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Evaluation of UNCTAD activities: Overview

Report by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD

I. Introduction

1. This report provides an overview of independent evaluation activities at UNCTAD between July 2025 and June 2026. The results of five evaluations of UNCTAD projects and programmes are presented in chapter II; a synthesis of lessons learned from the evaluations is provided in chapter III; and the evaluation plan for the period July 2026 to June 2027 is presented in chapter IV. The purpose of the overview is to demonstrate accountability to UNCTAD member States by reporting on the implementation and results of the evaluation function and to consolidate lessons learned and good practices for decision-making and future planning, promoting the use of evaluation findings.

2. Evaluation is integral to the work of UNCTAD and an essential component of the programme management cycle. The function is overseen by the Independent Evaluation Unit, which ensures that evaluation is undertaken according to rules and instructions from the United Nations Secretariat, the evaluation policy of UNCTAD and norms and standards established by the United Nations Evaluation Group.[1]

3. In accordance with the United Nations administrative instruction on evaluation in the United Nations Secretariat,[2] UNCTAD is required to “develop an evaluation plan and request adequate allocation of resources for evaluation capacity to deliver the plan through the budget process” and each subprogramme must be evaluated at least once every six years. Accordingly, the annual UNCTAD evaluation workplan generally consists of one subprogramme evaluation and, as established in the UNCTAD evaluation policy, independent evaluations of any project with a budget of $1 million or above or projects with a budget below $1 million for which the funding entity has requested an independent evaluation.

II. Summary of evaluation findings

4. Between July 2025 and June 2026, independent evaluations were completed of the following UNCTAD projects and programmes:

(a) Subprogramme 4: Technology and logistics;

(b) Develop integrated programmes to alleviate binding constraints to development by fostering structural transformation, building productive capacities and enhancing investment opportunities and linkages with China;

(c) Mobilizing resources for a green new deal: Partnerships in Asia for a decade of action in the era of coronavirus;

(d) Integrated policy strategies and regional policy coordination for resilient, green and transformative development: Supporting selected Asian Belt and Road Initiative partner countries to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

(e) Sustainable smart ports for African countries, including small island developing States, to “recover better” from the coronavirus.

5. The main objectives of the evaluations were to assess, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness (including impact) and sustainability of UNCTAD projects and programmes, as well as their mainstreaming of United Nations cross-cutting issues, and to draw conclusions from the findings, make recommendations on any enhancements needed and identify lessons learned and good practices to feed into decision-making and future planning. Key findings, recommendations and lessons learned from the evaluations are presented in this chapter.

[1] See https://unctad.org/about/evaluation and https://www.unevaluation.org/our-work.
[2] ST/AI/2021/3/Rev.1, sections 5.3 and 2.5.

A. Subprogramme 4: Technology and logistics

6. The evaluation of subprogramme 4 found that it was highly relevant to beneficiary countries; activities had been consistently grounded in country demand and aligned with national development priorities in digitalization, transport and trade facilitation. Within the United Nations system, the subprogramme maintained a clear comparative advantage as a trusted and neutral partner for the global South, combining high-quality analytical frameworks with country-level capacity-building. Member States gave very high ratings to the usefulness of the intergovernmental processes and flagship publications, such as *Review of Maritime Transport*.

7. A widening gap was noted between the increasing demand for UNCTAD products and services and UNCTAD delivery capacity. The United Nations liquidity crisis and the structural reliance of the subprogramme on earmarked funding constrained operational efficiency. Recruitment freezes and reduced non-post resources had led the division to scale down or cancel planned activities in 2025; for example, one session of a multi-year expert meeting was cancelled, the *Review of Maritime Transport* publication was shortened and future editions of *Digital Economy Report* and *Technology and Innovation Report* were planned to be merged. Shifting to online or hybrid delivery temporarily contained travel costs, yet limited the participation of capital-based technical experts at meetings, partly because, under United Nations administrative instructions, remote participation has not been supported for formal intergovernmental meetings since January 2024. In addition, with around three quarters of the subprogramme budget dependent on extrabudgetary funding, resource allocation remained fragmented and skewed towards particular donor priorities rather than core strategic needs.

