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Report of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance on its eighty-eighth session

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 7 to 11 October 2024

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Introduction

The eighty-eighth session of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance was held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 7 to 11 October 2024. The Working Party pursued its deliberations in an informal setting.

I. Action taken by the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance at its eighty-eighth session

A. Evaluation of UNCTAD activities

Agreed conclusions

The Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance

1. *Reaffirms* the importance of evaluation as a management tool to enhance accountability, organizational learning and evidence-based decision-making, in accordance with the UNCTAD evaluation policy and the norms and standards for evaluation of the United Nations Evaluation Group, as well as the secretariat's update to member States on the implementation of relevant recommendations identified during past evaluations;

Evaluation of UNCTAD activities: Overview

2. *Welcomes* the content of "Evaluation of UNCTAD activities: Overview" (TD/B/WP/330), and encourages the secretariat to continue strengthening its evaluation function, in line with United Nations system-wide benchmarks;

3. *Takes note* of progress made by the secretariat on the implementation of results-based management, including through its new results framework;

4. *Requests* continued action, in line with the guidelines and practices of the United Nations Secretariat, to ensure the relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness (including impact) and sustainability of UNCTAD interventions, facilitate the mainstreaming of United Nations cross-cutting issues and deliver on other evaluation recommendations;

External evaluation of UNCTAD subprogramme 3: International trade and commodities

5. *Welcomes* the "Independent evaluation of UNCTAD subprogramme 3: International trade and commodities" (TD/B/WP/331) and the "Management response to the independent evaluation of subprogramme 3: International trade and commodities" (TD/B/WP(88)/CRP.2);

6. *Requests* that the secretariat implement the recommendations contained in the external evaluation of UNCTAD subprogramme 3, taking into consideration the management response and the views expressed by member States during the eighty-eighth session of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance;

7. *Affirms* that UNCTAD will not conduct an independent subprogramme evaluation in 2025, the year of the quadrennial conference, as per established practice, and looks forward to resuming the cycle of subprogramme evaluations with subprogramme 4 on technology and logistics in 2026.

11 October 2024

B. Other action taken by the Working Party

1. Review of the technical cooperation activities of UNCTAD and their financing

(Agenda item 3)

1. At its closing plenary meeting, on 11 October 2024, the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance agreed upon a draft decision on the review of the technical cooperation activities of UNCTAD and their financing, which would be presented to the seventy-sixth executive session of the Trade and Development Board for consideration and adoption (see annex I).

2. Evaluation of UNCTAD activities

(Agenda item 4)

2. Also at its closing plenary meeting, on 11 October 2024, the Working Party adopted agreed conclusions on the agenda item (see chapter I, section A, above).

3. Preparatory session for the 2026 programme plan and performance information

(Agenda item 5)

3. Also at its closing plenary meeting, on 11 October 2024, the Chair of the Working Party confirmed that the membership had decided not to have agreed conclusions on the agenda item.

II. Chair's summary

A. Opening plenary meeting

4. In his opening remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD highlighted that, in 2023, voluntary funding to UNCTAD technical cooperation trust funds rebounded and reached almost \$50 million, only 3 per cent below the record year in 2021, largely due to increased funding support from developed economies, the European Union and the public and private sectors. Technical cooperation expenditures achieved a new record of \$57.3 million, with 42 per cent benefiting the least developed countries, the priority group in UNCTAD technical cooperation. On the functioning of technical cooperation, he stressed that UNCTAD had enhanced engagement with the resident coordinator system, developed an overarching results framework, which was expected to enhance the results orientation and build further trust with donors, and was working on updating the *UNCTAD Toolbox* to align better with the four transformations of the Bridgetown Covenant. He encouraged member States and development partners in a position to do so to continue supporting UNCTAD technical cooperation by providing sustainable and predictable contributions, with fewer that are earmarked.

5. He noted that the independent evaluation of UNCTAD subprogramme 3 highlighted the programme's significant global and national impact in influencing policy changes that supported economic diversification and resilience. The evaluation found the subprogramme to be rooted in UNCTAD mandates and aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. Its outputs were deemed highly relevant and indispensable by most stakeholders, particularly the least developed countries. The subprogramme's efficiency, innovative use of technology and role in multilateral systems were also recognized.

6. He shared a brief update on the current status of the 2025 proposed programme budget, including that the Committee for Programme and Coordination was not able to reach agreement on its conclusions and recommendations regarding the UNCTAD budget section. Later in 2024, the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly would consider the UNCTAD section, and he called for delegates to consider what additional resources could be necessary to support some of the outstanding priorities of the Bridgetown Covenant.

7. Regarding the proposed programme budget for 2026, he noted that UNCTAD prepared a non-paper with a general overview of the UNCTAD secretariat's thinking on current and upcoming challenges, as well as overviews of the five subprogrammes and

suggestions for highlighted results. The proposed plan reflected awareness of the forthcoming sixteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in late 2025 and that the plan would be adapted to the extent possible to reflect the Conference outcomes.

8. Drawing on the general overview, the Deputy Secretary-General highlighted the continuing concern that growth was slow and many poor countries were being left behind. Furthermore, the debt burden in the global South was driving a development crisis, and there was concern of declining foreign direct investment, as well as a tempered outlook on trade and disruptions in maritime transport. He emphasized the continuing need to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation and to support developing countries in their energy transition.

