

## **Harnessing technology for transformation and inclusive trade for Africa and the LDCs: The role of the WTO**

On 4<sup>th</sup> October 2018, during the WTO Public Forum 2018, SEATINI-Uganda in partnership with Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung-Brussels organized a Working Session on a theme “*Harnessing technology for transformation and inclusive trade for Africa and the LDCs: The role of the WTO*”. The major objectives of the session were: to discuss the ongoing WTO processes on Agriculture and technology-enabled trade; to discuss the role of the WTO in promoting technology transfer for Agricultural Transformation and inclusive trade for Africa; and to chart a way forward on how the WTO can use technology to promote an inclusive trading system for Africa by 2030. The Working Session which was chaired by Ms. Jane Nalunga, the Country Director of SEATINI-Uganda was comprised of a panel of four trade experts including Dr. Carlos Maria Correa, the E.D. South Centre; Dr. Arndt Hopfmann, the Senior Advisor on Economic and Trade Policy, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung-Brussels; Amb. Nathan Irumba, the E.D. SEATINI and Mr. Sylvester Bagooro, the Program Manager Third World Network Africa.

The panel’s submission evolved around what technology-enabled trade means for Agricultural trade and rural transformation in Africa and LDCs; how Africa can harness new technologies to increase her share of global trade thus realizing an inclusive trading system in 2030; and how to make the trading system more inclusive and catering for the development interests of LDCs in general and Africa in particular.

In the submission by the panel, it was reiterated that there is still a lot to be done to reduce poverty and inequality levels in Africa. Trade can play a big role in tackling this through promoting industrialization, revenue generation, job creation, addressing national trade deficit and in ensure more participation of African countries in global trade. Whereas the current discussion is on how to reform the WTO so as to make it more relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and more importantly to a technologically driven trade by 2030, at the onset of the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution African economies and most LDCs are still commodity dependent, with the weakening of the basis for diversification and sustainability. Therefore, key issues to consider under technology led trade are Access, Connectivity and Affordability, which should be complemented with the relevant skills and infrastructure.

In conclusion, it was largely acknowledged that the role of technology in Agricultural transformation and value chain enhancement in Africa cannot be underrated. It is for such associated benefits that WTO discussions on Technology-enabled trade should enable African countries to set up national strategies and build industrial capacities to better integrate their economies into high-value-added activities in the value chain, thus bolstering trade, creating jobs, and reaping better income opportunities. These discussions should also ensure that Technology-enabled trade maximizes the development potential of poor nations especially in Africa so as to spur inclusive growth, decent jobs and tackle inequalities. This will lead to the promotion of SDGs vision of leaving no one behind.