

**Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance
Eighty-third session**

**Monday 7 February 2022
Statement of Ms. Rebeca Grynspan
Secretary-General of UNCTAD**

(Check against delivery)

Chair of the 83rd session of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance, Mr. Martin Zbinden of Switzerland,

Vice-Chair Mr. Natee Vichitsorasatra of Thailand,

Your excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Dear DSG and UNCTAD's Members of my SMG

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends:

It is a great honor to be here in front of you, to present the first Programme Plan of my leadership as UNCTAD Secretary General and my strategic orientations for the future. We live in a period of great urgency, great ambition, and great expectations. So let me start by thanking you all for coming and for your dedication to UNCTAD.

Time is short and there is much I would like to say. I will structure my presentation in three parts. I will start by sharing some of my reflections on the global context, and how it affects this institution going forward. Then, I will refer to our Programme Plan for 2023, which has been made available to you all in advance, and which we hope will contribute to our discussion. And finally, I will share with you my decision with respect to some structural changes that will be in effect as we speak so it will support the implementation of the plan

This order of affairs is deliberate. Today, I would like to use this valuable time with you to not only go into the program plan, but to go beyond it as well, for reasons I will touch upon in a minute. In all, it is my hope that you leave today with a clear idea of my vision for this institution, in the context of the ongoing pandemic and the implementation of the Bridgetown Covenant.

So let me start with the context.

It has been only five months since I joined UNCTAD. It is perhaps a sign of the times we live, that in these five months the world has continued to change at a frenetic pace. It is clear we are all aware of this. It was made clear in the Bridgetown Covenant. It has been clear in all my bilaterals with member states and regional groups. And it is clear in the conversations I have with my staff and senior management.

But we should really pause for a second to reflect.

This pandemic has disrupted *all* of what we do, and UNCTAD is not an exception. In these two years, COVID has forever changed trade, finance, debt, technology, sustainable development, and logistics – the areas for which we are UN focal points. It has tested multilateralism, showing the complexities but also the rewards of consensus building efforts. And it has setback for the first time in decades much of the developing world, reducing our Human Development Index for the first time since we started recording it, and taking almost 80 million people around the world *back* to extreme poverty, and 200 million more into poverty.

The Bridgetown Covenant could not be clearer on this:

“This Conference meets again, for the fifteenth time, in the most unprecedented of circumstances. In addition to climate change threats, we are experiencing a pandemic which has generated a global health and economic crisis, exacerbating fiscal as well as other challenges faced by developing countries. These grim facts reflect the profound human suffering and immense challenges ahead”

Inequalities around the world, both within and among countries, have increased dramatically. Gaps that were already too wide got much wider – in access to social security, in health, in gender equality, in education, in nutrition, in the digital world, in the divide between formal and informal workers, between MSMEs and big corporations. And new gaps appeared – in vaccine equity, in fiscal packages, in debt stability. Much of humanity and the developing world is being left behind.

And that is a human catastrophe, a moral challenge, and a call to action. UNCTAD’s mission to achieve “prosperity for all” has perhaps never been this urgent.

These changes are still ongoing, and the dust has yet to settle in many key areas.

For example, after decades of retrenchment, the state seems to be back in force as an actor of economic policy. Ambitious, far-reaching, and innovative industrial and productive policies are now a reality in every single region of the world, no matter the politics. Resilience, for long the younger sister of sustainability, is now as key a word. The price has been immense, but we have now learned that unsustainable development is not just prosperity with a high price – it is simply not prosperity at all.

When we lose 10, 20 years of development metrics in the span of just ten months, what this shows is that what we were calling and what we were measuring as progress simply wasn’t.

The Bridgetown Covenant says, and I quote: “The pandemic underscored the uneven resilience and capacities of countries to deal with crises”. Indeed we have now learned that prosperity can only be for all if it is sustainable; that it can only be sustainable if it is resilient; and that it can only be resilient if it is for all.

As a result, Development economics is now in search of a new paradigm and a new consensus.

