



# United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Distr.: General  
25 July 2022

Original: English

## Trade and Development Board Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance

Eighty-fourth session

Geneva, 3–7 October 2022

Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda

### External evaluation of UNCTAD subprogramme 1: Globalization, interdependence and development<sup>1</sup>

#### *Summary*

The Trade and Development Board, at its seventy-first executive session, took note of the report of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance on its eighty-second session, and endorsed the agreed conclusions therein, in which the Working Party looked forward to considering the evaluation of subprogramme 1 on globalization, interdependence and development (SP1) at its eighty-fourth session.

The evaluation of SP1 assessed the overall performance of the subprogramme in the period 2018–2021 against the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, impact, efficiency and coherence. The evaluation was informed by the analysis and triangulation of data collected through document reviews, interviews and focus group discussions; a survey of member States; and the analysis of data and content. The evaluation found that despite deliverables being determined by the SP1 mandate and aligned with several of the Sustainable Development Goals, there was concern among some stakeholders about the thematic scope and approach of some key deliverables, such as the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Financing for Development and *Trade and Development Report*, which limited the contributions of SP1 to the consensus-building pillar. However, technical cooperation was unanimously assessed as highly relevant by all evaluation respondents. During the period under evaluation, all mandated publications were produced, although their outreach decreased, according to some indicators. Output delivery was monitored in line with secretariat requirements, although more quantitative indicators on the outreach of products could be monitored, to inform programme delivery. SP1 outcomes during the period had included Trade and Development Report 2019: Financing A Global Green New Deal, contributing to debates on climate finance at the time of the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Glasgow, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 31 October–13 November 2021); elaboration of a methodology to estimate illicit financial flows, to allow for data collection on indicator 16.4.1 under the Goals and fill a gap in the Goals monitoring framework; an analytical report on debt sustainability following the coronavirus

<sup>1</sup> This evaluation was prepared by an independent evaluation team: Mr. Niwa Dwitama, Permanent Mission of Indonesia; Ms. Helga Matos, Permanent Mission of Portugal; and Mr. Aitor Pérez, Chief Consultant, Economistas de la Cooperación, Spain. Supporting materials for this evaluation are presented in document TD/B/WP(84)/CRP.2.



disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which had been referenced in General Assembly and Group of 20 discussions; and support for South–South cooperation, which had influenced the design of industrial policies in India and South Africa. With regard to implementation modalities, SP1 staff reported being required to do more with fewer resources, but the evaluation could not ascertain whether prioritization and processes were in place to ensure the cost effectiveness of the limited resources. Partnerships had been successfully established with several United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations, as well as among academia, leading to joint publications and the development of methodologies and reports, among other substantive collaborations. There were requests from member States to better insert SP1 work on development finance into discussions of intergovernmental bodies based in New York and to increase consistency across UNCTAD publications, including through enhanced cross-divisional collaboration. The Debt Management and Financial Analysis System (DMFAS) programme was assessed as a relevant, effective and sustainable technical cooperation programme, while some challenges were identified in the sustainability of other technical cooperation projects.

The evaluation recommended the following: SP1 should adopt a set of indicators for tracking the use of knowledge products and reorient certain outputs to capture different sides of existing debates; under the Office of the Secretary-General, the publications committee should oversee flagship and other key publications, policy clearance staffing levels should be increased, the new communications strategy as part of the follow-up to the Bridgetown Covenant should provide guidance on the congruence of messages from different divisions and standard performance indicators for the research pillar should be established and monitored; and member States should establish a more concrete agreement on the UNCTAD publications policy and annual workplan, as well as more concrete terms of reference for the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Financing for Development.

## Introduction

1. This note presents the independent evaluation of UNCTAD subprogramme 1 on globalization, interdependence and development in the period 2018–2022, conducted in December 2021–June 2022. The full evaluation report contains detailed findings, the methodological overview and the results of evaluation activities.<sup>2</sup> In accordance with its terms of reference, the purpose of the evaluation is to help UNCTAD identify key lessons in strategic positioning, portfolio planning, management arrangements and programme implementation. The main objectives are to support accountability by analysing and synthesizing the performance of SP1 against planned objectives, including the evaluation of projects conducted during the period, and to contribute to institutional learning that can contribute to the formulation of the subsequent annual UNCTAD programme plan.

2. The note is structured as follows; the subject of evaluation is described in chapter I; an overview of the methodology is given in chapter II; evaluation findings are provided in chapter III; and conclusions and recommendations are provided in chapters IV and V.

### I. Subject of evaluation

3. SP1 aims to promote economic policies and strategies at all levels, for sustained growth, inclusive and sustainable development, full employment and decent work for all; on debt and development finance issues, including concerted efforts towards domestic, regional and international resource mobilization for development; and on poverty eradication in developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, including through North–South cooperation, which is complemented by South–South and triangular cooperation. To achieve these aims, the work of SP1 focuses on identifying needs and measures resulting from the interdependence of trade, finance, investment, technology and macroeconomic policies from the perspective of their effects on development, under the three pillars of UNCTAD (research and analysis, consensus-building, technical cooperation).

4. SP1 has the following five main areas of work:

(a) Supporting developing countries in the formulation of development strategies and practical policy options and recommendations (macroeconomic and development policies);

(b) Promoting stronger cooperation related to finance strategies, debt sustainability and debt management (debt and development finance);

(c) Undertaking research and analysis to support closer cooperation and integration among developing countries, including through technical assistance and the dissemination of good practices (economic cooperation and integration among developing countries);

(d) Providing statistics and supporting efforts to develop national statistics systems (development statistics and information);

(e) Providing support to the Palestinian people in policymaking and institutional capacity-building, in addition to strengthening international cooperation to alleviate adverse social and economic conditions resulting from occupation (assistance to the Palestinian people).

5. The UNCTAD Division on Globalization and Development Strategies (DGDS) implements SP1. It comprises four main branches, corresponding to the four thematic areas of work with a global scope, and one unit in charge of the support provided to the Palestinian people. These entities are overseen by the Office of the Director, which also oversees the Training and Outreach Unit that supports the director in the dissemination of SP1 products and ideas.

<sup>2</sup> TD/B/WP(84)/CRP.2.

## II. Methodology

6. The evaluation assessed the overall performance of SP1 against the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, impact, efficiency and coherence, through the collection of primary data and analysis of available secondary data, structured into three overarching dimensions and 13 evaluation questions, as follows:

(a) Strategic relevance and conceptual clarity dimension: Questions on internal consistency, relevance, mandate, alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals and incorporation of human rights and gender considerations;

(b) Contribution to results dimension: Questions on achievements, impact and enabling and limiting factors;

(c) Implementation modalities dimension: Questions on management, monitoring, coherence with other UNCTAD subprogrammes, partnerships with United Nations entities and sustainability.

7. The evaluation included 12 tasks grouped into four overlapping phases. The first phase consisted of an internal monitoring review, interviews with DGDS chiefs and an analysis of UNCTAD data sets. The second phase included two case studies, on *Trade and Development Report 2019* and its contribution to international consensus on climate finance; and the report of the Secretary-General on external debt sustainability and development, and its influence on Member State discourse and the related General Assembly resolution.<sup>3</sup> The third phase involved stakeholder consultations and included a survey of member States (195 States contacted, 31 full valid responses received) and member State focus groups and semi-structured interviews with UNCTAD and United Nations staff (31 participants of focus groups and interviews). The fourth phase involved desk research and included a general document review, a review of project evaluations, a citation analysis and a computerized content analysis of key SP1 publications.

