Trade and Development Board
Sixty-seventh session
Geneva, 2–3 July, 7–9 September and 28 September–2 October 2020
Item 17 (a) of the agenda

Report of the Chair of the Advisory Body
for the year 2019–2020, established in the context of
paragraph 166 of the UNCTAD X Plan of Action
Introduction

1. In line with paragraph 166 of the Bangkok Plan of Action, the Trade and Development Board at its forty-seventh session in 2000 adopted a decision to establish an advisory body to make recommendations to the Secretary-General of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on the broad objectives, content and structure of capacity-building courses. Since then, the mandate was renewed by the São Paulo Consensus, the Accra Accord and the Doha Declaration and reaffirmed at the fourteenth session of the Conference, held in Nairobi in 2016. The Division on Technology and Logistics coordinates, leads and implements these courses within UNCTAD, across geographical regions, with relevant regional economic commissions and permanent missions of member States based in Geneva.

2. The Advisory Body for the year 2019–2020, which was formed at the last session of the Board, met once in January 2020. I will today report on (a) the outcome of the meeting; (b) the implementation of the courses held in 2019, including regional courses, an interregional pilot course and short courses for Geneva-based delegates; (c) end-of-course evaluations for regional courses held for Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia and the Pacific; and (d) calls for proposals to host regional courses.

I. Outcome of the Advisory Body meetings in January 2020

3. At its meeting, the Advisory Body reviewed the activities of the UNCTAD flagship programme, content of the curricula and evaluations of regional courses, in addition to the proposals submitted to hosting the regional courses for the economies of Eastern European (2020–2024). The members of the Advisory Body took note of the multi-year venues in the five developing regions, reviewed the criteria required for hosting and expressed their satisfaction with all the proposals submitted. Given the discussion that ensued regarding the potential developmental benefits that could be generated for a country from organizing the course, a consensus was reached that North Macedonia will host the course under a multi-venue agreement. Therefore, the Advisory Body established the Faculty of Economics of the Saints Cyril and Methodius University of North Macedonia as the multi-year venue for the next three UNCTAD regional courses for Eastern Europe and economies in transition (2020, 2022 and 2024). As the Chair of the Advisory Body, I then requested the secretariat to deliver the decision to the parties involved, as per the standard practice.

4. At the Advisory Body meeting, I also took note of the extensive support the programme receives from member States. The achievements the programme made in 2019 include an increase in gender balance and solidification of its alumni network by bringing together alumni participants from five developing regions in an interregional pilot course for graduates to share cross-regional perspectives. The interregional pilot course was an outcome of a previous request made by the Advisory Body, which stressed the importance of bringing alumni together. The event was held in parallel to last year’s session of the Trade and Development Board.

5. The Advisory Body also took note that three regional courses were held in 2019 in Kenya, Colombia and Singapore for participants from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia and the Pacific, respectively. The Advisory Body thanks the Governments of Kenya, Colombia and Singapore for their commitment and substantial support to this flagship programme.

II. Courses in 2019

A. Regional

6. As mentioned, in 2019, the UNCTAD secretariat delivered regional courses in the following three regions: Africa (March–April 2019), Latin America and the Caribbean (July–August 2019) and Asia and the Pacific (November–December 2019).
7. In Nairobi, 27 participants hailed from 21 countries, representing Algeria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, the Comoros, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, the Niger, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

8. For Latin America and the Caribbean, 26 participants came from 12 countries, representing Argentina, the Bahamas, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

9. Finally, for Asia and the Pacific, 24 participants from 15 countries took part in regional courses, representing Afghanistan, Bhutan, Brunei, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Viet Nam.

10. As I will highlight, evaluations of the courses demonstrated broad success both in terms of organization and the relevance of the curriculum.

B. Interregional platform pilot

11. The interregional pilot platform was held for the first time in June 2019, in an event that ran in parallel to the annual session of the Trade and Development Board. The initial requests for this platform were made by the Advisory Body and at a Trade and Development Board session by member States. The pilot brought together 20 alumni participants, from five developing regions, who had previously completed UNCTAD paragraph 166 courses. They shared cross-regional perspectives and discussed the impact generated as an outcome of attending the course, in addition to receiving up-to-date training. The 20 alumni participants represented Albania, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, Estonia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Mauritius, Oman, Pakistan, Peru, Serbia, Viet Nam, Zimbabwe and the State of Palestine.

