



## ITFA'S EMERGING LEADERS; BUILDING A GLOBAL COMMUNITY

*Written by Shannon Manders, Editorial Consultant, September 2023*

The ITFA Emerging Leaders Committee is currently enjoying its most prosperous year to date, marked by substantial global growth and the expansion of its diverse range of activities. These encompass the prestigious annual Emerging Trade Financier of the Year Award, the highly popular mentorship programme, and a multitude of both online and in-person events. This collective effort has solidified the group's position as the premier global forum for emerging leaders within the trade finance industry.

"Certainly, one of the biggest highlights of the year has been our increased involvement in various regions across the globe, including India, Australia, Dubai and the US, in addition to our already extensive activities in the UK," says Pouya Jafari, Chair of the Emerging Leaders (EL) Committee. "We're not just hosting events; we're actively building communities."

Growing engagement in the EL Committee's various programmes reflects a clear market need and the industry's enthusiasm for such initiatives, says Jafari, adding that senior figures from the industry increasingly attend EL events, and recruiters are often drawn to these gatherings to connect with emerging talent.

Looking ahead, he emphasises the Committee's dedication to expanding its activities even further, particularly in regions with untapped potential, such as European capitals, the Far East and Africa, where numerous young professionals are eager to participate in this dynamic forum.

Throughout the year to date, several Emerging Leaders events have taken place across the globe, as detailed in the following recap. Many thanks to all the EL members for their valuable contributions.

### **The changing landscape of trade finance in India | Webinar | February**

In February, the EL Committee hosted an insightful webinar titled 'The Changing Landscape of Trade Finance in India', led by Vikrant Yadav from CredAble. Panellists included Ajay Rajan from Yes Bank, Anand Jha from Deutsche Bank India and Nirav Choksi from CredAble. The online event drew participants from diverse industry backgrounds and geographical locations.

Choksi shed light on fintech's pivotal role in advancing trade finance. He spotlighted the country's substantial working capital gap, half of which pertains to MSMEs, underscoring the need for solutions. Rajan emphasised the collaborative potential of banks and fintechs and how functions such as API connectivity can minimise trade finance complexities. Meanwhile, Jha highlighted India's allure for multinational companies, especially in the consumer goods sector. He cautioned that while India offers substantial growth opportunities across categories, risk mitigation tools, such as trade credit insurance, require further development.

### **Trade megatrends seminar | London | March**

The EL Committee organised a seminar titled 'Trade Megatrends for 2023 – How Sustainable Will We Be?' on March 9 at St Botolph's Church Hall in Bishopsgate, London. The event brought together approximately 50 attendees from various segments of the trade finance industry.



The thought-provoking keynote session was delivered by Dr Rebecca Harding, a renowned international economist, trade expert and founder of consulting firm Rebeccanomics. Harding examined a number of significant factors shaping trade and supply chain finance in 2023, including the impact of the Ukraine conflict, the persistent influence of commodity prices and inflation, the evolving landscape of China post-pandemic, and the implications of sustainability regulations on capital requirements and emerging product market opportunities. Harding's insights illuminated the ongoing trends and their relevance into 2024 and beyond.

This was followed by a training session led by Gurshinder Sidhu of Leadership Circuit Ltd, who focused her presentation on leadership development, high performance and the advantages of coaching. Drawing from her own experience as a former trade finance executive, Sidhu shared valuable tools and strategies aimed at helping emerging leaders excel in an ever-changing business environment.

The event concluded with networking drinks, providing attendees with an opportunity to connect with fellow Emerging Leaders and industry peers.

"This was a great event to be part of," said Harding. "The Emerging Leaders are always a really engaging audience to talk to – full of questions and their own insights and views. It made the session really exciting to deliver!"

### **Careers in trade finance seminar | Sydney | March**

The Emerging Leaders of ITFA's Australia New Zealand Regional Committee organised a breakfast session titled 'Careers in Trade Finance' on the sidelines of a larger 'Supply Chain Industry Summit' on March 15 in Sydney, Australia.

The breakfast marked the committee's first in-person Emerging Leaders gathering since the initiative was launched in the region in 2022 and attracted 20 young professionals.

The event's primary objective was to raise awareness about trade finance as a viable career option, facilitate networking opportunities for the region's Emerging Leaders, and gather feedback on potential subjects for future events. It featured three guest speakers, including Debora Santosa from Bank of America, Sheila Hie from ANZ and Steve Scott from Taulia, who shared their valuable career experiences in trade finance. This led to a lively discussion among delegates, focusing on identifying relevant topics to support Emerging Leaders in building successful careers in the field.

