



United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Distr.: General
27 February 2025

Original: English

Trade and Development Board
Working Party on the Programme Plan and
Programme Performance
Eighty-ninth session
Geneva, 20–24 January 2025

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

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 20 to 24 January 2025

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Introduction

The eighty-ninth session of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance was held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 20 to 24 January 2025. 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-ninth session

A. Review of the draft UNCTAD programme plan and performance information for the year 2026, part A of the proposed programme budget

(Agenda item 3)

Agreed conclusions

The Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance

1. *Takes note* of the UNCTAD programme plan for 2026 and performance information for the year 2024, part A of the proposed programme budget, as contained in document TD/B/WP(89)/INF.1, dated 3 February 2025;

2. *Requests* that the Secretary-General of UNCTAD take account of comments and inputs provided during the eighty-ninth session of the Working Party on document TD/B/WP(89)/INF.1 for the purposes of her submission of inputs for the proposed UNCTAD programme budget for the year 2026 to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, for subsequent consideration by the General Assembly of the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies;

3. *Requests also* that the secretariat to engage with New York on the possibility and the mechanisms to reflect and incorporate the outcomes from the sixteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development into the 2026 budget process, and inform the member states in Geneva on the outcome of the process in advance of the ninetieth session of the Working Party;

4. *Requests further* that the secretariat to continue 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 on proposed resources as well as on the final outcomes of the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations, in line with established practices;

5. *Notes* the continuous improvement in the quality of the results and performance measures presented and of the overall document presented, and encourages the secretariat to consider an example of its support to member States in the design and implementation of policies that support, among other matters, women's and girls' economic empowerment, as new results in future preparations of UNCTAD programme plans;

6. *Takes note with appreciation* of the information provided to member States and made available by the secretariat on the Delegates Portal, including the management reports on the geographical and gender representation of UNCTAD staff, as well as on the use of internships within the UNCTAD secretariat for the year 2024, and calls upon the secretariat to continue providing such information including the established methodology for determining geographical representations for the United Nations Secretariat, as well as historic information on the previous five years, by gender and geographical representation, by regional groups, and taking actions towards improving geographical and gender balance;

7. *Takes note of and expresses its appreciation for* the provision to member States of the performance report on the implementation of deliverables for the year 2024, in line with the agreed conclusions from previous sessions;

8. *Encourages* UNCTAD to continue to give focus to the special needs and problems of the least developed countries, including recently graduated ones, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States across all areas of its mandate, in order to foster sustained economic growth and sustainable and inclusive development.

24 January 2025

B. Other action taken by the Working Party

Review of the draft UNCTAD programme plan and performance information for the year 2026, part A of the proposed programme budget

1. At its closing plenary meeting, on 24 January 2025, 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 2026, as contained in document (TD/B/WP(89)/CRP.1). The Chair of the session informed the membership that the revised draft document would be issued as document TD/B/WP(89)/INF.1.

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 Nepal, on behalf of the least developed countries; the representative of the Dominican Republic, on behalf of small island developing States; the representative of Jamaica, on behalf of countries of the Caribbean Community; the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, on behalf of the Group of Friends in Defence of the Charter of the United Nations; the representative of the Russian Federation; the representative of the State of Palestine; the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; the representative of Spain; the representative of Peru; the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran; and the representative of Belarus.

4. In his opening statement, the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD presented the context and outlined the main points of the proposed programme plan for 2026. The plan built on the vision of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD on the way forward for UNCTAD and feedback received on proposals presented to member States at the preparatory meeting in October 2024. The document was aligned with the UNCTAD mandate, including the Bridgetown Covenant. As 2025 was a conference year, an ad hoc review mechanism could be used to adapt the programme plan, as possible, to the outcome of the sixteenth session of the Conference. The proposed programme plan also built on the Pact for the Future adopted in September 2024, which had implications for UNCTAD work in the areas of reform of the international financial architecture, development of a framework to measure progress in sustainable development beyond gross domestic product and implementation of the Global Digital Compact. Resolutions approved late in 2024 on the measurement of South–South cooperation and on promoting international cooperation to combat illicit financial flows were also considered.

