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Synthesis of the five subprogramme evaluations and update on the status of implementation of recommendations

I. Introduction

1.   The global objective of UNCTAD is "to assist developing countries, especially least developed countries, and countries with economies in transition to integrate beneficially into the global economy". [1] Up until the 2018–2019 biennium, biennial strategic frameworks[2] translate and operationalize the overall objective, and UNCTAD mandates, into five interrelated specialized subprogrammes: globalization, interdependence and development (subprogramme 1), investment and enterprise (subprogramme 2), international trade (subprogramme 3), technology and logistics (subprogramme 4) and Africa, least developed countries and special programmes (subprogramme 5).

2.   In line with the decision 515 (LIX) of the Trade and Development Board at its fifty-ninth session regarding measures to strengthen results-based management and the evaluation of programmes of work, the Working Party on the Strategic Framework and the Programme Budget agreed at its sixty-third session to a trial implementation of the approach of ensuring the systematic evaluations of UNCTAD subprogrammes.

3.   Accordingly, in line with the decision from its sixty-third session, the Working Party considered the external evaluation of subprogramme 1 in 2013, subprogramme 2 in 2014, subprogramme 3 in 2015, subprogramme 4 in 2017 and subprogramme 5 in 2018.

4.   At its seventy-sixth session, the Working Party requested that the secretariat present a review of the subprogramme evaluations for consideration at its seventy-eighth session in September 2019, including an update on the status of implementation of recommendations from the five subprogramme evaluations.[3]

5.   This synthesis report was produced by the UNCTAD Evaluation and Monitoring Unit, and is aimed at strengthening the use of evaluations and the feedback loop into the programme cycle, by extracting key findings and lessons learned from the five evaluations and extrapolating, overall, whether and how the UNCTAD strategic framework was effective as a programming tool in support of a greater development contribution by the organization. Thus, this report primarily promotes learning and collective reflection, and can play a role in contributing to improving strategic and operational performance.

A. Scope

6.   The scope of the present synthesis report is limited to a desk review of the five evaluations. The synthesis is based on an analysis of the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the five evaluations in order to extract key findings and lessons learned from the evaluations. Accordingly, it has involved drawing out similarities and comparisons across the evaluations and has not involved additional data collection.

7.   Chapter III of this report focuses on the evaluation recommendations. An analysis was undertaken to identify the main themes of the recommendations and their frequency. Subsequently, the report presents the status of implementation of recommendations.

8.   Finally, the synthesis report reveals some conclusions and lessons learned from the pilot approach of evaluating subprogrammes, which forms a baseline for the next cycle of subprogramme evaluations for the period 2021–2026.

B. Method

9.   The analysis and conclusions contained in the report are based on a content analysis of all five evaluation reports, including the supporting materials of the evaluations and management responses.

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[1] A/74/6 (Sect. 12).
[2] Shifting to annual programme plans and budgets from 2020.
[3] TD/B/WP/293, chap. 1, sect. A.

10.   With regard to the content analysis, the synthesis used a systematic review approach to ensure that the findings were accurate, methodologically sound, comprehensive and unbiased. Key elements of this approach include three steps: (a) coding of the evaluation texts into common themes; (b) separating data for analysis; and (c) data interpretation. The analysis was first anchored on the main evaluation criteria [4] used: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and human rights and gender mainstreaming. Common findings and themes within each of these categories were then identified.

11.   With regard to the evaluation recommendations, a quantitative analysis relied on the classification of recommendations by specific categories in accordance with established key words, while a qualitative analysis involved interpretation of information, definition of key words and building of categories. Each recommendation was coded with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 3 categories that represented the closest essence of the recommendation. Categories were counted and analysed to determine the frequency of each category and its percentual dominance.

12.   The analysis also included calculations of the implementation rates of recommendations, based on the information provided by UNCTAD divisions through templates developed for this purpose.

C.   Limitation

13.   The widely accepted criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and human rights and gender are usually applied to evaluations conducted at UNCTAD, consistent with the *Norms and Standards for Evaluation* of the United Nations Evaluation Group. However, in efforts to customize each evaluation and in view of feasibility considerations at the time of conducting each evaluation, there was uneven application of the criteria across the five evaluations. The table below shows the criteria addressed by each evaluation.

14.   This means that data for certain criteria are not available from certain evaluations. Nonetheless, unambiguous conclusions can be drawn from the data available.