8. In terms of project delivery, the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) programme was the most effective and sustainable intervention of the subprogramme, helping to modernize customs administrations, accelerate trade flows and strengthen national revenue collection across diverse and fragile environments. The Trade Logistics Branch showed results in supporting national trade facilitation committees; the Technology, Innovation and Knowledge Development Branch helped shape global policy debates on frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence; and the E-Commerce and the Digital Economy Branch contributed to stronger national electronic-commerce policy frameworks; enhanced the capacities of women digital entrepreneurs; and was highlighted within UNCTAD as a good practice example of results-based management. However, results-based management had been inconsistently applied across subprogramme 4, focused primarily on immediate outputs rather than longer-term outcomes and impacts, and cross-cutting issues such as gender equality and social inclusion had not been systematically integrated.

9. The following recommendations were made to the Secretary-General of UNCTAD and the Director of the Division on Technology and Logistics:

(a) Establish a strategic prioritization framework, aligned with mandate and resource realities, to guide subprogramme 4 delivery under constrained financial and human resources;

(b) Streamline approval processes for ASYCUDA and joint United Nations field interventions and strengthen communications, to improve the efficiency, timeliness and visibility of programme delivery;

(c) Expand and institutionalize hybrid modalities for intergovernmental and technical processes;

(d) Develop a more strategic, coordinated and programmatically aligned approach to partnerships and resource mobilization, to address fragmentation and funding imbalances;

(e) Develop and operationalize a more detailed, results-oriented results-based management framework across activities and outputs at the subprogramme level;

(f) Strengthen accountability and implementation of cross-cutting priorities, to move beyond general commitments and contribute to consistent, measurable and accountable results across subprogramme 4.

B. Project: Develop integrated programmes to alleviate binding constraints to development by fostering structural transformation, building productive capacities and enhancing investment opportunities and linkages with China

10. The project, funded by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sub-Fund, was implemented from January 2021 to December 2024 with a budget of $1,070,000. The project covered eight countries.[3] The main objective was to assist developing countries in Africa in building productive capacities and fostering structural transformation through technical training for statisticians in order to alleviate development barriers, focused on the UNCTAD productive capacities index, national gap assessments and holistic productive capacities development programmes.

11. The evaluation found that the project had achieved a high level of relevance by aligning with the national development plans and strategic priorities of the beneficiary countries. It raised awareness of a strength-based approach to development and shifted the narrative away from a traditional focus on low gross domestic product levels and on debt towards long-term structural transformation. It established technical coherence with the core work of UNCTAD on the productive capacities index and the high impact initiative on transforming for trade.[4] However, the project had shown uneven performance against planned outcomes. It articulated binding development constraints and validated structural frameworks in five of the eight countries, yet outcomes in Mozambique, Nigeria and Zimbabwe had remained incomplete or pending validation by the official closing date of the project. Full completion had been hindered by a small project management team tasked with an ambitious scope, alongside external disruptions such as national elections and pandemic-related delays.

12. The evaluation noted that stronger communications between the project team and in-country stakeholders were required in order to facilitate timely implementation and coordination. Many local stakeholders had been unaware that individual workshops belonged to a broader project framework and key strategic documents had sometimes been shared only shortly before high-level meetings. In addition, housing the project within individual trade ministries that lacked cross-ministerial coordination mandates had weakened country ownership, particularly when political portfolios shifted. The project had missed strategic opportunities to coordinate with United Nations resident coordinator offices in the beneficiary countries, leading to an UNCTAD-centric approach that limited integration into the broader approach of the “One United Nations” initiative. Participants had valued the quality of the technical training and knowledge products, yet the long-term impact of the project remained constrained by the lack of implementation funding, a high level of turnover among trained technical staff and the need for higher-level political ownership.

13. The evaluation made the following recommendations:

(a) Improve project design by verifying donor assumptions, matching scope to available human resources, creating country-specific indicators and embedding clear exit strategies;

(b) Clearly define and communicate project objectives and components, including which deliverables are intended for global comparative use and which are country-specific;

[3] Angola, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

[4] See https://www.un.org/en/sdg-summit-2023/page/transformative-action, https://unctad.org/meeting/transforming4trade-paradigm-shift-boost-economic-development, https://sdgs.un.org/SDGSummitActions/HII and https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/Keeping%20the%20SDG%20Promise%20-%20HII%20Snapshot.pdf.

