

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Evaluation of the project E262: *“Strengthening the capacity of SPECA countries for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”*

I. Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project in supporting member States to achieve the SDGs. The evaluation of project E262 is to analyze the current arrangements in place by UNECE for strengthening the capacity of SPECA countries for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The results of the evaluation will support improvement of services provided as well as future projects and activities implemented by Secretariat. The outcomes of the evaluation can also be used to help the donor to achieve its objectives in effectively supporting a regional network through such a project, and the beneficiary countries on making better use of such projects for their sustainable development.

II. Scope

The scope of evaluation will cover the full period of the project, from June 2016 to December 2019, as the project was extended till end of 2019 from its original May 2018 end date. In particular, the evaluation will cover the organization of the Economic Forums, Governing Council sessions and Working Group meetings in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. UNECE was responsible for organizing the high-level SPECA events in 2017 and 2019, yet through the project UNECE provided the substantive work on preparing documents and the proper functioning of the events in 2016 and 2018, following the procedures established in SPECA.

The universally recognized values and principles of human rights will be integrated at all stages of the evaluation, in compliance with the United Nations Evaluation Group’s revised gender-related norms and standards. Therefore, the evaluation will assess how gender considerations were included in the process and it would make recommendations on how gender can be better included in the process.

III. Background

Six of the seven SPECA countries are Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and one (Afghanistan) is a Least Developed Country (LDC). The level of cooperation among them since independence in the early 1990s has been low, and many efforts to deal with serious problems for sustainable development in the subregion have been stymied by this problem. The SPECA Programme aims at improving cooperation among the SPECA countries to enhance their capacity for sustainable development through subregional cooperation in areas where UNECE and ESCAP have comparative advantage.

The SPECA structure can provide a useful platform for implementing the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development; and the SPECA Governing Council took a course on refocusing the programme to become a platform for policy discussions and cooperation on achieving selected

SDGs and targets that will be better implemented through bilateral and sub-regional cooperation. The 10th session of the Governing Council held on 10 November 2015 took a decision to strengthen cooperation as an important precondition for the achievement of the SDGs in the sub-region; and it was reinforced by the decisions of all subsequent sessions of the Governing Council and the 2018 SPECA Evaluation report.

The logic of this project's intervention was to refocus the SPECA Programme on improving the understanding among SPECA countries of the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development and plan for the implementation of SDGs that can be better achieved through cross-border cooperation, notably SDGs and targets which fall within the remit of the UNECE, UNESCAP and the SPECA Thematic Working Groups. The project seeks change of mentality among policy makers and experts in the SPECA countries towards the SDGs. The core of the project was in support for the institutional framework (Governing Council, annual Forums, and Working Groups) that deliver the work of SPECA. The logic of the project was to define first the relevant SDG targets within each Working Group. A scoping exercise, including each Working Group defining the SDG targets on which to focus, including a scoping study prepared by a consultant, took place the first year of the project. On this basis, action plans were developed, and implementation started. The project also provided substantive support to the SPECA Evaluation in 2017-2018¹, notably, by organizing an Expert meeting in June 2018, in Almaty, to assess the findings and recommendations of the Evaluation, which had a key place in the development of this project.

The donor of the project is the Russian Federation. The human resources involved in the implementation included the Regional Adviser in the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division (ECTD) as the manager of the project and Deputy Coordinator of SPECA in UNECE, as well as UNECE focal point for the WG on Trade, the SPECA Coordinator (Deputy Executive Secretary) in UNECE, and the focal points for the various SPECA Working Groups to service those WGs and their areas of work. The initial timeframe was June 2016 – May 2018, but was extended until the end of 2019, as the need for further intervention became obvious. The key implementers are the substantive divisions providing support for the various working groups (thus the project was split among several segments) and the key partner for the implementation was UNESCAP, which services SPECA, together with UNECE. The modalities of the project included split of the budget and activities among the divisions servicing SPECA WGs. Practically all the planned outputs were organized under this setting.

IV. Issues

The evaluation criteria are *relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability*.

