

Non-reimbursable Loan (NRL) Services at ESCAP

An Evaluative Review

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary and Recommendations	page 5
Main Report	page 10
Introduction	page 10
Methodology	page 12
Findings	page 13
General	page 13
Performance Assessment	page 24
Conclusion	page 29
Recommendations	page 31

Acronyms

ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
DES	Deputy Executive Secretary
EDD	Environment Development Division
HRMS	Human Resources Management Section
ICTD	Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division
PPD	Programme, Planning and Partnerships Division
SDD	Social Development Division
TID	Trade and Investment Division
TD	Transport Division
SROs	ESCAP Sub-Regional Offices
ENEAS	Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia
EPO	Subregional Office for the Pacific
NCA	Subregional Office for North and Central Asia
SSWA	Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia
ESCAP Regional Institutes	
APCICT	Asian-Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development
APCTT	Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology
CAPSA	Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture
CSAM	Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Machinery
SIAP	Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECE	Economic Commission for Europe
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
JAXA	Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency
RoK	Republic of Korea

Executive Summary

1. Review Background

Non-Reimbursable Loan (NRL) services are one form of UN gratis personnel.¹ It is essentially a staff secondment scheme. The overall policy on gratis personnel in the UN Secretariat is provided in administrative instruction ST/AI/1999/6.² In the ESCAP context, the purpose of engaging the services of NRL experts is to assist in the execution of technical cooperation programmes and not for Secretariat-type functions under the regular programme budget. From 2008 to 2012, NRL experts provided an average of 112 work-months per year to ESCAP to support technical cooperation activities in ESCAP's substantive areas, including the work of the regional institutions. While the large majority of the NRL experts were supplied by the Republic of Korea, a few were also provided by Japan and the Netherlands.

2. Review Purpose and Scope

The purpose of the review is to assess the relevance and effectiveness of the NRL modality at ESCAP and to ascertain how it can be strengthened to better serve the needs of the secretariat and the member States of ESCAP.³ The results of this review are intended to support decision-making at the strategic management level. This review covers the time period 2008-2013. Issues outside the time frame are referred to when relevant.

3. Main Conclusions

3.1 Current Operation of NRL Modality

The source of NRL experts has become narrowly based over the last 5 years in particular.

ESCAP's approach to the NRL as a skills secondment scheme is ripe for refreshing, opening up and re-energising. There is clearly considerable potential and sufficient interest to improve, expand and promote the NRL modality. The NRL modality remains relevant for ESCAP. There are several practical steps that can be taken to improve effectiveness and added value, particularly in light of ESCAP's strategic direction. The key conclusions are outlined below.

3.2 Use of the NRL Modality Steadily Narrowing and Reducing

NRL is long established but little used by UN agencies. ESCAP is the predominant user within the UN Secretariat. Within ESCAP three countries, and predominantly one, the Republic of Korea, have been NRL providers and partners in the past 5 years. There had been more partners in the past, including a civil society organization in early 2008. There appear to be several reasons for the reduction in partners.

3.3 Mixed Awareness of and Interest in the NRL Modality

Beyond the circle of those involved with NRLs neither the modality, nor its potential, are well known. A selection of interviews indicate there is little awareness and knowledge about the NRL scheme among member States.⁴ Within Sub Regional Offices (SROs) and Regional Institutions (RIs) there is mixed knowledge and little direct use, sometimes because the modality is seen as being cumbersome. There is no publicly accessible place, such as ESCAP's website, that provides information about the NRL modality, opportunities available and processes to be followed.

¹ The other two main forms of gratis personnel are Interns and Junior Professional Officers

² Operational aspects of acquiring NRL services and related policies is provided in administrative instruction ST/AI/231/Rev.1. and attached as Annex vi

³ notes from: ESCAP Strategy: SMT Retreat, 9 August 2014

⁴ This review was relatively small scale. A series of interviews with Embassies in Bangkok were undertaken to obtain indicative awareness and interest of the NRL modality, rather than a survey all member States.

3.4 Complicated Character of NRL Modality acting as a Deterrent is Real - and also Reasonable

In terms of gratis personnel, the NRL modality is the most strongly relationship-based and has multiple steps in the process. This brings relatively high transaction costs and some frustration. Reasonable contributing factors to the complications are the more specialized nature of the assignments to be undertaken, the associated seniority of experience required, the longer term tenure (2-3 years) of NRL placements and time needed for negotiations between the UN agency and the partner.

3.5 NRL has become a Routine Feature for Some Divisions

Most, but not all, divisions of ESCAP in Bangkok use the NRL modality. Over the last five years in particular, NRL personnel have often been replaced by other NRLs for different phases of the same project. NRLs frequently come from the same Ministry of the same partner government – the Republic of Korea. They are seen as one part of extrabudgetary funding for the projects provided by the government. Given this, and the established set of contacts among current and former NRLs, it is easy to see why this has become almost a custom of continuity with some Divisions rather than a more open process.

3.6 Benefits of the NRL Modality Lie with all Parties

When the NRL placement works well the benefits for all parties include strengthened professional and inter-agency relationships which are often long lasting, along with greater access to a range of decision-makers. The more specific benefits are:

- (i) NRL individuals gain significant international professional development opportunities and experience
- (ii) The partner gains a greater understanding of, contribution to and influence on, international decision-making and policy development; the Government of the Republic of Korea (RoK) has an outlet for staff career development that can be planned for and is otherwise unavailable; and it increases the capacity of their Ministries to operate in the international arena
- (iii) ESCAP divisions increase their capacity to undertake technical projects through additional specialist personnel and frequently receive extra-budgetary project funding which NRLs either bring with them or access during their placement.

3.7 Efficient System and a Range of Challenges

1. HRMS is seen as efficiently managing the system for engaging NRLs.⁵ There are also challenges around NRLs. They include issues around recruitment, selection and quality of NRLs. There is a limited choice of personnel for ESCAP. There is reportedly high quality English language capability and pro-active contribution from some NRLs and not from others. For NRLs the management of their contribution varies. Some are integrated well into their 'home' Division others are more disconnected. For partners it is an expensive option. For ESCAP staff the processes are multi-layered and can be time consuming.
2. The almost rotational nature of RoK NRLs brings considerable efficiencies. It also contributes to confusion about expectations, including, at times, where the drive for NRL placements comes from.

3.8 ESCAP Processes around NRLs have become Disconnected within the Organization

As part of streamlining processes an NRL Review Group (NRG)⁶ established in 2001 with overall management responsibility is no longer operating. Key functions of the NRG included:

- reviewing each request for an NRL
- providing guidance on donor Governments / organizations for each request

⁵ Interviews within ESCAP and with DESA

⁶ The NRG was to comprise officials from the Office of the Executive Secretary, the then Programme Management Division and a Personnel Officer

- assigning a priority rating code to guide the personnel services section, and
- reviewing the relevance of all NRL experts at least once every two years, followed by drawing up a list of needed NRL services to discuss with donor Governments / organizations.⁷

These functions have been handled separately through sign-offs by the Executive Secretary.

Unintentionally this, combined with light-touch induction processes, seems to have reduced the opportunity for an organization-wide focus on the strategic relevance of NRL secondments for ESCAP and the possibility of input from a broader pool of potential partners.

Potential Strategic Development Opportunities with NRL

3.9 Opportunity to increase ESCAP leadership and management of NRL Modality

1. Currently, each individual Division makes a decision about whether or not they need the technical expertise available through a NRL. As mentioned, this is signed off by the Executive Secretary.
2. A dominant and consistent theme in the review was a wish for ESCAP, as a whole organization, to be on the front foot, leading and communicating priorities and driving the identification of where NRLs could assist with their technical skills in a way that met ESCAP priorities. There seems to be a real opportunity for ESCAP to take the lead in communicating to a wider group of member States and stakeholders why, where and how seconded skills would assist in achieving priorities.

3.10 Current ESCAP Strategy provides clearer direction and greater Fit of NRL Modality

ESCAP is refining its strategy with a focus on fewer, longer and deeper developments. The intention is for the three pillars of sustainable development to act as the core driver of all programmes. This calls for increasing focus on strategic and innovative partnerships, strengthening integration of sub-regional offices with ESCAP's overall strategy and programme priorities, and enhancing the secretariat's capacity.⁸ NRL as a modality fits well because of the focus on high level technical skills and the relationship-based nature of establishing the 'contract' for NRL engagement.

3.11 Important to Widen Pool of NRL Partners Associated with Strategy

A consistent theme arising in this review is that there is a wide talent pool for ESCAP to draw on in member States and beyond - government ministries, research institutions, private sector and civil society organizations. Equally consistently raised has been the importance and value of actively seeking the added value of more South-South secondments and exploring a mixed tenure for NRLs from a wider range of organizations. Inevitably there will be member States and organizations that cannot or do not wish to participate. However, a strategically focused effort to explore a potential wider pool of NRL partners around ESCAP strategy would be useful.⁹

3.12 Practical Steps for Strengthening NRL Modality in Transparent Manner

There are number of practical steps that can be taken. These are addressed in more detail in the recommendations and the full report. They include:

- (i) the importance and value of planned expansion to invite a wider pool of potential NRLs, involving a broader range of countries including member States, greater South-South connections and a wider variety of institutions and organizations including academic, civil society and private sector as well as government

⁷ ESCAP/AI/2001/2, 11 June 2001 (pages 2-3) – Annex vii

⁸ op cit: notes from ESCAP Strategy: SMT Retreat, 9 August 2014

⁹ Given the scale of this review, it could only scratch the surface of potential interest. But the message from over 40 interviews, within and beyond ESCAP, indicate there is potential interest.

- (ii) greater variation in time-frames for NRL secondments to suit the specific programme
- (iii) transparent systems of promoting and providing information about the NRL modality
- (iv) improved selection, appointment, orientation and NRL management
- (v) a focused project in a sub-region(s) that brings together ESCAP strategy, sub regional priorities, technical skill requirements of ESCAP and related secondment opportunities.

4. Recommendations

Recommendations fall into two main categories and, in line with the Terms of Reference, focus on strengthening the NRL modality. The first are steps to improve the generic operation of the NRL scheme. The suggestion is to start implementing these steps straightaway but some will take time to bear fruit. The second is for a more immediate action to integrate NRLs into the current ESCAP Strategic direction and to assess, through practice, potential broader interest in the NRL modality. It is for a short-term sub-regional initiative(s) that produces tangible results and allows ESCAP to focus on NRLs contributing to its overall strategy, strengthens partnerships and trials some of the more general recommendations.

A. Recommendations for Managing the NRL Modality

1. Appoint Human Resources and Management Section to coordinate and manage the NRL scheme and reactivate NRL Review Group

- (i) One division of ESCAP needs to have an oversight and leadership function in relation to the NRL scheme. The NRL modality is essentially a human resources issue and the Human Resources and Management Section (HRMS) is a logical lead section. This would build on the active role HRMS already takes.
- (ii) NRLs also have a role in helping ESCAP achieve its strategic priorities. The Programme Planning and Partnerships Division (PPD) has a vital place with the strategic overview, and organization-wide programme and partnership development roles it plays. PPD can play a role in providing strategic priorities and associated requirements for NRL expertise.
- (iii) HRMS will need to be well supported by communications staff within ESCAP
- (iv) Ideally, these skills and roles will all come together through a reactivated NRL Review Group

2. Active and Transparent Promotion of NRL

- (i) Rename the working title of the scheme so that its meaning is clearer to potential partners
- (ii) Develop a straightforward communication strategy for the scheme that includes:
 - posting the NRL placements on the ESCAP website outlining the process involved and the benefits of the scheme
 - working with DESA to post NRL opportunities and information on the DESA website¹⁰
 - for partners, providing a regular, either annual or six monthly, update about the scheme placement openings, placement achievements - including success stories - and how the placements fit with ESCAP strategic priorities

3. Identification, Selection and Appointment of NRLs

- (i) HRMS coordination of potential NRL secondments in association with PPD, in line with the ESCAP strategy and based on:
 - Division, sub regional office and regional institution identification of priorities
 - Annual assessment of technical requirements and how these fit with strategic priorities

¹⁰ Pers comm: DESA offered to post NRL opportunities on their website during the course of this review

- (ii) Terms of Reference prepared that cover: technical skills, language requirements, interpersonal /intercultural skills and duration of seconded assignmenttransparent listing of placements on the website
 - pro-actively engaging with countries and organizations that have the technical expertise required for the assignment
- (iii) Selection processes that involve ESCAP short-listing and interviewing of candidates, in person whenever possible, or by skype or video-link
- (iv) Checking or assessing suitability in more detail if questions arise for ESCAP
- (v) An informal addition to the Memorandum of Agreement to focus on a three way agreement (between ESCAP, the organization/government and the individual NRL) covering mutual expectations and the partnership potential of the NRL modality. It would also contribute to performance assessment
- (vi) In line with ESCAP Human Resources policies, seek to ensure gender balance of NRL experts

4. A Planned Orientation and Integration Process

- (i) That actively welcomes NRLs and builds quick understanding of the roles, priorities and codes of conduct and ethics of ESCAP
- (ii) Where HRMS coordinate NRLs on a regular basis to both help NRLs adapt, including their families, and, with PPD, build a shared intelligence about issues relevant to ESCAP's priorities
- (iii) Active steps taken to integrate NRLs into Divisions, incorporating relevant lessons from the integration of Interns
- (iv) Performance assessment based on the signed three-way agreement

B. Recommendation - Pilot of Sub-regional Initiatives

The review surfaced several suggestions for adapting NRL in a manner that:

- addressed producing tangible results for ESCAP's strategy and substantive priorities
- would integrate programmes more effectively between RIs, SROs and Bangkok, and
- would provide short and longer term opportunities for NRLs to contribute

Multiple suggestions were made for creative ways of working long distance, using technology and engaging member States, institutions and individual technical specialists. A sub-regional pilot initiative(s) is an approach that:

- brings these suggestions together
- is contained rather than all encompassing and therefore more manageable
- allows for testing a more integrated approach to NRLs within ESCAP strategic priorities, and
- seeks interest from a wider pool of partners

The recommendations are that:

1. ESCAP explore the development of two sub-regional pilot initiatives. Such initiatives would fit with a focus on achieving ESCAP substantive priorities and with better strategic and innovative partnerships. Pilots of a manageable size and duration also increase the likelihood of achievable and visible 'runs on the board'
2. The two sub-regions most frequently raised for initial exploration were: the Pacific (potential focus on renewable energy or development of statistics) and Central Asia (potential focus on transport, renewable energy /new energy technologies, or IT)
3. The leadership for exploring these is sub-regional initiatives resides with the Executive Secretary's Office, PPD, and HRMS.

Because these recommendations centre on strengthening the NRL modality in line with ESCAP's strategic priorities, they may well require dedicated or additional resources.

Main Report

Introduction

1.1 Background of Evaluative review

1. Periodically, the United Nations secretariat obtains gratis personnel¹¹ through the modality of non-reimbursable loan(NRL). NRLs are seconded experts, unable to be used for Secretariat-type posts or functions normally authorized under regular programme budgets.¹² Within ESCAP, the purpose of engaging NRL expert services is to assist with technical cooperation programmes.¹³
2. During the period 2008 to 2012, NRL experts provided an average of 112 work-months per year to ESCAP to support technical cooperation activities in ESCAP's substantive areas, including the work of the regional institutions. While the large majority of the NRL experts were supplied by the Republic of Korea, a few NRL experts were also provided by Japan and the Netherlands.
3. In accordance with the Monitoring & Evaluation System (M&E) established in 2009, ESCAP undertakes evaluations with a view to determining as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of an ongoing or completed sub-programme, project, modality, theme or other initiative in light of its expected results. In the instance of this evaluative review the NRL modality is the focus.
4. The purpose of ESCAP's evaluative exercises is to support decision-making at the strategic management level, hold the secretariat accountable to its stakeholders and foster organizational learning. Evaluation is also conducted to assess organizational performance and practices relating to particular modalities and procedures at ESCAP.

1.2 Purpose, Objectives and Outputs

1. The purpose of this evaluative review is to assess the relevance and effectiveness of the NRL modality at ESCAP and ascertain how it can be strengthened to better serve the needs of the secretariat, in particular, and the member States of ESCAP, in general.
2. This review is commissioned by the Office of the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, and conducted with support from the Evaluation Unit, Programme Planning and Partnerships Division. The results of the review will support decision-making at the strategic management level.
3. The specific objectives of the review are:
 - (i) To determine the relevance and effectiveness of the NRL modality against its stated purpose;
 - (ii) To examine the existing practices concerning the identification of the need for NRL services, selection of NRL experts, as well as their supervision and performance assessment;
 - (iii) To highlight issues and challenges to make the NRL modality more effective and beneficial to the organization and member States, and

¹¹ The overall policy on gratis personnel in the UN Secretariat is provided in administrative instruction ST/AI/1999/6

¹² Operational aspects of acquiring NRL services and related policies is provided in administrative instruction ST/AI/231/Rev.1. This includes a description of the purpose for which NRL experts may be used; legal status of NRL experts; obligations of NRL experts towards the United Nations; title rights in respect of material produced; requisites for acceptance of NRL experts' services; duration of services and termination; treatment of costs other than those included in the 13 percent overhead contribution and 1 per cent contribution for Appendix "D" (death/injury insurance) coverage; evaluation of the services of the expert; and compensation for death and injury. It also incorporates a draft agreement on the provision of an NRL expert.

¹³ In 2001, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP issued the ESCAP administrative instruction (ESCAP/AI/2001/2) to detail the internal arrangements required within ESCAP to consolidate, prioritize and formally request donors to supply experts to ESCAP on a non-reimbursable loan basis.

- (iv) To formulate concrete, action-oriented recommendations to strengthen the overall performance of the NRL modality and to streamline the administrative processes by which the NRL system is managed by ESCAP.

1.3 Scope

1. The evaluative review assesses the overall performance of the NRL modality using the evaluation criteria and questions stated below:

Relevance

- To determine the extent to which NRL services contribute to the effective delivery of ESCAP's technical cooperation activities
- To determine the relevance of the NRL modality in terms of the priorities and requirements of the sponsoring government or organization
- To assess the benefits gained by the secretariat and the sponsoring government or organization from the NRL modality.

Effectiveness

- Does the sponsoring government or organization find the NRL modality useful for enhancing the technical and professional skills of its personnel?
- How could the NRL modality be strengthened and better utilized to best fulfill its stated purpose?
- To what extent has the NRL modality been effective in attracting highly competent and experienced national personnel to contribute to the work of ESCAP?
- How could the NRL modality be enhanced to attract greater participation of and contributions from member States?
- How could the secretariat's management and administration of the NRL modality be strengthened to facilitate effective outcomes?

2. Key questions and information required included:

Effectiveness

- (i) How could the NRL modality be strengthened and better utilized to best fulfill its stated purpose?
- (ii) How could the NRL modality be enhanced to attract greater participation of, and contributions from, member states?

Relevance

- (i) Determining the benefits gained by the secretariat and sponsoring government / organization
- (ii) Determining the integration of NRL work with ESCAP priorities

Existing Practices around NRLs in ESCAP

- (i) How are the current decisions about the need for NRLs made within ESCAP?
- (ii) How are the decisions made to appoint specific NRL individuals?
- (iii) What are the processes for supervision and performance management?
- (iv) How is assistance from member states communicated and invited?
- (v) Are there transferable lessons for NRL from other gratis modalities?

Issues and Challenges

- (i) How can information about, and the opportunities of, NRL be known about and understood by a wider range of member states?
- (ii) How can the benefits of the NRL placements within ESCAP be more clearly defined and integrated?
- (iii) How can current administrative practices be redesigned for greater utility

2.0 Methodology

2.1 External Review

The evaluative review was undertaken by an external consultant. The expectation was that the review would be undertaken:

- in an independent and rigorous manner that will produce evidence-based data
- in a transparent and participatory process that will involve ESCAP staff and representatives from donor governments and organizations.

