

United Nations Development Account

Terminal Evaluation of Project 2124U

“Expanding the Science-Policy Nexus in Support of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab Region”

(2021-2024)

Report completed on: 29 November 2024

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Acknowledgements

The evaluator would like to express its sincere gratitude to the staff of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) for their cooperation and support throughout the evaluation process. The evaluator is also grateful to project beneficiaries, partners and other stakeholders for their valuable insight and feedback.

This report was commissioned by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The findings, conclusions and recommendations of this report are those of the external evaluator and do not necessarily reflect the views of the ESCWA.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

<i>AGFUND</i>	<i>Arab Gulf Programme for Development</i>
<i>AI</i>	<i>Artificial Intelligence</i>
<i>DA</i>	<i>Development Account</i>
<i>DEPAR</i>	<i>Digital Enabling Platform in the Arab Region</i>
<i>ESCWA</i>	<i>Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia</i>
<i>ESTIMRAR</i>	<i>Entrepreneurship, Science, Technology, and Innovation Multi-Modality Road Mapping for SDGs in the Arab Region</i>
<i>ETC</i>	<i>ESCWA Technology Center</i>
<i>GTA</i>	<i>General Temporary Assistance</i>
<i>ICC</i>	<i>International Chamber of Commerce</i>
<i>IfM</i>	<i>Institute of Manufacturing at Cambridge University</i>
<i>ISFD</i>	<i>Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development</i>
<i>ITFC</i>	<i>International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation</i>
<i>KICs</i>	<i>Knowledge and Innovation Centers/Communities</i>
<i>R&D</i>	<i>Research and Development</i>
<i>SDGs</i>	<i>Sustainable Development Goals</i>
<i>SME</i>	<i>Small to Medium Enterprises</i>
<i>STI</i>	<i>Science, Technology & Innovation</i>
<i>UNDA</i>	<i>United Nations Development Account</i>
<i>UNDP</i>	<i>United Nations Development Program</i>
<i>UNEG</i>	<i>United Nations Evaluation Group</i>
<i>WASH</i>	<i>Water, Sanitation & Hygiene</i>
<i>WIPO</i>	<i>World Intellectual Property Organization</i>

Executive summary

The Development Account (DA) project “Expanding the Science-Policy Nexus in Support of the 2030 Agenda” was implemented by the UN ESCWA Technology Centre (ETC) over a three-year period between January 2021 and December 2023 at a budget of \$549,000. The project involved partnerships with a number of UN agencies and other development partners, and primarily targeted Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt, in addition to including Palestine from the project’s initial list of secondary target countries, and targeting the whole Arab region in some project activities. The project aimed at strengthening the regional capacities to create and implement an enabling policy environment for science, technology and innovation in the Arab region. It sought to achieve this objective through (i) strengthening national capacities to address challenges and priorities based on scientific evidence to design and implement appropriate STI for SDGs roadmap, and (ii) developing the capacities of national STI communities to enhance impact on local economies. In turn, the project sought to achieve these outcomes through (a) assessing needs and gaps of STI systems, (b) developing suitable tools and technical outputs, and (c) capacity building and assessment.

Evaluation purpose, objectives, and scope

This evaluation is forward looking and aims to objectively and systematically assess the performance of the project in terms of the main OECD-DAC criteria including relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability, in addition to assessing the extent to which gender, human rights, disability inclusion, and environmental concerns were incorporated or mainstreamed into the project as a cross-cutting issue. The ultimate purposes of this evaluation include (i) providing a basis for evidence-driven strategic planning, decision making, and risk management, (ii) acting as a means to demonstrate accountability to ESCWA’s executive management as well as member states, and (iii) informing and facilitating organizational learning through the identification of evidence-based findings, lessons learned from project implementation, and recommendations for action that enhance upcoming ESCWA work. The Evaluation was conducted in line with ESCWA’s Evaluation Policy (2024), UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation, and the Development Account Evaluation Guidelines. The primary audience for this evaluation includes ESCWA, UN DESA, and government and innovation actors in ESCWA member states. The evaluation covers the entire period of the intervention from January 2021 to December 2023.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was based on a mixed methods approach consisting of a comprehensive desk review of project documents and other relevant documents in addition to semi structured in-depth interviews, to ensure an inclusive methodology as well as triangulated findings that are substantiated based on sound data analysis. Special attention was paid to ensure that voices and opinions of both men, women and any marginalized groups are heard through the purposive sampling approach proposed by the evaluation in consultation with the project team, and through the inclusion of gender-specific questions in the data collection tool. Special attention was also paid to ensuring an unbiased and objective approach to this evaluation through ensuring that all findings are triangulated before they are final. Out of the 70 stakeholders the evaluator identified during the inception phase, the sample included 28 stakeholders, of which only 17 could be reached in this evaluation (76.5% were female). A main limitation has been the time gap between the conclusion of the project activities and the start of this evaluation in addition to the adjustments made by the project during implementation, which were not accurately reflected in the

project's documentation. Yet another limitation is the difficulty in attributing results to the project's contributions given that some of the results stemmed from contributions from a number of projects.

Evaluation findings & conclusions

Relevance

The DA project was found relevant to the regional Arab STI contexts and its objectives aligned with the overall needs of constituents. This was because the project concept, including its objectives, came as a response to the expressed needs of ESCWA member States. The project was geared towards the SDGs and was found to have contributed to SDGs 7,9, 12 and 17. The relevance was enhanced early during implementation through the project's focus on carrying out a number of assessments of the STI systems and communities in the Arab world. However, the evaluation found that the stakeholders selected for the project's activities were not always the most suitable for the project activities, which resulted in an overall weak engagement in some of the activities. Adaptations were made to the project plans to maintain the relevance of the project to SME needs and to the overall evolution in the strategic direction of the ETC.

Efficiency

The efficiency of the project's implementation was influenced by a number of both exogenous and endogenous factors that included the COVID crisis and the associated transition to virtual activities as well as the weak engagement by stakeholders in some activities. The adaptations done by the project carried dual effects on the project's efficiency. On the one hand, the generated savings from the shift to virtual activities were utilized to implement activities that contribute to the project's intended results; on the other hand, the outputs of some initial activities could not be utilized in the project. A number of measures were taken by the team during implementation to enhance the project's efficiency including the utilization of technology, particularly AI, to overcome challenges during implementation, in addition to the reliance on a group of interns for the extensive research work that was required to produce the project's knowledge outputs. The project also leveraged existing partnerships and made use of co-financing and specific expertise in the implementation of the project's activities.

Effectiveness

The project was partially effective in contributing to its outcomes. On the one hand, the project contributed effectively to the project's second outcome 'developing the capacities of the national STI communities to enhance their impact on the local economies', in spite of the changes made to the original project plans under this outcome. A big factor driving the effectiveness of the project under this outcome was the project's contribution to the organization of two annual Arab SME summits. But this result cannot be attributed solely to this project, given that a number of other projects and initiatives contributed to its achievement.

On the other hand, the project was not as effective in contributing to its first outcome 'Strengthening the national capacities to address challenges and priorities based on scientific evidence to design and implement appropriate STI for SDG roadmaps' given that activities could not be completed according to plans due to challenges and delays faced in implementing this component that resulted from low attendance and weak engagement from stakeholders. Having said that, the project developed an AI-driven tool that provides an innovative resource for policy makers across the Arab region to help them in creating roadmaps and strategies across different sectors and in different Arab countries. But the limited

utilization of this tool during implementation limited its effectiveness in contributing to the intended result.

Impact & Sustainability

The evaluation has found that the most significant impact and sustainable feature of the project has been in initiating new streams of SME-focused activities on which the ETC then developed new projects and attracted donor financing. One of such activities was the Arab SME Summit held in 2022 and 2023, during which it was announced that an estimated \$300 million were committed by development partners in support to SMEs¹. The event will take place for its third year in 2024 with an anticipated higher and more diverse number of participants and a larger set of partnerships, with commitments expected to exceed previous levels. While this impact cannot be completely attributed to this DA project, the project's contribution has resulted in outputs being utilized as inputs for different subsequent projects implemented by the ETC. Other initiatives that were started by the project have been carried forward by subsequent projects, including a \$1.7 million project to develop the DEPAR platform, focusing on AI integration and converting some of the knowledge material into dynamic content and online training courses. The two main transformative and sustainable aspects of the project include the AI-powered tool and the guidance that this project has provided in informing the strategic orientation of the ETC. Other sustainable results of the project include the production of a number of outputs that will continue to benefit stakeholders after the project's completion, and have the potential to be scaled up to a larger audience, such as the extensive knowledge material prepared under the compendiums. The evaluation found that project results cannot be maintained by stakeholders following the completion of the project without the continued technical assistance of ESCWA, given that some of the project activities kickstarted new streams of work, on which additional technical assistance is required.

Gender, Human Rights, Disability Inclusion, and Environmental Issues

While the design of the project paid little attention to cross cutting issues of gender equality, disability inclusion, and the environment, the project team integrated these issues in some of the activities during implementation, thereby contributing to advancing gender equality, disability inclusion, and environmental sustainability. This has led to subsequent projects that focus on these issues.

Evaluation Recommendations

- ❖ It is recommended that the strategic evolution of the ETC, which has influenced the trajectory of this project, be formalized through an endorsement by its (advisory and) governing body of a strategic framework that clarifies its current strategic approach
- ❖ Project team is recommended to pay closer attention to the process of identifying and selecting suitable and relevant stakeholders for each stream of its activities, and ensure their continued engagement throughout implementation as much as feasible. This involves clearly explaining the objectives and timelines of a project so that stakeholder organizations can appoint the most appropriate person to attend the project's activities.

¹ Based on statement made by Rola Dashti, the Secretary General of ESCWA, at the closing of the 2023 Arab SME Summit. [asmes-2023, Arab SME Summit](#)

- ❖ The ETC is recommended to continue developing and holding its annual SME summit, given its effectiveness in providing SMEs with a platform through which they can network, increase their capacities, and establish partnerships with development actors.
- ❖ The ETC is recommended to promote the tools developed under the project's contributions to enhance their utilization, and publish the research studies produced under the project, thereby ensuring a sustainable impact. This includes utilizing other ESCWA project and activities to promote the project tools, especially the AI-driven tool, and releasing the unpublished research studies developed by the project.
- ❖ Project team is recommended to enhance its monitoring and reporting processes to ensure that reporting is made against intended results and more accurately reflect project activities and strategic decisions or adaptations made during project implementation.
- ❖ Project team is recommended to better focus the design of future projects according to available resources, including time, human, and financial resources, and in line with a formal strategic framework. This also involves steering away from a one size fits all approach, and better assessing actual needs to tailor the support accordingly.
- ❖ ETC is recommended to integrate the cross-cutting issues of gender and disability inclusion as part of the project design and mainstream them throughout the project cycle from planning through implementation and monitoring.
- ❖ Project team is recommended to better plan for risks or shocks through a well-developed risk mitigation analysis as part of the project design, involving the development of tailored risk mitigation strategies to avoid uncertainties during implementation.

1. Introduction

The Development Account (DA) project “Expanding the Science-Policy Nexus in Support of the 2030 Agenda” was implemented by the UN ESCWA Technology Centre over a three-year period between January 2021 and December 2023 at a budget of \$549,000. The project was implemented in partnership with a number of UN agencies including the Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT), The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). The main objective of the project was to strengthen the regional capacities to create and implement an enabling policy environment for science, technology, and innovation in the Arab region. The project sought to achieve this objective through adopting a dual approach of supporting and building the capacities of government agencies in evidence-based policy making and support science, technology, and innovation (STI) roadmaps for SDGs (Top-Down approach) and empowering local communities (mainly entrepreneurship enablers and SMEs) and support them with technical knowledge, tools, capacities, and facilities (Bottom-Up approach).

