



**UNCTAD YOUTH NETWORK**  
**Participation in the 2017 UNCTAD E-COMMERCE WEEK**  
**“Towards inclusive E-Commerce”**  
**Geneva, 24-28 April 2017**  
**Report of the online discussion of the youth**

The third edition of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) E-Commerce Week provides a platform for concerted dialogue on the digital economic landscape and the challenges and opportunities it presents for developing countries. The week will gather government officials, international organizations, financial institutions, private sector leaders, civil society and youth with the aim to agree on priority actions that need to be taken “towards inclusive e-commerce”.

The UNCTAD Youth Network facilitates young men and women, aged between 18 and 30, to participate in the E-Commerce Week. In addition to a session with youth on 25 April 2017, the latter held an e-discussion where youth were invited to share and exchange experiences on challenges they face related to:

- **Youth Employment in the Digital Economy**
- **Access to supporting mechanisms that allow youth to benefit from e-commerce through entrepreneurship and self-employment**
- **Availability of financial technology services for youth-led start-up and businesses**

Below is a compilation of the outcome of the e-discussion.

**Special remarks from young participants:**

Youth welcomed the virtual platform that UNCTAD continuously provides to bring young people together and work on solutions towards better livelihoods. In particular, they requested through a voting mechanism, that UNCTAD holds an annual summit where they can meet and craft solutions to world challenges that impact both the present and the future.

In a globalized and fast-changing economic landscape, participants expressed their motivation, potential and passion to make positive impact in their communities and countries. E-commerce was identified as a tool offering the opportunity to embrace globalization, as well as a topic of particular concern for their generation since technology-based businesses are gradually defining life and interaction with the world.

In order to drive inclusive development youth need to be perceived by public and private sector leaders as "partners" for economic growth. They felt that public and private sector leaders ought to hear their voices and include them in the decision-making process, in particular on national and international development topics. In addition, the level of trust in young men and women should be significantly increased so as to better deliver on the common goal towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### **Youth Employment in the Digital Economy**

Whether they are entrepreneurs or employees, the participants in the e-discussion recognized the disruptive economic trends that are changing the job market, as well as the required tools and skills to prepare them for the creation of high-skilled jobs and for their inclusion in the era of digitalization. All corners of society need to react and adapt to the dynamic demands of the workforce brought about by technological developments. Two areas need to be prioritized:

#### ***Skills building***

- ✓ The school system in developing countries is outdated. Current education models are not adapted to today's interconnected world where Internet access is gradually becoming a right and where the job market requests for experience. Youth call for an update of the school curriculum so as to be genuinely prepared for the job market with the right skill-set.
- ✓ In today's societies literacy does not merely mean the ability to read and write. Mastering technological tools needs to be taken as a form of literacy by governments and needs to be urgently included in all levels of the education system in an inclusive manner.
- ✓ The job market demands experience. Appropriate school curricula should involve mandatory practical experience before graduation, especially in the case of preparation of young men and women towards working in, for instance, the area of social media marketing and other ICT-related jobs.
- ✓ An updated and improved education system and curricula will not only enable young people to get employed, it would also empower them to become job creators.
- ✓ Young people in non-English speaking countries face a language barrier. Due to interconnectivity, the use of English has become indispensable for most types of

- jobs. Youth in non-English speaking countries call for quality education in English that prepares them to the e-work force of the present and the near future.
- ✓ It is felt that teachers should receive regular training on challenges youth face in the digital economy so as to raise awareness on their role as mentors in a transition period towards digital-based education approach.

### ***Social divide***

Youth identified the presence of a local class divide in society and a global developed-developing country divide that does not allow for an inclusive and sustainable development.

- ✓ Young people in less privileged positions of the social hierarchy find constraints when acquiring the skills they need. The quality education gap between inexpensive public schools and expensive private schools instantaneously exclude them from the right to education of quality. This gap can be found in different areas of knowledge but it is predominantly visible in ICT-related education and language school programs in the case of non-English speaking countries. A similar comparison can be made on education systems between developing and developed countries.

### **Access to supporting mechanisms that allow youth to benefit from e-commerce through entrepreneurship and self-employment**

Young people have an entrepreneurial spirit and a passion to create jobs. They believe that e-commerce is a tool that holds great potential to contribute to sustainable development as long as supporting mechanisms are set in place allowing them to take full advantage of e-commerce.

- ✓ The regulatory environment needs a dedicated strategy for start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to help them compete in the world economy.
- ✓ Start-ups require a tax-friendly environment as well as funding strategies tailored to their economic activity.
- ✓ Young entrepreneurs need support with facilities that allow them to operate. Support could be provided in the form of hubs with shared office spaces where they have access to basic technological tools such as computers and Internet access.
- ✓ The national and the international community need to come up with plans of action to connect aspiring and young entrepreneurs worldwide and network platforms with private and public sector leaders. On the one hand, youth networks would engage potential and early stage young entrepreneurs with experienced young entrepreneurs to exchange ideas and knowledge on the business creation road. On the other hand, engagement of youth with private and public sector leaders would

be conducive for multi-stakeholder partnerships to identify and tackle possible bottlenecks in the creation and expansion of small businesses.

- ✓ Youth-led SMEs need support in adapting their business models to the requirements of global value chains. In order to do this, policy-makers could introduce annual training programmes for SMEs to provide them with knowledge and strategies on expansion opportunities through digital platforms. Efforts in this regard could lead to the creation of more and better jobs while driving an inclusive national economic agenda.
- ✓ The SME training programmes need to encourage employee training and development in the core tasks where opportunity to grow is more prominent according to the sector (i.g. training in social media communication strategies, web development, e-payment processing, public and private sector engagements, among others).
- ✓ Start-ups and SMEs need proper infrastructure support. Connecting people who are not yet online and assuring fast broadband connectivity for all is imperative in the globalized world. Youth feel that if this is not done, a large part of the world populations will be excluded from participating in the national and global economy.

#### **Availability of financial technology services for youth-led start-up and businesses**

Financial technology services are rapidly changing the way business and consumers interact. E-commerce for all requires regulation and in-country innovation that allows cross-border payments.

- ✓ Most financial (public sector) institutions in developing countries struggle with promoting online transactions. This could be due to misinformation on the benefits of digital payment platforms.
- ✓ In the spirit of embracing globalization, the public and the private sector need to discuss the opportunities of e-payments for national growth and international trade. This dialogue would help governments to get in contact with service providers that could guide them to adopt a plan towards e-payment solutions that could support the growth of youth-led start-ups and SMEs.

18 April 2017