



E-COMMERCE READINESS ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGY FORMULATION



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Countries need to have a clear idea of their e-commerce readiness to develop strategies for increasing the benefits from e-commerce. National e-commerce strategies can help accelerate, mobilize and strengthen the effectiveness of available resources and efforts among stakeholders to harness the power of e-commerce for economic growth and socioeconomic development. They should be developed through a participatory consultation process that promotes multi-stakeholder involvement. They should be coherent with national development and trade strategies, and aim to maximize the benefits of e-commerce accruing to all.

CONTEXT

UNCTAD has carried out Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessments for [Bhutan](#), [Cambodia](#), [Lao PDR](#), [Liberia](#), [Myanmar](#), [Nepal](#), [Samoa](#), [Senegal](#), [Solomon Islands](#) and [Vanuatu](#). Each assessment was carried out along the seven policy areas of the [eTrade for all initiative](#):

- E-commerce readiness assessment
- ICT infrastructure and services
- Payment solutions
- Trade logistics and trade facilitation
- Legal and regulatory frameworks
- E-commerce skills development
- Access to financing

Although each assessment identifies country-specific barriers and opportunities related to strengthening e-commerce, and provides corresponding policy recommendations, some common themes are emerging.

This document summarizes the key findings and main policy recommendations, based on the seven assessments completed so far, with regard to: **e-commerce readiness assessment and strategy formulation**.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Countries lack a unifying vision on e-commerce

Although policymakers recognize the potential benefits of e-commerce, the overall understanding is uneven of the sector, basic concepts, definitions and policy drivers of e-commerce.

The e-commerce agenda tends to be diluted within the broader 'digital economy' or ICT policy discussions.

2. Development of e-commerce policies, initiatives and activities is fragmented

Work on e-commerce is spread across different ministries, departments and agencies, often with parallel and overlapping activities. Focus groups and task forces dealing with different elements of e-commerce are common, but they tend to operate in silos, on specific issues, without broader coordination across different government entities.

3. Public-private dialogue is underutilized

Although investment in the ICT sector is typically led by the private sector, an enabling policy environment is critical to fostering innovation and growth. The dialogue between private sector operators and government entities is often limited, in many cases due to the cross-cutting nature of e-commerce, leading to gaps in information and missed partnership opportunities.



MAIN POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a national e-commerce strategy.

This is important to help create a unifying ‘whole of government’ approach on e-commerce and to provide a common set of definitions, policy objectives and activities. It can empower policymakers to take adequate action and to prioritize resources, and it make it easier to integrate e-commerce into national development plans.

2. Improve inter-ministerial coordination.

In most of the countries, a multitude of committees and task forces work on different elements of e-commerce. Improving inter-ministerial coordination reduces the overlap across mandates, streamlines existing bodies and helps to overcome fragmentation in policy development.

3. Appoint an e-commerce ‘champion’.

Elevating the e-commerce agenda to inter-ministerial committees, with one ministry or agency acting as overall ‘champion’, can create synergies across government institutions working on e-commerce. This approach takes into account the reality that e-commerce is cross-cutting, while also recognizing the importance of strategic leadership.



4. Strengthen the government’s dialogue with other stakeholders.

Similar to increasing confidence among consumers, highlighting the benefits and costs of cashless payments to merchants would help close the trust gap. In addition to traditional channels, some awareness-raising programmes could be carried out through social media.

5. Enhance private sector coordination.

Private sector views on e-commerce are usually fragmented, with varying levels of experience in the industry and different views of the role of government. Unifying these voices to engage the government on e-commerce and digital innovation can help create the enabling environment that the private sector seeks. The establishment of a national e-commerce association should be considered.

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Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessments:
<http://unctad.org/en/Pages/Publications/E-Trade-Readiness-Assessment.aspx>

eTrade for all: <https://etradeforall.org/>

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