2.2 As part of standard practice at ESCAP, a Reference Group was established to support the evaluation process. The Group:

- reviewed basic evaluation documents, such as the terms of reference, the evaluation framework and work plan and review questions
- provided advice on evaluation methodology, and
- facilitated the engagement of all relevant stakeholders or informants in the evaluation process.

The Reference Group was under the direction of the Deputy Executive Secretary and comprised the Director, Programme Planning and Partnerships Division (PPD), the Evaluation Officer, PDD, a staff member from the Office of Executive Secretary, a staff member from Human Resources and Management Section (HRMS), and a staff member from the substantive Division – the Environment Development Division.

2.3 Key components of the conduct of the evaluative review were:

(i) A desk review of:

- Administrative instructions, guidelines and reports on gratis personnel and NRLs
- End-of-term assessments of NRL experts
- Relevant internal and external communications on NRL matters
- Progress, terminal and evaluation reports of technical cooperation projects in which NRL services were utilised
- Report on ESCAP's technical cooperation activities and extra-budgetary contributions
- NRL instructions, guidelines and reports from other secretariat entities

(ii) Interviews at ESCAP of:

- Deputy Executive Secretary
- Division Chiefs
- Section Heads
- NRL programme administrators
- Secretariat staff both GS and P level
- NRL experts
- Interviews of representatives from sponsoring governments and organizations

2.4 An interview with the Netherlands Embassy was sought but the staff were no longer familiar with the NRL modality.

2.5 This review was not of a scale to include a full survey of all ESCAP's member States on their level of awareness and familiarity with NRLs or their interest in contributing NRLs. Nor was it tasked, or of a scale, to undertake a detailed cost-efficiency assessment of the NRL modality for ESCAP.

3.0 Findings

3.1 General

3.1.1 Context - ESCAP's Current Strategic Direction

1. This review of the NRL modality is happening at time when ESCAP is refocusing and refining its strategy. While the NRL modality is a staff secondment scheme, and on the surface simple, it requires clear identification of ESCAP's technical requirements and gaps and then negotiations with potential partners. Partnerships have narrowed in the last few years. The review's focus on strengthening NRL modality and the review timing is opportune for maximising the use of NRLs for the next phase of ESCAP's development.

2. ESCAP as the regional development arm of the United Nations, for the Asia-Pacific region has 53 Member States and 9 Associate Members. ESCAP's geographical scope is vast, stretching from Turkey in the west to the Pacific island nation of Kiribati in the east, and from the Russian Federation in the north to New Zealand in the south. The region is home to 4.1 billion people - two thirds of the world's population.¹⁴

3. ESCAP's senior management have recently refined strategic approaches. The brief report "ESCAP Strategy: SMT Retreat, 9 August 2014" confirms:

- the focus of ESCAP on a regional sustainable development agenda
- the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development as core and the driver of all ESCAP's subprogrammes
- strengthening a systemic focus on regional connectivity for shared prosperity
- multiplying the impact of ESCAP's work by further developing strategic partnerships critical to long term impact and outreach
- strengthening ESCAP's 'Fit for Purpose' with renewed focus on countries with special needs and on better strategic partnerships
- reinvigorating the secretariat and strengthening capacities to support member States in evidence based policy-making and catalyzing innovative partnerships between government, civil society and the private sector

4. These directions present an opportunity for adapting the way in which the NRL modality is currently managed and for the 'fit' of NRL to be more effective.

3.1.2 ESCAP's Use of the NRL Modality

1. NRL is a system of gratis personnel where highly skilled, technically competent personnel for specific projects can be seconded to fill technical gaps in the UN agency team. Within ESCAP the source of NRL experts has become more narrowly based over the last 5 years in particular.

2. Gratis Personnel

Gratis personnel are personnel provided to the Organization by Governments or other entities at no cost to the Organization. There are two general types of Gratis personnel.

3. Type I Gratis personnel

(i). Associate experts

- primarily engaged for technical cooperation projects
- are staff members at the junior professional level
- subject to the provisions of the UN Staff Regulations
- fixed-term appointment, generally not exceeding four years

(ii). NRL technical cooperation experts

- primarily engaged for technical cooperation projects
- not staff member, treated as independent contractors

¹⁴Taken from ESCAP website

- subject to the provision of a special service agreement
- can be engaged for up to four years and are generally for two to three years

(iii). Interns

- for graduate and postgraduate students assigned to UN offices

4. Type II Gratis personnel

- Accepted on an exceptional basis only
- For 2 purposes: (a) provide expertise not available within the UN and for very specialized functions, or (b) provide temporary and urgent assistance in the case of new and/or expanded mandates.
- Mostly used in humanitarian functions.

5. UN Secretariat-wide engagement of Type I Gratis personnel during 2010-2011

- ESCAP had 16 NRL experts (or 30 per cent of the total number) during 2010-2011.
- Among the Regional Commissions, ECE and ESCWA had no NRL experts, while ECA and ESCWA only 1 or 2 NRLs in 2010-2011.

Entity ¹⁵	Associate Experts	NRLs
<i>Regional Commissions</i>		
- ESCAP	2	16
- ECA	2	2
- ECE`	12	0
- ECLAC	0	0
- ESCWA	0	1
<i>Othes entities with NRLs*</i>		
DESA	28	8
UNOV	5	9
OCHA	54	3
UNCTAD	10	5
UNODC	41	5

* all other secretariat entities did not engage NRL experts

6. Number of NRLs

- The number of NRLs at ESCAP has been consistent over the past five years, with the exception in 2008 when the number was relatively high. On average, ESCAP used 14 NRLs per year.
- The table below shows the source and number of NRL during the period from 2008 to 2013.

Source ¹⁶	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Republic of Korea	16	12	11	9	10	6
Japan	1	1	1	1	2	1
Netherlands	-	-	-	1	-	-
Christian Conference of Asia	2	1	-	-	-	-
						-
Total	19	14	12	11	12	7

¹⁵ Source: GA document A/67/329/Add. 1 Composition of the secretariat, gratis personnel, retired staff and consultant and individual contractors (23 August 2012)

¹⁶ Source: combination of GA document A/67/329/Add. 1 and data on each of the NRLs within ESCAP since 2008 (see Annex v)

7. Duration, source and type of service of NRL experts at ESCAP

- Almost all NRL experts were engaged for at least one year
- However, the assignment for the NRL from the Netherlands, in sustainable urban development, was for 4 months, and the Christian Conference of Asia assignments in the Social Development Division were each for 1 month and 7 months
- Most NRLs came from the Republic of Korea
- NRLs from Japan have been primarily focused on technical input into use of space technology for disaster reduction planning
- About 44% of NRLs were engaged for a period of three years and above

Duration	Number of NRL experts
3 years and above	14
2 years and above	6
1 year and above	10
Less than one year	3
Total	33

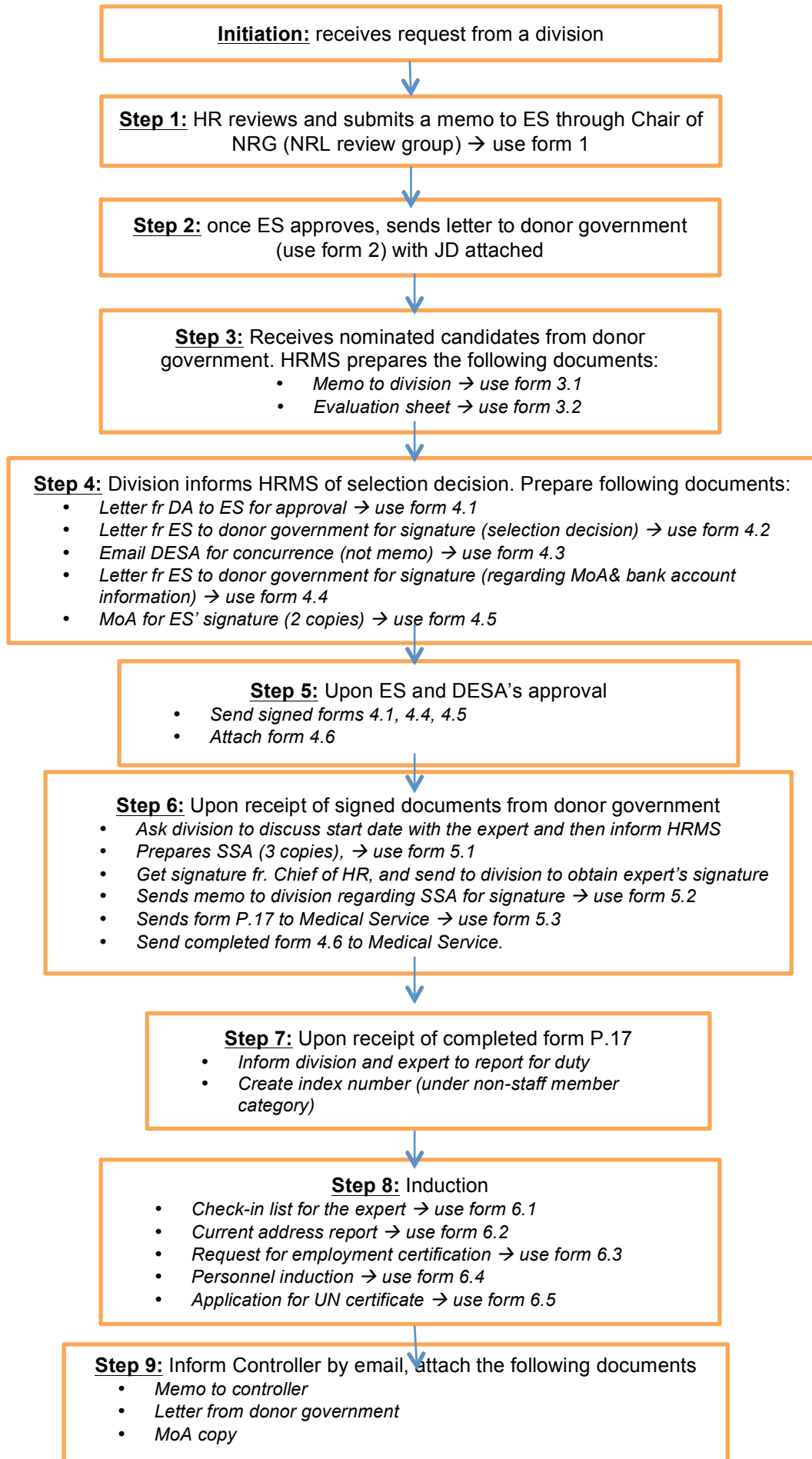
3.1.3 Decision Making Processes for NRL Engagement

The Formal Process for Engaging NRLs

1. In terms of Human Resource management systems for engaging and NRL there is a nine step process starting from¹⁷: HRMS receiving a request for an NRL from a substantive Division, then seeking approval from the Executive Secretary with prior support from the chair of the NRL Review Group. Following this, a request is sent to the targeted donor government from the Executive Secretary with a job description attached. By Step Four, nominations are then sought and received from the donor government or organization with the Division deciding their preferred candidate, usually on the basis of reading CVs.
2. From this stage onwards the steps focus on donor government official sign off and support, a Memorandum of Understanding agreed for Executive Secretary sign off, agreement from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and from there the set of steps taken for personnel engagement in the UN system.
3. The complete flow chart is presented on page 16.

