Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address you this morning – at this 80th session of the Working Party – dedicated to Technical Cooperation and Evaluation. It is our last formal session on Technical Cooperation and Evaluation before UNCTAD 15. As such, it presents a unique opportunity to review activities and lessons in these areas, and exchange views on the way forward.

Therefore, for Item 3 - Technical cooperation strategy, we have prepared a two-page note which should serve as a basis for discussion and brainstorming. We will, of course, have to consider the impact of COVID-19 on the future of technical cooperation delivery. In terms of timelines, our aim is to finalize the strategy immediately after UNCTAD 15, so as not to pre-empt any of its outcomes.

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Now, let us move to Item 4 and the highlights of Technical Cooperation activities and their financing. Technical cooperation is a third of UNCTAD’s work, and essential for us to fully deliver on our mandate. Our technical cooperation work, as you know, is highly valued and relevant to the needs and demands of beneficiary countries.

Over the last year – policy advice, training and other forms of technical cooperation from UNCTAD – have supported developing countries in advancing the 2030 Agenda (especially SDGs 8, 9, 15 and 17); and in recovering better from the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.

Total technical cooperation expenditures remained high in 2019, at $43.3 million – only a slight reduction from $44 million in 2018.

For the first time, more than half (52%) of technical cooperation was delivered in Least developed countries (LDCs), our priority target countries. In 2019, technical cooperation expenditures in support of LDCs rose to a record high of $22.7 million, up 13% compared to 2018.

These figures reflect the commitment of UNCTAD to strengthening its technical assistance to developing countries, especially the most vulnerable group of countries, in their efforts towards implementing the 2030 Agenda.
ASYCUDA and DMFAS continued to be the leading programmes in 2019 – representing, respectively, 48% and 12% of technical cooperation expenditures. Five additional programmes accounted for expenditures of over $1 million each.

I also have positive news on trust fund resources. 2019 saw the highest level of total voluntary contributions to UNCTAD trust funds. Overall voluntary funding rebounded strongly to reach $46 million, an increase of 35% over 2018. All main funding sources contributed to this rebound.

Developed country contributions to UNCTAD trust funds increased by 24% to reach $11.8 million in 2019. Contributions from the European Union recovered to $3.6 million, its highest level in five years.

Funding from developing countries, and countries with economies in transition, rose by 35% to reach a record high of $22.8 million in 2019. 95.5% of this was self-financing for ASYCUDA and DMFAS.

We also received contributions from the UN system and other international organizations – of $7 million – 6% higher than in 2018.

I would like to take this opportunity to express sincere appreciation to all those who have provided funds for UNCTAD technical cooperation! And these trends for technical cooperation expenditures and contributions are encouraging.

However, we are also very aware of the many challenges ahead. COVID-19 has reversed some of the early progress on the SDGs and increased global poverty. In such times, UNCTAD technical cooperation has become even more relevant.

Trade is at the centre of the evolution and impact of COVID-19, but also in the solutions to the crisis. UNCTAD is well-placed to further the understanding of these issues and their implications for development. And we have to adapt fast to the new situation. In particular, to the priorities identified by different countries in their recovery plans.

Last week, at the TDB, the importance of avoiding duplication, concentrating resources and expertise, and a consolidated UN approach, was stressed. For technical cooperation, that implies that, in parallel to bilateral North/South or South/South cooperation, donors could support consolidated UN action and joint UN projects. For example, through the UNCTAD-led Inter-Agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity, MPTF, SDG fund, and so on.

The UN COVID-19 Response & Recovery Fund illustrates the magnitude of the financing needs of the UN System, including UNCTAD. This inter-agency finance mechanism, launched in April by SG Guterres, targets those most vulnerable to economic hardship and social disruption. The aim was to collect $1 billion by the end of 2020. However, as of 11 September, commitments for disbursements to the fund amounted only to $64 million.
Sustainable and timely funding to meet demand for technical cooperation is critical. Therefore, I call on member States and development partners, who are in a position to do so, to provide support; especially through less earmarked, multi-year contributions. This will allow us to better plan our work and prioritise technical cooperation activities that support the recovery efforts of developing countries.

In terms of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of UNCTAD technical cooperation, I would like to highlight three things which we have been, and will continue, prioritizing.

First, in order to better bring our expertise to UN Country Teams in the field, UNCTAD has from the very beginning actively participated in the UN Development System reform process.

• For example, we are supporting our project officers to engage more effectively with Resident Coordinators and contribute, at country level, to the Common Country Analysis and Cooperation Framework.
• We also have joint initiatives with the UN Development Coordination Office, and Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity, to help Resident Coordinators tap into UNCTAD expertise. For example, for integrated policy advice.
• Moreover, I personally represent UNCTAD on the Advisory Committee for the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund; set up by SG Guterres to support low- and middle-income countries in overcoming the health and development crisis caused by COVID-19. UNCTAD colleagues have participated in the project review process and have quality assured over 25 proposals made by Resident Coordinators.

