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# Commonwealth Forum:

## Technology, Trade & Innovation in a COVID World '20

DATE: 25 JUNE 2020

## EVENT REPORT

### EVENT OVERVIEW

The inaugural webinar in a series of three hosted by Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) and the Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network (CBWN), looked at Technology, Trade and Innovation in a COVID World. The role of the tech sector in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, recognising the global health crisis has changed the dynamic of socio-economic transactions at the national, regional, and international level.

This year saw an exponential growth in the use of Over-The-Top (OTT) services, allowing families, businesses, and governments to stay better connected digitally. OTTs and the app economy provide online ICT services, allowing people to connect and trade during this intermediary period that has seen a major shift towards home working and socialising.

This report on the meeting, includes summaries of speeches, presentations, and discussions, as well as key take-aways. It is hoped that in the lead up to Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2021 (CHOGM2021) this webinar series will provide a platform for the ICT and telecommunications sector to discuss pertinent issues that can be addressed at subsequent meetings in the lead up to CHOGM2021 in Kigali. Had it not been for the COVID-19 pandemic the Commonwealth Leaders would have assembled the week of this webinar (starting 23 June 2020) in Kigali Rwanda.

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Hosted by:

Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO), Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network (CBWN)

Supported by: We Love Learning inc.

## Opening Session

### Welcome remarks

**Gisa Fuatai Purcell**, Director of ICTs, Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) gave her opening remarks.

It was noted that this is the first online forum of the CTO and a move to an online conferencing platform would be the new approach to CTO events for the foreseeable future.

This COVID situation has reinforced the fact that there is a necessity for member countries to invest and develop the digital economy infrastructure, it is essential when developing the relevant infrastructure that it is inclusive, secure, and affordable.

Countries must invest in the digital economy, so people are enabled to run businesses from their homes.

There will always be challenges that countries face, this forum will look at ways we can cooperate, collaborate, to ensure the digital economy once developed in each respective country can help all nations achieve the sustainable development goals of 2030.

## **Opening remarks**

**Rt. Honourable Baroness Patricia Scotland**, Secretary General, Commonwealth of Nations

The Secretary General in her opening remarks said it was a huge pleasure to greet the Honourable Ministers, Commonwealth friends, partners, and counterparts in attendance at this meeting.

She noted that had it not been for the COVID-19 pandemic the Commonwealth Leaders would have assembled this week (starting 23 June 2020) in Kigali Rwanda. She acknowledged that it was a distinct pleasure to share this virtual platform with the Honourable Paula Ingabire, Minister of ICT & Innovation, Republic of Rwanda. The heads of government of the 54 Commonwealth Nations would have been hosted this week by His Excellency Paul Kagame, President, Republic of Rwanda, for the 2020 Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM2020).

She confirmed that when this meeting does take place it will be a CHOGM like none that have gone before.

As the Nations of the Commonwealth and the world more widely work to rebuild social fabric and infrastructure the need for inclusiveness and resilience will be of upmost concern. Inclusiveness and resilience have long been Commonwealth watch words, they are also central to the 2030 agenda for sustainable development.

The Secretary General confirmed it was good to see Commonwealth co-operation and partnership in action and commended the partnership between the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) and the Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network (CBWN) for convening this forum as a joint initiative.

Technology, Trade, and Innovation are vital for tackling and recovering from the pandemic and for building the economies of our member countries to be more resilient for the future.

COVID-19 has had a far-reaching impact into the lives of Commonwealth countries and communities, immense changes to the way people conduct personal and business affairs have been necessary. Some of these are beneficial and should be embraced for the future and others less welcome.

The accelerated adoption of digital technologies is very positive, and it is encouraging to see how digital technologies are transforming home and work



environments, healthcare systems, and traditional trading methods, compelling people to adjust to the new normal.

The pandemic has brought home the vital importance of trade, technology, and innovation to all aspects of people's lives and livelihoods. It has underlined the urgent need to address digital divides by upgrading infrastructure and updating regulatory frameworks, so businesses and consumers can confidently and competitively engage in trade and commerce.

Advances in technology and innovation open broad horizons of opportunity for Commonwealth countries to develop new business sectors and to deliver improved services with enhanced market access in a post-COVID world.

Advanced digital production technologies create new ways to accelerate innovation boost productivity and increase the value-added content of goods that member countries produce and services they provide. More generally, the rise in new technologies is already opening new economic pathways, with livelihoods and job opportunities that support inclusive and sustainable development across the Commonwealth.

The innovation delivered during this period has been invaluable allowing for more remote and virtual ways of interacting, working, and doing business. This includes the healthcare sector where COVID-19 is providing the impetus to develop and adopt new approaches to the healthcare sector. Equipping the clinical workforce in member countries to utilize trends and solutions made available through technology to the healthcare sector is an important area of focus for the Commonwealth.

The effect of the pandemic has been apparent on trading, availability of medical supplies. Some measures that have been introduced to help to facilitate trade, while others tend to be protectionist in their impact with so many of our member countries heavily dependent on transnational support chains to support the healthcare systems. It is important to ensure access to medicines and medical equipment is eased rather than obstructed, it is therefore important that trade measures introduced in response to the pandemic should comply to World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules and should consider the special circumstances of developing countries. Particularly, of smaller, more vulnerable, and least developed countries. With global value chains being reconstructed with countries increasingly looking to reshoring and to a regionalization.

The WTO estimates global trade could decline by 13-32% in 2020. The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimates global foreign direct investment flows in Africa are set to fall by between 25-40% in 2020, and the equipment flows for developing in Asia could decline by as much as 45%.

These challenges have highlighted the need for technological innovation to reduce barriers to nationalisation to ensure the supply chain remains open, and to support ecommerce and borderless digital trade.

New technologies can also help Commonwealth countries to diversify the goods and services they produce and trade and enable a wider range of participants to engage in international trade.

There is a persistence of significant gaps in the access and uptake of digital infrastructure and technologies across the Commonwealth means there are varying degrees of readiness to adopt to the significant changes and challenges resulting from COVID-19 and the increasing need for digital solutions.

The fallout from COVID-19 is likely to be uneven with some member states effected far more severely than others and this threatens to exacerbate existing inequalities within and amongst Commonwealth countries unless collective efforts are doubled to collaborate and share knowledge. Pooling experience and best practice on how to build inclusive and sustainable digital economies is crucial and mutually beneficial.