(c) Establish country-based steering committees comprising United Nations resident coordinator offices, line ministries, academia and private sector champions, to secure early ownership and continuous communications;

(d) Implement an effective monitoring system, to rigorously track indicators, proactively mitigate risks and integrate a course correction mechanism;

(e) Co-develop post-project resource mobilization plans with country stakeholders, to clearly define operational fund-management structures and attract development partners.

C. Project: Mobilizing resources for a green new deal – partnerships in Asia for a decade of action in the era of coronavirus

14. The project, funded by the Development Account, was implemented from January 2021 to December 2024 with a budget of $624,000. The project achieved a budget execution rate of 96 per cent following accelerated mobilization in the final phases, after early delays due to the pandemic and political transitions. The project was designed to support developing countries in Asia by linking public finance and industrial policy. Technical capacity-building activities, field missions and the development of targeted national action plans were concentrated in three pilot countries and in one country added during a project extension.[5] Notably, the evaluation found that the project had shown results across the Asia and Pacific region.

15. The project had a high level of relevance, aligning with the needs of beneficiary countries, the UNCTAD institutional mandate and the Sustainable Development Goals. Grounded in the Nairobi Maafikiano, the project had addressed a critical knowledge gap, namely, linking financial sector reforms with green industrial policy in order to support post-pandemic economic recovery. Stakeholders stated that the project had filled a niche by focusing on the role of public development banks in climate financing. The flexible design had allowed for tailored country-specific interventions, such as on plastic pollution transitions in Fiji, debt sustainability and electric vehicle infrastructure in Sri Lanka and the green energy transformation in Viet Nam. The project had delivered 10 of the 13 planned outputs and enhanced local policymaking capacities, with 96 per cent of surveyed workshop participants reporting improved understanding of green financing approaches. Tangible policy outcomes were prominent in Fiji, where the Government formally endorsed a green transition action plan and integrated project recommendations into international plastic pollution treaty negotiations; and in Sri Lanka, where project findings on international development banking prompted the Government to consider establishing a national development bank. In addition, an operational partnership had been developed between UNCTAD and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, with cross-country learning networks that generated institutional demand for continued research.

16. Adaptive management had partially mitigated pandemic-related travel constraints through the use of local consultants and virtual platforms, yet the project had faced implementation delays due to the pandemic, economic volatility and political transitions in beneficiary countries. In addition, the evaluation noted weak knowledge management and data collection practices and infrequent updating of the project website. The sustainability of project results varied across countries. Institutional ownership was noted as strong in Fiji; progress in Viet Nam was delayed by political shifts. The integration of United Nations cross-cutting issues was deemed only moderately satisfactory. The project had maintained a gender balance in workshops and produced a dedicated study on the care economy, yet disability inclusion and principles related to leaving no one behind had received limited consideration in the project design and implementation processes.

[5] Fiji, Sri Lanka, Viet Nam, Indonesia.

17. The evaluation made the following recommendations:

(a) Develop a resource mobilization strategy and engage with emerging and non-traditional donors, to scale up green financing and industrial policy work;

(b) Establish more systematic partnership arrangements with regional commissions, such as the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, to strengthen institutional collaboration and reduce reliance on informal arrangements;

(c) Improve project planning by conducting risk assessments during the design phase, to better mitigate external delays;

(d) Build staff capacity to effectively integrate cross-cutting issues, such as gender and disability inclusion, into technical policy work;

(e) Improve knowledge management and communications by allocating dedicated resources to the timely publication and dissemination of project outputs;

(f) Establish a centralized participant database and implement pre- and post-assessment surveys for systematic workshop monitoring.

D. Project: Integrated policy strategies and regional policy coordination for resilient, green and transformative development – supporting selected Asian Belt and Road Initiative partner countries to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

18. The project, funded by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sub-Fund, was implemented from January 2022 to September 2025 with a budget of $1,198,400. The project covered four beneficiary countries[6] and achieved a budget execution rate of 99.8 per cent. It combined country diagnostics and policy strategy reports with national consultations and regional exchanges.

