UNECE
United Nations Economic
Commission for Europe

ESCAP
United Nations Economic and Social
Commission for Asia and the Pacific

UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL PROGRAMME FOR THE ECONOMIES OF CENTRAL ASIA (SPECA)

Fourth Session of the SPECA Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development

(Chair country: Uzbekistan, 19 October 2023)

WORK PLAN OF THE SPECA WG ON ITSD FOR OCTOBER 2023-DECEMBER 2025

The activities to be carried out by the Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development (WG on ITSD) are demand-driven, focused on a limited number of priority topics and matched with available resources.

ACTIVITIES ENVISAGED FOR OCTOBER 2023-DECEMBER 2025

1. **Capacity-building on policy options and practical instruments to promote innovation and technology for sustainable development**

Objectives:

To strengthen the national capacity of the SPECA countries to advance knowledge-based development by developing relevant substantive skills, increasing the organizational capacity of the institutions involved, promoting regional cooperation and fostering investment in modern infrastructure.

Rationale:

The project is in line with the objectives of the WG on ITSD as specified in its Terms of Reference. Implementation is subject to the availability of UNECE extrabudgetary funds.

Proposed activities:

(i) Organization of a regional/subregional capacity-building event on innovation and technology for sustainable development, possibly in conjunction with an annual session of the WG on ITSD;

(ii) Participation of experts from SPECA countries in UNECE policy-oriented meetings and capacity-building events on promoting knowledge-based development for policymakers and practitioners; and

(iii) Policy advisory services and other events promoting innovation and technology for sustainable development at the request of Governments of SPECA countries on priority topics, e.g. business incubators, accelerators and innovative high-growth enterprises.

2.   Implementation of UNECE Innovation for Sustainable Development Reviews of selected countries

Objectives:

To increase the role of innovation in promoting further economic development of the SPECA countries.

Rationale:

The project is in line with the objectives of the WG on ITSD as specified in its Terms of Reference. Implementation is subject to the availability of UNECE extrabudgetary funds.

Proposed activities:

Undertaking Innovation for Sustainable Development Reviews and capacity building support to implementation of policy recommendations in selected countries of the SPECA region (envisaged for 2022-2024).

3.   Support to SPECA countries to foster innovation to deliver the SDGs

Objectives:

Policy advisory support to SPECA countries to stimulate the private and public sector innovation required to deliver the SDGs.

Rationale:

The project is in line with the objectives of the WG on ITSD as specified in its Terms of Reference. Implementation is subject to the availability of UNECE extrabudgetary funds.

Proposed activities:

(i)   Capacity building activities upon request from SPECA countries, for example on integrating innovation policies into national strategies for sustainable development and supporting participation of SPECA countries in wider UN initiatives in support of Agenda 2030; and

(ii)   Implementation of the Action Plan of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development, identifying innovative joint initiatives between SPECA countries with potential to support delivery of Agenda 2030 within the sub-region and including support to innovation policy benchmarking among the SPECA countries.

4.   Promote regional connectivity and transformation of SPECA region in the framework of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Action Plan 2022-2026

Objectives:

To promote regional and subregional digital connectivity and transformation by assisting SPECA countries in carrying out the Action Plan for Implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Initiative, 2022–2026

Rationale:

The activities are in line with the objectives of the WG on ITSD as specified in its Terms of Reference. Implementation is subject to the availability of ESCAP extrabudgetary funds.

Proposed activities:

(i) Engagement of stakeholders (policymakers of governments, business sector and academia) of SPECA countries in implementing the Action Plan 2022-2026 of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway platform (APIS);

(ii) To foster digital cooperation among SPECA countries and beyond in order to bridge the digital divide, ensure the provision of digital skills training, strengthen digital connectivity, address and enhance digital trust and security, share good policies, practices and lessons learned, and promote inclusive digital economies and societies;

(iii) To mobilize the efforts of SPECA countries to collaborate in the digital transformation process, including under the framework of the Action Plan for Implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Initiative, 2022–2026;

5.   Capacity development on the utilization of digital technology and geospatial information

Objectives:

Strengthen the knowledge and capacity of SPECA countries in promoting digital connectivity and transformation towards an inclusive digital society.

Rationale:

The project contributes to the objectives of the WG on ITSD as specified in the Terms of Reference, in particular to the objective of informed disaster risk reduction and management. Implementation will be financed from the ESCAP extrabudgetary funds.

