

# eCommerce Week

16–20 April 2018  
Palais des Nations, Geneva



# SUMMARY REPORT



Development Dimensions of Digital Platforms

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS



### eCommerce Week 2018 in a nutshell



**1180+**  
Registered  
Participants  
**60+**  
Sessions



**1** High-level  
dialogue  
**2** Ministerial  
Round Tables



**264**  
Speakers &  
moderators



**41%**  
Women

**113**  
Countries  
represented



**50%**  
Developing  
countries

**23%**  
Asia  
**20%**  
Africa

**26**  
Least developed  
countries



**387**  
Government  
representatives



**238**  
Private  
sector



**317**  
Civil  
society



**21** out of the  
**29** eTrade for all  
Partners attending  
**30+** Sessions

**IGE**

**103**  
Countries  
**23** LDCs



**182**  
Private sector  
companies

The **eCommerce Week** has become over the years the leading global forum where public and private stakeholders, as well as civil society, engage in a conversation about the **development implications of the digital economy**. Its fourth edition brought together an impressive number of stakeholders from various backgrounds to discuss under the 2018 theme, "Development Dimensions of Digital Platforms", which was timely in view of recent revelations on the data-driven economy and social media.



In a nutshell, here are some key facts and achievements to take back from this week:

- The event attracted **more than 1180 registered participants**, from all backgrounds: public, private, civil society, all sides of the digital spectrum were well represented.
- There was a very strong presence of **stakeholders from developing countries**, which is critical to put the **development dimension** in focus.
- There was a good **gender balance** amongst participants, and one of the key issues discussed during many sessions was the digital gender divide.
- The week provided a set of key tangible outcomes:
  - a set of agreed **policy recommendations** stemming from the **Intergovernmental Group of Experts (IGE)**
  - the launch of a new private collaborative tool: [MyeT4a](#) (on the [etradeforall.org](#) platform), connecting donors, partners and beneficiaries.
  - **3 new [Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessments](#)** (Myanmar, Liberia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic),
  - The very first **[‘Year in Review’](#)** report of the **eTrade for all initiative**
  - The first global meeting of **e-commerce associations**
  - The Geneva launch of [Egypt’s national e-commerce strategy](#)
- **eTrade for all had 21 of its partners** (out of 29) participating and fully engaging in the various sessions, proving the inclusive nature of this initiative
- This fourth edition saw a **clear increase in the number of sessions and participants**, emphasizing the relevance of such an event in today’s evolving digital world
- With more than 10 ministers represented, as well as many CEOs and heads of organizations, **the IGE was, for the first time, an integral part of the eCommerce Week.**
- The eCommerce Week looked in depth at **key digital issues** like consumer trust; blockchain; digital gaps (between developed and developing countries, but also by gender; online platforms; payment solutions; digital skills amongst others.

# FROM THE HIGH-LEVEL TRACK



Development Dimensions of Digital Platforms



## UNCTAD

*"How can we find sufficient balance between incentivizing innovators, players, to continue driving inclusion while not sacrificing the responsibility of regulators to keep away illegal commercialization of confidential and personal data, abuse of privacy rules? (...) this balancing act becomes our major challenge"*

**Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary-General, UNCTAD**



## WTO

*"I see e-commerce as inevitable and increasingly pervasive. We can avoid distortions, but only if we do not cross arms. We must make sure this phenomenon leads to inclusive development"*

**Roberto Azevêdo, Director-General, World Trade Organization**



## BENEFICIARY COUNTRY

*"The rapid development and spread of technology, has without a doubt positively impacted the global economy, as it has translated into new opportunities for employment."*

**Pan Sorasak, Minister of Commerce, Cambodia**



## BENEFICIARY COUNTRY

*"E-commerce comes with challenges including skills gaps, affordability and the availability of IT infrastructures. We must address these in order to fully reap the benefits that e-commerce promises"*

**Amelia Kyambadde, Minister of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives, Uganda**



**PRIVATE SECTOR**

*"I sound like a broken record, but young digital entrepreneurs need capital. There's not enough capital in Africa."*

**Omobola Johnson, Senior Partner, TLcom Capital, and former Nigerian Minister of ICT**



**PRIVATE SECTOR**

*"Digital platforms are not only about e-commerce. They're about access to communication, to information, to education and entertainment."*

**Dinesh Agarwal, Founder and CEO, IndiaMART.com**



**DONOR COUNTRY**

*"Many women already offer products but don't know how to go online and use a platform"*

**Daniela Zehentner-Capell, Head of Division, Trade Related Development Cooperation, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany**



**CIVIL SOCIETY**

*"Africa is an almost virgin field in the area of e-commerce (with a share of around 1%). It is therefore a land of opportunities and possibilities, a land of potential and challenges."*

**Cissé Kane, Président, African Civil Society on the Information Society**



**CIVIL SOCIETY/ACADEMIA**

*"To build local platforms, we need higher levels of investment, but also protection of domestic industry from global monopolies."*

**Nick Srnicek, Lecturer in Digital Economy in the Department of Digital Humanities, Kings College, London**



**CIVIL SOCIETY**

*"In order for e-commerce to truly benefit us all, we need to look at e-commerce as a system and not as a mere sum of trade transactions."*

**Amanda Long, Director General, Consumers International**

If you missed it, you can watch the [entire recording of the High-Level Dialogue here](#) (Facebook Live) or listen to it on the [UN Digital Recordings Portal](#).

If you have suggestions or comments on the eCommerce week, [kindly take a minute to take our survey!](#)

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# HIGH-LEVEL SESSIONS



Development Dimensions of Digital Platforms

## HIGH LEVEL DIALOGUE: DEVELOPMENT DIMENSIONS OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS



**TUESDAY 17 APRIL**

Digital platforms are increasingly used by consumers as they facilitate e-commerce, online and mobile payments, and online labour. According to the [2017 Information Economy Report of UNCTAD](#), their importance in the evolving digital economy is growing. This high-level dialogue featured an interactive discussion with leaders from governments, international organizations, the private sector and academia, addressing the following questions:

- **What does this new economy mean for development?**
- **How will people and enterprises in developing countries, including the least developed countries, be affected?**
- **What are the main opportunities and pitfalls, and how should policy makers adapt?**

Dr Mukhisa Kituyi (Secretary-General, UNCTAD) stated that we are currently confronted with the challenge of the growing importance of the digital economy for any business that is trying to penetrate a new market or struggling in the competition with another big enterprise. He explained that 70% of people in Europe already shop online. However, such percentage goes down to 2% for least developed countries (LDCs). For small islands states, it is even more challenging as the broadband cost is extremely high and the Internet connection is often poor.



He recognized that 'technology is not a panacea for human problems' as we see that globalization is also correlated with inequality. He concluded by affirming that commerce is nowadays driven by aggregation of data and those actors who do not take part to it are in difficulty. He considered that **the biggest challenge for digitalization is balancing inclusion and integrity.**



Dr Nick Srnicek (Lecturer in Digital Economy, Department of Digital Humanities, Kings College, London) stated that if we consider data to be the new oil, then digital platforms are the new oil rigs as they aim at extracting as much data as possible. This is a feature that is included in their design: being intermediaries between producers and consumers or between companies, platforms are designed to collect all the data regarding such interactions. He then considered the existing problems:

- First, platforms have a tendency to monopolise. This is because the more people use them, the more they appear reliable and this leads to a 'winner-takes-all' scenario.

- Second, platforms amass significant amounts of data, and, consequently they are able to outcompete other companies that do not have access to such information.
- Third, platforms can reinforce lock-in effects: they also attract different businesses that in the end tend to adapt to a specific platform's business model. For example, some media organizations have completely readapted their business models in order to fit into Facebook's platform.

He concluded by **affirming that platforms surely bring opportunities and benefits for commerce as they reduce transaction costs**. However, **the concentration of the value that is created is often in the hands of the producers and very little may go back to consumers and society at large**.

Mr Roberto Azevêdo (Director-General, WTO) focused mainly on the **WTO's role vis-à-vis commerce: regulation**. He stated that e-commerce is an inevitable phenomenon that is currently unfolding faster than ever. However, there is still some margin of control as we are only at its early phase. He concluded by stressing the importance of avoiding possible distortions that uncontrolled and unregulated e-commerce could create. In particular, we have to make sure that development is as inclusive as possible, namely also offering opportunities to small players by providing both hard and soft infrastructure.

Mr Dinesh Agarwal (Founder and CEO, [IndiaMART.com](http://IndiaMART.com)) brought in **a practitioner's perspective**. He explained that only 30-35% of India has Internet coverage; however, it is still one of the countries with the highest absolute number of Internet users. He considered the crucial role of digital platforms as enablers of small entrepreneurs because they provide services and opportunities to rural consumers and businesses. He added that the Internet has the power to improve childcare and education; **'the Internet is not only entertainment and commerce, but also access to resources and knowledge'**. He did not ignore the possible pitfalls regarding data protection; however, he considered that it is up to regulators to create the best environment possible for platforms to flourish.

Dr Omobola Johnson (Senior Partner, TLcom Capital) also agreed with Mr. Agarwal regarding **platforms offering great opportunities for SMEs to increase their productivity**. She clarified that platforms provide small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) with infrastructural support, allowing them to access markets and increase their productivity. Moreover, platforms can also allow many new players to access the formal economy, as well as financing opportunities. She reaffirmed platforms' essential role in offering access to education and knowledge. Finally, she stressed the **important role of regulators in shaping the correct environment for SMEs' access to the digital economy, as well as the need for finance to set the right digital environment in place**.