19. The evaluation found a high degree of strategic relevance, as the project had been designed and implemented under the core mandate of UNCTAD and aligned with the green transformation and climate action priorities of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, the extent to which the project influenced policy varied across countries, depending in part on the ability of the project team to secure sustained engagement with senior government decision-makers during project design and implementation. The project had achieved the most significant outcomes in Malaysia, where strategic spillovers had been generated into climate finance and sectoral policy discussions; and in Pakistan, where project inputs were directly embedded into the national Strategic Trade Policy Framework 2025–2030, supported by sustained ministerial-level engagement. In Kazakhstan and Türkiye, however, policy uptake had faced challenges due to competing national priorities, institutional capacity constraints and limited engagement with senior government decision-makers, despite the delivery of high-quality analytical outputs.

20. The project had faced gaps in implementation efficiency and sustainability. Structurally, the project management architecture lacked operational resilience. In addition, early management transitions, staffing changes and interruptions in project support had contributed to significant delays. Some of the planned sustainability mechanisms were not fully realized. Regional meetings were successful and terms of reference had been prepared for an Asia green development partnership network, yet the network and its online platform remained non-operational after the official closing date of the project due to a lack of continued funding and inadequate early sustainability planning.

[6] Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Türkiye.

21. The evaluation made the following recommendations:

(a) Make country selection and scoping explicitly demand-led and confirm stakeholders' engagement and understanding of project timelines and deliverables before committing resources;

(b) Use existing regional or thematic platforms for information-sharing and stakeholder-convening instead of creating parallel networks that are difficult to sustain;

(c) Strengthen implementation planning, milestone tracking, risk management and course correction from project inception;

(d) Establish a proactive communications and implementation strategy from inception, to successfully translate research into action;

(e) Prioritize project sustainability from the outset by treating mechanisms as fully funded and governed systems rather than end-of-project events;

(f) Systematically implement UNCTAD guidelines on mainstreaming gender, disability inclusion and human rights as core design and implementation requirements.

E. Project: Sustainable smart ports for African countries, including small island developing States, to "recover better" from the coronavirus

22. The project, funded by the Development Account, was implemented from February 2022 to March 2026 with a budget of $600,000. The project covered three countries[7] and achieved a budget execution rate of 99.5 per cent.

23. The evaluation concluded that the project had been relevant and strategically aligned with the core mandate of UNCTAD and the subprogramme on technology and logistics, as well as the Development Account emphasis on results-based capacity development.[8] Across beneficiary countries, the project had addressed the need to transition towards sustainable smart ports and had remained responsive to country-specific priorities and differing operational environments. UNCTAD offered a comparative advantage by translating the still-evolving sustainable smart ports concept into a structured, country-level methodology. Through its convening ability, UNCTAD had created a collaborative platform that improved coordination among institutions, bringing together actors who did not typically work together, such as ministries, port authorities, energy regulators, utilities and private operators, to align on a common green port agenda.

24. In terms of effectiveness, the project had largely achieved its immediate objectives by enhancing stakeholder knowledge, building technical capacity and securing formal endorsement of the sustainable smart ports assessment methodology. Comprehensive assessment reports and national road maps and/or action plans had been developed and validated across all three countries. However, actual policy implementation remained early and uneven. Mauritius had finalized and integrated priority strategies into a national green port strategy. The action plans for Ghana and Morocco had been validated but remained under finalization at the time of evaluation. Beyond its intended scope, the project had resulted in additional unintended positive outcomes, such as the following: fostering inter-institutional dialogue; exposing regulatory bottlenecks, particularly regarding energy distribution rules in Ghana; and the establishment of a multi-stakeholder task force to track key performance indicators in Morocco.

25. Project management had efficiently delivered core activities despite a lean staffing structure, with a high degree of adaptive management and training tailored to each country's unique baseline. However, overall timelines had experienced administrative pressures and underestimated external risks, such as institutional disruptions due to a political transition in Ghana. Sustainability-related measures had been embedded through capacity-building and locally owned road maps, with 90 per cent of surveyed stakeholders

[7] Ghana, Mauritius, Morocco.

[8] See "Development Account project evaluation guidelines", available at https://da.desa.un.org/static-guidance-public.

expressing an intention to use the planning tools to guide future investments. The integration of United Nations cross-cutting issues had been limited; environmental sustainability was embedded as the core technical focus of the project, yet gender equality, disability inclusion and principles related to leaving no one behind had been addressed only indirectly and not systematically integrated into project design or outputs.

