

Independent Evaluation of UNCTAD's E-commerce and Digital Economy (ECDE) Programme

May 2025

DFAT Management Response to Partner-led Independent Evaluation

The E-commerce and Digital Economy (ECDE) Programme is a UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) multi-donor trust fund established in 2019 to provide policymakers and other key stakeholders, notably women digital entrepreneurs, with the knowledge, capacities, and dialogue avenues to take development-led actions towards an inclusive and sustainable digital future for all. Through the Programme, UNCTAD works with government officials and development partners, representatives of civil society and the private sector, to strengthen the readiness of developing countries to harness the opportunities and address the risks presented by digitalisation and the rise of e-commerce and digital trade.

The overall objective of the Programme is to enhance inclusive and sustainable development gains from e-commerce and the digital economy in developing countries, particularly Least Developed Countries (LDCs). It reflects UNCTAD's three pillars of work, research and analysis, consensus-building, and technical cooperation, their synergies. The Programme also establishes multistakeholder partnerships that help enhance coordination and collaboration among actors engaged in e-commerce and the digital economy.

Australia's \$3 million (2023-2026) contribution to the Programme focusses on strengthening the readiness of developing countries in South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific to benefit from digitisation in four main ways: 1) providing better evidence on what policy changes are needed at the national, regional, and international level to generate more inclusive and sustainable outcomes in the data-driven digital economy; 2) offering tailored assistance to developing countries to build their capacities to engage in and benefit from e-commerce and the digital economy (eTrade Readiness Assessments, E-commerce Strategies, E-commerce and Law Reform, Measuring the Digital Economy); 3) empowering women digital entrepreneurs in developing countries to become more visible as role models and therefore better able to foster change in the business enabling environment (eTrade for Women); and 4) paving the way for more collaborative efforts and effective partnerships to make better use of scarce resources in the area of digital trade for development (eTrade for all, eWeeks, Intergovernmental Group of Experts).

In 2022, Nordic Consulting Group A/S carried out a mid-cycle independent evaluation covering the ECDE Programme's work from 2019-21. This further independent evaluation, also by Nordic Consulting Group A/S, covers the period 2022-2024. It was carried out in consultation with the Programme's core donors, including Australia, to i) provide an independent assessment of progress towards the achievement of the Programme's development objective; ii) provide an assessment of the degree of implementation of the recommendations from the previous Programme

evaluation (2019-21); and iii) provide strategic recommendations and highlight good practices. The evaluation will also serve as an evidence base for the Programme in the planned 2026 evaluation of UNCTAD's Division on Technology and Logistics.

The evaluation's approach and methodology included i) a review of relevant UNCTAD and ECDE Programme documentation; ii) consultations with a total of 67 key stakeholders (35 women and 32 men); iii) field observations gathered during a 10-day field mission to Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal in January 2025; and iv) an online survey, linked to the Programme's intergovernmental work. A similar survey was implemented in the previous evaluation, allowing for a comparison over time.

The evaluation found

- i) the Programme is highly **relevant**, and well aligned with the UN's strategic guiding documents where digital transformation is highlighted as a key pillar for development;
- ii) the Programme's **research and analysis** is well regarded and sought after, with strong indications that its publications are widely downloaded and several of the Digital Economy Reports (DERs) are being applied in policy development;
- iii) the Programme's **intergovernmental work** on e-commerce and the digital economy for development is a relevant and essential part of UNCTAD's work, with stakeholders rating the UNCTAD Secretariat's organisation of its Intergovernmental Group of Experts (IGE) Meetings highly. Member States have used their engagement in IGE Meetings to enhance their national policy environments on data, particularly the 2023 IGE session which focussed on data flows.
- iv) the Programme's **technical cooperation and capacity building** continues to be highly relevant and in high demand (eTrade Readiness Assessments, eTrade Reform Tracker, eTrade for Women Masterclasses);
- v) the Programme's **M&E framework** is a best practice example within UNCTAD, with improvements made to increase emphasis on analysis and qualitative indicators at the outcome level. The Programme continues to be highly reliant on extra-budgetary resources, with an overall budget that has decreased while demand for services has increased, putting staff under severe pressure;
- vi) **coherence** and **synergies** across the three pillars of the Programme have been significantly enhanced over the last three years, with some good examples of collaboration between the Programme and the UN's Resident Coordinator Offices;
- vii) mainstreaming of **gender** and other **cross-cutting issues** has strengthened over the reporting period, and the Work Plan for 2024-2027 strongly reflects **gender equality, human rights, disability, and environmental considerations**.

