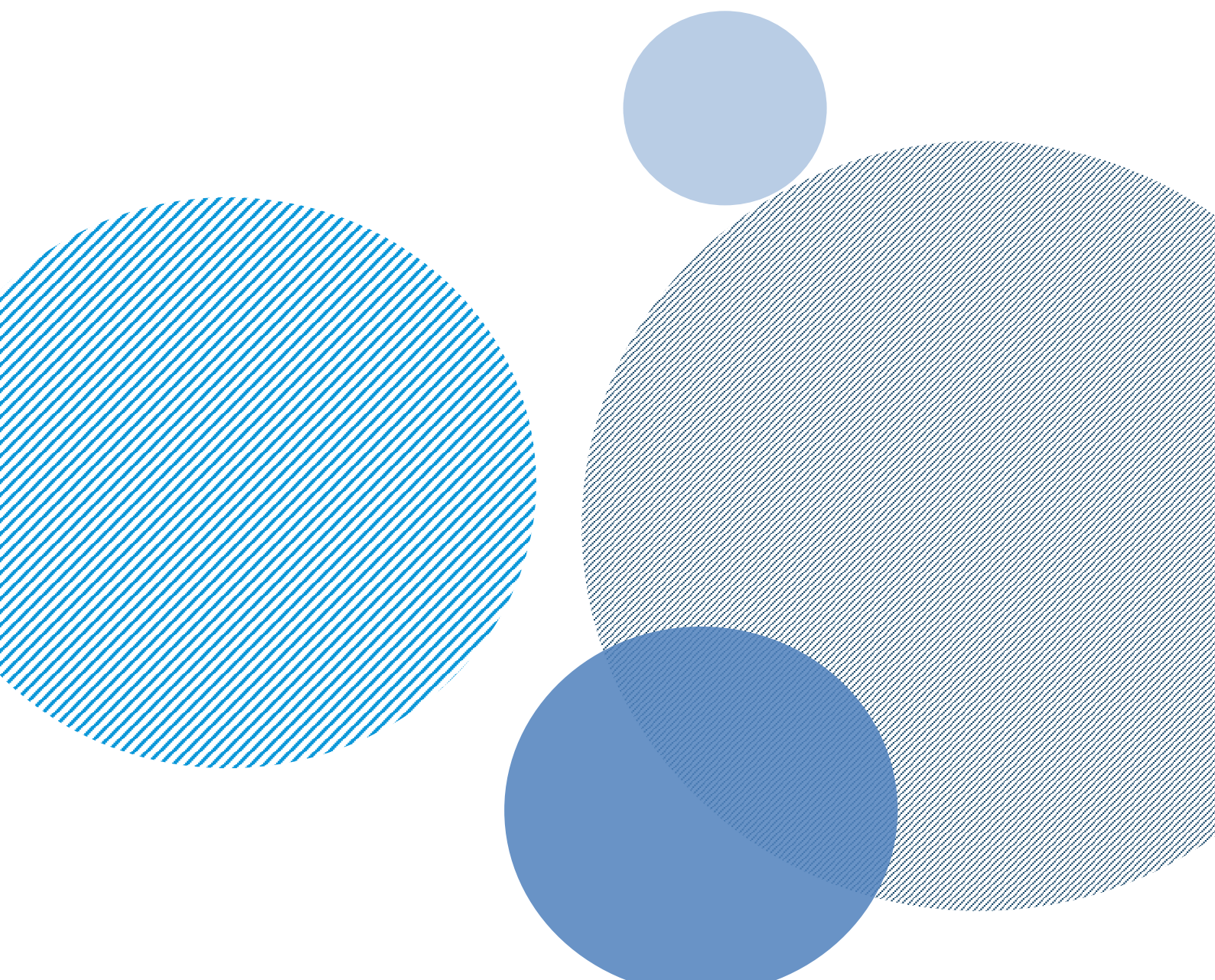# Evaluation of the project on 'Navigating policy in Asia-Pacific with data to leave no one behind' (2021 – 2024)

Evaluation report | May 2025

Evaluation of the project on 'Navigating policy in Asia-Pacific with data to leave no one behind' (2021 – 2024)

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May 2025

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Commissioned by

ESCAP

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Acknowledgments

List of acronyms

BPI	Business Process Improvement
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease (an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus)
CRVS	Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
DA	United Nations Development Account
DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DOSM	Department of Statistics Malaysia
DRSF	Disaster-Related Statistics Framework
EPiC	Every Policy is Connected
ESCAP	UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
GSBPM	Generic Statistical Business Process Model
IT	Information Technology
LDC	Least Developed Country
LLDC	Landlocked Developing Country
MBS	Maldives Bureau of Statistics
NSO	National Statistical Office
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PSA	Philippines Statistics Authority
PSRTI	Philippines Statistical Research and Training Institute
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIDS	Small Island Developing State
UN	United Nations

Executive summary

The *'Navigating policy in Asia-Pacific with data to leave no one behind'* project (May 2021 – June 2024) provided support to participating countries in implementing the *'Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind',* as made by member States during the sixth session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics, held in Bangkok in 2018.[1] The Declaration recognized the importance of reliable and timely data for policy making as well as for government transparency and accountability, while highlighting the importance of transforming national statistical systems in the region in support of sustainable development, particularly in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and within a 'whole-of-government' approach to the generation and use of data. As such, the objective of the project was to enable participating countries to develop and deliver timely statistical products and services, supporting country responses to both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[2] and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The aims of this project evaluation were:

- To assess the project performance against the evaluation criteria of results, effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, sustainability, and cross-cutting issues, including gender equality, and disability inclusion
- To formulate lessons learned and action-oriented recommendations to inform management decision-making and improve future project design

The evaluation, which covered the entire duration of the project (May 2021 – June 2024), was conducted between late November 2024 and March 2025 and included participation from stakeholders in the partner countries of the project, namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Kyrgyzstan, the Maldives, Mongolia, and Nepal.

Key evaluation questions were structured according to a selection of the widely accepted OECD Development Assistance Committee ('OECD-DAC')[3] criteria:

- <u>Relevance</u>: Is the project doing the right things?
- <u>Effectiveness</u>: Is the project achieving its objectives?
- <u>Efficiency</u>: How well are resources being used?
- <u>Sustainability</u>: Will the benefits last?

An additional 'cross-cutting' criterion was added to look at a range of issues, including gender equality and the empowerment of women (GEEW), disability inclusion, human rights, as well as results-based management.

The evaluation made use of a range of tools and techniques to support the findings and inform the recommendations. These included review and analysis of project documentation, development and deployment of evaluation surveys, analysis of data from post-event surveys conducted by the project, and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders. A process of triangulation was used to help develop multiple lines of evidence in support of each finding.

The key evaluation findings were:

1. The project was effective in delivering tailored capacity building that addressed key needs of participating national agencies, as illustrated by alignment of capacity building with national strategies and frameworks, as well as with the direct requests of member States. However, most project countries showed at least some challenges to effectiveness particularly when it comes to internal coordination and sharing of data

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[1] ESCAP/CST/2018/7 (2 November 2018)
[2] A/RES/70/1
[3] OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation, *Evaluating Development Cooperation: Summary of Key Norms and Standards* (Second Edition)

2. The project has successfully facilitated South-South cooperation and peer learning among relevant agencies
3. Participating member States consider the support provided through the project to be highly relevant to their plans and priorities, though internal issues prevented several countries from participating fully in the project
4. Adopting a 'systems-based' approach to national statistics supports overall relevance and usefulness, though more remains to be done to ensure relevant actors in the national statistical landscape have sufficient capacities to contribute to and benefit from statistical data and evidence
5. The project shows alignment with SDG 17 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as parts of the Cape Town Global Action Plan, and stakeholders value the project in particular for its support to developing data capacities for the SDG indicators
6. The project was mostly timely and efficient in its delivery, with some revisions of country development plans due to limited capacities in partner agencies
7. The use of partnerships, locally-based experts, and open-source tools has helped the project to achieve efficiencies in planning and execution
8. National stakeholders agree that project benefits will continue after the project, but resource limitations among NSOs and relevant national agencies remain a key structural impediment to both impact and sustainability
9. Partner country counterparts consider the areas of big data, artificial intelligence, and machine learning, and their linkages with the work of NSOs, as key priorities over the coming years
10. The project consistently seeks to engage women in project activities, and includes efforts at gender disaggregation within capacity building content. However, more could be done to ensure that data on women's participation in course activities is consistently measured and reported.
11. Disability inclusion and human rights are much less visible than gender in both content and implementation of project activities, though there may be considerable relevance of these areas especially for the production of SDG-related statistical data
12. The project shows good understanding of country needs and baselines, but the broad nature of the project outcomes hinders a more nuanced demonstration of project results

These findings informed the following recommendations:
1. Continue holistic and systems-based approaches to supporting national capacity development, with NSOs as a leading actor, and look to further strengthen all parts of the data ecosystem (see findings 1, 4, 5, and 8)
2. Include systematic consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of regional training institutions in project design, with an aim to support them as a part of South-South cooperation, while also exploring ways in which experiences and use examples can be shared on both an informal and formal basis (1, 2, and 9)
3. Future projects adopting a similar approach tailored to each target country should consider and document the theory of change of their interventions, including for the mapping of data provision and analytical capacities in national statistical systems (4, 5, and 12)
4. Identify areas where countries could be supported in producing data for SDG indicators that are relevant to supporting human rights and disability inclusion (4, 11)
5. Build upon NSO interest and seek opportunities to promote greater sharing and understanding of use cases for Big Data and artificial intelligence in national statistical systems, particularly in the context of low-resource environments (8)
6. Review and update templates and guidance for results-based management, particularly for the review and quality assurance of results statements and performance indicators (particularly at the outcome level), and inclusion of measurable output indicators (12)

1. Introduction

The *'Navigating policy in Asia-Pacific with data to leave no one behind'* project (May 2021 – June 2024) provided support to participating countries for the implementing the *'Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind',* as made by member States during the sixth session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics, held in Bangkok in 2018[4]. The Declaration recognized the importance of reliable and timely data for policy making as well as for government transparency and accountability, while highlighting the importance of transforming national statistical systems in the region in support of sustainable development, particularly in the context of the 2030 Agenda, and within a 'whole-of-government' approach to the generation and use of data. As such, the objective of the project was to enable participating countries to develop and deliver timely statistical products and services, supporting country responses to both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[5] and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The project was implemented as part of the 13th Tranche of the United Nations Development Account[6], a programme of the United Nations Secretariat with the objective to enhance capacities of developing countries in priority areas of the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda[7]. The Development Account projects aim at capacity building through cooperation at sub-regional and regional levels, while promoting the exchange of knowledge, skills, and good practices. In this context, the Project supported knowledge exchange and South-South cooperation on the regional level, while also taking advantage of the skills and expertise of ESCAP staff in developing national statistical systems.

The aims of this project evaluation were:

- To assess the project performance against the evaluation criteria of results, effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, sustainability, and cross-cutting issues, including gender equality, and disability inclusion
- To formulate lessons learned and action-oriented recommendations to inform management decision-making and improve future project design

The evaluation will be used to inform the development of new projects in both the United Nations Development Account and ESCAP, especially in the ESCAP Statistics Division. It may also be used to understand needs and priorities of national statistical systems in the region, as well as to provide examples of potential implementation themes and modalities for future interventions.

The evaluation made use of a range of tools and techniques to support the findings and inform the recommendations. These included review and analysis of project documentation, development and deployment of evaluation surveys, analysis of data from post-event surveys conducted by the project, and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders. A process of triangulation was used to help develop multiple lines of evidence in support of each finding.

The evaluation, which covered the entire duration of the project, was conducted between late November 2024 and March 2025 and included participation from stakeholders in the partner countries of the project, namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Kyrgyzstan, the Maldives, Mongolia, and Nepal.

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[4] ESCAP/CST/2018/7 (2 November 2018)
[5] A/RES/70/1
[6] See https://da.desa.un.org/
[7] See https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/

2. Description of the Project

2.1 Background

Effective delivery of national development goals and targets, including under international frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, relies on high quality and timely statistics and data. Policy and decision makers at all levels of government and across a wide range of different thematic areas, as well as members of the international community, make use of data from national statistical systems in planning, monitoring, and assessing policy initiatives, as well as for ensuring transparency and accountability of actors and institutions.

Official statistics provide a basis for assessment and decision-making on economic, social and environmental issues at all levels of society. Government and politicians use the statistics to evaluate and formulate policies and measures that national authorities may undertake to influence developments and improve the social, environmental, and economic conditions. Official statistics are also the basis for businesses to evaluate the economic situation and allow them to make informed business decisions. They also allow the media, various organizations, and the community at large to assess situations and developments and formulate their opinions and attitudes thereon. In all member states of the United Nations, the national authorities recognise their duty and responsibility to provide their people regularly with statistical information on the state of their countries[8].

In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), statistical systems contribute essential information for member States to achieve their national development targets. National Statistical Offices (NSOs) and national statistical systems provide data that can be used to assess progress towards relevant targets, while common methodologies help to ensure that data is comparable across jurisdictions in a meaningful way. Traditional data sources, including censuses, surveys, and administrative data are often key parts of national data sets, however, new and innovative data sources and methods are increasingly available and used to provide new sets of insights and information across policy areas.

In 2025 around two-thirds of SDG indicator data show good coverage internationally, while all 231 SDG indicators have common established methodologies (up from one third and less than half, respectively, in 2016). However, as noted in the project document, at the project outset there was considerable variation among countries in the Asia-Pacific region in terms of the capacity of their national statistical systems to produce reliable and timely data, with particular data gaps among the least developed countries. Such gaps act as a break to effective policy, limiting understanding and capacity to act effectively among decision-makers, policymakers, and the general public.

In this context, the scope for evidence-based or evidence-informed policy is limited. Efforts to advocate for use of data in decision-making and increasing sharing of data among relevant stakeholders (especially between national statistical offices and relevant line ministries), are limited. Moreover, it remains difficult to ensure the transparency and accountability of decision makers and institutions to the people that they serve.

Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind[9]

The Declaration was made during by ESCAP Member States in the Committee of Statistics in 2018. It recognised the importance of reliable and timely data for policy making as well as transparency and accountability, while highlighting the importance of transforming national statistical systems in the region in support of sustainable development, particularly in the context of the 2030 Agenda. It

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[8] Text in this paragraph based on the introduction to Chapter 2 of the *Handbook on Management and Organization of National Statistical Systems,* UN-DESA (2022)

[9] ESCAP/CST/2018/7 (2 November 2018)

contained both overarching principles and commitments within a 'whole-of-government' approach to the generation and use of data. The principles included:

- Linking policy with data is imperative for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and requires continuous dialogue between both users and producers of official statistics
- Investments in national statistical systems need to correspond to resource requirements for the statistical products and services demanded by users
- To deliver timely, innovative and reliable products and services, national statistical offices and the statistical units at all levels of government need to be empowered to operate as one integrated system, upholding standards articulated in the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, including confidentiality, transparency and professional independence, and resourced to implement modern statistical methods for producing, aggregating and disseminating statistics, data and microdata

Following these principles, member States committed to the implementation of a collective vision and framework of action that included, inter alia: setting targets to improving national statistical systems; developing a national monitoring framework with relevant indicators for use in planning and budgeting; representing the interests and demands of the uses of national statistics (including policy makers), to support the responsiveness of national systems to user needs; advocating for use of data and evidence in policy and decision making; empowering national statistical offices to take a leading role in developing national data systems, as well as to take advantage of new and innovative technologies, sources of data, and methodologies.

2.2 Project theory of change

This project was developed to support member States in implementing this declaration and meet these commitments, while following the principles outlined in the Declaration. Its objective and outcomes are outlined in Table 1 below.