The Commonwealth “advantage” can be increased by working together on regulatory templates and frameworks which encourage investment in the digital infrastructure and technologies that facilitate broader participation. These are going to be needed more than ever in an environment of significantly heightened pressure on budgetary resources, to increase the affordability and accessibility for digital infrastructure and technologies.

There must also be cooperation on developing the digital skills necessary to operate in the economy of the future, digital literacy, and confident IT skills become non-negotiable for the environment of women, girls, and marginalized populations.

Female run businesses are predominantly small, medium enterprises, or microenterprises and these have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 lockdown measures introduced by governments.

Many SMEs are connected to the tourism sector and its supply chains and with the precipitated decline in travel to many Commonwealth countries demand for their

products and services have been wiped out, together with their livelihoods, security and dignity it brings for many women.

There is a worryingly high-risk of long-lasting negative effects on female labour force participation and the concomitant danger of stopping and setting back the progress made towards the empowerment of women and on eliminating gender-based violence.

It is vitally important for such potentially, and far reaching, economic impact, to be at the forefront of planning for the reset of our economies.

The Secretary General reiterated that she expected this week to be in Rwanda with CHOGM2020 and confirmed that when the leaders and other representatives of the Commonwealth family eventually assemble in Kigali, the considerations mentioned will be what they wish to focus.

In CHOGM2018, Commonwealth leaders emphasized the seminal role of ICT and of science, technology, and innovation more generally. This is supporting the governance promoting inclusion and sustainable development and reducing the digital divide.

It is worth noting that although there are Commonwealth countries that rank among the world's leading innovators the remaining Commonwealth countries lag behind the 130 countries ranked in the latest global innovation index, only 29 are members of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Secretariat is very active in working to change that, as are Commonwealth organisations and agencies.

Some Commonwealth Secretariat initiatives launched in recent years which are contributing to digital transformation and innovation in member countries:

- The Hub and Spokes Programme is an innovative Aid for Trade Initiative
- The Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub
- The Commonwealth Small States Centre for Excellence
- The Commonwealth Digital Connectivity Agenda
- The Secretary's Innovation for Sustainable Development Awards
- The Commonwealth Blue Charter
- The NEKTON Project
- The Commonwealth Office for Civil and Criminal Justice Reform
- Commonwealth Innovation Hub

Central to each of these programmes and projects is the vision to put common back into wealth and the wealth back into Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth Data hub is a digital data platform dedicated to developing and delivering innovative solutions which can be accelerate the achievements of the sustainable development goals in Commonwealth countries. It is provided as a resource for all Commonwealth stakeholders. The Secretary General urges all accredited organisations and entities serving the governments and people of our member nations including the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation and the Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network to utilise it to developing even more inclusive and even more innovative approaches and partnerships with each other and with other stakeholders.

The current Commonwealth theme "Delivering a common future: connecting, innovating and transforming" which would have been central to the programme, if CHOGM had taken place in 2020, should be in people's minds when tackling COVID-19, it's impacts and aftermath.

The Secretary General ended by calling for participants to take encouragement from one another as they plan and work together to deliver a common future that is fairer, more sustainable, more secure, and more prosperous for all.

To view the opening Introductory address by Baroness Patricia Scotland, click [here](#)



## **Keynote speech**

**Rt. Honourable Paula Ingabire**, Minister of ICT and Innovation, Government of the Republic of Rwanda

The Honourable Minister paid respect to the Honourable Ministers, Rt. Honourable Patricia Scotland and distinguished guests present, and said it was an honour and delight to deliver a keynote address for this timely and pertinent Commonwealth forum on technology, trade and innovation in a COVID-19 world.

This week would have seen all convene in person in Kigali, however, due to circumstances and thanks to technology, we are still able to continue conversations virtually, which is critical considering such times we are living in.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore a new era of relevant technologies, and innovations that are responding to societies pressing needs. Across the world entrepreneurs, innovators have rapidly conceived designed and deployed new apps, robots and ventilators have been developed, platforms have been built and other technologies that have come to the market to support efforts of different governments and societies as we combat the pandemic.

In Rwanda, the government has been able to leverage various applications of technology to support contact tracing, quarantine tracking, improved citizen outreach, the use of drones to disseminate messages, but also monitor the many measures that are put in place by the government are being adhered to. When it comes to maintaining business continuity for the private sector, for the government, civil society, and schools, and all video conferencing and e-commerce app payment systems have ensured that businesses are not disrupted during such a pandemic. These examples demonstrate the idea that necessity is the mother of invention.

The COVID pandemic has renewed focus on the importance of a strong private sector, and a critical importance of and a support for an entrepreneurial mindset. The World Economic Forum has highlighted how COVID-19 has impacted a wave of innovation in India, this illustrates how various crowd-sourced platforms initiated by the government, industry associations, start-up incubators have attracted entrepreneurial talent and consequently solutions for tackling the pandemic. In India, Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM) has launched the 'Break Corona' initiative, to crowdsource ideas, spur innovations and product solutions that would be crucial in

the fight against Covid-19. 'Break Corona' is said to have received over 1300 ideas and 108 product solutions within just two days of the launch.

In Rwanda, the COVID platform "Action Rwanda" was launched, it was a platform that encouraged and supported innovative ideas, over 400 submissions were received, and this initiative has helped to prop up solutions for cushioning COVID-19 impact on the Rwandese population. As a result of this the government of Rwanda is trying to see how they can leverage different partnerships across the economy.

Across many international economies you will see lots of entrepreneurial and innovative ideas that have risen to the task of tackling COVID-19.

The swift and strategic policy discussions that have leveraged the collaboration of stakeholders in both the private, public, and non-governmental actors have softened the devastating effects of the pandemic on global trade. A World Trade Organisation (WTO) report released on the 23 June 2020 confirmed world trade fell sharply in the first half of the year, rapid government responses helped to temper this contraction. WTO economists expressed belief that while trade volumes would register a steep decline in 2020, they would unlikely reach the worst-case scenario predicted in April.

Governments cannot afford to be complacent, and this is because the forecast for the global economy in the coming years is still highly uncertain. As a matter of fact, the World Bank, WTO, Organisation for Economic Co-operation, and Development (OECD), and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have all released reports that focus on the significant slowdowns in global trade and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the coming years.

Declining demand as well as, supply disruptions have dramatically affected export revenues. In addition, service sectors are reeling from the negative effect from the pandemic with tourism, transport, distribution services, heavily affected by the lockdowns and social distancing measures imposed for public health reasons.

