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Trade and Development Board Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance

Eighty-seventh session
Geneva, 22–26 January 2024

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

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 22 to 26 January 2024

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Introduction

The eighty-seventh session of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance was held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 22 to 26 January 2024. The Working Party pursued its deliberations in an informal setting.

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

A. Review of the draft UNCTAD programme plan and performance information for the year 2025, part A of the proposed programme budget

(Agenda item 3)

Agreed conclusions

The Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance,

Having reviewed the draft UNCTAD programme plan and performance information for the year 2025, part A of the proposed programme budget,

1. *Takes note* of the UNCTAD programme plan and performance information for the year 2025, part A of the proposed programme budget, as contained in document TD/B/WP(87)/CRP.2;

2. *Requests* the Secretary-General of UNCTAD to take account of comments and inputs provided during the eighty-seventh session of the Working Party and document TD/B/WP(87)/CRP.2 for the purposes of her submission of inputs for the proposed UNCTAD programme budget for the year 2025 to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to highlight expectations from member States for subsequent consideration by the General Assembly of the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies;

3. *Further requests* the secretariat to debrief the UNCTAD membership on the final document issued for consideration by the General Assembly of the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies, including proposed resources, as well as on the final outcome document of the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations;

4. *Welcomes* the presentations provided by the secretariat, including by the Deputy Secretary-General, and calls upon UNCTAD to continue to mainstream the agreements outlined in the Bridgetown Covenant into its programme plans;

5. *Notes* the continuous improvement in the quality of the results and performance measures presented and of the overall document presented, and calls upon the secretariat to ensure further improvements based on the comments provided by the Working Party;

6. *Takes note with appreciation* of the information provided to member States and made available by the secretariat on the Delegates Portal on the resources for UNCTAD for the year 2024, on the geographical and gender representation of UNCTAD staff, as well as on the use of internships within the UNCTAD secretariat in the year 2023, and calls upon the secretariat to continue providing such information and, if possible, provide more detailed information by division, and taking actions towards improving geographical and gender balance;

7. *Takes note and expresses its appreciation* for the provision to member States of the performance report on the implementation of deliverables for the year 2023, in line with the agreed conclusions from the previous session, and calls on the secretariat to make efforts to ensure timely publication for due consideration by member States as well as to continue improving the coherence in reporting across subprogrammes and address duplications in the listing of deliverables.

26 January 2024

B. Other action taken by the Working Party

Review of the draft UNCTAD programme plan and performance information for the year 2025, part A of the proposed programme budget

(Agenda item 3)

1. At its closing plenary meeting, on 26 January 2024, the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance adopted agreed conclusions on the agenda item (see chapter I, section A, above).
2. Also at its closing plenary meeting, under the agenda item, the Working Party concluded discussions on the draft UNCTAD programme plan and performance information for the year 2025, as contained in document (TD/B/WP(85)/CRP.1). The Chair of the session informed the membership that the revised draft of the document would be contained in document TD/B/WP(87)/CRP.2.

II. Chair's summary

A. Opening plenary meeting

3. The Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD opened the discussion at the session. The following speakers made opening statements: the representative of Cambodia, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China; the representative of the European Union, on behalf of the European Union and its member States; the representative of Jamaica, on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries; the representative of Egypt, on behalf of the Arab Group; the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, on behalf of the Group of Friends in Defence of the Charter of the United Nations; the representative of China; the representative of Barbados; the representative of Peru; the representative of the United States of America; the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran; the representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; the representative of Canada; the representative of the State of Palestine; the representative of the Russian Federation; the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic; the representative of Indonesia; the representative of the Bahamas; the representative of Egypt; and the representative of Nicaragua.

4. In his opening statement, the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD presented the overall orientation and context of the proposed programme plan for 2025. The plan built on the vision of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD on the way forward for the institution, with sustainability as the main cross-cutting issue, in line with the Bridgetown Covenant. The plan took into account the feedback from member States at discussions on the preparatory session for the 2025 programme plan and performance information. The programme plan had particular importance as it would guide the work of UNCTAD over the year that followed the sixtieth anniversary and in the context of the sixteenth session of the Conference, which would renew the UNCTAD mandate.

5. The Deputy Secretary-General addressed performance in 2023 as highlighted in the programme plan, indicating that a more comprehensive overview of work would be available in the forthcoming annual report. He outlined the proposed results for 2025, taking into account the evolving needs of the membership. He also provided updates on the budget approved for 2024 and progress on results-based management and the results framework, as well as the current financial situation of the institution and the issue of liquidity.

6. The representative of one regional group and one delegate recognized that liquidity issues related to regular budget currently faced by the institution were an important constraint for UNCTAD to implement its programme of work and called on member States to make timely contributions to the United Nations Secretariat.

7. Some regional groups and delegates reiterated the importance of continuing to implement the commitments and provisions set out under the Bridgetown Covenant¹ and requested that the UNCTAD secretariat fully implement paragraph 127 (bb) contained in the document. They expressed appreciation for the work carried out and efforts made by the Assistance to the Palestinian People Unit of the Division on Globalization and Development Strategies. They requested that the Secretary-General of UNCTAD finalize the appointment of the three regular budget posts of the unit and strengthen the unit by upgrading the regular budget P-2 Associate Economic Affairs Officer position to a P-3 Economic Affairs Officer position. They likewise requested that she update member States on progress at the next sessions of the Trade and Development Board and the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance.

