eWeek

Shaping the future of the digital economy

UNITED NATIONS
UNCTAD

Geneva, 4–8 December 2023

The Geneva Vision on the Future of the Digital Economy

The "Geneva Vision on the Future of the Digital Economy" is the UNCTAD eWeek 2023 summary report. It provides context for the organization of the event, presents an overview of the high-level sessions that took place during the week, and offers a snapshot of the eWeek's key facts and numbers.

The Geneva Vision is a rallying call to turn digital opportunities into shared development gains, based on the discussions which took place during the week. UNCTAD sees a need for urgent action in scaling up global efforts to bridge digital divides and establishing effective global governance for data, AI, and other key aspects of the digital economy.

The digital transformation is happening at a fast pace, and existing as well as new partnerships and cooperation mechanisms must be leveraged to maximize development gains.

Background

The process of digitalization is happening against the backdrop of multiple global crises, including climate change, environmental degradation, rising poverty, inequality, food insecurity, debt distress, geopolitical conflicts, and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The world faces critical decisions on what trajectories to take to shape the future role of digitalization for development, while developing countries lack the necessary capabilities to fully harness digitalization for their development, and risk falling further behind.

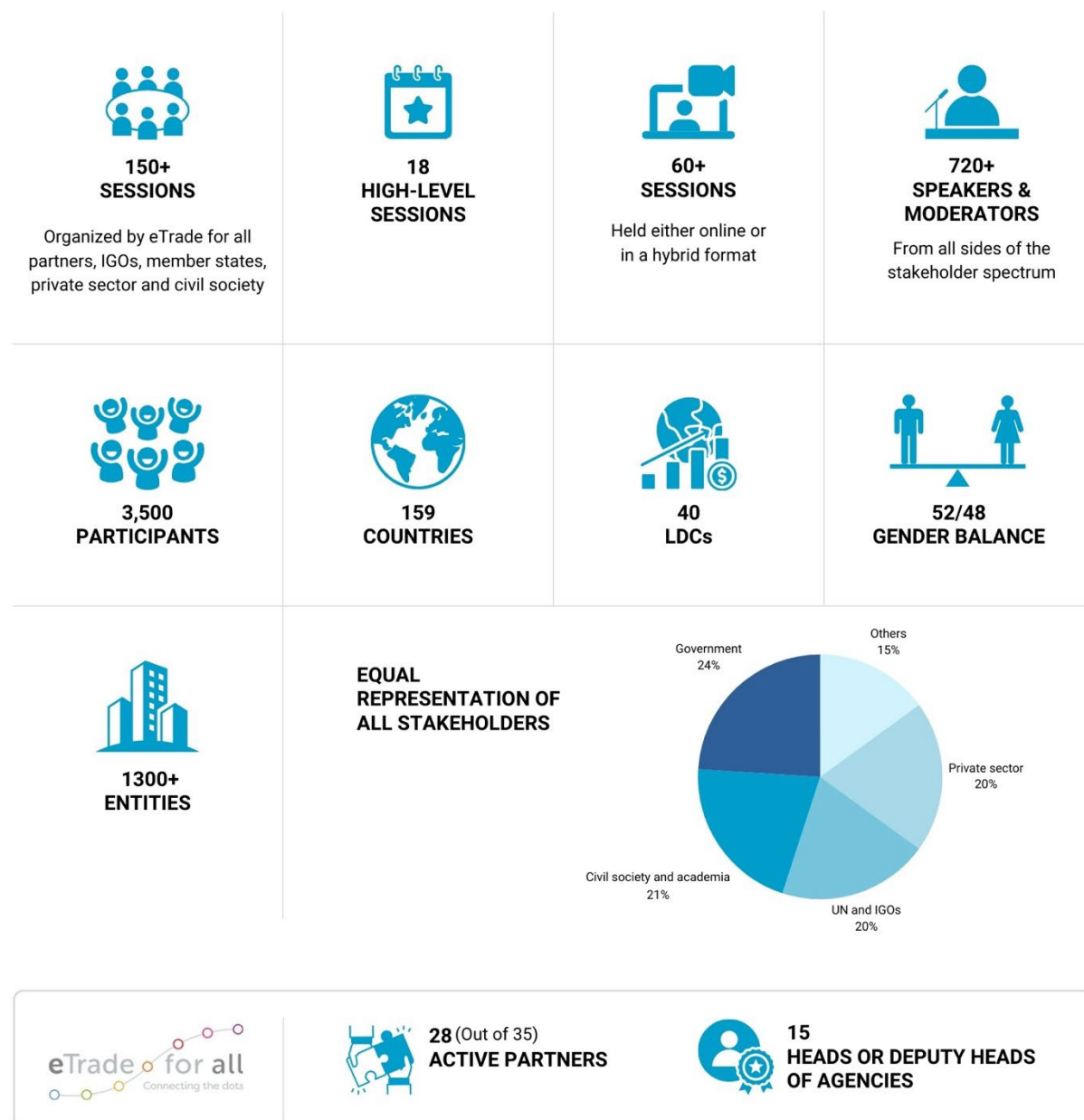### THE NEED TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

The digital economy is unequal. Although more people than ever before are using the Internet, a user in high-income countries utilizes on average 17 times more bandwidth than one in a least developed country (LDC). And while on average more than 60 per cent of people in developed countries shop online, that share is below 10 per cent in LDCs.[1]

In response to these challenges, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) convened the UNCTAD eWeek 2023 in Geneva, Switzerland on 4-8 December 2023. It provided an opportunity for governments, businesses, civil society, international organizations, and academia to come together and discuss how to shape the future of the digital economy.

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[1] Source: ITU Facts and Figures 2023 – Measuring digital development: Facts and Figures 2023 (itu.int)

UNCTAD eWeek IN NUMBERS

The 2023 edition of the UNCTAD eWeek was the largest of its kind to date. Through the eTrade for all initiative, it fostered comprehensive, cross-cutting and multistakeholder discussions aimed at finding smarter ways of building an inclusive and sustainable digital economy.

150+ SESSIONS

Organized by eTrade for all partners, IGOs, member states, private sector and civil society

18 HIGH-LEVEL SESSIONS

60+ SESSIONS

Held either online or in a hybrid format

720+ SPEAKERS & MODERATORS

From all sides of the stakeholder spectrum

3,500 PARTICIPANTS

159 COUNTRIES

40 LDCs

52/48 GENDER BALANCE

1300+ ENTITIES

EQUAL REPRESENTATION OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS

Government 24%

Others 15%

Private sector 20%

UN and IGOs 20%

Civil society and academia 21%

eTrade for all
Connecting the dots

28 (Out of 35) **ACTIVE PARTNERS**

15 HEADS OR DEPUTY HEADS OF AGENCIES

FEEDBACK FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

A feedback and satisfaction survey circulated among all participants at the end of the event. The results show that given the theme of the event, 94.3% of respondents deemed the content and discussions in the sessions as relevant to the current development context.

Overall, the event was rated a 4.3 (out of 5) by respondents to the survey.

> *'' I have been following discussions on digital policies since the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and I found in this eWeek the kind of serious discussions that I have only seen during WSIS and a few years later. In this eWeek I have seen much more mature and nuanced discussions. I am pleased to see maturity and a keen-minded attitude return to digital policy discussions, which are among the most important for the world today. I congratulate the UNCTAD team for making this possible. It makes me look forward to the future editions of UNCTAD eWeek.''*
>
> *- Parminder Jeet Singh, former Executive Director of IT for Change, India*

KEY AREAS OF WORK FOR AN INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE DIGITAL ECONOMY

UNCTAD highlighted 4 key trends and areas of work, which took center stage in the UNCTAD eWeek 2023 discussions, and which should be at the heart of the international community's attention over the next few years on how to shape the future of the digital economy:

The least digitally prepared countries are falling further behind. In the area of trade, advanced economies have seen their exports of digitally deliverable services surge in recent years. In LDCs, they have declined. Doubling the share of LDCs in world trade – as stipulated in Sustainable Development Goal target 17.11 – becomes even more difficult unless the ability of LDCs to engage in digital trade is strengthened through improvements in infrastructure, skills and regulatory frameworks[2].

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[2] Source: Digital Trade for Development (IMF/OECD/UNCTAD/WB/WTO): https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/dtd2023_e.pdf

The data-driven digital economy is becoming increasingly concentrated. The world's largest digital platforms now control most stages of the data value chain[3]– from collection and transmission of data to storage and analysis. Google alone produces as many academic papers on artificial intelligence (AI) as Stanford University and MIT together. Amazon Web Services, Microsoft Azure, Google and Alibaba account for two thirds of global cloud infrastructure service revenues. And five platforms receive more than 70 per cent of the world's digital advertising revenue.

Women remain underrepresented in the digital economy. Globally, women are less likely to be employed in the technology sector, and women working in this sector are usually paid less than men[4]. In Europe, 81 per cent of people employed as ICT specialists in 2021 were men. Women are also not well represented in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields, where only 35 percent of students globally are women[5].

The adoption of new and emerging technologies will significantly expand the environmental footprint of the digital economy. More e-waste is being generated and little is recycled[6]. And large language models for artificial intelligence consume huge amounts of energy in hyperscale data centers.