The World Tourism Organisation estimated in March 2020, that international tourist arrivals would decline by as much as 20-30% in 2020. This could translate into a loss of close to 300-450 billion US Dollars (\$) in international tourism receipts and this impacts the export markets.

In addition, the World Travel and Tourism Council estimated again in March 2020 that the number of travel and tourism jobs at immediate risk are close to 100,000,000 (one hundred million).

The question is how do governments work together, to deliver a common future, connecting, innovating, and transforming?

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted more than ever, the importance of technology, indeed the rapid advancements we have seen in technology its applications have proved again that technology is both a critical infrastructure and an enabler for social economic development and sustenance. Countries across the globe have reported unprecedented and anticipated demand for information technology services, especially related to infrastructure. In March 2020, when Facebook reported that in countries hard-hit by the pandemic use of its online messaging services was up more than 50% and voice and video traffic doubled. In Italy, Facebook saw a 70% surge in overall usage and a 100% increase in time spent on group calls. Thailand reported a growth of 828% and 215% in the number of users using Skype, respectively. This all goes to show how digital technologies have been instrumental in minimizing disruption brought upon by the pandemic.

This pandemic has made it overwhelming clear that e-commerce is a game changer. E-commerce is a critical economic driver for both domestic growth and international trade. Indeed, the demand for e-commerce services has increased sharply during this pandemic. Rwanda has seen a lot of e-commerce companies really rising to the task and have recorded a tremendous increase of more than 166% in growth merchandise volume and 20% increase in the use of various platforms during the period. Rwanda has seen an increase in food delivery start-up companies, deliver services in general and this alone when you look how digital payments have evolved from the time of our first COVID case until today we have seen a sevenfold increase in terms of the volumes of transactions. There was a deliberate effort and intention by the government to promote the use of digital payment channels.

These examples illustrate the shifting consumer habits and behaviour that should be nurtured, supported, and incentivised moving forward. This new normal is a positive outcome and it is important to find ways to maintain some of the gains and good things that have happened thanks to the pandemic, even once we have this behind us.

The pandemic has also highlighted the obvious digital divide, all stakeholders need to work together to ensure affordability and accessibility of ICT devices, Internet connectivity, and required infrastructure is there.

We need to ensure our efforts in consumer and child protection, if these factors are not urgently addressed, we risk not only undoing the progress shown in this season

but also losing out on the overwhelming potential of technology, as a facilitator of trade and development.

There is a need to strengthen international co-operation as well as, the multi-institutional approach to improving trade. This pandemic is unprecedented in the sense that it has impacted the whole world and indeed different segments of the economy and population.

Now more than ever, vast sums of the entire population are united on fighting the same enemy and its impact. This means we have a common-ground and a need to exploit and leverage, we have an unprecedented opportunity to sit together and discuss challenges and needs and then brainstorm solutions that can be implemented and scaled across the various jurisdictions, solutions in one-part of the world can be used in another part of the world almost seamlessly.

It is becoming increasingly evident that the significant impact is larger scale and meaningful transformation can only be achieved if all partners work together. To ensure there is support for the creation and maintenance of talents, mindsets and attitudes required to weather the effects of the ongoing pandemic on global trade. Together, we can, together we will, together we should.

The Honourable Minister thanked all for their participation and looked forward to a fruitful workshop and continued engagement going forward.

To view the opening keynote address by Rt. Honourable Paula Ingabire, click [here](#)

## **Session One: Commonwealth Digital Connectivity**

Chaired by Gisa Fuatai Purcell, Acting Secretary General, Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) Panellists:

Honourable Paula Ingabire, Minister of ICT and Innovation, Republic of Rwanda

Honourable Jonathan Le Tocq, Minister for External Affairs, The Bailiwick of Guernsey

Arif Zaman, Executive Director, Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network (CBWN)

Question: What is key to creating a digital economy, and why?

- The key turning point for the Bailiwick of Guernsey in creating a stronger digital economy was when the government discontinued ten-year censuses from being physically conducted. The government created a "rolling electronic census", this change that occurred approximately five years ago ensured that the government for the first time had real-time information. For a small island state that has a population of 63,000 people, the online census produced far more accurate data than the physical census. This data has allowed the government to create apps and information for much better evidence-based decision making by policymakers but also to improve services for the community.

- Minister Ingabire agreed that it is important to have information and data sharing. Data sharing is essential, to assisting collaboration between nations and filling information gaps, increasing innovation, exchanging best practices, but also allow for nations to seamlessly trade across borders.
- The Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network (CBWN) through an act of intervention at the last Women's Affairs Ministerial meeting in Nairobi, in September 2019, guaranteed through persistent lobbying that a single reference to the gender digital divide was included in the closing communique message for the Ministerial event, and this must be acknowledged and ratified during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2021 (CHOGM2021) to ensure positive change. Further action is needed to address the gender digital divide, in both words and deeds, women must be centrally involved in decision forming processes. If women remain sidelined, it is not sustainable, right, or fair, and governments need to ensure change.
- The Chair noted the Republic of Rwanda has made outstanding progress in terms of gender equality, with 62% of Rwanda's national legislature made up of women and are currently number one in the world for this.

Question: What have your respective countries/organisations achieved that is seen as a contributing factor for creating a common approach in promoting the digital economy. (to Ministers of Rwanda, Guernsey, and Arif Zaman respectively)

- The government of Rwanda made deliberate and intentional decisions to invest in building a fibre optic network that connects all districts of the country and all border points to create quality infrastructure, starting 25 years ago after the genocide. This was made with the intention that the private sector would subsequently invest in rolling out last mile connectivity.
- Other aspects around connectivity must be addressed as they are important, such as signal strength, but also affordability of devices, as well as having the right content creation, these are all drivers and triggers for infrastructure development that ensures accessibility in-country. Ensuring investments continue and last mile solutions are reaching all schools, hospitals, units of government, and in every home. This will take a number more years to achieve, in Rwanda, but can only be achieved with good infrastructure.
- The liberalisation of telecom markets is essential, the initial development of national infrastructure in Rwanda occurred at a time when there was only one telecom company in-country. The government had to think about liberalizing the telecommunications market and ensuring there is competition nationally.



The telecom sector cannot ensure affordability if markets remain controlled or dominated by a single player.

