



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
23 March 2015

Original: English

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Seventy-first session

Bangkok, 25-29 May 2015

Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

Evaluation pursuant to resolution 67/4: Establishment of the Asian and Pacific centre for the development of disaster information management

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Note by the secretariat**

Summary

Pursuant to resolution 67/4 of 25 May 2011, the present paper provides the findings and recommendations of the independent evaluation on the establishment of the Asian and Pacific centre for the development of disaster information management in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Overall, the evaluation found concrete evidence to support the need for and benefits of establishing the centre under the auspices of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and recommended that the Commission consider establishing it as a regional institution. The Commission may wish to pay particular attention to that recommendation, while taking into account the specific requirements for establishing the centre indicated in the paper, and to provide the secretariat with guidance on this matter.

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* E/ESCAP/71/L.1/Rev.1.

** The present paper was submitted late owing to the lengthy process needed to finalize the evaluation report.

I. Background

1. In accordance with resolution 67/4 of 25 May 2011, the Commission decided to initiate the process for the establishment of the Asian and Pacific centre for the development of disaster information management (hereafter “the centre”) in the Islamic Republic of Iran and invited all members and associate members to participate actively in the process of developing the programme of the centre and to support its activities. In the same resolution, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to support the process for the establishment of the centre and include in the secretariat’s evaluation plan for 2013 an evaluation of the above-mentioned activities and the need for, and benefit of, establishing the centre as a subsidiary body of the Commission for the development of disaster information management, and to submit the results of that evaluation to the Commission at its seventieth session.
2. At its seventieth session (phase I), the Commission took note of the request of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to postpone the evaluation related to the establishment of the centre and decided to review the results of the evaluation at the seventy-first session in May 2015.
3. On the basis of the above-mentioned request, the secretariat commissioned an external evaluation team from September 2014 to January 2015 to conduct the evaluation of the centre. The conclusions and recommendations, as prepared by the evaluation team, are transmitted to the Commission through the present note.¹ A presentation on the outcome of the evaluation by the lead evaluator was made to the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission at its 359th session.²

II. Purpose and method

4. The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the activities under paragraph 4 of resolution 67/4 and the need for, and benefit of, establishing the centre as a subsidiary body of the Commission for the development of disaster information management. It followed the norms, standards and procedures on evaluation as set out in the ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation System in order to ensure the design and conduct of an independent, objective and high-quality evaluation. The secretariat engaged an external evaluation team comprising a lead evaluator and a research assistant to undertake the evaluation in as rigorous a manner as possible. In accordance with evaluation practice at ESCAP, a Reference Group was established to lend methodological and logistical support to the evaluation process. Furthermore, the Reference Group facilitated the engagement of all relevant stakeholders in the evaluation process.
5. The evaluation was undertaken between September 2014 and January 2015 and followed appropriate evaluation approaches and tools, including individual interviews, focus group discussions with various stakeholders, survey questionnaires and review and analysis of related documents. The evaluation team also participated in the joint Regional Expert Group Meeting on Capacity Development for Disaster Information Management, which was held in Bangkok on October 2014, and had discussions with representatives

¹ The complete evaluation report is available at www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/APDIM-Evaluation-Report.pdf.

² See ACPR/359/RD/1/Rev.1.

and experts from Governments, United Nations organizations and other partner institutions concerning the need for, and benefits of, establishing the centre as a subsidiary body of the Commission.

6. The evaluation was informed by the outcome of the intensive consultations organized jointly by ESCAP and the centre with government officials and technical experts, including through the following subregional and regional expert group meetings:

(a) Expert Group Meeting on Capacity Development for Disaster Information Management in North and Central Asia, which was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 26 and 27 February 2014;

(b) Expert Group Meeting on Capacity Development for Disaster Information Management in South and South-West Asia, which was held in New Delhi on 16 and 17 April 2014;

(c) Regional Expert Group Meeting on Capacity Development for Disaster Information Management, which was held in Bangkok on 21 and 22 October 2014.

7. The Evaluation Team also conducted an evaluation mission to Tehran in December 2014 and held discussions with several senior officials from the Government and members of the United Nations country team.