Criteria addressed by each evaluation

	Relevance	Effectiveness, including indications of impact	Efficiency	Sustainability	Gender and human rights	Partnerships[c]
Evaluation of subprogramme 1	✓	✓	✓		[a]	
Evaluation of subprogramme 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Evaluation of subprogramme 3	✓	✓	✓		[b]	
Evaluation of subprogramme 4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Evaluation of subprogramme 5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

  [a]   The evaluation notes that "implementation of [the] UNCTAD gender strategy within the subprogramme is still in its early days and could not yet be evaluated". The UNCTAD strategy to mainstream gender in its work was approved by the Secretary-General in December 2011.
  [b]   Although the evaluation of subprogramme 3 did not include an evaluation criterion on gender equality, it examined contributions to gender objectives by the Trade and Gender Section that falls under the UNCTAD Division on International Trade and Commodities, which has substantive responsibility for the implementation of subprogramme 3.
  [c]   Standalone criteria introduced by the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit since 2017; addressed within the efficiency criteria in earlier evaluations.

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  [4] Evaluation criteria used by members of the United Nations Evaluation Group.

II. Synthesis of key messages from the evaluations

15. This chapter of the report analyses the findings and conclusions of the five evaluations. It is presented in five sections, covering each of the main evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, including impact, sustainability, efficiency, and human rights and gender equality.

A. Relevance

> **Finding 1. There is convergence from across the five evaluations that UNCTAD programmes of work under each subprogramme are well aligned to the secretariat's mandates, and there is evidence that UNCTAD products meet the needs of its target constituents, some better than others. The relevance of technical assistance interventions in particular was rated highly, although the scale of some activities and responsiveness to requests could be addressed, an issue linked also to the availability of extrabudgetary resources.**

16. Broadly, for each evaluation, relevance was assessed with regard to: (a) alignment of subprogramme activities with the organizational mandates, including internationally agreed development goals; (b) the extent to which each subprogramme was meeting the needs of its constituencies; and (c) the UNCTAD value proposition or comparative advantage.

17. All five evaluations found that UNCTAD work across its subprogrammes has been relevant and responsive to the needs of stakeholders, in addition to being clearly aligned to the mandates of the organization. For the period covered by the evaluations (2008–2018), mandates, such as the Accra Accord, the Doha Mandate and the Nairobi Maafikiano, formed the basis of the secretariat's work programme, and alignment of each subprogramme of work with the objectives elaborated under these mandates was recognized across the five evaluations.

18. With regard to 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the evaluation of subprogramme 5 noted that "the work of UNCTAD contributes to the achievement of 52 targets under 10 of the Goals" and that the work under this subprogramme is "crucial to the success of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". While also recognizing the relevance of UNCTAD work in support of the 2030 Agenda, the evaluation of subprogramme 4 suggested that there is further scope for improving alignment of certain work programmes in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.

19. Evidence and good examples are presented in the evaluations that UNCTAD is meeting the needs of its constituents under the research and analysis and consensus-building pillars. For example, the evaluation of subprogramme 4 observed that 81 per cent of delegates and attendees at sessions of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development who responded to their survey agreed that discussions were useful and relevant to national needs, and relevant in supporting their Governments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, while the vulnerability profiles produced under subprogramme 5 feed into the discussions at the Committee for Development Policy[5] on graduation from the least developed country category.

20. To better meet the needs of stakeholders under these pillars, elements identified include calls to improve linkage of research outputs to consensus-building platforms, to broaden coverage and discussions on policy options for development in parliamentary documents and publications, and to adapt research outputs to achieve greater country buy-in. On the last point, for instance, the evaluation of subprogramme 1 observes that the *Trade and Development Report* holds the key to "reignite substantive discussions on globalization and development concerns in the intergovernmental process" and "has to become more relevant to all member States".

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[5] The Committee for Development Policy is a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council.

21. High relevance of technical assistance interventions was indicated by survey respondents and project evaluations considered by the subprogramme evaluations. For instance, a survey conducted for the evaluation of subprogramme 2 found that 93 per cent of respondents from the least developed countries, small island developing States, landlocked developing countries and other structurally weak, vulnerable and small economies indicate that technical assistance implemented under this subprogramme is "well adapted to their particular situation and needs".

22. Two evaluations (subprogramme 3 and subprogramme 4) reported that UNCTAD has found, and serves, its niche offerings well, including in the areas of competition policy, non-tariff measures and strengthening of national trade facilitation committees. For instance, stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation of subprogramme 3 noted that UNCTAD provides valuable support to the least developed countries and developing countries in pre-accession and accession stages in ways that others cannot.

23. While recognizing that the capacity for subprogrammes to fully meet the needs of their stakeholders with regard to technical assistance is of course dependent to a large extent on the availability of extrabudgetary resources, the evaluation of subprogramme 5 noted, however, that though quality and relevance of the outputs produced under the subprogramme is undoubted, its programme portfolio could be rebalanced towards increased technical cooperation, in order to better meet the needs and expectations of its stakeholders.