From the discussions during the event, it emerged that charting a better digital future will require multi-stakeholder dialogue to foster partnerships, international cooperation and better governance. Shaping a better digital future for all hinges on a collective commitment and inclusive, global collaboration.

The UNCTAD eWeek generated insights and actions that can feed into global efforts, including the ongoing process to agree on a UN Global Digital Compact aimed at catalyzing an open, free and secure digital future for all, leading up to the UN's 2024 Summit of the Future.

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[3] Source: UNCTAD Digital Economy Report 2021: https://unctad.org/page/digital-economy-report-2021

[4] Source: ILOSTAT data: https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/

[5] Source: UNESCO: Cracking the code: Girls' and women's education in STEM: https://www.unesco.org/en/gender-equality/education

[6] Source: WHO: https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/electronic-waste-(e-waste)

The Geneva Declaration

The Geneva Declaration is an integral part of the Geneva Vision on the Future of the Digital Economy. It spotlights ten main messages stemming from the discussions that stakeholders held throughout the week during 18 High-level sessions.

First, throughout the week, a strong call from all stakeholders was made for the world to come together across geographies, policy areas and stakeholder groups to achieve a holistic approach to harnessing digitalization. We need to connect the dots more effectively. Discussions on charting the course of our digital future need to be multilateral and multistakeholder. And the UN should play a key role in this context.

Second, digital and data divides need to be bridged. This means ensuring meaningful and affordable digital connectivity in all countries, including for marginalized, disadvantaged and rural communities, as well as access to skills and digital literacy. We must ensure that men and women enjoy equal opportunities in the digital economy, as users, workers, entrepreneurs, and investors.

Third, we need to create a level playing field for companies to compete in the digital economy. Businesses of all sizes in developing countries should be able to create and capture value. Global governance systems need to be developed to ensure that the activities of the world's largest digital platforms and the growing reliance on data bring outcomes that benefit people and the planet. Effective competition law and policy and vigorous enforcement are essential in this context.

Fourth, we talked a lot about data and artificial intelligence. There is little doubt that the growing availability of digital data offers tremendous opportunities for the common good. But we must ensure equitable distribution of benefits and address risks related to human rights and national security. Data is also at the center of AI. To achieve the outcomes we want, we must leverage existing and new initiatives to ensure that all countries and stakeholders have a seat at the table when forming governance frameworks. And they must be formed, urgently.

Fifth, international trade is changing due to digitalization and rules are needed to promote inclusive outcomes. We should live up to the commitment made in the Agenda 2030 to double the share of LDCs in global exports, especially by harnessing opportunities from digital trade. We also need to ensure effective integration of advanced information and risk mitigation systems with shipping port operations.

Sixth, we need to better understand the interface of digitalization and environmental sustainability. Digital technologies can be applied to help solve global environmental challenges – including climate change. We also need to be mindful of the environmental footprint of the digital economy itself. Fostering sustainable consumption and production of digital devices and infrastructure becomes key in this context.

Seventh, governments as well as businesses need to have better information on how e-commerce and the digital economy evolve. This points to the need for the generation of relevant and up-to-date statistics on key aspects of the digital economy.

Eighth, the world should commit to the scaling up of resources that can help to address the needs in countries that are trailing behind in terms of digital readiness. More funding should be accompanied by concerted efforts to ensure effective collaboration among partners, including through the eTrade for all initiative. As a starter, all developing countries that so desire should be able to benefit from an eTrade Readiness Assessment or similar diagnostic study to accelerate their ability to engage in a benefit from digital trade and the digital economy.

Nine, this is about development, not about technology.

Ten, this is about shared values. Values are part of this agenda, not a marginal thought, not an afterthought, but a thought which has to be integrated from the beginning.

An Innovative Format for an Enhanced Impact

Leveraging the spirit of partnership, UNCTAD collaborated with the DiploFoundation to test-drive a new feature in event reporting, which allowed for a wider reach and therefore an enhanced impact of the discussions that took place during the week.

Considering the ever-growing role of AI, as also discussed in several sessions during the event, the UNCTAD eWeek pioneered the idea to 'walk the talk' in its reporting by using an innovative AI tool developed by the DiploFoundation. This AI reporting tool efficiently transcribed and analyzed all sessions showcasing the technology's ability to process large volumes of data accurately. The reports, available on this UNCTAD eWeek 2023 dedicated page, were published at the end of each session and allowed all participants to receive informed summaries of the discussions that took place among the panelists.

The use of AI in transcribing sessions revealed its potential to revolutionize discussions, offering detailed analyses that could facilitate more informed and nuanced conversations.

Overall, the successful application of AI during the UNCTAD eWeek emphasized its transformative potential and the need for further exploration in leveraging technology for positive societal impact.

Overviews of the High-Level Sessions

A series of 18 High-level sessions convened during the week tackled pressing issues requiring immediate attention, including the governance of digital platforms and artificial intelligence (AI), the environmental sustainability of the digital economy, the promotion of women's digital entrepreneurship, and fast-tracking digital readiness in developing countries. What follows is a summary of these sessions, detailing the challenges linked to these issues, and presenting some recommendations to move towards a more inclusive and sustainable digital economy.

OPENING SESSION

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/opening-session

AI title: **UNCTAD eWeek 2023 opens with focus on digital economy's role in inclusive growth and sustainable development**

Speakers:

- Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations
- Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General, UNCTAD
- H.E Febrian A. Ruddyard, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Indonesia to the UN in Geneva & President of the Trade and Development Board
- H.E. Benedikt Wechsler, Ambassador, Division of Digitalization, Switzerland
- Jovan Kurbalija, Executive Director, DiploFoundation
- Birame Sock, CEO, Kwely & eTrade for Women Advocate
- Moderator - Isabelle Kumar, Former news anchor, Euronews

This opening session of the 2023 edition of the UNCTAD eWeek set the scene for the week to come. It was dedicated to exploring the role of the digital economy in fostering inclusive global growth, innovation, and sustainable development. The session brought together influential figures from various sectors to discuss the challenges and opportunities presented by digitalization.

Amina Mohammed, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, addressed the session with a focus on the global crises that have led to a regression in development progress. She emphasized the critical need to harness the potential of digitalization to counter these setbacks. However, she also warned that without careful management, digital transformation could exacerbate inequalities.

Rebeca Grynspan, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, delivered a video message from the COP28 conference, highlighting the significant expansion of the digital economy and the surge in access to digital technologies. She pointed out the contrast between rapid digital growth and the stagnation of sustainable development, suggesting that this could be transformed into an opportunity to overcome development challenges using digital tools.

H.E Febrian A. Ruddyard, Ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Indonesia to the UN in Geneva and President of the Trade and Development Board emphasized the crucial role UNCTAD plays in fostering inclusive and sustainable digital economic outcomes.

H.E. Benedikt Wechsler, Ambassador, Division of Digitalization, Switzerland underlined the important role of Geneva as a global digital hub.

Birame Sock, CEO of Kwely and an eTrade for Women Advocate, shared her experience as an African entrepreneur. She discussed the barriers faced by entrepreneurs, especially women, in accessing finance and navigating fiscal and legal frameworks. Sock advocated for the adoption and implementation of the Startup Act by the African Union to facilitate entrepreneurial activities and called for the establishment of universal standards to aid in the development of the digital economy in Africa.

The importance of infrastructure, such as reliable electricity and internet connectivity, was also underscored during this session. The high costs associated with data and the necessity for private sector engagement in infrastructure development were identified as key issues. Additionally, the role of digital literacy and the need for a regulatory environment that balances innovation with the protection of individual rights were highlighted.

In conclusion, the session served as a call to action for collective efforts to leverage digital opportunities for progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Speakers encouraged UNCTAD eWeek's participants to engage in constructive dialogue and collaboration to utilize digital tools for sustainable development and to ensure equitable benefits from digitalization.

The session set a tone of urgency and optimism for the week's discussions, recognizing the digital economy as a pivotal driver for development. It called for a multilateral approach to shape the future of the digital economy and emphasized the human aspect of technology and its impact on individuals. The session underscored the potential of digital tools to transform economies and societies while acknowledging the significant challenges that must be addressed.

FAST-TRACKING A DIGITAL ECONOMY FUTURE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/fast-tracking-a-digital-economy-future-in-developing-countries-unctad

AI title: **Progress and challenges in e-commerce for developing countries: Insights from global experts**

Speakers:

- Pedro Manuel Moreno, Deputy Secretary-General, UNCTAD
- H.E. Mohamed Abdallahi Louly, Minister, Ministry of Digital Transition, Innovation and Modernization of Administration, Mauritania
- H.E. Sithembiso Nyoni, Minister, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Zimbabwe
- H.E. Massandjé Toure-Litse, Commissioner for Economic Affairs & Agriculture, ECOWAS Commission

- H.E. Marchel Gerrmann, Ambassador for Business and Development, Director Sustainable Economic Development Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Netherlands
- H.E. Prasith Suon, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Cambodia to the WTO in Geneva
- Anna Joubin-Bret, Secretary and Director of the International Trade Law Division, UN Office of Legal Affairs, UNCITRAL
- Lennise Ng, Co-founder Borong & eTrade for Women Advocate
- Moderator - Isabelle Kumar, Former news anchor, Euronews

The session focused on progress and challenges of e-commerce and digital trade in developing countries, with insights from ministers, ambassadors, senior government representatives, and industry experts. The discussion highlighted the importance of strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and the implementation of eTrade readiness assessments as essential guides for policymaking and digital transformation.

