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Programme questions: evaluation

Evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific: subprogramme 4, Environment and development

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) assessed the relevance, effectiveness, coherence and sustainability of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP): subprogramme 4, Environment and development, for the period 2018–2021.

The areas of work of the Environment and Development Division, which implements the subprogramme, were considered highly relevant to the needs and priorities of member States in the region by most stakeholders, and its activities were generally aligned with its mandates. In addition to its mandate provided in the 2017 Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific, the Division was assigned responsibilities in 2016 and 2017 to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and work on climate and ocean issues, respectively. However, the Division was given a significant additional role related to the 2030 Agenda, and its work in that regard until 2021 affected its work on the originally mandated substantive issues. The Division has responded satisfactorily to several requests for specific support from member States, but weaknesses were observed in its strategy, programming, monitoring and resource allocation, and some of its identified comparative advantages were not fully realized.

The Division achieved commendable results on the 2030 Agenda, sustainable urban development and, to some extent, climate change, but its capacity-building activities often lacked the focus and scale needed to produce tangible outcomes that address the significant needs of stakeholders. The Division's knowledge products were generally of high quality but, except for a handful of major reports, were not

* [E/AC.51/2023/1](#).



widely known or used. Its consensus-building work contributed to a few intergovernmental resolutions, but the interlinkages among its three core functions – research and analysis, convening and capacity-building – needed strengthening.

The Division's internal collaboration on the 2030 Agenda and its regional-level partnerships with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) were generally effective. However, substantive collaboration to synergize multidisciplinary expertise at ESCAP and country-level coherence with other United Nations entities needed strengthening. The Division worked with a wide network of civil society organizations at the regional level but needed to enhance partnerships at the country and local levels. The Division contributed to sustainable results related to the 2030 Agenda and urban development but faced several challenges in creating lasting change at the country level. The Division's incorporation of the cross-cutting issues of gender, human rights and disability was prominent in its work related to the 2030 Agenda but needed improvement in other areas.

OIOS makes eight important recommendations to the Division:

- Focus work on specific transboundary issues that are fully aligned with the Ministerial Declaration.
- Develop a technical assistance strategy to focus its capacity-building delivery.
- Prepare a list of its offers for outreach to key stakeholders and form communities of practice.
- Place more prominence on the sustainable urban development work.
- Strengthen the strategic utilization of intergovernmental mechanisms and the interlinkages between its different functions, including strengthening its flagship reports.
- Strengthen regional coordination efforts and engagement with other United Nations entities.
- Integrate the Disaster Risk Reduction Section into the Division.
- Strengthen the mainstreaming of the cross-cutting issues of gender, human rights and disability.

I. Introduction

1. The evaluation objective was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, effectiveness, coherence and sustainability of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP): subprogramme 4, Environment and development. The evaluation focus on subprogramme 4 was based on a programme-level risk assessment and scoping exercise, described in the evaluation inception paper.

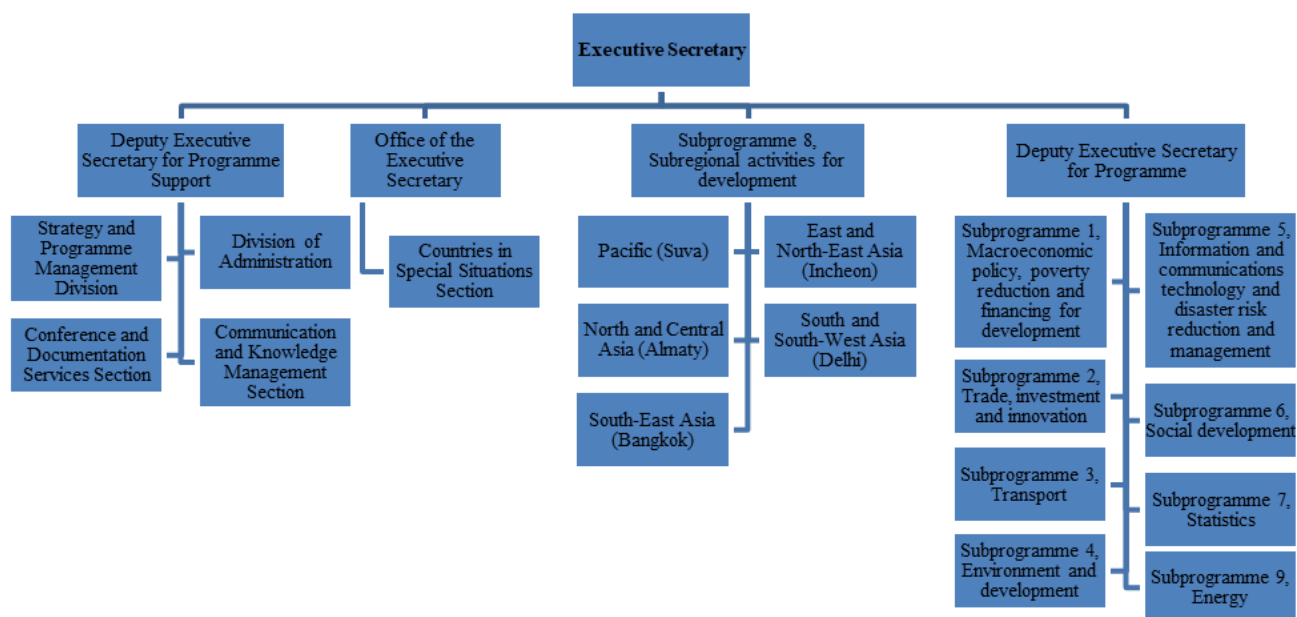
2. The evaluation meets the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards.¹ The management response of ESCAP was considered and is provided in the annex.

II. Background

3. ESCAP was established in 1947 as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council and a regional arm of the United Nations. It is the largest regional intergovernmental platform, serving 53 member States and 9 associate members covering more than 60 per cent of the world's population.

4. ESCAP is headed by the Executive Secretary, an Under-Secretary-General, who is responsible for its overall direction and management, and supported by two Deputy Executive Secretaries (D-2). It delivers its mandates through nine subprogrammes (figure I).

Figure I
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific organizational structure



5. The average annual budget of ESCAP during the three-year period from 2019 to 2021 was approximately \$77.16 million,² 60 per cent of which was devoted to the nine subprogrammes. Its funding source comprised assessed contributions through

¹ United Nations Evaluation Group, "Norms and standards for evaluation" (New York, 2016).

² A/75/6 (Sect. 19).

the regular budget, the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation, the United Nations Development Account and extrabudgetary resources.

6. The ESCAP programme budget for 2021, excluding the five regional institutes, was estimated at \$70.67 million, of which 42 per cent was from the regular budget, 39 per cent from extrabudgetary resources, 16 per cent from the United Nations Development Account and 3 per cent from the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation account.

Subprogramme 4, Environment and development

7. Subprogramme 4 is implemented by the Environment and Development Division of ESCAP, and its main objective in 2021 was to reduce the negative impacts of growth on the natural environment and to improve human well-being in urban and rural environments by building the capacity of member States to: (a) strengthen climate action and sustainable resource use; (b) realize sustainable urban development; and (c) eliminate pollution and waste. The Division supported the Committee on Environment and Development and the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. Through its work in the three above-mentioned focus areas, the Division sought to contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 2, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17 (see figure II).

Figure II

Sustainable Development Goals to which the Environment and Development Division sought to contribute



8. The Division's activities were implemented as part of the three core functions of ESCAP:

(a) **Research and analysis.** Providing innovative research, analysis and policy ideas to support evidence-based decision-making;

(b) **Convening role.** Providing a regional platform for deliberation and building consensus on environment- and development-related issues and sustainable development;

(c) **Capacity-building.** Providing training and advisory services to strengthen national efforts and influence environmental policymaking in member States.

9. The Division was headed by a Director (D-1) and composed of two sections, the Environment and Development Policy Section and the Sustainable Urban Development Section – each headed by a Section Chief (P-5) – with a combined staff of 23. The total 2021 budget of the Division was \$8.6 million: \$3.1 million for the regular budget; \$1.3 million for 2 projects funded by the United Nations Development Account; and \$3.8 million for 11 projects funded by extrabudgetary resources and the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation. The Division also participated as an implementing partner in five projects funded by the United Nations Development Account and led by other Secretariat entities.

10. The Division also backstopped the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization, which was evaluated in 2020 and was excluded from the scope of the evaluation.

III. Scope and methodology

11. The evaluation covered the period 2018–2021 and used a mixed-method approach incorporating the following data sources:

(a) Desk review of key programme documents and performance data, including budgets, project documents and workplans, performance reports, evaluation and other oversight reports, intergovernmental proceedings, reports and resolutions, including other United Nations and external materials on Division work areas;

(b) 119 semi-structured interviews, including 29 with ESCAP staff (14 Division staff), 41 with staff from other United Nations entities at the regional and country-level offices, 17 with government officials from member States and 32 with partners, civil society organizations and other stakeholders. Overall, 35 per cent of interviewees were women and 61 per cent were based at the country level;

(c) Three online surveys:

(i) **Survey of ESCAP personnel.** There were 180 responses representing a 22 per cent response rate across all personnel,³ 35 per cent for professional staff, 41 per cent for staff at the P-5 and above and 51 per cent for Division personnel. Among the 141 staff who responded to the gender question, 52 per cent were women;

(ii) **Survey of United Nations entities personnel.** There were 46 responses (25 per cent response rate) from 11 United Nations entities, including resident coordinators and United Nations country teams, in the Asia-Pacific region. Two thirds of the respondents were based at country offices and 39 per cent of those responding to the gender question (44) were women;

(iii) **Survey of external stakeholders.** There were 87 responses (29 per cent response rate) from government officials, policymakers, implementing partners, donors and civil society organizations from 10 countries. One third of those responding to the gender question (51) were women;

(d) Quality review of 41 knowledge products (51 per cent of total), including reports, policy briefs, working papers, manuals and training materials;

(e) Six country case study analyses (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia and Thailand);

(f) Observation data, including online videos and virtual sessions of the Committee on Environment and Development, the Seventh Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, the seventy-seventh session of the Commission, the launch of various reports and one session of the Regional Collaborative Platform.

12. Key limitations of the evaluation included low accessibility to some key government officials and policymakers due to restrictions related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), and a lack of sufficient outcome-level results reported by the Division in its capacity-building interventions as part of project reports. The evaluation mitigated these limitations by relying on virtual interviews to the extent possible and consulting with a wide range of stakeholders, including other United Nations entities, implementing partners and civil society organizations, and by triangulating data collected from multiple sources.

³ A total of 831 Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) staff surveyed.