Through assessing the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, and looking at gender equality, disability inclusion, and environmental issues, the evaluation sought to assess the extent to which the project contributed to achieving its objective and outcomes, and completed its planned outputs. The evaluation looked at how the work undertaken in the project contributed to achieving its intended results, the pathway to these results, and the elements that contributed most significantly to the achievement of these results. The evaluation was implemented between May 2024 and November 2024 and included a comprehensive desk review and semi-structured in-depth interviews with stakeholders.

The ultimate purposes of this evaluation include (i) providing a basis for evidence-driven strategic planning, decision making, and risk management, (ii) acting as a means to demonstrate accountability to ESCWA’s executive management as well as member States, and (iii) informing and facilitating organizational learning through the identification of evidence-based findings, lessons learned from project implementation, and recommendations for action that enhance upcoming ESCWA work. The primary audience for this evaluation includes ESCWA, UN DESA, development partners, and government and innovation actors in ESCWA member States. The evaluation will cover the entire period of the intervention from January 2021 to December 2023

2. Description of the Project

2.1 Background

The Development Account (DA) project “Establishing Effective Relationship between Innovation Actors in the Arab Region to Expand the Science-Policy Nexus in Support of the 2030 Agenda” was implemented by the UN ESCWA Technology Centre (ETC) over a three-year period between January 2021 and December 2023 at a budget of \$549,000. The project was implemented in partnership with a number of UN agencies and other development partners. The project primarily targeted Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt, in addition to including Palestine from the project’s initial list of secondary target countries, and targeting the whole Arab region in some project activities. The project aimed at strengthening the regional capacities to create and implement an enabling policy environment for science, technology and innovation in the Arab region.

The project attempts to tackle the drivers behind the weak science-policy interface in the Arab region identified by an expert group meeting that include (i) insufficient production and data gaps, (ii) ineffective platforms of exchange between science and policy, and (iii) weak governance, transparency, and accountability. For example, an output produced by the project showed that STI challenges faced by SMEs include challenges related to developing, diffusing, and deploying new technologies based on issues related to lack of information, R&D spending, linkages with academia, networks forum for knowledge diffusion, internal capacities, and others².

The project concept note was prepared before the beginning of the COVID crisis in 2020, while the project document was prepared in the months following the crisis. The project began implementation in early 2021, during which the COVID crisis was near its peak in many member States of the Arab region. This context has inevitably affected the project as the findings section will show.

The project was also implemented during a time of a strategic shift in how the ETC works to achieve its mandate. While there is no formalized document to illustrate and clarify this strategic shift, the ETC has been working more directly with the Arab SME community and development partners working on SME development across all of its project. The rationale of this strategic shift is to work through a dual approach (top-down and bottom-up approach) to reach the whole of the Arab STI communities, especially Arab SMEs, which constitute the majority of businesses in the region. This is well in line with the mandate of ESCWA. According to the resolutions and decisions adopted by the Economic and Social Council which established the ETC, the target recipient of ETC support include both public and private organizations in ESCWA member States according to the center's mission³.

2.2 Project objectives and expected results

The main objective of the project aimed at strengthening the regional capacities to create and implement an enabling policy environment for science, technology, and innovation in the Arab region. The project sought to achieve this objective through two main expected results or outcomes. The first, which involved a top-bottom approach, was related to “strengthening national capacities to address challenges and priorities based on scientific evidence to design and implement appropriate STI for SDG Roadmaps”. The second is related to “developing the capacities of national STI communities to enhance impact on local economies”.

In turn, it sought to achieve these objectives through (i) strengthening national capacities to address challenges and priorities based on scientific evidence to design and implement appropriate STI for SDGs roadmap, and (ii) developing the capacities of national STI communities to enhance impact on local economies. While significant changes were made to the project's strategy and key activities (shown below), no changes were made to the project's results framework (objective and outcomes).

2.3 Project strategies and key activities

² IfM Engage (2022) “Development and Dissemination of the ESTIMRAR Toolbox; Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Needs and Challenges Faced by SMEs”

³ ESCWA (2010) “Resolutions and decisions adopted by the Economic and Social Council and its Substantive Session of 2010”

The project sought to achieve its intended results through adopting a dual approach of supporting and building the capacities of government agencies in evidence-based policy making and support STI roadmaps for SDGs (Top-Down approach) and empowering local communities (mainly entrepreneurship enablers and SMEs) and support them with technical knowledge, tools, capacities, and facilities (Bottom-Up approach).

Both approaches, or workstreams, were initially planned to include (i) gap and needs assessments, (ii) development of tools and trainings, (iii) series of capacity building workshops, and (iv) assessments. As this evaluation will further illustrate, there were significant changes introduced to the original structured plan, partly due to the COVID crisis and also due to the strategic shift undergone by the ETC during implementation. The most significant changes occurred in the activities and outputs planned under the project's second outcome. Originally, the project planned to assess STI challenges and needs in targeted countries, develop knowledge material and capacity building tools, establish a physical knowledge and innovation center (KIC) in each of the targeted member States, build their capacity, and then assess their performance and enhance peer learning. But during the beginning of the project, the team made the strategic decision to shift towards virtual implementation modalities, given that the start of the project coincided with a lingering COVID crisis. The project implemented the STI assessment and developed the knowledge material and tools as originally planned, but opted to establish virtual knowledge and innovation communities (KICs) rather than centers. Rather than continuing with the original plan, the project utilized its resources for the development of the first ever annual Arab SME Summit in 2022 and another in 2023, during which capacity building workshops were held on the sidelines of the event, in addition to implementing specific activities to build the capacities of SMEs. Members of the established virtual KICs were invited to these events and constituted a significant share of attendees.

With regards to gender equality, human rights and 'leaving no one behind', there was no consideration of these cross-cutting issues in the project design. But during implementation, the project team incorporated gender and disability inclusion into some of the implemented activities.

2.4 Target countries and beneficiaries

The project primarily targeted Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt, in addition to including Palestine from the project's initial list of secondary target countries. In addition, other Arab beneficiary countries benefited from the project in a broader sense, mainly through the project's SME summit and related workshops.

2.5 Key partners and other key stakeholders

The main implementing partner for this project was the ESCWA Technology Center. Implementation was supported by a number of consultants working across the two different project components, in addition to a number of implementing partners, including Cambridge University's Institute of Manufacturing (IfM), WIPO and others, who provided valuable expertise for specific workshops under the project. In addition, the project's partnerships with UNCTAD and UNDP helped secure sponsorships for beneficiaries attending some of the project's events. Representatives of national governments of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine were the beneficiaries of road mapping workshops held under the 1st project outcome while SMEs and entrepreneurship enablers from across the Arab world were the beneficiaries of the SME summit and the thematic workshops held under the 2nd project outcome.

2.6 Resources

The implementation of the project began in January 2021 and was completed by December 2023. The project was funded under the United Nations Development Account (UNDA), which is a mechanism to fund capacity development project of the 10 economic and social entities of the UN secretariat. The project budget was \$549,000. The project's final progress report illustrates the human resources of the budget and show a total of 14 months for GTA (General Temporary Assistance), 33 months for project consultants, and 36 months for contractual services.

2.7 Link to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

According to the project documents, the SDG targets that the project intended to address include SDGs 7, 9, and 12.

2.8 Innovative elements

An AI-powered platform was developed (but not yet rolled out) during the implementation of the project to overcome the challenge of catering to diverse regional needs under the project. The AI platform allows for the customization of tools and training materials to meet the specific demands of each country in the Arab region. By analyzing extensive data, including stakeholder feedback and ecosystem mappings, the AI platform dynamically adapts its offerings to accurately address the unique challenges and opportunities within each nation's STI ecosystem.

3. Evaluation objectives, scope and questions

3.1 Purpose and objectives

This DA evaluation seeks to promote learning and accountability for results. The evaluation is forward looking, and aimed to objectively and systematically assess the performance of the project in terms of the main OECD-DAC criteria including relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability, in addition to assessing the extent to which gender equality, human rights, disability inclusion, and environmental concerns were incorporated or mainstreamed into the project as a cross-cutting issue. The evaluation sought to determine how the work undertaken in the project contributed to achieving its intended results, the pathway to these results, and the elements that contributed most significantly to the achievement of these results.

The evaluation assessed the extent to which the project contributed to achieving its objective and outcomes, and whether it completed its planned outputs, as per the results framework of the project. The evaluation also took into account gender and human rights considerations during the entire evaluation process, and gender-related questions was be incorporated in the research tools to be used in the evaluation.

The ultimate purposes of this evaluation include (i) providing a basis for evidence-driven strategic planning, decision making, and risk management, (ii) acting as a means to demonstrate accountability to ESCWA's

executive management as well as member States, and (iii) informing and facilitating organizational learning through the identification of evidence-based findings, lessons learned from project implementation, and recommendations for action that enhance upcoming ESCWA work. The primary audience for this evaluation includes ESCWA, including the ETC, and UN DESA. The ETC is expected to utilize the information included in this evaluation, especially the resulting recommendations, to inform its current strategic shift and future programming.

3.2 Evaluation scope, criteria and questions

The evaluation covers the entire period of the intervention from January 2021 to December 2023. It was conducted in line with ESCWA's Evaluation Policy (2024), UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation, and the Development Account Evaluation Guidelines. The evaluation assesses the project design and implementation based on five criteria including (i) relevance, (ii) efficiency, (iii) effectiveness, (iv) impact, (v) sustainability. In addition, it investigates the project's consideration of the cross-cutting issues of gender equality, human rights, leaving no one behind and environmental issues. The evaluation also looked at how the project contributed to the SDGs and investigated whether there was any innovation spurred by the project.

The evaluation questions below, under each of the criteria utilized for this evaluation, have been refined from the list of questions presented in the ToR during the inception phase. The evaluation questions, along with the evaluation matrix presented in the annex, have guided the whole evaluation process.

Relevance

1. How did the project team determine the strategic needs and priorities of member States in its project design?
2. How were the intended results of the project aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of member States, the SDGs, and national and regional development agendas?
3. How were the identified results aligned with other stakeholders' strategic needs and priorities?
4. How was the log frame adapted during implementation to ensure that the activities carried out were relevant and contributed to the achievement of the intended result(s)?
5. How did the design and sequencing of project activities take into consideration the intended result?

Efficiency

6. Did the project encounter any delays during implementation? What was the source of delay and how did the project address the issue?
7. What, if any, adjustments were made during the project implementation? On what basis were these adjustments made?
8. What considerations, if any, were made in terms of the most efficient way of delivering activities (choice of modality, expertise available... etc)?
9. To what extent were partnerships leveraged and/or enhanced to utilize additional strategic resources, including expertise?

Effectiveness

10. To what extent did the project achieve its identified results according to available evidence?

11. Which of the project activities directly contribute to the identified results and how?
12. To what degree can the achievement of results be attributed to the intervention?
13. How did the work with stakeholders contribute to the achievement of the identified results?
14. Which other factors have contributed to the achievement of the identified results?
15. How were key partnerships integrated in the delivery of the project to maximise the project's contributions in achieving results?

