

**COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT  
(CSTD)**

**Twenty-fourth session  
Geneva, 17 to 21 May 2021**

**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international  
organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2020 to  
implement the outcomes of the WSIS**

**Submission by**

International Trade Center,  
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development  
and  
United Nations Group on the Information Society

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 24<sup>th</sup> session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

**DISCLAIMER:** The views presented here are the contributors' and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

## **WSIS Action Line**

### **C7 e-business**

**Co-facilitators: ITC, UNCTAD, UPU**

## **Input for the CSTD report on the follow-up to the WSIS 2020**

*Version: December 17, 2020*

### **Part 1: Executive Summary**

Activities related to action line C7 (e-business) in 2020 were greatly coloured by the COVID-19 pandemic, which both helped to demonstrate the value of digital solutions for coping with various lockdown measures and travel restrictions, and highlighted the significant digital divides that still remain. Both UNCTAD and ITC (UPU?) conducted several surveys of consumers and businesses to assess the impact of the pandemic on e-commerce. During the virtual version of the WSIS Forum, the co-facilitators discussed [how to accelerate e-business creation of value in developing countries]. Through various technical assistance work, they replied to requests from countries to build the capacity to leverage e-commerce and the digital economy for sustainable and inclusive development.

ITC continued its work to support SMEs in developing countries to engage in digital entrepreneurship, support women in digital trade, and leverage technology for trade facilitation. UNCTAD hosted multistakeholder discussions at its first virtual eWeek, with more than 2,000 participants from 134 countries. It also convened a series of eTrade for Women Masterclasses, completed several new eTrade Readiness Assessments and increased its focus on ensuring effective follow-up to the implementation of recommendations contained in the assessments. UPU continued its programmes to modernize and transform public postal infrastructure to support the unconnected and introduce new ICT enabled services at the national level that increase digital inclusion, financial inclusion, trade inclusion for citizens and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

### **Part 2: Analytical Overview of Trends and Experiences**

- a) Trends in implementation, monitoring and cooperation at the national, regional and international levels. What are the achievements and obstacles? Relate to 2030 Agenda.

Global e-commerce has been estimated by UNCTAD to have reached \$26 trillion in 2018, up 8% from the previous year. Business-to-business (B2B) transactions (which include sales over online market platforms and electronic data interchange transactions) amounted to more than \$21 trillion, with the remaining stemming from business-to-consumer (B2C) transactions. The top 10 countries accounted for 75 per cent of the global e-commerce sales. Cross-border B2C e-commerce sales accounted for about 10 per cent of the total B2C e-commerce and some 23% of all 1.45 billion online shoppers made e-commerce purchases from abroad in 2018, up from 17% in 2016. There has also been rapid growth of trade in the digital economy. For example, exports of ICT services more than doubled from \$303 billion in 2010 to \$636 billion in 2019, and those of digitally deliverable services from \$1.87 trillion to \$3.19 trillion.

**New surveys during 2020:** ITC surveyed 170 small businesses across 107 countries and found among other things that the most cited need was support in building a long term strategy to digitize their business more successfully. An UNCTAD-NetComm Suisse survey covering about 3,700 consumers in nine emerging and developed economies found that, due to COVID-19, more than half of the respondents now shopped online more frequently and relied more on the internet more for news, health-related information and digital entertainment. Consumers in emerging economies had made the greatest shift to online shopping. Another UNCTAD survey of e-commerce companies and third-party market platforms in 23 developing countries, mainly LDCs, showed that, while 58% of businesses selling their own products or services online had recorded a drop in monthly revenue due to the pandemic, about 64% of third-party marketplaces had seen a spike in sales. Despite some coronavirus-induced e-commerce opportunities, two-thirds reported rising operational costs since the outbreak, and 44% expected to cut their workforce as a result. A webinar on the survey's results in November 2020 provided a platform for experience sharing and dialogue among public and private stakeholders.

**Global and regional dialogues:** UNCTAD's annual eCommerce Week had to be transformed into a virtual eWeek in 2020. The event attracted more than 2,000 participants from 134 countries from all stakeholder groups. eTrade for all partners were instrumental in the organization of 14 live sessions. The eWeek looked at key digital issues in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impact, including data, gender, trade and logistics, consumer trust, consumer protection, competition and digital entrepreneurship. New data on global e-commerce sales and the state of cyberlaws were also released. UNCTAD also convened the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy, which focused on the policy implications of digital platforms and value creation in developing countries. UNCTAD also convened one face-to-face (Western Africa) and two virtual eTrade for Women Masterclasses (Eastern Africa and Southeast Asia). Various workshops were also held to discuss e-commerce and development.

**Technical assistance and capacity-building:**

- Despite the pandemic, the co-facilitators and its partners continued to support developing countries in the area of e-commerce and the digital economy. the *Global Trade Helpdesk* partners, led by ITC, UNCTAD and WTO, began the rollout of the new version of the Global Trade Helpdesk platform (see below).
- Through the *FastTrackTech* initiative, as of Q3 2020, 953 digital entrepreneurs, including 689 youths and 280 women, had been equipped with managerial and technical skills, 120 tech startups selected, segmented and capacitated. A network of 15 partner tech hubs had been set up and engaged with as local multipliers across seven countries. The first business outcomes had also been recorded.
- To support the most advanced women entrepreneurs across six countries in Central America, ITC implemented one-on-one coaching with experts in various domains. These "elabs" demonstrated how advanced skills in website design and digital promotion can lead to higher sales. The recipients of this coaching are now in turn acting as mentors. Over eighteen months, ITC noticed in 2020 434 online orders from 18 countries, 96,544 visits of webshops, eBay and Etsy stores, 1,554 products listed on eBay, Etsy and websites and 10,990 new Instagram followers.
- Through the Refugee Employment and Skills Initiative (RESI) in Kenya, ITC, the Norwegian Refugee Council and partners Mastercard, Biolite and Total helps to connect local sales agents and wholesalers to larger suppliers based in Nairobi via an online application. During COVID, ITC

adapted the training delivery to be online and to provide mentorship and follow up support via phone calls, text messages and WhatsApp calls.