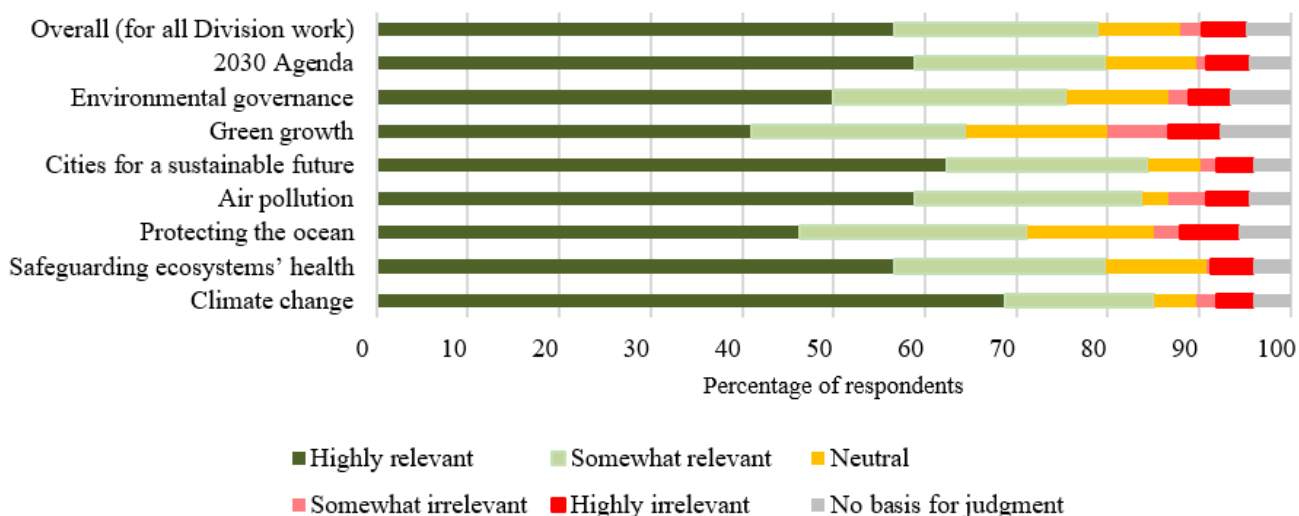
IV. Evaluation results

A. Division's work was highly relevant, and its activities generally aligned with its mandates; however, its significant role in support of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development resulted in the Division being spread too thin on mandated substantive issues

Division's thematic areas of work were highly relevant and aligned with its mandates

13. Stakeholders and staff members provided positive feedback about the relevance of the Division's thematic areas of work in the region. On average, 78 per cent of survey respondents considered most thematic areas to be highly or somewhat relevant (figure III). Interviewees widely shared this sentiment, while noting the global recognition of, and renewed attention to, climate change and the environment. The importance of the Asia-Pacific region – home to over 60 per cent of the global population and one of the fastest rates of urbanization, the source of over half of global greenhouse gas emissions and many countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change – in addressing global environment and climate challenges was also highlighted.

Figure III
Relevance of the thematic areas of work of the Division



Note: N=173, with "N" indicating the number of respondents.

14. The Division's capacity-building activities were also highly relevant. The majority of ESCAP respondents (79 per cent) assessed them as highly (42 per cent) or somewhat (37 per cent) relevant to the needs and priorities of member States. Similarly, three fourths of staff respondents considered the Division's knowledge products to be highly (40 per cent) or somewhat (35 per cent) relevant. Among the interviewees, 85 per cent of those with an opinion (n=34) considered the knowledge products relevant.

15. Interviewed government officials and personnel from United Nations entities and civil society organizations in all six case study countries also emphasized the very high relevance of subprogramme topics in their national contexts. In addition to the

high relevance and importance of its existing thematic areas, in 2016, the Division was assigned the responsibility for coordinating and leading ESCAP-wide work on the 2030 Agenda – one of the most relevant and visible areas of work of the United Nations system. As a result, the Division’s priority focus shifted to the 2030 Agenda (see paras. 28–30) even though that work was not included in the 2017 Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific, considered the blueprint for the Division’s work.⁴

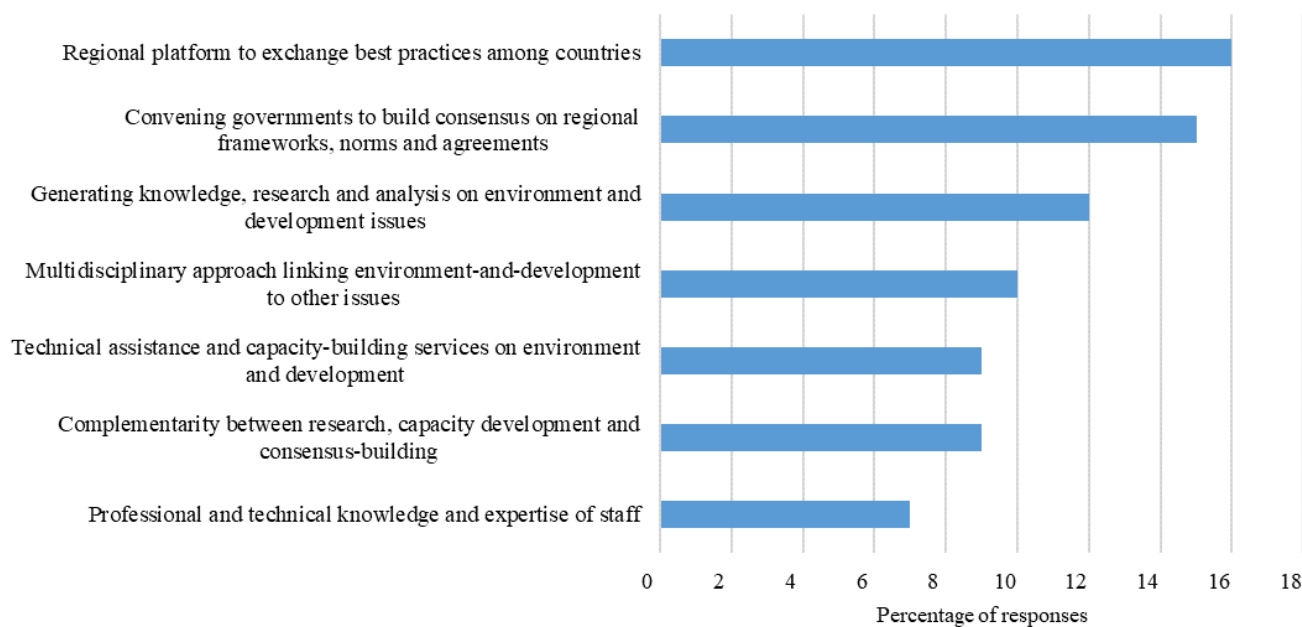
16. Promotion of green growth was a hallmark initiative of the Division during the period prior to the evaluation. After a change in leadership, the Division focused on a multitude of themes that were being addressed by several other United Nations entities, including resource efficiency, circular economy, oceans, plastic pollution, air pollution, stakeholder participation and urban development. Following the addition of responsibilities related to the 2030 Agenda, in 2016, and work on climate and ocean issues, in 2017, the Division heavily focused its work on the 2030 Agenda, which affected its work and visibility on its originally mandated areas. For example, among non-ESCAP survey respondents, less than one fifth were “very familiar” with the Division’s work, and those who were largely associated it with the 2030 Agenda. Interviewed stakeholders expressed high demand for the knowledge, data and regional platform for experience-sharing that the Division was positioned to provide in the originally mandated areas, especially on transboundary issues.

Stakeholders identified several ESCAP comparative advantages, but they have remained largely unrealized in the Division’s work

17. Survey respondents assessed the comparative advantages of ESCAP, listed in figure IV, as they applied to the Division.

Figure IV

Top seven comparative advantages of the Commission, as assessed by survey respondents



⁴ As contained in document [ESCAP/74/10/Add.1](#) and endorsed by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in its resolution 74/4.

18. Interviewees largely identified similar comparative advantages to those identified by survey respondents, with the top two being the Commission's role as a regional platform to exchange best practices and its convening power. The best examples of the realization of the top two comparative advantages were in the work related to the 2030 Agenda, and broadly in sustainable urban development (see result B). In general, implementing partners were highly appreciative of the Division's value added.

19. By contrast, the comparative advantage related to the multidisciplinary approach linking the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) was not fully realized in the Division's work (paras. 63–69).

20. Stakeholders identified the Division's key strengths, which included its country knowledge, effective communication, easy accessibility, proactive engagement, rich data, strategic vision, strong partnership and trusted reputation. Stakeholders also shared positive feedback on the quality of Division staff, including how flexibly they had adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic.

21. The key identified weaknesses of the Division included high staff turnover; lack of defined mandates, thematic focus and results orientation; duplication with other United Nations entities; low visibility; and weak collaboration with other ESCAP divisions, subregional offices and other United Nations entities.

Although the Division has responded well to specific member State requests for support, weaknesses were observed in its strategy, programming, monitoring and resource allocation

22. The Division has successfully responded to specific documented requests for support from member States, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Mongolia and Thailand. Staff interviewees referred to requests from several other countries, but there was no centralized system to monitor and follow up on member State requests. Furthermore, these requests were generally driven by the familiarity of the requestors or their networks with the Division's work or those who have previously engaged in Division activities. As a result, the Division responded to substantively disparate and one-off requests, including in areas better addressed by other United Nations entities with country presence, according to some stakeholders. The Division did not have a clear offer of national support work used for outreach to member States and country teams, nor did it have criteria for filtering and matching incoming requests, including referrals to other United Nations entities, where needed.

23. The lack of strategic outreach and programming sometimes led to a mismatch between where the Division allocated its resources and where needs were the highest. For example, its work on air pollution was not in the cities with the worst air quality, and its urban planning work was less present in countries with the fastest and least planned urbanization or in countries with special needs.

24. Division activities during the period 2018–2021 had a heavier concentration in the South-East Asia subregion, with 6 of the top 10 project countries located there, and was least concentrated in the Pacific (figure V). Contributing factors included geographical proximity, donor preference, demands from countries, established relations, visibility and knowledge of Division activities. This phenomenon was ESCAP-wide, as shown in an analysis of country-level work by the Strategy and Programme Management Division.

25. In addition, only 3 of the Division's top 10 project countries were countries with special needs, and fewer than half of staff survey respondents (48 per cent) considered the Division to be prioritizing the needs of countries with special needs in its activities. The Division considered that a focus on countries with special needs would

reduce its effectiveness, since the biggest challenges and potential opportunities for major improvements from an environment perspective are in the middle-income countries. However, these countries are the most vulnerable to the worst impact of the climate crisis, and are among the Organization's stated priorities.

Figure V
Distribution of Division project activities per country (2018–2021)



Source: OIOS analysis of data from ESCAP Programmatic Dashboard.