'Navigating Policy in Asia-Pacific with Data to Leave No One Behind' – High-level goals[10]
Objective: *National statistical systems in Asia-Pacific are enabled and empowered to lead the development of and to deliver innovative, trusted and timely statistical products and services for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and national COVID-19 policy responses.*
Outcome 1: *Strengthened national statistical systems of beneficiary countries in line with national commitments contained in the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind*
Outcome 2: *National statistical systems in Asia-Pacific benefit from the experiences of beneficiary countries to lead the development of and to deliver innovative, trusted and timely statistical products and services for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and national COVID-19 policy responses in line with one (or more) of the national commitments contained in the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind.*

Table 1: High-level goals

Based on the information in the original project documentation, the theory of change for this project is summarised in Figure 1 below. This is based on the overall approach of the project which begins with an initial assessment of needs and gaps in national statistical systems (for most project countries this took place during the 'Inception Workshop' held in May 2021). In this process, the NSO was the lead in presenting their own particular priority areas for further capacity development. They took the lead in, for instance, working in close collaboration with their respective United Nations Resident

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[10] Note that adjustments to project results were made during the course of the project. These results represent those in the original project document

Coordinator's Office (RCO) to help identify priority areas and facilitate discussions with relevant members of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), as well as to avoid potential duplication. Then, in discussion with ESCAP through the Development Account project, a workplan / strategy was developed to help address these needs. These plans typically involved inputs and expertise from both ESCAP staff members based in Bangkok, along with a set of technical experts recruited as consultants to the project. A country-specific programme of capacity building activities was then implemented, with overall coordination from ESCAP staff.
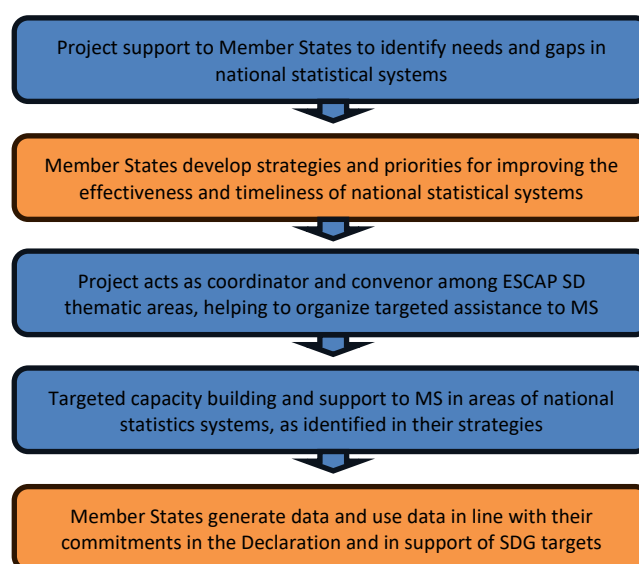

Figure 1: Project's overall theory of change as described in project documents

However, the types and range of technical cooperation varied significantly among partner countries. Each country-specific programme of work dealt with one or more separate themes (e.g. disaster-related statistics, reporting against SDG indicators, etc.), depending on the national needs identified at inception. This also involved varied sets of national partners (e.g. relevant government ministries and agencies), as well as different kinds of capacity building to the NSO and others. As a result, the project could perhaps be understood as being composed of a number of national 'mini-projects', each with their own policy areas, outcomes, key stakeholders, and particular theories of change. Through this evaluation, different overarching theories of change for each country were identified based on the specific form of capacity building supported by the Development Account project (see Annex 2: Project's theory of change on page 45).

2.3 Project strategies

As mentioned above, the overall project strategy was to help member States to identify their own particular needs and priorities in developing their national statistical systems, and from there to draft and implement a country-specific plan of action to address these needs, with tools, advice, expertise and coordination support provided by ESCAP. As such, each country had in effect a national level strategy based on plans to address their country-specific needs.

It can however be noted from the strategies below that the project followed a systems-oriented approach to analysing and planning the development of national statistics. In general, the project sought to involve a wide range of actors, e.g. various relevant government ministries, as well as in some places, local government and international actors, including local RCOs and members of the UNCTs. The Development Account project has also made use of tools, especially EPiC and the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM), supporting partner countries in their application. The

project has also made use of open-source standards, such as Statistical data and metadata exchange (SDMX), supporting project countries in their adoption and application.

Bangladesh

At the project inception, priorities identified were for improved sharing of quality data between line ministries and the NSO, as well as general capacity building in statistical data and use (see Annex 4: Project inception status (by country) on page 51). Bangladesh further identified gaps in the area of disaster-related statistics. The strategy in Bangladesh included use of the ESCAP Every Policy is Connected (EPiC) tool to help strengthen integration between policy and data. The project, working together with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, also organized multi-stakeholder workshops (with representatives from a wide range of ministries along with the BBS) to help plan the integration of a range of data related statistics.

Bhutan

At inception, three priorities were identified: firstly, the use of Big Data sources for official statistics; secondly, the improvement and use of collecting, sharing, and using administrative data; and finally, harmonizing and increasing the consistency of methods and standards for data use across agencies. In practice work between Bhutan and ESCAP under the project began somewhat later than other countries. In the time available, the strategy for Bhutan focused on support to the development specific datasets and the adherence to international standards, specifically the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO).

Kyrgyzstan

The project strategy in Kyrgyzstan focused on the development of economic, social and environmental statistical indicators. It also sought to support Kyrgyzstan in the adoption of international standards in sharing of data, including SDMX.

Maldives

Project inception noted the absence of legal framework in some areas of statistics, as well as the lack of capacity for the Maldives Bureau of Statistics (MBS) to gain access to certain administrative data. It also noted the need for further internal training within MBS. The focus of work in the Maldives was in data dissemination and developing of capacities in environmental and economic statistics. As strategy, ESCAP through the DA project supported the adoption of open-source and international standards in data dissemination. This also involved holding workshops with MBS and other government agencies on data modelling and dissemination, and supporting the country in establishing data structures and standards across various themes (e.g. health, tourism, education, etc.) The project further provided technical support to the establishment of the online data dissemination platform (including finding a suitable host server). Finally, the project provided support for the formulation of a roadmap for the development of environmental-economic statistics.

Mongolia

As the country strategy, the project focused on business process improvement in the generation of statistics as well a developing online capacity building for staff across the national statistical system. Actions were also taken to review the institutional framework around data integration in national statistics in the country. The project further supported a review of the existing national statistical legislation, and as a result new legislation has been introduced that incorporates the results of that project-supported review.

Nepal

The project inception raised the challenge of data integration and the decentralised nature of data production in the country, as well as the need for greater statistical capacities at policy level. The strategy of the project focused first on improving and integrating disaster-related statistics, which

involved working to increase sharing and cooperation both across government agencies, but also between regional governments and central government. Through the establishment of a multi-agency task force on this subject, the government and the project worked together to plan better integration and adopt international standards such as ESCAP's Disaster-Related Statistics Framework (DRSF) which provides methodological guidance in this area.

2.4 Innovative elements

Use of tools and standards

The project provided a range of tools developed by the United Nations development system, including ESCAP (e.g. EPiC, DRSF, etc.) and other development partners, as well as supporting the adoption of international standards and frameworks (particularly around the sharing and dissemination of data). These tools have been particularly helpful in adoption of common data standards among national agencies, and for the encouragement of more effective data sharing and integration.

The project also supported partner countries in their transition from older proprietary systems for data analysis, towards open-source systems (e.g. the use of the R programming language). While capacity building is still required to learn to effectively operated these open-source tools and systems, they represent an opportunity to move to lower cost systems, with increasingly large libraries of use cases and users, particularly among researchers and academia, but also among statistical offices in the region.

Promotion and use of regional expertise and South-South cooperation

The programme further made use of regional expertise for the delivery of training and the development of capacity building programmes. In particular, the project cooperated with the Philippine Statistical Research and Training Institute[11] to deliver training to regional NSOs on open-source statistical data and analysis, an area in which the Philippines has developed considerable experience. It further made use of specialised expertise at the Malaysia Statistics Training Institute[12], in the development of tourism-related statistics.

Development and use of online training tools

The project supported the development of an online training programme on a range of statistics-related topics, including health, official statistics in the SDGs, environmental economic accounting, and systems of national accounts. These were created using the Moodle platform, a free and open-source e-learning platform used by educational institutions worldwide. The training modules were developed first in English in a set of standardised templates (using an open e-learning standard), and then translated into Mongolian.

2.5 Beneficiaries, target countries and key partners

Target countries

The geographic scope of the project beneficiaries included ESCAP member countries in the Asia-Pacific region, who are among one or more of the: Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), and Small Island Developing States (SIDS)[13]. Beneficiary countries were selected from the total of 30 countries in the Asia-Pacific region who are in one or more of these lists. A further

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[11] A part of the Philippines official national statistical system, see: https://psrti.gov.ph/
[12] A training institute of the Department of Statistics Malaysia, see: https://ilsm.dosm.gov.my/
[13] Official United Nations lists of all countries in each of these categories are available on the website of the Office of the High Representative for the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS:
https://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/list-ldcs (LDCs)
https://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/list-lldcs (LLDCs)
https://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/list-sids (SIDS)

smaller set of countries were identified as 'candidate countries' for the project activities. These countries were: Armenia, Bhutan, Fiji, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Palau, and Samoa. However, while these were the countries identified in the original project document, not all these countries were part of the final project. The project went on to identify a smaller group of five countries from this list for project activities, namely Fiji, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Mongolia, and Samoa.

During project implementation, the list of countries further changed (no longer including Fiji and Samoa) and evolved to include Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal. Papua New Guinea was considered as a recipient country, but did not join the project. The final list of recipient countries can be seen in Table 2.

Final Project Countries	
Bangladesh	Maldives
Bhutan	Mongolia
Kyrgyzstan	Nepal

Table 2: Project recipient countries

Beneficiaries

Key beneficiaries and partner institutions for technical cooperation are listed in Table 3 below.

Country	Local partners / beneficiaries
Bangladesh	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief
Bhutan	Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment National Statistics Bureau (NSB)
Kyrgyzstan	National Statistical Committee (NSC)
Maldives	Maldives Bureau of Statistics (MBS)
Mongolia	National Statistics Office (NSO) of Mongolia
Nepal	National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority National Statistics Office (NSO) of Nepal

Table 3: Beneficiary institutions

Key partners

The project also worked together with other partners across the region to deliver technical and other kinds of support. These partners included both national institutions and UN system partners:

- Philippine Statistical Research and Training Institute (PSRTI)
- Philippines Statistics Authority (PSA)
- Department of Statistics of Malaysia (DOSM)
- UN Resident Coordinators Office Bangladesh
- UN Resident Coordinators Office Kyrgyzstan
- UN Tourism

The project worked together with the UN Resident Coordinators Offices in Bhutan, Maldives, Mongolia, and Nepal to keep them informed of activities and implementation in the respective countries.

2.6 Resources

The total budget for this project was US$649 000. The project received additional support from existing UN staff, namely:

- Director (D1), providing oversight to the implementation of the project
- P5 level staff, for overall project management, as well as providing substantive support to the review of national statistical systems, advising on disaster-related statistics, and identifying capacity development needs
- P4 level staff, providing support to the development of disaster-related statistics, conducting workshops
- P3 level staff, overseeing country capacity building efforts
- P2 level staff, for support to disaster-related statistics and project implementation
- G6-level staff for administration, coordination, and technical support on disaster-related statistics

The project also funded a G4-level post to support overall administration. The project made use of the services of twelve short term expert consultants, to provide specific technical advice and support to national capacity building, as well as for effective coordination with relevant national authorities and local United Nations system actors.

3. Evaluation Scope and Methodology

3.1 Evaluation scope

The purpose of the evaluation was to support accountability for results and to enable learning. It aimed to generate information on the results achieved and lessons learned to inform future programme design and implementation of relevant ESCAP capacity development work. The main users of these evaluation results are intended to be ESCAP, particularly the ESCAP Statistics Division (the implementing division) and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) as the coordinator of the UN Development Account Programme. Other expected users include the project participating countries and other implementing partners.

It was anticipated that the evaluation contribute lessons learned and recommendations that will inform:
- Efforts to further promote an integrated approach to addressing member States' specific needs, through cooperation across the ESCAP Statistics Division
- Effective planning and implementation of phased and multi-year country engagements to support development of national statistical systems

The overall objectives of this evaluation were to:
1. Assess the project performance against the evaluation criteria: effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, impact, sustainability, gender, disability inclusion and human rights mainstreaming
2. Formulate lessons learned and action-oriented recommendations to inform management decision-making and improve future project design and implementation.

The evaluation covered the life cycle of the project – *'Navigating Policy in Asia-Pacific with Data to Leave No One Behind'*, from May 2021 to June 2024. The evaluation's geographic coverage will include all participating countries across Asia and the Pacific (i.e. Bangladesh, Bhutan, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal).

3.2 Evaluation approach

The evaluation's overall approach was guided by the 2023 ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and Guidelines[14]. These take into account, for example, the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards for evaluation[15], as well as the UN Secretariat's 2021 Administrative Instruction on Evaluation[16].

Evaluation criteria

Key evaluation questions were structured according to a selection of the widely accepted OECD Development Assistance Committee ('OECD-DAC')[17] criteria:
- <u>Relevance</u>: Is the project doing the right things?
- <u>Effectiveness</u>: Is the project achieving its objectives?
- <u>Efficiency</u>: How well are resources being used?
- <u>Sustainability</u>: Will the benefits last?

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[14] See https://www.unescap.org/monitoring-and-evaluation/home
[15] See https://www.unevaluation.org/uneg_publications/uneg-norms-and-standards-evaluation-un-system
[16] ST/AI/2021/3
[17] OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation, *Evaluating Development Cooperation: Summary of Key Norms and Standards* (Second Edition)

The questions in the following table have been formulated on the basis of the OECD-DAC criteria (see Evaluation criteria above). The questions below are primarily retrospective, focusing on assessing past achievements and actions, however they also form the basis for forward-looking recommendations.

Criteria	Key Evaluation Questions
Relevance	To what extent was the project designed based on needs of the target beneficiaries?
	What adjustments, if any, were made to the project activities and modality, in response to the changing priorities/requirements of target beneficiary countries?
Effectiveness	What have been the most significant achievements of the project at the regional and national levels?
	How effective were the project's capacity-building activities?
	How could the implementing division make its future capacity-building activities more effective?
Efficiency	To what extent did the project achieve efficiency in implementation through the combination of project stakeholders involved, making use of comparative advantages and the creation of synergy?
	To what extent has partnering with other organizations enabled or enhanced reaching of results?
	Was the project implemented in a timely manner and according to plan? If not, why?
Sustainability	To what extent can results of the project be continued without ESCAP's further involvement?
Cross-cutting issues	To what extent were cross cutting issues, including gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion, integrated into the design and implementation of the project?

Table 4: Key evaluation questions

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The evaluation employed several data collection methods that were intended to provide complementary evidence in support of analysis and development of findings. These methods included review and classification of relevant documentation, semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, and surveys.

Document review

The evaluation conducted an in-depth review of 335 documents related to the project, in order to identify and record relevant material related to the key evaluation questions. Additional material was sought in order to provide clarification or additional details, largely by consulting national strategies and related materials, as well as reports from United Nations agencies and other bodies.

During the in-depth review, each document was scanned for its overall relevance to the evaluation criteria and / or whether the document provides additional detail to the project context, challenges, or good practices / lessons learned. Documents that were not found to provide information in these areas, or which are duplicates of other documents, were excluded from further analysis. The remaining documents were read through to identify any relevant text. This text was extracted into an Excel table and coded by evaluation question, and / or by potential to inform project context,

challenges, and good practices / lessons learned. In this way, collections of textual evidence was collected for each evaluation question

Almost 90% of these documents were materials related to workshops or capacity building, i.e. the substantive content of outputs delivered to project countries during implementation, as well as lists of workshop attendees, and post-event survey results. The remaining documents consisted of mission reports, project progress reports, and related materials.

