United Nations TD/B/73/4

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Distr.: General
6 July 2026

Original: English

Trade and Development Board
Seventy-third session
Geneva, 14–25 September 2026
Item 8 of the provisional agenda
UNCTAD contribution to the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries

Activities carried out in the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries

Note by the UNCTAD secretariat

Summary

The activities in support of the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2022–2031 described in this background note were carried out by UNCTAD between the third quarter of 2025 and the second quarter of 2026. A non-exhaustive list of activities delivered in the least developed countries is provided, structured around the three pillars of UNCTAD: research and policy analysis, intergovernmental consensus-building and technical cooperation. Key lessons learned and policy recommendations for the way forward are also highlighted.

I. Introduction

1. In 2025, the Geneva Consensus was adopted by member States at the sixteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (TD/561/Add.2). In paragraphs 80.70 and 80.71 of the Geneva Consensus, member States called upon UNCTAD to continue supporting the least developed countries (LDCs), in line with the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2022–2031, including by helping them to effectively utilize preferential market access, enhance productive capacities, improve transport, logistics and trade facilitation, address acute macroeconomic and structural vulnerabilities and facilitate technology uptake. UNCTAD is further mandated to strengthen tailored support to LDCs, including those meeting the criteria for graduation, through a dedicated graduation support programme. In addition, in paragraph 299 of the Doha Programme of Action, United Nations funds, programmes and other multilateral organizations are invited to participate fully in reviews of the Doha Programme of Action, while in paragraph 308, UNCTAD is called on to continue addressing the challenges faced by LDCs.

2. In 2025, LDCs continued to operate in a demanding global environment, characterized by sustained debt pressures, ongoing geopolitical tensions, limited fiscal space and subdued consumer confidence.[1] Despite the headwinds, growth in LDCs is projected to rise to 4.6 per cent in 2026 and to 5.0 per cent in 2027, up from an estimated 3.9 per cent in 2025, but remains below the Sustainable Development Goal target, echoed by the Doha Programme of Action, of 7 per cent of annual gross domestic product growth.[2]

3. Public debt in LDCs reached a nominal value of $774 billion in 2024. Compared with 2023, more than two thirds of LDCs have seen public debt rise. The global exports share of LDCs reached just 1.2 per cent in 2025,[3] registering little change over the previous period, and falls far short of the Sustainable Development Goal target of doubling the LDC share in global trade. Overall, LDCs face a double trade diversification gap across both products and markets that leaves their export earnings more exposed to external shocks.[4] Aggregate foreign direct investment flows to LDCs increased in 2025, thanks to a reversal of negative investment flows in Angola; however, three quarters of LDCs saw stagnant or declining inflows.[5] Official development assistance to LDCs totalled $61.8 billion in real terms in 2024, a 1.5 per cent decline from 2023 levels.[6] Preliminary estimates for 2025 record a further decline in bilateral official development assistance from Development Assistance Committee countries to LDCs, to $23.5 billion, a 25.8 per cent year-on-year decline.[7] Against this background, LDCs will require continued support and global partnership to foster inclusive growth and achieve the targets of the Doha Programme of Action.

[1] UNCTAD, 2025, Tariff disruptions: The impact on least developed countries. Available at https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/osgttinf2025d6_en.pdf.

[2] United Nations, 2026, *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2026* (Sales No. E.26.II.C.1, New York).

[3] See UNCTADstat database, 2026, international trade, data insights, available at https://unctadstat.unctad.org/insights/theme/94.

[4] See UNCTADstat database, 2026, international trade, data insights, available at https://unctadstat.unctad.org/insights/theme/229.

[5] UNCTAD, 2026, Global Investment Trends Monitor, available at https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/diaeiainf2026d1_en.pdf.

[6] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2025, Final OECD statistics on official development assistance (ODA) and other resource flows to developing countries in 2024, available at https://www.oecd.org/en/data/insights/data-explainers/2025/12/final-oecd-statistics-on-oda-and-other-development-finance-flows-in-2024-key-figures-and-trends.html.

[7] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2026. Preliminary official development assistance levels in 2025: Detailed Summary Note, DCD(2026)8, June (Paris).

4. Since the creation of the LDC category in 1971, only eight countries have graduated, bringing the total number of LDCs to 44. Four countries are scheduled to graduate by 2027 (Bangladesh, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Nepal and Solomon Islands), all of which have benefited from UNCTAD support. In this regard, paragraph 80.72 of the Geneva Consensus calls upon the institution to "continue to provide support for the least developed countries that are either in the process of graduation or have recently graduated from the least developed country category to ensure a smooth transition towards their new status and to explore, through research, effective procedures for the consideration of trade-related provisions of General Assembly resolutions for the least developed countries after their graduation".

5. A non-exhaustive overview of the activities carried out by UNCTAD, between July 2025 and June 2026, in support of the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action is provided in this background note. The activities are structured around the three pillars of UNCTAD work: research and analysis (chapter II), intergovernmental consensus-building (chapter III) and technical cooperation (chapter IV). The activities in chapter IV are listed under the six focus areas of the Doha Programme of Action. Lessons learned (chapter V) and recommendations for consideration by the Trade and Development Board (chapter VI) conclude the note.