Key achievements were shared, such as ECOWAS's first e-commerce strategy, Kenya's upcoming national e-commerce strategy, and Tunisia's digitalization of its central bank's information system. Ghana's eTrade Readiness Assessment showcased the potential for e-commerce growth, while Mauritania and Cambodia were recognized for their assessments that support their national digital agendas.

The panelists emphasized the need for a whole-of-government approach and multi-stakeholder consultations to address the complex aspects of e-commerce development. They noted the varying readiness levels among countries to leverage e-commerce opportunities and identified critical challenges such as ICT infrastructure, financial inclusion, trust and security, logistics, regulatory frameworks, digital literacy, and market fragmentation.

The role of development partners was highlighted, with a call for improved coordination and resource allocation to meet the actual needs of developing countries. The Netherlands' commitment to investing in technical assistance for inclusive digitalization was noted, as was UNCITRAL's contribution of harmonized legal texts for e-commerce and the digital economy, which are essential for creating trust in online transactions.

The private sector's involvement in policy discussion and formulation was deemed crucial, with an emphasis on encouraging local businesses and entrepreneurs to develop their own technologies suitable for their specific contexts. The discussion also touched on the importance of including marginalized groups to avoid exacerbating the digital divide.

In conclusion, the panelists concurred that a collaborative, inclusive, and action-oriented approach is vital for the successful integration of developing countries into the digital economy. They stressed the importance of creating enabling legal frameworks, investing in infrastructure, and ensuring the inclusivity of all societal segments to prevent widening digital divides. The session underscored the transformative potential of e-commerce and digital trade for developing nations, provided that the necessary supportive measures are in place.

BETTER GOVERNANCE FOR FAIRER DIGITAL MARKETS: UNLOCKING THE INNOVATION POTENTIAL AND LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/better-governance-for-fairer-digital-markets-unlocking-the-innovation-potential-and-leveling-the-playing-field-unctad

AI title: **UNCTAD panel discusses governance and competition in the digital economy**

Speakers:

- Pedro Manuel Moreno, Deputy Secretary-General, UNCTAD
- Andreas Schwab, Member of Parliament, European Union
- Katie McInnis, Chief Democratic Counsel, House Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on the Administrative State, Regulatory Reform, and Antitrust, US House of Representatives
- Andy Yen, CEO, Proton
- Amandine Le Pape, Co-founder and COO, Element
- Tembinkosi Bonakele, Former Commissioner of Competition Commission of South Africa, Wits University
- Moderator - Javier Espinoza, EU Correspondent, Financial Times

The panel discussion focused on the challenges and opportunities within the modern digital economy, particularly the dominance of a few digital giants and the implications for governance, competition and innovation. The session featured a diverse group of speakers, including industry leaders from smaller and independent digital platforms, a former competition authority head, and representatives from legislative and regulatory bodies.

The session's objective was to address the significant market power of large digital platforms like Apple, Google, Microsoft, Facebook (now Meta), and Amazon, and to explore the role of governance in ensuring fair and innovative digital markets. The Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD highlighted the risks that consolidation of market and technological power, control over vast data resources, and the far-reaching policy implications might have for competition, data, trade, and taxation. The current dominance of U.S. and Chinese companies in hyperscale data centers, 5G adoption, and digital advertising revenue was also noted.

Speakers from smaller digital platforms, such as Element and Proton, shared their experiences and challenges in competing against larger players. They emphasized the importance of open standards and interoperability, arguing that these principles can help level the playing field and provide consumers with more choices. The need for technical expertise within regulatory bodies to effectively challenge the claims made by larger companies was also discussed.

The EU's Digital Markets Act (DMA) was frequently mentioned as a significant regulatory effort to curb the power of gatekeeper platforms and foster market openness. However, the effectiveness of such regulations and their enforcement remains a point of debate. Representatives from developing countries expressed the need for international cooperation and regional approaches to regulation, as individual countries may struggle to regulate powerful multinational platforms effectively.

The panel concluded with a call for better governance and international cooperation to ensure that digital markets are fair and inclusive. The need for actionable solutions was emphasized,

with a focus on fostering an environment where innovation can thrive without being stifled by market dominance.

Challenges that smaller companies face in understanding and complying with complex regulations were acknowledged. The importance of creating a policy and legal enabling environment that supports innovation and competition was also stressed. The panelists agreed that while the digital economy presents significant challenges, it also offers opportunities for growth and development if managed effectively.

DONOR ROUNDTABLE: ENABLING IMPACT AT SCALE IN SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE DIGITAL ECONOMIES

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/donor-roundtable-enabling-impact-at-scale-in-supporting-inclusive-and-sustainable-digital-economies

AI title: **Experts call for inclusive digital revolution in line with sustainable development goals**

Speakers:

- Pedro Manuel Moreno, Deputy Secretary-General, UNCTAD
- H.E. Ram Prasad Subedi, Ambassador Permanent Mission of Nepal to the UN in Geneva, and Coordinator of the LDC Group
- H.E. Mere Falemaka, Ambassador, The Pacific Islands Forum Geneva Office
- H.E. Marchel Gerrmann, Ambassador for Business and Development, Director Sustainable Economic Development Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Netherlands
- Monica Rubiolo, Head of Trade Promotion, Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)
- Alessandra Lustrati, Head of Digital Development Cluster, UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)
- Charlotte Sammelin, Deputy Director-General and Head of the Department for International Trade and EU Single Market, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden
- Tomasz Husak, Adviser Digital Agenda and Data Technologies, Directorate-General for International Partnerships, European Commission
- Chrissy Martin Meier, Director, Policy, The Digital Impact Alliance
- Moderator-Shamika N. Sirimanne, Director, Division on Technology and Logistics (DTL), UNCTAD

During this high-level session focused on the impact of digital technologies on global development, donors, experts and policymakers convened to discuss strategies for leveraging the digital revolution to benefit people and the planet. The conversation was framed within the context of the SDGs and the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital age, particularly for developing countries and LDCs.

Shamika N. Sirimanne underscored the critical nature of the digital divide, warning against a repeat of historical oversights such as the Green Revolution, which bypassed entire continents. She emphasized the need for a digital revolution that is inclusive and does not exacerbate existing inequalities.

The panelists highlighted the stark disparities in internet access and digital readiness between developed countries and LDCs, as well as small island developing states. They also pointed out the significant economic impact of excluding women from the digital world, with a projected loss of $1 trillion from the GDP of low- and middle-income countries over the past decade.

The session identified key areas for development cooperation in the digital domain. An integrated approach was advocated, encompassing both hard infrastructure, such as connectivity, and soft aspects, including skills development, legislative frameworks, payment systems, and digital public infrastructure (DPI). The importance of public-private partnerships and collaboration among stakeholders was emphasized to maximize the impact of digitalization efforts.

Donors shared their priorities for supporting digitalization in developing countries. These included promoting digital inclusion, ensuring environmental sustainability, and adopting an integrated approach that addresses both technological infrastructure and the enabling environment. The discussion also touched on the concept of DPI and its role in fostering innovation and individual empowerment, with initiatives like the African Trade Gateway and the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System highlighted as positive examples.

The panelists reached a consensus on the need for a concerted effort to ensure that digital technologies contribute positively to development and do not widen existing inequalities. They called for addressing both the opportunities and the risks associated with digitalization, with a focus on collaboration among all stakeholders to harness the digital revolution for the benefit of all.

Key observations from the panel included the recognition of digitalization's cross-cutting impact across various sectors, such as education, healthcare and trade. The necessity of financing not just technology but also safeguards and regulatory frameworks to minimize risks was discussed. The importance of measuring not only access and usage but also whether people are truly empowered by digital tools was stressed.

In conclusion, the session underscored the critical role of digital technologies in shaping a more equitable and sustainable future. It called for an inclusive approach that leverages international cooperation and public-private partnerships to create a digital economy that benefits a broad spectrum of society, ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital transformation.

ETRADE FOR ALL LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE: UNLOCKING DIGITAL TRADE FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/etrade-for-all-leadership-roundtable-unlocking-digital-trade-for-inclusive-development

AI title: **eTrade for all session champions inclusive digital trade for global development gains**

Speakers:

- Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General, UNCTAD
- Anna Joubin-Bret, Secretary, UNCITRAL and Director of the International Trade Law Division, UN Office of Legal Affairs (OLA)
- Angela Paolini Ellard, Deputy Director-General, WTO
- Dorothy Tembo, Deputy Executive Director, ITC
- Mia Seppo, Assistant Director-General for Jobs and Social Protection, ILO

- Pradeep S. Mehta, Secretary-General, CUTS International
- Paul Donohoe, Digital Policies and Trade Coordinator, UPU
- Koji Hachiyama, Chief Operating Officer, Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA)
- Moderator- Isabelle Kumar, Former news anchor, Euronews

This high-level session convened eTrade for all leaders to address the imperatives of inclusion and development within global digital trade. The session brought together leaders from partner organizations, all committed to leading change and shaping the future of the digital economy.