Impact

16. What, if any, high-level effects did the project cause (such as changes in norms or systems)?
17. How transformative was the project – did it create enduring changes in norms – including gender norms - and systems, whether intended or not?
18. How did the project ensure that all the intended target groups, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, benefitted equally from the intervention?

Sustainability

19. To what extent did the intervention lead to scalable or replicable results?
20. Which of the activities (identified as contributing to the identified results of the project) provide ongoing benefits to stakeholders?
21. What evidence is available to indicate that the results of the project can be maintained by stakeholders?

Gender, Human Rights, Disability Inclusion, and Environmental Issues

22. To what extent were issues of gender, human rights, disability inclusion, and the environment incorporated into the design, planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation practices of the project, as well as the results achieved?
23. To what extent did the project respond to and affect the rights, needs and interests of different stakeholders, including women, men, youth, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups?

4. Methodology

This evaluation was based on a mixed methods approach to ensure an inclusive methodology as well as triangulated findings that are substantiated based on sound data analysis. Special attention was paid to ensure that voices and opinions of both men, women and any marginalized groups are heard through the sampling approach proposed by the evaluation in consultation with the project team, and through the inclusion of gender-specific questions in the data collection tool. Special attention was also paid to ensuring an unbiased and objective approach to this evaluation through ensuring that all findings are triangulated before they are final.

In addition to the continuous and comprehensive desk review of project documents and other relevant documents, the evaluator held in-depth semi-structured interviews with 17 stakeholders (76.5% were female) representing various stakeholder groups involved in this project.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were used to collect information from various project stakeholders including ESCWA staff and consultants, partners, and participants or beneficiaries (policy makers and SME

enablers), in accordance with the stakeholder categories determined during the inception phase. This instrument was used to collect qualitative information about the overall performance of the project across the evaluation criteria. In addition, it gathered information on the incorporation of cross cutting issue of human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion and the environment, as well as gain inputs on lessons learned by the project. The rationale behind utilizing semi-structured interviews for this evaluation is that they allow for an in-depth discussion around the evaluation questions. Depending on the target group, different dimensions were discussed and data collected. Given the nature of the project and scope of this evaluation, interviews were conducted remotely.

A purposive sampling approach was utilized when selecting the stakeholders to be interviewed, in order to meet with key stakeholders from the various stakeholder categories and from the various targeted member States and Palestine, and to ensure that the voices of both men and women are heard. Out of the total 70 stakeholders that the evaluator identified during the inception phase, the sample to be interviewed included 28 of these stakeholders, of which 14 are females (50%). However, many of these stakeholders could not be reached, and despite attempting to reach stakeholders outside the sample, the evaluation could only reach 17 stakeholders (76.5% were female). A main reason may have been the gap between the conclusion of the project activities and kicking off this evaluation, since some of the stakeholders contacted were not aware of (or could not remember) their engagement with the project.

The suggested sample of stakeholders in the inception report is presented in the table below, with those highlighted in grey being the ones who the evaluator was able to reach.

Sample for Fieldwork			
Stakeholder Group	#	Name	Position
ESCWA	1	Kareem Hassan	Director - ESCWA Technology Center
	2	Ban Pahlawan	Research Assistant - ESCWA Technology Center
	3	Shereen Al Jarrah	Project Coordinator - ESCWA
	4	Joel Yazbek	ICC-ESCWA Centre of Entrepreneurship
	5	Nadeen Suliman	Partnership Officer - ESCWA
Consultants	6	Nicky Athanassopoulou	IfM, Cambridge University
	7	Mohammad El Nisr	Consultant – Green Technologies
	8	Muheeb Anees	Consultant – KICs concept design & SME tools development
	9	Reem Al Masri	Consultant - Compendium in Green Energy
	10	Sama Abd El-Shakour	Compendium – Agritech
	11	Na’el Al Mulqi	Consultant
Partners	12	Amr Farouq	Consultant
	13	Amir Hijazi	Senior Program Coordinator - UNDP
	14	Mathilde Tachon	Programme Officer - WIPO
	15	Ayad Jalloul	R&D Department - Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO)
Participant/beneficiaries	16	Rasha Smadi	International Cooperation Manager - Higher Council for Science and Technology (HCST) (Jordan)

(policy makers & enablers)	17	Maha Aqra	International Cooperation Manager – National Center for Research and Development (NCRD) (Jordan)
	18	Samar Wreikat	Head of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Department - Scientific Research and Innovation Support Fund
	19	Hadi El Karhani	Project manager - Ministry of Industry (Lebanon)
	20	Rania Jaber	General Director of innovation and creativity center – Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology
	21	Shaimaa Helal	Director of Entrepreneurship Development Project – Academy of Scientific Research and Technology (Egypt)
	22	Maen Ayasra	Director of Energy and Sustainability Unit – Jordan Chamber of Industry
	23	Ziad Abichaker	Recycling Engineer - Association of Lebanese Industrialists
	24	Dr Mona Demaidi	CEO of Palmec International
	25	Mohamed Abdelaziz	Head of Automotive Engineering Department – Ain Shams University
	26	Farhan Kalaldehy	ImpactMena
	27	Sereen Dweiry	lpark-RSS
	28	Mona Itani	Riyada for Social Innovation
<i>*Some interviews may be arranged in addition to or replacing the above suggestions, based on suggestions from the project team and availability of stakeholders.</i>			

The methodology for this evaluation, especially the fieldwork, ensured that an unbiased and objective approach will be used to obtain the evaluation findings. The evaluator is committed towards ESCWA and also towards the stakeholders involved in the evaluation to adhere to the highest levels of integrity, confidentiality and ethical behavior. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation; and all rights and confidentiality of information providers were prioritized and safeguarded as per UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation.

The results framework of the project acted as the main framework for this evaluation, where causal links were tested using available evidence to evaluate the contribution of ESCWA's work to project results. This also contributed to addressing the degree to which the achievement of results may be attributed to the project.

All data analysis in this evaluation is based on triangulation in order to enable the evaluator to make sound judgments based on multiple channels of evidence. Generally, triangulation refers to the use of multiple approaches, methods and sources for data collection and analysis to verify and substantiate data and information. For this evaluation, triangulation was achieved by combining two main methods of data collection (document review and semi-structured in-depth interviews) in generating the evaluation findings, and including the different stakeholder groups as key informants for the evaluation. Through this triangulation process, the evaluator aimed at developing high quality analysis on which reasoned findings were based. Findings were confirmed and made final only after being triangulated. The process of triangulation enabled the evaluator to overcome the bias that comes from single informants, methods,

observations, or points of view. This ensured the reliability and credibility of the evaluation and minimized threats to validity. Moreover, it safeguarded independence and impartiality in the evaluation. The analysis entailed a reasoned assessment of facts and findings to provide answers to the evaluation questions, which were articulated according to cause-and-effect statements based on facts, data, interpretations and analysis. It is important to note that despite employing a gender lens in the analysis process, the evaluator found no key differences between the responses of men and women in this evaluation.

Limitations

Limitations	How they were addressed
The main limitation faced during implementation was the very low response rate by stakeholders to the project's emails and evaluator's follow-up emails. This was partly due to the time gap between the end of the project and the start of this evaluation, and partly due to the limited engagement of some stakeholders in the project's activities.	To address this limitation, the project team followed up with stakeholders reminding them of the project's activities and their involvement in the project overall. Along with continuous coordinated follow up from the project team and the evaluator, this has helped secure an adequate number of meetings with stakeholders involved in the various project components
The changes made to the project's plans, especially under outcome 2, blurred the scope of the evaluation, especially that such changes were not adequately explained in the project's reporting.	Despite the changes, the evaluator still based the evaluation methodology on the project's results framework to ensure an evaluation consistent with current global standards and methods. Having said that, the evaluator expanded the original scope of analysis to account for the activities to which the project contributed to but were outside of the original plan. The rationale for this is to illustrate the project's contribution to the intended results.

Quality Assurance Mechanism

To ensure a high-quality evaluation report, the evaluator assessed the strength and validity of the evidence that has been collected, and investigated whether there were gaps or shortcomings that need to be addressed, through utilizing standardized checklists (mainly the UNEG Quality Checklist for Evaluation Report and the DA evaluation reporting template). Through multiple internal revisions, the evaluator ensured that the report is internally consistent and coherent in the presentation of findings, and rational in the derivation of recommendations from findings and conclusions.

5. Findings

Relevance

Evaluation Questions
To what extent are the project objectives and approach relevant to the constituent's needs and present country context?
How were the intended results of the project aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of member States, the SDGs, and national and regional development agendas?
How were the identified results aligned with other stakeholders' strategic needs and priorities?
How was the log frame adapted during implementation to ensure that the activities carried out were relevant and contributed to the achievement of the intended result(s)?
How did the design and sequencing of project activities take into consideration the intended result?

The project's objective and intended results were found to be relevant to the strategic needs and context of the targeted countries, especially that the concept of the project concept stemmed from ESCWA member States themselves. The project was also well aligned with SDGs 9, 7, and 12.

The concept of the project came as a result of an agreement made by ESCWA member States on utilizing technology to achieve sustainable development. During ESCWA's 30th Ministerial Session, held in Beirut, 25-28 June 2018, member States adopted the Beirut Consensus on Technology for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region in which they agreed to put in place national and regional policies to support the development of technology ecosystems that are adapted to the socio-economic, environmental and political context of Arab countries. This agreement among member States came after an expert group meeting on advancing green technologies through Science-Policy interface found that the science-policy interface in the Arab region was weak, mainly attributed to three main reasons including insufficient scientific production and data gaps, ineffective platforms of exchange between science and policy; and weak governance, transparency, and accountability.

Based on this background, the concept note for the project was developed to address these issues, and to strengthen and expand the science-policy nexus in support of the 2030 agenda in the region, indicating relevance to the context of the Arab world and to the target member States in specific. Moreover, the project document contained an adequate analysis of the regional STI ecosystem and challenges, including a preliminary stakeholder and capacity analysis, thereby informing implementation.

According to the project documents, the project's objective, outcomes, and outputs are aligned with a number of different SDGs including SDGs 8, 9 and 12, to which the project supported directly or indirectly, and SDGs 7 and 17 to which the project contributed. But upon further review and discussion with stakeholders, the project was found to be aligned mainly with SDG 9 "Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure", given its work on advancing innovation and the science-policy nexus. The project was also found to be aligned with SDG 7 "Affordable and Clean Energy" & SDG 12 "Sustainable Consumption and Production", given the extensive work on various green sectors across the project activities(i.e. recycling and green tech). The project also contributed to SDG 17 'partnerships' given its leveraging of partnerships during implementation.

The relevance of the project was enhanced early in the project through the project's focus on carrying out needs and gaps assessments, but was challenged later by the low attendance of stakeholders and their limited engagement, in addition to the variability in the development level of the STI systems across the different targeted member States and other Arab countries.

This relevance was enhanced early in the project through the project's focus on carrying out needs and gaps assessment as a first step in implementation to gain a more in-depth understanding of STI actors, challenges as well as legislative and policy gaps. This work has informed some of the subsequent implementation, according to most stakeholders.

Having said that, the project's relevance was challenged during implementation from the large variability in the maturity levels of STI systems and communities across the different Arab countries, especially those who were involved in the project. According to stakeholders, activities were not equally relevant to participants under both project outcomes; while some participants or member State representatives found the project relevant to their needs and work, others were less engaged. For example, one of the government stakeholders mentioned that the level of capacity building was 'advanced' and there was a 'large gap' between where the country is and what is in fact presented in the workshops. This, one size fits all approach, may have been one of the reasons behind the lack of engagement from some of the participants. While another reason cited by stakeholders was the remote nature of the workshops and their overlap with participants' working hours. On a number of occasions, participants dropped off from the workshop to attend to their work responsibilities.

