Evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Subprogramme 4: Environment and Development

15 July 2022

Assignment No: IED-22-010

INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

<table>
<tr>
<td>Function</td>
<td>"The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organization. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organization;" (General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B).</td>
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Contents

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 (EDD) for the 2018-2021 period.

EDD areas of work 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, the Division was assigned responsibilities to support the 2030 Agenda in 2016 and work on climate and ocean issues in 2017. However, the Division's significant roles for the 2030 Agenda related work until 2021 — an add-on to its original mandates — affected its work on the originally mandated substantive issues. EDD 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.

EDD achieved commendable results on the 2030 Agenda, sustainable urban development and, to some extent, on 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. EDD knowledge products were generally of high quality, but except for a handful of major reports, they were not widely known and used. Its consensus building work contributed to a few intergovernmental resolutions, but the interlinkages among its three core functions — research and analysis, consensus building and capacity building — needed strengthening.

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

OIOS makes eight important recommendations for ESCAP-EDD to:

i) Focus work on specific transboundary issues that are fully aligned with the Ministerial Declarations;

ii) Develop a technical assistance strategy to focus its capacity building delivery;

iii) Prepare a list of its offers for outreach to key stakeholders and form communities of practice;

iv) Place more prominence on the sustainable urban development work;

v) Strengthen the strategic utilization of intergovernmental mechanisms and the interlinkages between its different functions including strengthening its flagship reports;

vi) Strengthen regional coordination efforts and engagement with other UN entities;

vii) Integrate the Disaster Risk Reduction section into EDD; and

viii) Strengthen the mainstreaming of the cross-cutting issues of gender, human rights and disability.

I. Introduction and Objective

1.   The evaluation objective was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, effectiveness, coherence, and sustainability of 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.[1] The evaluation was conducted in conformity with the norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations.[2]

2.   ESCAP management comments on the draft report were considered and are included in annex I.

II. Background

3.   ESCAP was established in 1947 as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and a regional arm of the United Nations. It is the largest regional intergovernmental platform serving 53 Member States and nine associate members covering over 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). ESCAP delivered its mandates through nine subprogrammes (Figure 1).

Figure 1: ESCAP organizational structure
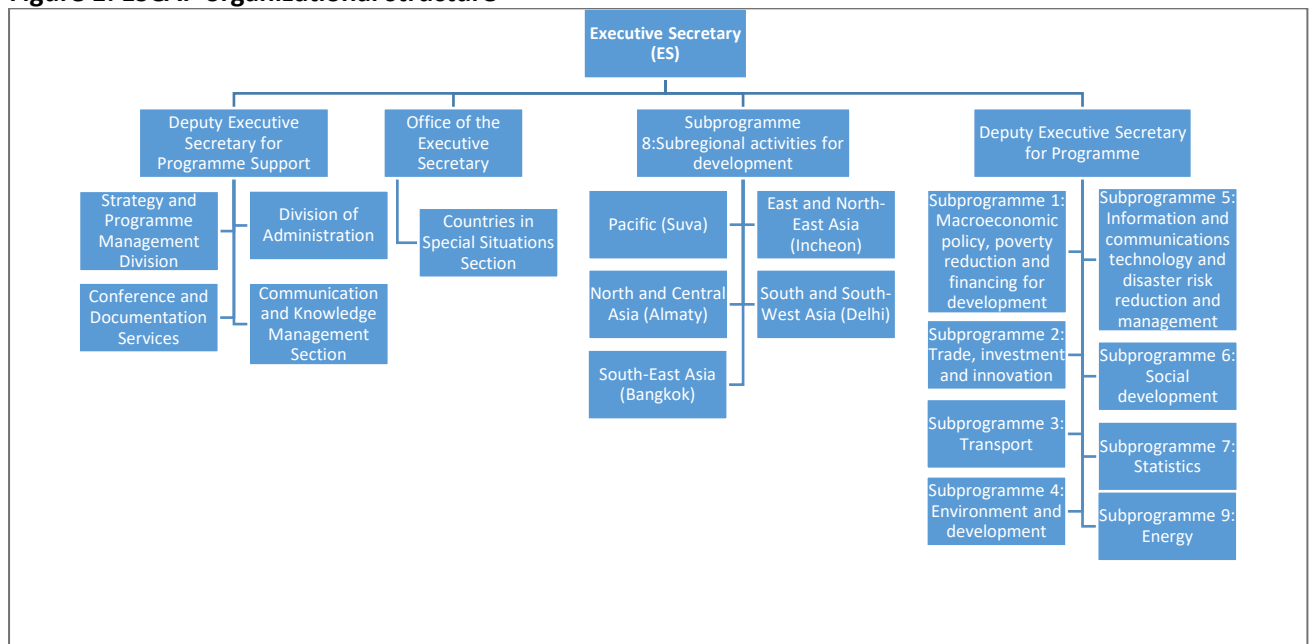
5.   ESCAP average annual budget during the three-year period from 2019 to 2021 was approximately $77.16 million,[3] 60 per cent of which was devoted to the nine subprogrammes. Its funding source comprised of assessed contributions through the regular budget (RB), the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation (RPTC), the Development Account (DA) and extrabudgetary (XB) resources.

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[1] OIOS-IED Inception Paper IED-21-0014, 11 August 2021
[2] United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation, 2016
[3] A/75/6 (Sect. 19)

6.   ESCAP programme of work budget for 2021 was estimated at $70.67 million excluding the five regional institutes (Table 1), of which 42 per cent was from the RB, 39 per cent XB, 16 per cent DA and three per cent from the RPTC account.

Table 1: ESCAP budget by subprogramme in 2021

Subprogramme (SP)	2021 budget ($ million)	Per cent	Number of posts
SP 1: Macroeconomic policy, poverty reduction and financing for development (MPFD)	5.4	8%	25
SP 2: Trade, investment and innovation (TIID)	11.6	16%	28
SP 3: Transport (TD)	7.1	10%	27
SP 4: Environment and development (EDD)	8.6	12%	23
SP 5: ICT and disaster risk reduction (IDD)	8.2	12%	27
SP 6: Social development	9.5	13%	33
SP 7: Statistics	7.6	11%	24
SP 8: Subregional activities for development	8.2	12%	44
SP 9: Energy	4.5	6%	12
Total programme of work	**70.67**	**100%**	**286[4]**

Source: ESCAP internal Monthly Budget Performance Report - 31 March 2021.

Subprogramme 4: Environment and Development

7.   Subprogramme 4 is implemented by the Environment and Development Division (EDD), and its main objective in 2021 was to reduce the negative impacts of growth on the natural environment and to improve human wellbeing in urban and rural environments through building the capacity of Member States to (i) strengthen climate action and sustainable resource use, (ii) realize sustainable urban development, and (iii) eliminate pollution and waste. The Division supported the Committee on Environment and Development (CED) and the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD). Through its work in these three focus areas, EDD sought to contribute to the achievement of SDGs 2, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17.

8.   EDD activities were implemented through the three ESCAP core functions:

   a)   Research and analysis: providing innovative research, analysis, and policy ideas to support evidence-based decision making in the substantive areas of EDD work;

   b)   Convening role: providing a regional platform for deliberation and building consensus on environment and development related issues and sustainable development; and

   c)   Capacity building: providing training and advisory services for strengthening national efforts and influencing environmental policy making in Member States of the region.

9.   EDD was headed by a D-1 Director and composed of two sections —Environment and Development Policy Section (EDPS) and Sustainable Urban Development Section (SUDS) — each headed by a P-5 Section Chief and a total of 23 staff. The total 2021 budget of the Division was $8.6 million comprising of $3.1 million RB, $1.3 million for two DA projects and $3.8 million in 11 XB and

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[4] Does not include management support and consultants

RPTC funded projects. EDD also participated as an implementing partner in five DA projects led by other Secretariat entities.

10.   The Division also backstopped the ESCAP Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization (CSAM), which was excluded from the scope of this evaluation. CSAM was evaluated in 2020.[5]

III.   Scope and Methodology

11.   The evaluation covered the 2018-2021 period 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 UN and external materials on EDD work areas.

   b) **119 semi-structured interviews** comprising of 29 with ESCAP staff (14 EDD), 41 with other UN entities at the regional and country-level offices, 17 with Member States government officials and 32 with partners, civil society organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders. Overall, 35 per cent of interviewees were female and 61 per cent were based at the country level.

   c) **Three online surveys**

      a. ESCAP personnel: 180 responses representing a 22 per cent response rate across all personnel[6], 35 per cent for professional staff, 41 per cent for P5 and above and 51 per cent for EDD personnel. Among the 141 who responded to the gender question, 52 per cent were female.

      b. UN entities: 46 responses (25 per cent response rate) from 11 UN entities, including UN Resident Coordinators (UNRCs) and UN Country Teams (UNCTs), from 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 female.

      c. External stakeholders: 87 responses (29 per cent response rate) from government officials, policy makers, project implementing partners[7], donors and civil society organizations (CSOs) from 10 countries. One-third of those responding to the gender question (51) were female.

   d) **Quality review of 41 knowledge products** (51% 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 CED, the 7th APFSD, the 77th session of the Commission, launching of various reports and one session of the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP).

12.   Key limitations of the evaluation included low accessibility to some key government officials and policy makers due to Covid-19 related restrictions and a lack of sufficient outcome level results

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[5] See ESCAP/76/INF/3 for CSAM evaluation report.
[6] A total of 831 ESCAP were surveyed, including management support and consultants.
[7] International and national NGOs working on projects, e.g., Habitat Cambodia, CGF, IGES, UCLG, ICLEI, etc.

reported on EDD capacity building interventions in project progress and final 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 UN entities, implementing partners and CSOs, and by triangulating data collected from multiple sources.

