

IGF 2017 Reporting

Session Title: E-commerce: Good or bad for development? (WS151)

Date: 18.12.2017

Time: 09.00 am

Session Organizer: Burcu Kilic, Public Citizen

Chair/Moderator: Sanya Smith Reid, Third World Network

Rapporteur/Notetaker: Burcu Kilic

List of Speakers and their institutional affiliations:

- Michael Wamai, Uganda Permanent Mission, Government, Uganda
- Fernando Rosales, Bolivia Permanent Mission, Government, Bolivia
- Aileen Kwa, South Centre, Intergovernmental Organization
- David Snead, i2coalition, Business, United States
- Pablo Viollier, Derechos Digitales, CSO, Chile
- Parminder Sigh, Just Net Coalition, CSO, India

Key Issues raised (1 sentence per issue):

The session sought to explore the question of whether electronic commerce is good or bad for development. It provided an overview of the WTO rulesmaking system, updated participants on the MC11, and focused on the development aspects of e-commerce and discussed those questions that haven't been asked.

- If there were presentations during the session, please provide a 1-paragraph summary for each presentation:

- Aileen Kwa: The central mandate of the World Trade Organization is trade liberalization. In the last two or three years, some developed country governments have come up with a different agenda. The United States has sought to bring the provisions they had developed for the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement on ecommerce to the WTO in a 2016 proposed work programme in ecommerce. The European Union and Japan followed suit with proposals on a work programme for ecommerce.
- Pablo Viollier of Derechos Digitales: Issues relating to ecommerce and human rights, such as the net neutrality and internet access, are not discussed at the WTO in the context of the ecommerce discussions.
- Fernando Rosales: In Bolivia, despite efforts by the government, for 2014 only around 23 percent of the population has access to internet. The WTO proposals are seeking to limit the countries' capacity to promote public policies to expand the benefits of ecommerce for all. Cross-border data flow requires a better understanding.
- Michael Wamai: The African Group is not against ecommerce as such, but before discussing multilateral rules, it is necessary to consider what kind of rules are needed. Developing countries need to choose which path to take to pursue their industrialisation, which model to follow, and understand how the other players managed to develop their own digital economy.
- David Snead: Trump administration's position towards the WTO is the same as its position towards trade in general. The Trump administration believes that the US has not benefitted enough from trade and trade agreements, and now favours a one-to-one approach instead of a multilateral approach. On ecommerce, leadership might come from the EU, which would be a good thing on issues such as privacy.
- Parminder Sigh of the Just Net Coalition: It is important to understand what is meant by ecommerce. At the WTO, developed countries are insisting that ecommerce rules are adopted as soon as possible, while developing countries say they are not ready. However, at the Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation on Public Policy Issues Pertaining to the Internet (WGEC) 2016-2018 (of the UN Conference on Trade and Development), developed countries have the opposite position, claiming that no rules are needed while developing countries request rules.

- Please describe the Discussions that took place during the workshop session (3 paragraphs):

E-commerce and the digital economy are crucial for the future but developed and developing countries face different realities and issues. The 11th Ministerial Meeting (MC11) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) was concluded in December, in Buenos Aires. E-commerce was one the hottest topic in the Ministerial discussions without any substantive outcome. However, 71 countries signed a declaration to move on with ecommerce discussions, which clearly shows that there is a shift at the WTO to agree to consensus between like-minded countries, instead of with the whole membership.

Developing countries have been clear that their concerns in this arena include increased access to energy, internet, and other information and communication technologies; closing the digital divide; increased infrastructure for logistics including transportation and postal systems; legal and regulatory frameworks; access to finance; and capacity building in technologies to help them prepare to benefit from e-commerce. But these issues are generally not reflected in the proposals that have been submitted, which are far more likely to result in binding and enforceable rules.

- Please describe any Participant suggestions regarding the way forward/ potential next steps /key takeaways (3 paragraphs):

Fernando Rosales suggested that solving internet governance issues should not only be left to the narrow trade perspective but rather be addressed in the multi-stakeholder format of the United Nations as the WTO is a very particular organisation where civil society has no access.

The moderator Sanya Smith Reid suggested that there is no reason discussions on ecommerce should not be transparent, and all stakeholders invited.

David Snead also suggested that the trade agreements and the trade negotiation process should be inclusive. The opportunity still exists for Governments to provide some transparency in other negotiating processes.

Gender Reporting

- Estimate the overall number of the participants present at the session: Around 70

- Estimate the overall number of women present at the session: 40

- To what extent did the session discuss gender equality and/or women's empowerment? The discussions were focusing on trade agreements. gender equality and/or women's empowerment haven't been dicussed.

- If the session addressed issues related to gender equality and/or women's empowerment, please provide a brief summary of the discussion: