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REPORT ON THE EVALUATION OF ESCAP PUBLICATIONS

SUMMARY

The present document reports on the outcome of a comprehensive evaluation of ESCAP publications conducted in 2002 as part of the Executive Secretary's revitalization programme. The report contains a plan of action to improve the planning, production, processing and dissemination of ESCAP publications. The Commission is invited to consider the document and provide guidance to the secretariat in its implementation of the plan of action.

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Introduction

1. One of the key functions of ESCAP is to promote sharing of knowledge and experiences on economic and social issues in Asia and the Pacific. To do this effectively, it is necessary for ESCAP to be an authoritative source of timely economic and social information, particularly covering the thematic areas of poverty reduction, managing globalization and emerging social issues. The secretariat's programme of work currently includes a range of analytical work, as reflected in publications, printed technical materials, training manuals and guides that have practical value for government agencies and other institutions in the region.
2. Given the importance of this area of work, the Executive Secretary, as part of ESCAP's revitalization, established a Publications Committee chaired by the Deputy Executive Secretary to oversee the conduct of an evaluation of the secretariat's publications programme.
3. The present report provides information on the methodology of the evaluation, the key findings of the assessment and the actions to be taken by the secretariat to improve the usefulness of ESCAP publications and other printed material.
4. The secretariat also took the opportunity, through this exercise, to implement measures to streamline the ESCAP publications programme and reduce the number of publications, as requested by the Commission at its fifty-seventh session. Special guidelines were introduced in connection with the preparation of the programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005, based on which all publication proposals were scrutinized with a view to eliminating those that were found to have weak linkages with priority programme areas, as identified by the Commission at its fifty-eighth session. In other cases, publications were consolidated into thematic volumes and others were proposed for dissemination electronically in lieu of the print format.
5. Through that streamlining exercise, the secretariat was able to achieve a 47 per cent reduction in the number of publications from the current biennium to the next (from 189 in 2002-2003 to 101 in 2004-2005). Continuing efforts will be made to review the publications programme with a view to further reductions, where appropriate.

I. EVALUATION EXERCISE

6. The primary purpose of the evaluation was to assess the impact of ESCAP publications on the end-users and, based on that outcome, propose measures to enhance the quality and usefulness of ESCAP publications and improve the planning, production, processing and dissemination processes.
7. The evaluation covered 34 recurrent and 82 non-recurrent publications produced in the biennium 2000-2001 and 13 recurrent publications produced in 2002. It focused on both qualitative and procedural aspects of ESCAP publications, including assessment of the contents, procedures for planning and processing, strategies for dissemination and marketing and institutional considerations.

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8. The evaluation included both internal and external elements to ensure objectivity. An external consultant, with in-depth experience in this area of work, was recruited to work with the secretariat to conduct the evaluation.

9. Four primary data-collection methodologies were utilized: (a) desk studies, which focused on analysis of the types, primary purposes and target audiences of the publications produced; (b) questionnaire surveys, which were used to solicit direct feedback from selected end-users with regard to the relevance, usefulness, quality and effectiveness of ESCAP publications; (c) external interviews with key respondents in government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academic institutions who are users of ESCAP publications on aspects such as readership, relevance and quality of content; and (d) internal interviews with author divisions and ESCAP staff on qualitative and procedural aspects.

II. FINDINGS AND PLAN OF ACTION

10. The evaluation concluded with findings and a plan of action in five key areas: (a) quality assurance; (b) processing and preparation of publications; (c) design and presentation; (d) dissemination and marketing; and (e) institutional arrangements.

A. Quality assurance

11. While ESCAP publications were generally viewed as value added and distinct in providing information, the evaluation revealed the following: (a) a need to enhance the level of analysis of issues; (b) a need to feature more prominently the experiences and good practices of members and associate members; (c) a need for better synthesis of information; (d) a need for more timely and up-to-date information; and (e) a need for more user-friendly formats.