IV.   Evaluation Results

A.   EDD work was highly relevant, and its activities generally aligned with its mandates; however, the Division's significant role in support of APFSD resulted in it being spread too thin on mandated substantive issues

a) *EDD thematic areas of work were highly relevant and aligned with its mandates*

13.   Stakeholders and staff members provided positive feedback about the relevance of EDD 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 2). Interviewees also widely shared this sentiment while noting the global recognition of, and renewed attention to, climate change and the environment.[8] 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.[9]

Figure 2: Relevance of EDD thematic areas of work (N=173)
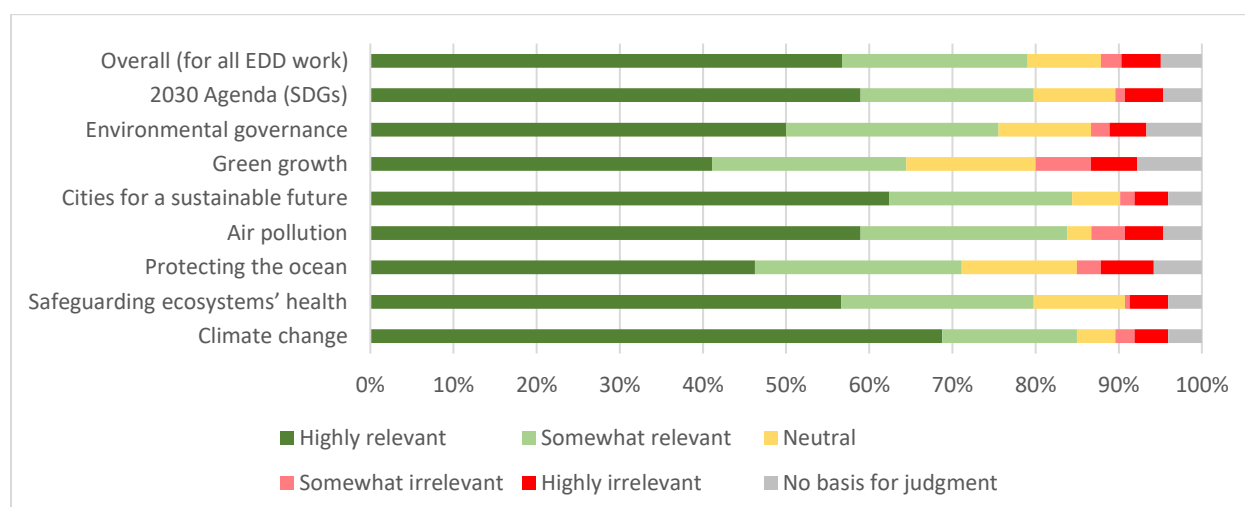
Source: OIOS surveys of staff and other stakeholders.

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

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[8] For example, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment reported that pollution caused more deaths than Covid-19 (A/HRC/49/53, para 5).
[9] The seven G20 members from the region are responsible for over half of global GHG emissions, and five of the 10 top countries with the greatest historic responsibility for emissions since the beginning of the twentieth century are from Asia. Source: Joint ESCAP, UNEP and UN-Women 2021 publications "Is 1.5°C within Reach for the Asia-Pacific Region? Ambition and Potential of NDC Commitments of the Asia-Pacific Countries".

15.   Interviewees of government officials, UN entities and CSOs in all the six case study countries also emphasized the very high relevance of EDD topics in their national contexts. In addition to the high relevance and importance of its existing thematic areas, since 2016, EDD 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 UN system. This had shifted the Division's priority to the 2030 Agenda work (see paragraphs 28-30) even though it was not included in the 2017 Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific — considered as the blueprint for EDD work.[10]

16.   Promotion of green growth was a hallmark initiative of the Division during the period prior to the evaluation scope. With change in leadership, it then focused on a multitude of themes that were being addressed by several other UN entities including on resource efficiency, circular economy, oceans, plastic pollution, air pollution, stakeholder participation, and urban development. Following the additional responsibilities to support 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 was "very familiar" with EDD work, and those who knew largely associated it with the 2030 Agenda work. Stakeholders interviewed expressed high demand for the knowledge, data and regional platform for experience sharing on its originally mandated areas that EDD was positioned to provide, especially on cross-boundary issues.

   b) Stakeholders identified several ESCAP comparative advantages, but they have remained largely unrealized in EDD work

17.   Survey respondents assessed the comparative advantages of ESCAP listed in Table 2 that applied to EDD.

Table 2: ESCAP comparative advantages as assessed by survey respondents

Comparative advantages	Per cent
Regional platform to exchange best practices among countries	16%
Convening governments to build consensus on regional frameworks, norms and agreements on environment and development	15%
Generating knowledge, research, and analysis on environment-and-development issues	12%
Multidisciplinary approach linking environment-and-development issues to other sustainable development challenges (e.g. economic and social development)	10%
Complementarity between research, capacity development and consensus building	9%
Providing technical assistance and capacity-building services on topics related to environment and development	9%
Professional and technical knowledge and expertise of EDD staff in the thematic areas	7%
Other	6%
Cooperation with other UN and non-UN entities	5%
Innovative approaches and use of data	5%
Work in a specific sector (e.g. climate change, biodiversity, pollution etc.)	2%
No comparative advantage	2%
No basis for judgment	1%
Total number of responses	100%

Source: OIOS surveys of ESCAP staff and stakeholders (multiple responses).

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[10] E/ESCAP/MCED(7)/5, endorsed in Commission resolution 74/4.

18.   Largely in line with survey respondents, interviewees identified similar comparative advantages with the top two for being a "regional platform to exchange best practices" and for its convening power. The best examples of the realization of these top two comparative advantages were in the 2030 Agenda related work, and broadly on sustainable urban development (see result B). Implementing partners were generally highly appreciative of EDD value added.

19.   In contrast, the comparative advantage related to multidisciplinary approach linking the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) was not fully realized in EDD work (see paragraphs 63-69).

20.   Stakeholders identified the key strengths of EDD 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 EDD staff and how flexibly they had adapted to the Covid-19 pandemic.

21.   The key identified weaknesses of EDD included high staff turnover; lack of defined mandates, thematic focus and results orientation; duplication with other UN entities; low visibility; and weak collaboration with other ESCAP divisions, SROs and other UN entities.[11]

   c) *Although EDD has responded well to specific Member States' requests for support, weaknesses were observed in its strategy, programming, monitoring and resource allocation*

22.   EDD 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 States requests. Furthermore, these requests were generally driven by the familiarity of the requestors or their networks with EDD work or those who have previously engaged in EDD activities. This resulted in EDD responding to substantively disparate and one-off requests, including in areas that some stakeholders considered better addressed by other UN entities with country presence. EDD did not have a clear offer of national support work used for outreach to Member States and UNCTs, nor criteria for filtering and matching incoming requests, including referring to other UN entities where needed.

23.   The lack of strategic outreach and programming sometimes led to a mismatch between where EDD 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 qualities, and its urban planning work was less in countries with the fastest and least planned urbanization or in countries with special needs (CSN).[12]

24.   EDD activities during 2018-2021 had a heavier focus in the South-East Asia subregion with six out of the top ten project countries located there, and the least in the Pacific (Figure 3). Contributing factors included, inter alia, geographic proximity, donor preference, demands from countries, established relations, visibility and knowledge of EDD activities. This was an ESCAP-wide phenomenon as shown in an analysis of country-level work by the Strategy and Programme Management Division (SPMD).

25.   Additionally, only three of the top ten EDD project countries were CSN countries and fewer than half of staff survey respondents (48%) considered EDD to be prioritizing the needs of CSN countries in its activities. EDD considered that a focus on CSN countries would reduce its effectiveness since the biggest challenges and potential opportunities for major improvements from an

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[11] These weaknesses were identified in both surveys and interviews and are further discussed in the following sections of the report.

[12] Comprising of least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small island developing States (SIDS).

environment perspective are in the middle-income countries. However, these countries are the most vulnerable to the worst impact of the climate crisis, and the Organization's stated priorities.[13]

**Figure 3: Distribution of EDD project activities per country (2018-2021)**
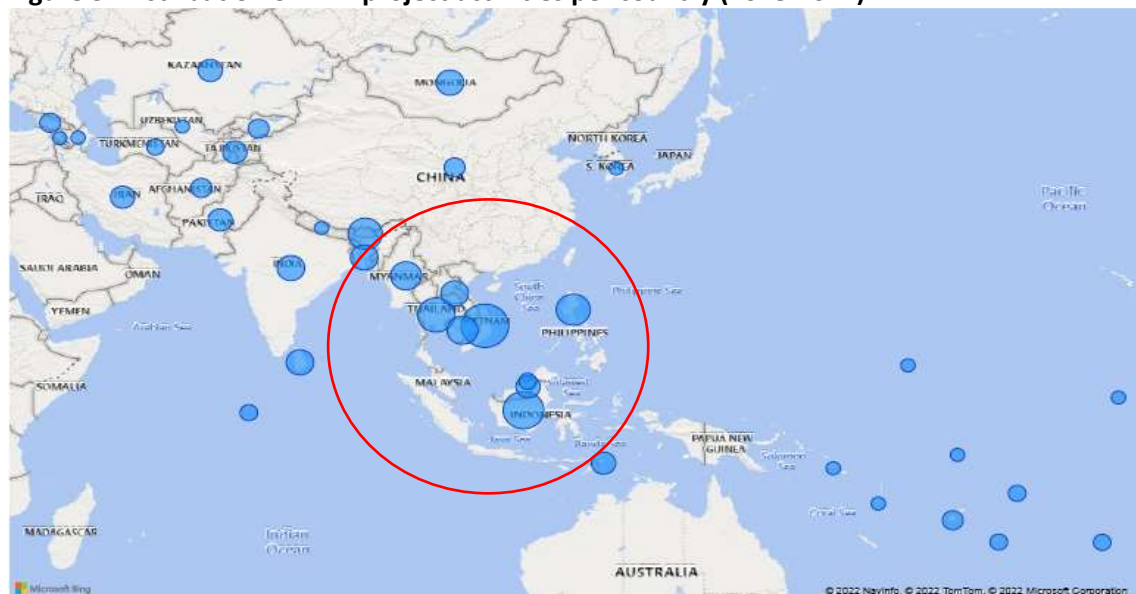
Source: OIOS analysis of data from ESCAP Programmatic Dashboard.

B. EDD effectiveness was mixed with most prominent results achieved on the 2030 Agenda and sustainable urban development

> *a) EDD 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.   Fifty-seven per cent of survey respondents[14] on average assessed EDD work as very (18%) or somewhat (39%) effective in their contribution to the four areas listed in Figure 4. The highest rated contribution was in enhancing regional cooperation and raising awareness.

Figure 4: Effectiveness of EDD work as assessed by survey respondents (N=160)

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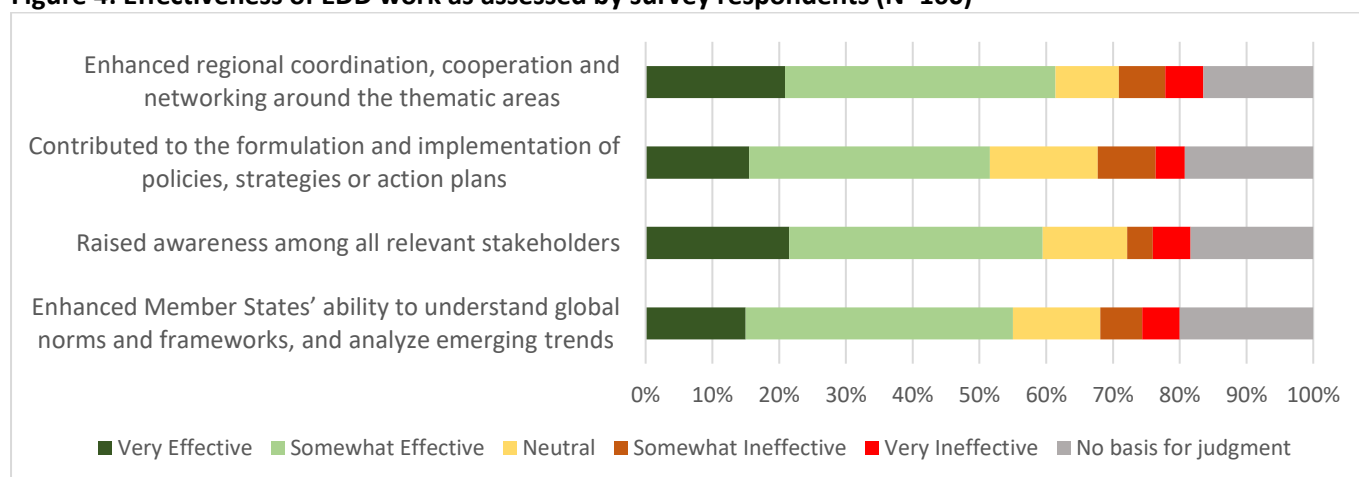
[13] UN prioritizing least developed countries in plans, investments, and actions, https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1114122

[14] Survey respondents include three groups of stakeholders: ESCAP staff, UN partners and external respondents, e.g., member States, donors, civil society organizations, etc.