The discussion was embedded in the eTrade for all initiative collective vision, emphasizing the need for equitable distribution of digital trade benefits across all economies. The session recalled previous day's conversations on the critical role of fair digital trade in achieving economic growth for all.

In her opening remarks, Rebeca Grynspan, UNCTAD's Secretary General, highlighted the potential of digital trade for inclusive development, but pointed out the significant disparities that exist in the share of digital trade between developed and developing economies. She outlined the indispensable role of partnerships in addressing these disparities. She explained that in order to prevent the deepening of pre-existing inequalities and to ensure that opportunities are evenly dispensed, a coordinated global effort will be required, involving policy, investment, resources, rules, and good governance.

Mia Seppo, Assistant Director-General for Jobs and Social Protection at the ILO highlighted the complexity of regulating digital platforms to ensure compliance with labor rights, fair working conditions and social protection. She called for international policy dialogue and coordination, citing emerging regulations and the importance of social dialogue involving workers, employers, and governments.

Dorothy Tembo, Deputy Executive Director at ITC discussed the challenges SMEs face in harnessing digital trade benefits, such as access to market opportunities and lack of management skills. She emphasized the need for an integrated approach to address these challenges, focusing on inclusiveness and gender equality. She highlighted the crucial role of partnerships and collaboration to achieve the objective of a sustainable digital economy.

Anna Joubin-Bret, the Secretary of UNCITRAL spoke about the necessity of legal frameworks that adapt to new commodities, like digital assets and carbon credits, which are central to the digital economy but lack clear legal definitions. She stressed the importance of laws that build trust in digital trade. She also discussed the specific challenges that women entrepreneurs and MSMEs face in the digital economy.

Angela Ellard, Deputy Director-General at the WTO outlined the organization's efforts to establish multilateral digital trade rules. She mentioned the ongoing e-commerce negotiations and the importance of technical assistance and capacity-building to ensure that developing countries can harness the benefits and opportunities offered by digitalization.

Paul Donohoe Digital Policies and Trade Coordinator at the UPU highlighted the role of postal services in facilitating cross-border trade, especially in underserved regions. He underscored the importance of reliable postal services in connecting digital marketplaces with physical delivery.

Koji Hachiyama, Chief Operating Officer at ERIA shared insights on the institute's role in providing evidence-based policymaking and supporting start-up ecosystems in ASEAN and East Asia. He emphasized the importance of fostering digital innovation and business-friendly policies.

Pradeep Mehta, Secretary-General of CUTS International, mentioned the specific issue of cybersecurity as increasingly relevant with the growth of the digital economy, as well as the need for a strong telecommunications and broadband infrastructure to establish a robust digital economy. He also highlighted the role that civil society can play in shaping a fair and inclusive digital future.

All panelists noted positively the growth of the membership of eTrade for all and the active contribution of its partner organizations.

The session concluded with a consensus on the need for enhanced attention to policy, investment, resources, rules, and good governance issues to bridge the digital divide. The speakers collectively called for collaborative efforts and supportive policies to ensure that digital trade leads to inclusive and sustainable outcomes for all countries, particularly the least developed ones.

Overall, the session underscored the transformative potential of digital trade for inclusive development, while acknowledging the challenges that need to be addressed through partnerships, international cooperation, comprehensive strategies and supportive policies.

eTrade for all LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE: THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIP FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE DIGITAL FUTURE

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/etrade-for-all-leadership-roundtable-the-role-of-partnership-for-a-more-inclusive-and-sustainable-digital-future

AI title: **Geneva roundtable champions inclusive and sustainable digital future amid technological change**

Speakers:

- Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General, UNCTAD
- José Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs, Executive Secretary, UN ECLAC
- Mourad Wahba, Officer in Charge, UNCDF
- Jovan Kurbalija, Executive Director, DiploFoundation
- Carlos María Correa, Executive Director, South Centre
- Edward Kwakwa, Assistant Director General, Global Challenges and Partnerships Sector, WIPO
- Hassan Nasser, Vice-President, International Affairs and Membership, Digital Cooperation Organization
- Moderator - Isabelle Kumar, Former news anchor, Euronews

This high-level session also convened eTrade for all leaders focused on the critical need to foster an inclusive and sustainable digital future in the face of rapid technological advancements.

Key themes of the discussion included the importance of ensuring equitable access to the benefits of digitalization and the role of data as a crucial global resource. The lifecycle of data, from its collection to its analysis by private companies, was highlighted, stressing the need for increased coordinated efforts across borders to manage and utilize data effectively.

The conversation emphasized the necessity of a multi-stakeholder approach to the digital economy, requiring comprehensive policy discussions and actions. Geneva's role as a hub for international cooperation and digital discourse was acknowledged, with the city serving as a meeting point for ideas and action.

The significance of regional perspectives in shaping global digital strategies was highlighted, recognizing the diverse paths to digital inclusivity across different geographies. The eTrade for all initiative was praised for its growth and advocacy for comprehensive approaches to e-commerce and digital trade.

The session showcased the collective achievements within the eTrade for all community, such as the eTrade for Women initiative and the Pacific Digital Economy Program, demonstrating the value of partnerships in the digital economy. The Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO) was noted for its role in fostering international collaboration towards an inclusive digital future.

Intellectual property rights and digital taxation were also discussed. The South Centre's efforts to shape international frameworks for digital taxation were mentioned, aiming to create a fair and balanced system that considers the diverse interests and development levels of different countries.

The roundtable concluded with a call to action for moving both fast and far with the many, leveraging platforms like eTrade for all to ensure the equitable distribution of the digital economy's benefits. The speakers collectively emphasized the need for continued collaboration and partnership to address the challenges of the digital economy and to foster inclusivity and sustainability in the digital landscape.

The discussion also touched on the need for a bottom-up approach to AI to preserve knowledge and human dignity, the importance of aligning AI development with the SDGs, and the recognition of the risks associated with AI, including job losses and misinformation.

Ultimately, this roundtable served as a platform for eTrade for all leaders to converge on the urgent need to work collectively for an inclusive and sustainable digital future. It highlighted the opportunities and challenges posed by technological advancements and underscored the importance of collaborative efforts, data management, AI integration, and equitable digital policies to ensure that the digital economy benefits everyone.

HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON SHAPING THE FUTURE OF THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/high-level-dialogue-on-shaping-the-future-of-the-digital-economy-unctad

AI title: **Navigating the complexities of the digital economy for inclusive growth**

Speakers:

- Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General, UNCTAD
- Amandeep Singh Gill, United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology
- Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Secretary-General, ITU
- Mitchell Baker, CEO and Chairwoman, Mozilla Foundation
- Francis Dufay, CEO, Jumia
- Michele Jawando, Senior Vice-President, Omidyar Network (ON)

- Linda Bonyo, Founding Director & CEO, Africa Law Tech
- Moderator- Peter Okwoche, Former News Anchor, BBC

Special remarks:

- H.E. Sithembiso Nyoni, Minister, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Zimbabwe
- H.E. Mohamed Abdallahi Louly, Minister, Ministry of Digital Transition, Innovation and Modernization of Administration, Mauritania
- Mira Tayyiba, Secretary-General, Ministry of Communications and Informatics, Indonesia

The UNCTAD eWeek 2023 High-level Dialogue offered a dynamic and insightful discussion on the future of the digital economy, highlighting the complexities and the need for inclusive growth. The session featured a diverse panel of experts from various sectors, including international organizations, the tech industry, and government ministries. The dialogue was hosted by UNCTAD Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan, who emphasized the importance of a global political dialogue on digital policy, reforms and regulation.

The panelists explored the digital divide, noting that a significant number of individuals is still without internet access while the concentration of AI capabilities currently lies in a handful of countries. They stressed the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement to ensure that the digital economy is beneficial for all. Discussions covered the need for digital public infrastructure as a common good, the role of private sector innovation in local markets, and the necessity of clear regulatory frameworks to support e-commerce and digital trade.

Concerns were raised about the dominance of big tech companies and their impact on competition and data governance, with calls for more balanced competition and consumer protection. The potential of technology to empower communities and contribute to sectors like healthcare, education, agriculture and environmental protection was also highlighted.

Challenges faced by developed countries were high on the agenda, with issues such as regulatory complexity, infrastructure limitations, and the need for capacity building being discussed. Panelists called for collaborative efforts to create an ethical, inclusive, and sustainable digital economy, emphasizing the need for action, political will, and global governance standards.

Talent was recognized as the most evenly distributed asset, with opportunities being the limiting factor. Speakers urged for harnessing this talent through investment in digital infrastructure, skills development, and policy harmonization. The importance of adapting technology to local needs and the potential of remote work to drive economic growth in developing countries were also underscored.

The High-level Dialogue provided a comprehensive overview of the current digital economy landscape, its challenges, and the pathways to a more equitable future. It highlighted the urgency of addressing the digital divide, fostering global cooperation, and empowering individuals and communities through technology. The session served as a call to action for stakeholders to work together in shaping a digital economy that leaves no one behind.