DFAT’s response to the Independent Evaluation

DFAT accepts the evaluation’s findings and agrees or partially agrees with each of its four strategic recommendations.

DFAT welcomes the evaluation’s findings of the Programme’s continued relevance to the needs and priorities of developing countries. DFAT also notes the high level of satisfaction of beneficiaries and other stakeholders with the support provided through multistakeholder engagement and collaborative exchange, and the quality of outputs delivered.

DFAT notes with appreciation the finding that progress has been made since the last evaluation, with proven concepts identified in the previous evaluation being consolidated during this reporting period. We encourage the Programme to continue to make progress on the activities that are well valued and offer beneficiaries maximum benefit, such as eTrade Readiness Assessments, the eTrade Reform Tracker and the eTrade for Women Masterclasses. We also look forward to working with the Programme to expand the awareness and understanding of its work.

DFAT is an active participant in the UNCTAD Core Donor Advisory Board and was actively involved in the evaluation of the Programme.

Strategic Recommendation	UNCTAD Response	UNCTAD Explanation	DFAT Response	DFAT Explanation	Action Plan / implementing party	Timeframe / resources
<p>SR1 (to the UNCTAD Secretary-General):</p> <p>1a Funding: Based on a strong and growing demand from member States for good quality research and data products/services, enhanced relevance of digitalisation to UNCTAD, and the positive assessment of the ECDE Programme in the evaluation, it is recommended to increase the amount of regular budget funds allocated to the Programme, in alignment with the expected</p>	Partially accepted	UNCTAD welcomes acknowledgement in the report that, despite the ongoing financial constraints facing the UN Secretariat, two additional regular budget posts were allocated to the ECDE Programme in 2022, together with resources from the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC). These developments reflect the UNCTAD Secretary-	Partially agree	Noting the success of the Programme in comparison to other areas of UNCTAD, and the call by the UNCTAD 16 ‘Geneva Consensus’ ‘...to enhance support to develop countries’ capacity for electronic commerce, support the development of an enabling environment for digital infrastructure, skills and frameworks necessary to harness the digital economy and	UNCTAD actions: UNCTAD Secretary-General will continue to support mobilisation of additional resources in alignment with the expected Outcome of UNCTAD 16.	UNCTAD suggest: Following UNCTAD 16 Ministerial and next appropriate programme budget cycle. Requires resources.

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Outcome of the next UNCTAD Ministerial Conference (UNCTAD 16, October 2025).		General's commitment to supporting the Programme's critical work. This recommendation can only be partially accepted, however, since as of 2026, a planned Secretariat-wide staff reduction of 20 per cent (equivalent to 77 posts for UNCTAD) will be proposed under the UN Secretary-General's broader initiative. In any event, the UNCTAD Secretary-General will continue to support mobilisation of additional resources in alignment with the expected Outcome of UNCTAD 16.		digital trade, and assist countries in building circular approaches to the digital economy.', DFAT supports a boost in regular budget funding for the Programme. However, DFAT understands that this will form part of UNCTAD's broader regular budget considerations and negotiations.		
<p>SR1 (to the UNCTAD Secretary-General):</p> <p><u>1b Communication/ dissemination of produced research products and data:</u></p>	Accepted	In line with this recommendation, UNCTAD has significantly expanded efforts to break down and tailor the key findings of the DERs for different audiences. To	Partially agree	DFAT welcomes further dissemination and communication of the Programme's excellent research products and data, and stands ready to assist the Programme in	UNCTAD actions: UNCTAD Secretary-General/ ECDE Programme management.	UNCTAD suggest: 2025-2027. Requires resources.