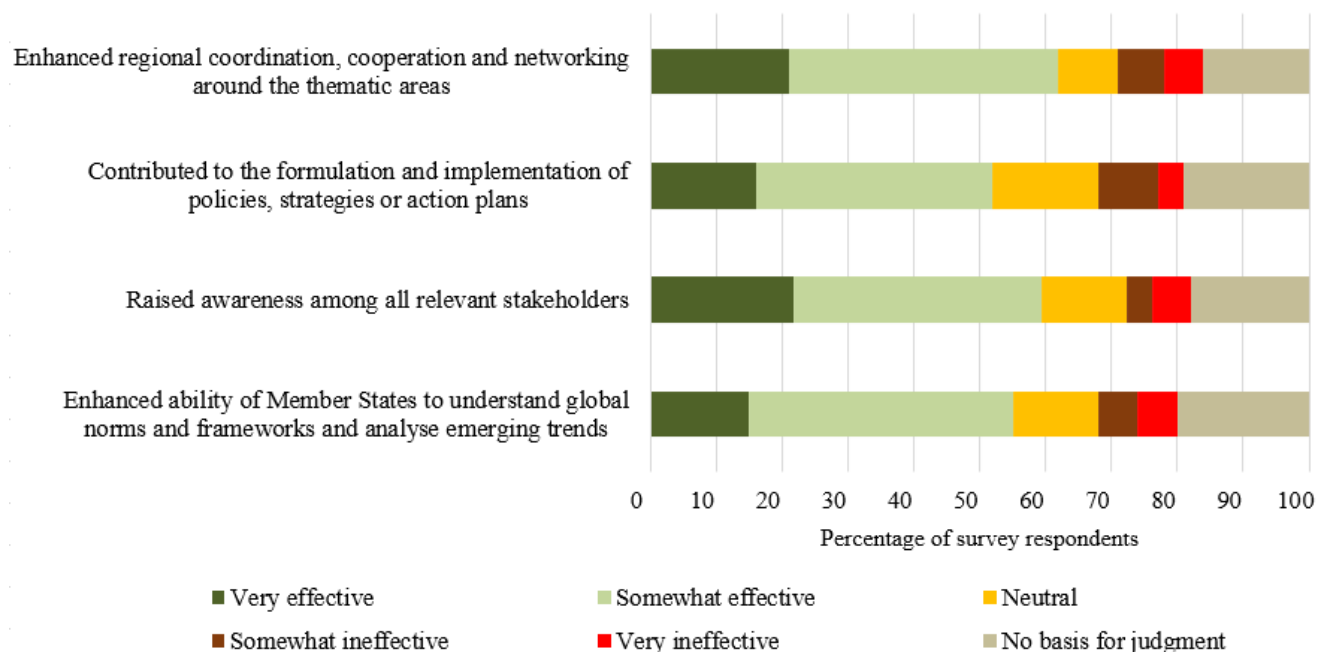
Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations for the map.

B. Division effectiveness was mixed, with most-prominent results achieved on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and sustainable urban development

Division produced commendable results in support of the 2030 Agenda, including sustainable urban development, though its capacity-building activities often lacked the focus and scale to address the significant needs of the region

26. On average, 57 per cent of survey respondents assessed the Division's work as very (18 per cent) or somewhat (39 per cent) effective in its contribution to the four areas listed in figure VI. The highest rated contribution was in enhancing regional cooperation and raising awareness.

Figure VI
Effectiveness of Division work, as assessed by survey respondents



Note: N=160, with “N” indicating the number of respondents.

27. The Division’s work on sustainable urban development was rated as the most effective by all survey respondents, and its work on the 2030 Agenda and climate change was assessed higher by non-ESCAP respondents.

Division played an instrumental role in facilitating ESCAP-wide work and regional United Nations system-wide engagement on the 2030 Agenda

28. The Division was highly effective in supporting work on the 2030 Agenda across ESCAP. It coordinated the annual Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development at the regional level, supported subregional Sustainable Development Goal forums and contributed to the high-level political forum on sustainable development. The Division supported countries in the preparation of their voluntary national reviews and spearheaded the voluntary local reviews initiative in several countries.

29. Both internal and external stakeholders recognized significant Division contributions in leading the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, with 730 and 850 participants in 2020 and 2019, respectively.⁵ It also supported the subregional forums and the Sustainable Development Goals Help Desk, and further supported an annual total of 10 countries in 2019 and 2020⁶ in the preparation of their voluntary national reviews, which were then submitted to high-level political forum. Funded by a project under tranche 10 of the United Nations Development Account, the Sustainable Development Goals Help Desk, launched in 2018, brought together relevant resources from over 100 entities on one platform to provide access to tools, knowledge, data and technical assistance on the Goals. It had over 50,000 registered

⁵ ESCAP/RFSD/2020/6 and ESCAP/75/5.

⁶ A/76/6 (Sect. 19), p. 5 and A/75/6 (Sect. 19), p. 6.

users and offered training and peer learning sessions benefiting more than 3,000 users from 20 countries.⁷

30. Interviewees confirmed that country-level officials benefited from the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and the Help Desk. They recognized the Division's contribution in localizing the Sustainable Development Goals through its voluntary local review guidelines and projects in seven cities in six countries, as well as the guidelines on stakeholder engagement for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Several countries acknowledged ESCAP support in their voluntary national reviews (e.g. Mongolia, Cambodia, Turkmenistan, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Kazakhstan).

Division work on urban development was highly valued and it contributed to advocacy on sustainable urbanization issues across the region; however, in some cases, its full impact was not realized

31. Through its publications, events, capacity-building projects and strong partnerships, the Sustainable Urban Development Section contributed to raising awareness and promoted tools for incorporating urbanization issues into regional dialogues and national policies. In 1993, ESCAP inaugurated the first Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, the success of which contributed to the formulation and launch of the World Urban Forum in 2002 by UN-Habitat. The Asia-Pacific Urban Forums served as a platform for urban policy actors to discuss emerging and critical urban development issues, share experiences, good practices and approaches, and build new partnerships for local, regional and national governments in achieving the New Urban Agenda in the Asia-Pacific region. In 2019, the Seventh Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, held in Malaysia, brought together over 5,000 stakeholders and established the Penang Platform for Sustainable Urbanization.

32. External stakeholders recognized the contributions made by the Sustainable Urban Development Section technical assistance and normative work on urban waste management (including plastic waste), localizing the Sustainable Development Goals and air pollution, as well as its e-learning and training programmes on mainstreaming climate change issues in urban policies, the Asia-Pacific Mayors Academy, smart cities, financing and the circular economy. Key interviewees saw urban data and trend analysis, showcasing and sharing best practices and being a regional platform for networking and learning as some of the strengths of ESCAP. This was partly because other United Nations entities were almost entirely project-funded and often lacked the capacity and predictable resources needed for research and analysis. Furthermore, the multidisciplinary nature of urban work was not fully realized, owing to its positioning as a section within the Division, its environment-focused disposition and a lack of urban experts among its staff. In addition, the approach of the Sustainable Urban Development Section, which involved working directly with medium and smaller cities through external partners, often left national-level policymakers and practitioners disengaged and unaware of its work, which affected the viability and scalability of activities.

Division's nascent work on climate change and the Paris Agreement was highly appreciated and in demand

33. The Division led several activities, including the organization of the Asia-Pacific Climate Week in 2019 and 2021 and its contribution to the Climate Action Summit in 2019. It facilitated the Asia-Pacific regional corners in the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and advocated the need to raise climate

⁷ A/75/6 (Sect. 19), pp. 32 and 33.

ambitions in nationally determined contributions. In particular, it supported the nationally determined contribution reviews of Mongolia and Myanmar.

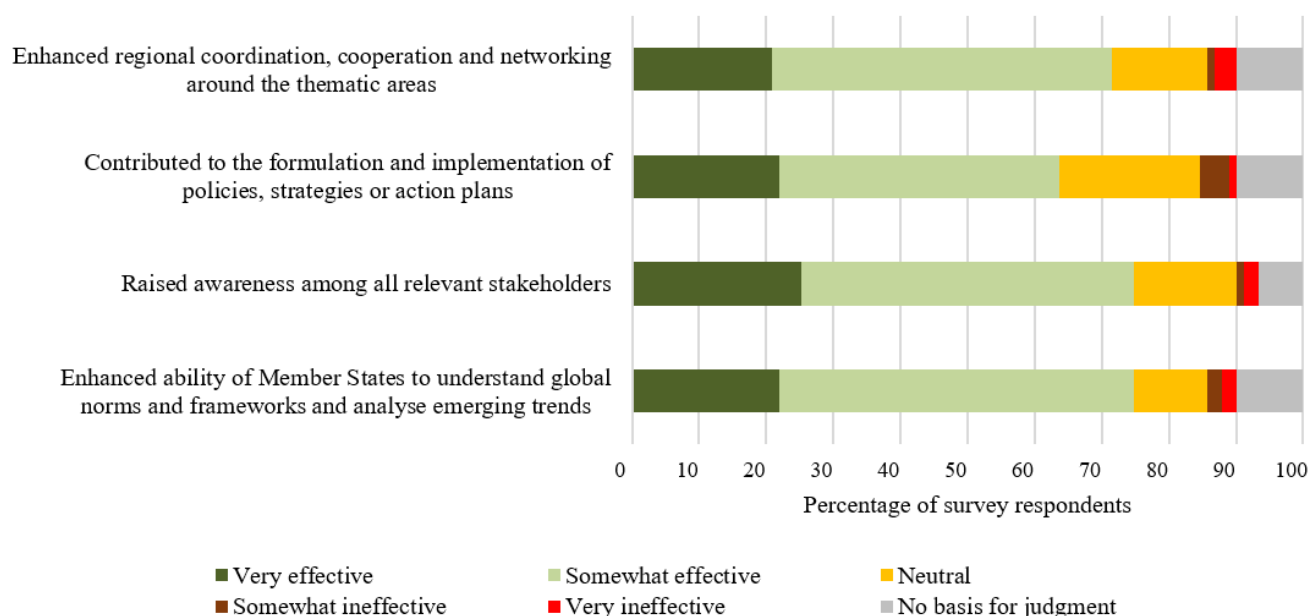
34. In late 2021, the Division published an assessment report on member States' commitments in their nationally determined contributions and how they contribute to keeping global temperatures below 2°C in accordance with the Paris Agreement. The Division co-chaired the issue-based coalition on climate change mitigation and air pollution with UNEP at the regional level and developed a carbon pricing model based on an ESCAP macroeconomic model. It worked on enhancing awareness of the importance of ocean ecosystems for the environmental health of the planet. The Sustainable Urban Development Section also supported a city-based climate initiative (including the Ocean Cities Project). Stakeholders expressed strong demand for ESCAP leadership in fostering climate action and identifying regional and country-level priorities.

Overall, the Division's capacity-building work contributed to several tangible outcomes

35. On average, 71 per cent of all survey respondents assessed the effectiveness of the Division's capacity-building work positively (figure VII). Respondents highlighted the Division's contribution to raising awareness and enhancing the ability of member States to understand global norms, as well as enhancing regional cooperation on thematic issues.