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 were assessed higher by non-ESCAP respondents.[15]

EDD played an instrumental role in facilitating ESCAP-wide work and regional UN-wide engagement on the 2030 Agenda

28.   EDD was highly effective in supporting the 2030 agenda related work across ESCAP. It coordinated the annual APFSD at the regional level, supported subregional SDG forums and contributed to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development. The Division supported countries with the preparation of their VNRs and spearheaded the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) initiative in several countries.[16]

29.   Both internal and external stakeholders recognized significant EDD contributions in leading the APFSD with 730 and 850 participants in the 2020 and 2019 forums respectively.[17] It also supported the subregional forums, the SDG Help Desk and ten countries annually in 2019 and 2020[18] in the preparation of their VNRs submitted to HLPF. Funded by a DA10 project,[19] the SDG help desk, launched in 2018, brought relevant resources from over 100 entities into one platform to provide access to tools, knowledge, data and technical assistance on the SDGs. It had over 50,000 registered users and offered training and peer learning sessions benefiting more than 3,000 users from 20 countries.[20]

30.   Interviewees confirmed that country-level officials benefited from the APFSD and the Help Desk and recognized EDD contribution in localizing SDGs through its VLR guidelines and projects in seven cities of six countries[21] and the guidelines on stakeholder engagement for the 2030 Agenda implementation. Several countries acknowledged ESCAP support in their VNRs[22] (e.g. Mongolia, Cambodia, Turkmenistan, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Kazakhstan).[23]

EDD work on urban development was highly valued and 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, SUDS contributed to raising awareness and promoted tools for incorporating urbanization issues in regional dialogues and national policies. ESCAP pioneered the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum (APUF) in 1993, the success of which contributed to the formulation and launching of the World Urban Forum in 2002 by UN-Habitat. APUFs served as a platform for urban policy actors to discuss emerging and critical urban development issues, sharing of experiences, good practices and approaches and building new

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[15] Effectiveness score of sustainable urban development work was the highest with 3.71 (on a 5-point scale) assessed by 118 respondents. Top two areas of effectiveness were: urban development and climate change (ESCAP respondents); climate change and 2030 Agenda (other UN respondents); and 2030 Agenda and urban development (external respondents).

[16] EDD prepared a detailed review of the environment-focused SDGs, namely Goals 6, 7, 11, 12 and promoted stakeholder engagement in the SDG process

[17] ESCAP/RFSD/2020/6 and ESCAP/75/5.

[18] A/76/6 (Sect. 19) p.5 and A/75/6 (Sect. 19) p.6.

[19] Strengthening the Capacities of Policy Makers for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, DA 10, budget $500,000. Period: 2017-2018.

[20] Project progress report and A/75/6 (Sect. 19) p.32-33.

[21] Asia-Pacific Regional Guidelines on Voluntary Local Reviews. Countries included Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Bangladesh, and Nepal.

[22] Voluntary National Review (VNR) is a process through which countries assess and present progress made in achieving the global goals.

[23] EDD self-reported data confirmed its 2030 Agenda contributions, including: Identification of best practices for 2030 Agenda implementation; Support to VNRs of Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Turkmenistan, Cambodia, Fiji and Timor-Leste in 2019, and Kiribati, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Sri Lanka in 2018; Endorsement of ESCAP regional road map for 2030 Agenda implementation; Access to the Help Desk and its rapid response facility

partnerships for local, regional and national governments in achieving the New Urban Agenda in the Asia-Pacific. The 7th APUF (2019) in Malaysia[24] brought together over 5,000 stakeholders and established the Penang Platform for Sustainable Urbanization (PPSU).

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

EDD nascent work on climate change and the Paris Agreement had high appreciation and demand

33.   EDD led several activities including the organization of the Asia-Pacific Climate Week in 2019 and 2021 and contribution to the Climate Action Summit in 2019. It facilitated the Asia-Pacific regional corners in the UN climate change conferences (COP 25 and COP 26) and advocated for the need to raise climate ambition of NDCs. In particular, it supported the NDC reviews of Mongolia and Myanmar.

34.   In late 2021, the division published an assessment report[25] on the NDC commitments of Member States and how these contribute to keeping global temperatures below 2°C as per the Paris Agreement. It co-chaired the issue-based coalition (IBC) 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 environmental health of the planet. SUDS also supported city-based climate initiative (including ocean cities project). Stakeholders expressed strong demand for ESCAP leadership in fostering climate action and identifying regional and country-level priorities.

Overall, EDD capacity building work contributed to several tangible outcomes

Figure 5: Contribution of EDD capacity building activities as assessed by survey respondents (N=91)
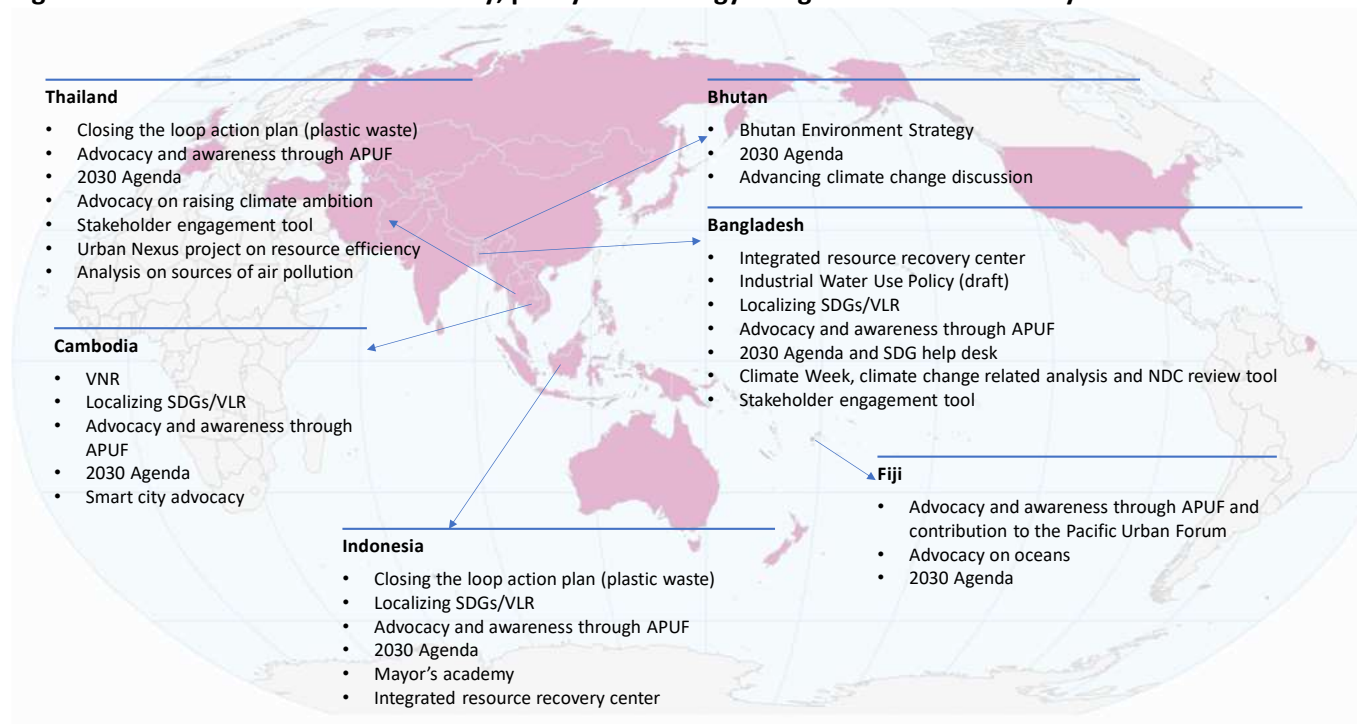

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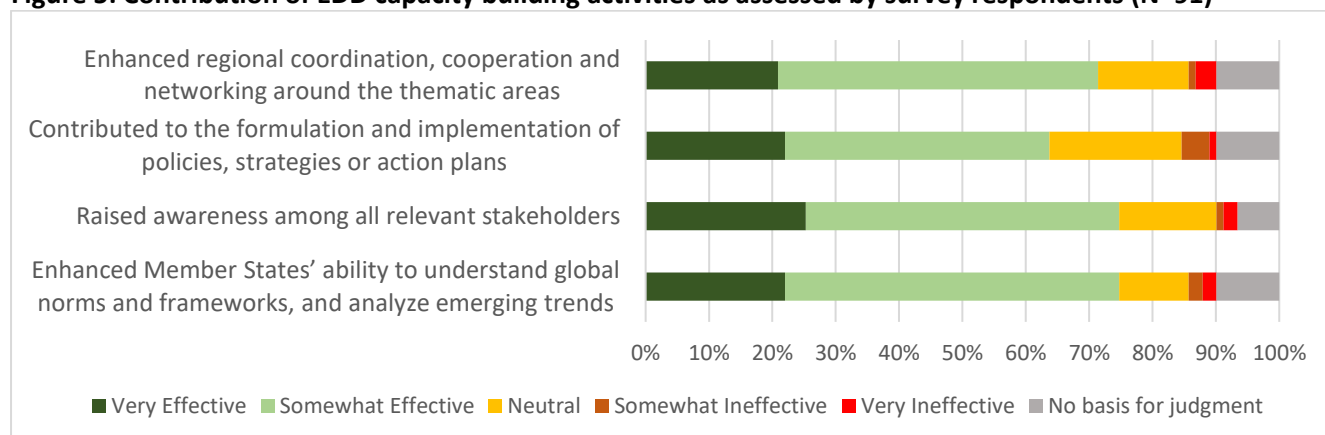
[24] Co-organized by ESCAP, UN-Habitat, Urbanice Malaysia, Penang Island City Council and State Government of Penang.
[25] Is 1.5°C within Reach for the Asia-Pacific Region? Ambition and Potential of NDC Commitments of the Asia-Pacific Countries, jointly published with UNEP and UN Women in October 2021.