## III. Findings

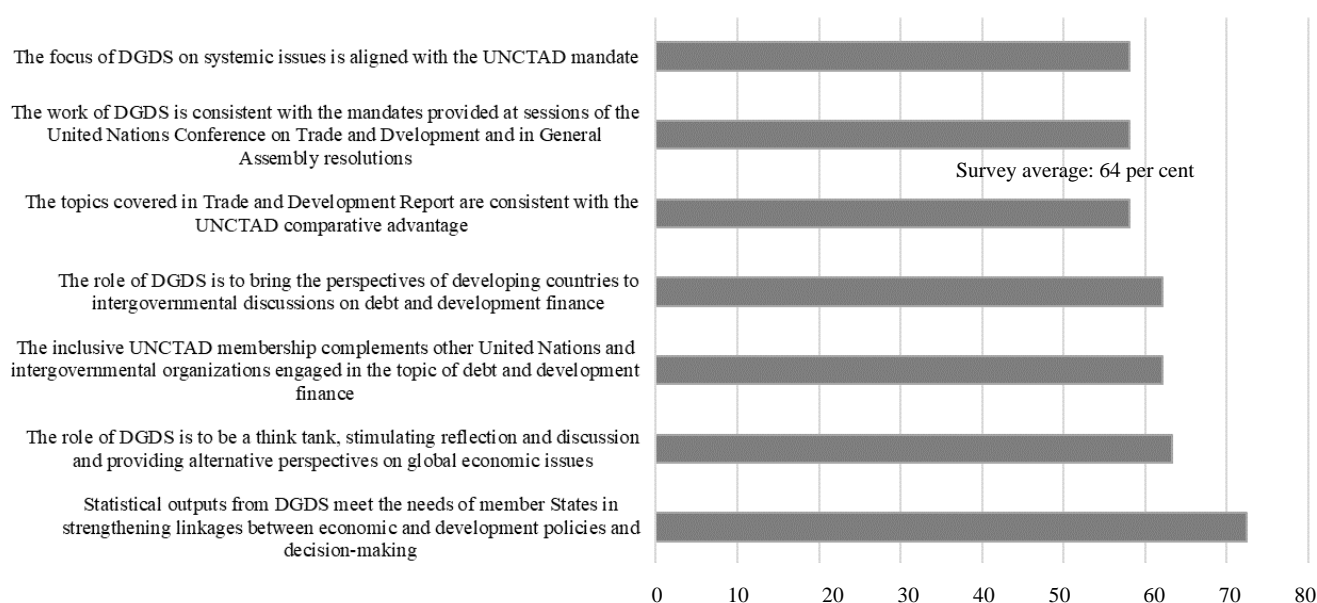
### A. Subprogramme 1 deliverables determined by mandate, but unease among some stakeholders about thematic scope and approach and role played under consensus-building pillar

8. SP1 deliverables are determined by the mandates in the Nairobi Maaфикiano and Bridgetown Covenant. The evaluation noted a high level of disagreement among stakeholders regarding the pertinence of the topics of and approaches taken under key SP1 deliverables, such as the meetings of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Financing for Development and *Trade and Development Report*. Such disagreement was also noted in public interventions by the representatives of some regional groups and reflected in survey responses, with levels of support at slightly over 50 per cent on fundamental aspects of SP1, such as thematic focus and alignment with the mandate (figure 1).

---

<sup>3</sup> A/RES/76/193,

Figure 1  
**Member State feedback on subprogramme 1 relevance: Share of survey respondents that agree or strongly agree with statements on relevance**  
 (Percentage)



Source: Independent evaluation team.

9. Although mandated by member States, the scope of SP1 outputs is often broad enough to allow for a selection of topics based on emerging issues and trends and the priorities of DGDS. Among member States, understanding of the UNCTAD focus and approach varied considerably. The representatives of some regional groups considered that SP1 should not focus on systemic issues and that UNCTAD work in this area overlapped with that of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank and processes taking place in New York rather than Geneva. The representatives of some other regional groups considered that the distinct mission of UNCTAD in helping developing countries participate more equitably in the global economy, as well as its membership and tradition, resulted in a valuable contribution to debates on systemic issues. In this regard, the secretariat highlighted that no other United Nations entity had a mandate to analyse global economic issues in such a comprehensive manner.

10. Similarly, the style of some SP1 publications, such as *Trade and Development Report*, and some SP1 panel discussions, such as those of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts, were criticized by some stakeholders for holding strong positions on politically and ideologically controversial issues and supporting such positions with a provocative style, which was not conducive to consensus-building. DGDS considered the style of publications, exemplified by the *Trade and Development Report* overview, to be highly appreciated by readers, and several stakeholders confirmed that such documents took the right approach to fostering reflection and debate on economic issues of a high level of relevance to the needs of developing countries, which were controversial by their very nature.

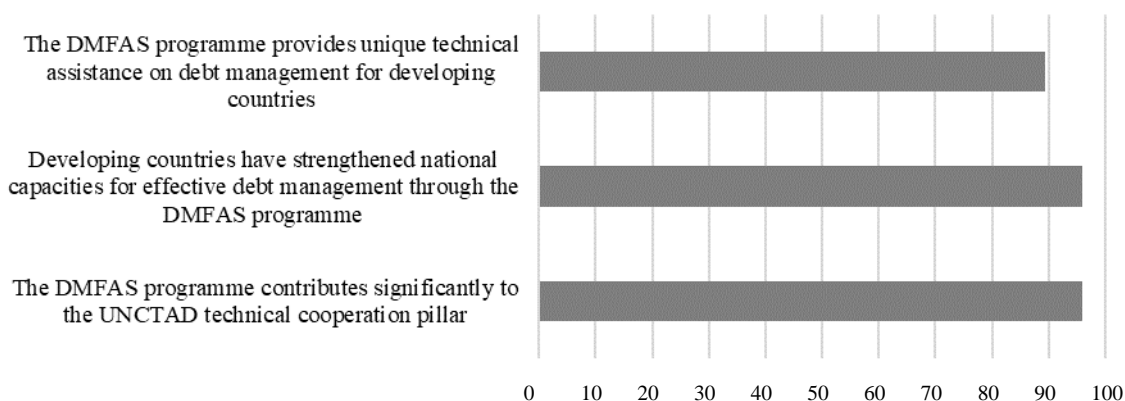
11. In relation to the position taken by SP1 in some debates, DGDS stated that it was a voice for developing countries. The development perspective and the position of focusing on the needs of developing countries was central to the mandate of UNCTAD and many evaluation participants indicated that the research focus of SP1 on macro-level issues from the perspective of developing countries was considered a unique contribution. However, some stakeholders highlighted that the secretariat of an intergovernmental institution must moderate debates in a manner conducive to consensus among regional groups and shed light on such debates with more data-driven analyses. These stakeholders were critical of SP1 for taking one clear position in such debates or further polarizing countries' positions, a perspective which was formally highlighted by some member States.

12. Faced with disagreement within the membership and the secretariat on such fundamental aspects of SP1, the evaluation drew the attention of various respondents to the vision of DGDS as a think tank. If SP1 were to act as a think tank aimed at putting ideas resulting from its analyses on the agenda, its independence in the choice of topics and approaches should not be limited and even the provocative or thought-provoking style of some products, such as the *Trade and Development Report* overview, could be fostered, if it was conducive to the broader dissemination of such ideas and a more effective dynamization of global debates. Some interviewees highlighted that there were many think tanks on international issues contributing to intellectual debates from diverse perspectives but that SP1 was not one of them. Several stakeholders recalled that UNCTAD served an intergovernmental Conference and that the *Trade and Development Report* overview was a parliamentary document whose value relied on the level of endorsement given by members. According to these stakeholders, SP1 analytical work should present debates in a balanced manner and take the role of a moderator in line with the UNCTAD goal of contributing to consensus. Other interviewees acknowledged that tensions with regard to United Nations proposals were part of intergovernmental discussions on relevant issues but that, in order for such discussions to lead to consensus, United Nations documents must be evidence based and have a style that matched the universality of the United Nations voice.

**B. Subprogramme 1 technical cooperation considered highly relevant to country needs**

13. The review of project evaluations found that, along with its strong theoretical base and extensive experience, the UNCTAD mandate was identified by stakeholders as key in establishing comparative advantage and that this advantage was further enhanced by the perception among stakeholders that UNCTAD was a neutral actor in comparison with the Bretton Woods institutions. This was particularly pertinent in the area of debt, where, as creditors, other institutions were viewed as conflicted in assessments of debt issues. With regard to technical cooperation, the relevance of the DMFAS programme to developing country needs was unanimously emphasized in focus groups and interviews (figure 2).

