

Evaluation Brief

ESCWA's Project : "Strengthening National Capacities in the ESCWA Region on Developing Green Production Sectors"



ESCWA

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Background

In the ESCWA region, environmentally adverse industrial and agricultural practices continue to dominate in the productive sectors. A lack of awareness, knowledge and capacity in green alternatives in both the public and private sectors perpetuates these environmentally damaging practices.

The absence of consolidated efforts to promote green production has hindered environmental conservation efforts throughout the Arab world, leading to further deterioration of the land, air and water heritage. Additionally, this adverse situation poses a major threat for national goods, as international markets are increasingly more restrictive and demanding regarding environmental regulations. This, in turn, negatively impacts the competitiveness of micro, small and medium enterprises – the backbone of many national economies – thus, potentially worsening unemployment and poverty conditions in the region.

This lack of awareness, knowledge and capacity in promoting a green economy led to the launch of ESCWA's project in 2012, on "**Strengthening national capacities in the ESCWA region on developing green production sectors**". The objective of the project was to build the capacity of policymakers, civil society, business support institutions and industry associations in developing green production sectors in ESCWA Member States, through the design and implementation of effective policies and programmes.

Pilot projects in Member States took the form of Green Help Desks, whose function was to support production sectors, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs), to engage in the emerging green economy by developing their products and/or production processes to become aligned with the principles and objectives of sustainable development. ESCWA also spearheaded activities such as information collection on Green Economy, trainings and workshops in green production and the creation of networks and platforms for stakeholders and experts to learn and share information.

Upon the project's completion in 2014, an evaluation was conducted to measure the project's overall achievements. By assessing the project's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, the evaluation consolidated key findings with regard to the project's challenges

Key Findings

The forward-looking evaluation concluded that the project was successful in implementing its original goals. The primary focuses of the evaluation were on the project as a whole and the five countries where a Green Help Desk was established and made operational: Lebanon, Oman, Jordan, Egypt and Tunisia.

Relevance: The project was and remains valid and responsive to pressing needs in the region, and aligns with the mandate of ESCWA, as well as a number of the Millennium Development Goals and other Internationally Agreed Development Goals.

Effectiveness: The project led to an increased understanding of policies and programmes aimed at the development of green production sectors among the participating Member States. Additionally, the project increased decision-makers' and other stakeholders' access to relevant, up-to-date information on national and local green production opportunities and options.

Efficiency: The project fulfilled its plan and successfully carried out numerous activities, many in partnership with national and/or international organizations, and all within the initially allocated budget. The project also was able to leverage additional resources from different national, regional and international partners.

Sustainability: ESCWA received more requests for the establishment of Green Help Desks in other Member States than was originally targeted. This active engagement of non-pilot countries ensures the project's life beyond the intended duration. The sustainability prospects of the Green Help Desks in the future, however, vary from country-to-country.

Key Challenges

1. The project design was seen as somewhat overly-ambitious, considering the level of change it aimed to bring about and the short two-year timeframe it set.
2. The political instability in Egypt, one of the pilot countries, delayed the launch of the Green Help Desks there and, accordingly, several key project activities. However, a one-year extension was requested and approved by mid-2013, allowing the project to achieve all its targeted objectives.
3. The establishments of the Green Help Desks is an achievement in itself, but they differed in their focus, reach and influence, due to their institutional set-up and, related, available financial, human and technical resources.
4. The legislative frameworks in many Member States are not necessarily conducive for promoting a green

economy, as the frameworks were drafted for different models of investment. Additionally, governments do not currently provide the necessary incentives for both the business sector and the community to move towards green economy.

5. National and private funding to green economies is also a challenge. Private financial institutions are wary of investing in new, not-yet-proven business or technology and, available government funding schemes fall below.

Recommendations

1. ESCWA was advised to consider alternative options for a follow-on project. The project's call for a national comprehensive strategy remains valid, but may not be feasible in the short term, and not for every country. A tailor-made approach to further cooperation with Member States, the Green Help Desks and other stakeholder groups is required.
2. Future projects could commence with an inception phase geared towards charting a country-specific course of future action or roadmap, through a consultative process. In doing so, the position of the Green Help Desks vis-à-vis the multitude of concerned stakeholder groups can be further identified and solidified.
3. The potentials and alternatives for establishing a regional network, among current and future Green Help Desks, could also be explored. Cooperation and collaboration with other international organizations working in related fields could be maintained.
4. An alternative design template more suited to reflecting the theory of such complex, multi-faceted change, may be sought, and adequate provisions for follow-up and monitoring both in design and on the ground should be made.

In response to the above recommendations, the project team prepared an action plan specifying the steps it will take to enhance performance in future projects.