Figure VII

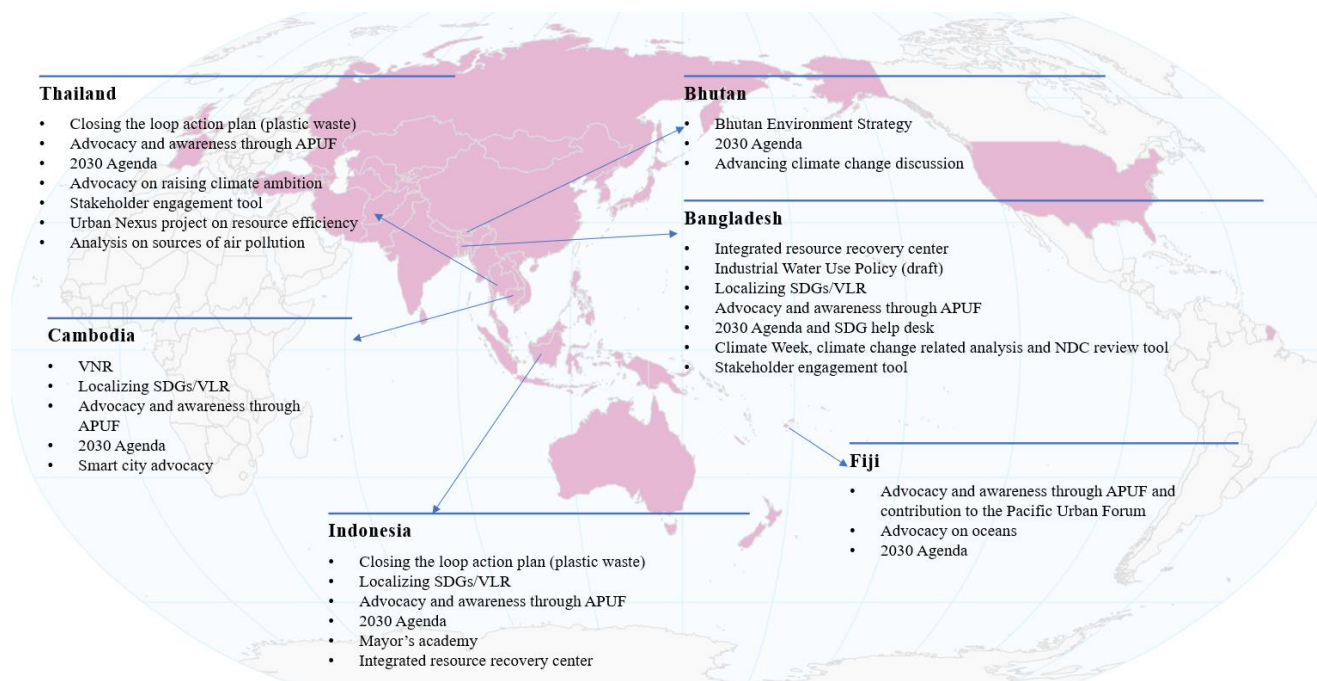
Contribution of Division capacity-building activities, as assessed by survey respondents



Note: N=91, with "N" indicating the number of respondents.

36. The Division's activities contributed to several specific intermediate-level outcomes and general advocacy in the six case study countries, as shown in figure VIII.

Figure VIII
Division contributions to advocacy, policy and strategy design in the six case study countries



Source: Analysis of survey, interview and secondary data.

Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations for the map.

Abbreviations: APUF, Asia-Pacific Urban Forum; SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals; VLR, voluntary local review; VNR, voluntary national review.

However, some capacity-building activities were small and appeared more opportunistic than strategic

37. Despite their relatively small budgets (see table) covering multiple countries and with limited follow-up, the Division's capacity-building projects produced good results, as discussed above.

Division capacity-building projects (2018–2021)

Funding source	Number	Total budget	Average budget
		(United States dollars)	
United Nations Development Account	4	1 836 000	459 000
Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation	6	502 188	83 698
extrabudgetary resources	11	4 444 836	404 076
Total	21	6 783 024	323 001

38. Notwithstanding the good results of some projects as discussed above, overall, some projects were not strategically formulated to address specific and targeted issues. They mostly responded to the availability of funding and familiarity with the intended beneficiaries and partners, owing partly to the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation funding modality, whereby small funds were allocated to ad hoc country requests for capacity-building. However, since not many countries were

aware of the Division’s offer of services, such requests normally came through personal connections or networking (see para. 24).

39. Projects also mostly lacked linkages with the United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks. Projects were more likely to succeed where the three pillars of ESCAP work – capacity-building, research and intergovernmental processes – had strong interlinkages, as in the case of the Sustainable Development Goals (see paras. 55–60).

Division’s knowledge products were generally of high quality but, except for a handful of major reports, not widely known or used

40. Between 2018 and 2021, the Division produced or contributed to approximately 80 knowledge products comprising flagship publications, thematic reports, policy briefs, manuals and training materials, covering various subprogramme topics. The most used words in 76 publications are included in figure IX, which offers a quick glance at the substantive issues addressed.

Figure IX

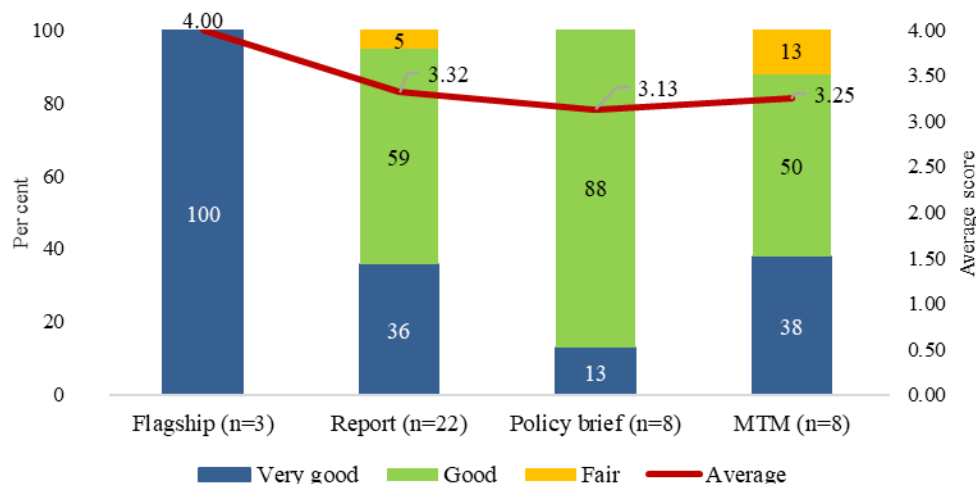
Most used words of 76 Division publications (2018–2021)



41. Of these publications, 41 were included in a detailed quality review. These included one report by the Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia and three system-wide global reports to which the Division contributed. The majority of the publications covered the thematic areas of the Sustainable Development Goals (29 per cent) and sustainable cities (27 per cent). The regional coverage of most reports (68 per cent) was based on case studies that were more often from the South-East Asia subregion than from other subregions.

42. The overall quality of 95 per cent of the reviewed publications were good (59 per cent) or very good (37 per cent), with an average score of 3.32 on a 4-point scale. Flagship and thematic reports were higher quality on all parameters (figure X).

Figure X
Overall quality of knowledge product, by type

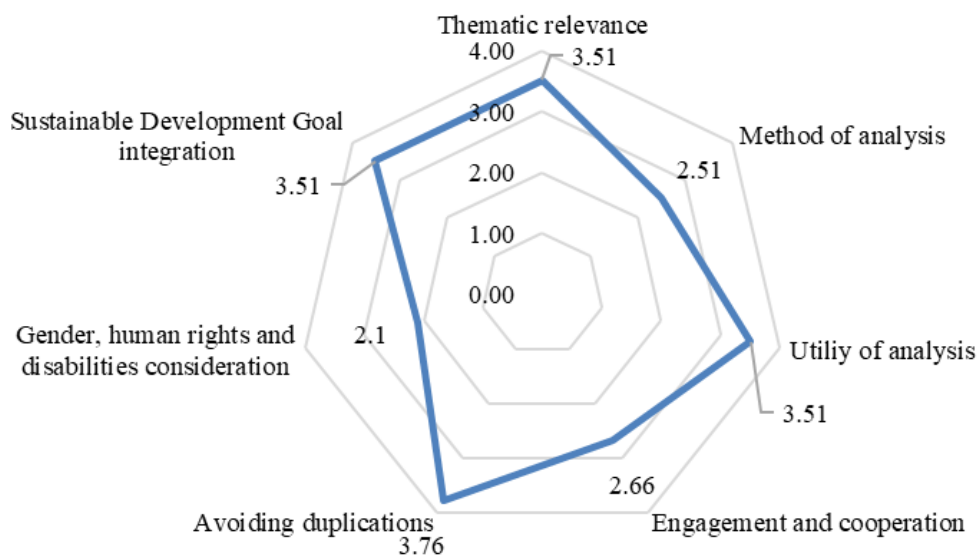


Note: "n" indicates the number of responses.

Abbreviation: MTM, manuals and training materials.

43. The average quality score per parameter was good in five out of seven review parameters (figure XI).⁸ The publications received the highest average score (3.76) in avoiding duplications with others, indicating that Division publications and research tended to address issues that were unique or tailored to the regional or subregional context, with clear added value.

Figure XI
Average quality score per review parameter

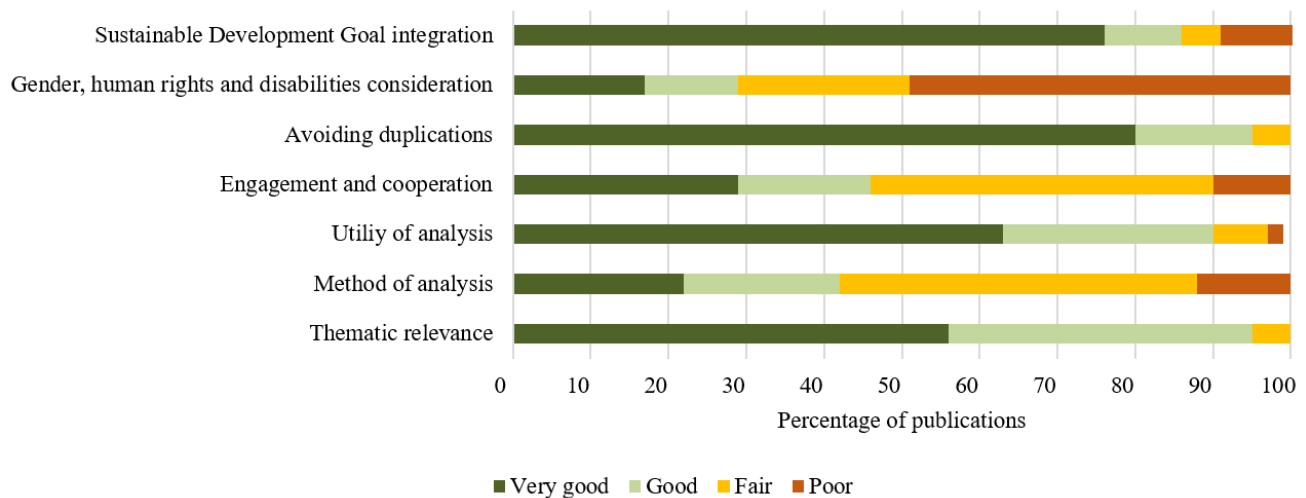


44. As reflected in figure XII, approximately 85 per cent of the publications clearly linked the analysis to overall 2030 Agenda issues, while 40 per cent were primarily focused on the Sustainable Development Goals. Nearly 90 per cent publications

⁸ Average score: very good = 3.40–4; good = 2.60–3.39; and fair = 1.80–2.59.

offered useful analysis and included specific and actionable recommendations and policy prescriptions. The publications were thematically relevant in all but one case (97 per cent) and covered topics within the Division's areas of work. Engagement and collaboration with others in the preparation of the knowledge products was somewhat clear in 90 per cent of the publications.

