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## Trade and Development Board

### Working Party on the Strategic Framework and the Programme Budget

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## Evaluation of UNCTAD activities: Overview

### Report by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD

#### Introduction

1. This report provides an overview of the external evaluations of UNCTAD programmes and projects undertaken between April 2015 and March 2016.<sup>1</sup> This information is presented to allow for more in-depth reporting on all evaluation activities and is a move towards strengthening accountability and lessons learned.

#### I. Summary of evaluation findings

2. Evaluations at UNCTAD are conducted against the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, consistent with the standards outlined by the United Nations Evaluation Group. The objectives of such assessments are to draw conclusions on the work implemented, to make recommendations on any enhancements needed and to identify lessons learned and best practices. Such information can help inform the design, planning and implementation of future work. Programme managers at UNCTAD are encouraged to refer to previous reports and overviews of evaluations of UNCTAD activities in designing, implementing and monitoring programmes.

3. Six evaluations were conducted in the period considered in this report. The first was an evaluation of subprogramme 3 on international trade, 2010–2014, as requested by the Trade and Development Board. This evaluation was conducted by one professional evaluator and two representatives of UNCTAD member States. External evaluations were also completed of the following five projects supported by the United Nations Development

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the UNCTAD evaluation policy, all evaluations mentioned in this report are external evaluations conducted by an external evaluator(s) or evaluation team (see [http://unctad.org/Sections/edm\\_dir/docs/osg\\_EvaluationPolicy2011\\_en.pdf](http://unctad.org/Sections/edm_dir/docs/osg_EvaluationPolicy2011_en.pdf)).



Account: (a) Enhancing capacities of developing countries to mainstream gender in trade policy (project 1011Q); (b) Addressing the impact and implications of the global financial crisis on developing countries through support to services sector development (project 1011P); (c) Strengthening the capacity of the rural communities in least developed countries to utilize the market access opportunities provided by duty free quota free and enhancing value added of their traditional products (project 08/09AT); (d) Accelerating progress of selected West African countries towards the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, particularly Millennium Development Goal 8, through trade-related training and capacity-building (project 1213J); (e) Promoting business models for sustainable development: investing in the poor, for the poor and with the poor (1213O).

#### **A. Evaluation of UNCTAD subprogramme 3: International trade, 2010–2014**

4. The Trade and Development Board, at its sixty-first annual session, requested the UNCTAD secretariat to conduct an independent evaluation of subprogramme 3 on international trade, 2010–2014, with the objective of assessing, in relation to its mandates, its relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, as well as the impact of its work, and proposing enhancements as appropriate. The following paragraphs highlight the main findings and recommendations of the evaluation and feedback received following the presentation of the report by the evaluation team at the seventy-first session of the Working Party on the Strategic Framework and the Programme Budget.

5. The evaluation confirmed the relevance and responsiveness of subprogramme 3 to the needs of its stakeholders. It concluded that the subprogramme had made material contributions across its work streams to strengthen understanding, analysis and policy formulation capacities in a large number of countries. The evaluation also concluded that an institutional culture of commitment to promoting economic growth through trade, strong technical expertise in multiple domains, a network of global experts and convening power as a United Nations agency had contributed to concrete results despite limited extrabudgetary support. The evaluation highlighted the achievements of the subprogramme through inter-agency cooperation and partnership with other UNCTAD subprogrammes. The evaluation also noted the weaknesses of the subprogramme, including lack of a robust results framework and communications strategy and challenges in demonstrating synergies and concrete outcomes from its research and analysis work and intergovernmental consensus work.

6. On the basis of its observations, the evaluation team presented 13 recommendations that covered a range of issues. With regard to programme design and setting of performance indicators, the evaluation recommended the use of more concrete and change-language indicators in biennial work programmes and branch-wide programmes, showing the contributions, synergies and impacts of activities and corresponding to the overarching economic, social and environmental goals and targets in the Sustainable Development Goals. To improve effectiveness, the evaluation recommended that the subprogramme review and optimize the number of research outputs and broaden policy alternatives for development in the elaboration of policy advice, publications, technical cooperation, parliamentary documents and other activities, and explore opportunities for greater synergy with other UNCTAD subprogrammes, the World Trade Organization and front line agencies under the United Nations Inter-Agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity. With regard to communications, the evaluation recommended that the subprogramme develop an integrated communications plan, including electronic and social media tools for strengthening outreach and stakeholder engagement. Finally, the evaluation recommended that in the prioritization of technical assistance, UNCTAD consider country capacities and willingness to assume implementation commitments in reforms, which could lead to the sustained success of its interventions.

