

Evaluation Brief

ESCWA's Project : "Strengthening Statistical Capacity for the ESCWA Countries in Energy Statistics and Energy Balance"



ESCWA

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Background

The energy sector is at the crossroads of socio-economic development and environmental protection, directly impacting the economy, employment and natural resources. Energy statistics provide the framework needed to develop evidence-based policies to make informed decisions regarding both the energy sector and national development. In the Arab region, a substantial gap exists between the demand and the ability to supply energy statistics. As such, energy policies risk being developed without accurate empirical evidence.

Due to this substantial gap in the region, ESCWA has received several requests from Member States for technical assistance on compiling energy statistics and producing an energy balance. Moreover, ESCWA organized an Expert Group Meeting aimed at the compilation and analysis of energy statistics and indicators in 2009, which guided a set of recommendations focused on enhancing the quality of energy statistics used in establishing an energy balance at the national and regional levels.

In follow-up to that expert meeting and its recommendations, ESCWA spearheaded the **"Regional project for strengthening statistical capacity for the ESCWA countries in energy statistics and energy balance"**. The project was designed to enhance national statistical capacity in developing energy information systems, energy statistics and balance. Project activities included technical assistance missions to Member States, setting-up national working groups to develop a knowledge network, regional and national training workshops, study

visits for practitioners, development of a national database and a regional seminar to formulate plans of action for regular energy balance. The project was implemented within all of ESCWA's 17 Member States in cooperation with international, regional and national institutions.

An evaluation was conducted reviewing the project's duration from 2011-2014, which sought to measure the project's overall achievements with regard to its intended goals and objectives. The evaluation was forward-looking and assessed the project's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. It consolidated main findings, limitations and critical reflections on the project's outcomes, providing insights for future work.

Key Findings

The evaluation found that the project was successful in achieving its stated objectives, with a clear commitment to using collaborative efforts to achieving the project's goals.

Relevance: Through the training of relevant ministries and national bodies, the project successfully addressed the primary goal of strengthening national statistical capacity in developing energy information systems and energy statistics and balance. The project's flexibility allowed activities to remain relevant for targeted beneficiaries within Member States, despite challenging contexts.

Effectiveness: As confirmed by many interviewed participants, the project was effective in its implementation strategy. The project took into account the planned benefits, stakeholders' participation and cooperation with other partners during the implementation of all its activities. The project was particularly successful in raising awareness about energy statistics and energy balance in the ESCWA region.

Efficiency: The findings determined that the project was correctly budgeted and that the project team managed well the matters related to the financial aspects and time management of the project. It was concluded that the day-to-day management of the project was efficient.

Sustainability: The sustainability of this project was made evident through the initiation of an externally funded follow-up project on energy statistics in the transport sector for Egypt, Jordan and Palestine. ESCWA and its partners play an imperative role in supporting Member States in implementing practical activities in the future.

Key Challenges

1. In many instances the political and/or security situation in a number of ESCWA Member States created circumstances that required a re-orientation of activities to other locations. This subsequently affected the delivery of the project and its activities.
2. Gender was difficult to address in this project, due to the technical nature of the subject matter under consideration.
3. The structure of the project's logical framework matrix made the monitoring of issues related to legislative and institutional framework for policies and programmes difficult. While the project articulation required redesign, the flexibility of the project enabled it to self-correct.
4. Implementing the project in 17 countries, each with different levels of knowledge regarding the technical subjects discussed under the project, proved to be a key challenge throughout the project's duration.

Recommendations

1. During the construction of the logical frameworks for future projects, more attention should be given to the "Objectively Verifiable" Indicators of Achievements and their sources of verification, and also to include a detailed system of monitoring and evaluation that allows easier follow up and assessment of the achievements.
2. Such projects could include a mid-term evaluation, conducted by an independent evaluator. This would identify any potential weaknesses inherent in the design of the project and would suggest, when appropriate, the reorientation of the remaining activities in order to successfully achieve the project objective.
3. In the future ESCWA should explore the possibility of initiating such projects with a "two-speed level": one level for those Member States that require more advanced knowledge and another level for the less advanced states. This could better enable the practical use of regional expertise to assist in knowledge transfer from the more technically advanced to the less technically advanced countries in the ESCWA region.
4. It is important to include in the design of such projects "exit strategies" that would further maximize the sustainability of the project. For example, ESCWA could consider an activity that would maintain the interest in the subject matters under discussion, while also assisting countries in continuing their practical involvement in energy statistics.
5. It is further recommended for new projects in the future to integrate better gender considerations in the design and execution of such projects.
6. Finally, projects should include a larger volume of practical activities in which national, regional and international experts and local learners perform tasks together and produce results to be used as "success stories".

In response to the above recommendations, the project team prepared an action plan specifying the steps it will take to enhance performance in future projects.