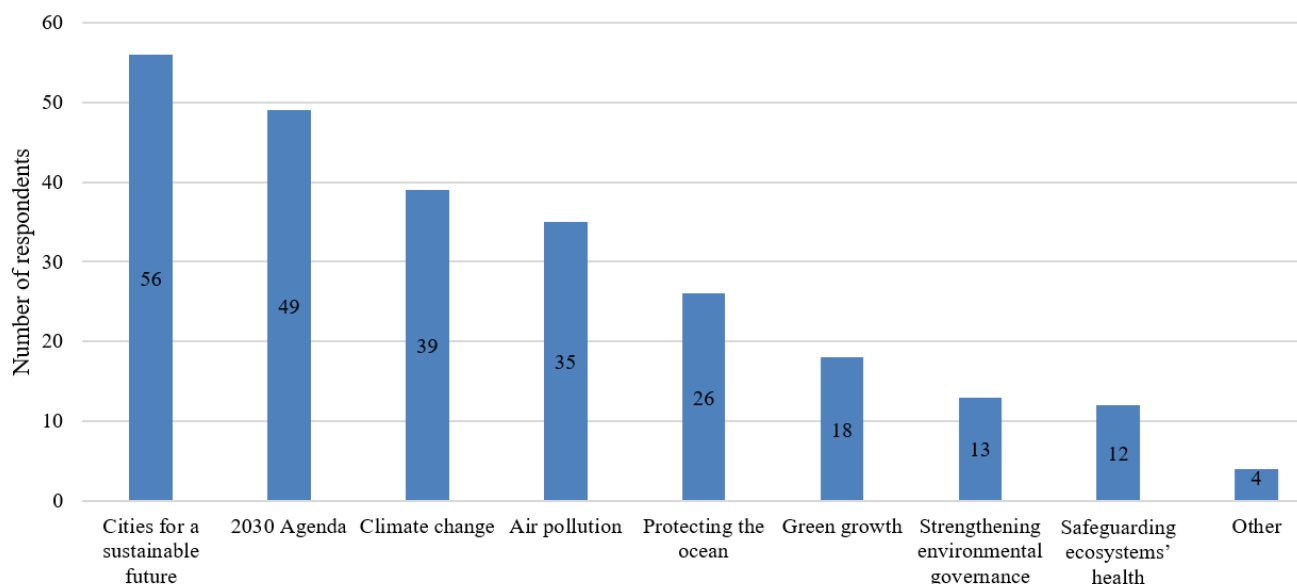
Figure XII
Quality ratings per review parameter



While knowledge products were assessed positively by survey respondents, they were not known to most external interviewees

45. Overall, 62 per cent of respondents of all three surveys who had a response (n=155) indicated that they were aware of at least one of the Division's knowledge products. Figure XIII provides the thematic areas of publications in order of familiarity.

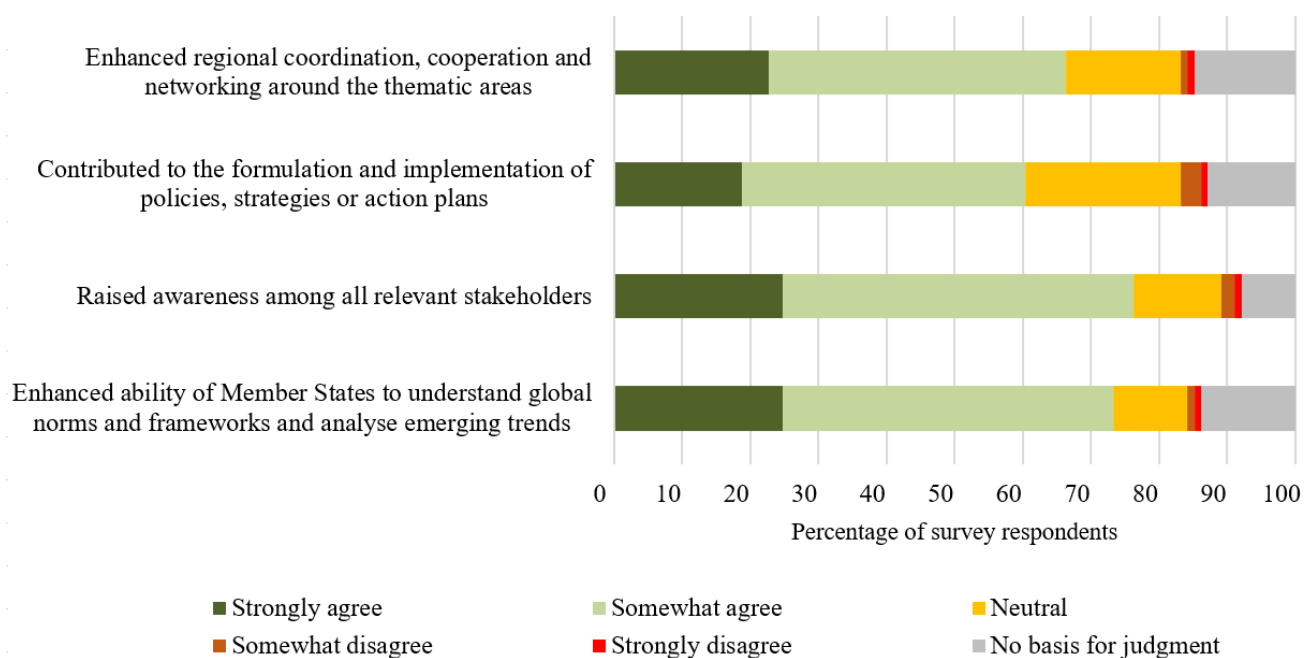
Figure XIII
Awareness of knowledge products among survey respondents, by thematic area



Note: n=252, with “n” indicating the number of responses.

46. Of all survey respondents, 72 per cent (n=92) rated the quality of knowledge products as high. They broadly assessed the effectiveness of Division publications positively. On average, 69 per cent strongly or somewhat agreed they contributed to the four areas listed in figure XIV.

Figure XIV
Division knowledge products’ contribution, as assessed by survey respondents



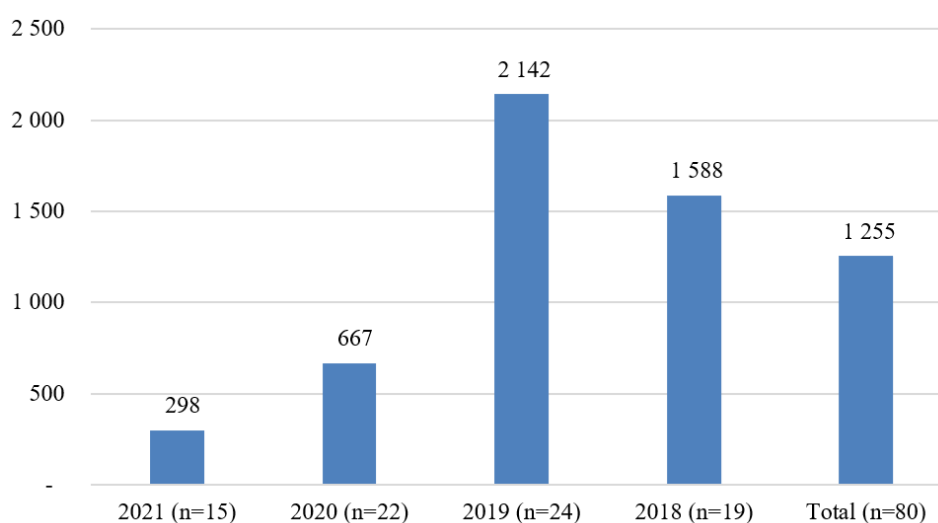
Note: N=101, with “N” indicating the number of respondents.

47. Very few external interviewees, on the other hand, were aware of the Division's publications. While nearly half of all interviewees (47 per cent) were unfamiliar with the Division's publications, the figure was 80 per cent in the case of government interviewees and 63 per cent in the case of other United Nations and external interviewees. This lack of awareness among the very group of practitioners who are the main target users of the publications meant that the good quality of analysis and policy recommendations in the knowledge products remained largely unutilized.

48. The lack of awareness of knowledge products among external stakeholders was also evident in the low number of downloads. The median number of total downloads for the 80 publications was 754, and 63 per cent of the publications had less than 1,000 downloads.

Figure XV

Average number of downloads of knowledge products, per year



Note: "n" indicates the number of publications.

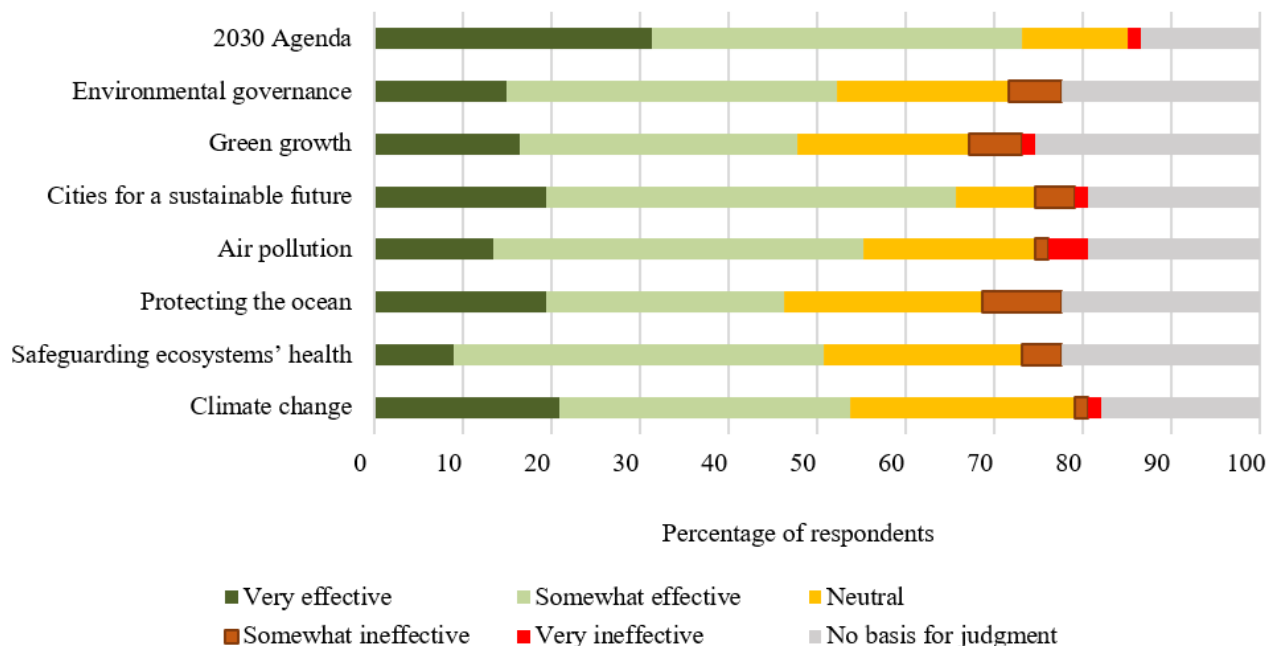
49. Notwithstanding the presumable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 (figure XV), the number of downloads was generally low considering the highly relevant topics and when compared with other regional commissions. For example, average downloads of the Division's publications were equivalent to one third of the number of downloads from a comparable subprogramme at another regional commission that covered less than one sixth of the population of the ESCAP region. Within ESCAP, the Division had 3 of the 100 most downloaded ESCAP publications in 2021, 5 in 2020 and 2 in 2018.

50. The low awareness of the Division's publications was due to a lack of monitoring and targeted dissemination to key audiences. In addition, publications resulting from specific projects with limited thematic and geographical scope had lower visibility and utility across the region. Conversely, flagship and thematic reports, which were higher quality, also had higher downloads. For example, the division's only publication among the top 10 most downloaded ESCAP publications in a year was the 2019 *Future of Asian and Pacific Cities* report, which was also considered the highest quality and most well-known publication among stakeholders.

Division consensus-building work contributed to a few intergovernmental resolutions but needed strengthening to fully realize its unique added value

51. Less than half of all survey respondents (45 per cent) were familiar with the Division's consensus-building work. They assessed the 2030 Agenda and sustainable cities as the areas where the Division's regional consensus-building has been the most effective (figure XVI).