The session was also enriched by the interventions of Ministers and senior-ranking officials from developing countries, namely Cambodia, Liberia, Uganda, Pakistan, Senegal and Zimbabwe. Selected senior representatives of the private sector and the civil society also contributed to this open and rich dialogue.

# MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLE: ADVANCING WOMEN'S DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES



TUESDAY 17 APRIL



As Deputy Secretary-General Isabelle Durant of UNCTAD pointed out in her opening remarks, **women's economic empowerment is at the heart of sustainable development and essential to achieve gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth.**

This Ministerial Roundtable looked at how digitalization can help empower women as entrepreneurs, traders, workers and professionals, and helped identify in which

areas digital inequalities remain gender-biased, paying particular attention to the situation in developing and least developed countries.

The following key issues were debated:

- The necessary steps to be taken to avoid the widening of existing gender digital divides. Indeed, data show that an estimated 250 million more men than women are currently going online. Women are also widely underrepresented in the ICT sector, especially in leadership positions.
- The role of digital technologies in empowering women entrepreneurs. ICT services are expanding and can provide well remunerated employment. Strategies that could facilitate an increase in the participation of women in the digital sector could focus on three main areas, including (but not limited to) challenging stereotypes; promoting digital skills and education and advocating for more women entrepreneurs
- How to strengthen the voice of women entrepreneurs in policy processes influencing e-commerce and the digital economy in developing countries.

The panel agreed that the time is now ripe to step up the efforts and take advantage of the digital transformation to ensure that it represents a leapfrog opportunity for women and a chance to build a more inclusive economy.

# MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLE: DIGITAL IMPACTS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



## TUESDAY 17 APRIL

This session addressed the impact and role of digitalization on the SDGs. The world is increasingly affected by the use of digital platforms. This creates new opportunities as well as poses challenges, especially considering that the persistence of digital divides heightens the risk of worsening the existing inequalities. The session focused on efforts at all levels to ensure that ‘the evolving digital economy brings about the inclusive future we want’.

The digital economy is creating **new opportunities for jobs and employment**. It is up to government leaders to create a digital environment that can benefit all sections of society at large. In accordance with the [Istanbul Declaration and Programme of Action \(IPoA\)](#), it is the governments’ task to encourage activity online and ensure an inclusive digital environment for all sections of society, including in the LDCs.

Digitalization is clearly **benefiting SMEs** in their competition with bigger groups, as classical business barriers can be broken down thanks to technology; e-commerce can also be leveraged to promote entrepreneurship. Digital platforms are particularly of use to SMEs vis-à-vis the achievement of SDG 8.3 which calls for the promotion of ‘development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation [...]’.

Nevertheless, digitalization raises many issues and challenges:

- The many **digital divides** need to be addressed: between developing and developed countries, between gender and between rural and urban areas, among others.
- There is the necessity to develop appropriate infrastructure that can facilitate communication and transactions between companies and customers and among businesses. Government action is paramount for **the creation of soft and hard infrastructure** conducive to the development of a digital economy.
- Governments must guard against the **risks and abuses of digital platforms** that can turn out to be monopolies misusing users’ data.
- **Consumer trust** is key: ensuring trust leads to consumers’ engagement which is crucial to the success of the digital economy. Governments need to create the right environment for technology to thrive, including by improving access to high quality and affordable Internet connections.
- There is a need to fight the misconception that careful design and safeguards can hold back progress. On the contrary, **legal certainty** through the creation of specific regulations is conducive to a better digital business environment.

In conclusion, it is clear that due to its particular nature (which combines big data and artificial intelligence), a ‘holistic’ approach towards the digital economy which combines regulation, education, and capacity building, at the national and international level is needed in order to achieve the ambitious 2030 Development Agenda.

# E-TRADE READINESS ASSESSMENTS IN LDCs: FROM ASSESSMENTS TO ACTIONS



## MONDAY 16 APRIL

Government representatives, international organizations and civil society reinforced their strong support for the **Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessments** developed by UNCTAD noting that they had helped policymakers in LDCs identify bottlenecks and concrete actions to enable them engage in and benefit from e-commerce. Turning the policy recommendations into practical activities and projects, with the support of development partners, was the important next step for beneficiary countries to take. Countries shared their plans for implementing the recommendations, while also highlighting common challenges, including the lack of coordination across government agencies; outdated regulatory and legal systems; low ICT literacy and skills; limited access to financing opportunities; a relatively nascent public-private dialogue; and low engagement from development partners in e-commerce, in some LDCs, due to its cross-cutting nature. In addition, **3 eTrade Readiness Assessments (“eT Readies”)** were officially launched for [Lao PDR](#), [Liberia](#) and [Myanmar](#).

### To move forward, the following suggestions were made:

1. Promote government ownership of the assessment recommendations. This requires strong national leadership, country-level coordination across different line ministries and departments and a “champion” leading the process.
2. Integrate specific elements of the recommendations into national development plans, government and private sector initiatives, ICT policies and strategies, regulatory frameworks and existing development projects.
3. Organize country-level launches of the eT Readies, coupled with a donor roundtable with development partners to help them identify specific projects and activities to fund and contribute to.
4. Customize the implementation of recommendations to each country, avoiding a one-size-fits all approach.
5. Engage the private sector and provide a platform for them to propose solutions.
6. Consider using the EIF national steering committees as the coordination forum to monitor the implementation of the assessment recommendations.
7. Consider providing additional resources to respond to the number of requests from member States, including for non LDCs. Although seven (7) eT Readies had been completed as of April 2018, fifteen (15) additional countries had made requests to UNCTAD to carry out assessments.

# DIGITAL ECONOMY FOR DEVELOPMENT - A EUROPEAN STRATEGY



## TUESDAY 17 APRIL



Following introductory remarks by UNCTAD's Secretary General, the EU Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, Ms. Mariya Gabriel, presented the EU digital strategy for development. She stated that the **citizens' interest must be at the heart of digital policy**. Although digitalization is not a priority for all development platforms, its value and need for integration are clear. In 2017, the European Union had launched the [Digital 4 Development policy](#) dedicated to mainstreaming digitalisation across the development

policy and promoting the principles of the European Digital Single Market in developing countries. **Digitalization drives development**, and this was why the EU digital strategy calls for the integration of development. This includes creating affordable broadband, teaching digital skills, and bolstering online entrepreneurship. However, only 250 million euros out of a total aid budget of 30 billion euros are currently spent by the EU on areas of relevance to digitalization.



The other panelists mentioned the need to integrate technology in development strategies for the creation of new employment opportunities. The African Union Commissioner for Infrastructure, Energy, ICT and Tourism, Dr. Amani Abou-Zeid, pointed out that Africa is the most youthful continent. As a result of this specific demographics, there is untapped potential that comes with digital development. The Co-CEO E-commerce of the Jumia Group, Mr Jérémy Doute, stated that a number of e-Commerce platforms

have emerged in Africa, filling up a market gap in delivering products and services and empowering local entrepreneurs.

### The following areas were identified as critical for digital improvement in Africa:

- Transition to a network-based society,
- Developing an ICT infrastructure programme,
- Universal Internet access to computers/devices,
- Better data protection.

# NATIONAL E-COMMERCE STRATEGY FOR EGYPT



## TUESDAY 17 APRIL

Following its launch in Cairo last year, the session presented highlights of a new [National E-commerce Strategy for Egypt](#) developed jointly UNCTAD and the Ministry for Communication and Information Technology. The strategy aims to support Egypt in growing its digital economy and to achieve the implementation of its Sustainable Development Goals Vision 2030. In the presence of H.E. Mr Yasser El-Kady, Minister of Communications and Information Technology, the new strategy was showcased and the country's vision towards making Egypt a leading e-commerce economy spelled out. Egypt has long been committed to harnessing the significant advantages that ICTs bring to national economic and social development. This strategy was **a concrete step toward helping Egypt achieve better economic performance, inclusive growth and sustainable development**. The national e-commerce strategy has fed into the formulation of Egypt's national sustainable development plan, Egypt Vision 2030 and comprises a key part of this national plan which aims to ensure that Egypt is among the top 30 countries in knowledge economy.

**The cooperation across sectors** - both inter-ministerially and between the public and private sectors – emerged as an important factor for successful implementation. Representatives from several key sectors for e-commerce in Egypt, including payments and logistics, assured their commitment to supporting the Government of Egypt in the strategy implementation.

The Egypt strategy is the first of its kind developed by UNCTAD; it is relevant not only for Egypt but for other countries as well, since many learnings from the Egyptian strategy development experience could benefit and be replicated by other developing countries.

# FROM THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL GROUP OF EXPERTS



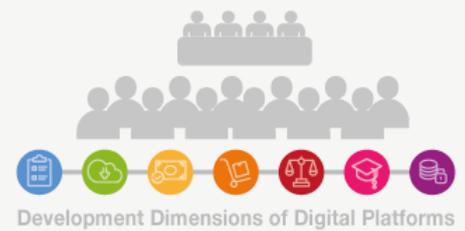
The second session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy took place as an integral part of the eCommerce Week.