II. Research and analysis

6. *The Least Developed Countries Report 2025: Are Services the New Path to Structural Transformation?* was launched in February 2026. In the report, the growing role of services in LDC economies is examined, an area where they now account for around half of economic output, driven in part by digital transformation. While services are often presented as a new pathway to prosperity, the report findings indicate that this expansion has not yet delivered broad-based development gains. Service employment remains largely low-skill, and LDCs are marginal participants in high-growth segments, accounting for only 0.16 per cent of global exports of services that are deliverable digitally. The conclusion of the report is that services are not a shortcut to structural transformation. Positive impacts materialize only when services are closely linked to manufacturing, agriculture and other productive sectors, supported by investments in digital infrastructure and skills, and underpinned by active trade and investment policies, regional cooperation and strengthened multilateral support. Based on the report findings, UNCTAD delivered online briefings (on 28 April 2026 and 15 June 2026) to LDC member States on harnessing services that are deliverable digitally for trade and development.

7. **Vulnerability profiles**. UNCTAD held inception missions for the vulnerability profile process in the United Republic of Tanzania (September 2025) and Uganda (September to October 2025), aimed at informing key stakeholders about the importance of the vulnerability profile and the concrete implications of LDC graduation.

8. **Strengthening access of LDCs to major markets and integration into the global economy**. In the *Trade Preferences Outlook 2025*, the trade impacts of changing and uncertain preferential market access for developing countries, including LDCs, were examined, factors that shape these impacts were identified, and how trade preferences can be designed for these countries, including LDCs, to support a more stable and sustainable development path was explored. The report contains an analysis of non-reciprocal trade preferences, such as the Generalized System of Preferences, the African Growth and Opportunity Act and the Everything-but-Arms initiative. LDCs are the main beneficiaries of these diversification schemes, which are offered by 25 economies, that account for about 70 per cent of LDC exports.

9. **Poverty and inequality in LDCs**. UNCTAD published a policy research report, *Towards a Prosperous and Equitable Chad: Economic and Social Policies to Reduce Poverty and Inequality*, in which it is stressed that poverty in Chad is multidimensional, and the factors contributing to its increase are identified. On 5 March 2026, UNCTAD also organized a webinar on disability and poverty in Africa, bringing together over 80 participants from governments, parliaments, international organizations, academia, civil

society and organizations of persons with disabilities, of which 59 per cent were female. The webinar featured a panel discussion with experts in parliamentary legislation, trade policy, labour markets and social protection. UNCTAD further presented the findings at the quarterly meeting of the Inter-Agency Technical Working Group on Trade and Disability Inclusion, held in January 2026.

10. **Digital technology for microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises**. UNCTAD published a technical and statistical report titled *Leveraging Digital Technologies for MSMEs' Integration into Regional Value and Supply Chains: The Cases of Ethiopia, Malawi, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda*. In the report, how digital technologies and innovative financing can enable microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in Africa to integrate more effectively into regional value and supply chains is investigated. The report benefited from in-country data collection and research conducted in partnership with the United Nations Capital Development Fund.

III. Intergovernmental consensus-building

11. **Policy dialogue and technical assistance to LDCs in Geneva**. UNCTAD provided policy advice and technical support to representatives of LDCs in Geneva on the following: preparations for the participation of LDCs in intergovernmental forums of UNCTAD and the World Trade Organization; the process of graduation; the Doha Programme of Action; ongoing and planned UNCTAD activities on LDCs; and the UNCTAD mandate on LDCs in the Geneva Consensus.

12. **Support to the Group of LDCs at the World Trade Organization**. UNCTAD continued to provide support to the Group of LDCs in World Trade Organization negotiations on rules of origin and organized two executive trainings to enable stronger participation by LDCs in multilateral negotiations on rules of origin and trade and support preparations for the 14th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization.[8] In addition, on 16 March 2026, UNCTAD co-organized an information session for LDC trade experts, in Geneva, on the theme of leveraging the multilateral trading system for LDC development. Discussions at the information session were on LDC trade and development challenges and priorities ahead of the 14th Ministerial Conference. UNCTAD contributions focused on smooth graduation support measures and market access and rules of origin. Furthermore, on 5 and 6 May 2026, UNCTAD co-organized executive meetings for the Group of LDCs of the World Trade Organization on negotiating and drafting rules of origin and on strategies and priorities for LDCs following the 14th Ministerial Conference.[9]

13. **Global Digital Compact and digital cooperation**. As part of its support to the Global Digital Compact, UNCTAD contributed to the development and launch of the United Nations Digital Cooperation Portal in collaboration with the Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). UNCTAD co-leads the sub-group on an inclusive digital economy under objective 2 of the Global Digital Compact and chaired the United Nations Group on the Information Society during the 20-year review of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society. These intergovernmental processes contribute to global digital governance frameworks relevant to LDCs.

14. **Commission on Science and Technology for Development**. In 2025, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development established a new multi-stakeholder working group on data governance, in accordance with the Global Digital Compact. The working group, which includes 5 LDCs as members, contributed to the development of a progress report to be submitted to the eighty-first session of the General Assembly. These processes contribute to the development of global data governance frameworks of relevance to LDCs.

---

[8] Organized in partnership with the European University Institute.

[9] Co-organized with the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore.

