



JOIN OUR SESSION

# MAINSTREAMING THE COVID-19 RECOVERY: THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS, MSMES AND DIGITAL TRADE

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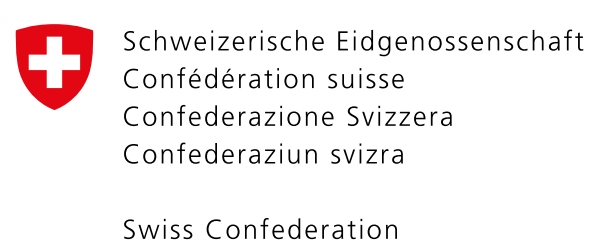
## @WTO PUBLIC FORUM 2021

Friday, 1 October from 11:30-12:30 in Room W / Public Forum Virtual Platform  
Registration is possible via WTO website until 6 September for an in-person\* and until 27 September for a virtual participation  
English | Spanish | French

The pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation of a great number of businesses, including MSMEs. Greater digital interconnectedness brings increased benefits – however, those without the requisite hardware or know-how will fall even further behind. Worldwide, women are still 8% less likely than men to own a mobile phone, and there are still 300 million fewer women than men who have internet access. Women, their communities, and national economies will not be able to realize their full potential in digital economies if inequalities in the affordability, access, use, and ownership of digital tools are not addressed.

This session provides insights into the experience of women entrepreneurs on the ground during the pandemic, with an emphasis on digitalization as well as what governments can do to support them. Speakers from the ITC, Colombia, Nigeria and Uruguay will share how gender and digitalisation is factored into planning for the post COVID-19 recovery. Closing remarks will be delivered by Ambassador Stephen de Boer, Permanent Representative of Canada to the WTO.

Organized by:  
International Trade Centre  
Permanent Mission of Canada to the WTO  
Permanent Mission of Colombia to the WTO  
Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the United Nations Office and other international organizations  
Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the WTO and EFTA (UN/ECE, UNCTAD, ITC)  
Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the WTO



\*until 27 September for WTO delegates who want to participate virtually or in-person



## THE SPEAKERS

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### **José Luis Cancela**

Ambassador / Coordinator of the Informal Working Group on MSMEs, Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the WTO

Ambassador José Luis Cancela is serving as Permanent Representative of Uruguay to the World Trade Organisation in Geneva. In 2018 he was appointed as General Coordinator of the Informal Working Group on MSMEs, Chairman of the Working Party on the Accession of Algeria to the WTO and during 2020 as Chair of the Council for Trade in Goods. A career diplomat, fluent in four languages and with a background in Law, Ambassador Cancela joined the Foreign Service in 1988, and has served in Bulgaria, the Kingdom of Belgium, the European Union, and the Kingdom of Spain. His last foreign assignment was as Permanent Representative of Uruguay to the United Nations in New York, from 2008 to 2013. While at headquarters in the Foreign Ministry, Ambassador Cancela served in the Direction General for Political Affairs, as Director of International Economic Organisms, as Secretary General of the Ministry and lately as Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs.



### **Vanessa Erogbogbo**

Head of SheTrades and Chief Sustainable and Inclusive Value Chains, International Trade Centre

With over 20 years of experience in trade and private sector development both in international development and with the private sector, Vanessa Erogbogbo oversees ITC's work on sustainable value chains, and trade and gender. The section she leads comprises three programmes; the SheTrades initiative, which is connecting 3 million women to market by 2021, GreenToCompete which leads ITC's strategy on trade and environmental sustainability, and Trade for Sustainable Development which provides solutions for improving sustainability across value chains. Vanessa Erogbogbo is a member of ITC's management action group and holds a number of advisory and steering positions, including Geneva Trade Platform, Forum on Trade, Environment and the SDGs, EQUALS Global Partnership, Ford Foundation Plus Fund Initiative. She holds an MBA from the London Business School, and MSc Information Technology and B.Eng Hons in Civil Engineering from Loughborough University, UK.



### **Opeoluwa Ashimi**

Founder and CEO Promane and Promade (M' Care Health), Private Sector Nigeria

Opeoluwa Ashimi is the Founder and CEO of Promane and Promade Ltd, a 100% women led and owned business. Promane and Promade focuses on using digital technology and AI to provide inclusive and affordable community health and medicines. Over 1million cases have been treated with their M'Care App and 300 rural women supported to access digital jobs and create digital businesses through their DigiWoman Initiative (both solutions featured on Forbes). Opeoluwa holds a dual degree in Pharmacy and Digital Health from the UK as well as an MBA. She is a Mandela Washington Fellow and has won several awards for her work including recognitions by the UNDP, the UN Equals Fellowship, EU-Africa Commission, Global Innovation Exchange, YGap Australia and Standard Chartered Foundation.



