No. 4. That quinquennial comprehensive reviews of APCICT be conducted

It is recommended that the secretariat conduct an independent comprehensive evaluation of the performance of the APCICT toward the end of each five year period, the results of which should be submitted to the Commission to inform key decisions on its overall policies associated with the APCICT. The evaluation would be carried out by an independent external evaluator but managed by the secretariat, as is the case of the present evaluation. An appropriate budget should be set aside to carry out this activity. Carrying out such an evaluation does not preclude the need for annual or other periodic reviews and evaluations, whether for APCICT as a whole or for individually funded projects managed by the APCICT. A similar policy may be considered for all of ESCAP’s regional institutions.

In addition to relevance, effectiveness and sustainability, it is recommended that the ESCAP secretariat include “efficiency” as the fourth dimension to be addressed in comprehensive evaluations. Efficiency, cost-effectiveness and value-for-money are important considerations and they should be explicitly factored into future evaluations of APCICT. The notion of sustainability should also be broadened beyond that of financial sustainability to include economic and institutional sustainability.

It is further recommended that the ESCAP secretariat consider introducing an explicit budget line and amount in annual RI programme financial plans to cover costs associated with annual, periodic or comprehensive evaluations or reviews. The Commission may further consider introducing a policy whereby all RIs are subject to a comprehensive evaluation at least every five years.

2. Operational recommendations pertaining to the ESCAP secretariat and APCICT

The following recommendations are related to ongoing operational matters of the APCICT and its relationship to the ESCAP secretariat. Some of the recommendations also have potential for broader application to all ESCAP RIs.

No. 5. Adopt a set of programming principles

It is recommended that the ESCAP secretariat and APCICT (as well as other RIs) adopt a sound set of development and programming principles based on the United Nations development system and on United Nations system coherence and reform, as generally discussed in section 3.3.3 of the report.^a Further, it is recommended that development activities be driven in the first instance by such principles, and that these should flow in a logical way from the ESCAP programme of work to the regional

institutions. Such principles would strengthen the United Nations dimension of APCICT's and other RI's identity and comparative advantages. These principles, including those principles that are currently adopted by APCICT, should be reflected in all key APCICT documents (e.g. statutes, strategies, plans) and should be consistent and mutually supportive of the host country's principles of development. The reflection and operationalization of such principles should ensure a proper balance to the "United Nations" ESCAP – Republic of Korea collaboration.

No. 6. Maintain focus

It is strongly recommended that APCICT maintain its focus on ICT training and human resources development directed toward national socio-economic development, as currently set out in its statute and covering resolution. There may be strong pressures from member countries, the secretariat or others to expand APCICT's scope by adding more and more modules to its "Academy", by expanding its advisory services function, or by other means. Rationalizations for scope expansion are easily made, but the best protection against scope-shift will in the first instance be found in the legislation and clearly articulated strategies and plans.

No. 7. Maintain the Academy as the flagship product

To ensure that the Academy continues as a relevant and effective flagship product and that future successes can be built on this success, it is recommended that the Academy be subject to constant "renewal" and modularization. Further, to optimize localization, the number of modules should be kept to a minimum and in line with the current "theme" of the academy (i.e. ICT for leadership). Where demands for other related themes emerge over time, other "academies" might be considered. The business strategy and plan recommended above should pay specific attention to this aspect.

No. 8. Strengthen ESCAP secretariat ICT policy and institutional linkages

It is recommended that a stronger statement of ICT policy be made in ESCAP's programme of work and that the institutional linkages between APCICT and the ESCAP secretariat be strengthened. APCICT should be directly involved in IDD activities associated with ICT policy development since APCICT has developed considerable knowledge and experience in the field in implementing much of the existing ICT strategy as contained in the Strategic Framework and Programme of Work. Particular attention might be given to strengthening IDD's substantive APCICT back-stopping support, and to better involve APCICT in all of ESCAP's ICT activities (i.e. its many other workshops, meetings, policy initiatives, etc.).

No. 9. Link with broader capacity-development methodologies

It is recommended that APCICT strengthen its partnership with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), other United Nations development agencies and other parts of the ESCAP secretariat in terms of linking national ICT training activities to well-established methodologies in capacity development/assessments and development-oriented strategic planning. These methodologies (including those dealing with capacity assessments per se) are proven in the field, and address capacity development from a system-wide and multi-dimensional perspective. This would help both national partners and APCICT to better understand how ICT training fits within broader organizational and system-wide capacity development or change management programmes.