IV. Technical cooperation

15. In 2025, UNCTAD spent a total of $23.5 million on technical cooperation activities related to LDCs. Of this amount, $14.0 million was spent on national projects, and $9.5 million on LDC participation in regional and interregional projects. Technical cooperation expenditures in support of LDCs in 2025 represented 39.9 per cent of total technical cooperation expenditures. Both the total amount and the share of LDCs in UNCTAD technical cooperation have increased relative to 2024, by $4.6 million and 6.6 percentage points, respectively.[10]

Technical cooperation related to the least developed countries

	(1) Country projects in LDCs	*(2) Participation of LDCs in regional and interregional projects*	*(3) Total expenditures related to LDCs*	*(4) Total UNCTAD technical cooperation expenditures*	*(5) Share of LDC-related expenditures in UNCTAD technical cooperation[a]*
Year		*Millions of United States dollars*			*%*
2020	8.93	6.73	15.66	35.04	44.7
2021	9.87	9.24	19.11	46.78	40.9
2022	14.32	12.39	26.71	54.49	49
2023	13.69	10.26	23.95	57.27	41.8
2024	9.93	8.86	18.79	56.48	33.3
2025	13.97	9.51	23.48	58.89	39.9

[a] Shares in column (5) calculated as a percentage by dividing the totals in column (3) by the amounts in column (4).

A. Investing in people in the least developed countries: Eradicating poverty and building capacity to leave no one behind

16. **Dialogue on poverty, inequality and trade**. UNCTAD and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Geneva Office) convened a high-level dialogue on inequality, poverty and trade in Africa and LDCs on 23 September 2025 with over 60 policymakers, international organizations, academics, trade unions and civil society. Three LDCs (Cambodia, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania) shared national initiatives to reduce poverty and inequality, while organizations such as the International Trade Centre, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, International Labour Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development presented related work. UNCTAD highlighted the role of productive capacities in achieving inclusive growth and lessons from relevant country studies on poverty and inequality reduction. Discussions stressed the importance of reliable statistics, tackling illicit financial flows and strengthening wealth taxation.

17. **Training on trade, poverty and inequality**. On 26 March 2026, UNCTAD delivered a paragraph 166 training course titled "Understanding poverty in developing countries: Trends, drivers and policy options". The course provided delegates with an understanding of how poverty is defined, measured and experienced across developing regions and of the key economic, social and institutional drivers that shape poverty outcomes. The course also provided practical insights into how policies can effectively contribute to poverty reduction in diverse contexts and drew on several LDC case studies.

[10] Final 2025 figures provided by the Budget and Project Finance Section, UNCTAD secretariat.

18. **Supporting women entrepreneurs**. In October 2025, UNCTAD delivered targeted capacity-building and firm-level support to women-led enterprises in Ethiopia in partnership with the Ethiopian Women Traders' Association. A training session held on 7 October 2025, bringing together 20 women entrepreneurs, strengthened participants' understanding of the African Continental Free Trade Area, digital tools for market access and export readiness. Building on this, a pilot firm-level support programme was launched in October 2025 that provides tailored technical assistance to four selected enterprises to address non-tariff barriers, enhance export-readiness and e-trade skills and support their integration into regional markets.

B. Leveraging the power of science, technology and innovation to fight against multidimensional vulnerabilities and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

19. **Science, technology and innovation parks for sustainable development**. In 2025, UNCTAD implemented a technical cooperation project, "Science, technology and innovation parks for sustainable development: Building expertise in policy and practice in selected Asian and African countries", aimed at leveraging science, technology and innovation parks to promote innovation and sustainable development. Mozambique benefited from the development of a national road map containing concrete measures to improve policymaking and management of science, technology and innovation parks.

20. **Digital economy and e-commerce measurement**. UNCTAD advanced international work on measuring electronic commerce (e-commerce) and the digital economy through collaboration with the International Monetary Fund, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, World Trade Organization and other partners. In 2025, UNCTAD delivered in-person training to 131 participants (of which 76 were women) from national statistical offices, central banks and other agencies of 56 countries, including 11 LDCs.

21. **E-commerce strategies**. In 2025, UNCTAD supported Mauritania and Timor-Leste in developing national e-commerce strategies or policies as follow-up actions to e-trade readiness assessments. Furthermore, in the Gambia, UNCTAD conducted an alignment assessment of national legislation with the stabilized text of the Joint Statement Initiative on E-commerce of the World Trade Organization. In addition, in Solomon Islands, UNCTAD supported the drafting of a data privacy and protection bill.

C. Supporting structural transformation as a driver of prosperity

22. **Building productive capacities**. On 16–20 March 2026, UNCTAD organized a high-level national, policy-level workshop on fostering productive capacities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for economic diversification, resilience and inclusive growth and a national capacity-building training on statistical, methodological and computational aspects of the productive capacities index, as well as consultations with government experts, academia and the private sector on building national productive capacities and advancing structural transformation and economic diversification.