In addition to the breakfast session, Emerging Leaders were invited to partake in the industry conference and networking sessions. The feedback received for both the breakfast session and the industry event was overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing interest in the possibility of making this an annual tradition.

### **EL seminar | Dubai | March**

In another first for the EL Committee, the ITFA Middle East Regional Committee (MERC) hosted its inaugural Emerging Leaders event in Dubai at the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) Academy on March 20. This event brought together professionals from diverse sectors, including banking, shipping and logistics, insurance and fintechs, under the capable leadership of Duarte Pedreira, ITFA Board member and Head of the Emerging Leaders, and Fatenah Danab, MERC Chairperson.

Speaking at the event, Sarah Mikhail, MERC EL ambassador, praised their leadership and guidance, adding: "This remarkable occasion brings together trade professionals across the ecosystem offering a prime



opportunity to enhance skills relevant to our market besides serving as a platform for them to connect, network and forge meaningful collaborations in our dynamic industry.”

The event commenced with a seminar titled ‘TradeTech: Digitalising the Trade Finance Industry’. Amr El Haddad from Kyriba initiated the seminar, engaging in a discussion on traditional supply chain finance and how innovative solutions optimise the working capital process. Following this, CA Pankaj Mundra of 360tf presented a session on the entrepreneurial journey of building tradetech firms across a range of different technologies. The day concluded with a networking event at Avli DIFC.

### **Happy hour | New York City | May**

On May 9, the Emerging Leaders from the ITFA Americas Regional Committee hosted a networking happy hour event at Treadwell Park (Downtown) in New York City. The event drew 40 Emerging Leaders from across the trade finance industry.

The gathering proved to be both engaging and dynamic, providing a platform for attendees to foster new relationships, exchange ideas and promote collaboration among members of the ITFA Americas Emerging Leaders group. For many, this marked their inaugural participation in an Emerging Leaders event, a testament to the significant growth of the group since it was launched in the region in September 2022.

“The enthusiasm and energy displayed by the Emerging Leaders community in the Americas were truly encouraging,” said Shane Halsey from WTW, member of the EL Committee and ITFA Americas EL ambassador. “This event, combined with ongoing engagement in other ITFA initiatives such as the mentoring programme and Emerging Leaders competition, underscores the strong desire among attendees to expand their networks and grow connections with peers who share similar career stages. As we move forward into the second half of 2023 and beyond, we eagerly anticipate building on the momentum generated by this initiative within the Americas.”

### **GTR Future-Proofing Trade Finance | London | June**

An entire panel of Emerging Leaders took to the stage at the annual GTR Future-Proofing Trade Finance event, where they were invited to debate the topic ‘Emerging leaders and future talent – is enough being done to compete?’

The session was led by Pouya Jafari, who was joined by Clara del Val from Allianz Trade Specialty Credit, Nigel Atta-Mensah from Crown Agents Bank and Katie Gates from DNB Bank.

During the session, the four speakers assessed the existence and impact of the trade finance talent gap, delving into the reasons behind its persistence and its implications for employers. The group also examined the attractiveness of trade finance as a career option, considering factors such as job availability and the composition of the talent pool. The conversation extended to whether a career in trade finance offers excitement, success and financial rewards in comparison to other industries, with a keen focus on work-life balance, growth prospects and compensation.

Valuable advice was also shared for individuals already in trade finance contemplating career transitions, addressing the industry's adaptability to career-switchers. To cap it off, the discussion ventured into the opportunities available for professionals from different sectors seeking entry into the trade finance industry.

The feedback on the session from both delegates and the event organisers was overwhelmingly positive, especially given the high level of interaction with the audience.



### **Summer Networking reception with Future of Export Finance | London | July**

In July, the Emerging Leaders joined up with members of the Future of Export Finance (FEX), a platform aimed at transferring knowledge and talent to the younger generation of the export finance industry, to co-host a collaborative networking event in London.

The event marked the second occasion for the two groups to meet up, this time at the historic St Botolph's Church Hall and gardens in Bishopsgate, London.

EL Committee Chair Jafari emphasises the significance of this collaboration: "Traditionally export finance and trade finance exist in parallel ecosystems. Even in banks, these functions are separated into different departments. But there is a multitude of crossovers between the businesses, so the events that we co-host with FEX provide a helpful forum to network with participants from both markets and learn from one another."

