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Programme of Work

Highlights of the Evaluation of the Standards for Sustainable Development Goals project, phase II

Submitted by the secretariat*

Summary

This document provides the main points of the Final Report Evaluation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) project “Enhancing usage and uptake of standards for sustainable development, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (2019-2022)”. It also includes the secretariat response and progress on the recommendations. More information is available on the UNECE website at: https://unece.org/evaluation-reports#accordion_7 (12/2022; XB E330).

The report was conducted by Ms. Chantelle McCabe; the text in sections II and III of this document is copy-paste from her report.

* This document has not been edited by a professional editor.

I. Introduction

1. The project “Enhancing Usage and Uptake of Standards for Sustainable Development, Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls” has been carried out by the ECE secretariat, from July 2019 to August 2022, with extra budgetary financial contributions from the German Cooperation Fund through the Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt (PTB).

2. This project was subject to an independent final evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation was to review the implementation and assess the extent to which the objectives of the project were achieved. The evaluation assessed the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project in increasing the understanding of the role of standards in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and strengthening cooperation for the achievement of sustainable development, gender equality and inclusive economic growth across standards bodies, national governments and the United Nations system. The methodology of this evaluation used a mix of data sources: (i) primary data collection through a survey questionnaire and key informant interviews; and (ii) secondary data collection through a desk review of project documents and other relevant materials. The evaluation used both quantitative and qualitative data. Data analysis used triangulation where possible.

II. Executive summary of the evaluation

3. Regarding relevance the evaluation found that the project activities were relevant for achieving increased understanding of the role of standards in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, strengthened cooperation for the achievement of sustainable development, and attaining the SDGs. Moreover, they were relevant for achieving increased understanding of the role of standards in strengthened cooperation for the achievement of gender equality and inclusive economic growth through the use of gender-responsive standards. The project was relevant to the needs and priorities of the UNECE region, as well as to the work and mandates of UNECE. The project activities contributed to the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment, and human rights, but did not have an emphasis on “leaving no-one behind”. The project applied gender inclusion approaches in the design, implementation, and results of the activities. However, the project did not apply a rights-based approach to the design of the activities. Nor did the project apply a disability inclusion approach in its design or implementation of the project. However, the results of the activities may have inadvertently helped to further disability inclusion in terms of preventing accidents and injuries. The project was also relevant with regard to climate change and disaster risk reduction.

4. Regarding effectiveness, the evaluation found that the project objectives were achieved to a high degree. The planned activities, including the training on gender-responsive standards, contributed to achieving the project objectives. The evaluation found that the support of the secretariat in servicing the activities was adequate. There were some challenges to achieving the project results, including the delivering during a pandemic; the lower proportion of women in the technical risk areas to which the standards are applied; cultural challenges and biases; and internal processes of the UN.

5. In terms of efficiency, the evaluation found that the project achieved its objectives within the anticipated budget and allocation of resources, coming in significantly under budget having adjusted the delivery modality to an online format due to pandemic travel restrictions. The remaining funds were spent on additional relevant activities, such as further translation of the elearning course, as well as development of an additional training module. The evaluation found that there were sufficient financial resources to achieve the intended outcomes. Regarding human resources, there was a perception that these were insufficient due to staffing gaps for a period during the middle year of implementation.

6. Concerning sustainability, the evaluation found that it was likely that the benefits of the project would continue after completion, notably due to the recent establishment of the Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards which is a permanent subgroup of

WP.6. It is likely that stakeholders' engagement would continue for the same reason. There was moderate to high ownership of the outcomes of the work by partners and beneficiaries.

7. A number of lessons stand out from stakeholder feedback and the review of documentation on implementation of the project. These provide useful inputs into the design and implementation of the next phase of UNECE work on gender responsive standards and standards for the SDGs. The evaluation noted lessons around (i) project planning and management, (ii) positive unintended consequences, (iii) European Union and Council of Europe accession as entry points to encourage UNECE member States to build consensus for gender-responsive standards, (iv) application of a rights-based approach, (v) building an evidence base for national policy making around standards for the SDGs – leaving no one behind and the value of a human rights based approach to data disaggregation, (vi) the need for continued capacity building and awareness raising about gender-responsive standards and Gender Action Plans, and (vii) increased translation has led to increased engagement and accessibility of gender responsive standards beyond the UNECE region.