DIGITAL FRONTIERS IN TRADE LOGISTICS: CONNECTIVITY FOR TOMORROW'S ECONOMY

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/digital-frontiers-in-trade-logistics-connectivity-for-tomorrows-economy-unctad

AI title: **Experts convene to discuss digital transformation in trade logistics at high-level session**

Speakers:

- Pedro Manuel Moreno, Deputy Secretary-General, UNCTAD
- Eman bin Habbas Al-Mutairi, Vice Minister of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- Carlos Guevara, Counselor and Chair of the WTO Committee on Trade Facilitation, Mission of Ecuador to the WTO
- Adrian P. Swarres, Head of Compliance and Automation, Zimbabwe Revenue Authority
- Steven Pope, Vice President, Group Head Trade Facilitation, Go Trade, DHL Group
- Paul Donohoe, Digital Policies and Trade Coordinator, UPU
- Moderator- Shamika N. Sirimanne, Director, Division on Technology and Logistics (DTL), UNCTAD

During the high-level session on digital frontiers in trade logistics and connectivity for tomorrow's economy, a diverse panel of experts discussed the transformative impact of digital technologies on trade logistics.

Dr. Eman bin Habbas Al-Mutairi, Vice Minister of Commerce of Saudi Arabia, highlighted the country's significant digital advancements, including the reduction of customs clearance time from two weeks to two hours. This was achieved through a comprehensive approach involving policy assessment, strategic investment in digital infrastructure, and a focus on e-commerce readiness. The Vice Minister underscored the importance of inclusivity and the need for reliable measurements of e-commerce and the digital economy to inform policymaking.

Paul Donohoe from the Universal Postal Union (UPU) discussed the organization's transition from a communication network to a trade facilitation entity. He detailed initiatives such as data sharing and mobile-based solutions that have led to a 20% improvement in delivery times. The UPU's efforts underscore the critical role of postal services in supporting MSMEs and facilitating international trade in the digital age.

Steven Pope, representing both the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and DHL, shared insights into programs aimed at reducing digital divides and enabling small businesses to engage in cross-border e-commerce. He highlighted the ICC's policy advocacy, training initiatives, and the DHL GoTrade program's success in mentoring SMEs and driving export growth.

Carlos Guevara from the WTO Committee on Trade Facilitation spoke about the Trade Facilitation Agreement's impact on digital divides and e-commerce promotion. He emphasized the importance of National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs) in implementing trade facilitation reforms and improving logistics barriers, highlighting the need for harmonization and good practices to build trust and reliability in e-logistics operations.

Adrian Swarres from the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority shared Zimbabwe's journey towards digital transformation in customs management. The implementation of the ASYCUDA system and

integration with other platforms has significantly improved trade facilitation, aligning with the national agenda for a prosperous society by 2030.

The session concluded with a consensus on the critical role that digital technologies can play in enhancing trade logistics in the global economy. The speakers provided evidence of their respective initiatives, such as investment figures, improvements in customs clearance times, and success stories from training programs. The discussion highlighted the need for political will, strategic planning, investment in infrastructure, and international collaboration to ensure a more connected and inclusive global economy.

Additional observations included the recognition of the challenges in measuring e-commerce and the digital economy due to varying definitions and data collection issues. The Vice Minister of Saudi Arabia emphasis on a whole-of-government approach and the importance of public-private partnerships were noted as key factors in achieving rapid digital advancements. The session also underscored the necessity of skills development and connectivity to fully leverage digital technologies in trade logistics.

COMPETITION LAW AND REGULATIONS FOR DIGITAL MARKETS: WHAT ARE THE BEST POLICY OPTIONS FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES?

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/competition-law-and-regulations-for-digital-markets-what-are-the-best-policy-options-for-developing-countries-unctad

AI title: **UNCTAD session explores competition law and regulation in digital markets for developing countries**

Speakers:

- Doris Tshepe, Commissioner, South African Competition Commission
- Victor Oliveira Fernandes, Commissioner, Administrative Council Economic Defense, Brazil
- Ana Malheiro, Case Handler, DMA Task Force, Directorate-General for Competition, European Commission
- Hee-Eun Kim, Director of Competition Policy, Asia Pacific, Meta
- Deni Mantzari, Associate Professor in Competition Law, University College London (UCL)
- Moderator- Teresa Moreira, Head of Competition and Consumer Policies, UNCTAD

The high-level session on competition law and regulation for digital markets delved into the complexities of shaping effective policy options for developing countries in the digital economy. Teresa Moreira highlighted UNCTAD's role as the custodian of the UN's principles on competition and its efforts to facilitate knowledge exchange between competition authorities worldwide to foster inclusive economic growth.

Doris Tshepe from the South African Competition Commission outlined her country's proactive approach to digital market concerns, including market studies and revised merger guidelines. She emphasized the utility of market inquiries in addressing broader market features and structures, rather than solely dominant firm conduct, and the flexibility that these inquiries offer in remedial actions.

Victor Oliveira Fernandes, representing Brazil's Administrative Council for Economic Defense, discussed Brazil's recent legislative initiatives inspired by the EU's Digital Markets Act (DMA). He

expressed concerns about the proposal's lack of public consultation and its potential for excessive regulatory discretion. Fernandes called for a closer examination of the proposal by the Brazilian Parliament.

Ana Melheiro from the EU's Digital Markets Act Task Force explained the DMA's ex-ante regulatory framework, which targets gatekeepers in the digital market to ensure fair competition. She detailed the implementation process, including the designation of gatekeepers, setting obligations, and conducting market investigations. Melheiro also mentioned the possibility of imposing fines and remedies in cases of systematic noncompliance.

Hee-Yoon Kim of META focused on the Asia-Pacific region's diverse approaches to digital market regulation, highlighting Korea's self-regulation model and Japan's co-regulation model. She stressed the importance of clear problem definition, robust evaluation of existing laws, and evidence-based rulemaking, given the region's significant growth potential in the digital economy.

Danny Manzari from University College London provided an academic perspective, suggesting that existing competition laws may not be sufficient to address anti-competitive conduct in the digital economy. He advocated for regulatory coherence and strategic experimentation, noting the unique challenges faced by developing countries regarding digital platform power.

The session concluded with a consensus on the need for international cooperation and evidence-based policymaking in digital market regulation. The importance of considering local contexts before adopting regulatory measures was underscored, and the potential for future online events to further explore the topic was suggested. The session brought to light the varied challenges developing countries face in regulating digital markets and the necessity for a multifaceted approach to competition regulation, with a call for further engagement among competition authorities to learn from each other's experiences and potentially align on certain standards.

THE DIGITAL ECONOMY IN THE AGE OF AI: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/the-digital-economy-in-the-age-of-ai-implications-for-developing-countries-unctad

AI title: **Experts Debate AI's Impact on Digital Economy and Call for Equitable Development in Developing Countries**

Speakers:

- Pedro Manuel Moreno, Deputy Secretary-General, UNCTAD
- Gabriela Ramos, Assistant Director-General for the Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO
- Jovan Kurbalija, Executive Director, DiploFoundation
- Paul-Olivier Dehaye, CEO, Hestia.ai
- Teki Akuetteh, Founder and Executive Director, Africa Digital Rights Hub
- Uma Rani, Senior Economist, ILO
- Moderator- Isabelle Kumar, Former news anchor, Euronews

During the High-level session on the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the digital economy, with a focus on developing countries, experts from various sectors, including international organizations, academia, and the private sector, engaged in a multifaceted discussion.

Pedro Manuel Moreno, Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD, highlighted AI's dual nature, acknowledging its capacity to revolutionize industries and support innovation across sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, and education. However, he also raised concerns about AI's potential to disrupt labor markets, displace jobs, and create new forms of inequality. Moreno pointed out the risk of AI exacerbating the digital divide, with certain countries, including the United States, China and the United Kingdom, dominating AI research and development, while LDCs lag behind.

The discussion also addressed the pervasive integration of AI into our lives, raising critical questions about privacy, data security and ethical technology use. Panelists debated AI's potential to worsen existing inequalities and biases, particularly in the context of the digital divide between developed and developing countries.

Panelists underscored the importance of inclusive AI governance and the need for effective institutions to regulate AI. They emphasized the role of governments in understanding AI technologies, not only to regulate markets but also to make informed decisions when purchasing AI packages for public administration.

Uma Rani Amara, Senior Economist at the ILO, highlighted the risk of de-skilling workers due to AI advancements, pointing out that highly skilled workers may be relegated to performing tasks that do not match their qualifications, such as content moderation for AI systems.

In terms of actionable steps, the panelists called for making AI resources equitably available to all, ensuring bottom-up transparency, and fostering ethical development and use of AI. They advocated for the establishment of a UN-led AI entity, that would invite stakeholders worldwide to contribute to new models in a protected and transparent environment.

The session concluded with a consensus that while AI holds enormous potential for positive change, significant challenges must be addressed to ensure its benefits are equitably shared. This includes ensuring equitable access to AI resources, fostering ethical development and use, maintaining transparency, and protecting worker rights in the face of potential de-skilling.