- In Rwanda, the mainstay telecom infrastructure was built between 2001-2005, and the subsequent five years were spent on ensuring there was development of apps and services that could be developed from the existence from the fibre infrastructure.
- The protection of assets is essential and that is when the government of Rwanda started to consider Cyber Operation Centre infrastructure and the development of a national Computer Emergency Response Teams (CERTs), to safeguard national information and infrastructure assets. In addition, a data centre was built for the needs within the government and sector.
- Consideration was given to how the technology was going to support other Rwandese government sectors such as, agriculture, education, health, as well as, how to facilitate the technology for community development.
- Improving the nations digital literacy was crucial, consumers must be empowered, it is important for them to understand and to leverage tools, eservices that are put at their disposal. The “Digital Ambassadors programme” was initiated across Rwanda, training citizens throughout the year, on how to use the phone to access e-services consolidated onto one platform. This helped drive digital inclusion and attempted to bridge the digital divide. The private sector has also been engaged by the Rwandan government insuring there is easy access to ICT devices, such as, laptops, smart phones, and tablets. At the same time, accessibility must also be addressed, with the creation of financing schemes to allow for people to buy these devices.
- It is essential that governments create flexible policies and regulations, to build agility into policies and regulations that are developed. Rwanda is positioning itself as a “proof of concept country”. Where effort is made to attract talent from across the world not just in Rwanda to create digital solutions that are new to the world, unique to the challenges that Rwanda faces. Once the Rwandan government can test it, there is an opportunity to scale it to the rest of Arica and other countries off the continent. This could be adapted to any other emerging economy with a similar set of challenges. A proof-of-concept business model can be adopted everywhere.
- Small islands are often isolated, the Bailiwick of Guernsey, includes the inhabited islands of Guernsey, Sark, Herm and Alderney. Mainland Guernsey lies 30 km off coast of North-West France. A small part of the population, 2%

in total speaks Guernésiais with the majority speaking English. The Bailiwick of Guernsey has been connected to the British Crown for 800 years, as a Crown Dependency, but the islands are independent and have their own government.

- Guernsey is currently COVID free, at the time of this event in June there is no social distancing, first place in British Isles and Europe that is COVID free.
- The Guernseymen and women have had to adopt working from home during the initial lockdown when first imposed, that forced the local population to change behaviour, the COVID pandemic has increased dependency on technology on a scale that has not been seen before.
- Even though Guernsey remains COVID-free for now, the behavioural changes enforced because of the pandemic has led the population to continue to use technology rather than go back to the old norm. Changing behaviour ensures a cultural shift and this is as important to building the digital economy as having the infrastructure and technology itself. Guernsey has seen an uptake of technology in a rapid way because of COVID.
- The electronic census Guernsey census confirms who is living in the Bailiwick of Guernsey, their employment status, details demographic issues, far more detailed than ever before. The government of Guernsey on the back of this has been able to identify target areas where there may likely be difficult issues as part of the COVID crisis. This has allowed the government of Guernsey to provide training that was necessary, as well as upgrade broadband speed, for example, to allow government and businesses to continue.
- The government of Guernsey has been able to communicate effectively over the various phases of lockdown, on what people were and were not allowed to do. The government was even able to monitor the mental health of people during this time using a community monitoring tool, and to ensure where community services were limited due to the impact of lockdown, identify the problems by using the community monitoring tool, and to rectify these issues where possible.
- The government of Guernsey has learnt that what digital does is enable people to learn very quickly. When this is coupled with the right training and community outreach this brings about behavioural changes. For example, the Guernsey government is fully operational and has been for the month of June, but not all desks are occupied any longer. There are opportunities for savings and Guernsey businesses are seeing this too, not just government.

- The government of the Bailiwick of Guernsey may not have been able to achieve this innovation and operate as affectively if they had not partnered in 2019 with a third-party contractor who had been awarded a contract to address digital innovation at the government level, because as a government of a small island state it would have been difficult to achieve without external support. There are advantages and disadvantages to being an island, the population is one disadvantage in that Guernsey is a densely populated island. The digital innovation partnership allowed government to move swiftly to get the latest.
- solutions and even businesses to make the most of the economic opportunities that came from partnering elsewhere.
- Without COVID the changes that have been brought about would have taken longer in the Bailiwick of Guernsey amongst islanders that are largely conservative in habit.
- The government of Guernsey does not want to turn its back on the progress that has been made and want this behaviour to continue as the new norm. To enable citizens to innovate and produce new businesses and opportunities for the next generation.
  
- Arif Zaman, Executive Director, CBWN wishes for the dialogue at government level to continue to focus on the role of women in business during CHOGM2021.
- It is necessary for meetings to have a proportional element of 50% of female.
- Malta in recent years ensured free childcare for Maltese women and this has allowed several women in Malta to be entrepreneurial, allowing women to free-up some of their responsibilities.
- It is important to define the barriers to gender digital equality. They range from the availability of infrastructure, but also financial constraints, ICT ability and aptitude, also perceived relevance of ICTs, safety and security remains an issue, especially the protection of children, it is also important to understand the social, cultural, and institutional context. Although the awareness of mobile internet is growing in most markets, it does remain consistently lower for women than men.
- GSMA have documented this clearly over several years. The mobile gender gap extends beyond ownership and access, even when women own a mobile phone, the reality is they use a smaller range of mobile services, and this is the general rule across all low-, and middle-income countries.

- In 2019, UNCTAD made the assertion governments need to improve access to the opportunities of the digital economy. It is important to bridge the digital divide, to find opportunities for women entrepreneurs to find jobs and bring in income.
- It is important to think about the upward mobility of women beyond the informal sector or the underground economy think about mentorship programmes and vocational training. Apprenticeships, internships, and leverage business networks for women leaders in e-Commerce.
- It is important to look at how the digital economy can be a driver for inclusivity particularly in the services trade ranging from communications to transport, finance, education, tourism, and environmental services. In Pakistan 57% of the economy is service based economy, this is mirrored in other Commonwealth countries. The CBWN have begun discussions with other accredited organisations that are active in this area, whether ICT, music or design or architecture to bring about the first initiative around women in the creative industries in the Commonwealth. It is important to move beyond STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) to STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics). To include Arts in the broader sense the use of design and technology to harness innovation.

Question from Abdul, from the continent of Africa: A question to Honourable Paula Ingabire. Should governments in Africa encourage their respective communications regulator to increase the price of spectrum at auctions. How does Rwanda address this challenge?

- Rwanda does not auction spectrum for licensed operators, the Rwandan regulators do equitable allocations and so operators pay regular annual fees, the annual spectrum fees are set through a ministerial order. In fact, Rwanda has one of the lowest spectrum fees in the region and among the lowest in the world. The government of Rwanda treats spectrum as a crucial resource, their approach is to plan for available spectrum and to make it available to licensed operators but not through auction.

