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Session Outcome Document

Helping SMEs Succeed in Digital Trade: Lessons from European & ASEAN Trade Promotion Organisations

International Trade Centre

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Tuesday, 7th July, 2026, 14:00-14:45 (UTC+02:00)

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2026/Agenda/Session/368>

Key Issues discussed:

- Governments maintain different priorities. In considering the role of the public sector in trade-related public-private partnerships, it is important to consider the priorities of the government, whether it be market competitiveness, sustainable development, export development, etc.
- Markets remain fragmented, a crucial consideration in the proliferation of digital trade. In Europe, despite the European Union, there is still a need for localized strategies and regulatory compliance which varies per country. Trade Promotion Europe (TPE), the pan-European association of TPOs, is playing an important advocacy role in this area. In the Philippines, there are inherent infrastructural challenges as an archipelago made up of thousands of islands.
- Combined governance structures can mitigate challenges of public-private partnerships in trade initiatives. As demonstrated by an example from West Africa, maintaining a board with representatives across the public and private sectors, as well as government ministers can facilitate access to resources while preserving innovation.
- Innovative technology must meet users where they are. Users will adopt practices that suit their needs, so innovative technologies must be adapted to local environments for the greatest uptake. In the Philippines, users have not demonstrated strong digital resistance, however adopting new technologies means rethinking workflows.
- Digital platforms can strongly facilitate digital trade. In the Philippines, PHX Source supports government mandates for export development and supports market access for enterprises. TPO Switzerland Global Enterprise hosts a tender service platform to streamline resources for users, facilitate ease of operations, and present a database of opportunities for exporters.

- Artificial intelligence creates opportunities to improve the effectiveness of digital platforms, to further facilitate the proliferation of global trade. There is further an underutilized opportunity of AI; beyond generative AI, systems like predictive AI and language learning models, for example, hold transformative potential.

Key Outcomes of the session

- Facilitated dialogue between TPOs (Switzerland, the Philippines, TPE), academia (University of Amsterdam, University of Malta), and private sector perspectives on key considerations related to digital commerce.
- Examined how TPOs and other BSOs integrate digital innovation to rethink their organizational set up and their service portfolios to support SME participation in global digitally enabled trade.
- Highlighted practical case studies from the Philippines, Senegal, and Switzerland to identify operational models and service delivery mechanisms that enable SMEs, particularly smaller firms with limited digital capacity, to participate more effectively in global digital trade markets with the support of TPOs.

Key Recommendations and Forward-Looking Actions

- Scale and strengthen digital TPO platforms as gateways for enterprises by providing centralized access to market intelligence, export opportunities, tender information, business support services, and AI-enabled tools that reduce barriers to international trade and enable enterprises—particularly SMEs—to compete more effectively in global digital markets.
- Strengthen public-private collaboration through inclusive governance models that bring together governments, TPOs, academia, and the private sector to co-design and implement digital trade initiatives that balance innovation, sustainability, and national development priorities.
- Expand the adoption of AI-powered trade support services by integrating predictive analytics, multilingual tools, and intelligent matchmaking into TPO digital platforms to improve market intelligence, streamline exporter services, and ultimately enhance SME competitiveness.
- Promote international knowledge sharing and replication of successful digital trade models through partnerships among TPOs, international organizations, and research institutions to exchange best practices, scale proven solutions, and support inclusive digital trade ecosystems worldwide.