



## UNCTAD E-COMMERCE WEEK “From Digitalization to Development”

Geneva, 1-5 April 2019

### UNCTAD YOUTH NETWORK - Report of the Youth Action Hubs

#### Introduction

The Youth Action Hubs initiative was created by youth at the UNCTAD Youth Forum in October 2018 in Geneva with the principle “for youth, by youth”. It empowers youth to think globally and express views on matters within UNCTAD’s mandate and enables us to take action locally as game changers in our communities by setting up SDG-related projects.

As a first assignment, we decided to incorporate in one report our thinking on the theme of the UNCTAD eCommerce Week 2019 “From Digitalization to Development” for your perusal. The outcome of the deliberations of sixteen of our Youth Action Hubs<sup>1</sup> is presented in the current report.

It is our hope that actors of the digital economy, public and private, will find inspiration in the contribution of the youth to the eCommerce Week and that this is the beginning of a more systematic engagement with the youth.

#### The views of the youth on Digitalization for Development

We are the generation of social media and will be the first one whose professional future will feel the impact of the transformative power of new technologies. We are also the generation that will face massive unemployment and geographical re-location. The social and economic disruption that new technologies will bring along asks for bold action in which out of the box thinking is a must.

Digitalization, seen through the eyes of development, is a means to empower people to create a more inclusive and sustainable world, in which digital innovation is oriented towards equality and justice. The digital economy allows for an increased number of opportunities thanks to new business models and innovative solutions putting people at the forefront.

For instance, the innovative force of blockchain technology, its potential and the many fields in which it is applicable, are unlimited and can, if applied in a smart way, help increase trust and promote transparency and accountability.

As youth, we believe that there is a growing need to put in place more efficient systems to transfer knowledge on and have access to technology. In particular, focus should be put on supporting

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<sup>1</sup> Australia, Brazil, Cameroon, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Guinea, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, the Netherlands, Oman, Pakistan, Uganda, Unites States of America and Zimbabwe

frameworks that enable socially and economically marginalized populations to be connected. Gender inclusive technological development is one of the many elements that should be encouraged.

Education is another important element for young people. It is our view that programmes and education systems should be adapted to today's changing landscape. Technological tools need to be considered as a form of literacy and need to be urgently included in all levels of education. This integration should allow for a better preparation for youth entering the job market, the future of work and optimization of the use of new technologies.

While digitalization can play a key role in ensuring the implementation of the SDGs, youth are sensitive to the fact that technology can also be a root of exclusion and inequality. There is a need to ensure that the world benefits from technologies and that conducive regulatory frameworks are implemented. In addition, with the increased number and use of data, protection of data and privacy rights has become crucial.

We also firmly believe that a dedicated strategy for start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is required to allow them to compete in a digitalized world economy. In this context, we want to reiterate the interest expressed by youth in our 2017 report, for supporting mechanisms that allow youth to benefit from the digital economy through entrepreneurship and self-employment.

With the aim of bridging the digital divide, young entrepreneurs create innovative business models around the concept of smart villages. They develop adapted technologies that address specific needs and challenges that vulnerable populations face in rural areas; thereby allowing them to be part of the digital transformation. Such initiatives can contribute to poverty alleviation and should be further supported.

We consider that large digital platforms play an important role in awareness raising and the advancement of the digital economy. In order to lead the change, we need to guide them and help understand the importance of the SDGs and their responsibility therein.

Through social media, we have access to more information than we used to have in the past. If properly used, social media can greatly enhance inclusiveness, transparency and communication as well as create job opportunities, networking and be used as an educational and awareness raising tool. However, as young people we are also aware of their possible flaws and see a need to educate people on the use of social media.

We believe that technology trends should be at the service of people. New trends, such as artificial intelligence, should be designed and used in such a way to ensure that each person can fully and equitably participate. There is a concern that with the fast-changing world, it is easy to be left behind and a call is made to governments to address this issue.

Finally, we call upon governments and the private sector to include environmental considerations into their development strategies when dealing with digitalization.

The youth want to thank UNCTAD for the opportunity provided to share our views at the eCommerceWeek 2019.