9. In concluding, he highlighted that the liquidity situation remained challenging for UNCTAD and, as of September 2024, unchanged.

10. The following speakers made statements: the representative of Cambodia, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China; the representative of the European Union, on behalf of the European Union and its member States; the representative of Bangladesh, on behalf of the Asia-Pacific group; the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries; the representative of Japan, on behalf of the JUSSCANNZ group; the representative of the Dominican Republic, on behalf of small island developing States; the representative of the State of Palestine, on behalf of the Arab Group; and a representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, on behalf of the Group of Friends in Defence of the Charter of the United Nations; the representative of China; the representative of Peru; the representative of Russian Federation, on behalf of the Eurasian Economic Union; the representative of Indonesia; the representative of Timor-Leste; the representative of Brazil; the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic; the representative of Belarus; the representative of Nepal, on behalf of the least developed countries; the representative of the United States of America; and the representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Discussion on technical cooperation

11. Many regional groups and delegates took note of the increase in technical cooperation trust fund resources in 2023 and valued the contributions by donors, which helped to sustain many important programmes of UNCTAD. They called on member States in a position to do so to provide increased, balanced and predictable funding to all regions to sustainably expand and improve UNCTAD technical cooperation activities. They also called on donors to sponsor junior professional officers from developing countries and the least developed countries as a way to strengthen the multilateral system.

12. Concerning delivery of technical cooperation, many regional groups and delegates stressed that, as a knowledge-based institution, UNCTAD should promote international consensus on principles, strategies and policy actions to enhance the development prospects of member States, particularly those of developing countries and the least developed countries. They reaffirmed the need to align extrabudgetary resources with the objectives of regional and national development strategies and technical cooperation projects of recipient countries, on a demand-driven basis. One delegate mentioned the need for developing countries to receive more support on World Trade Organization issues. Another delegate highlighted that the advisory support of UNCTAD to the drafting of competition law was one of the key elements that reinforced his country's recent accession to the World Trade Organization. He also appealed to UNCTAD to enhance its technical assistance and capacity-building for developing countries and the least developed countries, in accordance with a country-owned and country-led approach.

13. On the functioning of technical cooperation, many regional groups and delegates highlighted that the three pillars of UNCTAD work should be linked and strengthened. They acknowledged UNCTAD efforts in enhancing the role of the United Nations Inter-Agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity to "Deliver as one" on trade and trade-related issues. Another regional group appreciated that UNCTAD addressed cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, engaged in the reform of United Nations

development system, enhanced interdivisional and inter-agency cooperation in technical cooperation and had made progress in the results-based management framework, which was important to improve on transparency and attract more donors.

14. One regional group and several delegates said that, looking forward, UNCTAD could further enhance the relevance and visibility of its work in line with the Bridgetown Covenant. In particular, more technical assistance could be provided to close the gap on financing for development, ensure the smooth transition of the least developed countries and allocate the necessary funds to assist the Palestinian people. They further suggested that the technical cooperation strategy could consider a new economic model geared towards a resilient economy and resource efficiency and encouraged UNCTAD to enhance collaboration with United Nations agencies working in the area of trade and investment to maximize the impact.

15. Another regional group emphasized that UNCTAD needed to sensitize and build the capacity of the least developed countries on data and statistics and define project milestones, deliverables and stakeholders' roles early to manage expectations and ensure smooth implementation of projects. He suggested channelling some resources to the dedicated trust fund for the least developed countries and enhancing assistance to the least developed countries in all three pillars, particularly technical assistance and research and analysis work. Another regional group reiterated the importance of focusing UNCTAD work on commodities, non-tariff measures and critical minerals. Another regional group welcomed UNCTAD technical assistance to countries in conflict and suggested that UNCTAD conduct an impact study on the outcomes of its work in different countries so as to better leverage UNCTAD support on trade and development. One delegate requested an update on the status of bringing on board an officer responsible for resource mobilization.

16. Another delegate noted that UNCTAD was not a technical cooperation agency, as was the United Nations Development Programme. The UNCTAD technical cooperation pillar was meant to be provided, among related issues, for research and analysis, implementation of policies and understanding structural issues regarding trade and debt financing. He stressed that technical assistance to developing countries was needed in relation to ongoing discussions on a global tax convention.

Discussion on the 2026 programme plan

17. One delegate considered the Pact for the Future an important new reference point for UNCTAD activities. One regional group also noted that, in the lead up to the sixteenth session of the Conference, member States needed to start considering the future orientation and work of UNCTAD.

18. Another regional group, while commending efforts on results-based management and publications, said that the documentation circulated for the session confirmed that some challenges identified in independent evaluations remained. More focused efforts were needed on the intergovernmental machinery, prioritization and gender mainstreaming.

19. Another regional group expressed appreciation to the UNCTAD secretariat for supporting increased staffing for the Assistance to the Palestinian People Unit.

20. One delegate said that UNCTAD could engage further with World Trade Organization debates in areas such as the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, environmental measures, industrial policy, policy space and special and differentiated treatment and suggested that UNCTAD should further advocate for an effective dispute settlement function. In addition, UNCTAD should collaborate more with member States on the digital economy agenda, rather than with other international organizations.

