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External Evaluation of NEASPEC

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Note by the Secretariat

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. This document is presented to the SOM-22 for discussion and endorsement. The following plan of NEASPEC evaluation has been prepared by the Secretariat in consultation with the ESCAP Strategy and Programme Management Division (SPMD).
2. Having operated for over 25 years, ESCAP suggests NEASPEC member States to systemically evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of NEASPEC in fulfilling its mandate by reviewing programmatic achievements, strengths and challenges in the current institutional and organizational setup of NEASPEC, partnership arrangements, and resource mobilization efforts, and formulating concrete and actionable recommendations for improvement. This forward-looking evaluation is expected to support organizational learning and decision-making and to serve as a key reference for the preparation for the NEASPEC Strategic 2021-2025.
3. The evaluation will be undertaken during the first quarter of 2019 in a rigorous and independent manner in line with the norms and standards for evaluation set by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). The evaluation will also involve consultations with national focal points and partners in each thematic area to ensure that the needs and expectations of NEASPEC member countries are addressed.

II. EVALUATION OF NEASPEC

Background

4. The North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC), established in 1993 as a follow up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, has been a comprehensive programme that facilitates environmental cooperation among the North-East Asian countries.
5. The Framework for NEASPEC adopted at the third Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-3) in 1996 sets out the principal objective of the Programme as “to promote subregional environmental cooperation and sustainable development efforts for enhancement of quality of life and well-being of present and future generations in line with the spirit of United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCED)”. Furthermore, the Vision Statement for NEASPEC adopted at SOM-6 in 2000 calls on member States to “promote common policy dialogue on approaches and views and coordinated actions on subregional environmental issues”.
6. Since the inception, ESCAP has served as the secretariat of NEASPEC. The inauguration of the ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office (ESCAP-ENE) in May 2010 brought about the

change of the secretariat arrangement from interim to permanent nature by the endorsement of the 67th Commission Session in May 2011.

7. Further to the new arrangement, the 16th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-16) of NEASPEC in September 2011 discussed the need to clearly define rules of procedure for the operation of NEASPEC. In this regard, member States requested the secretariat to conduct a study of similar subregional programmes and entities with a view to learning and benefiting from their experience. In line with this request, the ESCAP-ENEA as the Secretariat of NEASPEC has commissioned an international consultant to undertake a review study of functions and institutional arrangements of subregional mechanisms for environmental cooperation in Asia and the Pacific, including the multilateral mechanisms, frameworks and programmes operation in North-East Asia.

8. The Study “North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities” reviewed the existing subregional environmental cooperation mechanisms in Asia and the Pacific and several recommendations were made by the expert in the study. Among the recommendations, the SOM-17 took note of the need of developing a long-term (five-year or ten year) strategy as a way to support member States to share a long-term view on the direction of NEASPEC and to enhance the efficiency of NEASPEC.

9. As a result, NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2016-2020 was presented and adopted during the SOM-20. The Plan provides long-term directions and approaches of NEASPEC to effectively and efficiently address the priority areas of the subregion. The Plan also keeps in mind the need to integrate economic, social and environmental aspects and to recognize their interlinkages, as emphasized in the outcome document of the UNCSD in 2012 (Rio+20) and supports the achievement of environment-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

10. Over its 25-year history, NEASPEC has adopted a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approach to address transboundary environmental issues in North-East Asia, and with multi-stakeholder partnerships in its programme development. It is considered necessary to have external evaluation in connection with the preparation of the NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

11. NEASPEC will benefit from an evaluation by providing information on its key achievements and challenges and on how it can further improve to support its member countries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and subregional priorities of environmental cooperation. The evaluation will be undertaken in a rigorous and independent manner in line with the norms and standards for evaluation set by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). Evaluation in the UN context entails a systematic, impartial assessment, of an activity, programme, strategy, policy, theme or institutional performance. Evaluation provides an evidence base for programmatic

strengthening and enables the timely incorporation of findings, recommendations and lessons into the decision-making processes of organizations. In recent years, evaluation has received increased attention in the UN system for supporting efforts to continuously improve the organization. In late 2014, the United Nations General Assembly adopted its first ever resolution on evaluation and referred to the designation of 2015 as the Year of Evaluation.