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<p>In addition to one comprehensive Digital Economy Report (DER) every 2-3 years, it is recommended to focus more efforts (in-between the DERs) on “breaking down” key messages of the DER according to specific stakeholder groups/ audience/ topics/regions (e.g. through preparation of different policy briefs etc.). There was strong demand for this, and potential utility could be high. It is recommended also to identify more ways and channels to pro-actively communicate about the publication of key reports, data etc. It is noted that the Programme is increasingly disseminating materials (e.g. the DER, the Year in Review report) to UNRCOs (by UNDCO via their policy bulletin), which is seen as a good step forward in this area. Still, not all UNRCOs are aware of the report and its contents, and it is recommended to further enhance what is distributed and how.</p>		<p>support targeted uptake, a policy brief on environmentally sustainable e-commerce was developed, drawing on Chapter 5 of the DER 2024. This is complemented by a broader communication strategy that deploys multiple accessible formats, design visuals, infographics, short videos, and storytelling elements from workshops and events, to ensure complex insights are presented in engaging, audience-friendly ways. Regular social media engagement, cross-collaboration with UN agencies, and active community management further amplify messages and extend reach. Building on successful practices from other initiatives, such as communication</p>		<p>these efforts. It also welcomes the Programme’s efforts to communicate the DER’s key messages to its stakeholders and make them more accessible. However, DFAT notes the pressure on ODA resources and urges UNCTAD to undertake this work within existing resources.</p>	<p>Building on successful practices from other initiatives, such as communication snapshots for the Black Sea Initiative and short video explainers for Global Trade Updates, CER and the Programme will work jointly to develop regional and thematic DER snapshots. These will distil key messages into formats that are practical and relevant for diverse stakeholders, including policymakers, practitioners, and UNRCOs.</p> <p>CER will also collaborate with the Programme</p>	

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		<p>snapshots for the Black Sea Initiative and short video explainers for Global Trade Updates, Communications and External Relations team (CER) and the Programme will work jointly to develop regional and thematic DER snapshots. These will distil key messages into formats that are practical and relevant for diverse stakeholders, including policymakers, practitioners, and UNRCOs.</p> <p>CER will also collaborate with the Programme team to explore novel communication approaches, building on recent innovations in presenting UNCTAD products. Dynamic methods incorporating interactive elements and highly visual summaries,</p>			<p>team to explore novel communication approaches, building on recent innovations in presenting UNCTAD products.</p> <p>CER will continue to build on [current] efforts to make UNCTAD research more accessible and relevant to policymakers and other stakeholders. Potential measures include tailored regional snapshots, briefing sessions, policy dialogues, and closer collaboration with UNRCOs to meet their specific needs.</p> <p>The planned roll-out of a centralised</p>	

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		<p>as demonstrated in the 2025 Technology and Innovation Report Page have proven effective in presenting complex findings in digestible and engaging formats. These approaches have contributed to measurable impact, including a 31 per cent increase in meeting page views between 2023 and 2024 and over 580,000 downloads across UNCTAD publication pages.</p> <p>CER will continue to build on these efforts to make UNCTAD research more accessible and relevant to policymakers and other stakeholders. Potential measures include tailored regional snapshots, briefing sessions, policy dialogues, and closer collaboration with</p>			<p>Customer Relation Management system will enable more tailored engagement, audience segmentation, and customised delivery of outputs to priority stakeholders.</p>	

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		<p>UNRCOs to meet their specific needs.</p> <p>Finally, the launch of Insights, UNCTAD's new streamlined newsletter, provides a single, personalised channel to disseminate trusted data and key messages from the DER and other flagship publications. In tandem, the planned roll-out of a centralised Customer Relation Management system will enable more tailored engagement, audience segmentation, and customised delivery of outputs to priority stakeholders.</p> <p>Together, these initiatives will ensure that DER messages are regularly broken down, proactively communicated, and adapted to the needs of specific audiences, while reinforcing UNCTAD's</p>				