5. The overall orientation of the proposed programme plan highlighted the ongoing multiple challenges in the world. Fostering inclusive and sustainable development and enhancing resilience to those challenges would continue to guide UNCTAD work. The plan also considered the needs and priorities of the least developed countries and small island developing States, including the strategy to support the latter group, and statistics and data as a cross-cutting resource. Effectiveness, coherence and efficiency should underpin all work, as well as a cohesive and coordinated voice and approach through interdivisional

cooperation. UNCTAD would likewise continue to forge strategic partnerships with entities of the United Nations development system, as well as the private sector, academia and other international and regional organizations. Furthermore, cooperation with international financial institutions, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and development and the Group of 20 was key. UNCTAD contributions served to foster informed discussions and facilitate cooperation in sustainable development while supporting the voice of developing countries.

6. In addition, the plan contained information on UNCTAD performance in 2024, with highlighted results for each subprogramme. As the document did not allow inclusion of all UNCTAD work in 2024, the UNCTAD annual report would be published later in 2025 and provide an overview.

7. The plan also contained proposed results for 2026. The results mirrored the range of work and reflected the three pillars of UNCTAD work for each subprogramme.

8. In accordance with the established practice, the proposed programme plan would be submitted to the Office of Programme Planning, Finance and Budget for review of coherence and alignment with the fascicle for the United Nations Secretariat. It would then be submitted for review by the Committee of Programme Coordination, experts of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and members of the Fifth Committee.

9. The Deputy Secretary-General updated the membership on the 2025 budget for UNCTAD. The proposed 2025 budget was approved in December 2024 by the Fifth Committee. A final resolution was pending, though the Office of the Controller had informed UNCTAD that the budget was approved at the level of \$89,995,000. The approved budget included \$2.8 million for the implementation of the memorandum of understanding with the Russian Federation, being undertaken by the United Nations Global Crisis Response Group-technical team at UNCTAD, and in effect until 22 July 2025. Temporary funds totalling \$1.45 million were also approved for implementation of the Pact for the Future and the resolutions on South-South cooperation and illicit financial flows. The approved staffing table included 387 posts (regular budget), including a P-3 post for the Assistance to the Palestinian People Unit. The liquidity situation continued to be a concern requiring caution.

10. Finally, he noted that three management reports were available to the membership on the Delegates Portal, on gender balance, geographical representation and internships at UNCTAD.

11. During the discussion, several regional groups and many delegates commended the proposed areas of work and strategic priorities for UNCTAD in 2026, including on small island developing States, critical energy transition minerals, the digital economy and financing for development.

12. The representative of one regional group highlighted UNCTAD efforts to address the challenges of the least developed countries, including poverty eradication, debt and trade barriers. He emphasized the need to focus more on graduation support for those countries and called on donor countries to enhance their support to least developed country programmes.

13. One delegate, acknowledging the management reports provided by the secretariat, asked about the possibility making historical trends available for the purposes of comparison and analysis of improvement. She noted that, in the document on 2024 deliverables, more than expected was delivered for some items, while in other cases, the objective had not been achieved and requested that the secretariat fully implement the goals, as possible. She also asked whether there was a specific procedure to adjust the 2026 programme plan after the sixteenth session of the Conference to reflect the outcome document that member States would adopt.

14. Another delegate requested that the secretariat provide clarification on the modalities of work of the Working Party, and particularly the use of informal and formal plenary meetings in relation to agenda item 3 (review of the draft UNCTAD programme

plan and performance information for the year 2026, part A of the proposed programme budget) and in accordance with the terms of reference of the Working Party.

15. Several delegates and one group of countries requested that unilateral coercive measures be given due attention by UNCTAD, noting the negative impact that those measures had on trade and development in the countries affected. They stated that, in line with the General Assembly resolution on unilateral coercive measures and paragraph 113 of the Bridgetown Covenant, UNCTAD had a mandate to pursue the issue and monitor and analyse the impacts of unilateral coercive measures through an economic lens.

16. Exercising the right of reply, one regional group noted its disagreement with that position and stated that no mandate existed for UNCTAD to undertake work on analysis and monitoring of the impact of unilateral coercive measures. The Bridgetown Covenant made reference to unilateral economic measures as part of context-setting but did not set a mandate for that work.