Upon further discussions with stakeholders, some participants found the workshops irrelevant to their work, limiting the overall relevance of the project. Some of the stakeholders mentioned that the project's objectives, timelines, and outcomes were not adequately explained to the invited entities, which in many cases led the entities to nominate individuals who were not the most relevant to the nature of the workshops provided. For example, only one stakeholder from Egypt attended the first workshop of the series of road mapping workshops planned for representatives from the targeted member States. During the 2nd workshop, the other Egyptian stakeholders who were invited left the workshop while it was still ongoing, as "they did not understand why they were in the workshop". According to stakeholders, some of the attendees dropped out of the workshop due to work commitments as the series of workshops was implemented virtually during working hours. There was a similar issue of weak engagement from stakeholders under some of the activities under the 2nd workstream of the project. For example, the majority of SME participants that attended a capacity building session on IP and its importance for startups "were not really expecting this capacity building, and were not much engaged" according to the implementing partner responsible for this work.

Efficiency

Evaluation Questions

Did the project encounter any delays during implementation? What was the source of delay and how did the project address the issue?

What, if any, adjustments were made during the project implementation? On what basis were these adjustments made?
What considerations, if any, were made in terms of the most efficient way of delivering activities (choice of modality, expertise available... etc)?
To what extent were partnerships leveraged and/or enhanced to utilize additional strategic resources, including expertise?

The project began implementation during the COVID crisis which disrupted the project's original plans and led to some initial delays as the project transitioned towards virtual activities and engagements. However, the switch to a virtual modality entailed had two opposing effects on the project's efficiency. Other delays were related to the project's activities under its first outcome, mainly due to an overall weak level of stakeholder engagement.

The implementation of the project kicked off in the beginning of 2021, coinciding with a period of uncertainty on when the COVID pandemic would ease.. The various social distancing and travel restrictions imposed across the region during parts of 2021, in addition to the uncertain outlook at the time, posed challenges for the project, which had initially (pre-COVID) planned its activities to be all in-person, including the setting up of physical KICs⁴. Despite the delays caused by the disruption of the COVID crisis, the project was able to amend its plans in an ad-hoc manner throughout implementation, including the shift to virtual arrangements. This adjustment was made to enable the project to implement activities in light of the global health crisis and associated restrictions that was prevalent at the time. Ideally, a well-developed risk mitigation plan in the project design would have supported the project during this time.

Given this shift in implementation to virtual modalities, the project was able to generate savings which were used to co-finance other ETC initiatives including two annual Arab SME summits, thereby making most use of project funds in light of the contextual limitations faced earlier in the project. On the other hand, some inefficiencies resulted from the ad-hoc approach to implementation including a few project outputs that were not utilized further by the project. For example, the project hired a consultant to work on developing a model for the establishment of physical KICs as originally planned, in addition to developing business development tools for SMEs. But given that the project shifted its approach towards virtual KICs, much of the output produced by the consultant was not utilized in this project

In addition to the above, the project experienced some delays in initiating and implementing its activities under the first outcome related to the road mapping for SDGs workshops, mainly stemming from counterparts' weak engagement with the project. The series of planned workshops ultimately could not be completed within the timeframe of the project.

The project team took a number of measures to enhance the efficiency of the project, including the switch to an AI-driven approach and was able to leverage partnerships to utilize additional resources, including expertise.

⁴ According to the project team, the original concept note of the project was prepared before the COVID pandemic and could not be significantly altered during the proposal writing stage due to limitations by the DA process.

Having said that, a number of measures were taken by the team to enhance the efficiency of the project. One measure was the switch to an AI-driven approach to deal with the challenges faced in the road mapping workshops. This resulted in an AI tool that can be utilized by all Arab countries to provide policy makers with insights on creating roadmaps and strategies to achieve SDGs across various sectors.

Furthermore, the project was able to utilize and leverage a number of partnerships both in conducting some of the project's activities and in utilizing some of the project outputs to attract extra budgetary funding. This is evidenced by the growing partnerships in the implementation of the Annual Arab SME summit in addition to the utilization of expertise from a number of partners, such as WIPO, for the project's capacity building activities. The impact of the project in developing further programming and attracting funding is explored further under the impact section.

Effectiveness

Evaluation Questions
To what extent did the project achieve its identified results according to available evidence?
Which of the project activities directly contributed to the identified results and how?
To what degree can the achievement of results be attributed to the intervention?
How did the work with stakeholders contribute to the achievement of the identified results?
Which other factors have contributed to the achievement of the identified results?
How were key partnerships integrated in the delivery of the project to maximise the project's contributions in achieving results?

The project contributed effectively to the project's second outcome 'developing the capacities of the national STI communities to enhance their impact on the local economies', in spite of the changes made to the original project plans under this outcome. A big factor driving the effectiveness of the project under this outcome was the project's contribution to the organization of two annual Arab SME summits and the partnerships that resulted from this activity. But this result cannot be attributed solely to this project, given that a number of other projects and initiatives contributed to its achievement.

Strategic modifications were made to the project's original plan (i.e. activities and outputs), especially under the its 2nd outcome, not only to accommodate some challenges faced during implementation but also to align the project with the evolving strategic direction of the ETC. Having said that, this new strategic direction is not illustrated in any formal document or process. Despite the divergence of the project's implementation from the original plan under the second project outcome, the project was found to have effectively contributed to OC2 'developing the capacities of the national STI communities to enhance their impact on the local economies'.

The main activities implemented by the project that directly contributed to this outcome included the knowledge material produced by the project in addition to the creation of virtual communities on ESCWA's DEPAR (Digital Enabling Platform in the Arab Region), across several themes, but the largest contribution came from the two annual SME summits, to which the project contributed. This means that the achievement of this outcome cannot be solely attributed to this DA project under evaluation, but was more a result of the activities of a number of projects implemented by ESCWA. Key partnerships were instrumental in enhancing the project's contributing to achieving this outcome.

Rather than working on establishing KICs and building their capacities over a series of sessions, the project instead opted to establish virtual KICs on the one hand, and utilized savings to co-organize two annual Arab SME summits and implement a series of brief capacity building sessions during summits benefitting KICs members. As mentioned in the preceding section, a main justification to the shift towards virtual KICs during implementation was the COVID crisis and the need to shift to virtual implementation modalities to allow for implementation to move forward. As a result of this shift, the project contributed to the establishment of virtual KICs on the DEPAR online platform but also supported other forms of KICs, including the ICC-ESCWA Center of Entrepreneurship. For example, one of the achievements supported by the project was the supporting the ICC-ESCWA Center of Entrepreneurship in launching the first e-commerce acceleration program on a regional level, involving training and coaching to SMEs.

Given the need for knowledge material to establish the virtual KICs, the project, through its consultants and a team of interns, formulated a series of compendiums on (i) green technologies for sustainable agriculture, (ii) water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) technologies and business models, and (iii) renewable energy technologies and business models, in addition to a large number of ecosystem maps covering several themes in most countries of the Arab World. These were considered to be valuable resources for the STI communities across the Arab world according to most stakeholders.

But the main adjustment came from channeling project resources towards the Arab SME Summit. This change to the original project plans was in order to align the project with the evolving institutional nature of the ETC as illustrated in the project documents and as explained by the project team during interviews. This evolving nature was in turn informed by the identified needs of the STI community early in the project. Having said that, the evaluation did not find any formal document that illustrates this new strategic direction of ETC, despite its impact on the project's implementation.

The Arab SME Summit was praised by most stakeholders which indicated that it is the largest gathering of Arab SMEs that provides a platform through which SMEs can network, access capacity building workshops, and access opportunities presented by development partners to develop their businesses. It was estimated that around \$300 million was mobilized as commitments from development partners in both SME summits held in 2022 and 2023⁵, which provides strong evidence of the effectiveness of these Summits in supporting the Arab SME community. In addition to the workshops implemented on the sidelines of the SME summit, the project also implemented a few separate workshops to SMEs on specific issues stemming from discussion held at the summits, in addition to contributing to the establishment of the first e-commerce acceleration program in partnership with the ICC-ESCWA Center of Entrepreneurship, which consists of training and coaching activities provided to SMEs from across the region.

On the other hand, the project was not as effective in contributing to its first outcome 'Strengthening the national capacities to address challenges and priorities based on scientific evidence to design and implement appropriate STI for SDG roadmaps' given the low attendance rate and limited engagement of participants in these remote workshops and challenges related to the variance of capacities of participants as well as delays in implementing this component. Having said that, the project developed an AI-driven tool that provides an innovative resource for policy makers across the Arab region to help them in creating roadmaps and strategies across different sectors and in different Arab countries. But

⁵ Based on statement made by Rola Dashti, the Secretary General of ESCWA, at the closing of the 2023 Arab SME Summit. [asmes-2023, Arab SME Summit](#)

the limited utilization of this tool in the project limited its effectiveness in contributing to the intended result during the implementation period.

On the other hand, the project was not effective in achieving its first outcome due to the incompleteness of the series of workshops on road mapping in addition to a modest number of stakeholders involved from each of the targeted countries. However, the AI tool developed by the project was a major achievement, despite its limited use so far.

The project contracted Cambridge University's Institute of Manufacturing as its main implementing partner under this component of the project. Through leveraging international experience, the project implemented a series of capacity building workshops for policy makers from the three targeted countries, in addition to Palestine. But given the project's decision to shift towards a virtual implementation modality during the COVID crisis, this component of the project was implemented virtually. According to stakeholders, the remote nature of the workshops ultimately limited their effectiveness. But the main challenge was related to the low attendance rates and limited engagement of stakeholders attending these online workshops, as explained under the 'relevance' section, in addition to the variant level of development in the STI sectors of the different member States involved. The delays in kickstarting this component, in addition to an overall weak engagement from counterparts and variance in their capacities, led to the incompleteness of this component of the project, and an overall limited effectiveness in contributing to this outcome.

Instead, the project transitioned to an AI-driven approach and developed an AI tool, ESTIMRAR⁶, in cooperation with IfM, that was meant to enhance the project's ability to provide tailored solutions to STI challenges in each country and support in overcoming policy barriers in each. The tool is meant to provide insights to policy makers and STI actors and guide the development of STI roadmaps for SDGs. The AI-Tool, which was fed with UN approved sources of information and knowledge, including the project's knowledge outputs, has been tried and tested by the evaluator for this evaluation, and was found to be helpful in generating relevant and suitable ideas that could have otherwise taken a long time to formulate. Having said that, there is no evidence that it has been utilized by policy makers, other than those involved in the virtual workshops. And even from those who attended the workshop, only two strategies were produced (i.e. for Egypt and Palestine) that according to stakeholders in both countries, need further revisions and validation to be in a final state. Such a resource could benefit from being promoted to relevant audiences across ESCWA's work, but need to be accompanied with a user-friendly manual that explains to users how to use the tool.

Partnerships were instrumental in raising the effectiveness of the project

A large part of what was implemented in this project was done through partnerships. For example, the international expertise leveraged through the partnership with IfM has helped advance ETC's use of technology, including AI, in its work. Without such international experience, this important achievement could not have been possible. In addition, the partnerships formed by the ETC with a number of development partners for the organization of the Arab SME Summit were essential to making these

⁶ ESTIMRAR: Entrepreneurship, Science, Technology, and Innovation Multi-Modality Road Mapping for SDGs in the Arab Region

summits a success. The impact that this project had on expanding ETC's partnerships is described in the next section.