Figure 2  
**Member State feedback on the Debt Management and Financial Analysis System programme: Survey statements with greatest degree of agreement (share of survey respondents that agree or strongly agree with statements on the programme)**  
 (Percentage)

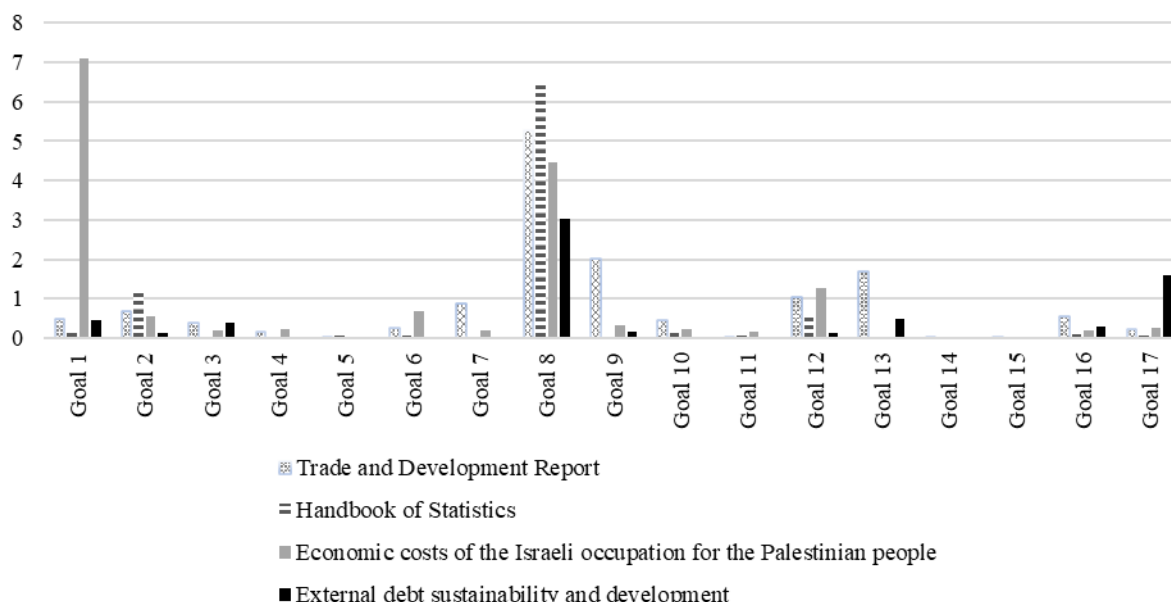


Source: Independent evaluation team.

**C. Subprogramme 1 mandate and outputs aligned with several Goals; division played key role in follow-up to 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including as custodian of indicator on illicit financial flows**

14. The work of SP1 aligns with the Goals in three ways, as follows: given the nature of SP1, there is strong alignment with the economic and institutional Goals (8, 9, 10, 16, 17) and content analysis of key serial publications confirms this alignment, notably with Goal 8; the Development Statistics and Information Branch (now the UNCTAD Statistics Service) formed part of the United Nations machinery for following up on and enhancing 2030 Agenda implementation; and the branch had been commissioned to conduct closer follow-up on the Goals more directly connected to the SP1 mandate, as evidenced in the SDG[Sustainable Development Goals] Pulse document (figure 3).

Figure 3  
References to the Goals in main subprogramme 1 serial documents and publications  
(Number of key words per 1,000 words)



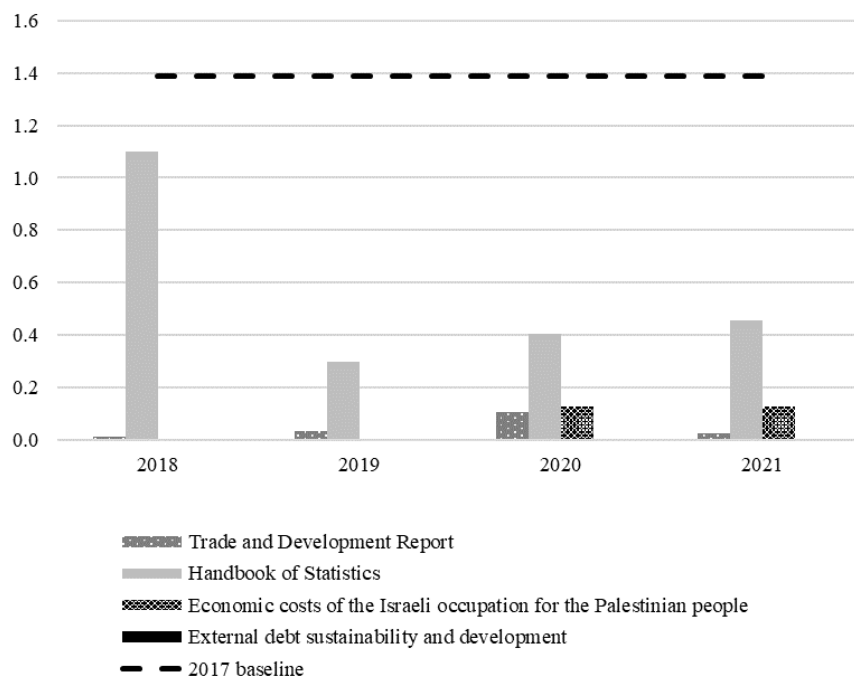
Source: Independent evaluation team.

**D. Gender considerations systematically incorporated in technical cooperation projects and increasingly present in statistical products; human rights considerations in concrete products and collaborations, but unclear how they can be mainstreamed in daily work**

15. With regard to technical cooperation, internal clearance procedures require gender to be considered in project formulation; interviewees indicated that the level of integration was minimal. The review of technical cooperation evaluations found that gender considerations were sometimes entirely lacking in project design; at times only consisted of introducing quotas and seeking a gender balance among participants; and that challenges to gender equality were not systematically identified and integrated into project logic and gender assessments not necessarily followed up on after the formulation phase. The lack of follow-up was linked to the time required to complete tasks. In economic research, gender analyses were conducted. However, interviewees noted that gender and human rights mainstreaming required additional time and that resources were increasingly stretched. Attempts were made to overcome such limitations by collaborating with other divisions, including in training programmes and the creation of indicators. The Development Statistics and Information Branch was the branch that most systematically integrated a

gender dimension into serial publications, which was related to efforts to provide gender-disaggregated data. Human rights considerations were not uniformly mainstreamed into the work of DGDS and it was unclear how mainstreaming could be achieved in daily work. However, opportunities for concrete collaborations were taken when possible and SP1 had held conceptual discussions on the right to development (figure 4).

Figure 4  
**References to gender in main subprogramme 1 serial documents and publications**  
 (Number of key words per 1,000 words)



Source: Independent evaluation team.

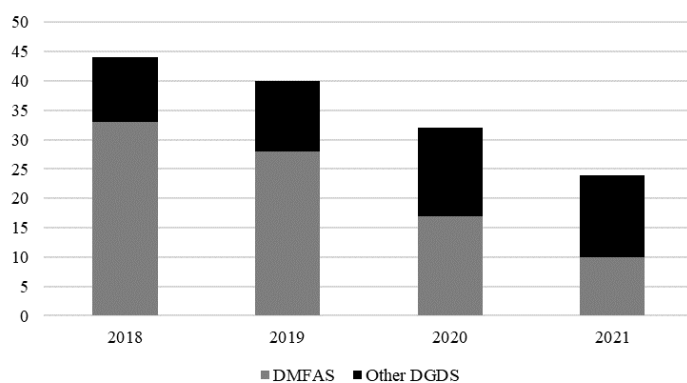
**E. All mandated publications produced, but outreach decreased**

16. During the period under evaluation, SP1 produced a large majority of mandated deliverables in line with programme budgets, according to data from Umoja, including a growing number of mandated publications, which increased from 23 in 2018 to 28 in 2021. The pandemic led to some changes to programmed activities and outputs, including the postponement of several events in 2020, and impacts were also evident in some technical cooperation activities. The pandemic also resulted in demand from the international community for updates on economic impacts, leading to the adaptation of some deliverables, including some key annual reports. With regard to technical cooperation, an overall trend of a decrease in the number of projects, donor countries and beneficiary countries was observed, with DMFAS projects comprising an increasingly smaller share of the total (figure 5). This does not necessarily mean a decrease in DMFAS performance, as the programme remains operational beyond the time frame of specific projects and the performance indicators of the DMFAS reporting system, on the contrary, show an increasing trend. Additionally, during the period under evaluation, extrabudgetary resources received by SP1, according to data provided by UNCTAD also show an increasing trend in absolute and relative terms. Finally, the review of project evaluations found that project stakeholders generally assessed the contribution of technical cooperation towards intended goals favourably.