23. **Industrial policy formulation**. Under the project, "Supporting structural economic progress towards and beyond graduation from least developed country status", funded through the United Nations Development Account, UNCTAD provided targeted advisory services to support industrial policy formulation and implementation. In Zambia, UNCTAD delivered advisory support to update the National Industrial Policy (2018) and develop a strategy to promote electric vehicles, electric vehicle batteries and key precursors. Support also included an industrial policy training workshop held in Lusaka on 29–30 May 2025, training 20 policymakers (8 women) in collaboration with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce of Zambia, UNIDO and African industrial policy scholars. UNCTAD also contributed to a three-day policy engagement on strategic product development, in support of participatory assessments of feasible value addition and diversification opportunities. Advisory services commenced in Cambodia to update the Industrial Development Policy

2015–2025 and, in Senegal, to conduct a critical review of the Industrialization Strategy of Senegal (2021–2035), in alignment with national priorities.

24. **Integration of small and medium-sized enterprises into regional value chains**. Under the project, "Enhancing the capacity of African vulnerable countries in adopting policy incentives and innovative instruments for the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises in regional value chains under the African Continental Free Trade Area", UNCTAD provided targeted support to Benin, the Central African Republic, Togo and Uganda. A national consultation workshop held in Uganda, in February 2025, launched project activities, examined opportunities and constraints facing small and medium-sized enterprises in regional trade, and informed ongoing analytical work on digital technologies, innovative financing and policy incentives to strengthen the integration of small and medium-sized enterprises into value chains. In the Central African Republic, UNCTAD finalized a national technical cooperation report identifying high potential regional value chains, in sectors such as cotton, timber, agribusiness and child nutrition products, and convened a national validation workshop in Bangui in May 2025. In Benin and Togo, in March 2026, UNCTAD delivered a four-day regional capacity-building programme using the Empretec methodology for small and medium-sized enterprises in agroprocessing, which strengthened the competitiveness and readiness of firms to integrate into regional value chains. Early evaluations indicated measurable improvements in participants' knowledge and skills. The training covered entrepreneurial competencies, meeting quality standards, access to finance and investment readiness to support the expansion of small and medium-sized enterprises into regional markets.

25. **My Africa Cross Border Trade Assistant application**. Also under the above-mentioned project, in collaboration with the United Nations International Computing Centre, UNCTAD developed My Africa Cross Border Trade Assistant ("MyACTA"), a pilot mobile application to modernize the monitoring and analysis of informal cross-border trade, support traders' access to market information and finance and strengthen evidence-based policymaking. In 2025–2026, UNCTAD advanced pilot testing through technical collaboration with the Uganda Bureau of Statistics and in-country pilots, including introducing the application to small and medium-sized enterprises in Benin and Togo, to better capture trader behaviour, address non-tariff barriers and improve data on informal cross-border trade across Africa.

26. **Entrepreneurship for sustainable development**. In December 2025, UNCTAD implemented the first Empretec LogiHub Launchpad workshop in Africa, focused on early-stage entrepreneurs in smart logistics.[11] The initiative attracted strong interest; ultimately, over 300 applicants and 48 participants were trained.

27. **Blue economy**. In November 2025, UNCTAD commenced implementation of the "Mainstreaming climate-resilient blue economy in the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem region (BCLME IV)" project, whose beneficiaries include Angola. The project is financed by the Global Environment Facility and implemented in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme, the Benguela Current Commission Secretariat and other partners. It seeks to support the transition to a climate-resilient blue economy through strengthened policy and regulatory frameworks, enhanced institutional and private sector capacities, development of sustainable financing mechanisms for blue economy investments and promotion of blue carbon finance at the national and regional levels.

28. **Critical minerals.** UNCTAD has advanced the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action through targeted technical cooperation that translates structural transformation priorities into quantified, country-level investment and diversification pathways. Under a project on critical energy transition minerals in Southern Africa, rapid assessments in Madagascar and Zambia identified concrete portfolios of opportunities for value addition and diversification within and beyond mineral value chains.

[11] Co-organized with LEARN Logistics by Kühne Foundation, Enterprise Uganda and the Empretec Centre Uganda.

D. Enhancing international trade of least developed countries and regional integration

29. **Eliminating non-tariff barriers in the African Continental Free Trade Area**. UNCTAD actively supports the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area. It has worked closely with member States to develop the official non-tariff barriers reporting, monitoring and elimination tool of the African Continental Free Trade Area.[12] In 2025, a smartphone application was introduced to improve accessibility further. Through these tools, private-sector actors, including MSMEs, informal traders and women and youth entrepreneurs, can easily report the barriers they encounter in intra-African trade. The relevant countries then address complaints through designated national focal points. Recognizing that awareness among the private sector is essential, UNCTAD also supports national initiatives, through its expertise, to promote the effective use of the tool.

30. **Supporting interregional integration among developing countries**. UNCTAD supported trade integration among developing countries in Asia, Africa and the Americas through the Global System of Trade Preferences among Developing Countries, which includes 7 LDCs as participants. Under this framework, UNCTAD hosted the thirty-third meeting of the Committee of Participants of the Global System of Trade Preferences, as well as a ministerial-level meeting and the South–South Cooperation Forum on the margins of the sixteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. These events aimed at discussing current efforts towards trade integration among countries that participate in the Global System of Trade Preferences and opportunities for deeper, more effective trade cooperation. A technical note on South–South trade in agriculture, "The potential of the Global System of Trade Preferences: The case of agricultural trade", was also released.

