



Independent programme evaluation:

**UNCTAD's E-commerce and Digital Economy (ECDE)  
Programme\***

Independent Evaluation Unit  
June 2025

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## Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSTD	Commission on Science and Technology for Development
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DCO	Digital Cooperation Organization
DER	Digital Economy Report
ECDE	E-commerce and Digital Economy
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EIF	European Investment Fund
ERIA	Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia
EQ	Evaluation Questions
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IABD	Inter-American Development Bank
ICC	International Chamber of Commerce
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IGE	Intergovernmental Group of Experts
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISM	Implementation support mechanism
ITC	International Trade Centre
LDC	Least Developed Countries
LNOB	Leaving No One Behind
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PADA	Abidjan District Address System Project
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
RBM	Results Based Management
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TDB	Trade and Development Board
TG-eCOM	Task Group on Measuring E-commerce Value
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNRCO	UN Resident Coordinator Office
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNCITRAL	United Nations Commission on International Trade Law)
UNCTAD	UN Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECLAC	UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
UNOG	United Nations Office at Geneva
UPU	Universal Postal Union
UNSIAP	UN Statistical Institute for Asia Pacific
WSIS	World Summit on the Information Society
WTO	World Trade Organization

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

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This report presents the independent evaluation of **UNCTAD's E-commerce and Digital Economy (ECDE) Programme** for the period 2022-2024. The development of the ECDE Programme was spurred by a strengthening of UNCTAD's mandate on e-commerce and the digital economy at the 14<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference in Nairobi in 2016. The overall objective of the ECDE Programme is to enhance inclusive and sustainable development gains from e-commerce and the digital economy in developing countries, particularly Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The Programme reflects UNCTAD's three pillars of work (research and analysis, consensus-building, and technical cooperation) and synergies between these. The establishment of multistakeholder partnerships reflects an additional element of the Programme to increase coordination and foster collaboration among actors engaged in e-commerce and the digital economy as well as to prevent overlapping initiatives.

**Objective, purpose and scope of the evaluation.** The overall *objective* and *purpose* of the evaluation is threefold: i) To provide an independent assessment of progress towards the achievement of the programme's development objective; ii) To provide an assessment of the degree of the implementation of recommendations from the previous Programme evaluation (2019-21); and iii) To provide strategic recommendations and highlight good practices. The evaluation will also serve as an evidence base for ECDE in the planned 2026 evaluation of UNCTAD's subprogramme 4 on Technology and Logistics. The expected *users* of the evaluation's findings are the ECDE Programme Team as well as UNCTAD as a whole (including senior management). Financing donors and partners of the Programme are also identified as key users, in particular the core donors. The *scope* of the evaluation thus includes the entire ECDE Programme in the period from 2022 to 2024, since the completion of the previous evaluation.<sup>1</sup> The evaluation cuts across two Work Plans (2019-2023 and 2024-2027) and covers activities implemented under all three pillars as well as partnerships.

**Approach and methodology.** The following main *data collection methods* have been applied: i) A review of relevant UNCTAD and ECDE Programme documentation; ii) Consultations with a total of 67 key stakeholders (35 women and 32 men); iii) Field observations gathered during a 10-day field mission to Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal in January 2025; and iv) An online survey, linked to the programme's intergovernmental work. A similar survey was implemented in the previous evaluation, allowing for comparison over time. The major limitations to the evaluation have been the constraint of conducting only one field visit to West Africa, due to a limited evaluation budget, along with a relatively low response rate to the online survey. To address these limitations, the evaluation team placed strong emphasis on triangulating data and information from different sources during analysis and report writing.

## Key Findings

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**Relevance.** The ECDE Programme is well aligned with UN strategic guiding documents where digital transformation is highlighted as a key pillar for development. The recently adopted Global Digital Compact has further emphasised the importance of digitalization and of

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<sup>1</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/osginf2022d5\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/osginf2022d5_en.pdf)

closing the digital divide and advancing responsible and equitable data governance approaches. The Programme is also highly relevant for member States who continue to demand support in developing their e-commerce structures. The substantial emphasis on SDG 17 through multistakeholder partnerships further enhances the relevance of the Programme.

**Research and analysis.** There are strong indications that ECDE publications are being widely downloaded and several of the Digital Economy Reports (DERs) are being applied in policy development. In particular, the DER 2021 on data flows has contributed to the current strong global focus on data governance. Research uptake has proven easier to document with international organizations than with member States, and the uptake is better documented in developing countries than in LDCs. Both the Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy (2020) and the Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade (2023) have been widely downloaded and the uptake of the Handbook has been well documented. Dissemination of research has been enhanced by stronger engagement during the research process, but there is still scope for more dedicated targeting in dissemination. This applies to the entire UNCTAD organization, which has yet to issue a corporate outreach and communication strategy, as intended at the time of the 2022 evaluation.

**The intergovernmental work on e-commerce and the digital economy for development** is an essential part of UNCTAD's work and is considered by most stakeholders to be very relevant. Stakeholders rate the UNCTAD secretariat's performance in organising and communicating around the Intergovernmental Group of Experts (IGE) meetings as very high. They find the interactive debates of the IGE on E-commerce and the Digital Economy to be both open and inclusive, with sessions showing improvement in several ways since the 2022 evaluation. There are concrete examples of how member States have used engagement in the IGEs, and in particular the 2023 IGE which focused on data flows, to further enhance their national policy environment on data. The participants in the Working Group on Measuring E-Commerce and the Digital Economy find it relevant and useful for methodological discussions and for ensuring the quality, comparability and usability of statistics.

**Technical cooperation and capacity building.** The **eTrade Readiness Assessments** continue to offer unique and holistic diagnostics of e-commerce "ecosystems" and serve as important reference documents for subsequent development of the e-commerce "sector" within the supported countries. UNCTAD is seen as a promoter of the multistakeholder, consultative processes and public-private dialogue. During the evaluation period, the ECDE Programme has successfully adapted eTrade Readiness Assessments, originally developed for LDCs, to make these diagnostics relevant and attractive to non-LDC countries. This has required flexible and contextualised processes and products based on differentiated demands coming from more advanced developing countries. This also relates to the interface between the eTrade Readiness Assessments and subsequent strategy and policy development processes. The responsibility for implementation rests with the national governmental institutions and here challenges often occur in relation to financing and with the capacity of national governmental and regional institutions to coordinate and follow-up on working processes internally. Legal reforms often constitute the main hurdle, although there are examples of progress in this area (e.g. in Senegal). UNCTAD's implementation reviews and the recently launched **eTrade Reform Tracker** have the potential to mitigate interministerial tensions by enhancing transparency on progress through clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The lack of political commitment can constitute an important barrier to progress, although the selected evaluation case countries generally demonstrated

strong commitment and interest in implementing recommendations from various ECDE Programme initiatives.

The **Masterclasses** implemented under the **eTrade for Women initiative** have been highly relevant, and there is strong evidence of established women entrepreneurs' networks and enhanced skills, which have led to growth, access to capital, and new opportunities. Achievements from policy dialogue are still less clearly documented and are more anecdotal. Women community building has become more strategic and systematised with commissioned community leaders, regular training activities and a more integrated approach to involving community members in other ECDE Programme activities. However, the engagement level of community members varies considerably, and ownership towards the communities could be enhanced.

UNCTAD has promoted the inclusion of developing countries in **measuring digital trade** with the development of the Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade, and capacity building of statisticians from developing countries. While such statistics have been collected by developing countries there are still no examples from LDCs and they require more support.

The **eTrade for all** partnership is highly valued by its members, as an expert-level networking and information sharing hub, creating interesting collaboration opportunities. The eTrade for all initiative is seen as a useful entry point for members to get access to in-country e-commerce development processes. Some key stakeholders still found that the “capital” of the eTrade for all network is underutilised and that there could be scope for fostering enhanced collaboration. Recently, new ways of engaging partners (e.g. “Breakfast” events) have been successfully introduced by the ECDE Programme team with a view to spurring more active engagement and involvement of partners. The **eWeek** is implemented with various eTrade for all partners and has served as a useful multistakeholder event, bringing together multiple actors within the e-commerce space. Some stakeholders expressed a wish to make the event more structured and outcome focused by topic, without losing its informal character.

**Programme efficiency, M&E and partnerships.** The ECDE Programme continues to be highly reliant on extrabudgetary resources which is putting staff members under severe pressure. The overall budget has decreased while demand for services has increased. The budget allocation across pillars of the programme has largely remained unchanged and an even larger share of the budget is allocated to technical cooperation where the eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies continue to make up the majority of initiatives. This aligns with the priorities of member States (as reflected by concrete requests for assistance) and the funding partners. The ECDE **M&E framework** is highlighted as a best practice example within UNCTAD, and it has been substantially improved through the last Work Plan with more emphasis on including analysis and qualitative indicators at the outcome level.

**Programme coherence and synergies.** Internal coherence and synergies across the three pillars of the Programme have been significantly enhanced over the last three years and there are good examples of activities within research, technical cooperation, consensus-building and partnerships informing each other. Within member States and the UN Country Teams, digital transformation is high on the agenda, and there are several good examples of collaboration between the ECDE Programme and UN Resident Coordinator Offices. In other cases, it has been a challenge for the ECDE Programme to effectively tap into the UN-wide



programming cycle and establish collaboration with other UN agencies, and there is still room for improvement when it comes to other development partners, although concrete joint programmes are being implemented e.g. in the Pacific and in Ghana.

**Gender mainstreaming and social inclusion.** The ECDE Programme has been strengthened in terms of mainstreaming gender and other cross-cutting issues. The Work Plan for 2024-2027 strongly reflects gender equality, human rights, environmental considerations and the inclusion of marginalised people such as persons with disabilities. Environmental considerations are the main topic of the DER 2024, and these are also included for the first time in the eTrade Readiness Assessment in Indonesia. Gender equality is mainstreamed in technical cooperation and gender-disaggregated data is collected wherever possible, including in M&E data. There is, however, no recognition of the different impact of macroeconomic policies on different genders in the Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade. There are several good examples of how the Programme has integrated organizations representing women and persons with disabilities in consultation processes, especially in technical cooperation. While it was a strategic recommendation from the evaluation in 2022 to actively encourage the enrolment of marginalised groups in the eTrade for Women application processes to clearly signal non-discrimination as a key value, this has only been partially implemented, with missed opportunities identified, particularly concerning persons with disabilities.

## Conclusions

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The activities and products offered and delivered through the ECDE Programme have been **highly relevant to the needs and priorities** of member States. The ECDE Programme clearly adds value by bringing together member States' voices and experiences from the ground through a focus on multistakeholder engagement and collaborative exchange. In addition, an enhanced focus in this programme period on **data governance issues** (as reflected in the Global Digital Compact) and strengthening of national capacities on data collection and statistics with regards to measuring digital economy/trade has been very timely and well received by the respective stakeholder and beneficiary groups. Overall, the relevance of the programme design and its intervention focus has further increased following shifting global landscapes since 2022, including recent geopolitical developments.

In general, the ECDE Programme beneficiaries and other stakeholders express **high satisfaction with the support provided and the quality of the products delivered**. A characteristic for most of the programme deliverables is that they are based on proven concepts and "blueprints" from the first phase of the programme, which in some cases have been further consolidated and adapted along the implementation process. The **DER flagship reports** and the **Handbook on measuring digital trade** are being taken up in other research products, indicating a strong usability potential. There are also concrete examples of policy documents reflecting ECDE Programme research. The capacity building and technical cooperation provided is generally deemed very useful and of high quality.

**Progress** is clearly evident across all outcome areas of the ECDE Programme. This also reflects growing recognition at global, regional and national levels that the digital transformation process is advancing very rapidly and that all countries need to adapt to these realities, including developing countries that are often falling behind. In view of this, the **eTrade Readiness Assessments** constitute an important holistic and unique diagnostic for both LDCs and non-LDCs, although political, financial and human resource constraints,

including interministerial tensions within countries, tend to delay implementation of the recommendations provided. These processes take time to develop and typically do not take-off immediately. The eTrade **Reform Tracker** developed by UNCTAD has the potential to serve as a valuable tool to further support an effective implementation of e-commerce strategies or similar policy documents and helps to make roles and responsibilities clearer to different government agencies. The **eTrade for Women Masterclasses** have been scaled up and community-building has been further enhanced and structured, although the communities could benefit from more ownership by the community members. Steps are being taken by the Programme to ensure more systematic data collection which may help to better document results under eTrade for Women. There is, however, good evidence of growth in the companies, strengthened capacities and networks established.

The ECDE Programme continues to be **under pressure in terms of human resources** and the total number of programme staff has been reduced despite an increase in the number of programme staff funded by the regular budget. In view of an increasing demand for the products and services delivered by the Programme, and the need to be adaptive and flexible in the implementation and follow-up of activities, **constraints and inflexibility in budget and resource allocations (outside of the programme's direct control) represent a major obstacle** for unfolding the full potential of the programme. The **M&E framework in the Work Plan 2024-2027** is well geared to monitor progress and extract learning from programme implementation. In a pragmatic way, it includes more operational and measurable outcome indicators and new and innovative practices to measure, for instance, policy impact from research products and from eTrade for Women support.

Compared to the last programme period, the ECDE Programme is now functioning **more coherently**, with activities across the three pillars complementing each other to a greater extent. For example, the eTrade for Women interventions have been more closely linked to other programme initiatives, such as eTrade Readiness Assessments, e-commerce strategies, and the eWeek. The research component has also been integrated into other activities by including presentations of research results at eTrade for Women Masterclasses and in the eWeek and IGE sessions. This has been useful in disseminating research results. Complementarity with other UNCTAD programmes has been most evident with the UNCTAD Train-for-Trade Programme. Likewise, there are a number of good examples of how **complementarity** between the ECDE Programme and other development interventions has resulted in enhanced collaboration opportunities.

The ECDE Programme has expanded its **collaboration** on statistics with other key institutions (such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), World Trade Organization (WTO) and the UN regional commissions) to deliver capacity building and technical assistance to countries. There is a need to further enhance such joint technical assistance initiatives, at a time when resources continue to be a constraining factor. The **eTrade for all** partnership is highly valued by its members, as an expert-level networking and information sharing hub which creates interesting collaboration opportunities. There is still scope for enhanced collaboration to harness the full potential of the eTrade for all network, including identifying alternative ways to encourage more active participation of partners.

**Gender mainstreaming** has been strengthened in the Programme, and a more systematic approach to including women's organizations in technical cooperation has been realised. The ECDE is highlighted as a best practice example of this within UNCTAD's technical

cooperation, particularly through the gender-targeted interventions of eTrade for Women. Social inclusion has also been enhanced on an analytical level and through consultations with organizations representing persons with disabilities. A missed opportunity to more explicitly consider the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the call for proposals for Masterclasses was identified. **Environmental concerns** have been strongly reflected in the DER 2024 and in subsequent events, and an assessment of environmental challenges in e-commerce is being included in the recently launched eTrade Readiness Assessment in Indonesia.

## Strategic recommendations

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### Strategic Recommendation 1 (the UNCTAD Secretary-General):

**Funding:** Based on a strong and growing demand from member States for good quality research and data products/services, the enhanced relevance of digitalization to development and to UNCTAD, and the positive assessment of the ECDE Programme in the evaluation, it is recommended to **increase the amount of regular budget funds allocated to the programme**, if in alignment with the expected Outcome document of the next UNCTAD Ministerial Conference (UNCTAD 16, October 2025).

**Communication/dissemination of research products and data:** In addition to one comprehensive DER every 2-3 years, it is recommended to focus more efforts (in-between the DER reports) on “breaking-down” key messages of the DER according to specific stakeholder groups/audiences/topics/regions (e.g. through the preparation of different policy briefs etc.). There is strong demand for this and potential utility could be high. It is also recommended to identify more ways and channels to proactively communicate the publication of key reports, data etc. It is noted that the programme is increasingly disseminating materials (e.g. the DER, the Year in Review report) to UNRCOs (via the UNDCO policy bulletins), which is seen as a good step forward in this area. Still, not all UNRCOs are aware of the DER and its content, and it is recommended to further enhance what is distributed and how.

### Strategic Recommendation 2 (to ECDE Programme donors and ECDE Programme management):

**To Programme donors:** Based on the overall positive assessment of the ECDE Programme in this evaluation, and the unique and high-quality products and services delivered within a tight budget, it is recommended that programme donors **continue their financial support** to the programme in light of UNCTAD’s continued strengthened mandate. At the same time, donors are encouraged to allocate a larger share through the UN Regular Budget to the programme to allow for more long-term planning, both in relation to programme staff and activities. In cases where donor funding is allocated for specific programme activities, it is recommended to consider allocation of specific/additional resources **in support of follow-up activities**, to strengthen the applicability and uptake of newly developed capacities and skills (individually and institutionally) in the area of e-commerce and digital economy measurement, and in support of implementing recommendations (e.g. from eTrade Readiness Assessments) and sustainability aspects.

**To ECDE Programme management:** It is recommended that the ECDE Programme management **further map and explore opportunities for expanding donor funding**, with a

particular view to attracting new emerging and non-traditional donors (philanthropy funds, banks, corporations etc.) to further diversify and broaden its extrabudgetary funding base. It is noted that both Saudi Arabia and China have shown interest in supporting the programme.

### **Strategic Recommendation 3 (to ECDE Programme management):**

Overall, it is recommended to **continue focusing work within the existing overall programme framework**, as the demand and relevance of products and technical cooperation is high. In terms of **follow-up activities**, and given existing funding and resource constraints, it is recommended to **further prioritise and target programme resources and efforts** on those countries that demonstrate ownership and interest in supporting the implementation of recommendations and prioritised actions from developed eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies, including through own resources and capacities, to enhance the likelihood of impact and sustainability.

More specific recommendations related to the products/areas of the ECDE Programme support include:

**eTrade Readiness Assessments/e-commerce strategies:** i) Continue and, if resources allow, **further strengthen and prioritise the eTrade Reform Tracker initiative**, as it is likely to become an important supplement to the implementation reviews which place stronger emphasis on measuring qualitative achievements at the country-level. ii) Explore opportunities for **expanding the focus in the assessments on forward-looking perspectives** (e.g. in relation to cross-border trade, which is of key importance for most countries). iii) Further explore opportunities for **strengthening implementation support** for prioritised recommendations within countries.

**eTrade for all:** i) Explore further and facilitate **new and alternative ways and opportunities for exchange among eTrade for all partners** to motivate enhanced and active engagement in addition to partners' current contributions to the eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies development processes. ii) It is also recommended to further explore the potential **to engage more with private sector strategic leadership**, e.g. based on the model the programme tried to implement with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) but which never materialised.

**Capacity building/technical cooperation:** i) Facilitate more possibilities for those attending particular training sessions (e.g. on statistics) for **sharing, as a group, experiences from applying new skills and knowledge** to further enhance the utility and uptake from these efforts and to support member States in applying new skills and capacities in implementation. ii) Promote the sharing of experience among participants of capacity building events through **"exchange sharing platforms"**. iii) In order to support the implementation of statistics on digital trade, it is recommended to pilot the compilation of such statistics in one LDC and ensure thorough dissemination of learnings, since member States are eager to gain concrete learnings from implementation in practice.

**Partnerships/collaboration:** i) Continue to **focus on joint delivery of training packages** (such as those organised with OECD, IMF and WTO), as this adds value and additional perspectives to the training, and enables greater outreach. ii) Explore possibilities for **working more strategically together with regional/national actors** (such as the Regional Economic Commissions) and tap further into the competencies and connections of these

actors to further develop, pursue and follow-up on the various initiatives launched by the ECDE Programme (e.g. eTrade Readiness Assessments), and to reduce unit costs.

**Strategic Recommendation 4 on Gender, disability inclusion and leaving no one behind (LNOB) (to ECDE Programme Management):**

**eTrade for Women:** i) Further explore opportunities for **more systematic data collection and documentation of results** (outcomes/impact) **from support to women entrepreneurs** to complement the individual case stories. Steps are already being taken in this direction. ii) Explore **how community leaders' ownership of the Communities could be further enhanced**, e.g. by engaging them further in planning and discussions on how the Communities should work, and making it more transparent how and who, besides the Masterclass participants, can be selected for the communities. iii) Explore how community members can more actively engage as they have a wealth of experience that could be better leveraged. This also includes dissemination of new knowledge and skills acquired through the community. iv) Consider **adding “persons with disabilities” as an inclusion criterion** in the call for applications (as is the case for religious and ethnic minorities). This should not constitute a main selection criterion, but could be a sub-criterion when all main criteria have been fulfilled. In the wider programme **context, introduce more systematic engagement of organizations representing persons with disabilities**. v) Consider introducing **more explicit poverty/sustainability criteria** (such as targeting specific vulnerable groups or including them in the business value chain, selecting entrepreneurs from sectors that have potential also for social impact, etc.), in selecting eTrade for Women Masterclass participants, especially in a situation where many applications are expected.

## 1. Introduction

UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has been working on the topic of e-commerce and the digital economy for development since the early 2000s to enhance the ability of developing and least developed countries (LDCs) to take advantage of the opportunities offered by digitalization, while minimising its risks. In 2016, the Nairobi Maafikiano - the outcome document of its 14<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference - gave UNCTAD a stronger mandate in this area, thus paving the way for the creation of the E-commerce and Digital Economy (ECDE) Programme. The Nairobi Maafikiano called attention to the role of digitalization in transforming economies for a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable world. It emphasised the need for further research on e-commerce and the digital economy for development and for support to governments in building capacities in this area, as well as the need for resource mobilisation to achieve these objectives.

In 2021, the Bridgetown Covenant – the outcome document of UNCTAD's 15<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference - recognised the widening digital divide and uneven speed of digital transformation as two major global challenges that have become more acute since the Nairobi Maafikiano.<sup>2</sup> The Covenant called on UNCTAD to strengthen its work on assisting developing countries to enhance their readiness to engage and integrate into the digital economy, thus reinforcing UNCTAD's mandate which is carried out through the ECDE Programme. In view of the growing importance of digitalization in the global development context, evidenced by the recently adopted Global Digital Compact (2024), UNCTAD's 16<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference (upcoming in October 2025), is expected to place a renewed and stronger emphasis on the work on digitalization for development.

To meet the expectations signalled through the strengthened mandate from UNCTAD's member States, and in view of the growing demand for technical assistance, research and dialogue, UNCTAD's ECDE Branch was created in the Division on Technology and Logistics in August 2021, as an upgrade of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Policy Section from which the ECDE Programme had previously operated.

The ECDE Programme aims to enhance inclusive and sustainable development gains from e-commerce and the digital economy for people and businesses in developing countries, particularly LDCs. Key initiatives under the ECDE Programme include the flagship publication, the Digital Economy Report (DER), the Intergovernmental Group of Experts (IGE) on E-Commerce and the Digital Economy, the Working Group on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy, the multistakeholder *eTrade for all* initiative which was evaluated in 2019,<sup>3</sup> E-commerce and Law Reform which was evaluated in 2011,<sup>4</sup> the eTrade for Women initiative, the eTrade Readiness Assessments, E-commerce Strategies and Implementation Support Mechanism (ISM), and the UNCTAD eWeek (previously called eCommerce Week).<sup>5</sup>

The Programme has been implemented based on multi-annual Work Plans. The first Work Plan covered the period 2019-2023 while its successor and current Work Plan covers the

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<sup>2</sup> The Bridgetown Covenant: Implications for the E-Commerce and Digital Economy (ECDE) Programme, / October 2021.

<sup>3</sup> UNCTAD (2019), Independent evaluation of *eTrade for all*, Evaluation and Monitoring Unit, September 2019.

<sup>4</sup> UNCTAD (2011), Balestrieri, Emmanuela: External Evaluation of UNCTAD's E-Commerce and Law Reform Project, July 2011.

<sup>5</sup> UNCTAD (2022), Independent evaluation of *eTrade for all*, Evaluation and Monitoring Unit, September 2019.

period 2024-2027. While the first phase of the Programme was characterised by several years of expansion, the current Work Plan prioritises consolidation with a focus on effective delivery of activities for the achievement of expected results and sustained impact. This aim is in line with recommendations from the first ECDE Programme evaluation conducted in 2022.<sup>6</sup> As agreed with funding partners, the ECDE Programme is to be evaluated every third year; hence this is the second Programme evaluation commissioned by UNCTAD. The evaluation has been managed by UNCTAD's Independent Evaluation Unit and conducted by an independent external evaluation team (in the following just referred to as the *Evaluation*).<sup>7</sup>

## 1.1 Evaluation objective, purpose and scope

According to the Terms of Reference (ToR), the overall *objective* of the evaluation is threefold:

- To provide an independent assessment of progress towards the achievement of the programme's development objective, assessing performance as per the established indicators vis-à-vis the strategies and implementation modalities chosen and programme management arrangements;
- To provide an assessment of the degree of the implementation of recommendations from the previous Programme evaluation (2019-21);
- To provide strategic recommendations, good practices and lessons learnt.

Thus, the evaluation serves an *accountability* purpose by documenting results and achievements, while at the same time assessing implementation of recommendations from the previous Programme evaluation. This is done with a view to providing new recommendations for improving the Programme moving forward. Further, the evaluation serves a *learning* purpose, advising on future actions and contributing to organizational learning. Lastly, the evaluation will serve as an evidence base for the planned 2026 evaluation of the work of the UNCTAD Division on Technology and Logistics (subprogramme 4).

Expected users of this evaluation are the ECDE Programme team, UNCTAD as a whole (including senior management), as well as financing donors and partners of the Programme; in particular the core donors (Australia, the Netherlands, Germany (until 2025), Sweden and Switzerland, but also other project funding partners (a total of 14 in 2024).

The *scope* of the evaluation includes the entire ECDE Programme and covers the period from 2022 to 2024, i.e. the period since the completion of the previous evaluation. The evaluation cuts across the two Work Plans (2019-2023 and 2024-2027 respectively). The evaluation covers activities implemented under all three pillars (research and analysis, technical cooperation, and consensus building), as well as partnerships. It focuses on the outcomes attained as well as on the relevance, synergies and coherence across components and the extent to which gender and disability inclusion and the principles of leaving no one behind (LNOB) have been mainstreamed.

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<sup>6</sup> UNCTAD (2022), Independent programme evaluation: UNCTAD's E-Commerce and Digital Economy Programme, Independent Evaluation Unit, September 2022. In accordance with the Programme's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework, the full Programme underwent an evaluation in 2022, covering the period 2019-2021

<sup>7</sup> The evaluation team consisted of two independent consultants: Mr. Carsten Schwensen and Ms. Louise Scheibel Smed.



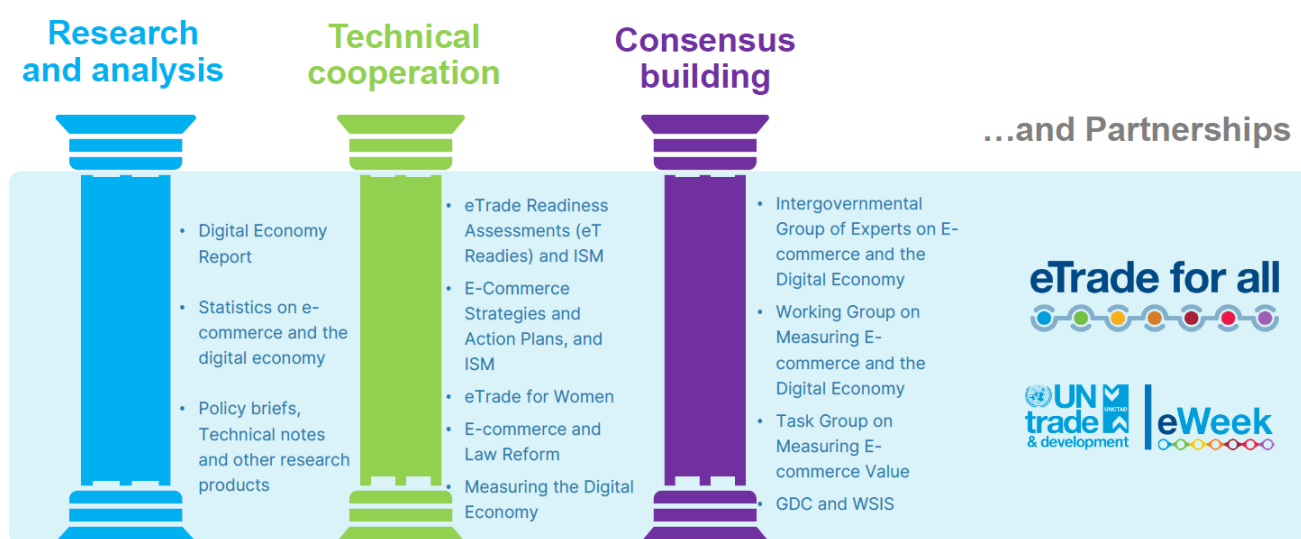
## 1.2 Report structure

After this short introduction, the context and subject of the evaluation are explained in Chapter 2. This includes an introduction to key activities offered by the programme. In Chapter 3, the methodology and approach are explained starting with the programme's Theory of Change (ToC). Chapter 4 first analyses the programme design and relevance in 4.1. Then it turns to programme implementation and results in 4.2 which is structured around the three pillars of work. In section 4.3, the efficiency of the programme is discussed with a specific focus on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and partnerships. Section 4.4 then analyses internal and external coherence, while 4.5 analyses the extent to which gender has been mainstreamed and a disability and social inclusion consideration has been applied. Sustainability aspects are discussed as part of sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4. Conclusions and recommendations are then presented in Chapter 5.

## 2. Context and subject of the evaluation

The ECDE Programme is structured around three pillars in line with UNCTAD's overall mandate: research and analysis, consensus building and technical cooperation. This reflects UNCTAD's vision to "think, debate and act". Multistakeholder partnerships reflect an additional element of the Programme to ensure increased coordination among actors engaged in e-trade and the digital economy and prevent overlapping initiatives. Figure 1 illustrates the three pillars and the main activities within these pillars.