Impact

Evaluation Questions
What, if any, high-level effects did the project cause (such as changes in norms or systems)?
How transformative was the project – did it create enduring changes in norms – including gender norms - and systems, whether intended or not?
How did the project ensure that all the intended target groups, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, benefitted equally from the intervention?

The main impact of the project so far has been in the impetus it provided for developing further programming and attracting extra budgetary funding. In other words, the projects initiated a number of SME-focused workstreams, on which new projects are being built and new funding secured. Therefore, the project's outputs have been utilized as inputs for different subsequent projects implemented by the ETC.

The evaluation has found that the most significant impact of the project has been in initiating new streams of SME-focused activities on which the ETC then developed/is developing new projects and attracting donor financing. A number of examples illustrate this impact.

The project contributed to the creation of the DEPAR online platform, and the knowledge material it contains, which has received interest and engagement from Arab SMEs. According to the latest statistics of users on the platform (as of Feb 2024), there were more than 5,000 registered users from across the Arab World. Despite that over 50% of users are from Jordan, the platform has registered users from most Arab countries. This platform, its rapidly increasing user base, and the knowledge material it contains, has garnered attention from development partners and allowed the ETC to develop a \$1.7 million project to develop the platform into DEPAR2.0 through focusing on AI integration, mobile accessibility, and online courses to provide comprehensive support for Arab SMEs. Other examples of projects that utilized the inputs of this DA project include a project that promotes women's entrepreneurship and access to technology in addition to the SME summit described below.

The annual Arab SME summit, which was initiated in 2022, had positive impacts on SMEs, in terms of providing them with the platform through which they can network with one another and access funding for business development initiatives.

Another example is the SME summit, to which the project contributed. The first annual SME summit was conducted in 2022 in Amman through the project's contribution (as well as the contribution of other projects implemented by the ETC), and given its initial success, a second annual summit was conducted in 2023. According to ESCWA announcements following the summits, the 2022 summit was able to secure around \$130 million in commitments to provide various forms of support to SMEs, while the 2023 summit secured over \$177 million in commitments⁷. In addition to these commitments, the summits also resulted in various opportunities for SMEs to build their capacities. According to the project team, indications so

⁷ Arab SME Summit 2023 website: <https://asmes-2023.unescwa.org/>

far show that the 2024 summit will result in even higher commitments that may reach up to \$300 million. Moreover, the ETC is expanding its partnerships and collaborations in the organization and implementation of these summits. For example, the 2024 Arab SME Summit will be held in collaboration with the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC), the Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development (ISFD) and the Arab Gulf Program for Development (AGFUND).

The main transformative aspect of the project was in advancing the utilization of technology in general and AI in specific in ETC's work, which can help mitigate the challenge of catering to diverse regional needs. While not fully utilized in this project, the tool is expected to contribute to ensuring that all intended target groups benefit equally from an intervention.

To counter the challenges faced in implementing the first component of the project (i.e. road mapping), an AI-powered platform was developed during the implementation of the project to overcome the challenge of catering to diverse regional needs under the project. The AI platform allows for the customization of tools and training materials to meet the specific demands of each country in the Arab region. By analyzing extensive data, including stakeholder feedback and ecosystem mappings, the AI platform dynamically adapts its offerings to accurately address the unique challenges and opportunities within each nation's STI ecosystem. The AI-driven platform streamlines the customization process, making interventions more effective and scalable across the diverse landscapes of the Arab region. Moreover, the project established virtual KICs consisting of ecosystem maps and community spaces established and integrated with other online tools available on the DEPAR platform.

The other transformative aspect of the project was in guiding and informing the new strategic direction of ESCWA, in terms of working more directly with SMEs and business enablers, alongside its work with policy makers.

Much of the activities implemented by the project, especially in its first half, was geared towards understanding the needs of STI communities across the Arab World. This means that the project consumed significant resources in identifying gaps and understanding needs of SMEs and the SME environment across the region. This, in turn, has helped the ETC inform subsequent implementation of the project and the design of follow-up projects that build on the knowledge gained in this project. In other words, the information and knowledge gained by the project has played a role in guiding the strategic evolution of ETC's work.

Sustainability

Evaluation Questions
To what extent did the intervention lead to scalable or replicable results?
Which of the activities (identified as contributing to the identified results of the project) provide ongoing benefits to stakeholders?
What evidence is available to indicate that the results of the project can be maintained by stakeholders?

While the results of the project cannot be sustained without continued ESCWA engagement and support, the project produced a number of knowledge outputs and tools that are expected to continue benefiting stakeholders following the completion of the project. The other main sustainable feature of the project lies in the follow up projects that are building on this project's outputs.

The project produced a number of outputs that will continue to benefit stakeholder after the completion of the project, and have the potential to be scaled up to a larger audience. These include the extensive research and knowledge materials produced by the project as well as the online communities. As mentioned above, the ETC is planning to utilize these outputs and communities to make ecosystems maps more dynamic and establish online courses on the various topics addressed by the project as part of a new project to upgrade the DEPAR online platform, thereby enhancing the sustainability of the project.

Another sustainable result of the project was the Arab SME summits and the associated deals made by SMEs on the sidelines of the summits. Given the success of the first two Arab SME summits conducted in 2022 and 2023, the event will take place for its third year in 2024 with an anticipated higher and more diverse number of participants and a larger set of partnerships.

The AI tool, developed by the project to guide policymakers in the formulation of roadmaps towards SDGs is yet another sustainable result stemming from the project. However, its sustainability will depend on the extent to which it will be utilized by policy makers in the Arab region moving forward. According to stakeholders, the tool has not yet been utilized by policy makers in the region and would benefit from being promoted to enhance the overall sustainability under the 1st outcome of the project.

The evaluation found that project results cannot be maintained by stakeholders following the completion of the project without the continued technical assistance of ESCWA. This is especially true given the number of new initiatives and workstreams created by the project and which are currently being carried forward by other initiatives and projects run by ESCWA.

Gender, Human Rights, Disability Inclusion, and Environmental Issues

Evaluation Questions
To what extent were issues of gender, human rights, disability inclusion, and the environment incorporated into the design, planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation practices of the project, as well as the results achieved?
To what extent did the project respond to and affect the rights, needs and interests of different stakeholders, including women, men, youth, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups

While the design of the project paid little attention to cross cutting issues of gender equality, disability inclusion, and the environment, the project team integrated these issues in some of the activities during implementation, thereby contributing to advancing gender equality, disability inclusion, and environmental sustainability.

The evaluation found no evidence that the above cross cutting issues were integrated into the design of the project. However, these issues were considered during implementation and integrated into some of the project's activities in an ad-hoc manner. For example, the ecosystem maps produced by the project included a mapping of women empowerment actors in each of the project's targeted member States as well as in a number of other Arab countries. The mapping was utilized for the development of a project focused on women empowerment. Moreover, there was a dedicated thematic track in the 2023 SME summit on 'women economic empowerment'.

Females were also fairly represented in many of the activities of the project. The list of participants of the project's activities (excluding SMEs) developed by the evaluator from the project documents shows a 38.5% representation of females. Furthermore, females made up almost 43% of the participants attending the 2022 Arab SME Summit but their share declined to 37% during the 2023 summit, which calls for a more conscious consideration of female inclusion.

With regards to disability inclusion, the 2nd annual SME summit launched a challenge that aims to promote and recognize the entrepreneurship and innovation of PWDs in the Arab business community. The initiative targeted SMEs across all sectors that were founded or were managed by people with physical or mental disabilities, and which have made a significant contribution in their industry. Winners are invited to the summit under sponsorship from the project.

And finally, a significant share of the project activities considered the cross-cutting goal of environmental sustainability, and there was a focus on green technologies across most. For example, the majority of content in the compendiums produced by the project as well the virtual KICs set up, directly tackled the issue of environmental sustainability. The 2023 Arab SME summit utilized one of the compendiums produced earlier by the project in integrating 'green technologies and business models' as a main thematic track of the summit.

6. Conclusions

The relevance of the DA project to the regional Arab STI contexts and needs is clear when looking at how the project came as a response to the expressed needs of ESCWA member States. The project was also found to be geared towards the SDGs and was found to have contributed to SDGs 7,9, 12 and 17. Initial project activities that focused on further needs assessments enhanced the project's relevance but the numbers and types of stakeholders in some activities limited the overall project relevance in some areas. Adaptations were made to the project plans to maintain the relevance of the project to SME needs and to the overall shift in the strategic direction of the ETC.

The efficiency of the project's implementation was influenced by a number of both exogenous and endogenous factors that included the COVID crisis and the associated transition to virtual activities and weak engagement by stakeholders in some activities. The adaptations done by the project carried dual effects on the project's efficiency. A number of measures was taken by the team to enhance the project's efficiency including the utilization of technology, particularly AI, to overcome challenges during implementation. The project also leveraged existing partnerships and made use of co-financing and specific expertise in the implementation of the project's activities.

The project was partially effective in contributing to its outcomes. On the one hand, the project contributed effectively to the project's second outcome 'developing the capacities of the national STI communities to enhance their impact on the local economies', in spite of the changes made to the original project plans. A big factor driving the effectiveness of the project under this outcome was the project's contribution to the organization of two annual Arab SME summits. But this result cannot be attributed solely to this project, given that a number of other projects and initiatives contributed to its achievement. On the other hand, the project was not as effective in contributing to its first outcome 'Strengthening the national capacities to address challenges and priorities based on scientific evidence to design and

implement appropriate STI for SDG roadmaps’ given the low attendance rate of workshop participants under this outcome and their weak and limited engagement in the project activities. Having said that, the project developed an AI-driven tool that provides an innovative resource for policy makers across the Arab region to help them in creating roadmaps and strategies towards achieving SDGs across different sectors and in different Arab countries.

The evaluation has found that the most significant impact of the project’s contribution has been in initiating new streams of SME-focused activities on which the ETC then developed new projects and attracted donor financing. While this impact cannot be completely attributed to this DA project, the project’s contribution has resulted in outputs being utilized as inputs for different subsequent projects implemented by the ETC. The annual Arab SME summit, to which the project contributed in 2022 and 2023, has had positive impacts on SMEs, in terms of providing them with the platform through which they can network with one another and access funding for business development initiatives.

Therefore, the main sustainability feature of the project was in its ability to lay the groundwork for further relevant programming that has so far been successful in attracting extrabudgetary financing. But there were other sustainable results including the knowledge outputs produced by the project that will continue to benefit stakeholders after the completion of the project, and have the potential to be scaled up to larger audiences. Similarly, the AI tool is yet another sustainable result stemming from the project, but would benefit from being promoted to larger audiences. In other words, its sustainability will depend on the extent to which it will be utilized by policy makers in the Arab region moving forward. Overall, the evaluation found that project results cannot be maintained by stakeholders following the completion of the project without the continued technical assistance of ESCWA.

The main transformative aspects of the project included (i) advancing the utilization of technology in general and AI in specific in ETC’s work, and (ii) guiding and informing the new strategic direction of ESCWA, in terms of working more directly with SMEs and business enablers, alongside its work with policy makers.

