



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

Twenty-sixth session  
Beirut, 17-20 May 2010

Item 7 (a-i) of the provisional agenda

**MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

**STREAMLINING THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION**

*Lessons learned from the evaluation of the sessions  
of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies*

**Summary**

This document provides the background to the evaluation efforts undertaken by the secretariat on the conduct of sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the quality of the services provided by the secretariat to member countries in facilitating their consultations on key regional development issues. It also provides consolidated evaluation results from eight sessions which took place between February 2008 and December 2009; the key lessons learned, including identification of best practice; and the way forward.

The Commission is invited to review the document and provide guidance on how the effectiveness of future intergovernmental sessions could be further improved.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. According to its mandate, one of the main functions of the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is to facilitate regular regional consultations among member countries in order to tackle key development challenges in economic, social and related fields, especially those of a regional nature; to share knowledge and experience between member countries; to forge common positions in response to the challenges and opportunities posed by development; and to promote regional integration and solidarity. To this end, the secretariat provides substantive and logistic services for the conduct of sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies.<sup>1</sup> It also reports the outcome of these sessions to the appropriate intergovernmental governing bodies: the outcome of the sessions of the Commission is reported to the Economic and Social Council and the outcome of the sessions of the Committees is reported to the Commission for its consideration, action and follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations made by the sessions.
2. To assess the quality of the services provided to member countries in this regard, the secretariat initiated an evaluation of the conduct of sessions in March 2004. At the twenty-fourth session (Beirut, 8-11 May 2006), the Commission was advised by the secretariat of the major findings from the evaluation of nine sessions, which had been held in the biennium 2004-2005.<sup>2</sup> Nine additional sessions, held in the biennium 2006-2007, were evaluated and a report presented to the twenty-fifth session of the Commission (Sana'a, 26-29 May 2008). The current document presents a review of the evaluations conducted for eight sessions held between February 2008 and December 2009, bringing the total number of evaluations to 26.
3. Through this document, the secretariat wishes to share with member countries the background to the evaluation; the main lessons learned from the consolidated review, including identification of best practice; and the way forward.
4. The Commission is invited to review the document and provide guidance on how the effectiveness of future sessions could be further improved through collaborative efforts by member countries and the secretariat.
5. The secretariat expresses its appreciation to member countries for their participation in the evaluation exercise and their invaluable feedback.

## II. METHODOLOGY

6. As part of the United Nations system, the secretariat carries out all evaluations in accordance with the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).<sup>3</sup>
7. For the evaluation of each session, the secretariat collected feedback from participating member countries through the use of a structured questionnaire that included both open and closed questions.<sup>4</sup> A copy of the questionnaire was distributed to the head of each delegation attending the sessions, who was requested to solicit views and comments from the members of the delegation and provide a consolidated response to the secretariat at the end of the session. The aim of conducting the questionnaire in this way was to ensure that the response from each member country would be given equal weight, irrespective of the size of the delegation. The method of administering the questionnaire thus differed from that used in the evaluation of

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<sup>1</sup> These are the Committee on Energy, the Committee on Water Resources, the Committee on Social Development, the Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade and Economic Globalization in the Countries of the ESCWA Region, the Committee on Transport, the Statistical Committee and the Committee on Women.

<sup>2</sup> See Consideration of ESCWA Intergovernmental Machinery (E/ESCWA/24/6(Part I)/Add.2).

<sup>3</sup> For more detailed information on UNEG, see <http://www.uneval.org>.

<sup>4</sup> The evaluation questionnaire prepared for the twenty-fifth session of the Commission is reproduced in annex III.

such other activities as group training, in which the feedback from each individual participant is considered essential.

8. The questionnaire comprised three main parts: (a) general questions on the intergovernmental meeting in question, including attendance, the importance of the agenda items to national and regional priorities, and follow-up on the decisions taken at previous sessions; (b) substantive preparation and servicing by the secretariat for each agenda item, including questions on the level of satisfaction of the delegation with the preparation and presentation of each agenda item, the timeliness and relevance of documents, the quality of discussion, the opportunities for networking with other delegations and the quality of the draft report; and (c) a section inviting suggestions for further improvement of sessions, in which delegations were given the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations on any aspect of the session.

9. For each session, the responses from member country delegations were analysed and the main findings and lessons learned, particularly those issues of greatest concern to member countries, were compiled in a brief report, which was reviewed by the secretariat management.

10. As part of the preparation of this document, the secretariat re-examined all evaluation reports and related documentation from February 2009 to December 2009, as well as the report compiled by the secretariat on the lessons learned from the twenty-fifth session of the Commission.