III. Recommendations of the evaluation

A. Recommendation 1

8. Plan effectively for implementation of future projects, including through spreading out the work appropriately across the full length of project lifetime, utilising annual work plans, adequately planning for effective use of human resources, both in terms of staff and contractors and the associated internal UN processes, and monitoring budget use at regular intervals.

B. Recommendation 2

9. Any future project should ensure equal integration of cross-cutting issues into its outputs and activities, by establishing respective mechanisms and tools derived from relevant UN mainstreaming strategies (gender, human rights, disability) which should include the strengthening of partnerships with relevant UN agencies, national partners, and think-tanks with subject-matter expertise.¹

a) Consider explicitly applying a disability inclusion approach in the design and implementation of the next phase of the Standards for the SDGs project, expanding the portal to map standards relevant for disability inclusion and prevention of accidents, injuries and illness, and embed disability indicators and targets in project and activity results frameworks. Gender should also be mainstreamed in these areas.

b) Apply a rights-based approach in the design, implementation and results of the activities for the next phase of the project, including by making explicit reference to relevant international human rights law standards, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Consider developing future projects on gender standards jointly with UN Women to leverage its comparative advantage and technical expertise in gender equality and gender mainstreaming. Increase participation of women including by seeking to engage with national gender equality machineries, women led MSMEs, and women's civil society organisations, and integrating use of gender advocates and experts. Consider embedding the appropriate gender equality, human rights, disability inclusion, and other LNOB indicators and targets for inclusion in project and activity results framework as relevant. Links should be made where possible and appropriate to relevant SDG indicators and targets.

c) Leave No One Behind: future projects should provide guidance for standards development bodies to employ a human rights-based approach to data disaggregation, i.e., one that calls for disaggregation in accordance with grounds of discrimination prohibited by international human rights law – including gender, age, geographic

¹ Office of Internal Oversight Services (2022), Draft: Evaluation of UNECE Sub-programmes 4 and 6.

location, income, and other characteristics relevant in the national context. Standards development bodies could be guided by OHCHR (2012), Human Rights Indicators: A Guide to Measurement and Implementation. Use this for evidence-based policy making relevant for inclusive standards development, including standards for the SDGs and gender-responsive standards.

C. Recommendation 3

10. Consider European Union and Council of Europe accession as entry points to encourage UNECE member States to build consensus and buy-in to integrate gender responsive standards.

D. Recommendation 4

11. Any follow up project should include a focus on capacity building and awareness raising relevant for Gender Action Plans and gender responsive standards, which may include the following:

- a) Assistance to specific beneficiary country signatories of the Declaration to draft and implement gender action plans for gender-responsive standards and gender inclusive standards development. This would include building consensus and buy-in.
- b) Support relevant institutions to engage more people with the topic of gender-responsive standards and to design and implement effective Gender Action Plans, including through raising internal awareness and building capacity. For example, by running campaigns with high visibility, making the topic a regular item in newsletters and on social media, building an online repository with useful resources and learning tools, including examples of Gender Action Plans of standard setting bodies.
- c) In line with the recommendation of Working Party 6: (i) encourage member States to engage in dialogue with standards bodies in their jurisdiction to become signatories of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Declaration for Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development; (ii) Encourage member States to consider financing for follow-up work particularly capacity-building for gender action plans; and (iii) Continue awareness-raising efforts.

E. Recommendation 5

12. Consider increasing translation of project materials and capacity building activities into multiple UN languages, e.g., Russian, Arabic, Spanish to increase engagement and accessibility throughout the UNECE region and beyond.

IV. Recommendations of the evaluation

A. Recommendation 1

13. On recommendation 1, the secretariat responded:

- The secretariat will make best efforts to ensure that future extra-budgetary (XB) projects are sufficiently staffed and that the monitoring of activities and budget use are spread out across the full length of project lifetime. The secretariat will continue its efforts for raising further XB funds including project-funded staff.
- However, the secretariat further notes that personnel constraints are not always fully under its control. Insofar as possible, all responsibilities of a vacant position are covered by staff within the division.