Relevance:

- 1- Was the project relevant to support subregional cooperation?
- 2- To what extent did the activity respond to the priorities and needs of UNECE member States (the SPECA participating countries)?
- 3- What is the relevance of the activity for the broader work of UNECE?

¹The Evaluation Report can be found in English and Russian on the following web sites
http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/gc/session_13/SPECA_Evaluation_Report_ENG.pdf;
http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/gc/session_13/SPECA_Evaluation_Report_RUS.pdf

- 4- How did it contribute to maintaining the relevance of the SPECA Programme in general (maintaining a subregional network in support of the SDGs, as subregional collaboration is required by the UN development pillar reform²)?
- 5- To what extent support for a unique regional cooperation platform was useful for maintaining a network in support for sustainable development of the subregion;
- 6- Did the project apply gender and rights-based approaches in the design, implementation and results of the activities?
- 7- Did UNECE advocate for gender equality and advancement of women in the SPECA work?

Effectiveness:

- 8- To what degree the project was successful in attaining the desired results stated in the project document? Did it support the SPECA networks?
- 9- To what extent are the outputs consistent with and relevant to the overall objective and expected accomplishments?
- 10- To what extent the expected accomplishments of the activity were achieved?
- 11- What were the challenges/obstacles (if any) to achieving the expected results?
- 12- How effective was the support to implement the annual SPECA Economic Forums and Governing Council sessions?
- 13- Were the recommendations of the annual sessions of the SPECA Governing Councils, the SPECA Economic Forums and the 2018 SPECA Evaluation effectively implemented through this project?

Efficiency:

- 14- Were the planned activities carried out on time as intended?
- 15- To what extent the resources made available through this project contributed to the achievement of the objective?
- 16- Did the countries mobilize sufficient in-kind and financial resources to supplement the activities and objectives of the project?
- 17- What was the efficiency of collaboration with other agencies, development partners, civil society and the business community?
- 18- Were the activities implemented in the most efficient way compared to alternatives? In particular, how do the costs and use of resources compare with other similar projects (within UNECE, other regional commissions, other UN agencies, or other organizations and initiatives)? Would you propose any alternatives to achieve the same results? If yes, which ones?

Sustainability:

- 19- What were the regional public goods produced by SPECA with support from this

² “The new generation of UN country teams would draw on strengthened regional economic commissions and regional UNDG teams for additional technical capacities to support national efforts.” From the Proposals for a New Generation of UNCTs, February 2018, https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/1_%20A%20new%20generation%20of%20UN%20Country%20Teams.pdf

project:

- 20- How did the project contribute to the overall sustainability of the subregional network of cooperation in the subregion? Did the project contribute to enhancing the level of cooperation among the SPECA countries?
- 21- What projects or project proposals, mobilizing additional resources, in the areas of SPECA's mandate were developed as a result of activities under the E262 project?
- 22- To what extent did this project strengthen the capacity of SPECA countries to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (e.g. SDG 6.5, SDG 7.1 and SDG 7.2 for the WG on Water, Energy and the Environment, SDG 3.6; SDG 9.1 and SDG 11.2 for the WG on Sustainable Transport and SDG 17.10 for the WG on Trade) through subregional cooperation?
- 23- Has the project helped to strengthen the application of gender mainstreaming principles and contribute to substantial and meaningful changes in the situation of the most vulnerable groups?
- 24- How can the UN Resident Coordinators be more efficiently involved in supporting SPECA activities?

V. Methodology

The evaluation will be conducted on the basis of:

1. A desk review of relevant strategic and meeting documents, including those resulting from the annual SPECA events and WG activities and outputs (strategy documents, action plans, concrete practical projects, other documents adopted by the Governing Council and the Working Groups.
2. An online survey to gather feedback from a range of stakeholders;
3. Structured interviews and focus group discussions with: member States' representatives, key development partners in SPECA participating countries, relevant staff from UNECE and ESCAP supporting the six working groups in all divisions in UNECE and ESCAP, staff of other stakeholder organizations (e.g. UN Resident Coordinators, UNDP, IFAS, the Islamic Development Bank, WTO and GIZ, etc.). In the recipient countries, interviews should take place with the coordinators and focal points for SPECA and for the working groups, Permanent Mission staff in Geneva, chairs of SPECA working groups. The UNECE Project Manager will provide the list with contact details, in coordination with focal points for the various groups.