17. In response to the issue of informal and formal plenary meetings, a representative of the UNCTAD secretariat clarified that opening and closing plenary meetings of the Working Party were held in a formal setting, allowing for delegate statements to be reflected in summaries in reports of sessions. Reports were translated into the six official languages of the United Nations. Discussions of those plenary meetings could also be listened to by the public in real time, and recordings were publicly available. In contrast, meetings concerning agenda item 3 were held in an informal setting to allow for candid exchange between delegates, and no written summaries or recordings of them were made available. She explained that a change to the long-standing practice on formal and informal meetings would require consideration through the Trade and Development Board and consensus from the UNCTAD membership.

18. Responding to the inquiry on management reports, another representative of the UNCTAD secretariat confirmed that it would be possible to prepare a five-year trend line for the membership. On how the outcomes of the sixteenth session of the Conference would be captured in the 2026 programme plan document, he clarified that ad hoc arrangements existed for that purpose, which would not entail a full rewriting of the document as the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions would have already reviewed the document. It could be possible to present certain adjustments for the Fifth Committee to review. He said the secretariat would come back to the membership on the matter when more information was available.

19. Thanking the representatives, one delegate requested that the secretariat share with the membership the timeline of the budget process, from the current session until its approval by the General Assembly, and to get back to the membership on the inquiry on how the outcome emanating from the sixteenth session of the Conference would be incorporated into the programme plan for 2026.

B. Review of the draft UNCTAD programme plan and performance information for the year 2026, part A of the proposed programme budget

(Agenda item 3)

20. Under the agenda item, representatives of the UNCTAD secretariat introduced the overall draft document and made presentations on the five subprogrammes. Discussions were held in an informal setting.

C. Closing plenary meeting

Review of the draft UNCTAD programme plan and performance information for the year 2026, part A of the proposed programme budget

21. One delegate expressed regret that the 2026 proposed programme plan document did not reflect language proposed for subprogramme 3, international trade and commodities, to monitor and report on the impact of unilateral economic, financial and trade coercive measures among other current trade trends and policies and to provide appropriate policy recommendations to member States. In her view, the language was unreasonably rejected by another delegation. She said that UNCTAD could not ignore the issue, as it concerned several member States, and should analyse the issue from a purely economic perspective.

22. One regional group and another delegate recalled their previous interventions at the session on unilateral coercive economic measures and reiterated that, in line with the Bridgetown Covenant and other relevant documents, UNCTAD did not have a mandate to carry out work on that issue.

23. Another delegate stated that his country, while not blocking consensus, dissociated from the agreed conclusions and the 2026 proposed programme plan as they contained concepts that were contrary to the position of his country, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, his country could not support the application of a gender perspective in the programme plan document. National legislation reflected a firm commitment to the rights of women, whereas both women and gender were terms used in the programme plan document, which implied that structural inequality should be corrected in all developing countries. Finally, mentions of the Palestinian question were likewise contrary to the national position.

24. In response, another regional group underscored the need to implement all United Nations resolutions related to Palestine, expressed appreciation to United Nations Member States and to UNCTAD for the long-standing technical assistance provided and dissociated from the statement of the previous delegate.

Provisional agenda of the ninetieth session of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance

25. One delegate proposed adding an item on the preparatory process for the sixteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development to the provisional agenda of the ninetieth session of the Working Party. She clarified that the proposal was linked to the request in the agreed conclusions for the secretariat to formalize discussion and inform the membership on possible ways to incorporate Conference outcomes into the programme plan for 2026. Another delegate concurred and suggested that the secretariat provide a briefing for the membership in September 2025 on its efforts related to incorporating the Conference outcome into the 2026 programme plan. She added that the calendar of meetings should be amended to reschedule the next session of the Working Party to after the Conference.

26. A representative of the UNCTAD secretariat confirmed that the secretariat would brief the membership, in line with the request in the agreed conclusions. The secretariat would do all that was necessary on the matter, ensuring that information was made available to the membership as soon as possible and providing an update when the final fascicle was published.