Noteworthy observations included the suggestion of a trust model for AI resources, where contributors to AI data sets could have a say in their use, and the call for clarity in the discussion around AI, particularly regarding the transparency of algorithms and the need for a clear regulatory framework.

AI GOVERNANCE: ENSURING EQUITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/ai-governance-ensuring-equity-and-accountability-in-the-digital-economy-unctad

AI title: **Experts convene to tackle AI governance challenges with an eye on equity and accountability**

Speakers:

- Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General, UNCTAD
- Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Secretary-General, ITU
- H.E Nele Leosk, Ambassador-at-Large for Digital Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Estonia

- H.E. Simon Manley, Ambassador, Mission of the United Kingdom to the UN in Geneva
- Lee Xiaodong, Founder and CEO, Fuxi Institution
- Zeynep Engin, Director, Data for Policy CIC
- Moderator: Isabelle Kumar, Former News Anchor, Euronews

The high-level panel discussion on AI governance, part of an ongoing conversation on artificial intelligence, brought together experts to address the governance of AI with a focus on ensuring equity and accountability in the digital economy. The session featured UN leaders like Rebeca Grynspan of UNCTAD and Doreen Bogdan-Martin of the ITU, who, along with other panelists, explored the challenges and opportunities that AI presents.

The conversation acknowledged the controversial nature of AI governance and diverse ideas within this space. A central argument was the necessity of governance mechanisms to prevent developing countries from being left behind in the AI technological revolution. The panelists highlighted the potential of AI to exacerbate existing divides in digital access, data control, and innovation capabilities, emphasizing disparities based on geography, gender, income and age.

The rapid development of AI presents significant governance challenges, with existing frameworks struggling to keep pace with technological advances. The panelists raised concerns about the potential risks of AI, including its use as a weapon, a tool for mass disinformation, and the creation of deepfakes. They underscored the urgency of regulating AI technologies, as governments currently lag behind, leaving ethical, privacy, and security concerns sometimes unaddressed.

The panel advocated for a comprehensive global conversation on AI governance, aiming to align AI applications with universal human rights and shared values. This dialogue should include a multidisciplinary approach to effectively anticipate and mitigate AI-associated risks. The conversation is already taking place in various summits and fora, with the UN positioned to play a central role in guiding AI towards being a unifying force rather than a divisive one.

Initiatives like the UN GDC and a High-Level Advisory body on AI were highlighted as pivotal steps in fostering international cooperation. The panelists concluded with a call for the responsible and ethical application of AI, ensuring that AI development aligns with the SDGs and addresses potential risks, thereby creating a digital future that is open, free, secure, and centered around human needs.

The discussion also acknowledged the digital divides are not merely as an issue of connectivity but as a broader disparity in access to technology. The concentration of data collection and usage among a few global entities creates a data divide that places many developing countries in the role of sheer data providers with limited control or benefit.

Panelists agreed that while AI presents profound opportunities, it also poses stark risks that need to be managed through effective governance. Recalling that the conversation on AI governance is already taking place in various summits and fora, participants reminded that the UN should play a central role in the conversation. The focus should be on empowering individuals and societies through responsible and ethical application of AI, ensuring that its development aligns with the SDGs and addresses potential risks, creating a digital future centered on human needs.

THE DIGITAL ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/the-digital-economy-and-enviromental-sustainability

AI title: **Navigating the paradox: Balancing digital growth with environmental sustainability**

Speakers:

- Torbjörn Fredriksson, Head, E-commerce and Digital Economy Branch, UNCTAD
- Laura Létourneau, Expert Advisor, ecological and digital transformations, Office of the Prime Minister, France
- Golestan (Sally) Radwan, Chief Digital Officer, UNEP
- Foluso Ojo, Founder, TruQ
- Virginie Le Barbu, Global Sustainability Director, Lenovo
- Gerry McGovern, Developer of Top Tasks research method & Author of World Wide Waste, Customer Care Words
- Moderator: Isabelle Kumar, Former news anchor, Euronews

The session delved into the complex and paradoxical relationship between the digital economy and environmental sustainability. The session's focus was on the digital economy's potential to be a transformative force for achieving emission reductions and the sustainability goals of the Paris Climate Accords, while also acknowledging the significant environmental risks associated with unmanaged digital growth.

The moderator underscored the urgency of embedding sustainability at the heart of the digital economy, especially during this period of accelerated digital transformation. Torbjörn Fredriksson, of UNCTAD, highlighted the critical juncture at which the global community finds itself, with current policies leading to a potential average temperature rise of 2.7 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by the century's end. He emphasized the dual role of digitalization as both a means to enhance environmental sustainability and a growing source of environmental footprint, citing concerns over energy usage, raw material depletion, and waste generation.

Laura Letourneau presented France's roadmap for integrating digital and data into its environmental strategy. She introduced the "public platform theory" or "digital public infrastructure theory," linking the digital infrastructure to a city's physical infrastructure. This theory underscores the importance of interoperability, security, and ethics in digital technologies, advocating for a balanced approach that considers the inherent risks of these technologies.

The panel discussion featured voices from both the private sector and developing countries. Virginie Le Barbu, Global Sustainability Director at Lenovo, outlined the company's sustainability initiatives, including greenhouse gas emission reduction, sustainable packaging, and circular economy principles. She stressed the need for responsible procurement and ESG data transparency. Foluso Ojo, founder of an online logistics and delivery company in Nigeria, highlighted the unique challenges and opportunities in the digital economy from a developing country's perspective, emphasizing the importance of public-private partnerships and digital literacy.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of consumer pressure in driving private sector change and the need for legislation at both national and international levels to manage the digital ecosystem's environmental impact.

The session concluded with a consensus on the need for a balanced approach to digitalization that ensures technological advancement while protecting the environment. Calls were made for international cooperation, responsible private sector engagement, and policy actions that address the environmental challenges posed by the digital economy. The urgency of action was stressed in light of the accelerating pace of climate change, with a recognition that wisdom and action are needed, on top of data.

HIGH-LEVEL MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLE ON DIGITAL TRADE: DO REGIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS INDICATE THE WAY FORWARD FOR THE MULTILATERAL TRADING SYSTEM?

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/high-level-ministerial-roundtable-on-digital-trade-do-regional-trade-agreements-indicate-the-way-forward-for-the-multilateral-trading-system

AI title: **High-level ministerial roundtable examines the impact of regional trade agreements on digital trade**

Speakers:

- Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General, UNCTAD
- H.E. Majid Al-Kasabi, Minister, Ministry of Commerce, Saudi Arabia
- H.E. Ratha Chea, Secretary of State, Ministry of Commerce, Cambodia
- H.E. Yusnier Romero Puentes, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Cuba to the United Nations & Chair of the Group of 77
- Johanna Hill, Deputy Director-General, WTO
- Mira Burri, Professor of International Economic and Internet Law, University of Lucerne
- Moderator – H.E. Usha Chandnee Dwarka-Canabady, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Mauritius to the UN in Geneva

The high-level ministerial roundtable on digital trade gathered several high-profile experts to discuss the impact of regional trade agreements (RTAs) on the multilateral trading system, with a focus on e-commerce and digital trade. The session was moderated by H.E. Usha Chandnee Dwarka-Canabady who introduced the topic and the panelists, including Rebeca Greenspan, Secretary-General of UNCTAD, who delivered a keynote address.

Grynspan highlighted the transformative forces of sustainability, digitalization, and geopolitics on global trade, referring to "poly-globalization" to describe the new era of decentralized, multipolar trade dynamics. She noted the exponential growth in RTAs, from 75 in 2000 to over 325, with a significant increase in the last five years. A notable trend in these agreements is the inclusion of digital dimensions, reflecting the growing importance of e-commerce and digital trade.

H.E. Majid Al-Kasabi, the Minister of Commerce from Saudi Arabia, highlighted the need to advance digital infrastructure and to foster partnerships to navigate the challenges and uncertainties faced by global trade, due to increasing protectionism, nationalism and individualism.

Professor Mira Burri from the University of Lucerne provided an academic perspective, detailing the evolution of digital trade rulemaking within trade agreements. She identified Singapore as a

key player in this area, taking over from the early efforts of the United States. Burri stressed the need for coherence between domestic and international data governance frameworks, highlighting the importance of cross-ministerial collaboration within governments.

Representatives from smaller economies, such as Cambodia and the Kyrgyz Republic shared their experiences with digital trade. They emphasized the need for investment in digital infrastructure, digital literacy, and regional cooperation to create an integrated and inclusive digital trade environment.

Johanna Hill from the WTO updated the audience on the e-commerce negotiations, indicating progress despite the COVID-19 pandemic. She mentioned the stabilization of texts on various digital trade-related issues and the importance of addressing the development dimension to ensure equitable participation in the digital economy.

From the audience, representatives from the private sector discussed the practical challenges and opportunities for SMEs in e-commerce. They called for supportive regulatory environments that can accommodate the gig economy and facilitate cross-border e-commerce.

The roundtable concluded with a consensus on the need for the UN GDC to address the digital divide and foster a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient global trading landscape. The discussions highlighted the pivotal role of international cooperation, capacity building, and investment in digital infrastructure to ensure that no country is left behind in the digital transformation. Panelists also emphasized the importance of data sharing and trust, as well as the need for trade agreements to systematically include clauses that encourage digitalization.