7. In its management response, the secretariat welcomed the evaluation and stated that it would continue its work and initiatives in line with the recommendations. At the seventy-first session of the Working Party, member States noted with appreciation the evaluation findings concerning the relevance of the subprogramme and its responsiveness in addressing the needs of stakeholders. Member States also expressed appreciation to the evaluation team for the evaluation and emphasized the importance of the independent external evaluation process in UNCTAD in contributing to the sharing of information, learning and the improvement of programme effectiveness and accountability. The secretariat was requested to report on progress made in the implementation of the recommendations at the seventy-third session of the Working Party.

## **B. Evaluation of United Nations Development Account projects**

### **(i) External evaluation: Enhancing capacities of developing countries to mainstream gender in trade policy (United Nations Development Account, project 1011Q)**

8. This project sought to strengthen the capacity of governments in developing countries to mainstream gender in trade policy and make trade policy more responsive to the specific needs of women. It aimed to promote the capacity of policymakers and trade negotiators to include gender considerations when designing trade policy and negotiating trade agreements, in order to make trade instrumental to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment. The project was implemented in four countries, namely, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Rwanda and Uruguay. The project organized one workshop in each country and subsequently delivered country-level reports translated into local languages. A synthesis report summarizing key findings and lessons learned was also produced. The project also developed an online course on gender and trade policy; upon its launch, 100 participants from 51 countries were selected out of 186 applicants. Subsequent to United Nations Development Account funding, the project received additional funding for country studies in Angola, the Gambia and Lesotho to reproduce the project activities.

9. The evaluation concluded that the project had been well implemented and highly successful in achieving short-term objectives and piloting case studies that could be catalytic in developing future work on mainstreaming gender into trade policy. The evaluator noted that the project had been relevant for all concerned parties, including national-level stakeholders, UNCTAD and the United Nations Development Account, that the country-level reports had evidenced rigorous and innovative methodologies adapted to suit country contexts over time and that the online course had been highly regarded by participants. The evaluation highlighted that all planned project activities had been completed efficiently by a small team and that the project had been successful in leveraging additional resources, and concluded that the willingness of member States to fund additional studies suggested that they valued the project's approach and initial findings. The evaluator noted that the high implementation rate, of 96 per cent,<sup>2</sup> implied a high execution rate of planned budgets, manifested in the full implementation of all planned activities. However, the evaluator also noted that project activities may have been spread too widely, which had prevented project managers from working more intensely with national stakeholders to build their capacities over time and from spending sufficient time on following up with national counterparts. Further, engagement by national stakeholders in project formulation and implementation could have been stronger, as well as project self-monitoring. The evaluator noted the different perceptions of UNCTAD and government stakeholders; UNCTAD had used the project to pilot studies for developing future work on

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<sup>2</sup> This implementation rate is compared with a United Nations Development Account project expense report for seventh tranche projects closed as of December 2014. Implementation rate is the term used in tracking the percentage of funds used, calculated by dividing the final expense by the approved budget, and is linked to the efficiency of a United Nations Development Account project.

gender and trade policy, while some other stakeholders had anticipated longer-term capacity development.

10. Based on the findings, some of the important recommendations proposed by the evaluator for UNCTAD were as follows: (a) ensure the work programme receives appropriate funding to ensure the sustainability of its work to date on mainstreaming gender into trade policy; (b) ensure a shared understanding of project objectives among all parties at the start of any new project on enhancing capacity on gender and trade policy; (c) design future projects in a way that allows engagement by national counterparts throughout project development and implementation to ensure greater national ownership, and ensure that longer-term capacity development is more closely linked to mainstreaming gender into trade policy; (d) develop a realistic framework for the self-monitoring of future projects and implement this on a regular basis, including the use of end-of-workshop surveys; and (e) continue to implement the online course and measure results over time

**(ii) External evaluation: Addressing the impact and implications of the global financial crisis on developing countries through support to services sector development (United Nations Development Account, project 1011P)**

11. This project aimed to strengthen the capacity of policymakers, regulators and trade negotiators of developing countries to capture new market opportunities and address national challenges in the services sector, particularly in the context of the impact and implications of the global financial crisis. Its particular focus was on improving capacities in developing, reforming and prioritizing national policies and strengthening institutional and regulatory frameworks, to ensure that services trade reform and liberalization in the countries generated expected development benefits. The project delivered eight services policy reviews in Bangladesh, Jamaica, Lesotho, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Rwanda and Uganda. In addition, 14 national workshops were organized on services policy reviews, two regional meetings were organized in Africa and Latin America and four study tours were organized for officials from Lesotho, Nicaragua, Peru and Uganda.