24. On the comparative advantage of UNCTAD, one evaluation noted that the UNCTAD mandate from the General Assembly for the integrated treatment of globalization and development issues surrounding trade, finance, investment and technology is unique, and remains a critical element for its value added contributions. In particular, UNCTAD was found to have served its function as a credible think tank, and three of the evaluations (subprogramme 1, subprogramme 3 and subprogramme 5) noted that the UNCTAD research and analysis pillar is its principal source of comparative advantage.

B. Effectiveness, including impact

Finding 2. The evaluations found that each subprogramme was effective in delivering its planned outputs in the biennial programme plan, and achieving the planned outcomes contained in its logical framework. Through these, there is evidence that UNCTAD has made substantive contributions across its work streams in support of the organizational objective. Stakeholders were generally positive with regard to UNCTAD products, although some variations in utility across outputs were observed.

Finding 3. Enabling factors for improved results include improving internal and external coordination and collaboration, improving outreach, communications and resource mobilization strategies, and improving results-based management in the secretariat.

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25. Effectiveness was assessed in relation to: (a) the extent each subprogramme was effective in achieving the planned outcomes contained in its logical framework; and (b) indications of actual or potential impact. In addition, each evaluation sought to identify enabling and limiting factors for results.

26. While each evaluation attempted to identify indications of impact, evaluability assessments prior to the evaluation already noted that attribution of outcomes and impact of UNCTAD's normative work posed a challenge, coupled with weaknesses in the secretariat's results-based management framework, including the results framework for each subprogramme included in the biennial programme plans. These results frameworks did not facilitate assessments of impact as the frameworks and reporting were largely outputs-focused. Budgetary constraints for the conduct of each evaluation were also a limitation. Nonetheless, the evaluations sought to identify impact through, for instance,

clarifying understanding of the pathways and channels for policy influence that flows from the UNCTAD three-pillar approach.

27.   All five evaluations noted that at the output level, UNCTAD has been effective in delivering against its planned programme of work. Survey and interview respondents to the evaluations largely report appreciation for the high quality of activities and products delivered under the various subprogrammes. For instance, in the evaluation of subprogramme 5, over 80 per cent rated the publications as either useful or very useful and indicated that publications produced under the subprogramme have been used as reference material in a number of policy debates, while the evaluation of subprogramme 3 stated that UNCTAD had created "a new class of public goods" through its development of "useful methodologies, tools and approaches that lend to standardization and replication". Another evaluation noted that products such as policy briefs improved transmission of research messages and were widely appreciated by member States and the media.

28.   At the same time, three evaluations (subprogramme 3, subprogramme 4 and subprogramme 5) noted that there are many research outputs, with some lacking visibility and showing low consumption, and suggested a need for rationalization and more effective communications and dissemination. Two evaluations (subprogramme 1 and subprogramme 5) also noted the need for improving the linkages between the research and analysis pillar and the two other pillars of UNCTAD in order to better contribute towards their use and benefit from synergies by stimulating debate and supporting application of policy recommendations by Governments. While policy advice has contributed to better understanding of issues, it was also observed that such advice, especially those not addressing country-specific situations, could be abstract and not sufficiently pragmatic (subprogramme 1).

29.   Not all the evaluations presented assessments of the effectiveness of UNCTAD in serving the consensus-building pillar. The evaluation of subprogramme 4 highlighted the role of UNCTAD in servicing the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, with feedback from current and previous Commission on Science and Technology for Development members indicating that the high quality of substantive inputs provided by UNCTAD to the Commission "contributed significantly to the passing of CSTD resolutions". Moreover, the sessions of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development reflected good cross-fertilization among the three UNCTAD pillars of work by including presentations of science, technology and innovation policy reviews, as an example.

30.   The evaluation of subprogramme 1 observed that the subprogramme was "not always able to reach out effectively to member States and to successfully serve consensus-building within the intergovernmental process", in part owing to its "alternative narrative" that was "provocative at times", though it was recognized that this in itself stimulates debate by challenging conventional wisdom.

31.   The evaluation also noted that UNCTAD multi-year expert meetings suffered from declining attendance, linked perhaps to inadequate funding for the participation of experts, the perceived theoretical nature of presentations, a perceived bias in the selection of panellists and limited room for interactive discussions, and suggested a need to "revitalize this potentially useful platform".

32.   On technical cooperation, the evaluations were able to draw upon an evidence base of self-assessments and project evaluations for its assessments. All five evaluations found evidence of positive results from technical assistance interventions across the five programmes of work. For example:

        (a)   "All countries where an investment policy review implementation report had been completed show implementation of legal, regulatory and institutional reform carried out in line with those identified in the original IPR [investment policy review]… the median reduction in the number of steps for business registration in the 12 countries most advanced in the implementation of e-regulations is 70 per cent" (subprogramme 2).

(b) "ASYCUDA [Automated System for Customs Data] has contributed to e-governance, regulatory process re-engineering and compliance with international standards" (subprogramme 4).

