

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

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Management issues**Evaluation of the work of the Commission****Summary**

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) attaches great importance to the continuous appraisal of the results of its normative and support work, in terms of effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The extent to which ESCWA programmes and projects uphold United Nations norms and values, especially respect for human rights and gender equality, is also a central criterion for evaluations. Evaluations at ESCWA have three main objectives: enhance accountability, promote results-based management and contribute to continuous learning.

This report provides an overview of the evaluations conducted at ESCWA in the biennium 2014-2015. It presents the main results and lessons learned, and highlights the challenges and steps forward. Participants are invited to review the report and provide comments thereon.

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I. EVALUATION IN THE BIENNIUM 2014-2015

1. Evaluation processes at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the use of evaluation results underwent major changes during 2014 and 2015, beginning with the formulation and adoption of the new Evaluation Policy in July 2014. This new Policy reflects the commitment of ESCWA to further its evaluation efforts, integrates the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), and mainstreams human rights and gender equality principles throughout the evaluation process. It put in place quality assurance mechanisms for evaluations, making them forward looking and user friendly. The main objectives of the 2014 Evaluation Policy are to enhance accountability and results-based management, and pave the way for continuous learning.

Box 1. The new Evaluation Policy garners praise

The 2014 Evaluation Policy was praised by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) as “one of the strongest in the United Nations system”. An article published in *Transform*, the online magazine of UN-Women, in July 2015, stated: “the revision of ESCWA’s Evaluation Policy in July 2014 to integrate more adequately gender equality and human rights principles was a key milestone”. ESCWA was invited by UN-Women to record an audiovisual training module on mainstreaming human rights and gender equality in evaluations, and by UNEG to participate in its annual seminar on Evaluation Practice Exchange.

Further acknowledgement was received in September 2015 from UNEG, which noted that the new evaluation policy “incorporates gender equality and human rights principles...and makes reference to UNEG norms and standards and the UN SWAP” (United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women).

2. ESCWA continued to report on the degree of gender mainstreaming in its evaluation processes as part of the UN SWAP. It improved its scoring in the UN SWAP exercise from “missing requirements” in 2013, to “meets requirements” in 2014, to “exceeds requirements” in 2015. This progress underscores the efforts of ESCWA to integrate gender equality and the empowerment of women in all stages of the evaluation process.

3. In line with its set evaluation workplan and budget for 2014-2015, ESCWA completed the evaluation of the ESCWA Centre for Women (ECW), the ESCWA Technology Centre (ETC), the Emerging and Conflict-related Issues Division (ECRI), five Development Account projects and one extrabudgetary project.

A. PROGRAMME EVALUATIONS

4. Programme evaluations examine the overall performance of a substantive subprogramme, division or centre at ESCWA, assessing its relevance, effectiveness and impact by examining its strategy, knowledge products, engagement with stakeholders, technical cooperation activities and implemented projects. In 2014 and 2015, ESCWA undertook discretionary evaluations of ETC, ECW and ECRI (annex, table A1).

5. Evaluations consisted of literature reviews; review of fieldwork with staff, partners, stakeholders and counterparts; and observation of technical activities and events (figure 1). Findings and recommendations focused on management and the programme of work.