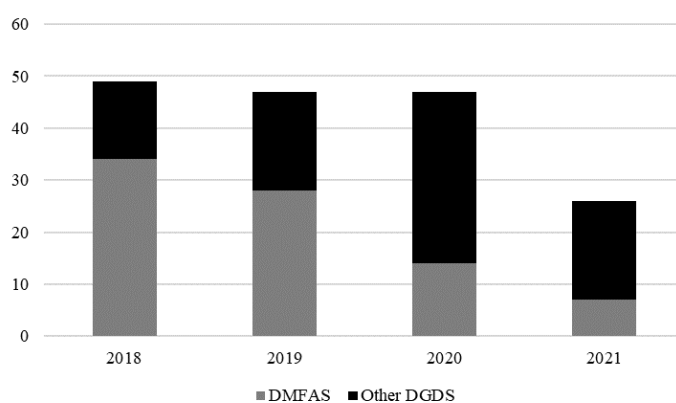


Figure 5  
**Subprogramme 1 technical cooperation: Number of projects, beneficiary countries  
 and donor countries**

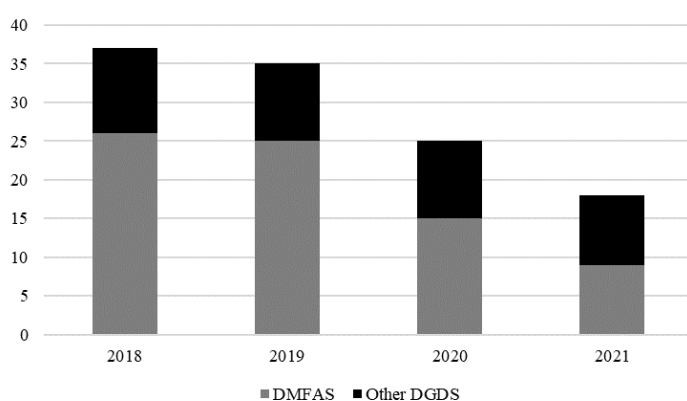
(a) Projects



(b) Beneficiary countries



(c) Donor countries

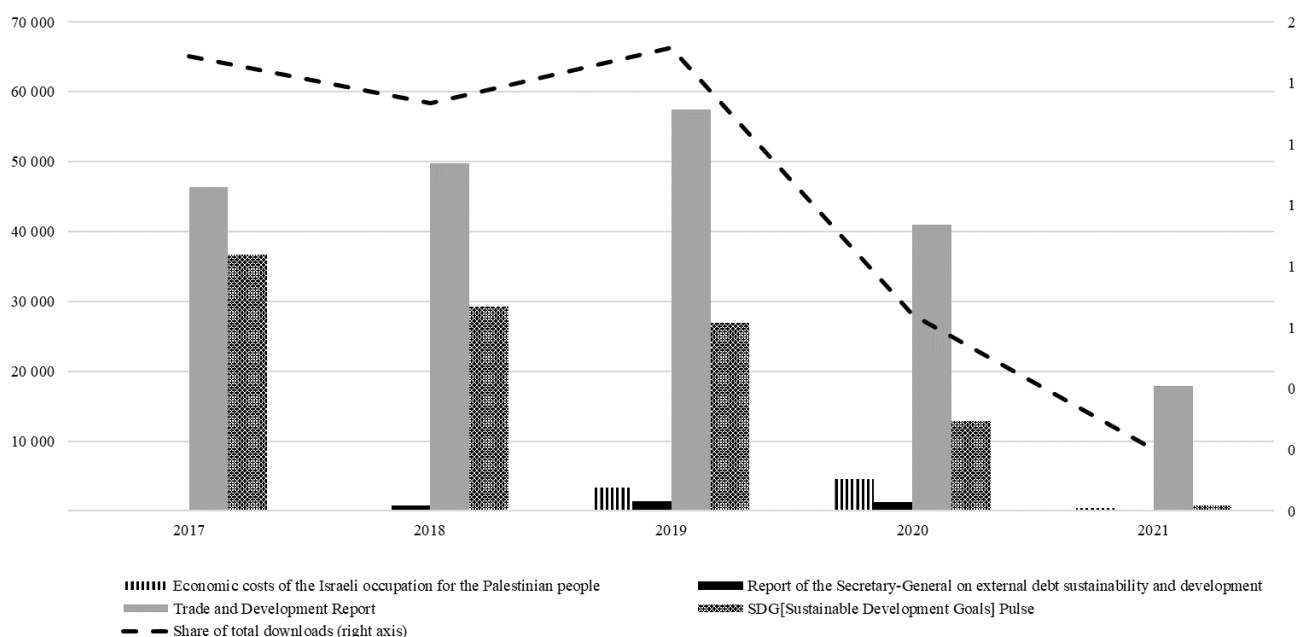


Source: UNCTAD.

17. DGDS does not track the outreach and use of knowledge products. DGDS chiefs stated that much effort was made to elaborate products, with little time for outreach. Analysis of downloads of key SPI publications, measured as a share of total downloads of UNCTAD documents, revealed a decreasing trend and that *Trade and Development Report* was the most successful publication, while downloads of *Handbook of Statistics* decreased over the period. However, users of Development Statistics and Information Branch products tended to consult online data rather than download reports (figure 6).

Figure 6  
**Downloads of key subprogramme 1 publications from the UNCTAD website and share of total downloads**

(Number and percentage)

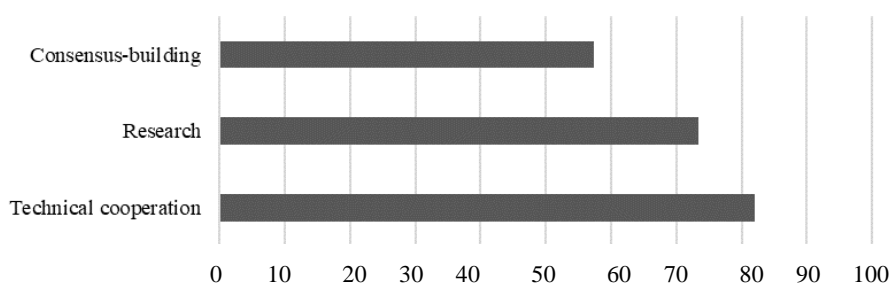


Source: UNCTAD.

18. DGDS staff tended to highlight the importance of research work, yet the most positive feedback from member States concerned technical cooperation activities (figure 7).

Figure 7  
**Member State feedback: Share of survey respondents that agree or strongly agree with positive statements related to the three pillars of UNCTAD work**

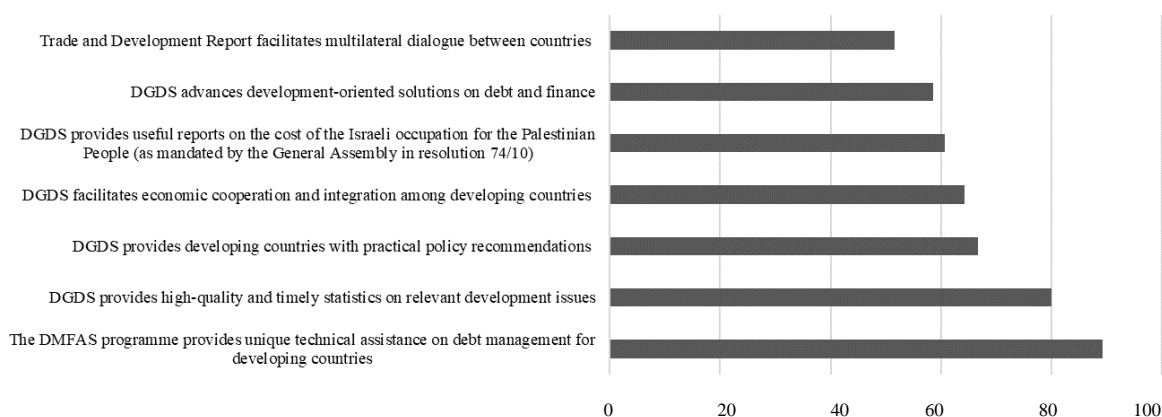
(Percentage)



Source: Independent evaluation team.

19. With regard to consensus-building, some participants of focus groups and interviewees indicated that discussions at sessions of the Trade and Development Board were not impactful, since reports, including *Trade and Development Report*, often did not result in agreed conclusions under the agenda item on interdependence and received little recognition in other contexts. Of all survey statements on the effectiveness of SP1, that on the contribution of *Trade and Development Report* to consensus-building received the lowest level of support, while the effectiveness of technical work under the DMFAS programme and the Development Statistics and Information Branch was highly appreciated (figure 8).

Figure 8  
**Member State feedback on subprogramme 1 effectiveness: Share of survey respondents that agree or strongly agree with statements on effectiveness**  
 (Percentage)



Source: Independent evaluation team.

20. Interviewees stated that there was a need to restore and enhance the negotiation function of UNCTAD. In this regard, interviewees reported cause for optimism. In particular, following the fifteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, there had been a revival of the intergovernmental machinery, exemplified in the emphasis in the Bridgetown Covenant on transforming multilateralism and in the increased level of participation of member States at intergovernmental meetings. Furthermore, some interviewees pointed to signs of the growing involvement of UNCTAD in processes in New York, including the work of UNCTAD under the Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance.