(c) "Ethiopia had used the diagnostic trade integration study to mainstream trade into its five-year national plan" (subprogramme 5).

C. Enabling and limiting factors for results

33. In assessing results attained under each subprogramme, each evaluation also sought to uncover elements that have either limited the attainment of results and/or could enable achievement of better results. These include the following:

(a) **Results-based management**. All evaluations reported that there was a general weakness in practicing results-based management at UNCTAD. The evaluations note that the United Nations Secretariat biennial programme plan that sets out the results framework for each programme and subprogramme is not a useful management tool, as the performance indicators do not satisfactorily measure achievements and do not facilitate improved management of outputs nor tracking of results. The findings suggest that in order to increase the likelihood of achieving results, it is important to improve programme design to better articulate explicit linkages and causal processes between outputs, outcomes, intermediate states and intended impacts.

(b) **Limited interdivisional coordination**. The evaluations observed that limited collaboration, for example, on research outputs, affected the resonance of UNCTAD messaging, and suggested that there is merit in building a culture of coherent messaging and collaborative functioning across divisions.

(c) **Resource and administrative challenges**. All evaluations identified this as a limiting factor for results. For example, the evaluation of subprogramme 4 states that "a lack of human and financial resources, the unpredictability of funding and administrative burdens" have affected its delivery and the evaluation of subprogramme 3 reported that "staff resources are inadequate to address all requests", while the evaluation of subprogramme 5 noted that "limited resources in combination with short production cycles…constrained the ability of [subprogramme 5] to provide adequate follow-up support".

(d) **Need for improved linkages with United Nations regional coordinators and country teams/programmes**. This limiting factor was highlighted across the five evaluations. For example, the evaluation of subprogramme 5 stated that "UNCTAD was disadvantaged by not having ears to the ground, networks, relationships and consultations. Some stated that UNCTAD should be more visible in United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks to advance the trade and development agenda in member States". The role and contributions of the United Nations Inter-Agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity, led by UNCTAD, were recognized in evaluations.

(e) **Outreach and communications**. Weaknesses identified include the need for: (i) improved communications and dissemination of UNCTAD products, including the UNCTAD website, and enhancing use of new communication tools and products; and (ii) generally increasing the visibility of UNCTAD, especially at the national and regional levels. The evaluation of subprogramme 3 stated that UNCTAD "cannot effectively communicate its offerings, comparative advantage and key messages in the absence of a proper communications strategy". As an illustration, the evaluation of subprogramme 4 noted that some interviewees were unfamiliar with the range of products that UNCTAD offered. The absence of effective communications and dissemination plans led to low consumption of several research products, as well as limiting reach to potential donors and beneficiaries.

(f) **Resource mobilization**. All evaluations recognised the need for systematic and targeted fundraising for extrabudgetary resources to meet increased technical cooperation demands. More internal support from fundraising experts was called for. The evaluation of subprogramme 4 also noted fundraising opportunities from the private sector,

while observing guidelines on cooperation between the United Nations and the business sector.

D. Sustainability of results, including catalytic effects and replication

Finding 4. All three evaluations that included sustainability as an evaluation criterion found evidence of some likelihood of sustainability of the technical cooperation interventions they examined. However, to better enable sustainability of results, and to respond to the sustainability concerns of donors, several factors were identified, including the need to ensure strong national ownership and engagement, as well as adopting a programmatic rather than project approach.

34. Sustainability was assessed in relation to: (a) the extent that activities implemented by UNCTAD led to a lasting change in the knowledge, awareness and behaviour of constituents and beneficiaries; (b) evidence that participating Governments, partners and organizations are committed to continue working towards the shared objectives beyond the end of UNCTAD support; and (c) evidence of catalytic effects from the interventions.

35. The focus of assessments of sustainability is usually on technical cooperation activities given that this criterion was developed as a measure of whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn.[6]

36. The evaluations of subprogrammes 2, 4 and 5 included sustainability as a distinct evaluation criterion. These evaluations found evidence of some likelihood of sustainability, with the evaluation of subprogramme 2 observing that reforms started through interventions implemented under the subprogramme had been "institutionalized by countries", "to varying degrees", while the evaluation of subprogramme 5 observed that the launch of centres of excellence on fisheries in Mauritius and Viet Nam is expected to play an important role in sharing knowledge of the sector in the respective regions. The evaluation of subprogramme 4 found good examples of incorporating institutional sustainability considerations in some interventions such as the inclusion of alumni networks under the Train for Trade programme and the focus on organizational strengthening of national trade facilitation committees.

37. Several factors were identified to better enable sustainability of results, as well as respond to the sustainability concerns of donors, including the need for strong national ownership and engagement, as well as adopting and/or offering a programmatic approach rather than small, one-off projects. This latter point was identified in three evaluations (subprogramme 3, subprogramme 4 and subprogramme 5) as a way forward:

(a) "Donors note many one-time, small-budget projects driven by one or two staff and lacking critical mass and scalability to show sustainable results" (subprogramme 3).

