Independent evaluation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sub-Fund Project

"Developing Integrated Programmes to Alleviate Binding Constraints to Development by Fostering Structural Transformation, Building Productive Capacities and Enhancing Investment Opportunities and Linkages with China"

Management Response[1]
October 2025

UNCTAD/OSG/INF/2025/10

[1] **Note:** This document considers each recommendation that is addressed to UNCTAD, discussing them in the order they are presented in the evaluation report. This is done in the format of the management response matrix and includes:

a. The recommendation number and text copied from the evaluation report;
b. Indication of whether the recommendation is accepted fully, partially, or rejected;
c. Description of actions to be taken, with comments as required on the conditions to be met during implementation, or on reasons leading to a partial acceptance or rejection of a recommendation;
d. The responsible party for implementing the action/s;
e. The timeframe or schedule for implementation, if required;
f. Indication if and what resources are required for implementing the recommendation.

Management Response Matrix

Recommendation 1

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">**Evaluation Recommendation (a)**</td><td>UNCTAD should improve project design by ensuring that assumptions and modalities for the involvement of donors and other development partners are verified and confirmed, that the scope of work is adequate to the human resources available for project implementation, that baselines and indicators speak specifically to countries' characteristics and realities, that the institution housing the project has a mandate for coordination, and that the exit strategy is clearly stated. Project management teams and UNCTAD management and UNCTAD technical cooperation section are jointly accountable for this recommendation, in their corresponding stage of project design and approval. Although the project implementation team is the accountable party in ensuring the quality of design, comments from UNDESA SDG Sub-Fund, as the source of funding, are relevant in providing additional feedback and guidance during consultation and revision rounds. For instance, during approval stage, requests could have been made for a formal memorandum of understanding with China as implementation partner and for evidence of consultations with UNRCOs to establish baselines and indicators that speak to what is happening on the ground (e.g., existing productive capacities-related projects and funding potential to support validated recommendations) and to properly map other UN interventions relatable to the project. One example of critical information that could enhance efficiency and effectiveness is incorporating country planning and budgeting cycles into indicators. This strategic approach would align the delivery of project outputs with country policymaking discussions and activities.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">**Management response (b)**

Accepted, partially accepted or rejected</td><td>**Partially accepted**</td></tr>
<tr><td>**Management Plan**</td><td>**Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)**</td><td>To follow part of the recommendations above in future project designs, particularly those related to the UNCTAD secretariat, it is important to note that there is no possibility for UNCTAD to sign an MoU directly with China. The SDG Sub Fund has its own administration and modus operandi where there is no direct involvement of China as donor. The Fund has a dedicated office that ensures the quality of projects and provided implementation arrangements.

Note: for ALDC, the specific indicator used for the evaluation of the situation on the ground is PCI. Therefore, the</td></tr>
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		recommendation for the selection of most suitable indicators is unlikely to be not considered.
	Responsible unit(s) (d)	ALDC, TCS
	Timeframe (e)	With the next project
	Resources required (Y or N) (f)	Y

Recommendation 2

Evaluation Recommendation (a)		UNCTAD should clearly define, from the start of the project, and communicate to stakeholders what aspects and/or elements of the project are global or country specific. For example, the PCI training for statisticians and NPCGA between-countries comparability support a global approach, while the HPCDP, roadmaps, and exit strategies align better with a country-specific perspective. The PCI training for statisticians and the general structure of the NPCGA appear well-suited to a global approach, particularly because PCI results facilitate comparisons between countries. However, the HPCDP, roadmaps, and exit strategies appear to be better suited to a country-specific perspective, with countries taking the lead in owning, financing, and implementing the holistic programme. The advantages of this primary decision to designing would be directing coordination efforts and funding to clear purposes, fostering ownership, and avoiding some of the doubts of country stakeholders and donors at the end of the UNCTAD SDG project.
Management response (b) **Accepted, partially accepted or rejected**		**Rejected**
Management Plan	**Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)**	While the argument about better communication is beyond dispute, elections and changes of governments after the project implementation made sustained information flow challenging. Moreover, it is not entirely clear as to what makes the distinction between global and country-specific and what this is supposed to achieve. For example, NPCGAs follow a particular design which include a numerical assessment of the state of productive capacities of a given country and compares the results with other countries or group of countries. However, the document as such is very much country-specific. So is the Holistic Programme designed to address the gaps identified in NPCGA.