## F. Some indications of subprogramme 1 resonance at national and intergovernmental levels

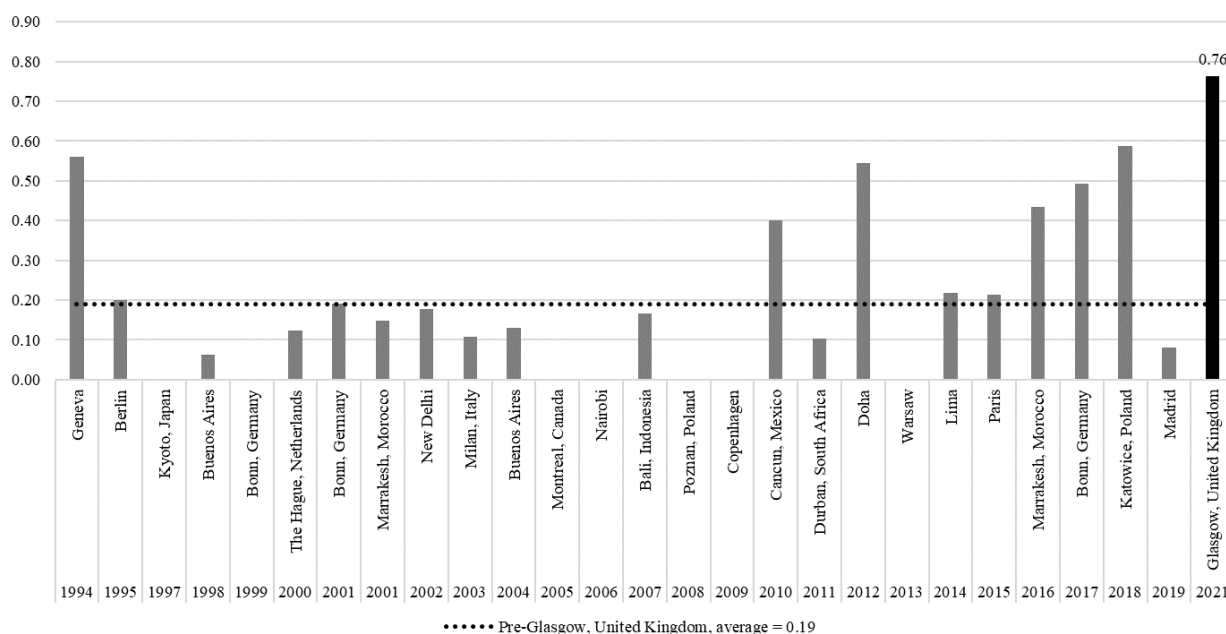
21. At the national level, SP1 support for South–South cooperation was influencing the design of industrial policies in India and South Africa. Similarly, positions on digital industrial policy in some developing countries during multilateral negotiations had been influenced by and referred to studies produced by DGDS. Several impacts at the intergovernmental level were attributed to SP1 work, as highlighted in results in programme budgets prepared by the secretariat. *Trade and Development Report 2019: Financing A Global Green New Deal* was considered the most influential output of the Macroeconomic and Development Policies Branch since 2018 and had been connected with broader United Nations developments such as the initiative on financing for development in the era of COVID-19 and beyond, the United Nations research road map for the COVID-19 recovery and the climate finance goals under the Glasgow Climate Pact. Similarly, the work of the Development Statistics and Information Branch on elaborating a methodology to estimate illicit financial flows, to ensure the collection of data under indicator 16.4.1 and fill a gap in the Goals monitoring framework, was highlighted. The Branch had also provided technical assistance to countries in sub-Saharan Africa to pilot the methodology and build capacities to monitor the illicit drain of resources. Debt-related analyses by the Debt and Development Finance Branch following the COVID-19 crisis had been discussed by the Economic and Financial Committee of the General Assembly and the Group of 20, and DGDS staff reported that SP1 ideas had inspired the Prime Minister of Pakistan to propose a global initiative on debt relief.

22. The evaluation studied two results in depth, namely proposals on debt sustainability and development; and the global green new deal detailed in *Trade and Development Report 2019* and presented during the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties. The case study of the former found that the report of the Secretary-General on external debt

sustainability and development had provided a reference for Member States during the negotiation of resolutions at the seventy-fifth session of General Assembly, including on external debt sustainability and development, with DGDS requested to provide consultation services during the process.<sup>4</sup> The case study of the latter showed mixed evidence with regard to the results highlighted in programme budgets but reference had been made in discussions at the European Parliament and at the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties, the outcome of which differed significantly from previous sessions in terms of reference to key terms concerning a global green new deal. Content analysis as part of the case study showed that such key terms were significantly more frequent in the report of the twenty-sixth session compared with those of previous sessions (figure 9).

Figure 9  
**Reports of sessions of the Conference of the Parties: Frequency of terms related to a global green new deal**

(Number of key words per 1,000 words)

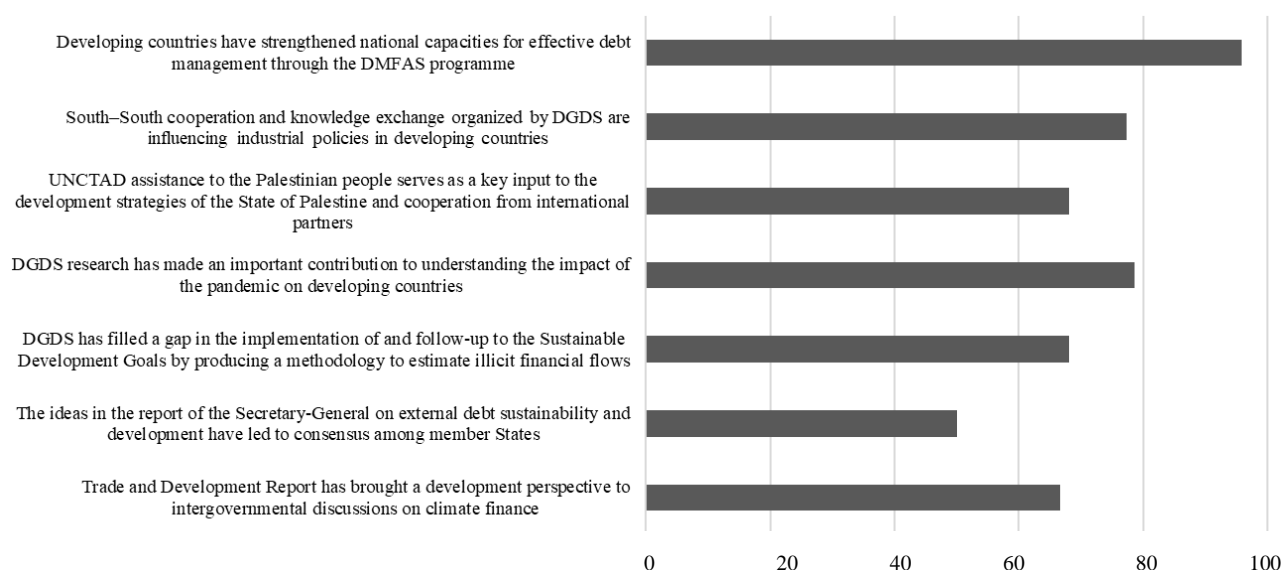


Source: Independent evaluation team.

23. The report of the twenty-sixth session contains 21 iterations of 6 terms used in *Trade and Development Report 2019*, compared with an average of 3.44 terms in the reports of sessions in the period 1994–2019, as follows (iterations in parentheses): national priorities (2); just transition (5); fiscal policies (1); public investment (2); regulation (3); and development bank (8). The frequency in the most recent report is four times higher than in previous reports (a statistically significant difference according to the Chi-squared test). Finally, nearly 70 per cent of member State respondents expressed agreement with regard to several impacts sought by SP1, including that of *Trade and Development Report* on intergovernmental discussions on climate change, while 50 per cent stated that the ideas in the report of the Secretary-General on external debt sustainability and development had led to consensus among Member States (figure 10).

<sup>4</sup> A/75/281.

Figure 10  
**Member State feedback on subprogramme 1 impact: Share of survey respondents that agree or strongly agree with statements on impact**  
 (Percentage)



Source: Independent evaluation team.

### G. Solid statistical capacities, intradivisional collaboration and technical cooperation linked to research strengths enabled results; broadness of scope, limited interdivisional collaboration and nature of topics addressed constrained effectiveness

24. SP1 technical cooperation was highly appreciated by member States. DGDS effectiveness under this pillar was related to a demand-driven approach and connections with the research pillar, wherein expertise of a specific nature was developed and attracted demand from developing countries. The DMFAS programme was the main DGDS technical cooperation initiative in terms of duration and financial volume. Its multi-donor trust fund, established in 2003 to channel donor and beneficiary country funding towards a single results-based management framework covering all country projects, was identified as an enabling factor, likely to be replicated in other technical cooperation activities, as it showed clear advantages in terms of efficiency (only one results framework and one report for all stakeholders) and transparency (all stakeholders interact with the programme through an advisory group).