Stakeholder interviews

Semi-structured interviews[18] were conducted with key stakeholders. These interviews were conducted both online and in-person. The format for the interviews was primarily one-on-one (and in a small number of cases two-to-one) with the evaluator. The interviews were semi-structured, i.e. they used the key evaluation questions as focus points for the discussion, but they provided scope for interviewees to provide additional context and insight. The evaluator took confidential notes during these discussions, the content of which was summarised and included in an Excel table with relevant points classified by key evaluation question, in a similar way as described for the document review. The semi-structured interview questions can be found in Annex 8: Data collection instruments on page 59.

Stakeholder survey

An online survey was conducted of relevant stakeholders. The content of the survey questions was reviewed and finalized together with ESCAP prior to distribution of the survey, but the questions were intended to reflect and provide information for the indicators contained in the evaluation matrix. The survey questions can be found in Annex 8: Data collection instruments on page 59.

Triangulation

The analysis made use of data and methodological triangulation, i.e. using various data sources (e.g. different stakeholders, types and origins of documents) and data types (e.g. document review, interview, and survey) in order to both validate as well as deepen understanding of the project and its effects. Each of the evaluation criteria and evaluation questions was examined using the three methods outlined above – document review, interviews, and survey.

3.4 Stakeholder analysis

Stakeholder	Role(s) in the evaluation
National Statistical Offices (NSOs)	The primary national partners of project, and often the main (though not sole) recipient of technical assistance. They have been sources of data for the interviews and surveys.
Government ministries and agencies (non-NSO)	Depending on country and policy area, participants in capacity building activities. They have been sources of data, particularly for the post-event surveys.
ESCAP (Statistics Division)	Project coordination and implementation. They are the first recipients of the evaluation findings, and have been sources of data for the document review and interviews.
Technical experts	Engaged by the project in specific technical areas. Some have been sources of data for interviews and the evaluation survey.
Training institutes	These are institutes that are part of, or related to, national statistical offices, with a specialisation in developing capacities in data and statistical

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[18] These is a style of interviewing that *"employs a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions"*. See, for instance, *Handbook of Practical Programme Evaluation*, Newcomer et al. (2015)

	analysis. They have provided capacity building as part of the project. Some have been sources of data for interviews.
UN officials (non-ESCAP)	Provided support to the implementation of the project's country-level activities, or disseminated information among members of UN Country Teams.

Table 5: Stakeholders and respective roles in the project and evaluation

Table 1 above provides an overview of the different stakeholders in this project, how they have interacted with the project, and their roles in the evaluation.

3.5 Sampling

The evaluation received considerable support from the project team in identifying potential interviewees and survey participants. For interviewees, sampling was done in two phases – firstly, to speak with those most involved in the project who were also present at the regional meetings held in Bangkok in December 2024. This included representatives from the relevant project country NSOs who were present. Secondly, the project team also provided the names and contacts of other project participants (i.e. staff of relevant NSOs) and stakeholders. From this second list, the evaluator tried to prioritize NSO staff covering the range of project countries while also speaking to representatives of ESCAP and the project team. There was limited scope to select according to gender and geographic balance, as these were largely a function of who had participated in the project in the relatively small number of project countries and partner institutions.

In a similar way, the evaluation survey targeted those stakeholders most involved in the project on the country level, i.e. NSO staff, as well as colleagues from UN and non-UN implementing partners. This was a limited survey population, as it only included those partners with some knowledge of the project itself. In all, this survey group was composed of a total of 41 people (25 men and 16 women).

3.6 Risks and limitations

Low response rate

There were relatively low response rates to the evaluation survey, in spite of several email reminders from both the evaluator and ESCAP staff. Of the 41 people in the survey group, only 14 responses were received (34% response rate). However, the respondents did cover the range of project countries and included primarily NSO representatives (see Table 6 and Table 7 below).

Country	Survey Responses
Bangladesh	14%
Bhutan	14%
Kyrgyzstan	14%
Maldives	29%
Mongolia	14%
Nepal	14%

Table 6: Evaluation survey responses by country

Type of participant	Survey Responses
NSO	86%
Government ministry	0%
UN system entity	7%
Other	7%

Table 7: Evaluation survey responses by type

On this basis, we can consider that the survey responses come from NSO participants who had the most contact project activities, and who cover all the project countries. The gender of the respondents was evenly split (50% men, 50% women).

Although this survey dataset does include key stakeholders from each NSO, the evaluator decided to take steps to ensure more effective triangulation of data sources for the evaluation. Firstly, the

evaluator looked to increase the documentation sources to be used in the document review. To a large extent, this consisted in ensuring what additional information could be used to demonstrate, e.g. the relevance of the project to national policy objectives. Secondly, this involved consolidating data from participation lists and post-event surveys to help supplement the data generated through the evaluation survey.

This second set of survey data covered an additional 70 responses collected after project training and workshop events. The respondents were somewhat less gender balanced (59% men, 36% women, 6% prefer not to say), though they represented a slightly broader range of actors (see Figure 2 below).
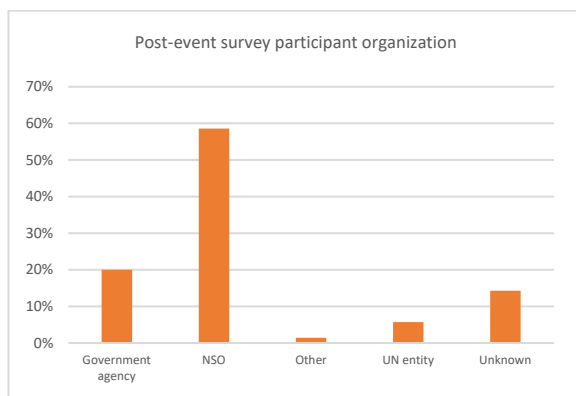
Figure 2: Post-event survey participant organization

Wherever possible in the evaluation results section below, evaluation survey results have been presented side-by-side with post-event survey results, so that any similarities and differences between responses can be more easily identified.

It should also be noted here that despite repeated attempts to contact some interviewees, the evaluator was unable to get responses out of all who were invited to participate in an interview. As such, 15 semi-structured interviews contributed to this evaluation (66% men and 33% women). However, representatives from all the project countries were interviewed, along with members of the project team.

4. Evaluation Findings

4.1 Effectiveness

Overview

The findings under the 'effectiveness' criteria show that the project has largely met or exceeded its intended capacity building for project countries, and that stakeholders are in agreement that the project was effective or highly effective in increasing national statistical capacities. A number of internal national constraints remain that hamper effectiveness (and these are largely the same as the factors that mitigate against sustainability below). However, the project is viewed as effective not only in delivery, but also in fostering peer networks and South-South cooperation.

Finding 1: The project was effective in delivering tailored capacity building that addressed key needs of participating national agencies, though most project countries showed at least some challenges to effectiveness particularly when it comes to internal coordination and sharing of data

The project effectively delivered capacity addressing key Member State needs

The project largely achieved or exceeded its targets and outcomes in delivering tailored technical advice, support, and capacity development to participating member States (see also the tables in Annex 5 and Annex 6). National Statistical Offices and relevant partners finalised a range of workplans and frameworks for use in producing enhanced statistical products. This included:

- A review of the legislation supporting the national statistics system of Mongolia[19] – this covered areas such as the roles of entities and coordination of the national statistics system, data quality, annual programme of work, etc.
- an indicator framework and the identification of data sources for disaster risk management in Bangladesh, using an ESCAP-supported tool[20] to strengthen the integration between policy and data
- a roadmap for the development of environmental-economic statistics in the Maldives
- localisation of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) in Bhutan
- an inventory of economic, social and environmental statistical indicators in Kyrgyzstan, along with recommendations to the National Statistics Committee
- publication of a report[21] on enhancing disaster related statistics in Nepal, serving as a pilot case study for the Nepalese government on hazard risk assessment and exposure to hazards using census and administrative data

Through the support of the project, several participating member States were able to review and enhance business processes, adopt new platforms for collecting and sharing data, and develop capacity building programmes. These included:

- Development and launch of a data dissemination platform[22] based on open-source standards[23] for data and metadata exchange, in the Maldives

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[19] This included the 1997 Law on Official Statistics as well related legislation. See the report and recommendations: https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12870/7198

[20] Every Policy is Connected (EPiC) tool: https://www.unescap.org/our-work/statistics/EPIC

[21] Available online from Nepalese government https://giwmscdntwo.gov.np/media/app/public/36/posts/1716105967_63.pdf

[22] Available online at: https://data.statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/

[23] .Stat Suite open-source system, and the SDMX standard for data exchange

- Review and revision of business processes for the production of statistics in Mongolia, for improving efficiency and alignment with the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) standard[24]
- Development and launch of an online training platform and learning management system[25], along with development of associated training materials on statistics, in Mongolia

Project participants mostly considered the delivery of support through the project to be effective or highly effective, with participants in capacity building activities reporting 'very high' or 'high' effectiveness for delivery of new capacities. Evaluation survey results also indicate the general perception that the project was 'effective' or 'very effective' in delivering additional capacities to beneficiary countries.
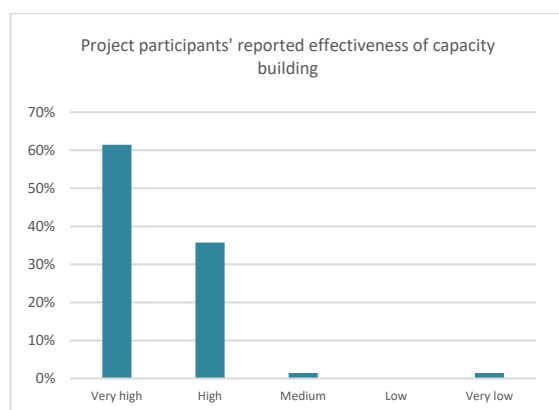

Figure 3: Project survey responses (consolidated) on the effectiveness of capacity building
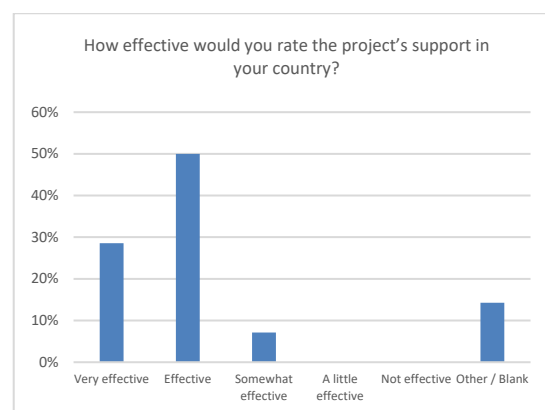

Figure 4: Evaluation survey results on project effectiveness

Challenges remain to effectiveness of delivery, mainly because of internal coordination and capacity constraints in Member States

There were however some challenges to the effective delivery of project outcomes. Most participants in interviews raised one or more of the challenges identified in Table 5 below. Among these issues, questions of coordination and sharing of information among relevant stakeholders were the most prominent, both in interviews as well as in workshops and other fora supported by the project. Following the coordination, knowledge and statistical competence among partner agencies was frequently cited by interviewees and project participants as a key limiting factor for further effectiveness across several country contexts.

Moreover, infrastructure challenges were fairly common (including for ensuring data is available both across ministries, but at different levels of government), though project efforts such as the development of common data dissemination platforms go some way to addressing these issues.

Challenge area	Description
Coordination	- Relevant national generators and / or users of data do not understand the importance of the data, e.g. Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) and other administrative data - There is reluctance among relevant national actors to share data, especially for reasons of distrust. This may be due to concerns about partners' ability to protect private or sensitive data, or differences in methodological approach to data analysis (i.e. concerns about the accuracy or quality of partners' data or analytical expertise)

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[24] See, for instance, ECOSOC report ECE/CES/2014/1 (2014)

[25] Available online at: https://edu.nso.mn/

Knowledge	• There is a lack of statistical knowledge among partners outside of the NSO, this may include other government agencies but also collectors and users of data at local or state / provincial level
Infrastructure	• Databases are held in different agencies, and in some instances, data is held locally, raising issues of infrastructure development and running costs, particularly in larger countries
Data	• Data can vary in its quality, accuracy, timeliness, and granularity, posing questions on how to effectively manage and integrate different data sources • Countries encounter challenges in sharing data while adhering to standards in data and privacy protection, particularly for data on individuals. In some countries, there appear to be differing standards among the various actors.

Table 8: Challenges to project effectiveness

Project countries benefited from having an external actor to highlight key issues, including helping raise both the profile of the NSO and quality of existing data

In the context of these challenges, it is worth highlighting the advantages that the project provided. In at least one project country, the involvement of ESCAP (as a United Nations entity) was considered key to bringing together the relevant line ministries, encouraging them to overcome internal resistance, to work together and link relevant data systems. As one stakeholder noted *"(…) it is good to have an external party to help say what needs to be done"*. The ability of the project and ESCAP staff to help create dialogue, even at high levels of government, was seen as a key part of the effectiveness of the project by several stakeholders.

Moreover, some stakeholders noted unexpected benefits from the project. Firstly, that in some areas, establishing automated processes for data sharing allowed them not only to reduce errors but also identify inconsistencies in previously isolated sets of data, helping to improve the overall data quality. Secondly, some participants felt that the role and position of the NSO had been strengthened through participation in the project, and decision-makers more likely to view their office as a key support to decision-making, allowing the NSO to engage more effectively with other parts of government.

Finding 2: The project has successfully facilitated South-South cooperation and peer learning among relevant agencies

Partnerships with regional training institutions have helped to strengthen South-South cooperation

The project's second outcome refers to learning and experience sharing among project beneficiary countries. To this end, the project supported a range of peer learning and exchange events, on both a formal and less formal basis. In terms of formal experience sharing within the region, this included:
- A workshop hosted by the Philippines Statistical Authority (PSA) and ESCAP on the use of the R programming language in statistical business processes
- A workshop on tourism related statistics held by the Department of Statistics of Malaysia, together with ESCAP and UN Tourism

For both of these workshops, participants rated the events as highly effective. For instance, 53% of participants in the tourism workshop stating that their expectations were exceeded or greatly exceeded (and another 37% saying their expectations were met), with most participants noting that the workshop material was useful and relevant for their work. For the R workshop, 83% of participants found it useful or very useful for their current work, with 87% expressing satisfaction with their gain in knowledge.

In discussions with the evaluator, several NSOs from the project noted that it is a priority for them to transition to open-source methods of data analysis, most particularly using R and Python, from existing proprietary systems (e.g. Stata). Moreover, it was noted by three NSOs that tourism-related statistics was a key area for further development, based on existing and future sectors of economic growth. There is therefore alignment between the provision of these capacity building activities and the needs expressed by some NSOs, however it is difficult to demonstrably connect, for example, training in use of R or development of tourism-related indicators with concrete outcomes at this stage.

4.2 Relevance

Overview

The project demonstrated alignment with national needs and priorities, adopting a flexible approach that tailored interventions to each participating country. The selected interventions seemed largely in line with national strategies and plans in the relevant areas, while also showing contributions to international frameworks, and notably the provision of statistical information for tracking progress against the SDGs. Several of countries that originally were positioned to take part in the project did not participate, though this appears to be more due to internal changes than lack of project relevance. In that context, it is also worth noting that the project was able to find additional countries in the region who were able to work with the project to meet the needs of their respective national statistical systems.

The 'systems-based' approach of the project to conceptualizing and seeking to further national capacities in statistics also appears highly relevant. Project countries appear to increasingly look at their statistical systems in this way, with the NSO playing the part of a 'convenor' or 'standards setter' among relevant national agencies. However, the distributed nature of capacities in these systems introduced challenges for designing and implementing capacity building initiatives.

Finding 3: Participating member States consider the support provided through the project to be highly relevant to their plans and priorities, though internal issues prevented several countries from participating fully in the project

The project demonstrated a flexible approach that aligned with the needs expressed by Member States

An initial online regional workshop[26] was held in May 2021 to understand and discuss regional needs and priorities for the strengthening of national statistics systems, in line with the commitments made in the *Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind*. This workshop also helped identify potential areas for capacity building for the project (for a summary, see the table in Annex 4 on page 51).