Figure XVI
Effectiveness of consensus-building work, by thematic area



Note: N=67, with "N" indicating the number of respondents.

52. As noted previously, stakeholders considered ESCAP as unique in its role as a regional intergovernmental platform for dialogue. Stakeholders' positive assessments included ESCAP facilitation of regional agreements, including ministerial conferences and direct access to national Governments. ESCAP successfully brought key issues, such as climate change, air pollution and oceans, to the policy discussions among its member States, contributing to two specific resolutions on air pollution and oceans.⁹ Along with these resolutions, the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific¹⁰ was also the results of ESCAP-wide efforts to which the Division contributed. Furthermore, the Division contributed to the strong incorporation of sustainability and environmental aspects in the theme study for the seventy-seventh session of the Commission.

53. The 2017 Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific was endorsed by the Commission in its resolution 74/4. However, several key areas of Division work did not have a regional-level mandate or resolution. Furthermore, the 2014 resolution on sustainable urban development,¹¹ adopted ahead of the Sixth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, needed to be updated in view

⁹ Commission resolutions 75/4 and 76/1.

¹⁰ Commission resolutions 73/9, 75/2 and 75/3.

¹¹ Commission resolution 70/12.

of the New Urban Agenda and the outcome of the Seventh Forum (i.e. the Penang Platform for Sustainable Urbanization), and as preparations for the Eighth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum begin. The Division did not fully utilize the global environment-related resolutions as a reference (e.g. the United Nations Environment Assembly was nearly absent from its knowledge products).

54. A review of the proceedings at the fifth (2018) and sixth (2020) sessions of the Committee on Environment and Development indicate active participation from member States, with over 20 country statements showcasing initiatives in the thematic areas (sixth session) and a largely positive assessment of the relevance and effectiveness of both sessions by delegates. However, the Committee did not make any substantive recommendation for consideration by the Commission at either session, except the establishment of a technical expert group.

Weak interlinkages among the three functional areas limited the effectiveness of the Division's work

55. There was a lack of interlinkages among the three core functions of Division – research and analysis, convening role and capacity-building activities. This was partly due to Division not having flagship reports that fed into and guide the discussions at its main intergovernmental platform.

56. Three reports were classified by the Division as flagship publications: an ESCAP-wide theme study on oceans for the seventy-sixth Commission session,¹² a report that the Division co-authored with UN-Habitat and other partners, and a report on the 2030 Agenda, produced jointly by the Division, the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). However, only the theme study on oceans was considered by the Committee, while the report on the 2030 Agenda was considered by the Sixth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and subsequently referenced in a Commission resolution.¹³

57. The Division, therefore, has not been able to use the Committee effectively to obtain strong mandates and clear directions. Other than the 2030 Agenda, the Division has not demonstrated strong interlinkages among its three pillars in any other thematic areas. As a result, its capacity-building activities are opportunistic and scattered rather than strategic and focused (see paras. 37–39).

58. In terms of operationalizing regional resolutions into actions and policies by member States, staff respondents assessed the Division to be most effective on the 2030 Agenda (38 per cent) followed by sustainable cities (21 per cent).

59. In addition, regional resolutions were not well known among country team members and national policymakers, who considered the Division's country-level efforts to be somewhat isolated from its intergovernmental mechanism. Most of the country-based interviewees from other United Nations entities had an unsatisfactory assessment of how regional resolutions translated into country-level actions and policies.

60. Country-level stakeholders, including country team members, expressed strong demand for ESCAP regional and subregional dialogues on transboundary issues, such as water, air pollution, climate change and disaster risk reduction, upstream issues with regard to river basin management, marine pollution, the blue economy and the related needs of countries with special needs.

¹² ESCAP/76/1/Rev.1.

¹³ See ESCAP/75/5 and Commission resolution 75/2.

Division reported that accomplishments were often output-oriented and evidence to validate them was lacking

61. Self-reported data in the budget documents reflected Division performance through a combination of activities, outputs and, in some instances, intermediate outcomes. The Division formulated its work under three key planned results, along with key achievements reported under each result.¹⁴ While the Division had mechanisms to report on its work, most of its self-reported data were at the activity and output levels.

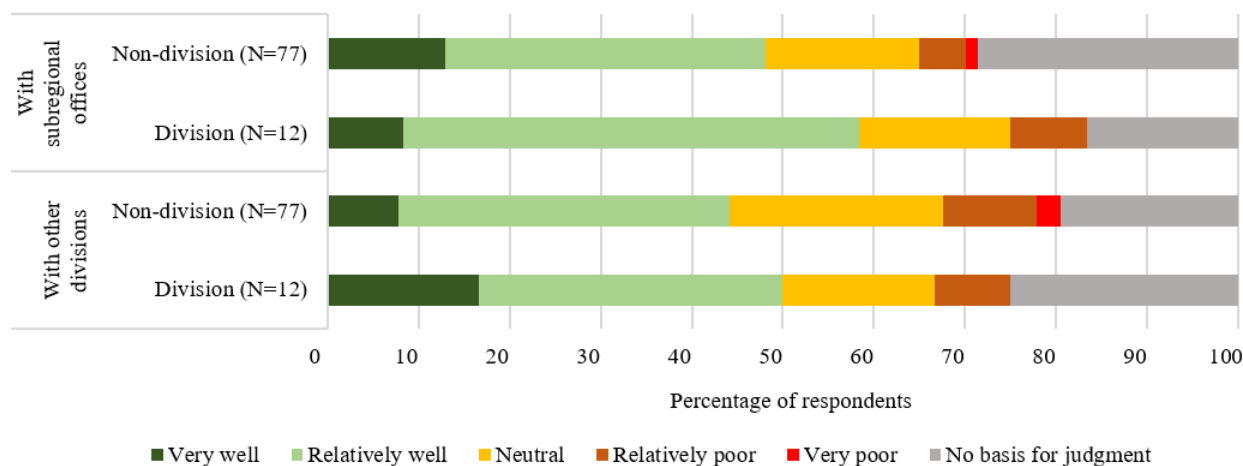
62. In addition, the evaluation’s ability to verify accomplishments was limited owing to the vagueness in the formulation of the indicators and lack of detailed records showing which beneficiaries had developed the referenced policies and frameworks, whether they had been implemented and how the Division had contributed to them.

C. Internal collaboration on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and regional-level partnerships with the United Nations Environment Programme and UN-Habitat were generally effective; however, cross-divisional substantive synergies and country-level coherence with other United Nations entities were still a work in progress

There were overall positive assessments on interdivisional collaboration, but substantive collaboration to synergize multidisciplinary expertise was a work in progress

63. There was strong internal collaboration on the 2030 Agenda coordinated by the Division, as was evident in the proceedings of the Asia-Pacific Forums on Sustainable Development and subregional Sustainable Development Goal forums, staff interviews and surveys. However, less than half of staff respondents (figure XVII) considered the Division to have collaborated “very” or “relatively” well with other divisions and subregional offices.

Figure XVII
Division collaboration with other divisions and subregional offices



Note: “N” indicates the number of respondents.

¹⁴ A/76/6 (Sect. 19), A/75/6 (Sect. 19), A/74/6 (Sect. 19) and A/72/6 (Sect. 19).

64. Over 80 per cent of ESCAP interviewees identified examples of interdivisional collaboration with the Division, although most examples pertained to the 2030 Agenda. Other examples of joint work and outputs included those on climate finance and carbon pricing (with the Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development Division), oceans (with the Statistics Division), phasing out coal (with the Energy Division), air pollution and plastic waste (with the Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division), the Asia-Pacific Mayors Academy and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Resources Panel (with several divisions), as well as ESCAP-wide work on the Sustainable Development Goals Help Desk, the Asia-Pacific Climate Week and climate conferences. Internal collaboration was partly enhanced by an ESCAP prerequisite that projects engage another division prior to approval.

65. While ESCAP divisions prioritized climate change issues in their activities, there was no structured arrangement for coordinating or synergizing ESCAP-wide work on climate change. For example, a 2021 flagship report of another ESCAP division on climate-smart trade and investment had little contribution from the Division, except by one staff member who contributed to the expert group meeting.

66. Among staff interviewees, 63 per cent raised concerns that substantive interdivisional collaboration was not optimal and observed competition and silos in how the different divisions operate. Several high-level interviewees observed improvement in that regard in 2021, but significant opportunities for substantive collaboration remained unfulfilled, as there were few strategically conceived partnerships to fully realize the Commission's comparative advantage of multidisciplinary expertise.

67. For example, interviewees in five countries expressed a lack of analytical tools to quantify the economic and social impacts of climate change, population forecasting tools for urban planning, and data and trend analysis on environment and urbanization, green energy and sustainable transportation in cities. Strengthening substantive partnerships with the respective ESCAP divisions would enhance the Division's role as a centre of excellence on multidisciplinary issues affecting the environment, climate and urbanization.

68. Collaboration with subregional offices was slightly higher than with other divisions, but it largely pertained to subregional office assistance in the identification of and liaison with relevant country-level counterparts and attendees for Division events. The Division provided technical support to subregional offices through inputs into reports, subregional forums, United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks and joint projects, such as collaboration on air pollution (with the Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia), oceans (with the Subregional Office for the Pacific) and plastic waste (with the subregional Office for South-East Asia). However, interviewed subregional office staff considered collaboration with the Division to be largely nominal and limited to government liaison.

69. Stakeholders also expressed a lack of clarity on the roles and concern about the capacity of subregional offices pertaining to the implementation of substantive activities – a longstanding and ESCAP-wide issue.¹⁵ Subregional offices had limited staff, exacerbated by prolonged vacancies (e.g. at the Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia and the Subregional Office for the Pacific), who were not specialists in the substantive areas. Some subregional offices had their own subregional reports, while others provided subregional input into ESCAP reports, indicating inconsistencies across the subregional offices.

¹⁵ E/AC.51/2015/7.

Division had strategic partnerships with UNEP and UN-Habitat but country-level coherence with other United Nations entities was poor

70. The Division's strategic partnerships with UNEP and UN-Habitat at the regional level was evident in the numerous joint publications, events, projects and activities. Notwithstanding some duplication in project activities, the Division's efforts – especially those regarding intergovernmental convening, regional forums, access to governments, multidisciplinary work and stakeholder networks – were seen as complementary. Staff respondents assessed the Division's collaboration with United Nations entities to be strongest with regard to UNEP and UN-Habitat. The Division was rated as collaborating "very well" or "somewhat well" with UNEP by 42 per cent of respondents and as collaborating "very well" or "somewhat well" with UN-Habitat by 40 per cent of respondents. Meanwhile, the Division's collaboration with UNDP was rated the lowest.

