**OIOS**

Office of Internal Oversight Services

# INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

# EVALUATION REPORT

**Programme evaluation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)**

**15 July 2014**

**Assignment No.: IED-14-008**

# INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

**FUNCTION**

"*The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organisation. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organisation;*" (General Assembly [Resolution 48/218 B](#)).

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# Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the evaluation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) was established in 1947 as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and regional arm of the United Nations. It currently serves 53 member States and nine associate members, covering a region that is home to 4.1 billion people, more than 60 per cent of the world's population. While changes in the region are responsible for much of the global progress against the Millennium Development Goals, totals and averages mask significant variations between subregions and individual countries. Forty per cent of the population in the region subsists on less than two dollars a day. Many countries in the region also lag in areas such as hunger, health and sanitation, and face challenges that include rising inequality, unplanned urbanization and vulnerabilities associated with being the most disaster-prone region in the world.

In line with ESCAP's mandate to promote regional cooperation and action for inclusive and sustainable economic and social development, the ESCAP Secretariat has supported relevant member State dialogue and policy work on development issues. Member state interviewees and survey respondents cited examples of useful consensus-building and norm setting work related to transportation connectivity, social development and environmental issues.

At the same time, the lack of a strong ESCAP Secretariat corporate framework to support joint planning has led to inefficiencies in the implementation of research and analysis, and other work. Coordination has sometimes been insufficient to achieve ESCAP's strategic goal to promote a multidisciplinary perspective and target its limited resources toward activities where regional cooperation is most critical. Also, monitoring and evaluation data on utilization of ESCAP research and analysis, and other outputs, is inadequate to assess programme effectiveness. Still, OIOS data indicate user satisfaction with ESCAP publications; the Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific, the Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific and the Millennium Development Goal Report were rated useful by the highest proportion of stakeholders and considered to be very authoritative in addressing economic and social development issues in the region.

ESCAP's network of subregional offices (SROs) (the Pacific Office apart) are a recent addition. While it will take time for SROs to evolve into their most meaningful corporate shape, it is already clear that they respond to an existing demand - in many cases the subregion is the most meaningful level for cross-border collaboration. Meanwhile, the priority that SROs should give to the corporate representational versus substantive role, as well as the activities that will be undertaken at the divisional verses SRO level is left unclear.

OIOS makes four important recommendations related to:

- Executive Secretary action on the recommendations of the ESCAP Research and Publications Committee;

- Strengthening monitoring and evaluation of ESCAP research and analysis work, including more evaluations that extend beyond a single project focus;
- Development and implementation of an ESCAP-wide outreach and common branding strategy for its outputs; and,
- Implement framework that addresses clarification of roles, responsibilities and authorities that relate to subregional offices.

**Contents**

## I.  INTRODUCTION

1.      The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) identified the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) for evaluation on the basis of a risk assessment undertaken in early 2013.  The Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) selected the evaluation for consideration at its fifty-fifth session, in 2015 (see A/68/16, para. 158).  The General Assembly endorsed the selection in paragraph 6 of its resolution 68/20.

2.      The general frame of reference for OIOS evaluation is provided in the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (PPBME), which defines the purpose of evaluation as: (1) determining, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Organization's activities in relation to their objectives, and (2) enabling the Secretariat and Member States to engage in systematic reflection on increasing Organizational effectiveness.[1]  Also, it has been prepared in conformance with the Norms and Standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).

## II.  BACKGROUND

### a.      Mandate, governance, organization and resources

3.      ESCAP was established in 1947 as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and regional arm of the United Nations in the Asia-Pacific region; it currently serves 53 member States and 9 associate members, covering an area stretching from Turkey in the west to Kiribati in the east and the Russian Federation in the north to New Zealand in the south.[2]

4.      ESCAP's mandate is to promote regional cooperation and action for inclusive and sustainable economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific.  ESCAP provides a forum for its member States on regional cooperation and assists them in building and sustaining shared economic growth and social equity.  Moreover, ESCAP provides a platform for participation of least developed and landlocked developing countries (LDCs, LLDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS).

5.      The Commission is ESCAP's main legislative organ.  During the period of this evaluation, ESCAP's work was guided by the Strategic Framework for 2012-2013.[3]  The ESCAP secretariat, which supports the Commission, is located in Bangkok, Thailand and headed by an Executive Secretary.  It services the Commission and its 8 sectoral Committees.  The ESCAP secretariat is comprised of the Office of the Executive Secretary, seven substantive divisions (including five regional institutions[4]), four subregional offices, a Division of Administration and a Programme Planning and Partnerships Division.  The

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[1] ST/SGB/2000/8, p. 12, Regulation 7.1.

[2] Further ECOSOC resolutions 37(IV) and 414(XII).

[3]  A/65/6 (Prog. 15).

[4] As per A/65/6 (Prog. 15), regional institutions are: Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization (Beijing, China); Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (Incheon, Republic of Korea); Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (New Delhi, India); Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture (Bogor, Indonesia); and Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (Chiba, Japan).

Strategic Framework outlines their expected accomplishments and corresponding indicators of achievement.[5] The seven substantive divisions cover:

- Macroeconomic policy and inclusive development
- Trade and investment
- Transport
- Environment and development
- Information and communications technology and disaster risk reduction
- Social development
- Statistics

For the 2012–2013 biennium, ESCAP had a total of 539 staff members of which 32 worked in subregional offices.[6]

The work of the ESCAP secretariat falls into three broad categories:

- Research and Analysis, including ESCAP Publications
- Convening and Consensus
- Technical Cooperation[7]

6.     The ESCAP secretariat undertakes numerous research and analysis activities within the context of its substantive areas of focus; the outputs of these activities are intended to support consensus building and technical cooperation activities.  Many ESCAP research and analysis activities culminate in publications.  ESCAP has recently designated one publication as its flagship – the "Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific."  Other types of publications that ESCAP produces, some recurrent and others non-recurrent, include: policy briefs; book series; journals; working papers; manuals; and, training materials.

7.     For the 2012-2013 biennium, ESCAP reported a total of 566 outputs and 2888 work months in the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System (IMDIS).  Research and analysis constituted 237 outputs (42 per cent) and 905 work months (32 per cent).[8]  The recurrent and non-recurrent publications subset of IMDIS-reported research and analysis constituted 47 outputs and 364 work months.  Not all publications are reported on in IMDIS.  As part of an initiative to review and revamp its publications programme, ESCAP is currently engaged in clarifying its universe of publications.

8.     Resources from the United Nations regular budget and extrabudgetary resources from donor contributions, the Development Account and the Regional Programme of Technical Cooperation support ESCAP's work.  According to the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015, approximately 31 per cent of ESCAP's total budget was extrabudgetary resources.[9]  Table A below provides funding and post information for the last four biennia.

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[5] A/65/6 (Prog. 15).

[6] A/66/6 (Sect. 19).

[7] ESCAP defines technical cooperation as encompassing policy advocacy, regional knowledge networking, training, advisory services and other forms of technical assistance aimed at strengthening the capacity of members to formulate and implement effective policies and programmes in a range of key development areas. See "Overview of technical cooperation activities and extrabudgetary contributions." Note by the secretariat. E/ESCAP/69/17, 2013, p.5-6.

[8] Output and work months calculation are approximations with the following functional categories identified as "research and analysis": parliamentary documentation; recurrent publications; non-recurrent publications; and, within the "other substantive services" category, booklets, fact sheets…, contribution to joint outputs and technical material.

[9] A/68/6 (Sect.19).

**Table A: ESCAP Budget by Type of Funding and Post (million USD)[10]**

| | Resources | | | | Posts | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2008-2009 (Actual) | 2010-2011 (Actual) | 2012-2013 (Estimate) | 2014-2015 (Estimate) | 2008-2009 (Actual) | 2010-2011 (Actual) | 2012-2013 (Estimate) | 2014-2015 (Estimate) |
| Regular Budget | 91.4 | 100.5 | 103.3 | 110.8 | 440 | 440 | 436 | 420 |
| Extrabudgetary | 27.2 | 25.2 | 32.6 | 50.1 | 94 | 92 | 103 | 99 |
| Total | 118.6 | 125.7 | 135.9 | 160.9 | 534 | 532 | 539 | 519 |

The top 5 bilateral donors to ESCAP are Republic of Korea, Japan, Russian Federation, China and Australia, together providing 91 per cent of all bilateral extrabudgetary funding.[11]

## b. Evaluation framework: scope and methodology

**Scope**

9.      This evaluation addresses overall programme effectiveness.  At the same time, in an attempt to maximize its usefulness, the following prisms were identified as entry points to assess the wider evaluative questions of overall programme relevance, efficiency and effectiveness: (a) the research and analysis work of the ESCAP secretariat, including publications, and linkages to related activities such as technical cooperation work, and, (b) the roles and responsibilities of substantive divisions in Bangkok vis-à-vis ESCAP subregional offices.  These areas of work are multifaceted and interlink with all other ESCAP activities. [12]   They were determined to be of high strategic importance to ESCAP's effectiveness based on an analysis of its mandates and work programme, as well consultations with its Secretariat management and Commission member States.   This evaluation was performed shortly after the expansion of ESCAP's subregional offices and the Executive Secretary's promulgation of a framework on the working relations between subregional offices (SROs) and substantive divisions in Bangkok (November 2012). Additionally, in the context of Secretariat-wide reform efforts, the New York-based Publication Board had identified the need for changes in research and analysis activities.

10.      OIOS assessed the utility of research and analysis work across all subprogrammes, including subregional offices, to determine the degree to which this work met the needs of intended beneficiaries.  OIOS also sought to reconcile the degree to which this work aligned with ESCAP's Strategic Framework and performance indicators, including how research and analysis work contributed to regional-consensus building.  To facilitate these analyses, the evaluation team developed a "Programme Impact Pathway" (PIP) (see Figure I below).  This PIP is based on expectations outlined in ESCAP's Strategic Framework mandated by the General Assembly (as per A/65/6 (Programme 15)) and depicts the relationships between inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes (expected accomplishments).  It provides a lens to

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[10] A/68/6 (Sect.19); A/66/6 (Sect. 19); A/64/6 (Sect.18).

[11] Overview of technical cooperation activities and extrabudgetary contributions, E/ESCAP/69/17, annex I; and, according to ESCAP, in 2012 top 5 bilateral donors contributed approximately 8.9 million USD, representing 91 per cent of all bilateral extrabudgetary funding.

[12] OIOS-IED Inception Report (TOR) for this evaluation, para 32,  states: "While keeping overall programme effectiveness in view, an evaluative focus through the following prism has been identified:  (a) The research and analysis work of ESCAP, for which concrete publications are available as a one key entry point for review; to include some of the linkages to related activities such as ESCAP technical cooperation work, and (b) The roles and responsibilities of the ESCAP secretariat's substantive divisions in Bangkok vis-à-vis ESCAP sub-regional offices, with particular emphasis on research and analysis function."

view how ESCAP's research and analysis activities are interconnected with its other activities and their intended contribution to achieving inclusive and sustainable economic and social development in the region.

**Figure I: Programme Impact Pathway (PIP) for Research and Analysis Work**[13]

| Inputs | Activities | Outputs | Immediate Outcomes | Intermediate Outcomes | Impacts |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Staff** | **Research & publish parliamentary documents, recurring and non-recurring publications and other documents** | **Documents and publications produced and disseminated** | **Regional eco & social data sets maintained in accordance with international standards** | **Awareness of UN issues among regional populations, analysts & policy makers** | **Inclusive and Sustainable Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific is Achieved** |
| **Financial Resources** | | **Expert group meetings delivered** | **Relevant and timely research and trend analysis made available to MSs** | **Regional MSs adopt global and regional policy norms** | **Millennium Development Goals are Achieved** |
| **Partnerships with other UN entities, RECs, ADB, ASEAN…** | **Organize ad hoc expert group meetings, exhibits, lectures, workshops and other special events** | **Knowledge networks and databases established** | **Eco & social policy options identified and advocated** | **UN policy norms reflected in MSs' domestic policy** | |
| **Decisions of Regional Coordination Mechanism and Related Forums** | | **Evaluations produced and used** | | | |
| **Participation of Academia, Civil Society Organisations** | | | **MSs access global and regional knowledge networks** | **MSs Institutional capacities for eco and social policy planning strengthened** | |
| **Consultants and Technical Cooperation Resources** | | | | **Gender equality and human rights are promoted** | |

MSs: Member States

*Source: OIOS analysis of programme documents*

## Methodology

11.     Data collection was undertaken between May and December 2013. OIOS would like to acknowledge, as exemplary, the good practice ESCAP put in place by establishing an internal reference group to support this evaluation.[14]

12.     The evidence in this evaluation report is derived from triangulation of documentary, testimonial, observational and analytical sources collected through quantitative and qualitative methods, including:

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[13] Each column in the PIP represents a set of elements that 'collectively' influence attainment of change as the process moves in the direction of the desired impacts.

[14] Comprised of Deputy Executive Secretary, Chief of Staff, Secretary of the Commission, Director of Programme Planning and Partnerships Division, Deputy Secretary of the Commission and Programme Officer responsible for Evaluation and opportunities to meet with ESCAP's Senior Management Team and Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives (ACPR).

**i. Document reviews and analysis of quantitative data:** including mandates, budgets, work plans, guidelines, policies, manuals, performance reporting data, previous oversight reports, publication production cost data and ESCAP Commission resolutions.

**ii. Stakeholder surveys:** two self-administered web-based surveys of 1,645 regional/subregional level partners and of 57 high-level member State representatives.[15]

**iii. ESCAP staff survey:** administered to all 503 staff listed at the time of the survey.[16]

**iv. Interviews and focus groups:** 121 semi-structured, primarily in-person interviews with purposive sample of ESCAP management, staff and a range of government, United Nations and NGO stakeholders; 2 focus groups with member States.[17]

**v. Field missions for data collection and observation:** to ESCAP's headquarters in Bangkok, and to two subregional offices--South and South-West Asia (New Delhi, India) and North-East Asia (Incheon, Republic of Korea).

**vi. Publication/analytical product utility assessment:** analysis of a sample of ESCAP publications and related analytical products using a number of methods such as review of web-based publication usage data and UN Global Pulse "big data"; the sample included key subregional office and joint-publications, as well as publications related to technical cooperation and advisory services.[18]

13. A limitation of this evaluation was the low stakeholder survey response rates; as a result, responses from one survey were not used. In order to mitigate against data limitation, any inferences of general validity were only made if survey data was also corroborated by interviews and document reviews. All analyses were thus triangulated with data from multiple sources to strengthen the evaluation results. In addition to internal quality assurance protocols, an external advisory panel was engaged to review the draft report.

14. Annex A presents the full ESCAP management comments to the OIOS-IED draft report.

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[15] First survey was sent to a wide range of stakeholders across all thematic areas and included ministerial level, NGO, regional coordination mechanism and United Nations agency representatives, as well as Bangkok-based and subregional partners. OIOS developed the universe in consultation with ESCAP focal points. This survey yielded 17 per cent response rate--283 of 1645. Second sent to each high-level ESCAP member State at the ambassadorial level; yielded only a 7 per cent response rate- 4 of 57. Therefore, this report did not use data from the second.

[16] Sent to all ESCAP staff, yielding a 42 per cent response rate--213 out of 503.

[17] 79 staff; 42 stakeholders.

[18] Sample: 2012 Theme Study 68th Session, 2013 Theme Study 69th Session, Asia-Pacific Development Journal, Asia-Pacific Population Journal, Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report, Green Growth, Resources and Resilience: 2012, MDG Reports, Monograph Series on Trade and Investment, Monograph Series on Transport, Pacific Perspectives, Review of Developments in Transport in Asia and the Pacific, South and South-West Asia Development Monitor, South and South-West Asia Development Report, Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific, and The Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific.

## III. EVALUATION RESULTS

### Result A - Relevance

## Through its research and analysis work, ESCAP has supported member State intergovernmental dialogue on regional cooperation, as well as policy work on development issues

15.     As indicated in ESCAP's Strategic Framework and the PIP (see para 10), ESCAP seeks to make research and trend analyses available to member States so that regional policy norms will be adopted, thereby facilitating improved, and inclusive, economic and social development in the Asia-Pacific region.  Although ESCAP has limited quantitative data on stakeholder utilization of its analytical outputs, ESCAP's work has promoted regional cooperation and norm setting.

