

**Insight into the Organisation of Women's Trade Member
(OWIT) on the WTO-ITC SheTrades Summit and 13th WTO
Ministerial Conference 24th February – 1st March 2021**

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Dear OWIT Members,

I am writing to share key insights from my participation in the WTO-ITC SheTrades Summit and the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi, UAE in 2024. The events were monumental for global trade, addressing complex issues and pushing for a more efficient and inclusive global trading system.

13th WTO Ministerial Conference Overview

The negotiations at the 13th Ministerial Conference were intense, underlining the challenges of reaching consensus in a diverse global context. However, the outcomes were significant, with the adoption of the Abu Dhabi Declaration marking solid progress in various areas and setting the stage for future resolutions. Achievements included the accession of Comoros and Timor Leste to WTO membership, the extension of the moratorium on customs duties on e-commerce, and breakthroughs in areas like services domestic regulation and investment facilitation.

Key Achievements

The conference outcomes highlighted a fully functioning global body that represents the interests of nations worldwide. The achievements, such as the agreements on e-commerce, Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures, and services regulation, showcase a commitment to fostering prosperity, sustainability, and development on a global scale. The commitment to concluding reform pathways for the WTO's dispute settlement system by the end of 2024 further underscores the determination to improve the multilateral trading system.

What was achieved:

- The accession of Comoros and Timor Leste to WTO membership – the first new members since 2016.
- A two-year extension of the moratorium on customs duties on e-commerce.

- The implementation of Special and Differential Treatment on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and Technical Barriers to Trade – a crucial breakthrough for Least Developed Countries following years of discussions.
- New disciplines on services domestic regulation will lower trade costs by billions of dollars.
- An Investment Facilitation Development agreement that will enable 123 developing countries to attract FDI.
- Several reform pathways for the WTO's dispute settlement system, which we have committed to conclude by the end of 2024.
- Protect tariff-free digital trade

UK Government delegation

UK, Business and Trade Secretary Kemi Badenoch and Minister of State for Trade Policy Greg Hands MP led the UK delegation, alongside UK Permanent Representative to the WTO Simon Manley.

Commenting after the conclusion of the conference, the Business and Trade Secretary said:

“While we didn’t achieve everything we wanted, we secured important agreements to protect tariff-free digital trade and help the least developed countries to benefit from free and open trade. “Anything agreed at the WTO requires consensus from all 164 members – that is by definition extremely challenging. But by getting the deals we have, we have shown the WTO is a critical, albeit imperfect, part of the global trading system that helps economies thrive. “The UK’s primary objective for this conference was to ensure digital trade remains tariff-free – to guarantee small businesses are not taxed for having an international conference call and consumers do not pay extra to stream songs or films from other countries. “I am pleased the WTO agreed to extend the e-commerce moratorium - a global agreement that avoids taxes on online transactions from e-mails to music or TV downloads, for two more years. The decision will provide businesses of all sizes with the certainty they need to grow and keep costs down for consumers everywhere. “The UK still firmly believes the WTO should extend the moratorium permanently and will continue to make for the case for that.

Implications for OWIT's Agenda

As OWIT members, these developments present opportunities for us to engage with policymakers and stakeholders to advocate for gender-inclusive trade policies and initiatives. The advancements made at the conference can inform our work in empowering women in trade, as we align our efforts with the goal of fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth globally. The protection of tariff-free digital trade also opens up avenues for women entrepreneurs to leverage digital tools for business expansion and market access.

MC13 Business forum WTO-ICC

The Business Forum, WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13). Where Private and public sector speakers from around the world offered their perspectives on some of the most pressing issues facing the WTO.

- Appropriation of businesses.
- Private and public sector collaboration with the government.
- Businesses, trade and governments implement trade policy, therefore collaboration is imperative.
- World trade has been and remains resilient despite hardships and conflict across the world.
- Rules based system is misconstrued in some quarters

The Rules Based System and Why the WTO Matters More Than Ever

In an age of “polycrisis” and ever increasing economic, political and environmental uncertainty, what are the end-users of global trade saying about the WTO and the multilateral rules-based system?