While the design of the project paid little attention to cross cutting issues of gender equality, disability inclusion, and the environment, the project team integrated these issues in some of the activities during implementation, thereby contributing to advancing gender equality, disability inclusion, and environmental sustainability. This has led to subsequent projects that focus on gender equality and disability inclusion.

7. Recommendations

- **It is recommended that the strategic evolution of the ETC, which has influenced the trajectory of this project, be formalized through an endorsement by its (advisory and) governing body of a strategic framework that clarifies its current strategic approach.** Ongoing and future projects should then be anchored in this strategic framework to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the contribution of the portfolio of projects to the identified and formalized strategic objectives and approach. The project team shared with the evaluator a recently developed log-frame that integrates all projects implemented by the ETC into one framework. While this has helped illustrate how the ETC will be implementing its projects in an integrated approach, a more formal document is needed to present longer term strategic outcomes and illustrate the new strategic direction of the ETC in

contributing to its mandate. This will ensure that projects are all contributing towards the same objectives across all of ETC's work.

- **The ETC is recommended to pay closer attention to the process of identifying and selecting suitable and relevant stakeholders for each stream of its activities, and ensure their continued engagement throughout implementation as much as feasible. This involves clearly explaining the objectives and timelines of a project so that organizations can appoint the appropriate person to attend the project's activities.** The evaluation has found that challenges in the implementation of some activities mainly stemmed from an unsuitable number and type of stakeholders which limited the project's efficiency and effectiveness in some areas. Therefore, a well-structured stakeholder mapping, identification, and selection process would ensure that the most relevant entities and personnel are exposed to a project's interventions. Moreover, the objective of the project, its timeframe and objectives should be clearly explained to selected stakeholders to ensure that the right person is appointed to attend a project's activities.
- **The ETC is recommended to promote the tools developed under the project's contributions to enhance their utilization, and publish the research studies produced under the project, thereby ensuring a sustainable impact.** The evaluation found that a number of project outputs are not yet published, despite being completed sometime ago. While the project has published the extensive compendiums and ecosystem maps produced, its research outputs from its assessments has not yet been published (e.g. "Assessing and Improving the Entrepreneurship Enabling Environment in the Arab Region). Publishing these outputs will enhance the sustainability of the project since these documents can act as an important reference for future practitioners and researchers in the field. Similarly, the tools produced by the project, including the AI-driven ESTIMRAR tool, provide an innovative tool that can be utilized by policy makers and even companies to provide relevant insights for road mapping for SDGs based on contextual international and local knowledge. Promoting this tool across all of ESCWA's activities would greatly enhance its sustainable impact.
- **The ETC is recommended to continue developing and holding its annual SME summit, given its effectiveness in providing SMEs a platform through which they can network, increase their capacities, and establish partnerships with development actors.** While the summit was not originally part of the design of the project, the project contributed human and financial resources to make it a success.
- **ETC is recommended to enhance its monitoring and reporting processes to ensure that reporting is made against intended results and more accurately reflects project activities and strategic decisions or adaptations made during project implementation.** In a number of cases, the information contained in the project's annual progress reports did not contain sufficient details on activities implemented by the project in the preceding year, thereby limiting its utility as a monitoring tool. Similarly, the major strategic decisions that shifted the trajectory of the project during implementation were not elaborated on in these reports. The project team is recommended to enhance the quality of its future reporting by providing an accurate number of activities implemented in the preceding year, their objectives, and the number of attendees participating in the activities, broken down by gender. In addition, any strategic decision that alters the course of implementation should be clearly explained and clarified in annual reports. This will not only improve the monitoring function of such reporting, but will also enhance the evaluability of the project.
- **The project team is recommended to better focus the design of future projects according to available resources, including time, human, and financial resources, and in line with the strategic**

framework. This also involves steering away from a one size fits all approach, and better assessing actual needs to tailor the support accordingly. In other words, rather than having a project address the needs of SMEs, the business enabling community, and policy makers altogether, the strategic framework may allocate the various projects in such a way that each can focus on particular stakeholder group while at the same time be part of a coherent strategic effort.

- **ETC is recommended to integrate better the cross-cutting issues of gender and disability inclusion as part of the project design and mainstream them throughout the project cycle from planning through implementation and monitoring.** Given that the project did not make a conscious consideration of gender and disability inclusion in the project design, but rather integrated these issues in some activities in an ad-hoc approach, gender and disability inclusion should be mainstreamed throughout the project cycle, from planning through implementation to monitoring and reporting.
- **Project team is recommended to better plan for risks or shocks through a well-developed risk mitigation analysis as part of the project design.** This involves identifying potential risks and developing tailored mitigation strategies in order to reduce uncertainties during implementation and enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the project.

8. Lessons learned and good practices

- **Utilizing technology (ie. AI) can in some cases overcome challenges related to the diverse needs of innovation ecosystems.** The approach taken by the project to shift to an AI-driven approach under its first outcome is expected to help address the diverse needs of the Arab region's ecosystems and also provides a dynamic and scalable solution for advancing an enabling innovation environment.
- **Without an overarching strategic framework that shows how a project fits within a portfolio, projects implemented by any entity may seem disconnected when seen in isolation.** The evaluator initially found many of the project's activities to be disconnected. But upon further discussion with the project team and other stakeholders, and upon further review of additional documents related to ETC's portfolio, the project was found to be part of a coherent effort and links with other ETC projects.
- **A careful mapping and selection of stakeholders for specific streams of activities, and then thoroughly explaining the objectives and timeline of the project, plays a large role in enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of an intervention.** The suitability of stakeholders limited the effectiveness of the project under its first outcome and according to discussions held during this evaluation, more suitable and engaged stakeholders under this outcome could have significantly enhanced the effectiveness of the project in contributing to its first outcome.

Annexes

Annex I - Evaluation TORs



ESCWA

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC & SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

Terms of Reference (TOR)

TOR

Evaluation of Development Account Project – Establishing Effective Relationships between Innovation Actors in the Arab Region to Expand the Science-Policy Nexus in Support of the 2030 Agenda

1. Background and Objective

Given the emergence by mid-2020 of a very complex and expanded innovation environment in the Arab region, the project Establishing Effective Relationships between Innovation Actors in the Arab Region to Expand the Science-Policy Nexus in Support of the 2030 Agenda (the project) was developed to explore ways to develop optimal relationships between relevant stakeholders, ensuring they work together towards developing a sustained and purposeful national technology sector.

This more effective innovation sector can help to: 1) delink economic/industrial development from imported technologies in critical sectors and thus reduce technological dependency; 2) provide economic incentives to innovators; 3) create a new source of income for educational sector through proper licensing structures and property right structures; 4) establish a productive R&D culture; 5) exploit opportunities to expand the cutting-edge technology sector in digital and ICT technologies and 6) ensure that the countries in the region can effectively integrate their innovation sectors into the 4th Industrial Revolutions processes.

The project will create interlinked national Knowledge and Innovation Centers (KICs) to enhance the regional innovation ecosystem, build the regional capacities through updating related policies,

and establish direct working relationships between the ESCWA Technology Center (ETC), National Technology Transfer Offices (NTTOs), United Nations Innovation Labs (UNTIL), Accelerator labs, ITU, WIPO, and other innovation actors in the region.

2. Duties and Responsibilities

Purpose of the Evaluation

Evaluations at ESCWA strive to demonstrate the difference that is being made by the work of ESCWA, and its impact on member States and their citizens. This evaluation will aim to determine how the work undertaken in the project contributed to achieving its intended results, the pathway to these results, and the elements that contributed most significantly to the achievement of these results. In addition, it will also consider how the project brought about any unintended results that may have occurred.

The evaluation will serve three main purposes:

- It will provide a basis for evidence-informed decision-making, strategic planning, and risk management.
- It is a means to demonstrate accountability to the organization's Executive and member States for performance, relative to ESCWA's mandate and strategic objectives.
- It will inform and facilitate organizational learning by identifying evidence-based findings, lessons to be learned, and recommendations for action that enhance the next generation of ESCWA's work.

The evaluation will be conducted in line with ESCWA's Evaluation Policy (2023), the [UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation](#), and the [Development Account Evaluation Guidelines](#). The evaluation will strive to employ development best practices with regard to promoting **gender equality** and a **human rights-based approach**, including **the rights of persons with disabilities**.

The primary audiences for the evaluation are ESCWA, UN DESA, ITU, OICT, UNICEF, UNDP, and the governments and innovation actors in ESCWA member States.

The evaluation will be facilitated and coordinated by ESCWA's Strategic Planning, Accountability, Results and Knowledge team.

Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation will be **forward-looking** and will objectively and systematically assess the performance of the project in terms of its **relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability**. Furthermore, the evaluation will assess the extent to which gender, human rights, disability inclusion, environmental concerns, and other cross-cutting issues were incorporated or mainstreamed into the project.

The evaluation will cover the period from January 2021 to December 2023.

Evaluation Criteria

The following key evaluation questions per criteria will guide the evaluation. The evaluator is expected to refine evaluation questions where necessary and to include the refinement in the Inception Report.

Relevance

- How did the project team determine the strategic needs and priorities of member States in its project design?
- How were the intended results of the project aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of member States, the sustainable development goals, and national and regional development agendas?
- How were the identified results aligned with other stakeholders' strategic needs and priorities?
- How was the log frame translated to ensure that the activities carried out were relevant and contributed to achievement of the intended result(s)?
- How were planned and implemented activities designed and sequenced to ensure a conscious consideration of the intended result?

Effectiveness

- What evidence is available to support the achievement of the results identified?
- Which of the activities undertaken by the project team directly contributed to the identified results? How did these activities contribute to the results?
- To what degree can the achievement of results be attributed to the intervention?
- How did the work of stakeholders contribute to the achievement of the identified results?
- Which other factors have contributed to the achievement of the identified results?
- Would the results have been achieved regardless of the project being implemented?
- How were key partnerships integrated in the delivery of the project to maximise the achievement of results?

Efficiency

- Were the planned activities considered and delivered with the end results in mind? How did this shape the process?
- What, if any, adjustments were made during the project to optimize the achievement of results?
- What, if any, considerations were made in terms of the most efficient way of delivering activities (choice of modality, expertise available, etc.)
- To what extent were partnerships leveraged and/or enhanced to utilize additional strategic expertise?

Impact

- What, if any, high-level effects did the project cause (such as changes in norms or systems)?
- How did the project ensure that all the intended target groups, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, benefitted equally from the intervention?

- How transformative was the project – did it create enduring changes in norms – including gender norms – and systems, whether intended or not?
- To what extent did the intervention lead to other changes, including “scalable” or “replicable” results?

Sustainability

- Given a similar context, could the identified results of the project be replicated?
- Which of the activities identified as contributing to the identified results of the project provided ongoing benefits for stakeholders?
- What evidence is available to indicate that the results of the project can be maintained by stakeholders?

Gender, Human Rights, Disability Inclusion, and Environmental Issues

- To what extent were issues of gender, human rights, disability inclusion, and the environment incorporated into the design, planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation practices of the project, as well as the results achieved?

To what extent did the project respond to and affected the rights, needs and interests of different stakeholders, including women, men, youth, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups?

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluator is expected to identify the main results achieved through the project, as established by both the project team and key stakeholders, and develop a Theory of Change (ToC) for these results. The causal links postulated in the ToC should then be used to theorise a plausible causal mechanism, which should be tested using all available evidence, to evaluate the influence of ESCWA’s work on results achieved through the project.

The evaluator is expected to ensure a mixed method (qualitative and quantitative), inclusive and participatory approach, with adequate triangulation across methods, to arrive at credible, reliable, and unbiased findings.