*ESCAP is recognized and utilized as a platform for inclusive international dialogue and consensus-building*

16.     Eighty-four per cent of ESCAP member State interviewees (16 of 19) told OIOS that ESCAP's research and analytical work has promoted useful intergovernmental dialogue. OIOS stakeholder survey respondents also indicated that ESCAP's outputs were regularly utilized in the context of the regional consensus-building platforms they had attended, as well as in their national and subregional level development work.  Specifically, ESCAP's research and analytical outputs were used as (1) guidance documents for development-related activities (52 per cent) (2) as a means to access regional and subregional knowledge networks (48 per cent); and (3) to assist with national policy work (47 per cent).

*ESCAP research and analysis work has promoted regional cooperation and norm setting*

17.     ESCAP's work on regional transportation connectivity was a positive example cited by over a third of member State interviewees (7 of 19).  Specifically, they pointed to ESCAP's recent work in support of the international agreement on dry ports with its potential to facilitate regional trade and increase investment in inland areas.  At the 69th Session, held in May 2013, ESCAP member States adopted the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports building on a longstanding body of ESCAP work.  ESCAP analysis in the 2011 Monograph Series on Transportation Facilitation was cited as an example of useful supporting analytical work.

18.     In addition to ambassadors based in Bangkok, country-level officials cited the usefulness of ESCAP's regional cooperation work related to transportation connectivity. Some pointed out that ESCAP headquarter-based regional cooperation transportation connectivity initiatives were complemented by, for example, ESCAP work on South-South West Asia subregional cooperation on two proposed corridors to strengthen connectivity: the Turkey-Iran-Pakistan-India-Bangladesh-Myanmar road corridor and the Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad-Delhi-Kolkota-Dhaka container train corridor.

19.     Another example of ESCAP work that promoted intergovernmental dialogue and regional cooperation is in social development.  ESCAP undertook analyses to determine the situation of persons with disabilities and develop a database of evidence supporting formulation of regional norms.  This work contributed to the "Incheon Strategy to Make the Right Real for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific," which includes a set of

regionally agreed upon disability-inclusive development goals with corresponding time-bound targets.

20.    Furthermore, ESCAP's analytical work on environment and development has contributed to the preparation of a series of regional reports.  As one example, ESCAP analytical work contributed to the adoption of the Astana Green Bridge Initiative, which was subsequently included in The Future We Want outcome document of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

***ESCAP's work is most relevant when it targets areas where regional cooperation is critical for success and integrates social and economic issues***

21.    Stakeholders reported that ESCAP is most effective when its work targets issues where regional cooperation is critical for success.  Stakeholder interviewees commented that ESCAP research and analysis work was particularly useful "when it identified what regional integration challenges existed" and "could guide work in terms of what policy focus to suggest at the national level."  Also, they valued ESCAP's analytical outputs because of their integrated presentation of social and economic issues, as compared to more narrowly framed analytical outputs of other institutions.

## Result B - Efficiency and Effectiveness

# The lack of a strong ESCAP corporate framework to support joint work planning has led to inefficiencies in the implementation of research and analysis, and other ESCAP work

22.    As indicated in the Strategic Framework and PIP, ESCAP seeks to provide member States with a variety of research and analytical outputs.  Examples include: knowledge databases, trend analyses, policy option papers and publications.  To do this efficiently and effectively, ESCAP must perform its work in a strategic and internally coordinated manner.

***Current joint planning and coordination is insufficient to achieve ESCAP's strategic goal to promote a multidisciplinary perspective***

23.    ESCAP's strategic documents emphasize its goal to support member States in having policies that address development from a multidisciplinary perspective - integrating economic, social and sustainable development issues.  For example, the 2012-2013 Strategic Framework comprises an "integrated set of eight mutually supportive and interconnected subprogrammes, which are linked to the priorities of member States."  ESCAP, however, has yet to institutionalize a plan for divisions to jointly plan, develop, and disseminate its research and analysis work.  ESCAP staff and stakeholders commented on the considerable potential to further strengthen multidisciplinary work and cited challenges of divisions working in silos, following independent work plans without a coherent ESCAP-wide message.  ESCAP's limited interdivisional work has at times been output driven without ties to a wider corporate strategy.  Moreover, some staff interviewees commented on a tendency to select research and analysis work at donors' requests, without sufficient thought given to cross-fertilization between subprogrammes.  Stronger executive leadership and exercise of authority towards more integrated planning and coordination of the subprogrammes are needed to achieve better cohesion.

24.     The current lack of a coherent corporate strategy and planning framework has also led to inefficiencies in ESCAP's production and dissemination of its research and analysis work. For example, ESCAP is challenged in its capacity to develop, edit, fact check and achieve consistent outputs because each division operates independently with its own data management, graphics and design ideas and quality assurance practices.  Likewise, the ad-hoc nature of publication launches was viewed critically by multiple key partners who indicated that stronger planning and consultation were needed.

*ESCAP has not defined its strategic focus and work plan priorities sufficiently to maximize the value it adds*

25.     As discussed in Result A, certain ESCAP research and analysis work has been valued by its stakeholders for promoting regional cooperation.  However, in order to achieve higher impact, ESCAP needs a comprehensive framework that clearly specifies its work programme implementation priorities, contains details and explicitly states the intended linkages between functional areas and subprogrammes.  While the 2012-2013 Strategic Framework served as a basic overarching framework, it did not lay out a clear and detailed corporate strategic plan that prioritized ESCAP's work.  And, synergies between ESCAP's research and analysis and technical cooperation work were not identified.

26.     Several ESCAP stakeholders and staff also commented on the tendency of ESCAP to accept offers of project funding without consideration of a larger ESCAP-wide strategy.  In instances where ESCAP engaged in national capacity development, some member States and other stakeholders questioned how some activities fit with ESCAP's role as a regional actor, in terms of ESCAP's comparative advantage of promoting regional cooperation vis-à-vis the capacity development work of other United Nations entities.  Moreover, if, in the future, SROs engage in more capacity development activities, ESCAP will need to ensure that there is alignment with organization-wide priorities.

27.     ESCAP realises this as an area in need of improvement.  In 2011 and 2013, as part of its preparation of the 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 Strategic Frameworks, ESCAP held a series of consultations on how to implement a programmatic approach, however, these steps have not yet resulted in the development of a corporate strategic framework.

## Result C - Effectiveness

## Utilization of ESCAP research and analysis work appears to be largely unknown, limiting ESCAP's ability to assess its overall effectiveness

28.     Sufficient programme monitoring and evaluation data is a critical ingredient to assess the degree to which intended outcomes are being achieved as outlined in ESCAP's Strategic Framework and PIP.

*ESCAP monitoring and evaluation data for its research analysis function, and other key functions, is inadequate to assess programme effectiveness*

29.     ESCAP's main source of monitoring data consists of information collected for the Secretariat-wide Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System (IMDIS). However, as indicated in para 7, not all research and analysis outputs, or all publications, are reported in IMDIS.  ESCAP reduced its IMDIS reported recurrent publications from 84 to 29

and non-recurrent from 24 to 18 over the last four biennia, in line with a Secretariat-wide directive to streamline publication programmes.

30.     Figures II and III below show the breakdown of outputs and work months as reported in IMDIS.  While research and analysis comprised the largest category of IMDIS tracked outputs, the data indicate that ESCAP spent more time on technical cooperation work.
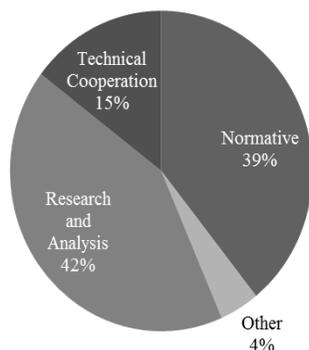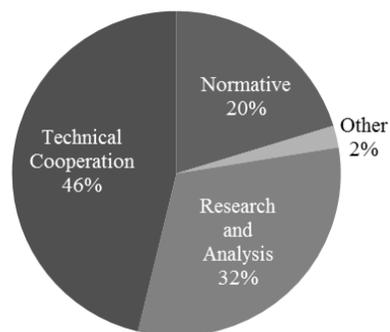
**Figure II: Outputs for 2012-2013**          **Figure III: Work months for 2012-2013**



*Source: OIOS analysis based on IMDIS data*

31.     Of the 29 evaluation reports produced in 2012-13 and 2010-11, most were project-based evaluative reviews.  Only one report cut across the subprogrammes and ESCAP's research and analysis function received limited attention.  ESCAP's Evaluation Unit manages evaluations and supports subprogrammes to conduct evaluative reviews.  Earlier OIOS reports on the strength of Secretariat entity evaluation functions, reported that ESCAP spent 0.36 per cent of its total resources on evaluation and 3.15 per cent on monitoring and evaluation combined.  Nevertheless, overall, ESCAP received higher scores than the majority of Secretariat programmes.  ESCAP's scores were negatively affected as a result of: its evaluation function reporting to another management function; spending less than 1 per cent of its overall budget on evaluation; and not having an appropriate evaluation plan,[19] since the evaluation plan in place in 2012-13 was not tied to a corporate strategy or needs assessment.