8. Some regional groups and several delegates welcomed the management reports provided by the secretariat on gender and geographical representation. They noted a clear improvement in gender representation of staff and called on the secretariat to continue to provide information on the matter and work towards improving the geographical representation of the institution. One regional group noted, while acknowledging the importance of addressing gender issues, that those considerations should not become an impediment to the regional group presenting candidates, which would consequently deprive the group of use of its current potential capacity.

9. Some regional groups and one delegate expressed appreciation for the performance report provided by the secretariat, in response to their request, on the implementation of deliverables for 2023. One regional group indicated that the document would benefit from enhanced coherence and urged the secretariat to pay attention to how certain deliverables were reported across subprogrammes and avoid duplication.

10. One regional group and one delegate welcomed the development of the strategy in support of small island developing States and called on development partners to ensure contributions to the corresponding trust fund.

11. The representatives of some regional groups and one delegate thanked the secretariat for providing the draft programme plan for 2025 in a timely manner and noted a clear improvement in the overall quality of the document, including the results included and performance measures, which built on the lessons learned and experience gained over recent years.

12. Some regional groups encouraged the secretariat to further enhance synergies with other entities in the United Nations system and ensure cross-fertilization and cooperation across subprogrammes to guarantee effective delivery of the programme plan. One regional group, while recognizing the financial challenges faced by the institution due to liquidity issues related to the regular budget, noted that the Office of the Secretary-General would be recruiting a fundraising expert to implement a more coherent and centralized approach towards fundraising of extrabudgetary resources and looked forward to receiving further details on the process.

13. One group of countries proposed an amendment to paragraph 12.47 (g) of the draft programme plan document, under subprogramme 3, International trade and commodities, after the word “policies” to insert the wording “including those related to the application of unilateral economic, financial or trade coercive measures”. With the proposed amendment, the paragraph 12.47 (g) would read: “Monitor and report on current trade trends and policies, including those related to the application of unilateral economic, financial or trade coercive measures, and their impact on inclusive, sustainable and resilient development to provide policy recommendations to member States”.

14. Many delegates expressed their support for the proposal to amend the text in paragraph 12.47 (g) under subprogramme 3, noting that more attention needed to be given to the analytical work tackling unilateral coercive economic measures and the trends stemming from them, including the development of recommendations to mitigate negative consequences.

¹ TD/541/Add.2.

15. One regional group and several delegates noted that they did not support the inclusion of the proposed amendment to the text, as unilateral coercive economic measures did not fall under the mandate of UNCTAD.

B. Review of the draft UNCTAD programme plan and performance information for the year 2025, part A of the proposed programme budget

(Agenda item 3)

16. Building on the Deputy Secretary-General's presentation, the Director of the Office of the Secretary-General provided an overview of the pathway for the consideration and approval of the proposed programme plan for 2025. The first step had been the preparatory session for the 2025 programme plan in October 2023. The second formal step was to formally review the proposed programme plan at the current session of the Working Party. He further explained the next steps of the programme budget process, which ended in December 2024 with the approval of the document by the General Assembly.

17. The Director also provided a brief overview of some technical details of the document, including the limited word count and the preliminary nature of the 2023 values for deliverables, which would be aligned with Umoja in the final fascicle.

18. One regional group asked the secretariat, with regard to the report on the implementation of deliverables for 2023, to clarify whether deliverables funded only by the regular budget were presented and how certain types of deliverables were counted.

19. In response, the Director of the Office of the Secretary-General clarified that the programme budget document was comprehensive and provided an overview of and comprised activities and deliverables funded by both regular budget and extrabudgetary resources. With regard to the question on how certain categories of deliverables were measured, he further clarified that, under the category of "substantive servicing of meetings", deliverables were measured in units of three hours and that, for divisions, substantive servicing of meetings was reported when they provided contributions from a substantive angle to support the deliberations of the respective meeting. In addition, he clarified on the reporting of reports and their respective overviews, which were presented and reported separately, as overviews were "executive summaries" of flagship reports and studies and were produced as separate publications. Thus, they were an important piece of and complementary to full flagship reports that were highly valued by member States, other partners and the overall public.

C. Closing plenary meeting

Review of the draft UNCTAD programme plan and performance information for the year 2025, part A of the proposed programme budget

20. One delegate and one group of countries (expressed disappointment that the proposal to include analysis of the impact of unilateral coercive measures on the international trade and development in the programme plan for 2025 was not accepted by the membership. The delegate said that, as a growing trend in international trade, illegal unilateral economic, financial and trade sanctions should be a focus of UNCTAD analytical work and in its agenda in general. The delegate and the group of countries stated that they reserved the right to address the matter to the Secretary-General of UNCTAD and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, while another delegate reserved the right to use all instruments available and the rules of procedure to uphold their interests. Another delegate stated that unilateral measures clearly impacted on trade and economic concerns. More dialogue and cooperation should be promoted, as well as fewer unilateral measures, which in the view of his country were not in the spirit of cooperation and an international community.