The meetings culminated with the adoption of 2 main outcomes:

- A set of agreed policy recommendations for the consideration by UNCTAD's Trade and Development Board (TDB), emphasizing the importance of e-commerce and the digital economy for sustainable and inclusive development.
- A decision to recommend the TDB to establish a **Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy** as described in [TD/B/EDE/2/3](#). To that end, UNCTAD should prepare terms of reference for this new Working Group, clarifying that its objective is to contribute to and advance cooperation on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy and that it will avoid duplication with other relevant ongoing work.



# TAKEAWAYS FROM SELECTED SESSIONS



*N.B: These summaries are based on the one-pager received from each session's organizer as of 22 May 2018. The following list is thus non-exhaustive. For more information **on all the eCommerce week sessions**, including the ones not summarized in this report, please see the [official website](#) for speakers' PowerPoint presentations and notes.*

## MONDAY 16 APRIL

### 4TH GLOBAL SURVEY OF INTERNET USERS

Reliance on digital technologies has never been higher. Technology companies are increasingly able to shape political and economic outcomes, while governments look for solutions to new technology-infused public policy problems. Knowing what Internet users think is crucially important, as public opinions shape the outcome of debates on technology, Internet governance, e-commerce, and public policy.

The 4th Annual Global Survey on Internet Security and Trust by CIGI/Ipsos, UNCTAD and the Internet Society sheds much needed light upon **public attitudes toward taxation of technology companies, use of e-commerce platforms and the power of social media, search engines, online applications and online advertisements, among other topics.**

The panel discussed this new survey data from 25 economies, with over two thirds of the surveyed economies hailing from the developing world. This global perspective provides an important glimpse at what Internet users are currently thinking, what sort of actions or actors concern them the most, and where they would like the Internet ecosystem to go in the future. From the results of the survey it seems that one of the main concerns remains the issue of trust. Trust is the bedrock of the Internet. Without trust, people stop freely expressing themselves, engage in e-commerce and use platforms of various stripes. In spite of existing mistrust towards digital platforms and social media, there appears to be a trend globally towards higher levels of participation in e-commerce. But online shopping still has a lot of untapped potential in many emerging economies.

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## PLATFORM-BASED E-COMMERCE: WHAT IS AT STAKE FOR MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES?

This session explored the **opportunities and challenges MSMEs in developing countries to meaningfully use the possibilities of e-commerce platforms**. A number of questions that need to be properly addressed were identified, questions related to the business models of platforms, their effects on competition and rule-setting, the shortcomings of social media platforms as marketplaces, possible alternatives to global e-commerce platforms, and the integration of emerging technologies and their effects on MSMEs.

Platforms provide a large potential consumer market, save time and transportation costs, and overcome geographical reach constraint; they often take care of the end-to-end process – including packaging, shipping, and payments – they provide data analysis tools, and can contribute to the MSMEs' reputation and consumer trust.

Yet, while there is a clear interest for MSMEs to play a more meaningful role in cross-border e-commerce, they are still lagging behind. **It is often difficult for MSMEs to make full use of these opportunities due to the high costs for logistics, weak ICT access and skills, and a general lack of resources**. At the same time, MSMEs from developing countries are often not eligible to register with a platform. Platforms sometimes impose restrictions related to the country of origin of the seller, the size of the business, and the bank account and currency used by the seller. On top of that, there are additional bottlenecks related to documentation requirements, cross-border product restrictions, poor infrastructure, and a lack of consumer trust depending on the origin of the seller.

**There is a need to adopt a comprehensive approach to identify the challenges systematically**. To that end, matrixes like the one designed by the International Trade Centre, which maps the four stages of the e-commerce value chain (establishing an online business; international e-payment; cross-border delivery; and after sales) to three layers (firm-level capabilities, immediate business ecosystem, and the national environment) are useful. The panel also discussed the potential influence of emerging technologies on e-commerce, focusing on the inter-connected developments in the Internet of Things (IoT), big data, and artificial intelligence (AI).

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## INTELLIGENT TECHNOLOGY AND TRADE TOOLS: FROM TRADE LOGISTICS TO A WTO E-COMMERCE AGREEMENT

ICT technologies and solutions could contribute to the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) implementation, improving administrative efficiency with the adoption of more transparent governance practices. Discussions in this session focused on the **impact of recent developments in technologies on trade facilitation and how cutting-edge technologies such as blockchain and augmented intelligence are allowing international trade transactions and negotiations to advance**. Concretely, blockchain is already a reality, and panelists shared practical applications of the distributed ledger technology for trade facilitation.

The possibilities of WTO members to adopt an artificial intelligence (AI) tool in order to speed-up the conclusion of an e-commerce multilateral trade agreement was discussed. The WTO Information Technology Agreement (ITA) could contribute to the implementation of the TFA. Referring to the WTO Work Programme on E-commerce, it was suggested that delegations should include scenario exercises on selected topics (such as 3D printing). With regard to the application of AI to trade negotiations, panelists concluded that machine learning tools have the potential to transform disaggregated trade data into intelligible scenarios for decision-makers, reducing the complexity of the process. Importantly, when analyzing trade data, negotiators would benefit from using AI tools which could enable data management, predictive analysis, and modelling. Ultimately, the adoption of AI-trade tools would result into smarter trade agreements. During the subsequent Q&A session, some participants questioned how the application of AI to trade negotiations could be aligned with democratic processes at the national level.

The session concluded with a signing ceremony of a memorandum of understanding between the [Intelligent Tech & Trade Initiative \(ITTI\)](#) and [UNCTAD](#) to collaborate on specific issues such as the application of AI and blockchain on international trade operations, trade logistics, transactions and negotiations.

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## DEVELOPMENT DIMENSIONS OF THE SHARING ECONOMY - LEARNINGS FROM CHINA

The 'Sharing Economy' is a term that is often used to describe the sharing of, inter alia:

- physical assets (such as a house, car, or machinery);
- time for tasks (such as cleaning, or running errands); as well as
- the sharing of knowledge and know-how.

Sharing economy activities often involve an exchange of money, as well as the creation of some employment. Most services relating to the sharing economy use digital platforms to achieve a more efficient utilization of these items, usually for a fee, and become “market places” that instantaneously match supply and demand on a massive scale.

This session aimed at studying the implications of the sharing economy from the perspective of sustainable development, with focus on China, which has seen a rapid growth in the value of its sharing economy, and where the sharing economy is promoted as a national strategy.

### ***Key themes identified included:***

- The potential for very rapid growth of new sharing economy businesses
- The potential of the sharing economy to reach the SDGs (by increasing employment, including for women; by potentially reducing poverty for certain groups; through environmental benefits associated with more efficient use of produced goods)
- The way that the sharing economy creates interlinkages between the economy, society and the environment
- The new opportunities for growth, new business models, and entrepreneurship, especially in the urban areas for the location-bound sharing economy

- That the sharing economy is reliant upon government investment in infrastructure (such as broadband and 3G rollout, including to rural areas) as well as investment in education and skills development of society
- The growth of sharing economy businesses also rely on access to venture capital, which may be less available in some developing countries than in others
- Policy-making and regulation have lagged behind the development of the sharing economy
- The sharing economy can have deep impact on employment.

**Recommendations included:**

- The need to share best practices and policies used in different countries
- The need for international standards on data sharing, to remove barriers to operating across borders.

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## HOW TO OVERCOME BARRIERS TO CROSS-BORDER DIGITAL PAYMENTS

Even as e-commerce flourishes around the world, entrepreneurs and start-ups cannot upload or sell apps they develop, as the seller option to receive cross-border payments is not always available. The app market is almost completely frictionless, in theory, with the app store taking care of storage, distribution, billing, and updates, but there are relatively few developing countries where developers can upload and sell their apps.

Innovative ways that have been devised to allow merchants in certain countries to sell their products overseas were discussed. The panel debated the roots of these challenges, mainly non-standardization of payment platforms across borders and compliance costs for banks.

Indeed, when a merchant wants to get past the ordering stage, receiving payments for exports can be difficult. Concrete examples from Amazon, Paypal and Mastercard were discussed to illustrate the existing issues sellers and buyers face in many developing countries.

The issues in cross-border payments come in the back-end, with respect to clearing and settlements. In addition to the correspondent system, however, there is a closed-loop system that can operate across borders but needs to be operating in both countries involved in a transaction. In the back-end, the issue is 'de-risking' by correspondent banks, resulting from the costs of due diligence with respect to know your customer requirements, anti-money laundering, and combating the financing of terrorism. Here again standardization is key, because correspondent banking is complex, and standardization lowers costs.

**It seems that the two biggest hurdles are the spectrum involved and the need for standardization. The spectrum refers to the relationships between the regulatory bodies, consumers, and sellers with regards to payment. It was concluded that the push for standardization should not merely occur at the international level, but that sellers should encourage their local jurisdictions to embrace standardization as well.**

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## DIGITAL TRADE AS IF DEVELOPMENT MATTERED

At the WTO's Eleventh Ministerial Conference in December 2017, 71 Members had signed a [joint statement on e-commerce](#) and expressed a shared commitment to advance discussions in the WTO on that issue. The panel at this session expressed its common view that development, capacity-strengthening and aid for trade should be placed at the heart of any future e-commerce discussions.

