
Pacific Regional Digital Trade Workshop : Panel discussion on Digital Trade Negotiations and Related Agreements and Provisions in the Pacific

Kim Kempel

Trade Adviser, CSSO Geneva

3 September 2024



The Commonwealth

Outline of the presentation

1. The Commonwealth Small States Office (CSSO)
2. Existing Support on E-Commerce and Digital Trade
3. Examples of Specific E-commerce or Digital Trade support
4. Future Potential Support
5. Implications of current negotiations for Pacific Pacer plus members



The Commonwealth Small States Office (CSSO)

- **CSS:** 33 Commonwealth members are defined as small states (across Pacific, Asia, Africa, Europe, Caribbean & America)
- **Origin:** Opened offices in Geneva - 2011 (CHOGM)
- **CSSO in a nutshell:**
 - Diplomatic base for small state envoys to various international organisations
 - Subsidised office space for diplomatic missions with two person secretariat
 - A business centre for tenants and visiting small state delegations
 - Technical assistance & support from resident technical experts in the work of international organizations in Geneva (Trade & Human rights)
- **Role and Purpose:**
 - Facilitating the representation and effective participation of small and developing states in international discussions and decision-making in Geneva (international “hub” for diplomacy)
 - Providing small states with a presence and ensure they are able to project, articulate and defend their national interests in international negotiations, in particular on matters of trade and HR
 - Supports other Commonwealth small states not physically present in Geneva
 - Represents the Commonwealth Secretariat vis-à-vis the United Nations, WTO and other international organisations in Geneva
- **Resident Missions:** Currently, 5 Permanent Missions (Malawi, Guyana, Seychelles, Vanuatu, Samoa) & 2 regional organisations: OECS (Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States) and Pacific Island Forum (PIFS) , for now...

Africa	Asia	Caribbean and Americas	Europe	The Pacific
Botswana	Brunei Darussalam	Antigua and Barbuda	Cyprus	Fiji
Eswatini	Maldives	The Bahamas	Malta	Kiribati
Lesotho		Barbados		Nauru
Namibia		Belize		Papua New Guinea
Mauritius		Dominica		Samoa
Seychelles		Grenada		Solomon Islands
The Gambia		Guyana		Tonga
Gabon		Jamaica		Tuvalu
		St Kitts and Nevis		Vanuatu
		St Lucia		
		St Vincent and the Grenadines		
		Trinidad and Tobago		

Existing support on E-commerce and Digital Trade

- CSSO v Commonwealth Secretariat work:
 - **Comsec:** digital transformation and TA more generally (advocacy; research and analytical support, policy advice and capacity-building; establishment of platforms and tools; and delivery of in-country technical assistance) eg Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda (Digitalisation)
 - **CSSO:** trade-related aspects of e-commerce and digital trade; unique small state focus; trade policy and negotiations support.
- Focus:
 - Empower CSS to engage in MTS, via technical, strategic inputs for policy discussions and negotiations on rules (JSI)
 - Assist to identify, assess policy options, articulate trade related e-commerce needs, priorities; interests (under 1998 WP and Moratorium)
 - Real-time on the ground support : planned activities and ad hoc requests
 - Ultimately facilitate trade growth by ensuring that international frameworks and rules and members' development needs, priorities and interests align
- Deliverables:
 - Capacity-Building and Technical briefings/seminars/ workshops
 - News briefs, negotiating briefs, analytical documents
 - Ad hoc requests (legal analysis; Ministerial briefings, presentations, statements; etc)
 - Support regional and national policy-setting processes on e-commerce and digital trade

Examples of Specific E-Commerce or Digital Trade Support

- CSSO-wide CB workshops/ briefings : internally or in collaboration with other IOS, WTO members and specialised agencies (convening power)
 - Eg UNCTAD on e-readiness implementation;
 - Singapore & Australia on GST;
 - Briefing sessions on technical issues by other members/experts/think-tanks
 - ITU on SIDS-specific priorities – connectivity and digital transformation
 - Negotiating and Analytical briefs
- Pacific country-specific:
 - Briefings on E-commerce JSI state of play and technical issues
 - E-Commerce Rules Course for Pacific Island Policymakers (March 2022 and December 2023)
 - Dedicated negotiating briefs
- Tailored regional in-person workshops:
 - OECS E-Commerce Workshop-Steps Towards a Digital Economy in 2019 (precursor to launch of OECS e-commerce strategy and readiness assessment)
 - Commonwealth Regional Workshop for Africa –session on digital trade and WTO developments
- Awareness-building and raising visibility in public fora:
 - CSSO/UNCTAD 2023 WTO Public Forum Panel on ‘Harnessing the digital creative economy in small economies: Creating pathways towards services-led diversification’

Future Potential Support

- Work Programme and Moratorium:
 - Support for ongoing reinvigorated discussions
 - Deeper dives into specific thematic issues
- E-Commerce Agreements:
 - Textual Analysis
 - Demystify technical elements
 - Unpack legal and policy implications
 - Can tailor-make support to the Pacific context

Implications of current negotiations for Pacific Pacer Plus members

- E-commerce/digital trade agreements: predictable regulatory environment
- However, significant digital divide
- International and regional templates, models - according to Pacific context
- Technical nature of provisions, demystifying and unpacking policy implications
- CSSO is well-placed to provide support!

CSSO: Nations Business Center
1 Rue de la Pre-Bichette, 1202 Geneva

k.kampel@commonwealth.int



The Commonwealth