**Figure 1.** ECDE Programme's pillars and partnerships

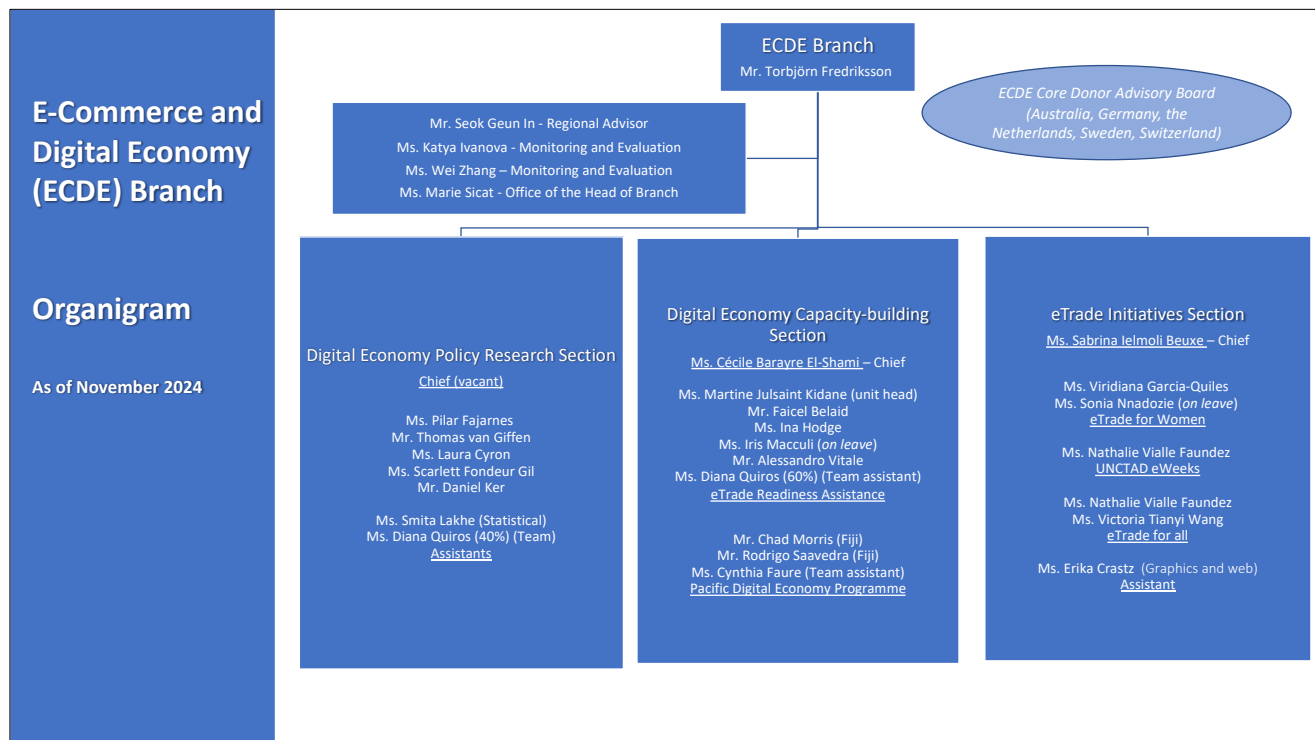


In its first five years of operations (2019-23), the Programme raised close to USD 23 million in extrabudgetary funding for supporting developing countries in e-commerce and the digital economy. In 2023, Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland were the five core donors providing two-thirds of the programme's extrabudgetary resources. These funding partners also constituted the Core Donor Advisory Board. Germany has, however, decided to end their funding to the Programme. Figure 2 provides an organigram of the ECDE Branch and the number of staff members allocated to key activities. It is noted that six staff members are focusing on the partnership elements (one staff member is responsible for the eWeek, two are allocated to eTrade for Women, two for eTrade for all), five for the capacity building section in charge of the eTrade Readiness Assessments, ISM and legal reform, three staff members are engaged in the (mainly Australia-funded) Pacific Digital Economy



Programme (PDEP)<sup>8</sup> jointly implemented with United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the research section and statistics currently have six staff members. All sections are also provided with administrative support.

**Figure 2.** Organigram of the ECDE Branch



The ECDE Programme has global reach with a specific emphasis on LDCs. While the scope is global and the Programme continues to expand to new regions, so far the focus, particularly in regard to the programme’s technical cooperation activities, has been on West and East Africa, South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific, not least reflecting the geographical distribution of LDCs.<sup>9</sup> Support to e.g. Latin America, has so far been limited, but initiatives have been taken to ensure a greater geographical balance.

Subsequent sections will provide an overview of key programme activities with an emphasis on developments since the last ECDE Programme evaluation.

## 2.1 Research and analysis pillar

The main output under the research and analysis pillar is the biennial flagship publication - the DER - first published in 2019, and subsequently in September 2021, and July 2024. In addition, a regional Pacific DER was published in February 2022. The DER is one of seven flagship reports by UNCTAD. It informs member States and other stakeholders in their policymaking on e-commerce and digital economy issues, as it analyses current trends and major international policy issues regarding ICT, e-commerce and the digital economy, and their implications for trade and development. The 2024 edition of the DER was launched

<sup>8</sup> The European Union and New Zealand joined Australia in funding PDEP in 2023.

<sup>9</sup> List of outputs 2019-2021, August 2021.

through a press conference in Geneva and a series of presentations around the world. These have included briefings organised for eTrade Focal Points and eTrade for all partners.

Aside from these publications, a number of research pieces (background notes) have been prepared in advance of intergovernmental work, such as under the IGE and the Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy. The programme's research activities also include thematic reports (e.g., on taxation and e-commerce, women digital entrepreneurship, cyberlaws, etc.), the development of methodologies and the collection, processing, and dissemination of internationally comparable statistics on trade in ICT goods and services, trade in digitally deliverable services, the size of the ICT sector and the use of ICT by enterprises.

Another aspect of the programme's research work involves conducting an annual survey of official economy statistics from National Statistical Offices or other competent authorities of member States through an online questionnaire. This work is also linked to various capacity-building activities (see section on technical cooperation on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy under 3.3) and the Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy (3.2).

## 2.2 Consensus-building pillar

The *consensus-building pillar* relates to the intergovernmental machinery of UNCTAD which fosters policy debates among member States and agreement on policy recommendations. Consensus-building activities through the IGE on E-Commerce and the Digital Economy are expected to primarily result in increased dialogue and exchange of good practices among policymakers and a set of agreed policy recommendations that can lead to concrete policy actions in member States. The IGE reports to the Trade and Development Board (TDB) which oversees the activities of the organization and provides strategic guidance to the secretariat.<sup>10</sup> As per the ToR for the IGE, it should be organised in conjunction with the UNCTAD eWeek.<sup>11</sup> This has, however, not been possible in recent years due to COVID-19 and the renovation of the Palais des Nations.

The policy focus of the IGE is maximising the development gains from e-commerce and the digital economy, addressing associated challenges, and thus strengthening its development dimension. The deliberations of the IGE offer an opportunity to strengthen synergies between the consensus-building efforts, research and analysis and technical assistance of UNCTAD.

Annual IGE sessions have taken place. During the evaluation period, the fifth, sixth and seventh sessions were conducted.<sup>12</sup> The Eighth session is planned for May 2025. Another key element in the consensus-building pillar is the Working Group on Measuring E-Commerce and the Digital Economy, which was created by the IGE in 2019. Its objective is to contribute to and advance cooperation on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy and enhance the availability, comparability, quality, relevance, and usability of statistics concerning e-commerce and the digital economy. The Working Group reports to the IGE. Its last three meetings were held in November-December 2022, November 2023, and December 2024. In November 2023, following a recommendation of the Working Group and

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<sup>10</sup> Guide for Delegates, UNCTAD in the United Nation's System, UNCTAD, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Terms of reference for the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy, revised September 2021.

<sup>12</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb\\_ede7inf1\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb_ede7inf1_en.pdf).

endorsement by the IGE, a Task Group on Measuring E-commerce Value (TG-eCOM) was established with a view to developing internationally agreed guidelines and recommendations on the value generated through online sales.

### 2.3 Technical cooperation pillar

Under this pillar of work, the ECDE Programme provides capacity-building and advisory support aimed at strengthening the ability of member States to engage in and benefit from e-commerce and the digital economy.

**eTrade Readiness Assessments.** One key element of the technical cooperation pillar is the *eTrade Readiness Assessments*, which provide a diagnostic of the state of the e-commerce enabling environment in partner countries across seven *eTrade for all* policy areas considered most relevant for e-commerce development: i) E-commerce readiness assessment and strategy formulation; ii) ICT infrastructure and services; iii) Trade logistics and trade facilitation; iv) Payment solutions; v) Legal and regulatory frameworks; vi) E-commerce skills development; and vii) Access to financing.

The areas covered in the eTrade Readiness Assessments are considered essential for countries seeking to strengthen their e-commerce ecosystems, whether they are LDCs or more advanced economies. These assessments have facilitated the comparison of findings, identification of challenges, exploration of development opportunities, and sharing of experiences across countries. The methodology and policy focus have been continuously refined, recognising the need for a more adaptable approach, particularly for countries with advanced digital economies (new approach currently being piloted for the first time in a G20 country [Indonesia]), and considering the need for a greater involvement of policymakers while conducting the assessments.

The assessments represent a key policy tool for governments, the private sector, development partners and other stakeholders to improve their understanding of the challenges and opportunities for e-commerce development, better engage in leading and supporting policy reforms in e-commerce and the digital economy for development, and to optimise coordinated actions on the ground. In addition, the assessments provide specific recommendations on how to address existing weaknesses through concrete actions in an “Action Matrix” and propose partners that could provide support in the respective areas. These matrices have not been promoted as binding documents, but more as a guiding document. So far, 34 national and 2 regional assessments have been finalised. Of these, 24 were for LDCs. During this evaluation period, 13 eTrade Readiness Assessments have been finalised or initiated.

**Implementation Support Mechanism (ISM).** In order to follow up on the suggested actions and recommendations from eTrade Readiness Assessments, the ECDE Programme introduced the ISM in 2020. Implementation Reviews are the cornerstone of the eTrade ISM and can be leveraged as a useful guide to scale-up implementation support interventions and benefit from assistance provided by UNCTAD and development partners, including eTrade for all partners.

Annual capacity building workshops with ISM focal points are conducted to support implementation and joint sharing across countries. In 2024, the workshop featured a demonstration of the eTrade Reform Tracker which triggered official requests for its

deployment from Kenya, Mauritania, Fiji and Solomon Islands.<sup>13</sup> This was also confirmed by interviews.

**E-commerce strategies.** The ECDE Programme also supports national governments and regional economic communities in developing e-commerce strategies/action plans/policies. This is sometimes conducted as a follow-up exercise from the eTrade Readiness Assessment (e.g. in Trinidad and Tobago, Kenya and the Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS]) or as stand-alone exercises. So far, e-commerce strategies/action plans have been developed for Benin, Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Fiji, Jordan, Kenya, Trinidad and Tobago, Myanmar, Oman, Rwanda, Solomon Islands, Tunisia (two action plans), Malawi, and the ECOWAS, providing them with an operational and planning tool to mobilise resources and fast-track implementation. Countries that UNCTAD is currently supporting to develop their strategies/policies include Ghana, Mauritania, Samoa, and Timor-Leste. Similar to the approach taken with eTrade Readiness Assessments, the ECDE Programme has been working to strengthen government ownership of E-commerce Strategies, building on existing structures established during the assessments. The nomination of country focal points is a key element in this regard.

**Assistance with measuring e-commerce and the digital economy.** The UNCTAD Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy was launched in 2020. The previous programme evaluation (2022) recommended to enhance capacity development of national stakeholders, including focal points, on the collection of data for the production of statistics related to the digital economy and e-commerce for development. In 2022, ECDE launched a new online course based on the revised Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy, in collaboration with UNCTAD's Train-for-Trade. In July 2022, an initial training was conducted in the Pacific region,<sup>14</sup> with 38 participants from 14 Pacific countries and territories (27 received certificates). In 2023, a second edition of the Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade was released, jointly developed by the IMF, OECD, UNCTAD and WTO.

In the period under evaluation, UNCTAD has worked closely with the IMF, OECD, World Bank and WTO, as well as partners from the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the UN Statistical Institute for Asia Pacific (UNSIAP), UN-ESCWA, the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics and others, to deliver training and capacity building to help improve the availability of timely, robust, and comparable official statistics on the digital economy and digital trade in developing countries.

**E-Commerce and Law Reform programme.** Key outputs include the Global Cyberlaw Tracker<sup>15</sup> measuring the degree of adoption of legislation on e-transactions, consumer protection online, privacy and data protection, and cybercrime. The Cyberlaw Tracker was last updated in 2023 to reflect global legislative changes across the four areas of e-transaction, data protection and privacy, cybercrime, and online consumer protection. A new update is planned in April 2025 where indirect taxation laws will also be featured.<sup>16</sup> Besides this, the activities under the law reform programme have been limited in the period under evaluation due to the lack of resources and dedicated staff. Research and capacity-building activities were carried out in Kazakhstan on the Joint Statement Initiative (JSI) on e-

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<sup>13</sup> UNCTAD (2024), Year in Review 2025.

<sup>14</sup> UNCTAD (2023), Year in Review 2022.

<sup>15</sup> The latest release was in 2023, and an update is currently being conducted.

<sup>16</sup> Reported in UNCTAD (2024), Year in Review 2023 but still to be done.

commerce to define the direction of legislative reform to facilitate e-commerce. Legal aspects have also been part of the Train-for-Trade courses, delivered under the PDEP in Pacific together with the Commonwealth Secretariat, and the capacity-building course on digital identity for trade and development. A study on Indirect Taxation and E-Commerce was released in early 2025. Also, the Cyberlaw Gap Analysis for Pacific SIDS was launched in April 2025.<sup>17</sup> There were no recommendations under this area of work from the previous evaluation, and thus no specific areas to follow up on. It is clear from the Work Plan for 2024-27 that this focus area has a less central role compared to other elements due to a lack of resources and dedicated staff to deal with this highly complex area. Stakeholder consultations in country and with partners indicate that this area is highly political, challenging and time consuming and, while there might be a need for support in this area, there are currently only a few concrete requests outstanding in this area.<sup>18</sup> A few partners suggested that UNCTAD's current lack of capacity is also likely to reduce concrete requests.

**eTrade for Women.** The eTrade for Women initiative was launched in 2019 as a spin-off from *eTrade for all* and as a concrete outcome of the eWeek in 2019 where consultations on the digital gender divide were organised.<sup>19</sup> The initiative involves successful female business owners, who have managed to establish high impact digital businesses, acting as Advocates in policymaking. Advocates are elected for a one-year term which can be renewed once.<sup>20</sup> They engage in policy dialogue and speak at high level events to raise awareness of the barriers that women entrepreneurs in developing countries face and, at the same time, serve as role models. Advocates are involved in organising and implementing Masterclasses that serve the purpose of empowering women digital entrepreneurs with the skills and knowledge to grow their businesses and connecting them to one another to enable them to access an international network of women entrepreneurs. Lastly, women are given opportunities to participate in policy dialogue and contribute to more inclusive policymaking. When Advocates end their tenure, they are invited to join the Advisory Board that holds meetings every 2 years and offers targeted insights and advice on the skills and resources needed by businesses in their region.<sup>21</sup> The Advisory Board is currently under review to effectively accommodate the increasing number of former alumni Advocates, while maintaining its strategic focus.

Since the start of eTrade for Women, 350+ women from 60 countries have participated in Masterclasses.<sup>22</sup> During the period under evaluation (2022-24), seven Masterclasses have been organised in French and English-speaking Africa, the Arab Region, Latin America, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, and most recently South Asia (Table 1). Prior to the evaluation period, seven Masterclasses had been conducted in the Balkans, French and English-speaking Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia. Multiple Community gatherings have also been organised and a study tour to China took place in November 2024.

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<sup>17</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlecde2024d6\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlecde2024d6_en.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> UNCTAD (2025), Year in Review 2024.

<sup>19</sup> eCommerce Week, Summary report, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> ECDE Programme Work Plan 2024-2027.

<sup>21</sup> ECDE Programme Work Plan 2024-2027.

<sup>22</sup> UNCTAD (2024), Year in Review 2023.

**Table 1.** Overview of Masterclasses conducted from 2022-2024

Region	Year	# of Masterclasses in region	# of participants
Arab Region, online	2022	First	15
Francophone Africa, online	2022	Second	22
English Speaking Africa, Nigeria	2022	Second	23
Southeast Asia and the Pacific, Malaysia	2023	First	25
Latin America, Ecuador	2023	Second	23
Francophone Africa, Senegal	2024	Third	22
South Asia, India	2024	First	21*
<b>Total</b>			<b>108</b>

\*While 25 participants were invited to participate in the Masterclass the entrepreneurs from Pakistan were unable to get a visa in due time for the travel.

The establishment of regional communities is a key element in the follow-up on the Masterclasses to allow women digital entrepreneurs to nourish an international network of likeminded peers. Regional communities for women entrepreneurs had been launched only one year before the first ECDE Programme evaluation (2022). They were thus at the very initial steps. The expectation is that through participation in such networks and experience sharing, women can develop strategies to overcome barriers (such as barriers to accessing finance; a key root cause for women's lack of participation), acquire new knowledge and, in the longer run, influence policy.

The six established regional communities now comprise around 300 community members and have a more systematic structure.<sup>23</sup> Communities consist of former Masterclass participants but also women entrepreneurs who have been identified during in-country activities, such as the eTrade Readiness Assessments, or direct self-application following a selection process managed by the team. The ECDE Programme team estimates that about one-third of the members of the Communities join through channels other than the Masterclasses.<sup>24</sup> In 2023, 15 Community Leaders were appointed to represent their fellows under a 2-year pro bono assignment. This first period came to an end at the start of 2025 and new community leaders have been selected since.

Another recommendation from the ECDE Programme evaluation (2022) was to ensure Advocates and community members' enhanced participation in advocacy since there were only limited concrete examples of this documented. More emphasis has been put on this element and the annual reports provide several examples of how this has been ensured. To better capture engagement and track impact, eTrade for Women has professionalised its social media strategy, developing educational content, promotion and learning material across X and LinkedIn (with a dedicated page).

## 2.4 Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement

The fourth element of the ECDE Programme is the Partnership component which is centred around increased collaboration and multistakeholder engagement. Coordination among policymakers, development partners, the private sector and research institutions in the area of e-commerce and the digital economy for development is the key element, as well as

<sup>23</sup> <https://etradeforall.org/et4women/community/members/>

<sup>24</sup> The eTrade for Women team estimates that among the one-third of all Community members who have joined the Communities through channels other than the Masterclasses, one-third have applied for membership via word-of-mouth, one-third via social media (LinkedIn and Facebook), and one-third through other means, including the *eTrade for all* newsletter.

ensuring visibility to the Programme. The main output is the *eTrade for all* initiative with the objectives to “1) *raise awareness of opportunities, challenges and potential solutions including best practices related to leveraging e-commerce in developing countries*; 2) *mobilise and make more effective use of financial and human resources to implement e-commerce projects in developing countries and countries with economies in transition*; 3) *strengthen coherence and synergies among partners’ activities with a view to increasing impact, avoiding duplication of work and enhancing aid efficiency*.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, it is both an information hub raising awareness of opportunities and potential solutions as well as a demand-driven mechanism for leading development partners to make their actions more transparent, coherent and efficient by pooling capabilities and resources according to their respective mandates and activities.

The *eTrade for all* initiative was born in 2016 with the ambition to make e-commerce work for development. 15 development partners joined forces and launched the initiative with the intention of enabling governments to access cutting edge information and resources on e-commerce and the digital economy, while offering a platform for exchange among partners to find synergies for greater impact. UNCTAD manages both the platform and the initiative, which is a joint effort among 35 partners, as of December 2024.<sup>26</sup>

The UNCTAD eWeek is another central element of the Programme’s multistakeholder engagement efforts. It provides a forum for discussing challenges within e-commerce and the digital economy for development and ensures their visibility. It is organised in collaboration with *eTrade for all* partners and has been implemented both in Geneva and in Nairobi, as a first regional gathering. While it has been an annual event up until 2023, UNCTAD has now decided to do it biennially, so no eWeek was organised in 2024. The reason provided is to keep its relevance but also manage internal resources for what has progressively become the third largest event for the organization (after the UNCTAD Ministerial Conferences and World Investment Forum).

The annual World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum (co-organised by ITU, UNCTAD, UNDP and UNESCO) and the UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) (of which UNCTAD is a vice-chair) are essential forums for digital cooperation for development. UNCTAD acts as co-facilitator, with International Trade Centre (ITC) and the Universal Postal Union (UPU), of the WSIS action line on e-business. The WSIS 20-year review, Secretary-General’s Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, establishment of the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Technology to lead its implementation, and efforts to forge a Global Digital Compact for an open, free, secure and inclusive digital future<sup>27</sup> are crucial new developments within this area. For its implementation, UNCTAD will be co-leading 2 out of 5 sub-groups (dedicated to inclusive digital economies and data governance).

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<sup>25</sup> *eTrade for all* Joint Declaration.

<sup>26</sup> ECDE Programme Work Plan 2024-2027; UNCTAD (2023) Year in Review 2022.

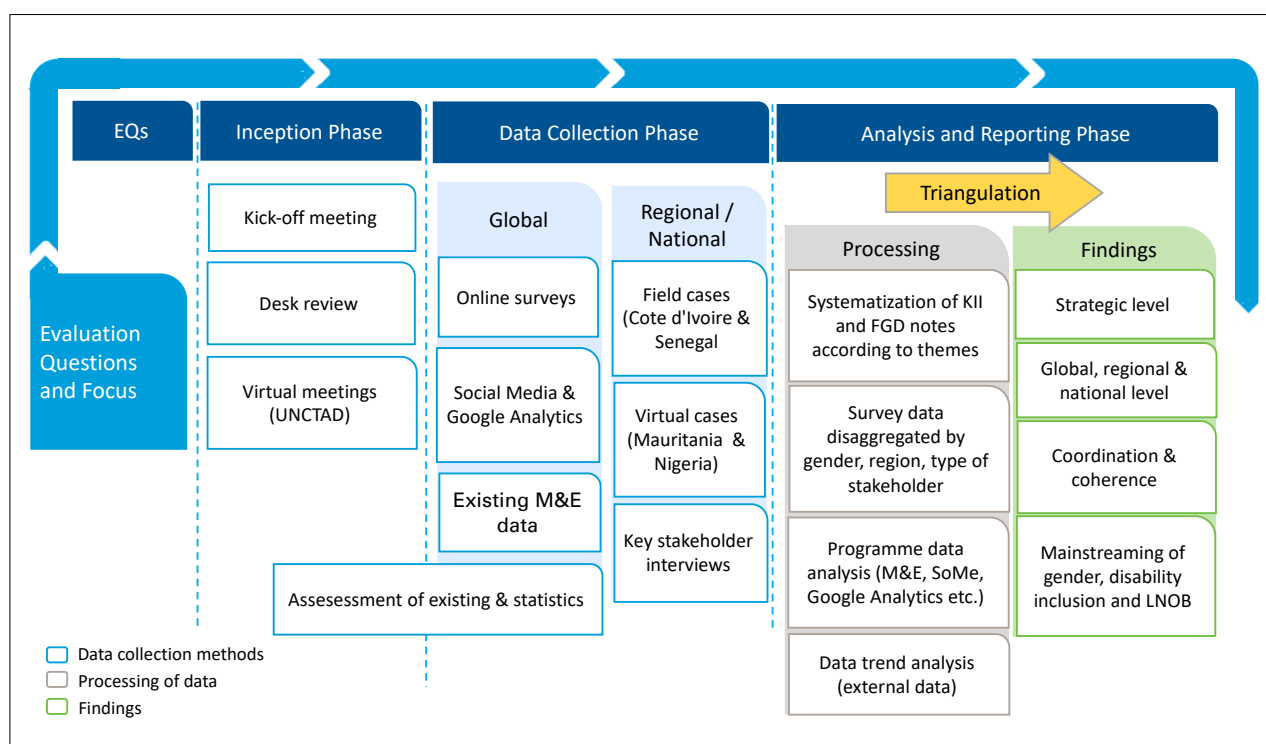
<sup>27</sup> ECDE Programme Work Plan 2024-2027.



### 3. Methodology of the evaluation

The overall analytical framework for the evaluation is illustrated in Figure 3. The evaluation is based on different dimensions and streams of data collection and analysis. There is a global dimension (*the width*), which mainly focuses on the broader dimensions of the different types and subjects of the support provided by the ECDE Programme. Then there are the regional/national dimensions (*the depth*), where some specific interventions/products have been focused on or piloted at either a regional or national level, however often with the intention and forward-looking potential to scale up more widely. The data collection streams capture the various scales and dimensions of the project interventions, while also incorporating a gender and inclusion perspective. The findings include both strategic and operational dimensions, with a particular view to coordination and coherence aspects. Gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion considerations cut across and are integrated into these discussions.

**Figure 3.** Analytical framework



The specific approaches and data collection methods applied by the evaluation are presented in more detail in the following sections.

#### 3.1 Key elements in the approach

Data collection and analysis has been based on a *mixed-methods approach*, combining quantitative data with qualitative methods (see further detailing of the specific methods below). The approach has included the following key elements:

*Use of a theory-based approach:* Given the complexity and nature of this evaluation, a theory-based approach has been applied, enriched with practical examples/cases from the supported interventions. A core element in this approach has been the ECDE Programme ToC (Annex ii) and the results framework. Together, they illustrate and explain how the



different programme components and intervention areas are jointly expected to lead to results and catalyse changes. This has allowed the Evaluation to conduct a systemic assessment of how the different components - individually and jointly - are contributing towards the programme objectives.

*Focus on contribution:* In order to assess achievements of results, the Evaluation focuses on the *contribution* of the ECDE Programme i.e., in obtaining an improved understanding of what difference the programme interventions have made, as well as an increased understanding of *how* and *why* observed results have occurred (or not). In cases where supported programme interventions have not yet yielded concrete results, focus has been on assessing the *process* and *trends/trajectories* towards results.

*Evaluation Matrix as a guiding framework:* The ToR outlines 10 key EQs related to six evaluation criteria (five OECD/DAC Evaluation Criteria (Relevance, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Coherence (internal and external), and Sustainability) and Gender, Disability Inclusion and other UN cross-cutting issues). Based on this, an Evaluation Matrix has been developed (Annex i), including specific judgement criteria and sources/means of verification related to each EQ. In the matrix, the 10 EQs from the ToR have been merged to 8 EQs, to make it more operational. The matrix provides the guiding framework for the data collection process and subsequent analysis.

*Purposive sampling strategy for data collection:* A purposive sampling strategy for data collection has been applied, in particular with a view to selecting case countries (field and virtual cases) and participants for Key Informant Interviews (KIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). More specifically, the Evaluation has adhered to a *maximum variation purposive sample* (which is sometimes also referred to as a *heterogeneous purposive sample*) with a view to examining a wide and diverse range of project supported interventions and gaining insight from several different actors and angles. The primary downside to purposive sampling is that it may be prone to potential bias due to the fact that selections are based on subjective or generalised assumptions. This bias, however, only threatens the evaluation's credibility if the judgements made by the Evaluation are poorly considered or not based on clear and well-defined selection criteria.

*Mainstreaming of Gender, Disability Inclusion and the principles of LNOB:* The Evaluation has made specific considerations of whether women and men are addressed equally through the supported programme interventions, specific needs and rights of women, and the extent to which men and women are included equally in policy and decision-making processes.<sup>28</sup> Similar principles have been applied to the actual evaluation process where efforts have been made to ensure that different stakeholders are included, and that no type of stakeholders are excluded from the process. Thus, both men and women have been consulted in the evaluation process to understand their different needs and challenges they face in their specific contexts, economies and in policy development. A specific effort has been made by the Evaluation to also include persons with disabilities and to identify areas where inclusion of persons with disabilities could be relevant moving forward. It is

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<sup>28</sup> The Gender Toolbox is interesting in this regard. It is separated in three areas concerning existence, relevance for women and accessibility. See: Trade and Gender Toolbox; How will the economic partnership agreement between the European Union and the East African Community affect Kenyan women? 2017. Project Documents Guidelines Development Account Joint Short-Term Projects, 27/5/2022.

acknowledged that this is a relatively new crosscutting requirement within UNCTAD and thus expectations of achievements within this area should be modest. Similarly, this is a newer topic for many developing countries, and thus the need for practical considerations.

### 3.2 Key methods for data collection

Below, the key methods applied for the data collection are briefly presented. All methods supplement and complement each other in order to provide both width and depth to the evaluation.

*Desk review of programme documents, publications and relevant materials.* Various programme documentation and additional programme-related material were reviewed, including budgets. In addition, a web screening of other topic-related literature was undertaken in relation to the case countries and to support data and trend analyses. Annual publications of the technical cooperation activities of UNCTAD were also analysed.

*Online survey.* Within the “Building Consensus” pillar, a follow-up survey<sup>29</sup> to the survey conducted as part of the first ECDE Programme evaluation in 2022 was implemented. The survey questionnaire largely built on the questionnaire applied for the previous evaluation, to allow for comparison. As in the case of the 2022 survey, the 2025 survey targeted the registered participants in the sessions of the IGE on e-commerce and the digital economy and meetings of the Working Group on Measuring e-commerce and the digital economy. The 2025 survey had a response rate of 19% (166 respondents out of 888 invited).<sup>30</sup> In comparison, the 2022 survey had a 11% response rate (156 respondents out of 1,414 invited). In both surveys, around two thirds of the respondents were male and one third were female. Survey respondents who neither attended IGE sessions, nor joined Working Group meetings, were also asked about their knowledge of UNCTAD's publication the “Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade, 2023” and here, a response rate of 14% (123 in absolute numbers) was achieved. Besides these quantitative surveys, the Evaluation has also made rich use of data collected by the Programme, such as questionnaires administered after meetings, large events, activities etc.

*Interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with a sample of programme participants and other relevant key stakeholders:* A total of 67 key programme stakeholders have been interviewed or attended FGDs,<sup>31</sup> either in-person during country visits (see below) or virtually. The interviewees have been balanced according to countries/regions and topics, as well as gender. The division of interviewees/FGD participants according to stakeholder categories<sup>32</sup> is listed in Table 2.

The Evaluation Matrix (Annex i) was used as an overall guide for the interview process to make sure that information was gathered in a consistent manner, covering all relevant evaluation aspects. The Matrix served as a flexible and adaptive guide in the interview process as not all EQs/topics were relevant to all key stakeholders.

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<sup>29</sup> In view of data protection rules, UNCTAD (through the Independent Evaluation Unit) administered the surveys, but only the evaluation team has had access to the data.

<sup>30</sup> 952 participants were invited to respond to the survey, 64 emails bounced back.

<sup>31</sup> FGDs were conducted with participants from the eTrade for Women Masterclasses during the case country missions to allow for a wider discussion and views on topics related to this specific activity.

<sup>32</sup> See further details on the stakeholder mapping in Annex iii.

**Table 2.** Overview of stakeholders consulted

Stakeholder type	Total	Females (F)	Males (M)
Civil Society Organization	2	1	1
Consultant	2	1	1
Donor	7	5	2
ECDE staff	4	3	1
Geneva representatives	4	3	1
Government representative	10	2	8
International Organization	2	1	1
National CSO	2	0	2
Private sector representative	4	2	2
Regional organization	3	1	2
UN organization	13	4	10
UNCTAD senior management	1	1	0
UNCTAD staff	2	1	1
Women entrepreneurs	10	10	0
Total	67	35	32

A 10-day case country mission was conducted in January 2025, covering **Côte d'Ivoire** and **Senegal** as case studies.<sup>33</sup> This mission included in-person interviews and FGDs with different key stakeholders involved with the ECDE Programme or related e-commerce and digital economy activities. **Mauritania** (fragile context) and **Nigeria** (regional perspective with ECOWAS) also served as case studies and were conducted remotely. The case country selection was based on a purposive sampling approach (see above) with a particular view to cover: i) eTrade Readiness Assessment conducted/in progress; ii) participation in the eTrade Implementation Support Mechanism, including implementation reviews; iii) implementation rate of recommendations from eTrade Readiness Assessment; iv) E-commerce strategy developed/in progress; v) presence of a (former) eTrade for Women Advocate and an active Community; vi) capacity-building support for producing statistics on the digital economy and/or digital trade; vii) ongoing dialogue with UN Resident Coordinator Offices; and viii) possibility to study a regional perspective and a fragile country context. Together, the case country selection provided the Evaluation a good opportunity to assess how the inter-connectivity at country and regional levels and the holistic dimension of the ECDE Programme work in practice. Countries from other regions were covered virtually.<sup>34</sup>

*Gathering of information through social media and the web:* As an additional source of information, the Evaluation has compared how and to what extent the 2019 and 2021 DERs have been disseminated through social media, including Twitter accounts, blogs, etc. The ECDE Programme is already using website metrics (Google Analytics) to measure publication

<sup>33</sup> Both Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire had eTrade Readiness Assessments conducted (2018 and 2021 respectively); they have participated in the implementation reviews and several in-person workshops in Geneva. Senegal ranked among the top performers in terms of implementation according to the 2<sup>nd</sup> implementation review (2022). E-commerce strategies have been developed in both countries; eTrade for Women participants were present in both countries and both had representatives participate in the joint 2024 IMF-UNCTAD Workshop on trade in services and digital trade statistics III.