***ESCAP maintains some records on its audience, but lacks consistent tracking on the dissemination of its research and analysis outputs, limiting its ability to assess utilization and programme effectiveness***

32.     ESCAP reported that its publications target a broad audience including: member States, policy makers, think-tanks, United Nations entities, academics, and the general public.  Some divisions track some recipient information and distribute readership surveys.  However, no ESCAP-wide systematic process is in place to monitor this information and the existing readership surveys struggle to get adequate response rates.

33.     Currently, the majority of ESCAP's publications are available both online and in print.  ESCAP's 2014-15 Programme Budget indicates a plan to increase online (only) publications from 3 in 2010-11 to 14 in 2014-15.  However, at present, ESCAP web tracking data is not a reliable source to determine website traffic or publication usage.  Furthermore,

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[19] OIOS report on Strengthening the role of evaluation and the application of evaluation findings on programme design, delivery and policy directives and related United Nations Secretariat Evaluation Scorecards, 2010-2011; A/68/70 and IED-13-006.

geographical data on ESCAP website users is scarce, leaving ESCAP with almost no reliable information on the degree to which target audiences are being reached through this channel. ESCAP has indicated that an overhaul of its website and associated tools is currently underway.

***Stakeholder data collected by OIOS provides some information on user satisfaction; however, an attempt to perform cost-benefit analysis of research and analysis outputs, including publications, was limited by a lack of consistent ESCAP cost data***

34.     OIOS asked stakeholder survey respondents to rate the usefulness of a number of ESCAP key publications. The results are in Figure IV below. The Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific, the Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific and the Millennium Development Goal Report were rated very useful by the highest proportion of stakeholders (55 per cent in each case), with another significant portion of stakeholders rating them somewhat useful. Respondents considered these analytical outputs to be very authoritative in addressing economic and social development issues in the region.

**Figure IV:  Stakeholder Ratings on Publication Usage**
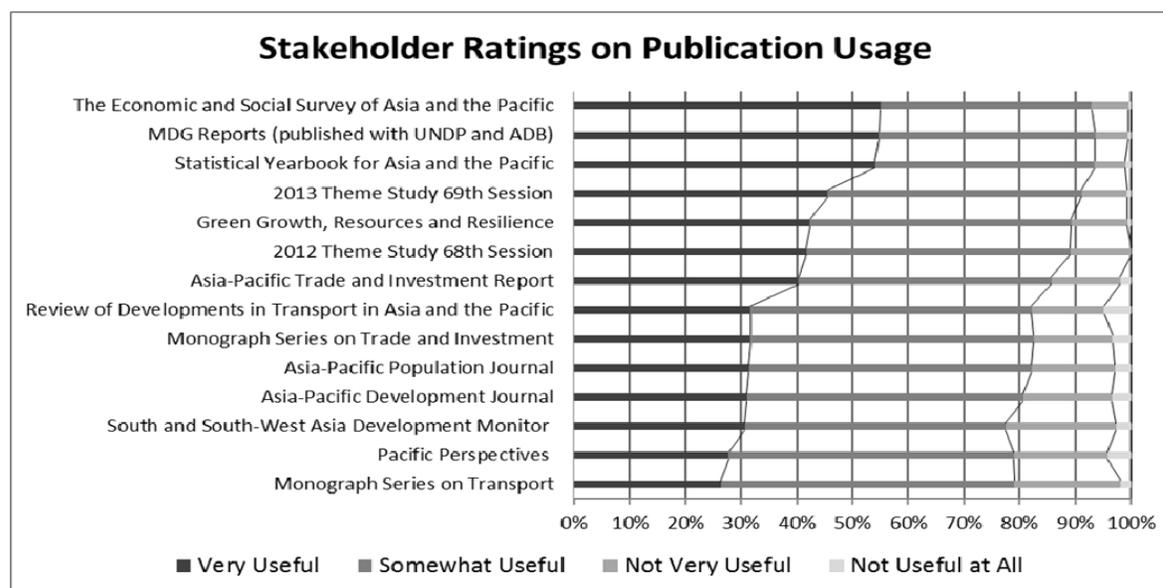


*Source:  OIOS Stakeholder Survey of Regional/Subregional Partners*

35.     Because ESCAP was not systematically tracking monitoring data on utilization and cost effectiveness of its research and analytical outputs, OIOS requested that ESCAP provide quantitative data on cost, dissemination and utilization for a sample of ten ESCAP publications. While ESCAP was fully collaborative in providing the publication data it had at the divisional level, available data proved too inconsistent for OIOS to perform a credible cost-benefit analysis of key publications. Without a centralized data depository, or enforced standards, ESCAP cost data has been maintained inconsistently and production cost calculation methods varied significantly.

36.     In search of additional quantitative data on ESCAP's effectiveness, OIOS partnered with UN Global Pulse, which explores innovative methods and frameworks for combining new types of digital data with traditional indicators. UN Global Pulse measured online

signals for ESCAP as an entity and for a number of its key publications.[20] Specifically, social media and online news organization mentions were analysed in an effort to gain additional information on the breadth of ESCAP's online reach, the type and location of its audience, and whether there were any press or social media "influencers" among those who mentioned ESCAP or its reports.[21]  See Table B below.

**Table B: UN Global Pulse Comparison of Social Media Profiles (Aug. 2012–Aug. 2013)**

|        | Twitter followers | Facebook followers |
|--------|-------------------|--------------------|
| **ESCAP** | 18,888 | 2,677 |
| **ADB** | 10,800 | 122,640 |
| **UNECA** | 3,389 | 526 |
| **AfDB** | 12,666 | 15,000 |

*Source: UN Global Pulse, 2013*

37.    UN Global Pulse indicated that ESCAP has a relatively large audience on Twitter when compared with AfDB, ADB and UNECA.  ESCAP's Facebook page, however, has a limited number of followers.

38.    With regard to a publication-based analysis of ESCAP's effectiveness, UN Global Pulse determined that ESCAP's flagship publication – the Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific (2013) – was the only one with enough online signals for a marginally relevant analysis.  UN Global Pulse found that mentions of this publication by online news organizations were spread across a wide geographical area.[22]  However, the number was relatively low at 40; by comparison, UNECA's Economic Report on Africa was mentioned 81 times.  Mentions of this ESCAP report on Twitter were also low at 30.  OIOS is providing the data gathered in this pilot analysis to ESCAP as it continues to consider social media tools as a means to reach its audience and improve programme effectiveness.  If ESCAP pursues this further, it will be important to do so with an organization-wide agreement on which online audiences ESCAP seeks to influence on a priority basis, and with what intended outcomes.

*While ESCAP has taken an important step to increase its effectiveness by developing a plan to improve its Publication Programme, implementation is needed*
39.    ESCAP has insufficient institutional architecture in place to implement a strategic, integrated publications programme.  Stakeholders consistently indicated that ESCAP's Publication Programme suffers from multiple shortcomings.  For example, the development and dissemination of its analytical outputs need more coordination, both within the context of ESCAP's work to support intergovernmental processes and in the context of its technical cooperation work.

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[20] OIOS utilized UN Global Pulse to better understand how analysis of digital 'big data' can add value to existing monitoring and evaluation analysis, and how better targeted digital strategy can increase the reach of United Nations outputs.

[21] UN Global Pulse utilized Factiva and Lexis Nexis for news sources around the world in different languages; Topsy, and Crimson Hexagon ForSight platform to identify Twitter messages and analyse their content; Topsy's and Google's specialized link functions, and Yahoo and Bing to identify relevant links.  UN Global Pulse defines social media "Influencers" as people with a sizable number of followers (at least 10,000) interested in the subject.

