

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

Independent programme evaluation:

**UNCTAD's E-Commerce and Digital Economy  
Programme\***

Independent Evaluation Unit  
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# Contents

Contents.....	iii
List of tables .....	iv
List of Figures.....	iv
Abbreviations.....	v
Executive Summary.....	vii
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Evaluation objective, purpose and scope .....	2
1.2 Report structure.....	3
2 Context and subject of the evaluation .....	4
2.1 Research and analysis pillar.....	4
2.2 Consensus-building pillar .....	5
2.3 Technical cooperation pillar.....	5
2.4 Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement.....	7
3 Methodology of the evaluation .....	9
3.1 Theory of change .....	9
3.2 Overall methodological analytical framework and rationale.....	10
3.3 Methods for data collection.....	11
3.4 Limitations to data collection and analysis .....	13
4 Findings.....	15
4.1 Programme design and relevance.....	15
4.2 Implementation and results .....	20
4.2.1 Research and analysis.....	20
4.2.2 Consensus-building .....	24
4.2.3 Technical cooperation.....	28
4.3 Programme efficiency, M&E framework and partnerships .....	36
4.3.1 Programme efficiency .....	36
4.3.2 M&E framework .....	38
4.3.3 Multistakeholder Partnerships .....	41
4.4 Gender mainstreaming and HRBA.....	43
4.5 Programme coherence and synergies.....	49
4.6 Sustainability.....	52
5 Conclusions and recommendations.....	54
5.1 Conclusions .....	54
5.2 Strategic Recommendations.....	56
6 Annexes.....	i
i. Evaluation Matrix.....	i

ii.	Semi-structured interview guides.....	vii
iii.	Country matrix for selection of case countries.....	xii
iv.	Revisited results framework.....	xiii
v.	Evaluation Terms of Reference.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

### List of tables

TABLE 1	INTERVIEWEES/FGD PARTICIPANT BY STAKEHOLDER CATEGORY AND GENDER.....	11
TABLE 2:	THE REPORTS RELEVANCE TO THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY OF THE DIGITAL ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT.....	19
TABLE 3:	THE REPORT PRESENTS UNIQUE AND NOVEL INFORMATION 2021 AND 2019.....	19
TABLE 4.	TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE THAT THE MASTERCLASS WAS PARTICIPATORY AND ENGAGING?*	32
TABLE 5.	RESULTS FROM THE MASTERCLASSES.....	32
TABLE 6:	MASTERCLASS PARTICIPANTS YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AS ENTREPRENEURS.....	33
TABLE 7:	E TRADE FOR ALL PLATFORM AND OUTREACH.....	42
TABLE 8:	KEY FIGURES FOR ECOMMERCE WEEK PARTICIPATION.....	43

### List of Figures

FIGURE 1.	THEORY OF CHANGE (DEVELOPED BY THE EVALUATION TEAM BASED ON UPDATED RESULTS MODEL).....	9
FIGURE 2:	REGIONAL REPRESENTATION OF E TRADE FOR WOMEN SURVEY RESPONDENTS.....	13
FIGURE 3:	USE OF THE DER 2019 AND 2021.....	21
FIGURE 4:	SHARING OF THE DER 2019 AND 2021.....	22
FIGURE 5:	TWITTER POSTS CONTAINING #DIGITALECONOMYREPORT.....	23
FIGURE 6:	HOW IMPORTANT IS UNCTAD AS A SOURCE ON E-COMMERCE AND DIGITAL ECONOMY.....	24
FIGURE 7:	EXTENT TO WHICH POLICY AGREEMENTS ARE DRAWN FROM DISCUSSIONS IN THE IGE.....	25
FIGURE 8:	RESULTS FROM THE WORK IN THE IGE.....	26
FIGURE 9:	THE WORKING GROUP'S CONTRIBUTION TO EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY MAKING (GENERAL) AND IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.....	27
FIGURE 10:	ASSESSMENT OF THE WORKING GROUP'S EFFECT ON MEASURING E-COMMERCE AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY.....	27
FIGURE 11:	ENGAGEMENT IN POLICY DIALOGUE AFTER MASTERCLASSES.....	34
FIGURE 12.	GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS FOCUS IN IGE MEETINGS.....	46
FIGURE 13:	EQS, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARISED.....	61

## Abbreviations

ACSIS	African Civil Society on the Information Society
AfDB	African Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASYCUDA	Automated System for Customs Data
AU	African Union
BSI	British Standard Institution
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CI	Consumers International
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CTIS	Cambodia's Trade Integration Strategy
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DE4A	Digital Economy for Africa
DER	Digital Economy Report
DTL	Division on Technology and Logistics (UNCTAD)
DTISU	Diagnostic Trade Integration Study Updates
EAC	East African Community
ECDE	E-commerce and Digital Economy
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EIF	Enhanced Integrated Framework
ERIA	Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia
EQ	Evaluation Questions
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
IAP	International Association of Prosecutors
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organisation
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ICT4D	Information and Communication Technologies for Development
IGE	Intergovernmental Group of Experts
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISM	Implementation support mechanism
ISOC	Internet Society
ITC	International Trade Centre
ITFC	International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation
KEBS	Kenya Bureau of Standards
LDC	Least Developed Countries
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
PDEP	Pacific Digital Economy Programme
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
RBM	Results Based Management
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
TDB	Trade and Development Board
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN RCOs	UN Resident Coordinator Offices
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNGIS	United Nations Group on the Information Society
UNCITRAL	United Nations Commission on International Trade Law
UNECA	UN Economic Commission for Africa
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
UPU	Universal Postal Union
WSIS	World Summit on the Information Society Forum
WTO	World Trade Organisation

## Executive Summary

At the fourteenth Ministerial Conference of UNCTAD held in Nairobi in 2016, UNCTAD's mandate on e-commerce and the digital economy was emphasised. This spurred a substantial development of the E-Commerce and Digital Economy (ECDE) Programme 2019-2023 with the overall objective to enhance inclusive and sustainable development gains from e-commerce and the digital economy in developing countries, particularly Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The Programme reflects UNCTAD's three pillars of work (research and analysis, consensus-building, and technical cooperation) and synergies between these. Establishing of multistakeholder partnerships reflects an additional element of the Programme to ensure increased coordination and enable enhanced collaboration among actors engaged in e-commerce and the digital economy as well as to prevent overlapping initiatives.

The evaluation focuses on documenting results and achievements so far with a view to providing recommendations for improvement of the Programme moving forward. Programme implementation is still at an early stage with several initiatives being in the start-up phase, hence mainly trajectories towards results at outcome level have been possible to assess. This includes an assessment of the suitability of the M&E Framework and established targets and the different implementation modalities applied. The evaluation also considers the extent to which the Programme has managed to mainstream gender equality and apply a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA). The scope of the evaluation includes the entire ECDE Programme in the period 2019-2021 and the extent to which the Programme has managed to operationalise the mandate given at the Nairobi conference.

The evaluation approach first focused on a reconstruction of the ECDE Programmes Theory of Change (ToC) in collaboration with the ECDE Programme team. The ToC has been important for structuring and focusing the analysis in the report and for testing of key assumptions related to the Programme implementation process. The following main *data collection methods* have been applied: i) a review of relevant UNCTAD and ECDE Programme documentation; ii) interviews and focus groups with a total of 79 key stakeholders (of whom half were women); iii) a three-days visit to Geneva to conduct in-person interviews, a ToC workshop and attend the Core Donor Advisory Board meeting; iv) field observations gathered during a two-weeks field mission to Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda in November 2021; and v) conducting of four online surveys, linked to different areas of the Programme's work. The major limitations to the evaluation have been the restrictions on field visits imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic to only allow for a field visit to East Africa together with low response rates for most of the online surveys. For this reason, the evaluation team has paid due attention to triangulating survey findings with observations and findings from the qualitative interviews and the desk review conducted and consulted intensively with the Programme team during analysis and report writing.

### Key Findings

The Covid-19 pandemic has further boosted the **relevance** of the ECDE Programme and strengthened the consensus around actions in support of e-commerce and the digital economy for development. The research conducted through the Programme has clearly documented the risk of a widening of the digital divide within and across countries and has further spurred the intergovernmental work in this area. Technical cooperation activities have to a large extent addressed governments and not least LDCs' needs. The importance of ensuring ownership and inclusive participation in the implementation processes has been clearly documented, although often difficult for UNCTAD to follow upon as a non-resident agency. Internal political and bureaucratic turf and

challenges have prevailed as a major obstacle in several countries, despite the Programme's attempts to mitigate these. On the other hand, the assumption of continuous political will and interest to develop e-commerce and the digital economy for development has materialised beyond expectations, boosted by the pandemic.

There is a high level of user satisfaction with **research and analysis** products conducted by the ECDE Programme and UNCTAD is considered an important source of information on e-commerce and the digital economy for development. This is a considerable achievement given the relatively few resources allocated for the research and analysis pillar. The Digital Economy Reports (DERs) are considered highly relevant and broadly recommended in the audiences' networks. However, inadequacy of the existing UNCTAD communication and outreach strategy, combined with resource limitations, has affected the ability of the Programme to better promote and track use and uptake of the research products in view of the intended target groups which are not explicitly defined.

The **intergovernmental work** on e-commerce and the digital economy for development is an essential part of UNCTAD's work and considered very relevant. There is high confidence in the UNCTAD secretariat, and the background notes prepared are considered of high quality. The number of member States participating in meetings has continued to increase, indicating a high interest and relevance of the work. The Manual related to Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy, revised based on input and feedback received from participants in the first meeting of the Working Group on Measuring e-commerce and the digital economy, is considered of high quality but needs to be further disseminated. The Working Group allows for enhanced dialogue on the need to measure e-commerce and the digital economy which is a key concern for many member States and needs additional attention moving forward.

The **eTrade for all** initiative is seen by its partners as a useful and valuable initiative, with good engagement that helps partners to strengthen their global connections and platform in relation to e-commerce development. Since the Covid-19 pandemic has spurred more use of online technology, this has facilitated wider meeting participation across different time zones etc. The eTrade for all platform has served well as an information hub for its members and a number of eTrade for all partners have been strong contributors to the eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategy processes. Likewise, in 2021 seven eTrade for all partners joined forces on the "Covid-19 and e-commerce. A Global Review" publication to understand Covid-19's impact on e-commerce. The eTrade for all initiative has also been a useful entry point for new members to get access to in-country e-commerce development processes. So far however, the initiative has to less extent catalysed collaborative efforts among partners for implementation of actions within countries, such as co-creating of transformative programmes.

The **eCommerce Weeks** are implemented with various eTrade for all partners and the yearly event has served as a successful multistakeholder event, bringing together government representatives, international organisations, civil society, academia and private sector actors to discuss challenges and opportunities within e-commerce. The eCommerce Weeks have been essential to allow for networking and consensus-building and there are several examples of how the event has helped to connect partners and key stakeholders. The number of participants in the eCommerce Week has increased steadily in the period from 2018 onwards. Although it was originally decided to postpone the 2020 event due to the pandemic, there was a high pressure from the stakeholders to organise some kind of sessions, and it was therefore decided to implement it as a number of virtual sessions to not lose momentum. The share of female participants increased from 38% in 2019 to 44% in 2020 when the eCommerce Week was moved to an online event.

The **eTrade for Women initiative** was launched in 2019 as a spin-off from the **eTrade for all** and as a concrete outcome of the **eCommerce Week in 2019** where workshops on the digital gender



divide were organised. Within this initiative, empowerment sessions offered to female entrepreneurs through women *Masterclasses* have been in high demand as this has provided opportunities to discuss challenges in a female-only forum as well as allow for networking and getting access to an international network of female entrepreneurs. While female entrepreneurs have benefited from the Masterclasses in several ways, so far the regional *communities* - which were launched a year ago and have become a key element in the follow-up to allow female digital entrepreneurs to nourish a network of likeminded - are still in an initial phase and need further maturing and development. The online implementation mode during the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the Masterclasses' ability to strengthen networking aspects, one of the main purposes and a major reason mentioned by the women for joining the classes.

The **eTrade Readiness Assessments** developed within LDCs have been a “flagship” within the technical cooperation pillar and have served as timely diagnostics from which further multistakeholder dialogue and actions at national and regional levels could take off. The eTrade Readiness Assessments have provided useful snapshots of the e-commerce “ecosystems”, structured around the seven pillars of the eTrade for all initiative,<sup>1</sup> and have provided a useful platform for follow-up discussions within the countries on priority actions. However, while the structure and format around the first batch of eTrade Readiness Assessments developed for LDCs have been adequate and constantly developing, moving forward with non-LDCs requires additional flexible and customised products based on differentiated demands coming from more advanced developing countries. This also relates to the interface between eTrade Readiness Assessments and subsequent strategy and policy development processes.

The ECDE Programme introduced in 2020 an **Implementation Support Mechanism (ISM)** as a specific response to the need for monitoring and support for the implementation of the recommendations included in the action matrix developed for each of the eTrade Readiness Assessments conducted by UNCTAD. A key role of the ISM is to engage with the UN Resident Coordinators (UNRCOs), eTrade for all partners and other development partners. Implementation Reviews are the cornerstone of the ISM and the first one was published in 2020 while another one will be published in 2022. The ISM serves as a guide to scale-up implementation support interventions and benefit from assistance provided by UNCTAD and other partners.

While **gender equality** is clearly reflected in the results framework and in the ECDE Programme document, the **human rights** dimension is less explicitly pronounced. For instance, a HRBA requires expressed linkage to rights and identification of duty-bearers and rights holders, but this is not systematically done. A “gender sensitive manner” is emphasised in both intermediate outcome levels and the M&E framework has an explicit target to contribute to SDG 5 at the outcome levels. In terms of the research publications, the mainstreaming of gender and human rights varies. While both the DERs for 2019 and 2021 clearly reflect human rights and a gender perspective, there are several other publications that do not. In the technical cooperation, the eTrade for Women initiative is where the gender dimension is most clearly reflected and the explicit focus on empowering of women engaged in the e-commerce sector to participate in policy processes is relevant and innovative. Women’s participation in policy development processes to ensure gender sensitive policies has been supported through female role models (Advocates) but the intention is also to engage Masterclass participants in such processes in the future.

The **Programme ToC** and the **results framework** have been tested, revisited and updated, based on learning and discussions, including during the evaluation process. This has resulted in development

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<sup>1</sup> E-commerce assessments, ICT infrastructure, payment solutions, trade facilitation and logistics, legal and regulatory frameworks, skills development, and access to finance.

of a more operational ToC and results framework, with a better conceptual understanding and sequencing of activities, outputs and outcomes. This can now be used for alignment and updating of the M&E Framework which is considered a living document. While the ECDE Programme maintains a consistent focus on learning, most of the learning events take place within each pillar and not as cross-cutting learning processes which could enhance the integration and coherence of the different areas. It is however noted that several **innovative initiatives** have been launched by the ECDE Programme and other initiatives have been continuously adapted to reflect the constant evolution and dynamics in the area of e-commerce and digital economy for development.

While the establishing of the Core Donor Advisory Board has been important to enhance the efficiency of resource and budget allocations to the Programme, the current **funding structure** creates imbalance between resource allocation to the three pillars and inefficiencies in relation to some of the work and implementation processes, in particular within the technical cooperation pillar. There are a number of activities within the Programme that UNCTAD is still mandated to undertake (such as production of the DER and support to the work of the IGE and the Working Group) whether obtaining extra-budgetary funds or not. Moreover, in the case of research and analysis, this area requires mostly regular budget funds in order to ensure its independence. This underlines the need for UNCTAD to ensure that sufficient regular budget funding is allocated to the Programme and so far this has not been the case.

The Programme has managed to create good **synergies and complementarity** between interventions across different pillars and the partnership dimension and continue to explore opportunities for better connections between some initiatives. There is strong coherence between research analysis and consensus building activities, and both eTrade for Women and eTrade Readiness Assessments were born out of the partnership-building activities. In the area of technical cooperation, there are good examples of linkage to other UN organisations at country-level and the ECDE Programme has been proactive in this regard. However, the lack of presence within countries has also demonstrated the challenges on maintaining a fluent dialogue with partners. Thus, although the ambitions of the Programme to integrate the three pillars and the partnership element have been achieved to a large extent within most areas of work, opportunities for synergies could still be further explored.

Member States are committed to continue working towards an enhanced framework for e-commerce and the digital economy for development. **Catalytic effects** from UNCTAD's support are observed in all regions. Regional e-commerce strategies are under development in three different regions where eTrade Readiness Assessments have been conducted within several countries. This indicates that strategic partnerships at regional level have been established. The ECDE Programme is however heavily dependent on donor funds, and despite increasing commitments, there is still a significant funding gap in view of the 2023 target. In addition, the regular budget support to the Programme needs to be reviewed considering UNCTAD's strengthened mandate in this area, and the need to further enhance the use and uptake of the Programme's work on research and analysis to complement interventions within the other Programme pillars and the partnership dimension.

## **Conclusions**

Presented below are the summarised main conclusions drawn from the evaluation findings.

**Conclusion 1:** The **relevance** of the ECDE Programme **design and focus** is high, building on the three Programme pillars supported by a partnership approach. The Programme has responded timely to critical gaps and demands within developing countries and has become a first mover to set the scene for e-commerce and digital economy for development within many LDCs and developing countries. The dynamics and supply and demand mechanisms are rapidly changing, thus an important task for the ECDE Programme will be to continue to adapt its products and working approaches in

order to remain relevant and a preferred option for developing countries when looking for support on e-commerce and digital economy for development.

**Conclusion 2:** Further **consolidation and follow-up** will be needed to support many of the already implemented and ongoing Programme interventions which are still at an early stage. Most of the deliverables within the **technical cooperation** pillar have focused on diagnostics and empowerment processes, from which it is in most cases still too early to identify concrete results. In the area of **research and analysis**, the Programme has delivered high quality products which however need to become better targeted and disseminated to ensure a higher uptake of data and research work including for policymaking.

**Conclusion 3:** The use of a **programmatic approach** has led to efficiency gains and has facilitated developing and implementation of holistic solutions and approaches in support of the Agenda 2030 and a number of the SDGs. Several of these solutions and approaches have been developed across Programme pillars and through multistakeholder engagement. Some inefficiencies have occurred in the implementation process relation to the **timing** and possible **follow-up** on some of the implemented technical cooperation interventions, mainly due to the Covid-19 pandemic and bureaucracy and capacity issues within beneficiary countries. In addition, a relatively large share of short-term and earmarked extra-budgetary project funding in the Programme budget has created some inflexibility in the way some of the technical cooperation products and services have been “supplied” by the Programme.

**Conclusion 4:** A **holistic and dynamic ToC and results framework** developed for the Programme, provide a strong platform for **adaptive programming**. Within this framework, the Programme team will need to continue to enhance its understanding and documentation of how and to what extent the supported interventions are contributing to development results. While learning is at the centre of the Programme team’s work, it could still become better integrated into the Programme cycle. This will help the Programme to further exchange lessons learned and good examples from these processes across countries and regions and enhance the understanding of the Programme’s contribution within a highly complex sphere where still more actors are engaging.

**Conclusion 5: Partnerships** have been successfully established with support from the ECDE Programme. In particular through the eTrade for all initiative and eCommerce Weeks, it has been possible to attract still more members that contribute with complementary competencies in support of the holistic approach needed for e-commerce and digital economy for development. Although a number of joint partner initiatives have already been implemented, more collaborative efforts could be done among the partners to support implementation of transformative actions within countries.

**Conclusion 6: Gender equality and human rights** are to some extent mainstreamed into the Programme and supported interventions, however this is not done systematically. Moreover, although it is widely acknowledged that e-commerce and digital economy offer particularly good opportunities for inclusion of marginalised population groups, including people living with a disability, this has not been consistently reflected in the implementation approaches and processes. It is essential to continue encouraging the active participation of private sector and civil society organisations (CSOs) at large but in particular organisations that represent women and vulnerable groups’ interests in diagnostics and e-commerce strategy development processes.

**Conclusion 7:** There are good examples of **internal complementarity** between activities implemented within the three pillars (e.g. between research and the inter-governmental work and between different activities within the technical cooperation pillar) and there is scope for further cross-collaboration in the Programme. The efforts made already by the Programme to tap into existing in-country structures established by partners or other agencies, such as the UN Country

Teams, are important steps for ensuring **external complementarity** and could be further strengthened to enhance support to implementation processes within countries.

**Conclusion 8:** From a **sustainability** perspective, UNCTAD has now got a reconfirmed mandate from member States to strengthen its work on e-commerce and digital economy for development. In addition, there is good evidence of member States' commitment to continue working towards the Programme objectives beyond the end of UNCTAD's support and some **catalytical effects** are already noted, both across countries as well as from national to sub-regional and regional levels. However, while the ECDE Programme clearly has a strong forward-looking potential, its sustainability is currently challenged by a strong imbalance in its funding composition, where a heavy dependence on **donor funding** calls for an urgent need to strengthen the regular budget funding base to the Programme.

## **Recommendations**

Based on these conclusions, the evaluation team has developed five main strategic recommendations.

**Strategic Recommendation 1** (*for the Secretary-General of UNCTAD and UNCTAD Management*): In view of the evaluation findings and the Bridgetown Covenant, which instructed UNCTAD to strengthen its work in the digital area, **UNCTAD should consider ways for allocating additional regular budget funding to the ECDE Programme** to ensure that it is better able to deliver sustainably the results sought by UNCTAD's member States. This may include a comparative assessment of staffing and resources currently allocated to different Programmes in UNCTAD.

**Strategic Recommendation 2** (*for the ECDE Programme donors*): **Donors to the Programme could aim at following the examples of the governments of Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands, who provide increasingly longer term, flexible and non-earmarked funding support to the ECDE Programme.** This would allow the Programme team to further strengthen its adaptive programmatic approach which is fundamental to maintain the Programme's high relevance and facilitate its further development in a rapidly evolving area.

**Strategic recommendation 3** (*for Division on Technology and Logistics (DTL) Management*): The remaining part of the current Programme period (up to end-2023) should **focus on consolidation of initiatives that have already been initiated and not launching of any new major initiatives.** This is in particular important if the ECDE Programme is unable to attract the amount of resources anticipated in its budget, which then further limits the possibility to expand its scope at this point of time. More fundamental adjustments should be explored mainly as preparation for a possible new Programme phase beyond 2023 (see recommendation 4 below).

**Strategic Recommendation 4** (*for DTL Management*): **For the remaining period of the current Programme plan, and as part of the preparation and design of the Programme phase beyond 2023, it is recommended that the ECDE Programme team will take on board the following concrete actions and proposed adjustments:**

- Enhance **integration and communication of key data and research/analytical results through the technical cooperation activities.** More specifically, and with a direct link to a new UNCTAD communication and outreach strategy: i) development of a **specific Programme outreach strategy** with a clear focus on how to reach and track target groups/audiences more effectively; ii) a **broader engagement of key stakeholder groups** in discussion of research topics; and iii) use of **more innovative and creative ways to communicate** results from the research and analytical work e.g. through social media.
- Enhance **capacity development of national stakeholders, including focal points, on collecting of data for production of statistics related to the digital economy and e-**

**commerce for development**, applying and building on the revised UNCTAD Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy 2020.

- Implement a system for better **monitoring and tracking of stakeholder feedback from IGE sessions and the intergovernmental work**.
- Explore opportunities for enhanced focus on country ownership, inter-institutional cooperation and multistakeholder engagement at country level as key selection criteria for **eTrade Readiness Assessment** requests.
- Conduct an **independent evaluation of the eTrade Readiness Assessments** with a particular view to assess and ensure its continued relevance and usefulness beyond 2023.
- Further activate **the collaborative potentials among partners** within the **partnership approach** - mainly related to the *eTrade for all initiative* - to jointly support implementation of transformative actions within countries.
- **Strengthen the established communities within the eTrade for Women initiative**, in particular the aspects of networking.
- Enhance the **use of the ToC and its linkages to the results framework** to further strengthen adaptive management principles within the Programme. Including: i) integrate **learning sessions** into the project cycle with a view to extract lessons learned after completion of major activities; ii) introduction of **a more participatory and dynamic M&E approach**; iii) introduction of **brief follow-up surveys** six months after concluding of major events; iv) introduction of **process and learning indicators**; and v) inclusion of **more qualitative targets/indicators** in the M&E framework.
- Develop an updated **strategic assessment and action plan** on current and emerging opportunities for further **diversifying and broadening the Programmes extra-budgetary funding base**.

**Strategic Recommendation 5 (for DTL Management)**: As appropriate, *gender equality and human rights aspects* should be strengthened and become more consistently reflected in the implemented Programme activities and the outputs produced. More specifically, this could include: i) conducting an **analysis of gender equality and human rights** for the entire ECDE Programme, followed by developing a programme-wide gender equality and human rights strategy; ii) more explicit reference to application of **a HRBA in research and technical cooperation**; iii) inclusion of a **specific session for consultants conducting eTrade Readiness Assessments on how to mainstream gender and ensure application of a HRBA in the process**; and iv) actively encourage enrolment of **marginalised groups in the eTrade for Women application processes** to clearly signal non-discrimination as a key value.

## 1. Introduction

Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) are central aspects of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. While targets for ICTs are explicitly reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ICTs are also important enablers for the achievement of practically all the SDGs in a cross-sectional manner. E-commerce and the digital economy have however only recently come to the forefront of the development agenda as digitalisation of the world economy is still in its early days. Nevertheless, great inequalities exist in the development of e-commerce and the digital economy and while they offer great potential for both developed and developing countries, challenges are many. For instance, the United States and China account for 90% of the total market capitalisation of the world's largest 70 digital platforms. While 70% of the populations in the developed countries buy goods online the equivalent figure for populations in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) is below 3% and within countries there are also great variations, for example, between rural/urban populations, men and women.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, significant efforts are needed to ensure inclusive and sustainable development in the digital economy.

A broad global survey conducted by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) found that the Covid-19 pandemic has shifted global consumer behaviours and accelerated the shift towards a more digital world in a way that will have long-lasting effects. A number of sectors are moving to adopt e-commerce as quickly as possible and countries that fail to keep up could get left behind.<sup>3</sup>

At the fourteenth Ministerial Conference of UNCTAD held in Nairobi in 2016, UNCTAD's mandate on e-commerce and the digital economy was emphasised. The Outcome document developed as a result of the conference<sup>4</sup> formed the basis for UNCTAD's work for the subsequent four years. The Outcome document specified the need for further research on e-commerce and the digital economy for development and support to governments in building capacities on e-commerce and digitalisation as well as the need for resource mobilisation to achieve these objectives. This spurred a substantial development of the E-Commerce and Digital Economy (ECDE) Programme which in 2016 consisted of five staff in the then ICT Policy Section in UNCTAD's Division on Technology and Logistics (DTL).

Today the mandate of the ECDE Programme has again been reaffirmed at the fifteenth Ministerial Conference of UNCTAD held in Barbados in October 2021, the Bridgetown Covenant.<sup>5</sup> This is in line with the substantial growth of the Programme which now has 30 staff members and applies a programmatic approach. In August 2021, reflecting this expansion, and in order to achieve a more effective organisation of work, the ICT Policy Section was upgraded to the level of a Branch – the E-commerce and Digital Economy Branch. Still however, while the Programme has grown considerably in terms of extra-budgetary funding, the allocation of staff members funded through regular budget funding has not followed this development. Today only seven staff members are funded through regular budget funds (an increase of two staff members since 2016) and the majority of staff is employed on short-term contracts.

Key initiatives under the ECDE Programme include the flagship publication Digital Economy Report (DER), the Intergovernmental Group of Experts (IGE) on E-Commerce and the Digital Economy,

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<sup>2</sup> E-Commerce and Digital Economy Programme Work Plan for 2019-2023, August 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Covid-19 and e-commerce. A Global Review 2021, eTrade for all, UNCTAD.

<sup>4</sup> UNCTAD XIV Outcome, Nairobi Maafikiano and Nairobi Azimio, United Nations, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> The Bridgetown Covenant: Implications for the E-Commerce and Digital Economy (ECDE) Programme, / October 2021.

the eTrade for all initiative (which was evaluated in 2019),<sup>6</sup> E-commerce and Law Reform (which was evaluated in 2011),<sup>7</sup> the eTrade for Women initiative, the eTrade Readiness Assessments, and the eCommerce Weeks.<sup>8</sup>

The overall objective of the ECDE Programme is to enhance inclusive and sustainable development gains from e-commerce and the digital economy in developing countries, particularly LDCs. It reflects UNCTAD's three pillars of work (research and analysis, consensus-building, and technical cooperation) and synergies between these. Thereby, the Programme is built around UNCTAD's vision to "think, debate and deliver". Establishing of multistakeholder partnerships reflects an additional element of the Programme to ensure increased coordination and enable enhanced collaboration among actors engaged in e-commerce and the digital economy as well as to prevent overlapping initiatives.

As part of the ECDE Programme's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework and as agreed with donors, an evaluation of the Programme is planned for every 3 years, and this is the first of the cycle. This independent evaluation of UNCTAD's ECDE Programme covers the period 2019-2021 but also considers activities conducted previously to the extent it is relevant to analyse development over time.

### 1.1 Evaluation objective, purpose and scope

According to the Terms of Reference (ToR), the overall *objective* and *purpose* of the evaluation is three-fold:

- to provide an independent assessment of progress towards the achievement of the Programme's development objective, assessing performance as per the established indicators vis-à-vis the strategies and implementation modalities chosen and programme management arrangements.
- to provide an assessment of the application of the Programme's M&E Framework (based on results-based management (RBM) principles) to date as well as a verification of results targets set for 2023.
- to provide strategic recommendations, highlight good practices and lessons learnt.

Thus, the evaluation focuses on documenting results and achievements so far with a view to providing recommendations and improving the Programme moving forward. The Programme is still at an early stage with several initiatives being in the start-up phase, hence mainly trajectories towards results at outcome level are possible to assess. This includes an assessment of the suitability of the M&E Framework and established targets and the different implementation modalities applied. The evaluation will also consider to what extent the Programme has managed to mainstream gender equality and apply a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA).

As mentioned above, the evaluation is the first of its kind and important for several reasons:

- The Programme has experienced a rapid and continuous growth in recent years: from five staff members in 2016 to 30 staff members now (although not permanent and full-time staff members) in September 2021 and the ICT Policy Section has recently been upgraded to the level of a Branch within UNCTAD. Therefore, there is a need to take stock of progress so far.
- While donor funding to the Programme has continued to grow there is still a need for further resource mobilisation in order for the Programme to be able to implement its Work Plan 2019-

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<sup>6</sup> Independent evaluation of eTrade for all, Evaluation and Monitoring Unit, September 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Balestrieri, Emmanuela: External Evaluation of UNCTAD's E-Commerce and Law Reform Project, July 2011

<sup>8</sup> Independent evaluation of eTrade for all, Evaluation and Monitoring Unit, September 2019.

2023.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, while extra-budgetary funding has increased considerably over time (in particularly earmarked for technical cooperation initiatives) this has not been the case for the regular budget funding. Thus, the evaluation also serves to address how the high dependency on extra-budgetary funding influences the manoeuvre-room of the Programme to deliver on activities outside the technical cooperation area.

- Programme evaluations are scheduled every third year and therefore the evaluation is timely. The period under evaluation is from 2019 to 2021, i.e., covering the first half of the Programme's Work Plan 2019-2023.

The evaluation will serve to document trajectories towards results. Expected key users of the evaluation findings are the Programme team and management as well as UNCTAD as a whole (including top management). Financing donors and partners of the Programme are also foreseen to be key users of the report, in particular the core donors (Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland).<sup>10</sup> These are not only important due to their financial support but also important stakeholders in building consensus on the need for further enhancing e-commerce and the digital economy for development.

The scope of the evaluation includes the entire ECDE Programme in the period 2019-2021 and the extent to which the Programme has managed to operationalise the mandate given at the Nairobi conference. As mentioned, this mandate was renewed again at the Bridgetown Covenant in the end of 2021 confirming the continued relevance of the Programme, however, given the evaluation timeframe, the focus will be on the operationalisation of the mandate from Nairobi. The temporal scope of the evaluation also covers the beginning of the application of the Programme's M&E Framework, with a view to generating insights for strengthening the Programme's results-driven approach.