35. On average, 71 per cent of all survey respondents assessed the effectiveness of EDD capacity building work positively (Figure 5). Respondents highlighted EDD contribution to raising awareness and enhancing ability of Member States to understand global norms as well as enhancing regional cooperation on the thematic issues.

36. EDD activities contributed to several specific intermediate-level outcomes and general advocacy in the six case study countries as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: EDD contributions to advocacy, policy and strategy design in the six case study countries

Thailand
- Closing the loop action plan (plastic waste)
- Advocacy and awareness through APUF
- 2030 Agenda
- Advocacy on raising climate ambition
- Stakeholder engagement tool
- Urban Nexus project on resource efficiency
- Analysis on sources of air pollution

Cambodia
- VNR
- Localizing SDGs/VLR
- Advocacy and awareness through APUF
- 2030 Agenda
- Smart city advocacy

Bhutan
- Bhutan Environment Strategy
- 2030 Agenda
- Advancing climate change discussion

Bangladesh
- Integrated resource recovery center
- Industrial Water Use Policy (draft)
- Localizing SDGs/VLR
- Advocacy and awareness through APUF
- 2030 Agenda and SDG help desk
- Climate Week, climate change related analysis and NDC review tool
- Stakeholder engagement tool

Fiji
- Advocacy and awareness through APUF and contribution to the Pacific Urban Forum
- Advocacy on oceans
- 2030 Agenda

Indonesia
- Closing the loop action plan (plastic waste)
- Localizing SDGs/VLR
- Advocacy and awareness through APUF
- 2030 Agenda
- Mayor's academy
- Integrated resource recovery center

Source: Analysis of survey, interview, and secondary data.

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

37. Despite their relatively small budgets (Table 3) covering multiple countries and with limited follow-up, EDD capacity building projects produced good results as discussed above.

Table 3: EDD capacity building projects 2018-2021

Funding source	Number	Total budget (USD)	Average budget (USD)
DA	4	1,836,000	459,000
RPTC	6	502,188	83,698
XB	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 availability of funding and familiarity with the intended beneficiaries and partners. This was partly due to the RPTC funding modality whereby small funds were allocated to *ad hoc* country requests for capacity building. However, since not many countries were aware of EDD offer of services, such requests normally came through personal connections or networking (see paragraph 24).

39.   Projects also mostly lacked linkages with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs). Projects were more likely to succeed where the three pillars of ESCAP work – capacity building, research, and intergovernmental processes – had strong interlinkages such as the case of SDGs (see paragraphs 55-60).

b) *EDD knowledge products were generally of high quality, but except for a handful of major reports, they were not widely known and used*

40.   Between 2018-2021, EDD produced or contributed to about 80 knowledge products comprising of flagship,[26] thematic reports, policy briefs, manuals and training materials (MTM), covering various subprogramme's topics. The most used words in 76 publications[27] are included in Figure 7 for a quick glance of the substantive issues addressed.

Figure 7: Word cloud of 76 EDD publications during 2018-2021

41.   Forty-one of these publications (51%) were included in a detailed quality review.[28] This included one report by the Delhi SRO[29] and three system-wide global reports with EDD contribution.[30] The majority of the publications covered the SDGs (29%) and sustainable cities (27%) thematic areas. Most reports (68%) had a regional coverage based on case studies that were more often from the South-East Asia subregion than others.

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

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[26] According to ESCAP Publications Programme, flagships are signature publications containing the most recent ESCAP analytical thinking on development areas for which ESCAP seeks to demonstrate or maintain leadership. Flagships are generally released during or just prior to major intergovernmental meetings. Each Division should prepare one flagship per major intergovernmental meeting, which may occur annually or biennially.

[27] Four publications issued in the last quarter of 2021 was excluded from this analysis.

[28] Each publication was assessed using 19 quality standards grouped under seven parameters: (1) thematic relevance; (2) method of analysis; (3) utility of analysis; (4) engagement and cooperation; (5) degree of duplication; (6) gender, human rights and disability considerations; and (7) SDGs.

[29] Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in South Asia: Key Policy Priorities and Implementation Challenges (2018).

[30] United Nations World Water Development Reports 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Figure 8: Overall quality per knowledge product type
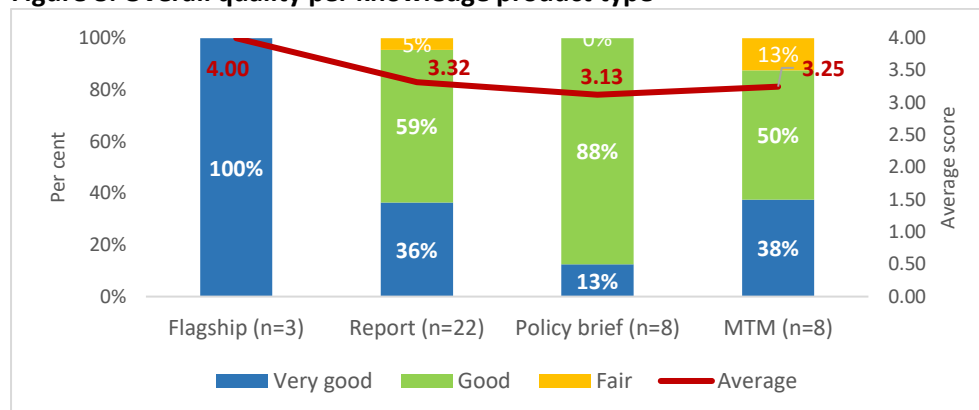
43.   Average quality score per parameter was good in five out of seven review parameters (Figure 9).[31] The publications received the highest average score (3.76) in avoiding duplications with others, indicating that EDD publications and research tended to address issues that were unique or tailored to the regional or subregional context with clear added value.

**Figure 9: Average quality score per review parameter**
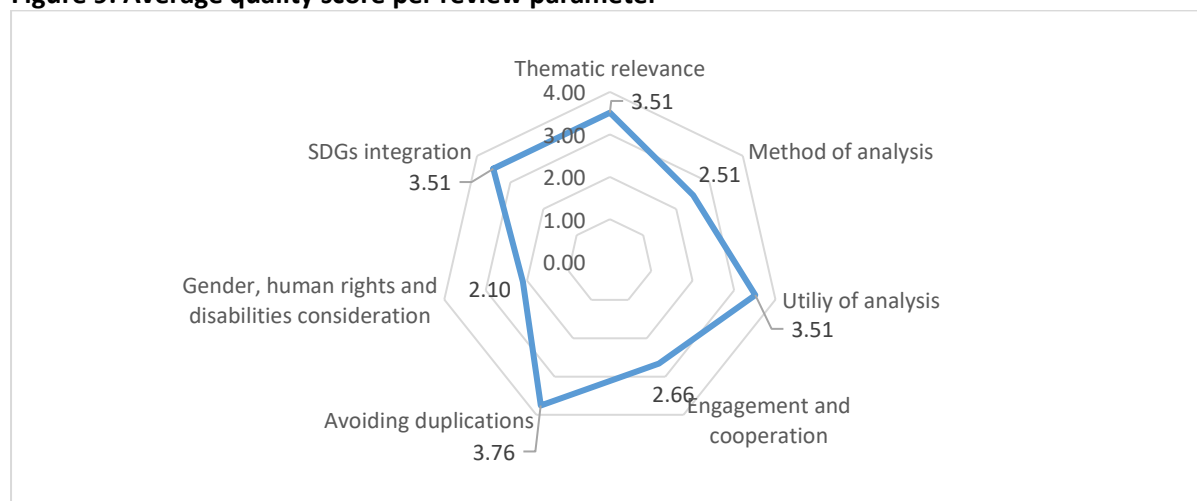
44.   As reflected in Figure 10, about 85 per cent of the publications clearly linked the analysis to overall 2030 Agenda issues, while 40 per cent were primarily focused on SDGs. Nearly 90 per cent publications offered useful analysis and included specific and actionable recommendations and policy prescriptions. The publications were thematically relevant in all but one case (97%) 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.[32]

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[31] Average score: "very good" =3.40-4; "good" = 2.60-3.39; and "fair" = 1.80-2.59.

[32] The relatively lower score for the methodology parameter was due to lack of explicit information about the methodology used in the publications. For the gender, human rights and disabilities parameter, the lower score was attributed mainly to the absence of any reference to human rights and disability issues in 68 and 54 per cent of the publications respectively.

Figure 10: Quality ratings per review parameter

% of publications

■ Very good ■ Good ■ Fair ■ Poor
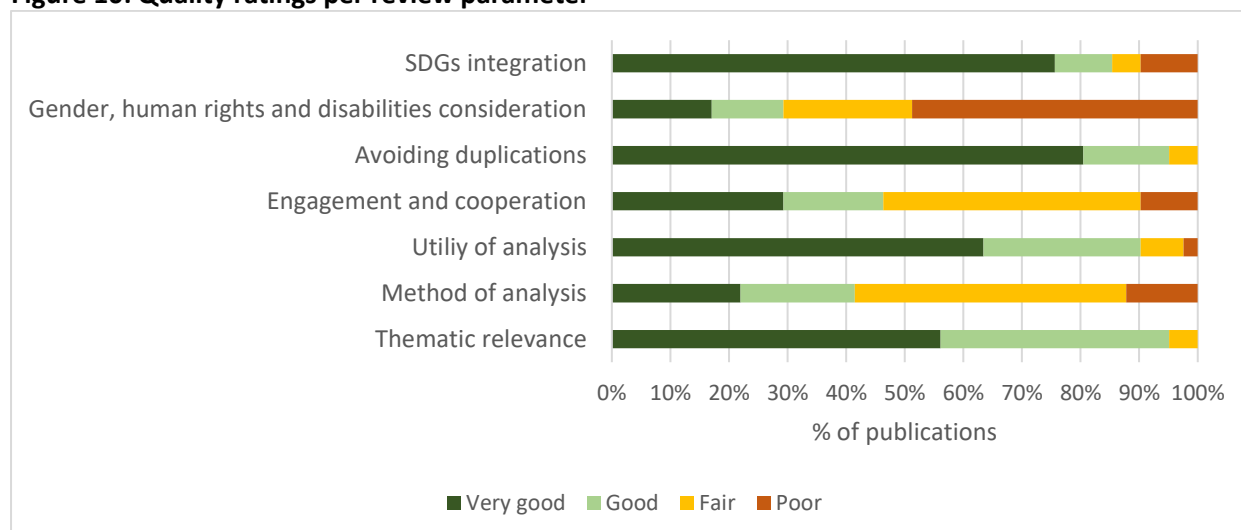
While knowledge products were assessed positively by survey respondents, they were not known to most external interviewees