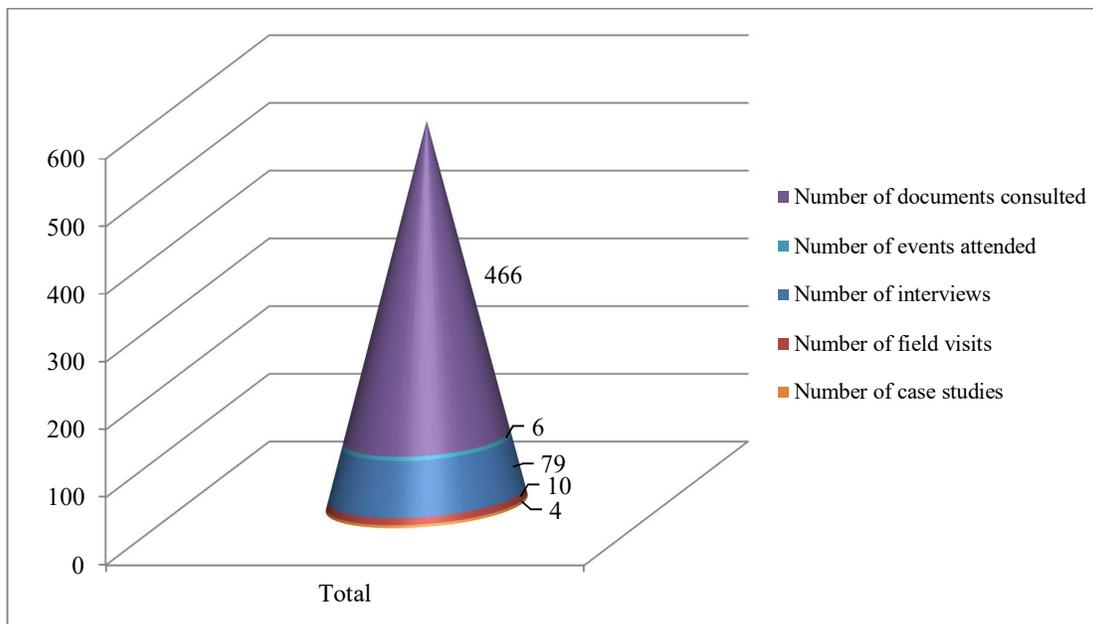
“The evaluation of the ESCWA Centre for Women was extremely thorough and forward looking. The evaluators were knowledgeable and grounded in the region. We are using many of the evaluation’s recommendations in our current planning cycle and daily work.”

Mehrinaz El Awady
Director, ESCWA Centre for Women

6. The main findings underlined the following:

- **Convening power:** Using its convening power and the accumulated technical competencies of its staff, ESCWA has successfully fostered high-level dialogue and debate among the region’s key decision makers;
- **Quality knowledge products:** Knowledge outputs are of high quality and are appreciated by peers and partner organizations;
- **Networking:** Expert group meetings are successful and offer an opportunity to network and exchange ideas for policymakers, academics, members of civil society organizations and United Nations agencies in the region;
- **Technical expertise:** The technical advisory services carried out by ESCWA regional advisors are well received by member States.

Figure 1. Programme evaluations, 2014-2015



7. While evaluators have identified many strengths in the programmes they examined, they have also highlighted some areas that require further work and formulated recommendations addressed to subprogramme and ESCWA management. These recommendations focused on the following:

- **Programme strategy:** Identify areas of added value and narrow the focus of work to issues most relevant to the region, in order to generate more cumulative effects and more impact. Build on previous achievements by having a long-term strategy for thematic areas, with key milestones for each strategic framework, in order to ensure coherence and sustainable results;
- **Increase interdisciplinary work:** Develop a strategy and framework to maximise cross-divisional work within the Commission, and thus enhance the overall impact of the total body of work;
- **Planning, monitoring and reporting:** Develop a work programme that leads to the achievement of the overall objectives, with expected accomplishments and associated activities designed to collectively build towards these objectives. Enhance project management practice and ensure that

monitoring and evaluation are neither merely compliance driven, nor only linked to financial spending, but are rather undertaken to capture the depth of the analysis and the added value of the outputs;

- **Gender mainstreaming:** Increase gender mainstreaming across the outputs and activities;
- **Outreach:** Develop division-level outreach and dissemination plans, maximising the partnerships and stakeholders;
- **Technical cooperation:** Revise the regional advisory function and increase the linkages between advisory services, technical cooperation and programmes of work;
- **Partnerships:** Develop a clear and strategic partnership approach, premised on the Partnership Strategy of ESCWA, to ensure long-term engagement, effective resource mobilization (including human resources) and thematic synergies.