Finally, the session underscored the potential of cross-border e-commerce to contribute to a country's development, while recognizing that the physical realities of trade still require the movement of goods through traditional means.

 This session served as a platform for sharing best practices, identifying challenges, and charting a path forward for integrating digital trade into the broader framework of global trade.

BOOSTING WOMEN DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: BRIDGING THE GENDER FINANCING GAP

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/boosting-women-digital-entrepreneurship-bridging-the-gender-financing-gap-unctad

AI title: **Panel discussion sheds light on empowering women in the digital economy**

Speakers:

- Pedro Manuel Moreno, Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD,
- H.E. Sithembiso Nyoni, Minister, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Zimbabwe
- H.E. Ratha Chea, Secretary of State, Ministry of Commerce, Cambodia
- Yasmine Abdel Karim, Founder and CEO of Yalla Fel Sekka, UNCTAD eTrade for Women Advocate
- Babacar Seck, Senior Investment Officer, Proparco

- Davide Strusani, Principal Sector Economist, International Finance Corporation
- Alisa Sydow, Associate Professor of Entrepreneurship & Innovation, Jean-Baptiste Say Institute for Entrepreneurship, ESCP Business School
- Moderator: Isabelle Kumar, Journalist, former News Anchor, Euronews

The panel discussion focused on the challenges and opportunities for women in the digital economy, particularly in respect of entrepreneurship and access to finance. The diverse group of speakers included government officials, economists, investors, and entrepreneurs, each providing insights into the gender disparities in the digital economy and strategies to overcome them.

Isabelle Kumar highlighted broader issues of women's underrepresentation in business, especially in leadership roles. She pointed out ingrained gender biases affecting young girls' educational choices, leading to fewer women in STEM fields and the digital sector.

Panelists discussed various challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, such as difficulties in accessing finance, building networks, finding role models, and overcoming a lack of confidence and imposter syndrome. UNESCO figures were cited, showing that only 35% of STEM students globally are women, underscoring the need for targeted interventions.

H.E. Sithembiso Nyoni, Zimbabwe's Minister of Industry and Commerce, emphasized the importance of women's inclusion in policymaking and the digital economy for economic growth. She highlighted Zimbabwe's initiatives, such as community information centers and training programmes, to increase women's participation in ICT.

H.E. Ratha Chea, the Secretary of State from the Ministry of Commerce of Cambodia, shared her entrepreneurial experiences and the cultural barriers Cambodian women face. She discussed the importance of public speaking skills for entrepreneurs and the need to change societal norms that limit women's educational and professional opportunities.

Alisa Sydow, from the ESCP Business School, provided a global perspective on the funding gap between male and female entrepreneurs. She stressed the need for women to embrace their entrepreneurial identity and actively seek funding, as well as the importance of psychological support for female founders.

Davide Strusani from the International Finance Corporation discussed the economic factors contributing to the funding gap, highlighting tailored financial products and services for women. He also mentioned the positive impact of gender-balanced teams on fund returns and company performance.

Babacar Seck from Proparco talked about the unique challenges in Africa, such as network-based funding and the importance of mentoring and coaching for women entrepreneurs. He emphasized the need for investors to take risks on female-led businesses and the importance of promoting women in leadership roles within companies.

Yasmin Abdelkarim, eTrade for Women Advocate and founder and CEO of a digital business, shared her success in raising $10 million for her startup and the resilience of women-led businesses. She highlighted the importance of confidence and speaking the same language as investors to secure funding.

The panelists provided a range of solutions, from policy changes and targeted funding to mentorship programmes and community building. They concluded that while challenges are substantial, opportunities exist to support women entrepreneurs through initiatives that promote

empowerment, mentorship, and networking, as well as through gender-balanced investment practices.

Noteworthy observations included the positive role of COVID-19 in accelerating digital adoption among women entrepreneurs, the need for legal reforms to eliminate discriminatory practices, and the importance of government initiatives in creating a supportive ecosystem for female entrepreneurs.

In their final thoughts, the panelists each offered a key word that encapsulates their view on the most crucial aspect of supporting women in digital entrepreneurship: empower, mentorship, enforce, psychological support, finance, and networking. These words reflect the multifaceted approach needed to create a more inclusive environment for women in the digital economy.

BRIEFING ON THE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT (GDC)

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/briefing-on-the-global-digital-compact-gdc-unctad

AI title: **Shaping a connected future: Global Digital Compact aims for inclusive and sustainable digital cooperation**

Speakers:

- Pedro Manuel Moreno, Deputy Secretary-General, UNCTAD
- H.E. Anna-Karin Eneström, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations & co-facilitator of the Global Digital Compact
- H.E. Chola Milambo, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Zambia to the United Nations co-facilitator of the Global Digital Compact
- Moderator - Shamika N. Sirimanne, Director, Division on Technology and Logistics (DTL), UNCTAD

The session provided an in-depth discussion on the GDC, a strategic initiative focused on shaping the future of digital cooperation. The dialogue featured a diverse array of stakeholders, from the GDC co-facilitators, to ambassadors, civil society representatives and members from various international organizations.

The briefing centered on the GDC's objectives to enhance digital cooperation, bridge the digital divide, and ensure a secure, inclusive, and equitable digital future, anchored in human rights and sustainable development goals.

As the moderator, Shamika N. Sirimanne from UNCTAD facilitated the conversation, which underscored the broad support for the GDC from member states and the various stakeholder groups. The GDC is envisaged to rest on the foundational principles of the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Agenda 2030.

A key point of consensus among the participants was the necessity to avoid duplication of existing efforts in the digital cooperation landscape. Instead, the GDC should complement and build upon the work of established processes and bodies such as the IGF, ITU, UNCTAD, UNDP, UNESCO, and the WSIS+20 Review process. The discussion emphasized the importance of identifying and filling gaps within the current ecosystem to create a more efficient and cohesive digital cooperation framework.

The session also addressed the need for inclusivity and multi-stakeholder engagement in the GDC's development process. The co-facilitators, ambassadors from Sweden and Zambia, committed to a consultative approach that involves all relevant stakeholders, including those from the Global South and marginalized groups. The aim is to ensure that the GDC reflects a wide range of perspectives and concerns from the global community.

Another significant topic was the intersection between digital technology and climate change. The participants acknowledged the urgency of addressing this nexus and the potential impact of digitalization on environmental sustainability.

Data governance emerged as a central issue, with discussions focusing on individuals' control over their data and the balance between free data flow and data protection. The need for investment in digital infrastructure and capacity building was also highlighted, especially in low-income countries where access to advanced technologies like 5G remains limited.

The session reiterated the commitment to maintaining an open, interconnected, and interoperable internet. It also called for the removal of unjustified obstacles to cross-border data flows while ensuring privacy and data protection.

The GDC process, led by the co-facilitators, is set to be finalized by mid-2024 and feed into the UN Summit of the Future in September 2024. The co-facilitators aim to create a bold and innovative compact that builds upon existing agreements and frameworks, such as the WSIS process and the outcomes of the IGF.

The session provided a platform for a rich exchange of ideas and proposals, reflecting a consensus on the need for a robust framework for digital cooperation. The GDC is envisioned as a comprehensive document that will guide future digital cooperation, focusing on inclusivity, human rights, and sustainable development. The co-facilitators' commitment to an open and inclusive negotiation process, alongside the engagement of a broad range of stakeholders, sets the stage for the GDC to become a landmark document in the realm of digital policy.

A REGIONAL APPROACH TO E-COMMERCE AND DIGITAL TRADE IN THE PACIFIC

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/a-regional-approach-to-e-commerce-and-digital-trade-in-the-pacific-unctad

AI title: **Pacific region explores tailored e-commerce strategies at high-level session**

Speakers:

- Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General, UNCTAD
- Henry Puna, Secretary-General, Pacific Islands Forum (PIFS)
- H.E. Manoa Kamikamica, Deputy Prime Minister & Minister for Trade, Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications, Fiji
- H.E. George Mina, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Australia to the WTO in Geneva
- Bram Peters, Programme Manager UNCDF
- Shelley Burich, Founder Vaoala Vanilla (Samoa)
- Sven Callebaut, Director, TradeWorthy Ltd
- Moderator: H.E. Mere Falemaka, Ambassador, The Pacific Islands Forum Geneva Office

This high-level session, organized jointly by UNCTAD and the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS), focused on the unique approach to e-commerce and digital trade within the Pacific region. The session was moderated by H.E. Mere Falemaka, who emphasized the significance of digital connectivity improvements and the expanding opportunities for e-commerce in the Pacific. The aim was to discuss the importance of tailoring policy environments to strengthen e-commerce and the digital economy in the region.

Keynote speakers included Ms. Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General of UNCTAD, and Mr. Henry Puna, Secretary-General of the PIFS. Ms. Grynspan discussed the digital transformation journey of Pacific countries, highlighting the rollout of eTrade Readiness Assessments and the development of national e-commerce strategies. She underscored the particular importance of digitalization for the Pacific, given its geographical challenges, and the potential to overcome traditional barriers to access opportunities.