### **2023 ITFA Emerging Trade Financier Award | Global | Ongoing**

Undoubtedly, one of the EL Committee's standout moments of the year has been the resounding success of the 2023 ITFA Emerging Trade Financier Award. This year saw an unprecedented 13 submissions from practitioners and students worldwide, underscoring the Committee's dedicated efforts to attract a diverse talent pool to the industry.

A hearty congratulations is in order for the trio of shortlisted finalists: Charlotte Russo from AIG UK, with her project on 'The Trade Finance Talent Gap'; Neha Saxena from DBS Bank, who delved into 'Unlocking the Potential of Deep-Tier Supply Chain Finance'; and Ruby Zhou of O'Connor, who presented an 'ESG Pricing Incentive for SCF'.

All three finalists will showcase their projects at the upcoming annual ITFA Conference in Abu Dhabi in October. Conference delegates will play a pivotal role in selecting the winner through an online voting process, with the grand announcement slated for the Gala Dinner on October 12.

In recognition of exceptional work, the judging panel also unanimously decided to grant an honourable mention to Yemi Paul of HSBC for her outstanding proposal concerning the launch of a Trade Finance Cross-Institutional Diversity Network. The panel was impressed by her concept and intends to reach out to Yemi to transform it into a reality.

Keep an eye out for an exclusive interview with the winner in a forthcoming edition of GTR, the Award's dedicated media partner.

### **ITFA Martin Ashurst Trade Finance Mentoring Programme | Global | Ongoing**

The ITFA Martin Ashurst Trade Finance Mentoring Programme was established with a singular aim: to provide aspiring trade financiers with a deeper understanding of the trade finance industry, empowering them to consider it as a worthwhile career path. Now in its eighth year, this programme boasts a global participation of as many as 100 individuals from across the trade finance landscape.

In January, the mentees and mentors were carefully paired, marking the commencement of their collaborative journey. Since then, they have engaged in a range of activities designed to foster personal and professional



growth. This included a kick-off webinar that served as an opportunity for everyone to meet and delve into the best practices of mentoring and personal development – a newly introduced segment for this year's iteration.

During the webinar, Nigel Atta-Mensah introduced the programme and Veronika Koroleva of gunnercooke llp delivered an insightful presentation on the “dos and don'ts” of mentoring.

Participants were also invited to attend a soft skills webinar hosted by Marilyn Blattner-Hoyle from Swiss Re, a session that has garnered popularity in previous years.

“When you're in the early stages of your career, there tends to be a heavy emphasis on acquiring domain-specific knowledge, with less attention paid to individual capabilities and personal character development,” says Jafari. “But in this session, we learnt about the crucial importance of prioritising these aspects right from the start of one's career. Marilyn drew upon her own early career experiences to illustrate this point, which made her presentation highly engaging.”

Throughout the year, mentors and mentees have maintained regular one-on-one sessions, consistently reporting back that they have gained valuable insights and experiences from their interactions.

### **Collaboration with Bayes Business School | London | Ongoing**

Over the course of the year, Duarte Pedreira and the EL Committee have sustained their ongoing collaboration with Bayes Business School. The partnership, which was first established in 2019, involves delivering a specialised trade finance course designed for MSc and MBA students.

As in previous years, this collaboration has been enriched by the involvement of the ITFA community, including several EL Committee Members.

The course covers various aspects of the industry. Topics include trade finance fundamentals, structured trade finance, financial crime, credit assessment, export finance, fintech, insurance and investment in trade finance assets. The course also explores sustainable trade finance and offers insights into trade finance careers. Sessions include lectures, recorded presentations and live streams, providing a comprehensive overview of the trade finance sector.

One of the most gratifying outcomes of the initiative is the tangible success it has achieved. Some of Duarte's former students have ventured into the trade finance industry, which speaks volumes about the quality and impact of the course. Parth-Mahesh Damani, a former student, received last year's Emerging Trade Financier Award for his project titled ‘Improving the UK's Balance of Payments by Increasing Trade Finance Opportunities for SME Businesses’. This recognition underscores the substantial contributions and accomplishments stemming from the Committee's partnership with Bayes Business School.

“We look forward to continuing this fruitful partnership and fostering future success stories,” says Jafari. “Thank you to Duarte and all those involved for their dedication and commitment to advancing trade finance education and industry expertise.”