26. The evaluation made the following recommendations:

(a) Conduct detailed planning consultations with national stakeholders and United Nations resident coordinator offices early on, to validate national capacities and data accessibility and mitigate implementation risks;

(b) Strengthen project management arrangements for multi-country interventions through improved workload planning, flexible access to short-term support during peak periods and structured coordination or tracking tools;

(c) Establish systematic, early partnerships with United Nations system entities, regional port associations and development finance institutions, to support road map implementation and project scaling;

(d) Optimize data collection processes by streamlining requirements, clearly communicating their purpose and preparing stakeholders early, to prevent operational delays;

(e) Integrate United Nations cross-cutting priorities, such as gender equality and disability inclusion, systematically into the project design, monitoring frameworks and core indicators from the outset.

III. Lessons learned from evaluations

27. The main lessons learned from UNCTAD evaluations completed between July 2025 and June 2026 are presented in this chapter, building on the findings presented in previous evaluation overview reports. Common patterns, trends and recurring themes are drawn from a synthesis of findings, conclusions and recommendations across all evaluations. By comparing and contrasting findings from different evaluations, the synthesis strengthens the validity and reliability of the evaluation process, allows for the triangulation of evidence and reduces the risk of drawing conclusions based on isolated or limited evaluations. The synthesis also serves to generate new insights and knowledge, by integrating diverse perspectives and data sources and uncovering underlying factors or dynamics that may not be evident in individual evaluations.

28. In the period July 2025–June 2026, 28 recommendations were issued to UNCTAD through independent evaluations. Common themes emerging from across the recommendations included strengthening the following: monitoring and evaluation (21 per cent); programme and/or project design (17 per cent); mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues (14 per cent); stakeholder engagement (10 per cent); partnerships (10 per cent); resource mobilization and long-term sustainability (10 per cent); and outreach and visibility (7 per cent). Drawing on these recurring findings, the lessons learned discussed in this chapter are identified as having broader relevance in strengthening the efficiency, coherence, effectiveness, sustainability and impact of the work of UNCTAD.

A. UNCTAD comparative advantage

29. The UNCTAD comparative advantage is in providing demand-driven, high-quality technical expertise and policy advice.

30. Across the evaluations, UNCTAD consistently demonstrated comparative advantages in delivering technically robust analysis, evidence-based policy advice, capacity development and multi-stakeholder engagement tailored to national priorities. Interventions achieved stronger results when they responded to clearly identified country needs and involved government institutions throughout implementation. This combination of specialized expertise, country ownership and convening capacity on the ground remains a

key strength of UNCTAD. Member States valued the ability to translate complex global development challenges into practical, country-specific recommendations from the perspective of developing countries.

31. Another strength of UNCTAD was cross-fertilization between the three pillars of work, namely, research and analysis, technical cooperation and consensus-building. The evaluation of subprogramme 4 highlighted that the three pillars were most effective when they were mutually reinforcing rather than operating in isolation. Linking operational experience with analytical work and policy dialogue helped ensure that UNCTAD research and recommendations were grounded in country-level realities and that lessons from technical cooperation informed broader global discussions.

32. The UNCTAD ability to translate complex global development challenges into tailored policy solutions was noted across several interventions. For example, under the sustainable smart ports project, UNCTAD had supported multi-stakeholder engagement in order to address interconnected energy and digital transition challenges. Evidence-based assessments had identified policy and capacity gaps, providing policymakers with information to guide investment and policy decisions and supporting countries in developing more targeted strategies, including, in Ghana, strengthened regulatory implementation pathways; and, in Mauritius, a green port strategy. Under the green new deal project, UNCTAD had responded to national priorities through tailored support addressing particular policy gaps, including green finance strategies in Fiji, analysis of electric vehicle battery manufacturing potential in Sri Lanka and work on green energy public financing in Viet Nam. In addition, under the productive capacities project, UNCTAD had supported eight countries in Africa in identifying structural bottlenecks, strengthening national statistical capacity and developing country-specific gap assessments and road maps, providing an evidence base for longer-term structural transformation.

B. Results-based management

33. UNCTAD should continue to strengthen branch-level results-based management systems and the link between project design, monitoring and evaluation and long-term development results.

