

Distr.: General
21 June 2022

Original: English

Trade and Development Board

Sixty-ninth session

Geneva, 20 June–1 July 2022

Item 11 of the provisional agenda

UNCTAD technical cooperation strategy

Introduction

1. Technical cooperation is one of the three pillars of work of UNCTAD and consists mainly of building the capacity of requesting beneficiary countries in the areas of UNCTAD expertise, as defined in quadrennial conference outcome documents. The technical cooperation work of UNCTAD draws heavily on the outcomes of UNCTAD work under the other two pillars, namely economic research and analysis and intergovernmental consensus-building. The three pillars mutually reinforce each other.

2. This strategy for UNCTAD technical cooperation intends to lay out: (a) the broad objectives of UNCTAD technical cooperation for the period commencing after the fifteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XV); and (b) the ways to meet those objectives. It will also provide the basis for systematic and robust, strategic secretariat-level coordination and decision-making for technical cooperation.

3. UNCTAD technical cooperation will continue to assist developing countries, continue to be demand-driven and be adapted to new opportunities and challenges, such as the ones resulting from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, in the fields of trade and development and interrelated issues, in alignment with the Bridgetown Covenant (TD/541/Add.2) and the transformations that are called for in it.

4. The range of UNCTAD technical cooperation is laid out in the *UNCTAD Toolbox: Delivering Results*,¹ which is reviewed every two years. The *Toolbox* contains information on UNCTAD technical cooperation products that can assist countries in putting in place the policies, regulations and institutional frameworks and the path to fulfil the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These technical cooperation tools will be organized and focused in line with the Bridgetown Covenant. The member State demand is registered in the UNCTAD technical cooperation requests database.

5. Three key processes and outcomes will guide the strategy:

(a) **Bridgetown Covenant.** UNCTAD technical cooperation will primarily be determined by the programme priorities set out in the Bridgetown Covenant and as reflected in the relevant decisions of the Trade and Development Board (see paragraphs 13 and 14 below for more details).

(b) **The reform of the United Nations development system.** The reform aims at repositioning the United Nations development system with a stronger, better defined collective identity as a trusted, reliable, cohesive, accountable and effective partner for countries in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Expected benefits are higher quality and more integrated and appropriately tailored operational support and policy advice for Governments in their efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. It also aims at creating a more collaborative and coherent United Nations development system where all relevant United Nations mandates, resources and competencies at the global, regional and country levels are brought together in support of the 2030 Agenda. In order to integrate and coordinate its technical cooperation activities with other United Nations entities at the country level, UNCTAD will strengthen its coordination with the Development Coordination Office to jointly define plans for UNCTAD contributions to Common Country Assessments and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. Engagement and communications with resident coordinators will be reinforced to better understand country needs and to convey information on UNCTAD strengths and development solution tools to resident coordinators of the United Nations system. This will be done through participation in resident coordinator trainings and meetings, in coordination with the Development Coordination Office. At the global level, UNCTAD will also continue to contribute to United Nations Sustainable Development Group task forces, with a view to identifying possible common approaches, strategies and tailored approaches.

(c) **COVID-19, geopolitical instabilities and other shocks with global impacts.** The post-pandemic world of 2022–2024 will still be marked by many uncertainties and risks. In this context, the strategy will aim at ensuring that UNCTAD continues to provide and,

¹ UNCTAD, 2020, third edition (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.II.D.5, Geneva).

when needed, to repurpose the appropriate technical cooperation programmes to alleviate the negative impacts of COVID-19 and other shocks on the development path of beneficiary countries, and demonstrate to potential funders, including beneficiaries themselves, the relevance of funding the implementation of programmes and projects in this context.

6. The remaining sections of this document define the UNCTAD focus for future technical cooperation and address questions on why UNCTAD technical cooperation is needed (rationale), what it consists of (scope), how it will be implemented (guiding principles and modalities and main forms), how it will be funded (fundraising), how it will be implemented (implementation arrangements) and, lastly, how the implementation of UNCTAD technical cooperation will be monitored, reported on and evaluated.

I. Rationale

7. UNCTAD has provided technical assistance tailored to the needs of developing countries almost since its inception. Special attention has always been paid to the needs of the least developed countries and countries with the greatest needs and specific vulnerabilities.