Old tools, some of which UNCTAD has push forward in the past, such as Special Drawing Rights, are resurfacing in the machinery of development finance, as is the issue of climate finance: mitigation and adaptation, mobilizing sustainable investment, and new treatments for debt management and debt relief.

Trade is becoming more regional and diversified. Green value chains are linking new commodities through new ports and routes around the world. Logistics are being tested like never, rising price levels are disproportionately affecting small island, landlocked, and least developed countries.

At the same time, premature monetary tightening in the rich world may produce capital flight and financial volatility in the Global South, making debt management even harder.

The digital economy is overflowing the confines of the internet and showing its potential but also its divides – both in terms of connectivity and data flows. A new economy is brewing at the frontier, but it is yet unclear whether it will be more inclusive, whether women will recover what they have lost in the last two years and find finally a path to equality and economic empowerment.

And *all* of this is happening with a speed and a sense of urgency of historic proportions. Indeed, as I have said since the beginning of the pandemic, *this* is really the beginning of the twenty-first century. Because epochs don't start on a first of January. The 20th century probably started in 1914, with the start of the First World War, followed also by the so-called Spanish flu. Epochs start when a line is drawn, and we can no longer recognize the past.

This is the case now, and the Bridgetown Covenant recognizes it. A central part of the Covenant is titled “UNCTAD in a world in transformation”, and emphasizes 4 distinct transformations:

- transforming economies through diversification;
- fostering a more sustainable and more resilient economy;
- improving the way development is financed;
- and revitalizing multilateralism

Dear friends,

New contexts require new strategies. I arrived at this institution at a time of disruption but also of opportunity, marked by UNCTAD15, which took place barely a month after my arrival. I cannot say the job has been easy. But what I can say is that it has been incredibly rewarding, and that I have every reason to believe that this institution has a lot of what it takes to do what is needed, and that it has what it takes to do better.

Indeed, in these five months as UNCTAD Secretary General, I have prioritized talking to you all, observing and listening very carefully. I have had over 120 bilaterals by now.

The universal nature of this Institution has really made an impression on me as a firm believer in multilateralism.

And I have also been able to really meet and engage my team. I say with modesty that we have one of the most professional group of experts of the whole UN System in our upper management – and I say with modesty, because that is no merit of my own!

In a word, in these months I have seen that we are really at a turning point moment for this institution. We are asked to step up and really contribute to a more inclusive recovery from this very divisive crisis. The membership demands it; the context allows it; and the team can do it. Furthermore, we have the whole support of the great UN System, with which we will seek to contribute ever more effectively, in the context of the SDGs framework and the UNSG's Our Common Agenda.

Much depends on us getting it right. At risk, is another lost decade in much of the developing world. Our first task is to avoid this from happening. At hand, is the possibility of getting back on track, and building forward differently and together for a world that closes gaps instead of opening them. We must seize this opportunity.

Dear friends,

Lao-Tse said: "A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step". The implementation of this Programme Plan is the first step towards UNCTAD's new journey. But I must be frank with you, and share some caveats that I have:

Prior to this meeting, we came together in November, in the context of the Preparatory Session, to have the first discussion on how the Bridgetown Covenant could be reflected in our 2023 work plan.

As a result of that meeting, we have outlined and presented to you some ideas and elements related to each subprogramme, including areas for highlighted results for 2023, and carefully noted your feedback.

But it is important to highlight that while we have tried to incorporate the Bridgetown Covenant to the proposed draft document presented to you, we had some important limitations.

As you know, our proposed programme budget is just one section of the UN Secretariat fascicle presented by the SG Guterres to Member States in New York. Thus, it is highly formatted and highly inflexible. In addition, we are limited by NY even on the total number of words we can have for our submission, which is to be exact 19,667 words.

This means that I had very little room to maneuver in the sense of how much or how extensively my vision for the implementation of the Bridgetown Covenant could be reflected here, I believe we sincerely made an important effort given the existing limitations.