- Africa continental free trade agreements has enabled more trade from the African continent.
- Trade facilitation agreement has contributed to continued growth
- WTO is not matching up with the 17 SDG's, but strides being taken.
- New policies must end ease of trade than hinder trade
- E-commerce moratorium

Sustainability and Digital Imperatives

Sustainable development and the protection of the environment are fundamental goals of the WTO.

At the same time, modern digital technologies are simplifying trade rules while they are simultaneously becoming more complex.

- Rapidly evolving challenges and opportunities presented by digital trade.
- How they can help to meet global sustainability goals.
- Their impact on MSMEs,
- The role the WTO can play in helping small businesses to participate in international trade.

We must double down on the digitisation, so we stop the digital divide and enable Africa to become fully digitised.

Digital democracy

Sustainability must be at the heart of trade and innovation.

Without digital constructs we are not going to be able to have the desired growth Standardisation and collaboration with all sectors, regions and governments.

- Data is vital to implementation of sustainability goals SDG's
- Africa's GDP is projected to double if AI is fully harnessed .
- Digitisation enables sustainability

- Supply chains should always go beyond national to international, therefore policy and standardisation should enable these goals. Otherwise it remains nationalistic/ localised and hinder global trade.

WTO-ITC She trades 24-25 February 2024

- She trades the Liinchpin for trade
- Inclusion from high level to all levels- locally led , global
- Celebration and call to action
- New fund WEIDE (Women exporters in the digital economy) Fund
- Gender responsive
- Empowers women and youth to come full circle
- Green transition
- Coming together to change the way we think of the world
- Collaboration and networking.
- Necessary mindset shift-
- Challenge policy making
- There is room for growth and a constant yearning and desire for more

Issues

- Visa sponsor addressed.
- Financial inclusion
- Digital divide
- Ensure digital financial services become the language of the world and move away from cash
- Enable the technology to be accessible by all.
- Export school in Ghana, to train people on understanding global markets and trade.
- Give exposure to what's happening globally.
- Focus on sustainable growth and education.

Legal challenges

- Intellectual property
- Compliance

Aspirations

- Women are wheels of the pyramid and not the bottom of the pyramid
- Women tend to be at the bottom of the. Value chains
- Digitalisation has brought many positives.
- Logistics, bar code, electronic commerce, green village, packaging, access to information, e-learning
- Encourage Scaling businesses
- Build Trade facilitation centre
- Women exporters
- Green exporters
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Wish list

- To set up a global task force
- To incentivise women participation
- Consortiums for knowledge sharing, participation and nurturing skill and talent
- Fund- to stabilise and To eradicate poverty and foster a sustainable mindset
- Plant trees, and not just factories 🏭
- Conscious effort to work closely with governments, companies, communities.
- Mentorship- education- training
- Developing prod and ideas into bigger and marketable product/ service

WEIDE Fund Launch

- Women have more difficulty securing financing than men
- Great disparity on access to finance.
- Women who earn more invest more in their children and communities.
- Empowering women is not just socially good but smart economics

The 3 main future goals of WTO-ITC SHE trades

- Digital
- Green
- Inclusive
- Women Empowerment

increases



Scale,



scope and



speed of trade and growth

OWIT Panel

Empowering Climate Resilience: Women-led solutions in business

This was a dynamic 60-minute session amplifying women-led, trade, and business-driven solutions to climate change.

Building on a global network across 30 countries and four continents, this transformative experience invites your active participation. At its core, this session highlights first-hand experiences of women addressing climate impacts. Engage interactively as project representatives present climate challenges, innovative solutions, and how governments and the private sector contribute to adaptation, mitigation, and resilience.

Your role is pivotal—to engage, critique, and contribute to collaborative problem-solving. Explore how women can leverage climate crises for economic opportunities, focusing on thriving businesses in trade.