### III. CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS

11. In order to achieve consistency in the comparison of the evaluation results, the format of the questionnaire would normally be required to be the same for all sessions. In this case, however, the questionnaire has been modified and improved in the course of the evaluation period, based on feedback from member countries and regular consultations within the secretariat.

12. The fact that the secretariat felt it important to give equal weight to all member country responses by providing one questionnaire per delegation had some impact on the response rate. This could be accounted for by the fact that the need for the heads of delegations to consolidate views and comments from their members required greater time and effort on their part, and once the sessions had been concluded, it was often difficult for heads of delegations to follow up with their members, who were frequently from different ministries or Government offices. Furthermore, the secretariat was unable to assess the extent to which the responses to the questionnaire reflected those of the majority within the delegations.

### IV. KEY LESSONS LEARNED

13. From the consolidated assessment of the evaluations of eight sessions,<sup>5</sup> the following lessons were learned:

**Lesson 1.** There was consensus among member countries that the sessions are an important forum for them to network and exchange experiences on substantive issues.

**Lesson 2.** Delegations highlighted the importance of continuity of representation, as this influences the effectiveness of discussions. This concern was raised with particular reference to the effect that changing the composition of delegations has on delegates' understanding of the terms of reference, purpose and expected outcome of the Technical Committee.

**Lesson 3.** There was general consensus that the interventions of the secretariat had improved in response to the concerns expressed by member countries in this regard during previous evaluation periods.

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<sup>5</sup> Listed in annex I.

14. The secretariat also noted a number of areas which required improvement and is taking action as follows:

**Lesson 4.** While there was general consensus that the agenda items matched their national and regional priorities, delegations requested that the secretariat make additional efforts to coordinate more closely with member countries when preparing for the sessions, in particular regarding input on substantive issues and agenda items.

*Action taken by the secretariat:* The secretariat is further improving the mechanisms for consultation with member countries through more focused attention to ongoing consultation and discussion of substantive issues of relevance to the region.

**Lesson 5.** Delegations suggested that consultation and coordination with member countries be continuous throughout the year, not only immediately prior to sessions. In this regard, delegations also noted that such efforts by the secretariat should be matched by similar efforts on the part of member countries.

*Action taken by the secretariat:* The secretariat is implementing a new strategy for information and discussion with member countries on issues of importance to the region beyond those already in place through existing committees.

**Lesson 6.** The feedback received from these evaluations showed the continued concern of member countries regarding the timeliness with which pre-session documentation is made available. Member countries requested that the Commission ensure that these documents be made available via the ESCWA website and that member countries be informed when this has been done.

*Action taken by the secretariat:* In preparation for the twenty-sixth session of the Commission, the secretariat has made additional efforts to ensure that the agreed timelines are respected in the preparation and clearance of documentation, and that delegations are informed promptly of the availability of pre-session documents on the ESCWA website.

**Lesson 7.** Member countries recommended that in order to enrich in-session discussion, the secretariat should allocate more time for debate and invite delegations to present country-specific experience and success stories. Delegations also recommended that additional focus be brought to issues that require collaborative input and decision-making.

*Action taken by the secretariat:* The secretariat has taken these comments into consideration in the planning of the agenda for the fourth session of the Technical Committee by scheduling presentations by each member country on the issues discussed during the session. The secretariat will continue to explore ways to enrich in-session discussions by promoting the engagement of delegations in substantive discussions.

## V. WAY FORWARD

15. With increased importance attached to evaluation as a tool for promoting learning and accountability, the secretariat intends to continue its evaluation of sessions. Since collective effort is required on the part of both the secretariat and member countries to further improve the effectiveness of sessions, the following proposals are made for consideration by the Commission as the way forward:

**Proposal 1.** To address the concerns raised in lessons 4 and 5 of paragraph 14 regarding the level and continuity of communication between the secretariat and delegations, and in order to reduce the potential impact of changes in the composition of delegations attending sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies, the secretariat has provided access to documents and reports issued for past sessions via its website. Furthermore, in order to provide easy access to such information and to further improve communication with

member countries, the secretariat is expanding the use of electronic media, including the use of electronic forums, to enhance substantive discussion between member countries and the secretariat on technical issues related to the agenda of the Commission. In turn, it is important that member countries actively participate in such forums and seek consultation with the secretariat on their priority issues to ensure that this vehicle for communication is used to its full potential.

**Proposal 2.** To further strengthen liaison and cooperation with the secretariat in response to lessons 2 and 5 above, member countries may wish to review their internal distribution channels for ESCWA session documents; solicit feedback from the ministries or offices concerned on how distribution channels between the secretariat and focal points could be further improved; consider ways in which internal governmental communications could be enhanced; and share the outcome of these reviews with the secretariat.

