

Executive Summary

Subprogramme Evaluation of: The Emerging and Conflict Related Issues Division at ESCWA (ECRI)

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This is the final report of the sub-programme evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) Emerging and Conflict Related Issues Division (ECRI) commissioned by ESCWA. The evaluation covers the work of the Strategic Frameworks 2012-2013 & 2014-2015. The evaluation takes place in compliance with ESCWA's Evaluation Policy, and as such has an accountability element. However, the primary purpose of this evaluation is lesson learning in order to help identify the strengths of ECRI and what has worked well and why, and where the main challenges have occurred. The evaluation focuses on ECRI's substantive work and organizational structure, and has a forward-looking dimension to it.

The findings are based on an in-depth document study (see Annex 3 for complete list), key informant interviews over the phone (with over 25 respondents) and four evaluation visits to Beirut for face-to-face meetings with relevant project stakeholders (see Annex 2 for complete list). Methods of analysis include Theory of Change¹, contribution analysis and the use of evaluation questions (complete table in Annex IV). Based on the objectives of the evaluations, as stated by the Terms of Reference (Annex I), three key OECD-DAC evaluation criteria were chosen to structure the analysis. These are Relevance, Effectiveness and Impact.

The key findings were presented to the ECRI team in Beirut on 10 December 2015 and a workshop was held to jointly reflect on recommendations. The report has incorporated comments by both ECRI and the Strategy, Evaluation and Partnership Section (StEPS) team. This final evaluation report has been assessed by an external evaluation expert using sections 4.4, 5 and 6 of the ALNAP Quality Proforma which can be found in the following link <http://www.alnap.org/node/5685.aspx>

Findings

The report finds that the timeframe of reflection is too short to try to assess the impact of ECRI's work on mitigating the impact of conflict and its spillover effects on people and development in the ESCWA region (as per ECRI's overall Objective for 2012-2015). It is also not possible to assess the extent to which the cumulative effect of the outputs produced by ECRI have contributed to the programme objectives, and what factors have allowed this to happen or prevented it from happening, as the programme

¹ A Theory of Change is a specific and measurable description of any initiative aiming to create behavioral change that forms the basis for strategic planning, on-going decision-making and evaluation. Using a Theory of Change approach for evaluation involves testing the assumptions inherent between each step of the theory of change and assessing how likely it is that one step will lead to another. This contribution analysis helps to confirm or revise the theory of change and will provide evidence and a line of reasoning from which a plausible conclusion can be drawn that, within some level of confidence, the project has made an important contribution to the documented results. (<http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>)

objectives are simply too high level and in many cases beyond the sphere of influence of ECRI.

Nevertheless, a number of key findings and lessons learnt were identified. These are as follows:

- ❖ ECRI is able to bring the right people around the table through the convening power of ESCWA, and also because of the excellent technical reputation and personal networks of ECRI staff;
- ❖ ECRI is ideally placed to ensure the relevance and conflict sensitivity of the outputs of the other ESCWA Divisions, given the high calibre staff it has, and the niche area of expertise of the Division, which is highly relevant to the current regional context;
- ❖ Knowledge generation outputs are of high quality and appreciated by peers and partner organisations. However, their cumulative effect is not as yet known, and a better internal monitoring framework with more realistic indicators is needed. Additionally, the intended purpose and audience of these knowledge products is not sufficiently targeted;
- ❖ ECRI's Expert Group Meetings (EGMs) are successful and offer an opportunity to network and exchange ideas for policy makers, academics, members of civil society organizations (CSOs) and UN agencies in the region. However, the outcomes and cumulative effects of these exchanges and encounters, beyond collaboration on future projects, are not systematically captured, which is a disservice to ECRI;
- ❖ The normative agenda and work of ECRI is not clearly focused and – in order to maximize potential impact – should be better defined;
- ❖ ECRI should build further strategic institutional partnerships with both CSOs and key UN agencies. Such partnerships could leverage ECRI's outputs and provide access to a broader audience;
- ❖ The technical advisory work carried out by the Regional Advisor in ECRI should be better linked with the regular work programme. One-off trainings are unlikely to have significant longer-term impact, as capacity building is a continuous process that requires both depth and duration in order to be effective. The most concrete impact could be observed in some of the technical advisory services provided, where the engagement has been very specific and continuous. However, these outcomes are not captured in a structured manner, and it is not clear how they contribute in any way to the regular Programme of Work; and
- ❖ Significant contribution to medium- or longer-term outcomes and impact depends as much on the quality of the outputs as it does on the quality of the implementation process. As such the extent and depth of needs assessments, the analysis of added value, strategic partner selection and targeted

dissemination strategies all influence the overall outcome and impact of a specific output.

Recommendations

Key recommendations to ECRI:

- ❖ ECRI should narrow its focus on a specific aspect of governance relevant to the situation in the region right now in order to have more accumulative effects and more strategic impact. Focus on a niche area (e.g. development in conflict settings/crisis; failure of linking relief, reconciliation and development (LRRD); aid-development nexus in conflict settings, taking into account gender dimensions).
- ❖ ECRI should develop a more strategic communications and targeting strategy to ensure that publications are being used and referred to.
- ❖ ECRI should document the lessons learned from the facilitation work of the Regional Advisor and analyse these further to understand how they could potentially be applied in other dialogue facilitation processes.
- ❖ ECRI should undertake more strategic external engagement and build long-term institutional relationships with partners. This should be preceded by the development of a partner engagement strategy with criteria for different types of partnerships in the region, e.g. broadening of networks, operational, substantive contributions, platform, etc.
- ❖ ECRI should carry out a thorough analysis of the potential use, beyond publication, for each specific piece of research, including determining more exactly the audience, dissemination strategy and assessment of potential competition, before embarking on it.
- ❖ ECRI must decide on its exact role and where its added value lies – this will help define the balance between outputs and the linkages these have to each other, and as such define what ECRI's Expected Accomplishments should be.

Key recommendations to ESCWA:

- ❖ ESCWA should become a better learning organization, documenting both from an accountability perspective and a learning perspective the outcomes and impact of its work. ESCWA should adopt an accountability framework that captures changes as a result of outputs, and ensures clear linkages and complementarities between all activities from normative work to knowledge generation activities to capacity building, and tie this in with the technical advisory services. Monitoring and Evaluation should not be merely compliance driven or linked to financial spending.
- ❖ ESCWA identify better its key audiences and review how it wants to communicate with them. Divisions should also be encouraged to develop their own communications strategies directly relevant to each Divisions' key stakeholders. A Social Media strategy and overhaul of the current website is

advisable in order to reach out to more potential users of research produced by ESCWA.

- ❖ ESCWA should make a strategic decision on how it wants to use the Regional Advisory function. From this evaluation, Regional Advisors appear as an underutilization of a potentially very strategic resource. Clarity should be brought with regards to the extent to which technical advisory services should link to regular Programmes of Work and if not, then what should they link to and how should this be captured.
- ❖ ESCWA Divisions should not have to conform to reporting against specific pre-set expected outcomes other than those clearly stemming from their Theory of Change and on which they have a clear influence.