



Independent evaluation of UNCTAD's E-commerce and Digital Economy (ECDE) Programme, 2022-24

Management Response¹

September 2025

Overall remarks

UNCTAD welcomes the evaluation as timely and useful to assess progress since the previous evaluation (2021) and identify areas for further improvement. We are pleased with the evaluation's positive findings and conclusions in terms of the Programme's continued and increased relevance to the needs and priorities of developing countries, and the high level of satisfaction of beneficiaries and other stakeholders with the support provided and the quality of outputs delivered. We appreciate the recognition of progress made since the previous evaluation in terms of enhanced coherence, outcomes across all three pillars, and cross-cutting issues.

UNCTAD management acknowledges the recommendations outlined in the final evaluation report and has given them due consideration. A response by recommendation is provided below.

UNCTAD wishes to thank the Evaluation team for its commitment and diligence at all stages of the evaluation and for the constructive dialogue and cooperation at the inception and reporting stages in particular. UNCTAD also thanks the members of the Core Donor Advisory Board for having sponsored the evaluation, and all interviewed stakeholders for their contributions.

UNCTAD/OSG/INF/2025/8

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

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

Management Response Matrix

Recommendation 1a

Evaluation Recommendation (a)		Strategic Recommendation 1a (to 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).
Management response (b)		Partially accepted
Management Plan	Accepted, partially accepted or rejected	
	Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)	UNCTAD welcomes acknowledgement in the report that, despite the ongoing financial constraints facing the UN Secretariat, two additional regular budget posts were allocated to the ECDE Programme in 2022, together with resources from the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC). These developments reflect the UNCTAD Secretary-General's commitment to supporting the Programme's critical work. This recommendation can only be partially accepted, however, since as of 2026, a planned Secretariat-wide staff reduction of 20 per cent (equivalent to 77 posts for UNCTAD) will be proposed under the UN Secretary-General's broader initiative. In any event, the UNCTAD Secretary-General will continue to support mobilization of additional resources in alignment with the expected Outcome of UNCTAD 16.
	Responsible unit(s) (d)	UNCTAD Secretary-General
	Timeframe (e)	Following UNCTAD 16 Ministerial and next appropriate programme budget cycle
	Resources required (Y or N) (f)	Y

Recommendation 1b

Evaluation Recommendation (a)	Strategic Recommendation 1b (to the UNCTAD Secretary-General): 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.
Management response (b) Accepted , partially accepted or rejected	Accepted
Management Plan	Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c) In line with this recommendation, UNCTAD has significantly expanded efforts to break down and tailor the key findings of the <i>Digital Economy Report (DER)</i> for different audiences. To support targeted uptake, a policy brief on environmentally sustainable e-commerce was developed, drawing on Chapter 5 of the <i>DER 2024</i> . This is complemented by a broader communication strategy that deploys multiple accessible formats, design visuals, infographics, short videos, and storytelling elements from workshops and events, to ensure complex insights are presented in engaging, audience-friendly ways. Regular social media engagement, cross-collaboration with UN agencies, and active community management further amplify messages and extend reach. Building on successful practices from other initiatives, such as communication snapshots for the Black Sea Initiative and short video explainers for Global Trade Updates , CER and ECDE will work jointly to develop regional and thematic DER snapshots. These will distil key messages into formats that

		are practical and relevant for diverse stakeholders, including policymakers, practitioners, and UNRCOs. CER will also collaborate with the ECDE team to explore novel communication approaches, building on recent innovations in presenting UNCTAD products. Dynamic methods incorporating interactive elements and highly visual summaries, as demonstrated in the 2025 Technology and Innovation Report Page, have proven effective in presenting complex findings in digestible and engaging formats. These approaches have contributed to measurable impact, including a 31 percent increase in meeting page views between 2023 and 2024 and over 580,000 downloads across UNCTAD publication pages. CER will continue to build on these efforts to make UNCTAD research more accessible and relevant to policymakers and other stakeholders. Potential measures include tailored regional snapshots, briefing sessions, policy dialogues, and closer collaboration with UNRCOs to meet their specific needs. Finally, the launch of Insights, UNCTAD's new streamlined newsletter, provides a single, personalized channel to disseminate trusted data and key messages from the DER and other flagship publications. In tandem, the planned roll-out of a centralised Customer Relation Management system will enable more tailored engagement, audience segmentation, and customized delivery of outputs to priority stakeholders. Together, these initiatives will ensure that DER messages are regularly broken down, proactively communicated, and adapted to the needs of specific audiences, while reinforcing UNCTAD's visibility and impact between full DER cycles.
	Responsible unit(s) (d)	UNCTAD Secretary-General, ECDE Programme management
	Timeframe (e)	2025-2027
	Resources required (Y or N) (f)	Y