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 EDD knowledge products. Figure 11 provides the thematic areas of publications in the order of familiarity.
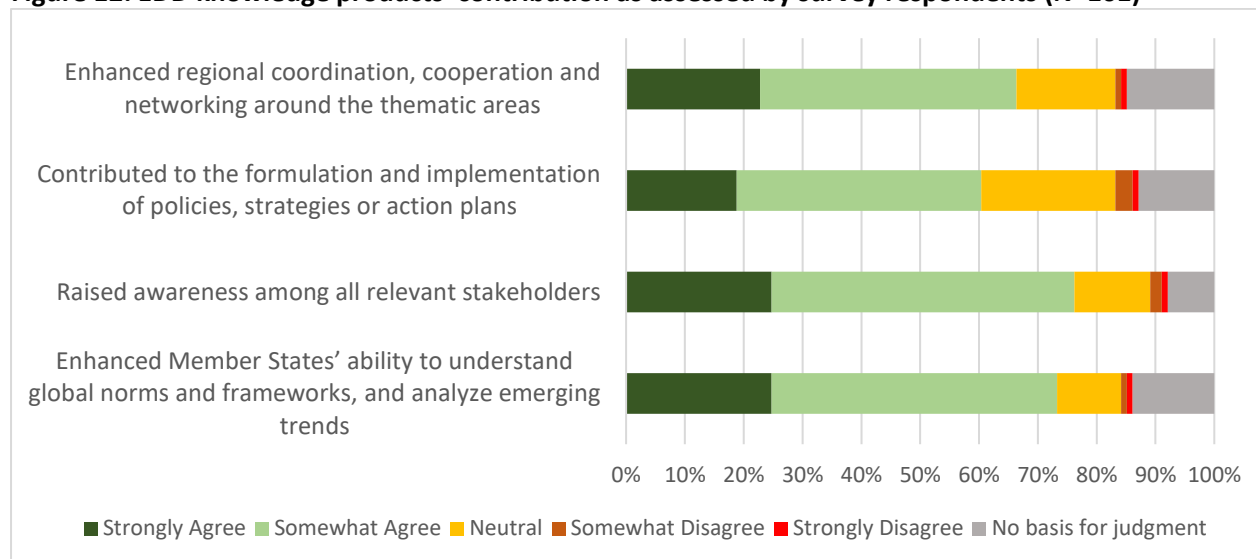
Figure 11: Awareness of knowledge products by thematic areas among survey respondents (multiple responses, n=252)
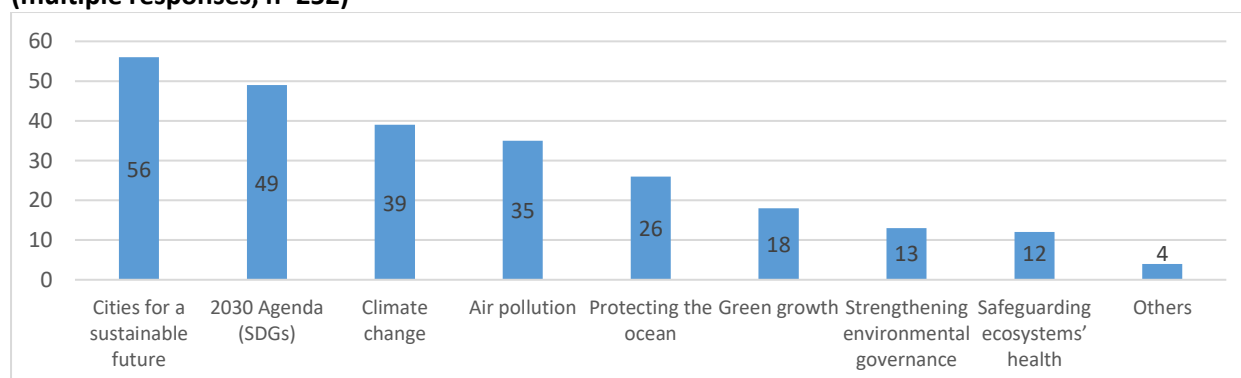
46.   Seventy-two per cent of all survey respondents (n=92) rated the quality of knowledge products as high (13% very high and 59% high).[33] They broadly assessed the effectiveness of EDD publications positively. On average, 69 per cent strongly or somewhat agreed they contributed to the four areas listed in Figure 12.

[33] This was 58 per cent among UN entity respondents.

Figure 12: EDD knowledge products' contribution as assessed by survey respondents (N=101)

Legend: ■ Strongly Agree ■ Somewhat Agree ■ Neutral ■ Somewhat Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree ■ No basis for judgment

47.   Very few external interviewees on the other hand were aware of EDD publications. While nearly half of all interviewees (47%) were unfamiliar with EDD publications, it was 80 per cent in the case of government interviewees and 63 per cent in the case of other UN 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 total downloads for the 80 publications were 754, and 63 per cent of the publications had less than 1,000 downloads.[34]

Figure 13: Average downloads of knowledge products per year
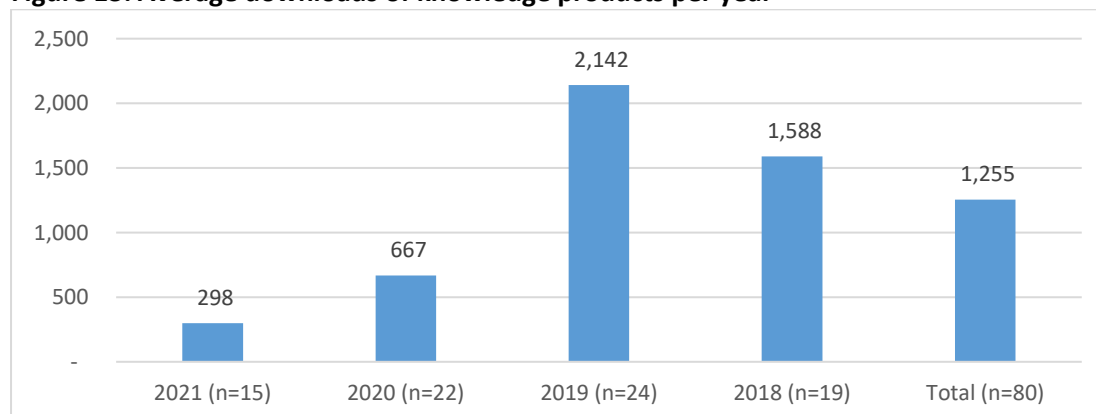
49.   Notwithstanding the presumable impact of Covid-19 pandemic during 2020-2021 (Figure 13), the downloads were generally low considering the highly relevant topics and also when compared with other regional commissions. For example, average downloads of EDD publications were a third of a comparable subprogramme in another UN regional commission that covered less than one-sixth

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[34] Some co-authored publications were likely to have additional downloads from the partners' websites.

of the ESCAP region population.[35] Within ESCAP, among the most downloaded 100 ESCAP publications, EDD had three in 2021, five in 2020 and two in 2018.

50.   The low awareness of EDD publications was due to a lack of monitoring and targeted dissemination to key audiences. Additionally, publications resulting from specific projects with limited thematic and geographic 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 ten most downloaded ESCAP publications in a year was the 2019 report on the future of Asia-Pacific cities, which was also the highest quality and most well-known publication among stakeholders.[36]

   c) EDD consensus building work contributed to a few intergovernmental resolutions but needed strengthening to fully realize this unique added value

51.   Less than half of all survey respondents[37] (45%) were familiar with EDD consensus building work. They assessed the 2030 Agenda and sustainable cities as the areas where EDD has been the most effective in regional consensus building (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Effectiveness of consensus building work by thematic areas (N=67)
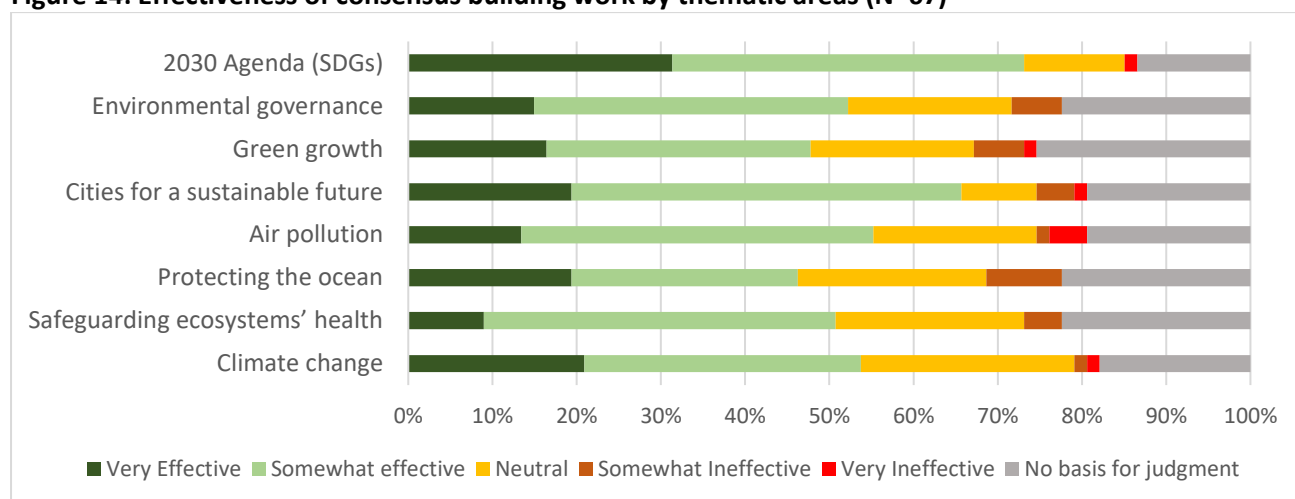
52.   As noted earlier, stakeholders considered ESCAP regional intergovernmental platform for dialogue as unique. Stakeholders' positive assessments included ESCAP facilitation of regional agreements including the ministerial conferences and direct access to national governments. ESCAP successfully brought key issues like climate change, air pollution and oceans to the policy discussions among its Members States, contributing to two specific resolutions on air pollution and oceans.[38] Along with these resolutions, the Regional Roadmap for Implementing the 2030 Agenda[39] were also results of ESCAP-wide efforts with EDD contribution. Furthermore, EDD contributed to the strong

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[35] Average EDD publication download was 1,323 compared with 4,032 of ECALC Subprogramme 7 Sustainable development and human settlements. Estimated ECALC region population was 660 million compared with over 4 billion in the ESCAP region.

[36] Of 414 articles in 2018 and 2021 on the Climate and Environment page of UN News, where system-wide entities showcased their work on the topic, none was by EDD. Its sole contribution was in the context of 2019 APFSD featuring the joint report with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and (UNDP) on the linkage between empowerment and sustainable development - https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/03/1035551

[37] Survey respondents include three groups of stakeholders: ESCAP staff, UN partners and external respondents, e.g., member States, donors, civil society organizations, etc.

[38] ESCAP/RES/75/4 and ESCAP/RES/76/1.

