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## Executive Summary

Trade liberalisation agreements are part of an intricate web of macroeconomic reform involving the re-tuning of export promotion and social, fiscal and labour market policies. These policies impact on gender relations, human development and poverty dynamics by re-arranging relations of power and access to resources between men and women. In general, however, trade negotiators and trade policy-makers have focused on market access and paid little attention to the social and infrastructural needs of different groups in the economy. For example, in the discussion of services liberalisation, critical services such as water, energy and health care are likely to be liberalised without adequate attention to how this will affect access, availability and cost to the poor. Since women shoulder primary responsibilities for household and community management, this has implications for their paid and unpaid work and overall time burden as well as their health and morbidity.

Yet gender has not been a significant variable in the agenda setting, rule-making or enforcement of trade policy. Despite the proliferation of non-trade concerns in current global trade negotiations – including food security, public health, rural livelihoods, environment and labour standards and animal welfare – gender has not been integrated as a cross-cutting issue in either these discussions or the substantive areas of trade policy and trade agreements. There is also very little attempt to link gender equality and gender mainstreaming objectives with commitments to trade and export promotion agendas.

Effective participation in decision-making in the governance of the multilateral trade system (MTS) requires an understanding of the priorities and objectives of the key issues being negotiated and how they are related to short, medium and long-term strategic gender interests. It is therefore important to identify the critical issues that policy-makers, trade negotiators and project managers who are concerned with women's social and economic advancement should be aware of. Broadly speaking, these fall into two categories: (i) the substantive content of trade liberalisation; and (ii) participation and governance issues.

## Gender and the Substantive Content of Trade Liberalisation

Trade liberalisation is associated with specific gender opportunities, constraints and challenges around access to inputs, markets, skills training, credit, labour mobility/rigidity and survival strategies. These are apparent in the most visible features of trade liberalisation and trade policy reform: increased imports, export promotion and market access provisions.

Two important effects of import liberalisation are budgetary impacts due to the revenue effect of decreased tariffs, and dumping and overabundance of cheap imports (especially agricultural products). These have different gender implications. For example, a decline in government revenue is likely to cause to a shift in government expenditure away from the social sector or an increase in other taxes such as the value added tax (VAT). In either case, the impact will be felt more heavily by women, who have primary responsibility for the household and are thus more highly dependent on government services. Dumping and the overabundance of foreign-produced goods have contrary impacts for women. On the one hand, this makes household items and food cheaper and therefore increases the spread of the household budget. On the other hand, however, it may have negative impacts on the domestic agriculture market share of small producers who in many countries are women. Additionally, it poses significant long-term risks for national food security.

Export promotion impacts on domestic regulations and may cause re-allocation of resources, land, etc. from the food-producing sector to the cash crop or export-oriented sector. It also influences the nature, size, rate and scope of business development, especially in the tourism and services sectors. Thus government policies in all sectors have implications for women's access to land, credit and technology. Whether the net effect is positive or negative depends on how gender-sensitive governments' export-promoting policies and programmes are.

Market access provisions and programmes impact on costs, availability and usability of marketing information and technical assistance. Again, the overall impact depends on the gender sensitivity of government programmes. The nature and delivery of market information (written, highly scientific *versus*

transmission by radio and other popular mass delivery methods) and whether there is assistance to upgrade production will also determine whether or not increased market access benefits women.

Overall, trade liberalisation and the reform of trade policies and measures it causes have also been implicated, to different degrees in different countries, with the scaling down of training, extension services and investment in rural infrastructure; the removal of agricultural subsidies; cheaper imports; the promotion of cash crops; decreased public investment; and privatisation and commercialisation of land, natural resources and some services.

All of these have gender implications. For example, the promotion of cash crops is likely to alter the gender division of labour and management of household resources since, traditionally, women may have managed food production and men cash crop production (with women's labour). It will mean more work for women and also introduce food and welfare insecurity.