The evaluation will cover activities implemented under all three pillars as well as partnerships and stakeholder engagement. It will focus on the outcomes attained as well as on the relevance, synergies, and coherence across components and the extent to which human rights and gender have been mainstreamed. Since, the eTrade for all initiative was evaluated in 2019, the current evaluation will focus on the follow-up to the recommendations from this evaluation and not include a full evaluation of the initiative again, although note will be taken of recent developments in the initiative. Instead, larger emphasis will be placed on the two major spin-offs of eTrade for all, namely the eTrade Readiness Assessments and the eTrade for Women initiative.

## 1.2 Report structure

After this short introduction, the context and subject of the evaluation are explained in Chapter 2. This includes a short introduction of the key activities offered by the Programme. In Chapter 3, the methodology and approach are explained starting with the Programme's Theory of Change (ToC). Chapter 4, first analyses the Programme design and relevance in 4.1. Then it turns to Programme implementation and results in 4.2 which is structured around the three pillars of research and analysis, technical cooperation and consensus-building activities. In 4.3, the efficiency of the Programme is discussed with a specific focus on M&E and partnerships and 4.4 analyses the extent to which gender has been mainstreamed and a HRBA has been applied. In 4.5 and 4.6, Programme coherence and sustainability are analysed before concluding on findings and providing recommendations under Chapter 5.

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<sup>9</sup> E-Commerce and Digital Economy Programme Work Plan for 2019-2023, August 2021

<sup>10</sup> Other major donors include: Finland, Sweden, Estonia, Australia, the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF), United Kingdom, Republic of Korea, United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), International Islamic Trade Finance Cooperation (ITFC).



## 2 Context and subject of the evaluation

Many developing countries, especially LDCs, have limited capacities to capture opportunities emerging as a result of digitalisation as well as to address the challenges and bear the costs involved. Moreover, there is a risk that digitalisation will lead to increased polarisation and widening income inequalities within and between countries, as benefits may accrue mainly to a few countries and already wealthy and skilled enterprises and individuals.

The ECDE Programme has a global reach and conducts research and consensus building activities at the global level. The technical cooperation and the eTrade Readiness Assessments have initially had a specific emphasis on LDCs<sup>11</sup> in West and East Africa, South and Southeast Asia as well as the Pacific.<sup>12</sup> The Programme however continues to expand to new regions, and while activities in e.g. Latin America have been limited, initiatives have been taken to ensure a greater geographical balance. Developing economies such as Egypt, Oman, Iraq, Botswana, Kazakhstan have therefore also more recently benefitted from the Programme support.

As mentioned above, the Programme is structured around UNCTAD's three pillars of research and analysis, consensus building and technical cooperation. In addition, there is an important partnerships and stakeholder engagement component that contributes to all of the three pillars. Organisationally, the Programme is situated in the E-Commerce and Digital Economy Branch within the Division on Technology and Logistics, and is divided into a Digital Economy Policy Research Section, a Digital Economy Capacity-building Section and an eTrade Initiatives Section.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.1 Research and analysis pillar

The main output under the *research and analysis pillar* is the biennial flagship publication the *DER* which was first published in 2019 and again in September 2021. The DER has succeeded the Information Economy Report that was published from 2005. The DER is one of seven flagship reports in UNCTAD. It informs member States and other stakeholders in their policymaking on e-commerce and the digital economy for development issues, as it discusses current trends and major national, regional and international policy issues regarding ICT, e-commerce and the digital economy, and their implications for trade and development.

The Programme also produces Policy Briefs based on research findings, as well as technical notes on e-commerce and the digital economy for development. Moreover, research can result in occasional products, based on relevant needs, such as the 2020 publication “What is at stake for developing countries in trade negotiations on e-commerce? The case of the joint statement initiative”, in collaboration with colleagues from the Division on International Trade and Commodities. During 2020 the research agenda of the ECDE Programme was extended and adapted to give particular emphasis to the links between the Covid-19 pandemic and the implications for e-commerce.<sup>14</sup> Apart from these publications a number of parliamentary documents are prepared in advance of intergovernmental meetings, such as the IGE and the Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy, which are strongly based on research and analysis work.

The Programme's research activities also include the development of methodologies and the collection, processing, and dissemination of internationally comparable statistics on trade in ICT

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<sup>11</sup> The list of LDCs follow the UN definition as reflected here: <https://unctad.org/topic/least-developed-countries/list>

<sup>12</sup> List of outputs 2019-2021, August 2021.

<sup>13</sup> ECDE team organigram, August 2021.

<sup>14</sup> E-commerce and Digital Economy Programme, Year in Review 2020, 2021.

goods and services, trade in digitally deliverable services, the size of the ICT sector and the use of ICT by enterprises. One aspect of this involves conducting an annual survey of National Statistical Offices or other competent authorities of member States to collect the latest available official statistics in these areas. This work is also linked to various capacity-building activities (see section on technical cooperation on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy under 4.2.3 below) and the Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy (4.2.2 below).

## 2.2 Consensus-building pillar

The *consensus-building pillar* relates to the intergovernmental machinery of UNCTAD concerning policymaking debates and agreements. Consensus-building activities through the IGE on e-commerce and the digital economy are expected to primarily result in increased dialogue and exchange of good practices among policymakers that can lead to concrete policymaking by member States at national, regional and international levels. The IGE reports to the Trade and Development Board (TDB) which oversees the activities of the organisation and adjusts UNCTAD's daily work.<sup>15</sup> As per the ToR for the IGE, it should be organised in conjunction with the UNCTAD eCommerce Week.<sup>16</sup> Four meetings have been conducted until end 2021.

Another key element in the consensus-building pillar is the Working Group on Measuring E-Commerce and the Digital Economy which was created by the TDB in 2019. Its objective is to contribute to and advance cooperation on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy and enhance the availability, comparability, quality, relevance, and usability of statistics concerning e-commerce and the digital economy. The Working Group reports to the IGE and until end 2021 two meetings have been conducted.

## 2.3 Technical cooperation pillar

Under this pillar of work, the ECDE Programme continuously provides capacity building and advisory support aimed at strengthening the ability of member States to engage in and benefit from e-commerce and the digital economy. The main activities during the period under review under this pillar are briefly presented below.

### **E-Commerce and Law Reform**

Key outputs include the Global Cyberlaw Tracker<sup>17</sup> measuring the degree of adoption of legislation on e-transactions, consumer protection online, privacy and data protection, and cybercrime; the development of a training course on Digital Identity (in cooperation with the World Bank, United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) delivered in 2019 for Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member States, which was followed by a regional publication titled *Train for Trade case studies in South-East Asia on e-commerce skills development*;<sup>18</sup> and an in-depth analysis of the compliance of Kazakhstan's existing regulations and laws related to e-commerce with the Joint Statement Initiative text on common rules for governing cross-border e-commerce in goods and services in the framework of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Guide for Delegates, UNCTAD in the United Nation's System, UNCTAD, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Terms of reference for the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy, revised September 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Released in 2020, and in early 2022.

<sup>18</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlkdb2020d1\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlkdb2020d1_en.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> List of outputs 2019-2021, August 2021; E-Commerce and Digital Economy Programme, Year in Review 2020, 2021.

## **E-Commerce strategies**

The ECDE Programme also supports governments and regional economic communities in developing e-commerce strategies. Egypt was supported to prepare a national e-commerce strategy previous to this programme phase (in 2017), and within the current programme period support has been provided to development of a national e-commerce strategy for Oman (2019) and strategies for Rwanda and Botswana<sup>20</sup> which were finalised in 2021. In addition, strategies are ongoing or upcoming for Benin, Kenya, Myanmar (however on hold due to the political situation), Solomon Islands, and for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).<sup>21</sup>

## **eTrade Readiness Assessments**

Another key element of the technical cooperation pillar is the *eTrade Readiness Assessments*. The eTrade Readiness Assessments provide a diagnostic of the state of e-commerce in beneficiary countries. Following the launch of the eTrade for all initiative (see below), and with a view to support countries to better understand where they stand and to strengthen their ability to engage in and benefit from e-commerce, as well as providing recommendations to overcome challenges identified, the eTrade Readiness Assessments were developed by UNCTAD, building on the seven policy areas of eTrade for all:

- E-commerce readiness assessment and strategy formulation
- ICT infrastructure and services
- Trade logistics and trade facilitation
- Payment solutions
- Legal and regulatory frameworks
- E-commerce skills development
- Access to financing

The eTrade Readiness Assessments were initiated in 2016 and first piloted in Cambodia where the first assessment was launched in April 2017. As of today, a total of 29 assessments have been conducted and others are in progress. At the same time, the assessments have developed from being initially rather rapid assessment to become more comprehensive diagnostics.<sup>22</sup>

As LDCs gradually have been moving from diagnostics to the action stage, the ECDE Programme has created in 2020 an *Implementation Support Mechanism (ISM)* to help monitor and provide assistance to support the implementation of the recommendations included in the action matrix developed for each of the eTrade Readiness Assessments conducted by UNCTAD. A key role of the ISM is to engage with the UN Resident Coordinators (UNRCOs), eTrade for all partners and other development partners. Implementation Reviews are the cornerstone of the ISM and the first one was published in 2020 while another one is to be published in 2022. It serves as a guide to scale-up implementation support interventions and benefit from assistance provided by UNCTAD and other partners.

## **eTrade for Women**

The eTrade for Women initiative was launched in 2019 as a spin-off from the eTrade for all and as a concrete outcome of the eCommerce week in 2019 where workshops on the digital gender divide were organised.<sup>23</sup> The initiative involves successful female business owners, who have managed to

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<sup>20</sup> <https://unctad.org/webflyer/national-ict-policy-review-and-e-commerce-strategy-botswana>

<sup>21</sup> List of outputs 2019-2021, August 2021.

<sup>22</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlstictinf2021d3\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlstictinf2021d3_en.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> eCommerce Week, Summary report, 2019

establish high impact digital businesses, as Advocates in policymaking. Advocates engage in policy dialogue and speak at high level events to raise awareness of barriers that female entrepreneurs meet and at the same time they serve as role models. Advocates are involved in organising and implementing *Masterclasses* with the purpose of empowering female entrepreneurs, connecting them to each other to allow for networking and getting access to an international network of female entrepreneurs.

A wish from Masterclass participants to further engage after the finalisation of the classes prompted the development of regional communities which have become a key element in the follow-up to allow female digital entrepreneurs to nourish a network of likeminded. Through participation in such networks and experience sharing, it is expected that women will become enabled to develop strategies to overcome barriers to accessing to finance (a key root cause for women's lack of participation), acquire new knowledge and in the longer run also influence policy making.

### **Technical assistance on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy**

Technical assistance on e-commerce and digital economy statistics is demand-based, either in the form of advisory services or of training. Training on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy is based on the UNCTAD Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy, which was revised throughout 2020. The UNCTAD Manual revision was based on inputs and feedback received from participants at the first meeting of the UNCTAD Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy in December 2019.<sup>24</sup> The Manual was finalised in early 2021 and has in turn prompted the revision of related training material. The pandemic has also urged the development of an online training course based on the Manual, since the training course was originally designed to be delivered face-to-face. A pilot delivery of the online training course will be held for Pacific Island countries in 2022. The online course is being developed in collaboration with the Train for Trade Programme.

## **2.4 Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement**

The fourth element of the Programme is the Partnership component which is centred around multistakeholder engagement. Coordination among policy makers, private sector and research institutions in the area of e-commerce and the digital economy is the key element here as well as ensuring visibility to the Programme. The main output is the *eTrade for all* initiative which is a mechanism for leading development partners, in partnership with the private sector, to make their actions more transparent, coherent and efficient by pooling capabilities and resources. The eTrade for all initiative was born in 2016 with the ambition to make e-commerce work for development. 15 development partners joined forces and launched the initiative which is supported by its digital platform which strives to help governments access cutting edge information and technical assistance on e-commerce. It is a joint effort between partners, managed by UNCTAD, which in 2021 had increased to 34 partners (including UNCTAD).<sup>25</sup>

The *eCommerce Week* is another central element of the multistakeholder engagement that ensures visibility and provides a forum for discussing development challenges within e-commerce and the digital economy for development. It is organised in collaboration with eTrade for all partners and has been implemented both in Geneva and in Nairobi (eCommerce Week in Africa). There were intentions to conduct an eCommerce Week in Asia as well in 2021 but this event was cancelled due to evolving and unforeseen circumstances mostly related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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<sup>24</sup> Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy, UNCTAD, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> <https://etradeforall.org/about/partners/>

The annual World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum and the UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) are mechanisms for digital cooperation for development.<sup>26</sup> UNCTAD is the co-organiser of the annual WSIS Forum and is co-facilitator of the WSIS action line on e-business.<sup>27</sup> UNCTAD is Vice-Chair of UNGIS and chaired the Group in 2020-2021, during which time it hosted an online dialogue on the Role of Digitalisation in the Decade of Action.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/ungis/About>

<sup>27</sup> E-commerce and Digital Economy Programme, Year in Review 2020, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> <https://unctad.org/topic/ecommerce-and-digital-economy/ungis-dialogue>

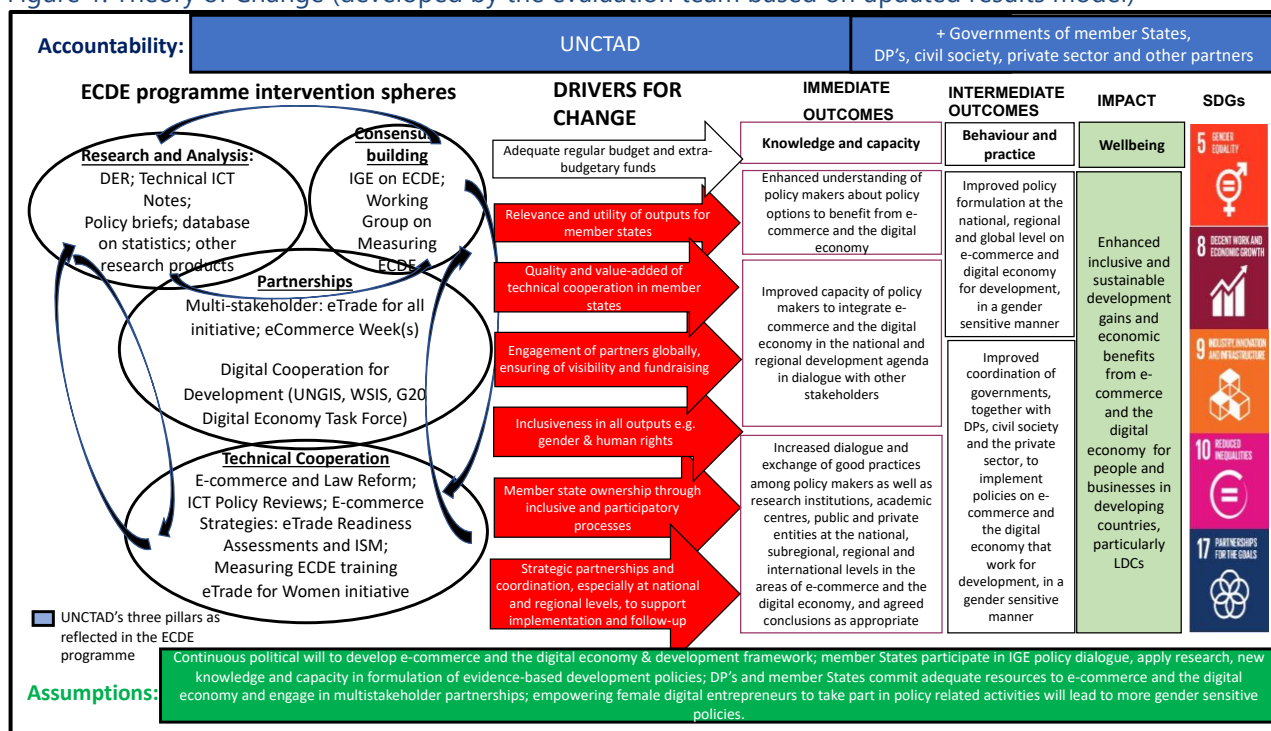
### 3 Methodology of the evaluation

The main methodological frameworks and tools applied by the evaluation are presented below.

#### 3.1 Theory of change

As a result of discussions in the inception phase, the Programme’s results model was modified. This model has been used by the evaluation team for developing an overall ToC for the ECDE Programme (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Theory of Change (developed by the evaluation team based on updated results model)



The ToC takes point of departure in the *holistic* intention of the ECDE Programme and the assumed interplay between the three pillars and the partnerships component. For instance, research made available through the DER informs topics for discussion at the IGE on e-commerce and the digital economy and the eCommerce Weeks; outcomes of the IGE identify information gaps for further research; the eTrade for all initiative (out of which the eTrade Readiness Assessments and the eTrade for Women initiative were born) was created to respond to some key challenges highlighted in the Information Economy Report 2015 “Unlocking the potential of E-Commerce for Developing countries” and discussed at eCommerce Week (eTrade for Women). Similarly, the technical cooperation programme components were developed to respond to the challenges faced by governments of developing countries as informed by the research and analysis work of UNCTAD. Thus, in reality all outputs contribute somehow to the achievement of all outcomes.

The ToC outlines key *drivers* for change, mainly from the output level to the immediate outcome level, which is where the main focus of the evaluation has been centred. The drivers marked with red arrows are *internal areas* the Programme can directly influence, meaning that the ECDE Programme team can inspire these elements through the design, planning, production and delivery of outputs. However, country ownership, inclusiveness and partnership engagement can only to a certain extent be assessed and encouraged prior to the engagement and e.g. intra-governmental political turf is outside the control of UNCTAD. The driver marked with the white arrow (adequate regular budget and extra-budgetary funds) is only partially internal to UNCTAD, as it will depend on decisions taken by the UN Secretariat and member States in New York as well as by the donors. The ToC also

includes key *assumptions* related to the ECDE Programme implementation (a further detailing and linking of assumptions to different steps in the results model is included in Annex iv). The assumptions will mainly depend on largely external factors that are outside the control of the Programme team (e.g. political will). During the data collection and analysis process, the ToC has been tested and verified together with the underlying results model and discussions are integrated into the findings section (Chapter 4).

### 3.2 Overall methodological analytical framework and rationale

The following overall framework has been applied for the evaluation:

*Use of a theory-based approach:* Given the complexity and nature of this evaluation, a theory-based approach has been applied. A core element in this approach has been the ToC (Figure 1 above) together with the results model for the Programme intervention (Annex iv) to illustrate and explain how the different pillars and partnership and stakeholder engagement initiatives introduced and supported by the Programme, together with external and internal contextual factors, have been expected to drive a change process. It has been useful to break down the chain of events into different *contribution pathways* (see below). This has allowed the evaluation team to conduct a more systemic assessment of how the various elements (separately and jointly) are contributing towards the achievement of results.

*Contribution analysis:* In order to assess results and achievements, the evaluation team has focused on the *contribution* of the ECDE Programme to obtain an improved understanding of what difference the ECDE Programme is making as well as an increased understanding of *how* and *why* observed results are occurring (or not). As it is noted that some elements of the Programme are still at an early stage of implementation, the focus will here be on assessing the *process* and *trends/trajectories* towards results. The contribution analysis has been implemented through a step-by-step approach, building on an understanding of the Programme theory and the expected results. This way, it has been possible to understand *progress* towards results in a systematic manner and following the chain of activities and intermediate level results along the change process.

*Development of an evaluation matrix:* An evaluation matrix has been developed (see Annex i) and has constituted the overall guiding framework for the evaluation. The evaluation matrix includes a further structuring and operationalisation of the Evaluation Questions presented in the ToR and in view of the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria.<sup>29</sup>

*Application of a human rights and gender equality approach:* The evaluation applies a HRBA and mainstream gender. This means that the evaluation pays due attention to the principles of a rights-based approach namely assessing the extent to which the Programme has *expressed linkage to rights*, has ensured *accountability, empowerment, participation, non-discrimination* and *attention to vulnerable groups*.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, the evaluation has applied the same principles to the actual evaluation process by making sure that data collection is conducted in a participatory, non-discriminatory, transparent manner. Different stakeholder groups have been included, and no type of stakeholders were excluded from the process. Both men and women have been consulted in the

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<sup>29</sup> While OECD-DAC specifies six criteria: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and coherence, UNCTAD's evaluation guidelines adds a criterion on gender equality and human rights. Since most of the Programme activities are in an initial phase of implementation this evaluation does not consider impact. See more on the OECD-DAC criteria here: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dacriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> Human Rights, Poverty and Governance in the Least Developed Countries: Rights-based Approaches Towards a New Framework of Cooperation, Contributions of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. May 2011.

evaluation to obtain a proper understanding of the different needs and challenges they face in their specific contexts, economies and in policy development.

### 3.3 Methods for data collection

The following main methods for data collection have been applied for this evaluation:

*Desk review of Programme documents and relevant materials:* A substantial review of Programme documentation has been conducted on research outputs, Programme documents, monitoring and evaluation reports, progress reporting etc. In addition, a web screening of other topic-related literature has been undertaken with a particular view to covering the case countries (see below).

*Interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with a sample of programme participants and other relevant key stakeholders:* A total of 79 key Programme stakeholders have been interviewed or attended FGDs,<sup>31</sup> either in-person during country visits (see below) or virtually.<sup>32</sup> The interviewees have been balanced according to countries/regions and topics as well as gender. The division of interviewees/FGD participants according to stakeholder categories is listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Interviewees/FGD participant by stakeholder category and gender

Stakeholder categories	Female	Male	Total #
Bilateral donors	1	3	4
Consultants	3	2	5
Female entrepreneurs	10		10
Government representatives	4	14	18
Private sector representatives	2	2	4
Regional organisation		1	1
UN Organisations	1	8	9
UNCTAD Programme staff	8	3	11
UNCTAD staff/management	4	2	6
International organisations	5	5	10
Other		1	1
<b>Total #</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>79</b>

*Online surveys:* Four different online surveys were implemented, directed to the following target groups:

The *first survey* was directed to all *registered persons for the main launch of the DER 2021*<sup>33</sup> in order to collect data and information on readers' assessment of UNCTAD's main publications related to e-commerce and the digital economy for development. The survey questions focused on the two flagship reports launched so far in the ECDE Programme: the DER 2021 and DER 2019 and included

<sup>31</sup> FGDs were conducted with participants from the eTrade for Women Masterclasses during the case country missions to allow for a wider discussion and views on topics related to this specific activity.

<sup>32</sup> Interviews were conducted with ECDE Programme staff as well as with other staff members from UNCTAD during a mission from 21-23 September 2021.

<sup>33</sup> <https://unctad.org/fr/node/34237>



a few general questions on the Programme's research activities. In total 31<sup>34</sup> responded to the survey out of 183<sup>35</sup> people invited (a response rate of 17%). Out of the respondents, two thirds were men and respondents who are currently resident in Switzerland, a number of them possibly Geneva-based, represent one fifth of the total sample.

The *second survey* was directed to all *registered participants in the last two IGE meetings on e-commerce and the digital economy*<sup>36</sup> to obtain a broader view on how the consensus building elements work in practice. This survey focused on the quality of the IGE meetings, and to what extent the meetings have allowed for sharing and learning among policymakers. A total of 156 persons<sup>37</sup> out of 1414 invited completed the survey (a response rate of 11%). Out of these, 24% responded that they had not participated in any of the two IGE sessions and have therefore skipped questions concerning assessing the quality of the meetings. Out of those that have participated, 28% participated in both meetings, 38% participated only in the meeting in 2019 while 10% participated only in the October 2020 session (online). Around one third of the respondents represent member States while two thirds come from organisations (35% of these come from private companies, 21% from business associations/councils/CSOs, 21% from research organisations and 8% from UN organisations).

The *third survey* was directed to all *registered participants in the Working Group on Measuring e-commerce and the digital economy*. 53 persons<sup>38</sup> completed this survey out of 183 invited (a response rate of 29%). Male participants constituted the vast majority of these respondents (78%). As a curiosity, 60% of the respondents answered "no" to an initial question on whether the person was part of the Working Group. This means that only (40%) of those that have completed the survey actually claim to be part of the Working Group. Only these respondents have been used for the analysis as the remaining participants were sent to the end of the survey by the skip logic. 31 of the respondents are from member States.

The *fourth survey* was directed to all *eTrade for Women Masterclass participants*, primarily with the aim to obtain a broader view of the types of empowerments that result from the events. In total, 49 women completed the survey out of 160 invited (a response rate of 31%). Nine out of 10 respondents were between 25 to 44 years old. Respondents from Eastern Europe and Eastern Africa were much more represented than those from Southeast Asia (see Figure 2).

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<sup>34</sup> A total of 40 respondents initiated the survey but only responded to the first questions (on country, organisation, gender) and did not provide any assessments of the DER. These respondents were excluded leaving 31 respondents.

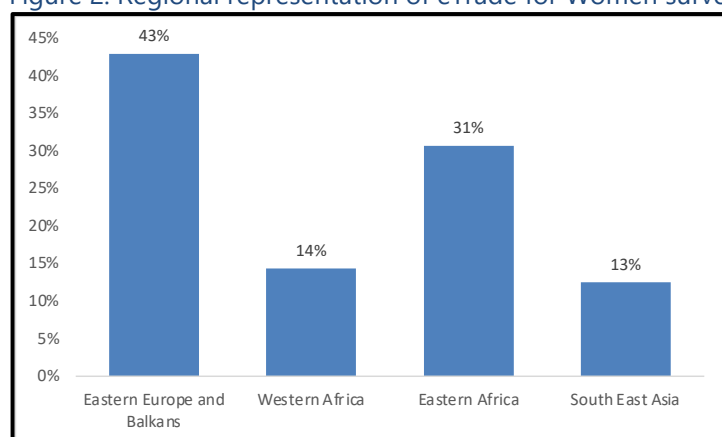
<sup>35</sup> 15 persons had either left their organisations, were out of office or the email was undelivered.

<sup>36</sup> <https://unctad.org/meeting/intergovernmental-group-experts-e-commerce-and-digital-economy-third-session>, <https://unctad.org/meeting/intergovernmental-group-experts-e-commerce-and-digital-economy-fourth-session>

<sup>37</sup> A total of 169 respondents initiated the survey but only responded to the first questions (on country, organisation, gender) and did not provide any assessments of the IGE meetings. These respondents were excluded leaving 156 respondents.

<sup>38</sup> A total of 60 respondents initiated the survey but after excluding responses that were incomplete the total number of respondents was 53.

Figure 2: Regional representation of eTrade for Women survey respondents



In view of data protection rules, UNCTAD (through the Evaluation Unit) has administered the surveys but only the evaluation team has had access to the data. Besides these quantitative surveys, the evaluation has also made rich use of data collected by the Programme such as questionnaires administered after meetings, large events, activities etc.

A 12-day case country mission was conducted in November 2021, covering Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya. This mission included in-person interviews and FGDs with different key stakeholders involved with the ECDE Programme or related e-commerce and digital economy activities. Due to the budget available for the evaluation and the Covid-19 travel restrictions, it was only possible to visit East African countries at this time. Countries from other regions were covered virtually. Priority was given to including as many government representatives as possible since they are UNCTAD's main counterpart.

*Gathering of information through social media and the web:* As an additional source of information, the evaluators have compared how and to what extent the DERs for, respectively, 2019 and 2021 have been exposed through social media, including Twitter accounts, blogs etc. The ECDE Programme is already using website metrics (Google Analytics) to measure publication downloads, unique page views, etc. and the evaluators have also made use of this existing information and trends in the analysis.

Annex ii and v present the checklists for the FGDs and semi-structured interview guides and the online surveys, developed with a particular view to provide responses to the questions and issues in the evaluation matrix (Annex i).

### 3.4 Limitations to data collection and analysis

The major limitation to the evaluation has been the travel restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic which has impacted on the possibility to gather data and information directly from the field. At the time of travel, it was not feasible to plan missions to Asia and West Africa, but only to East Africa. Thus, the first-hand impressions from the supported interventions are related to field observations from East African countries. In order to mitigate this potential bias, a substantial number of virtual interviews with key stakeholders from West and North Africa, Middle East and Asia were conducted. As a second limitation, during the first day of the field mission to Uganda, a bomb attack occurred in Kampala. This affected the ability to meet face-to-face with a number of the planned key stakeholders in Uganda. Instead, virtual interviews were conducted with most of these stakeholders.

As mentioned above, the survey response rate has for most of the surveys been rather low, which constitutes another key limitation of the evaluation. The relatively low survey response rates were not surprising however, based on UNCTAD's historical experience with conducting similar kind of

stakeholder surveys. Thus, the evaluation team was very much aware of this risk and tried to mitigate the risk for too low response rates by reducing the surveys to take less than 10 minutes and in most of the cases only around five minutes. At the same time all the surveys were conducted in both English and French to limit language barriers. Nevertheless, the relative low response rate weakens the strength of the survey results and the ability to make use of them for cross-regional comparison. For instance, the response rate from some regions has in many cases not been high enough to allow for a comparison with responses from the regions. Thus, in general the survey results cannot stand alone. For this reason, the evaluation team has paid due attention to triangulating of the survey results with observations and findings from the qualitative interviews and the desk review conducted.

## 4 Findings

This section analyses findings according to the evaluation questions, thus first relevance under 4.1, then effectiveness<sup>39</sup> under 4.2., efficiency<sup>40</sup> under 4.3, gender and human rights under 4.4, coherence under 4.5 and lastly sustainability under 4.6. Each section is initiated with a finding's summary and a discussion of how the ToC has been validated (or not) and whether assumptions have occurred and drivers for change have influenced the intended change. This summary will be further substantiated in the subsequent text.

### 4.1 Programme design and relevance

**Finding's summary: The relevance of the ECDE Programme is high, further boosted by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has strengthened the consensus around actions in support of e-commerce and the digital economy for development. The research conducted has clearly documented the risk for a widening of the digital divide within and across countries, which has been useful to further spur the intergovernmental work in this area. Technical cooperation activities have to a large extent addressed governments and not least LDCs' needs. The drivers for change, as reflected in the ToC, emphasises the importance of ownership and participation in the implementation processes which are however sometimes difficult for UNCTAD to follow-up on as a non-resident agency. Intra-governmental political turf and bureaucratic challenges have prevailed as a major obstacle in several countries, despite the Programmes attempts to mitigate these. On the other hand, the assumption of continuous political will and interest to develop e-commerce and the digital economy for development has materialised beyond expectations, boosted by the pandemic.**

**Finding 1:** The decision to design the ECDE Programme to develop a more holistic and coherent approach for support to e-commerce and digital economy for development was highly opportune given the complexity of the topic. Likewise, the decision to add a partnership dimension to the three pillars of work has been innovative and adds strong value to the Programme implementation process. The Programme design follows a logic approach by building around on all UNCTAD's three pillars of work which are also used to structure the results framework. While there is an inherent assumption and ambition that interventions within the three pillars will complement each other in implementation, this aspect was not so clearly reflected in the initial ToC and results framework developed by the ECDE Programme team. However, during the evaluation process the conceptual understanding of these elements and their operationalisation has been further clarified in discussions between the evaluators and the Programme team, based on which a revised results framework was developed by the team. The partnership dimension is winding elements from the three pillars together as well as providing concrete opportunities to support the implementation process. Still however, the potentials and utility of the partnership dimension are not fully reflected, neither in the Programme design nor in the results framework and work planning, where stronger operational linkages could be articulated. These aspects are further discussed in the following sections of the report. The ToC presented in Figure 1 is developed based on the discussion between

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<sup>39</sup> Effectiveness is defined as: “The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups.” See more on the OECD-DAC criteria here:

<https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dacriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

<sup>40</sup> Efficiency is defined as: “The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.” See more on the OECD-DAC criteria here:

<https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dacriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

the evaluators and the Programme team of the internal coherence aspects from an understanding of how the various Programme elements are interacting.

**Finding 2: The Programme design makes a strong and clear reference to the SDGs and in particular the focus on partnership and multistakeholder approach is crucial for the Programme.** As reflected in the ToC, the Programme document explicitly refers to SDG 5 on gender equality and women’s empowerment, SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure, SDG 10 on reduced inequalities and SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals. Contribution to SDG 5, and in particular women’s empowerment, is expected to be made through the eTrade for Women initiative that has a dedicated focus on empowerment. Empowerment training is delivered during the Masterclasses where female entrepreneurs are empowered to develop business plans, do online marketing and branding etc. but there is also a specific element on pitching the businesses. This has been mentioned by several Masterclass participants to have been particularly useful when meeting new clients and not least potential investors. Women are still underrepresented in technologies,<sup>41</sup> which is also confirmed by eTrade for Women participants, and large gender gaps prevail leading to little attention on finding solutions for issues that traditionally concern women more. One masterclass participant in Uganda had for instance developed a digital tool for monitoring school performance as well as a tool for logging pregnancies online instead of on paper. Innovative solutions for development are central in SDG 9 and supporting women in technology can ensure new ideas while at the same time reducing inequalities as reflected in SDG 10.