31. **Leveraging World Trade Organization accession**. UNCTAD continued to strengthen technical support to developing countries, during and after their accession to the World Trade Organization, advocating the need for full implementation of the guidelines[13] on facilitation and acceleration of LDC accession of the General Council of the World Trade Organization. UNCTAD provides advisory and policy support to improve the capacity of beneficiaries for trade policy formulation, particularly in the alignment of institutional and regulatory frameworks with the main General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and World Trade Organization multilateral agreements and disciplines. UNCTAD supported Ethiopia in the preparation of its revised offer on specific market access in key and sensitive services sectors, such as the financial and telecommunications sectors. In addition, UNCTAD assistance to the Comoros included support for a national post-accession strategic action plan, spanning several priority areas and activities related to trade policy tools and trade negotiations.

32. **Border agency cooperation and transit coordination**. UNCTAD implemented a programme on national transit coordinators to support the implementation of article 11 of the Agreement on Trade Facilitation of the World Trade Organization. In 2025, a global capacity-building course engaged over 585 participants from the public and private sectors, including 169 participants from 30 LDCs. Complementary workshops supported the development of national terms of reference and workplans and raised awareness on transit coordination and notification requirements.

33. **Sustainable and resilient transport and logistics systems**. UNCTAD provided technical assistance and capacity-building to strengthen transport and trade logistics systems across maritime transport and multimodal corridors. Activities included work on maritime risk management, sustainable freight transport, corridor performance and financing solutions, such as public–private partnerships, with relevance for improving connectivity and resilience in LDCs.

[12] See https://tradebarriers.africa.

[13] World Trade Organization, General Council, decisions WT/L/508 (2002) and WT/L/508/Add.1 (2012).

34. **Train for Trade Programme**. During the reporting period, 882 participants from LDCs attended Train for Trade training activities and the Train for Trade port management programme alone trained 166 port professionals from LDCs. The programme supports port communities in improving efficiency and promoting competitive and sustainable port operations, with a focus on adaptation of ports to evolving energy and digital landscapes.

35. **Customs automation**. As of the first quarter of 2026, 38 of the 44 LDCs were operating or implementing the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) to advance customs automation and trade facilitation. Country-specific assistance delivered concrete results. In Afghanistan, enhancements to the ASYCUDA exemption system enabled the digital processing of humanitarian aid, reducing physical documentation for exemption consignments by 93 per cent, while six capacity-building workshops trained 92 MSME staff, 68 per cent of whom were women. In Burundi, support focused on implementation and upgrading of an ASYCUDA-based national single window, while in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, new ASYCUDA World modules, including dynamic selectivity, delay penalty and transit, were deployed. Djibouti achieved 100 per cent paperless customs clearance, and Haiti and the Lao People's Democratic Republic received support for ASYCUDA upgrades and single window components. Liberia, Rwanda, Solomon Islands and Zambia benefited from ASYCUDA World upgrades and enhanced trade and transit tools, while Madagascar implemented an electronic permit system called eCITES to monitor trade in endangered species.

36. By early 2026, Burundi, the Comoros, Rwanda, Timor-Leste and Uganda were running or implementing ASYCUDA-based national single windows, which strengthened inter-agency coordination, transparency and procedural efficiency. In Kiribati, a single window blueprint was delivered, providing strategic guidance aligned with national and international standards, while in Timor-Leste, technical assistance ensured interoperability with the single window of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), supporting the accession of the country to ASEAN in October 2025.

37. UNCTAD signed a project of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa in 2025, funded by the European Union, to establish a regional transit solution. In West Africa, ASYCUDA regional transit solutions were implemented across six countries of the Economic Community of West African States that cover eight key corridors, including Abidjan–Ouagadougou and Accra–Niamey. The Niger expanded ASYCUDA World to a new border office and implemented the Interconnected System for the Management of Goods in Transit along major transit routes. Specialized tools were also deployed, including an exemption web reporting system for United Nations agencies in Afghanistan, a specialized module automating data collection and indicator generation for time release studies (known as ASYTRS) in Guinea, and a pilot of ASYCUDA World at customs headquarters in Eritrea in December 2025.

38. **Training on rules of origin**. On 16 and 17 March 2026, UNCTAD delivered a two-day executive training on rules of origin in Cambodia (Phnom Penh), co-organized with the Asian Development Bank. The training covered advanced technical issues, including ad valorem and net cost calculations under free trade areas, treatment of remanufactured and recycled goods, and full cumulation under the ASEAN–Australia–New Zealand Free Trade Area and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

39. **Trade and gender**. The online UNCTAD trade and gender course equips policymakers and stakeholders with the tools to better integrate gender considerations into trade policy and implementation. In addition, UNCTAD has contributed analytical work on gender and critical minerals in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, highlighting gender-specific challenges and opportunities in extractive sectors that are central to structural transformation in LDCs. Overall, without targeted gender-responsive policies, the risk is that the benefits of critical minerals trade reinforce existing inequalities.

40. **Trade analysis**. UNCTAD has been working on upgrading national trade information portals in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu with information technology systems, through integration with the non-tariff measures database of the Trade Analysis and Information System. UNCTAD also conducted the first-ever data collection on non-tariff measures in Kiribati and Tuvalu to update the content of the portals. An online

training course on non-tariff measures and the Pacific was rolled out across all three LDCs, and an additional in-person workshop was held in Kiribati. UNCTAD also prepared an export guide focused on six Pacific products with export potential to the European Union.