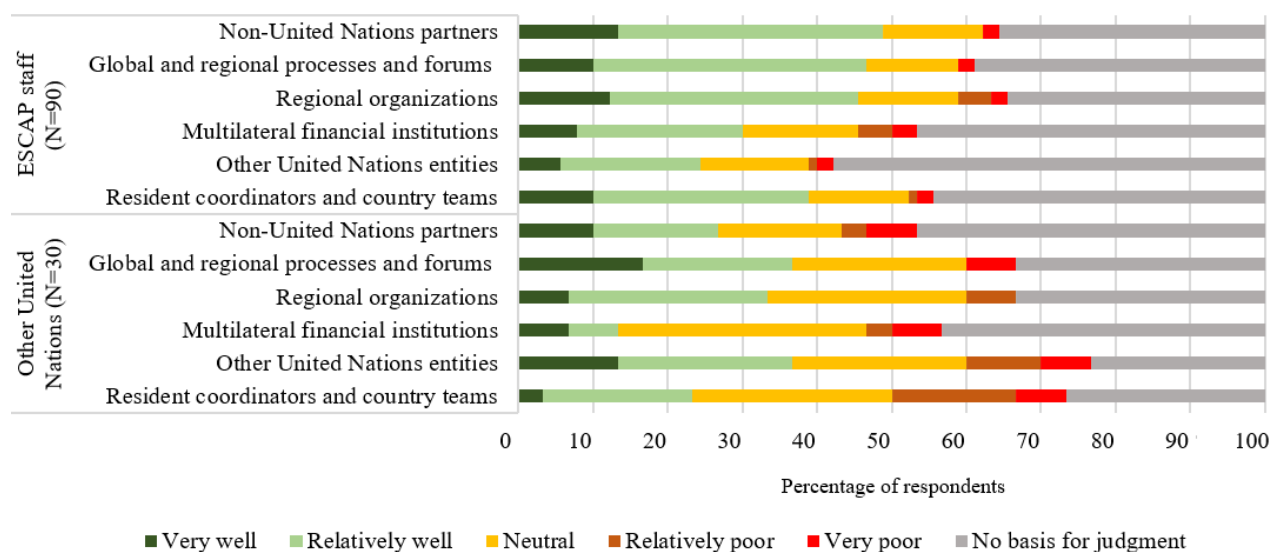
71. Owing to funding challenges and minimal-to-no UN-Habitat operational presence in several countries in the region, the Division's work on urban development was considered an important contribution to the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 11.¹⁶ The Division frequently referenced and mainstreamed the New Urban Agenda in its knowledge products.

72. Although the Sustainable Urban Development Section worked in collaboration with UN-Habitat and other partners, several of its capacity-building activities (e.g. marine waste) were duplicative with other United Nations entities, such as UNEP and UNDP.

73. Collaboration with country-level entities was still evolving. ESCAP respondents had a relatively more positive assessment of the Division's collaboration with other entities than external respondents did (figure XVIII). While 39 per cent of ESCAP respondents considered the Division to have collaborated "very" or "relatively" well with resident coordinators and country teams, only 23 per cent of other United Nations respondents assessed the Division's collaboration at those levels.

Figure XVIII

Division collaboration with other entities as assessed by Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and other United Nations respondents



Note: "N" indicates the number of respondents.

¹⁶ General Assembly resolution 71/256.

74. A good example of inter-agency collaboration was the Asia-Pacific Knowledge Management Hub, which was developed on the basis of the success of the Sustainable Development Goals Help Desk. Co-led by ESCAP and the Development Coordination Office regional office for Asia and the Pacific, the Help Desk served as a key platform for sharing policy expertise and providing rapid response to countries and country teams to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Regional Collaborative Platform and the issue-based coalition on climate change mitigation and air pollution (co-led by the Division and UNEP) were seen by country-level stakeholders as works in progress, which have yet to meaningfully benefit them.

75. There were multiple positive examples of the Division's regional-level collaboration with other United Nations entities, and its country-level collaboration with resident coordinators and country teams in Bhutan, Mongolia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Thailand, Malaysia and Cambodia. However, country-level collaboration was generally sporadic, often missing basic familiarity among country team members, and some projects were duplicative of country team efforts. Over 70 per cent of interviewees from other United Nations entities cited examples of inadequacy in collaboration with the Division.

76. Division projects were not linked to the United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks except in the case of Thailand. For all nine countries reviewed, frameworks included priorities that overlapped with Division work areas, but ESCAP was a signatory to only four of them (for Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji and Kazakhstan) despite having significant activities in the other five countries.¹⁷ The criteria for signing frameworks were not clear, although ESCAP management noted that the main reason for non-signature was the lack of resources in its subregional offices to meet the reportedly heavy coordination and reporting burden.

77. Resident coordinator interviewees recognized ESCAP value added and potential in addressing transboundary issues, regional consensus-building, data and analytics and sharing best practices. However, in 9 out of 11 countries, the interviewees were critical of Division activities as ad hoc, isolated efforts implemented in parallel to the country team. While they acknowledged an increase in ESCAP efforts to keep resident coordinators informed, substantive collaboration and shared programming were rare.

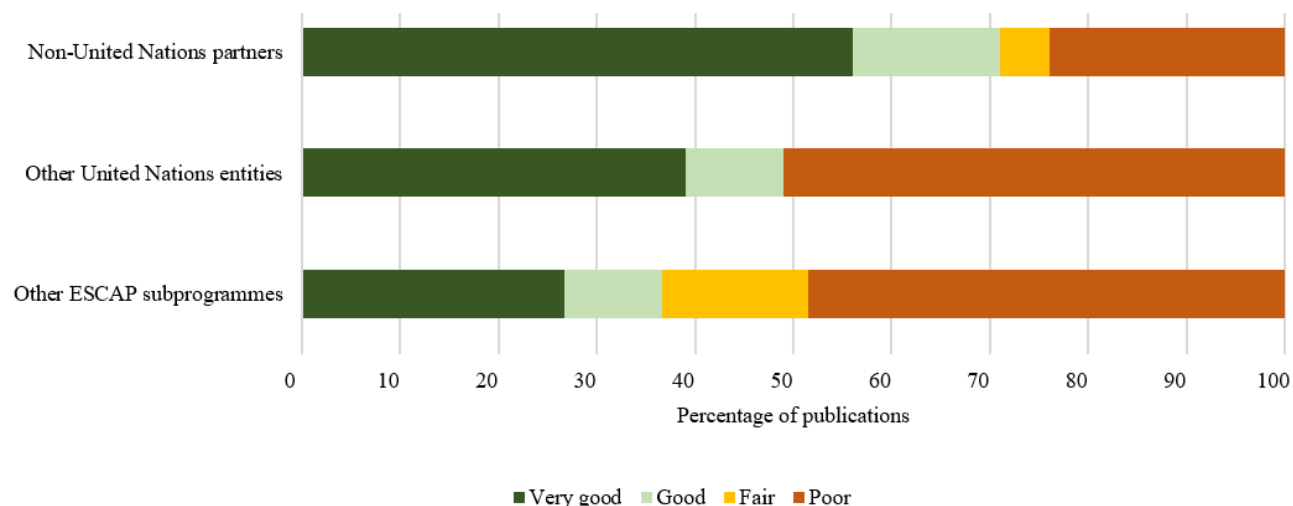
78. In the frameworks reviewed, environment and climate change issues were grouped together with disaster risk reduction in country priorities. Similar linkages were evident in the 2021 Glasgow Climate Pact, as well as in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Our Common Agenda", in particular under commitment 2 on protecting the planet to accelerate the measures for adaptation and resilience to climate change in developing countries. At ESCAP, disaster risk reduction activities are grouped together with information and communications technology at the division level, although disaster risk reduction is of more substantive relevance to the environment and climate change.

Division had strong collaboration and partnerships with non-United Nations entities

79. As shown in figure XVIII, survey respondents from both ESCAP and other United Nations entities assessed the Division's collaboration with external entities, such as civil society organizations, regional organizations and forums, higher than its collaboration with other United Nations entities. Similarly, figure XIX shows that, in the preparation of knowledge products, the Division's collaboration with external partners (71 per cent) was stronger than with other United Nations entities (49 per cent) and other ESCAP subprogrammes (37 per cent).

¹⁷ Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia and Thailand.

Figure XIX
Cooperation in the preparation of knowledge products



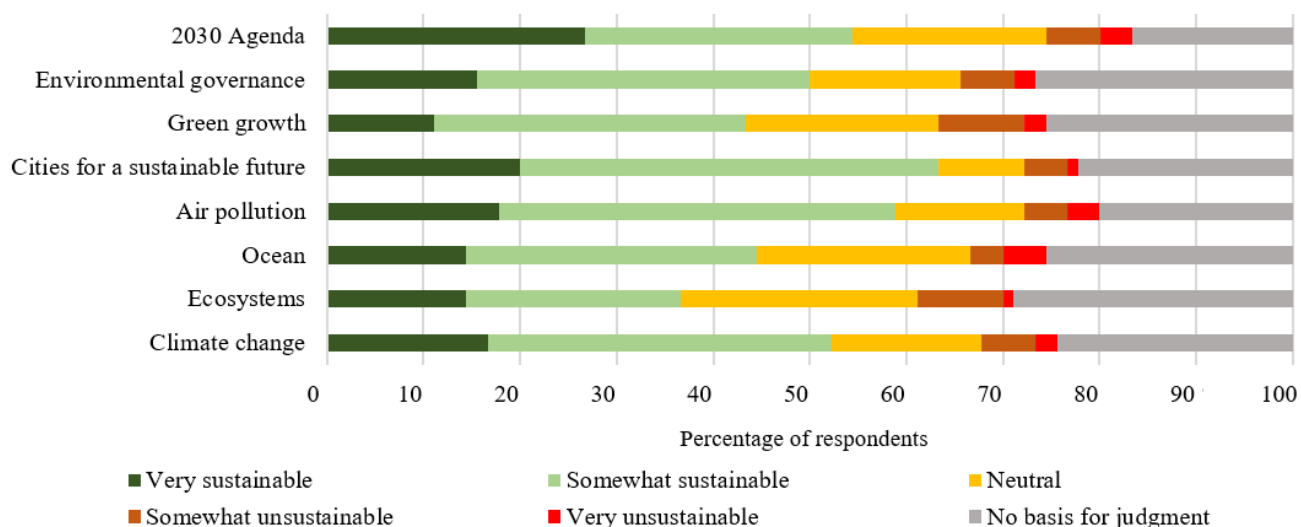
Note: N=41, with “N” indicating the number of respondents.

80. The Division maintained a strong network of civil society organizations in its 2030 Agenda and urban development work. Stakeholders appreciated the events that it held to engage civil society organizations as part of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, considering them inclusive, and the Division routinely partnered with several civil society organizations for project implementation and advocacy on urban issues.

D. There were some examples of sustainability in the Division’s work related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and sustainable urban development, but the general business model was not considered conducive to lasting country-level change

81. Over half of staff respondents considered the Division’s work on sustainable cities, climate change and air pollution and the 2030 Agenda to be “very” or “somewhat” sustainable (figure XX).

Figure XX
Sustainability of Division work, as assessed by staff



Note: N=90, with “N” indicating the number of respondents.

82. Several examples of the Division’s tangible and intangible contributions to sustainability were observed, including its contribution to the 2030 Agenda, regional and subregional forums, assistance to countries with voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews, and integration of Sustainable Development Goals into national planning and stakeholder participation tools. Its urban development work also served as a catalyst for advocacy and networking on urban issues across the region. The Division’s work on climate change – its contribution to the climate conferences, support for nationally determined contributions, and tools for climate finance and emission calculation – showed potential for the Division to contribute to raising climate ambitions in the region.

83. The Division’s tangible contributions included the success of the integrated resource recovery centres, conceived and piloted in Bangladesh and adopted in five other countries. The local action plans to address plastic waste through the Closing the Loop project and analytical work on sources of air pollution also showed promise for scalability and lasting impact. Its support on an environment strategy in Bhutan and industrial water use policy in Bangladesh were also examples of impactful contributions.