¹⁷ ESCAP HRMS NRL Workflow Chart

NRL PROCEDURES GUIDELINES – FLOW CHART



4. In terms of potential streamlining there have been considerable steps taken already. The multitude of required forms are in place, a dual sign-off required for NRLs by DESA in New York has been reduced to one formal sign-off by the Chief, HRMS. A previously required formal sign off by the Controller has been replaced by memoranda for information and the records. Many steps are taken simultaneously, for example the request to DESA for approval occurs at the same time as approval by the Executive Secretary for the engagement of the specific NRL. ESCAP is seen as being very efficient by DESA and DESA stated that their turnaround for their own decision-making responsibility can be undertaken in 2-3 days.¹⁸

5. The NRL Review Group (NRG) is one part of the decision-making procedures that was originally implemented but later found to be operationally redundant.¹⁹ The NRG was planned to comprise “ ... officials from the Office of the Executive Secretary, the Programme Management Division (now Programme Planning and Partnerships Division (PPD)) and a Personnel Officer who will serve as ex-officio member/secretary.” NRG responsibilities identified in 2001 were to:

- screen requests for NRLs for the completeness of the required information
- review each request, examining and taking into account in particular the detailed specification of the work to be performed, the job description, the description of the expertise required of the person being sought and the duration of the assignment. The relevance of technical cooperation activities in which NRL experts will be involved to the overall work programmes of ESCAP, the total number of NRL experts provided by donors concerned and other related factors
- provide some guidance as to which donor Governments/organizations should be targeted for each request
- assign a priority rating code to each request that will serve as a guide to the Personnel Services Section and to donors in the subsequent processing and negotiations for these experts.

6. The 2001 Instructions also specified that substantive divisions of ESCAP were not allowed to consult with potential donor Governments/organizations for the supply of NRL experts before the completion of the internal review process.²⁰

7. While it is totally understandable that the NRG was discontinued for efficiency and streamlining purposes, doing so has likely reduced the opportunity for collective consideration of NRL suitability, guidance on partners /donors for targeting and may have contributed to the increasing dominance of one main NRL partner.

3.1.4 Wider NRL Decision-Making Influences

Routine Process

1. It is noticeable from the review interviews that use of NRLs has become a routine process for some Divisions, especially in the Bangkok office. Most but not all divisions of ESCAP in Bangkok use the NRL modality. Few Regional Institutes (RIs) or ESCAP Regional Offices (SROs) access NRLs. Only the APCICT based in Incheon and CASM (previously APCAEM) based in Beijing, have engaged NRLs.

2. There is no question about the technical nature of the roles filled. Over the last five years, however, the process has often become akin to a rotational operation. NRL personnel have been replaced within the same project, as the project develops, and from the same Ministry of the same partner government. It has almost become almost a custom to continue.

¹⁸ Discussions with DESA

¹⁹ ESCAP AI/2001/2

²⁰ ESCAP/A1/2001/, para 8

Potential Partners not Canvassed

3. One of the contributing factors to dominance from a few partner countries is the little time able to be taken to look for technical expertise from a wider range of countries or institutions. An exception was the Hong Kong based, civil society (CSO) NRL who came to the Social Development Division as an expert trainer for a particular programme.

NRL Modality part of Career Development - Republic of Korea

4. The Government of the Republic of Korea (RoK) has also specifically identified the NRL modality as an opportunity for the staff of its ministries both within ESCAP and potentially beyond.²¹ The NRL modality is designed as part of career development and job placement for RoK government mid-level officials with, at times, an assumption that ESCAP will create an NRL position even if not requested. This was clearly identified in discussions between ESCAP's HRMS and representatives of the RoK government in 2010.²² Several interviews for this review confirmed, in many different ways, the central place of the NRL modality for RoK.

5. Winning an NRL placement is seen as desirable. There is significant internal competition for NRL roles in ESCAP with usually two candidates shortlisted by an RoK ministry, from a much longer list, and then put forward to ESCAP for final selection and appointment. Rarely is there an interview with ESCAP.

6. An additional key feature and value for sections and Divisions of ESCAP is that NRLs usually bring with them extra-budgetary project financing making it easier for ESCAP projects to be undertaken. NRLs are essentially part of the extra-budgetary assistance provided.

Changes in External Environment

7. Another issue mentioned in several interviews were changes in the external environment. The issues raised were by no means comprehensive but useful as indicators of a shifting scene. Historically NRLs came from a wider range of countries and were seen as providing strategically valuable contributions. In the 1990s Transport and Environment Divisions had NRLs from France, Germany, Japan, and the Republic of Korea all working together. NRLs were seen as contributing to significant developments. The State of Environment Report on Asia and a ministerial conference on Environment and Development were given as examples of such developments. This reflected a different set of circumstances: for example the ESCAP priorities of the time on transport inter linkages, the skills available, the interest of countries in contributing and greater familiarity with the NRL modality and its potential.

8. Change in the funding approaches of different member States has also occurred. An example given was the Japanese Aid agency (JICA) when it was part of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs having previously been a source of NRLs. It is now separate and does not supply NRLs. There is an overall trend of countries moving from multi-lateral to bi-lateral cooperation, which started in the early 2000s. Even with RoK there are fewer potential secondments. Korea has amalgamated government departments and provides only one NRL from each Ministry. For example in 2008/09 the Government created one large Ministry encompassing all aspects of Transport.

10. Combined, these parallel developments contribute significantly to the way in which NRL use has narrowed.

²¹ From interviews with NRLs, Embassy staff of the Republic of Korea, staff of the HRMS and PPD

²² From HRMS confidential note of discussion, 28 January 2010

3.1.5 Identifying NRL Need

1. Each division, SRO or RI identifies why, and where, it wishes to engage technical expertise for a project based around current project plans and gaps in technical expertise. Some needs are for a one-off project and several are for expertise to assist the next phase of existing projects for which NRLs have previously been engaged. Environmental expertise for the Green Growth strategy, Pan Asia ICT development, and space technology expertise for disaster relief planning are three examples. Excerpts below are examples of summarised technical skills gap identification

(i) "Develop and implement an adequate programme under the framework of the Seoul Initiative Network on Green Growth (SINGG) to build consensus on Green Growth and enhance members' capacity for pursuing Green Growth ... Assist in the implementation of NEASPEC projects, including eco-efficiency and air pollution projects, and promote environmental cooperation between ESCAP and the Republic of Korea, including development of joint activities and projects. (2013, Environment and Development Division - EDD)"

(ii) "1. Continue implementation of a Capacity Development project activity entitled 'Deepening regional ICT connectivity through the creation of a pan Asia Information Superhighway' funded by the Ministry of Science, ICT and Planning (MSIP) of Republic of Korea; 2. Assist substantial progress on Asia Information Superhighway Initiative through 4th CICT, 70th Commission, Expert Group Meetings and other Events; 3. Facilitate cooperation between ESCAP and the Government of Korea, in securing a Capacity Development Trust Fund Agreement for the 3rd phase (2016-2017), APCICT support and technical and policy involvement partnership on AISH Initiative; 4. Assist in the substantive preparations for ESCAP IDD/IDS scheduled and ad-hoc works and events. (2012 ICT and Disaster Risk Reduction Division - ICTD)"

(iii) "1. Assist in matters dealing with the promotion and utilization of space technology, to support disaster risk reduction in ESCAP region; 2. Develop projects and organize relevant activities towards the establishment of a regional disaster risk reduction mechanism for reducing socio-economic losses in Asia and the Pacific, particularly the promotion of the Sentinel Asia Project, and space-based Internet-based communications and regional positioning systems, through cooperation with the Asia Pacific Regional Space Agency Forum (APRSF) strengthening its links with relevant international and regional organizations. Attention to be given to reducing the risk of vulnerable groups eg, elderly women, children, and the disabled. 3. Plan, coordinate and organize regional workshops, seminars and expert group meetings on space-based disaster risk reduction and management support in Asia and the Pacific involving disaster risk reduction authorities and space-related agencies, utilizing, as necessary, the fund provided by JAXA. (2012 ICTD)"

(iv) "1. Provide technical and policy inputs to preferential trade arrangements for ESCAP countries, in particular, the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA); 2. Design and implement measures aimed at strengthening and deepening APTA and expand its membership, including the organization of national level seminars and consultation meetings as well as regional/subregional seminars for this purpose 3. Assist in the substantive preparations for Standing Committee and fourth session of the Ministerial Council of APTA; 4. Provide technical advice and perform such other functions as may be required in connection with activities relating to regional trade and monetary cooperation; 5. Contribute to resource mobilization from Republic of Korea Government for supporting APTA-related projects. (2012 Trade and Investment Division - TID)"

2. Current NRLs are also likely to have reported to their home ministry on whether or not they consider the project warrants continuation or adaptation and is suitable for an NRL. While Divisional priorities reflect the agreements of member States through ESCAP's broad intergovernmental decision-making processes, there is no organization-wide identification of expertise required based on substantive agency-wide discussions and strategy-based priorities and criteria. Processes of approval within ESCAP are more procedural.

