

## EVALUATION BRIEF “ACADEMY OF ICT ESSENTIALS FOR GOVERNMENT LEADERS IN THE ESCWA REGION (AIGLE)”



**Background & Context:** Rapid developments in information and communication technologies (ICT) require countries to transition to knowledge-based economies. These technologies may also be used to enhance development initiatives. However, many Arab governments lack the necessary infrastructure to establish information and communication technology mechanisms enhancing government efficiency and to facilitate populations’ access to a variety of services, including e-services. Moreover, many Arab government officials do not have sufficient expertise to plan and implement well-structured ICT initiatives and strategies.

Against this backdrop, ESCWA developed the United Nations Development Account project “Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders in the ESCWA Region (AIGLE)” with a budget of USD\$509,000, from February 2013 to December 2015. The project aimed at assisting selected ESCWA member States to build capacity among policymakers in ICT for development (ICD4D) in order to reduce barriers to the adoption of information and communication technologies and to promote the use of such technologies to accelerate socio-economic development. To achieve these objectives, the project targeted policymakers and national institutions involved in training activities.

**Purpose of the evaluation:** The end of project evaluation assessed the achievements of the project, and determined key challenges, best practices, and lessons learned. The evaluation exercise was forward looking and based on four OECD-DAC criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability), with a view to contribute to ESCWA’s future project

implementation and strategic decision-making processes. The evaluation used a mixed methods approach collecting data through semi-structured interviews of 22 project participants, partners, experts, trainers, and the project team, as well as through a desk review of 69 documents, including the project concept note, project document, progress and financial reports, workshop evaluations and the papers and manuals produced during the project.

**Key Results:** The evaluation reviewed the project's cumulative approach to narrowing skills gaps in the public sector, and to enhancing the capacity of policymakers and government officials to plan and manage ICT4D. The evaluation determined that the project first identified relevant training topics through a survey in the targeted 14 member States, produced a training package, developed an online training platform, and rolled out a training of trainers workshops. Then it introduced trainings at the national and regional levels, providing in-person and online capacity building sessions to the next level of project participants. Throughout project duration, the evaluation noted, ESCWA continued to provide advisory services to member States on different aspects of ICT and the use of such technologies for development.

The evaluation found that the project was highly ambitious and delivered most of its planned outputs. More specifically, the project undertook steps to assess the actual needs of the member States and to ensure the resultant training topics were prioritized accordingly. The project worked with 14 partners from 14 member States that proved useful not only to roll out the physical and e-trainings but also to sustain its outcomes. The evaluation stated that, in addition to training 1,573 participants (of which one-third were women), the project established an online training platform (<http://escwa-aigle.org/en>) with four modules. Likewise, the project trained 104 trainers to ensure national partners can continue trainings in their countries after the project's duration.

The evaluation found that some of the project's activities were delayed or had to be undertaken in a relatively shorter period than necessary due to administrative hurdles. As a result, the online training platform were not available for use in the trainings of trainers workshop. The project team overcame this challenge by disseminating training materials and worked with participants and trainers answering their questions.

The evaluation demonstrated that project participants found the project relevant, effective and efficient, with many expressing interest to spearhead ICT4D initiatives or advocate for adoption of relevant policies conducive to the development of knowledge-based economies. The project was shown to have fostered interest and built capacity in ICT4D, and through to its online training platform, the Academy continues to function as a knowledge hub.

**Key Accomplishments:** In addition to completing project outputs, the evaluation found that ESCWA's efforts resulted in a training institution in Sudan adopting the modules into its curriculum. Likewise, the evaluation determined that the creation of an experts and focal points

networks was a key accomplishment that will support national partners and present opportunities to exchange experiences and learn from each other. Finally, project participants from most countries demonstrated a voluntary and clear commitment to further the work the project initiated.

Taking note of the interest in and relevance of this topic to the region, the evaluation found that ESCWA's Technology for Development Division plans to build upon the achievements of this project and in line with the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**Recommendations:** Among others, the evaluation made four key recommendations to inform future decision-making and programming processes. First, ESCWA is encouraged to maintain communication with member States and national partners to help them continue to integrate AIGLE modules and trainings into their programmes. Providing backstopping support and continuing advisory services would enhance the sustainability prospects of the project and advance relations with relevant actors for future programming. Second, it is proposed that ESCWA plan for future AIGLE-type projects within its regular programme of work, and in coordination with its work on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Third, the evaluation determined that there is a clear need to cluster member States with similar needs and to tailor approaches accordingly. Finally, ESCWA and DESA are urged to be more flexible in project implementation, particularly when dealing with extraneous factors that cause administrative delays.