The second highlight is the revision to the UNCTAD Toolbox, which contains key information about our main technical cooperation programmes. Our technical cooperation request database was also improved and serves as an important tool to monitor official requests received by UNCTAD and mobilize funds from potential donors.

The third highlight is our continuous efforts to strengthen results-based management (RBM). As you know, our objective is for RBM principles to become fully integrated into the way we work – part of the organizational culture.

We have established the UNCTAD RBM framework, the governance structure, roles and responsibilities for RBM, guidelines, checklists, and in-house training.

We are now focusing on how to sustain the change and practically embed RBM into the day-to-day work of UNCTAD. For example, through change agents and the sharing of good practices and results.

How do we track results once we have delivered technical cooperation activities and left the country?

Together with our RBM officer, the Trade Facilitation team developed and delivered a module on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) to three National Trade Facilitation Committees.
The intention was to equip them for their own M&E responsibilities and sustain results along the results chain. Feedback from the participants was very positive and we hope to further roll out this type of initiative. The eCommerce team is also leading by example. The team now includes a dedicated M&E officer who ensures the collection and analysis of data on results.

Finally, on the much talked-about UMOJA extension for performance monitoring and reporting. As you know, we had said an IT-based solution was crucial to incentivise and enforce systematic, comprehensive reporting on results. We had put on hold plans to procure our own system as the UN Secretariat announced the roll-out of a Secretariat-wide solution.

However, given the constant delays in New York, we re-initiated our plans and now have our own IT system which is almost ready for testing.

And I look forward to updating you on this at the next Working Party.

This brings me to Item 5 on Evaluation, a key component of the results-based management cycle.

Evaluation at UNCTAD is not only an accountability tool but an important instrument for learning and decision-making. The findings, lessons and recommendations from evaluations offer rich sources of, both quantitative and qualitative, information for learning and improvement.

And when we work together to examine the evaluation results of our activities, discuss them – for example, here at the Working Party – and learn from them, we can increase the impact of our work.

In 2019, we had a record number of independent UNCTAD evaluations, largely due to the policy we introduced, in 2016, which required an independent evaluation for all projects with a budget of over $1 million.

From the 2019-2020 annual workplan – five project evaluations have been completed, and six are ongoing or scheduled to start. The five completed evaluations found our projects to be largely relevant and effective, contributing to concrete changes. For example, to the fisheries sector in Comoros and Mozambique, or freight policy changes in Kenya and Rwanda.

Some lessons include addressing sustainability concerns of training activities; and encouraging multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approaches. We are exploring how to better feed such lessons into the design and implementation of our technical cooperation.

UNCTAD also actively supported the work of the inter-agency UN Evaluation Group on the policy for system-wide evaluation, and in coordinating evaluations of UN interventions responding to the COVID-19 crisis.
Next year, we will likely be leading three evaluations of the joint COVID-19 projects supported by the Development Account. And we will participate in the management of the system-wide evaluation of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund. We will also embark on a new cycle of subprogramme evaluations, starting with Subprogramme 1.

To further strengthen the evaluation function and the use of evaluations, we intend to update our Evaluation Policy, in line with the UN Secretariat’s new policy. We are working to improve the quality of evaluation recommendations and their related follow-up. And we want to improve communication of evaluation work and findings to internal and external stakeholders for better organizational learning.

Finally, we are also looking into ways of broadening the coverage of our evaluations and/or conducting additional strategic evaluations, which will give even more valuable information on results and lessons learned.

We intend to establish a trust fund in support of UNCTAD’s evaluation function, which will pool evaluation allocations from different projects. We will also explore the possibility of including a mandatory budget line for evaluation in all extra-budgetary projects.

We look forward to reporting progress on this work to you in the future, but of course hearing your views over these next few days on the way forward.

Before I finish, I want to briefly touch upon the TORs for the Working Party. We have carefully considered the implications of the new TORs. We have several suggestions on the practicality of its application. And we would like to discuss these in more detail during the course of this Working Party.

We welcome and share the idea of having a preparatory session in early October. However, we should review the language of the document on the format of this session – in order to facilitate your and our work, rather than creating additional bureaucracy and overburdening the process.

We propose to specify that this session should be an informal exchange with oral presentations and discussions between the member States and UNCTAD on the strategic thinking and priorities for the upcoming year. An informal exchange would not require the secretariat to submit official documents ahead of this session and would provide a flexible and agile environment for all.

We also propose that the information presented to the Working Party focus on the outline of results and measures, rather than specific details. Again, this is important for flexible and agile programming. We can then have a discussion that informs our strategic thinking, rather than on individual details and parts of the document.

Finally, we propose to review the calendar in Annex I to reflect our new timeline, since we have moved to an annual budget cycle. To take on board your feedback, and submit the formal document by mid-December, the preparatory session should be completed by early October.
(rather than October-November as proposed). The timing of the sessions on Technical Cooperation and Evaluation should also be discussed.

Thank you.