3.1.6 Processes for selection, supervision and performance management

1. ESCAP procedures require at least two candidates to select from and this is what normally occurs.²³ The choice is usually made from the written information about candidate experience and expertise. Rarely is there an interview by phone or skype and there are no face-to-face interviews. Informal second opinions may come from current or former NRLs from the same department or Ministry. Checking or assessing suitability in more detail is not currently pursued, and this is something ESCAP staff could consider if issues or questions arise from the applications.
2. Performance assessments are undertaken by section heads, then ratified and signed off by Divisional Chiefs. These are annual for those NRLs who have a secondment of more than a year. Forms closely resemble those used by the UN for other performance management. The reports are held within each Division. Separately NRLs, especially from Korea, will prepare assessments of their own for their home Ministry about the progress and value of the placement.
3. The complexity of the three-way relationship between donor government, NRL and the ESCAP division was mentioned frequently in interviews. While technically, performance management lies within ESCAP, it is not as straightforward as it is with a core staff member, consultancy, internship or Junior Professional Officer. There were frequent comments about care being taken about what is written formally in the performance assessment reports. Although many noted that experience with NRL capability was a mixed bag, this sentiment was not reflected in the written performance assessments which are written very positively.

NRL Integration

4. An important part of supporting performance effectiveness is NRL integration into the section, Division and whole of ESCAP, especially for those NRLs whose tenure is more than 12 months. Tension between being connected to a team while not being a core member was raised frequently in review interviews by ESCAP staff and NRLs. Some NRLs find the ambiguity comfortable because of their specific assignment being distinctive while still connected to the work of the rest of the team. Others find it difficult to know if they are 'in' or 'out' of the team.
5. Some managers and divisional heads are very aware of this and actively manage to ensure clarity of role, an identifiable programme of work for the NRL and inclusive team involvement. Clearly however, there is considerable variation in experiences. Successful integration appears to be dependent on:
 - section and divisional management style, with a more inclusive management style and the ability to provide clarity strongly assisting integration
 - the 'culture' of engagement and participation of the section and Division
 - the ability of the individual NRL to meet, engage with others, appreciate different international cultures, bring an open mind and not their own agenda, and explain their technical project effectively
 - the spoken and written English language capability of the NRL
6. When integration works well it is highly effective. One NRL specifically mentioned, as a highlight of his secondment, the sense of being part of the broader divisional team and having an effective working relationship with the section chief. A Divisional Director, from a different Division, commented that an NRL coming with an open mind and the intention of focusing on priority issues brings a fresh injection of knowledge, experience and energy.

23 ESCAP/A1/2001/2

7. The interviews undertaken for the review around selection, performance assessment and integration of NRLs produced a range of consistent suggestions for managing the NRL modality more effectively for all concerned. These included:
- ensuring that ESCAP is clear about what it is seeking NRLs for and taking more of a front foot, cohesive, leadership role in identifying priorities
 - inviting a wider pool of partners to be involved, based on:
 - greater South-South secondments, reflecting the significant resource of expertise
 - a wider range of organisations beyond government ministries eg Civil Society Organizations, research institutes, private sector and academic institutions
 - broadening the skill-set of NRLs to include greater English language capability, ease with, and interest in, inter-cultural issues and communication, and interest in sharing their technical project in workshops or seminars
 - setting up an effective and welcoming orientation for NRLs which incorporates information about the place and role of the UN and ESCAP, including codes of conduct, and ethical standards

Issues

8. Issues connected with selection, performance management and integration of NRLs centred around the extent to which ESCAP is able to select the best technical and team expertise which they need. A frequent comment made in multiple interviews was that selection occurs in name only rather than in reality. This is made more difficult by the current approach of turning to one main potential partner for expertise and, in highly practical terms, having limited criteria for selection beyond technical expertise. Lack of interviewing reduces the ability to assess and cross-check capability.

3.1.7 Communicating with Member States about NRL Modality

1. The current system of communication is informal and essentially a closed loop primarily focused on those who are currently familiar and connected with the NRL modality. There is no broader communication through the ESCAP website, information updates or emails about the technical assistance requirements of ESCAP and associated NRL opportunities. Beyond this circle, preliminary information from interviews with a small selection of country embassies suggests that NRLs, neither the modality nor its potential are well known.²⁴

2. Countries are much more familiar with the Internship system and Junior Professional Officers (JPOs). Germany for example, funds 20 JPO positions in the UN system and also funds consultant experts through the German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation (a technical cooperation agency) GIZ. Through this, six experts are currently delivering on German funded projects in ESCAP.

3. However, there is considerable interest in finding out more about NRLs and potentially engaging with the system. It will take time for Government decision-making processes to incorporate the NRL system as a potential means for partnering with ESCAP.

4. In order to bring in a wider pool of partners, country governments need to know about ESCAP's priorities and the practicalities of how the NRL modality works. While cost may be a consideration, and should be explained by ESCAP, the key issues for potential wider Government interest appear to be more around:

- ESCAP's strategy, priorities and effectiveness as an organization
- the NRL modality 'fit' with the expertise strengths of a country – government and other organizations

5. Certainly this potential interest matches with the identification, by ESCAP staff, of a broader range of countries and organizations with the technical skills which ESCAP staff consider

²⁴ Information from interviews with the Embassies of Indonesia, India and Germany.

could add substantial value to ESCAP strategic priorities. Depending on the strategic priority, potential sources identified include: India, Singapore, China, the Russian Federation, Vietnam, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Indonesia, Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, with Germany, the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries particularly relevant on social development and renewable energy. Greater South-South exchanges were seen as highly desirable because of the significant sustainable development skills of several ESCAP member States. The French Institute for Agricultural Development in Montpellier was specifically mentioned, in its own right, and as an example of high quality, skilled organizations who second staff.

6. These were not randomly identified, were specifically connected to ESCAP region and organization-wide priorities, frequently emphasized the importance of South-South secondments to reflect the high levels of expertise in the ESCAP region and often focused on ways of connecting sub-regional developments across ECSAP Bangkok office, SROs, and RIs.

7. While it takes time to set up secondments under the NRL modality and it can be costly, there is clearly considerable potential and sufficient interest to expand and promote the NRL modality, especially in light of ESCAP's strategic direction. One relevant comment about NRLs within ESCAP, which was reflected in several interviews was that "ESCAP needs to tell its story of relevance more effectively to governments and it will make it easier to attract partner interest in supplying NRLs"²⁵

8. For all countries interviewed, finding the point of interconnection of shared interest between ESCAP priorities, technical requirements and country priorities and skills is important for the NRL modality to gain traction. Countries are keen to know more, including how to connect with NRL opportunities and to learn about the value-add and impact of current NRLs.

9. There is strong interest in receiving regular news updates that provide information about activities, progress and new opportunities - either six monthly or annually.

3.1.8 Transferability of lessons for NRL from other Gratis Modalities

1. Each of the other two main gratis modalities – interns and JPOs are organised quite differently.

*Interns*²⁶

2. For Interns the decision to participate is by the individual. UN openings are advertised, recent graduates or those in their final year of study or part-way through a graduate programme can apply. The internship is short-term and should not exceed six months. The intern role is voluntary is not paid by the United Nations and internships are not staff positions. All expenses connected with the internship, such as travel costs, travel arrangements, living accommodation, are the responsibility of the intern or the sponsoring institution.

3. The programme aims to expose the intern to the day-to-day work and special missions of ESCAP, promote a better understanding of international problems, and to introduce the intern to the unique and multi-national work environment of the UN organization.

4. In September 2014 there were just over 50 intern posts advertised on the ESCAP website, and there may be 200 interns in ESCAP in any one year.²⁷ This is a high number compared with the 600 permanent ESCAP staff. The majority of the 50 intern positions advertised in September are based in Bangkok with three in the Incheon SRO, five in New Delhi, and one for RI CSAM in Beijing.

²⁵ Interview notes

²⁶ Taken from www.un.org/Depts/OHRM, letter from Edgar Dante to Embassies and interview with DESA

²⁷ Pers comm: Jim Bradley HRMS

Associate Expert-Junior Professional Officers

5. The JPO or Associate Expert Programme provides young professionals pursuing a career in development with hands-on experience in many UN Agencies, either in Headquarters locations or in country offices. UN Agencies, in turn, benefit from young qualified professionals. JPO positions are fully funded by the contributing member States.

6. There are approximately 120 JPO positions funded annually in the UN system.²⁸ JPOs are UN staff positions, are usually a year-long and are sponsored by twenty three donor countries. Four donor countries are also member States of ESCAP - Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, Australia and Japan.²⁹

7. Sponsoring governments are generally in charge of publishing JPO posts in their own country and also with the pre-selection of suitable candidates. Short-listed candidates are then interviewed and selected by the relevant UN agency. Only the Netherlands funds JPO positions for candidates from developing countries.

8. Eligible junior professionals should be under 32 with a Masters degree or equivalent. JPO positions can be extended beyond the one year depending on the availability of donor funds. JPOs are frequently seen as doorways into permanent UN positions and as highly desirable by the junior professionals themselves.

NRLs

9. NRL positions are the most 'high-touch' of all the gratis personnel modalities. They are negotiated positions among three parties. High quality technical skills are required and a relationship developed with potential seconding countries and organisations. The positions are longer term, and although seconded NRLs are not UN staff members they are subject to performance assessment. They also need to be connected with and integrated into a team. The impact of their work is potentially long-lasting and the multi-country and professional relationships require skill to be developed and can also be long lasting.