Question on digital literacy from an unidentified audience member: With regards to digital literacy do you see any barriers for other Commonwealth states to replicate this? What could be done to promote sharing and best practices? (Question to Minister of Rwanda)

- Nations can review and contextualise how Rwanda has implemented the

- “Digital Ambassadors Programme”. It is important to look at different communities’ literacy levels, to then determine how you craft a digital literacy programme than resonates with current literacy levels that they have and that will allow them to want to improve their basic literacy, but also at the same time want them to build their digital literacy skills.
- One challenge would be for a large more populous country, then it is a case of finding the right resources to roll-out such a programme within that country.
- Rwanda is benchmarking the International Computer Driving License (ICDL). It has four different levels beginners (basic literacy), intermediary and then two higher levels. There are many similar frameworks to ICDL and for every country it is important to understand what will work with the communities that you provide for.
- Rwanda chose to customise the ICDL programme, to promote a central platform through which all government services are provided, to educate citizens to have the right understanding of the digital platform, it was therefore necessary to give users the digital tools by ensuring a particular component pertaining to this was inbuilt into the ICDL programme.

Question from Robert Hayman, CTO: How does your government plan to liberalise the use of ICTs even further since businesses, educational establishments have adapted and embraced home working and learning during this time. Are national policies and strategies in need of further review, or are they flexible enough to focus on the social changes that have come about since COVID? (To Minister of Guernsey)

- Guernsey has a parliamentary debate taking place the first week of July on what is known as the “Revive and Thrive Recovery Plan”. It is apparent that digital innovation is not the solution. It is essential that cultural and behavioural changes take place alongside that, what this does is it stimulates a debate around the government plans to bring online some of the things that were not seen as essential e-services in previous times.
- The Bailiwick of Guernsey will have to considerably spend money to ensure this happens, the government has had to borrow to pay the prices as passed, the “Revive and Thrive Recovery Plan” is a very forward-looking document and encouraging progress is being made.
- Guernsey is looking at developing health innovations through partnerships to create new opportunities such as telemedicine, to create telemedicine for business to emerge out of that for the global marketplace. Also health medical

passports so that individual records belong to an individual, these will be data protection compliant, but the Guernsey government believe it is worth investing in these things now, because having this data would enable an individual to have access to their medical records, which they can use not only for insurance and travel purposes, but for making more informed decisions and getting the services they require empowering them to make decisions and actions that they would have not been able to do in the past.

- The Guernsey e-governance services are currently across many varying web portals, each government department has their own system and for citizens this causes confusion, with multiple registrations required for various government services. The government plan is to bring all these systems together to offer one government portal that will allow citizens to do everything under one account such as tax, health, social security or applying for a permit. The government of Guernsey is accelerating this process into the new era with the buy in that is required from their island community, this would not have been as easily negotiated before COVID. COVID has allowed that debate, a once in a generation thing, as a small jurisdiction, to move forward positively and collectively, it is more than just digital.

Question from an unidentified audience member: What sort of tech projects have been put in place for the women in Guernsey? (To Minister from Guernsey)

- The government of Guernsey intends to further nurture a creative tech industry and not put barriers up for women to engage in app development. There are a number of women entrepreneurs in Guernsey that are looking at a number of innovative digital solutions to lifestyle issues and in order to facilitate that the government needs to facilitate those that are mothers, for example, to enable them to be able to work from home more easily, to have flexible hours to working and access to digital technologies. Digital technologies enable all of this.
- Guernsey is due to adopt new laws around discrimination that will give support to women's rights, and this looks certain to be passed by government. One of the things this will do is bring the opportunity for reasonable adjustment with regards to employment contracts that will be placed on businesses that otherwise might not have happened. Multinational companies operate in Guernsey, and these operate a best practice common to Western Europe, but the new laws when passed will force all companies to adhere to the relevant terms and make it mandatory.



Question from an unidentified audience member: What sectors is Rwanda focusing on in terms of forging partnerships around integrating technologies and innovations? (To the Minister of Rwanda)

- The Rwandan government is focusing on three Agri-tech, Fintech and Health.
- More than 70% of the Rwandan population is dependent on agriculture. The more investment in agriculture will increase peoples purchasing power.
- Secondly, Rwanda is leveraging the mobile phone as a key tool that is driving financial inclusion and financial literacy. Fintech allows Rwandans to empower and improve their wellbeing, in simple terms ensuring wealth creation for citizens, so with a focus on fintech will help achieve this financial inclusion.
- Thirdly, e-healthcare is essential to ensure every citizen has access to good quality healthcare. Babylon Inc a USA company is currently providing digital first healthcare services in Rwanda. Digital first healthcare relieves burden on healthcare workforce.

To view the discussions of Session One, click [here](#)

## Session Two: Commonwealth Digital Connectivity Report 2020

The first study to focus specifically on digitalisation in the Commonwealth which fills an important gap by providing new knowledge on the state of the digital economy in the Commonwealth, the challenges posed by digitalisation, and the opportunities available for Commonwealth members to harness the benefits of digitalisation for development and to boost intra-Commonwealth trade.

**Session Two** examined in detail the findings of the 2020 Commonwealth Digital Connectivity Report. This Ground-breaking Report was the first study of its kind focusing specifically on digitalisation in the Commonwealth with a strong focus on giving the Commonwealth greater visibility of the challenges posed, and the opportunities available to harness these benefits for development and to boost intra-Commonwealth trade.

### Panel discussion: Commonwealth Digital Connectivity Report 2020

Chair: Freda Miriklis, Chair, CBWN Panellists:

- Karishma Banga, Senior Research Officer, Overseas Development Institute and Author, Commonwealth Digital Connectivity Report 2020
- Akanksha Sharma, Research and Insights Director, GSMA
- Dr Salamat Ali, Economic Advisor-Trade Economist, Trade, Oceans and Natural Resources Directorate, Commonwealth Secretariat

Dr Karishma Banga, Lead Consultant, and author of the 2020 Commonwealth Digital Connectivity Report, discussed important findings, considering opportunities and challenges of digitalisation for Commonwealth countries. She reported that new opportunities are presenting for low income and developing countries. Some of the empirical analysis suggests that a doubling of the internet penetration on average increases manufacturing productivity by 5.3% in low-and middle-income countries. If Commonwealth countries can achieve a broadband penetration rate of 50% (global average) Commonwealth GDP can be significantly boosted by US\$74263B.