12. The evaluation concluded that the project had been relevant to the majority of beneficiary country needs and consistent with the work programme. The evaluator confirmed that the majority of stakeholders had been satisfied by the quality of the work and results achieved and that the services policy reviews had been considered useful by beneficiaries in many ways, for instance as reference documents for trade negotiations and policymaking. The evaluation highlighted that the project had been efficient and that the team had been able to accomplish a number of results in the beneficiary countries with a relatively small budget. The evaluator noted some of the challenges in project implementation in Asia and acknowledged external factors beyond the control of the team. In addition, the use of English in the services policy reviews had been a concern for some beneficiary countries whose official language was Spanish, and this had affected the relevance of the project.<sup>3</sup> The evaluation on gender aspects was positive; some services policy reviews had mainstreamed gender equality in policy advice. The evaluator concluded that more support was needed to follow up on the implementation of the recommendations of the services policy reviews, in order to increase the sustainability of the project's results.

13. Based on the findings, some of the important recommendations proposed by the evaluator for UNCTAD were as follows: (a) ensure that official documentation prepared for future similar projects is made available in the official language of the beneficiary country to facilitate the implementation of and follow-up on policy advice proposed by UNCTAD, and develop a diffusion strategy to ensure that services policy reviews are disseminated to

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<sup>3</sup> In most instances in Spanish-speaking countries, the project delivered output and organized activities in Spanish. However, at the time of the evaluation, all published services policy reviews were in English.

the widest possible audience, with targeted promotion to high-level decision makers; (b) make allowances for and necessary investments in increasing the collection and use of primary data, to improve the quality and usefulness of the data based on which services policy reviews are developed; and (c) seek appropriate solutions to problems of efficiency, such as the time-consuming process of the recruitment of national consultants, for instance by recruiting temporary administrative staff to support project management logistics.

14. In addition, the evaluator recommended that future similar projects integrate an implementation plan component as a next step following policy advice, that the United Nations Development Account provide sufficient funds for such plans and that project plans allocate appropriate funding, in order to increase the sustainability of services policy reviews.

15. The evaluator of this project had the opportunity to evaluate three United Nations Development Account projects, managed by three different UNCTAD subprogrammes, all of which had similar operations and activities in a number of developing countries. The evaluator especially commended this project's strong financial monitoring and reporting of expenses, which provided a clear, detailed structure of expenses at the country level and by expense type. Based on further research, the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit of UNCTAD underscored that of all United Nations Development Account projects implemented by UNCTAD and evaluated in the past three years, this project was one of the few that had managed to produce transparent and informative project expenses. Such strong tracking and monitoring of expenses required much administrative support, but was worthwhile and useful for monitoring project budgets and allocating resources in a reasonable and practical way and for planning similar future projects.

**(iii) External evaluation: Strengthening the capacity of the rural communities in least developed countries to utilize the market access opportunities provided by duty free quota free and enhancing value added of their traditional products (United Nations Development Account, project 08/09AT)**

16. This project aimed to support rural communities in least developed countries with utilizing geographical indicators to achieve the objectives of poverty reduction, economic growth and export promotion. The following six countries were identified in the preparatory phase: Bhutan; Cambodia; Ethiopia; Madagascar; Mauritania; and Mozambique. The project was subsequently extended to the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Senegal. The project organized five national workshops and two regional workshops in Cambodia and Italy, as well as an international experience-sharing workshop in Geneva, Switzerland, for project beneficiaries, as well as least developed country delegates to the World Trade Organization. The project prepared draft publications on specifications for potential geographical indicators products in three countries and collaborated with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Slow Food Foundation. The project received supplementary funding from the Government of Italy and leveraged support from the Slow Food Foundation to accommodate participants at a workshop held at the Terra Madre Salone del Gusto in Turin, Italy.