Partnerships under SDG 17 are clearly reflected through the eTrade for all initiative but also in the e-commerce strategies and to some extent eTrade Readiness Assessments where multistakeholder forums/committees as reflected are established nourishing public private partnerships and engagement (see discussion below). It also applies to the eCommerce Weeks which are implemented with various partners, and for instance, the eCommerce Week in 2020 was implemented with the active contribution from 14 different eTrade for all partners while 26 partners contributed to the 2019 event. In addition, inclusion of a multistakeholder approach is a key selection criterion for approval of applications for conducting thematic sessions during the eCommerce week<sup>42</sup> and the ECDE Programme team has put substantial effort into supporting partners connect and encourage the multistakeholder approach. Lastly, the WSIS and UNGIS are mechanisms for digital cooperation for development that also apply a multistakeholder approach with the objective to support the UN System in facilitating access of developing countries to new and emerging technologies, promoting transfer of technology and mainstreaming ICT into national development policies.

**Finding 3: The initiatives supported through the ECDE Programme address crucial needs and priorities of beneficiaries and key stakeholders in terms of e-commerce and digital economy for development. However, country ownership of some of the technical cooperation activities and products varies mainly due to contextual circumstances.** This relates in particular to the support provided to the eTrade Readiness Assessments and the e-commerce strategy formulations which are based on formal requests from the beneficiary countries received through the countries’ Permanent Mission and with a dedicated focal point appointed within a ministry. This formal process and requirement is different from what other donors require and is a good indication of a certain initial country ownership to the process. However, what has been seen happening in several countries is that political turf between ministries and other important barriers and obstacles within the

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<sup>41</sup> E.g. women engaged in digital intelligence and engineering only constitutes around 20% as reflected in the UNESCO Science Report: The race against time for smarter development, 2021.

<sup>42</sup> UNCTAD Secretary-General Briefing, Division on Technology and Logistic E-Commerce and Digital Economy Branch, PPT, January 2022.

beneficiary countries challenges achievement of expected results. The evaluators also came across examples, where eTrade for all partners or donors in practice had been formulating the request for the countries. In one country, the government was exploring different ways of benefitting from UNCTAD support and applied for several different products including the eTrade Readiness Assessment. A total of eight different UNCTAD programmes were explored by the government and different proposals were submitted, e.g. also for the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA). In the end, only the country's request for an eTrade Readiness Assessment was approved and while the country did find it to be very useful, the assessment was not the first choice of support from UNCTAD.

**Finding 4: While the Covid-19 pandemic has challenged the ECDE Programme on implementation aspects (mainly through restrictions on mobility and face-to-face interactions) it has at the same time boosted the global focus on e-commerce and digital economy for development and thereby also the relevance of the Programme.** It has been necessary to re-design a number of interventions that were planned to take place partly or fully through face-to-face interactions and instead do these virtually. This includes key initiatives such as the IGEs, eTrade Readiness Assessments, e-commerce strategy development, eTrade for Women Masterclasses and eCommerce Weeks, all activities where networking and face-to-face interaction are normally very crucial elements. Thus, the re-design of the Programme activities due to the Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly affected the ability to achieve the full impact of the supported interventions (see section 4.2 for further discussion of this in relation to specific results areas).

At the same time, all stakeholders consulted as part of this evaluation confirmed the high relevance of the ECDE Programme and that the Covid-19 pandemic has provided a further boost to the e-commerce and digital economy for development agenda. While national development plans were supposed to guide the interventions at national level, the UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to Covid-19 guided the global UN response. The digital economy and e-commerce are highlighted in the response plan to ensure continuous cross-border trade by facilitating regional digital payment systems, allowing Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to continue their businesses by shifting to more online modes of operation etc. The UN response plan refers to the eTrade Readiness Assessments as a key point of departure for governments and development partners to understand the digital challenges at national level.

The field mission to Uganda showed that the eTrade Readiness Assessments conducted in 2018 had received renewed attention during the pandemic and several new initiatives for e-commerce had been developed out of the severe lockdown. For instance, through direct funding from the Swedish Embassy in Uganda, United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) together with other UN agencies collaborated with the "SafeBoda" initiative to expand BodaBoda riders' business to not only transporting people from one place to another but also enable goods to be purchased online and transported directly to the buyer. Since BodaBodas were not allowed to transport people but only goods during the first strict lock down the online e-commerce platform allowed the BodaBoda riders to continue working while at the same time deliver goods to people whose movement was restricted.

The field mission to Rwanda also presented an excellent case in point. While an ICT-strategy was developed in 2017 and an e-commerce strategy was initiated in 2018, the progress stalled and the strategy development got stuck for several years. The Covid-19 pandemic however became a new kick-starter. While only nine online e-commerce platforms were officially registered by March 2020, this number had doubled to 18 in July 2020 and further to 67 registered platforms in September 2021, when the field mission was conducted. Interviews with government officials confirmed the perception that the country started basically from zero development on e-commerce when the Covid-19 pandemic hit but that progress has then very quickly occurred. The development was further spurred by development of a situational review (December 2020), and drafting of an e-commerce

policy in 2021, aligning with the e-commerce strategy already developed. This has now turned Rwanda into a country with a clear and very ambitious strategic direction in terms of e-commerce and digital transformation.

The first Implementation Review (2020) conducted by the Programme includes additional concrete country examples in relation to Covid-19 responses, for instance that e-commerce and the digital economy are now featured in the Covid-19 Economic Relief Plan in Myanmar, the fast-tracking of measures to ease access to essential goods and services during the pandemic in Senegal, and that e-commerce platforms were fast to promote contact-less payments and logistics and nurture new partnerships powering recovery from the Covid-19 crisis in Uganda (see also example above).<sup>43</sup>

Although, the pandemic has spurred development initiatives in several countries, it also creates a risk of creating a further digital divide on e-commerce and the digital economy for development if weaknesses are not adequately addressed. Many countries need support on this and the diagnostics of the eTrade Readiness Assessments are still needed in many countries to allow for a joint and collaborative approach to address such challenges. Interviews with government representatives clearly reflect that those countries with an eTrade Readiness Assessment conducted are much better prepared to deal with challenges such as the pandemic.

The risk of creating an even further gap is reflected in the publication “Covid-19 and e-commerce. A Global Review” (2021). This review is one of the concrete examples of how the Programme has responded to the pandemic by mobilizing eTrade for all partners under the joint leadership of UNCTAD and the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) in collaboration with other eTrade for all partners, notably UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA) with inputs also from e-Residency of Estonia, International Trade Centre (ITC), UNESCAP and Universal Postal Union (UPU). The Review assesses global trends on how the pandemic has disrupted trade patterns and argues that these changes are likely to prevail after the pandemic. It also provides policy recommendations for different actors on how to enhance the framework conditions for businesses, the needs for enhanced skills development for businesses in developing countries, enhanced collaboration among international actors, governments and the private sector etc.<sup>44</sup> The relevance of this publication is reflected in the great numbers of downloads of the report in a short time period (from March to July 2021 it was downloaded more than 11,000 times and by December 2021 this figure had almost doubled with 20,707 downloads) which is substantially more than several of UNCTAD’s other flagship reports.<sup>45</sup>

**Finding 5: In general, key stakeholders consider the research conducted as part of the Programme to be highly relevant, of a high quality, and providing needed research on e-commerce and the digital economy for development. Research is clearly linked to the intergovernmental work which is also considered highly relevant.** While the research aspects will be discussed further under section 4.2.1 survey responses, interviews and readership metrics clearly show that the DERs are considered to be highly relevant and presenting new and unique knowledge. The survey respondents have assessed both the DER 2019 and the DER 2021 very positively, with

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<sup>43</sup> Fast-tracking implementation of eTrade Readiness Assessments, UNCTAD, 2020, [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlstict2020d9\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlstict2020d9_en.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> Covid-19 and e-commerce. A Global Review 2021, eTrade for all, UNCTAD.

<sup>45</sup> Such as the Trade and Development Report 2019, Technology and Innovation Report 2018, Least developed Countries Report 2018 etc. as reflected in the internal document the DER 2019 Impact Report, 2021.

vast majority of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing to the relevance of these reports on all parameters (Table 2). This impression was confirmed during interviews with key stakeholders.

Table 2: The reports relevance to the current state of play of the digital economy and development

	2021	2019
Disagree	10%	0%
Agree	33%	60%
Strongly agree	53%	40%
Don't know	3%	0%

A similar result is reflected in the survey respondents' answers on the DERs presentation of novel and unique information: respondents in general agree that both the DER 2019 and the DER 2021 present novel and unique information.

Table 3: The report presents unique and novel information 2021 and 2019

	2021	2019
Disagree	7%	7%
Agree	53%	60%
Strongly agree	37%	33%
Don't know	3%	0%

Research and IGE meetings are clearly interlinked and supplement each other. As will be discussed more under 4.2.2, IGE meetings are based on research and e.g. the topic of the DER informs the meetings, and the meetings also suggest topics for further research. IGE meetings are well attended and actually there has been an increase in the participation of member States from 67 at the first meeting in 2017<sup>46</sup> to 93 in the fourth meeting in 2020.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, according to interviews with UNCTAD staff, the interest is also higher for attending the IGE meetings on e-commerce and the digital economy compared to other intergovernmental working groups of experts in UNCTAD. According to UNCTAD staff in charge of coordinating the IGE meetings, this is reflected through a higher number of incoming proposals for topics to be discussed in the meetings. This also indicates a high level of relevance of the meetings.

**Finding 6: One of the needs and priorities that has not sufficiently been covered is the capacity development on statistics on e-commerce and digital economy which is highly needed to inform policy making. This need was expressed by several stakeholders in-country and in Geneva.**

Capacity development activities of national statistics bureaus depend on the availability of extra-budgetary funds. Funding has been available for the revision of the Manual, but funding for implementation (course delivery) so far only covers the development of the online course to be piloted in 2022. Face-to-face delivery of a training course in 2020 was not possible pending revision of the Manual and due to the pandemic. Any future implementation of face-to-face training courses based on the Manual will require additional funding from donors. In this context, the Train for Trade Programme has identified funding from the Development Account, and a Statistician and a statistical assistant were hired to develop a broader training course on digital economy statistics (starting in 2022-2023) which could incorporate the Manual. Regarding the Working Group on Measuring E-Commerce and the Digital Economy, increased participation from developing country

<sup>46</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb\\_edel1d3\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb_edel1d3_en.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb\\_edel4d4\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb_edel4d4_en.pdf)



representatives (if/when physical meetings resume after the pandemic) will likely require also extra-budgetary funding.

**Finding 7: Development of digital economy and e-commerce cuts across several sectors and requires countries to move away from silo thinking in ministries. While this is highly relevant in view of the SDG framework’s encouragement of multistakeholder collaboration, at the same time it poses intra-governmental challenges that are largely outside UNCTAD’s control.** As will be discussed under eTrade Readiness Assessments there are various examples of intra-governmental challenges that have caused delays. These mainly concern government agencies’ political turf related to who “owns” the responsibility of the e-commerce agenda. These issues became very visible during the field missions and were also emphasised during interviews with key stakeholders. While such challenges are largely outside UNCTAD’s control, it may be useful to consider if more effort should be put into mitigating such risks. In this regard, it should be noted that in 2019 the ECDE Programme team conducted a stocktaking workshop with participation of in-country focal points and eTrade for all partners to discuss lessons learned and best practices for the conduct and implementation of the eTrade Readiness Assessments. While the workshop report highlighted the government’s buy-in and engagement as well as the involvement of different government actors within the seven different policy areas,<sup>48</sup> there is only little mentioning of the intra-governmental challenges in the report.<sup>49</sup> According to interviews with the ECDE Programme team it is a standardized process to establish committees during an e-commerce strategy development process, but not to the same extent for the eTrade Readiness Assessment. It was however agreed to do so moving forward from the stocktaking workshop and this has since been the practice in e.g. Kenya, Jordan and Iraq. Although, there is no guarantee that such a committee will remove political challenges it could possibly mitigate the risk for them.

## 4.2 Implementation and results

This section is structured around findings related to the main initiatives and products from UNCTAD’s work within the three pillars on research and analysis, technical cooperation and consensus-building.

### 4.2.1 Research and analysis

**Finding’s summary: There is a high level of user satisfaction with research and analysis products conducted by the ECDE Programme and UNCTAD is considered an important source of information on e-commerce and the digital economy for development. This is a considerable achievement given the relatively few resources allocated for the research and analysis pillar. The DERs are considered highly relevant and broadly recommended in the audiences’ networks. However, the lack of an adequate UNCTAD communication and outreach strategy with clearly defined target groups, combined with the resource limitations, has affected the ability of the Programme to better promote and track use and uptake of the research products. An indication of increased use of the research for policy making is however important in order to achieve the intermediate outcome as reflected in the ToC.**

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<sup>48</sup> E-commerce assessments, ICT infrastructure, payment solutions, trade facilitation and logistics, legal and regulatory frameworks, skills development, and access to finance.

<sup>49</sup> UNCTAD Stock-taking Workshop on Lessons Learned and Best Practices for the Conduct and Implementation of the Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessments, 3-4 April 2019, final report.

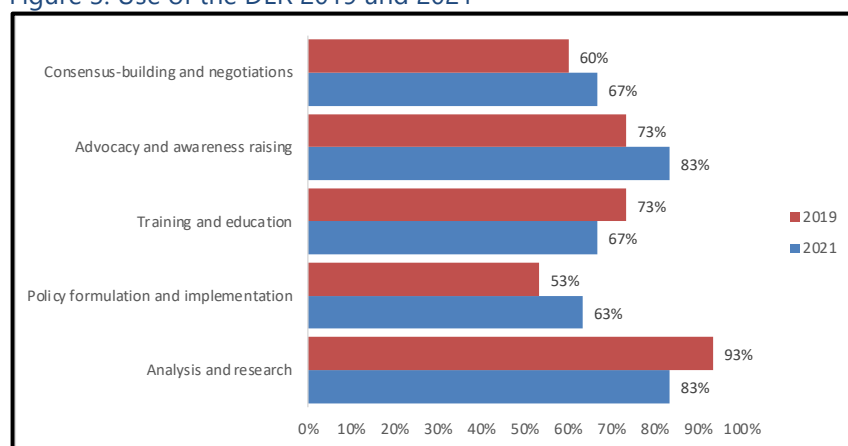
### *The Digital Economy Report*

As mentioned above, the DER reports are considered highly relevant and of substantial quality. It is one of UNCTAD’s seven flagship reports, and it is published every second year. The team in charge of producing the reports is small and mainly consist of one staff member (with some support from additional staff, as well as inputs from some expert consultants). This will be further discussed under 4.3.1 but should be kept in mind throughout this section.

**Finding 8: A comparison of the use of the DER 2021 with the use of the DER 2019 indicates an enhanced global interest and engagement in e-commerce and the digital economy since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.**

The DER 2019 provides a broader picture of the digital economy in terms of trends and value creation and capture, and discusses policies in developing countries while the DER 2021 looks at issues related to cross-border data flows and development. While the use of the DERs highly depends on the topics of the research it is noted that the intermediate outcome of the Programme is to influence policy making and thus the research should strive to support this process. According to the survey results, the DER 2019 appeared to be used mainly for analysis and research and to some extent also for training and education. Indications are that the DER 2021 will be used to a much larger extent also for consensus-building and negotiations, advocacy and awareness raising as well as for policymaking (Figure 3). Overall, the survey data show that the DERs are more likely to be used for analysis and research than for policymaking in 2019 while the indicated use in 2021 concerns to a larger extent advocacy and awareness raising. Interviews with government officials and in-country key stakeholders confirmed that the DERs are being used for analysing the national situation and policy framework in view of the global context and challenges. Within this perspective, the DERs seem to contribute to the expectations in the ECDE Programme ToC, where research is expected to “also offer policy solutions based on international experience to the major challenges facing developing countries, particularly LDCs.”<sup>50</sup>

Figure 3: Use of the DER 2019 and 2021

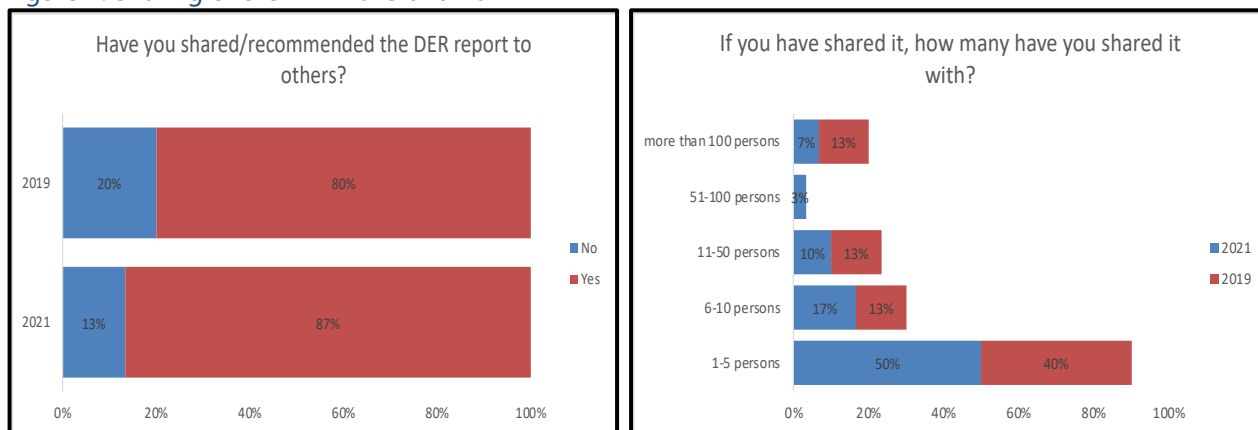


**Finding 9: The vast majority of those that attended the launch of the 2021 DER also shared or recommended the report to others afterwards. This indicates an importance of these launching events for outreach and further substantiate the relevance of the research. At the same time, the DER is one of the most downloaded UNCTAD flagship reports with an increasing online exposure.** Nearly nine out of ten of those that attended the official launch of the DER 2021 in

<sup>50</sup> E-Commerce and Digital Economy Programme of Work Plan for 2019-2023, UNCTAD, August 2021.

September have shared or recommended it to others, and in many cases to several persons (Figure 4). Slightly more respondents say that they have shared or recommended the DER 2021 than the DER 2019.

Figure 4: Sharing of the DER 2019 and 2021



According to UNCTAD statistics on downloads, during an 18-months period from September 2019 to March 2021, the DER 2019 has been the most downloaded UNCTAD publication. The DER 2019 was downloaded almost 42,000 times, whereas the World Investment Report 2019 was the second most downloaded with 37,000 times.<sup>51</sup> The DER 2019 appears in 769 scientific research papers as of October 2021.<sup>52</sup> The DER 2019 was launched in nine different locations in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America and at least 12 post-launches have taken place.

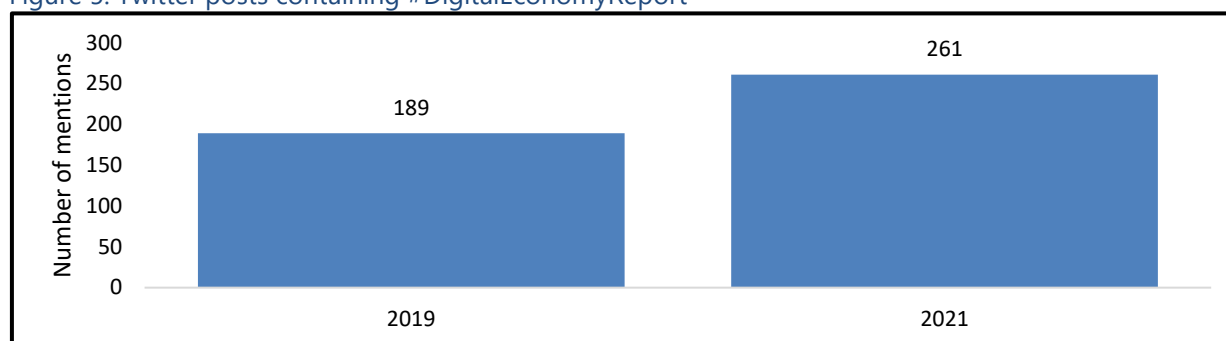
**Finding 10: There has been an increase in the online exposure of the DER in 2021 compared to the DER 2019.** In the period from October 2021 to December 2021, the phrase “Digital Economy Report” was mentioned in media and on social media 492 times and posts containing the phrase were shown more than 1.2 million times. The outreach was mainly channelled through Twitter (382 mentions) and the web (105 mentions) whereas Facebook and YouTube only contributed with a small amount. The mentions on the web (e.g., through news websites) are spread evenly across a series of sources. Examples include talkvietnam.com, unctad.org, and apc.org. The mentions are mainly coming from the USA (209 mentions), but also Switzerland, United Kingdom and Eswatini mention the report frequently.<sup>53</sup> In the same period, Twitter posts containing the hashtag #DigitalEconomyReport were mentioned 261 times - 88 of those were from the account @ICT4DatUNCTAD (it must be kept in mind that the posts containing the two phrases (“Digital Economy Report” and #DigitalEconomyReport) are not necessarily mutually exclusive). Compared to the online exposure of the DER in 2019, the number of tweets has increased by 38%. In 2019, 189 Twitter posts contained the hashtag #DigitalEconomyReport, according to the internal document the DER 2019 Impact Report (UNCTAD, 2019-2021).

<sup>51</sup> Internal report: DER2019 Impact Report (UNCTAD, 2019-2021).

<sup>52</sup> Google Scholar search for “Digital Economy Report 2019” and “Digital Economy Report Value Creation and Capture” on 12 October 2021.

<sup>53</sup> There is no obvious explanation for the large number of mentions from Eswatini since no launching of the report has occurred here.

Figure 5: Twitter posts containing #DigitalEconomyReport



Source: Mediatoolkit.com for 2021 data, DER2019 Impact Report (UNCTAD, 2019-2021) for 2019 data. Note: The 2021 data is measured from October to December 2021.

Many of the tweets about the DER come from UNCTAD. In 2019, the @UNCTAD account posted 39 out of the 189 posts, and in 2021, the account @ICT4DatUNCTAD posted 88 of the posts. Even when accounting for this, the Twitter outreach of the report still rose 15% from 2019 to 2021. Even though the 2021 report generated more Twitter posts containing the hashtag #DigitalEconomyReport, the posts from 2019 got more attention on social media. The top posts in 2019 received between 10-20.000 impressions, while the top post in 2021 received 3.300 impressions. In 2019 the top posts reached 150-300 interactions, and in 2021, the top post reached 110 interactions.<sup>54</sup>

**Finding 11: Although the visibility of the DERs has increased over time, a number of in-country representatives from authorities were either not aware of these reports or had come across them more coincidentally.** During the field mission to East Africa, all key stakeholders were consulted on their knowledge of the DERs and while all UNCTAD focal points were aware of the DERs, this did not extend to other key stakeholders within and outside governmental institutions. While it would have been easy (and obvious) for the focal points to share these flagship reports with other key stakeholders this seems in most cases not to happen. As will be discussed below there are often huge challenges with sharing of information across ministries (not to mention other stakeholders), thus other means may be needed to ensure that the DERs as well as other relevant research publications from the Programme will be shared and used more broadly in the countries. As mentioned above, resources for research in the Programme are few and dissemination of the products therefore relies heavily on the UNCTAD Communications, Information and External Relations Section to disseminate the research produced. In this regard, it is noted that the MOPAN review from 2019 indicates that “*weaknesses identified included the need for: (i) improving communications and dissemination of UNCTAD products, including the UNCTAD website, and enhancing use of new communication tools and products; and (ii) generally increasing the visibility of UNCTAD, especially at the national and regional levels.*”<sup>55</sup> The review calls for a well-focused communications strategy. This trickles down to the ECDE Programme that also has suffered from these weaknesses. In February 2022, the UNCTAD Secretary-General announced that a new and ambitious communication strategy for the institution is forthcoming.

### Other research products

**Finding 12: The knowledge of policy briefs, technical notes and other research outputs of the ECDE Programme is limited among key stakeholders.** In the survey, 50% of the respondents indicated to be aware of other research products produced through the Programme, however only

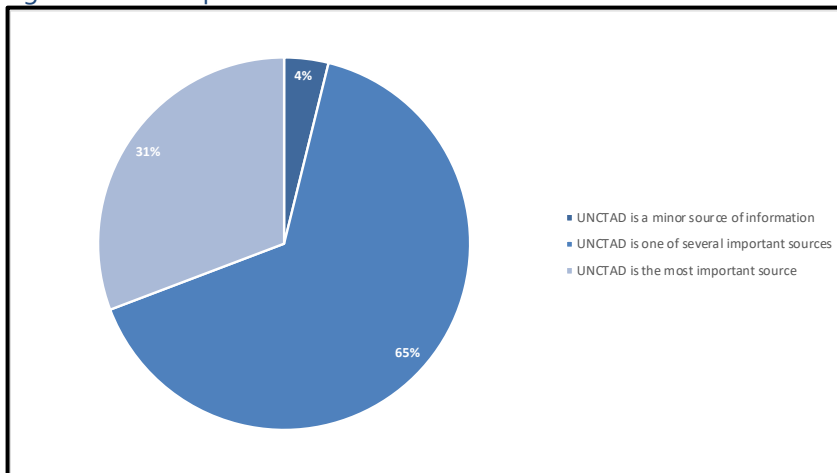
<sup>54</sup> Impressions measure the number of times the content was seen in general (not by unique users). Interactions measures how many likes, comments, shares or clicks a post received.

<sup>55</sup> Mopan Performance Assessment 2019 of UNCTAD, 2020

very few of them provided concrete examples. For instance, one respondent indicated that policy briefs are produced and the e-commerce series on LDCs was also mentioned. Similarly, while the vast majority of the key stakeholders interviewed were fully aware of UNCTAD’s mandate of conducting research in the area of e-commerce and the digital economy for development, their knowledge of specific research products was limited. Those that could refer to specific UNCTAD products, most often mentioned the DER reports and at times country specific studies. This is not surprising as it will often be difficult for an audience to distinguish from which programme a research product stems from. Also, the survey was directed towards registered participants of the DER launch and therefore the survey respondents would not necessarily know other publications. However, as also reflected above under 4.1, the Covid-19 Global Review publication has been downloaded quite a number of times, but it is branded as an eTrade for all publication which could explain why stakeholders consulted and surveyed did not consider this as an UNCTAD publication.

**Finding 13: In general, UNCTAD is considered an important source of information on e-commerce and the digital economy.** Overall, two thirds of the respondents indicate that UNCTAD is one of several important information sources and one third indicates the most important source. Very few have indicated that UNCTAD is a minor source so in general the recognition of UNCTAD as a key source within digital economy and e-commerce for development is high.

Figure 6: How important is UNCTAD as a source on e-commerce and digital economy



#### 4.2.2 Consensus-building

The consensus-building pillar relates to the intergovernmental machinery of UNCTAD. As explained above, activities under this pillar mainly consist of annual meetings in the IGE on e-commerce and the digital economy and in the Working Group for measuring e-commerce and the digital economy.

**Finding’s summary: The intergovernmental work on e-commerce and the digital economy for development is an essential part of UNCTAD’s work and considered very relevant. There is high confidence in the UNCTAD secretariat, and the background notes are considered of high quality. The number of member States participating in meetings has continued to increase, indicating a high interest and relevance of the work. The Manual related to Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy revised by the Working Group on Measuring e-commerce and the digital economy is considered of high quality but needs to be further disseminated. The Working Group allows for enhanced dialogue on the need to measure e-commerce and the digital economy which is a key concern for many member States and needs additional attention moving forward.**

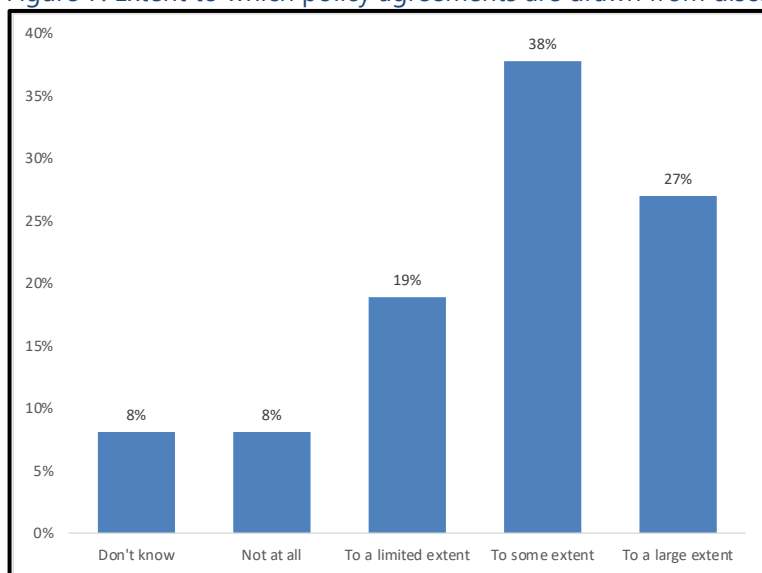
*Intergovernmental Group of Experts on e-commerce and the digital economy*

**Finding 14: The participation of member States in the IGE meetings and the interest and relevance for the IGE on e-commerce have increased over the years, leading to consensus-building. Reaching consensus has however been more difficult on some occasions.**

While IGE meetings are primarily for the intergovernmental discussion, participants from international organisations, private companies, academia etc. are invited to participate as observers. Records from the fourth IGE meeting show that out of 400 registered participants, 93 of these were representing member States.<sup>56</sup> This is an increase from 67 at the first meeting in 2017<sup>57</sup> to 93 in the fourth meeting in 2020.<sup>58</sup> In the Working Group, 43 member States were present at the first meeting.<sup>59</sup> While the majority of the registered participants continue to be organisations, the increase of member States indicate is positive.

Out of the four IGE meetings conducted, consensus on policy recommendations was reached in two of them (the two first meetings). In the third meeting agreement on policy recommendations was not reached due to divergence of opinions between different countries and the sensitivity of the topic, particularly when it comes to cross-border data flows,<sup>60</sup> however discussions were engaging and useful for building consensus although not reaching consensus. In the fourth meeting it was decided by the TDB not to aim for policy recommendation since this IGE was conducted online and therefore informal negotiations were deemed to be not possible. According to interviews with UNCTAD key stakeholders, policy agreements are normally reached in the intergovernmental machinery, however the IGE on “e-commerce and the digital economy” is more politically sensitive and very complex given that they refer to emerging new issues, thus it has sometimes been more challenging here to reach policy agreements. Survey results are overall positive in the sense that 65% indicate that policy recommendations have been reached to some or to a large extent (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Extent to which policy agreements are drawn from discussions in the IGEs



<sup>56</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb\\_ed4d4\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb_ed4d4_en.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb\\_ed1d3\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb_ed1d3_en.pdf)

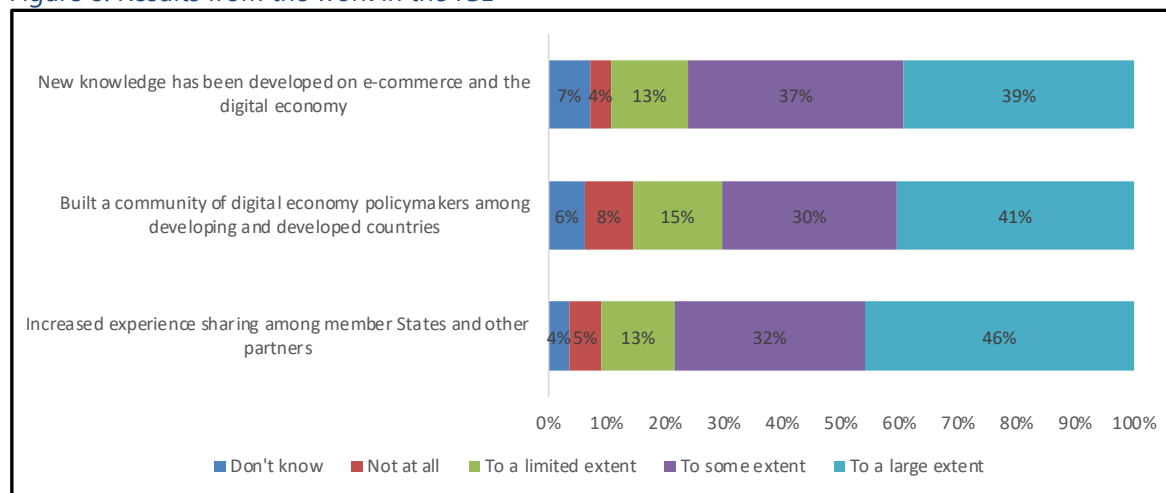
<sup>58</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb\\_ed4d4\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb_ed4d4_en.pdf)

<sup>59</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb\\_ed4d3\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb_ed4d3_en.pdf)

<sup>60</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb\\_ed3d3\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb_ed3d3_en.pdf)

**Finding 15: In general, the IGE meetings are highly valued by participants who believe that the meetings have built new knowledge and increased dialogue and sharing of experiences and best practices among member States. The secretariat’s performance is assessed to be of high quality. 77% of survey respondents have a high confidence in the secretariat and more than 70% of the survey respondents have indicated that new knowledge has been developed, and that increased sharing of experiences and best practices has taken place among member States and other partners (Figure 8). It should be noted that, member States and female IGE participants tend to be more positive in their assessment of new knowledge being developed than organisations and male participants.**

Figure 8: Results from the work in the IGE



71% of respondents also indicate that a community of digital economy policy makers among developing and developed countries has been developed, although there is slightly more scepticism concerning this aspect with one fourth indicating “not at all” or to “a limited extent.”

*Working Group on Measuring e-commerce and the digital economy*

**Finding 16: UNCTAD is acknowledged for its work on statistics on trade, e-commerce and the digital economy and is considered a reliable source for information within this area. Stakeholders perceive that the Working Group contributes to enhancement of comparability, cooperation and the quality of statistics as well as avoidance of duplications and evidence-based policymaking. There is however a need to strengthen dissemination of the the Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy among national statisticians and Working Group experts, and UNCTAD is requested to support capacity development on statistical production.** According to the survey responses, UNCTAD’s work on statistics is highly relevant with 90% of the respondents indicating the work of the Working Group to be “highly relevant or relevant”. The respondents representing member States rate the relevance higher than those representing organisations.

There is a large impression that the Working Group is contributing to evidence-based policymaking. This in particular applies to developing countries where two thirds of the respondents find that the Working Group is contributing to evidence-based policymaking “to a large extent” (Figure 9). This was also confirmed through field visits and interviews. In-country stakeholders make use of UNCTAD statistics for various purposes including analysis and research, decision-making etc. More than 75% of the survey respondents perceive that enhanced quality and comparability of statistics, and enhanced cooperation have resulted through the Working Group (Figure 10).

Figure 9: The Working Group's contribution to evidence-based policy making (general) and in developing countries

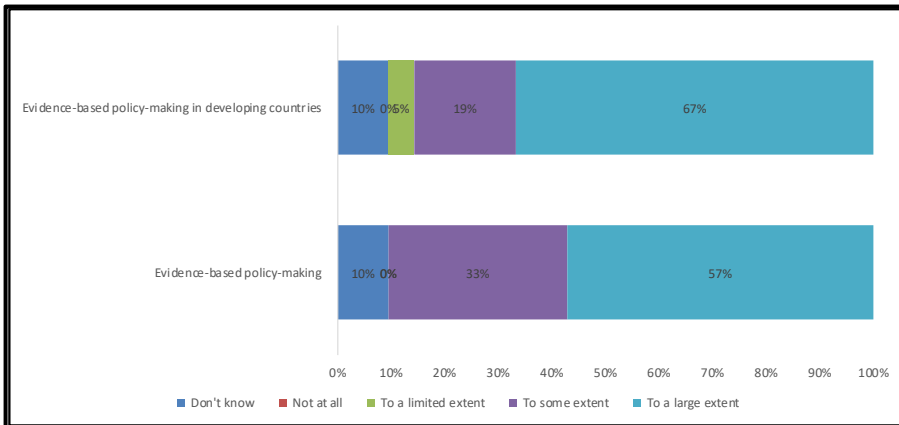
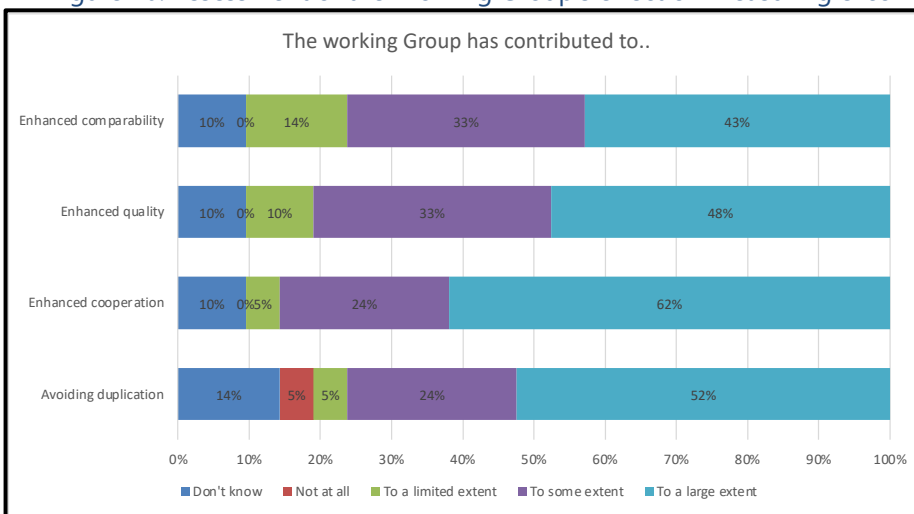


Figure 10: Assessment of the Working Group's effect on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy



Since the Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy was only launched in 2021, there is still only limited awareness of its existence among national statisticians and Working Group experts. The few stakeholders that are aware of the Manual have indicated that its quality is “very high/high”, and they find it “very useful/useful”. UNCTAD could increase its efforts at disseminating the Manual as methodological guidance and reference material among relevant stakeholders in developing countries. Government stakeholders also expressed a need for more capacity development on statistical production and also for advocating towards policy makers to include digital economy statistics in the regular statistical production and fund it adequately. In this regard, it is positive that the Programme has ensured funding to enhance the team with a statistician and a statistical assistant as mentioned above.



### 4.2.3 Technical cooperation

The findings in this section particularly focus on the eTrade Readiness Assessments and the e-commerce strategy development processes supported as well as the eTrade for Women empowerment activities such as the Masterclasses.

**Finding's summary:** The eTrade Readiness Assessments developed within LDCs have served as timely diagnostics from which further multistakeholder dialogue and actions at national and regional levels could take off. However, while the structure and format around the first batch of eTrade Readiness Assessments developed for LDCs has been adequate and developed from rapid to more into-depth assessments, moving forward with non-LDCs has required more flexible and customised products based on more differentiated demands coming from more advanced developing countries. This also relates to the interface between eTrade Readiness Assessments and subsequent strategy and policy development processes. The eTrade for Women is a new initiative that focuses on the niche of digital economy and e-commerce only for women which has been unique in an area often dominated by men. The empowerment sessions and opportunities to discuss challenges in a female-only forum have been in high demand. While the intention of the technical cooperation is to support more inclusive policies, as reflected in the ToC, it is essential to continue encouraging the active participation of private sector and CSOs in diagnostics and e-commerce strategy development processes. This also applies to women's participation in policy development processes to ensure inclusive gender sensitive policies. While Advocates have been involved in policy development discussions there is scope for a larger involvement of for instance Masterclass participants in such processes and thereby create even more synergy between the initiatives.

#### *eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies*

**Finding 17:** The eTrade Readiness Assessments<sup>61</sup> have provided snapshots and diagnostics of the e-commerce “ecosystems” within a large number of LDCs. The way the eTrade Readiness Assessments have been structured around the seven pillars of the eTrade for all initiative,<sup>62</sup> has provided a useful platform for follow-up discussions within the countries on priority actions. The eTrade Readiness Assessments have in most cases been conducted at a time where most of the supported LDCs were still at a rather premature stage of e-commerce and digital economy. Within the LDCs supported by the Programme, and among key stakeholders, there is a high level of satisfaction with the role played by UNCTAD in relation to the eTrade Readiness Assessment process. UNCTAD is seen to present a number of comparative advantages and value added to these processes (see case box). This both relates to the framework applied, the expertise provided, the facilitation role as well as being a UN organisation (which has a powerful convening power in many LDCs).

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<sup>61</sup> The eTrade Readiness Assessments, implemented through UNCTAD expertise, identify gaps in existing regulations and raise awareness of how e-commerce can contribute to sustainable development. The assessments make recommendations for governments, the private sector and donors in areas relevant to digital trade, including policy reform, ICT technology and trade logistics.

<sup>62</sup> E-commerce assessments, ICT infrastructure, payment solutions, trade facilitation and logistics, legal and regulatory frameworks, skills development, and access to finance.

**Finding 18: The eTrade Readiness Assessments have been instrumental in boosting the e-commerce and digital economy for development agenda within the benefitting countries and have catalysed further development and actions in several countries.** There are several examples

of how eTrade Readiness Assessments have been instrumental which is further elaborated in the fast-tracking implementation of eTrade Readiness Assessments (2020), including e.g. *Cambodia* which is a very good example of how an Assessment can influence longer term results (see case box below).

The evaluation team’s field visit to *Uganda* (where an eTrade Readiness Assessment was developed in 2018) also confirmed that this document was still alive and used as a reference document by the government in relation to development of the regional e-commerce strategy (see below). However, according to key stakeholders in *Uganda*, challenges in cooperation and division of responsibilities in the area of e-commerce and digital economy between ministries has limited the possibilities for coherent

policy actions as a follow-up to the eTrade Readiness Assessment. As an example, a national e-commerce strategy has been drafted by one ministry without involving other ministries. Currently, the UNDP office in *Uganda* is showing an interest to collaborate with the Government and UNCTAD on development of an e-commerce strategy through their new Digitalisation Programme 2021-25. This process is put on hold however, until the circumstances around the already drafted strategy has been clarified.

In *Burkina Faso*, the eTrade Readiness Assessment (2018) has served as the basis for creation of a national forum on e-commerce (UNDP providing 80% of the funding) and a national e-commerce strategy is currently under development. A fund is being established to support stakeholders to embrace e-commerce. In *Madagascar*, the eTrade Readiness Assessment has led to multiple initiatives in the financial sector to facilitate on-line payment, use of drones for delivery services and strengthening of technical vocational education and training to also include digitalisation.

Highlighted UNCTAD value added to eT Ready processes in LDCs:

- Boost trust and credibility (“blue print!”)
- Being impartial and a convener
- Strong ability to bring actors together
- Good facilitator of inter-ministerial cooperation
- Do not impose themselves to countries with costly projects, rely on requests
- Unique concept and framework
- Smooth interaction and communication with the ECDE Programme team
- Provide specialized expertise and global experience and perspective on e-commerce.
- Technical Assistance: good consultants with broad experience
- Strong analytical skills and reviewing capacity.

*Source: information provided during field missions and interviews.*

**Finding 19: An important result from the processes leading to development of both eTrade Readiness Assessments and to e-commerce strategy has been the establishment of new partnerships and multistakeholder fora. UNCTAD promotes public private dialogue but ultimately it is the governments who decide whom to engage.** The holistic approach required for e-commerce and digital economy for development involves participation of a broad mix of public and private actors. In some of the countries consulted it is one of the first times private and government actors are engaged in organised dialogue and this is a very important part of the eTrade Readiness Assessment methodology as well as the strategy development processes. A mapping of the private sector actors is done when UNCTAD starts a project with the support of the national consultant and focal point. Private sector is also invited to participate in the surveys and make remarks regarding their concerns.

In Rwanda, the evaluation team observed how the e-commerce strategy process had connected ministries closer to e.g. postal and courier services. In Madagascar, the eTrade Readiness Assessment has facilitated a partnership between the Ministry of Finance and the postal services to develop a system for on-line payment as well as with logistic companies (in competition with the national postal services) to develop transport solutions. In *Kenya*, the private sector (e.g. several associations such as the Courier Industry Association of Kenya, Kenya Alliance of Resident Associations, Kenya Private Sector Alliance and Kenya National Chamber of Commerce & Industry) were included in the group of key stakeholders who were invited to comment on the draft eTrade Readiness Assessment project proposal. The private sector was also involved in the surveys and the national consultants reached out to several entrepreneurs in the preparation of the eTrade Readiness Assessment. The national consultations workshop that took place in November 2021 included a mix of public and private sector actors in both the programme and the invitation list, although the evaluators observed that actual participation by several key private sector stakeholders did not eventuate. Key stakeholders interviewed considered this to be a statement from the private sector that they were not satisfied with their level of involvement in the process considering the key role private sector plays in e-commerce in Kenya.

#### **Cambodia case**

E-commerce started to play an increasingly important role in Cambodia's economy after UNCTAD conducted its first pilot eTrade Readiness Assessment in the country in 2017. Cambodia's Trade Integration Strategy (CTIS) 2019-2023 includes a dedicated chapter on e-commerce, which builds on the analysis of the eTrade Readiness Assessment. Further based on the CTIS and EIF's Diagnostic Trade Integration Study Updates (DTISU), the Government decided to develop an e-commerce strategy (launched in November 2020). The strategy includes new initiatives aimed at developing a digital economy and digital Government policy, fostering digital start-ups and support to the annual Digital Cambodia Forum. Women are singled out for support in the e-commerce strategy, particularly in the area of digital entrepreneurship and support for e-commerce start-ups.

**Finding 20: While the approach to eTrade Readiness Assessments has remained the same over time focusing on the seven pillars, an evolution has taken place in terms of how the assessments have been conducted. The eTrade Readiness Assessments have gradually shifted from being mainly a report as a key output to also include elements of inter-institutional cooperation/coordination and capacity building, thereby contributing more directly to achievement of the Programme outcomes.** In some cases, other eTrade for all partners have also become involved in the implementation of the eTrade Readiness Assessments. Challenges with inter-institutional cooperation have been the case in many countries and this is a particular challenge within the area of e-commerce that involves several ministries who wants to “own” the e-commerce

agenda.<sup>63</sup> The most common conflict is between the Ministry of Trade/Commerce and the Ministry of ICT. The evaluation team observed this situation during the field mission to East Africa, and virtual interviews with key stakeholders from a sample of West and Northern African countries confirmed similar situation in these countries. In one country, the evaluator was able to study UNCTAD's convening power to ease the political turf between the Ministry of ICT and the Communication Authority on the lead role in the ongoing eTrade Readiness Assessment implementation process, which also involves the Ministry of Trade in the coordination group. While the situation has been solved to some extent now by establishing a committee allowing for better cooperation and coordination, the process has been delayed due to competing interest.

**Finding 21: The Programme has proactively adapted its approaches and offerings in view of challenges faced and responsibility for the Action Matrix developed as part of the eTrade Readiness Assessments, as well as in relation to the endorsement and implementation of supported e-commerce strategies within countries, which affected funding opportunities for the proposed actions.** Supporting the development of national and regional e-commerce strategies is considered an important complement to the eTrade Readiness Assessments in helping governments to understand challenges pertinent to e-commerce and to build the adequate environment for its development. The eTrade Readiness Assessments provide specific recommendations on how to address existing weaknesses through concrete actions in an "Action Matrix" and propose partners that could provide support in the respective areas. Most of the eTrade Readiness Assessments recommend developing an e-commerce strategy. While some countries have been supported by UNCTAD to develop a strategy, other countries have developed strategies on their own or with support from other development partners. Yet, other countries have found it to be a too cumbersome process to initiate.<sup>64</sup>

In order to further facilitate the implementation of some of the recommendations contained in the eTrade Readiness Assessments, "Action Plans" are currently being prepared for some countries and serve to provide a more operational roadmap towards policy implementation of the recommendations contained in the eTrade Readiness Assessment Action Matrix. It is expected that these plans will include rough estimates of the resources needed to undertake prioritised actions, as well as a plan for resources mobilisation and preparation of related project proposals.

The developed Action Plans involve closer relationships with the UN RCOs and resident development partners as well as with eTrade for all partners. Several eTrade for all partners who could support the implementation of some recommendations (such as ITC and ILO) have been identified and it is planned to organise a special briefing with eTrade for all partners in February 2022 to explore their interest and then follow-up with those partners that would show specific interest. The inclusion of the costing of activities will be the responsibility of the countries which should evaluate its relevance and feasibility taking into consideration that it requires specific information from different Ministries and governmental bodies. In the case of *Tunisia*, GIZ has already expressed interest to fund some of the priority actions resulting from the assessment, thus the costing exercise could be tested here.

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<sup>63</sup> Iraq, Kenya, Uganda and Tunisia to name a few.

<sup>64</sup> So far, four e-commerce strategies have been finalized with UNCTAD support (Egypt, Oman, Botswana, and Rwanda), one is under finalization but paused due to circumstances outside of the Programme's control (Myanmar), and four are ongoing (Benin, Kenya, Solomon Islands and the regional e-commerce strategy for ECOWAS).<sup>64</sup> In general, not all e-commerce strategies are published (only the e-commerce strategies from Egypt (2017) and Botswana (2021) have been published). The strategies may be endorsed and promulgated by the government or in some cases may remain an internal working document.

The ECDE Programme is also currently adapting its approach to the process of developing e-commerce strategies, with a view to make the diagnostic part of the strategies more operational and aligned to the form of the eTrade Readiness Assessments. This initiative came out of a brainstorming event in June 2021. It is currently being implemented in Kenya and will be applied for Mongolia. Since the eTrade Readiness Assessment processes include engagement of several stakeholder groups, this is also a way to mobilise development partners, in case the e-commerce strategy will end up not being published.

### *eTrade for Women Masterclasses*

As mentioned above the eTrade for Women initiative has been initiated as a result of discussions at an eCommerce week. It is essential to notice that the eTrade for Women initiative is fairly new, and its activities in the framework of the eTrade for Women communities are only around one year into implementation.

### **Finding 22: Almost 90% of the survey participants find the Masterclasses to be participatory and engaging “to a large” or “to some extent”, with some regional variations in the perceptions.**

As presented in Table 4 below, the Masterclasses were assessed very positively in Africa (with only small variations between responses from East and West African respondents) and Asia (although small sample), while participants in the Balkans were more modest in their assessment. FGDs with Masterclass participants in East Africa confirmed that most participants found the sessions very engaging, with some feedback that the experience was less positive when participants switched off their cameras. The interpretation of the results in this area should also take into consideration the limitations of the Programme having to hold virtual instead of physical Masterclasses due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 4. To what extent do you agree that the Masterclass was participatory and engaging?\*

Answer	All (47)	Balkans (21)	Africa (20)	Asia (6)
To a large extent	55%	33%	80%	50%
To some extent	34%	48%	15%	50%
To a limited extent	9%	19%	0%	0%
I don't know	2%	0%	5%	0%

\*The number of respondents per region is mentioned in brackets.

### **Finding 23: Masterclass participants have felt strongly encouraged by their participation in the classes to continue developing their businesses as well as to develop other business ideas.**

This has been a key result from the Masterclasses, confirmed by both the survey (see Table 5) and the FGDs with participants in East Africa. The possibility to share challenges and learn from other success stories and obstacles was highlighted by several participants. This was also one of the key findings immediately after the training sessions as reflected in the data collected by UNCTAD.

Table 5. Results from the Masterclasses

To what extent has your participation in the Masterclass resulted in the following?	Not at all	To a limited extent	To some extent	To a large extent	Don't know
I have been encouraged as a female entrepreneur to continue developing my business		5%	28%	67%	
I have been inspired to develop other business ideas		10%	51%	38%	
I have been able to expand my business	8%	28%	33%	31%	
I now have a greater network that can support me overcoming challenges and obstacles	13%	18%	41%	28%	

I have engaged in interactions with policymakers or other stakeholders (e.g. chambers of commerce, etc.) to try and influence their environment	18%	28%	33%	18%	3%
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Engagement with policymakers is not surprisingly the area where participants have been least active with around half of the participants indicating “not at all” or “to a limited extent”. Notwithstanding, it is notable that half of the survey participants indicate to have been “to some or large extent” engaged with policymaking, especially when considering that the initiative is still young. The survey results also show a tendency that the level of policy engagement increases with the level (years) of experience as an entrepreneur: While 75% of the entrepreneurs with 6-10 years of experience indicate that they have joined policy processes or engaged in policy dialogue “to some or to a large extent”, this is only the case for 50% of the entrepreneurs with 3-5 years of experience and only for 17% of those with 0-2 years of experience. This information needs to be factored in when deciding on the specific target groups of this initiative.

**This evaluation observed that while criteria related to experience have been established for selection of participants for the Masterclasses these have not been strictly implemented.** The criteria specify that Masterclass participants should be female entrepreneurs who are founders or co-founders of businesses established within the last 2-5 years,<sup>65</sup> but 37% of the surveyed participants had more than six years of experience and 16% between 0-2 years (see Table 6). FGDs and interviews with female entrepreneurs confirmed that many of the participants have established businesses more than five years ago. While these in principle falls outside the target group, as reflected in the application announcement, it is considered by the ECDE Programme team to be a great achievement to be able to attract more experienced entrepreneurs to the initiative. If this is the case, it should be clearly stated in the call for applicants and it should be taken into account when developing the empowerment sessions.

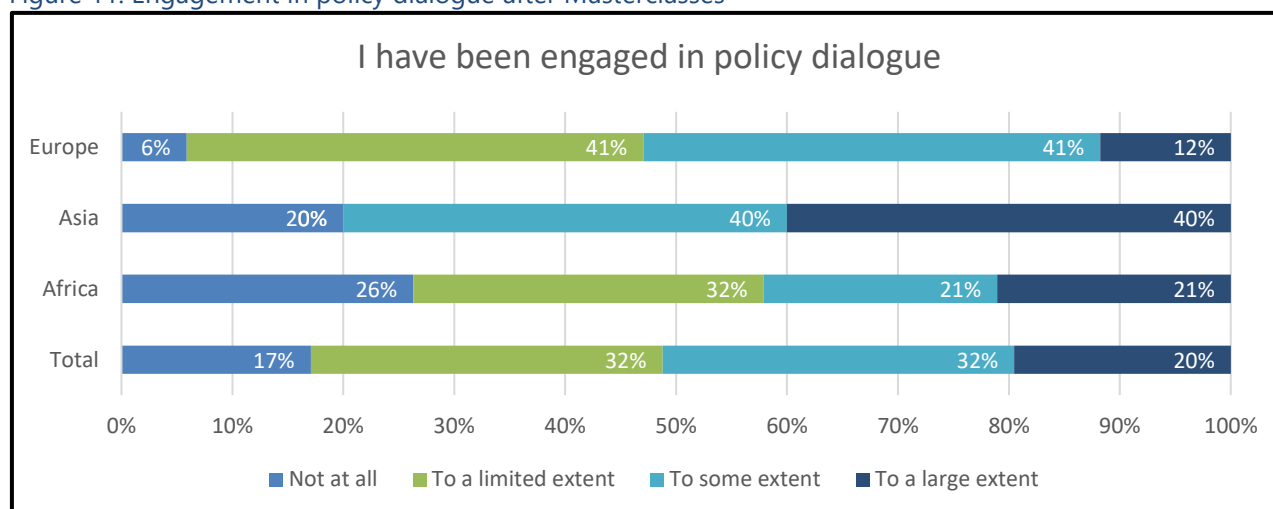
Table 6: Masterclass participants years of experience as entrepreneurs

Years of experience	% of respondents
0-2 years	16%
3-5 years	47%
6-10 years	29%
Above 10 years	8%

The survey results point to some substantial regional differences in the level of policy engagement: While 80% of the Masterclass participants in Asia have engaged in policy dialogue “to some or a large extent”, this is only the case for 42% in Africa and around 50% in Europe (Figure 11). On the other hand, participants in Europe have been further engaged in private-sector led activities to bring the voice of women-led digital businesses to the table (82%) while in Africa this applies only to 52% of the participants.

<sup>65</sup> See e.g. <https://etradeforall.org/masterclass/eastern-africa-2021/>

Figure 11: Engagement in policy dialogue after Masterclasses



**Finding 24: The Covid-19 pandemic has challenged the Masterclasses’ ability to strengthen networking aspects, one of the main purposes and a major reason mentioned in the FGDs for women to join the classes.** This relates in particular to the ability to build communities of female entrepreneurs which has been difficult with the limitations for physical meetings. In general, participants indicate that the Masterclasses have enhanced their ability to engage more and collaborate through peer networks of female entrepreneurs (76% indicating “to some or a large extent”). Yet, from the FGDs and with Masterclass participants in Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya it was however clear that these participants had not managed to engage in-person with each other after they joined the classes.

**Finding 25: While female entrepreneurs have benefited from the Masterclasses in several ways - so far the regional communities, which were launched a year ago – the initiative is still in an initial phase and needs further maturing and development.** As of 2021, four communities had been established in French and English-speaking Africa, the Balkans and South-East Asia. Thus, substantial progress has been made towards the 2023 targets of six communities. The FGDs and online interviews confirmed that the regional communities are still in an early phase. According to the respondents, very little activity take place and most Masterclass participants consulted have not made use of the communities yet.

In both Uganda and Kenya, female entrepreneurs know that a platform for the community exists but they had so far not been very engaging. The platform was established on Facebook which none of the participants use on a daily basis and they reported of very little activity in the group. The members of the communities were consulted formally and informally to express their preferences concerning the platform to be used to communicate. Although a majority selected Facebook and Whatsapp as their most used social platform, few members decided to join the Facebook groups. It was confirmed by FGDs that participants were consulted but while they indicated to have selected Whatsapp a Facebook group was established. They never fully understood why a Facebook group was established especially since Facebook has become a challenge to apply in Uganda since the election in spring 2021.

While the launch in each region is specifically tailored to the needs of the female entrepreneurs, it is time consuming to manage. The launching in September 2021 in Balkan revealed the complexity of this group evolving in more advanced economies which already offer other opportunities to interact and network. Therefore, it is currently being considered adopting a different approach to stay relevant in this region while using resources efficiently.

During the FGDs, several of the Masterclass participants confirmed to the evaluation team that the main reasons for them to join were to establish an international network both in Africa but also outside of Africa, share challenges and potentially get access to investment partner. This is currently being accommodated by pilot testing a global LinkedIn group for all the Communities. This will be launched in early 2022 to replace the Facebook groups. Since the communities are built around a regional approach there have been few attempts to apply a global angle to the communities before that. One experience sharing across regions have been piloted which yielded great interest that could be further explored. The fireside chat organized during the Masterclass for East Africa (in Sept. 2021) with the Advocate for the region, Clarisse Iribagiza, was opened to all the members of the Communities across regions. Although the contexts were quite different, the challenges were similar and hence offered great inspiration to the audience. The Pan African Communities event held on 15 July 2021 where the members from West Africa and East Africa were invited to join for insightful sessions with experts in funding, networking opportunities with peers across the African continent and coaching session in pitching to convey the right message. The participants provided very positive feedbacks which was also echoed in the FGDs and considered extremely relevant as some of the entrepreneurs were struggling with “selling” their business.

#### **Case - eTrade for Women Advocate**

Ms. Nina Angelovska is the founder of the company Grouper.mk and the former Minister of Finance in North Macedonia. She was part of starting up the eTrade for Women initiative which was launched in 2019 with Nina as the Advocate for the Balkans. She has collaborated with UNCTAD since 2014 and has participated in several eCommerce weeks and high-level events. In 2017 she established the “Macedonian e-Commerce Association” (based in North Macedonia) after meeting a Swiss e-commerce association at an eCommerce Week. Today 150 companies are part of the association and a new initiative to form a Gender Equality Alliance in cooperation with a Serbian association is underway. Masterclasses have been conducted in both 2019 and 2021, one face-to-face while the other online.

Masterclass participants highly appreciated the ability to maintain a close and informal contact with the eTrade for Women team within the ECDE Programme who is very responsive and also helps to keep participants informed of new developments, sharing of new opportunities etc. via email.

While the Communities are less than a year old, and so, still developing, it was noted by the evaluators that none of the Masterclass participants in Kenya were aware of the ongoing eTrade Readiness Assessment being conducted in the country and none of them had been invited to attend the national stakeholder workshop in November 2021. Likewise, in Uganda, none of the Masterclass participants had ever heard about the eTrade Readiness Assessments conducted in the country in 2018 although some of them were also active in policy dialogue. While the eTrade Readiness Assessment in Uganda is a couple of years old, it still serves as a relevant document, and could be useful to include in the Masterclass sessions as a basic introduction to the ecosystem for e-commerce.

**Finding 26: Masterclass participants have often participated in related training opportunities and events organised by other organisations as well as by other UNCTAD programmes, however the Masterclasses offered by the ECDE Programme are unique in the sense that they focus explicitly on female entrepreneurs (founders or co-founders) where new technologies and digital tools are at the heart of their business model and operations.** According to the survey results, participants consider the Masterclasses more useful than other related/similar training opportunities offered by other UNCTAD programmes (56% of the respondents found Masterclasses to be “more useful” while 31% found them to be “similar”) or by other organisations (40% rated Masterclasses to be “more useful” while 58% rated them “similar”). Almost 70% of the Masterclass



participants indicate that they have attended related events or trainings offered by other organisations while 32% have also participated in other UNCTAD training events.<sup>66</sup> This corresponds to findings from the FGDs and interviews conducted in Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya, where it was clear that several organisations are offering training for entrepreneurs and SMEs. These actors include private sector companies such as Google and DHL, bilateral donors such as GIZ, multilateral organisations such as ITC and UNCDF.

In particular, there seemed to be a potential overlap with activities within the SheTrades Programme (implemented by ITC) which several of the Masterclass participants had also participated in. SheTrades has a requirement of companies to be minimum 30% women owned, managed and controlled and also emphasises young women from LDCs but is not specifically targeting e-commerce. However, it is also noted that these other programmes/organisations target SMEs in a broader sense compared to the eTrade for Women Masterclass' more narrow focus on female entrepreneurs (founders or co-founders) where new technologies and digital tools are at the heart of their business model and operations. Especially within the more technical programmatic work and coding businesses as well as cybercrime consultancies this have been useful since the sectors are male-dominated and female entrepreneurs meet challenges related to sexual harassment etc. which can better be discussed in female only communities.

### 4.3 Programme efficiency, M&E framework and partnerships

**Finding's summary: The current funding structure and composition creates imbalances in the resource allocation to the Programme. In particular, a relatively low regular budget funding challenges the work to be done within the research and analysis pillar in view of UNCTAD's mandate. The establishing of a Core Donor Advisory Board has been an important achievement with a view to enhance the efficiency of resource and budget allocations to the Programme. The M&E framework is considered a living document to be adjusted regularly, however reporting on results should to a larger extent focus on the qualitative dimension of the support provided. While there is a consistent focus on learning and ad-hoc learning has occurred regularly on specific products, there is scope for learning processes to become more cross-cutting and regular. Partnerships have been leveraged through the eTrade for all initiative exemplified e.g. by the eCommerce Weeks, and a number of joint eTrade Readiness Assessments. However, collaborative efforts to support implementation of more transformative actions within countries have so far only taken place to a limited extent.**

#### 4.3.1 Programme efficiency

**Finding 27: The ECDE Programme is heavily dependent on extra-budgetary resources, which constitutes nearly 90% of the total budget. Most of this funding is earmarked for projects and of a short-term horizon. Still, according to the Work Plan 2019-2023, the extra-budgetary funding gap is nearly 60%, including anticipated funding from the three core donors, Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland. This creates an underlying uncertainty and risk for**

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<sup>66</sup> One of the Masterclass participants had also been part of the UNCTAD Empretec, a flagship capacity building programme implemented nationally in 41 different countries. Her assessment was that many of the topics of both Masterclasses and Empretec were similar, but Empretec was more intense and thorough and implemented in a face-to-face manner during a whole week. She is still in contact with other participants from that training. The Masterclass, on the other hand, had the disadvantage of being implemented online (due to Covid-19) during a 3-days course but had the great advantage of focusing on e-commerce and being global or at least regional.

**the planned implementation of the ECDE Programme.** At the same time, the Work Plan 2019-2023 reflects rather ambitious expectations to further funds mobilisation within the period.