25. Under the research pillar, the following three factors were repeatedly mentioned by interviewees: statistical capacity; collaboration across divisions; and broadness of scope. The Development Statistics and Information Branch not only produced statistical products and collaborated in capacity-building in developing countries, but also developed methodologies in response to numerous demands from other divisions, activities that were not made explicit in the SP1 programme budget. DGDS chiefs stated that cross-divisional collaboration on statistics was fruitful but that some member States had requested UNCTAD to reinforce the evidence base of research. In this regard, as part of the follow-up to the Bridgetown Covenant, the branch had been designated the Statistics Service and its supporting role in the work of all divisions had been clarified, with specialized statistics staff retained in each area of work. With regard to cross-departmental collaboration, DGDS staff stated that cooperation among the branches was an enabler of high-quality research. All branches indicated that peer reviews and collaboration with regard to the flagship *Trade and Development Report* enriched the report and enhanced the visibility of the research of each branch. However, there was limited evidence of cross-divisional collaboration on publications, despite clear recommendations in this regard in previous evaluations. SP1

publications drew on expertise from other divisions and also at times developed research in areas covered by other divisions, introducing contradictions with their publications. Interviewees noted that this had occurred on a few occasions and had been perceived negatively by other divisions and some member States. Finally, another aspect of UNCTAD research that might hinder its effectiveness was its broad thematic scope. DGDS staff stated that the broad range of issues investigated meant that research was spread thin and that the cyclical nature of key publications left little time between editions to enhance dissemination and follow-up. Some member States noted that they did not understand some of the choices of topic made by the Macroeconomic and Development Policies Branch.

26. Some member States had recently emphasized the need for a revitalization of the intergovernmental machinery and seemed to assign more value to the role of UNCTAD as a provider of data and technical assistance. The favouring of developing country perspectives was perceived as provocative and the representation of some debates was considered to be one sided, particularly the views expressed in *Trade and Development Report*. The representatives of some regional groups had criticized the lack of data-driven analysis in some DGDS statements and recommendations and the absence of links between evidence provided by the Development Statistics and Information Branch and the recommendations and conclusions in reports. DGDS staff noted that issues with regard to which DGDS was intended to contribute under consensus-building were controversial from the start, making it more difficult to make significant contributions to consensus-building. Controversies with regard to the work of DGDS, according to some stakeholders, were due to the different interests and perspectives of regional groups; borrowers and lenders tended to have opposing views on debt, and powerful and less powerful countries tended to assess power distribution differently. In this context, DGDS had explicitly committed to representing the needs of developing countries and the DGDS intellectual tradition, it was stated, was in line with the mandate in the Nairobi Maafikiano, namely that “UNCTAD was established to promote an inclusive global economy, through informing national and international policies, while giving priority consideration for the needs and interests of developing countries”. Meanwhile, other stakeholders questioned some of the topics and activities proposed by DGDS, stating that certain systemic issues should be left to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. This issue emerged, for example, during discussions on topics for consideration by the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Financing for Development and during its sessions. DGDS work included work on the global financial architecture in draft workplans without reference to the Bretton Woods institutions, interpreted by these stakeholders as SP1 taking the lead in an area seen as more relevant to those institutions. This opinion was not shared by the representatives of other regional groups; one group highlighted the importance of the unique contribution of UNCTAD in conducting analytical work and making recommendations on systemic issues, including debt sustainability, particularly with regard to the effects of the pandemic, which placed serious constraints on opportunities for developing countries to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth. Interviews and observations showed that these differences in viewpoints meant that sessions of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts often concluded without an outcome.

#### **H. All branches must do more with fewer resources, but strategic prioritization of resource use not evident**

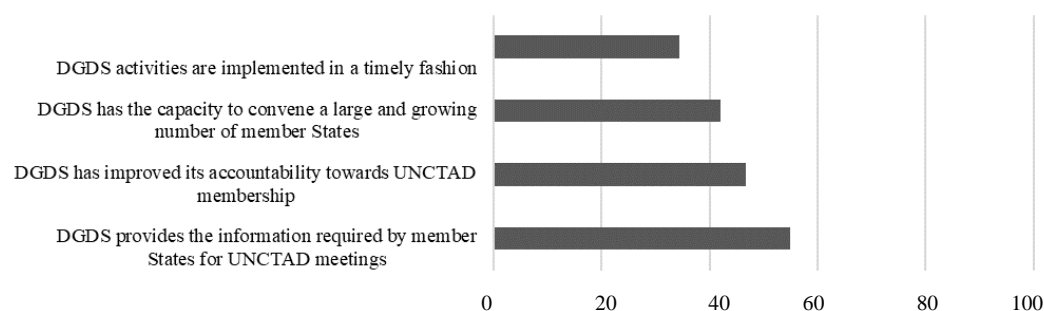
27. In addition to the delivery of parliamentary documents and key publications, SP1 is assigned to conduct an indeterminate number of activities, such as producing articles, seminars and workshops; contributing to ad hoc expert discussions; and providing advisory services to policymakers. The outputs of the Development Statistics and Information Branch included methodological support to other UNCTAD divisions. UNCTAD regular budget allocation had decreased slightly in recent years, before increasing slightly in 2021, and DGDS staff indicated that budget cuts and financial constraints limited capacity and flexibility to achieve results beyond the delivery of mandated outputs. Interviewees highlighted that DGDS was small in comparison with other international organizations conducting comparable research, such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. With regard to the Assistance to Palestinian People Unit, the mandate was broad and

expanding, while resources remained limited to two regular budget posts, meaning that external funding was used for a “precarious” P3-level post to ensure outputs mandated by the United Nations. Meanwhile, the volume of extrabudgetary funding to SP1 had increased, in both absolute and relative terms. However, it was unclear how priorities were set for the use of limited resources and how cost effectiveness was ensured. Beyond the list of mandated outputs under programme budgets (many of which lacked a definition and quantitative target), the official workplan of SP1 under the Headquarters-defined format only highlighted some concrete impacts of expected results. Previous evaluations and reviews had recommended that SP1 make use of results-based management frameworks to improve the efficiency and accountability of resources. This approach was applied to the DMFAS programme, yet most interviewed staff did not see the approach as applicable to research and intergovernmental support. On the contrary, 90 per cent of member States agreed or strongly agreed with the idea that results-based management would improve the efficiency of SP1. This observation was accompanied by negative feedback on management issues, such as the timely implementation of activities, convening capacity and accountability towards member States (figure 11).

Figure 11

**Member State feedback on subprogramme 1 management: Share of survey respondents that agree or strongly agree with statements on management**

(Percentage)



Source: Independent evaluation team.

## I. Delivery of outputs monitored, but more quantitative indicators could be used for internal follow-up

28. The delivery of mandated outputs is recorded in Umoja but the effects of each output are not tracked. Notably, beyond the delivery of reports and publications and reporting on each technical cooperation project, little data on SP1 performance were stored and reported. Along with figures on the number of papers written, estimates could be provided of the use made of such papers, with data on downloads and page views, academic citations, attendance at related presentations and training sessions, countries targeted through dissemination activities and media clippings. Several DGDS interviewees referred to individual advice requested and provided to member States as an indication of the impact of research. Advisory services and interaction with member State policymakers and delegations could be systematically tracked as part of SP1 work and related to specific research lines as a proxy for research impact. In addition, more innovative techniques, such as big data analysis, could be used to monitor the dissemination of SP1 ideas across official websites and social media accounts. DGDS chiefs indicated that they had put into practice monitoring practices at the branch level that were not systematized at the subprogramme level. Finally, it should be highlighted that the DMFAS programme produces an annual report that overcomes the narrow scope of programme budgets and contains indicators of effectiveness, sustainability and impact, with data providing a 10-year perspective. Monitoring is conducted on a quarterly basis under a strategic framework.