12. The evaluation further noted that peer group review of draft publications was conducted by some author divisions but was not uniformly undertaken as part of the secretariat's internal review procedures. The secretariat did not have an established procedure for attribution of authorship to staff, which was an accepted practice in most other institutions.

13. In the light of those findings, the following actions will be undertaken, as recommended by the evaluation:

Action 1.1 The secretariat will establish the following new criteria for quality assurance:

- (a) The content must be useful and relevant for the target group identified;
- (b) The content must provide sufficient detail about practices and experiences of members and associate members in the region that may not be readily available in the region;
- (c) The data and other information contained in the publication must be timely and up to date;

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- (d) The analytical rigour of the publication must be high, syntheses must be concise and attention must be given to policy recommendations that are responsive and address emerging economic and social issues;
- (e) The content must be distinct and value added, with minimal overlap with materials published elsewhere;
- (f) The content of the publication must contribute to increasing public awareness of the services provided by ESCAP.

Action 1.2 The secretariat will institute peer review as an integral part of the publication process.

Action 1.3 The secretariat will indicate the names of staff who are major contributors to articles, chapters or other parts of a publication to provide an incentive for high-quality analytical work.

B. Processing and preparation of publications

14. The Publications Committee reviewed the existing *Guide to ESCAP Publication Activities* issued in 1999. The evaluation revealed the need for more uniform compliance with ESCAP internal guidelines on drafting, processing, distribution and peer review of publication materials. The Committee also provided additional guidelines for incorporation into the *Guide* and recommended that it be revised to include the outcomes of the evaluation exercise.

15. The evaluation emphasized that the benefits expected from publications should be weighed against the cost in both monetary and non-monetary terms. While publications may be highly valued, especially when the information is unavailable elsewhere, opportunities to reduce the cost of publications, such as a reduction in printing costs, should not be overlooked. Possibilities for co-publishing with established publishing companies, preferably ones in the region, should be explored as a means for active promotion of publications at lower cost.

16. The following actions will thus be undertaken:

Action 2.1 The secretariat will revise the *Guide to ESCAP Publication Activities* to reflect the outcomes of the evaluation exercise and adopt measures to ensure full compliance by secretariat staff.

Action 2.2 The secretariat will analyse the costs and benefits (including non-monetary costs and benefits) to improve the budgeting and costing of publications and, where appropriate, utilize in-house printing facilities.

Action 2.3 The secretariat will introduce the concept of co-publishing on a pilot basis for two or three selected publications.

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C. Design and presentation

17. The evaluation found a wide variation in design and presentation of ESCAP publications, which projected an inconsistent image to outsiders. A new and uniform design is needed for covers and formats to enhance the corporate identity of ESCAP.

18. The evaluation further noted that ESCAP publications were highly diversified in terms of the types of publications issued, the sectoral coverage and the target groups served. For the latter, the wide range of target groups of readers with divergent needs included Governments, NGOs, training and academic institutions and private corporations. The evaluation recognized that different types of publications were required to meet the specific needs of key target audiences.

19. With regard to the primary target of ESCAP publications, namely, Governments, the Committee found that existing publications did not adequately respond to their needs. For this group, information was required at two levels. The first level was for ministers and other high-level policy makers, who needed policy briefings and executive summaries in a short and concise format. The second level was for civil servants, who were responsible for drafting and implementing policies. This group needed more detailed analysis and information, including intercountry comparisons.

20. Based on the above findings, the following actions will be undertaken:

Action 3.1 The secretariat will implement a new and uniform design for ESCAP publications to carry a strong corporate identity.

Action 3.2 The secretariat will establish standardized categories of ESCAP publications, including:

- (a) Flagship publications (e.g., *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific*; *State of the Environment in Asia and the Pacific*);
- (b) Theme-based series (poverty reduction, managing globalization and emerging social issues), including subseries under each theme, namely, (i) policy papers, (ii) research papers, (iii) training manuals and (iv) journals;
- (c) Statistical and reference publications;
- (d) Public information materials to increase public awareness of ESCAP accomplishments and activities;
- (e) Issue-oriented publications.