<sup>34</sup> It is to be noted that the ECDE Programme evaluation 2019-21 (2022) included a country mission to East Africa (Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda).

downloads, unique page views, etc. and the Evaluation has made use of this existing information and trends in the analysis.

In addition, the evaluation has made use of *Overton*<sup>35</sup> to further track the uptake of UNCTAD's research and analysis outputs in policy development. While *Overton* is a powerful tool allowing for a more qualitative assessment of the uptake of research, it cannot stand alone and needs to be triangulated with statements from interviews and survey results. A limitation is that it only provides information on citations and not the extent to which the research publications have been used as background information or for other purposes. Nevertheless, it does give an indication of the concrete uptake of research. UNCTAD's 2019 and 2021 DERs as well as the regional 2022 Pacific DER have been used as a search query.<sup>36</sup> The analysis searched for policy texts that mention these specific documents, tracing if the DERs have been informing policymaking.<sup>37</sup> In order to understand the extent to which policy reports actively reference or incorporate insights from UNCTAD's DER publications, the analysis applied three categories based on the following criteria: i) *Referenced*: An UNCTAD publication is referenced only in a footnote or citation, without being actively engaged in the discussion or contributing to the development of policy; ii) *Used to some degree*: Findings from an UNCTAD publication are used to provide initial context or motivation for the subject and offer limited information about e-commerce and the digital economy; or iii) *Used actively*: Findings from an UNCTAD publication are extensively utilised to motivate the subject, actively inform the discussion on e-commerce and the digital economy and contribute significantly to policy development in the policy report.<sup>38</sup>

A **summary** of how the main activities within each pillar are covered by the various evaluation methods is provided in Annex iv.

### 3.3 Challenges, limitations and mitigation strategies

The combination of a wide geographical coverage, with various activities and “products” embedded within the overall ECDE Programme, and a relatively limited time and resource frame for the evaluation, has made it challenging to ensure a coverage that represents both the width and the depth of the overall programme interventions. In order to balance this, the Evaluation included specific data collection and analysis tools both to address the wider global context and results (such as online surveys, tracking of social media/websites and reports) as well as the more concrete “footprints” and roll-out of project interventions within selected countries (in-person and virtual case country studies).

Since there is still limited availability of project data at the outcome level for some programme areas, the Evaluation has continuously built the analysis on triangulation of several data sources. Here, the interplay between quantitative data on one hand (databases, surveys etc.), and the qualitative information and mixed-methods analysis on the other, have been important to ensure that results are interpreted in a relevant and adequate manner.

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<sup>35</sup> Overton is a specialised database designed to track and measure the policy impact of research by indexing citations from millions of policy documents, including reports by government entities, think tank publications, and government guidelines. See more at [Overton.io](https://overton.io).

<sup>36</sup> The DER 2024 has only recently been published and very few hits were realised in Overton and therefore it has not been analysed further.

<sup>37</sup> It should be noted that the trial edition of Overton only allows for the extraction of less than 60 hits. It has therefore not been possible to extract all citations for DER 2019 and DER 2021 which both exceeded 60 hits. As a result, it has also not been possible to clean the data for duplicates, which are thus likely reflected in the data.

<sup>38</sup> Since this was a rather cumbersome and time demanding exercise, it has only been done for publications from developing countries.

The **online survey** had a response rate of around 20% of the invited participants. While the low response rate was expected, it also means that these results need to be treated with caution and supplemented with other sources of information. While it is not the exact same respondents in both the 2022 and the 2024 survey, they are still considered to be comparable as they constitute the same stakeholder group (government representatives).

Finally, the risk of **recall bias** should be noted, particularly in relation to the survey-based data collection (i.e. the error that occurs when respondents do not remember previous events or experiences accurately or omit details). This was particularly important in the case of the survey of registered participants in 2022-23 IGE sessions/Working Group meetings. This risk has been mitigated by triangulation with data collected by the programme as part of its M&E activities immediately after each session/meeting.

## 4. Findings

Chapter 4 presents the evaluation findings. Table 3 provides an overview of where the EQs are analysed in Chapter 4. Key recommendations from the evaluation report from 2022 have been assessed under the specific headers and Annex v provides a full overview of how past recommendations have been implemented.

**Table 3.** Overview of where EQs are assessed in the findings chapter

#	Evaluation questions	Criteria	Section
1	Did the design of the programme, including choice of activities and outputs properly address the needs of beneficiaries and stakeholders for enhanced understanding, strengthened capacities, and improved dialogue and cooperation towards building inclusive digital economies?	Relevance	4.1, 4.2 (specific components)
2	To what extent has the programme delivered on the immediate expected outcomes as defined in its Results Framework? What has been its contribution in terms of progress towards achieving its intended results?	Effectiveness	4.2, 4.3 (partnerships)
3	To what extent have programme beneficiaries and other stakeholders found the support delivered by the programme to be useful and have been satisfied with the quality of outputs?	Effectiveness	4.2, 4.3 (partnerships)
4	Have implementation modalities been adequate in ensuring the achievement of the expected outcomes in a timely and cost-effective manner? What programme and project management best practices can be identified and what are the lessons learned for the programme team?	Efficiency	4.3
5	To what extent are the programme's activities undertaken under each of UNCTAD's three pillars complementary to one another and conducive to advancing progress towards the programme's expected results? To what extent are the programme's activities complementary to other UNCTAD programmes?	Coherence	4.4
6	To what extent has the work under the programme been complementary to that of existing global programmes, regional/interregional initiatives, UN Country Teams, as well as other UN and non-UN actors in supporting developing countries in enhancing their digital readiness, including avoiding redundancy?	Coherence	4.4
7	Is there evidence that countries benefiting from interventions under the programme are committed to continue working towards the programme objectives beyond the end of UNCTAD's support? Have there been catalytic effects from UNCTAD's support at the national/regional/global level? What measures have been built in to promote the sustainability of outcomes? What additional measures could be taken to ensure the sustainability of the outcomes over time?	Sustainability (discussed within the different sections on Effectiveness, Efficiency and Coherence)	4.2 4.3 4.4

8	To what extent were gender, disability inclusion and the principles of “leaving no one behind” mainstreamed in the design and implementation of the programme, and can results be identified in this regard?	Gender & inclusion	4.5
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## 4.1 Programme design and relevance

**Summary of findings:** The ECDE Programme is well aligned with UN strategic guiding documents where digital transformation is highlighted as a key pillar for development. The recently adopted Global Digital Compact has further emphasised the importance of digitalization and the importance of closing the digital divide and ensuring advancing responsible and equitable and non-discriminating data governance approaches. The Programme is also highly relevant for member States who continue to demand support in developing their e-commerce structures. The substantial emphasis on SDG 17 with multistakeholder partnerships, further enhances the relevance of the Programme.

**Finding 1. Despite resource constraints, the ECDE Programme has been well aligned with UN strategic guiding documents such as the Bridgetown Covenant. Digital transformation is one of three pillars in the Bridgetown Covenant and the recently adopted Global Digital Compact has further emphasised the importance of digitalization, closing the digital divide and advancing responsible and equitable data governance approaches.**

It is beyond doubt that the ECDE Programme is highly relevant and is likely to remain so in the near future. In September 2024, world leaders adopted a Pact for the Future that includes a Global Digital Compact, further emphasising the relevance of digital transformation and enhanced data governance. The DER 2021 underlined the growing importance of data as a critical resource for sustainable development and, during the IGE in 2023, member States requested the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) to establish a working group dedicated to data governance. UNCTAD provides the secretariat services for the CSTD and is now mandated to steer a working group with the aim of creating recommendations on data governance arrangements, how to share benefits of data, and facilitation of safe, secure and trusted data flows.<sup>39</sup>

Stakeholders consulted by the Evaluation indicated a strong link between the DER 2021’s focus on cross-border data flows, the inequalities in the data-driven digital economy and the enhanced programme focus on data governance with the adopted Global Digital Compact. Although the Compact is not a strategic document for the ECDE Programme per se, it places a heavy emphasis on digital cooperation. Paragraph 48 in the Compact explicitly refers to the issue of data governance, including the need for the establishment of “....a dedicated working group to engage in a comprehensive and inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogue on data governance at all levels as relevant for development”. This working group is currently in the process of being established and will include representatives from member States, CSOs and the private sector. Several stakeholders interviewed by the Evaluation consider this initiative to be even more important today, given the increasing prominence of AI compared to the issue of data governance, as well as the rising polarisation and shifting narratives in the international geopolitical landscape.

<sup>39</sup> UNCTAD (2025) Year in Review 2024.



The working group is one example of how the ECDE Programme has continuously promoted the multistakeholder dialogue, well aligned with the SDG 17 on partnerships. Partnerships are promoted in all activities across the research, capacity building cooperation and in the consensus building pillars. While member States define the mandate of the programme, implementation of activities highly emphasises engagement of private sector actors, academia, other international organizations and CSOs.

The Evaluation of the ECDE Programme from 2022 recommended greater focus on strengthening capacities for measuring e-commerce and the digital economy and this element of the programme has been scaled up. The continued relevance is also reflected in the high number of requests to UNCTAD for support in this area. Similarly, member States' requests for eTrade Readiness Assessments and support to developing e-commerce strategies also confirm the relevance of the ECDE Programme.<sup>40</sup>

## 4.2 Implementation and results

### 4.2.1 Research and analysis

The research and analysis pillar is expected to lead to an enhanced understanding within governments of policy options at both the national and international level, enabling them to leverage e-commerce and the digital economy for inclusive and sustainable development. The DERs are key products in this regard, but this also includes statistics on e-commerce and the digital economy and other research elements that inform the other pillars (consensus building and technical cooperation). Key indicators are set out in the Work Plan 2024-2027 and include publication downloads and evidence of uptake of ECDE research. While UNCTAD already collects data on downloads, news features etc., a number of examples of research uptake are also provided in the Year in Review reports, e.g. citations of the 2021 DER by the UN System, the European Parliament as well as by different fora and organizations at international, regional and national levels.<sup>41</sup>

**Summary of findings:** There are strong indications that ECDE publications are being widely downloaded and several of the DERs are being applied in policy development. In particular, the data flow has contributed to the current strong focus on data governance. Research uptake has proven easier to document with international organizations than member States, and the uptake is better documented in developed countries than in LDCs. Both the Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy (2020) and the Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade (2023) have been widely downloaded and uptake of the Handbook has been well documented. Dissemination of research has been enhanced by stronger engagement during the research drafting processes, but there is still scope for more dedicated targeting in dissemination. This applies to the entire UNCTAD organization which has still not developed a corporate outreach and communication strategy, as intended in 2022.

**Finding 2. The DERs are widely downloaded, and stakeholder consultations indicate that the research published by the programme is highly valued and considered solid and of good quality. The development of the DER 2024 was conducted in a highly participatory manner which contributed to a larger sense of ownership among partners.**

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<sup>40</sup> UNCTAD (2025) Year in Review 2024.

<sup>41</sup> UNCTAD (2025): Year in Review 2024; UNCTAD (2024): Year in Review 2023. UNCTAD (2023): Year in Review 2022.

**In addition, the explicit focus in the DER 2024 on environmental sustainability marks an attempt by the ECDE Programme to prioritise this important aspect.**

As mentioned above, the DER is the main publication of the ECDE Programme and in the top three of UNCTAD's flagship reports, based on the number of downloads. Table 4 shows the DER publications published under the ECDE Programme and the number of times they have been downloaded. The global DER is published biennially, and the global publication has been supplemented with a regional publication for the Pacific, where the ECDE Programme is part of the project the "Pacific Digital Economy Programme" with UNDP and UNCDF. A new DER for the Pacific is currently being developed.

**Table 4.** Downloads of the Digital Economy Reports during the period 2021-24 (as of November 2024)

Publication	Publication year	# of downloads from Jan 2021-Nov 2024
DER 2024: Shaping an environmentally sustainable and inclusive digital future	2024	25,386
DER: Pacific Edition 2022: Towards Value Creation and Inclusiveness	2022	11,702
DER 2021: Cross-border Data Flows and Development - For Whom the Data Flow	2021	188,615
DER 2019: Value Creation and Capture: Implications for Developing Countries	2019	362,758

Qualitative interviews with eTrade for all partners and government officials indicated that the DERs are highly valued publications with no comparable publications from other actors. The reports are considered to be comprehensive, allowing for widespread data comparisons across and within different country categories and across different topics. Many of the consulted government stakeholders considered the DERs a key data source for their work.

The ECDE Programme also produces policy briefs based on research findings, technical notes and, as part of the technical cooperation pillar, the eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies. Table 5 shows the number of downloads of ECDE publications (by series), as of November 2024. While the DER is by far the most popular publication series, the technical notes have also been downloaded a relatively high number of times.

**Table 5.** Yearly ECDE publication downloads (per publication series) as of November 2024

Series	2022	2023	2024
Digital Economy Reports	212,459	75,062	73,318
Technical notes in ICT for development	58,479	32,977	22,267
Policy Briefs	6,816	6,076	4,449
E-commerce strategies	5,354	4,683	3,855
eTrade Readiness Assessments	37,848	22,047	22,704
Other <sup>42</sup>	36,067	27,253	21,980
<b>Total</b>	<b>357,023</b>	<b>168,098</b>	<b>148,573</b>

Since the DER 2024 has only recently been published, its number of downloads is still relatively modest. eTrade for all partners and other key stakeholders widely agreed that the

<sup>42</sup> These include the Programme *Year in Review* and publications released in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, among others.



process around developing the DER 2024 was highly participatory, consultative and collaborative. The work was described as a “co-designing process”, which fostered stronger ownership and engagement among partners. A network consisting of around 40 experts was created for the report development process, with several meetings to co-design and review the report. This approach enabled experts from different fields to provide data and feedback to the ECDE research team. The partners and network have also been essential in the dissemination of the report.

The DER 2024’s focus on environmental sustainability is directly linked to one of the key focus areas defined by the Bridgetown Covenant: *Climate change and environmental degradation*. Key stakeholders interviewed by the Evaluation agreed on the particular relevance of this topic, although some representatives from LDCs considered other challenges (such as the digital divide) to be of more immediate concern than environmental aspects. Some stakeholders also found that this environmental responsibility, and the ability to influence it, rested more with large tech companies than with governments. Other stakeholders praised the DER 2024 as being the first to take a real life-cycle approach in this thematic area, with other reports found not to include a similar scope. With this in mind, some stakeholders felt that more could have been done on forward-looking modelling using UNCTAD data.

**Finding 3. There are clear indications that the DERs 2019 and 2021 have had notable influence on the development of policy documents, particularly in relation to international organizations’ policies. There is also evidence that some national governments have made use of the DERs for policy development, more so for developed countries than for developing countries and LDCs.**

Three UNCTAD DER reports were analysed using the Overton database to identify policy documents that cite them. Table 6 shows the total number of citations of each report and disaggregates citations by type of organization citing them (governments, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), NGOs, think tanks, and legislative bodies). The DER 2019 and DER 2021 have been cited the most, which is unsurprising as they are global in scope and have been published for the longest time. In general, IGOs have been the type of organization that have cited the DERs most; 66% and 54% of all citations of the DER 2021 and DER 2019 respectively. The DER from the Pacific has acquired seven citations with the vast majority (six citations) being from IGOs and only one from an Indonesian Think Tank.

**Table 6.** Breakdown of DER citations by type of organization

Name of publication	Total	# of governments	# of IGOs	# of NGOs	# of Think Tanks	# of Legislative body
Digital Economy Report: Pacific Edition 2022	7	0	6	0	1	0
Digital Economy Report 2021	136	12	90	7	26	1
Digital Economy Report 2019	172	33	93	10	31	5

According to the ECDE ToC, the immediate expected outcome from the DERs is “enhanced understanding of governments of policy options at national and international levels to benefit from e-commerce and the digital economy for inclusive and sustainable development”. As indicated at impact level in the ToC, this applies in particular to LDCs. Thus, it would be

important to further understand how the DERs have contributed to informing government policies within different country categories.

Table 7 shows how the DERs have been cited more by developed countries than by LDCs/LLDCs. These data need to be interpreted with caution, however, as citation numbers do not fully reflect the actual influence of the reports across different regions. For instance, it is likely that direct citations are more common in developed countries, where research capacity is higher, and policy frameworks are often more aligned with international reports. On the other hand, in developing countries and LDCs/LLDCs, the influence of the DERs may be more indirect, for instance through capacity-building programmes, technical assistance, or policy dialogue supported by UNCTAD and other development partners. Therefore, the limited citations from LDCs/LLDCs do not necessarily imply a lack of impact, but rather point to the need for a more qualitative approach to assess the influence of DERs on digital policy frameworks globally.<sup>43</sup>

**Table 7.** DER citations by country classification

Report Title	Developed	Developing	LDC/LLDC
Digital Economy Report 2019	8	3	1
Digital Economy Report 2021	4	3	2

A qualitative assessment of the extent to which various policy reports from developing countries are actively referred to or incorporate insights from UNCTAD's DER publications, shows that four of them have only referenced the DERs, one has used the DER to some degree, and two have used the DERs actively (Table 8).

**Table 8.** Developing\* and LDC/LLDC countries' use of the DER 2019 and DER 2021 in their policy document.

1. Referenced	2. Used to some degree	3. Used actively
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 供应链视角下的 中非企业合作 (China)</li> <li>2. Pilot Digital Skills Acceleration Program (Uganda)</li> <li>3. Digital Transformation Roadmap (Uganda)</li> <li>4. Prestação de Contas Ordinária Annual (Brazil) [Two documents]</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Session 4 "How do we deal with currency, payment issues and digital assets in negotiating and enforcing contracts?" (China)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. El despliegue de la tecnología 5G como estrategia de poder global: Implicancias políticas del trazado submarino de cables de fibra óptica (Chile)</li> <li>2. The Digital Economy Agenda (Tanzania)</li> </ol>

\*Developing countries also included China, Brazil and Chile.<sup>44</sup>

**Finding 4. ECDE Programme supported publications concerning the production of statistics on the digital economy and trade have made important contributions to measuring the digital economy and trade.**

<sup>43</sup> See also <https://misiones.cubaminrex.cu/en/un/statements/statement-behalf-group-77-and-china-delegation-republic-cuba-informal-consultations>. This statement reflects the position of developing countries, including LDCs, and it clearly draws on the analysis of the DER 2021.

<sup>44</sup> By using Overton, ECDE staff identified a policy document from the Nigerian Communication Commission that also referred to the DER. This document was, however, not found by the evaluation team and therefore it has not been included in the current assessment.

The programme's research activities include the development of methodologies and the collection, processing, and dissemination of internationally comparable statistics on trade in ICT goods and services, trade in digitally deliverable services, the size of the ICT sector and the use of ICT by enterprises. In 2023, a Handbook on measuring digital trade was developed jointly with the OECD, WTO and IMF to provide better opportunities for developing countries to produce relevant statistics.

**Table 9.** Downloads of the Manual and Handbook on measuring the digital economy/digital trade, in the 2021-24 period to date<sup>45</sup>

Publication	Publication year	# of downloads since published
Handbook on measuring digital trade, 2 <sup>nd</sup> edition	2023	3,329
Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy 2020, 2 <sup>nd</sup> edition	2020	10,390

\* The number of downloads of the Handbook is from the UNCTAD webpage and does not include downloads from partners' websites.

A Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy was developed in 2020 and this publication has so far been downloaded to a greater extent than the 2023 Handbook (Table 9). A search in Overton on citations indicates, however, a much broader uptake of the Handbook compared to the Manual, which was published three years earlier and thus had more opportunities to be cited (Table 10). The partnership with three other multilateral organizations for the Handbook preparation likely contributed to its relatively large uptake within a shorter timeframe. It could also be due to the rise in digital trade over the period and the growing importance and policy relevance of being able to actually measure it. It is also important to keep in mind that while these two publications may sound similar, they address rather different topics (e.g. the Handbook is trade-focused). Nevertheless, these data indicate that dissemination efforts and working with partners (with their own target audiences) may help to increase outreach.

As reflected in the 2022 ECDE Programme evaluation, the Manual was not systematically disseminated and a recommendation was therefore made by the evaluation to enhance the capacity of national stakeholders, including focal points, for collecting data for the production of statistics related to the digital economy and e-commerce, applying and building on the Manual. To meet this recommendation, the ECDE Programme, in collaboration with UNCTAD's Train for Trade division, developed a new online course based on the Manual. Although this training was rolled out in the Pacific and other trainings have been conducted (refer to 4.2.3), resource limitations have posed a challenge.

**Table 10.** Citations of UNCTAD's Manual and Handbook on measuring the digital economy/digital trade

Name of publication	Total	# of Governments	# of IGOs	# of NGOs	# of Think Tanks	# of Legislative bodies
Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade, 2023	99	21	71	1	9	3
Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy 2020	28	2	26	0	3	0

<sup>45</sup> The number of downloads of the Handbook only reflects downloads from UNCTAD, but it can also be downloaded from partners such as the WTO and the OECD.

It is to be noted that 76% of the respondents to the online survey were aware of the Handbook. The quality of the Handbook was considered high, with 23% rating it as “excellent” and 45% rating it as “good”. In terms of usefulness, 35% indicated “very useful”, while 40% indicated it to be “useful”. 60% of the respondents indicated making use of the Handbook for their work.

**Finding 5. Dissemination of research has been enhanced by stronger engagement during the research process, but there is still scope for more dedicated targeting. While the intention in 2022 was for UNCTAD to develop a corporate outreach and communication strategy, this is yet to be realised.**

The ECDE Programme evaluation (2022) recommended strengthening the outreach strategy for research products to ensure a more systematic approach and more widespread dissemination of publications. Dissemination of research concerns all of UNCTAD, and in 2022 it was the intention of senior management to develop a new communication strategy for the organization. UNCTAD instead undertook a comprehensive brand review which, in 2024, culminated in an organizational rebranding, including a new name, and the development of some new directions and guidelines within this rebranding.<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, instead of applying a stronger corporate communication and outreach strategy, the ECDE Programme has focused on adapting to the new brand by applying a more structured approach to social media outreach. This remains a work in progress.

As mentioned above, the network established around the DER 2024 was also used for the dissemination of this report. Examples of this included a pre-launch event in London, a press conference in Geneva, joint dissemination with UNEP in Nairobi, a conference on shaping an environmentally sustainable and inclusive digital future in Africa, held in Addis Ababa alongside UNECA, and an event with the UNRC in New Delhi. These events were often conducted as part of other activities, such as panel discussions etc. Some partners that engaged in the DER 2024 suggested that this huge publication could be more strategically broken down and disseminated via policy briefs<sup>47</sup> targeting specific audience. While dissemination efforts naturally only occur after a publication is completed, the peer review process for the DER could potentially be used to gauge different interests in the report before publication.

#### **4.2.2 Consensus-building**

The consensus building pillar of the ECDE Programme aims to increase intergovernmental consensus on how to foster inclusive and sustainable development gains from e-commerce and the digital economy. Through advocacy and dialogue, this is expected to contribute to an improved policy environment and more effective, efficient, transparent and well-resourced multistakeholder digital cooperation.

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<sup>46</sup> <https://unctad.org/news/unctad-rebrands-un-trade-and-development>.

<sup>47</sup> It is noted that one policy brief has been produced, building on the findings of chapter 5 of the DER 2024: <https://unctad.org/publication/fostering-environmentally-sustainable-electronic-commerce>.

**Summary of findings:** The intergovernmental work on e-commerce and the digital economy for development is an essential part of UNCTAD's work and is considered by most stakeholders to be highly relevant. The performance of the UNCTAD secretariat in organizing, communicating etc. is very high, and the IGEs are considered to have largely inclusive interactive debates, reflecting an improvement since the 2022 Evaluation. There are concrete examples of how member States have used the engagement in the IGEs to further enhance their national policy environment, particularly on data flows which was the topic of the IGE meeting session in 2023. The Working Group on Measuring e-commerce and the digital economy is relevant and useful for methodology discussions and ensuring quality, comparability and usability of statistics. Participation has, however, been decreasing, not least due to funding constraints on travel and logistics for remote participation. The Handbook is considered very useful and there are strong indications of uptake of the publication as mentioned above, but concrete examples on implementation in practice still needs to be shared with member States.

## Intergovernmental meetings (IGE)

**Finding 6. Member States' representation at the IGE sessions has been more or less stable, although actual participation has varied depending on funding available. The sessions continue to be highly valued by the participants, and the secretariat support and communication is deemed of high quality. A growing share of participants also find the interactive debate at the IGE open and inclusive.**

Table 11 shows that while the number of member States represented at the IGE sessions has been more or less stable, the number of registered participants has been decreasing over the period 2022-2024.<sup>48</sup> The same applies to the Working Group meetings. Consultations with the ECDE Programme team indicate that this may be explained by a decrease in funding for member States' participation. Both the IGE 2022 and IGE 2023 were held in a hybrid format, which was highly valued by participants, but hybrid meetings were discontinued by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) due to interpretation requirements.<sup>49</sup> It is to be noted that registration for IGE sessions does not say much about actual participation in the intergovernmental meetings. In the survey, around 50% of the participants who had registered to attend IGE and Working Group indicated that they did not attend. Nevertheless, registration is an indication of interest from member States and therefore it is included in Table 11 as an indicator.

**Table 11.** Member States' participation in IGE sessions and meetings of the Working Group on Measuring e-commerce and the digital economy.

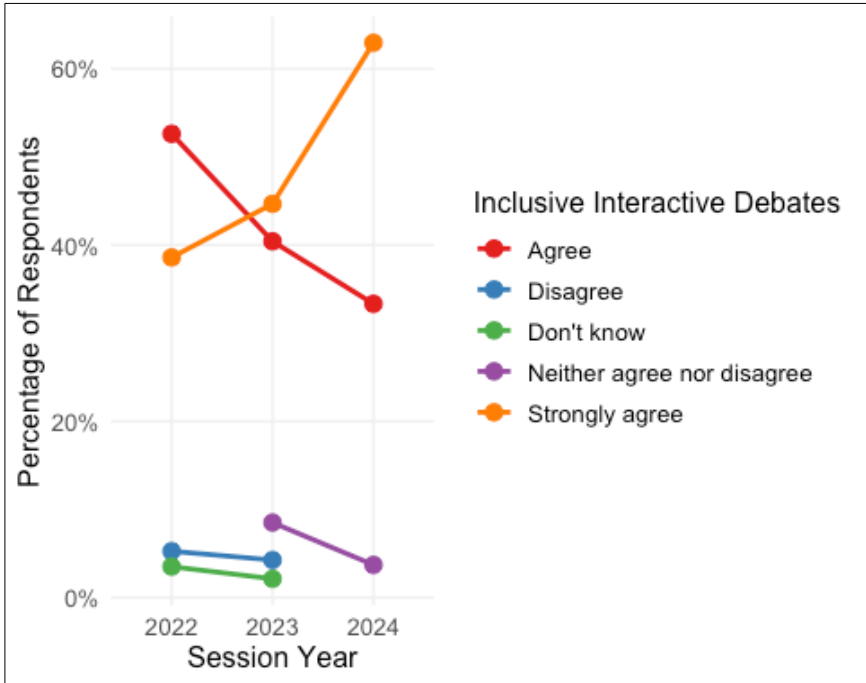
Indicators	2022	2023	2024
Member States participating in sessions of the IGE	80	75	77
Registered participants for sessions of the IGE	318	301	245
Member States participating in Working Group Meetings	79	-	-
Registered participants for the Working Group Meetings	205	172	105

<sup>48</sup> Table 15 shows registered participants as per the list generated by UNCTAD for the survey based on registration data from Indico (the official UNOG meeting registration system).

<sup>49</sup> UNOG (2023), Review of expanded meeting modalities at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

The post-IGE-session surveys administered by the programme as part of its M&E activities show that participants find the interactive debates in the IGE sessions to have become more open and inclusive since 2022.<sup>50</sup> For the 2024 IGE session, more than 60% “strongly agreed” with the statement that debates are inclusive and interactive (Figure 4). For comparison, in the 2022 survey, 40% indicated this.<sup>51</sup>

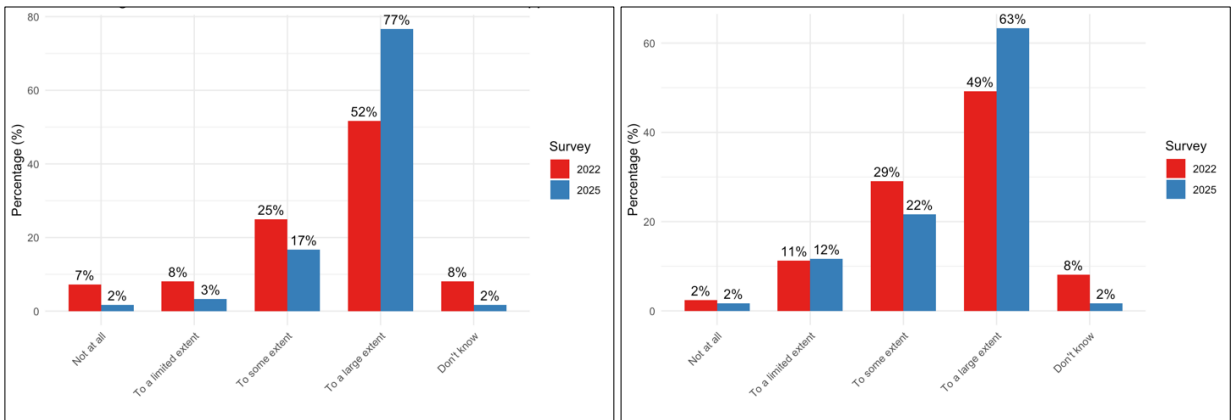
**Figure 4.** Percentage of IGE participants who find the interactive debate open and inclusive<sup>52</sup>.



Source: Post-IGE-session survey results.

It is an important role of the ECDE Programme team to coordinate large intergovernmental events and, in this regard, it is noted that the secretariat is highly valued by the participants. There is a higher confidence in the secretariat today than in 2022, and the satisfaction with communication has also improved quite considerably since 2022 (Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** IGE participants expressed confidence with the secretariat (left) and with the effectiveness of the communication channels used between the secretariat and the IGE (right).



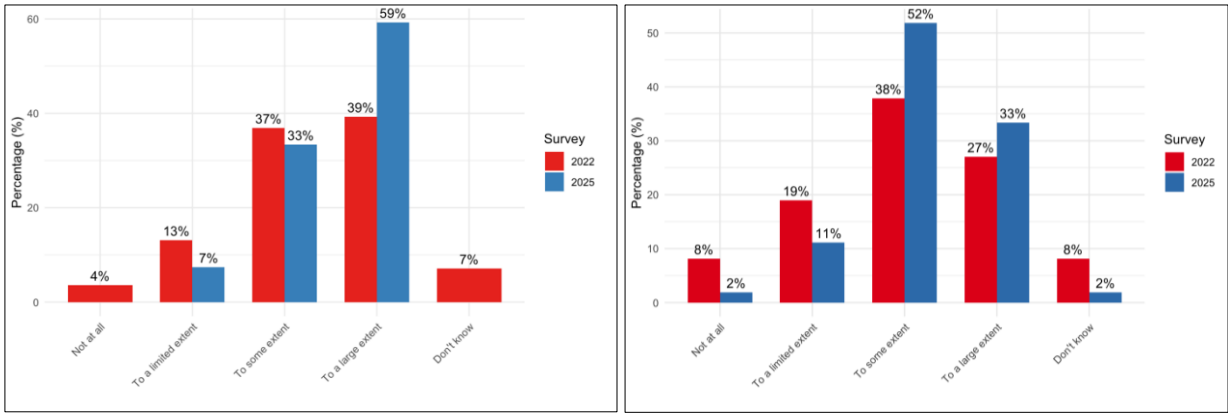
Source: Online survey conducted by the Evaluation.