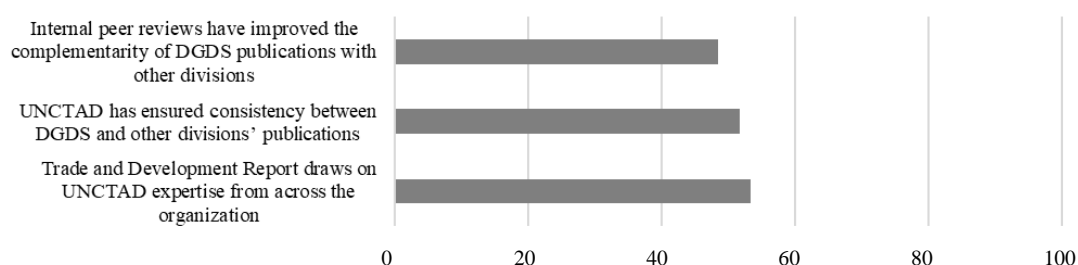
## J. Clear demand for greater consistency of messaging across UNCTAD publications

29. Several previous evaluations highlighted room for improvement in cross-divisional collaboration and overall UNCTAD coherence and coordination. During the period under evaluation, there were issues of inconsistency concerning the products of DGDS and other divisions, giving the impression that UNCTAD lacked a single voice. The survey confirmed that there was room for improvement in internal coherence, and participants of focus groups and interviewees highlighted the limitations of current practices in peer reviewing, cross-divisional collaboration on flagship publications, policy clearance and the overall steering of UNCTAD publications (figure 12).

Figure 12

### Member State feedback on subprogramme 1 coherence: Share of survey respondents that agree or strongly agree with statements on coherence

(Percentage)



Source: Independent evaluation team.

30. UNCTAD publications are currently peer reviewed but not in a way that ensures consistency across divisions. Interviewees indicated that only flagship publications were peer reviewed in other divisions and that limitations in the review process, particularly with regard to timing, had reduced effectiveness. The Secretary-General had introduced some changes with regard to reviews of non-flagship publications. Research work produced at the divisional level would be published internally as working papers before being subject to a blind peer review process controlled by the Office of the Secretary-General and a final decision taken on publication. This procedure was consistent with the idea of a single UNCTAD voice, as it centralized the oversight of publications. With regard to flagship publications, interviewed UNCTAD stakeholders and representatives of regional groups suggested that reports should involve other divisions at an early stage, as both contributors to specific chapters and as reviewers of chapter proposals.

31. In addition to peer reviews, policy clearance is conducted of all parliamentary documents and flagship publications; this is ensured by one staff member under the Office of the Secretary-General. The content and style of some output, such as the report on economic costs of the Israeli occupation for the Palestinian people, are cleared at the divisional level and by the Office of the Secretary-General. Policy clearance of flagship publications is rather formal. The process has not been intended to control the messages in reports and therefore cannot control consistency across reports, nor has it been intended to review the political and diplomatic correctness of messages, in contrast with parliamentary documents. Policy clearance mainly considers the accuracy of data, cross-divisional synergies and the presentation of information. The unit is too small to process the flagship publications and parliamentary documents of five divisions and review not only format but also content. In addition, the post level should be higher if policy clearance is to review and suggest changes to flagship publications led by division directors. Importantly, the unit does not receive clear guidance from the publications committee on requirements for each publication series, nor are priorities set as to the main topics and preferred approaches that represent UNCTAD choices under the research and consensus-building pillars. The committee comprises all division directors and agrees on a publications calendar but does



not enter into detail on the expected content and approach of each publication. At the member State level, the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance might hold a further session in the second quarter of the year to discuss publication issues, while sessions of the Trade and Development Board consider publications, as each flagship publication is currently considered separately and an overall publications policy is not discussed.

#### **K. Subprogramme 1 successfully established partnerships with several United Nations entities, but agreement within secretariat on need to better insert development finance work into processes in New York**

32. There are multiple examples of branches partnering with other United Nations entities<sup>5</sup> and the Debt and Development Finance Branch regularly contributes to processes in New York, including on financing for sustainable development. Despite these contributions, the recent calls by the Secretary-General for strengthened multilateralism have provided momentum with regard to the idea of better integrating the work of SP1 into such processes. The review of project evaluations showed that partnerships were crucial elements in the implementation of interventions, although they were unevenly used and inconsistencies were noted in the forming of partnerships with national authorities, United Nations entities and the Resident Coordinator system.

#### **L. Debt Management and Financial Analysis System a sustainable technical cooperation programme; some challenges in institutional and financial sustainability of other projects**

33. DMFAS programme beneficiary countries contribute resources, make up part of the trust fund and are on the advisory board, and make use of the programme beyond the time frame of specific projects. DMFAS is used in 90 institutions in 60 countries and, during the period under evaluation, 20 countries benefited from other SP1 technical cooperation projects. Of survey respondents, 90 per cent stated that the capacity built was maintained and/or further improved at the national level. However, the review of technical cooperation project evaluations found that a lack of funding at the national level following the completion of projects was a significant barrier to sustainability in some interventions, and that the absence of enduring partnerships and the removal of UNCTAD support for technical resources following completion also affected sustainability.

### **IV. Conclusions**

#### **A. Relevance**

34. SP1 deliverables under the research and consensus-building pillars are determined by mandates from sessions of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and from resolutions of the General Assembly. However, there is unease among some regional groups and among the secretariat on the scope, approach and style of some deliverables, including the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Financing for Development and *Trade and Development Report*. Such controversy affects fundamental aspects of the work of SP1, such as discussions on systemic issues, the development perspective and self-characterization as a think tank. Regarding the focus on systemic issues, the controversy derives from the interpretation of some member States that the dedication of SP1 to proposing reforms in the international financial architecture is not covered under an UNCTAD mandate. Meanwhile, the representatives of other regional

---

<sup>5</sup> For example, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Country Team in the State of Palestine, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the United Nations Office for South–South Cooperation, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the United Nations Statistical Commission.

groups consider the analysis of the economic order and contributions to discussions on systemic issues to be part of the mandate. The different interpretations of the mandate undermine the trust between some member States and the secretariat and hinder the contribution of SP1 to the consensus-building pillar.

35. SP1 technical cooperation is considered highly relevant to country needs. Under this pillar, the relevance of the DMFAS programme to developing country needs was unanimously emphasized in the survey, at focus groups and in interviews. The work of the Development Statistics and Information Branch was also highly relevant to developing country needs; overall statistical work in the United Nations system, including follow-up on the 2030 Agenda; and the work of other UNCTAD divisions and branches. However, the latter component, which comprises the development of methodologies, was not properly captured in annual programme budgets and should be clarified in the near future, as part of the designation of the branch as the Statistics Service. The work of the Assistance to Palestinian People Unit was reported to fully respond to the needs of the Palestinian people, and was clearly guided by dedicated paragraphs in United Nations Conference on Trade and Development outcomes and resolutions of the General Assembly.

## **B. Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals**

36. The SP1 mandate is clearly aligned with the economic and institutional Goals (8, 9, 10, 16, 17) and content analysis of key serial publications confirms this alignment, notably with Goal 8. Outputs of the Assistance to Palestinian People Unit stand out for references to Goal 1 on ending poverty.

## **C. Gender and human resources**

37. Gender is systematically incorporated into technical cooperation projects following general procedures within UNCTAD and despite some limitations reported in project evaluations. The gender dimension is also increasingly present in statistical products, but not as much in reports and publications. UNCTAD has not adopted clear guidelines on how to mainstream human rights at the activity or project level. However, ad hoc connections are made in some publications and through collaborations with the United Nations Human Rights Council.

## **D. Contribution to results**

38. During the period under evaluation, SP1 produced all mandated publications. The pandemic led to some changes to programmed activities and outputs. The pandemic also resulted in demand from the international community for updates on economic impacts, leading to the adaptation of some deliverables.

39. DGDS does not track the outreach and use of knowledge products, as efforts are focused on the elaboration of products, with little time to follow up on and enhance outreach. SP1 provides, in programme budgets, examples of concrete national-level and intergovernmental-level impacts, which are difficult to verify. During the evaluation, some data were collected on the impact of SP1 publications on the Internet and in academia, but this exercise was limited by the lack of baselines or benchmarks for comparison. DGDS staff tended to highlight the importance of research work, yet the most positive feedback from member States concerned technical cooperation activities. The DMFAS programme was commended for its capacity-building efforts and success in building sound systems that were key in implementing sustainable debt policies in developing countries.

## **E. Enabling and limiting factors**

40. The technical cooperation performance of SP1 is enabled by its demand-driven approach and connection with the research pillar. With regard to the DMFAS programme, its governance, financing and reporting structure, based on a trust fund, are worthy of more in-depth analysis as a possible example of a good practice to replicate. The unease concerning some SP1 deliverables is clearly a limiting factor in its contribution under the consensus-building pillar and in the period under evaluation, under the research pillar, cross-divisional collaboration was not being actively enhanced despite clear recommendations in previous evaluations, with the exception of the Development Statistics and Information Branch.