17. The evaluation concluded that the project had met its objective of improving understanding of the potential of geographical indicators among national Governments and rural communities in beneficiary countries. The evaluator confirmed that stakeholder satisfaction had been uniformly high regarding such understanding and that policy-level interest had been generated by the various workshops organized under the project. She noted that the project's approach of focusing on empowering rural communities with information and opportunities for engaging with government officials had been helpful. In addition, she highlighted that the focus on ensuring sustainability by integrating geographical indicators issues in the action matrices of diagnostic trade integration studies in many countries had contributed to the sustainability of the project. However, the evaluator observed that the scope of the project had been too broad and that spreading

resources across nine countries had posed challenges in ensuring sustained support and analysis. The evaluator acknowledged that UNCTAD had addressed this issue by inserting geographical indicators into workplans for diagnostic trade integration studies, but noted that ongoing involvement by UNCTAD might still be required. In addition, although one of the project's expected accomplishments had been to enhance the capacities of rural communities to meet market access requirements, this required a long-term approach and attainment of this result had been challenged by the fact that rural communities were not well organized or connected to actors in marketing and export value chains. The evaluator further observed that although rural communities had been given opportunities to establish contacts and dialogues with government officials, their follow-up engagement on issues related to the promotion of geographical indicators had not been fully realized, due partly to the fact that their abilities to take further actions were limited and partly to the fact that relevant ministries in some countries were more oriented towards export and import issues and, thus, ministry linkage and interaction with rural communities and relevant value chains was limited.

18. Based on the findings, some of the important recommendations proposed by the evaluator for UNCTAD were as follows: (a) use workshop outcomes to document project outcomes and publish and disseminate reports on developing country experiences with geographical indicators; (b) ensure a more comprehensive framework for gender integration at the design stage of projects to ensure gender equality along value chains for geographical indicators products in the least developed countries; (c) expand partnerships with other development partners such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and International Trade Centre, and make use of their special expertise in UNCTAD technical assistance to help the least developed countries expand agricultural production and markets, including for geographical indicators products; and (d) provide ongoing technical support to developing countries, including assisting policymakers in decision-making on the selection and prioritization of geographical indicators products and identification of rural communities, through the provision of feasibility studies on the potential of geographical indicators and their adaption to national situations.

**(iv) External evaluation: Accelerating progress of selected West African countries towards the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, particularly Millennium Development Goal 8, through trade-related training and capacity-building (United Nations Development Account, project 1213J)**

19. The goal of this project was to build sustainable trade-related capacities in selected West African countries through the increased use of electronic learning (e-learning) tools. Specifically, the project sought to strengthen the capacities of local government officials to formulate and implement concrete development-oriented trade policies and of national and regional trade-related training institutions to deliver training courses to build sustainable trade-related capacities, including through the use of distance learning tools. The capacity development had a specific focus on e-commerce. The main outputs were the following three capacity-building courses on e-commerce (available in both English and French): face-to-face training of technical tutors; face-to-face or online training on legal aspects of e-commerce; and face-to-face or online training on e-commerce for practitioners. Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo benefited from this project. Two training of technical tutors courses trained 34 national instructors. The five online training courses had a total of 638 participants and achieved a high completion rate (83 per cent or 529 participants successfully finished the training) and the seven face-to-face training

courses (training of technical tutors excluded) trained another 179 participants.<sup>4</sup> The project leveraged additional financial support from the Government of Finland and support from some beneficiary countries to self-fund some participants.<sup>5</sup>

20. The evaluation concluded that both the relevance and efficiency of the project had been high. The evaluators noted that the project's focus on the legal framework for e-commerce had become especially relevant over the years in addressing the human capital and legal gap in developing countries to maximize the benefits of e-commerce as a vector for inclusive and sustainable development. The evaluation highlighted that the number of beneficiary countries and distance-learning courses had exceeded those in the original plan and that the addition of countries had been driven by demand. The evaluation confirmed the effectiveness of the project, noting especially that the use of distance learning and the training of technical tutors had extended the outreach of the project at a low cost and that the latter had developed trained local human resources with capacities to reproduce the training. All of the technical tutors considered that they had adequate materials with which to reproduce the course in their organizations, contributing to the sustainability of the project. The evaluation concluded that the project had built synergy with other projects implemented by UNCTAD<sup>6</sup> and built on collaboration with regional organizations, notably the Economic Community of West African States. With regard to gender aspects, the evaluators acknowledged that achieving gender balance had been challenging as, in most of the countries in which the project had operated, e-commerce policy was handled mostly by men and e-commerce practitioners were also mostly men. The evaluation concluded that although participation by women in project activities had been low, the project had contributed to dispelling some stereotypes of women's involvement in information technology-related business. However, the evaluators also noted that linkages with training institutions could have been developed by the project as most technical tutors trained under the project were from the relevant authorities in charge of trade or telecommunications and were generally information technology specialists rather than professional trainers. The evaluators underscored the important role of technical tutors, noting the difficulties encountered in countries that had joined the project after the delivery of training of technical tutors courses, due to their lack of such tutors to facilitate distance learning.

