

Workshop Report

eTrade Capacity Building Workshop

9-10 May 2024

Palais des Nations, Geneva

Room E-XXVII

Since 2017, the UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has partnered with close to 50 developing countries of which 26 Least Developed Countries (LDCs), to understand their e-commerce readiness and provide policy recommendations to assist them in harnessing the benefits of the digital economy. UNCTAD support has included eTrade Readiness Assessments (eT Readies), eT Ready Action Plans, E-Commerce Strategies (ECS) as well as the Implementation Support Mechanism (ISM). The ISM aims to assist partner countries in monitoring progress in the implementation of eT Readies and related e-commerce policy documents and initiatives through Implementation Reviews (IR) which highlight good practices, policy impacts and lessons learned. The ISM also facilitates synergies among development partners, including the 35 eTrade for all partners which offer technical and financial solutions in support of partnering countries. As part of its assistance, UNCTAD regularly organizes workshops with partner countries' focal points.

The eTrade Capacity Building workshop held on 9-10 May 2024 in Geneva took place back-to-back with the [Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy, seventh session | UNCTAD](#) (6-8 May 2024), which focused on "Building digital readiness: from assessment to implementation". The topics of workshop sessions were selected to address areas and issues where capacities need to be strengthened, as per feedback received by partner countries in the various IRs and stakeholder engagement initiatives.

Focal Points from 35 countries and 5 African Regional Economic Communities (EAC, ECOWAS, IGAG, SACU and SADC) were invited. The final list of participants is annexed to this document. A total of 28 country and regional representatives attended the workshop, of which 8 were women. The geographical distribution of national participants was as follows: Africa (17 countries), Asia (2 countries), LAC (1 country), Pacific (3 countries). English/French/Arabic interpretation was provided to facilitate the discussions. UNCTAD gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Afreximbank which funded the travel and stay in Geneva of the participants from African countries and RECS during the entire week.

Ms. Shamika N. Sirimanne, Director, Division on Technology and Logistics (DTL), UNCTAD opened the meeting by welcoming the participants and commending them for their active participation during the 3 days of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts. She noted that feedback from partner countries and regions that had undergone eT Readies underscored the usefulness of the assessments for informing policymaking, fostering public-private sector dialogue, and prioritizing action. Many of the reports were followed by national or regional e-commerce strategies and action plans. She emphasized that UNCTAD saw the empowerment of Focal Points and the building of national coordinating entities as stepping stones to foster whole-of-government and whole-of-society implementation of e-commerce initiatives, as well as cooperation with development partners. The workshop was designed with this background

in mind and UNCTAD stands ready to continue assisting partner countries and RECs, including through the roll-out of the new online tool the eTrade Reform Tracker. She concluded by thanking the core donors of the E-Commerce and Digital Economy programme, as well as Afreximbank, whose support remained key to stepping up UNCTAD technical assistance efforts.

H.E. Mr. Sabri Bachtobji, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Tunisia to the United Nations in Geneva, in his opening remarks noted that this was his second time taking part in a meeting of the eT Ready focal points. The first time, in 2022, Tunisia had launched its evaluation. He was happy to share with the group that since then Tunisia had made significant progress in the implementation of the eT Ready recommendations, including with the development and implementation of an Action plan 2022-2023, which by March 2024 saw 78 per cent of its activities either fully implemented or being in the process of implementation. He underscored the importance of experience sharing and identification of good practices in view of the similar challenges faced by many developing countries and LDCs. Exchanges, such as the ones that the workshop would allow for were essential to define effective solutions adapted to countries' individual contexts.

Mr. Adham Abdelaal, Manager – AU/AfCFTA Relations and Trade Policy, Afreximbank, shared his appreciation for continuing the conversation initiated during the eWeek 2023 with the community of eTrade focal points and highlighted the importance of capacity building to accelerate African trade integration initiatives. He shared how Afreximbank, in collaboration with key stakeholders, is creating a digital ecosystem that is expected to accelerate intra-regional trade through the elimination or significant reduction of major bottlenecks to trade and financial flows within the continent, for example through the African Trade Gateway initiative.





The workshop was structured along 4 half-day sessions, addressing various thematic areas and a mix of panel discussions, interactive group exercises and experience sharing among participants.