APCICT might be able to tap into significant expertise available at the UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok. In this regard, there may also be an opportunity for APCICT to partner with other parts of the ESCAP secretariat.^b UNDP and other United Nations development agencies have a strong in-country presence. For example, UNDP has established long-standing in-country relationships with central and local governments in such areas as governance, energy and environment, poverty reduction and other emerging priority sectors of socio-economic and human development. General agreements to collaborate might be sought with the regional offices of the respective United Nations agencies.

No. 10. Provide interim bridge financing

APCICT is facing a heavy and increasing workload, and has another 1.5 years remaining in its current mandate. Some of the above recommendations imply an even greater workload on already constrained APCICT resources. It is recommended, therefore, that APCICT be given additional financial and human resources to successfully complete its current mandate and to prepare for its continuation as a regional institution of ESCAP.

No. 11. United Nations coordination

Similar to the preceding recommendation, the ESCAP secretariat should consider putting in place mechanisms whereby RI activity might be better coordinated with the work of other United Nations development agencies in the region, and to concentrate especially on those specific United Nations entities whose work may be more closely aligned with the work of the particular RI. This coordination work should not be left simply to the RI alone.

No. 12. NRL arrangements

While, the use of NRL resources should be based on existing guidelines available from the Human Resources Management Section, the ESCAP secretariat might initiate consultations with the Government of the Republic of Korea in order to optimize such arrangements for NRLs from the Republic of Korea. Areas that might be addressed include the setting of skills requirements, providing financial incentives where they may be needed, and factoring in staff performance to the host country's NRL career development and related promotional opportunities. NRL arrangements should be made for a longer period of time (e.g. 2-3 years), with an opt-out clause for either party, based on performance.

3. General recommendations for the Commission

The evaluation uncovered a number of opportunities for improving the APCICT operation and its relationships with other entities – recommendations that may also apply to other RIs. These may be considered during the development of the APCICT business strategy and plan, or as separate items:

No. 13. RI funding condition

In order to avoid the potential of a RI becoming overly dependent on a single source of funding (host country), the Commission might introduce a resource mobilization

^b A recent evaluative review was carried out on “ESCAP’s approach to capacity-building”, which explores in detail such general opportunities.

target in the resolution or statute whereby a minimum amount of RI financing (e.g. 25-50 per cent) might be obtained from non-host-country sources.

No. 14. Overall governance of RIs

Several actions might be taken by the Commission on the initiative of the ESCAP secretariat to clarify and strengthen the overall governance of the RIs.^c First, the Commission may wish to review the role and mandate of the APCICT GC (and other GCs) with a view to clarifying the GC role as one of an “advisory” nature or as one of a “governing” nature, or both. The different aspects that may be considered cover, inter alia: (a) the selection criteria for membership; (b) the term of membership in order to reduce turnover and enhance continuity; (c) an obligation of GC members to contribute a minimal annual voluntary amount of funding to the RI; (d) the precise role in reviewing and/or recommending for approval the RI annual programme of work; and (e) meeting frequency. Prior to taking on a role of approving (and not just advising on) the RI’s annual workplan, it would be important for GC members to become fully aware of and have ongoing, in-depth engagement with the RI’s work.

Secondly if such a governance review is carried out, it should be done in the context of reviewing the Commission’s overall conference structure (which includes the Commission, eight subsidiary Committees (including the Committee on ICT (CICT)) and the five regional institutions). In that context, it would also be beneficial to review the governing structure of all five regional institutions at the same time, including the role and mandate of the Commission, the Committees and the Governing Councils in that regard. On the basis of a decision by the Commission, the statutes of the regional institutions could then be changed accordingly.

Thirdly, it is noted that the annual report of RIs to the Commission contains GC’s recommendations and issues for consideration by the Commission. However, it is recommended that the secretariat apply other mechanisms to ensure that Commission oversight of RIs in fact takes place (e.g. that clause 6 in current resolution 61/6 has meaningful application). This might be achieved through a specific delegated authority to the GCs and/or the secretariat to monitor or follow up on the implementation of recommendations.

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^c It should be noted that previously the work programmes of the RIs were not an integral part of ESCAP’s subprogrammes, and hence the GCs had a clearer role on this aspect.