Mr. Puna spoke about strategic initiatives like the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and the Pacific Aid for Trade Strategy 2020-2025, which are designed to promote regional integration and economic development through e-commerce. He stressed the need for a coordinated regional approach to address gaps in e-commerce enabling areas and the importance of aligning national strategies with regional initiatives.

The session also addressed the challenges faced by Pacific countries, such as low broadband reach, high costs of digital infrastructure, and the necessity for regulatory frameworks that foster trust in e-commerce. Success stories from the region, including Rise Beyond the Reef and Lami Kava in Fiji, were shared, demonstrating the potential for e-commerce to support MSMEs and women entrepreneurs in remote areas. The role of international support from Australia, New Zealand, and the European Union was acknowledged in supporting these initiatives.

The panel discussion featured insights from government representatives, entrepreneurs, and trade and development experts. The Honorable Deputy Prime Minister of Fiji shared Fiji's digital transformation efforts and the successes of local MSMEs in leveraging e-commerce for market access. Ambassador George Mina from Australia emphasized the importance of inclusion and the Pacific's voice in shaping global trade architecture. Bram Peters of the UNCDF highlighted financial inclusion as a key aspect of building inclusive digital economies, citing specific success stories from the Pacific region. Ms. Shelley Burich, an entrepreneur from Samoa, shared her experience in overcoming challenges related to logistics, payments, and market access through e-commerce.

The session called for continued partnership and coordination among governments, the private sector, and international organizations to support the growth of e-commerce in the Pacific. The importance of inclusive policies that allow for equitable benefits from the digital economy was highlighted, along with the need for the private sector, particularly MSMEs, to be actively involved in policy discussions. The session underscored the transformative potential of e-commerce for the Pacific region and the critical role of digitalization in its future development.

Noteworthy observations included the emphasis on the diversity of challenges and opportunities within the Pacific region, the importance of original approaches to policymaking, and the role of digital connectivity in converging with e-commerce opportunities. The session also recognized the significance of national approaches within the broader regional strategy and the need for a coordinated effort to strengthen the enabling policy environment for e-commerce and the digital economy in the Pacific.

CSTD OPEN CONSULTATION ON WSIS+20

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/cstd-open-consultation-on-wsis20

AI title: **UN's CSTD open consultation reflects on WSIS+20 achievements and future in the digital era**

Speakers:

- Shamika N. Sirimanne, Director, Division on Technology and Logistics (DTL), UNCTAD
- H.E Sabri Bachtobji, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Tunisia to the United Nations Office at Geneva
- Ichwan Makmur Nasution, Head of Center for International Affairs, Indonesia
- Jorge Cancio Melia, Deputy Director of the International Relations team, Federal Office of Communications, Switzerland
- Sulyna Abdullah, Special Advisor to the Secretary-General & Chief, Strategic Planning and Membership Department, ITU
- Silvana Fumega, Director, Global Data Barometer, Buenos Aires
- Pauline Kariuki, Co-Founder & CTO, Mawu Africa
- Moderator: Ana Cristina das Neves, Chair, Bureau of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD)- UNCTAD

The second open consultation of the UN's Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) on the WSIS+20 review, chaired by Ana Cristina das Neves, was a significant event. The session, titled "WSIS + 20 successes, failures, and future expectations," was a collaborative effort involving UNCTAD, ITU, UNESCO, and UNDP, all key actors of the WSIS. The consultation aimed to engage in an in-depth dialogue on the WSIS implementation and its future, particularly in the context of sustainable development and the impact of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI).

The session began with a reflection on the extent to which the WSIS vision of a people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented information society has been implemented over the past 20 years. The discussion centered around the ongoing trends and the role of AI in progressing towards human development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Concerns were raised about how these trends might enable or hinder the realization of the WSIS vision and what measures should be taken to advance international cooperation, including governance, to leverage emerging technologies for sustainable development in various dimensions.

The consultation also examined the WSIS+20 review process, which began with the first open consultation during the 18th Internet Governance Forum in Kyoto, Japan in November 2023. The General Assembly Resolution A-70/125, calling for a high-level meeting in 2025 to review the WSIS outcomes, was highlighted, along with the roadmap adopted by the CSTD, which includes open consultations, surveys, and inputs for the UN Secretary-General's annual report. The roadmap's accomplishment depends on the availability of financial resources.

Participants from different countries and organizations shared their insights, highlighting the progress made in areas such as digital economy growth, as evidenced by Indonesia's increase from US$41 billion in 2019 to US$77 billion in 2022, and the rise in global internet users from 12.4% in 2003 to 67% in 2023. However, challenges such as the digital divide, with 2.6 billion people remaining offline, and disparities in internet affordability were also discussed.

The session underscored the importance of inclusivity, particularly for marginalized communities, and the environmental impact of digital transformation. The need for responsible AI practices was debated, with the potential of AI to bring more benefits than drawbacks to the implementation of the WSIS vision.

In conclusion, the consultation emphasized the ongoing relevance of the WSIS vision and called for active contributions to shape future discussions and outcomes. The importance of multi-stakeholder engagement in the review process was stressed, and the session concluded with a call for continued active participation and contributions from all stakeholders to shape the future of the information society.

Noteworthy observations included the recognition of the WSIS process as a robust framework for digital cooperation, the need for public-private partnerships, and the role of governments in supporting startups and digital services. The session also highlighted the importance of data protection and privacy in the digital world, the necessity of addressing the digital divide for equitable development, and the significance of data privacy and security in light of frequent data breaches and privacy concerns.

CLOSING SESSION

AI Report URL: https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/closing-session

AI title: **UNCTAD eWeek 2023 concludes with a call for inclusive digital trade and economy**

Speakers:

- Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General, UNCTAD
- Jovan Kurbalija, Executive Director, DiploFoundation
- Hajo Lanz, Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Geneva
- Damilola Olokesusi, CEO Shuttlers & eTrade for Women Advocate
- Moderator: Shamika N. Sirimanne, Director, Division on Technology and Logistics (DTL), UNCTAD

The 2023 edition of the UNCTAD eWeek concluded with a session that was both a celebration of achievements and a moment of reflection on the journey ahead in the realm of digital trade and the digital economy.

Hajo Lanz, the director of FES Geneva, addressed the gathering, reflecting on the progress made since a 2013 workshop on digital trade, co-organized by FES and UNCTAD. He pointed out that many of the issues discussed a decade ago remain pertinent today, such as the digital divide, the disparity between small enterprises and tech giants, and gender inequality in the digital sphere. Lanz expressed concern that current WTO negotiations lacked a developmental focus and stressed the importance of using digitalization as a means to bridge inequalities rather than widen them.

Damilola Olokesusi, CEO of Shuttlers and eTrade for Women Advocate for Anglophone Africa, shared her vision for a future where gender gaps are eliminated, and women are equally represented at decision-making tables. She praised the eTrade for Women programme for its role in fostering collaboration and mentoring among women entrepreneurs. Olokesusi urged the audience to take action towards empowering women, which she believes is crucial for overall economic prosperity.

Jovan Kurbalija from the Diplo Foundation presented the AI-based results of the eWeek, showcasing an innovative use of AI to create knowledge graphs and summarize the event's discussions. He emphasized the need for AI systems to be transparent, accountable, and open, and demonstrated how AI can change the dynamics of meetings and discussions. The AI-generated summary provided a detailed analysis of the event's content, including statistics on speeches, the frequency of digital mentions, and the balance of positive and negative arguments.

Rebeca Grynspan provided a comprehensive summary of the eWeek, encapsulating the essence of the discussions in 10 key points – the Geneva Declaration. UNCTAD Secretary-General called for a holistic approach to harnessing digitalization, bridging digital divides, creating a level playing field for businesses, and developing inclusive international trade rules. R. Grynspan also highlighted the critical role of data governance, the need to address the environmental impact of the digital economy, and the importance of equitable distribution of benefits from digital data and AI. She concluded by reiterating that digitalization is about development and shared values, not just technology.

UNCTAD eWeek 2023 exemplified the power of multi-stakeholder collaboration in shaping the future of the digital economy. With over 150 sessions, participation from 3,500 individuals across 159 countries, and a 50-50% gender balance, the event fostered a diverse and inclusive dialogue on digital trade. The closing session called for continued collaboration and action to ensure that digitalization serves as a tool for development, equality, and overcoming global challenges.

The way forward

The UNCTAD eWeek will transition to a biennial event from an annual occurrence. The upcoming edition is anticipated to convene in 2025.

All information pertaining to the previous editions of the UNCTAD eWeek can be found here: UNCTAD eWeek | UNCTAD

More information

All High-level and virtual thematic sessions, as well as some special sessions are available for replay here: Sessions Replay (unctadeweek2023.org).

All reports produced by the AI reporting tool are accessible here: UNCTAD eWeek 2023 | Digital Watch Observatory

More information on the UNCTAD eWeek 2023 can be found here: UNCTAD eWeek 2023: Shaping the future of the digital economy | UNCTAD

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We would also like to acknowledge the key role of the 28 eTrade for all partners who were active during the event and contributed to reinforcing its unique nature as a collaborative platform among all stakeholders.