27. One regional group added that the provisional agenda for the Working Party could be amended on the first day of the session, if necessary and based on the available information at that point.

Closing remarks

28. In his closing remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD expressed appreciation for the engagement, feedback and in-depth discussions of the membership and for the efforts of the Chair and Vice-Chair in facilitating the dialogue among regional coordinators. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD would submit the proposed 2026

programme plan document to New York, with the comments and agreed revisions of the membership. He assured the membership of the secretariat's commitment to keeping delegations informed of the results of UNCTAD exchanges with New York on available mechanisms and options.

29. One regional group underlined the priorities of the least developed countries, including productive capacities, development diversification, enhanced investment, technology transfer, regional cooperation, enhanced logistical and infrastructural connectivity, and asked the UNCTAD secretariat to explore alternative funding sources to support activities for those countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, as agreed at previous sessions of the Working Party. The request by some least developed countries to carry assessments and activities at the national level should also be taken into account.

30. Some delegates expressed appreciation for the incorporation of issues of concern to the least developed countries in the programme plan document and said that increasing the resilience of those countries required a holistic approach that encompassed strengthened meetings between the Secretary-General of UNCTAD and country representatives.

31. Many delegates noted that the inclusion of concerns, such as provision of capacity-building and technical assistance activities to developing countries across all subprogrammes and strengthening maritime strategies through policy support to enable greater integration into global supply and value chains, in the programme plan document reflected the long-standing commitment of UNCTAD to achieve its mandated trade and development goals, including as outlined in the Bridgetown Covenant.

32. Another delegate requested, further to the exchanges with the secretariat at the opening of the session on the modalities of work of the Working Party and given different interpretations of the terms of reference, that the Chair seek guidance on the matter at the seventy-seventh executive session of the Trade and Development Board. She also recalled the request for a timeline on developments concerning the proposed programme plan.

33. Another delegate said that UNCTAD should continue to strengthen its work programme, including through development of performance indicators on effectiveness, and asked the secretariat to hold consultations and briefings for regional groups. He said there should be a balance between what was done and the broadening of priorities. The sixteenth session of the Conference would provide inputs to further hone the work programme.

III. Organizational matters

A. Election of officers

(Agenda item 1)

34. At its opening plenary meeting, on 20 January 2025, the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance elected Mr. Hazem Abdel Samad (Lebanon) as Chair and Ms. Anna Barbarzak (Poland) as Vice-Chair-cum-Rapporteur of its eighty-ninth session.

B. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

(Agenda item 2)

35. Also at its opening plenary meeting, on 20 January 2025, the Working Party adopted its provisional agenda, as contained in document TD/B/WP/334 and Corr.1. 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 2026, part A of the proposed programme budget.
4. Provisional agenda of the ninetieth session of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance.
5. Other business.
6. Adoption of the report of the Working Party to the Trade and Development Board.

C. Provisional agenda of the ninetieth session of the Working Party on the Programme Plan and Programme Performance

(Agenda item 4)

36. At its closing plenary meeting, on 24 January 2025, the Working Party approved the provisional agenda of its ninetieth session, as contained in a non-paper dated 20 January 2025 (see annex I).

D. Other business

(Agenda item 5)

37. 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)

38. At its closing plenary meeting, on 24 January 2025, 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 ninetieth 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: Overview.
5. Preparatory session for the 2027 programme plan and performance information.
6. Provisional agenda of the ninety-first 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	Kuwait
Armenia	Lebanon
Australia	Malaysia
Barbados	Mexico
Belarus	Morocco
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Nepal
Brazil	Netherlands (Kingdom of the)
Cambodia	Niger
Cameroon	Pakistan
Congo	Poland
Djibouti	Russian Federation
Egypt	Serbia
Ethiopia	Spain
Gabon	Sri Lanka
Gambia	State of Palestine
Ghana	Togo
Guinea	Türkiye
Honduras	United Republic of Tanzania
India	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Viet Nam
Iraq	Zambia
Jamaica	Zimbabwe

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

Holy See

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

European Union

League of Arab States

* This attendance list contains registered participants. For the list of participants, see TD/B/WP(89)/INF.2.