The highly extra-budgetary-driven funding situation related to some of the key Programme interventions create inefficiencies in relation to work planning and the scoping and timing of implementation processes. This relates in particular to the eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategy processes, where the timing of the implementation process may not always fit well with the political realities and opportunities within the beneficiary countries, since it may take several months from the country's submission of a request to the funding has been approved and the project can get started. The ECDE Programme team also only have capacity to undertake a limited number of assessments at the same time. This was emphasised by several key stakeholders as a critical efficiency factor for these specific services delivered through the Programme. The evaluators witnessed part of this problem during the field mission to Kenya, where the scope and timing of the ongoing eTrade Readiness Assessment process was partly defined by the donors' budgetary cycle.<sup>67</sup>

**Finding 28: While the current resource allocation across the three pillars to a large extent reflects countries' demand for products and services, it is also partly a result of the donors' preference for funding of specific activities within the technical cooperation pillar. It is noted however that some major donors are starting to provide programmatic funding (Switzerland, Germany, Sweden) enabling more flexibility in the allocation of funding for the different parts of the ECDE Programme.** According to the ECDE Programme Work Plan 2019-2023, only around 10% of the total programme funding is allocated for the research and analysis pillar (and within this pillar, nearly two thirds of the funding is allocated for the DER). In comparison, around 55% of the funding is allocated for the technical cooperation pillar and in particular for the eTrade Readiness Assessments, the e-commerce strategies and the eTrade for Women activities (around 75% of the budget within the pillar go to these activities). Thus, at the same time as a large number of eTrade Readiness Assessments are being funded within the technical cooperation pillar, critical gaps are identified in relation to data and statistics within most countries, issues which could have been addressed to a larger extent through the research and analysis pillar if more regular and extra-budgetary funding had been available.

**Finding 29: There are a number of activities within the Programme that UNCTAD is still mandated to undertake (such as production of the DER and support to the work of the IGE and the Working Group) whether obtaining of extra-budgetary funds or not. Moreover, in the case of research and analysis, this area requires mostly regular budget funds in order to ensure its independence. This underlines the need for UNCTAD to ensure that sufficient regular budget funding is allocated to the Programme and currently this seems not to be the case.** While the Programme has demonstrated an extra-ordinary ability to attract external funding, this has not been reflected in increased regular budget funding, despite clear messages from member States in the Nairobi Maafikiano and Bridgetown Covenant to strengthen UNCTAD's work in this area. Since 2016, the number of regular posts in the Programme has only grown from five to seven, which does not correspond to the growing importance of the area in the UNCTAD Mandates. Thus, despite the increase in extra-budgetary funding to the technical cooperation pillar, the Programme is overstretched to deliver within the two other pillars, including the contribution of these pillars to the cross-cutting dimensions of the Programme.

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<sup>67</sup> Initially, the Government of Kenya had indicated its willingness to fund the work itself, but the process took longer than anticipated to finalize. Eventually, a donor (GIZ) showed interest and stepped in to fund the work.

**Finding 30: The establishment of the Core Donor Advisory Board, with participation of the three core Programme donors, is an important achievement with a view to enhance the efficiency of resource and budget allocations to the Programme.** The Core Donor Advisory Board serves as a useful mechanism to facilitate a closer and more fluid communication and dialogue between the Programme management and the core donors. In addition, it will help to strengthen possibilities for joint planning and development of coherent interventions as well as for sharing of information on any new developments in the donors' prioritisation of development topics, geographical orientation etc. that may be helpful for the Programme team's ability to plan ahead.

#### 4.3.2 M&E framework

**Finding 31: The Programmes results framework has been revisited and updated during the implementation period. The M&E framework serves as a living document to be revisited in terms of established targets and indicators.** Although developed earlier, the M&E Framework was applied for the first time in 2021 in the process of producing the Year in Review 2020 report. The results framework was revisited by the Programme team in October 2021 (as part of this evaluation), as the previous results framework included too distant and broad outcome level goals that were widely beyond any significant influence from the Programme. Cause and effect linkages were also unclear. These issues have been addressed in the revisited results framework through the introduction of both an immediate and an intermediate outcome level (compared to only one outcome level before). Likewise, in the most recent results framework the outputs have been pushed "down" to more concrete levels to enable shorter-term learning cycles.

While the introduction of an additional outcome level in the revisited results framework (October, 2021) is a step forward, there is still a need to better understand the effectiveness of the ECDE Programme interventions in some areas of support, by documenting both expected and unexpected, short, medium and longer-term outcomes of the Programme interventions. This is particularly needed in a situation like this where: i) there is a need to focus primarily on outcomes rather than activities and outputs and enhance focus on effectiveness rather than on efficiency or performance; and ii) the programming context is dynamic and complex and objectives and the paths to achieve them are largely unpredictable. Thus, the ToC must be modified over time to respond to changes in the context.

Targets (and indicators) in the M&E framework now need to be aligned to the most recent version of the results framework (October, 2021). It is noted, that in the M&E framework, the number of outcome and output indicators is quite high (on average each outcome and output had 5 indicators) which make it challenging to manage and monitor progress. This is partly due to specific requirements from donors on reporting of certain indicators (e.g. on some standard indicators which the donors report on each year to their Parliament). In addition to this, some of the baselines foreseen in the M&E framework are still pending which makes it difficult to specify the progress indicators within some areas.

Finally, the indicators included in the M&E framework are almost all quantitative which create the risk that the Programme may not sufficiently capture and focus on the qualitative aspects and the process dimensions of the support. Indicators should to a larger extent include both quantitative and qualitative aspects.<sup>68</sup> In addition, in a changing and dynamic context as this one, it may be useful to include also process indicators<sup>69</sup> in order to be able to assess not just what the Programme is

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<sup>68</sup> This could e.g. reflect changes in institutions functional capacities and attention to e-commerce; changes in stakeholders behaviour and attitudes; changes in interactions and collaboration between institutions and stakeholder groups; use of knowledge and skills acquired etc.

<sup>69</sup> See examples of these in section 5.2.

achieving, but also how it is doing it. This may be helpful to enhance focus on the cross-cutting dimension of how the Programmes work. It is also noted from the August 2021 M&E framework that gender specific targets and indicators have not yet been mainstreamed throughout the framework. This should be done when the M&E framework is to be aligned with the revised results framework.

**Finding 32: The formulated outcomes are clearly reflecting the intention of the ECDE Programme to encourage *complementarity* and *synergy* between the three pillars, as they connect outputs from different pillars. However, there is scope for further enhancing joint planning of working activities.**<sup>70</sup> The coherence and synergy logic is clearly reflected in the developed Programme ToC (Figure 1) where the change process is assumed to take place through an interaction between activities and outputs from the three pillars. However, while a strong and shared interest and commitment exist among Programme management and staff to contribute and work collectively towards the Programme objectives, interviews with Programme team members also revealed that in practices there is still a tendency to plan and conduct most working activities in “silos” within the Programme pillars. This may be partly explained by resource constraints in the Programme and general difficulties in changing mindsets and internal dynamics within an organisation like UNCTAD. However, there seems still to be scope for introduction of e.g. joint quarterly work planning sessions in order to further enhance synergies within the Programme (see also finding 34 on learning).

**Finding 33: In relation to the eTrade Readiness Assessments, the Implementation Reviews introduced as part of the ISM<sup>71</sup> have been useful to enhance focus on results (outcomes) from the eTrade Readiness Assessments. There is a strong focus within the Programme on constantly adapting and enhancing this tool and its utility based on learning and experiences from the process.** The ISM was introduced as a specific response to the need for strengthening the support to implementation and follow-up after completion of the eTrade Readiness Assessments. Implementation Reviews are a cornerstone of the ISM and are based on a monitoring methodology to assess progress and gaps in the implementation of the recommendations contained in the assessments and to document good practices, policy impacts and lessons learned. The Implementation Review methodology has been designed bearing in mind the need to take stock of progress and further induce the implementation process within a relatively large number of countries, in view of the limited capacity of beneficiary countries to undertake in-depth reviews (most of them being LDCs) and the constraints within the ECDE Programme team in deploying on-site technical assistance to support in-depth country reviews.

The first Implementation Review (2020) extracted some of the results following the development of eTrade Readiness Assessments within 18 countries. The results across the 13 countries that responded pointed towards relatively high implementation rates of the recommended actions (up to 70-80% in some countries and around 50% on average). For the second Implementation Review conducted in 2021, 15 out of 25 countries invited (those that had completed eTrade Readiness Assessments by June 2021) responded to the invitation. The preliminary results from the second review show that most of the countries that participated in the first review are making efforts to consolidate previous achievements. Overall, the average implementation rate across the 14 countries in the second round was 59%. The average implementation rate of first-time participating countries was 39% and that of countries participating for the second time was 73%.

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<sup>70</sup> Currently, discussions on how to implement and revise specific products and services are mainly taking place within each pillar.

<sup>71</sup> The ISM was rolled out in 2020 to monitor and support the implementation of recommendations included in the action matrix of each of the eTrade Readiness Assessments conducted by UNCTAD based on self-reporting and documentation submitted by the countries.

For the second Implementation Review, some additional elements of characterization by country were introduced, following the feedback received in the Satisfaction Survey. According to interviews with the Programme team, more significant changes to the methodology are currently being planned, geared towards better reviewing the performance of each country with regard to the specific recommendations contained in each beneficiary country's eTrade Readiness Action Matrix. Discussions are also ongoing on how on-site support could be made available where it is most needed and effective, as well as on the feasibility and desirability of using interactive online-based tools in the Implementation Review process, based on experiences from other parts of UNCTAD (e.g. the Trade Facilitation Reform Tracker). These planned improvements will respond to some of the main inquiries that the evaluation team also came across during interviews with national focal points which strongly emphasised the importance of making the tool more participatory and tailor-made to the specific need and use of beneficiary countries.

During 2021, the Programme team has organised a series of stakeholders' engagement to facilitate the sharing of experiences in managing the eTrade Readiness follow-up process and implementation of recommendations. In January and February 2021, around 270 key stakeholders from 20 eTrade Readiness Assessment countries, attended two virtual workshops to discuss the findings of the first Implementation Review and provide the basis for dialogue and experience-sharing. The stakeholders who were brought together came from different ministries and regulatory agencies, private sector, development partners, including UN system organisations (mobilised with the support of UN RCOs), as well as eTrade for all partners. These events also served as opportunities to encourage further coordination and collaboration among stakeholders, at the national level as well as across country groups and regions. In September 2021, three capacity building virtual workshops were organised to better engage the eTrade Readiness Focal Points and other relevant stakeholders involved in the second Implementation Review. These events were instrumental to deepen the understanding of the methodology and good practices as well as to communicate and raise awareness among countries on the value to engage in the review process to fully benefit from the ISM. Finally, in November 2021, the community of eTrade Readiness Focal Points and beneficiary countries' Permanent Missions in Geneva were invited to a series of virtual presentations on the DER 2021.

**Finding 34: There are several good examples of learning events and processes taking place and being documented within the Programme, in particular within the technical cooperation pillar. While this shows the importance given to learning in the Programme, learning is still mainly taken place ad-hoc and not across different Programme areas.** In relation to the eTrade Readiness Assessments, various learning events have taken place, such as the Stocktaking Workshop on Lessons Learned and Best Practices for the Conduct and Implementation of the Rapid eTrade Readiness (April, 2019) and different brain-storming sessions (e.g. reported in June 2021). Likewise, in order to reinforce communications and onboard new focal points, UNCTAD kicked off the 2<sup>nd</sup> Implementation Review with three workshops, one each for anglophone Africa and Asia, francophone Africa, and the Pacific. In these events, learnings from the first round of review (including from a satisfaction survey)<sup>72</sup> informed adaptation of the methodology applied in the second Implementation Review recently conducted, covering 25 countries that benefited from an eTrade Readiness Assessment until 2020. The eTrade for Women team has also organised learning and experience sharing. These events and processes demonstrate that the Programme team, in particular within the technical cooperation pillar, is revisiting the design on a regular basis to make sure that the right tools and support mechanisms are applied in the programming.<sup>73</sup> The field missions

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<sup>72</sup> UNCTAD eTrade Readiness Assessment Implementation Support Mechanism, Highlights from the 1st Implementation Review Satisfaction Survey. Summary Note, October 2021.

<sup>73</sup> Take away from the brainstorming webinar on eTrade Readiness Assessments and E-Commerce Strategies.

to Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, as well as the interview process with key stakeholders from other countries, confirmed that these countries benefit from sharing of practical experiences. It is also noted that informal learning processes and events take place when developing the DER report with brainstorming and peer review meetings. Still however, learning processes are mainly taking place within each pillar/product and cross-cutting learning allowing for understanding the different challenges, successes and lessons learned in other pillars is limited. Thus, it could be beneficial for the Programme to articulate a stronger cross-cutting and coherent approach to learning and adaptation. The M&E framework explicitly focusses on lessons learning on a semi-annual basis, but interviews indicate that this is yet to be properly implemented across pillars. Learning sessions could also be integrated in the project cycle to extract lessons learned after all larger activities' completion (e.g. after completing a DER, an eTrade Readiness Assessment, Masterclass etc.).

#### 4.3.3 Multistakeholder Partnerships

**Finding 35: The eTrade for all initiative is seen by its partners as a good and valuable initiative, with good engagement that helps partners connect with each other. It is seen as very useful and important for the partners' ability to strengthen their global connections and platform in relation to e-commerce for development. This creates potentials for synergies across the pillars.** The recent joint effort on the "Covid-19 and e-commerce. A Global Review" publication where seven eTrade for all partners joined forces to understand Covid-19's impact on e-commerce provides a good example of the collaboration spirit in this group. In addition, since the Covid-19 pandemic has spurred more use of online technology, this has facilitated wider meeting participation across different time zones etc.

The usefulness of the platform is in particular emphasized by some of those partners that have joined the initiative more recently. As an example, the British Standards Institution (BSI) is currently working on developing a toolkit and have been able to make good use of the eTrade for all platform to create awareness about this product. This has resulted in a concrete cooperation with the African Development Bank (AfDB). Moreover, the Pacific Digital Economy Programme is unlikely to have evolved if UNCDF had not joined eTrade for all. It now covers both research activities and technical cooperation activities.

The eTrade for all initiative has been a useful entry point for new members to get access to in-country e-commerce development processes which has at the same time helped to expand the scope of the assessment processes and ensure a more holistic approach. During the period under review, the eTrade Readiness in Iraq was done in cooperation with UPU and in Côte d'Ivoire with ITC, UPU and Consumers International. Likewise, as a result of the recent inclusion of the BSI in eTrade for all, specific questions on standards were introduced in the questionnaires that were distributed to key stakeholders in Kenya as part of the ongoing eTrade Readiness Assessment. BSI's engagement is now also facilitating that the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) becomes involved in the national key stakeholder process. Thus, the eTrade for all initiative has been successful in expanding its outreach and leveraging of regional opportunities to reach out to more and relevant stakeholders in the member States (this is the case also with the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), another recent member of the initiative), in line with the recommendations from the "External Evaluation of the eTrade for all initiative" (2019)."

A number of eTrade for all partners have been strong contributors to the eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategy processes. The United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) has contributed to all eTrade Readiness Assessments and also UPU has been a strong contributor to the eTrade Readiness Assessments (Cambodia, Tunisia, Ivory Coast, Myanmar and Vanuatu). In addition, the ITC and Consumers International contributed actively to the eTrade Readiness Assessments of Ivory Coast and Iraq. World Bank has also contributed, although to a less extent. The Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) has supported the preparation

of the national e-commerce strategies in Cambodia, Myanmar and Senegal, which emerged as an outcome of these countries' eTrade Readiness Assessments and initiated through dialogue between governments and development partners.

**Finding 36: The eTrade for all platform has served well as an information hub for the partners but has to less extent catalysed collaborative efforts among partners, such as co-creating of transformative actions and provision of joint technical cooperation within countries.** Table 7 reflects progress towards the targets and it is clear that number of visitors on the eTrade for all platform has been steadily increasing and the same applies for the number of subscribers to the newsletter. While being well on track, there is still however some way to go to achieve the targets.

Table 7: eTrade for all platform and outreach

Indicator	Baseline	2021	Target 2023
Number of requests for information or support channelled through eTrade for all	2020: 186 (cumulative)	+30* =216 (cumulative)	400 (cumulative)
Number of visitors on the eTrade for all platform per year	2017: 11,964	57,776	100,000
Number of subscribers to the eTrade for all newsletter	2017: 326	2,450	5000

\*The low number of requests is mainly due to a reconstruction of the site during 2021.

The “Development Solution” database that has been established at the eTrade for all platform present technical assistance factsheets (capacity-building programmes) of each of the eTrade for all partners in one or more of the seven policy areas identified by the initiative with the intention that countries should then identify the programmes of interest to them and get in touch directly with the corresponding eTrade for all partner(s) to explore cooperation opportunities or learn more about their respective activities. This approach has so far only resulted in few concrete actions. Several of the key stakeholders consulted within countries were not aware of this opportunity. This perception was confirmed by some eTrade for all partners. Likewise, the space created on the eTrade for all platform (My eTrade for all) for eTrade Readiness focal points to exchange has hardly ever been used by them.

While it is clear from the interviews conducted that collaborative opportunities are frequently being discussed between the eTrade for all members based in Geneva, this has so far not resulted in much concrete and coordinated implementation within countries, where the mechanisms for collaboration among partners often work quite differently. In terms of the follow-up on eTrade for all recommendations, this leads to sporadic and uncoordinated interventions from partners, which do not exploit the potentials for complementarity and synergies. Thus, the value of the eTrade for all platform can be further enhanced through greater collaborative efforts in particular within eTrade Readiness beneficiary countries. The “External Evaluation of the eTrade for all initiative” in 2019 came to a similar finding on this and recommended that “expectations about implementation activities should be carefully managed and further synergies explored”.

**Finding 37: The eCommerce Week is a multistakeholder event that brings government representatives, international organisations, civil society, academia and private sector actors together to discuss challenges within e-commerce for development. This is highly appreciated by attendants and there are several examples of how the event has facilitated linkages between partners and key stakeholders.** The majority of the stakeholders consulted had participated in the eCommerce Week which they assessed to be relevant, innovative and essential to allow for networking and consensus-building. The eCommerce Week is scheduled back-to-back with the IGE meetings to ensure high attendance in both sessions. As mentioned above, there has been an increase in member State's participation in both IGEs and eCommerce Weeks, thus it has been a good strategy to schedule them jointly. The number of participants in the eCommerce Week has increased steadily in the period from 2018 and onwards as reflected in Table 8. The 2020 event was organised entirely as an online event. Although it was originally decided to postpone this event, there was a high

pressure from the stakeholders to organise some kind of sessions, and it was therefore decided to implement it as a number of virtual sessions to not lose momentum during the pandemic. It is interesting to note that the share of female participants increased from 38% in 2019 to 44% in 2020 when the eCommerce Week event was moved to an online event.

Table 8: Key figures for eCommerce Week participation

Year	Registered participants	Member States represented	eTrade for all partners
2018	1180 (41% women)	113 (26 LDCs)	21 (out of 29)
2019	1520 (38% women)	135 (35 LDCs)	26 (out of 30)
2020	2000 (44% women)	134	14 (out of 30)*

\* For 14 sessions only.

Apart from the increasing number of participants and eTrade for all partners in the eCommerce Week another indication of the high relevance of this event is an increasing number of applications for organising thematic sessions. While the previous number of sessions conducted have been in the range of 60-80 sessions,<sup>74</sup> it is expected to increase to around 100 in the planned eCommerce Week in 2022 due to a higher number of applications received (around 150). The ECDE Programme team has tried to encourage and facilitate multistakeholder partnerships for organising of the thematic sessions. Thus, in cases where some actors have submitted applications solely the Programme team has tried to facilitate connection to other relevant partners. The experience from the current application round is that since the Programme team previously has pushed partners to link up to other partners, there has been an increase in the number of applications based on already established partnerships. As mentioned above, the eTrade for Women was also the result of discussions at the eCommerce Week and here the Advocate from North Macedonia was engaged in developing the concept. The high level of satisfaction with the eCommerce Week can also be read in the survey results collected after the sessions. More than 90% of the participants consider the sessions to be relevant for their work and that the sessions contribute to raising awareness.<sup>75</sup>

#### 4.4 Gender mainstreaming and HRBA

As mentioned above, UNCTAD is committed to mainstream gender and apply a HRBA to programming. The 2019 MOPAN performance review of UNCTAD<sup>76</sup> noted positively the progress made and actions taken to mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment in technical cooperation. For example, UNCTAD's understanding of gender is clearly reflected in the Trade and Gender Toolbox from 2017.<sup>77</sup> The gender toolbox reflects a four-step approach to be applied: *Identification* of gender inequalities in an economy by conducting a gender analysis; *evaluation* and estimation of results of trade reforms; *monitoring* where a checklist and indicators to track progress are reflected; and a *synthetizing indicator* which provides a trade and gender index. In order to ensure a HRBA, the Programme needs to define and target both *duty-bearers* (state stakeholders within the sphere of e-commerce and the digital economy but also businesses (the corporate responsibility)<sup>78</sup> to respect human rights as well as empowering *rights-holders* to claim their rights. This means that it needs to be clear how advocacy towards government institutions will be conducted at the same time as rights-holders are empowered to claim their rights. Also, the principles of a HRBA needs to be clear by expressing a *clear linkage to specific rights*, ensuring *accountability*, *empowerment*,

<sup>74</sup> Except from the eCommerce Week organised in 2020, where only 14 sessions were organised, all virtually.

<sup>75</sup> eCommerce Week - Summary reports from 2019 and 2020.

<sup>76</sup> Mopan Performance Assessment 2019 of UNCTAD, 2020

<sup>77</sup> Trade and Gender Toolbox; <https://unctad.org/webflyer/unctad-trade-and-gender-tool-box>, 2017.

<sup>78</sup> As defined in [https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinessshr\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinessshr_en.pdf)



participation, non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups.<sup>79</sup> These elements will be further explored in this section.

**Finding's summary: Gender equality concerns are considered and reflected to some extent in the M&E framework, research and activities including eTrade for Women, although a more systematic approach based on a thorough gender analysis could enhance this work. There are examples of human rights considerations being taken into account in research and technical cooperation, but an explicit reflection of human rights considerations in outputs is scattered and not systematically ensured. As reflected in the ToC, drivers for change include inclusivity in all outputs but while this has been well reflected in the DER, it is less vivid in other outputs. This applies in particular to ensuring reflection of a human rights perspective.**

**Finding 38: While gender equality is reflected in the results framework and in the Programme document,<sup>80</sup> human rights dimensions are less explicitly pronounced, for instance ensuring the explicit identification of duty-bearers and rights holders as is required with a HRBA.** A “gender sensitive manner” is emphasised in both intermediate outcome levels and the M&E framework has an explicit target to contribute to SDG 5 at the outcome levels. There are quantitative indicators measuring gender inclusivity e.g. by establishing how many countries have strategies/actions that includes gender inclusivity but no further explanation of when an action can qualify as gender sensitive is provided. It is not specified when a strategy/action is “good enough” to qualify as gender inclusive e.g. does it entail mainstreaming gender into all areas, one separate section on gender equality etc. At the output level, there is no mentioning of gender. The Programme document also reflects on how the Programme will share good practices among member States on how to include gender sensitivity as well as support member States in methods and procedures for collecting, using and analysing gender-disaggregated statistics. The eTrade Readiness Assessments have specific methodological guidance on how to include gender aspects (e.g. by identifying female entrepreneurs, inclusion of women’s organisations in stakeholder group etc.) however this is sometimes difficult to be implemented in practice. Lastly, the Programme document mentions an ambition to “*proceed to a gender equality analysis for the entire ECDE Programme, and then develop a programme-wide gender equality strategy, showcasing clear results, indicators and actions that should be integrated in all the Section’s work*”.<sup>81</sup> While this is in line with the gender toolbox and advisable to inform the Programme, this has not been conducted yet.

The ECDE Programme’s attention to human rights and how it intends to apply a HRBA is not explicitly reflected in the framework nor in the Programme document.<sup>82</sup> While a thorough stakeholder analysis is included, there is no mentioning of “duty-bearers” or “rights-holders” nor any specification of whom the most vulnerable people are in an e-commerce and digital economy perspective. Several stakeholders have emphasised that while human rights are not explicitly mentioned, it does not mean that they are not considered. While this is very likely the case, it is a key requirement of the HRBA to explicitly mention rights, thus it needs to be pronounced and not just assumed. The Programme document does not account for which human rights the Programme intends to address and there is no direct reference to human rights which is a prerequisite to be in line with a HRBA. Also, there is no explicit reflection of human rights in the outputs/outcomes defined. The

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<sup>79</sup> Human Rights, Poverty and Governance in the Least Developed Countries: Rights-based Approaches Towards a New Framework of Cooperation, Contributions of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. May 2011.

<sup>80</sup> E-Commerce and Digital Economy Programme Work Plan for 2019-2023, August 2021

<sup>81</sup> E-Commerce and Digital Economy Programme Work Plan for 2019-2023, August 2021

<sup>82</sup> Human rights are not explicitly reflected in the results framework, but this does not mean that no human rights considerations are taken.

flagship reports, the DER 2019 and even more so the DER 2021<sup>83</sup> have explicit references to a rights framework (e.g. the right to privacy). The DER 2021 discusses how the need for the digital economy has increased substantially during the pandemic and how cybercrime has as well increased, not least targeting vulnerable victims in the health care industry. Contact tracing applications have been developed and put in place in many countries in order to track and mitigate the spread of the Covid-19 virus. However, this has led to increased surveillance, thus challenging the right to privacy.<sup>84</sup> While need for internet has been high there have been documented a considerable number of internet shutdowns affecting livelihood and subsequently the right to development.<sup>85</sup>

**Finding 39: In terms of research, the mainstreaming of gender and human rights vary quite substantially. While both the DER 2019 and DER 2021 clearly reflect human rights and a gender perspective, there are other publications that do not.** The desk review indicates great differences in the extent to which a rights framework is reflected. Rights are clearly reflected in the DER's, the "What is at stake for Developing Countries in Trade Negotiations on E-Commerce" (2021)<sup>86</sup> and the "Digital Identity for Trade and Development – Train for Trade Case Studies in South-East Asia" (2020). This does not however apply to a number of other publications such as the recent "E-Commerce and the Digital Economy in LDCs: At Breaking Point in Covid-19 Times",<sup>87</sup> "E-commerce and Digital Economy Programme Year in Review 2020", the "Covid-19 and E-commerce - Impact on Businesses and Policy Responses" and the "Digital Economy Growth and Mineral Resources: Implications for Developing Countries"<sup>88</sup> that all have little explicit reflection on the human rights framework. Similarly, while both DER's clearly discusses gender inequalities and challenges facing both men and women, there are no references to gender in other key publications such as the "What is at stake for Developing Countries in Trade Negotiations on E-Commerce".<sup>89</sup> Although it is acknowledged that some topics are more relevant for discussing gender dimensions than others, a publication on trade negotiations could e.g. have reflected the opportunities e-commerce offers for involving women not least through focus on SMEs and how trade negotiations and priorities can enhance women's opportunities for participation.

UNCTAD gender equality policies clearly states that all flagship research publications are to be peer reviewed through a gender lens.<sup>90</sup> Peer reviews also include attention to human rights. While there has been an increasing focus on ensuring gender equality in UNCTAD's work (which has been recognised in previous reviews, e.g. the MOPAN Performance Assessment 2019), the human rights area is still less implemented in the organisation.<sup>91</sup> It is however, the assessment that some improvements have occurred related to human rights and the DERs are clear examples of this.

**Finding 40: In the consensus-building activities of the Programme, gender equality and human rights have been assessed rather positively by survey respondents, however this has not been confirmed by the desk review.** According to the IGE survey, background issues notes have

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<sup>83</sup> For example, there is a section dedicated to discussing digital and data-related rights and principles. Digital Economy Report, 2021, Cross-border data flows and development: for whom the data flow, UNCTAD, 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Digital Economy Report, 2021. Cross-border data flows and development: For whom the data flow, UNCTAD 2021.

<sup>85</sup> Digital Economy Report, 2021. Cross-border data flows and development: For whom the data flow, UNCTAD 2021.

<sup>86</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditctncd2020d5\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditctncd2020d5_en.pdf)

<sup>87</sup> "E-Commerce and the Digital Economy in LDCs: At Breaking Point in COVID-19 Times", UNCTAD, 2022. [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlstict2022d1\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlstict2022d1_en.pdf)

<sup>88</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tn\\_unctad\\_ict4d16\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tn_unctad_ict4d16_en.pdf)

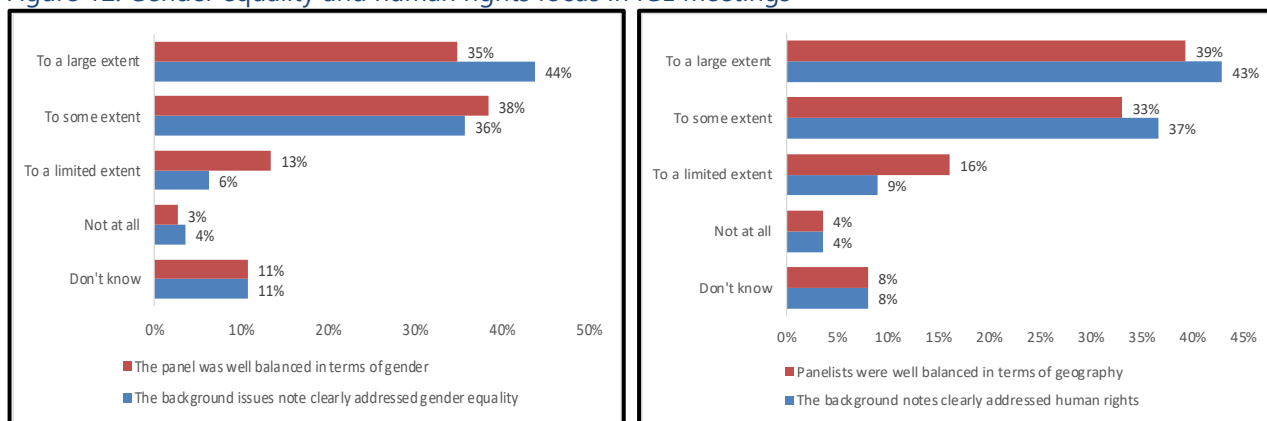
<sup>89</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditctncd2020d5\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditctncd2020d5_en.pdf)

<sup>90</sup> Roadmap to mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment 2012-2018, Action Plan 2019-2020

<sup>91</sup> Mopan Performance Assessment 2019 of UNCTAD, 2020

addressed gender equality as well as human rights very well (Figure 12). This is however not confirmed by the desk review. While there are notions on ensuring inclusive development there are no analysis on gender inequalities, attention to vulnerable people etc. If these areas are not covered in the background issues, they are less likely to be discussed in the IGE meetings. It should also be noticed that gender and human rights are the areas that come out most critically in the IGE survey which is otherwise very positive.

Figure 12. Gender equality and human rights focus in IGE meetings



**Finding 41: Although the panels for the IGE sessions tend to have more men than women and more experts from developed than from developing countries, the Programme team has made large efforts to ensure a more balanced participation.** This is also reflected in the survey responses, where over 70% of the respondents find that the panels for the IGE sessions “to some extent” or “to a large extent” have been well-balanced in terms of gender and geography. The document review showed that in the third IGE meeting, nine men and seven women were panellists and keynote speakers, while the gender division in the fourth IGE session were 10 men and six women. In terms of representation of developing countries, eight of the panellists from the third session were from developed countries (UK, Germany, Geneva) whereas five panellists represented developing countries, mainly within Asia (e.g. India, Thailand).<sup>92</sup> These imbalances in the composition of the panels however, also reflects a generally higher proportion of men and from developed countries that are experts in the matters in point.

Before each IGE, the Programme team first develops a shortlist of experts who know about a given topic, balanced in terms of gender, developed and developing countries and even regions. Then, in the final selection process, also issues of availability, practicalities and costs become of importance. Thus, while there is still an overrepresentation of men and representatives from developed countries in the panels, the Programme team is seen to make great efforts to have both men and women from developing and developed countries represented as panellists and keynote speakers.