Action 3.3 The secretariat will introduce hybrid publications in order to accommodate the different needs of target groups, including ministers and policy makers, who require shorter, more concise policy-oriented papers. More specifically, the publications will comprise:

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- (a) Briefing papers on all publications not exceeding four pages (print and web);
- (b) Synthesis and analysis, 16-32 pages long (print and web);
- (c) More detailed information on diskettes, CD ROMs and the Internet.

D. Dissemination and marketing

21. In addressing issues concerning the dissemination and marketing of ESCAP publications, the evaluation identified the need to ensure more effective distribution of both print and electronic publications to key target audiences and to eliminate wastage through more selective distribution of print copies to users. To facilitate more effective distribution and better meet the needs of the target audience, a prudent mix of publications in print and electronic format and improved dissemination of publications were viewed as important.

22. The evaluation recognized the benefit of translating ESCAP publications into local languages to increase sharing of knowledge and ensure that ESCAP's work had a greater impact at the national and local levels.

23. The evaluation also found that many potential beneficiaries of ESCAP publications did not know that they were available. To generate more awareness of the work of ESCAP, a catalogue of ESCAP publications should be prepared as part of the secretariat's public relations work. Furthermore, ESCAP publications should be reviewed in journals and bulletins enjoying a wide general or specialist readership.

24. The following actions will thus be undertaken:

Action 4.1 **The secretariat will establish a document alert system announcing new publications by e-mail. The system will be linked to web pages to ensure that the widest possible target audience which can benefit from the publications is informed of their availability.**

Action 4.2 **The secretariat will distribute its publications in printed form more selectively to defined target groups and minimize automatic initial distribution of print copies to standard mailing lists. In this connection, the author divisions will carefully review the needs of various target groups for each new publication.**

Action 4.3 **The secretariat will encourage translation into local languages to generate wider distribution at the national and local levels.**

Action 4.4 **The secretariat will introduce a catalogue of publications with annotations which will constitute a central guide to ESCAP publications.**

Action 4.5 The secretariat will prepare book reviews of major ESCAP publications for distribution to scholarly journals or publications, wire services, dailies and regional news agencies. The reviews should be sent to selected e-mail lists in government, NGOs, think tanks and other relevant institutions.

E. Institutional arrangements

25. The existing Publications Committee is purely advisory in function. To review and monitor ESCAP's publications strategy and provide ongoing advice to the Executive Secretary on relevant policies and programmes, the role of the Committee should be expanded.

26. The evaluation reaffirmed that the substantive divisions, as subject specialists, were in the best position to initiate publication projects that would meet the needs of ESCAP members and associate members and to supervise the process up to the pre-publication stage. It was thus necessary to conduct regular training programmes to enhance staff capacity in areas such as drafting and technical writing skills for quality assurance of the content and readability of ESCAP publications.

27. The evaluation, while recognizing that the publication process in ESCAP should be decentralized to author divisions, also observed that some administrative support functions could be undertaken centrally to obtain economies of scale.

28. Based on the above findings, the following actions will be taken:

Action 5.1 The secretariat will reconstitute the Publications Committee with a wider scope of functions to address issues related to both substance and process.

Action 5.2 The secretariat will establish training programmes on a range of capacity-building activities for staff to ensure that quality standards are met.

Action 5.3 The secretariat will establish a publications office to ensure effective coordination and provide support to author divisions to improve the planning, presentation, dissemination and marketing of publications.

III. CONCLUSION

29. Publications are critical to ESCAP's successful operation as they provide the analytical foundation for both its normative and operational work. The Executive Secretary has therefore directed the Deputy Executive Secretary to oversee the implementation of the above measures to improve the usefulness of ESCAP publications to end-users. Hence, in 2003, the secretariat will initiate the implementation of the above actions. These efforts are being pursued as part of the overall revitalization process at ESCAP and United Nations system-wide reform to further strengthen the Organization.