21. In response, the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD noted that a formal working group had been established with the World Trade Organization two years earlier and that UNCTAD continued its long-standing support towards member States in their dealings with that Organization.

22. One group of countries and several delegates called for UNCTAD to continue analysing global economic trends, including on the application of unilateral coercive

measures, to provide relevant policy recommendations, in line with the General Assembly resolution on the elimination of unilateral coercive measures. They also noted that paragraph 2 of the agreed conclusions in the report of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance on its eighty-seventh session (TD/B/WP/328) specifically requested that the Secretary-General of UNCTAD to take into account the comments and inputs provided during that session and to highlight expectations from member States for subsequent consideration by the General Assembly of the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies.

23. The Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD clarified that, in line with paragraph 2 of those agreed conclusions, all comments and deliberations of the membership were brought to the attention of the Office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in New York.

24. In exercising the right of reply, one regional group and some delegates stated that no mandate existed for UNCTAD to work in the area of unilateral coercive measures and, further, that paragraph 2 of the agreed conclusions made no reference to those measures. The delegates added that sanctions, as used by their respective countries, served to address matters such as threats to peace and security or deter egregious behaviour and were consistent with international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Another delegate responded that, from the point of view of international law, the only sanctions by the Security Council of the United Nations were legitimate. Some countries applied unilateral coercive measure rather to target economic systems that damaged international trade, food security and State assets.

25. One delegate thanked the secretariat for the provision of the management reports and stated that it would be useful to have a breakdown of the geographical representation of staff at UNCTAD.

B. Review of the technical cooperation activities of UNCTAD and their financing

(Agenda item 3)

26. The Chief of the Technical Cooperation Section of UNCTAD provided an overview of UNCTAD technical cooperation in 2023. He presented the funding sources of UNCTAD and highlighted the increased extrabudgetary resources in 2023, including the increased funds mobilized through “Delivering as one” funding mechanisms, as well as expenditures and allocation of technical cooperation resources. UNCTAD had seen a record-high level of expenditures in 2023, with those in support of the least developed countries reaching \$24 million. He underlined the progress made in improving the structure and functioning of technical cooperation. UNCTAD had enhanced its engagement in United Nations reform, strengthened results-based management and gender mainstreaming in technical cooperation and updated technical cooperation request data. He clarified the status of the update of the *UNCTAD Toolbox*. On the way forward, he called on donors to provide more sustainable and predictable funding to UNCTAD technical cooperation and committed to continuing to deliver technical cooperation in an agile and innovative way and further engaging in United Nations reform.

27. The representative of one regional group highlighted the importance of results-based management and an overarching results framework to enhance accountability and effectiveness of the three pillars of work of UNCTAD and welcomed the efforts made by UNCTAD in collaborating with the resident coordinator system. He expressed concern about the continued decline in expenditures in Africa and suggested UNCTAD allocate more resources to Africa through an engagement plan. He also requested that the update of the *UNCTAD Toolbox* be built on technical cooperation expenditure and request data rather than the merging of existing products. One delegate suggested that UNCTAD could advocate for more funds for technical cooperation by identifying the areas of most relevance to developing countries.

28. In response, the Chief of the Technical Cooperation Section provided technical details on matters such as declining expenditures in Africa in recent years, reasons for the

low level of expenditures of some technical cooperation products and the definition of public and private sectors in funding sources. He mentioned the high level of uptake of the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) programme in Asia.

29. The Director of the Office of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD presented the technical assistance work carried out in 2023 by the Division on Globalization and Development Strategies, and thanked donors for their financial support, particularly to the Debt Management and Financial Analysis System programme.

30. One delegate expressed appreciation to UNCTAD for its work in studying ways to improve the economic resilience of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and, while thanking donors for their support, reiterated the request for additional personnel resources to be allocated to the division to deliver its mandate. Another delegate joined in reiterating his country's support for strengthening the capacity of the division to conduct its work on the economic analysis of the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

31. The Director of the UNCTAD Division on Investment and Enterprise presented an overview of the subprogramme's technical cooperation activities, which were guided by the investment policy framework for sustainable development, global action menu for investment facilitation, reform package for the international investment regime, entrepreneurship policy framework and guidance on core indicators for sustainability and Sustainable Development Goal impact reporting. Against a background of the widening gap in renewable energy investment in developing countries, she presented several of the division's technical assistance products and activities that had successfully supported member States in attracting investment for the energy transition. She outlined how the division was leveraging partnerships and digital tools to enhance the reach of its work and highlighted the progress in implementing the recommendations of the independent evaluation of the subprogramme conducted in 2023. She also highlighted the positive evaluation of the "Global initiative towards post-COVID-19 resurgence of the microenterprise and small and medium-sized enterprise sector", a large-scale, cross-disciplinary project that involved all regional commissions and the Department for Economic and Social Affairs.

32. Some delegates praised the division for its work in the area of investment and enterprise development. One delegate particularly praised the subprogramme for the support his country received through the business facilitation programme, notably capacity-building and establishment of digital portals. He requested a periodic report on the assessment of investment in the country. Another delegate recognized the work of the subprogramme in promoting small and medium-sized enterprise development and pointed to the support needed by rural entrepreneurs and the need for a greater focus on gender.