**Finding 42: The Working Group on Measuring e-commerce and the digital economy, provided feedback on the “UNCTAD Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy 2020”, which clearly reflects a gender sensitive approach. However, there is no reflection of human rights.** While it is indeed positive that the Manual reflects a gender sensitive approach, it is a lost opportunity to not have human rights integrated. As reflected in the OHCHR guideline on

<sup>92</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/information-document/tdb\\_ed2019\\_prog\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/information-document/tdb_ed2019_prog_en.pdf)

official statistics and human rights,<sup>93</sup> statistics should allow for disaggregation in terms of income, gender, race, age, ethnicity, migratory status and disability, and geographic location. While some of these indicators are reflected (gender, geography and income) others are not, thus the possibility to include additional indicators into subsequent iterations of the Manual should be explored. It is acknowledged that since UNCTAD conduct business surveys and not household surveys not all of these indicators may be realistic to include. However, there may be scope for including questions on e.g. business owner's age and potentially disabilities or marginalisation to enhance the understanding of who does e-commerce businesses and whether the potentials of e-commerce for greater inclusion is being realised. As mentioned above, the Manual was only published in the second half of 2021 and due to budget constraints training in the use of the manual has not yet been done. This is however planned for 2022.

**Finding 43: In the technical cooperation pillar, the eTrade for Women has a specific focus on women's empowerment and is the most concrete example of how the ECDE Programme is trying to address gender inequalities and work directly with empowerment of rights-holders. In other technical cooperation aspects women and women's organisations have to some extent been involved in the eTrade Readiness Assessments and increasingly so, but there are only few concrete examples where marginalised people or organisations representing them have been consulted.** Although it is not an explicit target of the initiative, the survey results indicate that there are a number of gender and religious minorities among the Masterclass participants. This shows that e-commerce provides opportunities for discriminated groups that struggle against prejudice when trading face-to-face. This opportunity could even be further taken advantage of by giving priorities to marginalised groups in the applications for joining the Masterclasses or at least encourage them to apply by explicitly requesting all applicants, also from more vulnerable groups, to apply.

Results in terms of inclusion of women and vulnerable groups in the eTrade Readiness Assessments vary quite a bit. The eTrade Readiness Assessment in *Kenya* provides a good example of how attention to marginalised groups and gender has been mainstreamed throughout the process (see case box) and how *duty-bearers* are targeted. A systematic attention has been given to people living with a disability since this group is highlighted as a key vulnerable group to be considered in Kenyan development policies. Moreover, female entrepreneurs were identified to be included in the eTrade Readiness Assessment and for the national workshop as panellists. While this demonstrates a clear focus on gender issues, it is a bit puzzling why none of the eTrade for Women participants were invited to tell their story at the workshop or at least to participate if it is the intention to get them involved in policy making. In addition, a strong delay in sending out the invitations for

#### **eT Ready in Kenya**

The eTrade Readiness Assessment in Kenya conducted in late 2021 had a clear focus on women, youth and inclusion of people living with a disability. This was evident in the concept note produced by the consultants and in the invitation to the national key stakeholder workshop. The surveys for public and private stakeholders also included questions on employment of women, youth and people living with a disability and knowledge of programmes targeting these groups. As part of the stakeholder mapping, female entrepreneurs within e-commerce were identified to be included as success stories. Different representatives of youth, women and people living with a disability was identified and invited for the national workshop. Since it was a hybrid engagement, priority was given to government and private sector actors to be physical present at the workshop and CSOs were mainly participating online.

<sup>93</sup> UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), "Official Statistics and Human Rights. Statistics matter for human rights, and human rights matter for statistics!".

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/HRIndicators/StatisticsAndHumanRights.pdf>

the workshop became an issue for the outreach and for the inclusiveness. The hybrid nature of the event, where participants could attend either physically by invitation or online, even allowed for invitation of more participants. While it is indeed likely that the female entrepreneurs would have been too busy to attend the workshop, they should at least have been given the opportunity which would also have allowed for more synergies to other elements in the ECDE Programme.

In Rwanda, key stakeholders recognised UNCTAD as a promoter of gender equality in their support to the e-commerce strategy formulation process, with clear priorities on ensuring inclusion of gender considerations in outputs. Rwanda is quite advanced on mainstreaming gender into policies, and it is a clear focus area for the government which is also reflected in the e-commerce policy and strategy developed. It should also be noted that the eTrade for Women Advocate was involved in the strategy development process.

While the first eTrade Readiness Assessments did not devote much attention to gender issues, this focus has been strengthened over the years and recent examples such as the one in Kenya provides a good example of this. In Madagascar (2018), the government tried to identify women's organisations or individual women with capacity within e-commerce and the digital economy to participate as examples in the eTrade Readiness Assessments but also in national workshops but did not manage to do so. The same situation occurred in Uganda (2018), where it was the perception from government stakeholders consulted that women were largely left out of the processes although efforts were made to make the process as inclusive as possible. There are however some reflections on gender inequalities in the eTrade Readiness Assessment. Key stakeholders interviewed from Tunisia and Senegal also mentioned the importance of considering gender but without being able to provide concrete examples of how this has been done. In both Tunisia and Iraq, where eTrade Readiness Assessments were conducted more recently, there have been better results from including women entrepreneurs and organisations into the assessments. In Iraq, both women organisations and entrepreneurs were included, and it was clear that due attention had been paid to inclusion aspects. This is clearly reflected in the final report which includes comprehensive discussion of women-led businesses, lack of access to finance for women etc.

**Finding 44: The ToRs for and training of consultants to conduct eTrade Readiness Assessments have not been consistent in emphasising the importance of inclusion of gender equality and rights issues in these assessments, however these aspects have now been addressed. The lack of gender disaggregated statistics continues to be an issue in order to conduct gender disaggregated analysis of the e-commerce field.** In the training of consultants contracted to conduct the eTrade Readiness Assessments, inclusion of women and organisations representing women's interest are emphasised. This was confirmed by both the ECDE Programme team, and the consultants interviewed. Until recently, there was however no explicit mentioning of gender equality in the ToRs for national consultants but since this issue was identified in the evaluation, this has now been included. Also, there were no mentions of HRBA principles that should guide the consultancies and consultation processes. If other aspects are to be included, such as an analysis of whom the most vulnerable people are, it requires additional resources and should be clearly reflected in the ToRs, which has now been reflected. If gender considerations and rights issues are to be taken properly into account in these assessments, it requires time and proper discussion of these aspects. However, it could be considered to guide consultants by suggesting a few key documents such as the Universal Periodic Reviews that reports on human rights challenges in a given context as well as the Periodic Reviews of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) for countries that have ratified this Convention. These key documents could be included as point of departures for defining what inequalities e-commerce and the digital economy for development can realistically address.

**Finding 45: The ECDE Programme is accountable towards governments and partners, however, there is a need to ensure clearer communication on the extent to which UNCTAD can support implementation of recommendations.** In general, persons interviewed for this evaluation reflect a great trust in the ECDE Programme team and the easy and frank communication has been highlighted. Both consultants, partners, eTrade for Women participants have emphasised the team's responsiveness. Nevertheless, there is a high expectation from government stakeholders that, for instance, the eTrade Readiness Assessments will lead to resource mobilisation and additional support from UNCTAD. While this is a difficult challenge to solve there is a need to be more *transparent, realistic and accountable* towards governments on what can be expected after the eTrade Readiness Assessment has been conducted. UNCTAD has taken initiatives to ensure more transparency by developing a brochure on what kind of support UNCTAD can provide as well as a matrix on what eTrade for all partners can contribute with in terms of implementation. While the brochure provides clarity on what kind of support can be accessed it might also lead to high expectations from governments that financial support for implementation can be acquired. As mentioned above, the case from Iraq where the government applied for several support schemes in UNCTAD (not only the ECDE Programme) indicated that often the main concern for countries is to obtain funding. When funding is not available, it might lead to disappointments. Currently, there are limited possibilities for the Programme team to directly support the resource mobilisation process within countries and an increasing number of eTrade Readiness Assessments produced further challenges the team's ability to follow up, despite the attempts done through the ISM process. This underlines the importance of securing additional regular budgetary resources in order to allow for stronger support to follow-up processes.

#### 4.5 Programme coherence and synergies

**Finding's summary: There is strong coherence between research analysis and consensus building activities and both eTrade for Women and eTrade Readiness Assessments were born out of the partnership-building activities. In the area of technical cooperation, there are good examples of linkage to other UN organisations at country-level and the ECDE Programme has been proactive in this regard. However, the lack of presence within countries has demonstrated the challenges on maintaining a fluent dialogue with partners. Thus, although the ambitions of the Programme to integrate the three pillars and the partnership element - as envisaged in the ToC - have been achieved to a large extent within most areas of work, opportunities for synergy could still be further explored.**

**Finding 46: The Programme has managed to create good synergies between interventions across different pillars and the partnership dimension and continue to explore opportunities for better connections between some initiatives.** For instance, the choice of topics for the IGE sessions is informed by results from the research work as well as from the technical cooperation activities, to the extent that member States draw on findings from eTrade Readiness Assessments. Likewise, the research and analytical work included in the DER's and the Technical Notes on ICT for Development (ICT4D) is presented at the IGE sessions, as well as at other meetings and workshops attended by member States. At the same time, the outcomes of the IGE inform decision on the selection of topics for future research in the DER and the Technical Notes. The eTrade Readiness Assessments also contribute with inputs into the DERs as well as to the eCommerce Weeks where they are presented together with e-commerce strategies.

Most of the eTrade Readiness Assessments draw on UNCTAD's research and analytical work. This makes a strong linkage between these areas of work. In addition to this, different ad hoc events have also been organised by the Programme to present particular UNCTAD research and analytical products to the eTrade Readiness focal points (for instance, a separate presentation of the DER was

done on 16 November 2021). However, it was also noted by the evaluators during the field mission and from interviews that often information on UNCTAD's research and analytical products is not further distributed by the focal points. Therefore, key stakeholders within countries are mostly unaware of UNCTAD's work in this area and how it could benefit them. Among those country stakeholders that had knowledge of UNCTAD's publications, a wish was expressed that these publications would be presented in a less technical way and with more country cases included. Thus, while space is limited in global publications, the possibilities for including more case studies in other publications could be explored.

So far it has not been possible to develop a strong link between the eTrade Readiness Assessments conducted and the eTrade for Women activities. While the eTrade for Women initiative is still in its early days, it would still be possible to make use of the eTrade Readiness Assessments as part of the Masterclasses to provide an example of how different policy areas are interlinked. Likewise, since the process of the eTrade Readiness Assessments include consultations and engagement with female entrepreneurs, some of these women could be recruited from the Masterclasses. According to Masterclass participants and other key stakeholders, this is currently not happening. For instance, the female entrepreneurs who were invited for the national key stakeholder workshop in the recently completed eTrade Readiness Assessment in Kenya were not involved with eTrade for Women. They were however invited as "female role models" who had received female entrepreneur awards in Kenya. Female entrepreneurs from Kenya who had attended Masterclasses were not aware of the ongoing eTrade Readiness Assessment process. Similarly, in Uganda, eTrade for Women participants had no knowledge of the eTrade Readiness Assessment conducted back in 2018, which could however have been included in the Masterclasses as a point of reference and also to help participants to better understand the holistic ecosystem approach.

**Finding 47: The national eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies, supported by UNCTAD, have provided a useful point of departure for initiating and structuring regional e-commerce strategy development processes.** In East Africa, the eTrade Readiness Assessments prepared for Uganda (2018) and Tanzania (2020) were considered a "model" for the other countries in the region when preparing the national baselines/diagnosis as basis for development of the regional e-commerce strategy. According to interviews with policymakers in Uganda, their national eTrade Readiness Assessment provided them with a clear idea of the steps needed to be taken to develop e-commerce also compared to other countries in the region that are considered more developed on e-commerce (e.g. Kenya and Rwanda). In the Pacific, a regional e-commerce strategy and roadmap has been developed and approved (October 2021), based on 10 national E-commerce Assessments<sup>94</sup> undertaken, all based on the methodology developed by UNCTAD, as to ensure that results would be comparable and suitable for consolidation. In West Africa, interviews with country policymakers confirmed that it had been a huge advantage for the regional process, that several of the countries in the region had completed national eTrade Readiness Assessments before embarking on a regional strategy process since this provided a common basis. Finally, the current work on the African continental e-commerce strategy is also making use of UNCTAD's previous work in this area.

**Finding 48: The ECDE Programme team has acted proactively in reaching out to colleagues in the UN system at country level to look for synergies and coherence in support to development of e-commerce and digital economy. This has resulted in concrete examples of joint activities and collaboration, but also demonstrated the difficulties for UNCTAD not being present within countries.** The most notable achievement is UNCTAD's joining of forces with UNDP and UNCDF

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<sup>94</sup> Samoa, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and Federates States of Micronesia.

in the Pacific Digital Economy Programme (PDEP).<sup>95</sup> Here, the ECDE Programme contributes with several research and technical assistance activities, including a regional DER for the Pacific, assistance with the design of national e-commerce strategies, regional training and support on data collection and measuring of e-commerce and assessment of the possibility to establish an eTrade for Women community in the Pacific. The ECDE Programme team has also reached out to UN Resident Coordinator Offices (UN RCO) in order for them to assist in mobilising partners on the ground and creating synergies around e-commerce and digital economy for development issues. This has resulted in collaboration on launches of the eTrade Readiness Assessments prepared for, respectively, Benin, Niger, Iraq, Malawi and Ivory Coast as well as a dialogue on follow-up actions. A particularly positive experience from UN multi-agency coordination has been with the Lao PDR UN RCO which led to a mapping of e-commerce-related partner interventions in the country (was also done in Rwanda and Senegal) and mainstreaming of e-commerce development support into the UN country programming framework. However, it is important to note that since these processes only progress slowly it is still to be seen what the outcome will be. On the other hand, the evaluators' field visit to Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, as well as interviews with other key stakeholders, has demonstrated the difficulties for UNCTAD in maintaining a close relationship and interaction with UN country offices over a longer period of time, when not being present on the ground. In both Kenya and Rwanda, there are currently no joint activities on e-commerce and the digital economy going on between UNCTAD and the UN country offices while in Uganda there is a connection with the UNDP office on a possible joint e-commerce strategy project.

**Finding 49: An increased demand for support to digital economy and e-commerce development within developing countries, and more donors engaging in this area, increases the need for coordination of efforts in this area.** While the eTrade for all initiative potentially provides a useful mechanism for limiting redundancy and try to inform all relevant partners of any upcoming eTrade Readiness Assessments to be conducted, this is not always sufficient to avoid potential duplication of efforts within countries. Despite the fact that the products offered by partners are not identical, some of the same elements and stakeholders are still involved in the processes, leading to inefficiencies.

For instance, in *Benin*, the eTrade Readiness Assessment coincided with a diagnostic study prepared through the World Bank Digital Economy for Africa (DE4A) flagship initiative, which supports the digital transformation strategy for Africa prepared by the African Union (AU).<sup>96</sup> It is noted however, that there are some differences between UNCTAD's request driven approach and the World Bank studies, which are conducted regardless of requests. Likewise, while UNCTAD aims at integrating elements of capacity building, the World Bank study is primarily based on desk review. In addition, although the EIF's Diagnostic Trade Integration Study Update (DTISU) is a broader framework, it does also embrace e-commerce from a trade perspective. In some cases, this is being done in cooperation with UNCTAD or by using UNCTAD methodology. Also, the Commonwealth, ITU and ITC are conducting related studies at country level and these are not always done in coordination with UNCTAD's work. This demonstrates the inherent difficulties in transferring the Geneva-based dialogue down to the decentralised decision-making processes and concrete actions at country level. This is the core aspect the eTrade for all initiative strives to address but it takes time.

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<sup>95</sup> The objective of the PDEP is to support the development of inclusive digital economies in the Pacific.

<sup>96</sup> The World Bank is conducting e-commerce and digital economy diagnostics as part of the Digital Economy for Africa (DE4A)<sup>96</sup> programme, where country diagnostics provide a snapshot of the state of the digital economy in a given country for each of the five pillars of the DE4A initiative (digital infrastructure, digital public platforms, digital financial services, digital businesses, and digital skills).



## 4.6 Sustainability

**Finding's summary:** Beneficiary countries are committed to continue working towards an enhanced framework for e-commerce and the digital economy for development. Catalytic effects from UNCTAD's support are observed in all regions. Regional e-commerce strategies are under development in three different regions where eTrade Readiness Assessments have been conducted within several countries. This indicates that strategic partnerships at regional level have been established, as envisaged in the ToC. The ECDE Programme is however heavily dependent on donor funds, and despite increasing commitments, there is still a significant funding gap in view of the 2023 target. In addition, the regular budget support to the Programme needs to be reviewed considering UNCTAD's strengthened mandate in this area, and the need to further enhance the use and uptake of the Programmes work on research and analysis to complement interventions within the other Programme pillars and the partnership dimension.

**Finding 50:** There is good evidence of beneficiary countries' commitment to continue working towards the Programme objectives beyond the end of UNCTAD's support. While the first batch of eTrade Readiness Assessments largely could be considered "first movers" in the area of e-commerce and digital economy diagnosis, the development of these, boosted by the Covid-19 pandemic, has further enhanced the interest and demand from the supported countries within this field. This is clearly evidenced by experiences from both Asia/the Pacific, East and West Africa.

Experiences from the first eTrade Readiness Assessments (prepared before Covid-19) was that it often took some time before implementation took off. The actions proposed in the Action Matrix were considered rather generic and it was difficult to generate a real ownership and high political engagement within the governments, often further complicated by unclear mandates and roles/responsibilities (typically between the Ministry of Trade/Commerce and the Ministry of ICT). The situation was further challenged by lack of capacities and understanding of the topic within key governmental institutions and funding constraints, including limited ability to mobilise donor funding. Under these circumstances, progress and continued commitment to the e-commerce and digital economy agenda depended a lot on the presence of personalities who could drive these processes forward within the countries and regions. This is best evidenced by the case of *Cambodia*, which was the first country where the eTrade Readiness Assessments were piloted. The following e-commerce and digital economy development in that country, which later expanded to the Pacific sub-region, was largely driven by a strong personal engagement on the ground. In other cases, the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic has boosted attention to and development of e-commerce and digital economies both by governments and among donors. The implemented activities have been well-aligned to the recommended actions presented in the Action Matrices.<sup>97</sup>

In terms of the research and analytical work, the DERs are considered key reference publications within the area of digital economy and e-commerce and as discussed in Section 4.2.1 UNCTAD is considered one of the main sources of information within this field. The DERs are frequently cited in academic articles and research pieces and their content and analysis will remain relevant for use in debates and discussions beyond the Programme period.

**Finding 51:** Catalytic effects from UNCTAD's support are observed in all regions. In several countries, the request for an eTrade Readiness Assessment has been based on experiences from neighbouring countries. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic has further boosted this demand, to an extent where UNCTAD is not able to accommodate all these requests with the current financial and

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<sup>97</sup> See "Fast-tracking implementation of eTrade Readiness Assessments", UNCTAD 2020.

human resources available. By the end of 2021, 29 eTrade Readiness Assessments had been finalised while a number were progressing e.g. in Kenya.<sup>98</sup> The eTrade Readiness Assessments conducted have further catalysed e-commerce strategy development processes as this has often been one of the recommended actions in the Action Matrices. However, while still only a few individual countries have gone through an e-commerce strategy development process (in some countries, e-commerce strategy development is in process), UNCTAD's work has spurred development of a regional e-commerce assessment for the Pacific region covering all 14 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) members and based on findings from the 10 eTrade Readiness Assessments that were available in 2020 (there are now 11), five of which were prepared by UNCTAD. In addition, by using eTrade Readiness Assessments as diagnostic tools, the East African Community (EAC) Secretariat, the PIFS and ECOWAS have all embarked on developing of regional e-commerce strategies. These processes are all to some extent inspired by the eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategy methodology and approach applied by UNCTAD and by UNCTAD's diagnostic work at country level.

**Finding 52: Despite the ECDE Programme's ability to attract a growing amount of donor funding during the implementation period, in particular programmatic funding in response to the demand for work in each pillar, the relatively small increase in the regular budget funding makes it challenging to sustain the supported Programme interventions.** Around 75% of the current ECDE Programme staff is contracted through donor funding, mainly within the technical cooperation pillar. While this affects the capacity of the Programme to deliver in accordance to UNCTAD's mandate, in particular related to the Programmes work on research and analysis, it also presents uncertainty on the ability to continue and follow-up on implemented Programme activities as well as on retaining of staff members. Thus, the sustainability of the Programme interventions is currently challenged by a relatively low level of regular budget funding and a high dependence on donor (project) funding. In terms of the latter, an inherent risk is that despite expression of a continued and renewed interest by ECDE programme donors to contribute to more sustainable, programmatic longer-term commitments, the fact that many donors are now facing cuts in their development cooperation budgets due to Covid-19 may at some point also affect the donor's ability to contribute to the ECDE programme. These serious funding and resource challenge have become further critical in view of the Bridgetown Covenant's call for a strengthening of the area of e-commerce and the digital economy.

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<sup>98</sup> List of Programme output 2019-2021, August 2021.

## 5 Conclusions and recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusions

The evaluation conclusions are presented below, based on the findings. The sequencing of the conclusions follows the structure of the evaluation questions.

**Conclusion 1:** The **relevance** of the ECDE Programme **design and focus** has been high, building on the three programme pillars supported by a partnership approach. The Programme has responded timely to critical gaps and demands within developing countries and has become a first mover to set the scene for e-commerce and digital economy for development within many LDCs and developing countries. While the **Covid-19** pandemic has challenged implementation, it has at the same time boosted the level of attention and engagement in e-commerce and the digital economy within developing countries and highlighted the need to ensure that the digital divide is not further widened, thus confirming the relevance of the Programme. The dynamics and supply and demand mechanisms are rapidly changing, thus an important task for the ECDE Programme will be to continue to adapt its products and working approaches in order to remain relevant and a preferred option for developing countries when looking for support on e-commerce and digital economy for development. The ability to do so however, largely depends on the amount and flexibility of the resources allocated to the Programme.

**Conclusion 2:** Further **consolidation and follow-up** will be needed to support many of the already implemented and ongoing Programme interventions which are still at an early stage. Most of the deliverables within the **technical cooperation** pillar have focused on diagnostics and empowerment processes, from which it is in most cases still too early to identify concrete results. In the area of **research and analysis**, the Programme has delivered high quality products which however need to become better targeted and disseminated to ensure a higher uptake of data and research work including for policymaking. In view of this, it is encouraging that a new communication strategy is forthcoming in UNCTAD, since the ECDE Programme relies heavily on the institution's Communications, Information and External Relations Section for its outreach. At the same time, there is a huge need for countries to become able to provide better and more disaggregated statistics. Enhancement of capacities within national statistical bureaus for collecting and analysing such statistics could also help inform other aspects of technical cooperation and research.

**Conclusion 3:** The use of a **programmatic approach** has led to efficiency gains and has facilitated developing and implementation of holistic solutions and approaches in support of the Agenda 2030 and a number of the SDGs. Several of these solutions and approaches have been developed across Programme pillars and through multistakeholder engagement. Within LDCs in particular, the holistic ecosystem approach of the eTrade Readiness Assessments has been instrumental for enhancing the understanding of the complexity of e-commerce and digital economy and has supported countries introducing cross-ministerial collaboration and engagement with private sector actors. Multistakeholder collaboration has been supported at national, regional and global level, in support of **SDG 17** on Global partnerships. The eTrade for Women activities have explicitly contributed to empowerment of women (in support of **SDG 5**) which has embraced innovation and technology, often dominated by men, and supported establishing of companies that strive to find digital solutions for inclusive development, thus contributing to **SDG 9** and **SDG 10**.

Some inefficiencies have occurred in the implementation process relation to the **timing** and possible **follow-up** on some of the implemented technical cooperation interventions, mainly due to the Covid-19 pandemic and bureaucracy and capacity issues within beneficiary countries. In addition, a relatively large share of short-term and earmarked extra-budgetary project funding in the Programme

budget has created some inflexibility in the way some of the technical cooperation products and services have been “supplied” by the Programme.

**Conclusion 4: A holistic and dynamic ToC and results framework** developed for the Programme, provides a strong platform for **adaptive programming**. Within this framework, the Programme team will need to continue to enhance its understanding and documentation of how and to what extent the supported interventions are contributing to development results i.e. how and to what extent outputs are contributing to the next level in the results chain (the intermediate outcome level). While learning is at the centre of the Programme team’s work, it could still become better integrated into the programme cycle and made more cross-cutting.

The Programme ToC and the results framework have been developed, tested and updated, based on learning and discussions during the implementation process, including as part of this evaluation process. This has now resulted in development of a more operational ToC and results framework with the intention to also update the M&E framework, with a better conceptual understanding and sequencing of activities, outputs and outcomes. More need still to be done to document the qualitative results of the work. This will help the Programme to further exchange lessons learned and good examples from these processes across countries and regions.

**Conclusion 5: Partnerships** have been successfully established with support from the ECDE Programme. In particular through the eTrade for all initiative, it has been possible to attract still more members that contribute with complementary competencies in support of the holistic approach needed for e-commerce and digital economy for development. While there are some good examples of concrete cooperation among partners in relation to development of outputs (e.g. eTrade Readiness Assessments, eCommerce Weeks, PDEP, new E-commerce Training Course) one possible area to be further explored is more collaborative efforts among the partners in support of implementation on the ground (e.g. in relation to recommended actions from the eTrade Readiness Assessments). This will require an enhanced strategic and systematic focus within the eTrade for all initiative on identification of opportunities for joint programming in view of what the different partners can offer in terms of funding and expertise. Such an element could also be built even more systematically into the eTrade Readiness Assessment process e.g. through a concluding roundtable with partners and donors to secure funding and encourage joint collaboration for implementation of recommendations (this approach was piloted with good success in Myanmar).

**Conclusion 6:** While **gender equality** and **human rights** are to some extent mainstreamed into the Programme, this is **not done systematically** throughout all levels of results and indicators in its results framework. Moreover, although it is widely acknowledged that e-commerce and digital economy offer particularly good opportunities for inclusion of marginalised population groups, including people living with a disability, this has not been consistently reflected in the processes. There is a need to further enhance and incorporate the **inclusiveness** aspect, in particular with a view to ensure the participation of non-governmental stakeholders such as private sector and women’s organisations.

The Masterclasses are **empowering women** in sectors often dominated by men and has also managed to attract representatives from marginalised groups among its participants, even though there has not been any explicit focus on this. This is a good indication of the potential space for inclusion within e-commerce and digital economy. Communities established under the eTrade for Women initiative are still at an early stage of development and further consolidation efforts will be required to seize their full potential. So far, mainly Advocates have engaged in advocacy work but this aspect could become further strengthened also for Masterclass participants to enable them to influence policymaking in a more gender sensitive direction.

**Conclusion 7:** There are good examples of **internal complementarity** between activities implemented within the three pillars (e.g. between research and the inter-governmental work and between different activities within the technical cooperation pillar) and there is scope for further cross-collaboration in the Programme. The partnership dimension has played an essential role in connecting the dots between the three pillars and the eCommerce Week offers a good example of how visibility of the Programme is essential for promoting research results, linking partners to each other and further enhancing the dialogue in the IGE meetings that are planned back-to-back with the eCommerce Week. The adjusted ToC and results framework provides a good starting point for further internal discussions within the Programme team on how to further enhance synergies.

The efforts made already by the Programme to tap into existing in-country structures established by partners or other agencies, such as the UN Country Teams, are important steps for ensuring **external complementarity** and could be further strengthened to enhance coordination of support to implementation processes within countries. As more donors, particularly at country level, are now offering support to e-commerce and digital economy for development, this has increased the supply of different products within this area. Although these products may be different in nature and content from those offered by the ECDE Programme, it still increases the risk for inefficiencies in terms of redundancies and quality issues, if no proper coordination efforts take place.

**Conclusion 8:** From a **sustainability** perspective, it is important to note that UNCTAD has now got a reconfirmed mandate from member States to strengthen its work on e-commerce and digital economy for development. In addition, there is good evidence of beneficiary countries' commitment to continue working towards the Programme objectives beyond the end of UNCTAD's support. Some **catalytical effects** are already noted, both across countries as well as from national to sub-regional and regional levels, for instance in relation to the eTrade Readiness Assessments and the e-commerce strategy development processes. The Covid-19 pandemic has spurred developing country governments' interest in e-commerce and digital economy for development.

However, while the ECDE Programme clearly has a strong forward-looking potential, its sustainability is currently challenged by a strong imbalance in its funding composition, where a heavy dependence on **donor funding** calls for an urgent need to strengthen the regular budget funding base to the Programme. This was already recommended in an evaluation from 2017<sup>99</sup> and the Bridgetown Covenant's call to further strengthen the programme emphasises this point. Thus, in order to ensure financial sustainability of the ECDE Programme, **it will be important that extra-budgetary contributions become accompanied by increased UNCTAD regular budget resources** to ensure that the Programme is able to deliver fully on its mandate.

## 5.2 Strategic Recommendations

The findings and conclusions presented in this report leads to the following strategic recommendations presented below.

### **Strategic Recommendation 1 (for the Secretary-General of UNCTAD and UNCTAD Management):**

In view of the evaluation findings and the Bridgetown Covenant, which instructed UNCTAD to strengthen its work in the digital area, **UNCTAD should consider ways for allocating additional regular budget funding to the ECDE Programme** to ensure that it is better able to deliver

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<sup>99</sup> External evaluation of UNCTAD subprogramme 4: Technology and logistics, 2017.

sustainably the results sought by UNCTAD's member States. This may include a comparative assessment of staffing and resources currently allocated to different tasks.

The impressive expansion of the ECDE programme up to now has been almost entirely driven by extra-budgetary donor funding. However, the role of regular budget funds is very important to complement the extra-budgetary donor funding for primarily technical cooperation, to ensure that sufficient core resources will be available for a balanced and coherent implementation of the holistic ECDE Programme approach across the three pillars and the partnerships dimension. This is also essential in order to limit staff turnover and to be competitive in attracting qualified staff members. Since a large share of the donor funding is still earmarked and focused on support to technical cooperation and partnership activities, it is in particular the research and analysis and the intergovernmental work that suffer from relatively small increases in resource allocation over the period. This currently hampers the possibilities of the Programme to ensure sufficient outreach, follow-up and synergy effects from the otherwise high-quality research products produced by the ECDE Programme.

**Strategic Recommendation 2 (for the ECDE Programme donors):**

**Donors to the Programme could aim at following the examples of the governments of Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands, who provide increasingly longer term, flexible and non-earmarked funding support to the ECDE Programme.** This would allow the Programme team to further strengthen its adaptive programmatic approach which is fundamental to maintain the Programme's high relevance and facilitate its further development in a rapidly evolving area.

A good and constructive dialogue and trustful working relationship has already been developed with the Programme donors, notably through the establishment of the Core Donor Advisory Board. This builds a strong platform moving forward. Since adaptive programming relies on a higher risk taking for all partners concerned, it is essential with good communication, close collaboration and quick turn around on decision making between the donors and ECDE Programme management.

**Strategic recommendation 3 (for DTL Management):**

The main recommendation to the DTL management is to **focus the remaining part of the current Programme period (up to end-2023) on consolidation of initiatives that have already been initiated and not launch any new major initiatives within the remaining Programme period.** This is in particular important if the ECDE Programme is unable to attract the amount of resources anticipated in its budget, which then further limits the possibility to expand its scope at this point of time. Thus, while it will be important for the Programme to remain adaptive and flexible to its interventions, only minor adjustments to the existing portfolio should be considered for the remaining part of the current Programme period. More fundamental adjustments should be explored mainly as preparation for a possible new Programme phase beyond 2023 (see recommendation 4 below).

During the first period of Programme implementation, several innovative initiatives have been launched by the ECDE Programme and other initiatives have been continuously adapted to reflect the constant evolution and dynamics in the area of e-commerce and digital economy for development. Most of this has taken place in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. This has caused delays and prolonged implementation periods for a number of the supported interventions, and it has been necessary to convert most of the planned physical interventions to virtual interactions. Thus, many initiatives are still at an early stage of development, and results need to be tracked to better inform next steps.