8. Discretionary evaluations of other subprogrammes management are planned for the next bienniums. In 2016-2017, ESCWA will undertake the evaluation of the Economic Development and Integration Division (EDID) and the Sustainable Development and Policies Division (SDPD), in addition to an evaluation of the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation (RPTC) (annex, table A4).

B. EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT ACCOUNT AND EXTRABUDGETARY PROJECTS

9. ESCWA also carries out evaluations of specific projects managed by the different divisions and centres. Project evaluations focus on assessing the extent to which the objectives and outcomes identified in the project document were met. In the 2014-2015 biennium, ESCWA completed five Development Account (DA) project evaluations and initiated three others, for completion in the first quarter of 2016 (figure 2). Of the completed DA evaluations, four were initiated in 2013 (annex, table A2).

“The evaluation of the extrabudgetary project on Strengthening Statistical Capacity of Arab Countries (Egypt, Jordan and Palestine) in Producing Energy Statistics and Energy Consumption Surveys, funded by The Islamic Development Bank and the Department for International Development (DFID, United Kingdom), was a very positive experience. The evaluator undertook fieldwork in the three target countries and in ESCWA headquarters, and held interviews with project participants, donors and other stakeholders. She worked with us to ensure her understanding of the project’s objectives and methods was accurate, and also attended the project’s closing event. The donors and ESCWA were very satisfied with her commitment to the evaluation process.”

Wafa Aboul Hosn
Chief, Economic Statistics Section

10. The 2014 ESCWA Evaluation Policy indicates that all extrabudgetary (XB) projects with budgets exceeding \$500,000 should be evaluated, and that the evaluation of other projects lies at the discretion of the donor. It recommends that 2 to 4 per cent of the project budget be allocated for monitoring and evaluation (figure 3). In the 2014-2015 biennium, ESCWA completed the evaluation of an XB project on energy statistics, and initiated an evaluation of the XB project on the National Agenda for the Future of Syria, which should be completed by July 2016 (annex, table A3).

Figure 2. Development Account and extrabudgetary projects evaluation, 2014-2015

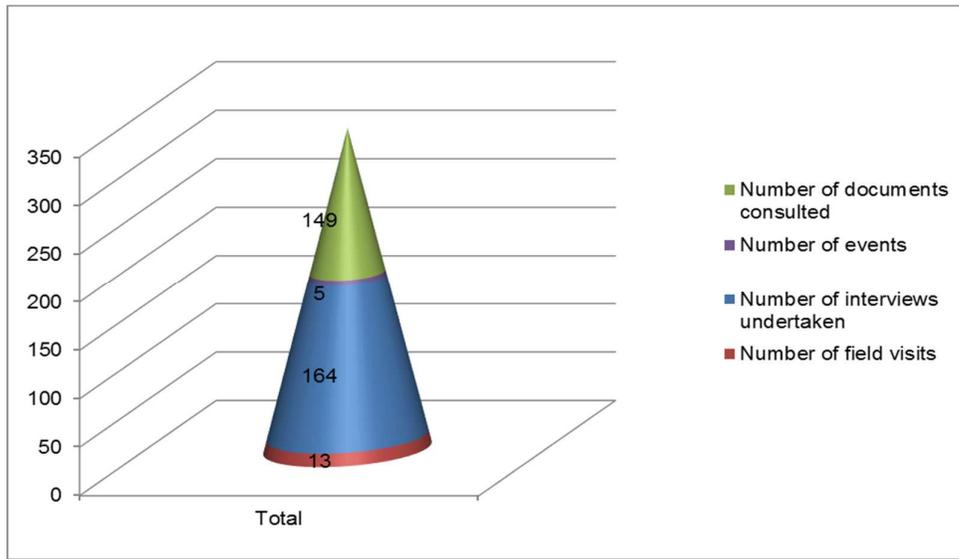
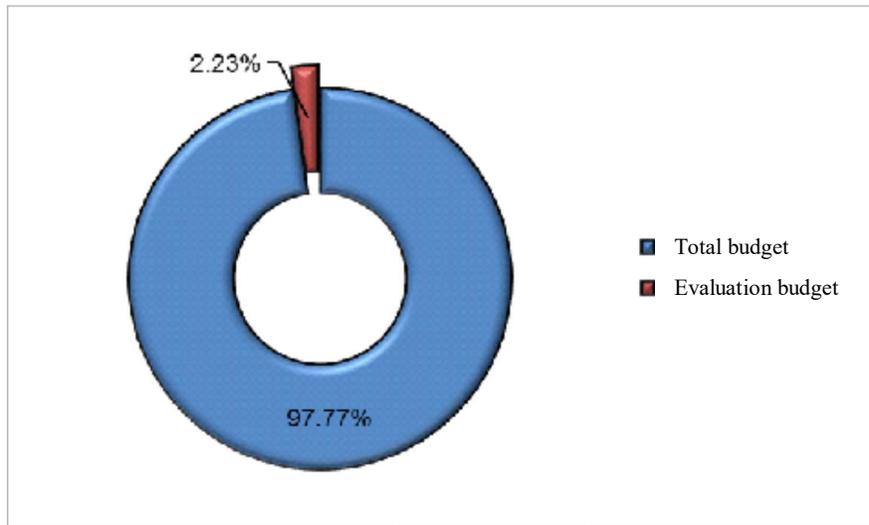


Figure 3. Budget allocation for Development Account and extrabudgetary projects evaluation



11. Evaluations of DA and XB projects led to the following findings:

- **Relevance:** The projects succeeded in addressing problems relevant to the region and were well aligned with the strategic objectives of ESCWA and with the needs of targeted member States;
- **Effectiveness:** The projects increased awareness of government officials on key issues and helped to improve the formulation of relevant policies and action plans;
- **Efficiency:** The projects were efficient in their use of resources within the allocated time frame;
- **Sustainability:** The projects established networks linking stakeholders, experts and international organizations.

12. The following recommendations were made for consideration in the planning, design and management of future DA and XB projects:

- **Needs assessment:** Projects would be strengthened if they were preceded by comprehensive needs assessments in the targeted countries to best identify priorities;
- **Coordination and consultation with stakeholders:** Continuous coordination by ESCWA with a core team of stakeholders and beneficiaries in member States ensures greater ownership and impact;
- **Regional cooperation:** Increasing the number of regional workshops was noted as a key recommendation for several projects, as regional meetings are opportunities to increase cooperation, promote the exchange of experiences and offer community learning;
- **Sustainability strategy:** Project design should consistently include the development of exit strategies to promote the sustainability of the project.

13. In 2016-2017, ESCWA will launch the evaluation of one XB project and five DA projects.

II. FOLLOW-UP MECHANISMS FOR CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

14. One of the main goals of evaluation at ESCWA is to ensure continuous learning and accountability. ESCWA has thus put in place mechanisms to translate the lessons learned from evaluations into actions to implement the recommendations. The management response to evaluation findings and recommendations is an action plan, in which each action is linked to a set of indicators and a time frame.

“Our evaluations produce realistic recommendations for actionable performance improvement. They are increasingly being used to inform our planning and monitoring processes.”

Rima Khalaf
Executive Secretary of ESCWA

15. The Strategy, Evaluation and Partnership Section (StEPS) acts as the focal point for the formulation of the management response. During this biennium, StEPS assisted five project teams in the preparation of management responses to evaluations of DA projects.

16. For subprogramme evaluations, after the Division has formulated its management response, StEPS facilitates its transformation into a two-year action plan with performance indicators and a timeline. This document is reviewed by the Executive Secretary, and a Management Performance Compact is signed by the Executive Secretary and the Division Directors. StEPS, under the leadership of the Deputy Executive Secretary for Programme, subsequently follows up on the implementation of commitments in the compact. The compact provides a useful tool for regular strategic discussions between the Division Director and the Executive Secretary on key priorities, achievements and challenges, and helps to ensure that the Division remains on track while implementing all accepted recommendations.