34. The evaluations consistently highlighted the importance of robust project design, realistic implementation planning and effective results-based management in achieving sustainable results. Stronger-performing interventions were typically characterized by clear theories of change, meaningful stakeholder engagement, realistic assumptions and monitoring systems that supported adaptive management. However, results-based management practices were uneven across the organization. The evaluations identified areas where results-based management approaches needed further strengthening across the UNCTAD portfolio, particularly by linking project outputs more systematically to longer-term policy uptake and institutional change, and by improving monitoring and evaluation systems in order to better track lessons and outcomes.

35. The evaluations also stressed the need to strengthen risk management as an integral part of project design and implementation. Risk mitigation was often addressed reactively rather than as a structured project management function. Recommendations included incorporating risk analysis and mitigation measures from the outset, including clearly defined and adequately resourced coordination roles, contingency arrangements and backup institutional focal points in order to reduce delays caused by changes in government counterparts or political transitions. Aligning implementation timelines with potential political and administrative changes was also identified as a good practice.

36. Several of the evaluations noted that delays and implementation challenges could have been reduced through better planning, resource alignment and adaptive management. The evaluation of subprogramme 4 found that expanding mandates, particularly in digital transformation and trade facilitation, required more strategic prioritization and resource mobilization approaches, to avoid delivery constraints. Across technical cooperation projects, midterm reviews were identified as valuable tools with which to adjust implementation approaches, reallocating resources and supporting the achievement of intended results when challenges emerged.

C. Sustainability

37. Long-term sustainability can be enhanced through stronger institutional ownership, systematic follow-up and integration into national systems.

38. The evaluations emphasized that the sustainability of UNCTAD work depended on embedding project results within national institutions, policies and development processes, rather than treating sustainability as a post-project consideration. More sustainable results were achieved when institutional ownership, follow-up arrangements and resource mobilization strategies were incorporated into project design from the outset. Doing so included aligning interventions with national priorities, strengthening institutional capacities and establishing clear pathways for implementing recommendations beyond project completion.

39. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of results nevertheless remains a challenge. As a non-resident agency, UNCTAD is not structured to provide continuous in-country support, and evaluations found that short project cycles, changes in government counterparts and the absence of structured exit or transition strategies often limited the durability of project outcomes. Sustainability was stronger when projects included measures to maintain engagement with countries beyond the official closing date of a project. For example, the green new deal project had shown that technical analysis generated more lasting benefits when translated into government-endorsed national action plans; and the productive capacities project had shown the importance of follow-up advisory support, to help countries in moving from diagnostic assessments to implementing policy road maps.

40. The evaluations also noted that sustaining results required stronger institutional coordination and more systematic monitoring of the uptake of project outputs. The sustainable smart ports project had shown that long-term success depended on formal coordination between maritime, transport and energy institutions, to ensure that technical interventions remained aligned with broader national policies. The evaluation of subprogramme 4 found that analytical products and capacity development initiatives, including science, technology and innovation policy reviews and training programmes, would benefit from more systematic post-intervention monitoring, to assess knowledge utilization, policy implementation and institutional change after project completion. Such follow-up would strengthen organizational learning while generating evidence of longer-term development results. The evaluations further highlighted the importance of moving towards longer-term, programmatic approaches supported by clear theories of change, stronger results-based management and more predictable resource mobilization, to enhance sustainability and respond to evolving donor expectations.

D. Partnerships and continuous stakeholder engagement

41. Strategic partnerships, continuous stakeholder engagement and integration into United Nations country processes can strengthen national ownership and long-term impacts.

42. The evaluations found that UNCTAD interventions achieved stronger and more sustainable results when implemented through strategic partnerships and sustained engagement with Governments, United Nations resident coordinator offices, regional organizations and other development partners. Early and continuous stakeholder

engagement by the project team throughout project implementation, including regular communications on overall objectives, progress and expected results, was essential in building ownership and ensuring that stakeholders understood the broader purpose and strategic relevance of UNCTAD interventions beyond their participation in particular activities or workshops. The evaluations found that, in some cases, national stakeholders had been aware of individual activities but had limited understanding of the wider project objectives and expected outcomes, reducing ability to engage fully in implementation and follow-up. Clearly defined coordination mechanisms and regular communications strengthened ownership, facilitated implementation and increased the likelihood that results would be sustained beyond the end of external support.