- The ITC's SME Trade Academy in 2020 accumulated over 140,000 course enrolments (50% more than in 2019), with a catalogue of 70 online courses, thereby contributing to SDG 4.
- ITC undertook audits of 150 SMEs' websites in Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Senegal, Tunisia, Uganda, UAE, and Vietnam to improve their online visibility. A few coaches were assisted to build new business services and to apply their experience toward other SMEs.
- UNCTAD in collaboration with eTrade for all partners completed another seven eTrade Readiness Assessments of five LDCs (Bénin, Mali, Malawi, Niger and Tanzania) and for Côte d'Ivoire and Iraq. UNCTAD also launched new work aimed at accelerating the implementation of policy recommendations contained in the 27 assessments conducted since 2016 (see below).
- UNCTAD also continued to offer support for the development of e-commerce strategies notably in Botswana, Myanmar and Rwanda. It also committed to commence similar work in Bénin and Kenya in 2021.
- Some 48 women digital entrepreneurs from 17 countries across Southeast Asia and Africa participated in regional eTrade for Women Masterclasses in 2020. The initiative also paved the way for the building of eTrade for Women regional communities, which will enable women digital entrepreneurs to connect and rely on a powerful network of like-minded peers.
- UNCTAD updated its Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy, which will serve as a basis for strengthening the capabilities of developing countries to measure e-commerce and the digital economy.
- The UNCTAD-led eTrade for all initiative saw two new members joining: the International Labour Organization and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

### **Part 3: Innovations and Future Initiatives**

- a) What policies, programmes and projects have been undertaken by stakeholders to implement the outcomes? Where specific targets or strategies have been set, please report progress in achieving those targets.

### **Global Trade Helpdesk**

In response to the growing need for accessible, digital trade information to help firms adapt to COVID-19 market disruptions and challenges, the Global Trade Helpdesk partners, led by ITC, UNCTAD and WTO, began the rollout of the new version of the Global Trade Helpdesk platform ([www.globaltrahelpdesk.org](http://www.globaltrahelpdesk.org)) in June 2020, on the WTO MSME Day. During this event, the multiagency tool received considerable support from the WTO Informal Working Group on MSMEs, whose 90 members welcomed the tool as a key deliverable for MSMEs, providing access to key information in a digital format to ensure free access for firms around the globe. The updated and enhanced platform, available in five languages (including the Russian and Arabic versions), provides information for exploring trade opportunities and making better business decisions. Since June, the number of users of the platform has tripled. To help build awareness and market analysis capacities for firms and trade professionals, more than 20 webinars have been organized, bringing together nearly 3,000 participants to enable more firms to identify and compare trade opportunities.

### **Fast-tracking the implementation of eTrade Readiness Assessment recommendations**

The UNCTAD eTrade Readiness Assessments (eT Readies) demonstrate the keen interest of many developing countries and LDCs in identifying challenges to the development of e-commerce in their

economies and undertaking reforms to address these challenges. To date, 27 eT Readies have been conducted. In 2020, UNCTAD launched a new monitoring exercise to assess progress made in 18 of these countries across the seven policy areas. The exercise reviewed the implementation of the recommendations made in each eT Ready and found that four policy areas had received the greatest attention by countries: payment solutions, ICT infrastructure and services, legal and regulatory framework, and trade facilitation and logistics.

### **Global eTrade for all assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on e-commerce**

Under the joint leadership of UNCTAD and ECLAC, a working group comprising several eTrade for all partners (ECA, ECE, ESCWA, ESCAP, ITC, CUTS , UPU and E-Residency) in 2020 engaged in a new research project to offer a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the pandemic on e-commerce and digital trade. In record-time, a global report and four regional reports were produced. They will be released early in 2021, offering policy suggestions in 7 policy areas as a contribution to the broader agenda of “building-back better”.

- b) What future actions or initiatives are foreseen by stakeholders (regional/international) to facilitate/implement the action line? Any new commitments?

In 2021, UNCTAD expects to begin supporting the development of regional e-commerce strategies, starting with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The first ever Asia eCommerce Week is scheduled to take place from 17-21 October 2021 in Abu-Dhabi (UAE). This will be one of the main global forums that year to discuss post-COVID 19 policy responses related to e-commerce, the digital economy and development.

# WSIS Follow-up Report: UNGIS

## **United Nations Group on the Information Society**

The United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) is an inter-agency mechanism to coordinate implementation of WSIS outcomes throughout the United Nations system.<sup>1</sup> During the WSIS Forum 2020, it organized a side event to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development on the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines in COVID-19 response and the Decade of Action.<sup>2</sup>

Running from June to October, UNGIS initiated the online *Dialogue on the Role of Digitalization in the Decade of Action* to help ensure that the digital dimension is adequately reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Agenda and to harness the UNGIS network for digital cooperation.<sup>3</sup> It also revamped its website and launched the Digital Transformation Repository, which will be used as a reference guide for all UN Agencies on different initiatives showing the direct impact of the WSIS Action Lines on SDGs.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ungis.org>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/ungis/Articles/View/1200>

<sup>3</sup> <https://unctad.org/topic/ecommerce-and-digital-economy/ungis-dialogue>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/ungis/Repository>