A much clearer picture of the linkages between trade liberalisation and gender can be seen through a sectoral analysis that looks at the different benefits, costs, challenges and constraints of trade liberalisation for men and women (e.g. in agriculture, services, investment and intellectual property). Focus should be placed on: the role of existing gender biases; structural inequality and discrimination in relation to women's and men's roles in the household and in the labour market (including responsibility for childcare, functioning of the household, and elder and community care); gender inequalities in access to and control of productive resources such as land, credit and technology; and the gender-based challenges, constraints and opportunities of liberalisation in the sector of investigation.

### **Agricultural trade liberalisation and gender**

The critical areas of concern in the debate on agriculture from a gender perspective are food security, food sovereignty and sustainable livelihoods. Food security is intertwined with the loss of domestic agricultural production, with impacts for nutrition and caloric intake of rural families. Loss of sustainable livelihoods is linked to import penetration and the loss of preference in international agricultural markets.

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A critically important aspect in examining trade liberalisation in developing countries is the gendered nature of agricultural production, processing and marketing/sales. A typical – though not necessarily endemic – feature in many Commonwealth countries is that men specialise in cash crops while women are to be found mainly in the production of the domestic staple. Women also tend to have greater involvement in the processing and sale of domestic food items. With regard to marketing and sales, men may tend to dominate the wholesale and intermediate trade while women are in retail.

Many women farmers are increasingly losing domestic markets to cheap food imports from the North. This puts a downward pressure on local prices and, along with the removal of subsidies, creates extreme hardship for women farmers as well as women in their roles as providers of family well-being. In these cases, women must increase time spent in home food processing since there is inadequate income to purchase foodstuffs. On a more positive note, some women have been integrated into micro- and small enterprise in village markets where they buy and sell farm products like milk, maize, beans and vegetables. Further, many women will find new job opportunities in the growing horticultural and other non-traditional agricultural sectors.

In many African countries, critical variables for increasing the benefits of trade liberalisation for women farmers are: state-run depots and enterprises that enable women to go outside their villages to secure better prices while maintaining their domestic responsibilities; extension services that provide programmes and services focused on women farmers in terms of language, outreach and delivery of information; price support for inputs such as fertilisers, irrigation systems and water; price controls on basic food items; and repackaging of technical information on standards and monitoring into easily understood language and transfer of such information via radio as opposed to technical seminars or briefing documents.

### **Investment and gender**

Foreign investment has an impact on employment patterns and on the nature, size and growth potential of small and medium-sized firms in host countries. Many such businesses are

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women-owned and operated. Its impact on taxation/tax revenue has implications for public expenditure and thus the availability of different types of infrastructure and social services. Its impact on the exchange rate has implications for domestic and import prices. The rapid acceleration in the de-regulation of foreign direct investment also has implications for women's health and morbidity.

Gender-friendly investment policies in the context of partial or complete liberalisation of investment must be designed to remedy the issues of transaction costs, imperfect information, market inter-linkages and asymmetry of property rights that women entrepreneurs face. Gender biases that lock women out of potential areas for the expansion of investment opportunities and markets due to the infusion of foreign investment should also be explicitly remedied. Promoting gender equality will mean the need for some form of subsidies or grants for local and women-owned businesses.

### **Intellectual property rights and gender**

Gender equity issues in Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) arise not only in terms of widely recognised structural inequalities between men and women in access to resources such as land, credit and technical assistance but also in terms of the issues of food security and public health. Patents and other IPR instruments have significant implications for agriculture (access to seeds, food security, livelihoods and nutrition) and transfer of technology. Likewise, protection of plant varieties impacts on traditional knowledge and access to genetic resources.

It is therefore critical that governments pay particular attention to creating gender-sensitive IPR rules and mechanisms. Such an approach could pivot around the key areas of impact assessment studies/research on the role of IPRs in and on the economy, agriculture and women and men. Particular attention should be paid to mapping of genetic resources; documentation of traditional knowledge and local innovation; and examining the current market structure for seeds (purchase relative to re-use).