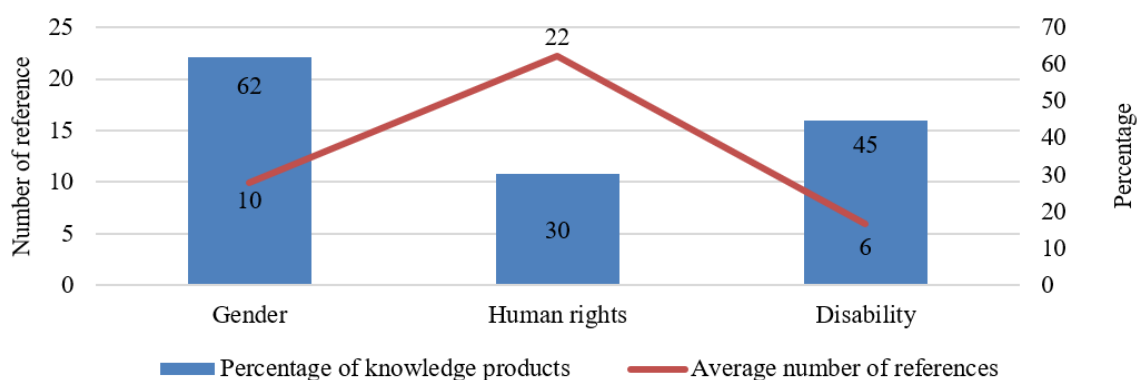
84. However, the sustainability of the Division’s work was challenged by the small size of its capacity-building projects (average budget of \$323,000) with limited coverage, lack of monitoring and follow-up, lack of capacity of local partners and beneficiaries and lack of country-based United Nations engagement and resources. Some of these constraints were linked to the funding modality of United Nations Development Account and Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation projects. The inherent difficulties of measuring the impact and sustainability of training, workshops and forums, knowledge products and intergovernmental discussions – key elements of the ESCAP business model – also contributed to such challenges. The significant adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on project implementation and negotiations, the two areas that stakeholders considered less conducive to virtual work, further exacerbated impact and sustainability challenges.

E. Cross-cutting issues of gender, human rights and disability inclusion were more prominent in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development work but needed improvement in other areas

85. Gender considerations were incorporated into the majority (60 per cent) of the Division's knowledge products, but human rights and disability issues appeared in less than half (figure XXI). While gender considerations appeared across all types of publications, human rights and disability issues featured mostly in the following knowledge products: two issues of the *United Nations World Water Development Report* (2019 and 2020); *Accelerating Progress: An Empowered, Inclusive and Equal Asia and the Pacific* (2019); "Assessment of access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental decision making in ASEAN" (2021); and *Environmental Change through Participation: A Closer Look at How Inclusive Engagement Can Achieve Environmental Outcomes* (2019); as well as four Sustainable Development Goal profiles. The publication on the sustainability outlook in Mongolia and the Future of Asian and Pacific Cities report also incorporated both issues.

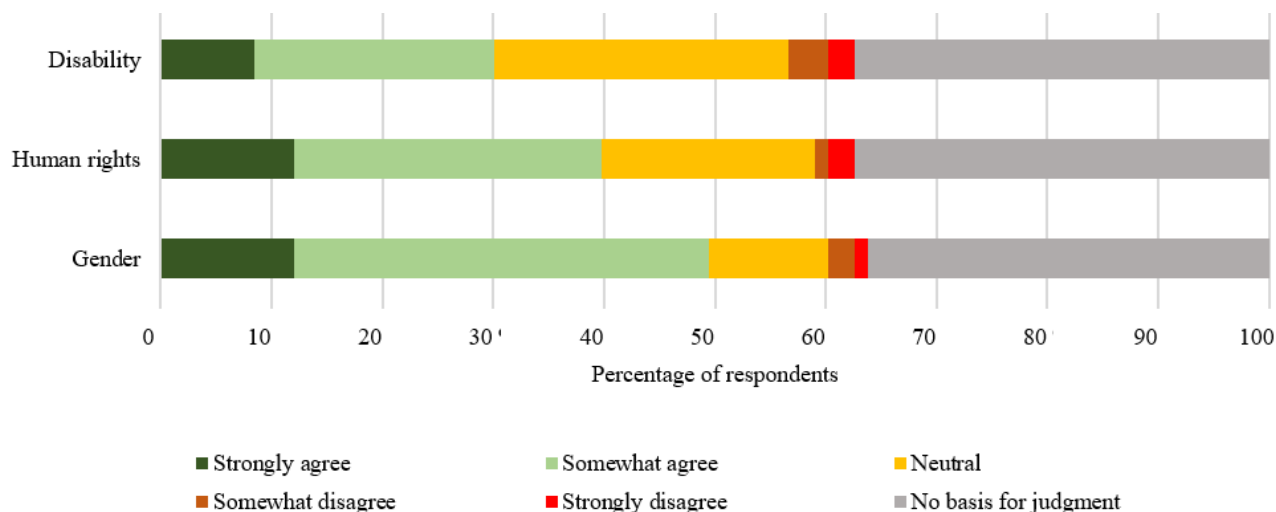
Figure XXI

References to cross-cutting issues in Division knowledge products



86. Staff survey respondents also assessed the Division's incorporation of cross-cutting issues in the same manner, with gender identified as the most incorporated cross-cutting issue, and disability identified as the least incorporated issue (figure XXII).

Figure XXII

Integration of cross-cutting issues in Division work, as assessed by staff

Note: N=83, with “N” indicating the number of respondents.

87. Staff interviewees expressed strong awareness about the incorporation of gender into their work, with examples spanning the work of both sections in the Division. Conscious efforts were made to increase the participation of women in activities and training (e.g. Asia-Pacific Mayors Academy, project under tranche 11 of the United Nations Development Account). However, human rights and disability issues had yet to be adequately mainstreamed.

V. Recommendations

88. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services makes eight important recommendations, all of which were accepted by ESCAP.

Recommendation 1 (results A, B and C)

89. In view of the transfer to the Office of the Executive Secretary of the work related to the 2030 Agenda, the Environment and Development Division of ESCAP should identify and focus its work on specific niche areas that are within its comparative advantages, transboundary and fully aligned with the Ministerial Declaration, including from the Committee on Environment and Development.

Indicator of achievement: revised strategy identifying focus areas of the Division’s work, including approaches on how it aims to contribute to specific environment, climate and urbanization issues in ways that are complementary to other United Nations entities’ efforts

Recommendation 2 (results A, B, C and D)

90. The Environment and Development Division of ESCAP should develop a capacity development strategy to plan and implement technical assistance and capacity-building projects in line with the identified niche areas. The strategy should focus on:

(a) Strengthening the strategic importance and geographical balance of its capacity-building activities across the five ESCAP subregions, including prioritizing the countries with special needs, as appropriate;

(b) Incorporating the priorities identified in the United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks of the respective countries into the themes of its planned flagship reports to the extent possible;

(c) Establishing a mechanism to monitor and follow up on member State requests for assistance;

(d) Striving for larger and longer-term projects to pilot innovative ideas, scale up and disseminate results among key stakeholders;

(e) Strengthening collaboration with local partners and country-based United Nations entities to enhance the sustainability of its technical assistance projects. This should include the enhanced use of national-level implementing partners, consultants and civil society organizations.

Indicators of achievement: strategy for planning, implementation and balanced geographical reach of capacity-building activities; dissemination of results, including setting up a mechanism for monitoring member States' requests

Recommendation 3 (results A and B)

91. The Environment and Development Division of ESCAP should prepare a list of its offers and disseminate it among key stakeholders at the regional and country levels. This effort should include the following elements:

(a) Development of a clear offer of analytical and national support work on the identified thematic areas of focus;

(b) Use of the offer list to make introductions and for outreach to key regional and national stakeholders, including relevant government officials and country teams;

(c) Through the monitoring mechanism (recommendation 2 (c)), filter and match incoming requests for support from member States on the basis of their offers, and refer requests falling outside the scope of their offers to other ESCAP units or United Nations entities, as appropriate;

(d) Use the outreach efforts as a basis to form communities of practice around identified thematic areas.

Indicator of achievement: Division list of offers prepared and used for introduction and outreach to key stakeholders

Recommendation 4 (result B)

92. ESCAP should give more prominence to the sustainable urban development work of the Environment and Development Division and clearly delineate the thematic areas of responsibility between the two sections. This could include, for example:

(a) Renaming the Division to reflect its dual focus on environment and urban development;

(b) Scaling up the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum to consider urban issues beyond the environment and across all ESCAP subprogrammes;

(c) Seeking a specific mandate from the Commission, as needed, to include an intergovernmental segment in the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum;

(d) Outlining distinct results on urban work in the programme plan.

Indicator of achievement: evidence of considerations and actions undertaken to give prominence to urban work

Recommendation 5 (result B)

93. The Environment and Development Division of ESCAP should strengthen the strategic utilization of its intergovernmental mechanism to enhance its regional consensus-building mandate, obtain guidance and mandates on future work, and promote its analytical tools and policy recommendations among member States. This work should include discussions and policy debates based on Division flagship reports, position papers and other knowledge products, and should be one of the key elements that inform the capacity development strategy under recommendation 2. In this regard, the Division should consider publishing periodic thematic and flagship reports in support of the Committee on Environment and Development, along with relevant dashboards and observatories, to enhance its role as a centre of excellence on multidisciplinary issues affecting environment, climate and urbanization. The Division should also have in place an active dissemination strategy and initiatives to promote the utility of its knowledge products.

Indicators of achievement: regular flagship reports in support of the Committee on Environment and Development; strategy and actions for dissemination of knowledge products; agenda and other documents of the Committee covering thematic areas of Division work and discussions based on Division flagship publications

Recommendation 6 (results A and C)

94. The Environment and Development Division of ESCAP should strengthen regional coordination efforts through the Regional Collaborative Platform and issue-based coalitions as opportunities to engage with the regional and country-level United Nations entities in a more systematic way. This should also include ongoing engagement with the resident coordinators and country team members to capture and showcase best practices and exchange lessons.

Indicator of achievement: evidence of enhanced participation in the Regional Collaborative Platform and issue-based coalitions and collaboration with country teams in the region

Recommendation 7 (result C)

95. ESCAP should consider integrating the Disaster Risk Reduction Section within the Environment and Development Division, in consideration of the substantive proximity of issues related to the environment, climate change and disaster risk reduction, and with a view to aligning its structure with the thematic grouping of these issues in the United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks of countries in the region.

Indicator of achievement: evidence supporting management deliberation and decision on integrating the Disaster Risk Reduction Section within the Division

Recommendation 8 (result E)

96. ESCAP should strengthen the mainstreaming of gender, human rights and disability inclusion into its substantive programme of work.

Indicator of achievement: guidance on mainstreaming gender, human rights and disability inclusion developed and disseminated throughout ESCAP

Annex***Comments received from the Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on the draft report**

With reference to your memo dated 1 July 2022 on the above-mentioned subject, we are pleased to inform you that the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has no further comments on the report and concurs with its findings and recommendations. In response to the recommendations, ESCAP shall prepare an action plan indicating concrete follow-up actions to address those recommendations with a clear time frame for implementation.

We wish to put on record our appreciation to the evaluation team for the participatory and consultative approach to the design and conduct of the evaluation

Thank you.

* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution [64/263](#), following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.