17. During the 2014-2015 biennium, StEPS followed up on the implementation by the Statistics Division, the Social Development Division and the Technology for Development Division of the recommendations stemming from the evaluations undertaken in 2012-2013. Following the evaluations of ECW and ECRI, StEPS assisted in the preparation of the management responses in the end of 2015. The resultant management performance compacts will be implemented in the 2016-2017 biennium.

18. For each evaluation undertaken at ESCWA, an evaluation brief summarizing the evaluation process, findings and key recommendations is prepared by StEPS and made available on the website of ESCWA, from <https://www.unescwa.org/about-escwa/evaluation>.

III. CHANGES TO STRUCTURE AND RESOURCES

19. As of November 2013, evaluations at ESCWA have been managed by an evaluation team within StEPS, reporting directly to the Deputy Executive Secretary for Programme and to the Executive Secretary. The evaluation function has thus been separated from the monitoring and planning functions, and the rigour of the evaluation process has been strengthened. External evaluators are selected by StEPS, which adds to the independence and impartiality of the exercise.

20. In November 2014, a Strategy and Evaluation Officer with seven years of evaluation experience joined StEPS (at the P-4 level). The post of the Associate Programme Management Officer (P-2) was reclassified in 2014 as dedicated Associate Evaluation Officer (P-2) working exclusively on evaluations.

21. Support from the Chief of Section and General Service Staff was provided throughout the biennium. It is estimated that total staff time dedicated to evaluations in the biennium 2014-2015 reached 46.85 work months, increasing considerably from 12.5 work months in 2012-2013.

22. The 2014-2015 Evaluation Plan was developed by the secretariat in consultation with member States. A number of new practices and improvements were introduced. To identify qualified evaluators, calls for applicants were placed on relevant websites and a large number of applications were received. After a thorough review and preliminary interviews, a roster of experienced evaluators with regional expertise, including Arabic-speaking experts, was built.

23. The ESCWA evaluation team also initiated internal outreach activities in 2014-2015. An introductory brochure on evaluations was issued. It explains the role of evaluations at ESCWA, and summarizes the evaluation norms and standards followed, the evaluation process and the means to integrate recommendations into future work plans.

24. Introductory meetings were also held to present the process to staff and project teams working on the project or programme to be evaluated. The roles and responsibilities of all parties were reviewed and jointly agreed to.

25. Finally, the terms of reference for evaluators were further clarified to provide more guidance and focus. Templates for the inception report, evaluation report and evaluation matrix were revised to better mainstream UNEG norms and standards, gender equality and a human rights based approach throughout the evaluation exercise.

IV. NETWORKING ON EVALUATIONS

26. ESCWA is an active member of UNEG; it attends its annual week-long meeting and participates in UNEG outputs and the Evaluation Practice Exchange. In 2016, ESCWA will present a review of all the evaluations it has undertaken in the period 2010-2015 at the Evaluation Practice Exchange Knowledge Fair.

27. ESCWA is also active in the informal United Nations Regional Commissions' Evaluation Network, which it chaired in 2015. Discussions have focused on good practice for monitoring frameworks and the use of evaluation findings in future programme and project planning. ESCWA helped to form the Inter-Agency Regional Evaluation Network for Arab States (IRENAS), a platform through which United Nations agencies can share information and identify regional evaluators. ESCWA has participated in the annual meeting of the Middle East and North Africa Evaluators Network, EvalMENA, a regional multi-stakeholder gathering of experts, practitioners and implementing organizations.

**Box 2. 2012-2013 Evaluation activities assessed
by the Office of Internal Oversight Services**

The achievements of ESCWA in the biennium 2014-2015 built on progress made in the previous biennium as acknowledged in United Nations Secretariat Evaluation Scorecards 2012-2013, prepared by the Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (17 November 2015, Assignment No.: IED-15-009). This exercise acknowledged the progress made by ESCWA during the 2012-2013 biennium to strengthen the evaluation function. It also identified some areas for further improvement.