Following this initial assessment, the project took requests from member States, most often National Statistical Offices, as the basis for further technical cooperation. As such, the project engaged with five countries[27] (of the original nine potential countries[28]) that submitted specific requests for technical assistance following the project inception workshop. While two of those countries[29] encountered specific difficulties related to changes in leadership of the relevant national teams that prevented them from taking part in project activities, the remaining countries were able to continue to work together with ESCAP to develop national capacities according to the priorities that they had established. During the course of the project, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal also submitted requests for assistance that aligned with the project outcomes and thus became project beneficiaries.

The way that project countries were able to engage and submit proposals on their own terms demonstrates the broad and tailored approach adopted by the project. In providing a flexible platform through which countries were able to identify areas of need in their statistical systems, several project beneficiaries noted that they were able to address needs that were not necessarily being supported by other actors (e.g. national or multilateral bodies).

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[26] *Workshop on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind: Regional Cooperation to Strengthen National Statistical Systems in Asia and the Pacific*, held online on the 10th, 11th, and 20th May 2021. The workshop aimed at assessing progress in the region against the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind, to understand regional needs and priorities for

[27] Fiji, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Mongolia, Samoa

[28] Armenia, Bhutan, Fiji, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Palau, and Samoa

[29] Fiji and Samoa

The project seemed to align with national strategies and plans for the development of statistics and related measures

For the most part, the project support could also show connections to provisions of national policies and strategies with regards to developing national statistical systems (see Table 6 below), helping to further demonstrate the relevance of capacity building support to each Member State.

Country	Relevant national law, strategy, plan, etc.	Project support provided
Bhutan	Strategy 2[30]: Develop, strengthen and implement statistical standards in line with international standards. ii. Develop and adopt Bhutan Standard Classification of Occupation.	• localization of the International Standard Classification of Occupations
Bangladesh	National accounting wing[31]: Strengthening Environment, Climate Change and Disaster Statistics (ECDS) programme	• development of an indicator framework and the identification of data sources for disaster risk management
Kyrgyzstan	*Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on Official Statistics*[32] Production of classification and efforts at improvement of coverage and quality of statistics (art. 8, 28, 29). Provides for the production and sharing of statistical metadata (art. 16, 18, 28, 30, 32)	• development of an indicator inventory • international practices with generating metadata, SDMX
Maldives	*National Strategy for the Development of Statistics*[33] 4-3-2 e-Platforms using latest technology for data dissemination of official statistics are available with content that effectively communicate statistics, facilitate access to statistical products and support data analysis and user-generated outputs 3-1-4 MBS to establish a proper mechanism to produce environmental statistics, as per international recommendations and as mandated by the Act	• development of a data dissemination platform • roadmap for the development of environmental-economic statistics
Mongolia	*Strategy Plan for the Statistics Sector*[34]	• improving statistical business processes • development of an online training platform for official statistics

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[30] *Strategic Plan to Improve National Statistics in Bhutan,* National Statistics Bureau (Bhutan)
[31] *An Assessment of National Strategy for the Development of Statistics*, Bangladesh Institute of Development Statistics
[32] See https://stat.gov.kg/media/files/dc69a94d-0744-46cb-987f-4e9bb54a747d.pdf
[33] See https://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/nbs/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/NSDS-Maldives.pdf
[34] See https://www.1212.mn/en/transparency/3/39953353

	6.4.1. Develop and implement a plan to introduce the General Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) 6.4.2. Use the information database of government agencies to produce, verify, and coordinate official statistical information 6.4.15. Expanding Statistical Training for Users	• review of the national statistical system
Nepal	*National Policy for Disaster Risk Reduction*[35] 7.4 Disaster risk assessment and mapping system will be developed. Identifying vulnerable communities, capacity development activities will be conducted for them	• enhancing disaster-related statistics

Table 9: Relevant national strategies and policies on developing statistical and related systems

The sense of alignment of the project's capacity building and support activities with national needs is reflected in project beneficiaries' responses to post-capacity building and evaluation surveys. Nearly 90% of both survey respondents indicated 'Very high' or 'High' relevance of project support to national needs (see Figure 5 and Figure 6 below).
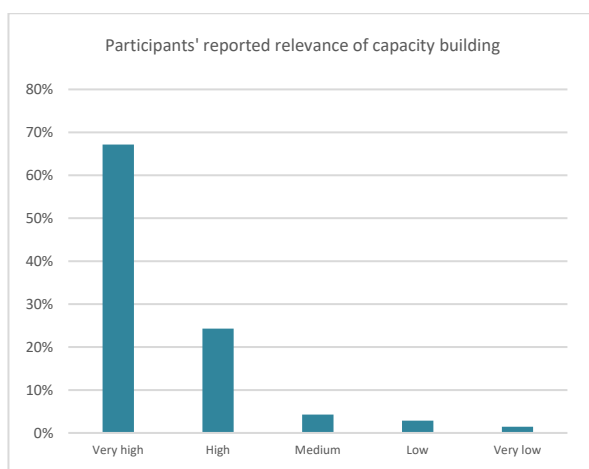
Figure 5: Project survey responses (consolidated) on the relevance of capacity building
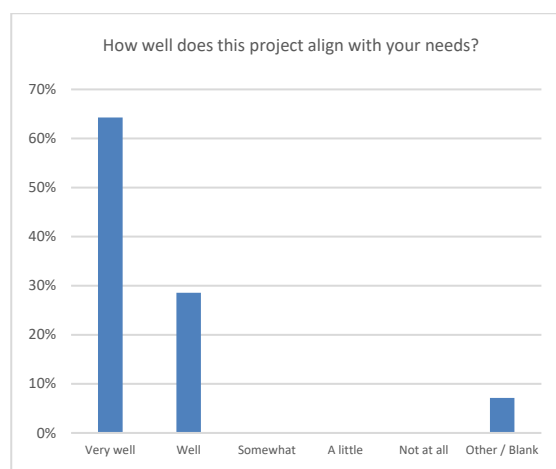
Figure 6: Evaluation survey results on project relevance

Several intended partner countries did not participate in the project due to leadership changes and other issues

Several countries that were intended as project partner countries did not participate in project activities. This included Fiji and Samoa, which were originally intended as participating countries, and Papua New Guinea, which was a potential additional participant. All of these countries participated in the online regional workshop[36] held in May 2021 where an initial assessment of national priorities and potential areas for future capacity building were identified. In Fiji, leadership changes in the Fiji Bureau of Statistics indefinitely delayed further participation in project activities. Similarly, in Samoa the

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[35]35 See http://drrportal.gov.np/exrules

[36] See above

selection and appointment of new leadership in the Samoa Bureau of Statistics introduced delays that prevented further participation. In Papua New Guinea, discussions initially began with the National Statistical Office, including one assessment mission that took place in August 2023 identifying several potential areas for cooperation under the project (including in legislative revision, inter-agency cooperation for data sharing, adoption of open-source software, and development of tourism statistics). However, the NSO was unable[37] to accommodate requests for the development of a capacity development plan with the project.

Finding 4: Adopting a 'systems-based' approach to national statistics supports overall relevance and usefulness, though more remains to be done to ensure relevant actors in national statistical landscape have sufficient capacities to contribute to and benefit from statistical data and evidence

A systems approach to developing national statistical capacities is well supported by project tools

A majority of interviewees highlighted the need for effective systems for data sharing across different agencies in government. This includes in areas mentioned such as CRVS and related health statistics, administrative statistics, disaster-related statistics (including at local level), as well as economic and sector-based data (e.g. labour and tourism statistics). As several national and United Nations counterparts noted, NSOs are not (or are no longer) the sole provider of national statistical information, and there are ecosystems of both generators and users of data across government. As one counterpart remarked given the volumes and variety of both public and private data now available, it may be better to consider NSOs as having a central role more in ensuring the quality of data that is an input into decision making, and that this data is effectively shared in a way that is useful.

In this context, as one ESCAP interviewee noted, the project has tried to explicitly follow a 'systems-led' approach to understanding capacity building in each country. An examination of the tools used in support of this capacity building reveals a more systemic approach to understanding the development of national statistical capacities. For instance:[38]

- GSIM[39] / GSBPM[40] alongside Business Process Improvement (BPI[41]) provide comprehensive ways to understand the needs of national systems for generating and using statistics, as well as providing ways to identify how data is being produced and analysed (including across national agencies or other actors), and how these processes can be further improved. Several national counterparts highlighted the importance especially of GSBPM and BPI to their effectiveness as NSOs
- EPiC tool[42] developed to facilitate structured engagement and dialogue between statistical data producers and data users, with the aim to identify key areas for action for improving national statistical systems, and producing data as an input to decision making in an integrated way

Through both a general systems-led approach as well as the application of tools that support an integrated view of how data is generated and used, the project has helped to address practical challenges faced by project countries' statistical systems in a way that takes into account the reality of both data needs and how data is produced and shared. As one survey respondent noted, the approach taken by the project, as well as the tools employed in support of their country, were

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[37] The reasons for this are unclear

[38] Note that ESCAP also has a short guide sheet on data integration

[39] *Generic Statistical Information Model*, a framework that helps describe the inputs and outputs of processes to collect and analyse statistical data

[40] *Generic Statistical Business Process Model*, a framework that helps describe the processes for transforming inputs of statistical processes into outputs. This is considered as complementary to GSIM.

[41] *Business Process Improvement*, a way of understanding how data in a statistical system is actually being collected and analyses, as a basis for making the process more effective and/or improving the quality of the statistical outputs

[42] *Every Policy is Connected*, see: https://www.unescap.org/our-work/statistics/EPIC

"coherent and comprehensive", allowing them to make further progress in integrating systems for generating and using statistical data.

Statistical capacities in partner agencies remain a challenge to real integration of national statistical systems

While the overall approach of the project towards national statistical systems was relevant, there remain some key challenges that will hinder further progress in several project countries. In some project countries, the *normative framework* for data sharing among both national agencies as well as agencies at relevant levels of government is incomplete or else is not yet fully effective at facilitating the sharing of data. While almost all national counterparts interviewed considered the *statistical capacities* of partner agencies and actors to be an area of challenge for further strengthening of the national statistics ecosystem as a whole. Examples of capacities mentioned by relevant stakeholders include:

- Small area statistics and local level data capacities (incl. in areas with important local considerations such as the development and use of disaster-related statistics) are areas of further capacity need mentioned by several project countries, including capacities in sub-national authorities
- Statistical and analytical capacities within different national-level agencies and authorities (i.e. outside the NSO) in differing policy areas, e.g. enabling a water authority to understand land use data, integration of population level data with GIS,[43] etc. This also includes capacities for effective collection and sharing of agency data with, for example, the NSO
- Technical capacity to store and share data according to common standards and processes, including relevant IT systems, use of common platforms and standards (e.g. SDMX, open-source software, etc.)

While the project has provided some support for countries in some or all of these areas (particularly for the adoption of common standards and processes for data quality and data sharing), in some project countries needs in these areas remain significant. Given that this encompasses both training and technical capacity needs across policy areas as well as levels of government, it is likely to continue to be a priority area for future development.

Finding 5: The project shows alignment with SDG 17 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as parts of the Cape Town Global Action Plan, and stakeholders value the project in particular for its support to developing data capacities for the SDG indicators

Data capacities for SDG indicators show improvement, but significant challenges remain

A key part of the rationale for this project was to support participating member States in improving their capacities to collect and report on a range of different indicators, including those related to targets under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals[44]. Indeed, reports[45] over the last few years have highlighted the on-going gaps in SDG indicator data sets among NSOs, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and among countries in the Global South. As noted in the project document itself, across the Asia and the Pacific region as a whole only 42% of the 231 SDG indicator datasets are complete enough to assess progress. Indeed, comparison of indicator data across all SDGs using DESA's own tools[46] shows continued data gaps for all the project countries. For the project countries, *Annex 5: Indicator data availability by country and*

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[43] Geographic Information System. A system of integrating and incorporating geographic information with other kinds of data, e.g. for production of maps and other tools
[44] A/RES/70/1
[45] *Survey on the Implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data*, World Bank (2022)
[46] See, for example, the UN DESA SDG Indicators Database *Data Availability Tool*, https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/analytics/DataAvailability

SDG, provides a comparison of data availability across the Goals highlighting significant differences across indicators and countries, but showing overall the limitations of existing SDG indicator datasets.

This lack of data availability obviously inhibits development of evidence-informed policy and programming, while also restricting the ability to measure and understand both positive and negative trends. In this context, we can consider the project as working to facilitate public policy in general and specifically the SDG targets under SDG 17 ('Strengthen the means of implementation (…)'):

- SDG 17.18: By 2020,[47] enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts
- SDG 17.19: By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries

Moreover, when questioned about the relevance and value of the project to their national circumstances, the majority of interviewees made at least some mention of increased capacities to monitor and report on SDG indicators. This was reaffirmed in the responses to the evaluation survey, which highlighted the role of the project in strengthening national systems to monitor and report on the SDGs (see Figure 7 below).
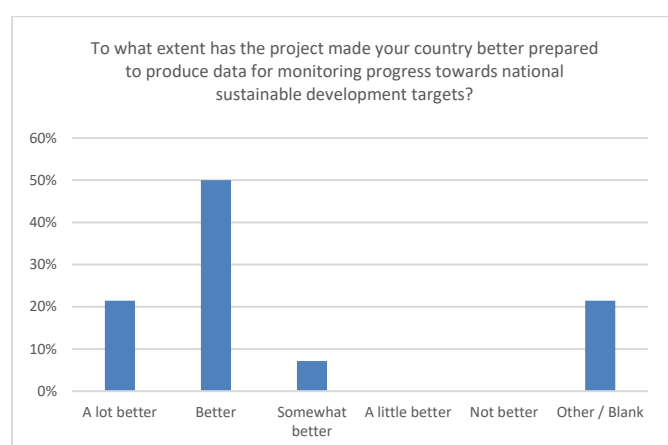
Figure 7: Effectiveness in preparing countries to monitor SDGs

The project also shows alignment with the *Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data*[48], which aims to *"provide a framework for discussion on, and planning and implementation of statistical capacity building necessary to achieve the scope and intent of the 2030 Agenda"*. Insofar as the project has provided direct support to efforts to improve the quality and expand scope of national statistics, as well as improve the sharing and dissemination of relevant statistical data, there is evidence of contributions to parts of the Action Plan's Strategic Areas 3 and 4 (see Figure 8 below).

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[47] This target refers to an end date of 2020, but still appears relevant considering the need for additional statistical capacities across Member States. This is further highlighted by the indicators for this SDG target, which deal with resourcing capacity development plans etc.:

"17.18.1 Statistical capacity indicators

17.18.2 Number of countries that have national statistical legislation that complies with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

17.18.3 Number of countries with a national statistical plan that is fully funded and under implementation, by source of funding"

[48] Endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission in 2017, and mentioned in General Assembly Resolution A/RES/71/313

Strategic Area 3: Strengthening of basic statistical activities and programmes, with particular focus on addressing the monitoring needs of the 2030 Agenda
Objective 3.2: Improve the quality of national statistical registers and expand the use of administrative records integrating them with data from surveys and other new data sources, for the compilation of integrated social, economic and environmental statistics and in relation to follow up on the 2030 Agenda
Objective 3.3: Strengthen and expand System of National Accounts and the System of Environmental Economic Accounts
Strategic Area 4: Dissemination and use of sustainable development data
Objective 4.1: Develop and promote innovative strategies to ensure proper dissemination and use of data for sustainable development

Figure 8: Relevant Cape Town Global Action Plan objectives

4.3 Efficiency

Overview

The project delivered its activities in a timely way, and project stakeholders considered the project team to be responsive and efficient in the way they conducted the project and responded to any issues that arose. The project did encounter some difficulties with delivering according to initial plans in some countries, largely due to the limited absorption capacity of the relevant NSO (this may be an area where additional consideration could be made for future activities). The project design made good use of regional and open-source training modalities, while helping to bridge the lack of sustained local presence in project countries.