33. The Director of the UNCTAD Division on International Trade and Commodities provided an overview of technical cooperation activities in the areas of trade policy and trade intelligence, commodities and sustainable export diversification, competition and consumer policies for inclusive trade, and trade through a gender lens. She mentioned the importance of seeking beneficiary country ownership of projects to ensure long-term sustainability. Emerging areas of work included new projects on critical minerals, artificial intelligence, gender inclusion, creative economy and commodity markets. She highlighted the importance of fundraising, as the division had 43 pending requests for technical cooperation since 2022.

34. One delegate commended the division's Suape project in the State of Pernambuco, Brazil, which had led to the development of a methodology that combined qualitative and quantitative approaches to identify new sectors and products that complemented existing product chains.

35. Several delegates recognized the division's contributions to capacity-building for World Trade Organization accession, non-tariff measures and consumer protection. Some delegates expressed support for the division's work on gender and trade and on critical minerals.

36. One regional group reiterated the importance of fundraising to secure funding for more projects among its members.

37. The Director thanked delegations for their support to the Suape project and said the division was willing to do that type of work in other regions and countries, in support of their industrial transformation. She also stressed that trade and inclusion, as well as trade that benefited women and rural communities, was a priority area. The division sought funding for projects on a gender lens in trade. On critical minerals, she would propose a pilot project on rapid assessments and invited member States to participate, given the widespread impact of critical minerals on the economies of developing countries.

38. The Director of the UNCTAD Division on Technology and Logistics presented an overview of the technical cooperation activities undertaken in 2023.

39. One delegate commended the subprogramme's substantial role in increasing national revenue and emphasized the importance of its continued success. One regional group praised the ASYCUDA programme for its concrete results and highlighted initiatives empowering women in electronic trade (e-trade), while expressing support for future editions of the Global Supply Chain Forum and the potential for enhanced partnerships with other international bodies.

40. Some delegates noted the alignment of the division's work with national strategies, such as digital economy development, and stressed the need for additional funding, particularly for the work of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on data governance. One delegate acknowledged the division's efforts in e-trade readiness assessments and the availability of funds to further enhance its activities. Some delegates highlighted the integral role of digitalization in economic and trade development, calling for increased contributions to the subprogramme and expanded technology transfer. They also recognized the paragraph 166 programme as a valuable asset.

41. Several delegates acknowledged the need for increased funding to address new demands, including green technology development.

42. The Director emphasized the subprogramme's role in driving sustainable transformation across borders by streamlining trade processes, fostering resilience in global supply chains and building capacity for climate-smart trade. She noted that the subprogramme's activities had not only increased revenue collection but also accelerated digital readiness, reducing transaction costs and promoting a greener trade environment.

43. The Director of the UNCTAD Division on Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes recalled the Bridgetown Covenant and presented highlights of technical assistance to the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and African countries. Work was organized around (a) transforming towards a more sustainable and resilient future and (b) transforming economies through diversification. Technical assistance work and impact in countries took place in the areas of supporting multilateralism; supporting least developed country graduation; enhancing trade and market access; building resilience in small island developing States; fostering economic and export diversification; building productive capacities; and improving trade, transit and transport logistics. He mentioned that the UNCTAD productive capacities index had been used in 42 research papers, including some from the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. He also outlined forthcoming activities and partnerships and cooperation.

44. One delegate welcomed UNCTAD technical assistance to the least developed countries, particularly to Cambodia on rules of origin, strengthening of productive capacities and the productive capacities index. He called for support from UNCTAD and work with the Economic and Social Council to improve the graduation of the least developed countries. One regional group asked about the use of the productive capacities index to evaluate development in the least developed countries, such as Angola.

45. Another delegate welcomed UNCTAD technical assistance for the Democratic Republic of the Congo on a diagnostic study on trade integration and competition and consumer protection policies. He informed the UNCTAD secretariat about a partnership agreement between his country and UNCTAD on competition policy and consumer protection. Another delegate welcomed the technical assistance from the division and

requested that donors and development partners support those activities of the division by providing finance (such as through special trust funds).

46. Another delegate noted the holistic approach to the development of the productive capacity index. He stressed the importance of South–South cooperation and inter-African free trade with Namibia, Zambia and other countries.

47. The Director provided clarifications on what funding had or had not been received. He explained that the productive capacities index had as yet not been used to assess the Angola programme. UNCTAD continued to work with the Economic and Social Council to support the least developed countries after graduating from the category. He recalled the importance of special trust funds to continue providing technical assistance to member States.

48. A representative of the UNCTAD Statistics Service introduced the technical cooperation and statistical capacity development activities undertaken in 2023 and highlighted the service’s overall goals.

49. E-learning courses on merchandise and service statistics continued to assist countries to understand and produce better data; 88 per cent of course participants had been from developing countries, and 46 per cent were women.

50. The United Nations Development Account project “Trade-in-Services Statistics Information System”, begun in 2024 with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, would assist seven Caribbean countries with producing trade in services statistics.