21. Based on the findings, some of the important recommendations proposed by the evaluators for UNCTAD were as follows: (a) adjust the resources of similar future projects to ensure that intervention goes beyond sensitization, taking into account the complexity of regional-level intervention, as the current project facilitated the attendance of only two participants per country in regional face-to-face training; (b) ensure that, when offering face-to-face training, the selection of the training venue is based on maximizing the benefits of institutional capacity-building, with greater participation from each country; (c) develop training of technical tutors to go beyond assistance and tutoring to the next level of capacity in order that tutors can adapt content and deliver training to relevant audiences, by strengthening linkages with training institutions to ensure the continuity of training reproduction at the country level; (d) continue to adapt the e-commerce courses and develop new modules regarding emerging themes such as e-administration, electronic signatures and anti-corruption systems; (e) consider developing regional capacities for distance learning to leverage South-South cooperation and bolster project outcomes; and (f) develop a comprehensive capacity-building plan to further disseminate issues related to

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<sup>4</sup> The numbers were confirmed at the time of preparation of the present report, as the evaluation was completed before the final training session in English had been delivered. All face-to-face course participants were selected from those who had attended the online courses.

<sup>5</sup> The contribution from the Government of Finland amounted to 7 per cent of the allocated United Nations Development Account funding.

<sup>6</sup> Notably, the work of the Information and Communications Technology Analysis Section of the Division on Technology and Logistics on legal frameworks for the growth of the online economy and the implementation of e-government services.

legal frameworks and e-commerce to a broader scope of national-level stakeholders such as members of parliament, the judiciary, law enforcement personnel and postal and telecommunications agencies, among others.

22. The evaluators suggested that budgetary provision should be made in project plans for evaluation teams to conduct data collection missions in beneficiary countries,<sup>7</sup> to enable deeper analyses of country-level programming and delivery modalities. The evaluators also suggested that Governments receiving technical assistance from UNCTAD could make efforts to build partnerships with national or regional training institutions and collaborate with international development partners to ensure the availability of appropriate training facilities and equipment for the effective and sustainable delivery of distance learning.

(v) **External evaluation: Promoting business models for sustainable development – investing in the poor, for the poor and with the poor (United Nations Development Account, project 12130)**

23. The objective of this project was to contribute to boosting pro-poor investment, that is, investment that led to pro-poor growth and sustainable development through the development of business models for sustainable development. The specific outcome was to develop and promote a curriculum for sustainable business models that could contribute to increasing awareness and enhancing knowledge of pro-poor investment policies and their impacts among participating business schools and their clients, and to increase awareness of the curriculum's benefits and its use in developing countries. As at February 2016, the project had linked 270 business schools in its online network, with registration by 426 students, 152 professors and 128 entrepreneurs; the project platform had made available 59 case studies and 48 course modules. The project leveraged partnerships with external business school associations (such as the Global Alliance in Management Education and the Global Business School Network) to raise awareness and enhance knowledge and understanding of social impact investment and sustainable business models and related teaching, both in developed and developing country business schools.

24. The evaluation confirmed the relevance of the project and commended the visionary approach of UNCTAD in engaging a non-traditional client group of business schools, business students and social impact networks, and advocating private investment in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. The evaluation highlighted the positive outcomes of partnerships with business school associations, which had enabled financial savings and facilitated the reallocation of 28.8 per cent of the project budget to reinforcing some project activities. The evaluator commended the project's approach in co-branding with UNCTAD initiatives such as Empretec and the Sustainable Stock Exchanges Initiative to promote social impact investment and sustainable business, which could contribute positively to the sustainability of the project. The evaluator concluded that the project had effectively delivered its planned outputs and that stakeholders had been especially satisfied with the availability and quality of the internship opportunities the project had sought within its network, the networking among institutions and the case studies. The efficiency of the project was seen in its 96 per cent implementation rate.<sup>8</sup> The evaluator noted that the project's logical framework had been affected by a lack of baseline data and concrete performance indicators, yet acknowledged that the project had been designed to focus on a previously untapped area. Without specific indicators, the evaluator could not assess the level of achievement of some performance targets.

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<sup>7</sup> No provision had been made for a field mission for this evaluation. However, the evaluators were invited to organize focus group discussions at a seminar for participants held in Geneva.

<sup>8</sup> Accurate financial data was unavailable at the time of preparation of the evaluation report, and the report therefore cited "close to 100 per cent"; the rate of 96 per cent was confirmed post-evaluation.