[39] ESCAP/RES/73/9, ESCAP/RES/75/2 and ESCAP/RES/75/3.

incorporation of sustainability and environmental aspects in the theme study for the 77th session of the Commission.[40]

53.   The 2017 Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific was endorsed by the Commission resolution 74/4.[41] However, several key areas of EDD work did not have a regional-level mandate or resolution. Furthermore, the 2014 resolution on sustainable urban development[42] adopted ahead of the 6th APUF needed to be updated in view of the New Urban Agenda, the outcome of the 7th session (i.e. PPSU) and as preparations for the 8th APUF begin. The Division did not fully utilise the global environment-related resolutions as reference (e.g., the United Nations Environment Assembly was nearly absent in its knowledge products).[43]

54.   A review of the last two CED meeting proceedings[44] indicate active participation of Member States with over 20 country statements showcasing initiatives in the thematic areas (6th session) and largely positive assessment of both sessions by delegates on the relevance and effectiveness of the sessions. However, the CED meetings did not make any substantive recommendation for decision to the Commission except establishing a Technical Expert Group.

d)   *Weak interlinkages among the three functional areas limited the effectiveness of EDD work*

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

56.   Three reports classified by EDD as flagships: An ESCAP-wide theme study on oceans for the seventy-sixth Commission session,[45] an EDD co-authored report with UN-Habitat and other partners,[46] and a jointly produced report by EDD, ADB and UNDP on the 2030 Agenda.[47] However, only the theme study on oceans was considered by the CED while the report on the 2030 Agenda was considered by the 6th APFSD and subsequently referenced in a Commission resolution.[48]

57.   EDD therefore has not been able to use the CED 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. This has contributed to its capacity building activities being opportunistic and scattered rather than strategic and focused (see paragraphs 37-39).

58.   In terms of operationalizing regional resolutions into actions and policies by Member States, staff respondents assessed EDD to be most effective on the 2030 Agenda (38%) followed by sustainable citifies (21%).

59.   Additionally, regional resolutions were not well known among UNCT members and national policy makers, who considered EDD country-level efforts as somewhat isolated from its intergovernmental mechanism. Most of the country-based interviewees from other UN entities had

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[40] Beyond the pandemic: Building back better from crises in Asia and the Pacific, ESCAP Theme Study for 77th Commission Session, March 2021.
[41] ESCAP/RES/74/4 on ESCAP/74/10/Add.1.
[42] ESCAP/RES/70/12.
[43] United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) is the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment. The 4th UNEA had over 20 resolutions in the areas of EDD work but EDD made only one reference to UNEA in a footnote in its knowledge products.
[44] Fifth (2018) and sixth (2020) sessions of the Committee on Environment and Development (CED).
[45] ESCAP/76/1/Rev.1. Changing sails: Accelerating Regional Actions for Sustainable Oceans in Asia and the Pacific (2020) where EDD led the drafting of one chapter.
[46] The Future of Asian and Pacific Cities 2019: Transformative Pathways Towards Sustainable Urban Development (2019).
[47] Accelerating Progress: An Empowered, Inclusive and Equal Asia and the Pacific (2019).
[48] See ESCAP/75/5 and ESCAP/RES/75/2.

an unsatisfactory assessment of how regional resolutions were translated into country-level actions and policies.

60.   Country-level stakeholders including UNCT members expressed strong demand for ESCAP regional and subregional dialogues on cross-boundary issues such as water, air pollution, climate change and DRR, upstream issues of river basin management, marine pollution, blue economy and related needs of CSN countries.

   e) EDD reported accomplishment were often output oriented and lacked the evidence to validate them.

61.   Self-reported data in the budget documents reflected EDD performance through a combination of activities, outputs, and in some instances intermediate outcomes. EDD formulated its work under three key planned results, along with key achievements reported under each (Table 4).[49] While EDD had mechanisms to report on their work, most of their self-reported data were at the activity and output levels.

62.   In addition, the vagueness in the formulation of the indicators and lack of detailed records on which beneficiaries developed the referred policies and frameworks, whether they were implemented and how EDD contributed to them, limited the evaluation's ability to verify them.

Table 4. EDD Self-reported performance data[50] [51]

Key planned results	Self-reported data	Output/outcome
i. Inclusive and integrated policy processes for effective climate action and natural resources management	Establishment of the ASEAN Resources Panel in 2020	Output
	18 policies, strategies and frameworks developed by Member States and stakeholders in 2018-2019 biennium (against the target of ten)	Outcomes
ii. More ambitious nationally determined contributions to meet commitments to the Paris Agreement	Support to the nationally determined contribution (NDC) review processes of Mongolia and Myanmar (2020)	Output
	Pathways for climate action identified in the Asia-Pacific Climate Week 2019, and its contribution to the 2019 Climate Action Summit	Output
	Signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between ESCAP and the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement to strengthen regional climate action in 2018	Output
iii. Member States strengthen regional cooperation on natural resource management, adopt sustainable urban development pathways and develop climate and air pollution mitigation actions	CED established a technical expert group on environment and development to enhance regional exchange and mobilize technical expertise to accelerate environmental and sustainable development action	Output
	Asia-Pacific Climate Week 2019	Output
	Call for expanding partnerships for sustainable development by Member States at the 5th APFSD in 2018	Output

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[49] A/76/6 (Sect. 19), A/75/6 (Sect. 19), A/74/6 (Sect. 19) and A/72/6 (Sect. 19).

[50] The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Resources Panel comprises up to 30 experts and scientists, and its workplan is intended to enhance knowledge and analysis on the environment, and natural resources management trends and impacts, and to provide policy recommendations for consultation and uptake by ASEAN member States.

[51] NDCs are national climate plans highlighting climate actions, including climate related targets, policies and measures governments aims to implement in response to climate change and as a contribution to global climate action. Central to the NDCs is the concept of national determination.

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

a) *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 work coordinated by EDD as evident in the proceedings of the APFSDs and subregional SDG forums, staff interviews and surveys. However, less than half of staff respondents (Figure 15) considered EDD collaborated "very" or "relatively" well with other divisions (45%) and the SROs (49%).

Figure 15: EDD collaboration with other divisions and SROs
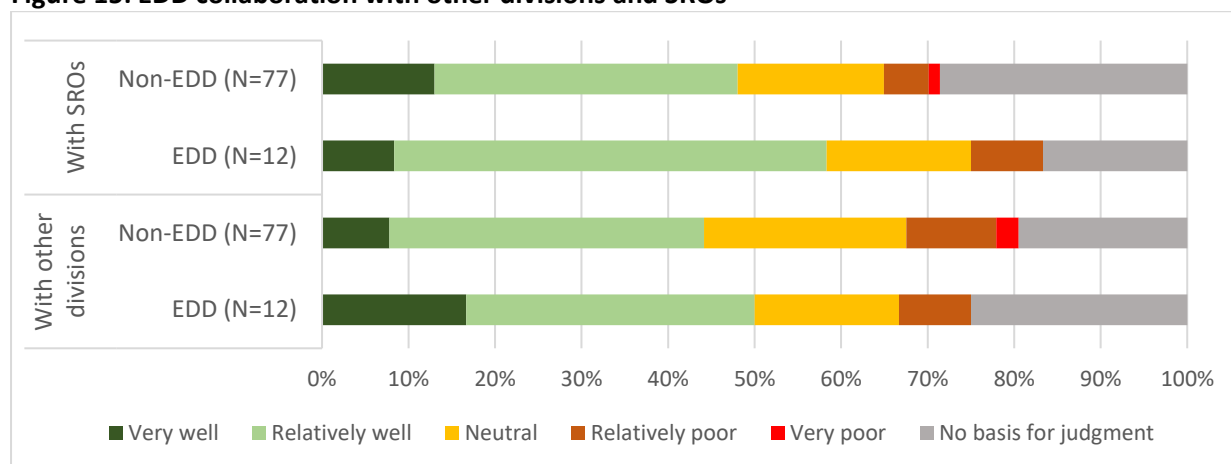
64.   Over 80 per cent (24 out of 29) of ESCAP interviewees identified examples of inter-divisional collaboration[52] with EDD although most pertained to the 2030 Agenda related work. Other examples of joint work and outputs included those on climate finance and carbon pricing (with MPFD), oceans (with Statistics Division), phasing out coal (with Energy Division), air pollution and plastic waste (with IDD), Mayors Academy and ASEAN Resources Panel (with several divisions) as well as ESCAP-wide work on the SDG Help Desk, the Asia-Pacific Climate Week and climate conferences. Internal collaboration was partly enhanced by ESCAP prerequisite to engage another division for project 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[53] had little contribution from EDD except by a staff member contributing in the expert group meeting.

66.   Sixty-three per cent of staff interviewees[54] raised concerns that inter-divisional substantive collaboration was not optimal and observed competition and silos in how the different divisions operate. Several high-level interviewees observed improvement in this regard in 2021, but significant

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[52] Inter-divisional collaboration included participation at events (e.g. workshops, conferences, forums) organized by other divisions, development and implementation of joint projects, contribution to studies, reports and intergovernmental meetings and development of analytical tools and training.

[53] The 2021 flagship report of the Trade, Investment and Innovation Division "The Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report (APTIR) 2021: Accelerating Climate-smart Trade and Investment for Sustainable Development."

[54] 15 out of 29.

opportunities for substantive collaboration still remain as there were few strategically conceived partnerships to fully realize the ESCAP comparative advantage of multidisciplinary expertise.

67.   For example, interviewees in several countries[55] expressed a lack of analytical tools to quantify the economic and social impacts of climate change, population forecasting tools for urban planning, 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 EDD role as a center of excellence on multidisciplinary issues affecting the environment, climate and urbanization.

68.   Collaboration with SROs was slightly higher than with other Divisions, but it largely pertained to SROs assistance in the identification of and liaison with relevant country-level counterparts and attendees for EDD events. EDD provided technical support to SROs through inputs into reports, subregional forums, UNSDCFs and joint projects such as collaboration on air pollution (with ENEA), oceans (with EPO) and plastic waste (with SEA).[56] However, SRO staff interviewed considered collaboration with EDD 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 SROs pertaining to implementation of substantive activities — a longstanding and ESCAP-wide issue.[57] SROs had limited staff, which was exacerbated by prolonged vacancies (e.g. SSWA and EPO), who were not specialists in the substantive areas. Some SROs had their own subregional reports while others provided subregional input into ESCAP reports, indicating inconsistencies across SROs[58].

b) EDD had strategic partnerships with UNEP and UN-Habitat but country-level coherence with other UN entities was poor

70.   EDD strategic partnership 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, EDD efforts — especially those regarding intergovernmental convening, regional forums, access to governments, multidisciplinary work and stakeholder networks — were seen as complementary. Staff respondents assessed EDD collaboration with UNEP and UN-Habitat to be the strongest among UN entities, with 42 and 40 per cent respondents rating it as "very well" or "somewhat well", respectively. Among the other relevant UN entities, collaboration with UNDP was rated as the lowest.