Education/training programmes should be geared to promoting better education for women in order to facilitate their adoption of new technology and improved environmental

management. There also needs to be support and assistance regarding biodiversity/conservation including: establishing technical rights banks that purchase core privately developed IPR-covered technology in essential areas (such as food) for the purpose of increasing access to wider groups; assistance to help conservation, management and improvement of plant genetic resource for food and agriculture; national/regional germ plasm programmes; and support for the informal system for breeding and saving (seeds, etc.) in rural areas that is dominant in the South.

Other related activities include support and assistance regarding the transfer of technology such as capacity-building for scientific knowledge; programmes and policies to improve the access of women and other small farmers to environmentally friendly fertilisers; programmes and policies to ensure that women and other small farmers have access to safe and affordable germ plasm; and recognition, protection and compensation for the knowledge, innovation and practices of farmers and traditional communities.

### Services and gender

The critical concerns regarding the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) from a gender perspective are its impact on access to and availability of public services, such as health care and education, and natural resources such as water and energy. Other pressing issues include its impact on government's ability to regulate the quality of health care and the nature of the employment of women in the growing services sector. The increasing mobility of women workers in health care and education is also a cause for concern, not only regarding the impact on the sending economies but also in relation to the terms and conditions of work and the overall benefits that the women receive.

Due to their responsibilities for the household, women have a higher dependency than men on access to clean sanitation, potable water, good roads and transport. Research shows that in many countries women and children shoulder the main responsibility for collecting, storing and distributing essential goods, such as water and fuel, within the family and community. Lack of easy access, therefore, imposes a tremendous

burden on women as they are often required to expend substantial amounts of time and energy in meeting these responsibilities.

The critical issues in health care focus on quality and affordable access for men and women as well as for girls and boys. Other issues include the employment of women and their over-representation in specific sub-sectors of the health care industry (e.g. nursing). The establishing of hospitals or clinics in a foreign country and the outsourcing of medical transcription services can have significant employment dimensions for women workers. The movement of health care professionals and students for medical education and the spread of cross-border services such as telemedicine raise the issue of equity in access with very specific gender and class dimensions. Two areas of greatest concern are the potential switching of resources from local health needs to catering for foreigners in high tech, high value specialised health care units and an exacerbation of the current trend of a declining role for the state in providing primary care. It is now recognised that women are likely to be over-represented among those suffering from untreated injuries/diseases, malnutrition/hunger and illiteracy/innumeracy.

As with health care, education is a critical variable in the promotion of a dignified life. Hence the liberalisation of this sector poses similar dilemmas in terms of access to education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The role and continued viability of the state in providing education that would meet the needs of all citizens, but most especially the poor, is a continuing source of concern. Women tend to be most lacking in access to education and training, hence the role of the state and its ability to provide affordable education for both girls and boys are critical.

A number of gender issues arise in the high growth tourism and travel-related sector. In terms of formal sector employment, this is an area of increased jobs and income for many women and may raise their income and improve their financial autonomy. In some cases, however, these jobs are characterised by sub-standard conditions of work, low pay, lack of benefits and the absence of human resource development. This raises serious concerns about women's longer-term prosperity.

In the informal sector, some women in some countries may

gain a measure of economic independence from their participation in activities such as washing clothes, petty trading, cooking and childcare as well as producing local handicrafts and marketing them in informal markets linked to the tourism trade. There is a need for specific programmes to assist women to become more involved in increasingly higher value activities such as wholesaling craft and handicrafts in urban centres (now primarily a male activity in some countries).

Tourism may create greater access to basic services (roads, water, electricity and sanitation) or it may reduce such access if services are diverted to hotels and resorts or there are restrictions on access to local resources due to tourism development. Increased revenue from the tourist sector into the government coffers may be available for the promotion of social development. Tourism also impacts local prices (land and food) as well as the exchange rate.