#### **Strategic Recommendation 4 (for DTL Management):**

**For the remaining period of the current Programme plan, and as part of the preparation and design of the Programme phase beyond 2023, it is recommended that the ECDE Programme team will take on board the following concrete proposed adjustments:**

- For the *research and analysis* area, there is need to further **integrate and communicate key data and analytical results through the technical cooperation activities**. This may call for more dedicated skills and resources to communication and outreach within the Programme. There is a huge interest and demand from country stakeholders to learn more about trends and experiences from other countries/regions in this field and how this could relate to the situation in their own country and institution. Therefore, additional **measures and mechanisms to enable a wider engagement and outreach of research products** should be introduced with a view to enable a higher utility and uptake for policymaking. More specifically, and with a direct link to a new *UNCTAD communication and outreach strategy*, this could include: i) development of a specific Programme **outreach strategy** with a clear focus on how to reach and track target groups/audiences more effectively; ii) a **broader engagement** of key stakeholder groups (e.g. eTrade for Women Advocates) in brainstorming/discussions of possible research topics (although it is still UNCTAD who will eventually decide on the specific research topics); and iii) use of **more innovative and creative ways to communicate results** from the research and analytical work e.g. through social media.
- Stronger efforts should be put into **capacity development of national stakeholders, including focal points, on collecting of data for production of statistics related to the digital economy and e-commerce**, applying and building on the revised UNCTAD Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy 2020. This should include the capacity of these actors to collect gender and human rights disaggregated data, and hence allow for better analysis and mainstreaming of these issues in the ECDE Programme work. The human resources within the ECDE Programme team have recently been strengthened in this area, which should enable this enhanced focus.
- For the *intergovernmental work*, a system for better **monitoring and tracking of stakeholder feedback from IGE sessions** should be implemented, allowing for a clearer understanding of outcomes and identification of opportunities for closer linkages within the Programme as appropriate.
- For the *eTrade Readiness Assessment processes*, it should be considered whether the selection of countries for support could include stronger indications of country ownership aspects, inter-institutional cooperation at the country level and multistakeholder engagement as key selection criteria. Further, the next iteration of the ECDE Programme could be informed by **an independent evaluation of the eTrade Readiness Assessments** with a particular view to assess how to ensure and strengthen its continued relevance and usefulness beyond 2023. This should include a mapping and comparative assessment of related diagnostics offered by other development partners, a review of the relevance of its concept and approach within different contexts, as well as an assessment of its concrete results.
- Within the *partnership approach*, mainly related to the *eTrade for all initiative*, efforts should be done to further activate the **collaborative potentials among partners** with a particular view to support implementation of transformative actions at country level. This could include developing of pilot joint initiative(s) within one or few countries, involving several eTrade for all members (e.g. in support to implementation of recommended actions from eTrade Readiness Assessments). In a forward-looking perspective, this could lead towards introduction of simple **joint work/activity planning** within the eTrade for all initiative in order to enhance the commitment from the members and inspire more collaborative actions within countries.
- For the *eTrade for Women initiative* efforts should be made to **strengthen the established communities**, in particular the aspects of networking as this is a major reason for female

entrepreneurs to join the Masterclasses. There should be a stronger focus on the content and build-in some form of exclusivity (for instance, “rewards” could be given as a recognition to particularly well-performing community members and access to grant opportunities where participation in the community could make part of the selection criteria to motivate active participation). Especially in some regions, as the Balkans but also to some extent in East Africa, there are several other communities and forums available to entrepreneurs so the exclusivity of the UNCTAD community needs to be clear before inviting female entrepreneurs outside the Masterclasses to join. The communities could also be used for raising awareness among the eTrade for Women community members on what UNCTAD stands for and how they can benefit from UNCTAD’s work and products. This could be done more effectively by introducing and engaging them more in other Programme activities such as eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategy developing processes.

- The ***ToC and the results framework*** went through a further refinement and operationalization as part of the evaluation process, and it is important that the revised framework will now lead to the intended revision of the M&E framework and be used as a dynamic tool by the team to manage and guide planning and implementation of interventions across the three pillars and the partnership dimension. In a forward-looking perspective, the ToC and its linkages to the results framework could still be enhanced to further strengthen adaptive management principles within the Programme and the understanding on how outputs from the ECDE Programme contribute to the next result level (immediate outcomes). This could include: i) integration of **learning sessions** into the project cycle with a view to extract lessons learned after completion of major activities (e.g. DER publications, eTrade Readiness Assessments, Masterclasses etc.); ii) introduction of **a more participatory and dynamic M&E approach** (e.g. Outcome Harvesting could be a useful approach to this); iii) introduction of **brief follow-up surveys** six months after concluding of major events (e.g. to eCommerce Week and Masterclass participants); iv) introduction of **process<sup>100</sup> and learning<sup>101</sup> indicators** (across the three pillars and the partnership dimension); and v) inclusion of **more qualitative targets/indicators** in the M&E framework (to enhance the focus on the qualitative dimensions of the results and less focus on numbers).
- As a larger and wider group of donors and other funding actors now seem to recognise the importance of e-commerce and digital economy for development in view of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, **the ECDE Programme should prepare an updated strategic assessment and action plan on current and emerging opportunities for further diversifying and broadening its extra-budgetary funding base.** The fact that a large number of country requests for eTrade Readiness Assessments received by the Programme are still awaiting funding may represent a good starting point.

**Strategic Recommendation 5 (for DTL Management): As appropriate, gender equality and human rights aspects should be strengthened and become more consistently reflected in the implemented Programme activities and the outputs produced.** More specifically, this could include:

- Conducting an **analysis of gender equality and human rights** for the entire ECDE

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<sup>100</sup> Process indicators should focus on the main processes that contribute to the achievement of outcomes. Examples of process indicators could refer to *structural* or *functional* issues, such as e.g. internal or external working arrangements; engagement and dialogue with partners, supporting functions (e.g. communication and platforms); fund raising etc. They could also refer to e.g. the quality of training provided, targeting of specific groups or inclusion of gender/human issues.

<sup>101</sup> Learning indicators could relate to e.g. sharing/uptake of knowledge and best practices within and across programme pillars as well as within the partnership dimension, testing of innovative and piloting initiatives/products, documentation of lessons learned, linkages/visits to knowledge management platforms etc.



Programme, followed by developing a programme-wide gender equality and human rights strategy. This should showcase results, indicators and actions to be integrated in all areas of the Programme's work, to further enhance gender mainstreaming and social inclusion.

- Based on such analysis, explicit reference to application of a **HRBA in research and technical cooperation**, entailing clear explicit linkage to human rights (refer for instance the Universal Periodic Review or the CEDAW Periodic Review) and who the most vulnerable groups are and whether this group can realistically be included in the technical cooperation), ensuring accountability, empowerment, participation, non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups.<sup>102</sup> A stronger focus on these aspects in analytical work will also allow for greater discussions of this in IGE sessions and at multistakeholder engagements (for instance, it could be emphasised in the application for conducting thematic sessions at the eCommerce Week that topics integrating gender equality and human rights dimensions will be given priority). In technical support to statistics, it should be further assessed whether there is scope for including data on company owner's age, gender and whether this person belongs to a minority group.
- Inclusion of a **specific session for consultants conducting eTrade Readiness Assessments on how to mainstream gender and ensure application of a HRBA in the process**. This could be concretised by developing checklists for consultants.
- Actively encourage enrolment of **marginalised groups in the eTrade for Women application processes** to clearly signal non-discrimination as a key value. While marginalised groups can be difficult to reach, a pro-active outreach strategy should be developed to ensure marginalised people's potential participation. Allying and sharing opportunities with CSOs representing such groups could be a first step.

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<sup>102</sup> Human Rights, Poverty and Governance in the Least Developed Countries: Rights-based Approaches Towards a New Framework of Cooperation, Contributions of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. May 2011.

Figure 13: EQs, findings, conclusions and recommendations summarised

DAC	Evaluation questions	Findings	Conclusions	Strategic Recommendations
Relevance	EQ 1: Did the design properly address the needs of beneficiaries & stakeholders to close knowledge gaps and strengthen capacities towards building inclusive digitale economies? What has been the role of Covid-19? How have constraints affected & have they been appropriately addressed?	<b>Finding 1-7:</b> The Programme is highly relevant, not least in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has strengthened the consensus around the digital economy and e-commerce for development. While activities have addressed govts', and not least LDCs' needs, intra-governmental political turf have prevailed as a major obstacle, despite attempts to mitigate these.	<b>Concl. 1:</b> The relevance of the ECDE Programme design and focus is high, building on the three Programme pillars supported by a partnership approach. The Programme has responded timely to critical gaps and demands within developing countries and has become a first mover to set the scene for e-commerce and digital economy for development within many LDCs and dev. countries.	<b>For the SG &amp; UNCTAD Management</b> <b>Rec. 1:</b> In view of the eval. findings and the Bridgetown Covenant, which instructed UNCTAD to strengthen its work in the digital area, UNCTAD should consider ways for allocating additional regular budget funding to the ECDE Programme to ensure that it is better able to deliver sustainably the results sought by UNCTAD's member States.
Effectiveness	EQ 2: What are the key achievements towards intended results? What is the likelihood that objectives will be achieved incl. relevant SDG targets? Have there been catalytic effects at national/regional/global levels? Are stakeholders satisfied with delivered support and quality of outputs?	<b>Finding 8-13:</b> There is a high level of user satisfaction with research incl. the DERs & UNCTAD is one of several important sources for information on e-commerce and the digital economy. However, the lack of an updated outreach strategy for research in UNCTAD combined with limited resources has limited the ability for ensuring outreach and tracking use and uptake of research <b>Finding 14-16:</b> There is high confidence in the secretariat & background notes are considered of substantial quality. The number of member States participating in meetings has continued to increase indicating a high interest and relevance of the work. Statistics are a key concern that needs additional attention.	<b>Concl. 2:</b> The ECDE Programme implementation process is still at an early stage, and so far most of the deliverables within the technical cooperation pillar have focused on diagnostics and empowerment processes, from which it is still too early to identify concrete results. Thus, further consolidation and follow-up will be needed to support many of the already implemented and ongoing interventions. In the area of research and analysis, the Programme has delivered high quality products that also informs the IGEs. <b>Concl. 3:</b> The programmatic approach has led to efficiency gains as compared to the project modality. This has facilitated implementation of an impressive amount and variety of products. The pandemic, inter-institutional challenges & political turfs has created inefficiencies in relation to the timing and possible follow-up on some of the technical cooperation interventions. A relatively large budget share consisting of short-term and earmarked extra budgetary project funding also creates some inflexibility in the way some of the technical cooperation products and services can be "supplied" by the Programme.	<b>For donors</b> <b>Rec. 2:</b> Donors to the Programme could aim at following the examples of the governments of Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands, who provide increasingly longer term, flexible and non-earmarked funding support to the ECDE Programme. This would allow for further strengthening/consolidation of an adaptive approach in a rapid evolving area
Efficiency	EQ 3: Have implementation modalities been adequate to ensure expected outcomes in a cost-effective and timely manner? Has the M&E framework enabled evidence-based decision making? Have partnerships been established in an efficient manner?	<b>Finding 17-26:</b> eTrade Readiness Assessments in LDCs, have been essential to put e-commerce & the digital economy on the agenda & establish structures for multistakeholder collaboration at nat. & regional levels, thus progressing towards SDG 17. eTrade for Women has empowered female-led businesses to enhance their companies (SDG 5) but the recently established communities are still at an early stage of development and further consolidation efforts will be required to seize their full potential.	<b>Concl. 4:</b> A holistic and dynamic ToC and results framework developed for the Programme, provides a strong platform for adaptive programming. Within this framework, the Programme need to continue to enhance its understanding and documentation of how and to what extent outputs are contributing to the development results. While learning is at the centre of the work, it could still become better integrated into the programme cycle. This will help to further exchange lessons and understand the Programme's contribution within a complex sphere with many actors	<b>For DTL management</b> <b>Rec. 3:</b> The focus the remaining part of the current programme period (up to end-2023) should be on consolidation of initiatives that have already been initiated and not launch any new major initiatives within the remaining programme period.
HRBA & gender	EQ 4: To what extent were a HRBA and a gender mainstreaming strategy incorporated in the design and implementation of the intervention, and can results be identified in this regard?	<b>Finding 27-37:</b> The current funding structure creates imbalance between the 3 pillars & inefficiencies in relation to work planning and the scoping and timing of implementation processes. The results framework is a living document which allows for learning, however the mainly quantitative indicators do not capture the complexity of the work well. Partnerships have been established through eTrade for all exemplified e.g. by some joint eTrade Readiness Assessments and eCommerce Weeks, but joint implementation has so far been limited.	<b>Concl. 5:</b> Partnerships have been successfully established and through the eTrade for all initiative and eCommerce Weeks, it has been possible to attract more members that contribute with complementary competencies in support of the holistic approach needed for e-commerce and digital economy for development. However, more collaborative efforts could be done among the partners in support of in-country transformative implementation.	<b>Rec. 4:</b> For the remaining period of the current Programme plan and as part of the preparation of the Programme phase beyond 2023, it is recommended to focus on establishing a comm./outreach strategy, capacity development for production of statistics based on the Manual, refine selection criteria of countries for eTrade Readiness Ass. to ensure proper inter-institutional collaboration, explore additional potentials to support joint programming, strengthen concrete implementation partnerships and eTrade for Women's communities
Coherence	EQ 5: To what extent are Programme activities under the 3 pillars complimentary and conducive for reaching the Programme outcomes? To what extent have the Programme been complimentary to existing global Programmes (UN and non-UN) in supporting beneficiary countries in enhancing their digital readiness?	<b>Finding 38-45:</b> Gender equality concerns are considered and reflected to some extent in the M&E framework, research, Programme activities including eTrade for Women, although a more systematic approach and a thorough gender analysis could enhance this work. There are examples of human rights considerations being taken into account in research and technical cooperation, but these are few, scattered and not systematic.	<b>Concl. 6:</b> While gender equality and human rights are to some extent mainstreamed into the Programme, this is not done systematically. Moreover, although it is widely acknowledged that e-commerce and digital economy offer good opportunities for inclusion, this has not been consistently reflected in the implementation approaches and processes. There is room for further involvement of CSOs representing women and vulnerable groups.	<b>Rec. 5:</b> Gender equality and human rights aspects should be strengthened and become more consistently reflected in the Programme. This should include an explicit reference to human rights, a gender and human rights analysis for the Programme, a stronger focus on social inclusion in research which will then be subject for discussion t the IGEs. Clear signal of human rights value and preference to marginalized groups in applications for eTrade for Women and in sessions for eCommerce Week.
Sustainability	EQ 6: Is there evidence that beneficiary countries of interventions under the Programme are committed to continue working towards the Programme objectives beyond the end of UNCTAD's support? What measures have been built to promote sustainability of outcomes? Is there evidence of continued interest by donors to more longer term commitments?	<b>Finding 46-49:</b> There is strong coherence between research & consensus building and both eTrade for Women and eTrade Readiness Assessments were born out of the partnership-building activities. In the technical cooperation, linkages to other UN organisations at country-level has proactively been strived for but the lack of presence on ground has demonstrated the difficulties on establishing partnerships for implementation.	<b>Concl. 7:</b> There are good examples of internal complementarity between activities implemented within the 3 pillars (e.g. between research and the inter-governmental work and between different activities within technical cooperation), and there is scope for further cross-collaboration in the Programme. The efforts to tap into existing in-country structures established by partners or other agencies, e.g. the UN Country Teams, are important steps to strengthen in-country implementation	
Learning	EQ 7: What adjustments are needed to make the Programme more relevant to beneficiary countries in supporting their efforts to enhance their digital readiness, including responding to emerging challenges?	<b>Finding 50-52:</b> Beneficiary countries are committed to continue working towards an enhanced framework for e-commerce and the digital economy for development. Catalytic effects from UNCTAD's support are observed in all regions. Regional e-commerce strategies are under development in three different regions where eTrade Readiness Assessments have been conducted within several countries.	<b>Concl. 8:</b> From a sustainability perspective, UNCTAD has now got a confirmed mandate and there is good evidence of commitment to continue working towards the Programme objectives. However, sustainability is at stake if the strong imbalance in the funding composition is not addressed.	

## 6 Annexes

### i. Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Questions	Criteria	Key Issue	Judgement Criteria	Means of Verification (source/method)
<p><b>EQ 1:</b> Did the design of the Programme, including choice of activities and deliverables properly address the needs of beneficiaries and stakeholders to close knowledge gaps and strengthen capacities towards building inclusive digital economies?</p> <p>What has been the role of COVID-19 in possible challenges/opportunities for the Programme? If constraints have been experienced, how have they affected Programme objectives and have they been addressed in an appropriate manner?</p>	Relevance	<p>Appropriateness of activities/deliverables to needs of participating countries/target group and partners</p> <p>Participation of key stakeholders and beneficiaries in the Programme design process</p>	<p>The project design targets the right group of beneficiaries and has identified the right mix of partners</p> <p>Reflection of key regional / national knowledge and capacity gaps in the Programme design.</p> <p>Programme deliverables are well aligned with national priorities/development strategies</p>	<p>Desk review, literature study, interviews with UNCTAD (Programme) staff and project participants and external stakeholders, online survey, ToC analysis</p> <p>Field missions</p>
		<p>COVID-19 implications</p>	<p>The Programme has identified and responded to critical challenges and new opportunities emerging from the COVID-19 situation, including those enunciated in the country's COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response Plan (SERP)<sup>103</sup>?</p>	

<sup>103</sup> Plans can be accessed from: [https://data.uninfo.org/Home/\\_DocumentTracker](https://data.uninfo.org/Home/_DocumentTracker)

Evaluation Questions	Criteria	Key Issue	Judgement Criteria	Means of Verification (source/method)
<p><b>EQ 2:</b>            What are the key achievements of the Programme in terms of progress towards the intended results?            What is the likelihood for the programme to achieve the intended objectives, including against relevant SDG targets?            Have there been catalytic effects of the Programme at national/regional/global levels?            To what extent are Programme beneficiaries and other stakeholders satisfied with the support delivered by the Programme and the quality of the outputs?</p>	Effectiveness	Level of results achievement	The Programme interventions contribute to direct outcomes (intended/unintended) as well as wider benefits within the supported countries Critical assumptions / risks have been identified and adequate support/mitigation measures taken	Desk review, interviews with UNCTAD (Programme) staff and project participants and external stakeholders, online survey, focus groups, ToC analysis, social media, Field missions
		Transformative and systemic changes against SDG targets	Programme interventions are contributing to changes in institutional approaches and legal frameworks, resource allocation, attitudes and behaviour in support of longer-term Programme outcomes and impact	
		Catalytical effects	The Programme interventions are contributing to wider engagements beyond the Programme boundaries (e.g. geographically, institutionally, stakeholder wise)	
		User satisfaction	The vast majority of the key stakeholders consulted by the evaluator express satisfaction with the support and outputs delivered by the Programme.	

Evaluation Questions	Criteria	Key Issue	Judgement Criteria	Means of Verification (source/method)
<p><b>EQ 3:</b> Have implementation modalities and internal controls been adequate in ensuring the achievement of the expected outcomes in a timely and cost-effective manner? To what extent has the Programme's M&amp;E Framework enabled evidence-based decision making? To what extent have partnerships been successfully established with and amongst its stakeholders in support of providing assistance on e-commerce and the digital economy for development in an efficient manner?</p>	Efficiency	Budgeting/resource allocation	The allocation of budget/resources across the three pillars and partnership activities are realistic in view output and outcome expectations	Desk review, financial and progress reports, interviews with UNCTAD (Programme) staff and project participants ToC analysis Field missions
		Work planning	Critical, unnecessary delays have been avoided in the planning and implementation process	
		M&E Framework	Critical Programme data and information are being systemically collected and processed and subsequently used for learning processes and feedback loops for improvement of ongoing interventions	
		Partnerships	The programme has successfully linked up and facilitated interaction between different groups of stakeholders in support of the Programme objectives	
<p><b>EQ 4:</b> To what extent were a human rights-based approach and a gender mainstreaming strategy incorporated in the design and implementation of the intervention, and can results be identified in this regard?</p>	HRBA and Gender Mainstreaming	Gender mainstreaming	Gender equality concerns are reflected in the planning of programme activities, including in the results Framework, as well as in the research products, training events and e-commerce strategy / policy development processes	Desk review, interviews UNCTAD (Programme) staff and programme participants, online survey (e-trade for women), focus groups, social media Field missions
		HRBA	Human rights concerns are reflected in the planning of programme activities, including in the results framework, as well as in the research	

Evaluation Questions	Criteria	Key Issue	Judgement Criteria	Means of Verification (source/method)
			products, training events and e-commerce strategy / policy development processes	
<p><b>EQ 5:</b> To what extent are the Programme’s activities undertaken under each of its three pillars complementary to one another and conducive to achieving the Programme’s expected outcomes?</p> <p>To what extent has the work under the Programme been complementary to that of existing global programmes, regional/interregional initiatives, UN Country Teams, UNDAF as well as other UN and non-UN actors in supporting beneficiary countries in enhancing their digital readiness, including avoiding redundancy?</p>	Coherence	Complementarity (internally, within Programme)	Programme interventions combine input from at least two different pillars to achieve results	Desk review Interviews with UNCTAD (Programme) staff,
		Complementarity (externally)	The Programme has proactively explored opportunities for development of synergies with related interventions implemented in the region/countries Evidence of linkages and complementarities between UNCTAD’s activities and other initiatives	Programme participants and external stakeholders ToC Analysis Field missions
<p><b>EQ 6:</b> Is there evidence that beneficiary countries of interventions under the Programme are committed to continue working towards the Programme objectives beyond the end of UNCTAD’s support?</p> <p>Have there been catalytic effects from UNCTAD’s support?</p> <p>What measures have been built in to promote the sustainability of outcomes?</p>	Sustainability	Country ownership / commitment	<p>Beneficiary countries are committing / leveraging additional budgets / funding to support actions towards achievement of the Programme objectives</p> <p>Initiatives are taken to develop / update relevant national strategy and policy frameworks Evidence of catalytic effects from UNCTAD’s support</p> <p>Technical assistance interventions have an exit strategy of how and whom will follow-up on</p>	Desk review, literature study, UNCTAD Programme staff and participants, focus groups, social media Field missions Core Donor Meeting

Evaluation Questions	Criteria	Key Issue	Judgement Criteria	Means of Verification (source/method)
Is there evidence of continued and renewed interest by donors to contribute to more sustainable, programmatic longer-term commitments?			project outcomes as appropriate	
		Donor engagement	Donors are willing to provide longer-term and non-earmarked funding	
<p><b>EQ 7:</b> What adjustments are needed to make the Programme more relevant to beneficiary countries in supporting their efforts to enhance their digital readiness, including responding to emerging challenges?</p> <p>Are results targets set for 2023 adequate?</p> <p>To what extent does the ECDE Programme review internal processes, activities and products in order to identify best practices and lessons learned?</p> <p>What additional measures could be taken to ensure the sustainability of the outcomes over time?</p> <p>What adjustments are needed to engender such</p>	Conclusions, learning and recommendations	Key issues derived from the analysis of the other questions will lead to conclusions and formulation of lessons learned and recommendations	<p>Key conclusions and lessons learned based on the assessment of the other EQs</p> <p>Recommendations provided by stakeholders on how to enhance the Programme</p>	Online surveys, FGDs, in-depth interviews, desk review

Evaluation Questions	Criteria	Key Issue	Judgement Criteria	Means of Verification (source/method)
interest and commitments?				



## ii. Semi-structured interview guides

Interview guide for internal programme stakeholders

### Relevance

To what extent have national and regional key stakeholder groups been involved in the **design and planning** of the programme activities? To what extent have national and regional key stakeholder groups been involved in activities implemented? Has this been sufficient or would a different level of involvement have been desirable?

Have there been any **major changes** over the past 4-5 years that have affected the (continued) relevance of the ECDE Programme? (probe for organisational changes and priorities, global trends, national policy changes etc.)

Has the programme focused on **the right group of people** for training and technical support? Have potential change agents been left out or prevented from participating? Why? How has new skills/knowledge been shared/institutionalised within the countries?

Has the **demand and interest for participation in the ECDE programme** activities changed over time - if yes, for what reason?

Has the programme corresponded to **needs and global development trends** in relation to e-commerce and digital economy development?

To what extent has gender equality been included in the interventions? (probe research, capacity building, technical assistance, statistics, intergovernmental collaboration, partnership and stakeholder engagement)

To what extent have human rights been included in the interventions? (probe research, capacity building, technical assistance, statistics, intergovernmental collaboration, partnership and stakeholder engagement)

What are the rights the Programme is trying to address? How are they addressed?

How do you assess UNCTAD's comparative advantage on the subject of e-commerce and the digital economy? How do you see UNCTAD's role compared to other actors?

### Effectiveness

What have been the **key results** from the ECDE Programme implementation? (probe research, capacity building, technical assistance, statistics, intergovernmental collaboration, consensus building, partnership and stakeholder engagement)

To what extent has the Programme resulted in any **changes** at national/global/regional level related to eTrade and e-commerce? (probe in terms of policy, regulations, collaboration, statistics, research, partnership and stakeholder engagement etc.)

What have been the most important **drivers** for results? What have been the major **barriers/hindering factors**?

Has the **capacity building approach** been effective - or what should have been done differently?

Has the approach for **partnership and stakeholder engagement** been effective - or what should have been done differently?

Has the quality and focus of the **training and technical support** been as needed – or what should have been done differently to achieve better results?

Has the quality and focus of **research** been as needed and relevant? or what should have been done differently to achieve better results?

To what extent have both men and women been involved in the project? What have been the challenges in this regard? (probe in research, technical support, intergovernmental collaboration, legal and policy frameworks etc.)

### **Efficiency**

Have the programme activities been implemented in the best possible way, or what could have been done to ensure a better **use of time and resources**?

To what extent are there linkages between the pillars of work and the partnership and stakeholder engagement? Please share specific examples. Is this working well?

What learning loops have been included in the programme management? Any examples?

### **Covid-19**

What have been the critical **challenges** as well as new **opportunities** emerging from the Covid-19 situation? To what extent has research supported identifying challenges/opportunities?

How has ECDE Programme responded to these and what have been the **implications for implementation/results**?

### **Partnership and synergies**

How has the Programme managed to facilitate and encourage **partnerships** and **dialogue** among national and regional counterparts, international development partners, the civil society and/or the private sector? How has this contributed to development of synergies and sustainability of results?

### **Gender and human rights mainstreaming**

How have **gender** and **HRBA** aspects influenced the process? Are women and men being targeted equally? How has gender considerations informed selected priority areas (e.g. for research)? What about vulnerable/marginalised groups?

To what extent has eTrade for Women been important in this aspect? What could have been done differently?

To what extent have gender and human rights (such as the right to development, right to privacy and access to information, right to equality and non-discrimination, among others) been mainstreamed in research?

### **Sustainability**

Has the programme catalysed any kind of **change processes** within supported national institutions (change in approaches/focus, resource allocation, collaborations, attitudes etc.)?

Have the programme interventions inspired to **broader and wider engagements** (e.g. within a country/ region or among non-supported institutions)? What has triggered this?

### **Recommendations**

What should be the **focus** for the continuation of the ECDE Programme? What should be done **differently**?

### Interview guide for external stakeholders

Stakeholder	UNCTAD (external to programme)	Donors	UN orgs.	Gov. officials	Private sector	Research institutions	CSOs
<b>Relevance</b>							
To what extent have national and regional key stakeholder groups been involved in the <b>design and planning</b> of the programme activities? To what extent have national and regional key stakeholder groups been involved in activities implemented? Has this been sufficient or would a different level of involvement have been desirable?			X	X	X	X	X
Have there been any <b>major changes</b> over the past 4-5 years that have affected the (continued) relevance of the ECDE Programme? (probe for organisational changes and priorities, global trends, national policy changes, partnership and stakeholder engagement etc.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Are there any organisations who have been left out or should have more actively been engaged?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Has the <b>demand and interest for participation in the ECDE programme</b> activities changed over time - if yes, for what reason?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Has the programme corresponded to <b>needs and global development trends</b> in relation to eTrade and e-commerce development?	X	X	X	X			
To what extent has gender equality been included in the interventions? (probe research, capacity building, technical assistance, statistics, intergovernmental collaboration, partnership and stakeholder engagement).	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
To what extent has human rights been included in the interventions? (probe research, capacity building, technical assistance, statistics, intergovernmental collaboration, partnership and stakeholder engagement)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
What are the rights the programming is trying to address? How are they addressed?	X		X	X			
How do you assess UNCTAD's comparative advantage on the subject of e-commerce and the digital economy? How do you see UNCTAD's role compared to other actors?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Effectiveness</b>							
What have been the <b>key results</b> from the ECDE Programme implementation? (probe research, capacity building, technical assistance, statistics, intergovernmental collaboration, consensus building, partnership and stakeholder engagement)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
To what extent has the programme resulted in any <b>changes</b> at national/global/regional level related to	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

eTrade and e-commerce? (probe in terms of policy, regulations, collaboration, statistics, research, partnership and stakeholder engagement etc.)							
What have been the most important <b>drivers</b> for results? What have been the major <b>barriers/hindering factors</b> ?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Has the <b>capacity building</b> approach been effective - or what should have been done differently?				X	X	X	X
Has the quality and focus of the <b>training and technical support</b> been as needed – or what should have been done differently to achieve better results?			X	X	X	X	X
Has the quality and focus of <b>research</b> been as needed and relevant? or what should have been done differently to achieve better results? (probe for DER, Covid publications)		X	X	X	X	X	X
Has the approach for <b>partnership and stakeholder engagement</b> been effective - or what should have been done differently?		X	X	X	X	X	X
To what extent has both men and women been involved in the programme? What have been the challenges in this regard? (probe in research, technical support, intergovernmental collaboration, legal and policy frameworks, partnership and stakeholder engagement etc.)		X	X	X	X	X	X
Efficiency							
Have the programme activities been implemented in the best possible way, or what could have been done to ensure a better <b>use of time and resources</b> ?		X	X	X	X	X	X
What learning loops have been included in the programme management? Any examples?		X					
To what extent are there linkages between the pillars of work? Please share specific examples. Is this working well?	X	X		X			
Covid-19							
What have been the critical <b>challenges</b> as well as new <b>opportunities</b> emerging from the Covid-19 situation? To what extent has research supported identifying challenges/opportunities?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
How has UNCTAD responded to these and what have been the <b>implications for implementation/results</b> ?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Partnership and synergies							
How has UNCTAD managed to facilitate and encourage <b>partnerships</b> and <b>dialogue</b> among national and regional counterparts, international development partners, the civil society and/or the private sector? How has this contributed to development of synergies and sustainability of results?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
To what extent has the programme allied with other UNCTAD departments and partners to take advantage of already established structures and avoid overlap?	X			X			
Gender and human rights mainstreaming							

How would you assess UNCTAD's role in terms of promoting gender equality and human rights?		X	X	X	X	X	X
In what ways are they promoting gender equality and human rights?		X	X	X	X	X	X
How has gender/human rights considerations informed selected priority areas (e.g. for research)?		X	X	X	X	X	X
To what extent has eTrade for Women been important in this aspect? What could have been done differently?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
How is gender and human rights reflected in outreach strategies?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Sustainability</b>							
Has the programme catalysed any kind of <b>change processes</b> within supported national institutions (change in approaches/focus, resource allocation, collaborations, attitudes etc.)?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Have the programme interventions inspired to <b>broader and wider engagements</b> (e.g. within a country/region or among non-supported institutions)? What has triggered this?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Recommendations</b>							
What should be the <b>focus</b> for the continuation of the ECDE Programme? What should be done <b>differently</b> ?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

### iii. Country matrix for selection of case countries

Country	Knowledge	Capacity							
	Tech. notes/policy briefs	E-commerce & law reform	eTrade Readiness assessment	Impl. Rate (ranking & implementation rate in %)	E-commerce strategies	Comm. W. RCO	Mapping of e-commerce UN partner interv.	E-commerce weeks	eTrade for Women
Cambodia	Data protection*	2019	2017	1 (81%)	Yes (2020) but not supported by UNCTAD				Yes
Indonesia									Yes
Lao PDR			2018	n/a		Yes	Yes		Yes
Myanmar	Gov Policies*		2018	4 (62%)	In-progress				Yes
Nepal			2017	9 (46%)					
Kenya			In-progress	n/a		Yes			
Madagascar		2019	2018	10 (42%)					
Malawi			2020	n/a		Yes			
Rwanda			-		2021	Yes	Yes		Yes
Tanzania			2020	n/a		Yes			
Tunisia			2021 (yet to be published)		In-progress An eT Ready Action Plan + plan for assistance from UNCTAD	Yes			
Uganda		(2019)	2018	7 (50%)		Yes			Yes
Benin			2020	n/a	In-progress	Yes			
Burkina Faso			2018	6 (50%)					
Ivory Coast			2020	n/a		Yes			
Mali			2020	n/a					
Niger			2020	n/a		Yes			
Senegal			2018	3 (73%)		Yes	Yes		Yes
Togo		2019	2018	2 (73%)	Requested				

\*Case study on data protection included in the “Digital Identity for Trade and Development, TrainForTrade case studies in Southeast Asia, 2020”.