Session 1: Development solutions to building digital readiness

The first session of the workshop provided an opportunity for participants to learn more about development solutions offered by various UNCTAD programmes and teams. An overview was provided of implementation support and capacity building assistance of the E-commerce and Digital Economy work programme (in the areas of e-commerce policy documents, cyberlaw reforms, measurement and statistics, empowerment of women digital entrepreneurs), along with a presentation of the eTrade for all initiative. This was followed by presentations of UNCTAD capacity-building programmes covering areas such as consumer protection, business facilitation, trade facilitation, customs automation (ASYCUDA) and skills development (TrainForTrade). During the Q&A session participants shared their experiences benefiting from some of the programmes presented and discussed how the assistance available in various policy areas can be customized and bundled to support implementation of policy measures at the national and regional level, in line with eT Ready recommendations, Action Plans and E-Commerce Strategies.

Session 2: The eTrade Reform Tracker

The second session of the workshop presented UNCTAD's new "eTrade Reform Tracker" (eTRT) online tool was presented, stressing how this can support national e-commerce committees or equivalent bodies in coordinating the implementation process more efficiently. The session provided an opportunity for countries' Focal Points to familiarize themselves with the eTrade Reform Tracker through a live interactive demonstration of its functionalities provided by UNCTAD. Three break-out groups were formed and facilitated by UNCTAD's team. The exercise simulated a typical scenario that country representatives can encounter when using the tracker and highlighted the importance of a well-coordinated and holistic approach to fast-track the implementation of reforms aimed at enabling e-commerce. The session also offered an opportunity to collect feedback from the participants on the use of the tool. They particularly noted the user-friendly and intuitive design of the platform. The modalities for countries to request the eTrade Reform Tracker were also presented.

Session 3: Building readiness for the implementation of trade agreements incorporating digital-related provisions

The third session of the workshop zoomed in on the experience of developed and developing countries that, over the last decade, had increasingly engaged in the negotiation of trade agreements that incorporate digital-related provisions. UNCTAD provided a global overview of initiatives and key issues at stake. This was followed by presentations on regional developments in Asia and the Pacific (by TradeWorthy) and in Latin America and the Caribbean (by UN ECLAC), and on multilateral and global initiatives in this area (by the WTO). Finally, two presentations focused on how countries can address development issues through specific provisions of the digital trade agreements as well as capacity-building solutions (by Diplo Foundation) and the integration of human rights in such agreements (by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights). Discussions emphasized how commitments undertaken in these frameworks influence the way domestic reforms are pursued and reaffirmed the importance of furthering capacity building in this area in developing countries, particularly LDCs.

Session 4: Lessons learnt on sustainable platforms and e-commerce marketplaces

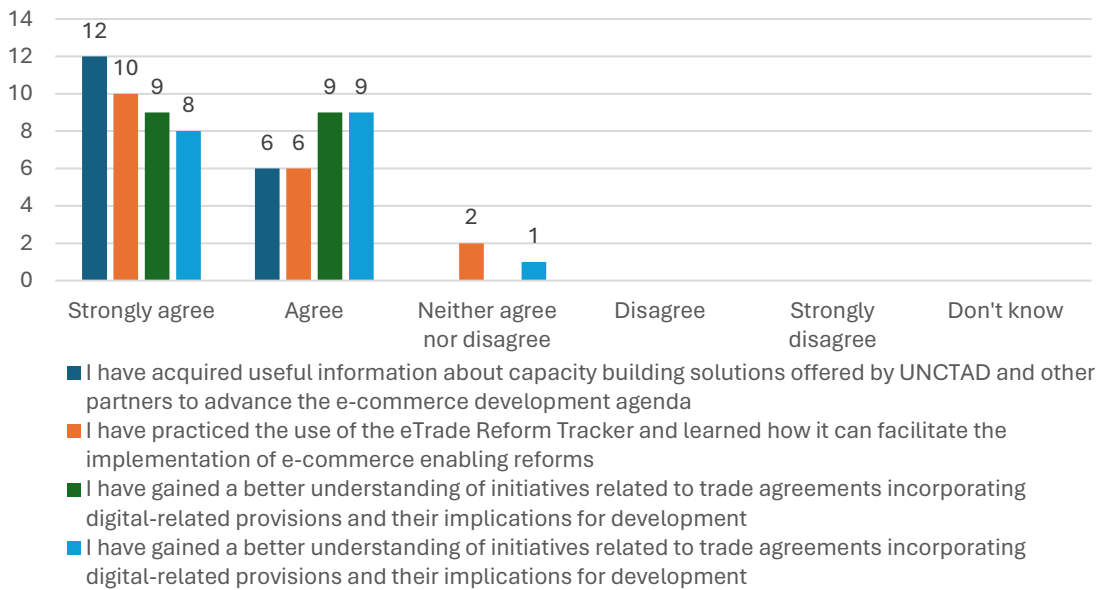
The fourth and last session dived into the experience of how national third-party e-commerce marketplaces by developing country governments, often with the support of development partners. The country cases of Cambodia and Senegal were shared by the focal points, focusing on governments' efforts to facilitate access to e-commerce markets for businesses and consumers, and the platforms' profitability and sustainability issues. The country examples were complemented by presentations from ITC and UNDP, which highlighted the experience of marketplaces from different regions. Participants discussed lessons learned on the capacity building dimension associated with the development of these platforms and useful recommendations to improve follow-up support.