Finding 6: The project was mostly timely and efficient in its delivery, with some revisions of country development plans due to limited capacities in partner agencies

Project was timely and responsive in its implementation

The project activities were mostly delivered in a timely manner. COVID-19 related travel restrictions during the initial part of the project required workshops and meetings to be held online. As a result, some national consultations (e.g. on national needs and priorities) were conducted online until in-person travel was again possible during the course of 2022. However, the project was able to exceed its planned outcomes by the end of the implementation period (see **Annex 6** on page 54). Moreover, the majority of project participants in interviews and surveys considered project delivery to be timely and efficient. Over 90% of post-capacity building survey respondents considered project capacity building efficiency to be 'Very high' or 'High' (Figure 9). In the evaluation survey, over two-thirds of respondents considered project capacity building to be 'Very timely' or 'timely' (Figure 10), while a similar proportion of respondents considered the project team to be 'Very responsive' or 'responsive' to questions and requests from national counterparts (Figure 11).
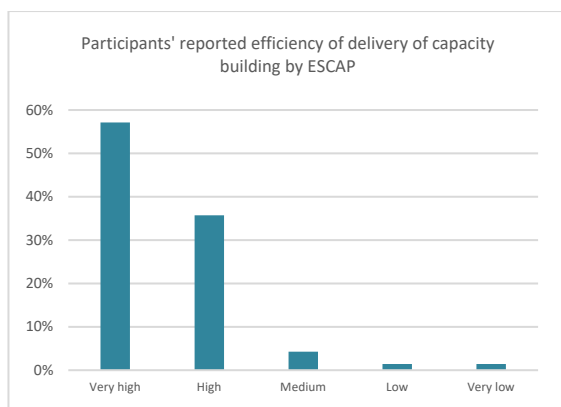
Figure 9: Reported efficiency of delivery
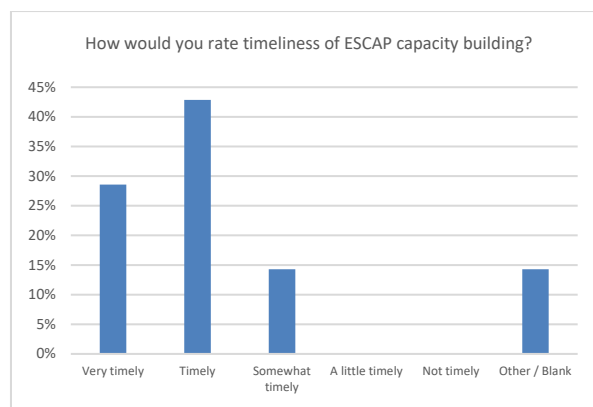
Figure 10: Evaluation survey timeliness of delivery
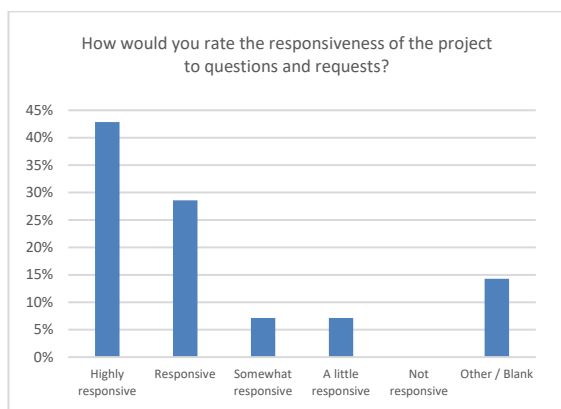
Figure 11: Evaluation survey responsiveness of project team

Internal NSO capacity constraints have limited their ability to absorb technical cooperation

However, there were some instances where limited capacities in NSOs hampered the ability of the project to make progress on initial plans. For instance, in one partner country, more ambitious capacity development plans had to be scaled back to more realistically reflect the absorption capacity and – especially – available time of NSO staff, who were tasked with multiple competing priorities in the course of their normal work. In another project country, initial scope for data integration meant that certain categories of data had to prioritized, and ESCAP is providing on-going support to this country for the inclusion of missing datasets beyond the lifetime of this project.

Additionally, though participating countries noted the responsiveness and high level of engagement of ESCAP staff in Bangkok, several interviewees noted that resource limitations did mean that in-person support to each country was limited, and follow up on project activities was often done remotely. This latter factor may also reflect the limitations in the way that Development Account funding can be allocated, which necessitates reliance on consultancy assignments for some roles, as well as the use of existing UN staff members who may be working across multiple assignments. However, as one participant noted, the ESCAP team were able to be flexible and responsive even with the additional workload of the project.

Finding 7: The use of partnerships, locally-based experts, and open-source tools has helped the project to achieve efficiencies in planning and execution

As mentioned above, the project made use of training institutes in Philippines and Malaysia for capacity building across NSOs in the region. These trainings leveraged particular expertise of partner countries, in the use of open-source software for statistical analysis in the Philippines, and the

development of tourism statistics in Malaysia. Discussions with stakeholders have highlighted that providing training on a regional basis in this way has helped to:

- Develop formal and informal regional networks among practitioners in project and partner NSOs. This has been particularly noted among several NSO participants who could identify with the challenges faced by the partner countries
- Further strengthen and raise the profile of partner training institutions

There is no exact point of comparison in terms of cost of national training institutes in the region versus an alternative modality with the same exact output. However, there is recognition of the value among participating NSOs of making use of national resources and institutions in the region, rather than relying on flying in external trainers or bringing both trainers and trainees to ESCAP headquarters in Bangkok whenever capacity building is needed.

Moreover, the project made use of open-source systems, notably for the development of training modules for translation and dissemination among partners in Mongolia. Given that much of this material is relates to topics that are relevant to NSOs and national statistical systems across the region, this has provided a resource that can then be reused and potentially translated into other languages, as needed, using the same open-source training tool ('Moodle')[49], itself available in a range of languages of the region.

Finally, the project made use of nationally-based consultants both as subject matter experts but also as lead contacts for coordination with relevant national agencies, as well as local United Nations partners. This approach helps to bridge the gap between project staff in Bangkok, both in their position as a non-resident agency in the respective project country, but also in terms of available time and ability to engage with local partners (e.g. using knowledge of local language and / or institutional frameworks).

4.4 Sustainability

Overview

Project stakeholders are in agreement that the benefits of the project will continue. This perception seems reinforced by the specific areas of capacity building undertaken, which focus on development of systems and standards for sharing of data, that have begun to be used and even extended by project countries. As mentioned above though, resource constraints remain a constraint to further benefiting from project interventions. It is however important that resource constraints are considered across the national statistical system including outside the NSO, since it is frequently capabilities among partner agencies (at national and in some cases local levels) that are mentioned as significant limitations.

Looking forward, project stakeholders also frequently raised the potential for further benefits in areas related to Big Data, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, which were not an explicit focus of this project. The use cases for these techniques in these countries remain unclear, and could be an avenue to be further explored.

Finding 8: National stakeholders agree that project benefits will continue after the project, but resource limitations among NSOs and relevant national agencies remain a key structural impediment to both impact and sustainability

Benefits from project capacity building seem set to continue

The capacity building supported by the project seems suited to providing continued benefits, so long as systems and people support their on-going use. For instance, the Maldives has continued to add

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[49] https://moodle.org/?lang=en

datasets to its data dissemination portal (with some support from ESCAP), Mongolia has adopted the training modules as well as reviewing business processes, Nepal has conducted the review of disaster-related data. In all of these cases, processes – whether technical or policy-related – have started that will continue to have effects after the project, so long as the necessary high-level support remains in place.

This seems to be the expectation among project beneficiaries – from the evaluation survey, 86% of respondents thought that the benefits from the project would continue. Moreover, national counterparts in discussions were highly supportive of the idea that project results would continue to be seen in their respective fields. Survey respondents have noted use of knowledge gained through the project in their work (see Figure 12 and Figure 13 below).
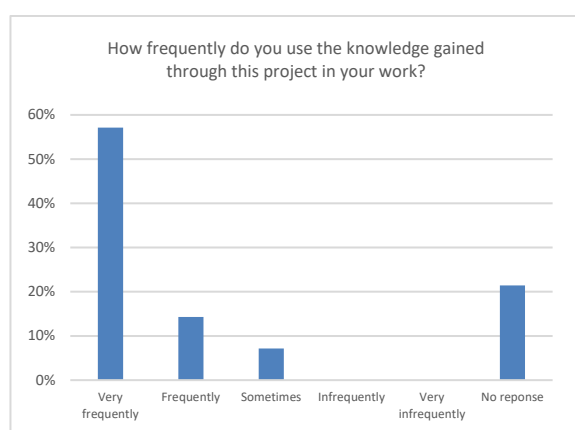
Figure 12: How frequently knowledge is applied
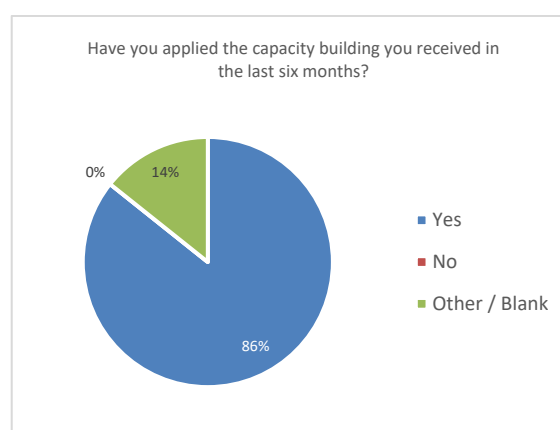
Figure 13: Application of knowledge in last six months

Resource constraints remain a key limiting factor, particularly for smaller NSOs

As noted above, resource limitations remain a key constraint for NSOs and national statistical systems more broadly. While in some cases, stakeholders mentioned the lack of sufficient legal or policy frameworks (e.g. for data sharing amongst relevant government agencies) as an on-going constraint, most interviewees overwhelmingly mentioned human resource and financial capacities as the major factors that can hinder both the sustainability and longer-term impact of the project's capacity building in their country.

Moreover, it is important to recognize that, while NSOs – and in particular NSOs in smaller countries – can have a significant volume of work and competing priorities (which may also include their engagement with international and bilateral organizations), the human resource limitations of the NSOs national partners was cited as often if not more as the key limiting factor. This includes the statistical capacities and understanding of partners in other government ministries, local and provincial authorities (e.g. in developing and using local and area-based statistics), etc. Stakeholders frequently expressed the need for development of statistical knowledge and understanding amongst these partners in order to help facilitate the health and functioning of the national statistical system as a whole (including the work of the NSO).

Finding 9: Partner country counterparts consider the areas of big data, artificial intelligence, and machine learning, and their linkages with the work of NSOs, as key priorities over the coming years

NSOs consider Big Data and artificial intelligence as key areas of need in the coming years

The importance of future-oriented capacities in the work of statistical authorities was repeatedly raised during the evaluation, in interviews as well as in surveys and discussions that took place during project implementation. Among the key areas highlighted were the use of 'non-traditional data

sources'[50] (and their integration and use together with more traditional datasets), Big Data tools and techniques, and the use of machine learning and artificial intelligence for the purposes of national statistics.

These areas pose a challenge[51] as: 1) they represent areas where technology and techniques have been and continue to be relatively fast moving, with new and evolving tools, applications, etc.; 2) even relatively well-resourced national statistical offices and governments find challenges in these areas, meaning there is no single clearly established path to their integration and use; and 3) they raise important legal and ethical considerations, especially for the use and protection of private data. Stakeholder discussions further highlighted awareness among project participants of these challenges, while also suggesting a concern among national counterparts that rapid advances in these areas risked lowering the perceived value of their work, should they not be seen to be 'keeping up to speed'.

However, it was less clear that there were specific use cases that stakeholders had in mind for these technologies. This is understandable given the novel and fast-moving nature of technical development in these areas, where applications are still be explored. It is further worth noting that for project countries, analytical and technical capacities for collecting and sharing data are still being developed, perhaps limiting the volume and kinds of data that can be used to inform, for example, a machine learning approach to a policy issue[52]. In this context, it is worth noting the recent report from UN Economic Commission for Europe *Machine Learning for Official Statistics[53]*, which noted the importance of: alignment with business needs of national statistical systems as well as end user requirements, demonstrated added value (e.g. better quality or more informative results, or at the very least results that are more timely and at lower cost), robustness of systems (the system is reliable and performs well), and that both ethical standards and domain expertise are incorporated into the design and use of these systems. All of these areas may have different implications for any NSO or national statistics system, and implies at least further discussion and collection of potential use examples that may be able to be adapted to, for example, an environment with resource limitations.

4.5 Cross-cutting Issues

Overview

The project showed engagement with the interconnections between capacity building themes and gender equality and the empowerment of women (GEEW), and there was some degree of balance in terms of participants in project activities. However, there may have been missed opportunities to, for instance, highlight the significance and usefulness of statistical data and SDG indicators for the purposes of disability inclusion, and in the area of human rights.

The project was effectively designed as an overall framework for a set of 'mini-projects' that were based around national needs. This allowed for a flexible approach that was greatly appreciated, and allowed for the addressing of particular gaps in national statistical systems. However, the downside of this approach is that the overall project results framework was quite general and didn't really accommodate the range of real outcomes generated by project capacity building. An approach that maintains the overall flexibility while also seeking ways to monitor and report on project interventions in a more nuanced way would be beneficial.

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[50] This generally refers to data collected for purposes other than national statistics. This may include, for instance, data from digital transactions (e.g. purchases and Point of Sale data), social media data, data on job postings, satellite imagery and GIS, etc.

[51] See, for example, the list of challenges and opportunities highlighted in the recent report, *Governing AI for Humanity*, United Nations (2024)

[52] It may be that the lack of data integration may be something that could be addressed by an AI / ML approach, though this is beyond the scope of the evaluation

[53] See https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210011143/read

Finding 10: The project consistently seeks to engage women in project activities, and includes efforts at gender disaggregation within capacity building content. However, more could be done to ensure that data on women's participation in course activities is consistently measured and reported.

Gender participation was mostly balanced, and linkages between gender and capacity building were typically highlighted

Analysis of project activities shows that, excluding where the gender of the participant is not known, around 56% of the participants are men and 44% of the participants are women. There is however, a relatively large proportion of participants where the gender is not known from the activity records (see Figure 11 below). Moreover, some project countries provided a relatively large proportion of all participants in the project activities, so this may not reflect the gender balance for each training and workshop that was undertaken by the project[54]. Overall, though, while there are some limitations to this data, it does broadly show a relatively balanced participation of men and women in project activities.

Activity participant gender (all project activities)

Don't know, 21%

Prefer not to say, 3%

Men, 41%

Women, 35%
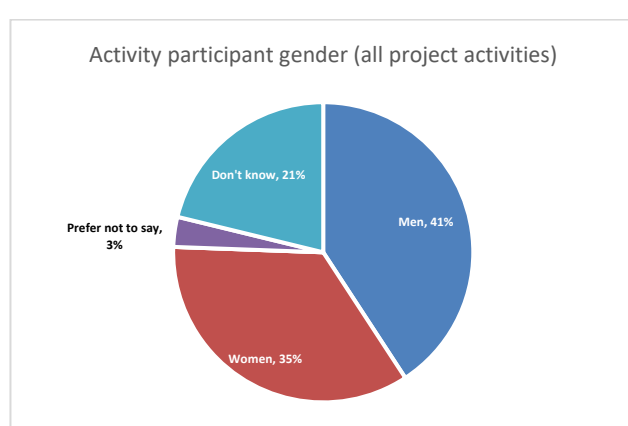
Figure 14: Gender of activity participants

In the content of the presentations and workshops conducted under the programme, we can see the issue of gender largely approached from the perspective of gender disaggregation of data and the in some cases discussion of gender in SDG indicators, and linkages of the project activities to SDG 5 and 17.[55] For example, the project's work in disaster-related data consistently discusses and supports efforts at gender-disaggregation of data. Sex disaggregation is part of: tourism statistics capacity building (including statistics in tourism employment), training in Community-Based Monitoring of Systems for data processing, development of online training modules in official statistics in Mongolia (including SDG-related statistics), and review of national statistical systems (in particular proportion of women employed in relevant NSOs). A review of the datasets available on the data dissemination platform for the Maldives shows the possibility to output gender disaggregated data in a range of health and social statistics (providing in principle easier availability of such data for decision makers).