The report will summarize the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation in English. An executive summary (max. 2 pages) will summarize the methodology of the evaluation, key findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Material needed for the evaluation, will be provided to the Consultant by the UNECE Project manager in consultation with focal points in the various divisions: SPECA activities documents and reports, meeting reports and publications, list of involved experts that can be interviewed by telephone. The UNECE Project Manager will provide support and further explanation to the evaluator as needed.

The evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the UNECE Evaluation Policy, as well as UNEG norms and standards. A gender-responsive methodology, methods and tools, and data techniques are selected. The evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations reflect a gender analysis.

VI. Evaluation schedule

- A. Preliminary research: 1-15 December 2019
- B. Data collection: 1 December 2019 – 31 January 2020
- C. Data analysis: 1-15 February 2020
- D. Draft report sent to Project Manager : 2 March 2020
- E. Comments back to the evaluator after review by the project manager and the PMU: 13 March 2020
- F. Final report: 30 March 2020

VII. Resources

The consultant will be managed by the UNECE Project Manager – Mr. Mario Apostolov – who will provide support by ensuring the provision of all necessary documentation needed for the desk review, guide the evaluator on the appropriate recipients for the questionnaire and for follow up interviews, and ensure that the necessary communications with these recipients are introduced by the secretariat.

The UNECE Programme Management Unit will provide guidance to the Project Manager and evaluator as needed on the evaluation design, methodology and quality assurance of the final draft report.

VIII. Intended use / Next Steps

The findings of the Evaluation report will be used to plan and implement better similar projects in the future. The donor will use the evaluation report to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the interventions under this project. Donor and implementer will use the findings to finetune any possible follow-up project in support of SPECA, for the period 2020 – 2022.

The findings of the evaluation will inform follow-up actions and guide initiatives already started and required to disseminate the knowledge created and enhance its use. The outcomes of the evaluation will also contribute to the broader lessons learned, by being made available on the project website³ and in Open UNECE.

IX. Criteria for the Evaluators

Evaluators should have:

³ <https://www.unece.org/energy/pathwaystose.html>

- a. Advanced university degree in a relevant discipline.
- b. Specialized training in such areas as evaluation, project management, political science, social statistics and analysis.
- c. Demonstrated professional and technical experience in evaluation (application of evaluation norms, standards and ethical guidelines and the relevant organizational evaluation policy and promotion of evaluation and evidence-based learning); design, management and conduct of evaluation processes with multiple stakeholders, survey design and implementation, and project planning, monitoring and management.
- d. Demonstrated methodological knowledge of evaluations, including quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis for end-of-cycle project evaluations.
- e. Fluent in written and spoken English. Knowledge of another language (Russian and or another language of the SPECA region) will be an advantage.
- f. Experience and knowledge of intergovernmental cooperation mechanisms and platforms in Central Asia, of the objectives, rules and functioning of the UN, of XB projects will be an advantage;
- g. Knowledge of major development trends and issues in Central Asia, particularly in the areas covered by SPECA, such as environment, energy, transport, transit and connectivity, trade, statistics, knowledge-based development and gender and economy.
- h. Knowledge of the United Nations System, including its programmes, organizational structures, its principles, values, goals and approaches, including human rights, gender equality, cultural values, the Sustainable Development Goals and results-based management.
- i. Demonstrated ability to communicate and engage with high-level government officials on challenging and politically sensitive matters.
- j. Demonstrated experience in applying gender perspective and human-rights based approach to evaluations.

Evaluators should declare any conflict of interest to UNECE before embarking on an evaluation project, and at any point where such conflict occurs.