The overall assessment of ESCWA was very positive. The OIOS report acknowledged the changes made since the biennium 2010-2011, in particular the full integration of the evaluation function into the work of ESCWA, the adoption of an evaluation policy (a reference to the 2014 new Evaluation Plan was also made) and the establishment of follow-up mechanisms. The report commended the mainstreaming of the gender perspective in evaluation exercises, the adoption of a quality assurance system for evaluation reports, and the integration of UNEG norms and standards in evaluation processes.

The scorecard underlined the importance of integrating human rights dimensions into the evaluation exercise and of having an independent reporting line for evaluations. Those recommendations were addressed during the biennium 2014-2015 and the relevant changes have been introduced.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2016-2017

28. The following recommendations were identified based on the lessons learned from the evaluations conducted in 2014 and 2015. They will be taken into consideration in future evaluations (annex, table A4).

- **Increase financial resources for evaluations:** ESCWA should seek to maintain an allocation of at least 1 per cent of its regular budget to evaluations.
- **Promote the implementation of recommendations:** Examine the findings of evaluation reports and engage in the integration of recommendations into programmes and project planning, and put in place a systematic mechanism for the follow-up of the implementation of recommendations.
- **Expand the roster of regional evaluation experts:** Continuously work on updating and expanding the roster of evaluation experts with regional expertise and knowledge of Arabic, and build sub-rosters by area of expertise to have a pool of experts who can help evaluators with technical evaluations.
- **Prioritize thematic evaluations:** Undertake thematic evaluations that assess the overall impact of services provided and the extent to which the work of ESCWA has a cumulative impact; priority should be given to evaluating the role of advisory services and technical cooperation.

Annex**SUMMARY OF SUBPROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS EVALUATION
AND FUTURE EVALUATION PLAN****TABLE A. SUBPROGRAMMES EVALUATION, 2014-2015**

Title	Status
Discretionary self-evaluation of the ESCWA Technology Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation completed in May 2015 • Management response was prepared in May 2015 • Action plan under consideration
Discretionary self-evaluation of the ESCWA Centre for Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation completed in December 2015 • Management response is under preparation
Discretionary self-evaluation of the Emerging and Conflict-related Issues Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation completed in December 2015 • Management response is under preparation

TABLE B. DEVELOPMENT ACCOUNT PROJECTS EVALUATION, 2014-2015

Project title	Tranche	Project budget (Evaluation budget)	Status
DA projects evaluation initiated in 2013 and completed in 2014			
Strengthening capacities of policymakers in the ESCWA region to formulate national youth policies and plans of action: Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)	7th Tranche	\$379 000 (\$8 000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation completed in March 2014 • Management response prepared in May 2014
Strengthening capacities in the ESCWA region to negotiate bilateral investment treaties	7th Tranche	\$502 200 (\$10 000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation completed in March 2014 • Management response prepared in March 2014
DA projects evaluation completed in 2014-2015			
Capacity-building on climate change mitigation for poverty alleviation in Western Asia	7th Tranche	\$547 200 (\$11 000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation completed in September 2014 • Management response prepared in November 2014
Regional project for strengthening statistical capacity for the ESCWA countries in energy statistics and energy balance	7th Tranche	\$509 000 (\$12 250)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation completed in March 2015 • Management response prepared in April 2015

Project title	Tranche	Project budget (Evaluation budget)	Status
Strengthening national capacities in the ESCWA region on developing green production sectors	7th Tranche	\$491 000 (\$10 000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation completed in March 2015 • Management response prepared in April 2015
DA projects evaluation initiated in 2015, to be completed in 2016			
Institutional and capacity building for Arab Parliaments and other stakeholders for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security	8th Tranche	\$510 000 (\$17 000)	Evaluation initiated in December 2015
Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders in the ESCWA Region (AIGLE)	8th Tranche	\$509 000 (\$11 000)	Evaluation initiated in December 2015
Strengthening Capacities to Utilize Workers' Remittances for Development	8th Tranche	\$464 000 (\$17 500)	Evaluation initiated in December 2015