Among the tools employed by ESCAP during the project, there is evidence of gender approaches being included. In the EPiC tool guidance, for example, there is discussion of disaggregation of data[56] (though not explicitly from a gender perspective) as well as in related documents such as the indicator guidelines[57] which discuss indicators for gender equality. Moreover, ESCAP has produced (outside of the scope of this project) materials on application of gender-informed approaches using the EPiC tool in addressing the gender data gap, progressing women's economic empowerment through improved data, etc. These are available amongst the accompanying materials[58] for the EPiC tool.

Post-capacity building survey information lacked consistent questions with regard to perspectives on the gender content of activities. The evaluation survey suggests that a clear majority participants were exposed to project capacity building components or modules related to gender in the context of the

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[54] It is also worth noting that this does not take into account gender by level of seniority among project participants

[55] Of particular relevance here may be SDG targets 5.1 (on ending discrimination), but also target 17.18 which refers to reliable data disaggregated by gender.

[56] *EPiC User Manual*, UN Economic Commission for Africa

[57] *Indicator Guidelines for Policy Monitoring in the Pacific*, ESCAP and Pacific Community

[58] See, for example, 'Resources' and 'Workshops' on the EPiC website: https://www.unescap.org/our-work/statistics/EPIC

production of relevant statistics (see Figure 12 below). Moreover, a majority of participants considered that the capacity building made a significant contribution to gender empowerment in their particular context (see Figure 13 below).
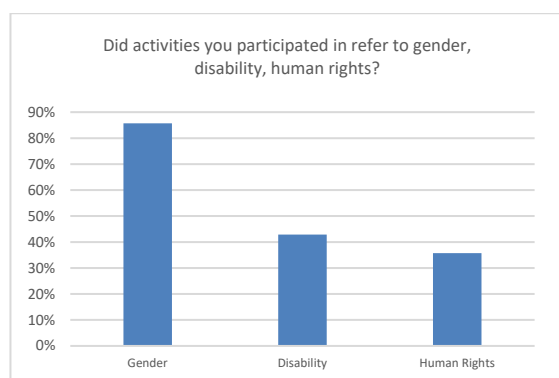
Figure 15: Inclusion of gender, disability, human rights
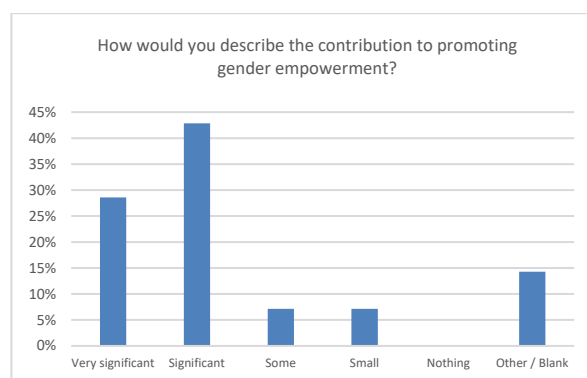
Figure 16: Perceived contribution to gender empowerment

Beyond the gender balance of project activities and inclusion of gender disaggregation among key tools and approaches taken by the project, there isn't a particular discernible approach to inclusion of GEEW-related content in responses to support requests from Member States.

Finding 11: Disability inclusion and human rights are much less visible than gender in both content and implementation of project activities, though there may be considerable relevance of these areas especially for the production of SDG-related statistical data

Disability related issues could be made more visible, particularly in connection with SDGs

Disability related issues remain less visible overall in the project, when compared to gender. For instance, we know little about the relevant disability status of participants as compared to their gender. Moreover, the evaluation survey suggests that respondents saw less inclusion of disability related content in project capacity building (see Figure 15 above), while respondents also saw the project's overall contribution to disability as mostly limited (see Figure 17 below).

However, disability does feature as a cross-cutting theme among some of the work done under this project. Disability is mentioned in the project document as one of the important categories for data disaggregation. Working sessions on disaster risk management included actions related to improving disability inclusiveness amongst disaster risk management data, and in the work of relevant authorities. Work in this area also included selection of key variables to mapped and disaggregated, including by disability status, in order to further understanding of hazards and risks, and promote risk-informed decision-making[59].

Training modules developed with support from the project includes an overview of the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)*[60], and its application in monitoring and reporting of health and disability conditions. These training modules also include direct reference to SDG target provisions for the inclusion of disability information in national data (especially under SDG target 17.18).

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[59] This aligns with, for example, the guiding principles of *Nepal's Disaster Risk Reduction National Strategic Plan of Action (2018 – 2030)*, as well as its strategic activities related to risk assessment
[60] A standard language and framework for the description of health and health-related states, which also classifies functioning and disability associated with health conditions

However, the relevance of disability inclusion to SDG indicator data is wider than a single target.[61] UN DESA and others have identified links between the SDGs people with disabilities. This may be because they are one of the seven targets and 11 indicators explicitly mention people with disabilities, because disaggregation of data may help to identify needs and impacts on people with disabilities, or because people with disabilities may be especially vulnerable to certain negative outcomes. Table 8 in *Annex 5: Indicator data availability by country and SDG* (on page 53) highlights data availability[62] across these disability-related indicators. While there is some variation across project countries, there has been a general lack of data for disability-related indicators under SDGs 10, 11, and 17. While these SDGs were not the explicit focus of the work of this project, it has supported, for instance, better understanding of disaster risk and housing, income and employment in key growing sectors in some project countries (such as in tourism) and related topics. Improved understanding of how disability intersects in these areas in each country could therefore enable finer grained analysis and decision making.
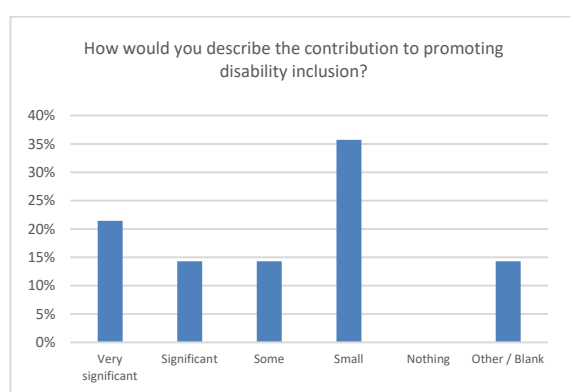
Figure 17: Contribution to promoting disability inclusion
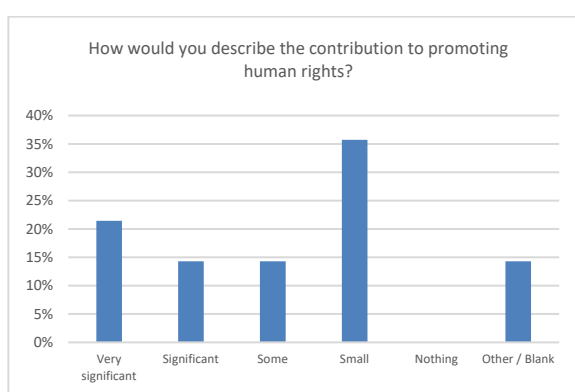
Figure 18: Contribution to promoting human rights

Human-rights related issues could be made more visible, particularly in connection with SDGs

Human rights are also less obviously visible in project documents and activities, particularly when compared to gender. Around a third of respondents to the evaluation survey saw inclusion of human rights within capacity building content of the project (see Figure 15 above), and figures for respondents considering the project's overall contribution to human rights are identical as for disability inclusion (see Figure 18 above).

However, human rights are discussed in the project document as one of the principles that underpin the EPiC tool used in some of the project activities. Moreover, human rights are discussed in online training material developed by the project, in the context of the development of the 2030 Agenda. They also appear in the discussions on agile statistical systems. While there is little additional evidence of human rights being a subject of explicit discussion elsewhere in project activities, it is important in the context of this project to note the relationship between improved statistical data (especially against the SDG indicators) and human rights. For instance, OHCHR has identified[63] interconnections between SDG indicators and human rights (under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights[64]), in all but one of the SDGs[65]. This makes human rights concerns relevant across a very wide range of themes and policy areas in the 2030 Agenda. There therefore appears to be broad scope to identify and

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[61] *Disability and Development Report*, UN DESA (2019)

[62] Note that this may not take into account the most recent developments and publications by project country, but is a record of availability of indicator data in the years since 2015

[63] See, for instance: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/HRIndicators/SDG_Indicators_Tables.pdf

[64] General Assembly Resolution 217A (1948)

[65] The list in the OHCHR's *Human Rights Indicators Tables* identifies 237 indicators that have some relationship with one or more articles of the *Universal Declaration*

highlight the connections between statistical data on the one hand and human rights issues on the other hand, and in particular how issues like data disaggregation, localised and area based statistics, and increased coverage and quality of statistical information can impact on human rights concerns.

Finding 12: The project shows good understanding of country needs and baselines, but the broad nature of the project outcomes hinders a more nuanced demonstration of project results

The project demonstrates good practices in baseline assessment and collection of survey data

The project document shows strong evidence of baseline needs assessment for potential project countries and discussion of potential outcomes that could be supported (though notably there is a much smaller number of countries where implementation actually took place). It seems likely that this reflects the resources and work that went into planning and hosting discussions with member States during the first workshop held in May 2021.

Some good practices can be observed in the implementation of the project, including in the way that project collects participant feedback following trainings, workshops, etc. While this was completely consistent across all activities, it does provide a valuable source of information on relevance and effectiveness of capacity building. Ideally, this would also include later follow up on application of training (whether by survey or by other means).

Broad nature of technical cooperation work under project makes for very general outcome statements and indicators, and there is a lack of output indicators

However, other aspects of the project seem very broad or general, likely reflecting the uncertain nature of both the precise geographic of the project as well as the nature of the technical cooperation that would be provided. As a result, the project results and risk management frameworks seem to lack detail. The project outcome statements (see on page 54) can be fairly broad, for instance, outcome two refers to national statistical systems benefitting 'from the experiences of beneficiary countries' but neither the outcome nor the associated indicators provide much insight into what should be expected nor how it will be measured. Outcome one indicators seem to simply count the number of beneficiary countries without much insight into how and whether the project outputs are 'in line with national commitments'. Indeed overall, the project outcomes are vague and do not describe well the 'short- or medium-term effects'[66] of the project's outputs.

This recognition of the lack of precision of the project outcomes is not intended to be an overly prescriptive approach to project design, but to rather highlight the missed opportunity to better understand the effects and, at some point, the impacts of the work of staff of the project. It would be good to, for instance, have more detailed data on usage of the Maldives' data dissemination portal (or even user feedback), training data for users of Mongolia's online training modules, instances or case studies of experience sharing among project countries, etc. This more outcome-oriented information (i.e. describing the effects of capacities delivered with project support) could provide insights into project implementation, including for programme management during the course of the project. It is also likely easier to incorporate when considering the design stage of country activities or workplans.

In this context, it is also worth noting that output indicators were not included at all in the project document or subsequently in the project reporting. This is in spite of relevant data being collected by the project in the form of participation in capacity building activities and workshops, adoption of training and other materials, etc. One result of this may be a reliance on narrative-based reporting in the annual reporting instruments, necessitating additional staff time, where more concise indicator-based reporting may have been used.

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[66] See, for instance, *Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management*, OECD (2022)

5. Conclusions

The *'Navigating Policy in Asia-Pacific with Data to Leave No One Behind'* Project provided an effective and tailored approach to addressing participating Member State needs in developing their national statistical systems. Overall, it proved to be flexible in both the kinds of interventions and capacity building that it was able to provide, as well as the diverse geographic, institutional, and specific national circumstances that it was able to address. Capacity building was generally in alignment with national plans and strategies for statistical and related systems, and the project as a whole served to advance the collection and use of statistical data, including for monitoring progress against relevant national SDG targets.

The project made a number of achievements, including for expanding the range and quality of statistical measures (e.g. in areas such as disaster-related statistics), the adoption of more effective business processes for the production of statistics in line with international norms, and the adoption of standards and platforms for the dissemination of data. The project also helped to support and promote the use of cost-effective open-source systems and practices among project countries, and to foster sharing of knowledge and experience among countries in the region. In doing so, it also helped to raise awareness of the importance and potential uses of data for decision making, while helping to support the role of the National Statistical Offices as key components of national data ecosystems.

Through partnerships with regional training institutes and the use of local expertise where possible, the project was able to take an efficient approach to developing national capacities. Moreover, the use of existing ESCAP staff resources has helped the project to make best use of its funds in order to support Member State capacities. Where the project encountered challenges, for example in helping project countries to meet objectives in their national timetables, ESCAP staff were able to suggest effective alternative approaches.

Capacities supported by the project are in use in each country, and seem likely to continue to provide benefits in the foreseeable future. However, there remain significant resource and technical hurdles to full realisation of benefits of capacity building. Some of these constraints relate to the increasingly 'systematized' nature of national statistical systems, where NSOs and others rely on human and technical capacities across national agencies in order to produce quality data for decision-making, in a timely and effective manner. Addressing these capacity deficits would seem to be a priority for further strengthening and improving the role and usefulness of national statistical systems in support of decision making. Finally, project stakeholders frequently raised the issue of the effect of Big Data, machine learning, and artificial intelligence on these national statistical systems. While use cases in the specific context of project countries remain unclear, they could potentially be areas to explore while remaining aware of the overall resource and capacity limitations in the region.

The project incorporated gender into capacity building content and was largely balanced in terms of participation in capacity building activities. However, there may be additional opportunities for this and future projects to make connections between, for example, specific sets of SDG indicators and issues such as disability inclusion and human rights.

The project design benefitted from a flexible approach which was reflected in both the high-level theory of change and the project results. However, this limited the opportunities to identify individual country theories of change and report on the resultant project outcomes. Among other things, this may mean that the project was less able to 'showcase' its achievements than would otherwise have been the case. Development of individual country theories of change and related output and outcome indicators, within the broad scope of the overall project, may have helped to counter this, while also supporting in areas such as results-based management (including monitoring and reporting) and country-level risk identification and management.