Having said that, we have ensured clear and visible linkages of the proposed narratives with the Bridgetown Covenant, both, at the level of Overall Orientation, and at the level of each subprogramme:

We have highlighted certain areas you asked us to move forward in the outcome document: you will see dedicated paragraphs on the importance of overarching areas such as statistics and environment and climate change.

While statistics is a cross-cutting dimension embedded in the work of all subprogrammes you will also note specific results, under Subprogramme 1.

On another point, you will note that the principle of decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation for sustainable development, as highlighted by the Bridgetown Covenant, can be clearly identified throughout the document, at the level of subprogrammes, including some specific highlighted results related to these areas, such the one under Subprogramme 3, International Trade and Commodities, related to integrating the climate change dimension into the AfCFTA agreement implementation policies.

In the Bridgetown Covenant you also asked us to strengthen or enhance certain areas of work, such as the digital economy and trade facilitation. This is fully reflected under proposed results you will find under Subprogramme 4 related to e-trade readiness assessments and our ASYCUDA Programme (Trade and Logistics)

The Conference also reaffirmed that while UNCTAD is universal in nature, it should continue giving priority to the needs and interests of developing countries, including by fostering their productive capacities and structural transformation for sustainable development. You will note that this is strongly embedded in our proposed programme plan, including through specific results under Subprogramme 5 (Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes) and Subprogramme 2 (Investment and Enterprise Development) that will continue their good work in this area, most notable through UNCTAD's Productive Capacity Index and all our policy instruments for investment, trade facilitation, STIs and LDC graduation support.

Finally, you asked us to focus on mitigating the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including by contributing to the coordinated international dialogue on COVID-19 response and recovery measures, with a special focus on developing countries.

While all that we propose in this draft programme plan seeks to contribute to recovery efforts, you will also see specific results targeting this area, such as the one under Subprogramme 2, focused on investment policies in support of member States Covid-19 recovery and sustainable development.

Subprogramme 2 also factored in new outputs emanating from UNCTAD 15 mandate on additional support to improve the quality of sustainable financing and investment (tackle SDG washing), to address the implications of the global tax reform for investment, to enhance investment policies to the attainment of the climate and environmental goals of the 2030 agenda and to link more effectively domestic economies with global value chains.

The divisions will further elaborate on their proposed results and provide more details, as you will have the opportunity to interact with them later.

Let me pause on another point. The Bridgetown Covenant clearly reaffirmed the importance of the gender dimension in trade and development and You, Member States, have recognized the critical role that women are playing in COVID-19 response efforts.

In 2023, our plan is to continue and reinforce the cross-cutting treatment of gender in trade and development by integrating the gender dimension into our research, and by improving data and statistics for the design of more gender-responsive trade policies.

In this sense, our Subprogramme 3, will continue focusing to enhance the capacity of member States to identify and address gender-specific trade barriers and gender-specific obstacles on the supply side and on capacity-building for developing countries, and our Subprogramme 4, in the area of e-commerce and the digital economy, will continue the implementation of the eTrade for Women initiative.

Dear Friends:

Before going to the last part of my presentation I want to assure you that your messages in terms of strengthening our results-based management in research and analysis and in technical cooperation, as well as your requests to have an indicators framework to follow on the implementation of the Bridgetown Covenant has been heard, this is work in progress, but one that I take seriously.

Let me now go to the last part of my presentation today: my decisions related to structural changes within the organization, that I believe will help implement the Bridgetown Covenant and all the objectives we have together envisioned. There are 10 transformational initiatives I want to inform you about so I will briefly touch on each of them.

First, I am establishing a new stand-alone, cross – organizational Statistics Unit, to ensure an independent statistics quality assurance, without centralizing the statistical activities of the divisions but coordinating and supporting standardization and coherence throughout the organization.

