

The Digital Moonshot

Switch ON



Why we need to act now

Digital connectivity matters: being connected is increasingly recognized as a driver of any economy. It is vital for small businesses to engage in trade and be resilient to economic downturns. Participating in digital trade brings tangible social and economic benefits including new trade revenues for small businesses, more jobs and investments.

Many small businesses in developing countries are not able to go online on a regular basis, at an affordable rate, with the right set of skills to use that connectivity to trade: this digital divide is particularly important for those who are remote, disadvantaged or lacking resources to address the opportunity.

What is an ITC moonshot?

At ITC, moonshots represent our bold solutions to confront the challenges experienced by small businesses in developing countries, to participate in global trade. They are our raised ambition for gender, youth, digital connectivity and green trade, aligned to our updated strategic plan, and grounded in our core expertise of delivering trade related technical assistance.



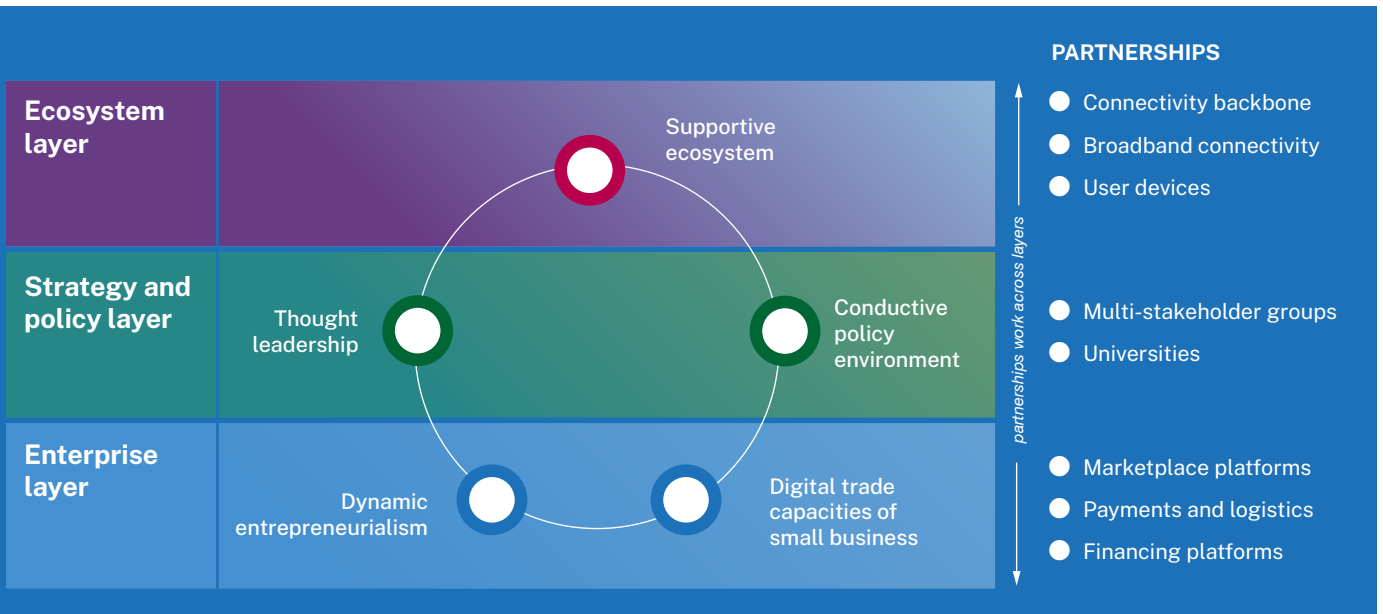
Our Vision

Our vision for Switch ON is to increase the scale and reach of our digital initiatives on e-commerce and tech entrepreneurship to reach 20,000 small businesses by 2025. This means prioritizing investments in connectivity and a conducive business environment –through hands-on skills training and information sharing, policy reform and key partnerships–so small businesses in developing and least developed countries can profit from digital trade.

The Switch ON initiative targets broader elements of trade facilitation and institutional support in

addition to the more targeted training related to digital entrepreneurship and e-commerce, resulting in coordinated action across the policy, institutional and enterprise levels.

Access to digital connectivity and related services plays an important role in increasing the competitiveness of small businesses in international markets, in particular those run by women, youth and people living in remote, rural or vulnerable communities.



