
Foreword

Trade liberalisation is a global phenomenon that few countries remain unaffected by. A rules-based multilateral trading system (MTS), as is obtained under the World Trade Organization (WTO), is recognised as ultimately being in the interest of small and vulnerable countries. However, there are concerns about the negative impacts that some of them are currently experiencing. The Commonwealth is therefore working to ensure that the benefits of globalisation and trade liberalisation are shared more widely among its diverse members – developing and developed countries, continental and small states. As the Doha Development Agenda suggests, equity in the MTS is in everyone’s interest.

As part of this effort, the Commonwealth is implementing a programme of assistance for its developing country members. This includes working to ensure country representation to the WTO in Geneva; technical support for Commonwealth developing country ambassadors in Geneva; capacity-building in trade policy formulation, implementation and negotiation; and skills training to negotiate national interests effectively in the WTO. The Commonwealth is also committed to understanding the impacts of trade liberalisation on different segments in the society, particularly women and other vulnerable groups.

The Commonwealth Secretariat’s programme on gender and multilateral trade issues emerged as a direct response to the Sixth Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Women’s/Gender Affairs, held in New Delhi in 2000. At their meeting, Ministers expressed “serious concern over some of the negative impacts of globalisation and trade liberalisation, particularly on weak and vulnerable economies and especially on women and children”. They “recommended that governments should use gender analysis in the negotiation and implementation of liberalisation processes”.

The production of this manual on gender and multilateral trade complements other activities being undertaken by the Commonwealth Secretariat in this area. These include: (i) collaboration with the Commonwealth Business Council to support a network of Commonwealth business women; (ii) work with Women in the Informal Economy, Globalizing

and Organizing (WIEGO) on their global markets programme to produce action-oriented research to enhance the value of women's work in the informal economy; and (iii) capacity-building for Commonwealth governments on mainstreaming gender into multilateral trade.

Work on gender and trade liberalisation in the Commonwealth Secretariat involves the collective effort of a number of individuals and groups. The work leading up to and the publication of this manual was made possible through funding from the Trade and Investment Access Facility. Members of the reference group and participants at the Symposium on Global Trade and Multilateral Agreements: Gender, Social and Economic Dimensions – held at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Suva, Fiji, 12–14 February 2003 – also contributed to the thinking behind it. We are particularly indebted for extensive comments on and corrections to specific sections of the draft document to: Elisabeth Tuerk, Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL); Sophia Murphy, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP); Cecilia Oh, Third World Network (TWN); Daniela Perez Gavida, International Gender and Trade Network (IGTN), Geneva; and AhnNga Tran-Nguyen, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Our special thanks to Tina Johnson, who worked on the adaptation of the manuscript to a handbook, and to Guy Hewitt, who co-ordinated the project. We would also like to thank our colleagues Indrajit Coomaraswamy, Pierre Berthelot and Roman Grynberg for their support in our efforts to mainstream gender into the Commonwealth Secretariat's trade programme, and Donna St. Hill for her more recent but invaluable involvement in the co-ordination of the project.

Finally, and most importantly, we are deeply indebted to the author, Mariama Williams, our gender and trade adviser. Her knowledge of the subject area and commitment to making the global trade agenda more equitable has been an inspiration to us all.

This publication is part of the Commonwealth's contribution to gender mainstreaming in key development issues.

Nancy Spence
Director, Social Transformation Programmes Division
Commonwealth Secretariat