Feedback from the participants

A feedback survey was shared with the participants after the workshop. A total of 18 responses were received and results are summarized below.

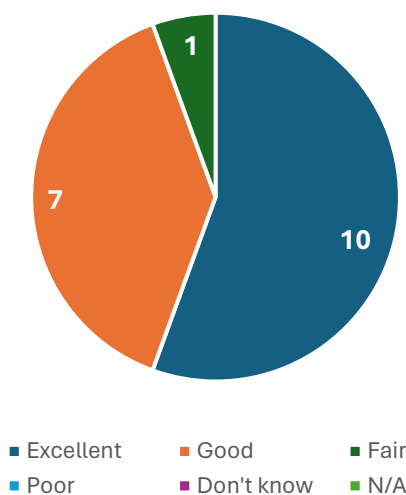
Almost all the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had acquired useful information about capacity building solutions offered by UNCTAD and other partners to advance the e-commerce development agenda, had practiced the use of the eTrade Reform Tracker and learned how it can facilitate the implementation of e-commerce enabling reforms, had gained a better understanding of initiatives related to trade agreements incorporating digital-related provisions and their implications for development, and had gained a better understanding of initiatives related to trade agreements incorporating digital-related provisions and their implications for development. In some residual cases, neutral responses were shared, but no negative feedback was recorded.

Level of satisfaction with the knowledge acquired (18 responses)

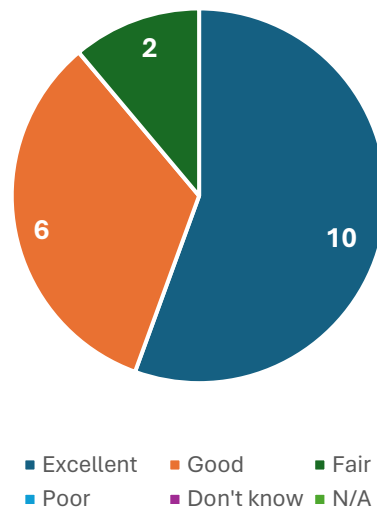


Similarly, the topics addressed were very positively considered by the respondents. The vast majority also found that the workshop offered good or excellent opportunities to connect and network among peers and with partners.

Topics addressed and structure of the sessions



Opportunities to connect and network with peers and partners



Participants unanimously confirmed that the workshop met their expectations. They were asked if they thought they would be able to apply the knowledge acquired in their work and

how. Participants were also encouraged to share other useful comments or suggestions. A few noteworthy responses are quoted below.

Michelo Makwembo (Senior Economist, Zambia): “I will definitely apply the knowledge acquired. As a starting point I will share the meeting report and a summary of the many presentations. I will also share information on the eTrade Reform Tracker, a useful tool for tracking and monitoring implementation of the ecommerce strategic objectives”

Christopher Matsiko (Senior Commercial Officer, Uganda): “It was a very well-organized workshop and very well coordinated. Using the eTrade Reform Tracker will help to track progress of the implementation and know areas of improvement”.

Rose Kemunto Masita (Deputy Director, State Department for Trade, Kenya): “I will utilize the eTrade Reform Tracker to monitor the implementation of the Kenya National E-commerce Strategy”.