14. The progress reported on recommendation 1 as of September 2023 includes:

- XB projects within the division are currently sufficiently staffed.

B. Recommendation 2

15. On recommendation 2, the secretariat responded:
- The secretariat recognizes the importance of these cross-cutting issues and their integration into all aspects of its work. It further notes that several of these issues were addressed by the current project, albeit not explicitly cited. These issues shall be fully integrated into the conception of future projects within Working Party 6 (WP.6) and used as performance indicators.
16. The progress reported on recommendation 2 as of September 2023 includes:
- WP.6 Secretary has successfully completed the United Nations System Staff College five-week course on “Improving People’s Lives Through UN Country Programming: Integrating the UNSDCG Guiding Principles Human Rights Based Approach, Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, and Leave No One Behind.”
 - These principles will be integrated into future projects within WP.6.

C. Recommendation 3

17. On recommendation 3, the secretariat partially accepted the recommendation and responded:
- The secretariat acknowledges the importance of regional economic and political bodies as a vector to promote its work. Efforts are currently made to engage these bodies which may not have been apparent in the deliverables of the current XB project. The regional standards development bodies are one of the key actors in this domain, especially in the European Union context and the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) & the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (CENELEC) is not only a signatory to the Declaration on Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development but has been an active participant in the formulation of the guidance provided under this initiative.
 - The secretariat would emphasize that the UNECE has 34 member States covering countries not only in Europe, but also countries in North America (Canada and United States of America), Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and Western Asia (Israel). The recommendations and guidance that it produces are applicable globally and experts from all United Nations Member States are welcome to join in developing these deliverables. Efforts have already been made to engage relevant regional bodies.
 - The secretariat would further underline that it brings particular efforts to its 17 programme countries within its own region. The translation into Russian of all relevant material is a major part of this effort, in order to ensure that it is accessible to the largest possible audience in this region. The workshop with Russian translation in April 2022 was particularly successful in reaching a large audience in these programme countries.
 - Moving forward, the secretariat will continue to engage the pertinent regional bodies, the major international bodies and continue to bring particular focus to the 17 programme countries in the UNECE region, subject to the availability of XB funds.
18. The progress reported on recommendation 3 as of September 2023 includes:
- WP.6 continues to engage with regional bodies in order to encourage the uptake of gender-responsive standards. During the first annual meeting of the Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards, several regional bodies were used to leverage buy-in on the topic and report on progress in their respective bodies: CEN/CENELEC, the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC), the Pan American Standards Commission (COPANT) as well as specific

countries. The World Trade Organization also made a presentation supporting the work of gender-responsive standards and linking this into more global initiatives on gender and trade. Furthermore, Kazakhstan has become the 82nd signatory of the Declaration on Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development. Moving forward, WP.6 will continue to engage with these regional bodies and seek further buy-in of gender-responsive standards in its programme countries.

D. Recommendation 4

19. On recommendation 4, the secretariat responded:

- The need for capacity building and further awareness raising efforts is a clear takeaway of this project. The experts in the Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards (GRS) and the initiative that preceded it have put together a guidance document to assist with this, which accompanies the guidance material developed under this project. The GRS is continuing to develop further guidance, however specific actions will be required in countries to provide capacity building. With this perspective, the secretariat has developed a follow-up project proposal and has approached UN-WOMEN to work together on the topic, with a specific focus on programme countries within the UNECE region. The proposal has been ready since April 2022 and the secretariat has been approaching potential donors. In the meantime, the secretariat is supporting the experts in the GRS to further the development of guidance while waiting for XB funds.

20. The progress reported on recommendation 4 as of September 2023 includes:

- Several donors have been approached. Pending responses on donor contributions.

E. Recommendation 5

21. On recommendation 5, the secretariat responded:

- The secretariat recognizes the importance of making material available in multiple languages in order to raise awareness on the topic and assist experts to access the material. As part of the project, certain materials were translated to the six official languages of the United Nations and this has been well received.
- The secretariat will ensure that such translations are an integral part of future XB projects and plan to deliver accordingly, subject to the availability of XB funds.

22. The progress reported on recommendation 5 as of September 2023 includes:

- Translations have been integrated into the project proposals, which are currently seeking XB funds.
