

E-COMMERCE AND DIGITAL ECONOMY PROGRAMME

YEAR IN REVIEW 2020

Facilitating inclusive digital economies
in challenging times



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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|----------|--|
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| B2C | Business to consumer |
| DER | Digital Economy Report |
| EAC | East African Community |
| ECDE | E-commerce and Digital Economy |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of West African States |
| ECS | E-commerce strategy |
| EIF | Enhanced Integrated Framework |
| GIZ | Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| IGE | Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| ITC | International Trade Centre |
| ITFC | International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation |
| JSI | Joint Statement Initiative |
| LDCs | Least Developed Countries |
| M&E | Monitoring & Evaluation |
| PDEP | Pacific Digital Economy Programme |
| PIFS | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat |
| RCO | Resident Coordinator Office |
| RPTC | Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SIDS | Small Island Developing States |
| SMEs | Small and medium-sized enterprises |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNCDF | United Nations Capital Development Fund |
| UNCITRAL | United Nations Commission on International Trade Law |
| UNCTAD | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNECA | United Nations Economic Commission for Africa |
| UNECE | United Nations Economic Commission for Europe |
| UNECLAC | United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean |
| UNESCAP | United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific |
| UNESCWA | United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Africa |
| UNGIS | UN Group on the Information Society |
| UPU | Universal Postal Union |
| WAEMU | West African Economic and Monetary Union |
| WSIS | World Summit on the Information Society Forum |

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Message from Shamika N. Sirimanne, Director, Division on Technology and Logistics

Since the COVID-19 pandemic struck our economies and societies, digital solutions have been used more than before to maintain economic and social activities in times of various lockdown measures and travel restrictions. At the same time, the wide gaps in digital readiness became even more apparent. Recent developments have further shown the wisdom of member States when they back in 2016, at the UNCTAD Ministerial in Nairobi, decided to strengthen UNCTAD's work on enhancing development gains from the digital economy and e-commerce. Their perspicacious actions laid the foundation for what evolved into the E-commerce and Digital Economy (ECDE) Programme.

Our economies are being transformed at record speed as more and more people, governments and businesses go digital. The rapid development of the digital economy is disrupting production, consumption and trade patterns, significantly affecting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Impacts will depend on policies and the readiness of countries, enterprises and people to take advantage of digitalization, and its benefits will not be equally distributed. Significant efforts are needed to create a more inclusive digital economy.

The pandemic has added urgency to the need for action. It has taken a huge toll in terms of lives and it plunged the world into a deep recession. At the same time, it has accelerated various digital transformation processes around the world. Digital solutions for telemedicine, telework, online education and – not least – e-commerce have been increasingly used to keep economic and social activities going, most likely with lasting effects. Without adequate actions, inequalities will widen even more.

Digital divides, differences in readiness and the high concentration of digital market power all point to the need for new policies and regulations to create a fairer distribution of gains from digital transformations. Finding suitable solutions will require effective international collaboration and policy dialogue, with the full involvement of developing countries.

The ECDE Programme has a key role to play in this context. It was set up with the aim of helping to reduce inequality, enable the benefits of digitalization to reach all people and ensure that no one is left behind – nor left offline – in the evolving digital economy. This overall goal has become even more important to achieve due to the pandemic and to support the recovery efforts.

This *Year in Review* is the first assessment of the work done under the common programmatic vision of the ECDE Programme. It focuses on activities that took place during 2020 and highlights key achievements related to its work to build knowledge, capacity and consensus. In doing so, it applies the Programme's monitoring and evaluation system for measuring results, with a view to ensuring a robust and results-driven approach to programme management and monitoring.

I would like to express my appreciation to the growing number of member States that are turning to UNCTAD for assistance to help them achieve more inclusive outcomes of the evolving digital economy. I am also grateful to our peer organizations in the *eTrade for all* initiative, for their commitment to connect the dots and work for a digital and sustainable future for all. Finally, growing trust and funding from development partners are essential for this Programme to fulfil its potential in this Decade of Action.



Message from Torbjörn Fredriksson, Chief, ICT Policy Section

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the ECDE Programme in several respects. It forced us to change the methods of delivering our work, adapt our research focus and find creative ways of interacting with our partners and beneficiaries. Since March 2020, the ECDE Programme team has largely been teleworking from home, and planned physical meetings, conferences, workshops and field missions have had to be undertaken virtually. Ministries of Commerce in many developing countries have adapted well, showing that they are embracing new technologies. This shift has been both challenging and a valuable learning experience.

Highlights during 2020 included several innovations. **New products** included the first virtual eWeek, which was held only a few weeks after the first lockdown was imposed in Geneva. The first eTrade Readiness Assessments of non-LDCs were conducted in Côte d'Ivoire and Iraq, in cooperation with **eTrade for all** partners. We set in motion a systematic monitoring exercise of the implementation of recommendations made in earlier assessments, with a first report published in December. The eTrade for Women initiative established its first regional communi-

ty. Better digital cooperation and more and more stakeholders are using it. We received growing support from donors, notably Germany and the Netherlands, and engaged in new partnership discussions with Switzerland. More support enabled us to strengthen the team by recruiting **new colleagues**, a process that is still ongoing. The expansion of the team is necessary in view of the growing number of requests for assistance from member States, and to leverage our expanding partnerships for cost-effective delivery of our services.

Some upcoming milestones for 2021 and beyond are also worth highlighting. We will join the UN Capital Development Fund and the UN Development Programme to launch the Pacific Digital Economy Programme, our first such regional effort. Work on a regional e-commerce strategy for the Economic Community of West African States will commence, and the Revised UNCTAD Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy will be used to develop new training courses. The Digital Economy Report 2021 is scheduled for release in September. We will contribute to the virtual UNCTAD XV Ministerial Conference to take place from 3-7 October 2021, and, a few weeks later, we hope to welcome you at the Asia eCommerce Week in October 2021 in Abu Dhabi or online, or both.

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