(b) "The key approach for [the Division on Technology and Logistics] to address sustainability concerns lies in consistently instituting programmatic approaches that promote larger projects with multi-year horizons, incorporating clear sustainability strategies…as well as to ensure cross-fertilization among the three pillars, requiring more interbranch and interdivisional cooperation" (subprogramme 4).

(c) "given the one-time nature of many [subprogramme 5] interventions, sustainability does not seem to be an integral consideration in project design" (subprogramme 5).

38. Aftercare support and follow-up reviews (after a number of years) to assess policy implementation could contribute to sustainability of results, but it was recognised that extrabudgetary resources are required for such actions. One evaluation suggested that such aftercare or follow-up support does not need to be solely provided by the programme that

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[6] See the Development Assistance Committee criteria for evaluating development assistance, available at https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/49756382.pdf.

first implemented the intervention, and the organization could better draw upon expertise/programmes within UNCTAD as appropriate.

39. With regard to research outputs, one evaluation (subprogramme 5) suggested that the significant variance in the themes addressed by the flagship reports produced under the subprogramme creates a challenge to sustain momentum towards impact of these messages.

E. Efficiency

Finding 5. While the evaluations observe that within its resources, UNCTAD delivers a substantial body of work, synergies across divisional and organizational boundaries need further improvement, and there is potential to improve the cross-fertilization between the three pillars of UNCTAD work.

40. Broadly, each evaluation assessed efficiency in relation to: (a) adequacy of programme management in ensuring the achievement of the expected outcomes in a timely and cost-effective manner; and (b) whether in-house expertise and/or external collaboration from international development partners and mechanisms was leveraged to support achievement of planned outcomes.

41. All five evaluations recognized that UNCTAD delivers much with limited resources. For example, the evaluation of subprogramme 1 states that "[subprogramme 1] produces a remarkable body of research with very limited staff resources" and that "resources are overstretched". Two evaluations (subprogramme 4, subprogramme 5) highlighted a need for prioritization-based resource allocations, as well as a "strategy reorientation" or rebalancing of work programmes to better meet needs.

42. The extent that work programmes leveraged synergies across the three pillars of work was also examined in all five evaluations. Some good examples of synergies could be identified (for example, subprogramme 2, subprogramme 3 and subprogramme 4 evaluations), but the evaluations also noted that there is potential to improve the cross-fertilization between the three pillars. This requires improved intradivisional and interdivisional cooperation. On this subject, all five evaluations also observed that internal and external collaborations could be improved.

43. On internal collaborations, substantive responsibility for a subprogramme is largely vested in one of the divisions of UNCTAD but achieving the objective of each subprogramme is an organizational responsibility. Nonetheless, all evaluations noted that divisions work fairly independently, within an "institutional culture of siloed functioning" (subprogramme 3). As a consequence, "synergies are not systematically exploited" (subprogramme 1), there appears to be discordant messaging (subprogramme 3), there is evidence of "avoidable duplication" (subprogramme 5) and follow-up support following conclusion of a project that could be provided by another part of UNCTAD is limited (subprogramme 2). There was recognition of good examples of effective interdivisional cooperation, for example, on the paragraph 166 courses, and also that UNCTAD management had taken steps to promote collaboration.

44. On external collaborations, good examples were cited, such as the following:

(a) "Subprogramme 3 demonstrates a culture of collaboration with a number of regional and technical agencies. Notable among these are partnerships in trade statistics, tariffs and non-tariff measures with [the African Development Bank], [the International Trade Centre], the World Bank and [the World Trade Organization]; partnerships with United Nations regional commissions in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America; and thematic partnerships with [the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora] on biodiversity and regional competition networks in Africa, Asia and Latin America under [the Competition and Consumer Protection for Latin America]" (subprogramme 3).

(b)   "The Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investments, which ha[ve] been adopted by both the Group of Eight and Group of 20, is a joint endeavour with the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development" (subprogramme 2).

45.   However, challenges to broadening such partnerships were also noted, for instance the evaluation of subprogramme 1 observed that "synergistic collaboration across organizational boundaries has not been easy as broad mandates leave much room for overlap and duplication", in addition to differences in capacity levels and strategic visions. There is thus "competition for limited resources across various agencies and programmes" (subprogramme 5).

46.   In particular, all five evaluations noted the challenges faced by UNCTAD as a non-resident agency in attaining resonance of its messages at the country and regional levels, accessing extrabudgetary resources from country-level funding dialogues and mechanisms, and in delivering technical cooperation efficiently. For instance, two evaluations (subprogramme 3 and subprogramme 5) reported some dissatisfaction regarding timeliness of assistance and responsiveness of UNCTAD to requests for assistance and requests for information. All evaluations highlighted the importance of partnerships and inter-agency collaborations, given the limited presence of UNCTAD in the field as well as to enhance its efficiency in delivering on its mandates.