III. Matters for consideration by the Commission and follow-up

8. The secretariat welcomed the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation, which were derived from intensive consultations undertaken by the Evaluation Team with member States, United Nations agencies and other development partners of ESCAP. It greatly appreciated the full cooperation accorded by the member States, the host Government and other development partners to the Evaluation Team by engaging in constructive interviews and discussions and providing relevant information for addressing the evaluation issues.

9. The Commission may wish to pay particular attention to recommendation 1, which is contained in the annex of the present paper and also the full evaluation report, which calls for the Commission to consider the establishment of the centre as a regional institution operating under the auspices of ESCAP. In its consideration of the matter, the Commission may wish to emphasize the requirements for establishing the centre as indicated in recommendation 1, including the issues of the centre's financial sustainability, the management and operation of which shall be fully funded through voluntary contributions from the host Government, its alignment with the governance structure of the existing ESCAP regional institutions and full integration into the programme of work of the secretariat — in particular under subprogramme 5 on information and communications technology and disaster risk reduction. The Commission may also wish to consider the outcome of the further study and analysis it had requested in its resolution 69/1 on the proposals to reform the Commission's conference structure, including the proposal to reform the governance structure of the regional institutions and their integration within the secretariat's programme of work.³ Accordingly, any decision made by the Commission concerning the centre would need to be aligned with the outcome of the review of the conference structure.

³ See E/ESCAP/69/27.

10. Regarding the remaining recommendations (2 to 5), the secretariat stands ready to support the Commission in ensuring their full implementation subject to its decision to establish the centre as a regional institution of ESCAP.

Annex

Evaluation of the Asian and Pacific centre for the development of disaster information management

Conclusions

Relevance

The need to establish a regional centre to support vulnerable member States to bridge their disaster information management gaps is evident and is based on explicit member State views and requests made at Commission sessions in the form of resolutions 63/10, 64/10, 66/8 and 67/4 and the three outcome documents of the expert group meetings, the disaster risk profile of the region, the unmet disaster information needs identified in the various regional disaster reports and the national United Nations Development Assistance Framework, as well as the member States' explicit views and request. The evaluation found that establishing the centre would strengthen, in particular, the capacities of the more vulnerable countries and subregions within the Asia-Pacific region in dealing with disaster information management.

Concerns over duplication with other regional organizations can be allayed as the centre can deliver unique services and products. Indeed, currently there is no evidence of the potential for significant duplication. At the same time, the demands for disaster information management in the region are high. In essence, the question becomes more one of careful coordination, rather than one of duplication.

Establishing the centre with the status of an ESCAP subsidiary body would provide greater visibility, policy influence and leverage for its planned activities. Furthermore, its establishment as a subsidiary body would enhance the member States' willingness to engage with it.

The convening power of ESCAP adds credibility to the centre among the member States as well as with its donors. This raises the expectation that ESCAP will assume a vital role in nurturing the centre. A strong institutional commitment from ESCAP can influence the centre's future positively. However, given the need to ensure the centre's financial sustainability in view of its current reliance on only one source of funding, its continuation as a subsidiary body after the initial five years of operation should be conditional on the host country's continuing to bear financial responsibility for it.

Effectiveness

Taking the first steps is a challenging task for any organization — and the centre is no exception. Nevertheless, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has made significant progress in laying the foundations for the centre's operations, including passing a parliamentary act that details the Government's financial commitments to the centre, procuring a dedicated office building and establishing interim management for the centre and signing agreements with two national centres, namely the Building and Housing Research Centre and the National Cartographic Centre.

With the support of ESCAP, the centre has successfully developed a draft strategy and workplan to address disaster information management needs in the Asia-Pacific region. The evaluation found that the centre had concluded three expert group meetings and one capacity development training session on microzonation, and had planned future activities and

initiatives that reflect the needs and aspirations of the ESCAP member States. Furthermore, the evaluation found that in planning its activities, the centre had given due priority to the more vulnerable countries and subregions within the Asia-Pacific region.

The aforementioned workplan is aligned on ESCAP subprogramme 5 on information and communications technology and disaster risk reduction. The current workplan covers a broad range of potential activities. Implementing those potential activities will be a major challenge, unless a clear list of priorities as regards geographical and subject matter is established. It is essential to fully contextualize the ownership of member countries within each subregion with respect to the strategy and workplan.

