

---

## Preface

The institutional framework of the multilateral trading system (MTS) has adapted over time to meet the specific needs of the process of global integration and the specific values and ideological shifts that accompany that process. Globalisation and trade liberalisation are often assumed to be universally beneficial and gender, class and race neutral. The view that policy measures are gender blind in orientation and gender neutral in effect (i.e. have similar or identical impacts on men and women) is commonly held by economic policy decision-makers. It has also carried over into trade policy-making and is deeply embedded in the formulation, negotiation and implementation of trade agreements such as the Uruguay Round/World Trade Organization Agreements (WTOA).

Yet trade liberalisation has different effects on women and men because of their different access to and control of economic and social resources, decision-making and participation. Trade rules and the MTS designed to enforce them thus have serious implications for national economic policies that attempt to promote sustainable human development, poverty eradication and the social and economic empowerment of men and women.

Over the course of the last 20 years, Commonwealth countries have made numerous commitments to and expended significant amounts of national resources on the elimination of gender-based discrimination and the promotion of gender equality. However, there is a great deal of concern that some of the advances of the last two decades may be seriously threatened if significant care and attention is not paid to the implementation of trade agreements. These concerns arise from the fact that, while the manifestations of globalisation and the ever-increasing push towards rapid trade liberalisation may present new options for some women and men, they may at the same time cause the loss of livelihood, employment and business for others. This reality cannot be ignored or neglected.

The social dimension of trade policy and trade liberalisation is now a common topic in many official trade fora. However, this discussion is proceeding with little or no atten-

tion to the different needs, constraints and interests of women. At the same time, it is increasingly recognised that simply paying attention to general targets and commitments of poverty eradication or sustainable development will not solve the problems of gender discrimination and the lack of economic and social advancement that still plague the lives of millions of women in developing countries.

There therefore needs to be an integrated framework for a sustainable, pro-poor and gender-sensitive approach to trade policy-making. However, a major part of the silence around gender, trade and investment at the level of governance of the trading system would appear to be a lack of understanding of the conceptual, empirical and policy links between gender and trade. Paradoxically, along with the view that trade policies are gender blind there is also an underlying popular viewpoint among some trade scholars and trade policy decision-makers that trade liberalisation has unambiguously benefited women in terms of widespread employment. However, emerging evidence shows that trade liberalisation can have both positive and negative effects on women's economic and social status.

A simple scan of the small but growing empirical literature on the relationship of trade and investment to gender-related issues in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean will reveal that trade reform policies – taken broadly to include measures that liberalise imports of goods and services as well as those to promote exports – generate complex and often contradictory effects on women's access to employment, livelihood and income. In some cases, trade reform/liberalisation has been associated with rising employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for women. However, in other cases the same phenomenon may exacerbate existing gender inequalities and thus worsen women's economic and social status. These different results may occur in the same economy at the same time for different groups of women, or may occur at different phases of the trade liberalisation process in the same country.

It is therefore important that policy-makers concerned with poverty eradication, social equity and gender equality improve their understanding of the gender dimensions of trade policy. They need to take steps to create gender-sensitive trade rules, as well as to develop complementary mechanisms to offset the negative effects and set in place policies, programmes and

projects that will promote improvement in the lives of women and men in society.

This reference manual is intended to serve as an information and training tool for policy-makers and inter-governmental and civil society organisations interested in building and enhancing their knowledge of the important linkages between trade and investment policy and gender equality objectives and priorities. It also presents recommendations on the key issues as well as the identification of strategies that could be utilised by different stakeholders.

Chapter 1 reviews the main features of the contemporary multilateral trading system (MTS) as well as the inter-linkages between this and globalisation. It also explores how the trade system is governed and looks at issues of transparency and participation. Chapter 2 lays out the contextual and overarching issues relevant to gender and trade. It examines the role that gender plays in the governance of international trade at the regional and multilateral levels. Finally, it offers a tentative framework for a sectoral analysis of gender and trade.

Chapters 3–6 provide an introduction to the implementation of World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements in key sectors: the Agreement on Agriculture (AOA), the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the agreements on Trade-Related Aspects of Investment Measures (TRIMs) and on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). Each chapter then explores in detail the gender dimensions of the agreement under discussion. Finally, Chapter 7 proposes a set of strategies and recommendations for integrating gender equality issues and concerns at the national, regional and multilateral levels. Throughout the text are boxes, case studies and technical and historical analysis to assist the reader towards a more comprehensive understanding of the issues raised. Most chapters also include pointers for further discussion and key questions for policy-makers and other stakeholders.

The manual is presented in a manner that allows for flexibility in use. Those trade officials, trade negotiators, civil society activists and researchers who are already familiar with the sectoral issues may simply go to the section in each chapter that focuses on gender. Readers with gender expertise, but who are not very exposed to trade issues, will find a fair amount to

---

build their knowledge base and enable them to become more conversant with this area. A glossary provides expanded definitions and elaborations of the main technical terms used in the text. An outline of the structure and decision-making processes at the WTO, issues of particular importance to developing countries and an indication of how gender has been handled in regional trade agreements can be found in the appendices. These also provide a model for civil society consultation.

Many of the modules that formed the basis for chapters in this manual were outputs of the International Gender and Trade Network (IGTN) research and economic literacy programmes and first appeared in article format or as primers on its website (see *www.igtn.org*).