The evaluator will also ensure that all aspects of the evaluation are gender and human rights sensitive (including a special focus on the rights with person with disabilities). In addition, the evaluator must ensure that they always comply with the [UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation](#) during the conduct of the evaluation.

The above methodology is indicative. The evaluator is expected to build upon it and present a robust evaluation methodology within the inception report, including addressing and refining the evaluation questions.

All evaluation methodologies are to be approved by ESCWA’s SPARK Section and will be piloted and revised as per best practice.

Quality Assurance Mechanism

The evaluator will employ a quality assurance mechanism of her/his preference (either an internal or an external system can be used), which will provide quality checks throughout the evaluation

process. This quality assurance mechanism will be indicated in the Inception Report and in the Final Evaluation Report.

In addition, ESCWA will review the evaluation report prior to finalization to ensure that it aligns with the [UNEG Quality Checklist for Evaluation Reports](#)⁸, particularly with reference to the quality of recommendations.

Evaluation Ethics

The evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the [UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation](#); and all rights and confidentiality of information providers will be prioritized and safeguarded as per [UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation](#).

3. Duration of contract

The evaluator is expected to work from May 2024 and 12 September 2024. (5 Months)

4. Ultimate Results of Service and Delivery Dates

Inception Report: The evaluator will submit a draft Inception Report totalling not more than 10 pages, in addition to associated annexes. The Inception Report will summarize the desk review and propose the evaluation methodology and sampling strategy/ies to be used in the evaluation, along with a detailed workplan, draft evaluation matrix, stakeholder matrix, and quality assurance mechanism. Any revisions to the Inception Report will be implemented no later than one week following receipt of comments. The Inception Report shall, where relevant, address the integration of human rights, disability inclusion, gender equality, and environmental issues. The Inception Report should contain ideas for further exploration to support organisational learning, to be done either a part of this evaluation or separately by ESCWA itself.

Final Evaluation Report: Following the evaluation's data collection and analysis of findings, the evaluator will submit a draft Final Evaluation Report. The Final Evaluation Report will be user-friendly, well-structured and evidence-based, totalling not more than 25 pages, in addition to a 2-page Executive Summary and associated annexes.

The Final Evaluation Report must use the Development Account Project Evaluation Report Template, which will be provided to the evaluator.

The Final Evaluation Report will summarize the agreed-upon methodology listed in the Inception Report, describe the evaluation's data collection and analytical approach, and present findings with **clear action-oriented recommendations**.

The Final Evaluation Report will be reviewed by ESCWA's SPARK Section, discussed with the evaluator. A revised Final Evaluation Report is expected on 16 August. The Final Evaluation Report shall, where relevant, address the integration of human rights, disability inclusion, gender equality, and environmental issues.

The Final Evaluation Report shall contain information (data, findings, expert views) that may allow ESCWA to identify lessons for wider organisational learning or for potential changes to

⁸ www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/607

relevant organisational policies, irrespective of the extent to which the evaluation recommendations makes reference to such information.

Both deliverables should be submitted in English.

Proposed timeline

Date	Action
31 May	Initial conversation with ESCWA
31 May – 21 June	Desktop review, secondary data collection, and preparation of inception report
21 June	Submit draft Inception Report to ESCWA
21 June – 28 June	Review of draft Inception Evaluation Report by ESCWA
28 June	Discussion with ESCWA
5 July	Submit revised Inception Report to ESCWA
5 July – 2 August	Conduct primary data collection
2 August – 23 August	Analysis of findings and drafting of Final Evaluation Report
23 August	Submit draft Final Evaluation Report to ESCWA
23 August – 30 August	Review of draft Final Evaluation Report by ESCWA
30 August	Discussion with ESCWA
30 August – 6 September	Revise and finalize the Final Evaluation Report based on comments received
6 September	Submission of Final Evaluation Report to ESCWA

5. Fees and payment schedule

The evaluator is expected to work between May 2024 and September 2024. Payments will be made based on delivery of outputs.

Inception Report: USD 5,000

Final Report: USD 20,000

The payment amount is intended to cover all evaluation fees: compensation of the evaluator, travel, translation, printing, editing as well as any other cost not listed here, whether direct or indirect, associated to completing the evaluation to the satisfaction of ESCWA. Therefore, it is understood

that ESCWA holds no responsibility for any costs or fees incurred by the evaluator that would exceed the allotted amount.

The evaluator is responsible for their own health and insurance plans.

6. Qualifications

ESCWA is seeking an evaluator who has five years of experience and possesses the following:

- A minimum of five years' experience undertaking impact evaluations, including of projects and/or evaluations working with Arab governmental bodies, is required.
- A good understanding of innovation, technological development and working with small and medium enterprises is required.
- Experience with process tracing analyses is desirable.
- Work experience in the UN environment is desirable.
- A high level of expertise in the distilling, communication and reporting of findings, recommendations, best practices, and lessons learned.
- Excellent oral and written communication skills and the ability to effectively convey complex information in a clear and concise manner to both governmental and UN audiences.

English and French are the working languages of the UN Secretariat. Fluency in English is required for this consultancy. Fluency in Arabic is an asset.

7. Duty Station or Location of Assignment

The work should be undertaken remotely

8. Travel

No travel is required.

9. Supervisor/Project Manager

The point of contact for this project is:

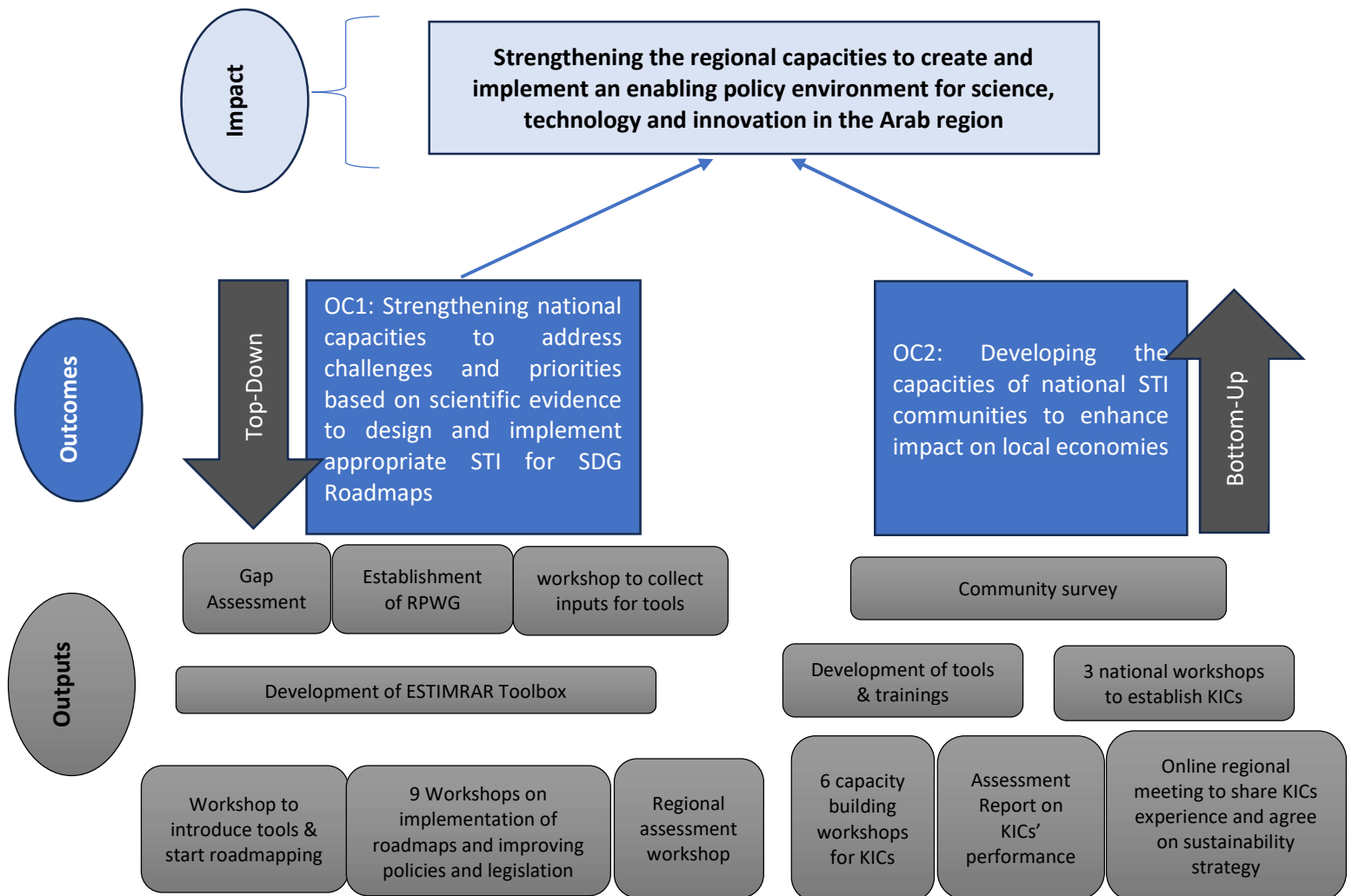
Name: Iain Gately

Title: Associate Evaluation Officer

Office/Division: SPARK

Email Address: iain.gately@un.org

Annex II: Project results framework



Annex III: Evaluation matrix

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Questions	Project team	Other stakeholders
Relevance	How did the project team determine the strategic needs and priorities of member States in its project design?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What kinds of needs assessments/analysis done for member States during the design phase of the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were you consulted on the proposed project results and activities during the phase of project design (i.e. prior to the beginning of implementation)? How? What were the needs or gaps addressed by this project design?
	How were the intended results of the project aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of member States, the SDGs, and regional development agendas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did the project align its intended results with the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> needs and priorities of member States? SDGs? Regional development agendas? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you think that the project's intended results are aligned with your strategic needs and priorities as a member state? How so? What about alignment with regional development agendas? And the SDGs?
	How were the identified results aligned with other stakeholders' strategic needs and priorities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What other stakeholders' needs did you identify? How were the results aligned to such needs? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent were you engaged throughout the project? What is your institutions' current priorities? Was the project aligned to your needs?
	How was the log frame adapted during implementation to ensure that the activities carried out were relevant and contributed to the achievement of the intended result(s)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was there a need to adapt the log frame due to stakeholder needs? How did the project adapt to changing needs or priorities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did the project maintain its relevance throughout its duration? Did the project respond to any of your changing priorities and needs during implementation? How so?
Efficiency	Did the project encounter any delays during implementation? What was the source of delay and how did the project address the issue?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What were the main delays encountered by the project? What was the source of these delays? How did the project deal with such delays? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you face any delays during the implementation of the project? What was these delays and how did they affect your engagement with the project?