Evaluation Criteria	Rating (1 – lowest, 5 – highest)
Effectiveness	5
Relevance	5
Efficiency	5
Sustainability	4
Cross-cutting issues	4

6. Recommendations

Recommendation	Findings
1: Continue holistic and systems-based approaches to supporting national capacity development, with NSOs as a leading actor, and look to further strengthen all parts of the data ecosystem The systems approach views the NSO as a leading coordinator and standard setter for data across government, and recognizes that data is produced and used across government agencies, and not only through traditional tools such as census and administrative data. It does, however, significantly increase the complexity of providing capacity building support as the potential participants will include national government ministries as well as local government agencies, depending on the thematic area. Other sources of data, including that coming from the private sector, academia, and others, also form part of this ecosystem of providers and users of data. In this context, mapping of the data ecosystem around particular thematic or policy areas, could become a key initial step in developing strategies and action plans to further develop national statistical systems and capabilities. This may become more important as NSOs and other actors in the statistics ecosystem consider the role of 'non-traditional' datasets and Big Data in helping to understand thematic areas and track progress towards policy goals.	1, 4, 5, 8
2: Incorporate a systematic approach to building the capacity of national training institutes which may be able to play a regional role in capacity building as part of South-South cooperation while also exploring methods for sharing experiences and practical examples both formally and informally The project made good use of regional training institutions to help build capacity. Future projects could also look at how to build relationships with these training institutions, in their relevant areas of expertise, to support priorities of other Member States in the region. ESCAP could further consider formal and informal opportunities at experience sharing, perhaps deliberately structuring these into regional and sub-regional events, and / or online communications. Further consideration could be given, for instance, to how learning and experiences can be more systematically documented and shared, helping to collect case studies and examples from countries in the region. This may include, for example, work to help identify common approaches to constraints in areas such as data sharing, as well as in the use of more innovative technologies and methods (such as machine learning and artificial intelligence).	1, 2, 9
3: Future projects adopting a similar approach tailored to each target country should consider and document the theory of change of their interventions, including for the mapping of data provision and analytical capacities in national statistical systems, whilst bearing in mind the need for a proportionate approach given the relatively small scale of funding for each target country. This Development Account project was essentially structured as an overall framework to deliver support to individual member States in the form of 'mini-	4, 5, 12

projects' for each country. The strength of this approach was that it allowed for flexible, tailored assistance based on country needs and requests. However, opportunities to better understand the connections between project capacity building and higher-level results were missed. Moreover, while risks encountered during the project remained fairly low, country-specific risk identification and management was less systematic (and therefore more prone to error) than might otherwise have been the case. In this regard, it would be useful during discussions with the relevant member State agencies to outline a theory of change for the country-level initiatives, linking ESCAP-supported capacity building to outcome-level results, while identifying any specific assumptions and risk areas that are relevant in the particular context of that country / the relevant policy area (e.g. DRR, etc.)	
4: Identify areas where countries could be supported in producing data for SDG indicators that are relevant to supporting human rights and disability inclusion, in the context of new projects and in line with national priorities The evaluation considers that inclusion of gender considerations in both planning activities (e.g. to promote gender balance in workshops) and in content of interventions was done well (though there were some gaps in recording gender of participants in workshops, trainings etc.). However, there may have been missed opportunities in terms of ways to incorporate disability inclusion and human rights elements into the project. On the implementation side, being more systematic in tracking both gender and disability status of participants in trainings and workshops should be fairly straightforward. Standard data collection tools could be developed for this purpose, including for keeping a running track of participant profiles (e.g. in a single Excel table or similar document) as the project is implemented. On the content side, work has been done in the UN system linking, especially, SDG data and indicators to both disability inclusion and human rights. While discussions of human rights especially can be sometimes contentious and politically difficult in some countries, a focus on supporting member States in developing capacities to collect, analyse and integrate SDG indicator data relevant to aspects of human rights and disability inclusion, could be an area where progress could be made in helping specific concerns come to the attention of decision makers.	4, 11
5: Build upon NSO interest and seek opportunities to promote greater sharing and understanding of use cases for Big Data and artificial intelligence in national statistical systems, particularly in the context of low-resource environments As noted in the report, there is significant interest among project partners in the use of Big Data, machine learning, and artificial intelligence tools in the context of the production and use of national statistics. However, the precise ways in which these tools can be productively deployed remain a little unclear, particularly when considering that partner NSOs are often operating in an environment where time, technical resources, and human capacities are limited. Development Account and / or ESCAP could consider working together with other UN agencies (particularly the UN Statistics Division and other regional economic commissions), organizations such as PARIS21, and private sector partners, to identify relevant case studies that can both inform as to what is possible, as well as to serve as models for implementation.	8

6: Review and update templates and guidance for results-based management, particularly for the review and quality assurance of results statements and performance indicators (particularly at the outcome level), and inclusion of measurable output indicators As noted, the structure of this project, as essentially a framework for implementing national-level initiatives, makes it challenging to define a solid theory of change and related outcome statements, along with relevant performance measures. Given the country-driven approach adopted in this project, there was an understandable need for flexibility in outcome statements and indicators. However, once plans were agreed on how to address country needs, there were opportunities for the results framework to be revisited to help identify appropriate output and outcome metrics that suited each national context. Flexibility could be provided within the scope of Development Account and ESCAP processes to allow for such a scheduled 'update' of the project results, without going through lengthy revision and approval processes.	12

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Evaluation TORs

Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation is to support accountability for results and to enable learning. The evaluation results will be used to improve the design and implementation of future projects facilitated through the formulation of an evaluation management response and follow-up action plan. The primary users of the evaluation results are ESCAP, particularly the implementing division. Other expected users include implementing partners and DA Programme Management Team (DA-PMT).

The objectives of the evaluation are to:

1)   Assess the project performance against the evaluation criteria: results & achievements, effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, sustainability and cross-cutting issues, including gender equality, disability inclusion, as deemed relevant.

2)   Formulate lessons learned and action-oriented recommendations to inform management decision-making and improve future project design.

The evaluation assesses the project's performance by examining its outcomes through the project's results framework, its implementation processes, and relevant contextual factors. It aims to establish causal connections as much as possible, guided by the evaluation criteria and questions. The evaluation will be conducted in line with ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and Guidelines and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards for evaluation.

Duties and Responsibilities

The Navigating Policy in Asia-Pacific with Data to Leave No One Behind project was focused on enhancing national statistical systems by addressing the four key commitments outlined in the Declaration to Navigate Policy to Leave No One Behind.

The project is one of the Development Account 13th tranche projects selected for evaluation. Recognizing the value of independent evaluations in guiding efforts to improve ESCAP's overall performance and effectiveness, ESCAP's evaluation policy requires that selected projects undergo independent evaluation. Evaluation is a crucial function aimed at systematically and objectively assessing the impact, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of a project.

The evaluator will assume overall responsibility for carrying out the evaluation. This includes, among other activities, managing the work, ensuring the quality of interviews and data collection, preparing the draft report, presenting the draft report and producing the final report after comments have been received in line with standard templates provided by ESCAP.

Ultimate result of service

The final evaluation report will be posted on ESCAP's public website. The evaluation will be used to improve the design and implementation of future projects facilitated through the formulation of an evaluation management response and follow-up action plan.

Travel Details

Travel to Bangkok, Thailand to be arranged by the consultant

Output/Work Assignments

The following outputs will be delivered to the project manager at ESCAP:

1. Inception report detailing the approach of the evaluator, workplan and evaluation logical framework
2. Results of data collection exercise including a mission to Bangkok, Thailand
3. First draft of evaluation report
4. Presentation (PPT) on findings, conclusions and recommendations
5. Final evaluation report
6. Two-page ESCAP evaluation brief

The draft evaluation report will be shared with the evaluation reference group prior to finalization. The final evaluation report will be posted on ESCAP's public website.

Annex 2: Project's theory of change

As the project delivered a tailored programme of support to each country, there were in effect multiples avenues for change and outcomes to occur. The diagrams below therefore represent, on a country-by-country basis, simplified theories of change and project outcomes.

Bangladesh

Bhutan

Kyrgyzstan

ESCAP supports building an inventory of economic, social, and environmental indicators → Kyrgyzstan endorses the recommendations on adoption of standards etc. → Kyrgyzstan establishes an indicator warehouse and produces indicator data and metadata in line with established standards → Kyrgyzstan makes use of expanded indicators and datasets in planning and monitoring

Maldives

ESCAP supports capacity building on use of SDMX standard and data modelling

ESCAP provides technical support to the development and launch of .Stat Suite data platform

ESCAP supports planning for the improvement of environment economic statistics

Maldives launch data dissemination platform and take steps to increase the range of available data → Maldives makes available increasingly comprehensive data and indicators for stakeholders → Maldives makes use of expanded indicators and datasets in planning and monitoring

Mongolia

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┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐
│ ESCAP supports      │      │ Mongolia adopts GBPM │
│ capacity building on │─────▶│ and takes actions to │
│ the GSBPM and        │      │ put relevant         │
│ related standards    │      │ standards into       │
│                      │      │ practice             │
└─────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐
│ ESCAP supports      │      │ Mongolia launches    │      │ Revised systems and  │      │ Mongolia makes use   │
│ development of       │─────▶│ training curriculum  │─────▶│ processes are        │─────▶│ of expanded          │
│ online training      │      │ and students         │      │ effectively          │      │ indicators and       │
│ platform, modules    │      │ complete online      │      │ implemented by       │      │ datasets in planning │
│ and curriculum       │      │ courses              │      │ trained personnel    │      │ and monitoring       │
└─────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────┘      │ across national      │      └─────────────────────┘
                                                           │ statistics system    │
┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐      └─────────────────────┘
│ ESCAP supports      │      │ Mongolia adopts      │
│ review of the legal  │─────▶│ recommendations of   │
│ and institutional    │      │ review of national   │
│ framework of the     │      │ statistical system,  │
│ national statistical │      │ and takes steps to   │
│ system               │      │ implement them       │
└─────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────┘
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Nepal

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┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐
│ ESCAP supports      │      │ Nepal adopts         │
│ integration of       │─────▶│ measures and plans   │
│ data-related data    │      │ to integrate         │
│ into national        │      │ disaster-related     │
│ statistics system    │      │ data, and takes      │      ┌─────────────────────┐
│ (incl. exposure      │      │ action to improve    │─────▶│ Nepal makes use of   │
│ mapping, etc.)       │      │ data integration     │      │ expanded indicators  │
└─────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────┘      │ and datasets in      │
                                                           │ improving            │
┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐      │ understanding of and │
│ ESCAP supports      │      │ Nepal takes steps to │─────▶│ resilience to        │
│ identification of    │─────▶│ address data gaps    │      │ disasters            │
│ data gaps and areas  │      │ and improve data     │      └─────────────────────┘
│ for improvement of   │      │ quality              │
│ data quality         │      │                      │
└─────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────┘
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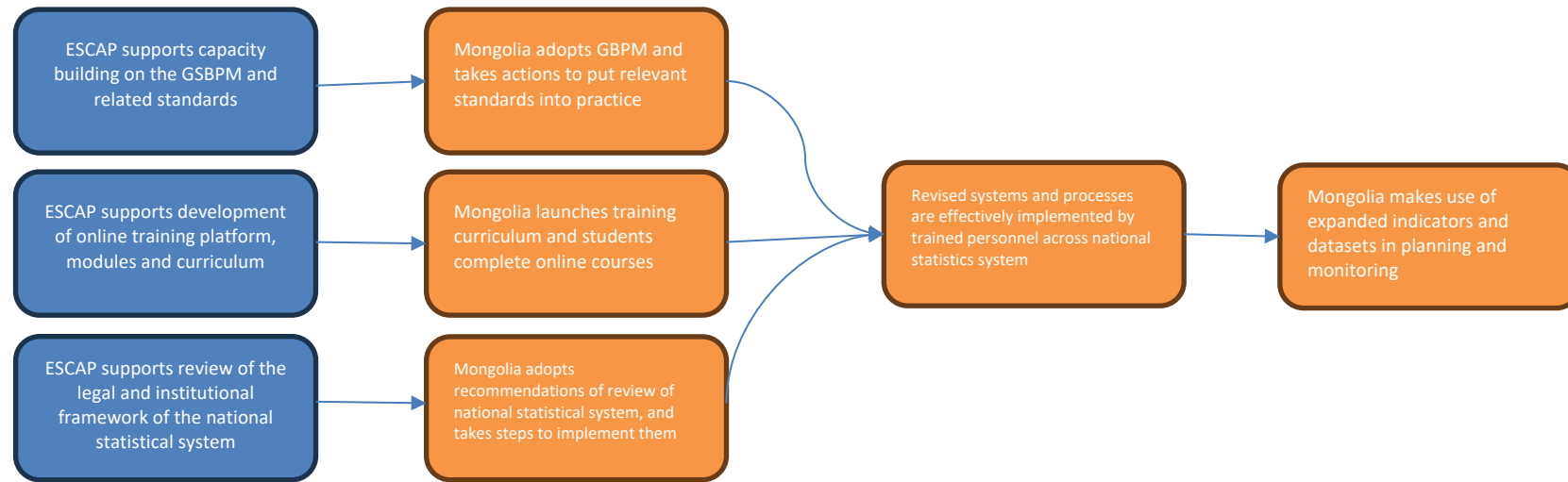## Annex 3: Evaluation matrix

Note the evaluation made use of the monitoring and reporting data collected for the indicators in the project results framework, as well as annual reports and relevant activity reports and summaries, most especially:

- Outcome indicators (indicators 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, and 2.2) – to be considered especially in the context of the evaluation criteria for impact
- Training results reporting – to be considered especially in the context of the evaluation criteria for relevance, coherence, and effectiveness
- Other output data to be considered especially in the context of the evaluation criteria for relevance, coherence, and effectiveness

Such data was considered in light of completeness of data, data collection methodologies, suitability to the theory of change, etc.

Criteria	Questions	Indicators	Results[67]	Sources	Risk/Assumptions
Relevance	To what extent was the project designed based on needs of the target beneficiaries? What adjustments, if any, were made to the project activities and modality, in response to the changing priorities/requirements of target beneficiary countries?	# / % of participants indicating that activities were consistent with national / organizational needs Level of flexibility of the project in meeting national needs, as indicated by participants	Majority of interviewees and survey respondents indicated positive alignment with national needs. Most interviewees noted flexibility of project.	Programme / activity planning; Partnership documents Stakeholders and key partners	National partner needs are clearly articulated in available documentation Adequate survey response rate
Effectiveness	What have been the most significant achievements of the project at the regional and national levels?	# / % of participants that indicate a gain in their knowledge through the project activities	Majority of interviewees and survey participants indicated training effectiveness was 'high' or 'very high'	Project reports; Meeting and mission reports; Training feedback	Available baseline data for training participants; Post-training comparison data availability

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[67] Note: Green = results support meeting evaluation criterion; Yellow = partial support to meeting evaluation criterion; Red = does not support meeting evaluation criterion

				Stakeholders and key partners	Adequate survey response rate
	How effective were the project's capacity-building activities? How could the implementing division make its future capacity-building activities more effective?	# / % of participants that indicate using increased capacities in their work in last 6 months	Majority of interviewees indicate use of increased national capacities delivered through the project	Stakeholders and key partners	Adequate survey response rate
Efficiency	To what extent did the project achieve efficiency in implementation through the combination of project stakeholders involved, making use of comparative advantages and the creation of synergy? To what extent has partnering with other organizations enabled or enhanced reaching of results? Was the project implemented in a timely manner and according to plan? If not, why?	# / % of participants that consider project activities were delivered in a timely fashion	Majority of survey participants report that efficiency of delivery was 'high' or 'very high'	Project and budget / financial reports Stakeholders and key partners	Adequate survey response rate
Sustainability	To what extent can results of the project be continued without ESCAP's further involvement?	% / # of participants indicating that further capacity building activities are planned in the next phase or in a related project	Majority of interviewees and evaluation survey respondents noted that further action will be taken following	Project documents; Meeting and activity reports Stakeholders and key partners	Availability of national stakeholder information Adequate survey response rate

			capacity building supported by the project. In some project countries sustainability will depend on further funding and political prioritisation.		
		% / # of countries where sustainability plans are in place			
Cross-cutting issues	To what extent were cross cutting issues, including gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion, integrated into the design and implementation of the project?	# / % of participants indicating that project activities impacted positively on gender, disability, and / or human rights	Majority of interviewees and evaluation survey respondents indicated incorporation of gender equality principles in capacity building. A minority of evaluation survey respondents indicated incorporation of disability inclusion or human rights into capacity building. In some project countries sustainability will depend on further funding and political prioritisation, affecting their ability to incorporate these elements into further activities.	Project documents; Meeting and activity reports Stakeholders and key partners	Availability of national stakeholder information Adequate survey response rate
		% / # of countries where gender, disability, and / or human rights are integrated into sustainability planning			

Annex 4: Project inception status (by country)