43. Several of the evaluations noted that ownership was strengthened when UNCTAD combined technical expertise with structured partnerships and capacity development. The evaluation of the productive capacities project noted that it had paired analytical diagnostics with training for national statisticians, enabling countries to better use the findings in national planning processes; yet highlighted that diagnostic tools risked remaining stand-alone products without continued engagement and institutional follow-up to support implementation. In addition, under the sustainable smart ports project, the establishment of a continuous coordination framework had helped align institutions, improve coordination and translate technical assessments into nationally owned strategies.

44. The evaluations also identified challenges linked to the status of UNCTAD as a non-resident agency. In several cases, partnerships remained dependent on branch or section-level networks and project-specific engagement, making them vulnerable to changes in counterparts or the conclusion of project funding. The absence of formal transition arrangements, institutional agreements or systematic follow-up mechanisms limited the ability to maintain momentum after project completion. The evaluations therefore stressed the need to move from primarily project-based relationships, focused on the delivery of particular activities and outputs, to more institutionalized, long-term collaboration models, including formal coordination mechanisms, strategic partnerships and structured stakeholder engagement platforms.

45. UNCTAD contributed to 46 United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks in 2024.[9] However, the evaluations noted that further efforts were needed to embed UNCTAD analytical frameworks and technical expertise into common country analyses and United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks. Interviews with United Nations country teams indicated that awareness of UNCTAD products, tools and areas of expertise remained limited, highlighting the need for more proactive communications and engagement. Greater integration of UNCTAD expertise into country-level United Nations planning processes would enable resident coordinator offices and other United Nations entities to draw more systematically on UNCTAD research and technical support in designing and implementing country programmes.

E. Resource mobilization strategies

46. UNCTAD should integrate resource mobilization strategies into project design, to sustain policy implementation and scale up results.

47. The evaluations found that valuable policy recommendations, diagnostics and implementation road maps risked having limited impacts when financing strategies and follow-up arrangements were not considered from the outset. They recommended that resource mobilization be integrated into project design, with early engagement with Governments, development partners, regional organizations and financing institutions, to identify pathways for implementation and scale-up. This was particularly important for interventions that generated policy frameworks or investment priorities requiring resources beyond the scope of UNCTAD technical cooperation budgets. For example, the productive capacities project had shown the value of tools such as the productive capacities index and national gap assessments but also served to highlight the risk that diagnostic exercises

[9] See https://unctad.org/publication/annual-report-2024.

might remain disconnected from implementation without dedicated follow-up support and a fundraising road map. The sustainable smart ports project had shown that technical assessments and national road maps could support larger-scale investments when designed with development partners in mind. Early engagement with financing institutions and regional development banks could help ensure that assessments, such as energy consumption mapping and port transition plans, served as a basis for future investment decisions.

48. The evaluations also identified the need for more strategic and coordinated approaches to resource mobilization. The evaluation of subprogramme 4 found that donor engagement and fundraising efforts were often decentralized and project-specific, limiting opportunities to establish longer-term partnerships aligned with expanding mandates in areas such as digital transformation, trade facilitation and logistics. Moving towards larger, integrated programme approaches and leveraging United Nations country platforms could help mobilize more predictable financing.

F. Outreach and visibility

49. Enhanced outreach and visibility can strengthen stakeholder engagement and increase the uptake of UNCTAD knowledge products and technical support.

50. The evaluations highlighted that the assessed analytical products and technical expertise were widely recognized for their quality, yet corporate-level dissemination alone did not necessarily translate into policy uptake or sustained stakeholder engagement. UNCTAD had achieved significant visibility through digital platforms in 2022–2025, including increased website traffic and social media engagement, yet the evaluations found that evidence of direct use of UNCTAD outputs in national policy processes remained more difficult to demonstrate. The evaluations emphasized the need to move beyond a primarily information-sharing approach towards more targeted, audience-specific outreach that identified priority stakeholder groups, understood how different users engaged with UNCTAD products and adapted communications channels and formats accordingly.