25. Based on the findings, some of the important recommendations proposed by the evaluator for UNCTAD were as follows: (a) move from a global to a regional approach, such as by piloting country-level engagement, to help broaden outreach with an increasing number of business schools, and advance the mainstreaming of social impact-oriented investment in business school curriculums; (b) weigh the advantages and disadvantages of offering free access to project deliverables (case studies are offered free within the network), given the possible perception that purchased items might have value added compared to free-of-charge items, and make the necessary decision to ensure sustainable interest and investment in teaching material, such as by facilitating access to the paid-for content of project partners; and (c) in carrying out other such initiatives in the future, engage all possible potential stakeholders in the planning stages to better capture their needs.

26. In addition, the evaluator recommended that the United Nations Development Account consider providing seed funding for a baseline study to facilitate better project conceptualization by programme managers. This, together with more guidance on designing good quality logical frameworks for projects, could facilitate performance management and evaluation. The evaluator suggested that UNCTAD member States could continue to support the division's strategy and initiative to engage business schools, which could help catalyse private sector investment in development in the long term and contribute to efforts related to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

## II. Lessons learned

27. One of the strategic objectives of the United Nations Evaluation Group is United Nations "entities and partners use evaluation in support of accountability and programme learning". Evaluation plays a crucial role in contributing to the United Nations system's enhancement of the impacts and results of its support to member States in their efforts towards implementing the post-2015 development agenda and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. Guided by the goals of the United Nations Evaluation Group and following its relevant principles and the recently updated norms and standards,<sup>9</sup> the secretariat is committed to efforts for enhancing the use of evaluation and improving evidence-based decision-making and accountability. Evaluations provide a comprehensive, systematic, transparent and objective approach to assessing the performance of programmes and the work of UNCTAD. The secretariat advocates to all stakeholders the importance of applying lessons learned more broadly in programme management at UNCTAD, to feed into UNCTAD programme planning and strategic decision-making.

28. Lessons learned from previous evaluations of UNCTAD activities (TD/B/WP/273, TD/B/WP/263 and TD/B/WP/254) remain recommended references for programme managers and project officers in designing and managing their programmes and projects. The evaluations reviewed in the present report and observations made by the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit in its ongoing management of evaluations have led to 10 new lessons learned for consideration, as detailed in the following sections.

### A. Lessons learned on project design

29. In conceptualizing a project, project managers should always make efforts to use specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound indicators. Indicators that cannot be used to assess the level of success should be avoided. For example, indicators such as

<sup>9</sup> The Annual General Meeting of the United Nations Evaluation Group, held in Geneva from 25 to 29 April 2016, endorsed the revised *Norms for Evaluation in the United Nations System and Standards for Evaluation in the United Nations System*, which will replace the 2005 editions.

“increased number of institutions participating in UNCTAD initiative” and “increased exchanges of best practices among participating ministries” are not designed in a way that contributes to results-based management. This type of indicator is to some extent associated with the lack of a thorough baseline study. If such a study cannot be conducted during project design, project managers may still attempt to set reasonable and attainable performance measurement targets based on known needs, in order to avoid the use of ambiguous indicators.

30. To improve the sustainability of a project, project managers should focus on institutional rather than individual capacity-building, and should analyse the modality of institutional capacity-building to determine which mode is more sustainable in the long term. In some instances, the capacity-building of trainers in a developing country may need to target specialized training institutions rather than government officials, as the latter may not necessarily obtain the skills needed for providing quality training to others.

31. Depending on the nature of an intervention, programme managers, in designing programmes and projects, may plan and budget for evaluation field missions to conduct data collection in a country receiving technical assistance from UNCTAD. This can facilitate the collection of first-hand data by evaluators and their conduct of in-depth analyses of project achievements in the field by meeting directly with country-level stakeholders and beneficiaries.

## **B. Lessons learned on project implementation**

32. Gender equality should be systematically mainstreamed into project design and implementation. Consideration of gender equality benefits should go beyond gender disaggregated data collection to gender equality integration at the policy advice level and the influencing of beneficiaries to mainstream gender equality in policymaking or administrative and operational activities to, ultimately, aim at achieving equality in economic situations and/or social status. If project managers have indirect control of the nomination and selection of participants benefiting from UNCTAD capacity-building and training, an emphasis on gender balance should be clearly communicated to counterparts in beneficiary countries. Gender balance at the project level in beneficiary participation in training, workshops and seminars should contribute to the overall UNCTAD objective in this area. Misunderstanding of gender equality as only a women’s equality issue should be corrected, and project managers should promote equality at all levels.