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="3"></td><td>Responsible unit(s) (d)</td><td>ALDC</td></tr>
<tr><td>Timeframe (e)</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Resources required (Y or N) (f)</td><td>N</td></tr>
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Recommendation 3

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Evaluation Recommendation (a)</td><td>UNCTAD should establish, as part of the project design, country-based steering committees with relevant stakeholders, including UNRCO and country focal points, relevant ministries, academia and the private sector to ensure strong and thorough communication channels, country ownership, and high-level engagement from the start. Such a multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism could rely on permanent members that are considered ‘champions’ (i.e. leaders, political influencers, mobilisers) throughout project implementation and add value to existing coordinating mechanisms (e.g., macroeconomic committees). One task of these country-based committees could be developing a knowledge sharing platform to regularly communicate updates on progress against project outcomes and make knowledge products available for long-term capacity building and use. They could support further partnerships on the ground, including with other UN interventions, since those on productive capacities tend to interact with the same stakeholders. This would help UNCTAD non-resident teams learn the institutional dynamics, build a UN-based network on the ground, gain intelligence on key stakeholders, estimate risks well, and adopt timely mitigation measures. It could also support handover mechanisms and the continuation of activities in the case of shifts in the institutional housing of the project.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Management response (b)

Accepted, partially accepted or rejected</td><td>Accepted</td></tr>
<tr><td>Management Plan</td><td>Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance</td><td>From the next similar project design, an approach with steering committees to enable greater engagement of stakeholders, better communication and national ownership will be emphasised and incorporated into project documents.</td></tr>
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	or rejection (c)	
	Responsible unit(s) (d)	ALDC, UNRCO focal points, and country counterpart institutions or focal points
	Timeframe (e)	With the next project
	Resources required (Y or N) (f)	Y

Recommendation 4

Evaluation Recommendation (a)		UNCTAD should establish an effective monitoring system to track progress on indicators, re-assess risks and mitigation measures, and enforce course correction to support project completion and prevent no-cost extension requests. In addition to the internal 6-months progress reports, the scope and characteristics of the UNCTAD SDG project would indicate the need for an independent mid-term evaluation. In the impossibility of such evaluation, the third progress report template (1.5 years into a 3-year project) should be revised to support a more thorough identification of critical gaps in project implementation and inform detailed course-correction (e.g., in addition to reporting achievements, there could also be an estimation of implementation time and constraints, by country and output, specifying stakeholders involved or to be involved, until the end of the project, as well as mid-term lessons learned by country). The risk of such a self-evaluation would be selective reporting and the consequent ill-informed follow-up by TCS and UNDESA. Regarding no-cost extensions, clearer instructions from UNDESA could level expectations held by the project management team. It is critical for project managers to be aware of current discussions on no-cost extensions and the likelihood of approval/refusal as early as possible. No-cost extensions involve costs and may indicate issues in project design and implementation that could have been prevented, as highlighted by this evaluation's findings.
Management response (b) **Accepted, partially accepted or rejected**		**Accepted**
Management Plan	**Actions to be taken, and/or**	Include necessary provisions, including budgetary, in the design of subsequent, similar projects.

	comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)	
	Responsible unit(s) (d)	ALDC, TCS and UNDESA
	Timeframe (e)	With the next project
	Resources required (Y or N) (f)	Y

Recommendation 5

Evaluation Recommendation (a)		UNCTAD should co-develop a post-project resource mobilisation plan with key stakeholders in the beneficiary countries, as soon as there is clarity about country-specific baselines and relatable projects by other development partners. This could be facilitated by a country-based steering committee. This co-development approach would increase country ownership exponentially and support a structured strategy to raise funds through gradual engagement of potential development partners purposefully selected. Evaluation results suggest that such an initiative would include discussions on the funding management structure, the provision of seed money to priority areas, and possibly the adoption of approaches such as results-based financing. This could require a medium to high resource investment if seed money were allocated from the project budget.
Management response (b) **Accepted, partially accepted or rejected**		**Partially accepted**
Management Plan	**Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)**	With increasing trends of decentralized allocation of development finance by donors, it will be difficult for UNCTAD to mobilize financial resources with the scale and magnitude of what Holistic Programmes require for implementation. Therefore, UNCTAD can only play a facilitating role in donor-recipients' engagements. Subject to available financing, UNCTAD could selectively engage with national stakeholders of the current project, based on the willingness of the latter to take the leading role.

		Specific provisions will be incorporated in the future projects of similar nature.
	Responsible unit(s) (d)	ALDC (with country stakeholders)
	Timeframe (e)	Unspecified, depending on the willingness of country-level stakeholders.
	Resources required (Y or N) (f)	Y