51. UNCTAD was a co-custodian of Sustainable Development Goal indicator 16.4.1; by 2023, the Statistics Service had helped 22 member States to pilot test illicit financial flow measurement. A Development Account project was currently supporting eight beneficiary countries in that regard. Over 40 other member States had requested support on the issue, which would require new resources. Also, as co-custodian of indicator 17.3.1, the voluntary measurement framework had produced early data from four pilot countries and served to confirm that informal assistance was essential to the indicator’s measurement.

52. He also shared details on the new transport costs dataset and the new gender equality in trade indicators.

C. Evaluation of UNCTAD activities

(Agenda item 4)

1. Evaluation of UNCTAD activities: Overview

53. The Chief of the Independent Evaluation Unit of UNCTAD provided a summary of the report (TD/B/WP/330) on the findings and recommendations from four independent evaluations completed between July 2023 and June 2024, relating to projects funded by the United Nations Development Account and extrabudgetary resources.

54. She identified common issues across the four evaluations, and others conducted in recent years, including the need to better mainstream cross-cutting issues, such as gender and disability inclusion; the need to monitor long-term results and put in place measures to enhance sustainability of UNCTAD interventions; and the need to further leverage partnerships with other United Nations entities.

55. Finally, she noted that, for the year ahead, eight evaluations were expected to be finalized. As per past practice, the evaluation of subprogramme 4 was not included in the evaluation workplan for 2024–2025, as member States would be engaged with the sixteenth session of the Conference. The cycle of subprogramme evaluations would resume in 2026.

56. One regional group asked about the planned evaluation of the E-commerce and the Digital Economy Programme in 2024–2025, while another regional group inquired about the criteria for selecting projects for evaluation and how the longer-term impacts of technical cooperation projects could be evaluated given the lack of data.

57. In response, the Chief of the Independent Evaluation Unit said that the core donors to the E-commerce and the Digital Economy Programme had requested the evaluation to be completed before their meeting in April 2025. Projects were independently evaluated if their budget exceeded \$1 million or, if below that ceiling, in line with donor requests. Currently, as most UNCTAD evaluations were conducted shortly after project completion, evaluations assessed the likelihood of impact. However, recommendations were regularly made for UNCTAD to strengthen the monitoring of long-term results so that impact could be assessed during programme and subprogramme evaluations.

2. External evaluation of UNCTAD subprogramme 3: International trade and commodities

58. An independent evaluator presented the results of the evaluation of UNCTAD subprogramme 3, on international trade and commodities (TD/B/WP/331).

59. The evaluator noted that, overall, the Division on International Trade and Commodities successfully executed its programme of work. Substantial evidence was found of subprogramme 3 being effective in achieving targeted outputs and outcomes and that it influenced national-level decision-makers and policies to promote economic diversification and transformation into more sustainable and resilient economies. The division had delivered more than planned against its proposed programme budgets and made important efficiency gains. On the other hand, areas identified for improvement included on cross-cutting issues, intergovernmental activities and strategic planning.

60. He put forward six recommendations to improve performance of the subprogramme: further embed results-based management across activities and outputs; develop a long-term strategic operational plan covering, inter alia, people management, resource mobilization and partnerships; develop a communications strategy; revitalize intergovernmental meetings handled by the subprogramme; undertake a prioritization exercise to ensure cost-effective allocation of resources; and more fully mainstream cross-cutting issues.

61. The Director of the UNCTAD Division on International Trade and Commodities delivered a management response, noting the evaluation showed strong results achieved by the subprogramme in implementing its mandate and accepting or partially accepting all six recommendations. She noted that some of the recommendations required close cooperation with several central UNCTAD services, as well as orientation from member States. She outlined concrete steps the division would take in implementing the recommendations and said she would provide an update on efforts in 2025.

62. Many delegations welcomed the evaluation findings and the management response, as well as the appointment of the new Director.

63. One delegate commended the subprogramme's intergovernmental work on consumer protection, citing in particular the contribution at a session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy, during which a declaration on cross-border dispute resolution and redress for consumers was adopted.

64. Some regional groups concurred with the recommendation to revitalize intergovernmental activities, while another regional group said that more clarity was needed on how UNCTAD meeting outcomes fed into other intergovernmental processes.

65. The Director welcomed the opportunity for further engagement with UNCTAD member States to optimize the division's intergovernmental activities.

D. Preparatory session for the 2026 programme plan and performance information

(Agenda item 5)

66. In his opening remarks concerning item 5, the Director of the Office of the UNCTAD Secretary-General noted that the preparatory session marked the beginning of the planning process for the UNCTAD 2026 programme plan. An informal non-paper

outlining the future orientation of the institution was shared with member States ahead of the session to facilitate the dialogue with divisions.

67. He noted that the preparatory session was created following recommendations by member States, as part of the revised terms of reference of the Working Party, with the objective of meeting in advance of the formal review session in January 2025 and to have an informal exchange with divisions on their proposed highlighted results before writing of programme plans began, so that the views and feedback of member States were fully integrated into the document.

68. He outlined the timeline of the process ahead and noted that the draft 2026 programme plan document would be shared with member States ahead of the eighty-ninth meeting of the Working Party, to be held in January 2025. The approved document would then be submitted by the UNCTAD Secretary-General to New York, to be reviewed by specialized committees: the Committee for Programme Coordination in May 2025, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in June 2025 and the Administrative and Budgetary Committee at some point in October 2025.