8. In alignment with the Bridgetown Covenant, the outcome document of UNCTAD XV, held in October 2021 in Barbados, the objective of UNCTAD technical cooperation is to support developing countries, through capacity-building and technical assistance, so that developing countries adapt to new opportunities and challenges in the fields of trade and development and interrelated issues.² Gender, human rights and environmental, sustainable and inclusive dimensions will be considered when planning and implementing UNCTAD technical cooperation programmes.

9. UNCTAD provides high-quality and evidence-based analysis and policy recommendations that feed into national, regional and international policies. Based on such analysis, and in order to support the implementation of new rules and procedures in trade, investment and related matters, UNCTAD technical assistance builds the capacities needed in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. It does so in a non-standardized, flexible and customizable way.

10. UNCTAD technical cooperation is focused within its mandate and tailored to the needs of beneficiaries. It involves donors, partners and other stakeholders and aims at achieving concrete, measurable results, to be disseminated and shared with stakeholders from different countries. Dialogues with partners will consistently emphasize the importance of sustainable outcomes, multidisciplinary and pluriannual programmes and funding. Dialogues with donors will also aim at raising awareness of the areas in which beneficiary member States need technical assistance, in order to develop the best match between these needs and donors' priorities and capacities.

11. UNCTAD technical cooperation aims at multiplying the intended effects by adopting integrated approaches and coordinating technical cooperation operations internally, in close cooperation with country teams, in accordance with the reform of the United Nations development system, and with other stakeholders, notably with the United Nations Inter-Agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity.

12. In the Bridgetown Covenant, member States requested the UNCTAD secretariat to prepare a "comprehensive and coherent technical cooperation strategy", which will "define the UNCTAD focus for future technical cooperation within its mandate".³ The present document has been drafted with the aim of addressing that request. It is based on discussions and deliberations among member States over the last few years in the context of the Working Party, as well as formal and informal consultations held between the secretariat and member States.

² TD/541/Add.2, paragraph 116.

³ *Ibid.*, paragraph 115.

II. Scope

13. The scope of UNCTAD technical cooperation is determined by its work programme priorities, as set out in the Bridgetown Covenant and reflected in the relevant decisions of the Trade and Development Board, as well as in outcomes of relevant global conferences and mandates emanating from the United Nations General Assembly.

14. The Bridgetown Covenant confirms the role of UNCTAD as the focal point within the United Nations system for the integrated treatment of trade and development and interrelated issues in the areas of finance, technology, investment and sustainable development, and mandates UNCTAD to continue its work through its three pillars of work: economic research and analysis; intergovernmental consensus-building; and technical cooperation. In the Covenant, four major transformations are also mentioned that are needed for a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable world. UNCTAD is to contribute to these transformations, namely: (a) transforming economies through diversification; (b) transforming to a more sustainable and more resilient economy; (c) transforming how development is financed; and (d) transforming multilateralism, by focusing its mandated activities and avoiding duplication with the work of other relevant entities.

15. The comparative advantage of UNCTAD and its complementarity with cooperation partners with country presence lies in the ability of that comparative advantage to produce solutions and tools, jointly with its partners, with a view to: (a) defining policies for the structural transformation of economies from a development perspective; and (b) proposing governance tools that can be adapted according to the needs of beneficiaries (software solutions, regulatory frameworks, institutional reform and legal instruments, sharing of experiences and good practices). The wealth of experiences and good practices accumulated over the years enrich and form part of UNCTAD support for South–South cooperation and economic cooperation among developing countries and feed the other two pillars of work, economic research analysis and intergovernmental consensus-building.

16. The UNCTAD secretariat will reflect its renewed range of technical cooperation in the *UNCTAD Toolbox*, which will include broad and integrated themes, such as multilateral trade, digitalization, climate change and environment and productive capacities, and ensure a clear focus of potential activities.

17. In terms of geographical scope, in the implementation of its technical cooperation, UNCTAD will place a special focus on Africa, the least developed countries, small island developing States, landlocked developing countries and structurally weak, vulnerable and small economies, while also taking account of the challenges of middle-income countries.

III. Guiding principles and modalities

18. UNCTAD technical cooperation will focus on the development of human, institutional and productive capacities to boost export capabilities of beneficiary countries. Activities will be guided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Bridgetown Covenant, in particular chapter IV, section D, entitled “Work programme of UNCTAD”, as well as relevant recommendations of global conferences.

