

Distr.: Restricted
19 September 2024

English only

Trade and Development Board

Seventy-first session

Geneva, 16–27 September 2024

Item 17 (a) of the provisional agenda

Report of the Chair of the Advisory Body for the year 2023–2024, established in the context of paragraph 166 of the UNCTAD X Plan of Action*

1. In 2001, at its forty-seventh session, and in line with paragraph 166 of the Bangkok Plan of Action, the Trade and Development Board established an Advisory Body to provide guidance to the Secretary-General of UNCTAD on the broad objectives, content, and structure of capacity-building courses, particularly those aimed at enhancing economic development and trade capacities in developing regions.
2. Paragraph 166, initiated nearly two and a half decades ago as part of the outcome of the tenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development held in Bangkok, has since been renewed and reinforced through subsequent UNCTAD conferences and declarations, including the São Paulo Consensus, the Accra Accord, the Doha Declaration, the Nairobi Maafikiano and the Bridgetown Covenant in 2021. The Bridgetown Covenant highlighted the significance of capacity-building activities under paragraph 166, emphasizing their critical role in advancing economic development and trade competencies among UNCTAD member States, noting that “the activities under paragraph 166 of the Bangkok Plan of Action have proven to be of great importance and utility and should be continued” (para. 117).
3. The Advisory Body for the year 2023–2024, which was appointed at the seventieth session of the Trade and Development Board in September 2023, met on 7 June 2024.
4. During the 2023–2024 reporting period, the Policy Capacity-Building Section of the UNCTAD Division on Technology and Logistics led the coordination and implementation of courses across various geographical regions. These efforts were conducted in close collaboration with other UNCTAD divisions, relevant United Nations regional commissions and the permanent missions of member States based in Geneva.
5. This report will cover (a) the outcomes of the Advisory Body meeting in June 2024; (b) the implementation of regional and short courses during the 2023–2024 period; (c) evaluations of these courses, including feedback on their impact on economic development and trade policy; and (d) plans for the remainder of the year, focusing on upcoming regional and short courses designed to further enhance trade and economic capacities.

* The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials or Member States.

I. Outcome of the Advisory Body meeting in June 2024

6. The Advisory Board took note of the proposal submitted by Egypt for hosting the regional courses for the economies of the Middle East and North Africa.¹ The members also took note of the current multi-year venues in the five developing regions, reviewed the criteria required for hosting regional courses and expressed their content with the proposal submitted by Egypt, particularly given the country's previous experience in hosting previous courses for the Middle East and North Africa and for Africa. Given the significant advantage in delivering high-quality training focused on economic development and trade, the Advisory Body decided by consensus that Egypt will host three editions of the regional courses for the Middle East and North Africa and that, in line with the terms of reference under the UNCTAD multi-year venue agreement, the Institute of Diplomatic Studies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt will be the multi-year venue over five years for the Middle East and North Africa.

7. The Chair of the Advisory Body requested that the secretariat deliver the decision to the Permanent Mission of Egypt to the United Nations, as per the usual mode of operation.

8. The meeting highlighted the innovative approach of UNCTAD regional courses, which not only raise support and share expertise but also foster bilateral and regional cooperation. National experts play a crucial role in these courses by sharing insights into national and regional economic experiences, thereby enriching the programme's curricula in enhancing knowledge among policymakers.

9. During the Advisory Body meeting the Chair also took note of the extensive political support the programme receives from member States.

10. The programme supports collaboration on all levels (national, regional and international) across its client base of UNCTAD member States and their policymakers at relevant public institutions, as well as Geneva-based delegates. In particular, UNCTAD collaboration with United Nations regional commissions brings into the curricula regional perspectives, highlighting the economic challenges faced and zooming in on countries' experiences in the various regions.

II. Regional courses and short courses, 2023–2024

11. In the reporting period, three regional courses were held for Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, and Africa.

12. Eastern Europe. The forty-ninth regional course on key issues on the international economic agenda, was held in North Macedonia, from 3 to 14 July 2024, at Saints Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.²

13. Arab region, Middle East and North Africa: The fiftieth regional course was held in Cairo, from 26 November to 7 December 2023, in collaboration with the Institute of Diplomatic Studies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt.³

¹ The proposal was submitted, following the call for proposals made by the UNCTAD, on 28 March 2024, ahead of the deadline of 31 March 2024.

² For the first regional course in Skopje, 20 participants attended representing Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Ukraine.

³ For the second regional course in Cairo, 25 participants attended, representing Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the Sudan, Tunisia, Yemen and the State of Palestine.

14. Africa. The fifty-first regional course was held in Nairobi, from 8 to 19 April 2024, in collaboration with the Faculty of Economics of the University of Nairobi and with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kenya.⁴

15. In total 69 participants from 41 countries attended these courses. Of that total, 34 participants were women, nearly 50 per cent.

16. By holding these courses in various capitals in developing regions, the multi-year venue approach continues to prove its usefulness for raising support, gaining experiences from different economies and enhancing bilateral cooperation at the country and regional levels. The contribution of national experts in shedding light on national and regional experiences enriches the programme's curricula by adding diversity and regional and local relevance of the knowledge shared with participating policymakers.

17. The five multi-year venues for the reporting period are:

- **Argentina.** University of Buenos Aires, Faculty of Economics, multi-year venue for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2022–2027.
- **Egypt.** The Institute of Diplomatic Studies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, multi-year venue for the Arab region, 2018–2023.
- **Kenya.** University of Nairobi, Faculty of Economics, with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, multi-year venue for Africa, 2019–2024.
- **North Macedonia.** Saints Cyril and Methodius University, Faculty of Economics, with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, multi-year venue for Eastern Europe, 2021–2025.
- **Pakistan.** The Foreign Service Academy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, multi-year venue for the Asia and the Pacific region, 2022–2026.