41. **Competition and consumer policies**. In 2025, UNCTAD continued to support four LDCs, namely, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Timor-Leste, under the project, "Technical assistance and capacity-building in competition and consumer protection for African Portuguese-speaking developing countries and Timor-Leste". UNCTAD provided advisory services to the competition implementation committee of Guinea-Bissau and supported Timor-Leste in drafting the country's first competition law. UNCTAD support was key to the adoption of the draft law in February 2025 by Council of Ministers, followed by its unanimous approval by the National Parliament in March 2026.

42. **Voluntary peer review of consumer protection law and policy**. The voluntary peer review of Angola was prepared and disseminated in Luanda in October 2025. UNCTAD also participated in a capacity-building workshop on investigation techniques for the competition authorities of Angola, Cabo Verde and Mozambique, hosted by Angola. The event facilitated the exchange of best practices and experiences on competition law and policy among participants and experts from Brazil, Portugal, UNCTAD and the European Commission. It helped raise awareness of competition officials on the Protocol on Competition Policy to the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area.

E. Addressing climate change, environmental degradation, recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and building resilience against future shocks for risk-informed sustainable development

43. **Capital markets and sustainable investment.** UNCTAD deepened its work on responsible investment through several channels, particularly the activities of the platform of the Sustainable Stock Exchanges Initiative. In 2025, membership grew to 138 exchanges, including six LDCs (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Rwanda, Somalia, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda). Additionally, in 2025, the Sustainable Stock Exchanges Academy provided technical assistance and market education to Bangladesh and Somalia on the adoption and implementation of sustainability reporting standards, and to Cambodia on gender equality in capital markets.

44. **Capacity-building on climate finance**. In 2025, UNCTAD held training workshops for developing country negotiators, including those from the Gambia and Mali, on climate finance options. This capacity-building work supports the implementation of the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. As mandated by the Geneva Consensus, UNCTAD support aims at assisting developing countries to leverage climate finance and contribute to the attainment of climate goals, address economic vulnerabilities and build sustainable, productive capacities resilient to shocks caused by climate change and extreme weather events.

45. **Trade and environment**. Through the sustainable manufacturing and environmental pollution programme, LDCs are supported in transitioning towards cleaner, more competitive and more resilient industrial development. In participating LDCs, including Ethiopia, Nepal and Uganda, the programme has contributed to national efforts in the areas of waste management, treatment of wastewater, improvement of textile traceability, development of biodegradable substitutes, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and discussions on standards, thereby translating Doha Programme of Action objectives into concrete action on sustainable industrialization and pollution reduction.

46. **External resource mobilization**. Under United Nations Development Account project 2225D, "Mobilizing external financial resources beyond coronavirus disease (COVID-19) for greener, more equal and sustainable development in selected vulnerable SIDS in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean", and in partnership with the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, UNCTAD supported the Comoros in the mobilization of affordable external financing aligned with climate priorities and debt sustainability. Through the project, an

external financial strategy and road map were produced and validated nationally and, at a regional workshop, lessons learned were shared, and the relevance of the approach for non-beneficiary countries was demonstrated.

47. **Accounting**. UNCTAD continued to support countries in strengthening sustainability reporting infrastructures through expanded regional partnerships, experience-sharing, capacity-building workshops and access to guidance, training materials and tools. In 2025, activities supported 17 LDCs in aligning national frameworks with global sustainability reporting standards. UNCTAD is also implementing the United Nations Development Account project, “Strengthening sustainability reporting to foster sustainable finance and investment in selected developing countries in Asia and Latin America”, which aims at enhancing regulatory, institutional and human capacities to promote sustainable finance, enterprise sustainability and investment in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, and including demand for standards of the International Sustainability Standards Board. Cambodia is a beneficiary country, for which the accounting and auditing regulator serves as the national focal point. Project activities were launched on 23 April 2026 and will be followed by a national assessment and targeted capacity-building. In Uganda, UNCTAD provided technical support to the country’s Informality Management for Compliance and Revenue Mobilization Programme, advancing pilot evaluations, strengthening institutional coordination and informing a national roll-out to support enterprise formalization and development.

F. Mobilizing international solidarity, reinvigorated global partnerships and innovative tools: Towards sustainable graduation

48. **Combating illicit financial flows**. Under the project, “Statistical measurement of tax and commercial illicit financial flows to enable more targeted policy action”, the Ministry of Finance and National Planning in Zambia, in collaboration with UNCTAD and key national institutions, such as the Zambia Revenue Authority and Financial Intelligence Centre, convened a workshop in June 2025 for 30 policymakers, experts and stakeholders, to analyse and discuss targeted policy options aimed at curbing tax and commercial illicit financial flows, based on the measurement results.

49. In addition, UNCTAD, the Economic Commission for Africa, other regional commissions and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime are jointly implementing the project, “Statistical measurement of tax and commercial illicit financial flows to enable more targeted policy action”, funded through the United Nations Development Account. Under the project, a policy workshop was organized in December 2025 in Ouagadougou, in collaboration with the National Institute for Statistics and Demography of Burkina Faso. The workshop trained a national policy technical working group on the “triple A” (assess, analyse, apply) policy framework for illicit financial flows and resulted in the preparation of an action plan that outlines further analyses of tax and commercial illicit financial flows and corresponding policy options. In January 2026, UNCTAD and the National Agency of Statistics and Demography of Senegal convened a similar workshop in Dakar, to train the country’s technical working group and facilitate discussions on data-driven policy responses to curb illicit financial flows.