Recommendation 2

Evaluation Recommendation (a)		Strategic Recommendation 2 (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.
Management response (b) Accepted , partially accepted or rejected		Accepted
Management Plan	Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)	ECDE Programme management continues to pursue this. In May 2025, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia committed USD1.4 million to support the Programme's work on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy. A Junior Professional Officer (JPO) sponsored by Finland will join the Programme team in 2025. Discussions are ongoing with Afreximbank and potential partnerships with philanthropic actors are being explored.
	Responsible unit(s) (d)	ECDE Programme management
	Timeframe (e)	2025-2027
	Resources required (Y or N) (f)	Y

Recommendation 3

Evaluation Recommendation (a)		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.
Management response (b) Accepted, partially accepted or rejected		Partially accepted
Management Plan	Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)	ECDE Programme management accepts the recommendation to focus work on the existing Work Plan for the remainder of the Work Plan period (2023-27), and to continue providing sustained support to countries with demonstrated commitment to and ownership of the process to implement eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies. At the same time, in accordance with the mandate granted by member States and in line with the principle of being demand-driven, the Programme remains committed to supporting all countries, and particularly those at risk of being left further behind as e-trade readiness divides continue to widen.
	Responsible unit(s) (d)	ECDE Programme management
	Timeframe (e)	2025-2027
	Resources required (Y or N) (f)	Y

Recommendation 3a

Evaluation Recommendation (a)	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.								
Management response (b) Accepted , partially accepted or rejected	Accepted								
Management Plan	<table border="1"> <tr> <td> Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c) </td><td> The implementation of this recommendation is underway. License agreements for the deployment of the eTrade Reform Tracker have already been signed with several countries, including Fiji, Peru, Samoa and Solomon Islands. Furthermore, the deployment of the Tracker for the ECOWAS E-Commerce Strategy is expected to begin in conjunction with the first face-to-face training, scheduled for 15 to 18 July. This training, supported by the ECOWAS Commission, will take place as part of a broader ECOWAS E-Commerce meeting. The event aims to raise awareness of the ECOWAS E-Commerce Strategy and its relevance for the private sector, particularly for women-led businesses. It will also serve to identify effective practices and strategies from member States and gather actionable recommendations to support the successful implementation of the Strategy. </td></tr> <tr> <td> Responsible unit(s) (d) </td><td> Digital Economy Capacity Building Section </td></tr> <tr> <td> Timeframe (e) </td><td> 2025-2027 </td></tr> <tr> <td> Resources required (Y or N) (f) </td><td> Y </td></tr> </table>	Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)	The implementation of this recommendation is underway. License agreements for the deployment of the eTrade Reform Tracker have already been signed with several countries, including Fiji, Peru, Samoa and Solomon Islands. Furthermore, the deployment of the Tracker for the ECOWAS E-Commerce Strategy is expected to begin in conjunction with the first face-to-face training, scheduled for 15 to 18 July. This training, supported by the ECOWAS Commission, will take place as part of a broader ECOWAS E-Commerce meeting. The event aims to raise awareness of the ECOWAS E-Commerce Strategy and its relevance for the private sector, particularly for women-led businesses. It will also serve to identify effective practices and strategies from member States and gather actionable recommendations to support the successful implementation of the Strategy.	Responsible unit(s) (d)	Digital Economy Capacity Building Section	Timeframe (e)	2025-2027	Resources required (Y or N) (f)	Y
Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)	The implementation of this recommendation is underway. License agreements for the deployment of the eTrade Reform Tracker have already been signed with several countries, including Fiji, Peru, Samoa and Solomon Islands. Furthermore, the deployment of the Tracker for the ECOWAS E-Commerce Strategy is expected to begin in conjunction with the first face-to-face training, scheduled for 15 to 18 July. This training, supported by the ECOWAS Commission, will take place as part of a broader ECOWAS E-Commerce meeting. The event aims to raise awareness of the ECOWAS E-Commerce Strategy and its relevance for the private sector, particularly for women-led businesses. It will also serve to identify effective practices and strategies from member States and gather actionable recommendations to support the successful implementation of the Strategy.								
Responsible unit(s) (d)	Digital Economy Capacity Building Section								
Timeframe (e)	2025-2027								
Resources required (Y or N) (f)	Y								

Recommendation 3b

Evaluation Recommendation (a)	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.
Management response (b) Accepted, partially accepted or rejected	Accepted
Management Plan Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)	Building on the existing collaboration framework, the programme will continue to explore and implement innovative and inclusive formats for synergies and knowledge exchange. Where feasible, in-person gatherings - like the Switzerland-based partners' coordination breakfast, will remain a priority, as they foster stronger engagement and trust among partners. In parallel, we will continue to collect tailored engagement plans for each partner, enhance opportunities for partners' briefings to showcase their research and activities, and promote deeper collaboration with those who show continued commitment and interest. We will continue to amplify outreach efforts, including through the eTrade for all platform and newsletter. Efforts will also be made to identify and bring in new partners whose expertise and strategic vision can complement the existing network. At the same time, it is acknowledged that meaningful partnerships require active engagement and mutual commitment from all partners, and this principle will continue to guide future collaboration efforts. The programme recognizes the importance of engaging with the private sector in a more strategic and sustained manner. While previous attempts to establish a structured collaboration model did not materialize, the programme remains open to pursuing similar avenues with like-minded private sector entities.