Digital technologies can also assist in the diversification of production and access to new markets. For example, some of the research on India indicates that digital competent firms are producing 4-5% more sophisticated products than those that are not as digitally competent. Companies investing in digital technologies can climb up the value chain ladder. Recent studies from ITC in 2018 found that online trade is more diversified than offline trade – Bangladesh was able to diversify into non-

traditional sectors. Some of the research at ODI also suggests that some of the agricultural and digital platforms are enabling Ugandan farmers to reach out to new markets. A recent survey of 821 farmers in Uganda found that diversification of markets and access to new customers were important channels where farmers benefited. New models of e-commerce led development for small states are also being explored in relation to specific challenges these states face in terms of geography, remoteness, connectivity costs etc. They also are not able to achieve the same economies of scale from agriculture or manufacturing led development so e-commerce presents new opportunities for these countries to reach out to traditional and new trade partners.

There is a significant digital divide pertaining to access to the internet, when looking across the Commonwealth, namely in relation to: ICT trade disparities, digitally deliverable export services, access to skills, and policy and regulatory readiness.

- ICT trade disparities and digitally deliverable export services: Commonwealth countries' that trade in digitalised products through electronic transmissions are most reliant on Commonwealth markets for exports and imports of digitalised products, highlighting that intra Commonwealth trade is significant. For example, Mozambique is 100% reliant while Eswatini, The Gambia, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Fiji and Zambia rely on over 99% for exports of digitised products. Countries like Solomon Islands, Ghana, and Samoa rely on Commonwealth members for over 90% of imports of digitalised products.
- Access to skills: The digital divide is stark amongst countries' able to invest in skills and development. A 1% increase in skills can increase the impact of internet penetration on manufacturing labour productivity in the Commonwealth by roughly 7.4%. Those that can access the internet are better placed to adapt and adopt technologies to leverage productivity gains. Over 70% of the population living in Australia and the UK purchase or order goods and services online. Comparatively, less than 12% of the populations in Bangladesh and Botswana can purchase goods or services online. Similarly, there are a considerable number of untapped opportunities for youth that are Not in Employment Education or Training (NEET). The NEET rate is quite high in countries like Trinidad and Tobago (52.1%), followed by Kiribati (46.9) and The Gambia (34%). There is also a gender digital divide in terms of access to internet, ITC skills, trade facilitation which is even starker amongst low income and small state countries of the Commonwealth.

- Policy and regulatory readiness: The report also considered policy and regulatory readiness of countries across the Commonwealth. In the case of Papua New Guinea (PNG), Dr Banga's research showed that there was a lack of the following: basic and technical skills to adapt technologies; adequate legislation for e-commerce; and policies to adapt supporting services (e.g. financial). There was also inadequate basic hard infrastructure to sustain the digital economy, such as telecommunications and data networks. Specific challenges also emerge around geography and cultural heritage; connectivity costs; high infrastructure and operating costs due to poor electricity penetration. PNG is in the process of enacting an Electronic Transactions Act however lack comprehensive legislation on digital issues such as data protection, cyberterrorism and/ or data localisation.

The following sever initiatives were recommended to help bridge the digital divide:

- Facilitating best practices on internet and broadband digital infrastructure
- Promoting e-commerce and investments in a data-driven economy, including through the formulation of a supportive legal and regulatory framework on 'data infrastructure'.
- Exploring use of smart agriculture and fisheries technologies such as blockchain in product traceability, smart phones for extension services, e- payment systems for online markets and sales, and connecting to suppliers and markets.
- Sharing experience on e-governance and smart cities
- Promoting an enabling policy and regulatory regime through pro-active policies at the national level.
- Promoting digital skills development within the Commonwealth □ Deepening co-operation for inclusive and sustainable development.

Dr Akanksha Sharma, Director of the organisation representing mobile operators worldwide – GSMA, shared key recommendations from GSMA's latest 'Digital Health: A tool for building resilient health systems in a COVID-19 world' report. GSMA have produced a health system strengthening tool that was funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Their research aimed to reveal the transformative impact digital health can have in developing countries which included four Commonwealth countries - Nigeria, Rwanda, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

Some of the challenges facing health systems in developing countries include:

- At least half of the world's population lacks access to essential health services (WHO & World Bank)
- While developed countries grapple with public health challenges, these challenges are much more pronounced in developing countries where health systems tend to be weak and fragile.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified existing weaknesses and gaps in health systems.

Digital technology has helped manage COVID-19 during the crisis where the doctor in China who first came across the virus created a Facebook Group to discuss and share ideas on the symptoms. Digital health was used during the crisis to manage COVID-19, for example: In Kenya, Flare convened available private and public ambulances on a single network. By playing a key role in the referral system (transferring patients to the right point of care), Flare was able to move patients in ambulances to limit further COVID-19 exposure and, in more serious cases, moved to higher levels of care. In India, Bharti Airtel collaborated with local hospitals to launch a self-diagnostic tool to check for COVID-19 symptoms. While in China, Alibaba developed an AI system for diagnosing COVID-19, claiming its new system can detect coronavirus in computed tomography (CT) scans of patients' chests with 96 per cent accuracy against viral pneumonia cases.

In the short term there are actions that developing countries can take to deal with COVID-19. Firstly, access and understand the current situation by understanding the current state of the health system and digital health system of each country; assess what the government is already doing to respond to the pandemic and begin coordinating efforts and collecting and sharing information. The second action is to take stock - understand the country's existing resources and what has been accomplished; and then analyse what has been done in previous disease outbreaks to improve the response. Finally, draw on best practices by using tried-and-tested digital technology and health tools to amplify local efforts; and refer to global best practices on the use of technology in health.

Recommendations arising from the report for digital health stakeholders, include:

- Development partners and NGOs: Align efforts and support the government to build capacity to deliver policy and strategy. Work collaboratively with other health stakeholders to extend the reach of digital health.
- Start-Ups: Focus on problems that people care about and develop realistic business cases. Pursue partnerships.

- Mobile operators: Make a long-term, large-scale business case for digital health. Extend the reach of digital health services.
- Investors: understand the investment climate and the local context and nurture the investment climate.
- Governments/MoH: Develop enabling legislations and regulations and ensure they are enforced. Develop policy and strategy and be active promoters of digital health.