[22] The Hindu (India), Xinhua News Agency, Press Trust of India, Deutsche-Welle radio station, Interfax news agency of Kazakhstan, Kyodo News, The Dawn (Pakistan), Thai News Service and Korea Herald.

40.     In 2012 ESCAP management took the initiative to strengthen its Publication Programme through the establishment of the Research and Publications Committee.  In May 2013, that Committee provided a report to the Executive Secretary--"Improving the Quality, Outreach and Impact of ESCAP Publication Programme."   The proposed recommendations of this report are on target, addressing many of the existing risks and opportunities for improvement, including:

- Develop a longer-term research agenda that distinguishes itself from other organizations, with all publications guided by a multi-year research agenda
- Establish a permanent ESCAP Research and Publications Committee empowered to spearhead "organization-wide strategic alignment between longer-term research agenda setting and the planning, production and dissemination of relevant publications"
- Develop and maintain a department-wide list of all ESCAP publications. Subsequent to list establishment, future development of publications could be reviewed with eye toward: (1) mandates (2) opportunities for ESCAP to add unique value through a publication and (3) the New York-based United Nations Publication Board's soon-to-be established directives to reduce publications by 30 per cent
- Re-allocate additional resource(s) to this work, if it is to be given the level of priority it warrants
- Incorporate, where appropriate, research activities into ESCAP capacity-building and technical cooperation programmes

41.     The ESCAP Senior Management Team adopted these and all other recommendations of the report on 11 June 2013.  However, as of the date of this OIOS evaluation report, implementation has not begun.

42.     As the information throughout this result indicates, ESCAP currently lacks important programme effectiveness data on its research and analysis outputs.  In addition, at the time of this report, ESCAP was unable to provide the total universe of its research and analysis work. Effective decision making (including work prioritization) is being hindered by the need for three things: (1) more effective coordination mechanisms (2) more effective monitoring data, and (3) the exercise of stronger executive authority.  Without these, ESCAP is not in a good position to make informed work programme implementation decisions which require trade-offs, such as those needed to comply with the United Nations Publication Board requirement to prioritize research and analysis work in a manner that further reduces publication outputs.

## Result D – Relevance, Efficiency and Effectiveness

43.     The degree to which ESCAP can be effective at achieving the intended outcomes spelled out in the Strategic Framework and PIP is closely related to its ability to align and coordinate the work of its SROs and divisions.

## ESCAP's effectiveness has been constrained by lack of implementation and enforcement of its framework on roles and responsibilities between SROs and divisions

*SROs have been relevant in highlighting differences among and within the subregions' economic and social development priorities*

44.     The Asia-Pacific region is home to 4.1 billion people, more than 60 per cent of the world's population.  GDP growth in developing Asia-Pacific countries (comprising 37 economies in the region) is expected to have expanded by 5.6 per cent in 2014, up from an expected 5.2 per cent in 2013.  At the same time, 2013 was marked by considerable slowdown in the domestic markets of India and Indonesia, two of the region's largest developing economies.[23]  Subregions and countries in the Asia-Pacific region face different economic and social challenges.  See Figure V for variation by subregion in 2012 GDP per capita.

**Figure V: 2012 Average subregional GDP per capita, PPP ($)[24]**
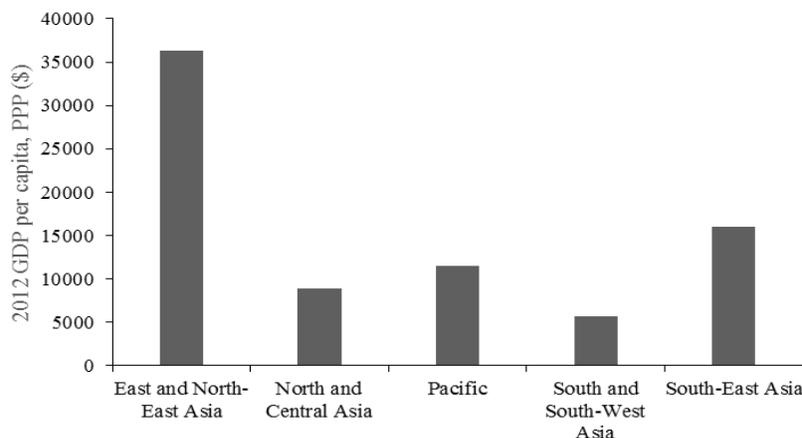


*Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank*

45.     Similarly, in a region that includes 12 least developed countries, 12 landlocked developing countries and 16 small island developing States, the Human Development Index rankings span a wide range from very high to low human development.

46.     The region as a whole has had considerable success with progress against the MDGs, particularly in reducing levels of poverty, with the incidence of extreme poverty (below $1.25 a day) dropping, in the aggregate, from 52 to 18 per cent between 1990 and 2011.  Still, more than 900 million people live in "near poverty" (between $1.25 and $2.00 per day), a number that has increased since 1990, and about 40 per cent of the population subsists on less than $2 a day.[25]  The region also lags in areas such as hunger, health and sanitation, and faces rising inequality and unplanned urbanization, along with climate change and environmental pressures.  Moreover, Asia-Pacific is the most disaster-prone region in the world.[26]  Progress in achieving MDG targets varies amongst the subregions and countries, with China, India, the Russian Federation and Papua New Guinea having a dominant influence on aggregates.  The challenge for the region is to translate economic growth into inclusive and sustainable development, and build economic and social resilience.

47.     To more effectively meet its member States' needs, ESCAP has four SROs, with the Pacific office having started operations in 1984.  Prior to the establishment of the other

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[23] Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2013 Year-end Update.

[24] Data not available for America Samoa, Cook Islands, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, French Polynesia, Guam, Islamic Republic of Iran, Marshall Islands, Myanmar, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands and Tuvalu.

[25] Asia-Pacific Regional MDGs Report 2012/13.

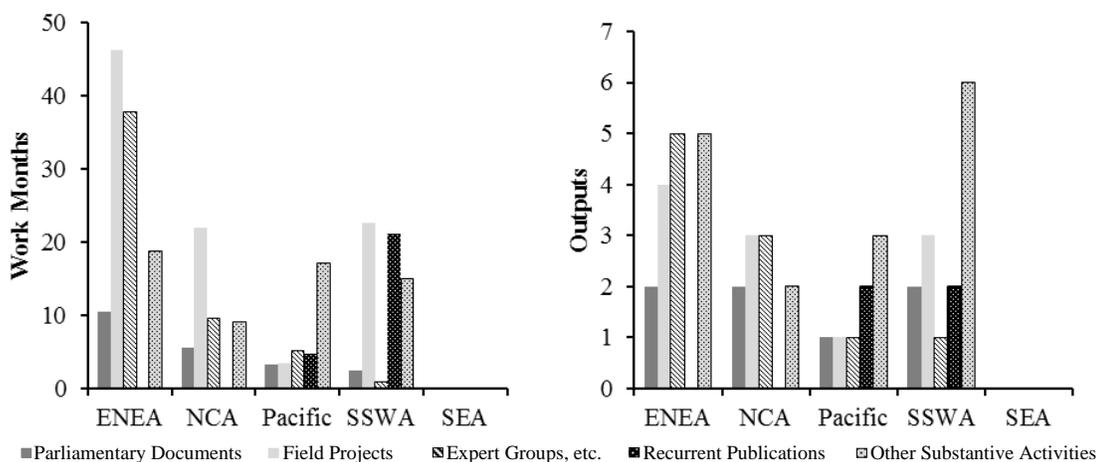[26] The Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2012.

SROs, member States expressed that ESCAP's programme of work did "not adequately balance the differing needs of the Commission's five subregions" and the Report of the Secretary-General noted that the subregions (other than the Pacific) "lack[ed] similar offices as a base for the planning and delivery of programmes to respond to their specific priorities."[27] Subsequently, the General Assembly, in its resolution 63/260 on strengthening the development pillar of the United Nations' work, established regular budget posts for three additional offices – East and North-East Asia (ENEA), North and Central Asia (NCA), and South and South-West Asia (SSWA) and strengthened the Pacific office. The ENEA office commenced operations in 2010 and SSWA and NCA in 2011. Each SRO's mandate covers programmatic work in substantive areas of priority to the respective subregion.