10. While there was no specific mention of orientation for JPOs in ESCAP the approach described by Mia Mikic for welcoming interns is impressive and provides some valuable pointers for NRLs as well. It combines formal and informal processes which are professionally supportive and keep the role of interns visible within ESCAP. These include:

- a welcome kit for each intern outlining information about ESCAP and the UN and also about Bangkok
- a facebook page – where Human Resources shares information about housing
- a 'support' intern identified for each new intern on their arrival
- brown bag lunches organised offering interns the opportunity to present their work
- a network of interns
- professional support and profile through co-publishing of papers
- each Division has a person who screens applicants³⁰

²⁸ Pers Comm, German Embassy Bangkok

²⁹ From: http://esa.un.org/techcoop/associateexperts/prospective_donors.html

³⁰ Pers comm, Mia Mikic, Section Chief, Trade and Investment Division

3.2 Performance Assessment

3.2.1 Relevance

1. Key questions to do with relevance are around the benefits gained from the NRL modality - and where they lie, and the 'fit' and integration of NRL work with ESCAP priorities.
2. It is clear that the relevance of the NRL modality is potentially very high. When it is working well it is an opportunity for member States and institutions to second high quality technical personnel to work on ESCAP priorities that have been mutually agreed and to grow strategic partnerships.
3. During the review the benefits have been clearly enunciated by the three parties involved: ESCAP, the member country and the NRLs themselves

Benefits

4. *Benefits for ESCAP*
 - Seconded skilled experts help ESCAP deliver on technical cooperation activities. Several instances of projects were identified including social welfare frameworks relevant to ESCAP countries, transport interconnectivity and disaster relief planning
 - As well as the NRL position being funded by member States, including costs such as travel for the assignment related activities, NRLs bring project financing with them and frequently use their connections with their home Ministries to mobilize additional resources for ESCAP projects
 - NRLs with the required skills facilitate effective project implementation and build the required collaboration
 - NRLs become 'knowledge messengers' and ambassadors about ESCAP's role and work. There were several examples of this given in interviews
 - With increasingly constrained budgets and small core staff in each division, SRO or RI additional technical expertise, that is project focused is highly valuable
 - When NRLs are sufficiently senior and experienced they open doors and help make developments seamless
5. *Benefits for individual NRLs*

NRLs are used more sparingly by Japan and the current sole NRL in Bangkok is focused on space technology for disaster relief. While finding the assignment professionally satisfying this NRL considers the assignment could also be undertaken from Japan.

For Republic of Korea NRLs:

- An NRL placement is sought after for career and professional development;
- An assignment of 2-3 years is seen as important to enable depth of learning, understanding and exposure to multi-lateral ways of operating
- Exposure to international organizations and the way in which multi-country decisions are negotiated and reached is an unique and professionally expanding experience
- Contributing, and also gaining, technical knowledge is professionally satisfying
- High level exposure to different ways of thinking and problem solving increases professional capability and boosts careers
- Project colleagues in the UN system and member States become potential partners
- Contributing connections and resources - NRLs can see the benefits they bring to ESCAP through their professional connections and familiarity with how the Republic of Korea system works. This often facilitates bringing in additional, extra-budgetary dollars

6. *Benefits for member State*

These benefits are multi-layered and include:

- Exposure to international organizations, the way in which multi-country decisions are negotiated through the very hands-on practical project experience of NRLs
- For the RoK:
 - Embassy staff have a link into the operations of ESCAP
 - Ministries a planned location for career development for their staff
- Gaining a more hands-on insight into region-wide issues, the similarities and differences both in terms of technical advice and development and policy making and implementation
- Increasing the visibility of the country where NRLs become ambassadors around their technical expertise and knowledge of country policies
- Becoming part of a regional network of technical expertise
- Developing country collegial relationships in the UN system that may later become potential partnerships
- Helping the government meet its commitment to global issues

Integration of NRL with ESCAP priorities - region-wide impact

7. The NRL modality fits with ESCAP's role and mandate to overcome some of the region's greatest challenges through promoting rigorous analysis and peer learning. It also fits well with ESCAP's convening power to bring countries together to address issues through regional cooperation.³¹

8. The current use of NRL modality is around Divisional priorities within the ESCAP mandate.

9. The potential of NRL has by no means been fully developed. The potential lies in the refreshed strategy of ESCAP mentioned earlier in the report, in particular:

- the focus of ESCAP on a regional sustainable development agenda and as core and the driver of all ESCAP's subprogrammes
- strengthening a systemic focus on regional connectivity for shared prosperity
- multiplying the impact of ESCAP's work by further developing strategic partnerships critical to long term impact and outreach
- strengthening ESCAP's 'Fit for Purpose' with renewed focus on countries with special needs and on better strategic partnerships
- reinvigorating the secretariat and strengthening capacities to support member States in evidence based policy-making and catalyzing innovative partnerships between government, civil society and the private sector

3.2.2 Issues and challenges

1. A range of challenges associated with the NRL modality have been consistently raised during the review. They include challenges around aspects of the operation of the modality and challenges around the bigger picture issues of ESCAP's own articulation of priorities, into which the use of NRLs would fit. Challenges identified are:

Modality Not Promoted

2. There is a problem with the name. It is not easy to gauge what 'non reimbursable loan (personnel)' means. The modality is not publicly promoted either from New York or through ESCAP communication channels. ESCAP is not fielding multiple enquiries about NRL and ESCAP

³¹ ESCAP website

staff note than in a few instances where all member States were made aware of NRL opportunities only the RoK indicated an interest. Those ESCAP country representatives and Embassies, and other UN secretariat agencies interviewed knew little about NRLs – although showed considerable interest in principle.³² A meeting place for promoting the NRL to potential suppliers and partners has not yet been well developed by ESCAP.

2001 NRG Management System Partially Implemented

3. The NRG identified as part of ESCAP's NRL modality management in 2001 in principle would have helped develop more of an overview of the 'fit' of NRL into ESCAP's strategy and priorities, as well as activating an approach to identify relevant countries, organizations and institutions along with strategic partnership and an outcome-focused use of NRLs.

Time and Resource Intensive

4. The time and costs associated with the NRL modality present a complex issue. Because the NRL modality focuses primarily on 2-3 year secondments and involves full salary costs, transport, accommodation and education costs, associated project costs and hosting and insurance costs (13% plus 1% of the employment costs of the NRL³³) it can be seen as expensive for the donor country, and therefore needs to be worthwhile.

5. A particular stumbling block for some has been the 13% plus 1%.³⁴ Interestingly while this has been presented on the surface as being about cost, the impression from RI staff affected is that it may be as much to do with the way the 14% is presented, as the amount itself.

6. The policy is clear. A January 1991 UN Administrative Instruction³⁵ notes in para 9: "The requisite for acceptance of services on a non-reimbursable basis include:

(b) i To provide the services requested ... free of all costs to the United Nations

(b) ii To pay 14% of all costs of the value of the services to the credit of the United Nations overhead account"

7. Paragraph 11 headed: "Costs arising from a non-reimbursable loan other than those relating to the services performed and the overhead contribution of 14 per cent" notes:

"The estimated cost of a non-reimbursable loan shall be provided by the donor and contribution of 14 per cent of the cost shall be deposited by the donor to the credit of the United Nations to cover servicing and administrative costs... . Any additional specific costs arising from a non-reimbursable loan, such as travel and subsistence or the rental or purchase of equipment must either be borne by the donor or must have been provided either in the regular budget or in extrabudgetary funds, so that no additional costs to the organization will arise"

8. This policy is reflected in the Memorandum of Understanding used for the engagement of NRLs.

9. While the percentage is fixed there can be variation in the actual amount involved with the 14% charge.³⁶ The variation seems to arise essentially around the salary costs of the NRL and the basis on which they are set, with lower salary levels leading to lower actual costs charged through the 14% payment.³⁷ Salaries in UN system organizations are often higher than in member State government ministries. The partner country meets the cost of salaries and it

³² This review was relatively small scale and was not in a position to evaluate the question of the nature and extent of interest of the 62 ESCAP or 193 UN member States widely. Interviews with Embassy staff provided indicative information only. It may be worthwhile for ESCAP to consider wider canvassing of interest.

³³ The 13% is calculated to cover UN administration costs and the 1% is for health and injury insurance

³⁴ Information from interviews with RIs about specific non progress with engaging NRLs

³⁵ ST/AI/231/Rev.1

³⁶ Interview: Furio de Tomasi, Chief HRMS, Capacity Development, DESA

³⁷ Interview: Furio de Tomasi, noted that salary levels have been reduced by changing from P5 to P4 for an NRL in another UN agency (not ESCAP)

seems there is flexibility around how they are set for the purposes of NRLs, including how and at what level they are pegged to UN grades.

10. Interviews within ESCAP identified mixed perspectives on costs, what they are and where they should lie. More than one person expressed some discomfort about the charges. There were several comments in a similar vein to this one: "If the .. (agency)... needs the services it doesn't make sense for the (partner) government to pay overhead costs".

11. Others talked about the hidden costs to ESCAP of the NRL modality.³⁸ Issues involved the 'high touch' nature of the modality including the time it takes to: identify the gap, match the right person with the specialist skills required, recruit the person obtaining organizational and UN-wide agreement, and then manage the NRL. Because the NRL modality requires DESA and Executive Secretary sign off there are several steps in the process. These are some of the reasons why the NRL modality has not been used greatly by those RIs and other UN regional agencies who know about the modality.

12. Discussions with other UN regional organisations identified that the UN rules around NRL had become stricter after an apparent overuse on one particular, large scale project (not ESCAP) in the 1990s.³⁹ DESA indicated there is no current appetite to simplify any steps to do with NRL modality and also noted that for a high level, technical placement of 1-3 years duration taking the time for wise decisions is important.

Small Pool of Partners and Places

13. Quite possibly as a result of the lack of promotion, the discontinued NRG, changes within member States and donors /partners own priorities, and the need for negotiations with partners that lies at the heart of the NRL system, the pool of available partners has narrowed. As well, the RoK has been the main member State to proactively engage with the NRL modality, with their systems geared, and the expectation, to utilise the modality.