<sup>50</sup> The specific statement participants were asked to agree/disagree with is “The interactive debate is open and inclusive”.  
<sup>51</sup> It is to be noted that a great number of eTrade for all representatives attended the session (Commonwealth, ITC and UNECLAC), as well as an eTrade for Women Advocate.  
<sup>52</sup> It is to be noted that respondents are not the same across the three years.

**Finding 7.** The IGE sessions play an important role in generating new knowledge for participants. An agreement on policy recommendations was reached in all IGE sessions from 2022 to 2024, and good examples were shared of agreed policy recommendations being implemented at the national level.

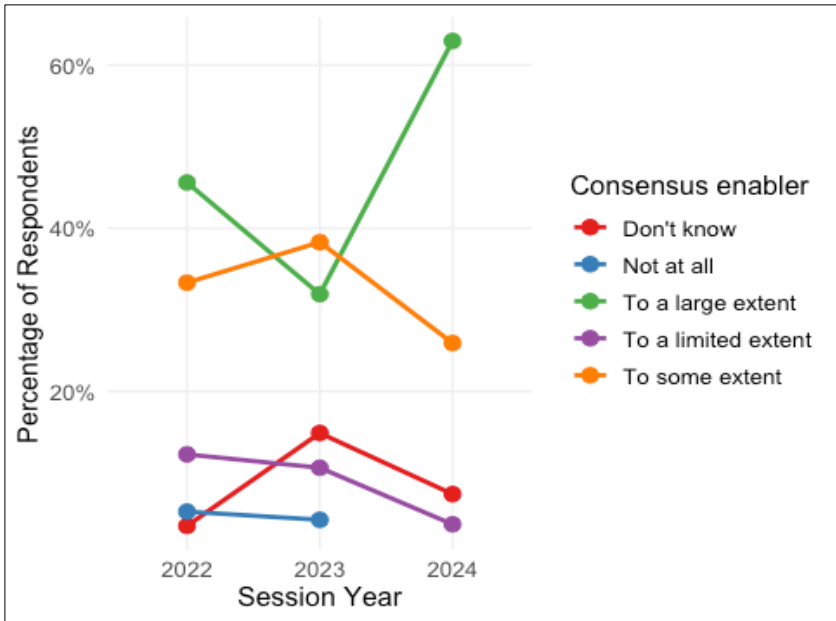
Stakeholder consultations with member State representatives and IGE participants have highlighted the importance of updating participants on new knowledge generated at the IGE sessions. As reflected in Figure 6 (left), participants indicate quite strongly that this was the case, and with quite a notable improvement compared to the 2022 survey. This is also reflected in the post-IGE survey where the generation of new knowledge was positively assessed.

**Figure 6.** IGE participants’ perception of the extent to which new knowledge has been generated on e-commerce and the digital economy (left) and agreement has been reached on policy recommendations drawn from discussions (right).



Source: Online survey conducted by the Evaluation.

**Figure 7.** Percentage of IGE participants who find that deliberations enabled consensus to be reached on policy recommendations.



Source: Post-IGE meetings survey results.

An agreement on policy recommendations was reached at all the IGE sessions in 2022, 2023 and 2024 by participants, which seems to reflect the better assessment in the 2025 survey compared to the 2022 survey (Figure 6, right) where not all prior IGE sessions had ended with



an agreement (in the 2020 session an agreement was not reached due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic). The IGE post-session-surveys ask to what extent “*the deliberations enabled consensus to be reached on policy recommendations*”. Here, a clear improvement in the participants’ perception is also noted, particularly from 2023 to 2024 (Figure 7).

Since 2022, a post-IGE-session survey administered by the ECDE Programme as part of its M&E activities, asks member States to provide concrete examples of how they have implemented agreed policy recommendations from the prior IGE session at the national level. While there were only few such examples in the 2023 survey, there were more concrete examples in the 2024 survey. Examples provided by member States are included in the box below.

**Textbox 1: Post-IGE-survey comments on implementation of agreed policy recommendations**

- *Implementation of e-commerce strategy, initiating formulation of e-commerce bill (it is in the approval process in the parliament).*
- *Government processed to set a legal policy related to data the interoperability of some data Government services. In addition, there is a legal framework for the personal data protection through an independent instance. We are trying to raise awareness among the agencies responsible for statistics to ensure they pay particular attention in relation to digital trade, a draft decree aims to create a Tunisian digital observatory to monitor the evolution of digital technology in Tunisia.*
- *New Cybersecurity law that came into force last week.*
- *Establish a national open data platform where all government agencies upload standardized, real-time data related to SDG, establish a framework related to interoperability between government services, framework related to the protection of personal data.*
- *My country has launched a national strategy that will address issues of data availability to inform policies for sustainable development.*

These concrete examples of changes clearly show that the IGE sessions do influence member States in terms of implementation of agreed policy recommendations. However, agreement on policy recommendations may not necessarily lead to results and it is important that IGE policy recommendations are linked to research and technical assistance. In particular, the 2024 IGE was based heavily on the ECDE Programme technical assistance work. This highlights one key value-added of the ECDE Programme in the context of the intergovernmental work, namely its ability to support countries beyond meetings once over.

The surveys themselves also provide a very good example of how a monitoring exercise can provide data at the outcome level in an easy way. They enabled the ECDE Programme team to address one of the recommendations from the 2022 evaluation, namely that “*a system for better monitoring and tracking of stakeholder feedback from IGE sessions should be implemented, allowing for a clearer understanding of outcomes and identification of opportunities for closer linkages within the programme as appropriate.*”<sup>53</sup> Concrete examples from member States enable a better assessment of the outcome level. Ideally, some form of verification should be undertaken, although this can be challenging in an anonymous survey.

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<sup>53</sup> ECDE Programme Evaluation 2019-2021 update on accepted recommendations April 2023.



## Working Group on Measuring E-Commerce and the Digital Economy

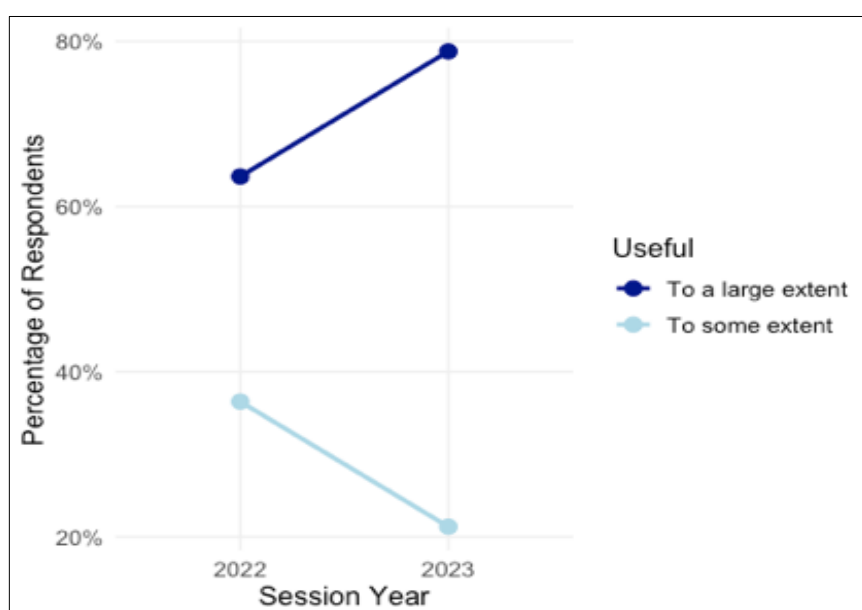
**Finding 8.** The Working Group on Measuring e-commerce and the digital economy is highly relevant, bringing important methodological discussions and considerations to the table.

Participants considered the topics for the Working Group meetings to be timely and relevant to the current state of measuring e-commerce and the digital economy, with over 60% “strongly agreeing” in the UNCTAD post-meeting survey. Textbox 2 provides concrete comments from the current evaluation survey and examples of how the Handbook is being applied in practice.

### Textbox 2: Comments to the Working Group on Measuring e-commerce and the digital economy

- *It would be useful to revise the coordination with other similar initiatives to avoid overlapping and to revise the same issues in the meetings.*
- *The team has been very motivated and has responded positively to new initiatives. In terms of visibility, dynamism and engagement, the Working Group has really been punching above its weight.*
- *Many of the topics you covered are outdated or far removed from the reality we deal with every day. It would be good to have advisors or experts to add testimonials.*
- *A consensus should be reached on the components of e-commerce and digital economy for uniformity.*
- *Sri Lanka calculated the digital economy in year 2023 and this handbook was taken as reference.*
- *1- I think that the next session or sessions should address the issue of taxation of the digital economy. 2- the dissemination and training of all stakeholders involved in the production, collection, analysis and dissemination of statistics on the digital economy must imperatively be made aware. I propose to create focal points, train them and assign them the task of disseminating and raising awareness among all stakeholders around this Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade.*

**Figure 8.** Percentage of Working Group participants who finds the methodological guidance useful

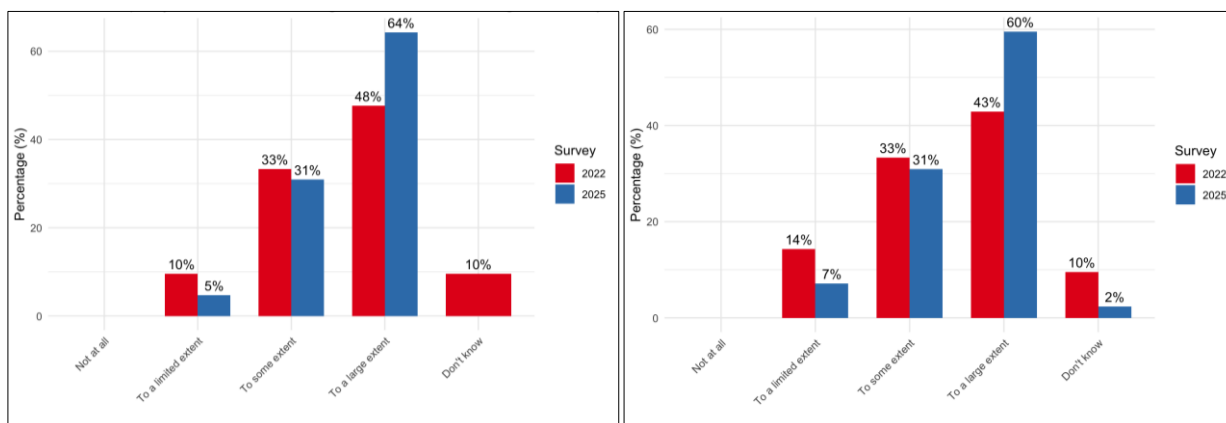


Source: Post-Working Group-meetings survey results.

Especially when it comes to methodological guidance, participants find the Working Group highly useful, and even more so in 2023 than in 2022 (Figure 8). Stakeholder consultations in the field confirmed the usefulness of the meetings as a place for discussing challenges on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy and looking for joint solutions. While participants did not always agree with the methodological decisions, they confirmed how important it was to further understand e-commerce and that data was needed in this regard. To be able to compare with other countries, the importance of having a joint agreement on methodology was emphasised.

These results are confirmed by the evaluation survey which allows for an indirect comparison between 2022 and 2025 (Figure 9). Enhanced quality of statistics and comparability and usability are strongly highlighted as key results by the Working Group participants.

**Figure 9.** Percentage of Working Group participants who find that enhanced quality of statistics concerning e-commerce and the digital economy (left) and enhanced comparability and usability of statistics concerning e-commerce and the digital economy (right) are key results from the Working Group



Source: Online survey conducted by the Evaluation

Still, the qualitative comments provided in the evaluation survey indicate that reaching a consensus on the methodology is challenging. This was also highlighted by the stakeholders consulted in the field.

#### 4.2.3 Technical cooperation and capacity building

The immediate expected outcome of the technical cooperation pillar is improved capacities of governments to establish favourable framework conditions for e-commerce and the digital economy for inclusive and sustainable development. This is to be achieved by assessments and sustained support for implementation in the areas of eTrade Readiness, E-commerce Strategies/Action Plans, advisory on e-commerce and law reforms, capacity building and technical assistance with e-commerce and digital economy measurement, and activities implemented by the eTrade for Women initiative.

**Summary of findings:** The eTrade Readiness Assessments offer unique and holistic diagnostics of the e-commerce “ecosystems” and serve as important reference documents for the subsequent development of the e-commerce “sector” within the supported countries. UNCTAD is seen as a promoter of multistakeholder, consultative processes and public-private dialogue. The responsibility for implementation rests with the national governmental institutions, but UNCTAD’s implementation reviews and the recently launched eTrade Reform Tracker have the potential to enhance transparency on inter-ministerial roles and responsibilities and progress. The Masterclasses implemented under the eTrade for Women initiative have been highly relevant, and there is strong evidence that the established networks and enhanced skills of women entrepreneurs have led to growth and access to capital and new opportunities. Achievements in terms of policy dialogue, however, have been less concrete. Women community building has become more strategic and systematised with commissioned community leaders, and regular training activities and a more integrated approach to involving community members in other ECDE Programme activities. However, the engagement level of community members varies considerably, and ownership towards the communities could be enhanced. UNCTAD has promoted the inclusion of developing countries in measuring digital trade with the development of the Handbook and with the capacity building of statisticians from developing countries. While such statistics have been collected by developing countries, there are still no examples from any LDCs.

#### 4.2.4 eTrade Readiness Assessments and E-commerce Strategies

**Finding 9.** The eTrade Readiness Assessments continue to offer unique and holistic diagnostics of e-commerce “ecosystems” and serve as important reference documents for the subsequent development of the e-commerce “sector” within the supported countries. While the eTrade Readiness Assessments were previously implemented mainly within LDCs, this programme period has included more requests from middle-income, higher-middle income and even high-income countries. This has required flexibility and adaptation of the eTrade Readiness Assessment approach to specific country contexts, while providing new opportunities for financing, collaboration and follow-up.

In the period 2022-24, 13 eTrade Readiness Assessments were either completed or initiated (Table 12).

**Table 12.** List of recently finalised and ongoing eTrade Readiness Assessments (2022-to date)

Finalised and ongoing eTrade Readiness Assessment	Year
Jordan eTrade Readiness Assessment*	2022
Kenya eTrade Readiness Assessment*	2022
Tunisie Évaluation de l'état de préparation au commerce électronique*	2022
Member States of the Economic Community of West African States eTrade Readiness Assessment	2022
Ghana eTrade Readiness Assessment	2023
Mongolia eTrade Readiness Assessment	2023
Peru eTrade Readiness Assessment	2023
Mauritania eTrade Readiness Assessment	2024
Trinidad and Tobago eTrade Readiness Assessment	2025
Timor-Leste eTrade Readiness Assessment	2025
Algérie Évaluation de l'état de préparation au commerce électronique	2025

Zimbabwe eTrade Readiness Assessment	2025
Indonesia eTrade Readiness Assessment	Ongoing

*\*The processes around these assessments were covered by the 2022 ECDE Programme evaluation.*

In line with the 2022 ECDE Programme evaluation recommendation, the ECDE Programme has further enhanced the use of a flexible and adjustable format for the eTrade Readiness Assessments based on differentiated demands. The inclusion of additional groups was already in progress in 2022, and the framework has evolved and been adapted in this programme period to include more advanced countries (still facing similar difficulties). The integration of cross-cutting themes, including gender, youth and rural communities was always considered part of the broader strategy. Disability inclusion has been done more recently, for instance in the eTrade Readiness Assessments/e-commerce strategies developed for ECOWAS, Kenya, Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji and Timor Leste. It should be noted that it is often difficult to identify actors/ programmes dedicated to those issues in developing countries. The eTrade Readiness Assessments also incorporates digital trade (defined as trade that is digitally ordered and/or delivered), reflecting the growing relevance of new digital trade protocols and agreements. As a result, the proposed recommendations within this framework aim to not only boost e-commerce development, but advance digital trade more broadly, ensuring a more inclusive and sustainable digital economy.

The eTrade Readiness Assessment recently initiated in **Indonesia** marks the first time that the environmental impact of e-commerce and digital trade is explicitly included in an assessment, reflecting a growing focus on this aspect (as also emphasised in the DER 2024). An observation made by some stakeholders was that the diagnostic conducted as part of the eTrade Readiness Assessments tends to focus too much on backward linkages instead of including more forward-looking perspectives (e.g. on trade patterns). An explanation for this is that the primary goal of the diagnostic is to identify key bottlenecks, evaluate progress within a country and provide recommendations for actions to address the issues identified in the diagnostic. When followed by an e-commerce strategy, the emphasis shifts to more forward-looking objectives. For some of the more developed countries (non-LDCs), where “domestic e-commerce” may already be relatively well-developed, the issue of cross-border trade was raised as an area that the assessments could pay more attention to. Thus, while the overall approach to eTrade Readiness Assessments has remained consistent over time, focusing on the seven pillars, the importance of continuously adapting and tailoring the assessments to the specific state, needs and context of each country is clear.

In **Mauritania**, key stakeholders consulted by the Evaluation noted that the eTrade Readiness Assessment completed in 2024 constitutes a very important and comprehensive reference document for the country, and that nothing similar had been developed in the country before. The inclusion of key data and statistics in the assessment was emphasised as being of particular importance. Private sector representatives explicitly referred to very useful discussions with the UNCTAD team, during which they were able to share thoughts and ideas and also respond to a comprehensive survey questionnaire. Women were referred to as a group who could potentially benefit significantly from enhanced e-commerce in the country.

In **Ghana**, an eTrade Readiness Assessment was developed in 2023. The assessment built further on UNCTAD’s widespread experience from e-commerce within West African countries, both at the national and regional level. As part of the policy recommendations included in the report, the eTrade Readiness Assessment led to the establishment of a National Steering Committee on E-commerce and Digital Trade to facilitate

intergovernmental policy coordination on e-commerce and digital trade. The diagnostic from the eTrade Readiness Assessment is now being used as an important input in the development of an e-commerce strategy, which was also one of the recommendations from the eTrade Readiness Assessment. This process was initiated in 2024 and both the country and donor (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)) have expressed strong interest in this follow-up, demonstrating the usefulness of the eTrade Readiness Assessment. GIZ is also contributing one of their project staff to assist with coordination and monitoring of the e-commerce strategy process, which serves as a good example of effective collaboration with partners. It is to be noted that in Ghana the government underwent a political change in December 2024 and the Focal Point was changed. At the same time, the established Committee has suffered from a lack of dedicated resources and commitment. This has complicated the completion of the e-commerce strategy development process.

In both Peru and Trinidad and Tobago, key stakeholders who participated in the eTrade Readiness Assessments found that these had been “tremendously useful” and had engaged “the right group of people and stakeholders”. In Trinidad and Tobago, the eTrade Readiness Assessment was undertaken by UNCTAD at the request of the Ministry of Trade and Industry and included a series of multistakeholder and bilateral consultations in Port of Spain. The eTrade Readiness Assessment, completed in October 2024, was undertaken as a first phase of the National E-commerce Strategy 2025-2030 development project, completed in March 2025. Both the eTrade Readiness Assessment and the strategy were funded by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. The Strategy, which aims to address the challenges and exploit the opportunities outlined in the e-Trade Readiness Assessment, includes a budget for implementation on which the advice of the ECDE Programme team has been sought. The eTrade Readiness Assessments conducted in, respectively, Peru and then Trinidad and Tobago were the first ones undertaken by UNCTAD in Latin America and the Caribbean region. The assessments were undertaken in close collaboration with development and eTrade for all partners, including the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC), the Inter-American Development Bank (IABD), the International Trade Centre (ITC) and others. Following these experiences, other requests have been received from the region, but it has not yet been possible to secure funding for these.

**Finding 10. UNCTAD is seen as a powerful convener and a key facilitator of the eTrade Readiness Assessment processes, including as a promoter of the multistakeholder, consultative processes and public-private dialogue. In the end, the responsibility for follow-up on these processes rests with national institutions. This often leads to inefficiencies and a loss of momentum.**

All key stakeholders consulted by the Evaluation recognised UNCTAD’s important role as a convener of these assessment processes. Key government stakeholders also emphasised that the ECDE Programme team continues to follow up and “always are responsive”, even after the official engagement has ended, including through global, regional and national capacity-building activities. The national “Focal Points” are always invited for UNCTAD meetings. The programme team’s efforts to try and link up to other programmes and funding opportunities, including through the UNRCOs and eTrade for all partners, are also highly appreciated by the national actors.

In **Mauritania**, some stakeholders found that internally the process leading to development of the eTrade Readiness Assessment was very much driven by the Ministry of Digital Transformation, Innovation, and Modernization of the Administration (MTNIMA) and that the involvement and ownership of other line ministries and actors in practice had been rather limited. Although a Steering Committee was established from the start – which comprised government officials from the different line ministries, private sector actors, representatives from civil society and others - it was noted that many of these stakeholders did not really understand the purpose of the assessment and did not really contribute to the process. A more general concern mentioned was the disconnect between government and private sector actors, particularly in terms of information sharing. One contributing factor seems to be that the private sector is not well organised in Mauritania but builds mainly on personal networks. Likewise, according to key stakeholder interviews, the eTrade Readiness Assessment process represents one of the first times in the country where private and government actors were engaged in organised public-private dialogue in this area (which constitutes a very important part of the eTrade Readiness Assessment methodology).

In **Indonesia**, the first stakeholder engagement for preparation of the eTrade Readiness Assessment (in February 2025) gathered more than 100 participants. Stakeholders interviewed by the Evaluation, expressed a positive impression of the UNCTAD team and the stakeholder interaction during the event. Some stakeholders noted that the event appeared to have been arranged too hastily and one of the eTrade for all partners, who had initially been consulted in the process, was only invited to the event the day before it was planned to take place,<sup>54</sup> which meant they were unable to participate. The national consultations in Jakarta are currently being organised (22-23 May 2025).

### **Textbox 3: Côte d'Ivoire**

In Côte d'Ivoire, an eTrade Readiness Assessment was conducted in 2021. One of its recommendations was developing a national E-commerce Strategy. The first national consultations in preparation of the development of an E-commerce Strategy in Côte d'Ivoire was organised in Abidjan in November 2023. In this meeting, an up-to-date diagnostic of the e-commerce ecosystem in Côte d'Ivoire (based on the eTrade Readiness Assessment Report from 2021) was presented across key policy areas and challenges faced by several entities from the government, the private sector and other key actors were discussed. At the same time, proposed orientations for the strategy were validated, with a particular view to alignment with the regional e-commerce strategy for the ECOWAS (endorsed in 2023).

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, a draft E-commerce Strategy was shared with the Ministry of Trade and Industry at the start of 2024 and discussed during national consultations organised in Abidjan in February 2024. Following these consultations, a draft “Action Plan” was developed for the E-commerce Strategy and discussed at a stakeholder event in Abidjan in June 2024. Stakeholders who attended this meeting recall very constructive discussions and good momentum. However, after this meeting, none of the stakeholders received any further information or update on the status of the process. This has limited the possibilities for aligning or tapping into UN System and other development partners’ programming processes, as this often requires a more continuous dialogue and a longer planning horizon.

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<sup>54</sup> <https://unctad.org/meeting/national-multi-stakeholder-kick-meeting-indonesia-etrade-readiness-assessment>

One of the main limitations has been the availability of staff within the Ministry who can dedicate the necessary time and support.

**Finding 11. The eTrade Readiness Assessments have been instrumental in advancing the e-commerce and digital economy development agenda within the benefiting countries and regions. This has catalysed further development and actions, including the creation of national and regional e-commerce strategies. Within countries, inter-ministerial tensions as well as financial and capacity constraints often tend to slow down the implementation process, particularly when it relates to legal reform and policy development processes.**

Supporting the development of national and regional e-commerce strategies is a natural follow-up to the eTrade Readiness Assessments. Based on the diagnostics, the strategy focuses on devising policies in selected areas to help governments address challenges pertinent to e-commerce and to build the adequate environment for its development. When a country requests an e-commerce strategy, the ECDE Programme always recommend conducting an eTrade Readiness Assessment beforehand, so that the strategy can be grounded in a proper diagnostic and to bring stakeholders together to identify the challenges they face before moving forward with the strategy itself. Another rational for this is that, since e-commerce strategies may end up not being published, the eTrade Readiness Assessment processes also serve as a means to mobilise development partners through engagement in the multistakeholder events. So far, this approach has been implemented only in Kenya. Mongolia requested an eTrade Readiness Assessment but no funding was identified for conducting an e-commerce strategy afterwards. There was also a change in the mandate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who handed over the digital agenda to the Ministry of Trade which had less capacity.

Back in 2020, the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** requested UNCTAD support (through the ECDE Programme) to develop an e-commerce strategy aimed at fostering a sustainable, inclusive, and secure e-commerce ecosystem in the region. Prior to implementing this, UNCTAD conducted a regional eTrade Readiness Assessment in the ECOWAS region to complete the information for countries not covered by an eTrade Readiness Assessment. Subsequently, a comprehensive Regional E-commerce Strategy and Implementation Plan was developed for the period 2023-2027, using the methodology developed by UNCTAD. The work took place through a consultative, multistakeholder process and a comprehensive desk study based on e-commerce work already conducted in some countries within the region, including through the ECDE Programme (mainly eTrade Readiness Assessments). Stakeholders consulted by the Evaluation emphasised UNCTAD's important role in facilitating and convening this regional strategy development process, linking it to the existing experiences and products already developed within countries in the region. The regional e-commerce strategy was endorsed by the Council of Ministers of ECOWAS in July 2023, and the implementation was planned to be governed by a framework comprising: i) a Regional Committee on E-commerce; ii) Expert Groups; iii) an E-commerce Community Forum; and iv) an Internal Working Group on E-commerce. The framework was designed with a particular view to fostering coordinated efforts at both regional and national levels, with active participation from civil society and private sector actors.

ECOWAS has since faced various challenges in implementing the Strategy, primarily due to funding and human resource constraints. While some directorates within ECOWAS have made progress, implementation of the strategy has not been coordinated effectively, as

ECOWAS has lacked a dedicated person responsible for coordinating e-commerce initiatives. Therefore, more dedicated support is still needed to make the implementation move forward and to connect the dots between the ECOWAS directorates. With support from UNCTAD, ECOWAS has been seeking technical assistance to support the implementation of the strategy, indicating their continued commitment to operationalise the strategy. The African Development Bank was approached with various proposals, but without results. Currently, discussions are taking place with the World Bank to provide funding for a technical advisor (for a 12-month period). The ECDE Programme also continues to provide ad-hoc assistance, including by advising on development of Terms of References etc.

In **Côte d’Ivoire**, the ECOWAS regional e-commerce strategy (from 2021) was used as an important reference document for the development of the country’s national e-commerce strategy. On the other hand, government representatives from the Ministry of Trade found that their own engagement in the development of the regional e-commerce strategy had not been strong enough, as it had been representatives from “foreign trade” who attended the discussions at ECOWAS (although the Commission took the lead in having countries nominate one person from the Ministries of Trade and ICT). In their view, this had reduced the potential synergies and learning aspects across these two strategy processes.

In 2022, the “Direction du Commerce Electronique” was established to promote e-commerce within the Ministry of Trade in Côte d’Ivoire,<sup>55</sup> following one of the recommendations from the eTrade Readiness Assessment. While those interviewed considered this an important milestone, it was noted that the Directorate has not been given a leading role in relation to the implementation of the subsequently developed e-commerce strategy. The reason for this is that the Directorate may not be sustained during a change of government. It is also noteworthy that Côte d’Ivoire is developing an e-commerce postal strategy that aligns with the national e-commerce strategy.<sup>56</sup> The Government relaunched the Abidjan District Address System Project (PADA) in November 2022 and has gradually rolled out the PADA which operationalises the street and door address system throughout Abidjan and involves setting up a single autonomous reference standard for addresses in Abidjan.<sup>57</sup> Although the e-commerce strategy is not yet officially endorsed in Côte d’Ivoire, the government is already starting to prepare for its implementation. A “Bill on E-commerce” (provision to the Strategy) has been drafted (by an Expert provided through EU funding) and is awaiting final approval. An E-Commerce Task Force is to be formalised through the Bill. In addition, an “Association of e-Commerce operators” (where the biggest companies have given the floor to smaller ones), was also established as part of the strategy process. Currently, it is mainly small and informal actors who are members, but larger operators (such as Jumia) are potentially interested in joining if more members from the “same level” participate (to be able to fight for same interests). In general, it is noted that Côte d’Ivoire has a very high implementation rate of recommendations, which has been evident in the last two implementation reviews.

In **Mauritania**, one of the recommendations of the eTrade Readiness Assessment was to develop an e-commerce strategy. This work was initiated, with support from GIZ at the end of 2024. Besides funding, GIZ is also providing human resource input (a staff member) to support the process. The strategy development is seen as an important task in Mauritania,

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<sup>55</sup> UNCTAD (2023), Fast-tracking implementation of eTrade Readiness Assessments, third edition.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*



also in view of a huge drive in e-commerce in the country with a growing number of new start-ups. This further adds to the importance of ensuring enhanced private sector engagement in the strategy development process. As a result, while key stakeholders in Mauritania perceive the strategy as an important output, many consider the strategy development process itself to be of equal importance.

In Senegal, UNCTAD supported the development of an eTrade Readiness Assessment (2018), and the country ranked among the top performers in terms of implementation according to the 2<sup>nd</sup> implementation review (2022). The field mission to **Senegal**, as well as virtual interviews with key stakeholders from other countries, confirmed similar challenges with inter-institutional collaboration and communication flows as mentioned above. The inter-institutional challenges within the area of e-commerce often prevail from several ministries wanting to “own” the e-commerce agenda. These competing interests often significantly delay approval procedures. In addition, the involvement of private sector actors in eTrade Readiness Assessments has generally varied significantly across different countries. While UNCTAD is emphasising its importance to government counterparts, it is ultimately up to them to decide. In Côte d’Ivoire, the big e-commerce platforms were engaged in the strategy process, however this was not the case in Senegal<sup>58</sup> (for instance, Jumia was not involved in Senegal’s strategy although it is the biggest e-commerce platform in the country).

**Finding 12. During this programme period, the ECDE Programme has further developed its eTrade implementation support tool, aiming to enhance national ownership of the implementation and monitoring processes and making them more transparent and inclusive.**

In the first programme period (2019-2021), the ECDE Programme created an ISM to support the implementation of recommendations included in the Action Matrix of eTrade Readiness Assessments conducted by UNCTAD, and to support national stakeholders in the implementation of e-commerce strategies. The ECDE Programme evaluation (2022) recommended the strengthening of country ownership to ensure a better anchoring of implementation of the “Action Matrices”. This recommendation was only partially accepted by the programme team, since it was considered that it would not be possible to fully ensure such ownership.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, some measures have been initiated to enhance country ownership. These include: i) To support the setting up an inter-Ministerial Committee and ensure regular convening of the committee (with support from actors on the ground e.g. the UNRCO); ii) a 2-day hybrid meeting (with eTrade Focal Points, other key senior government officials, Geneva-based representatives of Permanent Missions to the UN from 16 countries, and eTrade for all partners) conducted in 2022 to discuss lessons learned and needs for enhancing implementation of recommendations;<sup>60</sup> iii) an in-person capacity-building workshop for 26 participants (of whom 8 were women) from 24 countries, organised during the eWeek 2023; and iv) an in-person capacity-building workshop attended by 28 country and regional representatives, conducted in 2024 back to back with the 7th IGE session. Topics were selected based on feedback from partner countries through various stakeholder engagements on areas and issues where capacities need strengthening.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The e-commerce strategy in Senegal was led by the government and funded by the EIF.