F.   Human rights and gender equality

> **Finding 6. With the exception of the trade and gender programme under subprogramme 3, the integration of gender and human rights considerations in UNCTAD programmes and projects has been weak.**

47.   As indicated in the table above (section C), only three evaluations included human rights and gender equality as a dedicated evaluation criterion. Broadly, the evaluations assessed: (a) the extent to which the subprogramme and its related interventions were designed, implemented and monitored according to: (i) international norms and agreements on human rights and gender equality (e.g. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Universal Declaration of Human Rights), (ii) national and local strategies to advance human rights and gender equality and (iii) the needs and interests of all targeted stakeholder groups; and (b) whether there have been changes in attitudes and behaviours leading to promoting inclusion for all stakeholder groups, particularly women and individuals/groups most marginalized and/or discriminated against.

48.   The three evaluations that included this as a dedicated evaluation criterion found that, while equity and inclusive development are at the core of the UNCTAD mandate, there was limited common understanding of human rights and gender equality dimensions and how to apply their principles in UNCTAD work. For instance, the evaluation of subprogramme 5 found that the design of the subprogramme and projects implemented under the subprogramme "remain largely human rights and gender blind". The evaluation of subprogramme 4 noted a "need to formulate gender-related objectives in project designs, based on an analysis of how a project may affect both genders, and to monitor such objectives", in addition to a "need for gender-disaggregated data, interdivisional collaboration and support from managers". Recommendations called for an enhanced and systematic human rights and gender equality approach in future programming so that these goals are more explicit in UNCTAD work.
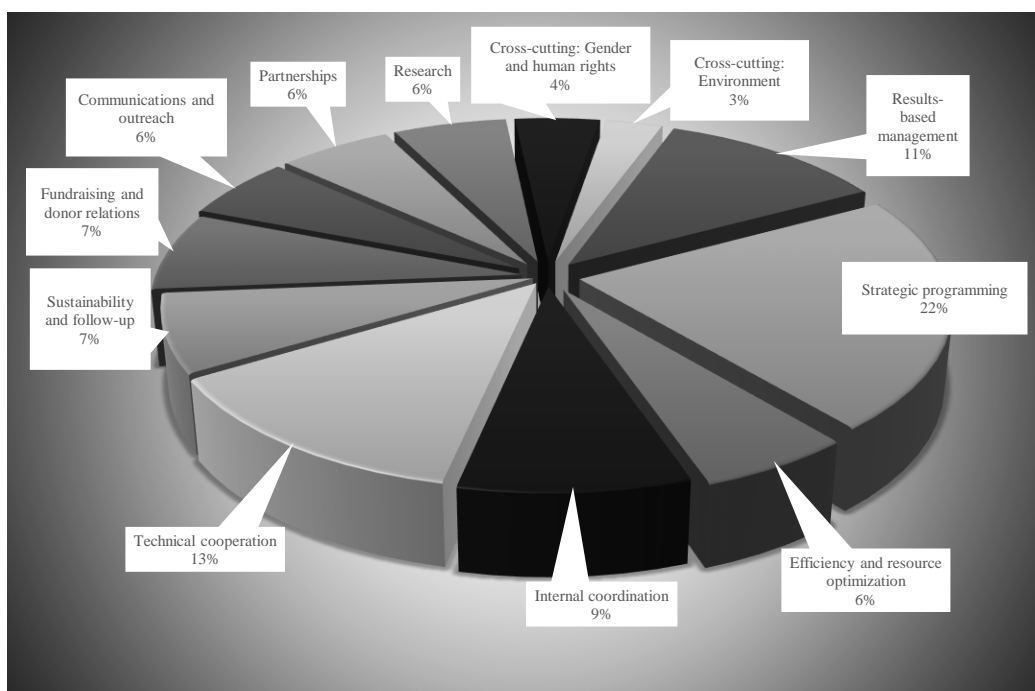
III. Evaluation recommendations

A. Analysis of evaluation recommendations

49. This chapter of the report analyses all the recommendations from the five evaluations and hence flags major areas where UNCTAD needs to either do more or do things differently. Following on from the issues identified in the previous chapter, the recommendations could be categorized into 12 main themes, as illustrated in the figure below.

Dominance of recommendations, by main categories
(Percentage)

50. The highest number of recommendations were coded under the strategic programming category (22 per cent or 15 recommendations). Broadly, these recommendations called upon UNCTAD to consider some degree of programmatic reorientation, such as to ensure closer alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to formulate more integrated programmes either at the branch or divisional levels, or interdivisional programmes or to increase use of regional approaches.