33. Whenever possible, project managers should allocate resources to collecting and using primary data from research and analysis conducted under a project, if such primary data does not exist at UNCTAD. The use of secondary data from other sources is only convincing in country studies or policy advice if such data has been sufficiently validated.

34. Knowledge management should always be an important consideration of project managers. The wealth of information resulting from interventions in beneficiary countries, the research and studies conducted for problem analysis and policy recommendation, and the presentations, discussions and sharing of best practices at workshops and seminars organized as part of a project can all feed into knowledge-building at UNCTAD in the related subject area. Project managers should make efforts to document project outcomes and use such reports to disseminate information to a wider audience that may not have directly benefited from UNCTAD technical assistance, at the same time contributing to knowledge management at UNCTAD.

35. To strengthen capacity-building efforts and improve the sustainability of projects, project managers are encouraged to engage with counterparts and develop action and/or implementation plans to follow up on project outcomes before the closure of a project. Consideration should be given to guiding project beneficiaries in implementing action

plans, thereby contributing to achieving more tangible results than sensitization or awareness-raising efforts.

36. Important project outcomes such as country reports or policy advice should be translated in a timely fashion into the official languages of countries benefiting from UNCTAD technical assistance, in order that a broad group of country-level stakeholders may benefit from such research products. Due to the complexity of planning for translations in the annual publications schedule, appropriate arrangements, including project-level budget allocations, should be envisaged, in order to ensure the timely translation of reports.

### **C. Lessons learned on monitoring of projects**

37. Project managers should improve knowledge and tracking of project expenses at activity and country levels. This is not only useful for analysing project efficiency in an evaluation, but important for enhanced budget management, and contributes to budget planning in future projects and ensuring resource allocation for priority issues.

38. Project managers should develop self-monitoring frameworks to strengthen control over projects and make use of feedback from project activities that may feed into continuous improvements in project implementation and future project designs. One useful monitoring tool is to set self-designed surveys at the end of training courses and workshops to collect feedback and suggestions on such activities.

## **III. Evaluation plan for 2017–2018**

39. The Working Party on the Strategic Framework and the Programme Budget fulfils an important oversight function through its consideration each year of external evaluations of UNCTAD programmes and projects. The subject of the evaluation is usually in accordance with a three-year evaluation plan that is approved by the Trade and Development Board. Subprogramme evaluations approved by member States are usually undertaken primarily towards the end of the year and completed by the following May. They are conducted by an evaluation team comprising a professional evaluator supported by two representatives of UNCTAD member States who participate in the evaluations in a personal capacity, bringing their unique expertise, perspectives and experiences to the evaluations. Depending on the nature and scope of work of a subprogramme and the available budget, a decision may be made at the recruitment stage of the professional (lead) evaluator to also assign an associate evaluator, to obtain complete coverage in terms of expertise and experience related to the substantive matters of the subprogramme. Evaluation teams usually present their reports at the Working Party meeting held in the third quarter of the year.

40. In line with the decision of the Trade and Development Board at its fifty-ninth session regarding measures to strengthen results-based management and the evaluation of programmes of work, the Working Party agreed at its sixty-third session to a trial implementation of the approach of ensuring the systematic evaluations of UNCTAD subprogrammes. Accordingly, the Working Party considered the external evaluation of subprogramme 1 in 2013, subprogramme 2 in 2014 and subprogramme 3 in 2015.

41. In accordance with established practice, following decision 2003/7 of 19 September 2003 (see TD/B/50/12-TD/B/WP/169, chapter I, section B) to invite the secretariat to propose future evaluation plans, the secretariat proposed an evaluation plan for 2016–2018 for consideration by member States at the seventy-first session of the Working Party. To complete the cycle of subprogramme evaluations, member States approved the evaluation plan for 2016–2018 illustrated in the table.

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**Evaluation plan for 2016–2018**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Title</i>
2016	Conference year – no external evaluation to be considered by the Working Party
2017	External evaluation of subprogramme 4: Technology and logistics
2018	External evaluation of subprogramme 5: Africa, least developed countries and special programmes

#### **IV. Seeking a sustainable way to fund evaluations at UNCTAD**

42. The approved evaluation plan for 2016–2018 requires UNCTAD to conduct evaluations of subprogramme 4 on technology and logistics in 2017 and subprogramme 5 on Africa, least developed countries and special programmes in 2018. Evaluations requested by member States have been funded by a trust fund project entitled “Strengthening results-based management of UNCTAD programmes”, supported by the Government of Norway.<sup>10</sup> However, as of end-2015, no financial support for evaluations has been identified.