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you know how the project team was able to deal with these delays?
	What, if any, adjustments were made during the project to optimize the achievement of results? On what basis were these adjustments made?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were there any adjustments made during implementation to make better use of project resources in the project's contribution to the project results? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did the project make any adjustments to make the best use of its resources? What were these adjustments and how did they make the project more efficient?
	What considerations, if any, were made in terms of the most efficient way of delivering activities (choice of modality, expertise available... etc)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did you decide on the modality of implementation in this project? What about expertise? What considerations were made in light of the project objective? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you think of the project's modality of operation compared to other alternatives? Can you think of another modality which could have resulted in more efficient implementation?
	To what extent were partnerships leveraged and/or enhanced to utilize additional strategic resources, including expertise?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What partnerships did you leverage or enhance to utilize additional strategic resources for this project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you partner with the project to offer additional resources, including expertise? How so?
Effectiveness	To what extent did the project contribute to achieving its identified results according to available evidence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What evidence is available to support the project's contribution to the achievement of results? (Across the two outcomes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What evidence is available to support the project's contribution to the achievement of results? (Across the two outcomes)
	Which of the project activities directly contribute to the identified results and how?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you think are the most relevant project activities that contributed to the identified results? Why? How did these activities contribute to the identified result? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you think are the most relevant project activities that contributed to building your capacity and the capacity of others in the project? How so?
	To what degree can the achievement of results be attributed to the intervention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Without the project's effect, do you think the results would have still been achieved? What additional factors might have influenced the achievement of results? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Without the project's effect, do you think the results would have still been achieved? What other capacity building interventions were you exposed to

			between 2021 and 2023? How do these compare with the activities of this project?
	How did the work with stakeholders contribute to the achievement of the identified results?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What work with stakeholders contributed to the identified results of the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did your work with the project contribute to achievement of results?
	Which other factors have contributed to the achievement of the identified results?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the factors that have contributed to the achievement of the identified results? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which other factors have contributed to the achievement of the identified results?
	How were key partnerships integrated in the delivery of the project to maximise the the project's contributions in achieving results?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did you involve partners in this project for a more effective contribution of the project in achieving results? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How were you involved in the project? What role did you play to enhance the project's contribution in achieving results?
Impact	24. What, if any, high-level effects did the project cause (such as changes in norms or systems)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the main impact of this project so far? Has there been any changes in norms or systems? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the main impact of this project so far? Has there been any changes in norms or systems?
	25. How transformative was the project – did it create enduring changes in norms – including gender norms - and systems, whether intended or not?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How enduring are these changes? Why? Were there unintended impacts resulting from the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you think such changes are enduring? How so? Were there unintended impacts resulting from the project?
	26. How did the project ensure that all the intended target groups, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, benefitted equally from the intervention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was there any mechanism utilized to ensure that all intended target groups (i.e. policy makers, enables, and SMEs & start-ups) benefitted equally from the project? Were there any considerations given to the most disadvantaged and vulnerable? How so? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you think that all intended target groups (i.e. policy makers, enables, and SMEs & start-ups) benefitted equally from the project? What those who are the most disadvantaged and vulnerable?
Sustainability	27. To what extent did the intervention lead to scalable or replicable results?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can the results achieved by the project be scaled up or replicated? How so? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can the results achieved by the project be scaled up of replicated?

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How so?
	28. Which of the activities (identified as contributing to the identified results of the project) provided ongoing benefits to stakeholders?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which of the project activities provide ongoing benefits to stakeholders? How so? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What project activities continue to provide you with ongoing benefits? How so?
	29. What evidence is available to indicate that the results of the project can be maintained by stakeholders?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can we know that stakeholders are able to maintain project results? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are you able to maintain results achieved by the project? How so?
Gender, Human Rights, Disability Inclusion, and the Environment	30. To what extent were issues of gender, human rights, disability inclusion, and the environment incorporated into the design, planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation practices of the project, as well as the results achieved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were issues of gender, human rights, disability inclusion, and the environment incorporated into the design of the project? How about in implementation or monitoring of activities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you think the project took into consideration the issue of gender, human rights, disability inclusion, and the environment, during implementation?
	31. To what extent did the project respond to and affected the rights, needs and interests of different stakeholders, including women, men, youth, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did the project respond to the needs and interests of different stakeholders including women, men, youth, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups? How did the project affect the needs and interests of different stakeholders including women, men, youth, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did the project respond to the needs and interests of different stakeholders including women, men, youth, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups? How did the project affect the needs and interests of different stakeholders including women, men, youth, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups?

1) ETC staff, including project team

Background information:

- Name of person being interviewed

- Job title of person being interviewed & role in project

- Organization in which the person being interviewed works

Relevance

- What kinds of needs assessments/analysis done for member States during the design phase of the project?
- How did the project align its intended results with the:
 - Needs and priorities of member States?
 - SDGs?
 - Regional development agenda?
- What other stakeholders needs did the project identify?
 - How were the results aligned to such needs?
- Was there a need to adapt the logframe due to stakeholder needs?
 - How did the project adapt to changing needs or priorities?

Efficiency

- To what extent did the project face delays during implementation?
 - What was the source of these delays (endogenous vs exogenous factors)?
 - How did the project address the delays?
- Were there any adjustments made during implementation to make better use of project resources in the project's contribution to the project results?
- How did the project decide on the modality of implementation in this project?
 - What about expertise?
 - What considerations were made in light of the project objective?
- What partnerships did the project leverage or enhance to utilize additional strategic resources for this project, including expertise?

Effectiveness

- To what extent did the project implement its planned activities/outputs?
 - If there are some activities that could not be implemented, what were the reasons?
- To what extent did the project contribute to its two main intended outcomes?

- What do you think are the most relevant project activities that contributed to the identified results? And why?
- How did these activities contribute to the identified result?
- Without the project's effect, do you think the results would have still been achieved?
- What other factors might have influenced the achievement of results?
- What work with stakeholders contributed to the identified results of the project?
- What are the factors that have contributed to the achievement of the identified results?
- How did you involve partners in the project for a more effective contribution in achieving results?

Impact

- What are the main impacts of the project so far?
 - Has there been any changes in norms or systems?
- How transformative was the project?
 - How enduring were these changes induced by the project? And why?
 - Were there unintended impacts resulting from the project?
- Was there any mechanism utilized to ensure that all intended target groups (i.e. policy makers, enables, and SMEs & start-ups) benefitted equally from the project?
 - Were there any considerations given to the most disadvantaged and vulnerable? How so?

Sustainability

- Can the results achieved by the project be scaled up or replicated? How so?
- Which of the project activities provide ongoing benefits to stakeholders? How so?
- How can we know that stakeholders are able to maintain project results?

Human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion, and leaving no one behind

- Were issues of gender, human rights, disability inclusion, and the environment incorporated into the design of the project?
 - How about in implementation or monitoring of activities?
- How did the project respond to the needs and interests of different stakeholders including women, men, youth, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups?
- How did the project affect the needs and interests of different stakeholders including women, men, youth, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups?

2) Other stakeholders

Relevance

- Were you consulted on the proposed project results and activities during the phase of project design (i.e. prior to the beginning of implementation)? How?
- What were the needs or gaps addressed by this project design?

- Do you think that the project's intended results are aligned with your strategic needs and priorities as a member State? How so?
- What about alignment with regional development agendas? And the SDGs?
- To what extent were you engaged throughout the project?
- What is your institutions' current priorities?
 - Was the project aligned to your needs?
- Did the project maintain its relevance throughout its duration?
- Did the project respond to any of your changing priorities and needs during implementation? How so?

Efficiency

- To what extent did the project face delays during implementation?
 - What was the source of these delays (endogenous vs exogenous factors)?
 - Do you know how the project team was able to deal with these delays?
- Did the project make any adjustments to make the best use of its resources?
 - What were these adjustments and how did they make the project more efficient?
- What do you think of the project's modality of operation compared to other alternatives?
 - Can you think of another modality which could have resulted in more efficient implementation?
- Did you partner with the project to offer additional resources, including expertise? How so?

Effectiveness

- To what extent did the project implement its planned activities/outputs?
 - If there are some activities that could not be implemented, what were the reasons?
- What evidence is available to support the project's contribution to the achievement of results? (across the two outcomes)
- What do you think are the most relevant project activities that contributed to building your capacity and the capacity of others in the project? How so?
- Without the project's effect, do you think the results would have still been achieved?
- What other capacity building interventions were you exposed to between 2021 and 2023? How do these compare with the activities of the project?
- How did your work with the project contribute to the achievement of results?
- Which other factors have contributed to the achievement of the identified results?
- How were you involved in the project?
- What role did you play to enhance the project's contribution in achieving results?

Impact

- What are the main impacts of the project so far?
 - Has there been any changes in norms or systems?
- How transformative was the project?
 - How enduring were these changes induced by the project? And why?
 - Were there unintended impacts resulting from the project?
- Was there any mechanism utilized to ensure that all intended target groups (i.e. policy makers, enables, and SMEs & start-ups) benefitted equally from the project?
 - Were there any considerations given to the most disadvantaged and vulnerable? How so?

Sustainability

- Can the results achieved by the project be scaled up or replicated? How so?
- Which of the project activities provide ongoing benefits to stakeholders? How so?
- Are you able to maintain the results achieved by the project? How so?

Human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion, and leaving no one behind

- Do you think the project took into consideration the issue of gender, human rights, disability inclusion, and the environment, during implementation?
- How did the project respond to the needs and interests of different stakeholders including women, men, youth, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups?

Annex V - List of individuals interviewed

Sample for Fieldwork		
#	Name	Position
1	Kareem Hassan	Director - ESCWA Technology Center
2	Ban Pahlawan	Research Assistant - ESCWA Technology Center
3	Shereen Al Jarrah	Project Coordinator - ESCWA
4	Joel Yazbek	ICC-ESCWA Centre of Entrepreneurship
5	Nadeen Suliman	Partnership Officer - ESCWA
6	Nicky Athanassopoulou	IfM, Cambridge University
7	Muheeb Anees	Consultant – KICs concept design & SME tools development
8	Reem Al Masri	Consultant - Compendium in Green Energy
9	Sama Abd El-Shakour	Compendium – Agritech
10	Na'el Al Mulqi	Consultant
11	Amir Hijazi	Senior Program Coordinator - UNDP
12	Mathilde Tachon	Programme Officer - WIPO
13	Rasha Smadi	International Cooperation Manager - Higher Council for Science and Technology (HCST) (Jordan)
14	Samar Wreikat	Head of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Department - Scientific Research and Innovation Support Fund
15	Rania Jaber	General Director of innovation and creativity center – Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology
16	Shaimaa Helal	Director of Entrepreneurship Development Project – Academy of Scientific Research and Technology (Egypt)
17	Dr Mona Demaidi	CEO of Palmec International

Annex VI - List of documents reviewed

- Project document, including Project network diagram
- Annual progress reports (2021, 2022, 2023)
- Document containing project activities implemented in 2023
- List of 22 participants (policy makers and enablers) from 10 entities across Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt.
- Comprehensive list of all ETC stakeholders
- ASMES 2023 – Progress Report
- Summary outputs from roadmapping workshops in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt.
- Compendium on Agriculture Technologies
- Compendium on WASH
- Compendium on Renewable Energy
- Strategic Plan for Electric Vehicles Manufacturing in Egypt
- Policy Agenda to Support Palestine ICT Startup Ecosystem
- High Priority Palestine ICT Startup Policy action detailed plan
- ESCWA Evaluation Policy (2023)
- UN Development Account (2019) “Project Evaluation Guidelines”
- UNEG (2010) “UNEG Quality Checklist for Evaluation Reports”
- UNEG (2020) “Ethical guidelines for Evaluation”
- All workshop reports
- Results of community survey on STI challenges in the member States
- Gap assessment conducted for policies and legislations related to national innovation ecosystems in member States
- Partnership agreements signed with partners.
- ETC Logframe
- DEPAR Statistics
- Project Doc: Advancement of the Digital Enabling Platform for the Arab Region: DEPAR 2.0
- ETC Resolution