<sup>59</sup> ECDE Programme Evaluation 2019-2021 update on accepted recommendations April 2023.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Workshop Report eTrade Capacity-Building Workshop 9-10 May 2024 Palais des Nations, Geneva Room E- XXVII.

Implementation Reviews have constituted the cornerstone of the eTrade ISM and can be leveraged as a useful guide to scale-up implementation support and benefit from assistance provided by UNCTAD and development partners, including *eTrade for all* partners. Since 2020, three Implementation Reviews have been conducted covering 18 beneficiary countries. The second Implementation Review, conducted in 2021, utilised an improved methodology that incorporated lessons learned and feedback from various stakeholders involved in the first review process. During this Review, 14 countries took part. The third edition meanwhile, was conducted in 2023 and covered 20 countries applying a simplified questionnaire for a less quantitative approach and greater focus on qualitative results and impacts.<sup>62</sup> This was also in line with the ECDE Programme evaluation (2022) that recommended more of a focus on qualitative monitoring, rather than quantitative numbers. The 4<sup>th</sup> Implementation Review is underway with 20+ countries having responded to the questionnaire.

More recently, an online platform-based implementation support tool (eTrade Reform Tracker) has been developed by UNCTAD and was presented during the IGE in May 2024. A hands-on session was organised during the eTrade Focal Points meeting as well. The Tracker was developed in response to interest expressed by partner countries in a web-based solution aimed at fostering effective collaboration. The Tracker provides functionalities that enable the assignment of responsibilities, tracking of task execution, and reporting on the progress of time-bound deliverables. Additionally, it allows for the recording of information related to the involvement of development partners, thereby facilitating the monitoring of resource mobilisation efforts. A test beta version of the Tracker was presented to focal entities in Kenya and Tunisia in late 2023 to collect preliminary comments, and a more advanced presentation in tandem with a live demonstration of the main features took place during the capacity-building workshop “Towards better coordination of eTrade implementation reforms” delivered as part of the UNCTAD eWeek 2023. Feedback from the participants, including on how the Tracker could be applied in their respective country contexts, has been instrumental in fine-tuning the development of UNCTAD’s rollout strategy in 2024.

The eTrade Reform Tracker, which can serve as a valuable tool supporting the effective implementation of eTrade Readiness Assessments, e-commerce strategies or similar policy document, marks a change in the monitoring approach. Its initial rollout has been planned in Kenya, Fiji, Mauritania, Peru, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Zambia, following requests from those countries. Interest was also expressed in exploring the opportunity to deploy the tool by Jordan, Trinidad & Tobago, and Zimbabwe. The intention of the Tracker is to minimise transaction costs, build a greater sense of national ownership and facilitate reporting in an effective, transparent and inclusive manner.<sup>63</sup> It is developed based on the web-based monitoring tool designed by UNCTAD (DTL) for trade facilitation reforms, which empowers National Trade Facilitation Committees in their role as coordinators of trade facilitation initiatives, especially those related to the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. The eTrade Reform Tracker will require dedicated internal resources for countries to fully leverage its benefits. Countries with specialised e-commerce units and robust committees are likely to gain greater advantages from it. Inputs and feedback from the eTrade Focal Points were also integrated into the development of the tool. Various country representatives consulted

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<sup>62</sup> <https://unctad.org/publication/fast-tracking-implementation-etrade-readiness-assessments-third-edition>

<sup>63</sup> ECDE Work Plan 2024-2027.

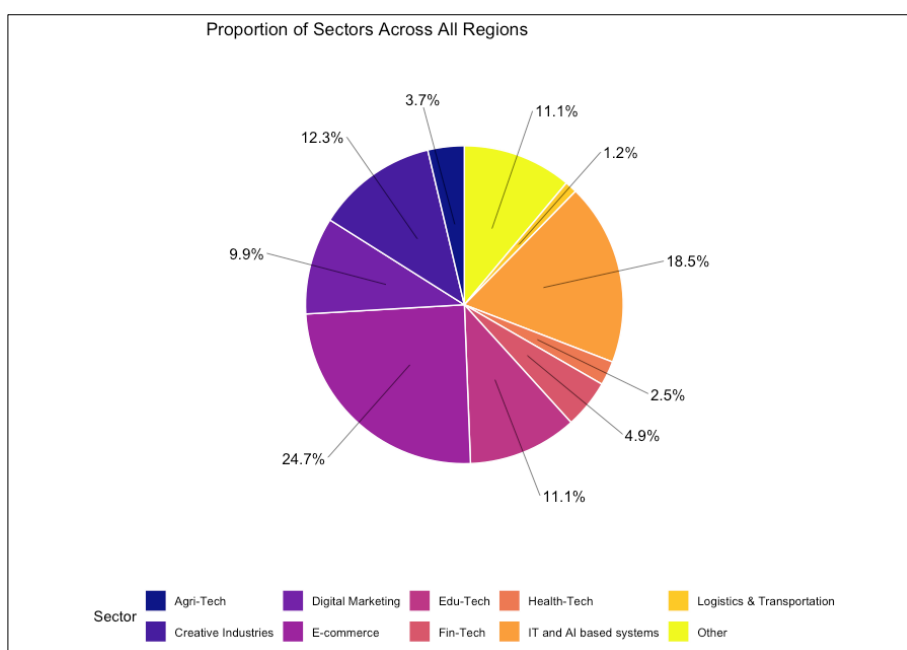
during the Evaluation explicitly mentioned the eTrade Reform Tracker and expressed high expectations for its roll out.

#### 4.2.5 eTrade for Women

**Finding 13.** The Masterclasses have been highly relevant, motivating, and useful for participating women entrepreneurs, featuring a good composition of participants, alongside well-structured and participatory sessions that consider the specific regional context. A majority of the women consulted found the Masterclasses of very high quality although the focus group discussions with women entrepreneurs indicated that the programme was quite dense. A few women also requested more focus on risk management.

The eTrade for Women Masterclasses have become popular with a high number of applicants. Each Masterclass accommodates around 25 participants, and in 2023-24, over 300 applications were received for the 25 spots per Masterclass. For instance, the Africa Masterclass received more than 400 applicants, from which a selection of 25 participants was made based on the following criteria: *You are a woman and you are the founder/co-founder of your business; You have a track record of at least 3 years in this role; New technologies and digital tools are at the heart of your business model and operations; geographic specification; and you are making a difference and creating a positive impact on your community.* In Southeast Asia, the risk of being overwhelmed with applications from India called for a different notification strategy. The programme engaged with the Permanent Missions which supported the organization and conduct of virtual online interactions with selected groups in several countries (i.e. Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal). These resulted in fewer and presumably more targeted applications. For India, a limited number of networks were reached out to jointly with eTrade for all partners. This resulted in 110+ applications.

**Figure 10.** Sectoral distribution of participants from Masterclasses.

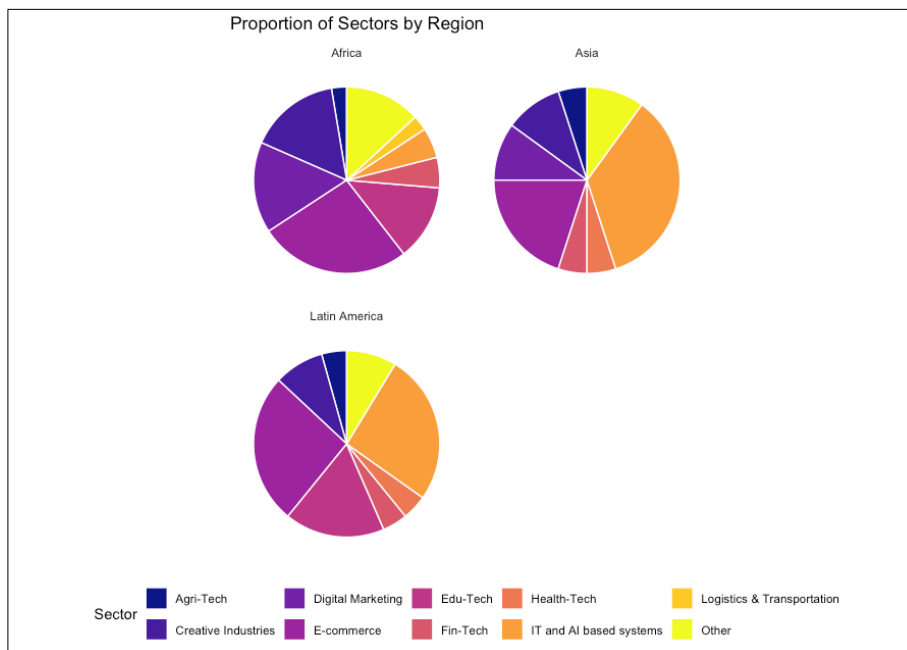


Source: Developed by the Evaluation based on data from the Masterclass participants.

The aim of eTrade for Women is to promote women entrepreneurs, their human empowerment, increased entrepreneurship, productivity and innovation but also to impact

the community. Therefore, it is relevant to consider the types of business that the women entrepreneurs are engaged in. Figure 10 illustrates the sectoral distribution of the Masterclass participants (based on information provided in post-training surveys). It gives an indication of what type of entrepreneurs are included in the Masterclasses. E-commerce represents the biggest category, followed by IT and AI services and creative industries.<sup>64</sup> Regionally, the distribution varies considerably (Figure 11). Education is well represented in Africa and Latin America but nearly absent in Asia. On the other hand, IT and AI services is by far the biggest sector in Asia.

**Figure 11.** Sectoral distribution of participants from Masterclasses by region.



Source: Developed by the Evaluation based on data from the Masterclass participants.

One of the entrepreneurs consulted in the FGDs was specialised in digital education with the potential to enhance digital skills in the education system and allow for online access to education. So far, the tool has been applied mainly in private schools since collaboration with the Ministry of Education in the country was not well established. However, the potential for impact moving forward was clear. A good example of impact was also provided from Nigeria where two entrepreneurs who met at the Masterclass established a social enterprise connecting rural women with an urban market through an e-commerce platform. Their agri-food e-commerce business has linked more than 6,300 women and girls to markets through digital and financial literacy training, the provision of 425 smartphones, and linkages to finance resulting in the opening of 114 new bank accounts. The enterprise works with clusters of 100 women, each of whom nominates a cluster leader responsible for ensuring that members repay their loans. While there have been delays in repayment, so far 100% of funds have been repaid. The enterprise gets a commission of 10-15% on all goods/services purchased through the platform and has now developed into a viable business.

There were also examples provided of women entrepreneurs engaged within beauty products or clothing (referred to above as creative industries). These companies often had elements of social responsibility in their business model, such as fashion based on a circular economy and recycling, entrepreneurs who linked producers of traditional clothing or crafts and arts

<sup>64</sup> Creative Industries refers to sectors that require creative thinking such as: Design, Architecture, and Artisanal crafts

developed in the village to urban markets, thus creating rural employment. One of the companies in Senegal produced skin care with raw materials (such as baobab) that were extracted from the villages; thus the labour-intensive work gave local women an opportunity to generate an income, while benefitting the company. There were, however, a few cases where wider impact from the entrepreneurs' business was difficult to identify. For instance, one company was engaged in linking handy workers to clients, and while this can provide employment for the handy workers and support households accessing such services, the impact on the community was less obvious.

Interviews with ECDE Programme staff, Masterclass participants, Advocates, eTrade for all partners and other stakeholders highlighted that the groups of participants were very diverse, covering different businesses and focus areas. They had different levels of maturity, but all of the entrepreneurs went home with new useable knowledge. In fact, while the Evaluation sought to understand if e.g. the different stages of development of the companies provided an obstacle for learning in the Masterclasses, it was clear that participants considered this to be an advantage and not an obstacle. It proved to facilitate sharing and learning between participants.

The women entrepreneurs consulted by the Evaluation highlighted the practical and participatory aspects of the training and the opportunities to share and understand other experiences as women entrepreneurs. The end-of-training surveys and consultations with participants have emphasised the usefulness of the Masterclasses and there have only been a few suggestions for improvement. Survey respondents, particularly from English-speaking Africa and Southeast Asia, specifically requested the inclusion of risk management, a point also echoed in a few interviews. Aside from this, around half of the women entrepreneurs consulted through FGDs indicated that the programme was a bit dense and compact, and suggested including some more cultural activities to lighten the programme.

#### **Textbox 4: Masterclass participants' suggestions for other topics to be included**

- *"Story about failing, and how to handle it, what to do. When should we say it is enough and maybe close the business?"* Woman from Southeast Asia.
- *"Sessions on pitfalls to avoid financial (loses)."* Woman from Southeast Asia.
- *"Risk management and succession planning."* Woman from English speaking Africa.
- *"Business continuity and risk management."* Woman from English speaking Africa.
- *"Know about possible scams, what to do and how to act in case of them?"* Woman from Latin America (translated from Spanish).

**Finding 14. Concrete results from the support to women entrepreneurs have been realised, particularly in terms of building self-confidence and growing professional networks. There are also good indications of business growth and business restructuring as a result of the Masterclasses, but less clear evidence of enhanced engagement in policy dialogue.**

The women entrepreneurs consulted by the Evaluation highlighted networking opportunity and personal development as key results of their engagement with eTrade for Women. This was also confirmed by the impact survey conducted by the ECDE Programme team in May 2024. Here, 30 women out of 39 (77%) indicated that the Masterclasses had "boosted their confidence as a women digital entrepreneur" and "enabled them to grow their professional network". Several women entrepreneurs mentioned during the consultations for this

evaluation that it was a relief to learn that most entrepreneurs have faced struggles along the way, that no one is perfect, and that balancing household chores and being an entrepreneur is an experience shared by many women entrepreneurs. This has played a crucial role in encouraging and motivating participants to continue, even when faced with challenges. Practical experiences, such as pitching, were also highlighted. Some quotes on concrete changes after the Masterclasses from the impact survey are included in the text box below.

**Textbox 5: When requested to indicate concrete examples of change, the Masterclass participants mentioned in the impact survey:**

- *“The entirety of the Masterclass teaching has bolstered my confidence through knowledge acquisition. This has facilitated more ease in my interactions with professional contacts, thus expanding my network, acquiring new clients and contracts. This knowledge has contributed to securing public contracts.”*
- *“I implemented the strategic marketing techniques discussed, optimising my online presence. This resulted in increased engagement and a notable uptake in sales.”*
- *“Directly after Masterclass, I started prospect the Ivory Coast market, and I got some clients.”*
- *“I feel significantly more empowered in my role after attending the Masterclass. I attended a successful commercial mission in Mexico. My company is well-established and experiencing strong growth, which excites me about the future.”*

During the FGDs with Masterclass participants, numerous examples of how the Masterclasses have led to concrete new partnerships across and within countries were provided. One example highlighted three Masterclass participants from Nigeria, Ghana, and Côte d’Ivoire who have become board members of the same company. There were also examples of a partnership between a Nigerian and Kenyan participant, collaboration between participants from Mali and Côte d’Ivoire and several in-country collaborations. While some of these women knew each other from prior engagement, it is very clear that the Masterclasses have been important in expanding their professional networks.

At the enterprise-level impact in the ToC, the overall aim is “increased female entrepreneurship, productivity, competitiveness, innovation and value creation in e-commerce”. Consultations with women entrepreneurs indicated that several of the businesses had experienced growth after the Masterclasses (refer also Textbox 5), which is reflected by the increased numbers of employees in Table 13. A bit more than half of the respondents in the impact survey indicated that the Masterclasses had supported them to “enhance their capacities to manage and grow their business”. While this is the overall aim, not all entrepreneurs are successful in achieving growth, which would not be a realistic target regardless. It is noted that no targets are established for how many of the entrepreneurs are expected to achieve growth and therefore it is difficult to assess whether results are good enough. However, from FGDs and interviews and the impact survey there are good indications that around 50% of the participants have experienced growth.

FGDs and interviews with Masterclass participants indicate that a key challenge for expanding businesses is a lack of funding. The programme does not provide funding and has never had the intention to do so. Instead, Masterclass participants are capacitated to seek funding on their own. One of the sessions concerns pitching the business idea towards investors and this element has been highly rated by Masterclass participants. As reflected in Table 13, some of the participants have managed to use the skills developed at the

Masterclass and, through follow-up training in e.g. pitching, obtain funding from investors. The visibility and branding opportunities have also supported women accessing funding. While the idea is to build skills rather than providing funding (which a UN organization can rarely provide to SMEs), lack of financing is a key concern for many of the participants. Even if it is clearly stated from the outset that no funding will be provided, it continues to be an expectation from the participants that funding might be provided in the longer run.

**Table 13.** Results from eTrade for Women as reflected in interviews/FGDs.

Business/sector	Concrete results realised	Additional training	Wider impact on community
E-commerce construction/food crops	Used the pitch and acquired XFA 1 million/USD 1500	Pitching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural and urban linkage</li> </ul>
Agriculture cooperatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to ministry to further develop software for cooperative leading to re-design of software</li> <li>Linked to cooperatives (linked to 10 today)</li> </ul>	China study tour eWeek in Geneva	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support to small-scale farmers within cocoa, coffee and palm oil value chains</li> </ul>
FinTech/ Agribusiness	Elected President of Council of the Small and Medium Businesses Movement of Côte d'Ivoire representing 2,500 SMEs	New York	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expanded coverage from only capital based SMEs to also include rural areas</li> <li>SME insurances</li> </ul>
e-Commerce platform/communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visibility and branding</li> <li>Grew from 2 to 5 employees</li> <li>Appointed as National advisor on digital inclusion and communication by the government</li> </ul>	eWeek in Geneva China study tour	
Edu-tech			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education of children, although mainly in private schools</li> </ul>
Creative industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Growth of online sales from 5 to 25%*</li> <li>Grew from 12 to 15 employees</li> </ul>	China study tour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Part time employment of 500 rural women who collected baobab</li> </ul>
e-Commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acquired USD 250,000 in funding</li> <li>Realised need to re-structure governance of company</li> </ul>		

\* This growth occurred during COVID-19 and the community member indicated that as the main reason for the growth, while also recognising acquiring skills from the Masterclass.

It is also a clear target of the ToC to encourage entrepreneurs to promote advocacy and policy dialogue and bring forward opinions and expertise in public forums. The Masterclass therefore contains sessions on public-private collaboration and on how entrepreneurs can engage more with policymakers. Engagement with policymakers was, however, the element which was found to be less useful in the impact survey and end-of-training surveys. Some of the women interviewed by the Evaluation were also not fully convinced of the relevance of training Masterclass participants in engaging with policymakers during the Masterclasses since some of the companies were not necessarily fully ready for engagement in such dialogues. Thus, while most interviewed persons found it highly relevant to foster this dialogue, some indicated that it was probably a bit too early for some of the companies.

Advocates, on the other hand, found the policy dialogue essential and an important way to get international exposure. The ECDE Programme has clearly opened doors for them

internationally but also at national level. Through support to governments, UNCTAD has established a strong network in many of the countries. There were instances where UNCTAD facilitated access to ministries for both Advocates and Masterclass participants. For example, UNCTAD linked one of the participants to the Ministry of Agriculture in one country, which led to the redesigning of the software focusing on agricultural cooperatives. This engagement also put the entrepreneur in contact with other cooperatives.

**Finding 15. The eTrade for Women community building has become more strategic and systematised with commissioned community leaders, regular training activities and a more integrated approach to involving community members in other ECDE Programme activities. However, the engagement level of community members varies considerably.**

The 2022 ECDE Programme evaluation provided a number of recommendations to further build and support the community building of eTrade for Women, as this element had not been fully developed at the time of the last evaluation. Since then, additional resources have been allocated to the communities and a more strategic approach to supporting the communities has been realised.

One essential initiative has been the appointment of community leaders responsible for regularly coordinating activities. In 2023, 15 of the more advanced community members were selected out of more than 50 applications, and now five of the communities have three community leaders (with two alternates in each group) who work under pro-bono agreements.<sup>65</sup> Community leaders are offered concrete opportunities to benefit from skills-development and advocacy activities organised by the eTrade for Women Initiative and its partners. 14 Community leaders also participated in the eWeek in 2023, benefitting from a curated programme and targeted interventions.

There are currently six communities, with the community in South Asia having only been established after the Masterclass in December 2024, and no community leader in place yet there. Community leaders are selected for a two-year period and a second round of selection was finalised in early 2025. It is noted that while community members were well aware of the ongoing selection process, the selection criteria are less transparent and largely driven by UNCTAD; community members and leaders have not been very actively engaged and consulted in this process. It is clear to the community members that commitment and active participation in the communities is likely to support a woman's candidature, but besides that, the female entrepreneurs were not fully aware of concrete selection criteria. The programme would therefore benefit from making this clear to communities so as to ensure transparency and ownership.

While community members are all listed in the eTrade for Women webpage and transparently disclosed, it is noted that community members, leaders and Advocates have limited knowledge of new members in the community. It is an open application process, with an interview and selection process - to make sure that prospective members qualify - but this process is done in Geneva with limited participation of community leaders. Sometimes the community leaders suggest new potential members to join the community, but it is solely the eTrade for Women team in Geneva who assesses them and decides on the selection. Formally, there are only three requirements for applicants to enter the communities: 1) that

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<sup>65</sup> UNCTAD (2024) Year in Review 2023; ECDE Programme Evaluation 2019-2021 update on accepted recommendations April 2023.



you are a women founder or co-founder of a business that has been operating for at least 2 years; 2) you run a digital business, that is, it leverages technology and digital tools to create value and drive operations; and 3) you are based in a developing country.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the selection criteria are quite broad.

Activities in the communities have been more systematically implemented since 2022. A total of 22 activities for the communities was organised in 2022, targeted at strengthening business, leadership, and networking skills.<sup>67</sup> According to consultations with the French speaking community, training sessions are conducted every second month. While the eTrade for Women impact survey found that around 80% of Masterclass participants joined community activities,<sup>68</sup> this was not confirmed by the Evaluation's consultations in the field. It was estimated that the French speaking community has around 72 community members, but only 15-20 of them (or less than 30%) are currently actively engaged. It is more or less the same members who participate in all training sessions, although the women entrepreneurs are selective in what they participate in due to time constraints. According to eTrade for Women participants consulted by the Evaluation in Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, less than half of the women entrepreneurs who had participated in the first Masterclass in 2020 were still active in the community. While most were still registered as community members, only a few of them participate actively in the activities (Table 14). The main reason for community members losing interest was, as mentioned above, the lack of funding opportunities or concrete opportunities for additional support. eTrade for Women is competing with a number of governments, private sector and other international organizations supporting SMEs and the entrepreneurs are joining other networks offering the most benefit. Several of the eTrade for Women participants consulted took part in several networks depending on their need.

While the level of activity varies across the communities, the ECDE Programme team has worked on actively linking eTrade for Women participants to other opportunities. As reflected in Table 13 above, a China study tour was arranged with 31 participants. Community leaders were invited to participate in the eWeek, and a pitching coaching session was offered. Several of these initiatives have yielded concrete results e.g. access to finance, skills development etc. The formalised partnership with Deutsche Post DHL Group enabled two community members to enter the highly selective DHL GoTrade GBSN Fellowship Program on 5 April 2022. The 12-month programme provided two community members with training, mentoring as well as new business skills to improve the overall management of their businesses, including by offering them logistical support to reach new markets.<sup>69</sup>

**Table 14.** French-speaking Masterclass participants in the communities consulted for the evaluation.

Country	Trained entrepreneurs	Community members	Still active
Senegal	5	5	1-3
Côte d'Ivoire	5	3	2

**Finding 16.** While almost all activities during the Masterclass have been considered highly useful and relevant, it has been more challenging to balance between

<sup>66</sup> <https://etradeforall.org/et4women/community>

<sup>67</sup> UNCTAD (2024) Year in Review 2023; ECDE Programme Evaluation 2019-2021 update on accepted recommendations April 2023.

<sup>68</sup> UNCTAD (2024), Summary & analysis eTrade for Women Masterclasses global impact survey, May 2024.

<sup>69</sup> UNCTAD (2024) Year in Review 2023; ECDE Programme Evaluation 2019-2021 update on accepted recommendations April 2023.

**entrepreneurs at different maturity levels in the communities. Capacity and skills development activities are mostly considered useful to the community members, but the latter have also been selective in what they have participate in. This calls for putting community leaders and members more in the driving seats to develop communities/activities they find useful for them in that specific context.**

Community leaders and UNCTAD strive to plan activities that women entrepreneurs find useful and interesting. Community members are asked to provide input on what trainings they would like to attend, although such feedback is not always provided. This makes it challenging for eTrade for Women to make the training sessions relevant to the community members. While community members acknowledge that they do not always provide feedback to community leaders about the activities they would like to see, there is a lack of understanding about what would actually be feasible. Members often have limited understanding of whether there is a budget available and what would be feasible to suggest. Several of the consulted women entrepreneurs felt they could contribute with their personal experiences but were rarely requested to do so. Members are awaiting community leaders' initiatives instead of being proactive, indicating a lack of ownership. There is also a perception that the sessions could become more interactive and use the qualifications in the community to a larger extent. In one community, it was noted that there have been few opportunities for members to share their own experiences. Online trainings were often conducted as presentations, with limited active engagement from members. This was a demotivating factor for some participants who felt they had valuable experiences to share.

One of the main motivations for community members to engage in the community is the opportunity to participate in capacity-building activities. There were several examples of women who had accessed additional training through the eTrade for Women, e.g. training on pitching, participation in a study tour to China, and participation in the eWeek in Geneva (although there was no systematic approach to ensuring that the women were asked to share their knowledge with fellow members). The systematisation of learning across community members could support knowledge sharing, transparency, motivation of others and joint learning. It is also a good example of how community members could be engaged more actively in the training sessions.

The study tour to China received an excellent rating in the post-travel-survey, with an average rating of 4.9 out of 5. The networking aspect of the study tour received high praise, with 81% of participants finding it extremely beneficial. However, participants were less aware of the Chinese companies' preparedness to do business at the international level. One participant consulted by the Evaluation mentioned that, *"while a study tour to China opens doors and allows us to meet with companies there was a feeling that they were not interested in doing business. They were not aware of who we were, and they did not acknowledge us as businesswomen. Expectations were not fully clear. Very useful for us to see how to livestream and sell online but we lack all the tools to do it... Apps are very expensive."* It was also stated that while social media tools were considered useful, in practice, they were difficult to apply in a West African context due to several barriers, such as lack of access to technology, high costs and lack of finance. It was evident that the female entrepreneurs were granted access to companies and potential new partners to a degree which they would not have achieved independently (although some of the entrepreneurs had already been to China on their own), and this access was highly appreciated. There were also examples of women entrepreneurs from Latin America who had been able to establish business

connections in China leading to concrete results, but this was not the case for the West African participants consulted as part of the Evaluation.

As a general observation from the Evaluation's consultations with several eTrade for Women participants, there is a need to better understand the overall offerings of the eTrade for Women programme. While the women valued the activities, networking opportunities, and community connections, they found the overall goal somewhat unclear. The consulted women entrepreneurs in both Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria indicated that they tried to keep active in the communities in order to be considered for additional opportunities, but without fully understanding what to expect in the longer run.

**Textbox 6: Former eTrade for Women Advocate from Côte d'Ivoire**

The former Advocate in Côte d'Ivoire was recently elected president of the Executive Council of the Small and Medium Businesses Movement of Côte d'Ivoire, which represents over 2,500 SMEs in 25 sectors. The Executive Council has existed for 45 years but has been under the same president during the last 25 years. The former Advocate challenged the President in the election and won. She explained to the evaluation team how the position as Advocate had given her exposure towards SMEs and confidence to act at both the national and international scenes. She indicated that this exposure had been important for being elected as President. At national level, she had participated in numerous policy dialogues and provided input for the e-commerce strategy, the e-commerce Bill and the Start-up Act (2024). At regional level, she was part of the discussion on the ECOWAS e-commerce strategy. Thus, it was her impression that the role as advocate for eTrade for Women had been essential in providing this forum to engage in policy dialogue since policy makers listen more seriously to a representative of an international organization. A concrete change she introduced at the Executive Council was to open it up to rural SMEs and, whereas it had been initiated as an Abidjan-based organization, it was now a national organization. This increased the membership base from 41 SMEs when she took over to currently around 1000 SMEs organised under the umbrella organization. She had expanded the office space to also include office and learning spaces where SMEs could sit and work from as well as attend training sessions.

#### **4.2.6 Capacity building and technical assistance to measuring the digital economy and digital trade**

**Finding 17. UNCTAD has promoted the inclusion of developing countries in measuring digital trade with the development of the Handbook and through the capacity building of statisticians from developing countries. While the Handbook and training sessions are considered useful, with concrete examples from both developed and developing countries, there are few examples of practical application in LDCs due to limited digital trade statistics in these countries.**

One of the key concerns driving the demand for better evidence on digital trade has been the perception that large parts of the economy are not being recorded because of digitalization. Even if it is generally accepted that the current statistical frameworks are still well suited for measuring international trade, the fact that digital trade is not visible within existing statistics hinders the ability to assess the impact of trade policy. Therefore, the Handbook set out to

define what digital trade is and how it relates to international trade as a whole. It defines digital trade as “all international trade that is digitally ordered and/or digitally delivered.”<sup>70</sup>

There has been a strong focus on making the Handbook work for developing countries and this has been the key mandate of UNCTAD in joining the partnership (with the IMF, OECD and WTO) to work on the first edition of the Handbook. Interviews with partners indicated that UNCTAD was an important addition to the working group in terms of enhancing focus on the inclusion of developing countries, LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs. This supplements in particular the OECD, which has a focus on developed countries. A good example of efforts to make the Handbook work in developing countries is the revised reporting template, which offers statistical compilers flexibility when collating digital trade components, even with only partial information. The Handbook also offers case studies from China, Jamaica, Spain and Turkey on measuring digitally ordered merchandise trade and digitally delivered trade, but there are no case examples from a LDC provided in the Handbook since no LDC is collecting such data.<sup>71</sup>

Another important contribution from UNCTAD to the revision of the Handbook was the member State consultations. Through the Working Group on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy, UNCTAD has requested member States to provide feedback on the Handbook. The important role played by UNCTAD in ensuring consultations with member States was confirmed by partners engaged in developing the Handbook.

In order to promote the inclusion of developing countries in statistics and measuring the digital economy and digital trade, the ECDE Programme has implemented numerous capacity-building activities during the evaluation period 2022 to 2024. This was a key recommendation from the 2022 ECDE Programme evaluation, which highlighted a significant need for enhanced capacity in e-commerce statistics. Table 15 provides an overview of training sessions implemented.