Overall, whether or not liberalisation of the tourist and travel-related sector impacts negatively or positively on men and women depends on governments' ability and willingness to use fiscal and monetary measures to ensure that there is social development linked to increased tourism development. Governments will also have to take proactive measures to promote better jobs and working conditions at all levels of the tourism sector as well as put in place special policies to promote women's involvement at the higher and more lucrative levels of the industry.

The use of women's bodies to sell travel destinations is a growing and controversial issue. In its most benign manifestation, gender differences are manipulated in order to 'feed the fantasy of the male tourist'. Increasingly, however, women are directly exploited as sexual playthings and earners of foreign exchange in prostitution and now the new explosion of sex tourism. This is an area for strong government enforcement and protection of the rights of women and children.

### **Labour rights and gender**

Key areas of concern regarding labour rights from a gender perspective include the abuse of women workers in export processing zones, home-based production and the informal sector linked to industrial agriculture, manufacturing and service

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activities. The question of labour rights and conditions also emerges with the growing trend of the migration of primarily female health care workers and teachers between the South and the North and within the South.

In general, labour laws should be reformed and repealed where necessary in order to prevent or eliminate abusive working conditions. There is also a great need to modify labour laws and practices to ensure that women's gender-specific needs are adequately addressed. This may include strong enforcement and better regulation of foreign and domestic corporations in the export sector to protect workers' rights.

Complementary to this is the need for support and assistance to micro- and small businesses, especially women-owned enterprises, to enable them to offer better working conditions for themselves and the workers they hire. This should include training on occupational health and safety practices as well as improving their knowledge of national labour laws in this area.

## **Gender, Participation and Governance**

The relative roles, influence and contribution of men and women in national and international economies play an important but often unrecognised role in the setting of trade rules, the kinds of assumptions on which these rules are based and the consequent diagnosis of development and social issues that follows. This also affects the issue of who decides and who is consulted in the decision-making process surrounding WTO provisions as well as provisions at national and regional levels.

Other issues in the area of general governance include the lack of gender analysis and consultation with women's groups and community-based organisations in: (a) determining national priorities for trade negotiations; and (b) formulating the substantive advocacy positions of governments and NGOs. This is especially significant in the areas of trade policy reviews, dispute settlements and technical assistance. In addition, effective and meaningful co-ordination among sector ministries such as health, education and agriculture are critical to developing an informed gender-sensitive approach to trade policy-making. This should involve significant participation of national and regional gender machineries in the decision-making process of trade negotiation frameworks.

Overall, avenues for mainstreaming a gender perspective and analysis into trade policy decision-making include:

- the emerging spate of social and environmental impact assessments of trade agreements, among which a gender impact assessment also has validity;
- the trade policy review process undertaken at the multi-lateral level by the WTO's Trade Policy Review Division, and the preparation of national inputs for this process;
- the explicit development focus of the Doha Development Agenda;
- the debate about access to public and essential services, food security and the 'development box';
- advocacy for gender mainstreaming within the key sectors, ministries and inter-governmental fora that deal with trade policy;
- technical assistance/trade capacity-building programmes (WTO, UNCTAD, World Bank, etc., regional and bilateral);
- the special and differential treatment (S&DT) framework;
- technical assistance and capacity-building for trade policy at national, regional and WTO levels;
- discussions around Mode IV of the GATS (movement of natural persons).

## Strategies and Recommendations

### Maximising the positives and minimising the negatives from trade liberalisation

In order to maximise the gains from trade liberalisation and promote the social and economic empowerment of women, there should be an emphasis on:

- programmes to promote men's and women's access to resources including technology and equipment;
- education, skills and training for men and women to take advantage of new opportunities and openings;

- re-thinking and reconstituting the provision of government services (day care, health care, subsidisation of basic services, etc.), in order to help women meet their multiple obligations;
- gender-sensitive and gender equity oriented modification of trade rules and other policy areas;
- programmes and policies to remove or offset the information bias that women face relative to men in terms of credit, government services and technology.