71.   Due to funding challenges and minimal to no operational presence of UN-Habitat in several countries in the region, EDD work on urban development was considered important contribution to the New Urban Agenda and SDG 11.[59] EDD frequently referenced and mainstreamed the New Urban Agenda in its knowledge products[60].

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[55] Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia and Fiji.

[56] Subregional Offices for East and North-East Asia (ENEA), Pacific (EPO) and South-East Asia (SEA).

[57] OIOS 2015 evaluation report (E/AC.51/2015/7) recommended ESCAP to clarify roles, responsibilities and authorities related to subregional offices.

[58] Subprogramme managers saw little substantive contributions from SROs, and a few questioned the value of going to country-level counterparts through SROs given the improvement in virtual technologies and diminished locational advantages between Bangkok and the SRO locations.

[59] See A/RES/71/256 for New Urban Agenda. SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

[60] 74 references in 13 publications

72.   Although SUDS worked in collaboration with UN-Habitat and other partners,[61] several of its capacity building activities (e.g., marine waste) were duplicative in nature with other UN entities such as UNEP and UNDP.

73.   Collaboration with country level entities was still evolving. ESCAP respondents had relatively more positive assessment of EDD collaboration with other entities than external respondents (Figure 16). While 39 per cent of ESCAP respondents considered EDD collaborated "very" or "relatively" well with UNRCs and UNCTs, only 23 per cent of other UN respondents assessed as such.

Figure 16: EDD collaboration with other entities as assessed by ESCAP and other UN respondents
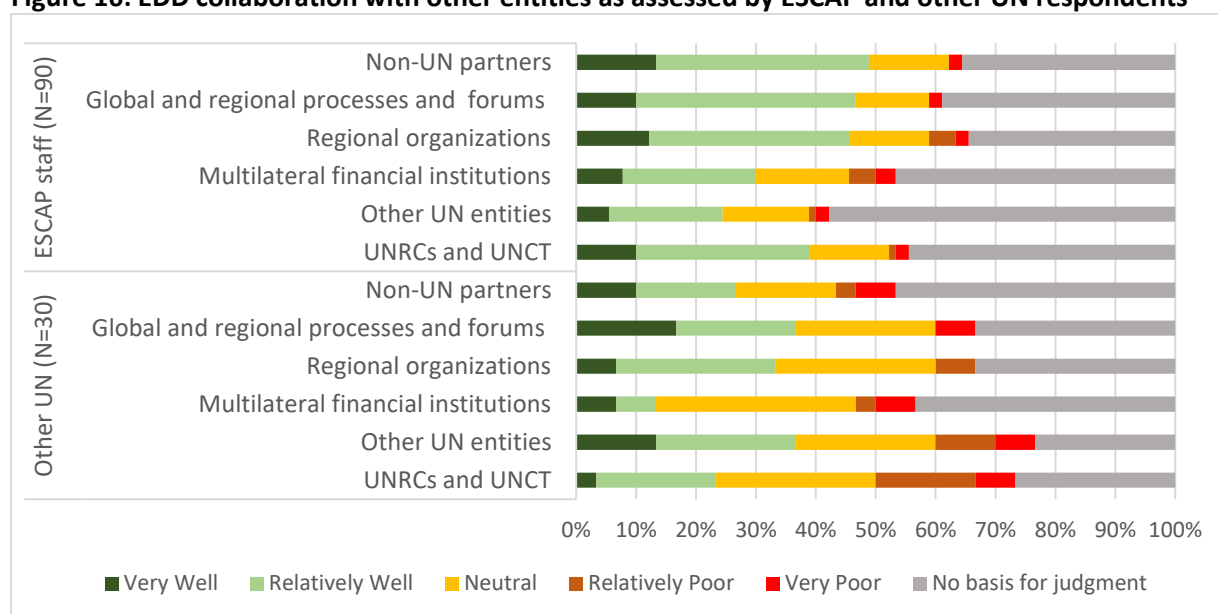
74.   A good example of interagency collaboration was the Asia-Pacific regional knowledge hub, which was developed based on the success of the ESCAP led SDG Help Desk. It was co-led by ESCAP and the Development Coordination Office (DCO) regional office for Asia and the Pacific, which served as a key platform for sharing policy expertise and providing rapid response to countries and UNCTs to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The RCP and the IBC on climate change and air pollution (co-led by EDD and UNEP) were seen by country-level stakeholders as work in progress, which have yet to meaningfully benefit them.

75.   There were multiple positive examples of EDD regional-level collaboration with other UN entities, and with UNRCs and UNCTs at the country level in Bhutan, Mongolia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Thailand, Malaysia and Cambodia. However, country-level collaboration was generally sporadic, often missing basic familiarity among UNCT members and some projects duplicative of UNCT efforts. Over 70 per cent of interviewees from other UN entities (29 out of 41) cited examples of inadequacy in collaboration with EDD.

76.   EDD projects were not linked to the UNSDCFs except in the case of Thailand.[62] UNSDCF priorities in all of the nine countries reviewed included EDD work areas, but ESCAP was signatory to only four of them (Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, Kazakhstan) and not the other five despite having significant activities in those countries.[63] The criteria for signing UNSDCFs were not clear, although ESCAP

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[61] Such as the United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific (UCLG ASPAC) and Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI).
[62] As per General Assembly resolution 72/279, UNSDCFs are "the most important instrument for the planning and implementation of United Nations development activities in each country."
[63] Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Thailand

management noted the lack of resources in its SROs to meet the reportedly heavy coordination and reporting burden as the main reason for non-signature.

77.   UNRC interviewees recognized ESCAP value added and potential in addressing transboundary issues, regional consensus building, data and analytics and sharing best practices. However, in nine out of 11 countries, they were critical of EDD activities as *ad hoc*, isolated efforts implemented in parallel to UNCT. While they acknowledged an increase in ESCAP efforts to keep UNRCs informed, substantive collaboration and shared programming were rare.

78.   In the UNSDCFs reviewed, environment and climate change issues were grouped together with disaster risk reduction (DRR) into country priorities. Similar linkage was evident in the 2021 Glasgow Climate Pact as well as Secretary-General's report on "Our Common Agenda" Commitment 2 on protecting the planet to accelerate the measures for adaptation and resilience to climate change in developing countries. In ESCAP, DRR activities were located in IDD along with the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) section, although it had more substantive relevance with the environment and climate change.

c)   EDD had strong collaboration and partnership with non-UN entities

79.   As shown in Figure 16 above, both ESCAP and other UN survey respondents assessed EDD collaboration with external entities such as CSOs, regional organizations and forums higher than with other UN entities. Similarly, in the preparation of knowledge products, EDD collaboration with external partners (71%) was stronger than with other UN entities (49%) and other ESCAP subprogrammes (37%) (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Cooperation in the preparation of knowledge products (N=41)
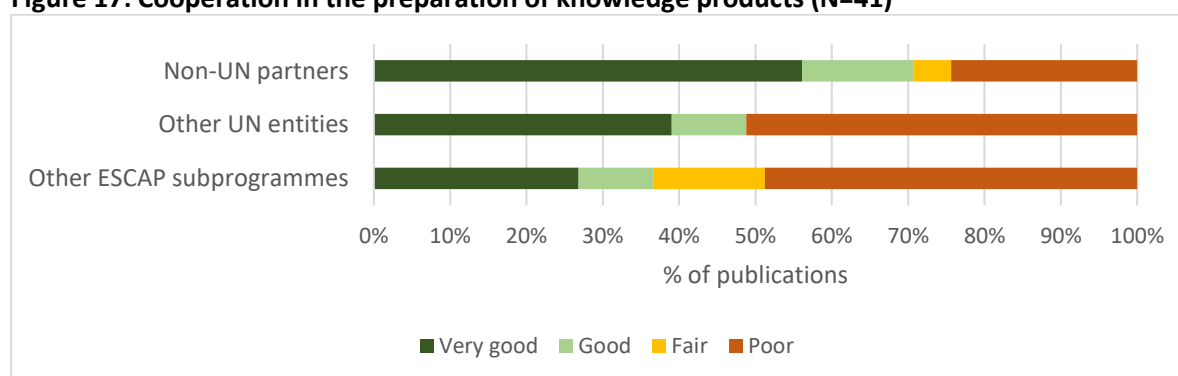

80.   EDD maintained a strong network of CSOs in its 2030 Agenda and urban development work. Stakeholders appreciated its APFSD events engaging CSOs as inclusive, and it routinely partnered with several CSOs for project implementation and advocacy on urban issues.

D.   There were some examples of sustainability of EDD work related to the 2030 Agenda and sustainable urban development, but the general business model was not considered conducive to creating lasting country level changes

81.   Over half of staff respondents considered that EDD work on sustainable cities, climate change and air pollution and the 2030 Agenda was "very" or "somewhat" sustainable (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Sustainability of EDD work as assessed by staff (N=90)
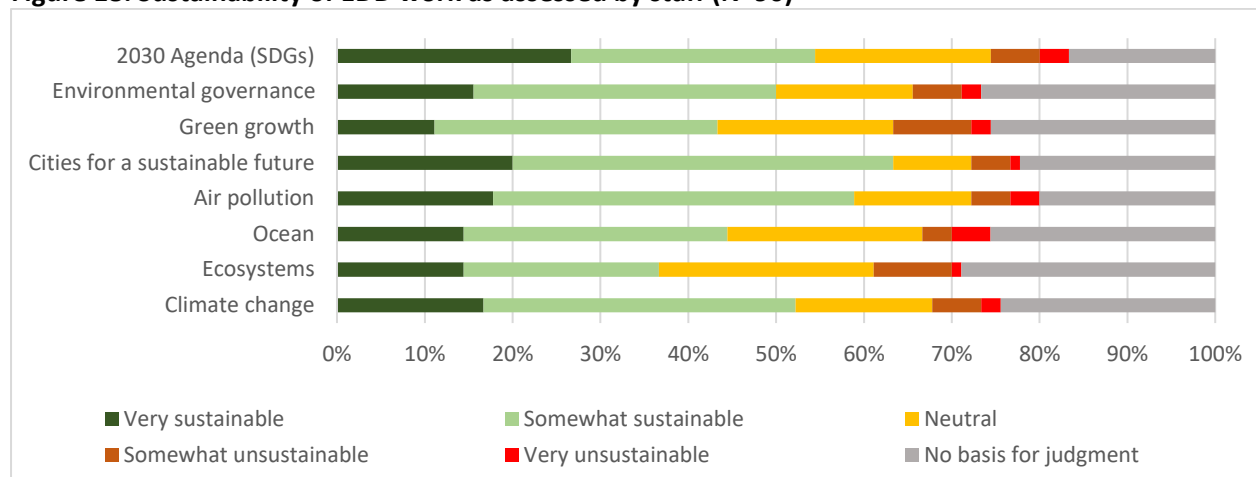
82.   Several examples of tangible and intangible EDD contributions to sustainability were observed, including contribution to the 2030 Agenda, regional and subregional forums, assistance to countries with VNRs and VLRs, integration of SDGs into national planning and stakeholder participation tools. Its urban development work also served as a catalyst in raising advocacy and networking on urban issues across the region. Its work on climate change — contribution to the climate conferences, support to NDCs, tools for climate finance and emission calculation — showed potential for contribution in raising climate ambitions in the region.