It was crucial in these discussions to take into consideration the different e-commerce development stages and needs of each Member. In this regard, there was a common view that the [Trade Facilitation Agreement \(TFA\)](#) was worth looking at, including in the negotiation process, as a potential model for future discussions. For an LDC, the potential benefit from engaging in the e-commerce discussions was that its actual needs and concerns can be reflected in the rule-making process. LDCs still face many challenges when trying to reap the benefits from the digital economy. Therefore, for an LDC to be able to participate comprehensively in any future discussion on this topic, capacity building and technical assistance for the government, business community and other stakeholders are key. Before moving towards the implementation phase of any potential e-commerce agreement in the future, LDCs should have the necessary space to bring their digital economy to a certain level.

Among several key capacity constraints, the last-mile delivery was identified as a major hurdle in terms of trade facilitation and access to finance by MSMEs. It was also mentioned that public-private partnership (PPP) and the increased involvement of SMEs can help prioritize policy interventions. The possibility to establish a global fund for e-commerce was also mentioned.

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## AN AFRICAN DIGITAL STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION

This session explored [the implications of the digital transformation for Africa's long-term development](#). The challenges and opportunities against the background of Africa's agenda for integration, industrialization, structural transformation and economic diversification were discussed.

The African paradox is that it is rich continent with a wealth of natural resources but it is beset with widespread poverty and underdevelopment. Panelists also mentioned Africa's premature deindustrialization over the last twenty years. They also recalled Africa's vision for [Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want](#) and the recent launch of the [African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement \(AfCFTA\)](#). The adoption of the AfCFTA is a further step towards continental integration and will need to be complemented with cross border infrastructural development, and stronger coordination of industrial and agricultural policies.

In the lead-up to the WTO MC11 (held in December 2017), developing countries came under pressure to agree to negotiate global rules on e-commerce. Panelists suggested that African governments and citizens should build national and regional knowledge, skills and capabilities to obtain a share of its potential benefits as a prerequisite to consideration of multilateral rule-making. Policies and programmes for digital infrastructure, access to technology, ownership and management of national data were highlighted. Panelists also considered issues related to the free flow of data, non-disclosure

of source code, prohibition on data localization amongst others. Key questions on the types of national policies that would promote industrialization in the new digital age were similarly debated.

**The following recommendations were made:**

- African countries need to build its digital capabilities for inclusive digital trade.
- African countries should pay attention to the risks of the digital rule-making agenda.
- African countries should assess the tendency in digital transformation for market concentration that exacerbates inequality.
- Policy-makers should recognize that digital platforms extract data in ways that may enhance consumer surplus at the expense of producers, and that benefits derived from data are often not reinvested in the jurisdiction where the data are obtained.
- Digital technologies may reduce transaction costs but without a corresponding reduction in production costs, the economy may be made vulnerable as increased imports of manufactured goods come at the expense of domestic production.
- Vital infrastructure such as roads, electricity and water should not be neglected in favour of digital infrastructure.
- Digital transformation does not mean other policies for industrial and agricultural development are no longer needed.
- Enabling local digital eco-systems will contribute to global digital value chains, and domestic ownership over domestic platforms, collective rights over collective data, and free flow of digital technologies are some areas for further exploration.

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## **MEASURING EXPORTS OF DIGITALLY-DELIVERED SERVICES**

The session offered an opportunity to review first hand results from the first two developing countries - Costa Rica and India – to have implemented an enterprise survey to measure exports of services delivered remotely over ICT networks. Another presentation on current, new and related initiatives on measuring digital trade in the United States provided comparable estimates. The session also reviewed main findings and recommendations stemming from the implementation of the first surveys, with a view to making the methodology widely available.

It was acknowledged that the Internet and the digital transformation of business processes fundamentally change the way people, businesses and governments interact, allowing services to become more tradable and more traded. Examples include telecommunications, information services, computer services, licensing and business and knowledge processes. They are of high and growing relevance for all countries, as they represent a strategic component of the digital economy and are gaining increasing importance in international trade negotiations.

Many countries are challenged by the need to produce timely, comprehensive and comparable statistics on the digital economy and trade. In this context, the UNCTAD initiative to develop a definition and methodology for measuring digitally-delivered services (also known as ICT-enabled services) was acknowledged as a valuable contribution, particularly as this was achieved in consultation with experts from the Inter-agency Task Force on International Trade Statistics and the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development and was submitted for review and approval by the UN Statistical Commission.

It was shown that the implementation of the survey can yield meaningful results. Running the survey also helped improve information in the business register. In India, the survey was acknowledged as an opportunity to obtain more disaggregated trade in services data. Information was shared on a new initiative, the 2017 benchmark survey of transactions in selected services and intellectual property with foreign persons, which will collect data on the percentage of services sales to foreign persons that are performed remotely.

Both Costa Rica and India confirmed the interest in continuing to conduct the survey in 2017. It was agreed that conducting such a survey can pose challenges, notably of providing the necessary support to help enterprises respond, of ensuring full consistency with existing trade in services statistics and of continuously needing to improve the sampling frame and business register.

Notwithstanding the challenges, a number of good practices were identified, including the organization of a sensitization workshop for respondent enterprises in Costa Rica and the availability of follow up for clarifications by telephone; and the collection of data using sectorial lists of licensed enterprises in India, in absence of a business register, as well as a good collaboration and data sharing with the Reserve Bank to ensure consistency of results.

In light of the shared experiences it was recommended to **extend the survey to other developing countries and to complement this approach with other initiatives to measure trade in the digital economy.**

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## **THE ROLE OF BUSINESS IN PROTECTING ONLINE CONSUMERS**

The [United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection](#) are the most relevant instrument at the international level to assess the role of business in protection online consumers. The Guidelines were first adopted by the General Assembly in 1985 and revised in 2015 to address, among other issues, the principles for good business practices and e-commerce. Further, the [UNCTAD Manual on Consumer Protection 2017](#) is the first comprehensive international reference in this field, aiming to support developing countries and economies in transition in their choice of policies and providing practical tools to assist policy makers in enhancing capacities while implementing the recently revised Guidelines. UNCTAD's publication: [Towards e-commerce legal harmonization in the Caribbean](#), reports on progress made by the countries in regard to electronic transactions and electronic signatures, online protection of consumers, protection of personal data, industrial and intellectual property, domain names, cybercrime, security of information and pending legislation and challenges.

Speakers identified the challenges that consumers face online: lack of access to the internet, quality and cost of access, lack of access to payment methods, scams, unfair business practices; misleading reviews, and lack of knowledge of their rights in the digital marketplace. One of the key contributions that businesses can provide to increase consumer trust is higher security and data protection as well as more effective and accessible dispute resolution. This all contributes to ensuring a level of protection for consumers using e-commerce that is not less than that afforded to other forms of commerce, as contained in Guideline 63.

Businesses must integrate consumer protection as an objective and make it an integral part of their business culture if they are to thrive in the digital context. Meanwhile, regulators should move from protectionism to consumer protection. For this to happen, there needs to be more effective cooperation among all relevant stakeholders: Governments, international organizations, businesses and consumer groups. This is an important way to ensure that **the development of e-commerce contributes to the attainment of the SDGs.**

## TUESDAY 17 APRIL

### EXPANDING E-COMMERCE CAPACITY FOR A SUSTAINABLE 2030

Studies show that MSMEs that use online platforms are around five times more likely to export than those in the traditional economy. Moreover, 75% of Internet impact in terms of economic value arises from companies operating in traditional industries (such as transport and agriculture). To ride the wave of the e-commerce potential it is becoming increasingly important that populations have meaningful access to and use of digital technologies.

Participants in this session considered the features of an enabling policy environment for e-commerce and discussed the opportunities and bottle-necks MSMEs face. Speakers shared their expertise about how the ICT ecosystem works in practice and offered suggestions as to how governments and businesses can work together to align e-commerce expectations and drive well-informed and future-oriented policy approaches that encourage ICT access, investment and innovation. Participation from the audience underscored the challenges countries often face to expand e-commerce capacity including payments, skills, infrastructure and awareness.

#### Key recommendations include:

- Increased understanding of what digital trade is and the opportunity it can provide is needed. E-commerce will impact economies differently, so governments and businesses should align expectations on e-commerce and consider short, medium and long-term impacts.
- There is a strong need to address connectivity within all aspects of the value chain on the national, regional and international level. E-commerce by nature is not necessarily restricted to one single country so coherence and consistency are important factors.
- Emerging technologies such as AI can provide new and innovative tools to build inclusivity in a digital trade environment. Incentives for the development of language and localization software have to go hand in hand with the ambitions to ensure physical connectivity. Such

incentives or policies should be market-driven and based on voluntary commercial arrangements recognizing their return on investment potential.

- An e-commerce business cannot rely on the digital layer only but must consider all aspects of activity such as logistics. A holistic business strategy is important to develop to compete in the digital economy.
- Declarations on trade need to catch up with the current environment. There are gaps between business and government understanding that can be narrowed by more multistakeholder discussion.
- Companies of all sizes rely on a holistic interoperable digital ecosystem and enabling policy environment to reap the benefits of e-commerce. See ICC policy statement on [ICT, Policy and Sustainable Economic Development](#) that was provided as an example of this framework.