19. Stemming from the focus on capacity development, UNCTAD technical cooperation will have the following features:

(a) It will be demand-driven, based on beneficiaries’ needs and follow the priorities defined by funding partners. The UNCTAD secretariat has been playing and will continue to play, in the period 2022–2024, the role of both of “convener” and “advocator”, supporting efforts to match country needs and donor priorities. When feasible, the UNCTAD secretariat will support and advocate for interlinkages between the various priorities of the Bridgetown Covenant;

(b) It will be results-oriented, so as to maximize the impact of technical cooperation activities. UNCTAD will apply results-based management methodology throughout the life cycle of its technical cooperation projects and conduct ex post evaluations, if possible, in the long term;

(c) It will be designed and implemented in such a manner as to ensure the ownership of the beneficiaries and to be supportive of national development efforts;

(d) It will be coordinated with United Nations resident coordinators and their teams, as laid out in the relevant United Nations development system reform documents;

(e) Programme design, formulation and implementation will be carried out in close consultation with beneficiaries and funding partners and, where warranted, in cooperation and interaction with international, regional and local partner agencies, stakeholders and actors;

(f) It will target long-term development needs, such as human and institutional capacity and environmental and digital challenges;

(g) Particular attention will be given to the goal of sustainability, recovery and inclusivity of projects and programmes;

(h) With a view to increasing the effectiveness and enhancing the impact of technical cooperation activities, a well sequenced approach will be adopted in the formulation and implementation of programmes and activities, reflected in logical frameworks.

20. An integrated approach for the delivery of technical cooperation will be pursued at both the UNCTAD and the inter-institutional levels:

(a) At the UNCTAD level, through more interdivisional cooperation, the integrated approach will provide for delivery of unified, holistic and multidisciplinary technical cooperation and capacity development in UNCTAD areas of expertise. This will provide more coherence in the operation of UNCTAD and lessen the incidence of fragmented interventions. A technical cooperation committee (see paragraph 32) will play an important role in interdivisional cooperation.

(b) At the inter-institutional level, UNCTAD will seek to strengthen cooperation and increase joint activities with other agencies providers of trade and investment technical assistance, and in particular with the entities forming part of the United Nations Inter-Agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity (UNCTAD, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Labour Organization, United Nations regional commissions, United Nations Development Programme, World Trade Organization and International Trade Centre), as well as the World Bank and other intergovernmental institutions, including regional and subregional institutions. The main goal of UNCTAD cooperation with other providers of trade and investment technical cooperation will be to maximize the impact of operations and increase the complementarities between institutions, so as to take advantage of their respective expertise and cooperation programmes in the field, taking into account their mandates and comparative advantages, and increase synergy and avoid duplication.

21. According to the needs identified in each case, as well as the human and financial resources available, regional and interregional activities benefiting a larger number of beneficiaries will be encouraged.

22. Subject to availability of human and financial resources, country-level activities will be intensified. This applies in particular to topics and modalities of technical cooperation that require customized, long-term and intense country-focused operations, according to beneficiary interests and commitment in support of an operation.

IV. Main forms

23. UNCTAD technical cooperation will revolve around policy analysis, institutional capacity development and human capacity development. With regard to forms of technical cooperation, UNCTAD technical cooperation will include, among other activities:

(a) Advisory services at the country, subregional and regional levels;

- (b) Policy reviews in the areas of trade, investment and science, technology and innovation, which entail provision of policy recommendations and support in their implementation, as well as follow-up and assessment.
- (c) Support for human resources and institution-building:
 - (i) Development of software solutions and advice and training on their application and utilization by beneficiary countries (with a particular focus on open-source software);
 - (ii) Development of data compilation and data architecture;
- (d) Exchanges of development experiences;
- (e) Support for South–South cooperation and economic cooperation among developing countries;
- (f) Training activities that seek to strengthen local training and research capacities, as well as ad hoc training workshops;
- (g) Dissemination of information on trade, investment and related matters from UNCTAD databases to developing countries, for use by Governments, parliaments and civil society.

24. Each technical cooperation programme and / or project will be adapted to the needs of the beneficiary and may incorporate one or more of the above forms of cooperation.

V. Fundraising

25. In order to support the long-term goals of capacity development, the secretariat will work hand in hand with donor and beneficiary countries to ensure that the human and financial resources allocated to the implementation of UNCTAD technical cooperation are sufficiently predictable and sustainable.