GSMA's latest 'Digital Health: A tool for building resilient health systems in a COVID-19 world' report can be accessed here: [bit.ly/digitalhealthGSMA](https://bit.ly/digitalhealthGSMA)

Dr Salamat Ali, from the Commonwealth Secretariat, considered trade more broadly. The structure of his presentation included a macro view of the: Commonwealth trade profile; Anatomy of trade in services; and the pandemic and services trade.

The total value of global Commonwealth exports (goods and services) in 2018 exceeded US\$3.5T; representing 15% of the world trade and 20% of intra-Commonwealth trade. Dissecting these numbers further between goods and services reveals that as the Commonwealth has many developing countries (48 countries) which sees many merchandise trade between members – around US\$2.5T in trade in 2018 and US\$2.2T in 2019 with world trade growing to 14% and intra Commonwealth trade is around 17%.

Services are a big component of the Commonwealth's trade. In 2018, the world trade, in services alone, was over US\$5T and 19% of those exports originated from Commonwealth countries. Services from Commonwealth countries is larger than its net imports. In 2018 imports were around 17% and exports were around 19% and one reason for this is because of financial services from the UK; IT services from India; tourism related services from small island developing countries and the Caribbean. This accounts for the larger percentage of export services from Member Countries. The trade in goods has been volatile however trade in services has been more resilient even during the Financial Crisis. The role of technology and other factors has seen a higher growth in services than goods with growth in services around 9% p.a. and goods around 5.5%. The share of goods and services by Commonwealth regions also varies. Here we see that in the African region has a higher percentage of goods manufactured compared to services; in Asia services reflects the Commonwealth average; while the difference in Caribbean is marginal (due to tourism) and the Pacific has a higher percentage towards manufacturing.



Overall, developed countries have a greater share of services exports in GDP by percentage. The world's share of services exports by % of GDP is around 13% and for Commonwealth countries, this is significantly higher.

The Commonwealth is not a formal trading block however some of the drivers for trade flow can be attributed to what is referred to as the 'Commonwealth Advantage'. The benefits are due to – a) the historical and cultural linkages leading to trade advantage (rule of law, language etc.); b) 11% advantage in trading of goods; c) 42% advantage in services trading and d) 27% advantage in FDI. The largest services exporters in the Commonwealth are – UK, Singapore, India, Canada, and Australia. Technology and internet account for the high percentage of exports in services. The way forward is to bridge the digital divide which exists amongst Commonwealth. Developed countries have greater access to the internet because it is more accessible and affordable compared to least developing countries where access is costly.

In closing, the moderator deduced that in the COVID-19 era, digitalisation is an important conduit to economic growth and international trade and now more than ever, there has never been a time of greater promise or greater peril. Indeed, the speakers highlighted that the internet is not a luxury as much as it is a necessity and that the only wrong move when it comes to Digital Transformation is not making any move at all.

To view the discussions of Session Two, click [here](#)

## **Session Three: Over-The-Top (OTT) Study Report**

Chaired by Honourable Anusha Rahman Ahmad Khan, Regional Advisor for East and South Asia, Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO), Former Minister for Telecommunications, Islamic Republic of Pakistan

### **Presentation: Over-the-Top (OTT) study report 2020**

Martin Koyabe, Manager, Technical Support and Consultancy, Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) and Dr Christoph Stork, Telecom Expert, Research ICT solutions (RIS)

- The CTO were issued with a mandate Commonwealth ICT Ministers at the Commonwealth ICT Ministers Forum in London in June 2016 to conduct a survey on behalf of the Commonwealth, to look at Over-The-Top services as an ongoing issue. The report was published to help ensure there was an understanding of the issues, to inform decision and policy makers, regulators and Ministers and Private and Public sector around the issues of OTT services. The CTO took that task to look at a global study.
- The first report which the authors have referred into this second report, looked at how people can better understand based on the consultations with relevant stakeholders in a number of jurisdictions the market dynamics, policy, regulatory challenges and opportunities of OTT services.
- The first survey was completed by Governments, policymakers and regulators, ISPs, telecom, broadcast and other network operators, OTT service providers, vendors, and content and application providers and Consumers (end-users), civil society and advocacy groups.
- There were lessons learnt from the first report. There are several things that influence OTT services, especially once the drivers for the technology are reviewed. OTT services are a communication medium or tool and have given rise to the rapidly expanding ecosystem of the app economy and how it has exploded during the COVID pandemic. OTT applications offer outwardly affordable communication solutions allowing customers to connect with a supporting cloud infrastructure. The devices are accessible anywhere in the world if there is extensive broadband infrastructure in country.
- With regards to the licensing issues and universal fund, how does OTTs contribute to the jurisdictions that they are used within. Consideration was paid to taxation, quality of service, net-neutrality, data protection and privacy,

interconnection costs that many operators do face, these were all evaluated in the first report. The second report the authors reviewed what were seen and identified as the many challenges, giving examples of how these challenges are being addressed across the Commonwealth, and to determine and identify what were the facts and myths.

## **Panel discussion: Over-the-Top (OTT) study report 2020: ensuring effective government policies and regulation in an ever-changing world**

### Panellists:

Kojo Boakye, Director, Africa Public Policy, Facebook

Dr Christoph Stork, Telecom Expert, Research ICT solutions (RIS)

Martin Koyabe, Manager, Technical Support and Consultancy, Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO)

Question: In view of the study conducted and the findings derived, and the complexity involved, do you consider the status quo is the best policy approach in addressing the regulatory imbalance, and competitive disadvantage for legacy telcos, or considering the necessity that the report stresses, that OTTs should be viewed from the internet value-chain perspective? (Question to Martin Koyabe)

- The report confirms there is a need for incumbent operators to be innovative, there are business models that they can come up with in partnership with OTT service providers, that could leverage some issues that are being articulated with regards to declining revenue. Data is the key, metaphorically it is the digital currency, to address future challenges then there is a need to shift the business model. The parameters of the business model should be defined, considering the opportunities and challenges.
- It is also important to look at the taxation model, in many countries that have looked at taxation approaches, they have only considered one level of taxation, consumer taxation, enforcing a digital OTT tax on consumers. However, the value chain of the OTT services, in addition to the consumer, there is a market player in-country (mobile operator) but also at the source, the company holding that information (OTT service provider). When you look at taxation at the local context, a flat rate taxation should be avoided, taxation policies must consider affordability factors and how people are distributed in country.

- It is necessary to look at other increasing revenue streams for national telecom operators, such as data and not focus only on the declining revenue streams. Voice traffic revenue cannot be looked at separately, as data usage now creates higher revenue for operators.
- Telecom operators are often chiefly responsible for investing and building the infrastructure in-country, in addition, in many countries' operators purchase spectrum through auctions or agreed government fees.
- Many governments do not heavily invest in building telecom infrastructure but leave it to the private sector to develop, in addition governments sell spectrum to operators, spectrum as a resource is largely free. However, governments do not provide industrial zones, incentives, or subsidies to the telecom sector. In fact, the telecom sector returns to the government and universal service funds (USF) in addition to spectrum fees.

Question: How fair would it be for the governments to ask for a taxation when the real investment is coming from the Mobile Network Operators (MNO). Do you think the solution could be for the MNOs and the OTTs to make an agreement to work together, where the proportionate increase of the profits of the OTTs are amicably shared, proportionately shared with the MNOs, so that MNOs can maintain their infrastructure. What alternative arrangements can be suggested if there are no taxes to the OTTs? (Question rhetorically asked and answered by the Chair herself)

- It is important to accept that there is a clash between the services that OTTs provide and what MNOs provide. What's App, or any other voice or chat service provide similar services to what MNOs provide.
- Governments should not be obliged to tax services where the basic costs are being incurred by the private sector.

Question: To address this issue, do you think operators should use the virtual network operator (VNO) or mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) mechanism, available to the operators, to give out a proportion of their voice traffic. Do you think that data can be shared in this manner? (Question to Christophe Stork)

- The different market players have different business models and difference investment centres, it would be problematic for operators to request revenue sharing with OTTs and vice versa. Revenue sharing would not work from a business, legal or equity perspective.
- Approximately 20-25 years ago when mobile operators took huge risks to invest into countries to improve communications infrastructure. There was no

enforcement at the time for these MNOs to share these large profits with the incumbent fixed line operators that existed in each respective country.

Question: Do you think a multi-stakeholder win-win model could be achieved with regards to revenue generation and profitability in the field of OTTs. What do you think is the role of the ITU, WEF and CTO in this area? What is Facebook trying to achieve in-country at a local level to help resolve some of the challenges for the local market players, as every country has their own dynamics? (Question to Kojo Boakye)

- OTT companies and mobile operators should work together, there are benefits of shared infrastructure, and Public-Private-Partnerships allow these discussions to take place, where governments put in place have many benefits. There are many studies that have taken place to review this, the most recent possibly the ABC study that spoke about the cost operators can save, up to 80% of the costs of all that infrastructure. Facebook can point to numerous examples of when the company has worked with operators in Asia or Africa, most recently in Africa Facebook has contributed to the roll-out of Open Access in partnership with mobile operators in-country.
- Facebook has worked with Airtel in Uganda and BCS Group (Broadband & Cloud Services Group) and in Northern Uganda, in areas where many considered the project unviable for 4G and 3G, 900km of fibre optic cable was rolled out in this country. Facebook has also rolled out fibre in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and South Africa in partnership with mobile operators.
- Facebook has recently confirmed a partnership in 2Africa, 2Africa is one of the largest subsea cable projects in the world, it is hoped that this will be operational by 2023 or the start of 2024. Partners on this project include China Mobile, MTN, Vodacom. These partners are all private partners that have bought into this idea that increasing connectivity is vital and connecting all people is necessary. It is not only one of the largest subsea cable projects, but it will be the first time that Africa is connected from East to West. It will also bring more capacity than this point in time, this is evident of Facebook's understanding that Africa will require increased capacity in the coming years.
- Facebook is always open to partnerships.
- Facebook would like to thank CTO for their second OTT report, as well as a recent report published by the ITU looking at the OTT sector - "Economic impact of OTTs on national telecommunications/ICT markets". The CTO, ITU

and WEF have been responsible for looking into issues surrounding the OTT sector, dispelling myths, and encouraging dialogue on these issues discussed and have an important role to play.

- The CTO report concludes that it is important not to stand still but continue in a positive way, whether that is through taxation solutions and many governments within COVID are looking into ways of generating income.
- Facebook awaits the report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) of the global digital tax deal, this report has been delayed until 2021. The OECD is helping to lead negotiations between nearly 140 countries in a bid to finally solve the question of where tax is paid by major digital firms, such as Facebook, and how much.
- It is important to keep this dialogue going, and make sure that policymakers are guided by facts.
- Net neutrality must be considered when discussing these issues, net neutrality must be central to any discussion when discussing accessibility, allowing citizens access to essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic must remain a priority to all countries as well as in a post-COVID-19 world.

Question from an unidentified audience member: Should the Commonwealth develop a common policy for net neutrality?

- There was agreement that CTO could work on reviewing net neutrality policy issues, it would be helpful for CTO to give guidance in this area.

Question from an unidentified audience member: In view of the ongoing cross-border linkage of data and its criticality to trade, how is CTO addressing the need for international agreements on such jurisdictional matter?

- With regards to cross-border issues, there are international agreements that exist in specific regions, such as, the continental agreement in Africa connecting all states to ensure there is easiness of restrictions for trade. Technology is key in enabling transactions, as well as safeguarding users, it is important that governments have flexible enough policies and regulations, cross-currency issues must be addressed as well.
- There is no one size fits all, there are various regulatory challenges with AI, blockchain, big data, cloud computing, these are all data centric. The issue of data protection means that some regulation may need to be delegated from sector specific regulation to cross sectorial regulators, cybersecurity for example is not just for ICT regulator but also commerce, law, and a whole

range of sectors, the same for data privacy and consumer protection. In a country with a strong consumer protection agency, it may make sense to outsource data protection aspect from the ICT regulator to this consumer protection agency, but for another country that is without such an agency the move would not make sense.

To view the discussions of Session Three, click [here](#)

## **Session Four: Commonwealth Trade Developments**

This session looked at key developments in Commonwealth trade, during the UK term as Chair-in-Office (since April 2018). These include the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda, the Commonwealth Standards Network, Commonwealth She Trades and the CBWN 10 Point Action Plan on Women in International Trade which builds on the London CHOGM commitment in this area.

Chair: Arif Zaman, Executive Director, Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network

Panel discussion: Commonwealth trade developments: exploring trends and patterns

Panellists:

- Clarisse Irabagiza, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, DMM, HeHe, Republic of Rwanda, UNCTAD eTrade for Women Advocate
- Shafquat Haider, Executive Committee Member, SAARC Chamber and Managing Director, Ciproco Computers, People's Republic of Bangladesh

To view the discussions of Session Three, click [here](#)