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## REPUBLIC OF KOREA'S NEW E-GOVERNMENT IN TODAY'S DIGITAL ECONOMY

Best practices of the Republic of Korea's new e-Government were presented during this session:

- How its new e-Government will promote new economic value, which in turn may lead to sustainable development.
- The Korea On-line e-Procurement System (KONEPS) was introduced. It is a national comprehensive e-Procurement system that allows people to do business with the country by processing all the procurement processes online, including registration, bidding, contract, receiving and payment.
- The Electronic Customs Clearance System (UNI-PASS) was also presented. It is the electronic customs clearance system used by the Korea Customs Service. It is the world's first electronic customs clearance system that automates export/import customs, tax collection and any other related administrative processes.

The e-Government environment is rapidly changing. New ICTs will create a hyper-connected society that connects people, things, and space without any constraints. In particular, emerging technologies, IoT, cloud, big data, and mobile (the so-called 'ICBM') are transforming the future of the e-Government.

The Republic of Korea announced that it was ready to provide technical assistance to developing countries, and LDCs in particular, in the field of e-government.

## E-RESIDENCY: DEMOCRATIZING ACCESS TO THE EU BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The discussion centered around **e-Residency, an innovative method for entrepreneurs in developing countries and LDCs to seamlessly engage in global trade through e-commerce**. The session was divided into three topics: (i) e-Residency; (ii) Holvi, a fintech company that provides digital business accounts to e-residents around in the world; and (iii) the journey of an e-resident from Turkey.

The first segment discussed the e-Residency programme of the Government of Estonia, which grants digital access to the EU business environment, so people can easily start and run an EU business remotely and online, open an EU business payment account and have access to international payment providers such as PayPal. The session focused on the user journey

- to become an e-Resident;
- to establish and manage online an EU company; and
- to open an EU business payment account.

It took 15 minutes to complete the e-Residency applications and the company was established in less than one day, with the person retaining full ownership of the business. Additionally, e-residents can manage the company online because the e-Residency card allows the person to digitally sign documents and contracts. The programme had received more than 33,000 applications from 154 countries, with most businesses created being classified as microenterprises. One of the major challenges of e-Residency remained reaching people in developing countries.

In the second segment. The CEO of Holvi provided an overview of his company's work to help microentrepreneurs by providing them with an EU digital payment account, digital bookkeeping and invoicing. As microbusinesses becomes the new standard for work, Holvi's services make it easier to run a business when time and monetary resources, as well as expertise in matters like compliance, accounting and legal, are scarce. Part of Holvi's business was to help e-residents from all over the world to open an EU business current account, which enabled them in turn to access international payment providers.

Mrs. Arzu Altınay, an e-resident from Turkey talked about her experience with e-Residency. Before the programme, she had had a thriving walking tour business in Istanbul. By the summer of 2015 however, she had experienced a dramatic loss in business. Most importantly, PayPal had had to close operations in the country, so she stopped having access to international clients. When she discovered e-Residency in 2016, she established another business in the EU, opened a bank account, and reopened her PayPal merchant account. She now has two thriving businesses and can accept payments from international clients.

To watch Arzu's experience with e-Residency, visit these links: [here](#) and [here](#)!

Although entrepreneurs in developing countries stand to benefit the most from e-Residency, the programme has the challenge of opening more centres to deliver the e-Residency cards in developing countries. In the meantime, cooperation between governments and the private sector is encouraged so more people can better integrate themselves into global trade through innovative programmes like e-Residency.

# WEDNESDAY 18 APRIL

## INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE ON DIGITAL COMMERCE AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Developing trainings on digital commerce is complicated, not only because the topic is evolving, it also demands a twofold approach, considering core trade issues on the one hand and the broader digital issues on the other. The [World Bank's 'Digital Dividends Report'](#) and [UNCTAD's Information Economy Report 2017](#) have helped to 'wake us up from digital sleepwalking' as they both address the mismatch between expectations and reality.

**The Digital Commerce course, which is offered by a number of eTrade for all partners**, presented at the session has focused on two important flows in the delivery of digital services: the flow of data and the flow of money. The course targeted specifically the knowledge gap arising from the fact that discussions regarding digital commerce tend to be restricted to a small community of experts who fully understand the issues at stake. In particular, the course's modules have focused on the understanding of e-commerce issues in trade agreements and considered that the applicable legal framework comprises those provisions related to the following:

1. Market access and customs duties
2. Intellectual property, protection of personal information, consumer protection
3. E-signatures and digital authentication

The value added by this course lies in the fact that it offers a safe and free space for discussing the promises as well as the challenges of digital commerce.

With regard to **technical aspects**, data flows facilitate access to market information and reduce the costs of transactions thus connecting consumers and firms on the global scale. Data flows comprise three layers: the interface (i.e. content and applications such as the web browser), the transport layer (through protocols such as Transport Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) or the Domain Name System (DNS) and the physical layer namely telecommunication infrastructures. Business models incorporating data flows include:

1. Internet access through a subscription fee
2. Computer software and services
3. Cloud service model: fee demanded for storage space online
4. Digital products (e.g. books, themes, music): subscription fee
5. Internet data model (e.g. Facebook): collection through user data and use of advertisements
6. Platforms (e.g. Airbnb, Uber): demanding a transaction fee as intermediaries.

With regard to **policy aspects**, competition on the market is mainly targeting consumers' attention. In this regard, it was noted that some commentators refer to Gross Domestic Time (GDT) rather than Gross Domestic Product (GDP) while speaking of economics. In a market where production is increasingly being automated, the focus is not on production but rather on how time and money are spent. The [ITC's report on e-commerce](#) shows that e-commerce offers a possibility for more inclusive trade: it suggests that 82% of the enterprises that engage solely in cross-border e-commerce are small and medium in size. Furthermore, e-commerce enables micro enterprises in Africa to trade as such

enterprises are those that resort to e-commerce the most. Despite this positive outlook, there are many current challenges hindering developing countries' participation in global e-commerce.

**When looking at the phase of the creation of an enterprise, here are some of the issues to consider:**

- In the establishment phase, most of the difficulties for MSMEs lay in lack of online visibility and technical skills
- International e-payments: the major challenge is the missing link between third party e-payment service providers and local banks
- Cross-border delivery: costly postal and courier delivery (costs are often twice as high as in developed countries)
- Aftersales: high rate of merchandise returns

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## **UNDERSTANDING INTO ACTION: E-COMMERCE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR AFRICA'S ENTREPRENEURS**

***How do skills for e-commerce differ from those in traditional trade?***

Personal qualities, business skills, international skills, and e-commerce skills are all needed. Changing over to digital trade is a 'big task', some companies feel that they simply do not understand the digital world, the quantity and depth of expertise is in short supply, or the leaders don't know where to start. If these challenges are not addressed, then the business runs the possibility of being left behind.

***How can SME managers best be prepared and coached to build those skills?***

Be ready to 'learn, unlearn, and relearn'. If managers are not willing to explore what is possible, but merely wish to improve already existing models, then progress will not be achieved. Progress can stagnate as the managers procrastinate at the cusp of switching to digital. The major challenges in the coaching of MSMEs are the differentiation through an integrated and value-added approach, getting the MSMEs to engage in E-commerce, attend trainings and use their new skills to digitalize their products. There is also difficulty in finding available skilled HR dedicated to the coaching and a lack of IT infrastructure.

***What role can trade promotion organizations and other institutions play in building these skills?***

Trade and Investment Promotion Organizations can upgrade their skills for e-commerce by strengthening the supply-side and developing competitive value chains in order to provide diversified and higher value products. This will require an increased number of skilled human resources who can train MSMEs. Developing strategic alliances with local IT companies can provide efficient services in the E-commerce process chain: production of content, graphic design, pricing, referencing, payment, logistics, customs, etc. Design and implementation of capacity building programs: promotion of e-commerce curricula or vocational trainings to equip IT companies with adequate skills, stimulate a

digital culture and spirit. It will also help with encouraging knowledge sharing and best practices to raise awareness on opportunities and increase interest in E-commerce.

### *Are African organizations prepared to play these roles?*

With the platform “Made in Senegal”, beneficiary Senegalese MSMEs have been helped with managing their projects, developing synergies with key TSIs, guaranteeing their products meet standards and quality requirements, and receive training on digitalization. There are six facets to sustainable growth: 1) Payments; 2) Regulatory, Tax, and Legal; 3) Africa and Global; 4) Research, Education, and Skill Development; 5) Distribution, Logistics, and Infrastructure (e-fulfilment); and 6) Trust. The most important is research, education and skill development. A partnership is fruitful, but the African SMEs must learn how to be able to function independently so that they may continue to thrive even after the partnership or training comes to an end.

### *How do we build and nurture partnerships to achieve scale in skills development?*

The key is to embrace change, both on the business and partner side. We must be systems and ecosystems thinkers. The whole process of digital trade must be seen holistically. Existing partnerships like Africa and the global Deloitte network exist, and more can be fostered. To make an impact, one needs to be a participant, not a passenger.

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## **NEW DATA AND BEST PRACTICE POLICY IDEAS FOR INCLUSIVE ONLINE COMMERCE**

The panel in this session shared new data on e-commerce flows and SMEs’ use of e-commerce around the world. It also **explored the impact of e-commerce for more inclusive trade and growth both among and within countries**. Panelists presented survey data on SMEs’ challenges to use e-commerce for cross-border trade and discussed global best practices and new technologies to solve challenges to e-commerce in such areas as trade facilitation, logistics and online payments.

