

more by e-platforms as the next market segment to move into from a growth perspective (e.g., TradeCard).

That being said, it is important to note a segmentation based on market characteristics. For those SMEs that are in a "many suppliers to one buyer" market, there is a greater likelihood of being required by buyers to adopt ICT practices that will pull them into GVCs thus facilitating their internationalization. However, for those SMEs that are in "many suppliers to many buyers" type markets, the drivers for a higher degree of ICT adoption are not as high, and their path to internationalization may be slowed down. For this latter group it would appear that there is a role for TPOs to facilitate the adoption of ICT practices and for e-platforms to accelerate the internationalization process.

Advanced payments, reverse factoring and credit rating information services are increasingly being used within e-platforms to support SMEs (e.g., Nafinsa, Coface, TradeCard, Project C). However, few stakeholders are principally focused on addressing the major ETF gaps with SMEs.

Moreover, TPOs often appear to be inclined to disengage from the ICT enablement of SMEs once they reach a certain level of sophistication in developing international trade opportunities. This poses a problem for their SME clients since most of the opportunities for ICT enablement are in the downstream GTM aspects of participation in GVCs and, in most cases, there is no neutral third party with a mandate to continue to facilitate ICT enablement. The exception to this observation is where national government trade facilitation platforms of integrated trade services are available.

Other areas identified where improvement in TPO services for SMEs by means of e-platforms could be made include reducing non-tariff barriers, providing easier access for SMEs to global markets, and improved matching of buyers and suppliers. In these cases, however, the acceptable time horizon for investment purposes is longer.