69. Finally, he highlighted that the 2026 programme plan was based on the commitments and priorities in the Bridgetown Covenant, with a clear acknowledgement that the sixteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development would be held in 2025, which would set out its work programme for the following four years. If mandate changes occurred as a result of the Conference, there was a mechanism in place to modify the programme budget accordingly.

70. Many delegations appreciated the non-paper, stating that it was useful for their consideration of agenda item 5, and encouraged the secretariat to take into account the feedback of member States provided at the session and reflect it appropriately in the final document.

71. One regional group noted continuous improvement of the non-paper, which clearly outlined the areas of work and proposed highlighted results for 2026, as well as improvement in the connection between lessons learned and proposed results, including performance indicators.

72. Some delegates highlighted the importance of the issue of artificial intelligence, which was cross-cutting to trade and to which UNCTAD should pay attention when planning its work for 2026. They also noted the role of the Pact of the Future and of the Global Digital Compact, where UNCTAD was specifically mentioned and thus should be central when addressing digital economy work.

73. One delegate mentioned that dependency on commodities remained one of the important issues to be addressed by UNCTAD, as well as, among others, the debt issue of developing countries, financing for development, market access and environmental protectionism in the context of industrialization efforts. He added that UNCTAD could contribute to the ongoing negotiations at the World Trade Organization, which were important for developing countries.

74. Another delegate highlighted the importance of the creative economy, in line with UNCTAD mandates and resolution of the General Assembly, as well as the topic of critical minerals.

75. Representatives of the UNCTAD secretariat presented their perspectives on current issues and trends that would influence the future work of each subprogramme, providing context and details for the proposed options of highlighted results for 2026, for the consideration of member States.

76. The UNCTAD secretariat took note of the comments and feedback on the highlighted results provided by member States.

E. Closing plenary meeting

77. At the closing plenary meeting, some regional groups and several delegates emphasized that, with respect to the evaluation of subprogramme 3, the frequency and duration of sessions of the Working Party were necessary to foster comprehensive discussion and ensure that the views of all members were fully represented and considered. Meetings were neither too frequent nor too long; formal, structured dialogue remained essential to achieving results and common understandings. Additionally, informal dialogue should complement, not replace or overshadow, formal processes. They urged a reaffirmation of the commitment to multilateralism and the mandate of UNCTAD in fostering inclusive and sustainable development through the three pillars of research and analysis, intergovernmental consensus-building and technical cooperation. One regional group added that interactions among members at sessions strengthened UNCTAD as a whole; interactions were constructive and versatile, with agreements reached in a timely manner. One delegate stressed that the UNCTAD intergovernmental machinery was highly important, and existing meetings were helpful in enhancing the discussion of relevant topics by all parties, particularly developing countries, while the frequency and length of meetings had their value. Another delegate noted the evaluation recommendation and management response. She emphasized that follow-up to the recommendation should be implemented in accordance with the mandates, rules and procedures within UNCTAD, as well as taking account of the views and consensus of member States. Another delegate, while expressing support for the activities and findings of positive impact for member States, also differed on the recommendation regarding the frequency of meetings, given the strategic relevance of the themes addressed. It was vital to maintain sufficient space for dialogue and constructive exchanges among members. Another delegate recognized that evaluation was a relevant tool for transparency and accountability. More rather than fewer meetings were needed, with more focus on reviewing publications and more informal dialogue.

78. One delegate noted the lack of resources for subprogramme 3 and suggested linked resources to results-based management and improved indicators for subprogrammes, with a focus on the sustainability of activities. He also considered that the recommendation of the evaluation was unclear, stressing the importance of maintaining all available opportunities for meetings and discussions on UNCTAD publications, in line with established practice. One regional group added, in relation to the evaluations, that one challenge that remained was the integration of gender and human rights considerations. On subprogramme 3, the evaluation confirmed the value of the subprogramme and made some relevant recommendations. Though sufficient time should be ensured for discussion, whether formal or informal, the frequency of meetings should be considered critically, as often the time allocated for meetings was not used.

79. On technical cooperation, one delegate acknowledged the progress made and reiterated a request to redouble efforts to address the many pending requests from member States. She looked forward to the prompt incorporation of the official responsible for mobilization of resources, which would be crucial in properly addressing those pending requests. She likewise reiterated the call for swift publication of the *UNCTAD Toolbox*, as previously agreed by the Working Party. Welcoming the participatory approach adopted in developing the 2026 programme plan, she expressed the expectation that the final proposal would reflect suggestions and priorities articulated by members at the session. Another delegate stressed that technical cooperation was one of the three pillars of UNCTAD, as reiterated in the Bridgetown Covenant, underscoring the importance of coordination among them. UNCTAD should continue giving consideration to the specific needs of all regions. He acknowledged the leadership role of UNCTAD in the United Nations Inter-Agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity and UNCTAD efforts in cooperating with other agencies and the resident coordinator system. Another delegate said that all parties at the Working Party session had a clear understanding of UNCTAD technical cooperation projects and funding sources and their utilization.

80. One regional group encouraged UNCTAD to look into new funding sources, particularly for activities in support of the least developed countries and small island developing States, while inviting member States to consider sponsoring junior professional

officers from the countries most in need, which were the least developed countries. Another delegate said that the continuous efforts of the secretariat in delivering technical cooperation to member States were invaluable to countries' shared development goals. She expressed gratitude to developed and developing country donors and development partners for their continued support to development.