## **F. Management**

41. All DGDS branches indicated being required to do more with fewer resources, but it was unclear how priorities were decided in the use of resources. The recommendation from the evaluation of SP1 in 2013,<sup>6</sup> to adopt results-based management approaches in its work, had not been implemented, and the evaluation noted an explicit reluctance under SP1 and in other areas of UNCTAD to apply such approaches to the research pillar.

42. Mandated outputs are adequately followed up on in the mandatory reporting framework of the secretariat, yet more quantitative indicators could be used for internal follow-up. Beyond the delivery of reports and publications and reporting on each technical cooperation project, little data on SP1 performance were stored and reported. Along with figures on the number of papers written, estimates could be provided of the use made of such papers, with data on downloads and page views, academic citations, attendance at related presentations and training sessions, countries targeted through dissemination activities and media clippings. Moreover, several DGDS interviewees referred to individual advice requested and provided to member States as an indication of the impact of research. Advisory services and interaction with member State policymakers and delegations could be systematically tracked as part of SP1 work and related to specific research lines as a proxy for research impact.

## **G. Consistency**

43. The recommendations of previous evaluations aimed at increasing internal consistency at UNCTAD have been only partially applied. These recommendations affect not only SP1 but the secretariat as a whole, and affect policy clearance, peer reviews and the steering and oversight of the overall publications policy and plan.

## **V. Recommendations**

### **A. Subprogramme 1**

44. It is recommended that SP1 adopt a set of indicators to allow for tracking the use of knowledge products. In addition to web-based and social media metrics and scholarly citations, a new system to collect quantitative and qualitative indications of utility by key users should be established. Key users should include at least member States and policymakers receiving ad hoc advice and participants of intergovernmental meetings, seminars and training sessions. The set of indicators could form the basis of an internal monitoring and reporting system that provides evidence for reporting against the programme plan and budget and enriches the showcasing of highlighted results in such documents.

---

<sup>6</sup> TD/B/WP/252.

45. Considering the difficulties in reaching intergovernmental consensus on the *Trade and Development Report* overview and the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Financing for Development, it is recommended that these outputs be reoriented to capture different sides of existing debates on selected topics while including UNCTAD contributions to each debate on the basis of its independent analysis. Related documents should be circulated in a timely manner to allow for appropriate consideration by member States, that is, within the time frame of the intergovernmental setting in which they are presented. The defence of concrete ideas related to each debate and resulting from the SP1 intellectual tradition and research areas could be published as working papers under individual authorship, meeting the new quality requirements set out in the note of the Secretary-General on instructions and guidelines applicable to UNCTAD publications, dated 27 January 2022.

## **B. Office of the Secretary-General**

46. In addition to coordinating the publications agenda, it is recommended that the publications committee oversee the goals, thematic choices and quality requirements of UNCTAD flagship publications and other key publications with a focus on responding to member State decisions on UNCTAD products, mainly those channelled through a new dedicated session of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance. The publications committee should also support the Office of the Secretary-General in the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations related to policy clearance, internal peer reviews and cross-divisional collaborations on flagship publications. In doing so, it should play an oversight role in the early stages of the publication process by reviewing a concept note of each product, directly or through the policy clearance unit.

47. With regard to policy clearance, it is recommended that staffing levels be increased, to allow for a broader range of elements to be considered, such as publication voice and alignment with other divisions. The reinforcement of this unit should include the unit head being given a higher level of seniority commensurate with the increased responsibilities of the unit, including the review of flagship publications led by division directors.

48. To help facilitate the dissemination of SP1 research and publications, it is recommended that the new communications strategy provide guidance on the congruence of messages sent by various divisions, the balance of resources dedicated to producing and disseminating publications and the increased outreach of UNCTAD work within the United Nations system with the support of the UNCTAD New York Office.

49. Considering that the recommendation on indicators could apply to other subprogrammes, it is recommended that the Office of the Secretary-General design and support the regular monitoring of standard performance indicators for the research pillar. Such indicators should be oriented to results that meet the needs of member States, the United Nations system and partners.

## **C. Member States**

50. Agreement by member States on the mandate of UNCTAD in the Nairobi Maafikiano and Bridgetown Covenant is not detailed enough to provide SP1 with guidance on the scope, choice of topics and style of key deliverables, such as *Trade and Development Report*, and since concerns about fundamental aspects of SP1 work are recurrent, it is recommended that member States reach a more concrete agreement on the UNCTAD publications policy on the basis of a proposal by the secretariat, without limiting its analytical independence. Such an agreement should provide general criteria on the purpose and approach of mandated parliamentary documents and flagship publications, including thematic priorities. An additional session of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance held in the second quarter of the year would be the right setting to reach agreement on overall UNCTAD publications, as individual reports are considered at different sessions of the Trade and Development Board.

51. Similarly, to avoid concerns related to the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Financing for Development, it is recommended that member States agree on more concrete terms of reference and the policy focus. The terms of reference could also include additional requirements on principles for the composition of panels, choice of experts and complementarity with other forums, to provide clearer guidance to the secretariat.

---

**Page 8, subheading E**

For the existing text *substitute*

All mandated publications produced, but outreach unclear

**Page 9, figure 5**

Under “*Source: UNCTAD.*” *insert*

*Notes:* Figures 5 (a), (b) and (c) reflect data on projects funded through extrabudgetary resources, excluding those funded through the United Nations Development Account; data are calculated based on contributions received in 2018–2021; and data for 2021 are provisional. Figure 5 (b) reflects only countries identified as direct beneficiaries of technical cooperation activities, due to the nature of certain projects, which reflect broad groups and/or unspecified beneficiaries, for example, a project that is relevant for all developing countries.

**Page 9, paragraph 17**

For the existing text *substitute*

DGDS does not track the outreach and use of knowledge products. DGDS chiefs stated that much effort was made to elaborate products, with little time for outreach.

**Page 10**

*Delete* figure 6

**Page 18, subheading C**

For the existing text *substitute*

Gender and human rights

---



# United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Distr.: General  
28 September 2022

Original: English

---

## Trade and Development Board Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance

Eighty-fourth session

Geneva, 3–7 October 2022

Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda

## External evaluation of UNCTAD subprogramme 1: Globalization, interdependence and development<sup>\*†</sup>

### Corrigendum

#### Page 3, Introduction

Insert a footnote *reading*

<sup>2</sup> Changes made to the present document after 25 July 2022 do not impact the overall conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation report. UNCTAD is currently taking steps to rectify a technical fault in the system that was used during the evaluation to extract publication download data. The difficulties in using publication data draw further attention to certain findings of the evaluation, namely, that there is a need for UNCTAD to develop performance indicators to better monitor the reach and impact of research products. This is captured in paragraphs 44 and 49 of the recommendations contained in chapter V.

#### Page 3, paragraph 1, first sentence

For the existing text *substitute*

This note presents the independent evaluation of UNCTAD subprogramme 1 on globalization, interdependence and development in the period 2018–2021, conducted in December 2021–June 2022.

---

\* This evaluation was prepared by an independent evaluation team: Mr. Niwa Dwitama, Permanent Mission of Indonesia; Ms. Helga Matos, Permanent Mission of Portugal; and Mr. Aitor Pérez, Chief Consultant, Economistas de la Cooperación, Spain. Supporting materials for this evaluation are presented in document TD/B/WP(84)/CRP.2.

† Changes made to the present document after 25 July 2022 do not impact the overall conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation report. UNCTAD is currently taking steps to rectify a technical fault in the system that was used during the evaluation to extract publication download data. The difficulties in using publication data draw further attention to certain findings of the evaluation, namely, that there is a need for UNCTAD to develop performance indicators to better monitor the reach and impact of research products. This is captured in paragraphs 44 and 49 of the recommendations contained in chapter V.



**Page 8, subheading E**

For the existing text *substitute*

All mandated publications produced, but outreach unclear

**Page 9, figure 5**

Under “*Source: UNCTAD.*” *insert*

*Notes:* Figures 5 (a), (b) and (c) reflect data on projects funded through extrabudgetary resources, excluding those funded through the United Nations Development Account; data are calculated based on contributions received in 2018–2021; and data for 2021 are provisional. Figure 5 (b) reflects only countries identified as direct beneficiaries of technical cooperation activities, due to the nature of certain projects, which reflect broad groups and/or unspecified beneficiaries, for example, a project that is relevant for all developing countries.

**Page 9, paragraph 17**

For the existing text *substitute*

DGDS does not track the outreach and use of knowledge products. DGDS chiefs stated that much effort was made to elaborate products, with little time for outreach.

**Page 10**

*Delete* figure 6

**Page 18, subheading C**

For the existing text *substitute*

Gender and human rights

---