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		visibility and impact between full DER cycles.				
<p>SR 2 (to ECDE Programme donors and ECDE Programme management):</p> <p>2a to Programme donors: Based on the overall positive assessment of the ECDE Programme in this evaluation, and the unique and high-quality products and services delivered within a tight budget, it is recommended that Programme donors continue and, if possible, enhance their financial support to the Programme in light of UNCTAD’s continued strengthened mandate. At the same time, donors are encouraged to allocate a larger share through the UN Regular Budget to the Programme to allow for more long-term planning, both in relation to Programme staff and activities. In cases where donor funding is allocated for specific Programme activities, it is recommended to consider</p>	N/A	No comments from UNCTAD	Partially agrees	Given the strong performance of the Programme to date, DFAT aims to continue its support. However, Australia’s funding is dependent on performance, available budget and Australian Government priorities.	DFAT actions: DFAT to assess the performance of the Programme when its current funding cycle ends and determine the demand, need, focus and level of funding at that time.	DFAT suggest: Nov 2026 – Nov 2029

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<p>allocation of specific/additional resources in support of follow-up activities, to strengthen the applicability and uptake of newly developed capacities and skills (individually and institutionally) in the area of e-commerce and digital economy measurement, in support of implementation of recommendations (e.g. from eTrade Readiness Assessments) and sustainability aspects.</p>						
<p>SR 2 (to ECDE Programme donors and ECDE Programme management):</p> <p>2b to ECDE Programme management: It is recommended that the ECDE Programme management further map and explore opportunities for expanding the donor funding, with a particular view to attracting new emerging and non-traditional donors (philanthropy funds, banks, corporations etc.) to further diversify and broaden its extra-budgetary funding base. It is noted that both Saudi Arabia</p>	Accepted	<p>ECDE Programme management continues to pursue this. In May 2025, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia committed USD1.4 million to support the Programme’s work on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy. A Junior Professional Officer (JPO) sponsored by Finland will join the Programme team in 2025. Discussions are ongoing with Afreximbank and</p>	Agree	<p>DFAT agrees UNCTAD should map and explore opportunities for expanding donor funding for the Programme. DFAT urges UNCTAD to do this in a way that preserves the Programme’s purpose, scope, and commitment to transparent, inclusive, and demand-driven assistance.</p>	<p>UNCTAD actions: ECDE Programme Management.</p> <p>A Junior Professional Officer (JPO) sponsored by Finland, joined the Programme team in 2025. Discussions are ongoing with Afreximbank and potential partnerships with</p>	<p>UNCTAD suggest: 2025-2027. Requires resources.</p>

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and China have shown interest in supporting the Programme.		potential partnerships with philanthropic actors are being explored.			philanthropic actors are being explored.	
<p>SR 3 (to ECDE Programme management):</p> <p>Overall, it is recommended to continue focussing work within the existing overall Programme framework, as the demand and relevance of products and support is high. In terms of follow-up activities, and given existing funding and resource constraints, it is recommended to further prioritise and target Programme resources and efforts on those countries that demonstrate ownership and interest in supporting the implementation of recommendations and prioritised actions from developed eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies, including through own resources and capacities, to enhance the likelihood of</p>	Partially accepted	ECDE Programme management accepts the recommendation to focus work on the existing Work Plan for the remainder of the Work Plan period (2023-27), and to continue providing sustained support to countries with demonstrated commitment to and ownership of the process to implement eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies. At the same time, in accordance with the mandate granted by member States and in line with the principle of being demand-driven, the Programme remains committed to supporting all countries, and particularly those at risk	Partially agree	DFAT agrees with UNCTAD's response that while it is important to continue to provide support to countries that have demonstrated commitment to the Programme, it is also important that UNCTAD continues to offer its services to eligible countries that seek assistance.	UNCTAD actions: ECDE Programme management to continue focussing on the existing Work Plan (2023-27) , and to offer to assist any country that demands their support.	UNCTAD suggest: 2025-2027. Requires resources.