50. **Investment policies.** At the request of the Commission of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa, UNCTAD prepared a regional investment policy review that encompassed six member States, including the Central African Republic and Chad, and held a regional validation workshop in October 2025. In Bangladesh, a fact-finding mission in October 2025 supported the preparation of an investment policy review implementation report, validated progress on the recommendations from 2013 and assessed recent developments in view of the country’s scheduled graduation from LDC status in November 2026. UNCTAD presented preliminary findings, demonstrated a live implementation matrix and delivered capacity-building for the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority on investment policy and negotiations. The implementation report was published in December 2025. In Chad, UNCTAD provided targeted training on investment promotion and special economic zones to 10 policymakers of the Special Economic Zones Administration Agency of Chad.

51. **International investment agreements**. In 2025, UNCTAD assisted the League of Arab States, including 6 LDC members,[14] during the third meeting of the Special Committee on International Investment Agreements of the League of Arab States, and provided research inputs, policy guidance and written comments to inform negotiations on a draft regional international investment agreement. UNCTAD also supported the secretariat of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, including 13 LDCs, in modernizing the Common Investment Area to align with continental frameworks and international best practices. Revisions to a draft agreement were advanced, strengthening coherence with African Continental Free Trade Area processes and promoting modern international investment agreement approaches that preserve policy space, enhance transparency and reduce dispute risks. On 3 June 2026, UNCTAD delivered a capacity-building webinar for investment policymakers of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and promotion agencies to support implementation of a reformed framework. Furthermore, on 25 September 2025, UNCTAD conducted a webinar, "Maximizing the developmental potential of investment facilitation through international agreements", for government officials from the United Republic of Tanzania. Attended by 53 participants (including 17 women), the webinar provided guidance on developing and implementing international investment agreement reform in line with sustainable development objectives and national priorities. It covered issues related to investment facilitation in international investment agreements, the core content and development impact of the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement of the World Trade Organization and presented findings of an UNCTAD review of the international investment agreement network of the United Republic of Tanzania, completed in June 2025.

52. **Investment promotion**. UNCTAD has been working on a Development Account-funded project, "Attracting finance and investment for the energy transition in Africa", in five African countries, including two LDCs (Ethiopia and Malawi). The project aims at strengthening capacity in the promotion and facilitation of investments that contribute to the energy transition. In partnership with the Ethiopian Investment Commission, UNCTAD organized a capacity-building workshop on 4 and 5 December 2025, in Addis Ababa, on the bankability of energy transition projects. The workshop was attended by 38 participants, including 8 women; 96 per cent of participants found the workshop useful or very useful. UNCTAD also organized events at the inaugural Future Investment Conference, held on 7 September 2025 in Xiamen, China. One event addressed strategic partnerships for Africa's energy transition, showcasing country investments, and a high-level panel focused on attracting private investment in Africa's energy transition. Officials from Ethiopia and Malawi were supported through capacity-building on pitching projects and facilitated engagement with investors, including through a dedicated exhibition area. In February 2026, training on the bankability of energy transition projects was delivered in Malawi. The investment guide to Malawi was updated in 2025.[15]

53. **Assistance to national LDC graduation processes**. On 29 and 30 September 2025, UNCTAD actively participated in a national workshop on enhancing the trade resilience of Rwanda. The Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and the Ministry of Trade and Industry of Rwanda jointly organized the event. UNCTAD delivered a presentation highlighting trade vulnerabilities and opportunities in the context of the potential graduation of Rwanda from LDC status. In addition, from 17 to 18 September 2025, UNCTAD and UNIDO, in collaboration with the Ministry of the Economy, Planning and Cooperation of Senegal, trained 20 policymakers (7 women) in support of graduation with momentum. The Government of Senegal requested that UNCTAD provide advisory services on diagnosing the country's industrial policy. Furthermore, at the request of the Government of Cambodia, UNCTAD is providing technical assistance through a policy study on potential impacts from the country's planned graduation from LDC status in December 2029.

[14] Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

[15] See https://www.theiguides.org/countries.

54. **Business facilitation**. UNCTAD continues to support business facilitation reforms across several LDCs through targeted digital solutions. In Angola, UNCTAD is supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Investment Facilitation Agreement, funded by the European Union, including the simplification and digitalization of procedures for investors through prototype services. In the Gambia and Lesotho, UNCTAD developed digital single windows for business and licensing registration, simplifying and digitizing key procedures such as company incorporation, licensing and permits. In Benin, UNCTAD and the Agency for the Promotion of Investments and Exports upgraded the investment single window to enable online compliance and certification. In Mali, UNCTAD supported the development of a digital licensing platform for pharmaceutical commercialization, to enable online authorization for import, distribution and local production.

55. **Statistics on international trade**. A six-week online course on statistics on international trade in services, held from September to November 2025, engaged 1,689 participants, including 427 participants from LDCs. Furthermore, in March 2026, Train for Trade launched the six-week online course "International merchandise trade statistics". Among 1,123 participants, 289 were from LDCs. The course focused on identifying appropriate data sources, establishing data collection systems and improving statistical compilation processes.