21. Another delegate recalled furthermore that, since its inception in 1964, UNCTAD had the mandate to look at trade, economy, technology, finance and interrelated issues,

including debt, without restrictions. Thus, as in the case of other topics such as environmental concerns, he considered that unilateral sanctions could likewise be looked at through the lens of trade, economy, technology and finance.

22. The representative of one regional group and one delegate reiterated their disagreement on the inclusion in the programme plan of unilateral coercive economic measures as it did not fall under the mandate of UNCTAD. The delegate further clarified that sanctions and economic pressure were more generally an issue of peace and security, and broader than simply an economic or trade issue.

23. Another delegate emphasized that the conduct of evaluations and assessments should be limited to the United Nations framework for all activities, programmes and the intergovernmental machinery. Evaluations conducted by donors should be limited to the technical projects funded or financed by the respective countries. He requested that the secretariat further confirm the matter.

Closing remarks

24. In his closing remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD said that, while the objected was a fully endorsed proposed programme plan, the secretariat took note of the different views of a global and diverse membership. The secretariat likewise took note of the request for a briefing on the final version of the programme plan for 2025 when it was issued for the consideration of the committees and the General Assembly. A dedicated management briefing would be organized for that purpose in May 2024, which could be merged with the briefing on results-based management.

25. He clarified that, while the UNCTAD secretariat took note of the request to include that information at the divisional level, as an entity of the United Nations Secretariat, UNCTAD was accountable for the gender and geographical representation information at the organizational level. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD took that accountability seriously and senior management were also fully aware of their responsibilities. Action was taken at every management level where the issue belonged.

26. He explained that the performance report on deliverables for 2023 was intended as an informal supporting document to facilitate discussions and considerations during the session. Preparation of the document with the level of detail requested was a time-consuming task; an earlier cut-off date, if considered, would not provide a complete picture of the year, though more quality checks could be undertaken.

27. One regional group reaffirmed its commitment to the principle of multilateralism and the mandate of UNCTAD. While acknowledging the budgetary constraints within the United Nations system, the regional group and one delegate noted that the difficulties of some members of the group, particularly francophone least developed countries, to meaningfully engage in discussions when documents and meetings were available in English only. Addressing the diverse linguistic needs of members would be supportive of inclusive participation and leaving no one behind.

28. Another delegate reiterated his regret that the proposal on the impact of unilateral coercive measures on trade and development was not endorsed.

29. One regional group recalled that the session should use resources for three days, according to its terms of reference.

III. Organizational matters

A. Election of officers

(Agenda item 1)

30. At its opening plenary meeting, on 22 January 2024, the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance elected Mr. Peter Nalanda (Kenya) as Chair and Mr. Rashaun Watson (Jamaica) as Vice-Chair-cum-Rapporteur.

B. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

(Agenda item 2)

31. Also at its opening plenary meeting, the Working Party adopted its provisional agenda, as contained in document TD/B/WP/327. The agenda was thus as follows:

1. Election of officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
3. Review of the draft UNCTAD programme plan and performance information for the year 2025, part A of the proposed programme budget.
4. Provisional agenda of the eighty-eighth session of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance.
5. Other business.
6. Adoption of the report of the Working Party to the Trade and Development Board.

32. One delegate raised a question and expressed concern regarding the modalities of work for the current session. She said it was unclear why agenda item 3, as the substance of the session, would be discussed informally as indicated in the programme timetable. The issue had been raised with the secretariat. She requested that the secretariat further clarify the matter at the forthcoming executive session of the Trade and Development Board or the next session of the Working Party.

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

(Agenda item 4)

33. At its closing plenary meeting, on 26 January 2024, the Working Party approved the provisional agenda of its eighty-eighth session, as contained in a non-paper dated 22 January 2024 (see annex I).

D. Other business

(Agenda item 5)

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

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

(Agenda item 6)

35. At its closing plenary meeting, on 26 January 2024, the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance approved the report of the session and authorized the Vice-Chair-cum-Rapporteur, under the authority of the Chair, to finalize the report to the Trade and Development Board.

Annex I

Provisional agenda of the eighty-eighth session of the Working Party

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

Annex II

Attendance*

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

Angola	Mexico
Barbados	Morocco
Belarus	Mozambique
Belgium	Netherlands (Kingdom of the)
Bhutan	Nicaragua
Brazil	Nigeria
Cambodia	Oman
China	Pakistan
Congo	Panama
Dominican Republic	Philippines
Ecuador	Poland
Ethiopia	Portugal
Honduras	Russian Federation
India	Spain
Indonesia	Syrian Arab Republic
Iraq	Thailand
Italy	Togo
Jamaica	Trinidad and Tobago
Japan	Tunisia
Jordan	Türkiye
Kenya	United Arab Emirates
Kuwait	United States of America
Lebanon	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
Libya	Zambia
Malaysia	Zimbabwe

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

Bahamas

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

African Union

* This attendance list contains registered participants. For the list of participants, see TD/B/WP(87)/INF.1.