

## workshop report

### E-commerce, trade and the digital economy

**tralac**, with the financial support of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, hosted a policy workshop on e-commerce, trade and the digital economy. The overarching aim was to demystify e-commerce and create a pragmatic ‘to-do list’ to address governance gaps to work towards developmental gains.

Ashly Hope, **tralac** volunteer, provided an overview of e-commerce and its pervasive reach across all value chains, to frame the discussion. Professor Alison Gillwald, Executive Director of Research ICT Africa, provided an illuminating presentation on the large gaps in data, especially on the demand-side, the digital inequality paradox and the low internet penetration in Africa holding back the continent from fully benefiting from the digital economy.

John Stuart, **tralac** Associate, shared views on how African countries or groupings can leverage new technologies for trade, emphasising both postal reliability and payments. Adheesh Budree, co-chair of the E-commerce Forum Africa reviewed key e-commerce policy challenges in the South African context.

Global and regional developments in e-commerce were discussed by Jonathan Evans from South Africa’s Department of Trade and Industry,

Iffy Ogo from African Trade Policy Centre and Aeden Pulestone from the Department of Foreign Affairs of Australia. Insights were provided on South Africa’s domestic and international stance in e-commerce regulation, the digital policy landscape of the Economic Commission for Africa and the Australian experience with e-commerce in the CPTPP and other recent trade agreements.

The closing panel of day 1 provided first-hand feedback from e-commerce businesses. The discussion focussed on existing issues around e-commerce and cross-border trade and what small businesses need from policymakers. Laetitia Breedts, owner of Akina, provided insight on her small online sustainable swimwear business noting the challenges of cross-border sales when it comes to returns. Sethebe Manaka, founder of buybdub.com and several other digital businesses, shared the story of establishing the first online marketplace for local and indigenous products in Botswana. Jason Blackman, Director of Compliance, Customs and Regulatory Affairs of DHL Sub-Saharan Africa, illustrated the issues that DHL experiences with its international courier, parcel, and express mail division in Africa.

On the final day of the workshop, Sha’ista Goga, Director of Acacia Economics, delved into the competitive environment and the regulation underpinning e-commerce and the retail sector.

Key takeaways included: the emergence of omni-retailing, re-thinking the death of shopping malls due to the rise of online platforms and regulatory issues around dominant platforms such as Google and Amazon. Paul Esselaar, from Esselaar Attorneys, emphasised the importance of data privacy and examined data protection laws across jurisdictions, illustrating the challenges for compliance when moving data across borders.

Trudi Hartzenberg, **tralac** Executive Director wrapped up the workshop with a discussion on what really matters for Africa’s e-commerce agenda, noting: the role of governance, e-commerce’s fit with industrial policy and cross-border implications. Key issues raised were: customs simplification, *de minimis* thresholds for customs duties, dealing with returns issues, postal services, the benefits of economies of scale that also bring challenges for small competitors, understanding how markets are evolving with digital advances. With respect to governance, participants raised concerns about the lack of common purpose among government departments and regulators. The absence of good data hampers the development of appropriate policy and regulation.

Presenters and participants emphasised the need for African countries to embrace digitalisation. They noted that to realise the potential benefits, careful calibration of policy and regulation is required.