TABLE C. EXTRABUDGETARY PROJECTS EVALUATION, 2014-2015

Project title	Funding partners	Project budget (Evaluation budget)	Status
XB projects evaluation completed in 2014-2015			
Strengthening statistical capacity of Arab countries in producing energy statistics and energy consumption surveys	The Islamic Development Bank, on behalf of the Department for International Development (DFID, United Kingdom)	\$421 897 (\$14 360)	Evaluation completed in August 2015
XB projects evaluation initiated in 2015, to be completed in 2016			
National Agenda for the Future of Syria (NAFS)	Several regional and international partners	\$5 million (\$100 000)	Evaluation initiated in June 2015

TABLE D. 2016-2017 EVALUATION WORKPLAN

Evaluation title	Evaluator	Resources	Schedule	Type
Internal discretionary evaluations				
Evaluation of the Economic Development and Integration Division	Independent consultant	\$18 700	2016-2017	Subprogramme evaluation
Evaluation of the Sustainable Development Policies Division	Independent consultant	\$18 700	2016-2017	Subprogramme evaluation
Thematic evaluation of publications 2014-2015	Independent consultant	\$14 000	2016-2017	Thematic evaluation

Evaluation title	Evaluator	Resources	Schedule	Type
Evaluation of the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation (RPTC) (tentative, subject to availability of funds)		Envisioned: \$100 000	2016-2017	Thematic evaluation
Internal mandatory evaluations				
Developing the capacities of the Arab countries for climate change adaptation by applying integrated water resource management tools	Independent consultant	\$11 000 (consultant)	Q3 2016	DA project evaluation
Building capacities in developing appropriate green technologies for improving the livelihood of rural communities in the ESCWA region	Independent consultant	\$6 000 (consultant) + \$2 000 (travel)	Q4 2016	DA project evaluation
Strengthening the statistical capacity of the countries members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia in producing and disseminating short-term economic indicators for sustainable growth	Independent consultant	\$10 000 (consultant)	Q4 2017	DA project evaluation
Strengthening national capacities for integrated, sustainable and inclusive population and development policies in the Arab region	Independent consultant	\$14 000 (consultant)	Q4 2017	DA project evaluation
Promoting renewable energy investments for climate change mitigation and sustainable development (ESCWA + Economic Commission for Europe (ECE))	Independent consultant	\$16 500 for entire project evaluation (ESCWA+ECE)	Q4 2017	DA project evaluation
Developing the capacity of countries members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia to address the water and energy nexus for achieving sustainable development goals	Independent consultant	\$12 000 (consultant) + 2 100 (travel)	Q4 2017	DA project evaluation
Establishing national technology development and transfer systems in selected ESCWA member States	Independent consultant	\$10 000 (consultant)	Q4 2017	DA project evaluation
Preparation of key performance indicators for State actors with respect to the tenth National Development Plan (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia)	Independent consultant	Financial information to be confirmed	Q2 2016	XB project evaluation
Regional Initiative for the Assessment of the Impact of	Independent consultant	\$7 500 (consultant) + \$2 000 (travel)	Q4 2016	XB Project Evaluation

Evaluation title	Evaluator	Resources	Schedule	Type
Climate Change on Water Resources and Socio-Economic vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR)				
Internal mandatory evaluations				
Regional Initiative for Establishing a Regional Mechanism for Improved Monitoring and Reporting on Access to Water Supply and Sanitation Services in the Arab Region (MDG+Initiative)	Independent consultant	\$10 000 (consultant)	2017	XB Project Evaluation
External mandatory evaluations				
Programme evaluation of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia	OIOS		2015-2016	Organizational level evaluation
OIOS thematic evaluation of the United Nations regional commissions	OIOS		2016-2017	Thematic evaluation
