

Agreed policy recommendations of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy at its first session

The Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy,

Recalling General Assembly resolution 70/1, “Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, of 25 September 2015,

Recalling further General Assembly resolution 70/125, “Outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society”, of 16 December 2015, which calls for close alignment between the World Summit on the Information Society process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, highlighting the cross-cutting contribution of information and communications technology to the Sustainable Development Goals and poverty eradication,

Sharing the concern expressed that there are still significant digital divides, such as between and within countries, and between women and men, which need to be addressed through, among other actions, strengthened enabling policy environments and international cooperation to improve affordability, access, education, capacity-building, multilingualism, cultural preservation, investment and appropriate financing,

Recalling the provisions related to e-commerce and the digital economy adopted at the fourteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Nairobi, July 2016), including those in paragraph 55 (u) and (v) of the Nairobi Maafikiano,*

Recalling paragraph 100 (r) of the Nairobi Maafikiano, which called for the establishment of an intergovernmental group of experts on e-commerce and the digital economy,

Recalling its policy focus on maximizing the development gains from e-commerce and the digital economy and addressing associated challenges, and thus strengthening its development dimension,

Underlining that information and communications technology and the digital economy, including e-commerce, have an increasing impact on global trade and development, including on the organization of work, employment and productivity,

Recognizing that the evolving digital economy can create both opportunities and challenges for developing countries, including in terms of competitiveness, creation of new value chains, entrepreneurship and economic inclusion,

Recognizing further the need to strengthen the work of UNCTAD on information and communications technologies, e-commerce and the digital economy for development, so as to enhance its ability to support developing countries to engage in and benefit from the evolving digital economy, and reduce the digital divide, for the creation of more inclusive knowledge societies,

Noting with concern declining aid for information and communications technology in total aid for trade,

Noting that only 16 per cent of the world’s adult population uses the Internet to pay bills or purchase items, and that while more than 70 per cent of the population in several developed countries already buys goods and services online, the equivalent share in most of the least developed countries is less than 2 per cent,

Welcoming the written and oral contributions from participants that enriched the debate during its first session,

* TD/519/Add.2.

Taking note with appreciation of the documentation prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat for its first session,

Welcoming the analysis in *Information Economy Report 2017: Digitalization, Trade and Development*,

Stressing the need for upgraded, resilient and extended infrastructure for greater digital connectivity, noting that a diversity of public and private sources of financing will be needed to achieve these outcomes,

Noting the commitment contained in Sustainable Development Goal 4, target 4.4, that by 2030, the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship, has to be substantially increased,

1. *Encourages* member States, as appropriate, to fully integrate the digital agenda into their national development agendas both within and across tiers of government; and *calls on* UNCTAD to enhance its cooperation with other relevant stakeholders, in order to provide countries with practical examples and good practices supporting this effort;
2. Taking note of the tools developed by UNCTAD, such as the Business-to-Consumer E-commerce Index, information and communications technology policy reviews, the Global Cyberlaw Tracker and the Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessments, and their contribution to data collection and analyses of national statuses on e-commerce and digitalization, *requests* the secretariat to continue with the Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessments for the least developed countries and to expand their scope to developing countries; and *invites* development partners in a position to do so to provide UNCTAD with the necessary funds to cover such technical assistance;
3. Noting with concern the asymmetrical nature of the global digital economy, including current uneven access to international e-commerce platforms, that directly affects the competitive advantages of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular in developing countries, *requests* the secretariat to continue its analysis on the challenges of developing countries in the digital economy, particularly e-commerce, initiated in *Information Economy Report 2015: Unlocking the Potential of E-commerce for Developing Countries*, and to come up with policy recommendations for members to discuss at the next session, taking into account the challenges faced by developing countries;
4. Taking note of the presentation on electronic readiness, *expresses with concern* that most of the developing countries are yet to have the required infrastructure, electronic payment systems and other logistical arrangements for the conduct of e-commerce;
5. *Invites* member States to review the information contained in the UNCTAD Global Cyberlaw Tracker on their countries and provide updated information as appropriate to the secretariat;
6. *Recognizes* the importance of cross-border data flows in the digital economy; and *encourages* the secretariat to continue its work on the implications for developing countries;
7. Acknowledging that poor logistics remain a barrier to e-commerce in many developing countries, *encourages* the secretariat to continue its collaboration with the Universal Postal Union in support of e-commerce, including leveraging the possibilities for partnerships between the private sector and local post offices in accordance with their domestic policies and priorities;
8. *Notes with concern* the existing digital divide and poor e-commerce readiness of developing countries, especially the least developed countries, which could lead to an inequitable distribution of benefits from e-commerce and the digital economy; and *requests* the secretariat to present an analysis of the first set of Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessments of the least developed countries, including with a view to discussing possible ways to ensuring effective follow-up to recommendations made in the assessments, and to

progressively scope the digital divide and develop more relevant indicators for digital readiness assessments, for members to discuss the issue further;

9. *Emphasizes* the need for effective interaction between the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy and the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Consumer Protection Law and Policy and the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Competition Law and Policy, with a view to reaping synergies and avoiding duplication;

10. Noting that there is fragmentation among programmes by numerous development partners, foundations and private sector actors offering models for facilitating greater connectivity, lowering costs and addressing regulatory issues, *encourages* the usage of the eTrade for All platform to promote coordination, and invites development partners in a position to do so to support financially eTrade for All and relevant programmes;

11. *Encourages* initiatives that improve the availability of statistics for developing countries, including the joint initiative of UNCTAD, United Nations regional commissions, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Universal Postal Union, the World Bank, the World Customs Organization and the World Trade Organization to improve the measurement of cross-border e-commerce; and *invites* development partners to contribute by supporting capacity-building in this area;

12. *Recommends* the establishment of a Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy in a format that aligns with available resources; and *invites* the secretariat to prepare a concept note on the working group and explore interest among development partners to financially support its operations;

13. *Emphasizes* the need to engage stakeholders in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular with regard to achieving inclusive e-commerce and development gains from digitalization; and *welcomes* the participation of civil society, business representatives and academia in the deliberations of the sessions of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy;

14. *Decides* that the work programme of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy in terms of substantive focus will be decided on an annual basis at each session;

15. *Decides* that the topic of its second session will be fostering development gains from domestic and cross-border e-commerce in developing countries;

16. *Decides* that its second session should focus on the following questions:

(a) How can developing countries foster local platforms for domestic and cross-border e-commerce?

(b) What are the existing barriers related to international e-commerce platforms that developing countries, including the least developed countries, face and how can these barriers be overcome?

(c) What are some of the operational constraints that small and medium-sized businesses in developing countries face when setting up trade online, and how can they be overcome?

(d) What are the good practices that developed and developing countries, including the least developed countries, can learn from each other?

Provisional agenda for the second session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy

1. Election of officers;
2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work;
3. Fostering development gains from domestic and cross-border e-commerce in developing countries;
4. Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy;
5. Provisional agenda for the third session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy;
6. Adoption of the report of the second session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy.