



Executive Summary

ESCWA SUBPROGRAMME EVALUATION: Statistics Division (SD)

Jan 2014 – June 2019

Prepared by: Dr. Ahmed Tammam (Independent Consultant)

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Evaluation overview

The Statistics Division (SD) is one of ESCWA's seven Substantive Divisions, its mandate is to transform the regional statistical system into a well-coordinated and functional system of national and regional statistics with the aim of producing and sharing statistical data in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Also, as per ST/SGB/2010/7, SD has the mandate to "coordinat[e] the statistical data work of the ESCWA secretariat and the collection, production and dissemination of statistics in print and electronic media and through an online database". As mandated by the Executive Secretary of ESCWA, each of ESCWA's sub-programmes is subject to discretionary evaluation every three biennia. This evaluation addresses two DAC criteria (Relevance and Effectiveness) covering the timeframe from January 2014 to June 2019.

Evaluation methodology

This evaluation was designed to be utilization-focused. A mixed methods approach applied to respond to the evaluation questions. This was through an online survey (quantitative) and key informant interviews (KIIs) with 64 persons met through three regional meetings as well as country visits. This approach was supported by review of relevant secondary data. The qualitative sample was purposive, based on the stakeholders identified as relevant to SD work whether internally (SD and other ESCWA sub-programmes) or externally (member States and peer stakeholders). The consultant selected participants from 18 countries including 16 Member States (MS) supported by ESCWA as well as all ESCWA internal divisions. Gender and human rights dimensions were accounted for throughout the evaluation. The evaluation process was subject to a few limitations and constraints. Closer consultation and engagement with Strategy, Evaluation and Partnership Section (StEPS) and SD staff ensured the development of mitigation measures in order not to delay the process. The quality of the evaluation was ensured through close communication with both StEPS and SD director, ensuring relevance as well as impartiality and fidelity of the implementation of the evaluation different milestones.

Findings and Conclusion

The evaluator has reached the following findings that were explored, triangulated and validated. SD reports and publications are highly relevant to the needs of MS, such reports are originally developed in a full participatory way with MS. The evaluation unveiled that while the majority of the interviewed government officials acknowledged the publication's relevance, timeliness and scientific rigor, they underlined the inefficient dissemination practices. The root causes are the limited awareness of National Statistical Offices of their existence, the lack of publicity and dissemination strategy, and the limited knowledge management strategy to organize contents in a way to be easily accessible to MS and other actors.

The scope of SD was found to be highly relevant to ESCWA mandates, regional needs and MS emerging priorities. One of the key weakness on the relevance of SD is the lack of existence of a solid data portal despite its urgency. The expectations of NSO from SD are centered around technical support, capacity building, coherence approaches and fostering the inter-countries learning based on the common regional priorities influenced by the SDGs commitments. NSOs and other MS actors are satisfied with the support provided by SD, however, the demands are much higher than the human and technical resources available in the SD team to respond to the different expectations from the MS. Additionally, the follow up mechanisms on the agreed commitments still needs to be strengthened, as currently it lacks accountability, authority and resources to fulfill all agreed plans.

The Statistical Committee role is pivotal in reshaping priorities of the SD work. SD used the convening power of the Statistical Committee and initiated a discussion on a medium-term strategy in 2010, then followed up in 10-year intervals. These strategic documents were used in formulating the SD biennial (and now annual) work plans. Developing metadata for indicators and way of measurement of different thematic areas, establish a utilization focused data portal, continue MS capacity building as well as responding to data needs of ESCWA divisions should represent the division priorities.

SD established a wide spectrum of collaborations with relevant regional partners from both UN and outside UN system. SD has successfully delivered on all its outputs stipulated in the Strategic Frameworks of the three biennia. The possibility of inducing policy change is often amplified when there is a joint program between SD and other divisions. The effectiveness in addressing MS technical assistance needs, is powerful, however, it is being hindered due to the limited technical and financial resources of the Division to provide support against the growing demands of member States. The internal coordination and collaboration between SD and other ESCWA divisions is currently not satisfactory, as the support received from SD to other division was described as poor. The reasons behind it are the limited resources of SD and the lack of focus of SD on its dual mandate a) to support and coordinate work with other divisions, and b) to support MS. There are a few initiatives of collaboration, however, there are many missed opportunities due to lack of coordination at both planning and implementation stages.

The review of data of publications from other ESCWA divisions is a time-consuming process. It is conducted by SD upon request of other divisions and based on SD resource availability. There is no systematic quality assurance role within SD annual plan. On gender and human rights approach, evaluation findings confirmed that almost all SD interventions made explicit reference to gender considerations in the design, planning and implementation. NSO rated SD's contribution to promoting gender equality and human rights through its scope and interventions as medium to extremely satisfactory.

Recommendations

- 1) **SD** should consider the internal needs of other ESCWA divisions and coordinate its tools and data collection processes to respond to collective ESCWA needs and having those collective needs as part of the division annual plan with adequate resources for that role.
- 2) **SD** should develop a timeframe to conclude the data portal and metadata projects, also identify resources and embed those two projects milestones into the performance evaluation of the concerned staff to ensure the swift delivery.
- 3) **SD** should continue its efforts to follow an integrated approach and focus on the niches where it has comparative advantage, and to which other divisions can contribute systematically on cross-cutting issues, namely gender, disability, population data among others. Additionally, this strategy should be complemented with a robust M&E framework that can track, analyze and report on the achievements and evaluate the expected accomplishments and changes.
- 4) **SD** should use resources provided through the different sources more creatively in an interlinked manner to complement one another, also should attract further resources (XB and DA projects) with the aim to complement its technical and normative scope and magnify its impact.
- 5) **ESCWA** should consider mobilizing adequate resources to **SD** to be able to implement the recommendations of the evaluation, also develop tracking system to hold **SD** accountable on delivery.
- 6) **ESCWA** should assign **SD** to be custodial body of the data collection process of any ESCWA division to avoid the duplication of the requests to **MS**.