Country	Needs noted at project inception phase (summary)
Bangladesh	Inception report priorities: • The NSO in Bangladesh needs to have a good data ecosystem with the line ministries (including a good quality assurance framework) • There is need for knowledge regarding the use of statistical data, standards definitions used, as well as how data is generated and interpreted
Bhutan	Inception report priorities: • The first priority on Big Data Sources explores the use of big data to complement traditional data sources to generate official statistics • The second priority is on administrative data. Use of administrative data is increasing in Bhutan, especially the use of ethnicity data for policy and plant formulation. Bhutan is exploring how the use of administrative data can be improved, especially identifying and filling gaps and there is a need to prepare an appropriate template for data collection and data sharing standard operating procedures • The third priority is data harmonization. Data in Bhutan are being collected by many agencies, which are not consistent due to the different methods and standards
Kyrgyzstan	N/A[68]
Maldives	Inception report noted: • Maldives does not have a Statistics Law, and there are some areas of statistics in the regulation that need to be strengthened • MBS is not able to exercise its authority to gain access to administrative data at a sufficient level of disaggregation, for statistical purposes and to assure data quality • The absence of a statistical business register was a major stumbling block for past economic survey • Training needs of MBS and the wider NSS are insufficiently addressed due to government budget funding issues and no proper mechanism to train the people working in the statistics and the dissemination policy
Mongolia	Inception report:

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[68] Priorities were not identified at project inception stage

	- there is an emphasis by the Government on integrating statistics development with national development policies in a holistic manner, such as including some clauses for helping the government to focus on the production of the statistics and the investment in the national statistical system - improvement of capacity building for the government ministries statistical functioning - improvement is the national SDG indicators and the aligning of the SDG indicators with the indicators of the Vision 2050
Nepal	Inception report: - there are many data producers that produce data in a decentralised manner, and it is a challenge to integrate these data sources - data generation is weak at municipal level, and there are incomplete household records, especially outside urban areas - low levels of statistical literacy at the policy level

Annex 5: Indicator data availability by country and SDG

Indicator data for at least one year since 2015, by goal (average across indicators in percent)

Country	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5	Goal 6	Goal 7	Goal 8	Goal 9	Goal 10	Goal 11	Goal 12	Goal 13	Goal 14	Goal 15	Goal 16	Goal 17
Bangladesh	60.95%	50.33%	94.87%	77.17%	74.07%	77.21%	100%	72.92%	73.44%	74.58%	57.50%	55.23%	36%	64.12%	64.88%	64.26%	84.44%
Bhutan	21.50%	20.60%	19.50%	49.80%	25.00%	17.70%	10.00%	21.90%	28.10%	25.80%	32.00%	27.70%	21.70%	12.50%	75.60%	18.00%	32.40%
Kyrgystan	23.00%	19.10%	27.80%	51.50%	23.60%	24.00%	10.00%	22.90%	34.40%	37.10%	42.50%	24.30%	36.70%	25.00%	53.40%	47.60%	32.40%
Maldives	56.90%	42.23%	91.41%	56.50%	55.56%	44.79%	100%	62.50%	50%	45.83%	45.50%	49.09%	16.56%	44.12%	49.35%	44.77%	76.94%
Mongolia	19.20%	22.20%	27.60%	69.20%	58.30%	24.00%	10.00%	45.80%	43.80%	27.10%	29.10%	38.20%	41.00%	12.50%	75.60%	46.50%	32.40%
Nepal	46.07%	56.58%	96.79%	55.07%	66.67%	76.29%	100%	64.58%	78.13%	47.08%	62.50%	40.68%	16.67%	12.50%	85.71%	59.40%	84.72%

Table 10: Indicator data availability by country and SDG (source: UN DESA)

Country	SDG 4.5.1	SDG 4.a.1	SDG 8.5.1	SDG 8.5.2	SDG 10.2.1	SDG 11.2.1	SDG 11.7.1	SDG 11.7.2	SDG 17.18.1	SDG 17.18.2	SDG 17.18.3
Bangladesh	40.00%	100.00%	100%	50%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Bhutan	26.70%	71.40%	100%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Kyrgystan	33.30%	57.10%	0%	50%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Maldives	33.30%	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Mongolia	60%	57.10%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Nepal	33.30%	85.70%	100%	50%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 11: Data availability by disability-related indicator

Annex 6: Project outputs by country

Intended Outcomes (OCs)	Indicator(s)	Baseline / Target / Achievement	Status	Outputs / Notes
OC1: Strengthened national statistical systems of beneficiary countries in line with national commitments contained in the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind	1.1 Five targeted countries produce (or if existing, enhance) work plans to strengthen national statistical systems to lead the development of and to deliver innovative, trusted and timely statistical products and services for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and national COVID-19 policy responses in line with one (or more) of the national commitments contained in the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind.	Baseline: 0 Target: 5 countries Achievement: 6 countries (**Bhutan, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Mongolia** and **Nepal**)	**Exceeded**	**Bhutan** • • localization of the International Standard Classification of Occupations **Bangladesh** • development of an indicator framework and the identification of data sources for disaster risk management **Kyrgyzstan** • development of an indicator inventory **Maldives** • development of a data dissemination platform • roadmap for the development of environmental-economic statistics **Mongolia** • improving statistical business processes • development of an online training platform for official statistics • review of the national statistical system **Nepal** • enhancing disaster-related statistics

	1.2: Five targeted countries report strengthened national statistical systems to lead the development of and to deliver innovative, trusted and timely statistical products and services for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and national COVID-19 policy responses in line with one (or more) of the national commitments contained in the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind[69].	Baseline: 0 Target: 5 countries Achievement: 6 countries (**Bhutan, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Mongolia** and **Nepal**)	**Exceeded**	NSOs from six countries report strengthened national statistical systems
OC2: National statistical systems in Asia-Pacific benefit from the experiences of beneficiary countries to lead the development of and to deliver innovative, trusted and timely statistical products and services for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and national COVID-19 policy responses in line with one (or more) of the national commitments contained in the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind.	**2.1:** Five member countries have improved regional (and global) access to experiences and perspectives on strengthening national statistical systems to lead the development of and to deliver innovative, trusted and timely statistical products and services for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and national COVID-19 policy responses in line with one (or more) of the national commitments contained in the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind.	Baseline: 0 Target: 5 countries Achievement: 6 countries (**Bhutan, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Mongolia** and **Nepal**)	**Exceeded**	**Bhutan** • localization of the International Standard Classification of Occupations **Bangladesh** • work in other countries with EPIC **Kyrgyzstan** • international practices with generating metadata, SDMX **Maldives** • data modelling • SDMX • .Stat Suite **Mongolia** • GSBPM • Moodle, SIAP e-learning courses **Nepal** • diagnostic tool, disaster-related policies and data management, DRSF

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[69] The original prodoc noted: "Can only be reported on after work on outputs under this outcome has been completed. Data for this indicator will either be collected in the project closing workshop scheduled to take place on 17-19 June, or in a post-project evaluation survey after project closure."

	2.2: Member countries in Asia-Pacific benefit from lessons learned and experiences of beneficiary countries to lead the development of and to deliver innovative, trusted, and timely statistical products and services for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and national COVID-19 policy responses in line with one (or more) of the national commitments contained in the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind[70].	No baseline or targets provided	*Unclear*	Unclear the extent to which relevant experiences have been shared. Some evidence of knowledge and experience sharing has taken place, most especially during the regional workshops organized by the project.

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[70] The original prodoc noted: "Data for this indicator will be collected at the dialogue on the declaration to take place in June 2024 (under OP2.2)."

Annex 7: Potential outcomes[71] by country

Country[72]	Potential outcomes (as per project document)	Realised Outputs	Note
Bhutan	Depending on national priorities, one or more of the following outcomes could be achieved during the project: 1. **Statistics development integrated with national development policies and priorities** 2. Strengthened legislative provisions and institutional mechanisms 3. Advocacy for the expanded use of official statistics for evidence-based policymaking and transparent governance.	• review of an indicator framework and assessment of data needs for monitoring the implementation of the 13th Five-Year Plan • development of a construction material price index • localization of the International Standard Classification of Occupations	These align with the proposed outcome highlighted here (1)
Kyrgyzstan	Depending on national priorities, one or more of the following outcomes could be achieved during the project: 1. Statistics development integrated with national development policies and priorities 2. **Development of national monitoring frameworks and indicator sets** 3. Advocacy for the expanded use of official statistics for evidence-based policymaking and transparent governance.	• development of an indicator inventory	This aligns with the proposed outcome highlighted here (2)
Maldives	Depending on national priorities, one or more of the following outcomes could be achieved during the project: 1. Statistics development integrated with national development policies and priorities 2. **Development of national monitoring frameworks and indicator sets** 3. Strengthened legislative provisions and institutional mechanisms 4. **Advocacy for the expanded use of official statistics for evidence- based policymaking and transparent**	• development of a data dissemination platform • roadmap for the development of environmental-economic statistics	The data dissemination platform is part of a larger effort at advocacy for the use of data and evidence (4) The development of environmental-economic statistics expands the available range of datasets (2)

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[71] The relationship between the 'potential outcomes' listed here and the outcomes in the results framework was not clarified in the project documentation
[72] Bangladesh did not feature among countries for baseline assessment in the original project document

	governance.		
Mongolia	Depending on national priorities, one or more of the following outcomes could be achieved during the project: 1. **Strengthened legislative provisions and institutional mechanisms** 2. **Advocacy for the expanded use of official statistics for evidence-based Policymaking and transparent governance**	• improving statistical business processes • development of an online training platform for official statistics • review of the national statistical system	Institutional mechanisms for data production are strengthened through analysis and improvement of business processes (1) Training contributed to increase knowledge on the use of official statistics (2)
Nepal	Depending on national priorities, one or more of the following outcomes could be achieved during the project: 1. Statistics development integrated with national development policies and priorities 2. **Development of national monitoring frameworks and indicator sets** 3. Strengthened legislative provisions and institutional mechanisms 4. Advocacy for the expanded use of official statistics for evidence-based policymaking and transparent governance.	• enhancing disaster-related statistics	This aligns with the proposed outcome highlighted here (1)

Annex 8: Data collection instruments

Semi-structured interview

Interview phase	Text and/or question[73]
Opening	Thank you for speaking with me today.
	I would like to start by giving you an overview of the purpose of this discussion.
	I am an independent consultant conducting an external evaluation of the latest phase of the *'Navigating Policy in Asia-Pacific with Data to Leave No One Behind'* project. During this evaluation the aim is to:
	• Assess the project performance, including the impact it has had • Formulate lessons learned and recommendations for future projects
	By conducting these interviews, I hope to get further insights into the project, how it has worked, the impact it has had, and the challenges faced and lessons learned.
	I have a series of questions to ask, but I would like this to be an open discussion where you should feel free to share your thoughts and perspectives.
	I will take some notes *[that I will keep electronically in a file only I can access]*[74], but our discussion will be confidential. I will not share the notes with anyone and I will not quote what you say in any report, though what we discuss here will help me to write recommendations in the final report.
	At any point after this interview, you can contact me to correct any information or to ask me to delete any notes I have taken[75].
Initial check-in with participant	Does that sound ok to you? / Are you happy to proceed?
	Do you have any questions about me, the evaluation, or this interview at this stage?
Interviewee	• What is your job and position? *[Record type of institution, e.g. NSO, line ministry, etc., as well as approximate hierarchical position]* • What was your role(s) in the project? (e.g. participated in workshop, donor, etc.) *[Note that interviewee nationality and gender are recorded here]*
Relevance	• When you think of the work done by the project [support of the project to your country], how well do you think it met national needs or priorities? Were the key needs addressed? Was anything

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[73] Note that the discussions are *semi-structured*, i.e. these questions are starting points for further discussion with the interviewee. There are variations in terms of how relevant questions may be for a particular interviewee.
[74] Note that part of this is a GDPR requirement, and may not be necessary for these interviews
[75] Idem

	in particular missing from what the project delivered? What adjustments were made to take into account specific national needs?
Cross-cutting issues	• How do you think the project has supported women and girls, (either directly or indirectly)? How well does this meet their needs in your country? • How do you think the project (positively or negatively) affected efforts to support women and girls; how did it work to include those with disabilities and support human rights?
Effectiveness	• What key initiatives did the project implement in your country? What was the result of these? • How well did the project meet your expectations in the quality of support that was received? Were there any areas that you thought were particularly good / any areas for possible improvement? • Were there significant challenges that the project faced? How were these dealt with and what do you think was learned?
Efficiency	• Were project deliverables produced according to agreed timelines? If there were any delays or inefficiencies, how were these dealt with? • Did the project make good use of partnerships in your country to support implementation? How did these enable results?
Sustainability	• Have steps been taken to help ensure that the project benefits continue to be used after the project, e.g. for the production and / or use of national statistical systems and data? In what way(s)? • What activities or project benefits are planned to be continued (i.e. for / by different stakeholders), and how have constraints to sustainability been identified and addressed? • Are further steps planned to help support gender and inclusion in areas related to the project?
Further challenges and lessons learned	• Are there any additional challenges that the project faced that you can think of? How were these addressed? • Can you think of additional lessons that have been learned during the project? Things that you think may be helpful in the future?
Final check-in with participant	That brings us to the end of the questions in our discussion. Is there anything further that you would like to add? Is anything still unclear about myself, this discussion, or how your responses will be used? Thank you for your time and participation. *[Ensure contact details for both interviewer and interviewee have been shared; follow-up is possible for both parties]*

Evaluation survey

Criteria	Questions	Survey questions
Survey participant	N/A	Type of participant [*National statistics office; ministry or government agency; UN develop system entity; other [Free text]]* Gender *[female; male; other / non-binary; do not wish to say]*
Relevance	To what extent was the project designed based on needs of the target beneficiaries? What adjustments, if any, were made to the project activities and modality, in response to the changing priorities/requirements of target beneficiary countries?	How well do you think the project was aligned with national or organizational needs for improving national statistical systems? *[1 -5]* To what extent did the project demonstrate flexibility in meeting your national needs? *[1 – 5]* Are there any areas where the project was well or poorly aligned to national needs? How? *[Free text]*
Effectiveness	What have been the most significant achievements of the project at the regional and national levels? How effective were the project's capacity-building activities? How could the implementing division make its future capacity-building activities more effective?	Have you applied the knowledge gained through this project during in your work in last 6 months? *[Yes; No; Not applicable]* How frequently do you use the knowledge gained through this project in your work? *[1 – 5; Not applicable]* What kind of other support did the project give towards capacity building in your country? *[Select one or more: Business process improvement; Development of statistical datasets (e.g. in tourism, disaster-related statistics) ; E-learning; Revision of legislation; Statistical and metadata exchange; Adoption of software; Other (free text)]* How effective would you rate the project's overall support? *[1 – 5; Not applicable]* To what extent has the project made your country better prepared to produce data for monitoring progress towards national sustainable development targets? *[1 – 5; Not applicable]*

Efficiency	To what extent did the project achieve efficiency in implementation through the combination of project stakeholders involved, making use of comparative advantages and the creation of synergy? To what extent has partnering with other organizations enabled or enhanced reaching of results? Was the project implemented in a timely manner and according to plan? If not, why?	How would you rate the responsiveness of the project to questions, requests etc? *[1 – 5]* How well did the project partner with relevant stakeholders in the country? *[1 – 5, do not know]*
Sustainability	To what extent can results of the project be continued without ESCAP's further involvement?	Do you expect the benefits of the project to continue after the project, e.g. through the production and use of statistical data? *[Yes; no]* What preparations have been made to ensure that the capacities built through the project can continue to be used for the production and / or use of statistical data? *[Free text]*
Cross-cutting issues	To what extent were cross cutting issues, including gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion, integrated into the design and implementation of the project?	Did activities that you participated in include explicit references to gender, disability, or human rights? *[Choose from one or more of: gender; disability; human rights]* How much do you think that the project has contributed to promoting: gender mainstreaming? *[1 – 5]* Disability inclusion? *[1 – 5]* human rights? *[1 – 5]* Are there any contributions to gender, disability, and human rights that you would like to mention? *[Free text]*
Further comments		Are there any other issues, challenges, or good practices that you would like to highlight? *[Free text]*