48.     In the Strategic Framework for 2012-13, the four SROs implement the activities under Subprogramme 8 Subregional activities for development for the Pacific, ENEA, NCA and SSWA, and divisions in Bangkok implement activities for the South-East Asia (SEA) subregion. For the 2012-13 biennium, Subprogramme 8 implemented 94 per cent of its outputs. As set forth in Figures VI and VII, ESCAP spent most of its time at the subregional level on field projects, and the Pacific and SSWA SROs each produced a recurrent publication. The component for Subregional activities for development in SEA did not list any outputs or work months.

**Figures VI and VII**
**2012-13 Work Months for Subprogramme 8      2012-13 Outputs for Subprogramme 8**



■Parliamentary Documents   ▢Field Projects   ▨Expert Groups, etc.   ■Recurrent Publications   ▨Other Substantive Activities

*Source: OIOS analysis based on IMDIS data.* No resources recorded for SEA.

49.     Ninety per cent of stakeholder and 75 per cent of staff survey respondents agreed that SROs have added value bringing ESCAP closer to the countries in the subregions. In addition to the logistical convenience associated with the SROs' physical locations, stakeholders remarked that the SROs supported member States in policy dialogues on subregional priorities, including presenting them to Commission sessions in Bangkok. For example, based on national assessments, the Pacific SRO has used its publication "Green Economy in a Blue World; Pacific Perspectives 2012" as a tool to support integrating green economy policies into national planning and budgeting processes. The other SROs have also used subregional needs assessments to prioritize their work and provide policy options to member States. Eighty-one per cent of stakeholders responded that the SROs' work has been effective in meeting their needs.

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[27] A/62/708.

*Divisions and SROs do not have a shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities in substantive work*

50. The SROs have been operating, collectively, for only a few years and new structures and relationships take time to develop. At the same time, there is a need to identify, at this formative stage, what has worked well and areas for improvement. An earlier OIOS Audit Report on the Governance and organizational structure of ESCAP[28] and an Evaluative Review of the Pacific Office[29] identified as a critical issue the need to clarify the roles, responsibilities and authority of the SROs and divisions.

51. Staff interviewees and survey respondents remarked on the need to better define the roles and functions of the SROs and divisions. Sixty-one per cent disagreed that the research and analysis roles and responsibilities of SROs and substantive divisions were clear. Likewise, inconsistent views were held on the role of SROs and divisions in capacity development activities. Views varied from those who saw SROs as having their own work programmes to those expecting SROs to primarily support divisions.

*Without implementation and enforcement of the framework on working relationships between the SROs and divisions, risks exist*

52. ESCAP senior management recognized that a lack of consensus on the SROs' role presents risks. In November 2012, the Executive Secretary issued a framework on the working relations between the SROs and divisions ("November framework"), which subsequently was updated in an implementation plan.[30] Fifty-five per cent of staff survey respondents were familiar with the November framework, while 45 per cent were not. It outlines that SROs will develop stand-alone knowledge products and lead subregional specific programmes or capacity development projects. But, it also states that the SROs will collaborate with relevant substantive divisions in supporting subregional programmes and projects, as requested.

53. There have been instances where divisions and SROs took different positions on substantive issues, engaging in research and analysis and capacity development activities without coordination, and leading to conflicting messages and inefficiencies. One example involved an SRO using draft data from a regional report that was to be issued jointly with a partner, and proceeding on its own to publish a subregional report before the regional report's finalization. This confused ESCAP's stakeholders and put a strain on ESCAP's relationship with the partner. Many staff viewed the divisions and SROs as competing rather than collaborating. Staff remarked on other examples where divisions and SROs gave "different," "incoherent," and "uncoordinated" messages. Member State interviewees also cited examples where SROs and divisions gave differing information to member State representatives in the subregions and Bangkok. Staff survey respondents and interviewees underscored that the November framework needs to be implemented and enforced. In the last quarter of 2013, ESCAP began holding planning and coordination meetings between the divisions and SROs.

*Resource and structural questions related to SRO engagement in substantive work remain*

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[28] AN2010/740/01, 11 May 2010.
[29] 4 November 2011.
[30] Framework on the working relations between subregional offices (SROs) and substantive divisions of ESCAP, 21 November 2012; Implementation plan, Updated 26 February 2013.

54.     The strategic documents for the SROs outline functions that go beyond representational or liaison offices.  For example, the Proposed Road Map for the new SROs and November framework specify that SROs will engage in research and analysis and capacity development activities.[31]  Notwithstanding variation amongst the SROs, each of them has broad mandates and the current staffing levels present challenges for them to fulfil a significant substantive role in multiple programmatic and functional areas as envisaged in ESCAP's strategic documents.  As stated earlier in this Report, overall SROs have received positive feedback; however, staff and stakeholder interviewees also remarked that the SROs need critical mass to engage in significant substantive work.  The ESCAP SROs are small in comparison with those in other regions.  See Table C for budget and staff by SRO for each Regional Commission.

### Table C: 2012-2013 Budget and staff by Regional Commission and SRO[32]

| Regional Commission | Budget | Staff |
|---|---|---|
| **ESCAP[33]** | | |
| Pacific | $2,793,800 | 9 |
| East and North-East Asia | $3,965,500 | 14 |
| North and Central Asia | $1,428,100 | 4 |
| South and South-West Asia | $1,852,100 | 5 |
| SROs Total | $10,039,500 | 32 |
| ESCAP Total | $135,888,800 | 539 |
| **SROs Total/ESCAP Total** | **7%** | **6%** |
| **ECA[34]** | | |
| North Africa | $5,820,400 | 23 |
| West Africa | $6,433,300 | 23 |
| Central Africa | $6,456,200 | 23 |
| East Africa | $6,309,600 | 26 |
| Southern Africa | $5,980,100 | 26 |
| SROs Total | $30,999,600 | 121 |
| ECA Total | $169,716,600 | 667 |
| **SROs Total/ECA Total** | **18%** | **18%** |
| **ECLAC[35]** | | |
| Mexico and Central America | $8,928,400 | 43 |
| Caribbean | $7,582,900 | 36 |
| SROs Total | $16,511,300 | 79 |
| ECLAC Total | $145,300,600 | 526 |
| **SROs Total/ECLAC Total** | **11%** | **15%** |

55.     Questions also remain on the SROs' placement in the organizational structure; this may be contributing to the lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities.  In 2012-13 all

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[31] Proposed Road Map for the Establishment of New Subregional Offices in East and North-East Asia, North and Central Asia, and South and South-West Asia, E/ESCAP/65/20.

[32] The Proposed programme budget presents SRO budget figures before recosting while the Regional Commission total budget figures are estimates after recosting.

[33] A/66/6 (Sect. 19). The subregional activities for development in South-East Asia list $8,900 for non-post requirements.  Staff in the respective subprogrammes based in Bangkok implement the work for this subregion.

[34] A/66/6 (Sect. 18).

[35] A/66/6 (Sect. 21).  These figures do not include 5 national offices in Bogota, Brasilia, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and Washington, D.C. with a total of 24 staff.

subprogrammes reported to the Executive Secretary. The proposed 2014-15 organigramme, however, shows SROs and Regional Institutions reporting to a Deputy Executive Secretary for Programmes while the divisions report to the Executive Secretary, eventually reinforcing the risk of ambiguity on SROs' functions. Staff also remarked that having ESCAP's Chief Economist concurrently serve as Director of an SRO contributes to confusion on roles and responsibilities, particularly when it comes to regional and subregional economic research and analysis work. Finally, outstanding questions exist on how Bangkok-based divisions are implementing subregional activities for development in SEA. ESCAP noted as a challenge in IMDIS: "[SEA] outputs are implemented through ESCAPs [*sic*] main sub-programmes which target results at the greater regional context."

## IV. CONCLUSION

56.      As member States and the United Nations system consider options for a 'post-MDG' agenda, the opportunity may exist for ESCAP to play a bigger role in the United Nations architecture for supporting economic and social development in the Asia-Pacific region. In order to do so, ESCAP needs to clarify its current role and improve the methods it has to assess effectiveness. Specifically, there is a need for ESCAP to strategically identify the areas where it can most effectively add value. This includes a need at the corporate level to prioritize implementation of its work programme and discipline activities accordingly.

57.      It hardly needs saying that the Asia-Pacific region is highly dynamic and diverse, with multiple fora for deliberating issues of shared concern for member States. The range and technical complexity of issues placed at ESCAP's door through member State debates and resolutions bring a need for action that exceeds the ESCAP Secretariat's capacity. Articulating: what ESCAP will do; what it will not commit its limited resources to; and, how it will work with relevant partners are all key questions. ESCAP needs strong partnerships. As the United Nations moves into the future, there are a number of relevant questions that ESCAP needs to consider further. For example, how will ESCAP partner with the United Nations funds and programmes in the context of their significantly expanded regional centres and long-standing emphasis on institutional capacity development work?

58.      With regard to the research and analysis function, there is a need for this work to be more clearly anchored to ESCAP's unique intergovernmental convening and norm-setting role. When it comes to implementing international agreements at the national level, the role of ESCAP should be limited to areas outlined in a prioritized implementation strategy. The fact that follow-up national action is needed should not, alone, justify ESCAP involvement. Other actors may be better placed to deliver capacity development intended to strengthen institutions of individual countries.

59.      Through the recent work of ESCAP's Research and Publications Committee, the organization has taken an important step toward clarifying the process to prioritize, produce and disseminate its research and analysis work. This initiative is needed because ESCAP's publication outputs are, in some key regards, uncoordinated. Dissemination and outreach is often poorly planned and utility untracked. While an overall strategy has been developed, implementation has yet to begin. Follow-up in terms of monitoring and evaluation also needs to be vigorously pursued.

60.      The network of subregional offices (the Pacific Office apart) are a recent addition. While it will inevitably take time for SROs to evolve into their most meaningful shape, it is already clear that their existence responds to an existing demand; in many cases the subregion

is the most meaningful level for cross-border collaboration. Meanwhile, the priority that SROs should give to the representational versus substantive role is left unclear, which is exacerbated by the absence of an effective joint-planning system at the corporate level. Some instances of palpable conflict have, therefore, arisen between the SROs and divisions in their activities.

61.    ESCAP's work has been used and is valued by member States in support of intergovernmental dialogue, as a means of accessing regional and subregional knowledge networks and as a reference for national policy work. Changes at the executive leadership level bring a fresh opportunity for taking stock and making adjustments that will strengthen the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of ESCAP's research and analysis, and related work, in the ever-changing environment in which it seeks to make an impact.


## V.  RECOMMENDATIONS

Subject to acceptance by CPC, OIOS makes the following 4 important recommendations.

**[See paras. 28-42]**
**Recommendation 1:**
The Executive Secretary should establish an action plan to implement recommendations from the Research and Publications Committee with concrete timelines and clear roles and responsibilities, giving emphasis to establishing a multi-year research agenda and permanent Research and Publications committee. The research agenda should take into account joint planning, development and dissemination of research and analysis work between all divisions and SROs and linkages between ESCAP's research and analysis work and its normative and technical cooperation work.

**[See paras. 22-42]**
**Recommendation 2**
ESCAP should improve monitoring and evaluation of its research and analysis work, including publications, by establishing ESCAP-wide performance measures of such work and systematically measuring their cost effectiveness, utilization and impact. Moreover, future self-evaluations should extend beyond single projects to include more subprogrammatic and thematic issues.

**[See paras. 28-42]**
**Recommendation 3**
ESCAP should develop and implement an ESCAP-wide outreach strategy for its research and analysis work that incorporates developing a database of all stakeholders, common branding elements for all publications and web pages, and dissemination for each type of work.

**[See paras. 43-55]**
**Recommendation 4**
The Executive Secretary should implement and enforce the November 2012 framework (after updating it, as applicable) on the working relations between the SROs and divisions that clarifies their respective roles, responsibilities and authority. As part of the framework's implementation, ESCAP should discuss the question of resource allocation as it relates to its expected accomplishments.

# Annex A: ESCAP Management Response and Action Plan

**INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| To: | Ms. Deborah Rugg<br>Director<br>Inspection and Evaluation Division<br>Office of Internal Oversight Services | 19 June 2014 |
| From: | Shamshad Akhtar (sign.)<br>Executive Secretary<br>ESCAP | PPD/WP/16 |

SUBJECT: **OIOS draft report on the Evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)**

With reference to OIOI interoffice memorandum dated 16 June 2014 on the above subject, we are pleased to provide you with the following documents:

1.  Executive Secretary's response to the recommendations of the OIOS draft report on the Evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

2.  ESCAP's additional comments on the OIOS draft report on the Evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

3.  ESCAP Action Plan to the recommendations of the Evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

We would appreciate it if documents 1 and 2 above would be appended to the final report as ESCAP's management response to the evaluation findings and recommendations.

We thank OIOS for giving the opportunity to provide these additional comments to the draft report.

Thank you.

Cc:  Mr. Shun-Ichi Murata, Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCAP
Ms. Nanda Krairiksh, Director, Social Development Division, ESCAP
Mr. Don Clarke, Director, Programme Planning and Partnerships Division, ESCAP

# I. Executive Secretary's comments:  OIOS draft report on the Evaluation of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Since my assumption of duties at ESCAP in February 2014, the organization has undergone a process of significant deliberation and reflection on the means to strengthen the effectiveness of its work in all areas.  The outcome of our deliberations has pointed to a need for ESCAP, within the context of its man

date, to enhance its core role as a regional think tank, particularly in generating innovative research and analysis to support evidence-based policies; serving as the preeminent regional intergovernmental platform for building consensus on norms, agreements and policies as well as regional cooperation on inclusive and sustainable development; and serving as a regional hub for development knowledge and technical cooperation. The findings and recommendations of the OIOS evaluation of ESCAP have strongly validated the outcome of our internal deliberations on the key strategy for moving forward.

To implement the above focused strategy, communication and coordination frameworks have been enhanced. A key step has been the transformation of the Senior Management Team (SMT) into an inclusive platform for consideration of corporate strategic directions and initiatives. This has been reinforced by an emphasis on increased knowledge and information sharing across all substantive divisions and subregional offices through a weekly reporting system, interdivisional/office cooperation and alignment of work in all areas.  The SMT will provide the principle platform for collective oversight and joint decision-making on the development of ESCAP's programme of work and programme budget for the forthcoming 2016-2017 biennium, institutional strengthening and the adoption of new guidelines, which will in turn be informed by the OIOS evaluation recommendations.

A Senior Management Team Retreat held on 24 May 2014 agreed to develop a corporate strategy and planning framework to ensure effective prioritization and strategization of ESCAP's work programme, including its research agenda.  A follow-up Senior Management Team Retreat in August 2014 will agree on the key elements of the corporate strategy and planning framework; further refine the development of ESCAP's research agenda; and reinforce measures to ensure seamless collaboration between the substantive divisions and subregional offices (SROs).

To strengthen the oversight and coherence of its research, analytical and publications work, ESCAP has constituted a new strategic publications, communication and advocacy office. This office has the responsibility for leading work on a new research and publications strategy and action plan, as well as for managing and coordinating ESCAP's multi-year research and publications work.  The office will work with all divisions and SROs to develop an integrated research agenda; develop common guidelines for publications and support a newly established Research and Publications Committee, chaired by the Executive Secretary. The Terms of Reference of the Committee will, inter alia, include the approval and monitoring of a comprehensive action plan on research and publications in line with the OIOS evaluation recommendations.

Further institutional steps are being taken to strengthen programmatic oversight, prioritization and joint planning, as well as the alignment of resources with programme priorities, including the refocussing and reconfiguration of ESCAP's programme planning and partnerships

division into a Strategic Planning and Programme Management Division, which will play a pivotal role in the implementation of the OIOS programme evaluation recommendations.

With respect to the strengthening of collaboration between ESCAP's substantive divisions and the subregional offices, a review of the current framework underpinning relationships has been initiated, including in the context of the deliberations at the above-mentioned Senior Management Team Retreat in May 2014. I will issue new guidelines to strengthen joint programme planning and implementation by substantive divisions and SROs. The Strategic Planning and Programme Management Division has been delegated to set in place a mechanism to ensure that substantive divisions and SROs contribute to a common programme strategy and achieve synergies through their work to create greater impact.

In the context of the above commitments, measures and actions, I wish to take this opportunity to formally indicate ESCAP's acceptance of the recommendations of the OIOS programme evaluation and commit the secretariat to their full, effective and efficient implementation.

Finally, there remain some specific references in the final OIOS evaluation report on which we wish to place on record our views, as summarized [below].

