

Concept Note

Webinar Series: South-South and Triangular Cooperation among Cities on Cross-border E-commerce and Digital Innovation for Sustainable Development

15 weekly webinars on every Friday
from 15 August to 20 November 2020

1. Background

E-commerce, driven by digital technologies, is growing exponentially in many countries today, with the global online retail sales projected to exceed USD 4 trillion in 2020.¹ E-commerce has been considered an effective instrument with which developing countries could unlock the opportunities offered by digital innovation in creating job opportunities, accelerating economic growth, reducing poverty, and improving gender equality. For example, the reduction in trade costs is especially conducive to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and companies from developing countries.² E-commerce provides instant market access for women to sell goods and services to the world, offering women opportunities for entrepreneurship which would not have been possible without platform economy or access to the Internet.³

South-South and triangular cooperation can accelerate the development of e-commerce in developing countries. Because, the development of e-commerce requires sufficient information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructures, enabling policy and regulatory environment, and adequate human capital. This entire process cannot happen in a country on its own, especially given the limited digital capacities of many Southern countries.⁴ Second, many developing countries have made extraordinary progress in harnessing e-commerce for socioeconomic growth. They are ready to cooperate among themselves to generate innovative and effective solutions in this field. For instance, African local e-commerce platforms including Jumia, Konga, Mall for Africa, Takealot, and Bidorbuy, have reportedly acquired higher market shares than Amazon.⁵ India's e-commerce market is projected to reach USD 200 billion by 2026.⁶ In particular, China, one of the largest e-commerce markets, has announced to establish 46 new **city-based** cross-border e-commerce pilot zones, in addition to the 59 in existence, to bring a full play to accelerate foreign trade.⁷

¹ United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation and Finance Center for South-South Cooperation, *South-South Cooperation in a Digital World: 2018 Annual Report in South-South Cooperation* (2018) at p 53. Available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZyD-3qsUI22M09z-S2LROluesR9RGw6J/view>.

² World Trade Organization, *The Future of World Trade: How Digital Technologies Are Transforming Global Commerce* (2018) p 5. Available at https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/publications_e/wtr18_e.htm

³ Supra note 1, at p 27.

⁴ United Nation Conference on Trade and Development, *South-South Digital Cooperation for Industrialization: A Regional Integration Agenda* (2018) at pp 14-5. Available at <https://unctad.org/en/Pages/MeetingDetails.aspx?meetingid=1940>

⁵ Supra note 1, at p 80.

⁶ Supra note 1, at p 79.

⁷ According to the authorities, exported retail goods from the pilot zones will enjoy exemption from value-added tax (VAT) and consumption tax. Taxpayers' enterprise income taxes in these zones will be collected according to the fixed amount upon assessment or by verifying the taxable income rate. E-commerce companies are encouraged to develop and share overseas warehouses and global marketing network, cultivate their own brands and diversify export markets to upgrade foreign trade and enhance economic

But the development of e-commerce, including cross-border e-commerce, in developing countries, is still faced with many barriers, including inadequate ICT infrastructures, lack of human resources, low logistic capacity, knowledge gaps, limited cross-border data flow, lack of uniformed international technical standards, insufficient national and international rules and regulations, etc. Moreover, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, global supply chains are expected to experience significant disruptions, including reductions in trade volumes, declines in foreign direct investment, lower consumer goods demand, a reduction in commodity prices, and a general economic decline for vulnerable developing countries.⁸ To address these challenges, Southern countries need to, among other things, enhance policy coordination and capacity building.

The [South-South and Triangular Cooperation \(SSTC\) among Maritime-Continental Silk Road Cities for Sustainable Development Project](#), was initiated by the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC Cities Project) in partnership with the government of China in 2017 to facilitate SSTC at the city level, leveraging the strategic opportunities and resources offered by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Cities Project is designed to provide streamlined services and support which include demand-driven needs assessment, capacity development, advisory and advocacy, knowledge and technology transfer, expertise exchange, and implementation and co-financing.

The China Association of Trade in Services (CATIS) is a national service trade industry association supported by more than 2,000 company members in China. CATIS has a wide network of e-commerce organizations and practitioners and broad-based experience in organizing e-commerce-related events and training programs. In May of 2018 and 2019 respectively, CATIS signed the *Memorandum of Understanding on National Capacity Building Action Plan for Belt and Road Countries* and the *Cooperation Agreement on National Capacity Building for the Belt and Road Countries* with the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Since July 2018, jointly with partners including UNCTAD and UNOSSC Cities Project, CATIS has organized four advanced training sessions on cross-border e-commerce for about 580 participants from more than 80 countries. Since March 2020, CATIS has organized six online forums on cross-border e-commerce development and four online forums on international trade for private sector companies, in partnership with local governments and the private sector in China.⁹

2. Objectives

In view of the above, CATIS and the UNOSSC Cities Project jointly organize a series of webinars focusing on South-South and triangular cooperation among cities on cross-border e-commerce and digital innovation for sustainable development, for the following targeted audience:

- 1) government officials of cities where China's 105 integrated pilot zones for cross-border e-commerce

competitiveness. For more, please see "China to extend cross-border e-commerce scheme amid COVID-19", CGTN, 7 April 2020. Available from <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-04-07/China-to-extend-cross-border-e-commerce-scheme-amid-COVID-19-PvadhcQHte/index.html>. See also "New Cross-Border E-Commerce Zones, Extended Tax Incentives for Small Businesses in China", China Briefing, 13 April 2022. Available from <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/new-cross-border-e-commerce-zones-extended-tax-incentives-small-businesses-china-secure-china-europe-supply-chain/>

⁸ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Adapting the use of Asycuda World to the Covid-19 Situation: Guidelines to Customs Administrations*, 09 Apr 2020, p1, available from https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/dtlasycudainf2020d1_en.pdf

⁹ CATIS official website, available from <http://www.catis.org.cn/toArticleMoreDetailPage?classify=2&id=459&parentPageUrl=toArticleListMoreDetailPage>. Last retrieved on 26 May 2020.

- are located and cities from other developing countries;
- 2) representatives from national commercial and customs ministries of China and other developing countries;
 - 3) representatives from industry associations and chambers of commerce in China, such as the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT), and other developing countries;
 - 4) representatives from leading private sector companies in China and other developing countries;
 - 5) City-related practitioners and representatives from relevant financial institutions, NGOs, CSOs, research institutions in China and other developing countries.

to achieve the following objectives:

- **Objective 1:** enhancing the capacities of participants in developing cross-border e-commerce and harnessing digital innovation for achieving SDGs, especially Goal 1, Goal 2, Goal 4, Goal 5, Goal 8, Goal 9, Goal 11, and Goal 17,¹⁰ and facilitating a speedy recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic;
- **Objective 2:** facilitating the partnership brokering among participants and engaging them to undertake South-South and triangular cooperation in the area of cross-border e-commerce to accelerate the establishment of an e-commerce city cluster under the framework of the UNOSSC Cities Project;
- **Objective 3:** developing knowledge products on SSTC in e-commerce among cities and expanding the partnership base of the UNOSSC Cities Project and identifying collaboration opportunities with potential pilot cities;

3. Webinar Agenda (generic)

Activities*	Duration
Opening remarks	5 min
Speeches/lectures/presentations	60 min
Q&A session / city-to-city dialogues	30 min
Concluding remarks**	5 min
<p>*Before each webinar, there will be a brief survey to collect registration data and understand participants' interest/preferences about the contents;</p> <p>**After each webinar, there will be an exit survey to assess participants' knowledge of the webinar topic and to understand participants' feedback on the webinar.</p>	

¹⁰ Goal 1 No Poverty, Goal 2 Zero Hunger, Goal 4 Quality Education, Goal 5 Gender Equality, Goal 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 9 Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, Goal 17 Partnerships.

4. Webinar survey schedule

No.	Date/Time (Beijing time)	Topics*
Webinar 1	Friday, August 14, 19:30-21:00	Towards a Sustainable Financial Ecosystem of Cross-Border E-commerce
Webinar 2	Friday, August 21, 15:30-17:00	The Construction of “Two Platforms and Six Systems” in China’s Integrated Cross-Border E-Commerce Pilot Zones
Webinar 3	Friday, August 28, 15:30-17:00	E-commerce for Poverty Alleviation
Webinar 4	Friday, September 11, 15:30-17:00	Alternative Dispute Resolution and E-Commerce Negotiation Rules
Webinar 5	Friday, September 18, 15:30-17:00	Reforming Cross-Border E-Commerce Training Models
Webinar 6	Friday, September 25, 15:30-17:00	Product Selection and Brand Marketing in Cross-Border E-Commerce
Webinar 7	Friday, October 09, 15:30-17:00	Sustainable Logistic Solutions in Cross-Border E-Commerce: Spotighting Good Practices of City-to-City Cooperation
Webinar 8	Friday, October 16, 20:00-21:30	Sustainable Payment Solutions in Cross-Border E-Commerce: Spotighting Good Practices of City-to-City Cooperation
Webinar 9	Friday, October 23, 20:00-21:30	Sustainable Operation Solutions in Cross-Border E-Commerce: Spotighting Good Practices of City-to-City Cooperation
Webinar 10	Friday, October 30, 20:00-21:30	Sustainable Solutions in Cross-Border E-Commerce Supply Chains: Spotighting Good Practices of City-to-City Cooperation
Webinar 11	Friday, November 06, 20:00-21:30	South-South Cooperation and Cross-border E-Commerce Governance in the Digital Era
Webinar 12	Friday, November 13, 20:00-21:30	The Role of Belt and Road Initiative in Advancing Fintech in the Cross-Border E-Commerce Sector in Developing Countries
Webinar 13	Friday, November 20, 20:00-21:30	Interpretation of the World Customs Organization’s Framework of Standards on Cross-Border E-Commerce
Webinar 14	Friday, November 27, 20:00-21:30	South-South Cooperation and COVID-19 Responses of Cross-border E-commerce SMEs in Developing Countries
Webinar 15	Friday, December 04, 20:00-21:30	Innovative Practices of E-Commerce in China and Good Practices of Regional Cooperation

*topics are provisional and subject to change. In each webinar, there will be three speakers presenting three sub-topics focusing on thematic areas such as women empowerment, youth and entrepreneurship, agriculture value chain development, creative economy, digital innovation. Detailed agenda of each webinar will be circulated one week ahead of the event date.