# workshop feedback

## E-commerce, trade and the digital economy



### OVERVIEW

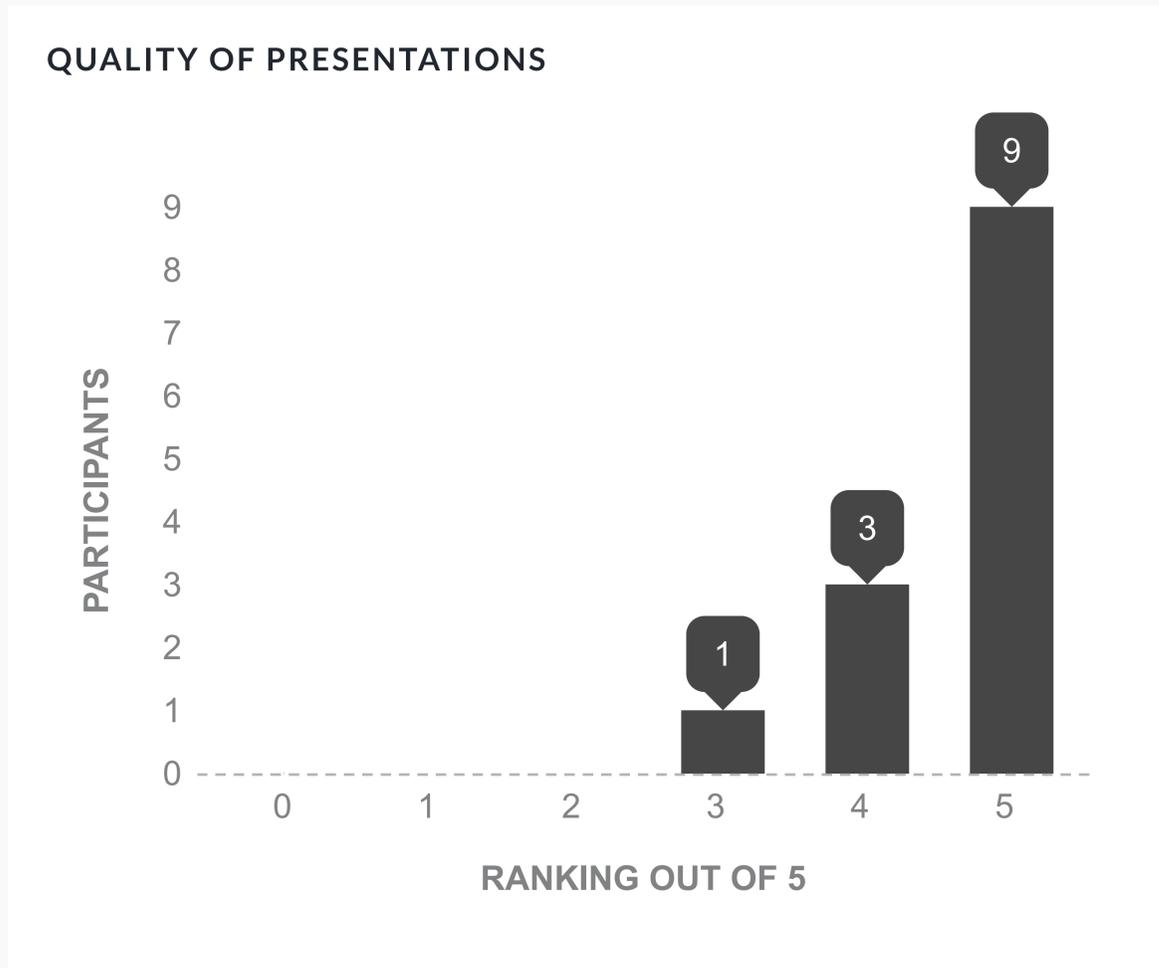
<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>  <span style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">23</span>	<b>COUNTRIES REPRESENTED</b>  <span style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">7</span>	<b>GENDER</b>  <span style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">10</span> MEN <span style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">13</span> WOMEN <span style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #0072bc;">44%</span> <span style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #0072bc;">56%</span>
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### FEEDBACK

"Excellent conference, well done team!"

"A most interesting workshop, which connected several elements of the e-commerce debate."