Variable Quality of NRLs

14. It requires a highly skilled person to be an NRL – someone with the technical skills, sufficient English language capability to communicate effectively in writing, conversations and presentations, curiosity, inter-cultural competence, the ability to be a self starter and yet fit with a team. Interviews during the review indicate that there has been variable ability among NRLs in the review period, with some, seen to not be contributing. This is not usually captured in formal performance assessments. As well it has been found that if NRLs are too senior in their previous positions they may expect support, such as a Personal Assistant and driver- back-up which is not available to NRLs.

Variable Orientation and Integration

15. The orientation of NRLs to the UN and ESCAP is currently overall a 'light touch' approach and varies between divisions. Having a still 'light touch' consistent and pro-active orientation of NRLs into ESCAP will assist in dealing with some past and current challenges such as:

- NRL lack of awareness and understanding of the UN system
- Difficulties in handling the ambiguous role of an NRL – ie not regular staff nor consultant
- Refining and tailoring specialist project design
- For some, and by no means all, there can be a lack of integration with the Divisional and wider ESCAP team producing a sense of disconnection. This also contributes to others in the division not understanding the NRL role

³⁸ These were generic comments and were not able to be costed as part of this review. The Terms of Reference did not include a cost-efficiency or 'value for money' analysis

³⁹ Interview with Leslie Cleland, ECE

3.2.3 Effectiveness

1. Questions around effectiveness include how the NRL modality could be strengthened and better utilized to best fulfill its stated purpose, and how it could be enhanced to attract greater participation and contributions from member States.
2. The current use of NRLs has been efficient for those involved. At the same time there has been insufficient outreach to a wider pool of countries and organizations by ESCAP and lack of organization-wide, connected management of the NRL modality within ESCAP, reducing its effectiveness.
3. Despite the challenges, there are significant opportunities for the NRL modality in ESCAP. A feature of the review has been the considered, forward thinking and creative approaches to how NRLs can be used by ESCAP and partner countries effectively. Insights have come from ESCAP's staff in Bangkok, from the SROs and RIs and from member States.
4. A clear picture has emerged during the review from the 42 interviews, desk reviews and analysis, that if the NRL modality were to be effective for ESCAP:
 - (i) Member States, potential partners, SROs and RIs and ESCAP Divisional chiefs would:
 - Be familiar with ESCAP's strategic priorities and how the NRL modality could help achieve those priorities
 - Be part of well established relationships that easily translate into strategic partnerships in priority areas and incorporate NRLs where relevant
 - Be clear about how the NRL modality fits with other gratis personnel, and staffing and consultancy schemes of ESCAP
 - Know where to turn to in ESCAP to find out how the NRL system works
 - Know who to turn to in ESCAP for guidance in developing proposal and plans
 - Be able to access examples of NRL project and strategic partnership contributions with associated success stories

The HRMS has already drafted information about the NRL process which could act as a basis.
40

- (ii) NRLs and ESCAP staff would:
 - Know how the NRL projects fit with ESCAP strategic priorities
 - Have NRLs orientated into ESCAP and appropriately integrated into relevant teams
 - Experience how the NRL contributions strengthen sustainable development in the region, including the connections between the Bangkok office, RIs and SROs
 - Be contributing suggestions to, and seeking information from, an identified group in ESCAP about countries, governments, institutions and organizations that have the skills and interest in contributing NRLs
- (iii) NRLs would be high achievers and contributors in their fields, able to be simultaneously self starters and team contributors, technically competent, comfortable with English and facilitators of inter-country solutions.

Overall, there would be a visible management group within ESCAP, akin to the original NRG, guiding the promotion and use of a renamed NRL modality, strengthening relationships, and facilitating strategic partnerships that bring together the work of the Bangkok office with relevant SROs and RIs.

⁴⁰ Draft Information Note for Managers (undated)

4. Conclusion

1. This review of the NRL modality is happening at a time when ESCAP is refocusing and refining its strategy. It is also happening at a time when the use of NRLs in ESCAP has diminished in numbers and partners, particularly in the review period of 2008-2013.

NRL Operation

2. Within ESCAP there are multi-layered procedures that are efficiently managed. Many Divisions have accessed technical expertise through the NRL modality with variable, but often highly satisfactory, results. The modality has been significantly less accessed by sub regional offices (SROs) of ESCAP and regional institutes (RI), partly because it is seen as cumbersome and partly because the 14% additional costs, and the way in which they are packaged and presented, are seen as a barrier for partner countries or member States. While there are instances of effective communication and assistance between one SRO and a Bangkok based NRL these connections do not appear to be frequent or common.

3. The NRG established through 2001 ESCAP instructions intentionally ceased to operate as part of streamlining the NRL processes within ESCAP. While understandable, there is value in its functions of cross-agency planning connections, oversight and guidance on potential target donors and partners. It provides an identifiable mechanism for guidance, leadership and management and may help with expanding the pool of potential NRL partners.

4. There are a number of steps that can be taken to improve quality control around the selection, appointment, integration, support and management of NRLs, especially building on informal good practice that currently exists among NRLs and within ESCAP's HRMS and Divisional management. The benefits of effective NRL placements have been clearly articulated by all interviewed for this review, although associated costs have also been mentioned.

5. The NRL modality is not well known outside of ESCAP with little promotion. There is an opportunity to promote the existence, benefits and positive stories associated with NRLs.

6. One partner government in particular, the Republic of Korea (RoK), has seen the NRL modality as valuable for many reasons. This has been particularly for career development opportunities for middle level-senior staff with strong technical capabilities. The NRL opportunity is designed into the RoK system for career planning. This has led at times to almost a custom of one NRL being replaced by another in the different phases of a project and, at times, an expectation of automatically providing an NRL even if not requested by ESCAP.

7. Of the small number of countries interviewed for this review there was clear interest in exploring the NRL opportunities further.

8. Effectiveness of the NRL modality could be enhanced and there a number of straightforward recommendations on NRL implementation.

Relevance

9. The more fundamental question is whether or not the NRL modality is still relevant for ESCAP. It is undoubtedly useful when the right person with the right technical, interpersonal and intercultural skills is engaged to meet a need and where effective cross-national and cross-partner relationships grow.

10. In the course of this review, it has become clear that the refinement of ESCAP's strategy with a focus on fewer, longer and deeper developments provides a logical 'fit' for the NRL modality⁴¹ The ESCAP intention is for the three pillars of sustainable development to act as the

⁴¹op cit: notes from ESCAP Strategy: SMT Retreat, 9 August 2014

core driver of all programmes. This calls for increasing focus on strategic and innovative partnerships, strengthening integration of sub-regional offices with ESCAP's overall strategy and programme priorities, and enhancing the secretariat's capacity.

11. NRL as a modality is highly relevant under the current ESCAP circumstances because of the focus on high level technical skills and the relationship-based nature of establishing the 'contract' for NRL engagement. It is of course only one modality but it is relevant, especially if combined as part of a package with other modalities to bring together teams of staff, NRLs, and maybe interns and consultants to ensure strategic priority work is undertaken in a manner that produces results, and builds relationships and capacity at the same time.

12. Equally important is the opportunity for ESCAP to provide the overall drive through management and guidance of the NRL modality, including to broaden intentionally the pool of potential partners - government ministries, research institutions, private sector and civil society organizations. This review has heard about the importance of actively seeking the added value of more South-South secondments, and exploring a mixed tenure for NRLs.

5. Recommendations

Recommendations fall into two main categories and, in line with the Terms of Reference, focus on strengthening the NRL modality. The first are steps to enhance the generic operation of the NRL scheme. The suggestion is to start implementing these steps straightaway but some will take time to bear fruit. The second is for a more immediate action to integrate NRLs into the current ESCAP Strategic direction and to assess, through practice, potential broader interest in the NRL modality. It is for a short-term sub-regional initiative(s) that produces tangible results and allows ESCAP to focus on NRLs contributing to its overall strategy, strengthens partnerships and trials some of the more general recommendations.

A. Recommendations for Managing the NRL Modality

1. Appoint Human Resources and Management Section to coordinate and manage the NRL scheme and reactivate NRL Review Group

- (i) One division of ESCAP needs to have an oversight and leadership function in relation to the NRL scheme. The NRL modality is essentially a human resources issue and the Human Resources and Management Section (HRMS) is a logical lead section. This would build on the active role HRMS already takes.
- (ii) NRLs also have a role in helping ESCAP achieve its strategic priorities. The Programme Planning and Partnerships Division (PPD) has a vital place with the strategic overview, and organization-wide programme and partnership development roles it plays. PPD can play a role in providing strategic priorities and associated requirements for NRL expertise.
- (iii) HRMS will need to be well supported by communications staff within ESCAP
- (iv) Ideally, these skills and roles will all come together through a reactivated NRL Review Group

2. Active and Transparent Promotion of NRL

- (i) Rename the working title of the scheme so that its meaning is clearer to potential partners
- (ii) Develop a straightforward communication strategy for the scheme that includes:
 - posting the NRL placements on the ESCAP website outlining the process involved and the benefits of the scheme
 - working with DESA to post NRL opportunities and information on the DESA website⁴²
 - for partners, providing a regular, either annual or six monthly, update about the scheme placement openings, placement achievements - including success stories - and how the placements fit with ESCAP strategic priorities

3. Identification, Selection and Appointment of NRLs

- (i) HRMS coordination of potential NRL secondments in association with PPD, in line with the ESCAP strategy and based on:
 - Division, sub regional office and regional institution identification of priorities
 - Annual assessment of technical requirements and how these fit with strategic priorities
- (ii) Terms of Reference prepared that cover: technical skills, language requirements, interpersonal /intercultural skills and duration of seconded assignment listing of placements on the website

⁴² Pers comm: During the course of this review DESA offered to post NRL opportunities on their website