81. One regional group noted many positive trends in technical cooperation activities over the previous year, particularly extrabudgetary contributions and different funding sources. He regretted the decrease in the share of expenditure in African countries. Another regional group urged the secretariat and member States to continue taking into account that the least developed countries needed special prioritizations in UNCTAD programmes and enhanced assistance long after graduation, until establishment of structural stability and sustainability. One delegate said that it was necessary to continue improving UNCTAD approaches towards effectiveness of instruments to oversee implementation of recommendations and improve accountability. It was also important to regularly analyse the effectiveness of financing projects and relevant amendments. One group of countries urged UNCTAD and member States to provide sufficient additional regular and extrabudgetary resources to enable the programme of assistance to the Palestinian people to implement its mandate and called on UNCTAD to continue technical cooperation research and advisory services under the programme.

82. Under agenda item 5, another delegate looked forward to a successful process in New York to ensure a budget allocation that would effectively meet the needs of all. On the 2026 programme plan, she said that the secretariat should take into account member States priorities and focus on ongoing multilateral mechanisms, such as the Global Digital Compact and implementation of the General Assembly resolution on the creative economy. She noted the successful negotiations and discussions, as a spirit of cooperation, collaboration and consensus-building would be key in preparing for the sixteenth session of the Conference. Another delegate said his country would carefully study the official document of the draft UNCTAD programme plan and performance information for 2026 after its circulation by UNCTAD and discuss it with all parties. One regional group noted that, with sixteenth session of the Conference scheduled for 2025, a productive discussion on future activities was timely; information on progress on the result-based framework and other ongoing initiatives would be welcome.

83. One group of countries and some delegates reiterated their request that UNCTAD monitor and report on current trade trends and policies, including those related to unilateral economic, financial or trade coercive measures and their impact on inclusive, sustainable and resilient development, and to provide appropriate policy recommendations to member States. In their view, the matter should not be ignored and should be included in the UNCTAD programme of work and noted the lack of clarity on implementation of the agreed conclusions of the eighty-seventh session of the Working Party. One delegate added that there were no obstacles in the UNCTAD mandate to analysing the economic, financial and trade dimensions of the impact of unilateral coercive measures, and the issue should not be politicized. She requested that the ninetieth session of the Working Party should be conducted in a formal setting, based on its terms of reference.¹

84. One regional group considered that there had been a good exchange on ideas outlined in the non-paper on the programme plan and counted on the secretariat to take into account the opinions expressed by the membership, while staying within consensually established mandates and areas of work. Some members had continued to insist on a non-consensual interpretation of certain references in mandates and agreed outcomes. UNCTAD outcomes, such as the agreed conclusions from the eighty-seventh session of the Working Party in January 2024, made no mention of studies on unilateral coercive measures. Moreover, sanctions did not create impediments for investment and development; rather, the cause of impediments were the conduct that was sanctioned with the aim of inducing a change. One delegate noted, in relation to the UNCTAD mandate, that sanctions were tools for responding to malign activity and addressing threats to peace and security and not related to trade and development. In exercising the right of reply, one delegate and one

¹ See also chapter III, paragraph 88.

group of countries recalled that the agreed conclusions of the eighty-seventh session of the Working Party requested that the expectations of member States should be highlighted for consideration by the General Assembly. The request was that UNCTAD analyse purely economic, financial and trade dimensions of the unilateral coercive measures, not their peace, security and human rights-related dimensions, and noting that there were many forums with no consensus on the topic.

85. A representative of the UNCTAD secretariat welcomed the constructive feedback of member States on UNCTAD technical cooperation. He reassured the membership that particular consideration would be given to the needs specified. UNCTAD was committed to delivering technical cooperation in an agile and innovative way. UNCTAD would continue to strengthen the evaluation function, in line with United Nations system-wide benchmarks, and regular updates on implementation of the evaluation recommendations would be undertaken. The in-depth discussions concerning the preparatory session for the 2026 programme plan set the foundation for drafting the proposed programme plan, guided by the template provided by New York and within the set limits, which would be presented as per past practice for formal review at the Working Party in 2025. Feedback on the proposed options for the highlighted results of each subprogramme would be taken into consideration, as well as observations on agreed terminology in accordance with the Bridgetown Covenant.

III. Organizational matters

A. Election of officers

(Agenda item 1)

86. At its opening plenary meeting, on 7 October 2024, the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance elected Mr. Agustín Navarro de Vicente-Gella (Spain) as Chair and Mr. Shah Nazar Khan (Pakistan) as Vice-Chair-cum-Rapporteur.

B. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

(Agenda item 2)

87. Also at its opening plenary meeting, on 7 October 2024, the Working Party adopted its provisional agenda, as contained in document TD/B/WP/329. The agenda was thus as follows:

1. Election of officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
3. Review of the technical cooperation activities of UNCTAD and their financing.
4. Evaluation of UNCTAD activities:
 - (a) Evaluation of UNCTAD activities: Overview;
 - (b) External evaluation of UNCTAD subprogramme 3: International trade and commodities.
5. Preparatory session for the 2026 programme plan and performance information.
6. Provisional agenda of the eighty-ninth session of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance.
7. Other business.
8. Adoption of the report of the Working Party to the Trade and Development Board.