Proposed activities:

(i) Provide technical assistance, policy analysis and capacity development and promote knowledge-sharing among SPECA countries and beyond on digital connectivity and transformation through the Asia Pacific Information Superhighway Initiative;

(ii) Engage SPECA countries in capacity-building workshops and events of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway including the preparation process of the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Digital Inclusion and Transformation to be held in Kazakhstan around October 2024, and the Asia Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee in 2023-2025.

(iii) Provide continued support in promoting innovative technology applications including ICT and geospatial information for SDGs.

(iv) Explore opportunities to support capacity-building in geospatial information applications for disaster risk reduction (SAS).

(v) Engage SPECA countries in capacity-building workshops and events of APCICT's Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders Programme and Women ICT Frontier Initiatives in 2023-2025.

(vi) Facilitate the work of the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries (ITTLLDC, Ulaanbaatar) in mobilizing data collection and engaging partnership for delivery of the prototypes of connectivity tools of ESCAP on co-deployment of ICT with energy and transport infrastructure.

(iv) Support SPECA countries, upon request, to enhance capacity on forest fire monitoring through applications of geospatial information.

6. Strengthen institutional capacity on integrating geospatial and statistical data, with a focus on drought monitoring and land accounts in Central Asia

Objectives:

Enhance the institutional capacity of Central Asian countries to integrate geospatial and statistical information.

Rationale:

The project is in line with the objectives of the WG on ITSD to support drought management and land-related SDG challenges including disaster risk reduction as specified in its Terms of Reference.

Proposed activities:

(i) Conduct assessment of country profile on drought monitoring and land accounts with a diagnostic tool and template (patterned after ESCAP's environment statistics diagnostic tool) to identify policy priorities, available information, data sources, stakeholders and institutional mechanisms necessary to develop or strengthen the land accounts.

(ii) Organize an inception regional workshop and expert group meetings to discuss preliminary estimates of assessment on drought monitoring and land accounts in Central Asia region, and assist capacity building on using the System of Environmental- Economic Accounting (SEEA) and the framework for integration of the geospatial and statistical information.

7. Capacity Development to reduce and mitigate disaster risks in endorheic (inland) water basins in Central Asia

Objectives:

Strengthen disaster risk reduction and management for the Aral Basin in Central Asia through analytics, sharing of best practices, and regional cooperation efforts.

Rationale:

Understanding the risk drivers of water-related disasters in inland water-basins including the impacts of climate change through advances in earth observation, digital elevation modeling,

geospatial techniques and high-resolution climate modeling can support development of regional cooperation processes that could significantly address the Aral Sea catastrophe from multi-sectoral risk management perspectives.

Proposed activities:

(i) Prepare a literature review, risk modeling, assessing the latest scientific evidence on the Aral Sea Crisis using a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach.

(ii) Prepare an integrated risk assessment of the Basin using the latest advances in hydrological modelling, digital elevation modelling and socio-economic modelling to demonstrate the impact of the Aral Sea Crisis on economies and populations.

(iii) Organize a capacity development workshop on preventing and mitigating natural disaster of endorheic (inland) water basins and prepare an outcome report to submit to the ESCAP Commission at its seventy-eight session.

SUMMARY TABLE

Area of Activity	Lead Executive Agency	Timeframe
Ongoing and planned projects/activities with funding secured or expected. These activities would be implemented in mutually reinforcing way. Additional support from interested partners would expand the scope and the number of beneficiaries of these projects/activities.		
Capacity-building on policy options and practical instruments to promote knowledge-based development	UNECE	October 2023-December 2025
Implementation of the UNECE project on Innovation for Sustainable Development Reviews of selected countries	UNECE	October 2023-December 2025
Support to SPECA countries to foster innovation to deliver the SDGs	UNECE	October 2023-December 2025
Promote regional connectivity and transformation of SPECA region in the framework of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Action Plan 2022-2026	ESCAP	October 2023-December 2025
Capacity development on the utilization of digital technology and geospatial information	ESCAP	October 2023-December 2025
Strengthen institutional capacity on integrating geospatial and statistical data, with a focus on drought monitoring and land accounts in Central Asia	ESCAP	October 2023-December 2025
Capacity Development to reduce and mitigate disaster risks in endorheic (inland) water basins in Central Asia	ESCAP	October 2023-December 2025