**Proposal 3.** Member countries are invited to participate actively in the further improvement of the questionnaire, with a view to providing the secretariat with the information which it needs, while reducing the work required of member countries in providing feedback through the questionnaire.

## **VI. ACTION REQUIRED BY THE COMMISSION**

16. The Commission is invited to provide guidance on how the effectiveness of future sessions may be further improved through collaborative efforts by member countries and the secretariat, focusing in particular on the lessons learned, as identified in paragraph 13, and the way forward, as proposed in paragraph 15. The heads of delegations attending the current session of the Commission are urged to provide their written, consolidated feedback to the secretariat in the form of responses to the questionnaire that will be circulated at the beginning of the session.

Annex I

**LIST OF EVALUATED SESSIONS**

1. Commission sessions:
  - Twenty-fifth ESCWA session (Sana'a, 26-29 May 2008)
2. Committee sessions:
  - Ninth session of the Committee on Transport (Beirut, 26-28 February 2008)
  - Eighth session of the Statistical Committee (Beirut, 14-16 October 2008)
  - Seventh session of the Committee on Energy (Beirut, 5-6 February 2009)
  - Tenth session of the Committee on Transport (Beirut, 31 March - 2 April 2009)
  - Fourth session of the Committee on Women (Beirut, 21-23 October 2009)
  - Seventh session of the Committee on Social Development (Beirut, 26-27 October 2009)
  - Eighth session of the Committee on Water Resources (Beirut, 17-19 December 2009)

Annex II**QUESTIONNAIRE FEEDBACK**

<b>Sessions (in chronological order)</b>	<b>Number of member countries participating</b>	<b>Number of member countries responding</b>	<b>Response rate (percentage)</b>
Ninth session of the Committee on Transport	11	9	82
Twenty-fifth ESCWA session	13	9	69
Eighth session of the Statistical Committee	12	9	75
Seventh session of the Committee on Energy	13	10	77
Tenth session of the Committee on Transport	13	13	100
Fourth session of the Committee on Women	12	11	92
Seventh session of the Committee on Social Development	10	10	100
Eighth session of the Committee on Water Resources	10	10	100

Annex III

**SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE**



**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION  
FOR WESTERN ASIA**

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

**EVALUATION BY DELEGATIONS  
TO THE TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION**

*(Note: One questionnaire per delegation)*

**PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION**

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the quality and effectiveness of the twenty-fifth session of the Commission.

In order to receive the consolidated views of each delegation, one questionnaire is provided to each head of delegation.

Please return the completed questionnaire at the end of the Committee session to the Secretary of the Commission by handing it to the ESCWA staff at the registration desk. Should you wish to keep a copy of your responses, please ask the ESCWA registration desk staff to provide you with a photocopy of the completed questionnaire.

**Chief  
Programme Planning and Technical Cooperation Division  
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia**



**PART I: General questions about the session**

1. Have any of your delegates attended previous session(s) of the Commission?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, please specify which session(s) the delegate(s) attended:	If no, please provide any further information:
2. If your answer to question 1 is yes, do you think that there has been significant improvement in the conduct of this session compared to previous session(s)?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Additional comments:</b>	
3. Do you think that the agenda of the twenty-sixth session of the Commission and the deliberations adequately addressed topics of priority and importance <b>to the ESCWA region</b> ?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, all important topics were adequately addressed	<input type="checkbox"/> No, the following important topics were missing or not addressed adequately in the agenda. (Please provide full details.)
4. Do you think that the agenda of the twenty-sixth session of the Commission and the deliberations adequately addressed topics of priority and importance <b>to your country</b> ?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, all important topics were adequately addressed	<input type="checkbox"/> No, the following important topics were missing or not addressed adequately in the agenda. (Please provide full details.)
5. In your view, was there adequate follow-up between your country and ESCWA regarding the decisions of the twenty-fifth session?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Additional comments:</b>	

## PART II: Substantive preparation and servicing by the secretariat

### Section 1: Policy issues

Please indicate the extent to which you found the following agenda items useful and adequately delivered by the Commission by ticking the appropriate box. Your comments will help us to improve future sessions, so please provide as much detail as possible.

6. Youth in the Arab world: challenges and opportunities			
<input type="checkbox"/> To a great extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To a satisfactory extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To some extent	<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all
<b>Additional comments.</b> If you felt that important aspects were not addressed, please provide details here.			
7. Human and institutional capacity-building			
<input type="checkbox"/> To a great extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To a satisfactory extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To some extent	<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all
<b>Additional comments.</b> If you felt that important aspects were not addressed, please provide details here.			
8. Which topics did you find <b>most</b> relevant to the policies and programmes of your country?			
9. Which topics did you find <b>least</b> relevant to the policies and programmes of your country?			