88. One delegate asked how, when and why the informal modality of deliberations was decided, and its added value and implications. Noting that the issue had been raised at the previous session of the Working Party, she requested that the UNCTAD secretariat provide clarification on the matter well in advance of the next session of the Working Party.

89. A representative of the UNCTAD secretariat recalled that the agenda and meetings had been determined by member States. The discussion at the current session on the programme plan and budget were for consideration in an informal setting, as agreed by member States.

C. Provisional agenda of the eighty-ninth session of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance

(Agenda item 6)

90. At its closing plenary meeting, on 11 October 2024, the Working Party approved the provisional agenda of its eighty-ninth session, as contained in a non-paper dated 8 October 2024 (see annex II).

D. Other business

(Agenda item 7)

91. There were no further issues presented for consideration by the Working Party.

E. Adoption of the report of the Working Party to the Trade and Development Board

(Agenda item 8)

92. At its closing plenary meeting, on 11 October 2024, the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance approved the report of the session and authorized the Vice-Chair-cum-Rapporteur, under the authority of the Chair, to finalize the report to the Trade and Development Board, taking into account the proceedings of the closing plenary meeting.

Annex I

Draft decision for consideration by the Trade and Development Board

Review of the technical cooperation activities of UNCTAD and their financing

(Agenda item 3)

The Trade and Development Board

1. *Takes note with appreciation* of the technical cooperation activities carried out by the UNCTAD secretariat, urges it to continue efforts in giving particular consideration to the specific needs of each region, and also welcomes the increase in contributions in 2023;
2. *Reaffirms* the role of UNCTAD technical cooperation as one of the three fundamental pillars of UNCTAD, as reiterated in the Bridgetown Covenant, and stresses the importance of coordination among those pillars for coherent and mutually reinforced assistance;
3. *Encourages* UNCTAD to enhance its involvement in the main forums organized at the global level pertinent to trade-related assistance, and recommends that the concepts originating from UNCTAD research be appropriately channelled through UNCTAD technical cooperation;
4. *Appreciates* the efforts made by UNCTAD on results-based management aimed at increasing transparency and efficiency when delivering technical assistance, and calls on UNCTAD to continue updating its results-based management tools and providing regular feedback;
5. *Encourages* UNCTAD to continue to provide technical cooperation activities deriving from its mandates and expertise, in accordance with the development strategies of recipient member States, in their pursuit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
6. *Takes note with appreciation* of continuous UNCTAD efforts in strengthening inter-agency and interdivisional cooperation, to best respond to the current and future global challenges, and in achieving the 2030 Agenda;
7. *Recognizes* the leading role of UNCTAD within the United Nations Inter-Agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity and its efforts to enhance collaboration with partner agencies and the United Nations resident coordinator system;
8. *Stresses* the importance of sufficient and predictable funding to ensure effective technical cooperation, and encourages countries in position to do so to provide UNCTAD with multi-year contributions, including to the trust fund for the least developed countries, to increase the sustainability of UNCTAD demand-driven technical assistance, underlining the importance of results-based management and the relevance of non-earmarked funding, while reaffirming the need to continue improving the application of good governance, transparency and accountability;
9. *Encourages* UNCTAD to explore accessing new funding sources, in particular for its activities supporting the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States;
10. *Invites* member States in a position to do so to consider sponsoring junior professional officers (Junior Professional Officers Programme), and notes the value of this programme in improving the competence of experts from the countries most in need;
11. *Reiterates* the request to the UNCTAD secretariat to present the streamlined *UNCTAD Toolbox* currently under preparation by the next session of the Working Party, and notes the importance of its update as requested by member States.

Annex II

Provisional agenda of the eighty-ninth session of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance

1. Election of officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
3. Review of the draft UNCTAD programme plan and performance information for the year 2026, part A of the proposed programme budget.
4. Provisional agenda of the ninetieth session of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance.
5. Other business.
6. Adoption of the report of the Working Party to the Trade and Development Board.

Annex III

Attendance*

1. Representatives of the following members of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance attended the session:

Argentina	Lebanon
Azerbaijan	Libya
Bangladesh	Malawi
Belarus	Malaysia
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mexico
Brazil	Morocco
Cambodia	Mozambique
China	Nepal
Congo	Nigeria
Croatia	Pakistan
Cuba	Peru
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Philippines
Denmark	Poland
Djibouti	Russian Federation
Ethiopia	Sierra Leone
Gambia	Slovenia
Ghana	Spain
Greece	Sri Lanka
Honduras	State of Palestine
Hungary	Switzerland
Indonesia	Syrian Arab Republic
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Thailand
Iraq	Trinidad and Tobago
Italy	Türkiye
Jamaica	United Arab Emirates
Japan	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
Kenya	Viet Nam
Kuwait	Zimbabwe

2. Representatives from the following States that are not members of the Working Party attended the session:

Bahamas
Holy See
Timor-Leste
Vanuatu

3. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented at the session:

European Union

* This attendance list contains registered participants. For the list of participants, see TD/B/WP(88)/INF.1.