**Table 15.** Joint capacity-building activities on measuring ECDE in the 2022-24 period.

Year	Event	Partner(s)	# of participants	Of whom, # of women
2022	Various training events co-organised by UNCTAD and other partners (UNECLAC/IMF)	UNECLAC/IMF	236	
2023	Gulf Cooperation Council working group on National Accounts/Trade Stats		45	not available
2023	Session on Measuring Digital Trade for SACU member countries, at the invitation of UNSD	UNSD	40	14
2023	Workshop on Measuring the Digital Economy jointly with IMF - Gaborone, Botswana	IMF	36	14
2023	Workshop on Measuring e-commerce	World Bank	23	17
2023	LAC: session on measuring digital trade	UNSD	29	17
2023	LDC workshop on Improving LDC services exports data	WTO	100	not available
2023	Arab countries: Workshop on Measuring Digital Trade	WTO	26	10
2023	UAE: National Workshop on services and digital trade statistics	WTO	45	21

<sup>70</sup> WTO, OECD, IMS, UNCTAD (2023), Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade, second edition.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

2024	Central Asia Regional Workshop on Measuring E-commerce	NSO Tajikistan/ World Bank	22	8
2024	IMF-UNCTAD Workshop on trade in services and digital trade statistics I (Zanzibar)	IMF	24	9
2024	IMF-UNCTAD Workshop on trade in services and digital trade statistics II (Tbilisi, Georgia)	IMF	23	11
2024	Webinar on measuring digital trade	UN Statistical Institute for Asia Pacific	153	77
2024	5th International Seminar on Big Data for Official Statistics: Measuring the Digital Economy	NBS China	90	50
2024	IMF-UNCTAD Workshop on trade in services and digital trade statistics III (Mauritius)	IMF	27	10
2024	High level regional event and measurement workshop on digital trade (Bali, Indonesia)	Bank of Indonesia/UNSD	53	25
2024	Follow-up workshop on Measuring Digital Trade for Arab Countries	AMF/WTO	26	13
<b>Total</b>			<b>998</b>	<b>296</b>

Between 2022 and 2024, close to 1,000 participants (around 30% women) from countries in the Southern African Customs Union and Gulf Cooperation Council, and other countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the Arab region and Latin America and the Caribbean, benefited from regional workshops and dedicated sessions on core ICT indicators and measuring e-commerce and digital trade (Table 15).

The Evaluation consulted with partners and statisticians who had attended Workshops on trade in services and digital trade statistics which were based on the Handbook. In these workshops, there had been a very clear strategy from UNCTAD for inviting participants from both National Central Banks and National Statistical Offices from all the countries joining, and this was confirmed both during the field visits and in online consultations.

Representatives from both Central Banks and Statistical Offices from Senegal, Nigeria and Côte D'Ivoire had joined training sessions in either Mauritius, Botswana or Zanzibar and were able to explain the selection criteria. The training sessions were done over five days and participants found them very useful, although the topics were substantial for a five-day training. Member States were encouraged to share examples of how they navigated data gaps, a major challenge across all countries.

Training sessions also included suggestions for how such data could be collected, which involves conducting an annual survey of official digital economy statistics (on ICT usage by enterprises and on the ICT sector) through an online questionnaire. All participants interviewed indicated a high interest in implementing such a survey and felt capable of doing it after completing the training sessions, but they lacked the agency and resources from the political leadership within their countries. In Côte d'Ivoire, terms of reference for such a survey have been prepared and submitted to the government, but no funding has been made available, despite high political interest in the subject (not least in terms of taxation on digital transactions). Consequently, none of the consulted participants had yet been able to apply their knowledge in practice. It is noted that 60% of the respondents to the 2025 evaluation survey reported using the Handbook in practice. However, consultations in the field indicated that the actual data collection required for measuring digital trade has not been realised so far.

The evaluators' consultations with statisticians indicated good and systematic approaches for the sharing of learnings with colleagues after the end of training. For instance, in Côte d'Ivoire, the staff who attended training sessions were requested to prepare a training report and share information on learning through various sessions. Similar systematic set-ups were realised in Senegal where it was a requirement from management to staff to ensure broader knowledge sharing. Related to this, training participants referred to the need for more systematic follow-up opportunities on the training provided by UNCTAD. Participants explained that questions on operational issues related to the training provided often came up after returning to their office work and when sharing with colleagues, and they would have liked an opportunity to discuss and reflect on such issues with the experts and other training group participants. The trainers had offered participants the opportunity to contact them with any post-training questions, but there was a request for a more systematic follow-up system.

In some cases, capacity-building activities were preceded by an online course and attending meetings in advance of the training workshop itself. For instance, participants from the IMF-UNCTAD Workshop on trade in services and digital trade statistics III in Mauritius explained how they had participated in two webinars and had to complete one test prior to the workshop. This approach was highly valued and exemplifies how learning can be distributed over time. It also helps ensure that participants reach a comparable level of understanding before the actual workshop.

An important result besides the knowledge and capacity enhancement for participants is the networking aspect. Contact details shared with other training participants (e.g. among West African participants who also often meet in other trainings offered by other development partners) are important in ensuring cross-country learning. There are examples of regional collaboration on surveys. For example, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Benin jointly applied for conducting a cross-border trade survey. Côte d'Ivoire consulted Benin (who was more advanced) when they drafted the terms of references. Unfortunately, it required financial contribution from participating countries, which Côte d'Ivoire was unsuccessful in mobilising.

UNCTAD collects important statistics on various indicators that could benefit member States in their calculation of the digital economy and e-commerce. However, this data is not accessible to member States. A recommendation from the 2025 evaluation survey and stakeholder consultations was to ensure better access to data for member States. Such a database is currently being developed by UNCTAD and should be accessible during 2025.

## 4.3 Programme efficiency, M&E and partnerships

**Summary of findings:** The ECDE Programme continues to be highly reliant on extrabudgetary resources which is putting staff members under severe pressure. The overall budget has decreased, while demand for services has increased. The distribution of funding across pillars has largely remained unchanged, although eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies have received an even higher share of the funding. The ECDE M&E framework is highlighted as a best practice example within UNCTAD, and it has been substantially improved through the last Work Plan, with more qualitative indicators at the outcome level. The eTrade for all partnership is highly valued by members as an expert-level networking and information-sharing hub that creates valuable collaboration opportunities. Some key stakeholders still found that the “capital” of the eTrade for all network is underutilised and that there is scope for enhanced collaboration.

### 4.3.1 Programme efficiency

**Finding 18. The ECDE Programme continues to be heavily reliant on extrabudgetary resources. This is putting pressure on staff members, creating insecurity in terms of their jobs. The ECDE Programme is among the top three programmes in UNCTAD receiving requests for technical cooperation from member States, but this is not fully recognised in the allocation of staff members from the UN regular budget.**

While extrabudgetary funding has continued to increase over the period, regular budget allocation has not increased much. One of the main recommendations from the 2022 ECDE Programme evaluation was to increase the number of staff members funded by the regular budget due to the growing mandate. As documented by the 2022 evaluation, funding was a severe concern, and the programme was highly driven by extrabudgetary funding. In 2021, seven staff members were funded by the regular budget and almost 90% of the full budget was funded by extrabudgetary funding.<sup>72</sup> In 2022, member States decided to allocate two additional posts from the UN’s regular budget to make up the total of nine staff members allocated today. The ongoing UN liquidity crisis, however, delayed the two new posts from being filled before 2023. The ECDE Programme team comprised a total of 34 staff members at the end of 2022. By the end of 2024, this number had decreased to 30.<sup>73</sup> According to the current Work Plan, around 80% of the ECDE Programme is funded by extrabudgetary resources.<sup>74</sup>

According to interviews conducted by the Evaluation, funding continues to present a severe challenge, with the ECDE Programme team under continuous pressure to raise funds for activities that countries increasingly demand. Whereas a growing number of staff paid by extrabudgetary funds have been recruited on fixed-term contracts, several staff members continue to be engaged on short-term contracts. There are concerns that qualified staff members are seeking employment elsewhere due to insecure contractual arrangements.

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<sup>72</sup> UNCTAD (2022), Independent programme evaluation: UNCTAD’s E-Commerce and Digital Economy Programme, Independent Evaluation Unit, September 2022.

<sup>73</sup> UNCTAD (2023) Year in Review 2022; UNCTAD (2024) Year in Review 2023; UNCTAD (2024) Year in Review 2025.

<sup>74</sup> UNCTAD (2024), Work Plan 2024-2027.



There is a high and increasing demand for ECDE Programme products. In 2022 and 2023, UNCTAD received respectively 63 and 67 formal requests for technical cooperation. The two areas of work that received the highest number of requests were e-commerce and the digital economy, and competition and consumer protection policies and frameworks. Between 2019-2023, 224 funding requests were received, with the highest demand for investment policy reviews, e-commerce and digital economy services, and competition and consumer protection policy frameworks.<sup>75</sup> The reliance on extrabudgetary funding for most activities hampers forward planning and reduces programme efficiency.

**Finding 19. The distribution of budget across different pillars has remained largely unchanged since the 2022 ECDE Programme evaluation. The budget allocations continue to reflect developing countries' demand for technical cooperation, especially the eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies which 67% of the technical cooperation budget.**

Technical cooperation continues to receive most of the funding allocation in the Work Plan 2024-2027, and the share has increased from 51% in the 2019-2023 Work Plan to 54% in the 2024-2027 Work Plan (refer to Table 16). The budget share for research and analysis remains around 10%, while consensus building increased from 4% to 6%. The most notable decline in budget share is for partnerships (including eTrade for All and eWeek), which has declined from 20% in the 2019-2023 Work Plan to 9% in the 2024-2027 Work Plan. Programme management costs constitute 21% of the total budget for 2024-2027, compared to 17% in the 2019-2023 Work Plan.

**Table 16.** Budget allocations in Work Plan 2019-2023 and Work Plan 2024-2027 by pillar

Workplan	2019-2023*		2024-2027	
Activities	Total USD	%	Total USD	%
<b>1. Research/analysis</b>	<b>4,292,123</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>4,147,045</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>2. Technical cooperation</b>	<b>25,685,715</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>22,416,020</b>	<b>54%</b>
2.1 e-commerce and Law Reform	2,793,820	6%	1,197,122	3%
2.2 eTrade Readiness Assessments/e-commerce strategies, implementation	12,995,408	26%	15,091,710	36%
2.3 Measuring e-commerce and the digital economy	3,004,312	6%	2,224,512	5%
2.4 eTrade for Women	6,892,175	14%	3,902,676	9%
<b>3. Consensus-building (IGE, Working Group)</b>	<b>2,215,562</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>2,405,650</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>4. Partnerships (eTrade for All, eWeek, digital cooperation for development)</b>	<b>10,069,074</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>3,575,263</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b>5. Programme management</b>	<b>8,504,237</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>9,099,160</b>	<b>21%*</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>50,766,711</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>41,643,138</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*The budget for the Work Plan for 2024-2027 includes all programme management and administration under one joint budget header while the budget for the Work Plan for 2019-2023 includes administrative support under each of the three pillars: research, technical cooperation and consensus-building.

**Table 17.** Outstanding requests from member States

Year	eTrade Readiness Assessments & e-commerce strategies	Statistics	Legal Reform
2024	14	4	1

<sup>75</sup> UNCTAD (2024), Review of the technical cooperation activities of UNCTAD and their financing. Annual Report 2024.



It is clear from outstanding requests from member States that eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies are the most demanded products from the ECDE Programme, justifying the larger share of the budget towards these activities. The Evaluation noted that a very minimum budget is provided to E-commerce and Law Reform (6%). This is reflected by a minimal description of the Law Reform component in the Work Plan - there seems to be some recognition of this being outside the core competence area of UNCTAD. Stakeholder consultations revealed limited internal ECDE Programme staff capacity in this area, and heavy reliance on consultants to deliver services in what is a highly political and complex field. Also, there are few official requests within this area as reflected in Table 17.<sup>76</sup>

#### 4.3.2 M&E framework

**Finding 20. The M&E framework of the ECDE Programme has been enhanced considerably from the Workplan for 2019-2021 to the current Workplan covering 2024-2027. While there is still a strong focus on quantitative surveys, there are several examples of how the Programme team has included more qualitative indicators at the outcome level to better track results.**

The ECDE is recognised as a best practice example within UNCTAD for its monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and application of results-based management (RBM). An M&E framework has been developed for each of the two Workplans under evaluation. Since 2020, reporting on the M&E framework has been done annually through the Year in Review. While the most recent M&E framework has been developed and included in the Work Plan 2024-2027, it is noted that the Year in Review 2024 was the first time the framework was applied in practice. This provided an opportunity to fully test the usability of the updated framework, and it is envisaged that this will lead to further fine-tuning of the indicators that will then be applied throughout the remaining Work Plan implementation. The framework is considered a living document that is revisited on an ongoing basis to allow for continuous learning. The M&E framework for 2024-2027 is internally praised within UNCTAD for its improvements, such as the prioritisation of outcome-focused indicators, inclusion of more qualitative indicators where appropriate, and use of the UNCTAD database of statistics on e-commerce and the digital economy to better capture impacts and results.<sup>77</sup>

As part of the Work Plan 2024-2027, a revised ToC has been developed (refer to Annex ii). In relation to the ToC, it clearly outlines how change is expected to occur and the assumptions underlying the change theory. Digitalization is considered to support progress towards the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). More specifically, the ECDE Programme seeks to contribute to five SDGs: Gender Equality (SDG 5), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9), Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10), and Partnerships (SDG 17), with the overall aim at the economy level to: *“increase and more gender-equal income generation, employment creation, trade diversification and revenue collection from e-commerce and the digital economy in developing countries, in particular LDCs”*. Impact-level results in the updated framework are better articulated than in the previous framework and includes also an impact goal *“on Increased (women) entrepreneurship, productivity, competitiveness, innovation and value*

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<sup>76</sup> UNCTAD (2024) Year in Review 2025.

<sup>77</sup> UNCTAD (2024), Review of the technical cooperation activities of UNCTAD and their financing. Annual Report 2024.

*creation in e-commerce and the digital economy in developing countries, in particularly LDCs.”<sup>78</sup>*

Since the 2022 ECDE Programme evaluation, there has been an enhancement in the monitoring data collected. The 2022 evaluation recommended collecting more qualitative data to complement the existing quantitative data. All training sessions are finalised with a survey where participants are requested to provide feedback. While this was already being done in the first years of implementation, there have now been attempts to measure the longer-term effects from training sessions (e.g. by implementing follow-up surveys six months after completed training), to better understand whether participants have been able to use the acquired knowledge/skills in practice. For instance, in 2024 an impact survey was conducted among eTrade for Women Masterclass participants to assess how they had been able to apply the new learning in practice. To supplement the quantitative data collected, more emphasis has also been put on presenting change stories and collecting more qualitative data in other areas. This is clearly reflected in the results framework where a combination of qualitative and quantitative indicators is now included. For example, as mentioned earlier, the initiative with Overton aims to go beyond merely counting report downloads and instead seeks to understand its actual impact on policy development. As discussed above, the post-IGE-meeting survey also allows for member States to provide concrete examples of how consensus building has influenced policymaking in their countries. Similarly, the implementation reviews now allow for more qualitative assessments of the implementation of recommendations from the eTrade Readiness Assessments.

#### 4.3.3 Multistakeholder partnership

**Finding 21. The eTrade for all partnership is highly valued by its members, as an expert-level networking and information sharing hub which at the same time creates interesting collaboration opportunities. Some key stakeholders still found that the “capital” of the eTrade for all network is underutilised and that there is scope for enhanced collaboration, for instance through the establishment of thematic and/or geographical (pop-up) sub-groups/events.**

The eTrade for all platform currently consists of 35 partners (up from 34 when the last evaluation was conducted). In 2022, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO) joined the initiative.<sup>79</sup> Although eTrade for all is a multistakeholder initiative, officially anchoring private sector engagement remains a challenge. In 2022, a memorandum of understanding was signed with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) as a principal private-sector counterpart.<sup>80</sup> Unfortunately, this partnership has never fully been operationalised due to lack of management buy-in on the side of the ICC. Despite the fact that some dedicated private sector funds had been made available from ICC to fund a coordinator for the work, the partnership was never operationalised.

UNCTAD collaborated closely with the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) in supporting the Government of Kazakhstan’s efforts to strengthen their

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<sup>78</sup> UNCTAD (2024), Work Plan 2024-2027.

<sup>79</sup> There were 34 partners when the 2021 Programme evaluation was conducted. Since then, three new partners have come on board while two partners have been removed (due to inactivity).

<sup>80</sup> UNCTAD (2023): Year in Review 2022; UNCTAD (2024): Year in Review 2023; UNCTAD (2025): Year in Review 2024.

capacity to reflect joint statements on e-commerce in legal reform matters in Kazakhstan. UNCTAD published three publications, and a workshop was held to define the direction of legislative reform to facilitate e-commerce and align national laws on e-commerce.<sup>81</sup> The joint support to Kazakhstan also involved the Train-For-Trade team since they developed an e-learning course on e-commerce's legal implications. This provided a good example of a joint and in-depth collaboration where both teams contributed with their different areas of expertise. In other cases, partners described the eTrade for all relationship as a bit of a one-way exchange where partners reviewed eTrade Readiness Assessments and then UNCTAD finalised the reports. Intentions to conduct joint field visits in some cases ended up becoming too expensive, with partners rarely having an allocated budget to join such field visits.

In Tuvalu, the Government established a National E-Commerce Committee to track progress in eTrade Readiness implementation, identify gaps and coordinate resource mobilisation. The support provided by different eTrade for all development partners, ranging from assistance for a national trade development strategy (from European Investment Fund [EIF] and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP]), national e-commerce strategy development (from PIFS), customs automation (from UNCTAD) and legal reform (from EIF, UNCITRAL, UNCTAD), among others, provided good examples of eTrade for all partners contributing jointly to national processes. The replication of the eTrade for all initiative for the Pacific is also a key example of how partners have found the initiative useful.

Some of those defined as more “active” eTrade for all members expressed an interest in more opportunities for face-to-face meetings with other members. This could be through smaller thematic sub-groups (e.g. on “capacity building”) for example, or via geographical sub-groups. Others found that the website still needs improved readability and a better outreach plan. This could include establishing a calendar.

A key product of *eTrade for all* is the monthly newsletter, which offers a snapshot of partners' activities. As reflected in Table 18, the number of subscribers has continued to increase; from 2022 to 2023 it increased by 55%, and as of the end of 2024 it counts more than 5,300 subscribers, indicating the relevance of the newsletter. This was also confirmed by interviews with eTrade for all partners but also member State representatives. No explanation for the extensive increase between 2022 and 2023 has however been identified.

**Table 18.** Indicators for partnership and engagement

Indicators	2022	2023	2024
<i>eTrade for all</i> newsletter subscribers	3,550	5,500	5,360 <sup>82</sup>
<i>eTrade for all</i> newsletter “open” rate	24%	25%	29.3%
UNCTAD eWeek registered participants	2,600	3,500	N/A
UNCTAD eWeek mailing list subscribers		6,600	N/A

The **eWeek** is also seen by many as a great opportunity for networking and gaining new knowledge from research work and other activities implemented by eTrade for all partners. The side events and conversations are considered a very important part of the event. The

<sup>81</sup> UNCTAD (2023): Year in Review 2022.

<sup>82</sup> The newsletter's audience is actively managed and as a result, more than 900 subscribers have been removed to ensure the relevance and integrity of the audience list.

majority of stakeholders consulted by the Evaluation suggested that the global eWeeks should continue as biennial events, maybe supplemented by biennial regional eWeeks in-between.

In the eWeek 2023 “Shaping the Future of the Digital Economy”, a total of 28 (out of 35) eTrade for all partners actively contributed. The event, which took place in Geneva and online, gathered more than 3,500 registered participants from 159 countries across all developing regions and country groups. This was an increase from 2,600 participants in 2022 (Table 18) and the most widely attended and inclusive eWeek of all so far, strongly indicating its relevance and importance in the development space of the digital economy. In total, the eWeek featured more than 150 sessions. By outlining actions and steps needed to turn digital opportunities into shared and sustainable development gains, the eWeek outcome document, entitled “The Geneva Vision on the Future of the Digital Economy”, sent a strong message to the UN-convened Summit of the Future in September 2024.<sup>83</sup>

Some stakeholders and eTrade for all partners felt that the eWeeks were becoming too informal and suggested that a bit more structure and focused topics with an opportunity to feed into something larger at the outcome level would be beneficial. This could involve clustering some of the topics to be presented and encouraging more joint presentations and facilitation among eTrade for all partners.

#### 4.4 Programme coherence and synergies

**Summary of findings:** Internal coherence and synergies across the three pillars of the Programme have been significantly enhanced over the last three years and there are good concrete examples of activities within research, technical cooperation, consensus-building and partnerships informing each other. There are good examples of external coherence and collaboration with other UN organizations, but there is still room for improvement when it comes to other development partners.

##### 4.4.1 Internal coherence

**Finding 22. Internal coherence and synergies across the three pillars of the programme has have been significantly enhanced over the last three years and the programme has addressed internal coherence challenges identified by the 2022 programme evaluation. There are good examples of research informing technical cooperation and multistakeholder engagement.**

Linkages between eTrade for Women and eTrade Readiness Assessments have been strengthened by incorporating Advocates into national consultations. At the same time, the consultations for eTrade Readiness Assessments have contributed to the identification of potential Masterclass participants. The eWeek provides another good example of enhanced synergies: In 2023, four eTrade for Women Advocates from different regions and 14 Community Leaders and one community member from the Pacific took part in the eWeek.<sup>84</sup> At national level, the Evaluation noted that the Head of the Statistics Department in Côte d’Ivoire also participated in the Task Force for the National e-commerce strategy. These

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<sup>83</sup> UNCTAD (2024) Year in Review 2023.

<sup>84</sup> UNCTAD (2024) Year in Review 2023.

developments appear to be well in line with the recommendation of the 2022 ECDE Programme evaluation to ensure better synergies across the pillars of work.

The complementarity with other UNCTAD programmes, particularly Train-for-Trade, has been most clearly demonstrated through technical assistance in measuring e-commerce and the digital economy. This has been achieved by developing an online training module specifically for statisticians. It is noted that the ECDE Programme Team has been in contact with ASYCUDA to explore if data collected by customs could be applied more actively in measuring the digital economy. Data collected by customs are however controlled by each country rather than by ASYCUDA as the technical service provider. Thus, there is no easy, straightforward solution to gaining access to these data. Still, and especially in the Pacific where the ASYCUDA system is widespread and where joint project implementation with UNCDF, UNDP and the PIFS has established a foundation for tracking and promoting e-commerce across the islands, there may be scope for using ASUCUDA as an entry point for discussing enhanced data access from customs.

#### 4.4.2 External coherence

**Finding 23. There are good examples of external coherence and collaboration with other UN organizations, but there is still room for improvement when it comes to other development partners.**

The second edition of the Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade is the outcome of a partnership between the IMF, OECD, UNCTAD and WTO. The first edition of the Handbook was developed by the IMF, WTO and OECD but in the second edition it was agreed to join forces and include UNCTAD in the work. According to stakeholder consultations, UNCTAD has provided solid input to measuring e-commerce.

In general, since 2022, the ECDE Programme has placed greater emphasis on collaboration with UNRCOs. In Côte d'Ivoire, technical sessions for the e-commerce strategy process were facilitated by UNCTAD together with the UNRCO, trying to engage other UN agencies into the process. While this did not immediately result in concrete collaboration arrangements, potential complementarities may materialise as the UN agencies develop the "UN Cooperation Framework 2026-2030", where "Digital Transformation" is considered one important aspect, in particular linking to the "Social Inclusiveness" pillar. In addition, the Common Country Analysis (CCA) in both 2021 and 2023 included assessments of Leaving No One Behind (LNOB). As part of this, eight different groups involved in digital transformation were identified in the country. The CCA 2025 (not yet published) will feature an in-depth assessment of digitalization in national programmes, financing, and the categories of people excluded. A challenge related to UNRCO collaboration is that the relation with the Ministry of Commerce has mainly been through the e-Commerce Strategy project. Otherwise, the UNRCO does not interact much with this ministry.

In Ghana, UNCTAD's ECDE Programme began implementing a joint UN project with UNDP and the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) in the second half of 2024. This initiative is under the auspices of the UNRC and the Ministry of Trade and Industry and involves collaboration with key stakeholders. The project, which is supported under the Joint SDG Fund (Window on Digital Transformation) runs for three years (2024-2027) and aims to boost financial access, digital skills, and e-commerce support for MSME in Ghana, primarily those led by women and youth. UNCTAD supports the development of an e-commerce strategy.

Other collaborations with UN agencies that could potentially be developed further include collaboration with UNECLAC, which has been part of the eTrade Readiness Assessments in both Peru and Trinidad and Tobago. There may be scope for more strategic collaboration with UNECLAC, who has strong connections and analytical capacity in the region and may be in a position to further support parts of the implementation process in a cost-efficient manner. The same relates to UNEP, where fruitful collaboration took place around the preparation of the DER 2024.

The eTrade for Women initiative has benefitted from collaboration with the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) as well as World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). ERIA has played an important role in disseminating calls for participants in Masterclasses and identifying a new strong Advocate for South Asia. This is the first time the Masterclasses have been conducted in South Asia and there was strong interest in joining the eTrade for Women network. While ERIA has a strong network in the region, including a good overview of partners who work with organizations promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, this was never explored. This is considered a missed opportunity to further boost the social inclusion element of the programme. WIPO has been engaged in disseminating information to Masterclass participants on intellectual property and how to protect a brand. According to the end-training-survey, this was an eye-opening session for several participants.

#### 4.5 Gender mainstreaming, disability inclusion and other UN cross-cutting issues

**Summary of findings:** The ECDE Programme has been strengthened in terms of mainstreaming gender and considering UN cross-cutting issues. The Work Plan from 2024-2027 strongly reflects gender equality, human rights, environmental considerations and the inclusion of marginalised people such as persons with disabilities. Environmental considerations is the main topic of the DER 2024, and this is also included for the first time in the eTrade Readiness Assessment for Indonesia. Gender equality is mainstreamed in technical cooperation and gender-disaggregated data is collected wherever possible including in M&E data. There is, however, no recognition of the differentiated impact of macroeconomic policies on different genders in the Handbook on Measuring digital trade. There are several good examples of how the Programme has integrated organizations representing persons with disabilities in consultation processes, especially in technical cooperation. While it was a strategic recommendation from the evaluation in 2022 to actively encourage the enrolment of marginalised groups in the eTrade for Women application processes to clearly signal non-discrimination as a key value, this has only been implemented to some extent and missed opportunities have been identified especially concerning persons with disabilities.

**Finding 24.** Gender mainstreaming, human rights and disability inclusion are now more explicitly mentioned in the ECDE Work Plan and there are concrete examples of gender being better mainstreamed into the programme. Environmental considerations have been an important element in research and the recently initiated eTrade Readiness Assessment in Indonesia marks the first instance where environmental factors are incorporated into such assessments. Disability inclusion is now a specific requirement for UNCTAD's technical cooperation, and while positive concrete examples of inclusion



**of persons with disabilities have been identified, there is still scope for a more systematic approach.**

The Work Plan thoroughly explains how the ECDE Programme's intervention logic aims to contribute to gender equality and the upholding of human rights. Gender equality is reflected in the ToC primarily at the impact level (except for eTrade for Women which is a gender targeted intervention and more explicitly reflects gender equality). At the enterprise-impact level the focus is on enhancing productivity, innovation etc. with a clear emphasis on women entrepreneurs. At the same time, the economy-level impact also emphasises gender-equal income generation. At the intermediate outcome levels, inclusive and sustainable development is reflected. Overall, the Work Plan provides a solid point of departure for gender mainstreaming. Gender-disaggregated data is used to the extent possible in the monitoring of activities and results and whenever possible the M&E framework emphasises disaggregated data. This is also reflected in indicators of the M&E framework.<sup>85</sup>

The ECDE Programme is highly praised within UNCTAD for women's active and meaningful participation throughout technical cooperation work,<sup>86</sup> and ministries in charge of gender issues, women's groups and business associations in beneficiary countries are consulted in capacity-building activities with the aim of achieving gender parity.<sup>87</sup> Consultations in the field have confirmed that gender and the inclusion of women is taken into consideration in technical cooperation, although it could still be further systematised. In Côte d'Ivoire, there was a thorough stakeholder consultation regarding the development of the e-commerce strategy, which included specific consultations with women's organizations. The UNRCO also convened a consultation which included UN Women. Government officials shared that other women's organizations had represented women in the discussions. The previous eTrade for Women Advocate, who represents SMEs in the country with a specific emphasis on women, was also included in the consultation process. Likewise, government representatives mentioned that specific agencies responsible for women, youth and vulnerable people were consulted in the process and a diagnostic for these specific groups had been conducted. This included consultations with the focal point for persons with disabilities. It is also noted that Côte d'Ivoire is implementing the 2022-2024 Roadmap to strengthen the Fintech environment. Specific actions undertaken include improving alternative finance, promoting women-led fintech, as well as gender-focused product designs.<sup>88</sup> This indicates that Côte d'Ivoire has placed a strong emphasis on women's engagement for several years, which was also confirmed during the Evaluation's field visit to the country.

In 2023, UNCTAD issued Compilation Guidelines for Measurement of Gender-In-Trade Statistics, aimed at supporting interested countries in enhancing the measurement of gender

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<sup>85</sup> UNCTAD (2024), Review of the technical cooperation activities of UNCTAD and their financing. Annual Report 2024.

<sup>86</sup> Since 2021, UNCTAD has worked to implement the Integrated Planning, Monitoring and Reporting (IPMR) Solution to enhance results-based management in programming. The annual report for 2022 on technical cooperation refers to all ongoing extrabudgetary projects being transferred to the IPMR Solution and that projects are updated with information on compulsory tags such as SDGs, geographical coverage, gender and disability. Since 2022, a disability tag has been compulsory. Nevertheless, the annual reporting on technical cooperation from 2023 and 2024 does not report on disability. There is a comprehensive section on gender equality and women's empowerment, but it lacks any reflection on disability. This clearly illustrates that establishing a new focus in a large organization like UNCTAD takes time. While considerable progress has been made regarding gender, progress is less evident for persons with disabilities.

<sup>87</sup> UNCTAD (2024), Review of the technical cooperation activities of UNCTAD and their financing. Annual Report 2024.

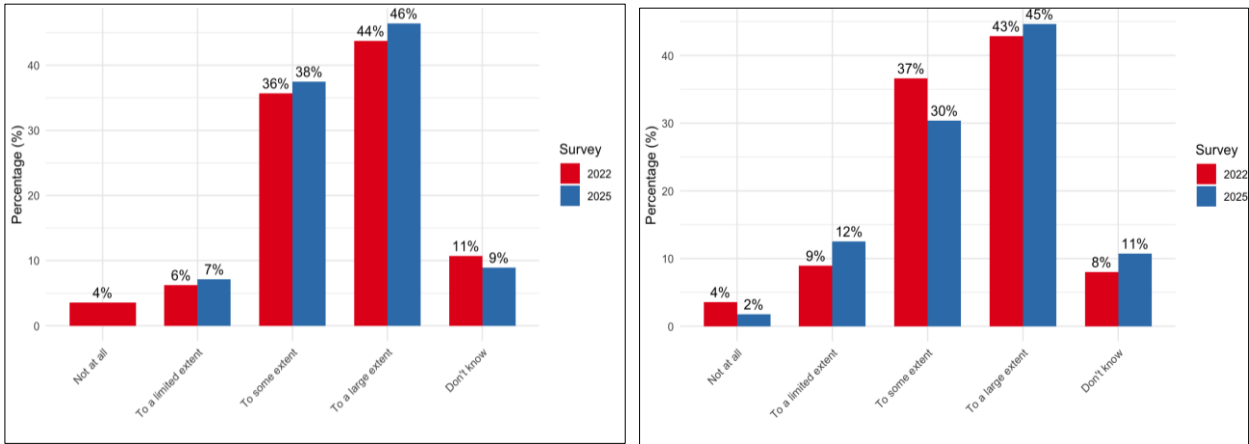
<sup>88</sup> UNCTAD (2023), Fast-tracking implementation of eTrade Readiness Assessments.

in trade.<sup>89</sup> The project results were planned to contribute to the release of the first global data set of key gender-in-trade indicators by UNCTAD in 2024 and to the mainstreaming of gender in United Nations trade statistics manuals as part of updates in 2025. While this work has been ongoing in parallel with the revision of the Handbook on measuring digital trade, it is noted that there is no reflection of this guideline nor any reflection of gender in the Handbook. While the Handbook’s scope is designed to align with broader macroeconomic standards (e.g., national accounts, balance of payments statistics, etc.), gender is not mentioned once. While macro-economic standards are often gender-neutral, it is important to recognise that macroeconomic decisions will influence men and women differently.<sup>90</sup>

It was a recommendation from the 2022 ECDE Programme evaluation to ensure more gender disaggregated data when measuring the digital economy and e-commerce. While the recommendation was only partially accepted by the programme team, the Compilation guidelines offer a new angle for considering the collection of such data. The TG-eCOM is currently working on guidelines on measuring e-commerce. Gender is expected to be addressed but it is yet to be seen.