83.   Its tangible contributions included the success of the Integrated Resource Recovery Centers — 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 environment strategy in Bhutan and industrial water use policy in Bangladesh were also concrete examples of contributions.

84.   However, the sustainability of EDD 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 UN engagement and resources. Some of these constraints were linked to the funding modality of DA and RPTC projects. The inherent difficulties of measuring impact and sustainability of training, workshops and forums, knowledge products and intergovernmental discussions — key elements of 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.

E.   The cross-cutting issues of gender, human rights and disability considerations were more prominent in the 2030 Agenda work but needed improvement in other areas

85.   Gender considerations were incorporated in the majority (60%) of EDD knowledge products, but human rights and disability issues appeared in less than half (Figure 19). While gender considerations appeared across all types of publications, human rights and disability issues featured mostly in the two World Water Development reports, SDG Progress Report, access rights and stakeholder participation and four SDG profiles. The publication on sustainability outlook in Mongolia and the Future of Asia-Pacific Cities report also incorporated both issues.

Figure 19: References to cross-cutting issues in EDD knowledge products
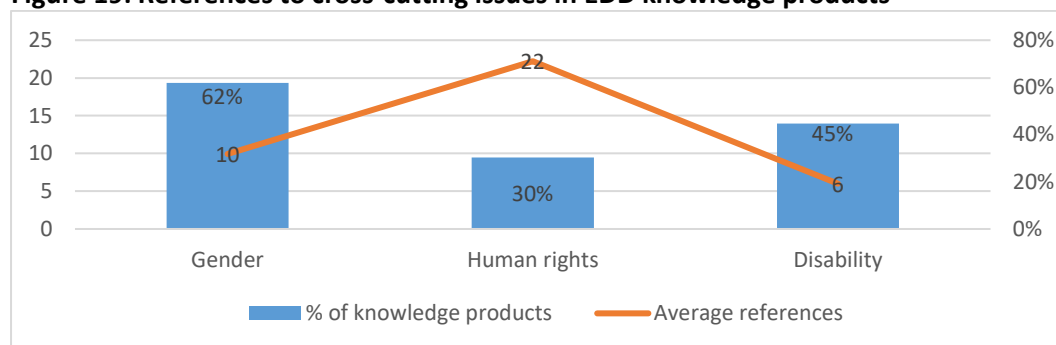
Source: Knowledge products review, N=76.

86.	Staff survey respondents also assessed EDD incorporation of cross-cutting issues in the same manner, with gender the most incorporated and disability the least (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Integration of cross-cutting issues in EDD work as assessed by staff (N=83)
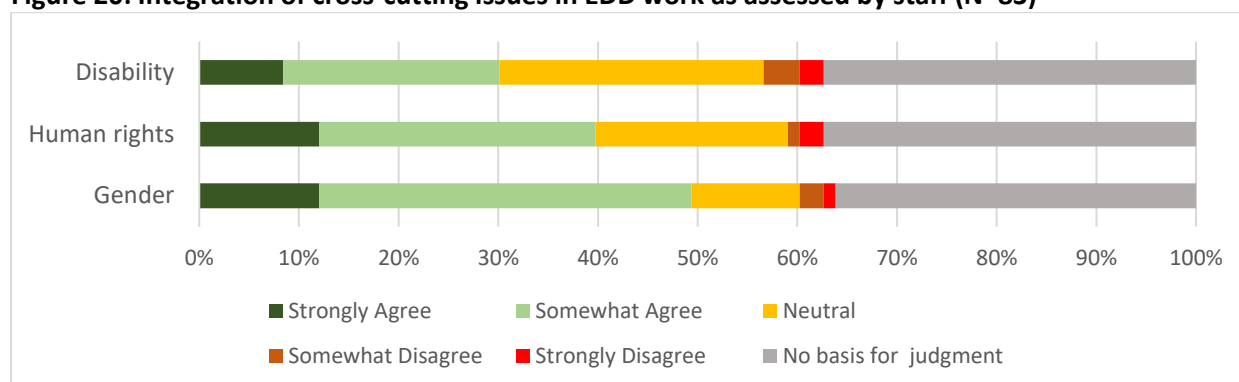
87.	Staff interviewees expressed strong awareness about incorporation of gender in their work with examples spanning the work of both sections. Conscious efforts were made to increase female participation in activities and training (e.g. Mayor Academy, DA 11 project). However, human rights and disability issues were yet to be adequately mainstreamed.[64]

# V.	Conclusion

88.	ESCAP-EDD worked on highly relevant and some of the most visible themes of the United Nations system, including on the 2030 Agenda, environment and climate, and sustainable urban development. Amid a crowded field of United Nations entities, the Division produced significant results in operationalizing ESCAP-wide work on the 2030 Agenda and supporting Member States in mainstreaming SDGs into their national plans. Stakeholders also appreciated its work on promoting issues related to sustainable urban development and climate action. EDD was responsive to specific requests from Member States for technical assistance, consistently produced high quality knowledge products, and effectively partnered with some key actors.

89.	However, the Division has not fully realized its comparative advantages, with challenges in creating strong interlinkages among its three functional areas of work, consolidating the multidisciplinary expertise of ESCAP in addressing the issues and fully adopting the UN development system reform principles in the delivery of its work.

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[64] A DA 12 project on "Leaving No One Behind" to address disability in urban policies was planned with UN-Habitat.

90.   There remains strong stakeholder demand for intellectual and analytical leadership and guidance from EDD in supporting countries and UNCTs, taking integrated approach to tackle these multidisciplinary and cross-boundary challenges. At the same time, its work remains more relevant than ever in view of the dire warnings issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) about the consequences of inaction on climate and the unavoidable multiple climate hazards.[65]

VI.   Recommendations

91.   OIOS-IED makes eight important recommendations, all of which were accepted by ESCAP.

Recommendation 1: (Results A, B and C)

92.   In view of the transfer of the 2030 Agenda related work to the OES, **ESCAP-EDD should identify and focus its work on specific niche areas that are within its comparative advantages, transboundary and fully aligned with the Ministerial Declarations, including from the Committee on Environment and Development**.

Indicators of implementation: Revised strategy identifying focus areas of EDD work, including approaches on how it aims to contribute to specific environment, climate and urbanization issues in ways that are complementary to other UN entities' efforts.

Recommendation 2: (Results A, B, C and D)

93.   **ESCAP-EDD should develop a capacity development strategy to plan and implement technical assistance and capacity building projects in line with the identified niche areas.**

This should focus on:

a) Strengthening the strategic importance and geographic balance of its capacity building activities across the five ESCAP subregions, including prioritizing the CSN countries as appropriate;

b) Incorporating the priorities identified in the UNSDCFs 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 States' requests for assistance;

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

e) Strengthening collaboration with local partners and country-based UN 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 implementation: Strategy for planning, implementation and balanced geographic reach of capacity building activities, dissemination of results including setting up a mechanism for monitoring Member States' requests.

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[65] Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, February 2022.

Recommendation 3: (Results A and B)

94.   **ESCAP-EDD should prepare a list of its offers and disseminate it among key stakeholders at the region and at country levels.**

This should include:

> a) Development of a clear offer of analytical and national support work on the identified thematic areas of focus;
>
> b) Use the offer list to make introductions and for outreach to key regional and national level stakeholders including relevant government officials and UNCTs;
>
> c) Through the monitoring mechanism (recommendation 2c) filter and match incoming requests for support from Member States based on their offer and refer requests outside the offer to other ESCAP units or UN entities as appropriate; and
>
> d) Use the outreach efforts as the basis to form communities of practice around identified thematic areas.

Indicators of implementation: EDD list of offers prepared and used for introduction and outreach to key stakeholders.

Recommendation 4: (Result B)

95.   **ESCAP should place more prominence on the sustainable urban development work of EDD and clearly delineate the thematic areas of responsibility between the two sections.**

This could include, for example: (i) renaming the Division to reflect its dual focus on environment and urban development; (ii) scaling up the APUF to consider urban issues beyond environment and across all ESCAP subprogrammes; (iii) seeking a specific mandate from the Commission, as needed, to include an inter-governmental segment in the APUF; and (iv) outlining distinct results on urban work in the programme plan.

Indicators of implementation: Evidence of considerations and actions undertaken to give prominence to urban work.

Recommendation 5: (Result B)

96.   **ESCAP-EDD 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 should include discussions and policy debates based on EDD flagship reports, position papers, etc., and should be one of the key elements that inform the capacity development strategy under recommendation 2. In this line, ESCAP-EDD should consider publishing periodic thematic and flagship reports in support of the CED along with relevant dashboards and observatories to enhance its role as a center of excellence on multidisciplinary issues affecting environment, climate, and urbanization. This should include an active dissemination strategy and initiatives to promote the utility of its knowledge products.

Indicators of implementation: Regular flagship reports in support of the CED. Strategy and actions for dissemination of knowledge products.   Agenda and other committee documents covering thematic areas of EDD work and discussions based on EDD flagship publications.

Recommendation 6: (Result A, and C)

97.   **ESCAP-EDD should strengthen regional coordination efforts through the RCP and IBCs as opportunities to engage with the regional and country-level UN entities in a more systematic way.** This should also include ongoing engagement with the UNRCs and UNCT members to capture and showcase best practices and for exchange of lessons.

Indicators of implementation: Evidence of enhanced participation in the RCP, IBCs and with UNCTs in the region.

Recommendation 7: (Result C)

98.   **ESCAP should consider integrating the DRR section within EDD in consideration of the substantive proximity of environment, climate change and disaster related issues, and to align its structure with the thematic grouping of these issues in the UNSDCFs of countries in the region.**

Indicators of implementation: Evidence supporting management deliberation and decision on integrating DRR section within EDD.

Recommendation 8: (Result E)

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

Indicators of implementation: Guidance on mainstreaming gender, human rights and disability developed and disseminated across ESCAP.

Annex I: ESCAP management response on the draft report

UNITED NATIONS   **NATIONS UNIES**

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: Mr. (Eddie) Yee Woo Guo   12 July 2022
Director
Inspection and Evaluation Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services   SPMD/WP/24

THROUGH: Ms. Fatoumata Ndiaye, Under-Secretary-General
Office of Internal Oversight Services

FROM: Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and
   Executive Secretary of ESCAP

SUBJECT: **Draft Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific – Subprogramme 4: Environment and Development**

With reference to your memo dated 1 July 2022 on the above-mentioned subject, we are pleased to inform you that 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 timeframe 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.