This will also ensure that data is managed as a shared strategic asset, ultimately increasing the support we provide to member States. We have some of the most authoritative and influential statistics indicators and data analysis of the whole UN system, we need to continue breaking new ground in crucial frontiers in this area, including for example, our support on the GDP plus efforts of the UN secretariat, the South South indicators as well as the vulnerability index demanded by the SIDS countries.

Second, I have integrated the Technical Cooperation Section and the Resources Management Service (RMS). I believe that while the organization is moving towards an integrated way of planning and reporting activities funded by both RB and XB resources, we must create closer synergies between RMS and TCS, and not have two stand-alone and parallel entities, dealing separately with RB on one side, and XB the other.

At the same time, the integration of TCS will allow for enhanced coherence of the clearance and approval of all organizational agreements, will ensure better compliance with project financial and substantive performance monitoring and reporting policies, and will enhance our capacity for data analytics. In recognition of the integration of the technical cooperation component, I am renaming the newly combined entity as the Programme Support and Management Service.

Third, as an initial contribution to our collective effort to revitalize the intergovernmental machinery, recognizing that support needs to be demand-driven, I will empower and accelerate the gradual reorientation of the Intergovernmental Support Service to better reach out to member states and the other stakeholders in the intergovernmental machinery. I have therefore established a new unit in ISS to reach out to the other development stakeholders to open-up the space for them to better contribute to the work we do.

Fourth. Creation of a new branch in DTL focused on e-Commerce and Digital Economy.

Fifth. Creation of new branch in Africa and Least Developed Countries, named “Productive Capacities and Sustainable Development and the change of name of the Branch called “Trade Poverty” to “Trade Poverty and Inequalities”. Change reporting lines of the Regional Office for Africa to ALDC.

Sixth. Refining the programmatic focus and the title of the branch in DITC into “Trading Systems, Services and Creative Economy” instead of ”Trade Negotiations and Commercial Diplomacy Branch”.

Seventh. I will create Thematic Working Groups and coordinating committees in certain key areas:

Working groups: a) taking stock of Covid 19 after 2 years b) UNCTAD’s G20 participation c) How to integrate Environment and Climate change from a development perspective throughout UNCTAD.

Standing committees: a) the statistical coordination committee and b) the Technical Cooperation committee.

Eight. I will improve the UNCTAD publication policy to enhance the delivery and consistency of the Publications Programme.

Ninth. I intend to create dedicated capacity within my Office of the Secretary General to deal with resource mobilization for UNCTAD's work. I count on your support to make sure that we can, with the adequate political will, mobilize together the resources needed to ensure that UNCTAD can provide and meet its potential.

Lastly, Tenth. I will invest in a new and ambitious communication strategy for this institution. Experience has taught me that communications is part of mandate delivery. If our voice is weakened, so will be our impact. Communication that is strategic contributes to organizational objectives, drives engagement, and builds support for effective development policies. We will drive issue led communications focused on key areas, supporting the Bridgetown Covenant implementation, putting our top-level analysis, reports and policy propositions at the heart of our narrative.

We will roll out a renewed and innovative digital presence, that will convey the complexity of our work our analysis and our policy ideas.

We will ensure coherent messaging and a stronger, consistent brand that truly leverages the power of the UN in support of our developing country perspective on trade and development. We will have greater engagement with international, regional, and national media so UNCTAD’s voice is heard regularly on key issues and in your capitals, and finally, we will begin planning for UNCTAD’s 60 anniversary which will take place in 2024 when we can celebrate together the many achievements of the past 60 years and demonstrate that, as a renewed organization, we can successfully meet the challenge of the next 60 years.

Dear friends,

This has been my presentation. I hope I have been able to give you my vision, showing what's at stake and what's at hand, and proving to you how this Programme Plan represents the first step of a larger effort.

Before I finish, I would like to say one last thing.

Now begins a process of consultations. If we really want to achieve what we want to achieve, we must work together. No effort can be isolated. The vision I have today presented is therefore a proposal, not a program.

So I must ask for your trust, your support and your cooperation.

Thank you for very much for your time. I look forward to your comments and questions.