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impact and sustainability to be achieved.		of being left further behind as e-trade readiness divides continue to widen.				
<p>SR 3 (to ECDE Programme management):</p> <p>3a eTrade Readiness Assessments/e-commerce strategies:</p> <p>i) Continue and, if resources allow, further strengthen and prioritise the eTrade Reform Tracker initiative as it is likely to become an important supplement to the implementation reviews which place stronger emphasis on measuring more qualitative achievements at the country-level.</p> <p>ii) Explore opportunities for expanding the focus in the assessments on forward-looking perspectives (e.g. in relation to cross-border trade, which is of key importance for most countries).</p>	Accepted	The implementation of this recommendation is underway. Licence agreements for the deployment of the eTrade Reform Tracker have already been signed with several countries, including Fiji, Peru, Samoa and Solomon Islands. Furthermore, the deployment of the Tracker for the ECOWAS E-Commerce Strategy is expected to begin in conjunction with the first face-to-face training, scheduled for 15 to 18 July 2025. This training, supported by the ECOWAS Commission, will take place as part of a broader ECOWAS E-Commerce meeting. The event aims to raise awareness of the	Agree	Measurement of E-commerce Strategies is crucial in understanding their effectiveness, identifying gaps, formulating recommendations, and maximising their impact.	<p>UNCTAD actions:</p> <p>Digital Economy Capacity Building Section to continue work on implementing licence agreements for deployment of the eTrade Reform Tracker, including for the ECOWAS E-commerce Strategy.</p> <p>Face-to-face training delivery.</p>	<p>UNCTAD suggests:</p> <p>2025-27. Requires resources.</p>

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<p>iii) Further explore opportunities for strengthening implementation support for prioritised recommendations within countries.</p>		<p>ECOWAS E-Commerce Strategy and its relevance for the private sector, particularly for women-led businesses. It will also serve to identify effective practices and strategies from member States and gather actionable recommendations to support the successful implementation of the Strategy.</p>				
<p>SR 3 (to ECDE Programme management):</p> <p>3b eTrade for all:</p> <p>i) Explore further and facilitate new, alternative ways and opportunities for exchange among eTrade for all partners to motivate an enhanced active engagement in addition to partners' current contributions to the eTrade Readiness Assessments and e-commerce strategies development processes.</p>	Accepted	<p>Building on the existing collaboration framework, the Programme will continue to explore and implement innovative and inclusive formats for synergies and knowledge exchange. Where feasible, in-person gatherings - like the Switzerland-based partners' coordination breakfast - will remain a priority, as they foster stronger engagement and trust among partners. In parallel, we will continue to</p>	Agree	<p>DFAT agrees it is crucial for the Programme to explore all opportunities for partners to collaborate. It agrees UNCTAD should pursue new partners, particularly from the private sector, to broaden the depth of knowledge and experience that partners bring to the Programme's work.</p>	<p>UNCTAD actions: eTrade Initiatives Section will explore innovative & inclusive formats for knowledge exchange. In-person gatherings will remain a priority. Collection of tailored engagement plans for partners will continue, and partners will have more opportunities</p>	<p>UNCTAD suggests: 2025-27. Requires resources.</p>

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<p>ii) It is also recommended to further explore the potential to engage more with private sector strategic leadership, e.g. based on the model the Programme tried to implement with ICC.</p>		<p>collect tailored engagement plans for each partner, enhance opportunities for partners' briefings to showcase their research and activities, and promote deeper collaboration with those who show continued commitment and interest. We will continue to amplify outreach efforts, including through the eTrade for All platform and newsletter. Efforts will also be made to identify and bring in new partners whose expertise and strategic vision can complement the existing network. At the same time, it is acknowledged that meaningful partnerships require active engagement and mutual commitment from all partners, and this principle will continue to guide future collaboration efforts.</p> <p>The Programme recognises the importance of engaging</p>			<p>to showcase their research and activities. New partners will be identified and brought in, while existing partnerships will be fostered. The private sector will be more strategically engaged.</p>	