Emphasizing government partnerships, public procurement, and public-private partnerships, we reshape paradigms in addressing climate challenges, and enhancing global competitiveness. Additionally, discover how trade agreements can uplift women entrepreneurs.

Event Highlights:

- Dedicated emphasis on fostering enduring climate and environmental advantages and economic prosperity through initiatives driven by women.
- Establishment of robust networks empowering female entrepreneurs, fostering collaborations, customer engagement, and market expansion.
- Presentation of scalable solutions, featuring insights from women-led initiatives.

Trade Tech Forum World Economic Forum

Tech innovation and regulation don't always go hand in hand. Implementation of trade policy has to be digitalised. Customs digitisation to be a priority. Standards divide in technology between the west and east.

- Training and upskilling to adapt the AI era.
- Data and right regulatory frameworks must be implemented.
- Promoting growth of digital economy
- Enabling MSME to reach global markets
- digital control agreements.
- To have flexible path finding solutions
- end to end
- Trusted online environments

We need tangible examples and projects. Digital customs reducing border delays from days to minutes and collaboration across and the whole supply chain Eg.

Enables tracking products on their Journey through data collection and trade digitisation

E-commerce

- Understanding the people you serve urban vs rural
- 1st world vs 3rd world
- Their needs and challenges are different and all need to be addressed appropriately.
- Digital protocol Africa
- Data has to be collected and digitised so it can be evidenced
- Sharing best practices and contextualising.

Communication and engagement aspect.

- Meaningful digitisation.
- There must be inter- company communication/ collaboration as we advance in trade and innovation.

Moratorium- will heavily impact SME's growth.

SDG - standard infrastructure

Governance of AI.

- AI is advancing way faster the policy making and government infrastructure.
- How Do we not continue to introduce trade barriers
- Moratorium- could deter em
- baseline rules to enable ease operation. basic function of digital trade
- capacity building and facilitation
- Efficient, inclusive, operable .

Digitalisation Trade for Africa Session

Who, what, when, where how we trade are being revolutionised through Digitalisation

Unleashing Africa's potential

- Aspiring for Africa
- Digital
- Sustainable - green
- Inclusive

Key takeaways

- Growing 1% per year
- Africa has 1% share on the digital space
- Digital divide- large percentage of sub- saharan Africa has no electricity
- Connectivity infrastructure
- 36% of sub Saharan Africa has broadband.
- Digital iD systems - Fin-tech industry
- E-commerce
- Digital scales

- Skills-infrastructure- education- policy makers- reforms
- Rwanda Champions Smart Africa
- Policies- structures- tools - connectivity to the rest of the world.
- Concept paper- should stir everyone to the cause.
- Data collection and analysis 🤖 to enable trading through digital platforms

Trade + Sustainability Hub

Agenda

Our Trade + Sustainability Hub provides a space for civil society and those with a stake in trade policy to convene these conversations, bringing their distinct perspectives, priorities, and approaches to the key question of finding a way back to cooperation on trade policy.

Within its overall theme, conversations at the Hub focussed on three key issues:

1. Climate Action, Industrial Policy, and Subsidies: Are we spending wisely?
2. Trade Rules to Protect the Natural World: How do we allocate the burden of change?
3. Development and Inclusion in Trade: What would a fairer system look like?

Recommendation

Following my participation at WTO-MC13 , I would highly recommend for OWIT UK, to register as an NGO, for the WTO-MC14 and subsequent events, as it offers great opportunities and insights, that align with our mission and organisational objectives.

Conclusion

In conclusion,. The WTO-ITC SheTrades Summit and the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference provided valuable insights and opportunities for OWIT to advance our mission of supporting women in trade and enhance our 3 pillars Trade finance, Trade digitisation and Capacity building& Facilitation. I look forward to collaborating with all of you as we leverage these outcomes to drive positive change and empower women entrepreneurs in the evolving global trade landscape.