Gender mainstreaming and the incorporation of human rights language have largely been included in flagship reports. The most recent DER 2024 report incorporates clear human rights language and the topic of the DER 2024 is environmental sustainability. When it comes to addressing gender and human rights in background notes, IGE participants in the online evaluation survey are overall positive. Compared to the survey from 2022, only minor changes are observed (Figure 12).

**Figure 12.** The extent to which the background note addressed gender (left) and human rights (right).



Source: Online survey conducted by the Evaluation.

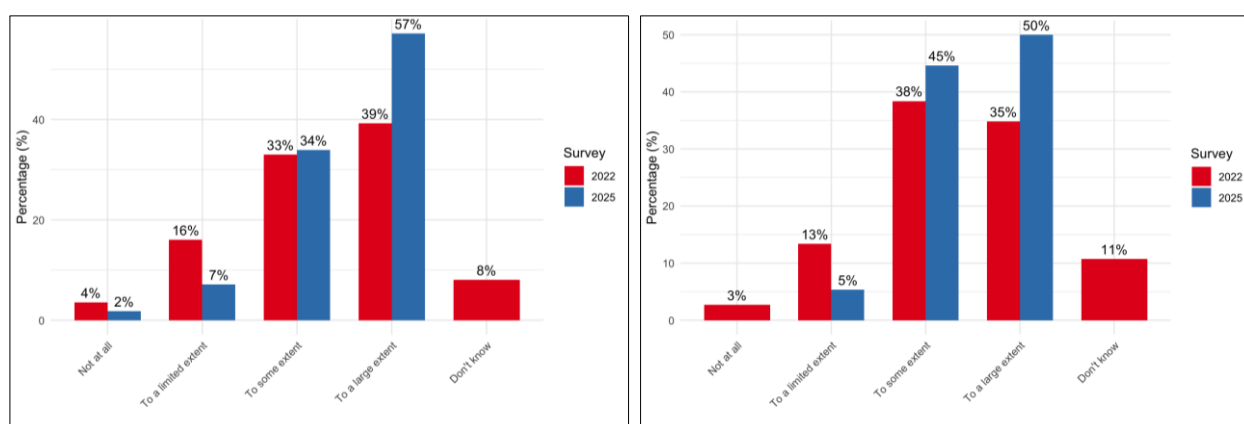
In relation to IGE panel discussions, improvements have been noted since the 2022 evaluation, in both the balance of geographical representations and gender. A growing share of survey respondents in 2025 perceived panel compositions to be geographically and gender-balanced, while efforts are being made to achieve more equal gender representation (Figure 13), than in 2022.

<sup>89</sup> UNCTAD (2024), Review of the technical cooperation activities of UNCTAD and their financing. Annual Report 2024.

<sup>90</sup> UNWOMEN (2015-2016), Why Macroeconomic policy matters for gender equality, Policy Brief No.4.



**Figure 13.** Extent to which Panel was well balanced in terms of geographical representation (left) and gender (right).



Source: Online survey conducted by the Evaluation.

Social inclusion of persons with disabilities is as mentioned a fairly new area for the ECDE Programme. When the first ECDE Programme evaluation was conducted in 2022, this topic was for the first time included in the Kenya eTrade Readiness Assessment. During the last three years the topic has been better addressed in eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies including the Ghana e-commerce strategy that was recently initiated, ECOWAS, Timor Leste, Fiji, etc. Also, in the E-commerce Strategy Development Project for Trinidad and Tobago, which included both an eTrade Readiness Assessment and an E-commerce Strategy, national-multistakeholder consultations included organizations of persons with disabilities. The National Centre for People with Disabilities was consulted and they highlighted the need for assistive technology and increased accessibility requirements, as well as improved access to the government for persons with disabilities.

This indicates that the ECDE Programme has made considerable progress in this respect. In some countries, stakeholders noted that it was more difficult to find and include organizations of persons with disabilities, and some member States consulted were not fully aware of this as a criterion to be considered. For instance, the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) has a good network of organizations working with persons with disabilities, but these organizations had not been targeted when issuing the notification of the eTrade for Women Masterclass conducted in India in 2024. Nevertheless, it is recognised from many sides that e-commerce can benefit disadvantaged people. For persons with disabilities in rural areas, or those who otherwise find it difficult to get to shops to buy goods and services, it can even act as a lifeline. This was confirmed by stakeholder consultations in Côte d'Ivoire where e-commerce was recognised as a crucial tool to promote inclusion.

In communications, the ECDE Programme adheres to the UN's Disability Inclusive Communication Guidelines<sup>91</sup> by publishing the ECDE Programme Year in Review publications, and increasingly other publications as well, in a fully accessible format, including content tags that make it possible for the report to be easily read by visually impaired users on assistive devices such as screen readers.

<sup>91</sup> [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un\\_disability-inclusive\\_communication\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_disability-inclusive_communication_guidelines.pdf)

Environmental considerations were the main topic of the DER 2024, which focused on the environmental footprint of growing digitalization. It is also noted that the eTrade Readiness Assessment from Indonesia recently launched will assess environmental considerations. This is the first time an eTrade Readiness Assessment includes this focus which is also well aligned with the research agenda.

**Finding 25. While it was a strategic recommendation from the 2022 ECDE Programme evaluation to actively encourage the enrolment of marginalised groups in the eTrade for Women application processes to clearly signal non-discrimination as a key value, this has only been partially implemented, and missed opportunities have been identified.**

The eTrade for Women initiative now encourages applications to Masterclasses from ethnic and religious minorities which is clearly stated in the call for participants. While this could also target persons with disabilities, they are not explicitly mentioned. There is general agreement among eTrade for all partners and stakeholders consulted, that the Masterclasses should not compromise qualitative selection criteria of participants since the main focus should be on female digital entrepreneurs. However, given the increasing interest in the Masterclasses, it could be considered to explicitly encourage persons with disabilities to apply. According to stakeholder consultations there has been one example of a woman entrepreneur who was in a wheelchair attending a Masterclass. She was selected without the team knowing about her disability.

The 2022 ECDE Programme evaluation recommended developing a proactive outreach strategy to ensure the potential participation of marginalised people. Allying and sharing opportunities with CSOs representing such groups could be a first step. The Evaluation found no evidence that this approach has yet been implemented for eTrade for Women. Despite high interest from donors and concrete suggestions from some eTrade for all partners for organizations to ally with, it is yet to be explored. Especially given the increasing number of applicants, there could be scope for establishing sub-criteria with a stronger focus on inclusion/poverty reducing elements. It is important to emphasise that these sub-criteria would only be applied when all the overall criteria were complied with.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusions

Below are conclusions derived from the evaluation findings.

**Conclusion 1:** Based on consultations and feedback from stakeholders and beneficiary groups, the activities and products offered and delivered through the ECDE Programme are highly relevant to their needs and priorities. The ECDE Programme clearly adds value by bringing together member States' voices and experiences from the ground through a focus on multistakeholder engagement and collaborative exchange. In addition, an enhanced focus in this programme period on data governance issues (as reflected in the Global Digital Compact) and the strengthening of national capacities on data collection and statistics with regards to measuring digital economy/trade has been very timely and well received by the respective stakeholder and beneficiary groups. Overall, the relevance of the programme design and its intervention focus has increased further due to developments since 2022, including recent geopolitical developments.

**Conclusion 2:** Progress is clearly evident across all programme outcome areas. This also reflects growing recognition at the global, regional and national level that the digital transformation process is moving forward very fast and that all countries need to adapt to these realities, including developing countries that are often falling behind. However, while the ECDE Programme and other development programmes have contributed to the development of relevant capacities and assessments, information gathered directly from beneficiaries reveal that political, financial and human resource constraints still constitute important obstacles for further advancement within many countries. This relates, for instance, to the implementation of the eTrade Readiness Assessments recommendations/actions. It raises the question of how much the ECDE Programme can be held accountable for, also in view of its own Results Framework. Within the programme's own "sphere" of control, at the lower results levels, the achievements are highly satisfactory. At the higher result levels, the degree of control the programme has over results is more limited as it is then up to policymakers to act on new knowledge and make use of strengthened capacities to enact changes in the policy environment (expected outcomes) that would deliver the desired enterprise and economy-level impact. The experience from beneficiary countries is that these processes often take time and may not take-off immediately.

During this programme period, the ECDE Programme expanded its collaboration on statistics with other key institutions (such as the IMF, OECD, WTO and the UN regional commissions) to deliver capacity building and technical assistance to countries. There is a need to further enhance such joint technical assistance initiatives, at a time when resources continue to be a constraining factor. The eTrade Reform Tracker developed by UNCTAD has the potential to serve as a valuable tool to support the effective implementation of e-commerce strategies or similar policy documents, and several countries appear prepared to apply it. The eTrade Reform Tracker will make roles and responsibilities clearer to different government agencies who will then be able to hold each other accountable to making progress. This is likely to become an important supplement to the implementation reviews which also apply a new approach and emphasise measuring more qualitative achievements at the country-level. The

eTrade for Women Masterclasses have been scaled up and community-building has been further enhanced and structured. There is good evidence for growth in the companies and strengthened capacities and networks established, although the communities could benefit from more ownership. The eTrade for Women initiative would benefit from more systemised data collection to better document the linkages between supported activities and outcome levels. Steps are being taken in this direction.

**Conclusion 3:** Overall, the programme beneficiaries and other stakeholders express high satisfaction with the support provided and the quality of the products delivered. A characteristic for most of the programme deliverables is that they are based on proven concepts and “blueprints” from the first phase of the programme, which in some cases have been further consolidated and adapted along the implementation process. The flagship research reports and the Handbook on measuring digital trade are being taken up in other research products, indicating a strong usability potential. There are also concrete examples of policy documents reflecting ECDE Programme research. While the capacity building and technical cooperation provided is deemed to be generally very useful and of high quality, in some cases facilitation of a few online follow-up events could further enhance the utility of this effort and continue to support member States in applying new skills and capacities and implementing policy recommendations. It could also support the sharing of new knowledge with colleagues who did not take part in the training sessions.

**Conclusion 4:** The ECDE Programme continues to be under pressure in terms of human resources, and the number of programme staff has been reduced. The current liquidity situation of the UN Secretariat may make the allocation of new regular budget posts from New York even harder to secure. It is important to note that the programme staff funded by the regular budget has increased from seven to nine members, despite delays caused by the UN liquidity crisis to fill these new posts. The programme budget allocation across pillars of the programme has largely remained unchanged and an even larger share of the budget is allocated to technical cooperation. The eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies continue to make up the larger share of technical cooperation, in line with the priorities of the funding partners. The M&E framework in the Work Plan for 2024-2027 is highlighted as a best practice example within UNCTAD as it combines more operational and measurable outcome indicators, including on qualitative factors and inclusion elements by disaggregating data by gender and country categories. This provides a clearer picture of the performance of the programme during its implementation.

**Conclusion 5:** The ECDE Programme team has invested valuable efforts into the development of a more coherent programme design, with clearer linkages between the programme pillars. The ECDE Programme is now functioning more coherently, with activities across the three pillars complementing each other to a greater extent. For example, the eTrade for Women interventions have been more closely linked to other programme initiatives, such as eTrade Readiness Assessments, e-commerce strategies, and the eWeek. The research component has also been integrated into other activities by including presentations of research results at eTrade for Women Masterclasses and in the eWeek and IGE sessions. This has also been useful for disseminating results. The complementarity with other UNCTAD programmes has been most evident with Train-for-Trade, particularly in providing technical assistance for measuring e-commerce and the digital economy through the development of an online training module for statisticians on the legal aspects of e-commerce and digital ID. The key recommendations provided in the 2022 evaluation for the ECDE Programme team have either been fully or partly implemented.

**Conclusion 6:** There are a number of good examples of how complementarity between the ECDE Programme and other development interventions has resulted in enhanced collaboration opportunities. At the global level, a good example is the extended collaboration with institutions such as the OECD, WTO and the IMF on statistics, including joint planning and implementation of capacity building events. At the regional level, the UN regional commissions (such as UNESCAP and UNECLAC) are engaged in related interventions, and there may be scope for further collaboration with these commissions. At national level, digital transformation is also high on the agenda within the UN Country Teams, and there are some good examples of collaboration between the ECDE Programme and UNRCOs. In other cases, it has been a challenge for the ECDE Programme to effectively tap into the UN programming cycle and establish collaboration with other UN agencies. Programmes in the Pacific and Ghana are good examples of how it can be done in practice, although it is not without challenges, such as when other UN agencies primarily collaborate with different government and non-governmental partners (e.g. different Ministries) than the ECDE Programme; made more challenging by the fact that UNCTAD is a non-resident UN entity. The eTrade for all partnership is useful as an expert-level networking and information sharing hub which at the same time creates interesting collaboration opportunities. There is still scope for fostering enhanced collaboration to release the full potential of the eTrade for all network, hereunder to identify alternative ways and forms to mobilise a more active participation of partners. The eWeek is still considered an interesting event for information sharing and networking but may benefit from a bit more structuring and focus on the topics to maintain its relevance and attractiveness.

**Conclusion 7:** The commitment and interest within the selected case countries was in general strong towards implementation of the recommendations provided through the various ECDE Programme initiatives. Challenges, however, often occur in relation to financing and with the capacity of national governmental and regional institutions to coordinate and follow-up on working processes internally. Legal reforms are the main challenging elements, although there are also examples of progress in this area (e.g. in Senegal). Catalytical effects from UNCTAD's support are highly visible at country level - good examples of this are provided by women entrepreneurs who have attended eTrade for Women activities as well as participated in the eTrade Readiness Assessments. Another good example is in the Pacific, where ECDE Programme support has been a great catalyst for the further scaling of support.

**Conclusion 8:** Gender mainstreaming and social inclusion have been strengthened, and a more systematic approach to including women's organizations in technical cooperation has been realised. The ECDE Programme is highlighted as a best practice example of this within UNCTAD's technical cooperation, particularly through the gender-targeted interventions of eTrade for Women. Social inclusion has also been enhanced on an analytical level and in consultations with organizations representing persons with disabilities. A missed opportunity to more explicitly consider inclusion of persons with disabilities in the call for proposals for Masterclasses was identified. It is also noted that the Handbook makes no reference to how macroeconomics influence men and women differently and there is no encouragement of disaggregating data by gender to the extent possible. In order to promote proper gender disaggregation in statistics, it will be important to ensure that gender is included in the guidelines on measuring e-commerce currently being developed by the TG-eCOM. Environmental concerns have been strongly reflected in the DER 2024 and in subsequent

events, and an assessment of environmental challenges in e-commerce is being included in the recently launched eTrade Readiness Assessment in Indonesia.

## 5.2 Strategic recommendations

Below are recommendations derived from the findings and conclusions.

### Strategic Recommendation 1 (the UNCTAD Secretary-General):

**Funding:** Based on a strong and growing demand from member States for good quality research and data products/services, the enhanced relevance of digitalization to development and to UNCTAD, and the positive assessment of the ECDE Programme in the evaluation, it is recommended to **increase the amount of regular budget funds allocated to the programme**, if in alignment with the expected Outcome document of the next UNCTAD Ministerial Conference (UNCTAD 16, October 2025).

**Communication/dissemination of research products and data:** In addition to one comprehensive DER every 2-3 years, it is recommended to focus more efforts (in-between the DER reports) on “breaking-down” key messages of the DER according to specific stakeholder groups/audiences/topics/regions (e.g. through the preparation of different policy briefs etc.). There is strong demand for this and potential utility could be high. It is also recommended to identify more ways and channels to proactively communicate the publication of key reports, data etc. It is noted that the programme is increasingly disseminating materials (e.g. the DER, the Year in Review report) to UNRCOs (via the UNDCO policy bulletins), which is seen as a good step forward in this area. Still, not all UNRCOs are aware of the DER and its content, and it is recommended to further enhance what is distributed and how.

### Strategic Recommendation 2 (to ECDE Programme donors and ECDE Programme management):

**To Programme donors:** Based on the overall positive assessment of the ECDE Programme in this evaluation, and the unique and high-quality products and services delivered within a tight budget, it is recommended that programme donors **continue their financial support** to the programme in light of UNCTAD’s continued strengthened mandate. At the same time, donors are encouraged to allocate a larger share through the UN Regular Budget to the programme to allow for more long-term planning, both in relation to programme staff and activities. In cases where donor funding is allocated for specific programme activities, it is recommended to consider allocation of specific/additional resources **in support of follow-up activities**, to strengthen the applicability and uptake of newly developed capacities and skills (individually and institutionally) in the area of e-commerce and digital economy measurement, and in support of implementing recommendations (e.g. from eTrade Readiness Assessments) and sustainability aspects.

**To ECDE Programme management:** It is recommended that the ECDE Programme management **further map and explore opportunities for expanding donor funding**, with a particular view to attracting new emerging and non-traditional donors (philanthropy funds, banks, corporations etc.) to further diversify and broaden its extrabudgetary funding base. It is noted that both Saudi Arabia and China have shown interest in supporting the programme.

### Strategic Recommendation 3 (to ECDE Programme management):

Overall, it is recommended to **continue focusing work within the existing overall programme framework**, as the demand and relevance of products and technical cooperation is high. In terms of **follow-up activities**, and given existing funding and resource constraints, it is recommended to **further prioritise and target programme resources and efforts** on those countries that demonstrate ownership and interest in supporting the implementation of recommendations and prioritised actions from developed eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies, including through own resources and capacities, to enhance the likelihood of impact and sustainability.

More specific recommendations related to the products/areas of the ECDE Programme support include:

**eTrade Readiness Assessments/e-commerce strategies:** i) Continue and, if resources allow, **further strengthen and prioritise the eTrade Reform Tracker initiative**, as it is likely to become an important supplement to the implementation reviews which place stronger emphasis on measuring qualitative achievements at the country-level. ii) Explore opportunities for **expanding the focus in the assessments on forward-looking perspectives** (e.g. in relation to cross-border trade, which is of key importance for most countries). iii) Further explore opportunities for **strengthening implementation support** for prioritised recommendations within countries.

**eTrade for all:** i) Explore further and facilitate **new and alternative ways and opportunities for exchange among eTrade for all partners** to motivate enhanced and active engagement in addition to partners' current contributions to the eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies development processes. ii) It is also recommended to further explore the potential **to engage more with private sector strategic leadership**, e.g. based on the model the programme tried to implement with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) but which never materialised.

**Capacity building/technical cooperation:** i) Facilitate more possibilities for those attending particular training sessions (e.g. on statistics) for **sharing, as a group, experiences from applying new skills and knowledge** to further enhance the utility and uptake from these efforts and to support member States in applying new skills and capacities in implementation. ii) Promote the sharing of experience among participants of capacity building events through **“exchange sharing platforms”**. iii) In order to support the implementation of statistics on digital trade, it is recommended to pilot the compilation of such statistics in one LDC and ensure thorough dissemination of learnings, since member States are eager to gain concrete learnings from implementation in practice.

**Partnerships/collaboration:** i) Continue to **focus on joint delivery of training packages** (such as those organised with OECD, IMF and WTO), as this adds value and additional perspectives to the training, and enables greater outreach. ii) Explore possibilities for **working more strategically together with regional/national actors** (such as the Regional Economic Commissions) and tap further into the competencies and connections of these actors to further develop, pursue and follow-up on the various initiatives launched by the ECDE Programme (e.g. eTrade Readiness Assessments), and to reduce unit costs.

#### **Strategic Recommendation 4 on Gender, disability inclusion and leaving no one behind (LNOB) (to ECDE Programme Management):**

**eTrade for Women:** i) Further explore opportunities for **more systematic data collection and documentation of results** (outcomes/impact) **from support to women entrepreneurs** to complement the individual case stories. Steps are already being taken in this direction. ii) Explore **how community leaders' ownership of the Communities could be further enhanced**, e.g. by engaging them further in planning and discussions on how the Communities should work, and making it more transparent how and who, besides the Masterclass participants, can be selected for the communities. iii) Explore how community members can more actively engage as they have a wealth of experience that could be better leveraged. This also includes dissemination of new knowledge and skills acquired through the community. iv) Consider **adding "persons with disabilities" as an inclusion criterion** in the call for applications (as is the case for religious and ethnic minorities). This should not constitute a main selection criterion, but could be a sub-criterion when all main criteria have been fulfilled. In the wider programme **context, introduce more systematic engagement of organizations representing persons with disabilities**. v) Consider introducing **more explicit poverty/sustainability criteria** (such as targeting specific vulnerable groups or including them in the business value chain, selecting entrepreneurs from sectors that have potential also for social impact, etc.), in selecting eTrade for Women Masterclass participants, especially in a situation where many applications are expected.



## 6. Annexes

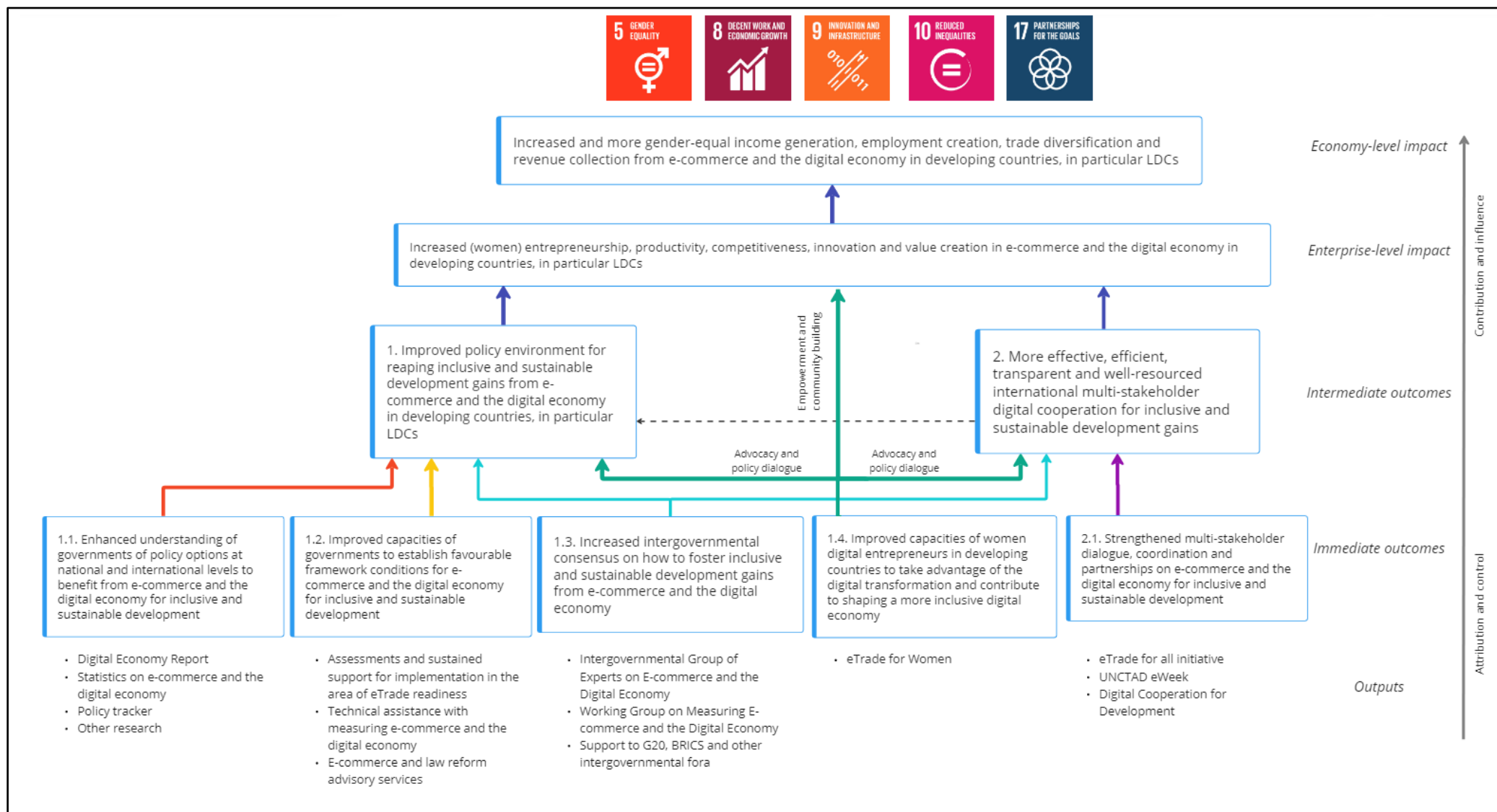
### i. Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Questions	Criteria	Key Issue	Judgement Criteria	Means of Verification (source/method)
<b>EQ 1:</b> Did the design of the Programme, including choice of activities and outputs properly address the needs of beneficiaries and stakeholders for enhanced understanding, strengthened capacities, and improved dialogue and cooperation towards building inclusive digital economies?	Relevance	<p>Appropriateness of activities/deliverables to needs of participating countries/target group and partners</p> <p>Participation of key stakeholders and beneficiaries in the Programme design process</p>	<p>The programme design targets the right group of beneficiaries and has identified the right mix of partners</p> <p>Reflection of key regional / national knowledge and capacity gaps in the programme design.</p> <p>Programme deliverables are well aligned with national priorities/development strategies</p> <p>Reflection of learning from previous evaluation</p>	<p>Desk review</p> <p>Comparison between Work Plans (2019-2023 vs. 2024-2027)</p> <p>KIIs with UNCTAD (Programme) staff, Member State representatives UN Resident Coordinators/UN Country Teams, and external stakeholders</p> <p>Country cases (physical and virtual)</p>
<b>EQ 2:</b> To what extent has the Programme delivered on the immediate expected outcomes as defined in its Results Framework? What has been its contribution in terms of progress towards achieving its intended results?	Effectiveness	Research	<p>Outreach and uptake of research</p> <p>Member States' participation and capacity on statistics and digital economy</p>	<p>Desk review</p> <p>SoMe and Google Analytics (research/policy uptake)</p> <p>Online surveys</p> <p>KIIs with UNCTAD (Programme) staff, Member State representatives, female entrepreneurs</p> <p>Monitoring data on intergovernmental meetings (LDCs/LLDCs/SIDs) and masterclass training (region)</p> <p><i>eTrade for all</i> webpage/newsletter survey,</p> <p>Country cases (physical and virtual)</p>
		Technical cooperation	Member States' implementation of recommendations from eTrade readiness assessments and e-commerce strategies	
		Intergovernmental consensus	Member States' participation and contribution to working group on measuring e-commerce and intergovernmental meetings	
		eTrade for women	Women entrepreneurs enhanced business capacity and participation in policy dialogue Benefits from communities	
		Multistakeholder partnership	Participation in eWeek over time Multi-partnerships established	

Evaluation Questions	Criteria	Key Issue	Judgement Criteria	Means of Verification (source/method)
<b>EQ 3:</b> To what extent have Programme beneficiaries and other stakeholders found the support delivered by the Programme to be useful and have been satisfied with the quality of outputs?	Effectiveness	User satisfaction	Level of satisfaction with the support and outputs delivered by the Programme.	Desk review SoMe and Google Analytics KIIs with member States representatives, female entrepreneurs, partner organizations, Online surveys Monitoring data, satisfaction surveys Country cases (physical and virtual)
<b>EQ 4:</b> Have implementation modalities been adequate in ensuring the achievement of the expected outcomes in a timely and cost-effective manner? What Programme and project management best practices can be identified and what are the lessons learned for the Programme Team?	Efficiency	Budgeting/resource allocation	Allocation of budget/resources across the three pillars.  Partnership activities are realistic in view of output and outcome expectations and funding	Desk review Financial and progress reports KIIs with UNCTAD (Programme) staff, funding partners and programme participants Monitoring data Country cases (physical and virtual)
		Work planning	Critical, unnecessary delays have been avoided in the planning and implementation process  Available funding for implementation	
		M&E Framework	Critical Programme data and information are being systemically collected and processed and subsequently used for learning processes and feedback loops for improvement of ongoing interventions	
		Partnerships	Facilitation of interaction between different groups of stakeholders in support of the Programme objectives	
<b>EQ 5:</b> To what extent are the Programme's activities undertaken under each of UNCTAD's three pillars complementary to one another and conducive to advancing progress towards the Programme's expected results? To what extent are the Programme's activities complementary to other UNCTAD programmes?	Coherence (internal)	Complementarity	Programme interventions combine input from at least two different pillars to achieve results  Uptake of tools from and collaboration with other UNCTAD entities	Desk review KIIs with ECDE Programme Team and other UNCTAD staff members Country cases (physical and virtual)

Evaluation Questions	Criteria	Key Issue	Judgement Criteria	Means of Verification (source/method)
<b>EQ 6:</b> To what extent has the work under the Programme been complementary to that of existing global programmes, regional/interregional initiatives, UN Country Teams, as well as other UN and non-UN actors in supporting developing countries in enhancing their digital readiness, including avoiding redundancy?	Coherence (external)	Complementarity	<p>The Programme has pro-actively explored opportunities for development of synergies with related interventions implemented in the region/countries</p> <p>Evidence of linkages and complementarities between Programme activities and other UN/non-UN initiatives</p>	<p>Desk review</p> <p>KIIs with EDCE Programme team, partner organizations, funding partners, UN Resident Coordinators/UN Country Teams, Member State representatives, external stakeholders</p> <p>Country cases (physical and virtual)</p>
<b>EQ 7:</b> Is there evidence that countries benefiting from interventions under the Programme are committed to continue working towards the Programme objectives beyond the end of UNCTAD's support? Have there been catalytic effects from UNCTAD's support at the national/regional/global level? What measures have been built in to promote the sustainability of outcomes? What additional measures could be taken to ensure the sustainability of the outcomes over time?	Sustainability	Country ownership / commitment	<p>Beneficiary countries are committing / leveraging additional budgets / funding to support actions towards achievement of the Programme objectives</p> <p>Initiatives are taken to develop / update relevant national strategy and policy frameworks</p>	<p>Desk review</p> <p>KIIs with ECDE Programme team, funding partners, partner organizations (national, regional, global level), Member State representatives, UN Resident Coordinators/UN Country Teams, external stakeholders</p> <p>Country cases (physical and virtual)</p>
		Catalytic effects/spillover effect	Spillover effect from national/regional/global level	
		Funding partners engagement	<p>Funding partners are willing to provide longer-term and non-earmarked funding</p> <p>New funding partners attracted</p>	
<b>EQ 8:</b> To what extent were gender, disability inclusion and the principles of “leaving no one behind” mainstreamed in the design and implementation of the Programme, and can results be identified in this regard?	Gender, Disability Inclusion and other UN cross-cutting issues	Gender mainstreaming	Reflection of gender in analyses/research, M&E framework, training sessions, activities/outputs, outreach.	<p>Desk review</p> <p>KIIs/FGDs with UNCTAD (Programme) staff and programme participants, Assessment of general research/eTrade for Women research</p> <p>ECDE monitoring data</p> <p>Country cases (physical and virtual)</p>
		Gender targeted initiatives	Usefulness and concrete results from eTrade for Women (business performance, policy dialogue)	
		Disability inclusion and LNOB	Reflection of human rights in analyses/research, M&E framework. Incentives provided for inclusion of persons with disabilities or other marginalised groups in programme activities. Inclusion of LDCs in	