- pro-actively engaging with countries and organizations that have the technical expertise required for the assignment
- (iii) Selection processes that involve ESCAP short-listing and interviewing of candidates, in person whenever possible, or by skype or video-link
- (iv) Checking or assessing suitability in more detail if questions arise for ESCAP
- (v) An informal addition to the Memorandum of Agreement to focus on a three way agreement (between ESCAP, the organization/government and the individual NRL) covering mutual expectations and the partnership potential of the NRL modality. It would also contribute to performance assessment
- (vi) In line with ESCAP Human Resources policies, seek to ensure gender balance of NRL experts

4. A Planned Orientation and Integration Process

- (ii) That actively welcomes NRLs and builds quick understanding of the roles, priorities and codes of conduct and ethics of ESCAP
- (iii) Where HRMS coordinate NRLs on a regular basis to both help NRLs adapt, including their families, and, with PPD, build a shared intelligence about issues relevant to ESCAP's priorities
- (iv) Active steps taken to integrate NRLs into Divisions, incorporating relevant lessons from the integration of Interns
- (v) Performance assessment based on the signed three-way agreement

B. Recommendation - Pilot of Sub-regional Initiatives

The review surfaced several suggestions for adapting NRL in a manner that:

- addressed producing tangible results for ESCAP's strategy and substantive priorities
- would integrate programmes more effectively between RIs, SROs and Bangkok, and
- would provide short and longer term opportunities for NRLs to contribute

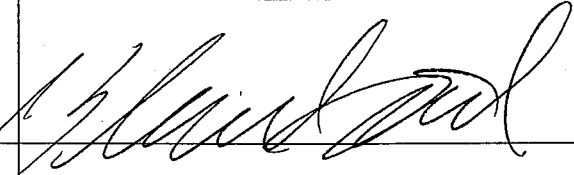


Multiple suggestions were made for creative ways of working long distance, using technology and engaging member States, institutions and individual technical specialists. A sub-regional pilot initiative(s) is an approach that:

- brings these suggestions together
- is contained rather than all encompassing and therefore more manageable
- allows for testing a more integrated approach to NRLs within ESCAP strategic priorities, and
- seeks interest from a wider pool of partners

The recommendations are that:

- (i) ESCAP explore the development of two sub-regional pilot initiatives. Such initiatives would fit with a focus on achieving ESCAP substantive priorities and with better strategic and innovative partnerships. Pilots of a manageable size and duration also increase the likelihood of 'achievable and visible' 'runs on the board'
- (ii) The two sub-regions most frequently raised for initial exploration were: the Pacific (potential focus on renewable energy or development of statistics) and Central Asia (potential focus on transport, renewable energy /new energy technologies, or IT)
- (iii) The leadership for exploring these is sub-regional initiatives resides with the Executive Secretary's Office, PPD, and HRMS.

Annex I. Management Response and follow-up Action Plan

Title of Evaluation	Evaluation on Non-reimbursable loan (NRL) services at ESCAP	
	Signature	Date
Shamshad Akhtar Executive Secretary ESCAP		- 3 JUN 2015
Adnan Aliani Director, Strategy and Programme Management Division		28/09/15
Frances Kamikamica Officer-in-Charge, Division of Administration		15/5/15
General Remarks by Management		
<p>The evaluation was commissioned while the senior management team underwent a series of deliberations on how to make ESCAP “fit for purpose”. These consultations provided the basis for redefining ESCAP’s strategic direction from 2015 to 2020, strengthening integration of subregional offices and regional institutions with ESCAP’s overall programme of work, and enhancing the secretariat’s capacity to deliver its expanding mandates from member States. In this context, the evaluation found that the NRL scheme remains relevant for ESCAP, and made a strong case for refreshing, opening up and re-energising the programme in light of the ongoing efforts to improve the functioning and operation of ESCAP.</p> <p>The findings and conclusions offered helpful insights into the challenges and issues of the NRL scheme, particularly the programme’s limited publicity and outreach, its largely supply-driven nature whereby a narrow pool of donors supply the candidates, and its limited integration into the overall work of ESCAP.</p> <p>The recommendations focused on measures to improve the process of acquiring NRL services, and on the overall effectiveness of the scheme. In general, we agree with the intent of these recommendations and commit ESCAP to addressing the issues raised in the report, although follow-up actions need to be considered based on existing budgetary and human resources, particularly within HRMS. We also feel that the report somewhat overstated the significance and importance of the NRL Review Group. While the intent of certain roles and responsibilities of the Group may have served a discrete, useful purpose, we consider that the Group itself was not the best arrangement to carry out these functions.</p>		

Report Overall Recommendation	Report Specific Recommendations	Management Response and Follow-up Action
<p>1. Appoint Human Resources and Management Section to coordinate and manage the NRL scheme and reactivate NRL Review Group</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One division of ESCAP needs to have an oversight and leadership function in relation to the NRL scheme. The NRL modality is essentially a human resources issue and the Human Resources and Management Section (HRMS) is a logical lead section. This would build on the active role HRMS already takes. 2. NRLs also have a role in helping ESCAP achieve its strategic priorities. The Strategy and Programme Management Division (SPMD) has a vital place with the strategic overview, and organization-wide programme and partnership development roles it plays. SPMD can play a role in providing strategic priorities and associated requirements for NRL expertise. 3. HRMS will need to be well supported by communications staff within ESCAP 4. Ideally, these skills and roles will all come together through a reactivated NRL Review Group 	<p>SPMD would take the lead role in identifying the programmatic areas and assessing the strategic priorities where the NRL scheme would best meet the demands of the work of ESCAP. Management agrees with the recommendation that SPMD's role could be further enhanced beyond providing technical review of requests for NRL services.</p> <p>Specifically, SPMD will assess the overall organizational demand for NRL services and actively seek interest from a wider pool of potential donors and partners, with the support of HRMS and the office for Strategic Publications, Communications and Advocacy (SPCA).</p> <p>HRMS would support SPMD in outreach activities and in processing requests, as well as monitoring and evaluating NRL performance. HRMS can continue to serve as the focal entity for all NRL activities. Regarding the NRL Review Group, we feel that the responsibility of the Group, such as the screening and selection of requests for NRL services, will be best addressed under the enhanced responsibilities of HRMS and SPMD. Since experience showed that the NRL Review Group did not add value to the recruitment process and was operationally redundant, it was discontinued to streamline the process.</p> <p>HRMS, in collaboration with SPMD and OES, agreed to update the existing procedures on NRL by reinforcing – among others – the roles and responsibilities of HRMS and SPMD, and to issue a revised procedure from the Executive Secretary during the second half of 2015.</p>

<p>2. Active and transparent promotion of NRL</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rename the working title of the scheme so that its meaning is clearer to potential partners 2. Develop a straightforward communication strategy for the scheme that includes: posting the NRL placements on the ESCAP website outlining the process involved and the benefits of the scheme; work with DESA to post NRL opportunities and information on the DESA website; for partners, providing a regular, either annual or six monthly, update about the scheme placement openings, placement achievements - including success stories - and how the placements fit with ESCAP strategic priorities 	<p>We agree with the recommendation to undertake active and transparent promotion of the NRL scheme. However, the actions we take must be within the existing resources and capacities of ESCAP. This includes posting the NRL requirements on the ESCAP website and outlining the application process involved. HRMS, in collaboration with SPCA, will be responsible for implementing this action during the second half of 2015.</p>
<p>3. Identification, selection and appointment of NRLs</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. HRMS coordination of potential NRL secondments in association with SPMD, in line with the ESCAP strategy and based on: Division, sub regional office and regional institution identification of priorities; and Annual assessment of technical requirements and how these fit with strategic priorities 2. Terms of Reference prepared that cover: technical skills, language requirements, interpersonal /intercultural skills and duration of seconded assignment transparent listing of placements on the website; pro-actively engage with countries and organizations that have the technical expertise required for the assignment 3. Selection processes that involve ESCAP short-listing and interviewing of candidates, in person whenever possible, or by skype or video-link 4. Check or assess suitability in more detail if questions arise for ESCAP 5. An informal addition to the Memorandum of Agreement to focus on a three way agreement 	<p>We welcome these recommendations to strengthen the effectiveness of acquiring NRL services. Many of these are already current practice but could be further reinforced through the revised NRL procedures indicated above.</p> <p>Regarding the issue of an additional MOA, any modifications to NRL policy, including the MOA, requires consultations and approvals from OHRM, OLA, and DESA.</p>

	<p>(between ESCAP, the organization/government and the individual NRL) covering mutual expectations and the partnership potential of the NRL modality. It would also contribute to performance assessment</p> <p>6. In line with ESCAP Human Resources policies, seek to ensure gender balance of NRL experts</p>	
4. A planned orientation and integration process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That actively welcomes NRLs and builds quick understanding of the roles, priorities and codes of conduct and ethics of ESCAP 2. Where HRMS coordinates NRLs on a regular basis to both help NRLs adapt, including their families, and, with SPMD, build a shared intelligence about issues relevant to ESCAP's priorities 3. Active steps taken to integrate NRLs into Divisions, incorporating relevant lessons from the integration of Interns 4. Performance assessment based on the signed three-way agreement 	<p>We welcome these recommendations to strengthen the integration of NRL personnel into secretariat work. The orientation and on boarding process will be included in the revised NRL procedures indicated above. For any changes to the MOA, see comments above (3).</p>
5. Recommendation - Pilot of Sub-regional Initiatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ESCAP explore the development of two sub-regional pilot initiatives. Such initiatives would fit with a focus on achieving ESCAP substantive priorities and with better strategic and innovative partnerships. Pilots of a manageable size and duration also increase the likelihood of achievable and visible 'runs on the board' 2. The two sub-regions most frequently raised for initial exploration were: the Pacific (potential focus on renewable energy or development of statistics) and Central Asia (potential focus on transport, renewable energy /new energy technologies, or IT) 3. The leadership for exploring these is sub-regional initiatives reside with the Executive Secretary's Office, SPMD, and HRMS. 	<p>We agree with the recommendation. It could, however, be applied to ESCAP as a whole based on our organizational strategic priorities and requirements, rather than focussing on certain SROs. Specific areas for possible NRL engagement would be assessed as part of the follow-up actions to Recommendation 1.</p>