#### iv. Revisited results framework



**Impact**  
 Enhanced inclusive and sustainable development gains from e-commerce and the digital economy for people and businesses in developing countries, particularly LDCs  
 Accountability at Impact level: Governments of member States, development partners, civil society and private sector

#### Assumptions

**Intermediate Outcome 1**  
 Improved policy formulation at the national, regional and global level on e-commerce and digital economy for development, in a gender sensitive manner  
 Accountability at Intermediate Outcome level: Governments of member States, development partners, civil society and private sector

**Intermediate Outcome 2**  
 Improved coordination of governments, together with development partners, civil society and the private sector, to implement policies on e-commerce and the digital economy that work for development, in a gender sensitive manner  
 Accountability at Intermediate Outcome level: Governments of member States, development partners, civil society and private sector

**Immediate Outcome 1.1**  
 Enhanced understanding of policy makers about policy options to benefit from e-commerce and the digital economy

**Immediate Outcome 1.2**  
 Improved capacity of policy makers to integrate e-commerce and the digital economy in the national and regional development agenda in dialogue with other stakeholders

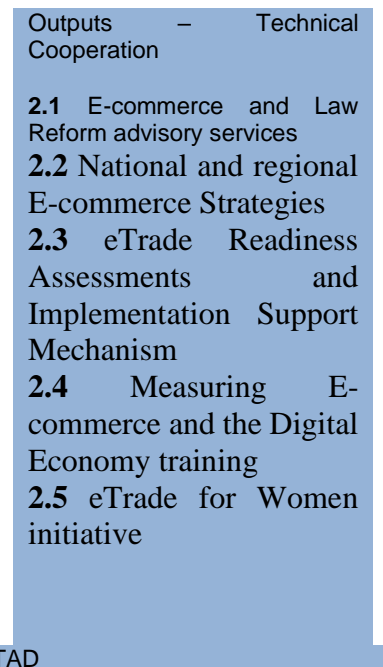
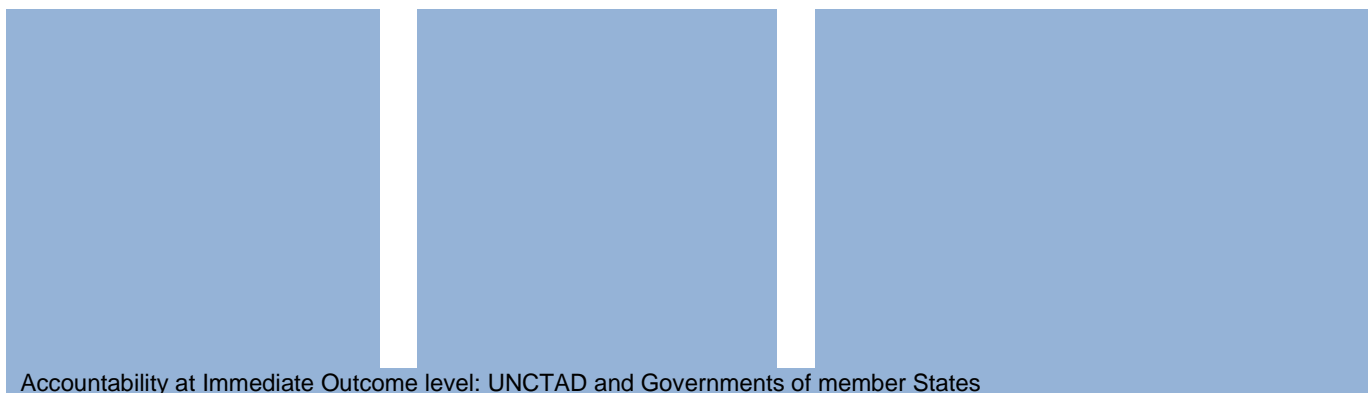
**Immediate Outcome 2.1**  
 Increased dialogue and exchange of good practices among policy makers as well as research institutions, academic centres, public and private entities at the national, subregional, regional and international levels in the areas of e-commerce and the digital economy, and agreed conclusions as appropriate

- There is a stable political environment and political will in member States to implement policies
- Development partners remain committed to providing assistance for policy formulation and implementation
- A stable national, regional and global economic environment enables policies implemented to yield benefits
- Member States have clear institutional responsibilities and policy coordination mechanisms, including coordination with development partners
- Member States commit adequate resources to generating evidence for policy formulation

Contribution and influence

- Member States take action on the knowledge and capacities gained to formulate better policies and integrate them in the national and regional development agenda
- Development partners provide assistance according to priority needs identified and their respective comparative advantages

- UNCTAD's research, analysis and technical cooperation outputs are based on sound evidence and are inclusive of all stakeholders' perspectives
- Member States take up UNCTAD's research and analysis products and use them to enhance their understanding of policy options
- Member States are able to formulate their needs for and request UNCTAD technical cooperation
- Member States engage in intergovernmental and multistakeholder policy dialogue, including with women digital entrepreneurs to close digital gaps



Activities

Activities

Activities



- Methodology development
- Secondary data review (background research)
- Primary data collection (surveys)
- Data processing and analysis
- Database management
- Report production and dissemination
- Brainstorming and peer review meetings when appropriate
- National and regional capacity-building workshops
- Legislation mapping, review and revision
- Diagnostics, strategy formulation and implementation support
- Development of manuals and training materials, training delivery
- Empowerment events, community building
- Organisation of IGE and Working Group
- Follow-up of IGE for TDB reporting
- Development of background material and overall substantive coordination
- Meeting and event management
- Platform management
- Content management
- Stakeholder management
- Coalition and partnership building
- Policy dialogue
- Advocacy
- Outreach
- UNCTAD's mandate to work on enhancing development gains from the digital economy and e-commerce is reaffirmed
- Adequate resources are available to deliver the outputs of all three Pillars
- An effective management structure is in place for the delivery of outputs
- Staff continuity is ensured

Accountability at Activity level: UNCTAD

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## v. Evaluation Terms of Reference

### **Terms of Reference (TOR) -**

#### **Independent evaluation of UNCTAD's E-commerce and Digital Economy (ECDE) Programme**

##### **I. Introduction and Purpose**

This document outlines the Terms of Reference (ToR) for an independent evaluation of UNCTAD's E-commerce and Digital Economy (ECDE) Programme. The programme aims to improve the ability of people in developing countries, in particular least developed countries (LDCs), to reap inclusive and sustainable development gains from e-commerce and the digital economy. This evaluation is commissioned by the Programme Management Team in accordance with its Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework and as agreed with donors.

The evaluation serves the following main purposes:

- Provides an independent assessment of progress towards the achievement of the Programme's development objective, assessing performance as per the established indicators vis-à-vis the strategies and implementation modalities chosen and programme management arrangements;
- Provides an assessment of the application of the Programme's M&E Framework (based on results-based management (RBM) principles) to date as well as a verification of results targets set for 2023;
- Provides strategic recommendations, highlights good practices and lessons learnt.

Moreover it:

- Advises future programme development;
- Contributes towards organizational learning;
- Helps those responsible for managing the resources and activities of the Programme to enhance development results from the short term to a sustainable long term;
- Assesses the effectiveness of planning and management for future impacts;
- Supports accountability aims by incorporating lessons learned in the decision-making process of programme stakeholders, including donors and national partners. These constituents, and the Programme Team will be consulted throughout the evaluation process.

The UNCTAD Evaluation Unit will manage this evaluation, in collaboration with the Programme Team from the ICT Policy Section within the Science, Technology and Information and Communication Technologies Branch of the Division on Technology and Logistics.

- **Context of the evaluation**<sup>104</sup>

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the role of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in advancing progress towards the achievement of every single one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with ICTs being widely acknowledged as a catalyst for decent work and economic growth, industry and innovation, and gender equality.<sup>105</sup>

However, the impacts of digitalization on skills needs, jobs and employment are challenging to address. Many developing countries, especially the least developed countries (LDCs), are inadequately prepared to capture opportunities emerging as a result of digitalization. Moreover, there is a risk that digitalization will lead to increased polarization and widening income inequalities, as productivity gains may accrue mainly to a few, already wealthy and skilled enterprises and individuals.

Governments have a central role in creating an environment that is conducive to maximizing sustainable development opportunities and in ensuring that the environment supports the relevant development objectives of a country. Digital policies should be coherent and well-integrated with each country's national development agenda, as e-commerce and other digital applications may support different economic and social objectives, such as higher productivity, improved competitiveness, improved access to information, transparency of regulations, and more inclusive and equitable development.

The speed at which the digital economy is unfolding, and the gaps that exist in terms of the ability of countries, enterprises and individuals to engage in it, underline the urgency of scaling up global support for capacity-building and technical assistance to countries trailing behind in the digital economy. In 2020, the significant divides in digital readiness were further accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Subject of the evaluation**

In 2016, the Nairobi Mafikiano – the outcome document of the 14th UNCTAD Ministerial Conference – formally acknowledged UNCTAD's leadership role in the area of e-commerce and the digital economy for development through its three pillars of work. Member States called on UNCTAD to strengthen its work on these issues (paragraph 55 (u)) and to assist developing countries in this regard (paragraph 55 (v)). In addition, member States decided that the Trade and Development Board would operationalize the creation of two new intergovernmental groups of experts, one of which focused on e-commerce and the digital economy (paragraph 100 (r)).

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<sup>104</sup> Extracted from reports produced by the Programme

<sup>105</sup> SDG targets explicitly stating the importance of ICTs include: 5.b. Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women; 9.8. Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020; and 17.8. Fully operationalize the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017 and enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology.

The key objective of UNCTAD's ECDE Programme is to enhance inclusive and sustainable development gains and economic benefits from e-commerce and the digital economy for people and businesses in developing countries, particularly LDCs. To achieve this objective, the Programme has three main work pillars: research, technical cooperation, and consensus-building. In particular, the Programme provides a platform for a) generating research and better statistics to enable governments and other stakeholders to understand the implications of economic digitalization for sustainable development; b) providing assistance to developing countries as they seek to prepare for and adapt to digital disruptions; and c) fostering global multi-stakeholder dialogue and a more coordinated approach on e-commerce and the digital economy from a development perspective.

To enhance the effectiveness of its interventions, a more efficient use of resources and a robust and results-driven approach to programme management and monitoring, the ECDE Programme uses a Results Framework that unites all individual projects under a common vision. The Framework is organized around the main working areas and positive changes expected in the short, medium, and long term to reduce digital divides between and within countries and promote equitable, inclusive, and sustainable gains from the digitalization of economic and social activities. The Results Framework is operationalized via a Work Plan and is accompanied by a detailed monitoring and evaluation (M&E) Framework, the primary purpose of which is to guide progress measurement in terms of expected results and against expected targets. Figure 1 presents the Results Framework and activities of the Programme.

Figure 14. E-commerce and Digital Economy Programme's Results Framework



Activity 1.1.5 Other research activities	Activity 1.2.5 eTrade for Women	Activity 2.1.5 Digital Co-operation for Development (UNGIS, SG Roadmap, WSIS)
<b>Level of accountability for activities: UNCTAD</b>		

The Programme has a global reach, in particular through its research and consensus-building work, but LDCs have been a particular focus under its technical cooperation workstream (activities under Output 1.2). For example:

- 27 eTrade Readiness Assessments have been completed, including for 23 LDCs such as [Benin](#), [Cambodia](#), [Mali](#), [Myanmar](#), [Tanzania](#), and [Uganda](#);
- ASEAN, Cambodia, Madagascar, Togo and Uganda were supported in the area of E-Commerce and Law Reform;
- Women entrepreneurs from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Senegal and Uganda benefited from activities under the eTrade for Women initiative;
- Egypt, Oman, Rwanda, Botswana, Kenya and Myanmar received support in developing their e-commerce strategies.

Key partners of the Programme include:

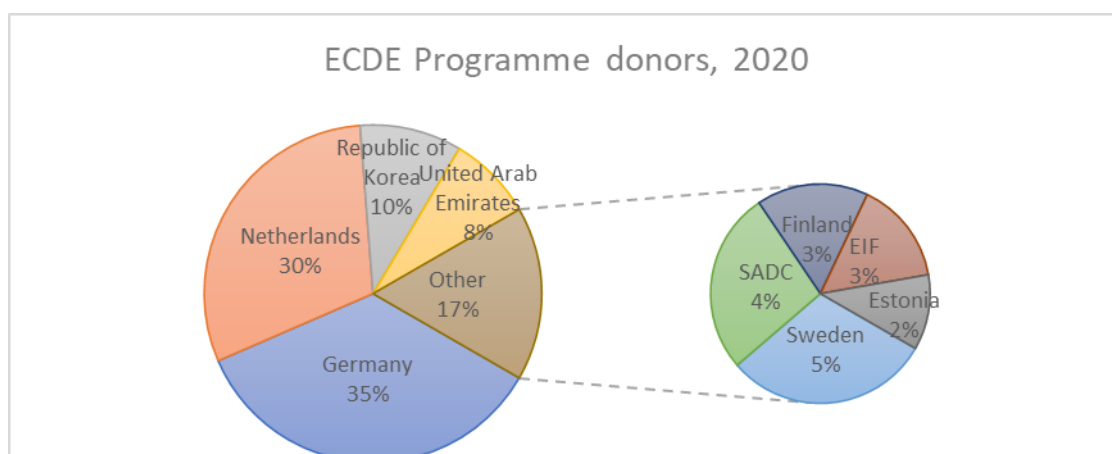
- different departments within national Governments – including ministries of science and technology and ICTs;
- regional organizations;
- non-governmental organizations;
- private sector organizations; and
- other United Nations bodies such as the International Telecommunication Union, the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and its Institute of Statistics, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Statistical Division, the Universal Postal Union, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Intellectual Property Organization.

The ECDE Programme is implemented by a team of 22 staff members<sup>106</sup> from the ICT Policy Section within the Science, Technology and Information and Communication Technologies Branch of the Division on Technology and Logistics. Six of the Programme's staff members are funded through UNCTAD's regular budget and 16 staff members are funded through extra-budgetary sources. In 2020, the Programme received support from 9 different donors, for a total of USD 2.7 million in extra-budgetary funding. More than half of the Programme's extra-budgetary resources were provided by 2 core donors – namely Germany and the Netherlands. Significant contributions were also received from the Republic of Korea, the United Arab Emirates, and five other organizations (Figure 2).

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<sup>106</sup> As of April 2021, with 2 more staff members under recruitment.

Figure 2. ECDE Programme donors, 2020



In 2020, the ECDE Programme's total expenditures amounted to USD 1'609'383. Programme expenditures by component are presented in Table 1:

Table 1. ECDE Programme expenditures by programme component and type, 2020

	Staff Personnel including consultants	Contractual Services	Travel	Operating other costs	Transfer/ Grant to IP	Equipment	Project support costs	Grand Total
eTrade Readiness Assessments	25.1%	0.6%	1.8%	1.1%		-0.03%		28.6%
eTrade for all	18.6%	2.6%		0.1%	0.9%			22.3%
eTrade for Women	10.8%	0.6%	1.6%					12.9%
Management	8.1%		0.3%					8.5%
E-commerce Strategies	4.1%	0.9%		0.2%				5.3%
Research	3.4%			0.1%				3.5%
E-commerce Week	2.8%							2.8%
E-commerce and Law Reform	2.7%							2.7%
Measuring	2.1%							2.2%
Project support costs							11.3%	11.3%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>77.8%</b>	<b>4.7%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>-0.03%</b>	<b>11.3%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

- **Scope of the Evaluation**

The evaluation will cover the first three years of the Programme's 2019-2023 Work Plan, namely the period 2019 - 2021. This enables the evaluation to take into account the extent to which the relevant mandates of the Nairobi Maafikiano have been operationalized and the results from these interventions. The temporal scope of the evaluation also covers the beginning of the application of the Programme's M&E Framework, with a view to generating insights for strengthening the Programme's results-driven approach. The evaluation will cover all outcomes of the Programme, taking into account interventions that have previously been evaluated, and will pay particular attention to coherence and synergies across components and across countries, and the extent of gender and human rights mainstreaming.

The evaluation is expected to address the questions under the following criteria:

- a) **Relevance**

- Did the design of the Programme, including choice of activities and deliverables properly address the needs of beneficiaries and stakeholders to close knowledge gaps and strengthen capacities towards building inclusive digital economies?
- What has been the role of COVID-19 in possible challenges/opportunities for the programme? If constraints have been experienced, how have they affected programme objectives and have they been addressed in an appropriate manner?
- What adjustments are needed to make the Programme more relevant to beneficiary countries in supporting their efforts to enhance their digital readiness, including responding to emerging challenges?

**b) Effectiveness**

- What are the key achievements of the Programme in terms of progress towards the intended results and what is the likelihood for the programme to achieve the intended objectives, including against relevant SDG targets? Have there been catalytic effects of the programme at national/regional/global levels?
- To what extent are Programme beneficiaries and other stakeholders satisfied with the support delivered by the Programme and the quality of the outputs?

**c) Efficiency**

- Have implementation modalities and internal controls been adequate in ensuring the achievement of the expected outcomes in a timely and cost-effective manner?
- To what extent has the Programme's M&E Framework enabled evidence-based decision making? Are results targets set for 2023 adequate?
- To what extent have partnerships been successfully established with and amongst its stakeholders in support of providing assistance on e-commerce and the digital economy for development in an efficient manner?
- What Programme and project management best practices can be identified and what are the lessons learned for the programme management team?

**d) Coherence (internal and external)**

- To what extent are the Programme's activities undertaken under each of its three pillars complementary to one another and conducive to achieving the Programme's expected outcomes?
- To what extent has the work under the Programme been complementary to that of existing global programmes, regional/interregional initiatives, UN Country Teams, UNDAF as well as other UN and non-UN actors in supporting beneficiary countries in enhancing their digital readiness, including avoiding redundancy?

**e) Sustainability**



- Is there evidence that beneficiary countries of interventions under the Programme are committed to continue working towards the Programme objectives beyond the end of UNCTAD's support and/or have there been catalytic effects from UNCTAD's support?
- What measures have been built in to promote the sustainability of outcomes? What additional measures could be taken to ensure the sustainability of the outcomes over time?
- Is there evidence of continued and renewed interest by donors to contribute to more sustainable, programmatic longer-term commitments? What adjustments are needed to engender such interest and commitments?

**f) Gender and Human Rights**

- To what extent a human rights-based approach and a gender mainstreaming strategy were incorporated in the design and implementation of the Programme, and can results be identified in this regard?

- **Methodology**

The evaluation will adopt a utilization-focused<sup>107</sup> approach. It will be guided by the Programme's Results framework and ensure a gender and human rights responsive approach. The evaluation team is required to use a mixed-method approach, including qualitative as well as quantitative data gathering and analysis as the basis for a triangulation exercise of all available data to draw conclusions and findings.

In view of the current global pandemic situation, innovative methods for data collection are required. Hence, methods for data gathering for this evaluation will likely include, but should not be limited to, the following:

- Desk review of relevant documents and materials;
- Desk review of programme outputs;
- Collection and analysis of relevant web and social media metrics related to the outputs of the programme;
- Telephone or virtual interviews with relevant UNCTAD staff and a balanced sample of programme participants, implementing partners, funding partners, and other relevant stakeholders, and follow-up interviews as may be necessary;
- Online surveys (in appropriate languages) of and/or focus group discussions, as appropriate;
- Observe a sample of virtual meetings, webinars and other activities to be implemented by the Programme, as appropriate.

As part of the desk review, which will lead to an Inception Report, the evaluation team will use the Programme documents as well as additional documents such as relevant evaluation reports, mission reports; progress reports, financial reports, publications

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<sup>107</sup> Utilization-focused evaluation is a framework whereby evaluations should be planned and conducted in ways that enhance the likely utilization of both the findings and of the process itself to inform decisions and improve performance ([https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/utilization\\_focused\\_evaluation](https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/utilization_focused_evaluation))

and studies. An exhaustive list of stakeholders involved in the Programme will be provided to the evaluator.

The evaluation team will further elaborate on the evaluation methodology in an Inception Report, determining thereby the exact focus and approach for the exercise, including developing sub-questions and indicators for each evaluation question in the Terms of Reference, developing the sampling strategy, identifying the sources and methods for data collection, and developing tailor-made data collection instruments that target different stakeholders (based on a stakeholder analysis). The methodology should follow the UNCTAD Inception Report Guidelines.

The evaluation team is required to submit a separate final list of those interviewed in the Annex of the evaluation report. The evaluator is to ensure a wide representation of stakeholders, bearing in mind the need to include those in a disadvantaged or minority position as appropriate.

Specifically, envisaged steps include the following:

- a. Desk Review: Review of programmes and its components materials, publications, data, among others;
- b. Inception meeting with the Programme Team. The objective of the consultation is to reach a common understanding regarding the components of the Programme, the priority assessment questions, available data sources and data collection instruments. The following topics will be covered: project background and materials, key evaluation questions and priorities, list of stakeholders, criteria for country selection, outline of the inception and final report.
- c. Submission of an Inception Report with the final methodology and work plan. The Inception Report will be subject to approval by the Evaluation Manager, and it will indicate the steps/phases and dates of the process in which the evaluation will take place;
- d. Additional documents review and analysis, data collection prior or in parallel to the evaluation interviews as required by the proposed methodology;
- e. Evaluation interviews (individual or collective) with stakeholders;
- f. Drafting evaluation reports;
- g. Presentations to the Programme Team and the key stakeholders on the draft report;
- h. Finalization of the evaluation report.

- **Deliverables and Expected Outputs**

Three deliverables are expected out of this evaluation (following UNCTAD templates):

- An inception report<sup>108</sup>;
- A draft evaluation report; and

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<sup>108</sup> Quality of the inception report should meet those set out in UNEG Quality Checklist for Evaluation Terms of Reference and Inception Reports: [http://www.uneval.org/papersandpubs/documentdetail.jsp?doc\\_id=608](http://www.uneval.org/papersandpubs/documentdetail.jsp?doc_id=608)

- The final evaluation report<sup>109</sup>

The inception report should summarize the desk review and specify the evaluation methodology, determining thereby the exact focus and scope of the exercise, including the evaluation questions, the sampling strategy and the data collection instruments.

The final report of the evaluation must be composed of the following key elements:

- i. Executive summary;
- ii. Introduction of the evaluation, a brief description of the projects, the scope of the evaluation and a clear description of the methodology used;
- iii. Findings and assessments according to the criteria listed in Section 4 of this ToR; and
- iv. Conclusions and recommendations drawn from the assessments.

Annex 1 presents the full requirements for the evaluation report.

All the evaluation assessments must be supported by triangulated facts and findings, direct or indirect evidence, and well-substantiated logic. It follows that proposed recommendations must be supported by the findings and be relevant, specific, practical, actionable, and time-bound recommendations.

- **Description of Duties**

The evaluation will be led by an Independent Evaluation Team (ET) comprising a Team Leader with demonstrated relevant experience in leading evaluations of programmes, and an evaluation Team Member with demonstrated relevant experience in conducting evaluations, in addition to having expertise in the areas of Human Rights and Gender Equality.

The UNCTAD Independent Evaluation Unit will manage and quality assure the evaluation. The Evaluation Team reports to the Chief of the Evaluation Unit. The ET will undertake the evaluation exercise under the guidance of the Evaluation Unit and in consultation with the Programme Team. The ET is responsible for the evaluation design, data collection, analysis and reporting as provided in this ToR. The ET will submit a copy-edited final report to UNCTAD.

The members of the ET shall act independently, in line with United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines and in her/his capacities and not as a representative of any government or organization that may present a conflict of interest. The evaluation consultants will have no such link to the project as would pose a conflict of interest. Consultants who have implemented assignments for the UNCTAD in the past are kindly requested to indicate the nature of these assignments. The UNCTAD reserves the right to accept or refuse a proposal for the evaluation on the basis of the above.

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<sup>109</sup> Quality of the evaluation report should meet those set out in UNEG Quality Checklist for Evaluation Reports: <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/607>

The members of the ET should observe the UNEG guidelines, standards<sup>110</sup>, and norms<sup>111</sup> for evaluations in the UN system, as well as UNCTAD's Evaluation Policy<sup>112</sup>, in the conduct of this assignment. The ET needs to integrate human rights and gender equality in evaluations to the extent possible.<sup>113</sup> The ET needs to ensure a complete, fair, engaging, unreserved, and unbiased assessment. In case of difficulties, uncertainties or concern in the conduct of the evaluation, the ET needs to report immediately to the Chief of Evaluation Unit to seek guidance or clarification.

The Programme Team will support the evaluation, by providing desk review documents (following Evaluation Unit desk review documents guidelines), contact details of project stakeholders as well as any additional documents that the evaluator requests. It is the responsibility of the Programme Team to ensure senior management engagement throughout the evaluation and timely feedback in the quality assurance and factual clarification process coordinated by the Evaluation Unit. The Programme team will review and provide comments on the inception, draft and final reports with a view on quality assurance and factual accuracies.

The Evaluation Unit acts as clearing entity during the main steps of this evaluation. It endorses the ToR and convokes the Evaluation Team. The Evaluation Unit reviews the evaluation methodology, clears the inception report, the draft report, performs quality assurance of the final report and participates in disseminating the final report to stakeholders within and outside of UNCTAD. The Evaluation Unit engages the Programme Team throughout the evaluation process in supporting the evaluation and validating the reports.

In addition, this evaluation will ensure close consultation with key project stakeholders and partners, including the donors.

- **Timetable**

The evaluation will take place from **9 August 2021 to 31 January 2022**.

- **Monitoring and Progress Control**

The evaluator must keep the Evaluation Unit informed of the progress made in the evaluation on a regular basis.

The evaluator will submit the **inception report** by **30 August 2021**.

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<sup>110</sup> "Standards for Evaluation in the UN System" by UNEG, UNEG/FN/Standards (2005); [http://www.uneval.org/papersandpubs/documentdetail.jsp?doc\\_id=22](http://www.uneval.org/papersandpubs/documentdetail.jsp?doc_id=22);

<sup>111</sup> "Norms for Evaluation in the UN System" by UNEG, UNEG/FN/Norms (2005); [http://www.uneval.org/papersandpubs/documentdetail.jsp?doc\\_id=21](http://www.uneval.org/papersandpubs/documentdetail.jsp?doc_id=21);

<sup>112</sup> "Evaluation Policy" of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), December 2011. December 2011, [http://unctad.org/Sections/edm\\_dir/docs/osg\\_EvaluationPolicy2011\\_en.pdf](http://unctad.org/Sections/edm_dir/docs/osg_EvaluationPolicy2011_en.pdf).

<sup>113</sup> "Integrating human rights and gender equality in evaluations" by UNEG, UNEG Guidance Document (2014): <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1616>. The UNEG Handbook on "Integrating human rights and gender equality in evaluations: Towards UNEG Guidance" by UNEG, UNEG Guidance Document (2011): <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/980>.

The evaluator will present the **draft report**, first to the Evaluation Unit and then to the Programme Team, giving sufficient time for the verification of factual findings as well as its compliance with the ToR (approximately 2 weeks). To this end, a draft of the report must be presented to the Evaluation Unit by **20 December 2021**.

The deadline for submission of the **final report** will be **31 January 2022**.

The contracts conclude, and payment issued, upon satisfactory receipt of the final report.

- **Evaluation communication and dissemination plan**

The final evaluation report and key findings will be disseminated widely to all relevant stakeholders such as the funding partners, UNCTAD management, etc. through the following possible mediums:

- A workshop (possibly online or face-to-face) with all relevant stakeholders to present the key findings, recommendations and lessons learned.
- A copy of the final evaluation report will be made available publicly on the UNCTAD website.
- A brief summary of the key evaluation findings and lessons learned will be communicated to all UNCTAD staff through an UNCTAD internal newsletter.

The brief summary can also be made available on social media platform through short messages or videos, with the assistance of the UNCTAD Communication and External Relations Unit.

## Annex 1. Requirements for the evaluation report

	<b>Report Section</b>	<b>Contents</b>
1.	Title and opening pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Title of the report</li> <li>Date of the report</li> <li>Names and organizations of evaluator(s)</li> <li>Name of the organizations commissioning the evaluation</li> <li>Acknowledgements</li> </ul>
2.	Table of contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listing of all the contents of the report including annexes, boxes, figures and tables with page references</li> </ul>
3.	List of acronyms and abbreviations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listing of all acronyms and abbreviations used in the report</li> </ul>
4.	Executive Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Executive Summary needs to be a stand-alone section of maximum length of approximately 10-15% of the main report, excluding annexes.</li> <li>Needs to include a short overview of the Programme/Project, the purpose, scope and objective of the evaluation and the intended users</li> <li>Provide key aspects of the methodology, its limitations and ways in which these were mitigated</li> <li>Summarize key findings, conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations</li> </ul>
5.	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Background to the Programme/Project and the evaluations</li> <li>Purpose of the evaluation including timing of the evaluation and expected users and use of evaluation results</li> </ul>
6.	Context of the evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction of the topic of the evaluation and relevant developments concerned</li> <li>Details on the topic in countries/regions covered by the programme/project</li> <li>Details on policies, plans and programmes of government and other organizations on the topic concerned and support provided by other development partners</li> </ul>
7.	Subject of the evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Programme/Project, its objective and how it tries to achieve this</li> <li>Coverage in terms of countries/regions and time frame concerned</li> <li>Partners for implementation, including government, other UN agencies at country/regional level</li> <li>Programme/Project resources</li> <li>Past evaluations/assessments/studies if relevant, including gender analysis and vulnerability assessments</li> <li>An analysis of the theory of change of the Programme/Project.</li> </ul>
8.	Evaluation scope, objectives and questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scope of the evaluation and rationale concerned</li> <li>Objectives of the evaluation, including what evaluation criteria will be covered</li> <li>Evaluation questions, organized by evaluation criteria</li> </ul>
9.	Methodology of the evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Detailed description of the selected methodological approaches, the corresponding rationale for selection.</li> <li>The description should help the report users judge the merits of the methods used in the evaluation and the credibility of the findings, conclusions and recommendations. It should describe in particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall methodological approach(es) used for the different evaluation questions</li> <li>Sample and sampling frame</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Data collection methods</li> <li>- Stakeholder engagement</li> <li>- Ethical concerns and how these were handled</li> <li>• Major limitations, such as security issues, access to information and data, etc.; should be identified and openly discussed as to their implications for evaluation, as well as steps taken to mitigate those limitations.</li> </ul>
10.	Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Findings are analyzed and presented according to the evaluation questions. Each evaluation question should have a separate subsection.</li> <li>• Main findings must be well substantiated by evidence originating from relevant sources, triangulated, and supported by logical analysis and reasonable judgments.</li> </ul>
11.	Conclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statements at the level of evaluation questions and beyond, that are grounded in the analysis of the findings. This can include statements at the level of the evaluation criteria, across criteria as well as related to cross-cutting issues.</li> <li>• Conclusions provide added value to the findings. Conclusions are not a synthesis of the main findings, but rather conclusive statements based on and substantiated by the key findings. Conclusions will consolidate the assessment of various aspects to judge the value and worth of the Programme/Project.</li> <li>• Conclusive statements for each of the evaluation questions will be provided, for example in relation to the effectiveness of the Programme/Project, its relevance et cetera.</li> </ul>
12.	Lessons learned/good practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lessons that were learned in the implementation of the programme/project and that are useful beyond the context in which they were learned, with sufficient substantiation to be of use to people who do not know the programme/project.</li> </ul>
13.	Recommendations (maximum of 8 recommendations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommendations should be firmly based on evidence and analysis, and be relevant and realistic. Depending on whether this is a mid-term evaluation or a final evaluation, recommendations can be related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- programme/Project implementation /operational issues</li> <li>- Strategic issues: this can include recommendations for redesigning the programme/project (mid-term evaluation); recommendations for a next phase (final evaluation);</li> <li>- Thematic issues</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Each recommendation should tackle one set of issues at a time, in particular when different levels in decision-making and action are involved.</li> <li>• Each recommendation should be clearly addressed to the appropriate party (ies). Responsibilities and the time frame for their implementation should be stated, to the extent possible.</li> </ul>
14.	Annexes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ToR</li> <li>• Programme/Project results framework and additional details on the Programme/Project as needed</li> <li>• Additional details on the context of the Programme/Project as needed</li> <li>• List of persons interviewed and additional details on methodology and needed</li> <li>• References of documents reviewed</li> </ul>