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		with the private sector in a more strategic and sustained manner. While previous attempts to establish a structured collaboration model did not materialise, the Programme remains open to pursuing similar avenues with like-minded private sector entities.				
<p>SR 3 (to ECDE Programme management):</p> <p><u>3c Capacity building/technical cooperation:</u></p> <p>i) Facilitate more possibilities for those attending particular training sessions (e.g. on statistics) for sharing, as a group, experiences from applying new skills and knowledge to further enhance the utility and uptake from these efforts and to support member States in applying new skills and capacities in implementation.</p> <p>ii) Promote sharing of experience among participants in the</p>	Accepted	<p>The implementation of this recommendation is underway. It should be noted that the UNCTAD Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy meets once a year to provide opportunities for member States to share experiences and lessons learned, including from trainings.</p> <p>Moreover, discussions in the Task Group on Measuring the Value of E-commerce are</p>	Agree	DFAT notes the activities already in place by the Programme measuring its work. DFAT suggests the Programme communicate more actively with Members on these activities to ensure they are fully aware of the opportunities available to them to share their experiences and learn from other Members.	<p>UNCTAD actions:</p> <p>Digital Economy Policy Research Section.</p> <p>Annual meeting of UNCTAD Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy.</p> <p>Dedicated online platform for the Task Group on Measuring the Value of E-commerce.</p> <p>Experience sharing through regional training.</p>	<p>UNCTAD suggests:</p> <p>After UNCTAD 16 (Oct 2025). Requires resources.</p>

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<p>capacity building events through “exchange sharing platforms”.</p> <p>iii) In order to support implementation of statistics on digital trade, it is recommended to pilot compilation of such statistics in one LDC and ensure thorough dissemination of learnings, since the member States are eager to learn from concrete learnings from implementation in practice.</p>		<p>documented in a dedicated online platform accessible for all participants.</p> <p>Experience-sharing is also facilitated through regional training efforts, such as have been held in the Pacific region and in Latin America, for example.</p> <p>Statistics on digital trade will be a consideration in our partnerships with Saudi Arabia and Fiji. Supporting additional countries will need resourcing.</p>				
<p>SR 3 (to ECDE Programme management):</p> <p>3d Partnerships/collaboration:</p> <p>i) Continue to focus on joint delivery of training packages (such as the ones organised with OECD, IMF and WTO) as this adds value and additional perspectives to the training as well as a greater outreach.</p>	Accepted	The implementation of this recommendation is underway. The joint delivery of training is already applied in practice, for example in the Pacific region with UNESCAP, in Arab countries (with UNESCWA) and, most recently, in Latin America, where a training on measuring digital trade was	Agree	DFAT agrees the Programme should explore every opportunity to collaborate more strategically with partners, including regional and national actors, to maximise impact and minimise operational costs of training delivery wherever possible.	UNCTAD actions: Digital Economy Capacity Building Section; Digital Economy Policy Research Section. Programme to continue to collaborate with partners like the OECD, WTO, etc. on training delivery.	UNCTAD suggests: 2025-27. Resources not required.

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ii) Explore possibilities for working more strategically together with regional/national actors (such as the Regional Economic Commissions) and tap more into the competencies and connections of these actors to further pursue and follow-up on the various initiatives launched by the ECDE Programme, and to reduce unit costs.		co-organised with WTO, OECD and UNECLAC in Chile. This practice will be continued wherever possible.				
<p>SR 4 on Gender, HRBA and inclusion (to ECDE Programme Management)</p> <p>eTrade for Women:</p> <p>1. It is recommended to further explore opportunities for more systematic data collection and documentation on results (outcomes/impact) from support to women entrepreneurs to complement the individual case stories. The potential and interest in eTrade for Women is high and wider</p>	Partially accepted	As the Initiative enters its next phase, the overarching goal is to move beyond individual capacity building to more systemic support at the ecosystem and business level. Efforts are underway to better capture outcome-level changes per the eTrade for Women Results Framework, including enhancing the use of ex-post surveys of members participating in high-business impact	Agree	DFAT agrees the collection of data should be maximised and is pleased the Initiative is working to achieve this goal. DFAT also welcomes enhanced collaboration with community leaders and members on maximising the Communities' impact. DFAT places great importance on inclusion in its international development policy and supports efforts to	<p>UNCTAD actions:</p> <p>Activities will continue to directly inform analytical work, as demonstrated by the forthcoming report Breaking Down Barriers for Women Digital Entrepreneurs: Insights from Africa, to be released in July 2025. At the Community level, the Initiative will continue to</p>	<p>UNCTAD suggest:</p> <p>2025-2027. Resources required.</p>