51. Eight recommendations addressed the issue of strengthening results-based management at UNCTAD. This is a clear indication that the organization should continue investing systematically in results-based management, beyond considering it merely as a process requirement or reporting burden. This would involve, for instance, setting aside time and resources to collect and report data on results.

52. Technical cooperation-related recommendations call on UNCTAD to, among other things, develop comprehensive and inclusive capacity-building strategies, including further utilization of distance learning and e-learning tools to enhance the reach of capacity-building efforts. Recommendations on fundraising were fairly convergent in identifying a need for UNCTAD to have a clear resources mobilization strategy or plan to better meet increasing requests for technical cooperation. The plan should cover different funding sources, including the private sector, and country-level mechanisms.

53. Recommendations coded under the partnerships category encourage UNCTAD to expand its partnerships with agencies with complementary and similar mandates and strengthen its institutional links with the rest of the United Nations system.

54.   Recommendations calling for improved internal coordination are aimed at promoting improved linkages for more efficient delivery of certain interventions, as well as for enhanced coherence of messaging.

55.   There were also recommendations calling for the UNCTAD approach to promoting gender equality objectives to be strengthened as it is inadequately mainstreamed in UNCTAD interventions. UNCTAD is encouraged to think through ways of making links between its work and gender more explicit, within its mandate and without prejudice to other United Nations programmes.

B.   Status of implementation of recommendations

56.   This section of the report analyses the status of implementation of recommendations from the five evaluations. A key consideration when considering the status of implementation relates to the sequenced conduct of these evaluations, with the first evaluation (of subprogramme 1) considered by the Working Party on the Strategic Framework and the Programme Budget in 2013 and the last evaluation (of subprogramme 5) only presented in September 2018. In this context, a comparative analysis of rates of implementation of the recommendations across the subprogrammes is not meaningful and was not undertaken. A general discussion on the status of implementation follows, in addition to a simple analysis of the recommendations that have yet to be fully implemented. Annex I [7] to this report presents the full reporting on implementation of each recommendation.

57.   There were 37 recommendations that were addressed to the secretariat that were either accepted or partially accepted. Of these 37 recommendations, as at April 2019, 22 recommendations have been implemented, 3 recommendations that were "partially accepted" have been "partially implemented", 12 recommendations are in progress, and 0 recommendations have not been implemented.

58.   Implementation of recommendations has led to improvements on a number of fronts. For example:

        (a)   The Division on Globalization and Development Strategies reports that it has intensified cross-divisional consultations, namely through the publications committee and through an internal peer review of the Trade and Development Report. Participation in new secretariat-wide initiatives to promote collaboration and interdivisional dialogue, such as the Crossing the Line Initiative: Research in Motion and the Research Seminar Series of UNCTAD, also represent steps in the right direction.

        (b)   The Division on Investment and Enterprise has responded to a recommendation to make the goals of gender equity and women's empowerment more explicit in its work by mainstreaming the gender dimensions across its three pillars of its work. In the area of research and policy analysis for instance, since 2017, the *World Investment Report* systematically examines the gender dimension of its main theme and also analyses international investment policies through gender lenses. At the same time, recent evaluations of projects in support of investment for development illustrate a strong link between the programme activities and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5, on gender equality.

        (c)   The Division on International Trade and Commodities reports that it is currently developing an integrated communications plan for its work, which includes, inter alia, social media coverage of activities and publications. In 2019, as a result of a successful collaboration between the division and the Communications, Information and Outreach Unit, the publication *Key Statistics and Trends in Trade Policy 2018: Trade Tensions, Implications for Developing Countries* on trade tensions was widely covered by international media. The director delivered interviews for important worldwide broadcasting companies, including BBC and Euronews. Other important news outlets such

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[7] TD/B/WP/299/Add.1, Synthesis of the five subprogramme evaluations and update on the status of implementation of the recommendations, annex I, Status of implementation of recommendations.

as CNN, CNBC, Al-Jazeera, Reuters, as well as regional and well-known national newspapers also covered the report.

(d) The Division on Technology and Logistics reports that it adheres to a multi-year programmatic approach to delivering its technical cooperation programme, and has developed a results-based framework for its work on electronic commerce and the digital economy, with this approach to be rolled out by other programmes in the division progressively. Successful implementation of this recommendation will ultimately depend on member States' support in funding multi-year programmatic interventions.

59. Of the 12 recommendations that are in progress, 6 recommendations are from the 2018 evaluation of subprogramme 5 and, understandably, there had not been sufficient time for implementation at the time of preparing the present status report. Of the remaining recommendations, three address strategies for capacity development, including capacities of United Nations country teams on trade issues, two are aimed at ensuring adequate resources (both from the regular budget and from voluntary contributions) in support of UNCTAD work, and one recommendation calls for consideration of absorptive capacity and commitment at the national level when prioritizing and designing technical assistance.