Since 2011, the centre has engaged with ESCAP and its subregional offices with increasing intensity. In particular, the organization of expert group meetings in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and New Delhi show that the centre has the capacity to successfully cooperate not only with the ESCAP secretariat, but also with its subregional offices.

Forward-looking conclusions

The financial viability of the centre is contingent on voluntary contributions from ESCAP member States, which in the first phase consist solely of contributions from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has committed itself to bearing the costs of establishing, as well as operating, the centre and its programme for five years with a maximum budget of \$50 million. In addition, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran confirmed that it will provide in-kind contributions in the form of office space and other items.

In accordance with the draft work programme (see annex IV of the evaluation report), the centre would provide disaster information management services that are relevant to the whole of the Asia-Pacific region, with a particular focus on more vulnerable States. Furthermore, the governance of the centre would comprise of representatives from a broad range of member and associate members, including the host Government.

The process of establishing a regional institution in accordance with ESCAP practices is a lengthy process. The centre will benefit from a dedicated management team to lead this process and to keep the momentum created by the expert group meetings in determining more precisely needs and fine-tuning the substance of its workplan.

The centre lacks visibility, hence knowledge of the centre's status and activities is limited among its key stakeholders. The centre has not been effective in widespread and regular dissemination of information among its key stakeholders about its achievements and the challenges it has faced.

The centre's strategy relies on collaboration with a broad range of organizations, including United Nations entities and other regional and subregional organizations. The wide network of partners with which the centre seeks partnerships can be seen as an extension of its capacity to make an impact on development in the region.

Making additional resources available to the centre would significantly enhance its positive impact on disaster information management in the region. South-South cooperation and capacity-building could gradually leverage resources, especially human resources, within the Asia-Pacific region.

The prevailing conditions in the Islamic Republic of Iran necessitate acknowledgment of particular issues that may affect the centre's operationalization, including organizing international fund transfers and procurement and recruitment of international staff. Partnerships with other United Nations entities, such as the United Nations Development Programme, may be sought to facilitate the operationalization of the centre in its initial phases.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

In light of the growing need for regional disaster information services and in acknowledgment of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran's strong commitment to provide financial support to the centre, it is recommended that the Commission consider establishing the centre as a regional institution operating under the auspices of ESCAP in accordance with the following requirements:

- (a) The management and operation of centre shall be fully funded through voluntary contributions from the host Government;
- (b) The Centre shall have international and national staff who shall be ESCAP staff members, including a Director at the D1 level and initially three or four professional staff and support staff, appointed under the appropriate United Nations rules and regulations;
- (c) The Director of the centre shall report to the Executive Secretary of ESCAP on the administration of the centre and implementation of its programme of work in the same manner as the other regional institutions;
- (d) The programme of work of the centre shall be aligned on subprogramme 5 of ESCAP on information and communications technology and disaster risk reduction.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the centre be established with an arrangement made for deciding upon its continuation after five years of operations, based on the results of an independent evaluation of the centre to assess its performance and relevance as well as its financial status.

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that, during its first phase of operations, the centre focuses on the most vulnerable countries in the region, including as a priority those in North and Central Asia as well as South and South-West Asia. It is also recommended that during its first phase, the centre focuses on earthquakes, and that it delivers a programme of work that targets a few countries with the most urgent needs and aims to support them in establishing long-term capacities.

Recommendation 3

In order to maximize the benefits that the establishment of the centre could potentially generate for the Asia-Pacific region, it is recommended that a matrix mapping the needs, resources and capacities of member States in disaster information management be developed in consultation with the relevant United Nations entities and regional and subregional organizations.

Recommendation 4

The process of establishing a regional institution in accordance with United Nations rules and regulations can be a lengthy process. Consequently, it is recommended that a dedicated management team for the centre be established, which would be responsible for fine-tuning and implementing the centre's programme of work and supporting the necessary steps for its establishment as an ESCAP regional institution, including the conclusion of a headquarters agreement between the host Government and the United Nations. Furthermore, it is recommended that the proposed dedicated management team shall include international and national staff who are to be recruited by ESCAP on a temporary basis, to be funded by the host Government through extrabudgetary contributions.

Recommendation 5

The centre should develop a communication strategy to disseminate information on its activities and progress. The centre would benefit from more widespread and regular dissemination of its achievements and the challenges it has faced to the member States, the relevant United Nations agencies and potential partner organizations and institutions in the region.