Ibrahim Tanda Bonkano (National Director, Promotion of Trade in Services and E-Commerce Niger): “I think I can make good use of the knowledge acquired, firstly, for the implementation of certain actions thanks to the experiences shared, particularly in terms of supporting SMEs to bring them online, but also to contact certain partners who are already in Niger to find opportunities for collaboration together. I am thinking of organizing a meeting of the National Committee on E-Commerce very soon to share with the members the content and importance of the eTrade Reform Tracker.”

Benjamin R. Katjipuka (Director, Policy Development and Research, SACU Secretariat): “The meeting was very useful in appreciating the scope of e-commerce and digital economy trajectory well. SACU is exploring feasibility for developing an E-commerce Framework and this meeting enabled us to leverage from existing baselines and best practices in other regions, i.e., EAC and West Africa. The meeting provided further insights in regard to the level of eTrade readiness in SACU, [including] work done with the collaborating partners. This would go a long way to establish synergies, synchronize a regional approach and build complementarities on e-commerce and the digital economy.”

Chisepo Lungu (ICT Programme Officer, SADC Secretariat): “The organizers did a great job with the organization, facilitation and support before and during the workshop. It enhanced knowledge of the various considerations needed for e-commerce to thrive (...) The workshop revealed to delegates that technical aspects such as setting up marketplaces is only one aspect to be addressed. Political will from the highest levels was noted as probably the biggest key to success. The eTrade Tracker presents a one-stop portal which can be used to oversee, coordinate and monitor multiple stakeholder entities’ progress on agreed e-commerce goals and measures.”

Laichea Chea (Director, International Cooperation Department, Cambodia): “The knowledge acquired from the capacity building is very useful (...) and helpful for me to work on this matter and coordinate this issue with line ministries and government agencies involved.”

Karen Niumata (Principal competition policy analyst, Samoa): “I believe I will be able to apply the knowledge acquired from the eTrade Capacity Building Workshop in my work in Samoa in several ways. (...) I plan to advocate for and participate in projects that aim to upgrade internet connectivity and digital platforms. (...) The knowledge gained about creating supportive regulatory frameworks will help me contribute to developing policies that encourage digital entrepreneurship, protect consumer rights online and promote competition in Samoa. (...) I will use the strategies and best practices shared during the workshop to conduct training sessions and workshops locally, helping businesses and individuals develop the skills needed for effective eTrade. (...) I intend to work on initiatives that ensure women, youth, and rural communities in Samoa have access to digital trade opportunities.”

Anonymous respondent: “Capacity building on the eTrade Reform Tracker tool will contribute to better monitoring of the implementation of the policy recommendations from the eT Ready. Then, the sharing of experience on the duration and sustainability of marketplaces gave me relevant elements for a strategic reorientation of our national e-commerce platform. Yes, indeed, the workshop met my expectations. It allowed for the sharing of experiences between focal points on best practices in the implementation of governance models for the implementation of eT Readies.”

Additional feedback received from participants including suggestions to:

- organize longer workshops to allow for more panel interactions, more group discussion and longer interactive exercises,
- add a focus on the challenges faced by specific groups of countries (e.g., SIDS),
- organize more structured networking sessions (e.g., facilitated group discussions, mentorship pairings, or thematic breakout rooms) and facilitate communication among the participants and facilitations (e.g., through a WhatsApp group), and
- create an online repository of resources, including presentations, reading materials, and recorded sessions, to allow participants to revisit the content and share it with their colleagues and communities.

Final considerations

The workshop was the 4th in-person event organized in Geneva as part of the ISM (after workshops in April 2019, October 2022, and December 2023). Participants benefited from the organization of the workshop back-to-back with the 2024 IGE, including through their interactions with colleagues from the permanent missions in Geneva. They expressed appreciation for the contents and organization of the workshop but also made concrete suggestions to improve future workshops. The event built on the strengths of the eTrade for all (eT4a) initiative and the ISM by bringing together partners both from across UNCTAD and from the initiative to share information on resources available to countries looking to benefit from the opportunities that the digital economy offers. Among the main messages which emerged from the discussions was that multi-stakeholder partnerships are essential to support the political leadership and national stakeholders in their efforts to integrate and benefit from the new global digital economy. This points to the continued need for “connecting the dots” between beneficiary countries, partners, and donors as much work remains to



ensuring that no one, including the most vulnerable, are left behind. The support of UNCTAD's E-Commerce and Digital Economy (ECDE) programme donors is duly acknowledged.



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