### Section 2: Activities of the Commission

Please indicate the extent to which you found the following agenda items useful and adequately delivered by the Commission by ticking the appropriate box. Your comments will help us to improve future sessions, so please provide as much detail as possible.

10. Programme performance report for the biennium 2008-2009			
<input type="checkbox"/> To a great extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To a satisfactory extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To some extent	<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all
<b>Additional comments.</b> If you felt that important aspects were not addressed, please provide details here.			

11. Follow-up to implementation of the resolutions adopted by the Commission at its twenty-fifth session			
<input type="checkbox"/> To a great extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To a satisfactory extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To some extent	<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all
<b>Additional comments.</b> If you felt that important aspects were not addressed, please provide details here.			
12. Technical cooperation programme and regional advisory services			
<input type="checkbox"/> To a great extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To a satisfactory extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To some extent	<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all
<b>Additional comments.</b> If you felt that important aspects were not addressed, please provide details here.			
13. Reports of the Commission subsidiary bodies on their sessions			
<input type="checkbox"/> To a great extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To a satisfactory extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To some extent	<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all
<b>Additional comments.</b> If you felt that important aspects were not addressed, please provide details here.			

### Section 3: Management Issues

Please indicate the extent to which you found the following agenda items useful and adequately delivered by the Commission by ticking the appropriate boxes. Your comments will help us to improve future sessions, so please provide as much detail as possible.

14. Streamlining the work of the Commission			
(a) Evaluation of the intergovernmental structure of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies			
<input type="checkbox"/> To a great extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To a satisfactory extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To some extent	<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all
<b>Additional comments.</b> If you felt that important aspects were not addressed, please provide details here.			
(b) Upgrade the Centre for Women in ESCWA to a division			
<input type="checkbox"/> To a great extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To a satisfactory extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To some extent	<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all
<b>Additional comments.</b> If you felt that important aspects were not addressed, please provide details here.			
(c) Upgrade the Section on Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues to a division			
<input type="checkbox"/> To a great extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To a satisfactory extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To some extent	<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all
<b>Additional comments.</b> If you felt that important aspects were not addressed, please provide details here.			

15. Proposed amendments to the work programme for the biennium 2010-2011			
<input type="checkbox"/> To a great extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To a satisfactory extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To some extent	<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all
<b>Additional comments.</b> If you felt that important aspects were not addressed, please provide details here.			
16. Revised draft strategic framework for the biennium 2012-2013			
<input type="checkbox"/> To a great extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To a satisfactory extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To some extent	<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all
<b>Additional comments.</b> If you felt that important aspects were not addressed, please provide details here.			
17. Progress made in the establishment of ESCWA technology centre			
<input type="checkbox"/> To a great extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To a satisfactory extent	<input type="checkbox"/> To some extent	<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all
<b>Additional comments.</b> If you felt that important aspects were not addressed, please provide details here.			

#### **Section 4: Organizational issues**

Please indicate the extent to which your delegation agrees or disagrees with the following statements by ticking the appropriate boxes:

18. The pre-session documents conveyed clear messages about the issues on the agenda			
<input type="checkbox"/> Fully agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Mostly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
<b>Additional comments:</b>			

19. The pre-session documents were issued in a timely manner			
<input type="checkbox"/> Fully agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Mostly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
<b>Additional comments:</b>			
20. In-session interventions by the secretariat contributed to productive discussion, effective decision-making and recommendations by the Commission			
<input type="checkbox"/> Fully agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Mostly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
<b>Additional comments:</b>			
21. The chairman provided adequate opportunity to make interventions			
<input type="checkbox"/> Fully agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Mostly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
<b>Additional comments:</b>			
22. Overall, the session is a good opportunity for member countries to network with each other and to share experiences			
<input type="checkbox"/> Fully agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Mostly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
<b>Additional comments:</b>			

23. The draft report adequately reflects the discussions, decisions and recommendations of the Commission			
<input type="checkbox"/> Fully agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Mostly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
Additional comments:			

**PART III: Administrative servicing by the secretariat**

Please indicate your answer by ticking the appropriate box:

24. The level of conference servicing provided by the secretariat to facilitate smooth organization of the session was:			
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor
Additional comments:			

**PART IV: Your recommendations**

Please provide any additional comments you may have on the session and further suggestions on how future sessions may be improved:

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~ Thank you for completing this questionnaire ~

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