“The WTO Facilitation Agreement as an Enabler of ICT Development and Supply Chains” forthcoming paper had found that the main challenge in border management inefficiencies is not customs but rather coordination bottlenecks that prevail among different permit-issuing bodies. While this particular inefficiency is addressed by the commitment in the TFA to adopt a single window, Members seemed to find this to be the most difficult provision to implement. Another finding was that trade facilitation reforms and ICT adoption are mutually reinforcing. ICTs and solutions must play a supporting role to TFA implementation. They can contribute to improving the administrative efficiency of government agencies, be deployed to improve risk management, and help countries, particularly developing countries, to transform governance by adopting the smart government solutions on offer. Still another finding related to complementarities inherent to connectivity infrastructure. To boost trade and integrate into global value chains, it was not enough for a country to step up trade facilitation or to become a signatory to the ITA, although these are both important steps. Today China is the world’s biggest e-commerce market and also the largest ICT manufacturer. And this status has been achieved to a good extent due to massive investments in the supporting infrastructure, like roads, communications networks, ports, and even high-speed rail, where China went from global laggard in the early 2000s to having more high-speed rail than the rest of the world combined just a few years later.

- First, platforms are an increasingly significant enabler of SME exports in goods and services in developing countries, in particular.
- Second, SMEs' use of platforms is still very limited in developing countries – less than 10 percent of the level of in the UK, for example. This suggests that better policies, programs, and incentives are needed to bolster developing country SMEs' access to and use of platforms for trade.
- Third, most countries have adopted what might be called “low-hanging fruit” policies conducive to platform-enabled trade, such as making customs information available online, accepting digital signatures, and providing credit guarantees for SME loans. However, yet to be adopted at scale are such essential policies as safe harbors that provide immunity for internet intermediaries from user-generated content, online dispute resolution systems that build consumers' trust in trade on platforms, and export promotion practices that enable SME exporters to use e-commerce to boost exports.
- Fourth, there is significant amount of positive innovation and experimentation in policy areas conducive to platform-enabled trade. For example, Singapore has created new postal services to promote e-commerce; Peru, Mexico, Brazil, and Costa Rica, along with Thailand and Malaysia, have built creative online programs, public-private partnerships, and digital transformation initiatives to help SMEs use platforms to export; and the Republic of Korea, UK, and several East African economies have made inroads into adopting blockchain in customs, to identify high-risk shipments and clear low-risk ones faster.
- Fifth, overall, advanced countries and selected East Asian and Latin American economies have adopted about 60-75 percent of the policies mapped, while less developed countries in Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Central America have adopted only 20-35 percent. Thailand, Malaysia, Mexico, China and Rwanda outperformed their peers at the same level of development in the adoption of the mapped policies.

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## **EMERGING B2B MARKET PLATFORMS: SPOTLIGHT ON TRADE IN SERVICES**

The session explored how online business-to-business (B2B) marketplaces are offering not only equipment and supplies to customers, but also services. The speakers related the opportunities and challenges they face in promoting trade in services via their platforms. E-commerce in both B2B and services are less well explored and have, moreover, proved difficult to measure. Nevertheless, they represent an important and a growing feature of the digital economy.

The co-founders of IndiaMART provided insight into India's B2B services, which is still a relatively small segment of the economy. IndiaMART attempts to facilitate such trade by connecting sellers and consumers of services – ranging from technicians to accountants and human resource specialists – on their online marketplace. Compared to the online trade in goods, trade in services face important challenges, especially considering the lack of standardisation of offerings. The product is often customized, depending on the needs of the client. In addition, there is a general lack of quality and consistency in the services offered, not least due to a lack of skilled manpower on the supply side. This can lead to a lack of consumer confidence which made them wary of buying services online. The services sector will expand further with the automation of production, which should drive more

business towards the services sector. To encourage more users to come on to a platform, considerable networking efforts were unavoidable.

**Trust assumes a central role**, as it is needed for buyers and sellers to build sustainable relationships. Some companies support this process by providing related services and expertise alongside the transactions that take place and by verifying all companies who wish to register with the platform. The possibilities to set common standards and exchange experiences to improve the effectiveness of global online marketplaces could be explored to overcome these challenges.

**Three areas of potential growth for B2B e-commerce in services were identified:**

- A shift away from hardware into software services (e.g. storing data in the cloud).
- The emergence of new technologies, such as 3D printing, which can change the way in which goods flow across borders.
- Virtual reality and augmented reality will shape the nature of service delivery as these can allow customers to see what something will look like before it has been completed. There is a strong need for basic digitalization of small businesses, as this is still a major barrier, requiring technical expertise that is often expensive to obtain. This digitalization calls for capacity building and education, to develop the skills needed for the digital economy.

In conclusion, **B2B business is often underestimated, due to a general lack of reliable data**. In addition, however, the digitalization of business has become so commonplace that consumers and organizations often do not even realize that they are conducting digital transactions, for example through e-banking or arranging travel logistics. There **is a misperception that digitalization is an 'add on', whereas it needs to be seen as part of re-engineered business models**. Electronic contracts may also be more difficult to produce for B2B transactions due in large part to the customization of services.

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## E-COMMERCE AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

The session focused on the role of e-commerce in empowering women in developing countries. The world is changing under the shared principle of 'leaving no one behind'. Applied to the trade sector, this also means 'leaving no entrepreneur behind', including women.

For the longest times, most countries believed that trade was gender-neutral. But the discourse has shifted considerably. Women are still underrepresented among entrepreneurs. These issues should be discussed at the WTO level, and developing countries should also take part in the discussion. The lack of disaggregated data hinders the possibility of developing a precise strategy aimed at empowering women in developing countries.

The number of women starting and running new businesses is growing. Women's role in the business sector is higher in countries with a lower level of development because there is also an important margin of opportunity. The internet has revolutionized the retail industry for small businesses because it allows producers to reach out to customers that are outside their near community without forcibly

investing in local facilities and infrastructures. This is precisely the potential of the digital economy for women entrepreneurs: expanding the traditional retail business. Women doing business face a two-fold problem. On the one hand, there are **infrastructural limitations**, namely the need for low-cost connectivity, access to global online payment systems, and cheaper parcel delivery solutions. On the other hand, **women must fight the stereotypes either from their own societies (lack of support) or from the western world.**

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## LEVERAGING DIGITAL PLATFORMS FOR SME EXPORTS OF IT AND IT-ENABLED SERVICES FROM LDCS – OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The session was focused on recent trends, opportunities and challenges related to the platform economy & e-commerce. Special attention was given to the role of Upwork, Jobbatical, Codertrust, Qualshoreas and similar platforms as well as ILO and SGO in trade in services and the future of work in the service sector in developing countries.

The panel addressed the following questions:

- *How digital work fits the economic and social context in developing countries?*
- *How to make digital platforms more sustainable and inclusive?*
- *How is the “gig economy” impacting IT & ITES suppliers in developing countries?*
- *How do the platforms see the role of these suppliers?*

Finally, the panel discussed the business opportunities for both companies and individuals in developing countries.

Digital platforms affect the future of work, not only in developing countries. According to a recent study by McKinsey, “20 to 30 percent of the working-age population in the United States and the EU-15, or up to 162 million individuals, engage in independent work”.

Since the emergence and growth of the global sourcing market for IT and Business Process Management services in the early 2000s, companies of all sizes have been taking advantage of the related opportunities as “offshore” providers. While the demand has been expanding, the competition has grown rapidly as well amongst developing and emerging economies. New challenges are emerging – cloud-based platforms are perceived by smaller suppliers with limited marketing resources as challenging them on their entry-level deals (small-scale transcription, digitization, web site, app development).

Indeed, digital platforms are connecting individual and SME clients with mostly independent workers from around the world for assignment opportunities in the IT and ITES sector. SMEs are few on the supply side.

And only 15% of independent workers have used digital platforms so far (McKinsey). In fact, this new working model raises challenges in terms of social protection, regulation and income stability (ILO), but also the competitive disadvantage for SMEs, which have to finance a work force and the related taxes. At the same time, the platforms offer opportunities to agile people and SMEs that have been able to adapt their business environment to the new marketplace.

# THURSDAY 19 APRIL

## WHAT DOES DIGITAL TRADE MEAN FOR INDUSTRIALIZATION?

The main message from this session was that **though digital trade brings many benefits, industrialization in the era of digital trade is probably going to be more difficult.**

The digital economy amounts to "skill-biased" technological trade, the opportunities from which can be more easily harnessed by those with the appropriate digital skills. Currently, these skills are concentrated in developed countries, risking a re-shoring of tasks and economic activities as digital technological uptake contributes to making capital-intensive manufacturing in developed countries more competitive than traditional labour-intensive manufacturing in developing countries.

Compounding this are new challenges due to the prevalence of natural monopolies in the digital economy (fueled in some part by big data and "data moats"), renewed risks of tax base erosion and profit shifting, and concerns over how the benefits from digital trade are distributed across society.

In response there was a need to update our policy toolkit to address these challenges and leverage targeted digital opportunities. In concrete terms this may include

- digital industrialization strategies,
- new approaches to competition, taxation, data control and other regulatory policies, and
- regional approaches to digital policies, including using the African Continental Free Trade Area as a platform for harmonizing digital policy in Africa.

