E-COMMERCE AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY
LEVERAGING E-COMMERCE AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

GLOBAL CONTEXT

E-commerce – and more generally the rise of the digital economy – is rapidly transforming the way in which enterprises are interacting among each other, as well as with consumers and Governments. E-commerce is creating new opportunities for technological leaps, productivity gains across the economy, the rise of new sectors and boosting trade. At the same time, the transformation is raising new challenges and costs for countries. Some of the greatest dynamism in e-commerce and information and communications technologies (ICTs) can be found in developing countries, but the potential is far from fully realized.

Making ICTs work for development means adapting to the benefits and the legal challenges that go along with their use. Conducting domestic and international trade online has to be simplified, and there is a need for legal protection for users and providers in order to ensure that citizens, consumers and enterprises can trust online transactions. Developing countries should establish legal, institutional and policy frameworks, as well as effective national strategies, to leverage the dynamism of e-commerce, whether via the Internet, mobile telephones or cloud computing. Developing countries, including LDCs, require better access to reliable statistics on the digital economy. It is also important for policymakers to receive evidence-based guidance on the design of sound policies and to learn from best practices in securing development gains from e-commerce and the digital economy. Seizing development gains from this evolving landscape requires a holistic, cross-sectoral and cross-institutional approach.

HOW CAN THE BENEFITS OF E-COMMERCE AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY BE HARNESS?

UNCTAD offers several technical assistance programmes to assist Governments in developing countries and countries with economies in transition in harnessing the benefits of e-commerce and the digital economy, as follows:

(a) The E-Commerce and Law Reform Programme helps to build the capacity of law and policymakers at the national and regional levels to understand the legal issues underpinning e-commerce. Concrete actions include the following:

- Assistance in establishing domestic and regional legal regimes to enhance trust in online transactions and offer legal protection for users and providers of e-commerce and electronic government services;
- Organization of national and regional capacity-building workshops for law and policymakers;
- Mapping of e-commerce legislation in the areas of electronic transactions, data protection, cybercrime and consumer protection online, available at unctad.org/cyberlawtracker.

(b) UNCTAD work on measuring the information economy includes statistical data collection (focusing on ICT use in enterprises, the ICT sector and ICT trade), technical assistance (for example, capacity-building to produce official statistics on the information economy), the development of methodologies and research

PROGRAMME FACTS AND FIGURES

Scope: Developing countries and LDCs

Start date: 1999 (new components added in 2007, 2009 and 2016)

Projects per year: 10 (average)

Projects to date: 53 (e-commerce and law reform: 27; measuring the information economy: 18; ICT Policy Reviews: 3; rapid eTrade readiness assessments: 5)

Partners: 26 (public sector and civil society); 30+ (private sector)

Summary of success: 2,650 persons trained and 7 national reviews completed

Website: unctad.org/ict4d; unctad.org/ictpr; etradeforall.org

UNCTADstat database: unctadstat.unctad.org

Sustainable Development Goals addressed:
Directly: 8, 9 and 17
Indirectly: 5

and analysis presented and published in the annual *Information Economy Report* and the statistics portal UNCTADstat.

(c) The ICT Policy Review Programme provides technical assistance, advisory services, diagnostics and strategy development on e-commerce and national ICT planning at the request of Governments. Through analysis of the infrastructural, policy, regulatory, institutional, operational and socioeconomic landscape, the Reviews help Governments to overcome weaknesses and bureaucratic barriers, leverage strengths and opportunities and put in place strategies to maximize the benefits of ICTs and e-commerce.

(d) The eTrade for all initiative was launched as a collaborative effort to scale up cooperation, transparency and aid efficiency towards more inclusive e-commerce. At the core of the initiative, the eTrade for all online platform, at etradeforall.org, helps countries navigate the technical and financial services available to drive development through e-commerce. Through the platform, beneficiaries can connect with potential partners, learn about trends and best practices, access up-to-date e-commerce data and be informed about upcoming e-commerce events. eTrade for all works in close cooperation with more than 30 contributors to Business for eTrade Development (business4etrade.org/), the premier private sector voice for optimizing public policies and leveraging cross-border e-commerce worldwide.

(e) The Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessments Programme assists LDCs in assessing their e-commerce readiness, in order that they can better engage in and benefit from e-commerce. The aim is to help LDCs take stock of their ICT and e-commerce capabilities and formulate a strategy to overcome barriers and bottlenecks to the growth of digital trade.

RESULTS AND IMPACT AT A GLANCE

- The E-commerce and Law Reform Programme pioneered the introduction of the legal dimension of ICTs in more than 20 LDCs and 63 developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. The East African Community became the first African region to adopt a harmonized framework for cyberlaws

- UNCTAD has trained over 250 national statistical officers from 117 countries and contributed to the definition of the core ICT-related indicators of the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission.

- As part of the ICT Policy Review Programme, the Government of Egypt developed and launched its first official national e-commerce survey of its microenterprises, covering all governorates in the country. Inter-agency collaboration between UNCTAD and the World Bank for the national e-commerce strategy for Egypt for 2015–2017 led to the development of a comprehensive strategy on electronic payments for e-commerce in a developing country.

- As at November 2017, the eTrade for all website, offering a platform for cooperation opportunities and knowledge exchange

between donors, beneficiary countries and development partners, had on average about 2,600 monthly visitors.

"The strategy is a solid foundation for stimulating e-commerce growth in Egypt throughout the coming years. I wish to express my appreciation for all the efforts and dedication by UNCTAD on this strategy. Egypt is heading steadily towards achieving better economic performance, inclusive growth and sustainable development. This strategy is a concrete step towards bringing this aspiration into reality."

Mr. Yasser El-Kady, Minister of Communications and Information Technology, Egypt, March 2017

"Leveraging e-commerce is a challenge that requires a joint multi-stakeholder effort and the [eTrade for all] initiative provides the perfect framework for collaboration."

Mr. Jovan Kurbalija, Director, DiploFoundation, and Head, Geneva Internet Platform (eTrade for all partner)