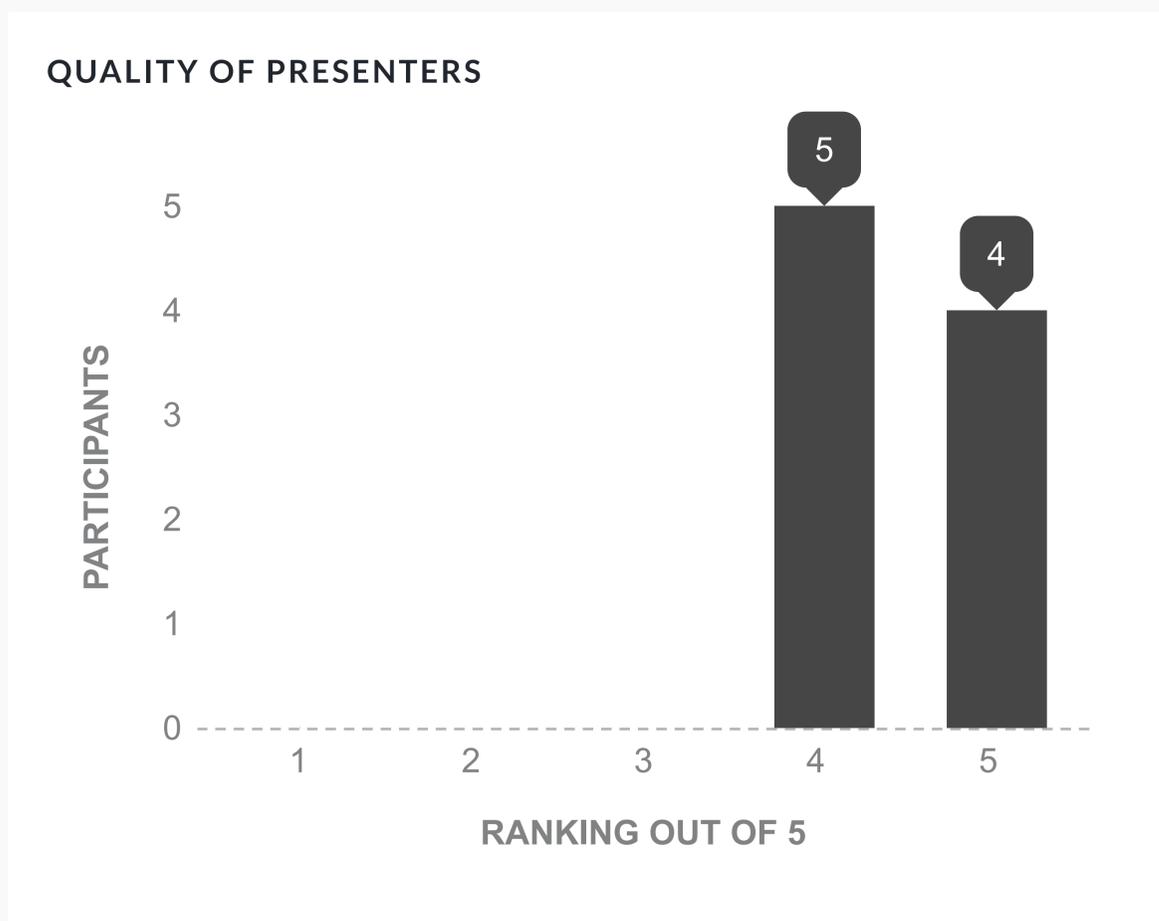
"Congratulations on a worthwhile workshop."



<b>MAILING LIST ACQUISITIONS</b>  <span style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">6</span> ▲ <span style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #0072bc;">6 ALREADY REGISTERED</span>	<b>PRESENTATIONS SHARED</b>  <span style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">10</span> <span style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #0072bc;">100%</span>
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### HOW HAVE YOU BENEFITED?

- 'Extremely valuable and useful'  
*CEO, Trade Consultative Body*
- 'Gave me interesting new perspectives'  
*E-commerce entrepreneur*
- 'I acquired new knowledge and understanding on e-Commerce.'  
*Trade Official*



### WHERE TO NEXT?

-  Global North vs. Global South policy making, how do we address issues relevant to us rather than waiting to inherit answers that don't necessarily fit?
-  Second-phase issues in the AfCFTA
-  Tax/Revenue and Investment implications for eCommerce.
-  Fourth industrial revolution - implications for Africa