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## FIRST GLOBAL MEETING OF E-COMMERCE ASSOCIATIONS

NetComm Suisse, the Swiss Association of e-Commerce, was proud to have co-hosted with UNCTAD **the very first Global Meeting of e-Commerce Associations**. The focus was on how to better benefit from closer relations among nations and get precious insights from different cultures.

For the occasion, a panel discussed the role that e-commerce associations can play in developing the digital sales channel, both nationally and internationally.

As major takeaways all the participants agreed on:

- the need to share knowledge and experience among national associations to foster the development of cross-border e-Commerce
- the importance of working towards the creation of a Global e-Commerce Association
- the opportunity of lobbying in favour of international e-Commerce standards

Alongside NetComm Suisse, participants included European organizations such as Ecommerce Europe and Ecommerce Foundation; the national e-Commerce associations from Brazil, Macedonia, Czech Republic, Romania and Bangladesh; Ecommerce Forum of Africa and the African Ecommerce Performance Institute; and specialist organizations such as Taxmen, Retail Excellence, and DutyPay.

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## FOSTERING EFFECTIVE TRADE LOGISTICS IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Cross border e-Commerce presents a significant opportunity for MSMEs in emerging markets to sell their products to new customers around the world. However, many challenges remain. How to deal with issues such as cash-on-delivery payments and returns is increasingly important for last mile delivery companies and ensuring that trade processes and protocols are frictionless and efficient, whilst minimizing risks, will be essential. In addition, new regulations such as city diesel-bans and how the industry deals with concerns over the last-mile 'gig economy' will influence how the market develops. A partnership between retailers, e-Commerce platforms, government agencies and logistics partners will be fundamental to future growth.

**The ASYCUDA Postal Customs Declaration (ASYPCD)** was the newest addition to the [ASYCUDA](#) Suite, facilitating the exchange of electronic Customs information between designated postal operators and customs administrations through the development of a standardized interface (ASYCUDA - UPU CDS). Subsequently, the new ASYCUDA component will be made available, primarily, to the interested ASYCUDA-user countries around the world.

Small businesses face many challenges in reaching export markets accessing services such as logistics for shipping goods abroad, knowledge of regulatory requirements in the exporting and importing countries, and trade finance. In addition, they often lack the specialized knowledge required for navigating many Single Window systems, government e-services and advanced supply chain e-tools, for example for traceability. The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) project on Integrated Services for MSMEs in International Trade (ISMITE) can bring together the professional service providers and service partners that are needed in order to facilitate the participation of MSMEs in international trade within a practical framework that also supports their participation in GVCs.

One of the challenges faced in the development of international standards for the airlines was related to the definition of e-commerce and the fact that transporters don't know if what they are carrying are a product of e-commerce or not. The presentation by IATA continued with the introduction of some of the trends (business models, data volume, supply chain digitization, efficiency, safety and compliance with new regulation) that airlines are following and highlighted some of the efforts that are being done by IATA to provide more clarity on how e-commerce affects air transport. The recommended practice on "piece level tracking", the IATA White Paper on e-commerce and the participation in the discussions of the WCO e-commerce framework of standards.

The demand for transaction data is significantly increasing. Semantics and predefined code lists are crucial in eCommerce transactions. The transaction may start on a platform, but it will be followed by automated transactions which require traditional e-business standards. Further standards are still required such as UN/CEFACT standards on eCMR (electronic consignment note) and VERMAS (Verified Gross Mass Exchange). Major evolutions in the last four years are also technological including

blockchain, internet of things (IoT), big data, and artificial intelligence (AI) that helped e-commerce to have greater potential have also contributed. Even with the growing presence of e-commerce platforms, traditional standards are required. UN/CEFACT aims to be the semantic hub for standardization in international trade.

**‘Last mile delivery’ needs to be improved in LDCs as it is key to unlock e-commerce potential in these countries, while often being the most challenging to implement.** Cash on delivery is the number one preferred payment option for e-commerce in LDCs e-commerce and often this option is neglected by traditional couriers. The purpose behind the ‘last mile’ logistics study by ITC is on one hand to collect reliable information from e-commerce companies & third-party logistics service providers and on the other to create a solid foundation on which to organize e-commerce logistics services. The main focus areas of the study are around Infrastructure (quality of the transportation system and internet services) and Logistics Services (quality of delivery, third party logistics, crowd Logistics, management of returns).

For international development partners such as the UNECE, UNCTAD and ITC, the focus of their work is to assist developing countries, transition economies and SMEs to reap the benefits of international trade. E-commerce as applied to trade facilitation has a crucial role to play in this endeavour and more broadly to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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## ENABLING E-COMMERCE: OPENING THE DOOR FOR SMEs

The session engaged with stakeholders on top e-commerce challenges as part of the **Enabling E-commerce initiative**. The latter is an informal collaboration to encourage public-private dialogue on policies and practices that benefit small business.

The World Economic Forum is contributing to the initiative through a series of e-commerce challenge scoping papers designed to provide a common knowledge baseline for discussions. Papers have been published to date on e-signatures, paperless trade and forthcoming on e-payments. Additional topics that will be explored include online consumer protection and e-commerce logistics. World Economic Forum dialogues are planned for the ASEAN region and among Pacific Alliance economies.

Trade has changed dramatically in the last two decades. It can make replying to the question “how current policies apply” difficult to answer. There is a need for a wide conversation to better understand modern international commerce and ensure it delivers widespread benefits.

Using live room polling, participants identified logistics and small package delivery issues as the top challenge to cross-border e-commerce, followed by “limited international payment options,” “limited digital skills” and “low consumer trust,” among others. Access to trade finance was considered a greater problem in some regions – such as Africa – as compared to others.

Discussion leaders reporting back on group conversations highlighted the importance of SME training to navigate the global commercial landscape – including complex trade rules – as well as the development of marketing, digital and communication skills in order to adequately manage consumer expectations.

Some participants suggested that the Internet needed to be more secure for consumers with quality and legal products, and for businesses, in terms of ensuring that small enterprises can pursue disputes if not paid.

The cost of operating in different markets with diverse regulatory requirements – which were not always well-designed to achieve the objective at hand – was highlighted. Issues cited included the need to comply with various data localization requirements.

Many participants felt that governments lacked understanding on what e-commerce activities entailed and this has in some cases led to ill-adapted policy responses or inadequate capacity building. Several stakeholders noted that while e-commerce challenges could be cross-cutting, government or regulatory approaches remained siloed. More efforts were also needed to connect small businesses to policy-makers as these typically had neither the time nor capacity to engage.

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## GROWING GLOBAL: ONLINE CONSUMER TRUST

Purchasing online involves a higher level of risk compared to traditional brick-and-mortar purchasing. Perhaps more importantly, **e-commerce involves a higher level of perceived risk for consumers, which contributes greatly to the slower growth of e-commerce acceptance in all countries.**

Obtaining consumer trust is a daunting task for any retailer, particularly for SMEs attempting to compete with massive brands and retailers with reputations around the world. Moreover, many of the countries exhibiting trust concerns higher than the global average are considered developed countries with expansive infrastructures and more assurances when shopping online!

Consumer trust and ‘perceived risk’ revolve around the uncertainty, vulnerability and dependence of a consumer; as consumers view these levels increasing, so does their perceived risk of purchasing online. Research has shown there are multiple ways to increase consumer trust, and some investments have more of an impact on others, including anything that increases the ‘perceived security’ of a webshop.

Research has revealed that some security assurance signals/indicators have a higher impact on the perceived security of a webshop, therefore lowering the consumer perception of risk, and increasing the likelihood of purchasing online. Consumer reviews, trustmarks/trust seals, transparent privacy and security policies, as well as web design investment, can have this positive impact on consumer trust. However, according to consumers in a survey asking which security signals have a stronger impact on their trust (cognitive, affective, behavioral and on average), trustmarks were ranked the highest. Knowing that trustmarks have the best effect is important, however it’s also important to understand the role of culture, particularly if the goal is to facilitate cross-border trade and online growth for SMEs.

Culture Matters. Looking specifically at the spectrum of Individualism/Collectivism can give retailers, as well as governments and NGOs, some insights into how and whom the population trusts. For example, societies at the extreme end of the spectrum on the Collectivist side exhibit emotional dependence on institutions and organizations, whereas societies at the other extreme end (Individualistic) exhibit emotional independence from institutions and organizations.

According to a study published in 2008, “The current results tentatively suggest that the partnering between 3<sup>rd</sup> party assurance services and the government in [collectivist cultures] is a way to provide the necessary trust...”

Whether in a developed/developing/least developed country, the goal was to increase e-commerce. To do this, we had to think more from a consumer perspective, which includes decreasing the perceived risks of purchasing online by lowering the uncertainty and vulnerability. Trustmarks were the key to increasing consumer trust, and working within the right cultural framework was the next step towards increasing e-commerce. In these conditions, the acceptance and use of a global trustmark was presented as the best option for every country looking to begin and/or grow their e-commerce market. The key was to work together with organizations, governments and retailers to adapt a trustmark that will inspire the necessary trust in consumers to encourage their online shopping and purchasing.

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## **BOOMING BANGLADESH: MOVING FORWARD TO LDC GRADUATION**

The objective of this sessions was to discuss Bangladesh's success in meeting the eligibility for graduation from LDC status, to identify challenges and strategies for graduation and to address broader issues facing recently graduated and graduating countries.

