

Executive Summary

Final Evaluation of

*"Implementation and Follow-Up and Review of the
2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Enhancing
the Capacities of Arab Countries"*

Development Account Project

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for

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Executive Summary

This report is the result of a final evaluation carried out on the US \$598,000 1617AQ Development Account (DA) project entitled "Implementation and Follow-up and Review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Enhancing the Capacities of Arab Countries" developed and implemented by ESCWA Cluster 5 on 2030 Agenda and SDG Coordination (former Unit on the 2030 Agenda). The project was implemented from January 2017 to March 2020.

The overall objective of the DA project was *to enhance the capacity of Arab countries to operationalize the 2030 Agenda and develop integrated approaches to SDG implementation, adaptation and follow up and review at national and regional levels*. Generally, the project consisted of national and regional-level components, with the national component implemented on an ad-hoc basis based on requests from member countries.

The primary audience for this evaluation is the project team, Cluster 5 on 2030 Agenda and SDG Coordination and ESCWA at large. The evaluation focused on the three main OECD-DAC criteria of *relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability*, and aimed at investigating the extent to which the project achieved its overall objective, expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement. A gender lens was employed throughout the project, from the selection of sample interviewees to the analysis of gender disaggregated data. But despite the fact that analysis was done on gender disaggregated data, the evaluator concluded that the overall views of men and women did not differ regarding the questions raised in this evaluation.

The evaluation methodology was comprised of a comprehensive desk review and remote interviews conducted with the project team and project stakeholders across different Arab countries. Moreover, the evaluator observed one of the activities of the project first-hand through attending a regional workshop on Voluntary National Review (VNR) that took place in Cairo in late February 2020.

Findings

Relevance

The project was found to be **fully relevant** to the needs and plans of member States as well as to the work of ESCWA, and of the Cluster 5 in specific. The project was integrated into the Cluster's own activities, making it a complementary tool that actually helped establish the Cluster. Most of the activities actually built upon ESCWA's previous work, especially in terms of utilising the outcomes of the annual Arab Forums for Sustainable Development which took place before the start of the project. All interviewed stakeholders expressed a positive opinion on the relevance of the project to their professions, countries' development, and their work. The project maintained a high degree of responsiveness to member States throughout the project cycle despite not having a stable team structure, but the proactive engagement with member States was not consistent throughout the project duration. The project was also found to be directly relevant to gender and disability issues facing the region given the activities it supported directly contributed to women empowerment and gender equality, as well as the rights of people with disabilities.

Effectiveness

The project was found to be **partially effective** in achieving its activities and expected accomplishments due to a host of different factors including a lack of specificity in the project design, an unstable team structure, and human resource capacity constraints, which led to significant delays in implementation and an overall non-systematic DA project. The design of the project was found to be open and general in nature, not containing sufficient analysis and specific needs assessment, especially given the fact that the project was designed right after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, and member States were still unaware of the technical support they need in this new endeavour. Another related factor was the structure of the project team, which underwent many changes throughout the project; it took significant time until the work team was complete. But given all the challenges and obstacles encountered by the project, it should be commended that the project was able to implement the majority of the planned activities in the last 18 months of the project cycle. This was done through a flexible approach that helped sustain the work of the Cluster and deal with external obstacles that arose during implementation. In addition to this, the evaluation found a positive effect arising from the implementation of the project, which was the enhanced level of partnerships and coordination.

Sustainability

The project's results were found to be **partially sustainable**. The fact that the SDG Knowledge and Learning Platform has not yet been launched, even after the closure of the project, means that the project did not fully achieve its main result related to sustainability, as the platform is one of the main aspects of sustainability in the project. Having said that, the platform was recently redesigned in order to be part of an ESCWA-wide SDG Gateway and will thus sustain the project's knowledge and capacity building outcomes. The platform will provide a wealth of information on all SDGs and related issues including training courses, tools, and important reports have been compiled and translated into Arabic, providing real usable resources for practitioners working in any SDG field across Arab countries. Moreover, the absence of follow-through on the project's national-level activities meant that the project's results are not fully sustainable, but national level activities are expected to be sustained throughout the Cluster's technical cooperation work. This indicates that despite the fact that the project's results were not fully sustainable, the work of the Cluster will build on the project's results moving forward to enhance their sustainability.

Recommendations

- 1. The project team should launch the Arab SDG online platform (now called the SDG Knowledge and Learning Platform) should be launched as soon as possible and link it with other knowledge platforms.**
- 2. The Cluster should continue with the series of VNR workshops to guarantee the sustainability of project outcomes**
- 3. ESCWA staff should design DA projects clearly and in a focused way based on thorough analysis, and laying out specific resource needs to facilitate actual implementation.**

4. The Cluster, and ESCWA at large, should build on the fruitful partnerships that the project achieved over its cycle to further increase coordination both within ESCWA and between ESCWA and other government or nongovernmental organisations.
5. ESCWA at large should explicitly state and take into account gender and human rights considerations (including the rights of people with disabilities) during the design phase of the project