18. Regarding the short courses for Geneva-based delegates, in 2023 the programme delivered six courses, on the following topics:

- Maritime transport for sustainable development: Key insights and projections from the UNCTAD *Review of Maritime Transport 2022* (9 February 2023).
- Foreign direct investment trends and prospects and investment policies and their impact on sustainable development (14 March 2023).
- Voluntary sustainability standards and international trade (27 April 2023).
- Shaping the future of supply chains in Africa: Optimizing opportunities and strategic value, UNCTAD *Economic Development in Africa Report 2023* (12 September 2023).
- Challenges and opportunities around green innovation and sustainability (26 September 2023).
- Unlocking the potential of the creative economy for resilience and sustainable development (24 November 2023).

19. In 2024, and up to the time of the meeting of the Advisory Body, the programme delivered so three short courses on the following topics:

- Insights from the UNCTAD *Review of Maritime Transport 2023* (15 February 2024).
- Inclusive diversification and energy transition: Prospects and challenges (7 March 2024).
- Status of trade in national determined contributions under the Paris Agreement (2 May 2024).

⁴ For the fifty-first regional course in Nairobi, 20 participants attended, representing Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, the Niger, South Sudan, Togo, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

20. With regard to these activities, an important factor of success is the collaboration that the paragraph 166 programme maintains with permanent missions in Geneva, various institutions from host countries and the national stakeholders who contribute their expertise for participants to learn from their national experiences in development. Furthermore, UNCTAD collaboration with United Nations regional commissions in all regions brings specific regional perspectives into the curricula, highlighting economic challenges and prospects, and proposing avenues for regional cooperation.

III. End-of-course evaluations for the regional and short courses, and online course on resilience

21. Evaluations from participants indicated that approximately 90 per cent of respondents were able to apply the knowledge and tools acquired during the courses in their daily work. This included improvements in economic policy formulation, trade negotiations, strategic planning, foreign direct investment attraction, employment creation and advisory services. The knowledge gained has enhanced their understanding of contemporary economic issues and coping with the new multilateral trading system, including post-pandemic recovery.

22. Evaluations by alumni of the programme also indicated their increased integration into decision-making processes at their institutions. As the programme is embedded in a knowledge-based capacity/building framework, it focuses heavily on sharing and disseminating information with policymakers and government officials in relevant departments. These factors, as configured in the overall approach, could have led to this greater integration. It was also reported that a deepened knowledge on development and economic matters was acquired. The content of the regional courses was relevant to the professional duties of the participants who indicated a strengthened ability to apply lessons learned that emerged from the course.

23. Additionally, the vast majority of them indicated that the knowledge they have gained from UNCTAD regional courses was useful to them in formulating policies in various areas, such as policies on trade in the post-pandemic era, improving analysis and statistics sources, trade negotiations, and trade facilitation and logistics.

24. In this regard, supervisors who provided feedback indicated that participants shared the knowledge gained with colleagues in their departments and related ones. Supervisors also indicated they would recommend UNCTAD paragraph 166 courses to other colleagues.

25. Similarly, delegates who attended the short courses indicated that these were useful in deepening their understanding on various topics related to UNCTAD areas of work. The evaluations by Geneva-based delegates indicate that short courses are informative and raise awareness on development, economic and trade topics pertinent to the delegates professional duties. Participants also noted the presentations are comprehensive and interrelated and contribute to the formulation of policy measures. Furthermore, the short courses identify challenges developing countries face and are consistently linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals.

26. In this regard, the efforts of the secretariat should continue to ensure that the courses continue to be delivered with a high degree of quality, at both substantive and organizational levels. The Advisory Body encourages member States to provide all the necessary support to the secretariat for this capacity/building programme, which responds to the needs of delegates, government officials and policymakers, and academics in development policy areas related to trade, finance, investment and technology.

IV. Plans for the remainder of the year, including upcoming regional and short courses

27. The programme will hold another six short courses in the third quarter of 2024 and second quarter of 2025. In total, the UNCTAD secretariat will deliver six short courses, as per the usual mode of operation, on an annual basis.

28. In addition, one regional course is planned for 2024, in Asia and the Pacific. I have taken note of the liquidity crisis facing the United Nations, which led to delivering only two regional courses by the end of 2024, rather than the three planned ones, as envisioned in earlier programme plans.

V. Conclusion

29. First, the Advisory Body notes that such positive feedback on the programme is the result of carefully designed curricula and course delivery, which led to positive impact on the knowledge and skills of policymakers. To this end, the involvement of UNCTAD experts, regional commissions and national experts consistently ensures the high quality of paragraph 166 regional and short courses. Its holistic approach addresses the challenges faced by developing economies in achieving development in general and in trade, investment, finance and technology objectives in particular. In this regard, the Advisory Body extends its appreciation to the member States who host the course in the current cycle: Argentina, Egypt, Kenya, North Macedonia and Pakistan.

30. Second, gratitude goes to the members of the Advisory Body for 2023–2024, namely Algeria, the Dominican Republic, the Gambia, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kenya, North Macedonia and Panama, for their efforts to guide this programme and to the UNCTAD secretariat in the implementation of this important mandate.

31. Finally, on behalf of the Advisory Board, congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Paul Bekkers, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, on his election as the new Chair for 2024–2025 and wishes for full success in the performance of his functions.