Purpose and objective

12. The proposed evaluation would be forward-looking and designed to support organizational learning and decision-making. The aim would contribute to the deliberations at the NEASPEC Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) on ways to further strengthen the Programme in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Agenda.

13. The overall objective is to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance and effectiveness of NEASPEC in fulfilling its mandate. In this context, it would highlight programmatic achievements; identify strengths and challenges in the current institutional and organizational setup of NEASPEC; emphasize significant partnership arrangements and resource mobilization efforts; and formulate concrete and actionable recommendations for improvement.

Methodology

14. The evaluation is proposed to commence during the first quarter of 2019 and take three months to complete. Detailed evaluation on the terms of reference (TOR) will be developed in consultation with the ESCAP SPMD and NEASPEC member countries. Follow-up consultations with partners in each thematic area and national focal points will be undertaken to ensure that the needs and expectations of NEASPEC member countries are addressed.

15. On the basis of the detailed TOR, an evaluation consultant will be recruited to undertake the evaluation in a rigorous and participatory manner. Experience in the areas of institutional assessment, results-based management, programme design and working with various partners, particularly in the NEASPEC member countries context, are important considerations.

16. The evaluation methodology will cover but not be limited to the following actions:

- A desk review of relevant strategic and meeting documents;
- Interviews with member States' representatives, key programme partners in NEASPEC member countries, and relevant staff from the NEASPEC Secretariat Office;
- An on-line survey to gather feedback from a wide range of stakeholders;

- Visit to selected member countries to engage with NEASPEC national focal points and other relevant government representatives as well as programme partners, including other UN entities.

17. The following outputs will be delivered to the ESCAP SPMD through the NEASPEC Secretariat:

- Inception report, including an evaluation work plan and framework detailing the methodology and approach for the evaluation;
- On-line survey
- First draft and final evaluation reports
- Presentation (ppt) on the findings, conclusions and recommendations
- Facilitation at the NEASPEC Secretariat on how to operationalize the evaluation recommendations

18. In analyzing the data and information, the evaluation will use qualitative and quantitative approaches, provide charts and direction quotations and highlight good practices examples.

Proposed management structure for the evaluation

19. ESCAP's East and North-East Asia Office as the NEASPEC Secretariat would assist in implementing the evaluation and facilitate the work of the consultant by providing access to relevant documents and information, arranging interviews and consultations with relevant stakeholders and informants, reviewing the draft report and ensuring that the evaluation results is shared with the NEASPEC governing body for consideration. The Evaluation Unit, Strategy and Programme Management Division of ESCAP would provide technical and quality assurance support and ensure that the evaluation is credible, independent and impartial as required under the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards for evaluation.

20. On the basis of the evaluation findings and recommendations, NEASPEC Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) can consider options and agree on concrete actions to improve effectiveness of the work of NEASPEC in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Tentative timeline is proposed as below.

Table 1. Tentative timeline and budget plan for the proposed evaluation

Time	Activity	Budget
February 2019	Develop the detailed TOR for consultancy contract and identify national stakeholders for survey	
March 2019	Recruit an evaluation consultant	USD 20,000 for a three-month contract
April – June 2019	The consultant is assigned to take the following tasks (1) Inception report (2) Interviews with national focal points and stakeholders (3) On-line survey (4) Draft and final report	
July-September 2019	Review and overall evaluation with ESCAP SPMD	
October 2019	Results submitted to the SOM-23	

III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

21. The Meeting may wish to review and adopt the presented External Evaluation Plan and request member Governments to support the participation of national focal point and national stakeholders in the consultation to be conducted in 2019.