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<p>results/impact are expected now after several years of implementation and hundreds of participants being trained and supported. Currently, the documentation and evidence of wider impacts (e.g. policy impact) is mainly exemplified through (selected) individual case stories. More systemic efforts to track companies' growth (e.g. through annual turnover, number of employees (m/f) etc.) should be considered. The recent research study on the eTrade for Women in Sub-Saharan Africa is a step in this direction.</p> <p>2. It is recommended to explore how community leaders' ownership of the Communities could be further enhanced, e.g. by engaging them further in planning and discussions on how the Communities should work, and making it</p>		<p>activities (such as the study tour to China) to capture and document results at the leadership, networking and business levels.</p> <p>Additionally, activities will continue to directly inform analytical work, as demonstrated by the forthcoming report <i>Breaking Down Barriers for Women Digital Entrepreneurs: Insights from Africa</i>, to be released in July 2025.</p> <p>At the Community level, the Initiative will continue to engage Community Leaders more systematically in program planning and consultations. It is important to note that the role of Community Leader is a relatively recent feature (introduced in 2023), with each cohort serving on a pro-bono basis for 2 years. Building</p>		<p>increase the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Initiative's work. DFAT welcomes the Initiative's willingness to consider the inclusion of disability as a sub-criterion. While DFAT recognises the Initiative's primary focus remains on identifying women digital entrepreneurs with strong potential for business growth and ecosystem leadership, it also encourages it to pursue avenues for introducing poverty/sustainability criteria.</p>	<p>engage Community Leaders more systematically in program planning and consultations.</p>	

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<p>more transparent how and who, besides the Masterclass participants, should be selected for the communities. It is noted that the community leaders already have a strong role to play in the organisation of local activities to match and accommodate local needs and specificities and in relation to the outreach and have more women applying.</p> <p>3. Explore also how community members can more actively be engaged as they have a wealth of experience that could be better taken advantage of. This also includes dissemination to the communities on new knowledge, skills acquired through the community.</p> <p>4. Consider adding “people living with a disability” as an inclusion criterion in the call for applications, as is the case for religious and ethnic</p>		<p>on the experience of the 1st cohort, we have taken concrete steps to support the new Leaders: they have been asked to sign a Community Leader Charter, which outlines their roles and responsibilities; they have benefitted from a tailored onboarding session and have access to a dedicated space on the Platform to facilitate coordination. In addition, they engaged with the Advocates from their respective regions to foster alignment in vision and priorities. Creating additional opportunities for in-person gatherings will be essential to reinforce their leadership and visibility in their respective regions. To support this, dedicated resources will</p>				

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<p>minorities. This should not constitute a main selection criterion but could be a sub-criterion when all main criteria have been fulfilled. In the wider Programme context, it is recommended to introduce more systematic engagement of organisations representing people living with a disability. For example, developing a checklist of stakeholders to be engaged in consultations, workshops, communication processes, eTrade for all newsletters distribution lists etc.</p> <p>5. Consider introducing more explicit poverty/ sustainability criteria to qualify as eTrade for Women Masterclass participants. Companies consulted differ quite substantially in their outreach and business models and while some have more visible impact by creating rural jobs, providing</p>		<p>need to be identified and mobilised.</p> <p>As to Community members, they are a valuable source of lived experience and practical knowledge. Existing formats and channels will be further explored to encourage their active participation and to facilitate the wider sharing of learnings and expertise within the Communities, including through the eTrade for Women Academy.</p> <p>Inclusion is a core value of the Programme, therefore the criterion of living with a disability may be included and considered as a sub-criterion (once primary selection criteria are met), but not as a mandatory requirement. This is due to the challenge of maintaining a sufficiently broad and</p>				

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<p>underserved groups with e.g. financial services, this is less clear for others. As e-commerce develops and more are applying to join the Masterclasses, there is scope for adding more explicit sustainability and poverty reducing criteria.</p>		<p>comparable pool of high-potential women-led digital businesses across developing countries. On the introduction of poverty/sustainability criteria, while the Initiative recognises the relevance of social impact and sustainability, its primary focus remains on identifying women digital entrepreneurs with strong potential for business growth and ecosystem leadership. Many participants already operate businesses with a social dimension, but the main emphasis remains on economic impact and scalability.</p>				