	Responsible unit(s) (d)	eTrade Initiatives Section
	Timeframe (e)	2025-2027
	Resources required (Y or N) (f)	Y

Recommendation 3c

Evaluation Recommendation (a)		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.
Management response (b)		Accepted
Accepted, partially accepted or rejected		
Management Plan	Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)	The implementation of this recommendation is underway. It should be noted that the UNCTAD Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy meets once a year to provide opportunities for member States to share experiences and lessons learned, including from trainings. Moreover, discussions in the Task Group on Measuring the Value of E-commerce are documented in a dedicated online platform accessible for all participants.

		Experience-sharing is also facilitated through regional training efforts, such as have been held in the Pacific region and in Latin America, for example. Statistics on digital trade will be a consideration in our partnerships with Saudi Arabia and Fiji. Supporting additional countries will need resourcing.
	Responsible unit(s) (d)	Digital Economy Policy Research Section
	Timeframe (e)	After UNCTAD 16 (October 2025)
	Resources required (Y or N) (f)	Y

Recommendation 3d

Evaluation Recommendation (a)		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.
Management response (b) Accepted , partially accepted or rejected		Accepted
Management Plan	Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection	The implementation of this recommendation is underway. The joint delivery of training is already applied in practice, for example in the Pacific region with UNESCAP, in Arab countries (with UNESCWA) and, most recently, in Latin America, where a training on measuring digital trade was co-organized with WTO, OECD and UNECLAC in Chile. This practice will be continued wherever possible.

	(c)	
	Responsible unit(s) (d)	Digital Economy Capacity Building Section, Digital Economy Policy Research Section
	Timeframe (e)	2025-2027
	Resources required (Y or N) (f)	N

Recommendation 4

Evaluation Recommendation (a)	<u>Gender, disability inclusion and leaving no one behind (LNOB):</u> 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
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		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.
Management response (b) Accepted , partially accepted or rejected		Partially accepted
Management Plan	Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)	ECDE Programme management partially accepts this recommendation. As the Initiative enters its next phase, the overarching goal is to move beyond individual capacity building to more systemic support at the ecosystem and business level. Efforts are underway to better capture outcome-level changes per the eTrade for Women Results Framework, including enhancing the use of ex-post surveys of members participating in high-business impact activities (such as the Study Tour to China) to capture and document results at the leadership, networking and business levels. Additionally, activities will continue to directly inform analytical work, as demonstrated by the forthcoming report <i>Breaking Down Barriers for Women Digital Entrepreneurs: Insights from Africa</i>, to be released in July 2025. At the Community level, the Initiative will continue to engage Community Leaders more systematically in programme planning and consultations. It is important to note that the role of Community Leader is a relatively recent feature (introduced in 2023), with each cohort serving on a pro-bono basis for 2 years. Building on the experience of the 1st cohort, we have taken concrete steps to support the new Leaders: they have been asked to sign a Community Leader Charter, which outlines their roles and responsibilities; they have benefited from a tailored onboarding session and have access to a dedicated space on the Platform to facilitate coordination. In addition, they engaged with the Advocates from their respective regions to foster alignment in vision and priorities. Creating additional opportunities for in-person gatherings will be essential to reinforce their leadership and visibility in their respective regions. To support this, dedicated resources will need to be identified and mobilized.

		As to Community members, they are a valuable source of lived experience and practical knowledge. Existing formats and channels will be further explored to encourage their active participation and to facilitate the wider sharing of learnings and expertise within the Communities, including through the eTrade for Women Academy. Inclusion is a core value of the programme, therefore the criterion of living with a disability may be included and considered as a sub-criterion (once primary selection criteria are met), but not as a mandatory requirement. This is due to the challenge of maintaining a sufficiently broad and comparable pool of high-potential women-led digital businesses across developing countries. On the introduction of poverty/sustainability criteria, while the Initiative recognizes the relevance of social impact and sustainability, its primary focus remains on identifying women digital entrepreneurs with strong potential for business growth and ecosystem leadership. Many participants already operate businesses with a social dimension, but the main emphasis remains on economic impact and scalability.
	Responsible unit(s) (d)	eTrade Initiatives Section
	Timeframe (e)	2025-2027
	Resources required (Y or N) (f)	Y