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**Contribution by**

**Rwanda**

## **RWANDA'S EXPERIENCE, GOOD PRACTICES AND SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO BUILD DIGITAL READINESS, TO INFORM THE DISCUSSIONS OF THE UNCTAD'S INTERGOVERNMENTAL GROUP OF EXPERTS (IGE) ON E-COMMERCE AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY AND ETRADE CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP.**

A comprehensive diagnostic analysis conducted in 2020 on the state of e-commerce in Rwanda showed that Rwanda's e-commerce ecosystem was in its infancy. However, a good foundation had been set for its growth. In this regard, an e-commerce policy was drafted and with UNCTAD's support, an accompanying e-commerce strategy was developed with strategic recommendations and an action plan for the development and use of e-commerce in Rwanda.

The Government of Rwanda has made commendable efforts towards creating a conducive environment for 'doing business', realizing a 'Digital and Cashless Rwanda' and in establishing modern logistics infrastructure. The country also has in place strong policy, regulatory and institutional frameworks. Government efforts have further been augmented by development partners and trade facilitation agencies who have supported elaborate e-commerce initiatives.

- **Legal and regulatory framework**

Rwanda has in place a good number of laws, policies and strategies aimed at promoting ICT in general, including its use for trade. A recent Digital Trade Gap Analysis conducted in 2023 by WTO in collaboration with the World bank found that Rwanda has substantially advanced in adopting key policies for digital markets such as personal data protection and cybersecurity, and on the other hand, elucidates areas that requires more efforts such as data governance including cross border transfers.

At regional level, the country has joined hands with other EAC member states and embarked on the development of a regional framework on e-signature which is expected to fast track the digital market integration in the Eastern Africa region by strengthening the enabling environment for cross-border digital services.

At continental level, the AfCFTA protocol on Digital Trade was recently adopted and the country envisions to be among the pioneers of its implementation.

- **Initiatives aimed at promoting e-commerce in Rwanda**

The development of e-commerce requires synergy and harmonization of efforts among different stakeholders. A framework that provides strategic direction to monitor the governance and implementation of all e-commerce initiatives in an effective and coherent manner was created as part of the national e-commerce strategy. It comprises the National E-Commerce Steering Committee that provides overall guidance on the implementation of different initiatives and the National E-Commerce Council that facilitates implementation of the strategy by providing a framework for monitoring and tracking performance and progress.

At national level, a good number of initiatives have been implemented successfully implemented and they include but not limited to the establishment of Rwanda E-commerce Center which comprises an online marketplace (RwandaMart Platform) and the E-commerce Service Center. The overall objective of the Centre is to promote and enable Rwandan SMEs to sell their goods online, with a special focus on Made-in-Rwanda products. The E-commerce Service Center is an inclusive facility that provides e-commerce support services to SMEs and other e-commerce players, enabling the entire e-commerce ecosystem. The services offered under the Service Center include product design and development (3D printing and labelling), content creation (product photography and content writing), packaging and order fulfilment (first and last mile delivery).

In order to address the issue of lack of trust among consumers, a Digital Business Institute was established through the Chamber of ICT of the Private Sector Federation. It provides a trust seal to e-commerce platforms that meet specific criteria which contributes to increased trust and adoption of e-commerce among consumers.

Efforts were put in running awareness raising programs through different channels including radio and TV programs, capacity building of players, stakeholders and more specifically SMEs in different areas of the country. With the help of digital ambassadors who are placed in all districts, the community are widely reached on increasing their understanding on e-commerce and consumer awareness. There also other initiatives with a number of development partners who are supporting to reach to vulnerable people like women and informal cross border traders.

Last but not least, the country has prioritized the establishment of a comprehensive framework for e-commerce related statistics at national level and accordingly, an e-commerce data collection and reporting tool was developed by the Ministry of Trade and industry which is planned to be integrated with e-commerce platforms and provide necessary information to measure the performance of e-commerce sector.

- **Required actions to build digital readiness**

There is a need for continued collaboration in implementing the AfCFTA Agreement with a special emphasis on the Protocol on Digital Trade by providing the required support and Technical Assistance to ensure that national laws and regulations are more inclusive and opening more opportunities to the citizens.

Also further analysis on all regulations around e-commerce to ensure the complementarity among them is needed.

With more focused and deliberate efforts, e-commerce has a tremendous potential to not only increase the domestic and international export capacities of MSMEs in Rwanda, but also to improve the standards of living and contribute to Rwanda's economic transformation.