## ii. ECDE Theory of Change



### iii. Stakeholder mapping

Stakeholder	Stake in the Programme and the topic that the Programme addresses	Level of influence over topic and Programme/ Ways in which affected by topic and project	Expected use in the evaluation results	Way(s) to involve this stakeholder in the evaluation process
<b>UNCTAD Programme staff</b>	Responsible for implementation and establishing direction	High influence and drivers of the Programme	Will contribute with understanding of Programme implementation, challenges, opportunities	KIIs; ongoing discussion and reflection of findings and fact checking
<b>Other UNCTAD staff members incl. management</b>	External to the Programme but internal to UNCTAD so profound understanding of topic and issues	Medium to high influence. UNCTAD sets out the overall Programme framework incl. allocation of regular budget funds based on previous experience, learnings, priorities etc. which inform specific programme	Inform general priorities and principles of UNCTAD to allow for comparison with the specific Programme priorities. Management can provide vision for the future	KIIs
<b>Member State Delegates based in Geneva</b>	Involved to mitigate risks of senior officials not participating in the project	High influence since member States determine UNCTAD's mandates and budget and whether agreement is reached at intergovernmental meetings	Inform general country priorities in collaboration with UN organizations	KIIs. A sample of Delegates will be engaged through KIIs in order to cover all main regions. Delegates from selected case countries (physical and virtual) will be prioritised
<b>Policymakers and senior government officials from the case countries selected</b>	Are involved in all aspects of the support and key anchors in-country	High influence. Key target group and actors of the programme as they are the ones to promote evidence-based policymaking	Will provide feedback on relevance of the programme, how it has supported them in policymaking, what has been achieved, and what else is needed	Will be included in KIIs and FGDs to understand how their skills and knowledge has improved and whether knowledge has been applied in practice and behaviour has changed.
<b>United Nations Resident</b>	Are involved in capacity-building initiatives, by mobilising partners on the	Potential high influence although rather newly	Will provide feedback on implementation of recommendations	KIIs (case countries and/or other

<b>Coordinator Offices (UN RCO)</b>	ground and creating synergies around digital development issues as a partner on the ground	established cooperation. Key in-country actor in following up on recommendations from eTrade Readiness Assessments	and collaboration with UNCTAD	selected countries)
<b>External researchers/experts contributing to research activities</b>	Linkage to academia and civil society to ensure evidence-based policymaking	Medium influence: Can influence evidence-based policymaking and specific topics to include in policies by sharing research results and continue feeding results into consensus building and to national governments and partners	Will inform understanding of the relevance of the programme, what results have been achieved (e.g. has linkage been strengthened?), has changes occurred? In both negative and positive directions	KIIs as needed
<b>Funding partners</b>	Funding partners are part of consensus building activities; they also provide the majority of the funding for programme activities (extrabudgetary)	High influence	Will inform the added value of UNCTAD and prospects for the future	KIIs with a selected number of funding partners, including at national level in the case study countries
<b>Intergovernmental Group of Experts, and Working Group on measuring ECDE</b>	Central part of the consensus building activities	High influence	Will inform the added value of UNCTAD, results achieved within measuring ECDE, and prospects for the future	Online survey for IGE and Working Group and KIIs
<b>eTrade for Women Advocates</b>	Female ICT entrepreneurs who take part in organising Masterclasses and serve as role models for other female entrepreneurs	High influence as they understand the challenges women face, influence Masterclasses, and are intended as influencers towards national governments	Will inform results achieved, how to even further mainstream gender into the programme	KIIs (case countries and/or other selected countries)
<b>eTrade for Women Community members</b>	Female ICT entrepreneurs who may have participated in Masterclasses and engage in policy dialogue. Includes Community leaders who play an active part in organising Community activities	Medium influence as they understand the challenges women face, could engage in policy dialogue and help maintain the vivacity of the network/contribute to its sustainability	Will inform results achieved, how to even further mainstream gender into the programme	FGDs/KIIs as possible
<b>eTrade for all partners</b>	Collaborating partners on <i>eTrade for all</i> . WTO is a central partner here since it constitutes the main forum to discuss the rules of trade.	High influence	Will inform the added value of UNCTAD and to what extent the programme has been	KIIs with a selected number of partners (both active and less

	A number of the partners also contribute to eWeek. Several partners are part of the Working Group on measuring ECDE (e.g. ITU, WTO, ILO, UPU, EU as central partners in measuring ECDE)		coordinated with partners	active partners)
<b>Other partners (not included under <i>eTrade for all</i>)</b>	Specific organizations involved in the case countries	Medium to high influence	Will inform in-country case studies	KIIs

#### iv. Overview of data collection methods applied

Pillar	Main work areas in the period 2022-2024	Data collection Instrument				SoMe/ Google A.	Existing data
		Online Survey	KIIs	FGDs	Case countries		
Pillar 1: Building Knowledge	DER (2021, 2024)		X		X	X	# of downloads per year; T; # of views; likes and tweets on Twitter and LinkedIn; a non-exhaustive list of academic and other works that cite ECDE Programme research and analysis and/or make use of ECDE data
	Technical notes					X	# of downloads per year
	Policy Briefs					X	# of downloads per year
Pillar 2: Building consensus	Intergovernmental Group of Experts on e-commerce and the digital economy	X <sup>92</sup>	X		X		End of session survey
	Working Group on Measuring e-commerce and the Digital Economy	X <sup>93</sup>	X		X		End of meeting survey
Pillar 3: Building Capacity	E-commerce and Law Reform		X				
	National and regional E-commerce Strategies		X		X		
	Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy		X		X		End of training surveys
	eTrade Readiness Assessments		X	X	X		Implementation reviews; end of workshop surveys
	eTrade for Women		X	X	X	X	Masterclass impact survey 2024; China tour 2024 feedback survey; Social media monitoring data
Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement	eTrade for all		X				Was evaluated in 2019; Newsletter survey
	eWeek		X			X	Satisfaction survey; Social media monitoring data
	Digital Cooperation for Development		X				

<sup>92</sup> The survey was administered by UNCTAD to the registered participants of the 5th, 6th and 7th session of the IGE on e-commerce and the digital economy (2022, 2023 and 2024 respectively).

<sup>93</sup> The survey was administered by UNCTAD to the registered participants of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy (2022, 2023 and 2024 respectively).



**v. Overview of how the recommendations from the 2022 ECDE Programme evaluation have been addressed**

Evaluation Recommendation (a)	Management response	Status from ECDE Programme (2023)	Validation by the evaluation team
<b>Strategic Recommendation 1</b> In view of the evaluation findings and the Bridgetown Covenant, which instructed UNCTAD to strengthen its work in the digital area, UNCTAD should consider ways for allocating additional regular budget funding to the ECDE Programme to ensure that it is better able to deliver sustainably the results sought by UNCTAD's member States. This may include a comparative assessment of staffing and resources currently allocated to different tasks.	Accepted	Status: Implemented In December 2022, a decision was made in the United Nations General Assembly Fifth Committee to increase the allocation of regular budget resources to the Programme, resulting in two new regular budget-funded posts being added to the Programme team in 2023 – one at the P4 and another at the P3 level.	Implemented. A total of 10 regular budget funded posts is currently in place. Delays in effectuating the regular budget funded posts affected implementation.
<b>Strategic Recommendation 2</b> Donors to the Programme could aim at following the examples of the governments of Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands, who provide increasingly longer term, flexible and non-earmarked funding support to the ECDE Programme. This would allow the Programme team to further strengthen its adaptive programmatic approach which is fundamental to maintain the Programme's high relevance and facilitate its further development in a rapidly evolving area.	Accepted	Status: Implemented The Programme welcomes Sweden as a core donor and the Netherlands' renewed support on a programmatic basis. In 2022 Sweden committed approximately USD 1 million for the 2022-2023 period, while the Netherlands renewed its Strategic Partnership with UNCTAD, committing USD 6 million to the ECDE Programme over 2023-2026. Discussions are ongoing with other potential donors.	Implemented, although Germany has now exited the core donor group. New donors have been attracted (e.g. China and Saudi Arabia) but they provide only earmarked funding.
<b>Strategic recommendation 3</b> The main recommendation to the DTL management is to focus the remaining part of the current Programme period (up to end-2023) on consolidation of initiatives that have already been initiated and not launch any new major initiatives within the remaining Programme period. This is in particular important if the ECDE Programme is unable to attract the amount of resources anticipated in its budget, which then further limits the possibility to expand its scope at this point of time. Thus, while it will be important for the Programme to remain adaptive and flexible to its	Accepted	---	Implemented. A consolidation process has taken place with no new larger activity types. A much greater emphasis has been put on ensuring internal coherence and linking the different pillars. There are still quite many activities going on and with funding opportunities becoming still more challenging, there could be a need for further prioritizing activities to allow for further enhancement and focus on follow up actions. In this regard, the introduction of the eTrade Reform Tracker is noted as an interesting initiative with good potentials.

Evaluation Recommendation (a)	Management response	Status from ECDE Programme (2023)	Validation by the evaluation team
interventions, only minor adjustments to the existing portfolio should be considered for the remaining part of the current Programme period. More fundamental adjustments should be explored mainly as preparation for a possible new Programme phase beyond 2023 (see recommendation 4 below).			
<b>Strategic Recommendation 4</b> For the remaining period of the current Programme plan, and as part of the preparation and design of the Programme phase beyond 2023, it is recommended that the ECDE Programme team will take on board the following concrete proposed adjustments:			
<b>Strategic Recommendation 4.1</b> For the research and analysis area, there is need to further integrate and communicate key data and analytical results through the technical cooperation activities. This may call for more dedicated skills and resources to communication and outreach within the Programme. There is a huge interest and demand from country stakeholders to learn more about trends and experiences from other countries/regions in this field and how this could relate to the situation in their own country and institution. Therefore, additional measures and mechanisms to enable a wider engagement and outreach of research products should be introduced with a view to enable a higher utility and uptake for policymaking. More specifically, and with a direct link to a new UNCTAD communication and outreach strategy, this could include: i) development of a specific Programme outreach strategy with a clear focus on how to reach and track target groups/audiences more effectively; ii) a broader engagement of key stakeholder groups (e.g. private Advocates) in brainstorming/discussions of possible research topics (although it is still UNCTAD who will eventually decide on the specific research topics); and iii) use of more innovative and creative ways to communicate results from the research and analytical work e.g. through social media.	Partially accepted	Status: On track Efforts are continuously made to effectively communicate on research and analysis outputs as well as publications from technical cooperation activities, to ensure that they are taken up and used by policymakers and other stakeholders.  In 2022, more than 350K downloads were registered for ECDE publications issued in the 2019-2022 period. The DER 2021 is frequently cited by policymakers (UN, G20) in connection with data for development.  25 news articles published, generating more than 27,000 unique page views. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>COVID-19 boost to e-commerce sustained into 2021 featured among the top 10 most read UNCTAD stories in 2022.</li> <li>UNCTAD names new advocates for women in e-commerce and UNCTAD assessment set to boost digital economy in Peru</li> </ul>	Partly implemented. Efforts have been made to enhance communication of research data through technical cooperation activities. The DERs have to a greater extent been disseminated during capacity building events (e.g. in Masterclasses) and the development of the Handbook for measuring the digital trade has provided the foundation for training member States on how to apply the Handbook in practice. An enhanced collaborative effort has also been sought by engaging eTrade for all partners more actively in the research around the DER 2024. This has enhanced the ownership of the report and partners have been committed to disseminate the report. The evaluation team also found that in particularly the DER 2021 has been taken up and been applied in national policies and guidelines.  Still, an overall UNCTAD communication and outreach strategy has still not been developed, despite plans to do so already when the 2022 evaluation was being concluded. Instead, a greater re-branding exercise has been conducted in UNCTAD which the ECDE Programme has aligned to by also re-branding the programme.

Evaluation Recommendation (a)	Management response	Status from ECDE Programme (2023)	Validation by the evaluation team
		<p>were promoted on the UN home page</p> <p>An impact story about trailblazing eTrade for Women Advocate Mona Attaya featured in global UN news coverage.</p> <p>The Programme's work received coverage in multiple national and international media such as Business Daily Africa, China Daily, the Economist Impact and Forbes Magazine.</p> <p>The Programme's Twitter handle, @ECDEatUNCTAD, has become the 4<sup>th</sup> largest account in UNCTAD, with 7'200+ followers as of December 2022 – up 22% from 2021.</p> <p>The eTrade for all newsletter continued to provide relevant content to a growing audience base (up 44% from 2021). In response to the Programme's active management of the newsletter's content and audience, its 'open' and 'click' rates increased by 32% and 28% respectively on an annual basis.</p> <p>In 2022, the Programme found evidence of update and use of its research in policy documents from across a number of countries and organizations, including Estonia, Nigeria, the United Kingdom and the European Parliament, to name a few.</p>	

Evaluation Recommendation (a)	Management response	Status from ECDE Programme (2023)	Validation by the evaluation team
<p><b>Strategic Recommendation 4.2</b></p> <p>Stronger efforts should be put into capacity development of national stakeholders, including focal points, on collecting of data for production of statistics related to the digital economy and e-commerce, applying and building on the revised UNCTAD Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy 2020. This should include the capacity of these actors to collect gender and human rights disaggregated data, and hence allow for better analysis and mainstreaming of these issues in the ECDE Programme work. The human resources within the ECDE Programme team have recently been strengthened in this area, which should enable this enhanced focus.</p>	<p>Partially accepted</p>	<p>Status: Implemented</p> <p>In 2022, the Programme launched a new online course based on the revised <i>Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy</i> in collaboration with UNCTAD's TrainforTrade, with the first training activities delivered for the Pacific. A total of 38 participants, including 25 women, from across 14 Pacific countries and territories participated.</p> <p>All respondents to the final course evaluation reported increased knowledge as a result of the course, while more than half indicated that their national statistical office would be ready to receive further country-specific technical assistance from UNCTAD on producing e-commerce and digital economy statistics. An official request for such assistance has been received from the Samoa Bureau of Statistics. Six months after the completion of the course, participants reported having applied the knowledge they acquired in various ways, from transferring it to other colleagues to undertaking data collection on digital economy statistics; digital economy statistics have reportedly been compiled and disseminated in one of the countries that benefited from the training.</p> <p>In addition, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Working Group on Measuring E-Commerce and the Digital Economy, which took place in November 2022, it</p>	<p>Partly implemented. Capacity strengthening activities on measuring the digital economy have been highly prioritised during the evaluation period but primarily in relation to the Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade developed in 2023 and to a limited extent the Manual. Between 2022 and 2024, close to 1,000 participants (around 30% women) from countries in the Southern African Customs Union, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and other countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the Arab region and Latin America and the Caribbean benefited from regional workshops and dedicated sessions on core ICT indicators and measuring e-commerce and digital trade.</p> <p>There has been a strong focus on making the Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade (2023) work for developing countries and this has been the key mandate of UNCTAD in joining the partnership with the IMF, the OECD, and the WTO, to work on the first edition of the Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade (2023). A good example of the intentions to making the Handbook work in developing countries was the development of a revised reporting template, which offers flexibility to statistical compilers when collating components of digital trade, even when only partial information is available. The Handbook also offers case studies on measuring digitally ordered merchandise trade and digitally delivered trade.</p> <p>There are no explicit reflections on gender and human rights issues in the Handbook.</p>

Evaluation Recommendation (a)	Management response	Status from ECDE Programme (2023)	Validation by the evaluation team
		was proposed to create a task group of interested Working Group participants to support the development of UNCTAD guidelines on measuring the value of e-commerce (including cross-border e-commerce). The decision on that is expected to be taken in the 6 <sup>th</sup> session of the IGE on 10-12 May 2023.	
<b>Strategic Recommendation 4.3</b> For the intergovernmental work, a system for better monitoring and tracking of stakeholder feedback from IGE sessions should be implemented, allowing for a clearer understanding of outcomes and identification of opportunities for closer linkages within the Programme as appropriate.	Partially accepted	Status: Implemented Feedback from participants in the Intergovernmental Group of Experts (IGE) on E-commerce and the Digital Economy and Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy is collected after each IGE session and WG meeting through a brief survey administered by email to all registered participants. Questions allow for assessing the relevance, effectiveness and organisational aspects of each session/meeting, as well as main outcomes in terms of member States' actions following each session/meeting.	Implemented. The feedback mechanism now allows for greater qualitative reflections and encourages participants to provide concrete in-country examples. These examples have also been important for validation of results in this evaluation.
<b>Strategic Recommendation 4.4</b> For the eTrade Readiness Assessment processes, it should be considered whether the selection of countries for support could include stronger indications of country ownership aspects, inter-institutional cooperation at the country level and multistakeholder engagement as key selection criteria. Further, the next iteration of the ECDE Programme could be informed by an independent evaluation of the eTrade Readiness Assessments with a particular view to assess how to ensure and strengthen its continued relevance and usefulness beyond 2023. This should include a mapping and comparative assessment of related diagnostics offered by other development partners,	Partially accepted	Status: On track A database of existing assessments and e-commerce strategies is maintained.  To continue fostering country ownership and further strengthen implementation, in cooperation with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), UNCTAD convened in 2022 a 2-day hybrid meeting of eT Ready Focal Points and other key stakeholders, mainly senior government officials, Geneva-based representatives of Permanent Missions to the UN in	Partly implemented. Some measures have been initiated to enhance country ownership. These include support to setting up inter-Ministerial Committees and ensuring regular convening of these committees (with support from actors on the ground e.g. the UNRCO) and several capacity-building workshops/training sessions to enhance learning across countries and focal points.  While the Work Plan 2024-2027 acknowledges other organizations' work and manages a database on existing assessments to avoid duplications there is

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<p>a review of the relevance of its concept and approach within different contexts, as well as an assessment of its concrete results.</p>		<p>Geneva, representatives of eTrade for all partners and other development partners from headquarters and national or regional offices, as well as UNRCOs. The thematic discussions enabled 47 officials from across various Ministries in 21 beneficiary countries, including 16 women, to share experiences and good practices and identify the types of support they need to play a more active role in the implementation of eT Ready recommendations.</p>	<p>limited assessment of where the potential overlap could occur.</p>
<p><b>Strategic Recommendation 4.5</b> Within the partnership approach, mainly related to the eTrade for all initiative, efforts should be done to further activate the collaborative potentials among partners with a particular view to support implementation of transformative actions at country level. This could include developing of pilot joint initiative(s) within one or few countries, involving several eTrade for all members (e.g. in support to implementation of recommended actions from eTrade Readiness Assessments). In a forward-looking perspective, this could lead towards introduction of simple joint work/activity planning within the eTrade for all initiative in order to enhance the commitment from the members and inspire more collaborative actions within countries.</p>	<p>Partially accepted</p>	<p>Status: On track In the context of the eT Ready implementation support (ECS, Action Plans), several eTrade for all partners participated in the discussions and several partnerships have been concluded.</p> <p>Recognising the need to continuously nurture and accommodate the interest and needs of a growing partnership of 35 members, the Programme implemented in 2022 a new collaborative strategy. Partners were requested to complete an “Engagement Plan” for 2023, highlighting areas of interest where they would be interested in exploring synergies with other partners and identifying activities that they would be keen on engaging in as partners themselves. 15 to 20 contributions are expected to be received (as of end of April, 13 have been received).</p>	<p>Partly implemented. The eTrade for all partnership is highly valued by its members, as an expert-level networking and information sharing hub which at the same time creates interesting collaboration opportunities. Some key stakeholders still found that the “capital” of the eTrade for all network is underutilised and that there could be scope for fostering enhanced collaboration, for instance through the establishment of thematic and/or geographical (pop-up) sub-groups/events.</p>

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<p><b>Strategic Recommendation 4.6</b></p> <p>For the eTrade for Women initiative efforts should be made to strengthen the established communities, in particular the aspects of networking as this is a major reason for female entrepreneurs to join the Masterclasses. There should be a stronger focus on the content and build-in some form of exclusivity (for instance, “rewards” could be given as a recognition to particularly well-performing community members and access to grant opportunities where participation in the community could make part of the selection criteria to motivate active participation). Especially in some regions, as the Balkans but also to some extent in East Africa, there are several other communities and forums available to entrepreneurs so the exclusivity of the UNCTAD community needs to be clear before inviting female entrepreneurs outside the Masterclasses to join. The communities could also be used for raising awareness among the eTrade for Women community members on what UNCTAD stands for and how they can benefit from UNCTAD’s work and products. This could be done more effectively by introducing and engaging them more in other Programme activities such as eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategy developing processes.</p>	<p>Partially accepted</p>	<p>Status: Implemented</p> <p>Thanks to additional funding provided by core donors, the Programme was able to steer efforts toward greater support to the community building dimension.</p> <p>Regular activities have been offered and organised for Community members (reaching 176 members in 40 countries across in 5 regions, in March 2023). A call for expression of interest to assume the position of “Community Leader” to help coordinate activities at the national level received more than 50 applications. 15 were selected and each community can now count on 3 Community Leaders (with 2 alternates in each group). 22 activities for the Communities were organised in 2022, aiming at strengthening business, leadership, and networking skills.</p> <p>Activities resumed also in person and an in-person meeting with representatives from the English-speaking community was organised in Kenya in February 2023.</p> <p>In addition, dedicated funding to sponsor the participation of a few Community Leaders in the upcoming eWeek 2023 (happening in Geneva from 4 to 8 December) will be granted by the FES Foundation.</p>	<p>Implemented. Several initiatives have been taken to further enhance the community development. The eTrade for Women community building has become more strategic and systematised with commissioned community leaders, regular training activities and a more integrated approach to involving community members in other ECDE Programme activities. However, the engagement level of community members varies considerably.</p> <p>The communities are inviting members from outside Masterclass participants and while this is growing the network it is not fully clear for community leaders who are included and why. This is decided upon in UNCTAD and there is room for improvement in terms of ensuring ownership of group members.</p> <p>A much stronger linkage between eTrade for Women and other ECDE Programme activities have been established and both Advocates and Community leaders are now much more included in advocacy activities such as strategy development processes and in the eTrade Readiness Assessments.</p>

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		Finally, a number of mentorship opportunities are being explored by UNCTAD in the interest of community members.	
<p><b>Strategic Recommendation 4.7</b></p> <p>The ToC and the results framework went through a further refinement and operationalisation as part of the evaluation process, and it is important that the revised framework will now lead to the intended revision of the M&amp;E framework and be used as a dynamic tool by the team to manage and guide planning and implementation of interventions across the three pillars and the partnership dimension. In a forward-looking perspective, the ToC and its linkages to the results framework could still be enhanced to further strengthen adaptive management principles within the Programme and the understanding on how outputs from the ECDE Programme contribute to the next result level (immediate outcomes). This could include: i) integration of learning sessions into the project cycle with a view to extract lessons learned after completion of major activities (e.g. DER, publications, eTrade Readiness Assessments, Masterclasses etc.); ii) introduction of a more participatory and dynamic M&amp;E approach (e.g. Outcome Harvesting could be a useful approach to this); iii) introduction of brief follow-up surveys six months after concluding of major events (e.g. to eCommerce Week and Masterclass participants); iv) introduction of process and learning indicators (across the three pillars and the partnership dimension); and v) inclusion of more qualitative targets/indicators in the M&amp;E framework (to enhance the focus on the qualitative dimensions of the results and less focus on numbers).</p>	Accepted	<p>Status: On track</p> <p>Concrete measures to implement this recommendation include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For capacity-building activities, the introduction of follow-up surveys based on the Kirkpatrick model of training evaluation to assess learning and behaviour six months after the end of activities;</li> <li>A simplified questionnaire for the 3<sup>rd</sup> implementation review of the eT Ready ISM, to adopt a less quantitative approach and instead focus more on the results and impacts of eT Ready implementation;</li> <li>The Programme also endeavoured to better monitor the uptake and use of its research and analysis products in policy documents (e.g., using Overton).</li> </ul> <p>The recommendation for a revised M&amp;E Framework and related indicators is further being implemented in the context of the development of the Programme's Work Plan for 2024-2027, i.e., the M&amp;E Framework is being revised</p>	<p>Implemented. The M&amp;E framework of the ECDE Programme has been enhanced considerably from the Work Plan 2019-2021 to the current Work Plan covering 2024-2027. While there is still a strong focus on quantitative surveys, there are several examples of how the programme team has included more qualitative indicators at the outcome level to better track results.</p> <p>As part of the Work Plan 2024-2027, a revised ToC has been developed (refer Annex ii). In relation to the ToC (refer Annex i), it clearly outlines how change is expected to occur and the assumptions underlying the change theory. Digitalization is considered to support progress towards the achievement of all SDGs.</p> <p>Since the 2022 ECDE Programme evaluation, there has been an enhancement in the monitoring data collected. All training sessions are finalised with a survey where participants are requested to provide feedback. While this was already being done in the first years of implementation, there have now also been attempts to measure the longer-term effects from training sessions (e.g. by implementing follow-up surveys six months after completed training), to better understand whether participants have been able to use the acquired knowledge/skills in practice. There was also an attempt to measure impact from Masterclasses although with a rather low response rate. Attempts have also been done by the Programme</p>



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		in line with the Work Plan's updated Results Framework and Theory of Change.	team to track policy impact from research and analysis products (through use of Overton). Likewise, a new research initiative has been initiated to further explore impact from the eTrade for Women initiative which is commendable.
<b>Strategic Recommendation 4.8</b> As a larger and wider group of donors and other funding actors now seem to recognise the importance of e-commerce and digital economy for development in view of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the ECDE Programme should prepare an updated strategic assessment and action plan on current and emerging opportunities for further diversifying and broadening its extrabudgetary funding base. The fact that a large number of country requests for eTrade Readiness Assessments received by the Programme are still awaiting funding may represent a good starting point.	Accepted	<p>Status: On track</p> <p>In 2022, ECDE Programme interventions were funded by 10 different donors and funding partners, with the 4 core donors – namely the Netherlands, Germany (including both BMZ and GIZ), Sweden and Switzerland accounting for more than two-thirds of the Programme's extrabudgetary resources. Significant contributions were also received from Australia through UNCDF, the Republic of Korea, and four other organizations.</p> <p>The European Union joined Australia in financially supporting the Pacific Digital Economy Programme (PDEP, jointly implemented with UNCDF and UNDP), committing EUR 8 million for the period 2023–2025. The Programme has also received a contribution of USD 150,000 from China.</p> <p>It is expected that in 2023, funding will be made available by at least 11 different donors. The Programme continues to seek additional extrabudgetary funding to diversify its funding base and ensure its financial sustainability.</p>	<p>Partly implemented. Funding continues to be a struggle for the ECDE Programme and efforts are continuously made by the Programme team to diversify the funding base. It is noted that both Saudi Arabia and China have shown interest in supporting the programme. Thus, the need for preparing an updated strategic assessment and action plan on current and emerging funding opportunities seems still to be present.</p> <p>The evaluation team therefore recommends again to further map and explore opportunities for expanding donor funding, with a particular view to attracting new emerging and non-traditional donors (philanthropy funds, banks, corporations etc.) to further diversify and broaden the extrabudgetary funding base.</p>
<b>Strategic Recommendation 5</b> As appropriate, gender equality and human rights aspects should be strengthened and become more consistently			

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reflected in the implemented Programme activities and the outputs produced.			
<b>Strategic Recommendation 5.1</b> Conducting an analysis of gender equality and human rights for the entire ECDE Programme, followed by developing a programme-wide gender equality and human rights strategy. This should showcase results, indicators and actions to be integrated in all areas of the Programme's work, to further enhance gender mainstreaming and social inclusion.	Accepted	Status: On track The recommendation is being implemented in the context of the development of the Programme's Work Plan for 2024-2027, which will include a stronger emphasis on mainstreaming a human-rights based approach (HRBA) and gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) consideration in programming. More details will be provided in the draft ECDE Work Plan 2024-2027.	Implemented. The Work Plan 2024-2027 includes a more in-depth analysis of gender, vulnerability and human rights elements. This includes reflection of persons with disabilities. The work plan now provides a solid point of departure for gender mainstreaming. Gender-disaggregated data is used to the extent possible in the monitoring of activities and results and whenever possible the M&E framework emphasises disaggregated data. This is also reflected in indicators of the M&E framework.  The work of the TG-eCOM is currently working on guidelines on measuring e-commerce and here gender is expected to be addressed but it is yet to be seen.
<b>Strategic Recommendation 5.2</b> Based on such analysis, explicit reference to application of a HRBA in research and technical cooperation, entailing clear explicit linkage to human rights (refer for instance the Universal Periodic Review or the CEDAW Periodic Review) and who the most vulnerable groups are and whether this group can realistically be included in the technical cooperation), ensuring accountability, empowerment, participation, non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups. A stronger focus on these aspects in analytical work will also allow for greater discussions of this in IGE sessions and at multistakeholder engagements (for instance, it could be emphasised in the application for conducting thematic sessions at the eCommerce Week that topics integrating gender equality and human rights dimensions will be given priority). In technical support to statistics, it should be further assessed whether there is scope for including data on company owner's age, gender and whether this person belongs to a minority group.	Partially accepted	Status: On track See above and refer to the draft ECDE Work Plan 2024-2027.	Gender mainstreaming and the incorporation of human rights language have largely been included in flagship reports. The most recent DER 2024 report incorporates clear human rights language, and the topic of the DER 2024 is environmental sustainability. When it comes to addressing gender and human rights in background notes, IGE participants in the online evaluation survey are overall positive
<b>Strategic Recommendation 5.3</b> Inclusion of a specific session for consultants conducting eTrade Readiness Assessments on how to mainstream gender and ensure application of a HRBA in the process.	Accepted	Status: On track See above and refer to the draft ECDE Work Plan 2024-2027.	Implemented. Consultations in the field have confirmed that gender and inclusion of women is taken into consideration in the technical cooperation, although it could still be further systematized. A greater

Evaluation Recommendation (a)	Management response	Status from ECDE Programme (2023)	Validation by the evaluation team
This could be concretised by developing checklists for consultants.			emphasis has been put on including consultations with women's organizations in technical cooperation. There are also examples of consultations with organizations representing persons with disabilities, although there is still room for further enhancing this element. The eTrade Readiness ISM monitoring methodology includes a specific focus on gender-related capacity development
<b>Strategic Recommendation 5.4</b> Actively encourage enrolment of marginalised groups in the eTrade for Women application processes to clearly signal non-discrimination as a key value. While marginalised groups can be difficult to reach, a pro-active outreach strategy should be developed to ensure marginalised people's potential participation. Allying and sharing opportunities with CSOs representing such groups could be a first step.	Accepted	Status: On track The initiative is paying extra efforts in reaching out to marginalised groups for its activities.	Partly implemented. The eTrade for Women initiative now encourages applications to Masterclasses from ethnic and religious minorities which is clearly stated in the call for participants. While this could also target persons with disabilities, there is no explicit mention made of persons with disabilities. The evaluation team found no evidence that a proactive approach to ally and share opportunities with CSOs representing marginalised groups has been implemented yet in eTrade for Women. Despite high interest from donors and concrete suggestions from some eTrade for all partners for organizations to ally with, this is yet to be explored, and examples of missed opportunities were identified.