26. For this purpose, priority will be given to longer-term, sustainable and consolidated activities, particularly through interdivisional projects based on the thematic priorities mentioned above, as set by the UNCTAD work programme and the UNCTAD XV outcome documents. Specific strategies will be considered for a number of projects already submitted and not yet financed, in accordance with the outcome of UNCTAD XV.

27. Given the persistent financing needs to cover requests for UNCTAD technical cooperation, the secretariat will reinforce its efforts to finance the demand-driven requests from member States through existing donors and, in parallel, broaden the donor base, namely by approaching new donor countries and institutions, as well as foundations and private sector partners, and explore synergies with other institutions. Fundraising for UNCTAD technical cooperation programmes and projects will be coordinated by a senior staff from the Office of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, and in close collaboration with divisions and the technical cooperation committee (see paragraph 32).

28. This new methodological approach under the responsibility of the Office of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD should make it possible to build a common culture of technical cooperation and a unified and coordinated approach among the various donors, without losing the expertise and knowledge accumulated within divisions.

29. Member States will have an opportunity to review UNCTAD fundraising efforts at sessions of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance dedicated to technical cooperation.

VI. Implementation arrangements

30. The Trade and Development Board will review the technical cooperation activities of UNCTAD, including their cost effectiveness. It will be assisted in this task by the Working Party, which will meet for this purpose immediately prior to the Board.

31. In order to ensure the effective integration of analytical work with technical cooperation, responsibility for project preparation and implementation is entrusted to the corresponding secretariat entity responsible for the work programme. The UNCTAD Technical Cooperation Section will have responsibility for ensuring the overall coherence of the secretariat's technical cooperation activities and the implementation of the strategy. The section will also be tasked with preparing the annual review of the technical cooperation activities of UNCTAD and their financing, which will include a section on the implementation of this strategy.

32. The technical cooperation committee will be the interdivisional mechanism tasked with: (a) the promotion of cross-divisional cooperation and an UNCTAD-wide perspective; (b) enhancing transparency, synergies and cost-effectiveness; and (c) sharing best practices and lessons learned in the design, delivery and fundraising of UNCTAD technical cooperation.

33. The ultimate aim of the technical cooperation committee is to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of UNCTAD technical cooperation. The Secretary-General will take the opportunity to revitalize the technical cooperation arrangement, ensuring that it has the most senior-level engagement and leadership under the Deputy Secretary-General, thus providing the necessary focused and strategic orientation.

VII. Monitoring of and reporting on implementation

34. Projects and programmes will be monitored on a continuous basis for their development impact, particularly from the point of view of the development of national capacities, including human and institutional (and productive) capacities, and for their sustainability and cost-effectiveness. In the case of programmes, implementation and effectiveness of policy reforms will also be considered. To facilitate this, measurable targets will be set up by project officers in compliance with the minimum UNCTAD requirements for results-based management when projects begin. This includes benchmarks and indicators of achievement at the stage of project formulation that will also lay the groundwork for project evaluation.

35. The Secretariat-wide Integrated Planning, Monitoring and Reporting Solution of the United Nations, an end-to-end solution which enables programme managers to plan and monitor substantive work and resources, based on defined activities, tasks and timetables, was adopted by UNCTAD in 2021.

36. The Integrated Planning, Monitoring and Reporting Solution utilizes the results-based management methodology, enabling clear linkages between resources and results frameworks, and improved management of day-to-day United Nations operations, including management of substantive and programmatic activities in addition to administrative processes. UNCTAD will be adopting new functions (in particular the monitoring and reporting functions) and modules as they are rolled out by the United Nations Secretariat. The secretariat's aim is for the Integrated Planning, Monitoring and Reporting Solution to provide corporate-level information, through dashboards, that will allow monitoring of progress of UNCTAD technical cooperation activities and measurement of its results.

37. Strict quality control will be exercised by the secretariat through adherence to commonly established quality standards at the project design, implementation, monitoring and reporting stages.

VIII. Evaluation

38. Selected projects and programmes will be subject to independent evaluation in agreement with both the beneficiary country (or countries) and the donor(s). Evaluations will examine the outcomes and impact of activities against their objectives and will propose practical recommendations to deal with deficiencies. Each year, the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance will consider an in-depth study on a technical cooperation programme, selected from across UNCTAD, to highlight the breadth and focus of technical cooperation themes and activities.