## II. ESCAP's comments on the OIOS draft report on the Evaluation of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

### Section b: "Evaluation framework: scope and methodology"

**Paragraph 10:** We note the first sentence indicating that "This evaluation addresses overall programme effectiveness" is broader than what was originally indicated in the scope of the evaluation. In this respect, paragraph 32 of the "Inception Report of the Programme Evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)" dated 20 August 2013 stated that the evaluation focus would be on: (1) the research and analysis work of ESCAP, and (2) the roles and responsibilities of the ESCAP's secretariat's substantive divisions in Bangkok vis-à-vis subregional offices, with particular emphasis on the research and analysis function. ESCAP would have appreciated notice of the broadening of the scope of the evaluation, which implies that a more widely ranging examination of ESCAP's mandate and role was undertaken than was actually the case.

### Section on Result D – Relevance, Efficiency and Effectiveness

**Paragraph 54:** ESCAP is of the view that this paragraph goes beyond the stated focus of the evaluation, as stated in the Inception Report of 20 August 2013, covering wider ESCAP governance, strategic management and resource issues. Furthermore, we find statements in paragraph 54 such as "… the current staffing (of the SROs) is inadequate for them to fulfil a significant substantive role" are at variance with the views of our member States.

According to the principle users of ESCAP services, namely the member States, the subregional offices have demonstrated their ability to deliver an effective programme of work in a range of development areas of priority concern to their respective subregions. Evidence of the above-mentioned position can be verified with the following documented statements by member States on the demonstrated capacity of the subregional offices to perform significant substantive roles:

- *"The Commission expressed appreciation for the work of the ESCAP Pacific Office and the support it had provided for members in the subregion, particularly its technical assistance and capacity-building activities in the areas of sustainable development, green growth and the integration of social, environmental and economic outcomes."[36]*

- *"The Commission noted that the Subregional Office (for East and North-East Asia) had successfully implemented programmes to support meeting the special needs of member States..."[37]*

- *"The Commission noted that the Subregional Office for North and Central Asia had become fully operational within its first year and begun implementation of various activities related to subregion specific development priorities."[38]*

- *"The Commission noted that the work of the Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia covered analytical undertakings, policy advocacy, technical assistance and capacity-building activities pertaining to inclusive growth and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, connectivity and regional economic integration, regional cooperation for food and energy security and disaster risk reduction, and implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action and the Almaty Programme of Action for the subregion's least developed and landlocked developing countries".[39]*

With respect to **Table C on "Budget and staff by Regional Commission and SRO",** ESCAP is of the view that the information provided is misleading as it does not take into account the differentiated roles, mandates and functions of the respective subregional offices.

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[36] E/ESCAP/68/24 Annual Report of ESCAP, paragraph 233
[37] E/ESCAP/68/24 Annual Report of ESCAP, paragraph 219
[38] E/ESCAP/68/24 Annual Report of ESCAP, paragraph 226
[39] E/ESCAP/69/27 Annual Report of ESCAP, paragraph 234

**B: ACTION PLAN dated 19 June 2014**

| IED Recommendation | ESCAP Response and Anticipated Actions | Responsible Entity(ies) | Target date for completion |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Development of an Action Plan**<br>With the recent assumption of duties of the incoming Executive Secretary, the Senior Management Team, comprising heads of all divisions and subregional offices, has been transformed into an inclusive platform to consider strategic corporate initiatives. | Senior Management team | **February 2014 onwards** |
| | To support the development and implementation of an Action Plan, amongst other work, a hub has been established and work has been reorganized through the merging of the functions of two units to form a strategic publications, communications and advocacy office. | Strategic publications, communications and advocacy office under Executive Secretary oversight | **June 2014** |
| | The Action Plan will be developed with time bound targets and will identify specific roles and responsibilities of the concerned entities. | Strategic publications, communication and advocacy office | **October 2014** |
| | The Executive Secretary will establish and chair an ESCAP Research and Publications Committee. | Office of Executive Secretary | **August 2014** |
| | The Research and Publications Committee will monitor the implementation of the Action Plan to ensure full accountability and timely delivery of results. | Research and Publications Committee | |
| | **Development of a corporate research agenda through joint planning, development and dissemination of research and analysis between divisions and subregional offices** | | **24 May 2014** |
| | The Senior Management Team (SMT) Retreat of 24 May 2014 | | |

| IED Recommendation | ESCAP Response and Anticipated Actions | Responsible Entity(ies) | Target date for completion |
|---|---|---|---|
| | initiated discussions on the development of a coherent and strategic multi-year research agenda for ESCAP.<br><br>The Research and Publications Committee will function as a platform for joint planning, development and dissemination of research and publications by the substantive divisions and subregional offices.<br><br>The specific terms of reference of the Committee will include: (1) development of an overall ESCAP corporate research strategy building on ESCAP's comparative advantage in undertaking interdisciplinary analysis; (2) coordination of the publications programme of ESCAP to achieve synergies in the research work of all divisions and subregional offices and to preempt duplication; (3) enhancing the linkages between ESCAP's analytical work with its normative and technical cooperation work; and (4) development of an dissemination strategy to ensure effective outreach to the users of ESCAP's knowledge products.<br><br>The Senior Management Team will serve as an inclusive body to consider and adopt the outcome of the work of the Research and Publications Committee.  It will also promote inter-divisional/office teamwork and monitor the joint implementation of the overall research strategy by all concerned substantive divisions and subregional offices.<br><br>The adopted research strategy will, *inter alia*, guide the development of the programme of work for 2016-2017. | Research and Publications Committee<br><br><br><br>Strategic publications, communications and advocacy office, in cooperation with substantive divisions and subregional offices | **December 2014**<br><br><br><br>**August  2014** |

| IED Recommendation | ESCAP Response and Anticipated Actions | Responsible Entity(ies) | Target date for completion |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2.** | Steps will be taken to: (1) establish ESCAP-wide performance measures for research and analysis work which will be endorsed by the Research and Publications Committee; and (2) develop a monitoring mechanism for reporting on the results and outreach of research conducted by ESCAP.<br><br>Building on past evaluations,[40] sub-programmatic and thematic issues will be incorporated into the biennial ESCAP Evaluation Plan for 2016-2017. | Strategic publications, communications and advocacy office, with technical support from the Evaluation Unit/PPD. | **October 2014**<br><br><br>**December 2014** |
| **3.** | The development of an outreach strategy,[41] and monitoring of its implementation, will be incorporated into the Terms of Reference of the Research and Publications Committee, which will report regularly to the Executive Secretary and Senior Management Team.<br><br>An agency-wide stakeholder database will be developed and maintained to support dissemination of publications.<br><br>Common branding requirements will be established for all ESCAP publications and web pages.<br><br>A requirement will be instituted that no publication plans can be approved without an associated dissemination strategy and evidence of compliance with corporate branding requirements. | Strategic publications, communication and advocacy office | **October 2014** |

[1]Recent subprogramme and thematic evaluations have been carried out of ESCAP's Pacific Office in 2011; ICT and Disaster Risk Reduction and Management subprogramme in 2012 and Commission Conference Structure in 2012/13 (phase I) and 2014 (phase II).

[41] Steps have already been taken to strengthen outreach. For example, through a major regional multi-stakeholder event on financing for development held on 10 and 11 June 2014, stakeholder data for this area was compiled and the research undertaken for this purpose will be finalized and strategically disseminated.

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| | The Executive Secretary will issue guidelines and establish an approval process to ensure compliance with the above measures and requirements. | | |
| 4. | **Framework to guide working arrangements**<br><br>A review of the current framework and its implementation is currently underway, and a new set of updated guidelines will be issued.   These matters were considered at the Senior Management Team Retreat of 24 May 2014.<br><br>A follow-up Senior Management Team Retreat in August 2014 will finalize modalities on enhancing cooperation and working arrangements between the substantive divisions and subregional offices to ensure coherent and well-coordinated planning and implementation of ESCAP's Strategic Framework and programme of work, including the new research agenda.<br><br>The Executive Secretary will issue the updated guidelines to strengthen joint programme planning and implementation by the substantive divisions and subregional offices.<br><br>**Resourcing**<br>Resourcing requirements of SROs will be considered in the formulation of the proposed programme budget for 2016-2017. Given current budgetary constraints, additional funding of the SROs will be dependent on an increase in the Regular Budget. | Office of the Executive Secretary, with support from PPD.<br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>PPD and Division of Administration | **September 2014**<br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>**December 2014** |