Plenary Session 1- Alliance initiatives to enable SMEs in ecommerce

Michael Poor, Senior Manager at Nextrade Group, introduced the panel by noting that the goal of eTrade Alliance initiatives is to target the constraints that developing country MSMEs face in adopting ecommerce in areas such as capacity building for ecommerce skills, payments and logistics capabilities, inclusive trade, and policy enablement. The Alliance partners have been essential in supporting this mission through a variety of partner-led projects and programs. This panel discusses some of these projects and their accomplishments, defines how to measure and drive success including for women focused initiatives, and shares ideas for ensuring sustainability and scalability.

The panel highlighted the following themes:

- **Capacity building for SME ecommerce:** There has been a heavy focus on capacity building in eTrade Alliance projects, including training in the digital skills necessary for SMEs to succeed in ecommerce in areas such as ecommerce training, logistics, payments, and marketplace onboarding.
- **Defining success**: A key to defining success metrics is to consider what is important at different stages of the project, for example gathering relevant data before the start in order to build the most effective project, measuring participant engagement and satisfaction during the project, and following up to determine levels of growth after completion of the project.
- **Considerations for women-focused initiatives:** Women-focus projects require additional considerations for success, namely in the areas of leadership, confidence-building, networking and community-support.
- **Ensuring sustainability:** Alliance initiatives should include elements of networking, community support and essential business skills training for the participants, and should work to facilitate government engagement with SMEs, as well as ensure stakeholder buy-in and commitment.

Partner-led eTrade Alliance projects

Erica Libertelli, Executive Director of the eCommerce Institute, shared the extensive work that the eCommerce Institute has accomplished as a partner in the Alliance, specifically in ecommerce capacity building and training for MSMEs. The eCommerce Institute capacity-buildings focus on training MSMEs in digital skills for ecommerce and helping MSMEs advance upward in their digital journeys as online sellers and exporters.

Maria Luisa Boyce, Vice President for International Policy for Global Public Affairs at UPS, helped launch the UPS Women Exporters Program in 2018, seeking to help women entrepreneurs expand their cross-border businesses. She soon realized how the eTrade Alliance could be a crucial partner in this program, especially utilizing the Alliance's community of public and private stakeholders, helping UPS to reach a wider group of global women entrepreneurs.

Michael Murungi, Government and Public Policy Lead of Eastern Africa at Google, discussed Google's Hustle Academy, which trains SMEs to upskill, expand and sustain successful businesses. Hustle Academy's partnership with the Alliance focuses on providing Kenyan SMEs with live training, one-on-one mentorship, and masterclasses in business strategy and planning.

Sylvia Mbaabu, Partnerships Lead in East Africa at BrighterMonday, detailed how the company's Alliance supported initiative has helped 18-35 year old entrepreneurs in Kenya take their ecommerce businesses to the next level. The participants receive training in ecommerce and assistance with onboarding onto ecommerce marketplaces. Select businesses also receive coaching and mentorship.

Craig Kirkland, Director of Pacific Islands at Mastercard, discussed the company's Alliance supported project in Fiji that helps women entrepreneurs sell online. This is done through a two-fold project which helps train women on a variety of ecommerce topics, and which also partners with local banks to upgrade payment gateways with new fraud technology, expanding card and digital payments acceptance capabilities for local entrepreneurs and especially in the vital tourism sector.

Devandran Muniandy, GoTrade Regional Coordinator for Asia Pacific at DHL, provided details on the GoTrade program in Malaysia, a collaboration with Asia Foundation and the Alliance. GoTrade aims to equip SMEs with skills and knowledge to participate in cross border trade and consists of expert-led training modules covering various aspects of ecommerce and logistics.

Lastly, Pierre Claude Blaise, CEO of AMVO, discussed the importance of the AMVO's program in Mexico to accomplish the critical first step of ensuring SMEs see the value of ecommerce and exporting for impact on business and economic growth. This is followed by training modules to help upskill and expand businesses.

How to define and measure success in eTrade Alliance projects and programs

Abodunrin "Bods" Babalola with UpSkill Digital, the service provider for Google's Hustle Academy, kicked off the discussion around how to best define and measure success in Alliance partner initiatives by emphasizing the importance in participant feedback and engagement throughout the lifecycle of the program. UpSkill Digital first surveys SMEs on what they want to learn about to help build the most effective program, then gathers additional feedback during the program on participant satisfaction, and finally seeks data on participant progress after completion of the program.

Sylvia Mbaabu highlighted the importance of customized training based on participants' abilities and education levels, as well as ensuring to cater to those with special considerations and disabilities. Similarly to Hustle Academy, BrighterMonday's initiative differentiates measures of success based on project phase: the number of enrolled participants in the training phase, and KPIs such as new sales or diversification of products in the implementation stage. Another key element for success is collaboration with stakeholders in the ecommerce ecosystem.

Pierre Claude Blaise emphasized the need to ensure buy-in from the MSME community that ecommerce is important through measuring awareness and positive perception of ecommerce. It is also important to measure success beyond traditional KPIs such as sales and revenue, and attempt to measure "social

ROI"- including metrics like creating new abilities and skills, creating new employment opportunities, and fostering inclusion.

Special considerations for women-focused projects

The Alliance places special focus on inclusivity in its initiatives, including supporting women-led SMEs. These initiatives often require addressing the unique challenges that women SMEs face, and the panel discussed their experience in this area. Maria Luisa Boyce started by highlighting that women benefit from additional layers of training, specifically in the areas of empowerment and confidence-building, networking and community-building. It is also essential to ensure women's issues are considered in policy recommendations. Erica Libertelli amplified the need for leadership skills and peer-to-peer support within a community.

Craig Kirkland added from his experience in the Pacific that cultural sensitivity is important as well as engaging with NGOs that specifically focus on women to be able to draw on their networks. Devandran Muniandy echoed this point that it is important to reach networks of women through local organizations and partners, and to adjust training for different technical capabilities and levels.

Ensuring sustainability and scalability in projects

The panel concluded with a discussion around ideas for how to ensure projects are sustainable and scalable, with common themes around building community support, networking, and government and stakeholder engagement.

Maria Luisa Boyce first noted that while online training is still important, the further the world moves away from the Covid pandemic, there seems to be less interest in being online, and training should adjust to being shorter and more digestible for people. Additionally, programs should cultivate lasting networking and community support, teach essential business and financial skills, and support SMEs in successfully engaging with government.

Michael Murungi echoed the significance of government engagement, suggesting that programs should boost the ability for SMEs to build their own networks and their own capacity to negotiate for themselves, for example through establishing strong associations for SMEs and scaling them to keep them running and growing.

Sylvia Mbaabu added the potential benefits of partnering with academic institutions that can cater to SMEs. She also emphasized the necessity to build empirical evidence around the benefits of ecommerce development initiatives in order to get essential buy-in from stakeholders. Bods Babalola added on to the importance of working within the community of stakeholders, such as local governments and ecommerce ecosystem partners, to proactively approach businesses and provide a scalable platform.

Conclusion

Michael Poor noted that the Alliance partners have a wealth of experience and knowledge to share about best practices for MSME ecommerce development initiatives. In this panel we learned about the variety of impactful projects and programs that have already been implemented, how to think about defining and measuring the success of these kinds of initiatives, and ideas on ensuring and improving the sustainability of projects in the future. In the following plenary session, the eTrade Alliance Secretariat and notable partners discuss the success factors in the Alliance's adaptive management approaches.