### **Gheidy Gallo Santos**

Head of the Presidential Council for Women's Equity, Colombian Government

Gheidy Gallo Santos is a lawyer from the National University of Colombia, with a specialization in Economics from Andes University (Colombia) and studies in Leadership and Global Competitiveness from Georgetown University (United States). She has more than 15 years of professional experience. In addition to working for the private sector and the Congress of the Republic of Colombia, she was part of the Advisory Centre on WTO Law in Geneva (Switzerland) and worked for government entities such as the National Planning Department and the Ministries of Agriculture and Trade. Her academic training and experience in the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies have been fundamental to lead the strategy of empowerment of Colombian women as head of the Presidential Council for Women's Equity.

## THE MODERATOR

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### **Didier Chambovey**

Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the WTO and EFTA (UN/ECE, UNCTAD, ITC)

Ambassador Didier Chambovey, Dr. oec., is head of the Swiss Permanent Mission to the WTO and EFTA in Geneva since 1st September 2016. He is part of the International Gender Champions network, which brings together decision-makers who are determined to make gender equality a working reality. Previously, he was Federal Council Ambassador and Delegate for Trade Agreements, and head of the World Trade Division in the Foreign Economic Affairs Directorate. From 2006 to 2011, he was Deputy Secretary-General of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). From 1998 to 2006 he served as deputy head of the Swiss Permanent Mission to the WTO and EFTA. Before his appointment as section head in the WTO Division in 1993, he worked in the field of economic cooperation with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Didier Chambovey joined the Federal Office for Foreign Economic Affairs in 1987 as scientific adviser in the GATT Division.



## THE DISCUSSANT

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### **Stephen de Boer**

Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Canada to the World Trade Organization

Stephen de Boer was appointed as Canada's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the World Trade Organization on August 21, 2017. He joined Global Affairs Canada in 2005 and has held various positions in the department, including in the Investment Trade Policy and North America Trade Policy Divisions. In 2006, he was named the Director of the Softwood Lumber Division. From 2008 to 2010, he served as the Director of the Oceans and Environmental Law Division and as Lead Counsel for Canada's international climate change negotiations. In 2010, he joined Environment Canada as the Deputy Chief Negotiator for climate change and the Director General responsible for Canada's international climate change negotiations and partnerships. Mr. de Boer returned to the department in 2013 as the Director General of the Trade Controls Bureau. In 2015, he was appointed Ambassador to Poland and in 2016, Ambassador to Belarus. Prior to joining the public service, he worked for the Government of Ontario.

## THE CONTENT

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The COVID-19 pandemic represents significant challenges to MSMEs globally, particularly women-owned and/or led businesses. We continue to witness how the after-effects of the pandemic will likely re-shape global supply chains and accelerate the digitalization of companies. Evidence shows the ability to pivot and tap into the digital economy meant some businesses fared better than others and were able to lay steady foundations for the post-Covid recovery.

The crisis has highlighted the importance of women entrepreneurs being equipped with the digital skills and knowledge needed to leverage digital technologies to increase productivity and usage of e-commerce platforms and social media to reach new customers. Further, the increased use of digitalization and e-commerce during the pandemic may have positive effects on women businesses' internationalization and ability to participate in global markets.

In aligning with the theme of "Trade Beyond COVID-19: Building Resilience", this session explores the opportunities digitalization offers to women entrepreneurs to strengthen their operations and build resilience in the post-Covid-19 recovery, looking specifically at the experience of women-led businesses leveraging IT technologies. In discussion with policymakers, women entrepreneurs and the private sector, this panel will provide examples of some of the opportunities and successes, showcase the governmental response to digitalization and recovery efforts and offer a private sector perspective on closing the digital divide to enable more women to build resilience post-COVID by leveraging the digital economy.

The panel will address the following questions:

- What is the value in mainstreaming women's economic empowerment and support for women owned and/or led MSMEs at the WTO?
- How have women entrepreneurs pivoted their businesses under challenging circumstances to adapt in times of Covid-19
- Digitalization in real terms: what do women entrepreneurs stand to gain from accelerating their digitalization efforts?
- How are governments responding to the requirement of providing a gendered recovery response?
- How are governments leveraging trade policy to address women's economic empowerment and COVID-19 recovery?

The theme of the proposed session reinforces this year's Public Forum sub-theme "Enhancing Resilience Beyond Covid-19", as it focusses on the importance of supporting women entrepreneurs and women owned or led MSMEs, who have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic. This session will address how to better mainstream this issue into COVID-19 recovery efforts as well as how to close the skills gaps exacerbated by the pandemic, while taking stock of what is still left to do collectively to ensure a more gender inclusive and sustainable trade environment as we rebuild and recover.

## **WE LOOK FORWARD DISCUSSING WITH YOU!**

PLEASE NOTE THAT A REGISTRATION IS MANDATORY.