43. The secretariat has been attempting to secure voluntary contributions to fund the evaluation of subprogramme 4.

44. At the seventy-third session of the Working Party, member States are invited to continue their support for evaluations by identifying potential extrabudgetary contributions to carry forward the approved evaluation plan.

45. The Working Party is invited to submit its conclusions and recommendations to the Trade and Development Board.

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<sup>10</sup> To assist UNCTAD with strengthening the results-based management of work programmes, the Government of Norway began providing funds in October 2004 through this trust fund project. The principle objective of the project was to enhance the effectiveness of UNCTAD activities and results-based management through an annual report, in-depth programme evaluations and inter-agency coordination. The project had an initial budget of US\$213,980. The Government of Norway continued its support for the project; in 2004–2014, total funds received were US\$1,123,892.



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### Trade and Development Board

Working Party on the Strategic Framework and the Programme Budget

Seventy-third session

Geneva, 5–7 September 2016

Item 4(a) of the provisional agenda

## Evaluation of UNCTAD activities: Overview

### Report by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD

#### Corrigendum

##### Chapter I, section B (iii)

For the existing text *substitute*

- (iii) **External evaluation: Strengthening the capacity of the rural communities in least developed countries to utilize the market access opportunities provided by duty free quota free and enhancing value added of their traditional products (United Nations Development Account, project 08/09AT)**

16. This project aimed to support rural communities in least developed countries with utilizing geographical indications to achieve the objectives of poverty reduction, economic growth and export promotion. The following six countries were identified in the preparatory phase: Bhutan; Cambodia; Ethiopia; Madagascar; Mauritania; and Mozambique. The project was subsequently extended to the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Senegal. The project organized five national workshops and two regional workshops in Cambodia and Italy, as well as an international experience-sharing workshop in Geneva, Switzerland, for project beneficiaries, as well as least developed country delegates to the World Trade Organization. The project prepared draft publications on specifications for potential geographical indications products in three countries and collaborated with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Slow Food Foundation. The project received supplementary funding from the Government of Italy and leveraged support from the Slow Food Foundation to accommodate participants at a workshop held at the Terra Madre Salone del Gusto in Turin, Italy.

17. The evaluation concluded that the project had met its objective of improving understanding of the potential of geographical indications among national Governments and rural communities in beneficiary countries. The evaluator confirmed that stakeholder

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satisfaction had been uniformly high regarding such understanding and that policy-level interest had been generated by the various workshops organized under the project. She noted that the project's approach of focusing on empowering rural communities with information and opportunities for engaging with government officials had been helpful. In addition, she highlighted that the focus on ensuring sustainability by integrating geographical indications issues in the action matrices of diagnostic trade integration studies in many countries had contributed to the sustainability of the project. However, the evaluator observed that the scope of the project had been too broad and that spreading resources across nine countries had posed challenges in ensuring sustained support and analysis. The evaluator acknowledged that UNCTAD had addressed this issue by inserting geographical indications into workplans for diagnostic trade integration studies, but noted that ongoing involvement by UNCTAD might still be required. In addition, although one of the project's expected accomplishments had been to enhance the capacities of rural communities to meet market access requirements, this required a long-term approach and attainment of this result had been challenged by the fact that rural communities were not well organized or connected to actors in marketing and export value chains. The evaluator further observed that although rural communities had been given opportunities to establish contacts and dialogues with government officials, their follow-up engagement on issues related to the promotion of geographical indications had not been fully realized, due partly to the fact that their abilities to take further actions were limited and partly to the fact that relevant ministries in some countries were more oriented towards export and import issues and, thus, ministry linkage and interaction with rural communities and relevant value chains was limited.

18. Based on the findings, some of the important recommendations proposed by the evaluator for UNCTAD were as follows: (a) use workshop outcomes to document project outcomes and publish and disseminate reports on developing country experiences with geographical indications; (b) ensure a more comprehensive framework for gender integration at the design stage of projects to ensure gender equality along value chains for geographical indications products in the least developed countries; (c) expand partnerships with other development partners such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and International Trade Centre, and make use of their special expertise in UNCTAD technical assistance to help the least developed countries expand agricultural production and markets, including for geographical indications products; and (d) provide ongoing technical support to developing countries, including assisting policymakers in decision-making on the selection and prioritization of geographical indications products and identification of rural communities, through the provision of feasibility studies on the potential of geographical indications and their adaption to national situations.