



Evaluation of SPECA Summary of key findings and recommendations

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Why is SPECA needed?

- The only organization that focuses solely on exchanges between the landlocked countries of Central Asia, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan.
- Ideal platform to coordinate policies, overcome barriers to cooperation, exchange information, commission studies and learn.
- As a group, countries are in a stronger position to negotiate and integrate into larger processes

Proposed actions

- **Option 1: Status Quo:** Keep purpose and institutions as is, states to engage more
- **Option 2: Reform:** More a country-owned and country-led platform of cooperation and policy dialogue, with support/facilitation from UN
- **Option 3: Transform** SPECA into a member-owned, member-driven, and member-financed formal inter-governmental body, supported by UN
- **Option 4: Gradual closure,** absorption of activities in other regional programmes and processes

SPECA and the SDGs

- Pursue mostly (only) the SDGs that are directly regional in nature or require strong regional coordination
- Commission **study** of regional challenges and opportunities for implementing SDGs
- By analysing **feasibilities and bottlenecks**, be more proactive rather than reactive
- Draw a **strategy** for Implementation of SDGs at the Regional Level until 2030 , ways to get there, benchmarks, indicators etc.
- **Work of TWGs** to be based on this strategy
- **Review and assess** implementation of the strategy every two years

Thematic Working Groups: Findings

- Most efficient TWGs: Those with relevance to regional priorities, have a common strategy, unity and sense of purpose.
- TWGs now forums for exchanges with other countries but not as opportunities for the harmonization of policies in those fields: Little impact nationally
- Recommendation: To have less TWGs, and revamp the remaining ones with more concrete responsibilities, actions and outputs.

Thematic Working Groups: Choices

Review the choice of TWGs, based on:

- key priority areas identified by the states, and thematic competence/mandates of UN Regional Commissions
- themes that have regional (inter-state) implications
- SDG areas that can be achieved better through regional cooperation (and not nationally).
- Themes that have regional leverage; consider challenges and opportunities

Thematic Working Groups: Functions

- Make TWG **output driven** more than just process/meetings
- Assign key **task** to each TWG (for example, regional strategy, research, strategic recommendations, feasibility study, coordination of legislation and policies etc.)
- Assign fixed **experts/members** tasked with communication, implementation of outcomes of TWGs and integration in national policies
- Each country to individually or jointly lead a TWG, **chair**
- Have **concrete outcomes** and recommendations
- Set up **mechanism for follow up** at the national level
- Report to chairs **electronically**
- Meeting every two years, but **on-going communication**

Secretariat: Challenge

- No secretariat:
 - Added work on staff of commissions
 - In countries: High staff turnover turnover, loss of intuitional memory
 - Lack of knowledge about work of TWGs, ad hoc work, no networking between, no network of regular experts, etc.

Secretariat: solutions

- Consider a proper Secretariat, even if virtual and online
- Tasks: Coordinating the TWGs, acting as interface between the needs and demands of the Governing Council and the TWGs.
- Ideally, the Secretariat should be populated with focal points seconded from each country (virtually or in person).
- Focal points coordinating together to advance SPECA activities and interests online.

Financing: Challenge

- Special Programme without adequate programmatic budget
- Contribution from countries very minimal
- Cannot compete in raising money for projects with other regional organizations backed by IFIs

Financing: Solution

- Finances should be **rationalized** so that strategic results are achieved (more on policies than projects).
- Funds are necessary to support the **operation** of the Platform, the secretariat (even if virtual) commissioning of studies, meetings, selected capacity building workshops etc.
- The two Regional Commissions to consider raising funds together through **a joint Trust Fund**
- Countries should be encouraged to pay a **contribution** to signal their interest and engagement.
- **Investment forums** to attract targeted funds for projects

EGM recommendations

Focal Points

- Nominate national focal points for SPECA.

Identity of SPECA

- Consider substituting “Platform” for “Programme” in the name of SPECA and focus SPECA on policy dialogue (away from project management), to be reflected in the revised Terms of Reference of SPECA.

Web site

- Consider developing a joint web site on which both the United Nations Regional Commissions and SPECA countries can upload documents in English and Russian.

EGM recommendations

Partnerships

- Further develop cooperation and partnerships with relevant organizations, development banks and initiatives

Thematic Working Groups

- SPECA should support implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, that are “regional – cross border” in their nature. In compliance with this criterion, the Thematic Working Groups on Water, Energy and Environment; on Sustainable Transport, Transit and Connectivity; and on Trade should be maintained;

EGM recommendations

- The working groups on Knowledge-Based Development (KBD), Statistics, and Gender and Economy, should formulate at their next meetings, with support from UNECE and ESCAP, where regional coordination is needed in relationship to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in their areas. It is necessary to look into the possibility for ad hoc working groups (task forces) on concrete topics, such as an innovation strategy (currently under consideration) or disaster management.
- Another criterion for the maintenance of thematic working groups and ad hoc task forces should be correspondence to the mandates of the two supporting United Nations Regional Commissions. All activities of UNECE and ESCAP supporting cross-border cooperation in the SPECA region should be included in the SPECA framework; and
- Focal points should be nominated for each thematic working group (area of work).

EGM recommendations

Financing

- The participants from the SPECA countries are invited to explore with their Governments possibilities for financing and in-kind contributions to the SPECA operational budget.
- Look for support from the countries as indicated in the Terms of Reference of SPECA.
- Explore with Kazakhstan possibilities for support under the arrangements of the United Nations hub in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Secretariat

- Re-establish the joint SPECA Office in Almaty within the ESCAP SONCA office.
- Explore possibilities for hosting the secretariat of SPECA under the United Nations building in Almaty.
- Explore possibilities to support the SPECA secretariat virtually or through staff/staff time contributions to the SPECA activities.