ITC plans to connect 20,000 small businesses from 17 countries to online opportunities by 2025, strengthening 4,000 digital entrepreneurs and reinforcing a network of 30 business support organizations.



Our Response

1. Improved capacity of stakeholders to manage the implications of digital trade

- Lead multistakeholder working groups on shared initiatives, such as within the Broadband Commission.
- Develop thought leadership on the implications of digital for small businesses, through applications and extension of the ITC SME Competitiveness Survey.

Digital connectivity is a priority for the UN system – the Global Digital Compact will launch in 2024 – and is supported by multistakeholder initiatives. ITC’s contribution is to ensure that opportunities to make a living online, through digital entrepreneurship and e-commerce, are supported by these initiatives and that private-sector partnerships deliver the required digital connectivity and services.

2. A more supportive business ecosystem; affordable and accessible connectivity

- Train business support organizations on the implications of digital connectivity and ensure that they can advocate for connectivity and support changes to the digital ecosystem.
- Promote appropriate support of digital entrepreneurship, especially by providing services which enable widespread or effective use of digital connectivity by small businesses.

National digital trade strategies require a vibrant local innovation system that delivers digital solutions and services adapted to the local market. Digital entrepreneurship generates value-added, decent work opportunities. Moreover, the digital technologies have a large-scale multiplier effect in terms of productivity and business growth on other sectors such as agriculture, education, health care.

ITC works with digital entrepreneurs, with specific attention given to youth and women-led start-ups. We help them scale and grow in foreign markets, and connect them to investors, partners and international customers, applying the FastTrackTech methodology.

3. A more conducive policy and regulatory environment for small businesses

- Engage in public-private dialogue on digital connectivity and trade topics.
- Advise policymakers on the implications of digital trade related policy and negotiations.

ITC supports governments in their policy reforms and works with e-commerce ecosystem players to advance their capacities. To nurture these ecosystems in developing and least developed countries, we equip local business support organizations with the knowledge to advocate for digital connectivity and the skills to offer training and support.

ITC leverages its in-house expertise to ensure that thought leaders have access to focused research and innovation that can better target impactful change. Digitalization and its implications on small business will be a priority in our future competitiveness research. Public-private consultations and pilot implementations, such as digitalized Certificates of Origin, provide insights on best practices.

4. Improved capacity among small businesses to trade digitally

- Build an online community for networking and learning (ecomConnect).
- Establish local business support centers (hubs) to provide training and coaching.

Not all businesses are born digital: Switch ON brings essential skills of marketing and selling online to local merchants by accompanying beginners, the intermediate and advanced in e-commerce, whether of goods or services. By linking digital entrepreneurs with local merchants, a peer group of young, digitally oriented enterprises will receive support to grow their businesses.

To be accessible to different regions and the varied experience of businesses, ITC will establish local facilities for learning and support. They will offer a range of services to help small business transition to digital processes and solutions.

The goal is to show digital trade opportunities, and to create peer groups in the communities who support one another, do business together and grow local confidence, trust and experience in using digital tools.



Partner with us and get involved

Private sector firms are the principal driver for the innovation and adoption of digital technologies. Switch ON prioritizes innovative partnerships with local and international partners that bring global connections and world-class capabilities. Together, we can achieve scale among the entire local business community, including groups that may have so far been excluded.

Such partnerships may focus on delivering better or more affordable connectivity or may be centered on boosting complementary services that enable digital trade.

Existing partners include multistakeholder groups such as the Broadband Commission or Smart Africa, where Switch ON collaborates in advocacy, knowledge building and on joint projects.



'Although there is more to do in expanding digital coverage in Zambia, the connectivity gap is being addressed. The issue now becomes a usage gap – How do we ensure increased use of digital connectivity for productive economic activities? How do we ensure people leverage improved connectivity to make a living?'

Pethel Phiri, Acting Director General, Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority (ZICTA)

'At the Mobile World Congress 2023, we were able to meet partners and develop a stronger relationship with them. We got a deeper understanding of the market, which will help us in strategizing our expansion. It provides an opportunity to build our network and brand awareness.'

Taha Jiwaji, CEO, BEEM Africa



'Now, more than ever, it is crucial to accelerate the digital economy to foster inclusive development. Zambia, like other developing countries, requires targeted interventions that promote connectivity and digital skills. The Switch ON initiative plays a critical role in bridging the digital skills gap and uniting ecosystem players to take action.'

Stephen Muraga, Co-Founder, NyamukAfrica