56. **Food Stockholding Mechanism for LDCs**. UNCTAD is a member of an expert group, coordinated by Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, that is working on the creation of the Food Stockholding Mechanism for LDCs, a specific deliverable of the Doha Programme of Action. UNCTAD has contributed inputs, revised and commented on research carried out by the expert group, prepared technical presentations and contributed to providing expert guidance that will shape the final feasibility study. UNCTAD will continue to support the work of the expert group and its activities and deliverables during the 2026–2027 cycle.

57. **Follow-up and review of the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action.** UNCTAD participated actively in the proceedings of a meeting of the inter-agency consultative group on LDCs on the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action. UNCTAD also participated in the Asia–Pacific ministerial midterm review, held in Cambodia from 31 March to 1 April 2026, and delivered a keynote address for a session that examined strategies to accelerate structural transformation by shifting from low-value activities to higher productivity and higher value added sectors

V. Lessons learned

58. In the fourth year of implementation of the Doha Programme of Action, LDCs continued to face significant development challenges. Economic growth remained subdued, below the 7 per cent target of the Programme, reflecting persistent structural constraints. Limited productive capacities, weak structural transformation and export diversification and inadequate infrastructure continue to constrain development prospects. Rising debt vulnerabilities, global trade tensions and a difficult external financing environment, including the risk of declining official development assistance, have further compounded these long-standing challenges.

59. Against this backdrop, UNCTAD continued in 2025 and 2026 to play a central role in supporting LDCs to advance implementation of the Doha Programme of Action, in line with the priorities reaffirmed in the Geneva Consensus. UNCTAD delivered targeted, demand-driven and results-oriented support to address key structural vulnerabilities that limit the effective integration of LDCs into the global economy. Through its analytical work, intergovernmental deliberations and technical cooperation, UNCTAD supported LDCs in strengthening trade integration, building productive capacities, promoting economic diversification and advancing structural transformation.

60. However, the scale, complexity and multidimensional nature of the challenges facing LDCs underscore the need for strengthened collective action and significantly scaled-up international support. Continued exposure to economic volatility, climate-related shocks and persistent capacity gaps highlights the importance of effective delivery of commitments under the Doha Programme of Action. This is particularly critical for commitments related to supporting graduation processes and strengthening resilience before, during and after graduation. Achieving these objectives will require reinforced partnerships, enhanced policy coherence and a substantial increase in sustained and predictable financial support from bilateral and multilateral partners, including through Sustainable Development Goal stimulus and improved access to finance.

61. UNCTAD assistance to LDCs remains largely dependent on extrabudgetary resources. Insufficient and unpredictable funding, therefore, poses a risk to the continuity, scope and effectiveness of support, including assistance aimed at addressing post-graduation vulnerabilities. Securing a more stable and predictable extrabudgetary funding base is essential to safeguarding development gains and enabling UNCTAD to respond effectively to the evolving priorities of LDCs.

62. Key lessons from the reporting period reaffirm the effectiveness of UNCTAD technical assistance in strengthening policymaking capacities in LDCs. High-level political ownership, strong engagement by relevant ministries and inclusive stakeholder engagement have proven critical to the achievement of sustainable outcomes. Continued demand from LDCs across a wide range of areas underscores both the relevance of UNCTAD support and the need for sustained resources to scale up assistance in pursuit of the objectives of the Doha Programme of Action.

VI. Recommendations

63. The Trade and Development Board may wish to consider the following actions:

(a) **Call upon the international community** to fully and consistently implement all internationally agreed commitments relevant to LDCs, while ensuring coherence and the effective monitoring of delivery on these commitments.

(b) **Urge donor countries and international financial institutions** to significantly scale up concessional and grant-based financing for LDCs, to enable essential investments in sustainable development, climate adaptation, resilience and structural economic transformation.

(c) **Reaffirm the call for all countries** to systematically consider the specific vulnerabilities and constraints of LDCs in trade, finance and investment, including through the preservation and enhancement of preferential market access, avoidance of trade-restrictive measures and support for rules that facilitate LDC integration into global and regional value chains.

(d) **Encourage strengthened technical assistance and capacity-building** to address the interlinkages between trade, poverty and employment creation, with a view to enhancing inclusive growth, expanding fiscal space and increasing the poverty reduction impact of economic growth in LDCs.

(e) **Highlight the importance of resilience-building in LDCs**, including through the development of productive capacities, economic diversification, climate-resilient infrastructure and strengthened domestic resource mobilization, and encourage development partners to provide sustained support aligned with national development strategies.

(f) **Re-emphasize the call to donor countries** to meet or exceed the target of allocating at least 0.2 per cent of gross national income as official development assistance to LDCs and to safeguard this commitment from future reductions, particularly in periods of global fiscal consolidation.

(g) **Emphasize the need for the United Nations system** to continue delivery of coordinated, targeted and demand-driven support to LDCs, including during and after graduation, to address persistent vulnerabilities and ensure sustainable development gains.

(h) **Appeal for increased contributions** to the United Nations trust fund for the least developed countries and thus enable UNCTAD to respond effectively to the growing demand for technical assistance and to scale up support in priority areas aligned with the Doha Programme of Action.