C. Short courses for Geneva-based delegates

12. I shall now report on the short courses for Geneva-based delegates. The secretariat delivered six short courses, which continued to update Geneva-based delegates on recent UNCTAD research on development, economic and trade matters. In cooperation with several UNCTAD divisions, six short editions were offered in the second and third quarters of 2019 on the following themes:

(a) Trade, trade policy and inequality (19 March 2019);

(b) Better trade for the Sustainable Development Goals: Using trade as a motor for achieving the Goals (12 April 2019);

(c) Commodity dependence and development (30 April 2019);

(d) Entrepreneurship and the Sustainable Development Goals (18 October 2019);

(e) The digital economy and the challenge of structural transformation in developing countries (8 November 2019);

(f) Creative economy for development (6 December 2019).

13. These short courses were well attended, and this indicates that they are informative and raise awareness on development and trade topics useful for the delegates’ professional duties. Participants also noted that the choice of topics was relevant.

14. The evaluations of and feedback on the programme highlight the impact of the UNCTAD courses on policymakers in the five regions. Let me further elaborate.

III. Evaluation of the regional courses delivered in 2019

15. Let me now turn to the result of the evaluations of the courses. Mid-level government officials involved in policymaking who attended the three regional courses, held in Nairobi,
Medellín (Colombia) and Singapore in 2019, praised the curricula, structure of the course and focus on national economic policies coordination and the link to development, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

16. The alumni participants reported a better understanding of how economic integration is key to economic growth and trade-related development policies that are country-specific, while considering the role of finance and technology. Participants particularly stressed their appreciation, among other issues, of the approach of case study analysis, which helped build their capacities to formulate economic policies. They also appreciated the course’s emphasis on the importance of policy pace in designing policies that are conducive to development. Overall, the paragraph 166 course provides a better understanding of development and trade-related matters.

17. The evaluations by the alumni of this programme illustrated their increased integration into decision-making processes. As the programme is embedded in a knowledge-based capacity-building framework, it focuses heavily on sharing and disseminating information with colleagues in relevant departments. The content of the regional courses was relevant to the professional duties of participants, who indicated that they apply the lessons learned during the course in their work. Alumni participants indicated that they shared the knowledge they gained from the course with their colleagues, leading to a multiplier effect, which is one of the main pillars of the programme. Many of the supervisors who provided feedback also confirmed that the participants shared the knowledge gained with colleagues in their departments and related departments. Supervisors also indicated they would recommend UNCTAD paragraph 166 courses to other colleagues.

18. With regard to their institutions, participants reported increased integration into their organization’s structure and political strategy. Attending the course increased their involvement in the formulation of trade policies at their respective departments, in addition to providing advisory services, in the areas of development, trade, investment and financial matters.

19. Policymakers also referred to the adequate environment provided for these courses, generating solid debates and discussion sessions, the importance of learning from other countries’ experiences and good practices in economic policy development. I commend UNCTAD, the regional economic commissions and national counterpart institutions for the high quality of the experts they provided to guide participants during the courses.

20. The Advisory Body took note that such positive feedback is the result of carefully designed curricula and meticulous delivery, which led to the positive impact on the knowledge and skills of policymakers. Its holistic approach addresses the challenges faced by developing economies in achieving development in general and in relation to trade, investment, finance and technology objectives in particular.

21. In this regard, I wish to applaud the efforts of the secretariat towards ensuring that the courses continue to be delivered with a high level of quality, both in terms of substance and expertise. I call upon all members of the Trade and Development Board to continue supporting these efforts. I also call upon them to provide the necessary support to the secretariat in undertaking this important capacity-building programme to continue meeting the demands of mid-level government officials and policymakers in the areas of trade, finance, investment, technology and development.

IV. Calls for proposals to host regional courses

22. Additionally, and during my tenure as Chair of the Advisory Body, UNCTAD made two calls for proposals to host the upcoming round of courses for Latin American and the Caribbean and Asia and the Pacific. The former was made in February 2020 and the latter in May 2020. My successor will chair the meetings for the deliberations on the future venues for these two regions.
V. Conclusion

23. On a final note, I wish to thank the members of the Advisory Body, namely Azerbaijan, Belgium, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kenya, Oman, Pakistan and Uganda, as their feedback and observations made during the Advisory Body were constructive and contributed to the deliberations of the Body, providing the necessary guidance and support to the Secretary-General of UNCTAD in the implementation of this important flagship capacity-building programme and setting out the way forward.

24. Finally, I congratulate His Excellency, Mr. Federico Vallegas Beltrán, Ambassador of Argentina, on his appointment as the new Chair of the Advisory Body and wish him a fruitful and successful term. I wish for His Excellency to note this significant programme of building the capacity of future policymakers across developing regions and to extend all the support needed for the implementation of this important mandate.