The session highlighted the importance of achieving the target of the [Istanbul Programme of Action](#) to enable half of the LDCs to meet the criteria for graduation by 2020. In this regard, speakers commended Bangladesh's achievement in meeting the criteria in March 2018. The Perspective Plan 2010-2021 for realizing its 'Vision 2021' and country's aspiration toward 'digital Bangladesh' were key to this success. The contribution of the country's extraordinary socio-economic performance, increased capital accumulation, growth of labour intensive manufacturing sector, increased flow of remittance, robust export performance, excellent performance of agriculture sector, expansion of education and health sector towards meeting the criteria were highlighted. As a result, Bangladesh has been able to meet all three graduation criteria during 2018 Triennial Review by the UN's Committee for Development Policy with GNI per capita almost tripled and Human Assets Index (HAI) increased by 40% since 2009 and the lowest Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI) among the least developed countries. Accordingly, at the next triennial review in 2021, the country is expected to be recommended for graduation by 2024 if meeting the criteria the second time.

**Graduation from LDC Status was viewed as a milestone on a journey towards achieving sustainable development and securing 'graduation with momentum' is the key.** Speakers pointed out the challenges facing the graduated LDCs such as, loss of duty-free and quota-free market access; loss of special and differential treatment in WTO-related obligations; increase of assessed contribution to various international organizations; reduction in ODA and other forms of development financing; and reduction in technical cooperation and other forms of assistance. They later advised that Bangladesh could on that basis start conceptualizing strategies for graduation and addressing post-graduation broader challenges. In this context, need for negotiating new benefits, sector specific support for enhancing productive capacity and leveraging and organizing pledging conference including with credit rating organizations for graduated LDCs were highlighted.

# FRIDAY 20 APRIL

## DATA FLOWS, E-COMMERCE, AND DEVELOPMENT

Government officials and development advocates are increasingly aware that **the domestic policy space necessary to promote e-commerce for development, and some proposed rules on e-commerce in the WTO, may represent different policy priorities.**

This session examined the positive and negative implications of some WTO proposals for a variety of laws, policies and sustainable development goals (SDGs). It analyzed the implications of the proposed e-commerce rules including on data and other localization requirements, access to source code, and other provisions, on privacy, small and medium enterprises, financial regulation, agricultural development, tax revenue, and jobs, including on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and in particular with regards to the potential for structural transformation of African countries.

It critically evaluated the proposition that data should be borderless and that it should flow freely. Since data is the world's most valuable commodity, some speakers asked why it should be transferred across borders for free. It would appear that the producers of the raw material that is data should be compensated, as is the case with other valuable resources.

The session examined the effects of e-commerce on the labour markets, in particular in light of the prevalence of platforms, and the emergence of AI that is based big data.

The session included a specific analysis of the potential implications for development policy regarding agriculture in a digital world, given the importance of this topics in development.

The session also included a legal analysis of provisions contained in free trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership, provisions proposed in the Trade in Services Agreement, and proposals presented to the WTO, considering how such proposals could constrain national development efforts and policies.

And the session included an analysis of e-commerce benefits and risks from the African point of view, with a discussion on how countries that do not yet have a clear digital industrial policy would need time and freedom to develop such policies before entering into binding trade agreements relating to e-commerce.

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## BLOCKCHAIN FOR EMERGING ECONOMIES

The session explored two questions:

*1. Can there be a leapfrog effect of blockchain adoption and use in emerging economies building on existing infrastructure and learning?*

*2. How can emerging economies position themselves to derive the greatest benefit from blockchain technology while protecting users from harm?*

The evolution of technology does not change human nature. While we are inundated with information, this does not inherently provide access to information about socio-economic and geopolitical inequities. Blockchain is a tool that has the potential to automate some aspects of human moral behaviour by capturing and providing transparency to hard facts, thus providing better insights into these issues. Political will, a convergence of technological, ethical and legal considerations along with public support, was seen as essential for supporting this augmentation of human morality and transforming it into progress for humanity.

A key functionality of blockchain technology includes self-sovereign identity. Defined, self-sovereign identity involves individuals being responsible for holding and securing their own personal data and identity documentation, while also storing (cryptographically secure) attestations of the authenticity of these documents provided by third parties (such as a government agency which issues passports). Only the relevant personal data plus attestations of authenticity are then shared as necessary with a third party to establish identity. This process requires a high degree of personal responsibility and technical competence of individuals and is subject to the same concerns over trust in attesting institutions that are faced today in respect of conventional identity documents.

**Key recommendations included:**

- Both emerging and developed economies should include human sustainability considerations in the debate regarding the creation, adoption and use of blockchain and other technologies.
- Data privacy and protection as defined by legislation requires governance and technology investment to enable a sustainable leapfrog effect. The risks are acute related to privacy and cyber vulnerabilities, while remedial actions after a breach are partial at best. Policy makers must ensure that rights and freedoms are built-in by design and by default, both for current and emerging technologies. Legislation and enforcement on a global scale must be in place to ensure this.
- Policy makers need to correctly analyze which economic actors are currently incentivized to adopt fair and transparent tools and technologies, and implement legislation protecting human rights accordingly.

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## BLOCKCHAIN FOR TRADE FACILITATION

Blockchain (based on DLT - Distributed Ledger Technology) offers significant possibilities for increasing the reliability and security of trade transactions. In addition, to provide the greatest benefits more standards are needed in blockchain technology in order to support greater harmonization and systems' interoperability.

Some additional questions that should be explored further are:

- What are the concrete use cases for blockchain in cross-border exchange of goods?
- How can we ensure the sustainability of this innovative tool?
- What is needed from a standards development perspective to provide stability?

The cryptographic methods used in blockchain to verify and protect data, together with the distribution of data across multiple ledgers in a network can provide high levels of confidence in

information to both traders and regulators. However, **blockchain is not the panacea for all problems** and the hype surrounding this innovative and potentially disruptive technology need to be reduced and put in perspective. Applying blockchain features to operational supply chain processes suggests that a good number (according to Aite Group research, at least one-third) of these could strongly benefit from the features offered. **Cases that establish the true potential of the blockchain in the supply chain include food processor's quality declaration and trade logistics.**

Blockchain can provide document immutability and traceability. At the same time, it can create higher processing costs and may not be a good solution for storing large amounts of information. In addition, there are different configurations (protocols) used in blockchains and it is important to understand their relative benefits and limitations. When approaching blockchain projects, it was important to identify what blockchain could do to address the problem in question which cannot be accomplished using other technologies.

One example was the application by the World Food Programme's (WFP) for distributing food aid. By harnessing the power of the blockchain, WFP aims to reduce payment costs, better protect beneficiary data, control financial risks, and set up assistance operations more rapidly in emergencies. A blockchain collaboration platform could benefit the entire humanitarian community. All 106,000 Syrian refugees in the Jordanian refugee camps now redeem their cash transfers on the blockchain-based system. Transaction costs have been almost eliminated, with monthly savings of around US\$40,000. By early April 2018, Building Blocks had cumulatively saved some US\$140,000. WFP has also significantly reduced a number of risks, for example by eliminating the need to advance funds to financial service providers and removing the requirement to share confidential beneficiary information with third party financial service providers.

Blockchain reduces the costs incurred for Financial Service Provider fees and improves efficiency in providing aid to the beneficiary. In addition, the use of funds can be traced allowing more detailed information to donors. There is also lower financial risk. For example, in the past the WFP needed to advance an entire month's distribution for a value of approx. USD 10 million to a local bank with the accompanying risk of the bank closing (or going into foreclosure) or the money disappear. In addition, using blockchain means that the WFP no longer needs to share confidential beneficiary information with third party financial service providers.

In the energy industry, blockchain can be used to manage and reconcile billing between peers (i.e. consumers) on mini-grids using renewable energies such as solar – as well as billing between the mini-grid and utility companies. Interoperability standards are important in this context. Another possible application of blockchain is for the issuance and trading of certified emission reductions or CER) which can reduce costs and contribute significantly to reducing carbon emissions. These initiatives can also enable the creation lessons for application in other asset-backed markets.

Small businesses that sell products or services to large buyers often face onerous payment terms which can impose severe cashflow constraints. In Australia, notarising the billing "conversation" (invoices, credit notes, status updates) in a public blockchain ledger, allows banks to "purchase" invoices with proof that it was issued and accepted by the buyer. This new tradeable instrument significantly reduces risk to the lender because they can risk assess based on a buyer promise to pay and not on supplier finances.

The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) is working on two White Papers, which will investigate how blockchain impacts its work. For example, are there any new technical specifications that UN/CEFACT should develop in order to maximize this technology's value to its government and business constituencies? Are there recommendations that should be

made to governments on how to best use and/or manage this new technology? A draft of the first white paper looking at technical standards is now available for comment. The draft of the second paper on how blockchain can be used to facilitate trade will be available for comment and consultation in the first half of 2018. These white papers will provide input to government delegations and technical experts on possible, related future work. (to access these papers: visit this [link-part 1](#), and this [link -part 2](#))

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**“ ONLY MARRIAGES, DIVORCES AND SELLING YOUR HOUSE ARE NOT DIGITAL. YET. ”**

**Victoria Saué**, Head of Legal, Risk and Compliance for e-Residency program at Enterprise Estonia.

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#### Development Dimensions of Digital Platforms



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