

Introduction

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*'Gender equality implications of globalisation and trade liberalisation arise because these phenomena do not eliminate existing inequalities in access to resources, power and decision-making between men and women in society. This is a reality that must be confronted directly or else much of the tremendous investment in promoting the social and economic advancement of women will have been in vain'**

This statement brings us to the heart of the rationale for producing an action guide on gender and trade. There is a realisation that many countries, especially smaller countries, have only limited capacity to participate effectively in trade negotiations and to formulate appropriate trade policies. Yet, there has been much less focus on the relationship between gender and trade. In fact many assume that the processes of globalisation and trade liberalisation are 'gender neutral'.

* Williams, M (2003) *Gender Mainstreaming in the Multilateral Trading System: A handbook for policy makers and other stakeholders* Commonwealth Secretariat page 17

The terms on which women and men enter the labour market vary. These often depend on women's and men's different roles and responsibilities within the household, as well as their different access to resources – material, financial, technological and social. Women are concentrated in the informal economy and contribute disproportionately, and in unpaid terms, to care. In addition, there is a need to take into account women's roles not only as producers and workers, but also as consumers. The impacts of trade policy are thus different for women and men. Export competitiveness has created opportunities for women, but has also destroyed livelihoods for many of them. While many non-trade concerns have entered the negotiating arena – public health, food security and the environment, for example – gender has not, nor is it yet considered in the important areas of trade policy and trade agreements.

This **Gender and Trade Action Guide** is based on two premises:

- the need for greater understanding within public and private organisations and institutions of the gender implications of trade negotiations and policy; and
- the need to mainstream a gender perspective in such areas as impact assessments of trade agreements, trade policy review processes, capacity building and the special and differential treatment framework.

The guide is part of a wider initiative of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Gender Section on gender and trade. The mandate for the initiative arose in 2000, at the 6th Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting. There, ministers expressed concern at some of the negative impacts of globalisation and trade liberalisation and 'recommended that governments should use gender analysis in the negotiation and implementation of the liberalisation process'.

The Secretariat's work on gender and trade has developed in two phases. The first phase **Building the case** (2002-2005) concentrated on analytical work. This resulted in a path-breaking book, *Gender Mainstreaming in the Multilateral Trading System* by Mariama Williams, which focused on the importance of gender dimensions in trade policy-making. A second book, *Chains of Fortune: Linking women workers and producers with global markets*, edited by Marilyn Carr, provided case studies of how poor women producers and workers had been successfully linked with global markets.

The current phase **Moving from analysis to action** (2005 onwards) has been about influencing and informing. The focus has been on developing the capacity of public and private sector institutions and civil society organisations, national and regional, to integrate gender analysis in trade-related negotiations, policy and implementation. During this phase, funding from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for a gender and trade capacity-building project has added momentum and enabled

dissemination and advocacy in a manner that would not have been possible earlier. The project has focused on the Caribbean, South Asia and East and Southern Africa.

Activities within the project include:

- regional capacity-building workshops in gender, trade policy and export promotion
- advocacy at regional and international fora
- development of a gender and trade e-newsletter, e-network and website
- embedding processes in two countries
- development of this action guide – a training resource aimed at officials, researchers and civil society organisations from both the gender and the trade fields.

The approach to the current phase was developed in February 2005 in Kampala, Uganda, based on a consultative process with academicians and national, regional and international representatives from ministries of trade and gender affairs and civil society organisations. It concluded that the main focus of our efforts in gender and trade should be to bridge the conceptual and physical divide that exists between trade and gender. This includes the gap between those responsible for trade and gender in governments, as well as the one between government officials and members of civil society organisations who are nearer the ground, more aware of the impacts of trade liberalisation on women and men and whose voices need to be heard.

Our approach has been to establish dialogue and to develop mutual understanding. This involves exposing trade negotiators and policy makers to the need for gender analysis, and introducing gender ministries to the overall framework of trade negotiations. Policy commitments at all levels bind governments, but the dialogue between those involved in policy-making in these two areas has been limited. As a result, the different priorities, language and constraints are not fully understood.

This action guide is informed by the same process. It aims to help those involved to take action – to get gender onto the regional, bilateral and international trade agenda and to recognise and seize the opportunities trade can offer to further development and alleviate poverty. It also identifies the ways in which women producers and workers can take advantage of the new economic opportunities offered by trade liberalisation, gain access to global markets and access better wages and working conditions within the global value chains of which they are a part.

The action guide is flexible. It can be used in many different ways by people coming at the issues from many different angles of trade or gender and

with different roles. It is intended particularly for people who are in some way responsible for capacity building and bringing about change – for example, through training, briefing or lobbying. It can be used as a basic introduction to the topics, as a resource to develop capacity building or training programmes for others or as a self study resource. However it is used, the aim is to enable people to take action and apply what is learned to their own context and requirements – to turn information ‘about’ trade and gender into practical action. It is accompanied by a CD-ROM of key readings and recommended texts.

The guide is divided into 10 units.

Unit 1 Getting started introduces the action guide’s approach and contents and ways to use it.

Unit 2 Concepts, Unit 3 The trade policy environment, Unit 4 The multilateral trading system and Unit 5 Regional and bilateral agreements are all briefing units that cover the basic concepts and essential information, with related case studies.

Unit 6 Joining the global economy presents ways women producers and workers can benefit from the opportunities of trade liberalisation.

Unit 7 Tools, Unit 8 Planning training and Unit 9 Resources are a resource for capacity building, to be used in conjunction with the other units.

Finally, **Unit 10 Planning action** helps identify the way forward.

And from there to implementation, and to equitable outcomes for women and men.