

NEW PATHWAYS TO E-COMMERCE

A GLOBAL MSME COMPETITIVENESS SURVEY



International
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Centre

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FOR GOOD

NEW PATHWAYS TO E-COMMERCE

A Global MSME Competitiveness
Survey

About the paper

This first ITC e-commerce survey provides valuable insights that will allow countries to shape policies and practices that address the real business needs on the ground.

To ensure that micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) can benefit from e-commerce, they need better access to e-platforms, payment and delivery services; streamlined customs procedures; and targeted skill building. These are the key findings from this ITC survey of 2,200 MSMEs in 111 countries. In addition, the survey reveals that the share of logistics costs over final price is nearly double in developing countries than in developed countries and that product return is a significant cost factor for enterprises from least developed countries.

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For more information on E-commerce, see: <http://www.intracen.org/itc/sectors/services/e-commerce/>

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Foreword

E-commerce has opened a gateway of new opportunities for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) to access international markets, find new sources of demand, and build value through exposure to new technologies.

Stories of entrepreneurs building online business empires from their garages in Boston, Bangalore or Beijing are on the rise, and serve as new business models. Supported by social media, digital promotion and e-commerce platforms, MSMEs can promote their products and services to professional buyers and consumers across the world, and build a name for themselves beyond their geographical borders. Some of the best-known examples come from China, where new rural production centres are emerging from micro-enterprises that serve customers through common e-commerce platforms. Examples like these show that e-commerce is democratizing the playing field for businesses across the globe.

Beyond this optimistic picture, however, there are challenges, especially for MSMEs in developing countries. Barriers to setting up an online international presence often limit firms to the domestic market. This matters because e-commerce offers great potential to deliver economic growth, jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Absence from international e-commerce is a missed opportunity. It is an important component of modern competitiveness. Access to digital technologies underpins the ambitions behind many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. E-commerce can be an important engine for inclusive economic growth, empowering women and creating jobs for youth.

The 2017 International Trade Centre (ITC) competitiveness survey of more than 2,200 MSMEs across 111 countries goes beyond e-commerce success stories to understand the concrete issues that MSMEs face. Why are MSMEs from developing countries, and in particular Africa, so absent from cross-border e-commerce channels? Are there differences, perceived or experienced, in how women and men entrepreneurs engage in e-commerce? And most importantly, what can the international community do – through international regulation, capacity building, enhancing business environments and national public policy – to help more MSMEs tap into e-commerce potential?

This report reveals that while some e-commerce issues are common to MSMEs across the world, others are specific to developing countries, especially least developed countries. I would like to thank ITC's global network of partners, including trade and investment support institutions (TISIs) and companies around the world for their contributions to the survey.

It is our hope that the results can contribute to the work of the World Trade Organization's 'Work Programme for Electronic Commerce', which works to create a better policy environment for global e-commerce; and the 'eTrade for All' initiative of the UN Conference on Trade and Development, which aims to improve developing countries' ability to benefit from e-commerce. It is our expectation that the findings from this survey will provide trade negotiators, policymakers and TISIs with a deeper understanding of the concrete challenges MSMEs face when bringing their businesses online.

E-commerce is not a future trend. It is the way successful business is done today, and we need to help more entrepreneurs, especially in developing countries, connect to its tremendous economic potential.



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¹ The Board includes ITC and 11 trade and promotion organizations from Australia, Benin, Costa Rica, Finland, Malaysia, Mauritius, Morocco, Spain, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates and Zimbabwe.

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