IV. Lessons on evaluation approaches

60. The five subprogramme evaluations were undertaken as a pilot and, as such, lessons can be drawn from this first cycle of evaluations for the next cycle that begins in 2021. The UNCTAD Evaluation and Monitoring Unit continually aims at improving the quality, objectivity and comparability of its evaluation approaches and products and, to this end, has identified the following lessons:

(a) While ensuring that each evaluation approach is contextualized, the next round of subprogramme evaluations should be based on a relatively standardized terms of reference, particularly with regard to the evaluation criteria to be applied. This will allow for consistency of assessments across the subprogrammes and better comparability.

(b) The methodological approach of each evaluation needs to be strengthened, to ensure higher confidence in evidence collected to yield answers to the evaluation questions. A mixed methods approach, including qualitative as well as quantitative data gathering and analysis, should be employed for each evaluation. Further, given prevailing weaknesses in results-based management approaches within the secretariat, in particular linked to a lack of time and resources dedicated to monitoring and reporting on results, and the challenges of measuring outcomes of normative work, special attention is required to address the effectiveness criterion concerning assessing attainment of results.

(c) As part of the methodology, there is a need to make explicit how evaluation methods used allow for assessment of issues related to human rights and gender equality, and the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations reflect a gender analysis.

(d) Recommendations are the forward-looking part of an evaluation report and are especially crucial as they can be the cornerstone for improved decision-making among stakeholders including senior management and governing bodies. The quality of recommendations for the next cycle of evaluations needs to be improved, including by avoiding being too prescriptive, avoiding having too many recommendations, and ensuring it is clear to whom each recommendation is directed for action. The United Nations Evaluation Group "Improved quality of evaluation recommendations checklist" will be used as a guide for this purpose.

V. Conclusions

61. UNCTAD is committed towards programme and organizational effectiveness as well as sustainable and robust development results. This integrated approach also includes a process of continuously analysing and utilizing evaluation evidence and lessons learned to guide organizational and programme orientation.

62.   The present synthesis report allows conclusions to be drawn on three key aspects of programme management: (a) conceptualization of the subprogrammes; (b) results attained through these programmes of work; and (c) operationalization of the subprogrammes.

63.   On conceptualization, the evaluations clearly affirm the relevance of the stated objectives and areas of work. The evaluations observe the unique role of UNCTAD in fostering an equitable global economic environment for sustainable development, as reiterated in the Nairobi Maafikiano. Of the two evaluations that were conducted after the adoption of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the evaluations note that UNCTAD work is crucial to the success of the 2030 Agenda, although close alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals should be continuously ensured across all areas of work.

64.   On results attained, the evaluations show that implementation of the subprogrammes has contributed towards a number of intended results at the national, regional and global levels. To strengthen results delivery as the organization moves forward, the secretariat could consider the following: some rationalization of research outputs, more effective communications and dissemination, and more integrated programmatic approaches rather than project approaches in support of sustainable results.

65.   In the operationalization of the subprogrammes, a number of factors affecting programme performance were identified. These include suggestions for consideration of a rebalancing of work programmes to improve cross-fertilization across the UNCTAD pillars of work, as well as to better meet needs of UNCTAD stakeholders, particularly at the national levels, subject to availability of extrabudgetary resources, improved internal coordination and collaborations and improved external visibility and partnerships. In particular, in the current context of United Nations reform, reflections on UNCTAD contributions within United Nations country programme frameworks need to be considered, as do optimal modalities for engagement.

66.   The evaluative evidence and lessons presented in this report serve as a basis for such reflections within the secretariat.

67.   Annex I (TD/B/WP/299/Add.1), on implementation of recommendations, to the present synthesis report shows how evaluations have contributed towards strengthening of UNCTAD subprogrammes. Some recommendations require the support of member States, including through voluntary contributions, for their implementation.

68.   For the next cycle of subprogramme evaluations, a number of lessons have been identified on measures that need to be taken to improve the quality, credibility and utility of the evaluations. Findings from the first cycle of evaluations provide a baseline for the subsequent iteration, but in evaluation design, it will also be necessary to consider the implications of a significant change in the official results framework of each subprogramme as captured in the annual programme plan (also known as the annual results framework) that replaces the biennial programme plans of the United Nations Secretariat from 2020. A logical framework for the full subprogramme is no longer required within the annual programme plans, as submitted to the Committee for Programme Coordination and Fifth Committee in New York. Such frameworks would usually be the standards against which a programme's relevance, effectiveness and impact is assessed. The UNCTAD secretariat is working on ensuring that results frameworks are developed at the branch-level across the secretariat, but further reflections on evaluation design will need to identify alternative measures and approaches to ensure robust evidence on these aspects in cases where results frameworks have not been developed.