51. The evaluations noted the importance of balancing a coherent institutional communications approach with the ability of divisions and branches to engage directly with specialized technical audiences. Centralized communications had strengthened the corporate visibility of UNCTAD and the consistency of messaging, but more flexible communications modalities would enable branches to respond more effectively to the needs of professional networks, policymakers and practitioners in respective areas of expertise. The evaluations recommended that the forthcoming UNCTAD communications strategy and guidelines support the targeted dissemination of specialized content, including through the development and maintenance of stakeholder databases, systematic follow-up with established networks and the integration of communications and dissemination plans into project designs from the outset. The evaluations further noted that user-friendly formats, such as policy briefs, country summaries and practical toolkits, could help translate complex analytical work into more accessible information for decision-makers.

G. Cross-cutting priorities

52. Cross-cutting priorities should be further integrated throughout a programme or project cycle, to strengthen relevance, inclusiveness and sustainability.

53. The evaluations highlighted that cross-cutting priorities, including gender equality, disability inclusion, human rights and environmental sustainability, were most effectively addressed when integrated throughout a project cycle, from design and implementation to monitoring and evaluation, rather than treated as stand-alone considerations. Systematic mainstreaming strengthened the relevance and inclusiveness of interventions and helped ensure that development outcomes were sustainable and responsive to the needs of different groups and contexts. The evaluations found, however, that the integration of cross-cutting issues remained uneven across the evaluated UNCTAD portfolio, with some projects

lacking clear indicators, dedicated resources or mechanisms to monitor progress beyond activity-level implementation.

54. The evaluations identified good practices in areas where cross-cutting dimensions had been embedded into the core analytical and operational approach of projects. For example, the green new deal project had shown the value of integrating environmental sustainability into broader economic policy processes by linking green finance, industrial policy and energy transition considerations. The sustainable smart ports project had shown the importance of integrating environmental objectives into wider infrastructure planning. Through energy assessments, including an analysis of port energy consumption, the project had supported country-specific road maps that connected port modernization with broader energy transition considerations.

55. Overall, the evaluation of subprogramme 4 concluded that cross-cutting issues, particularly gender equality, disability inclusion and human rights considerations, had not been consistently reflected in project designs, monitoring frameworks and reporting. The evaluations recommended moving beyond a checklist approach by providing clearer guidance, dedicated expertise and stronger accountability mechanisms, to help project teams integrate and monitor cross-cutting priorities throughout project life cycles.

IV. Evaluation plan for the period 2026–2027

56. In line with United Nations guidelines, UNCTAD will continue the cycle of one subprogramme evaluation per year with the evaluation of subprogramme 5: Africa, least developed countries and special programmes, to be considered by the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance in 2027. The evaluation plan for the period July 2026–June 2027 includes six additional evaluations (see table).

Evaluation plan, 2026–2027

Programme or project	*Funding source*	*Overall budget (Dollars)*	*Evaluation budget (Dollars)*	*Period of evaluation*
Train for Trade blended learning strategy to boost the digital economy in small island developing States of Africa, the Caribbean and Asia and the Pacific	Development Account	600 000	24 000	Q4 2025–Q3 2026
External evaluation of subprogramme 5: Africa, least developed countries and special programmes	Regular budget	24 232 000	30 000	Q4 2026–Q2 2027
Science, technology and innovation parks for sustainable development: Building expertise in policy and practice in selected Asian and African countries	2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sub-Fund	1 014 360	31 000	Q2–Q4 2026
European Union for business support to Central European Free Trade Agreement for non-tariff measures monitoring and reporting and support for the implementation of the Central European Free Trade Agreement dispute settlement mechanism	European Union	1 830 000	37 000	Q3 2026–Q1 2027
Automated System for Relief Emergency Consignments for innovative coordination and facilitation of relief consignments in times of disaster in the Pacific region	Development Account	650 000	26 000	Q1–Q3 2027

Programme or project	*Funding source*	*Overall budget (Dollars)*	*Evaluation budget (Dollars)*	*Period of evaluation*
Quantifying South–South cooperation for the Sustainable Development Goals	Development Account	800 000	32 000	Q1–Q3 2027
Independent evaluation of the Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and UNCTAD partnership (2023–2026)	Kingdom of the Netherlands	4 000 000	40 000	Q1–Q3 2027

Source: UNCTAD.
Abbreviation: Q, quarter.