In order to minimise the negative effects of trade liberalisation on women's social and economic well-being, there should be an emphasis on:

- surveys and assessments to determine the exact nature and causes of negative impacts on men and women;
- proactive measures in the areas of job training/skills development and upgrading;
- supportive measures to bolster women's access to credit and technical and marketing knowledge;
- grants and low interest loans to small enterprises disadvantaged by trade liberalisation;
- modification of trade measures to limit the negative impact on disadvantaged groups.

Trade liberalisation can create institutional and legal changes in entitlements, rights and responsibilities and access to assets and government services. In order to ensure these do not undermine the social and economic empowerment of women and men, there should be an emphasis on:

- reforming/repealing laws that are injurious to women's short-term and long-term interests;
- creating provisions in intellectual property rights laws that recognise women's contribution to, need for and interest in traditional knowledge, access to seeds and other resources, and technological transfer.

## Enhancing participation at national, regional and international and regional trade fora

### *National level*

In order to enhance, build and create greater participation in the formulation and implementation of trade policy at the national level, specific initiatives are required. These should focus on:

- a more active role for all stakeholders in determining negotiation mandates and in the regular monitoring of progress;
- wider and deeper inter-agency collaboration, especially between social sector ministries and the Trade Ministry;
- wider civil society involvement in debates via national consultations;
- policy reform/institutional reform in local trade policy formulation and implementation;
- discussion and plans of action on what is needed for effective competition of poor households and businesses: credit, land, education and health services;
- an assessment of the effects of liberalisation on each sector;
- support for research on the impact of trade liberalisation;
- better sequencing of trade reform measures at the national level;
- comprehensive economic/trade literacy training for broad cross sections of society, starting with key economic decision-makers in government, the private sector and civil society;
- comprehensive review of opportunities and constraints in the economic structure;
- assessment of the changing nature of national competitiveness.

### *Regional level*

In order to facilitate the process of gender mainstreaming in WTO member states, regional trade fora should ensure that:

- gender analysis and a gender perspective are incorporated in all policies, projects and programmes;
- regional agreements are used as a conduit for members to share experiences with integrating gender and improving access of women to decision-making processes;
- gender impact assessments of policy, programmes and project proposals are implemented at all stages from design and decision-making through to action and evaluation;
- a coherent and effective policy framework and institutional process for gender mainstreaming is developed;
- the development and functioning of strong independent/autonomous women's leadership and professional organisations is supported in member states;
- the collection of sex-disaggregated data is prioritised.

### *International level*

Measures to integrate gender into trade negotiations at the international level include:

- establishing an independent focal point to monitor the coherence and contradiction between the policies and practices of the WTO, IMF and World Bank with regard to the programmes and operations of specialised UN agencies such as FAO, World Food Programme (WFP), WHO, etc., and in favour of sustainable economic development;
  - undertaking a gender impact assessment of all trade agreements, whether at the multilateral, regional, national or bilateral level;
  - resources and training for the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated trade and trade-related data (formal channels for such an endeavour could be bilateral or multilateral support programmes through UNIFEM, UNDP, INSTRAW or the NGO community);
  - integrating gender equality and gender mainstreaming goals and commitments into trade and other macroeconomic policies (implemented through gender-sensitisation training with the WTO Secretariat and Geneva-based missions);
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- establishing gender-aware and gender-sensitive technical assistance and capacity-building programmes.

### The role of inter-governmental organisations

Inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) such as the United Nations and Commonwealth Secretariat can play an important and sustained role in advancing gender analysis, a gender perspective and gender mainstreaming into the trade policy-making environment. Policy-oriented interventions in this area could focus on:

- gender impact assessments of trade liberalisation and export promotion;
- proactive programmes to facilitate the integration of gender analysis and a gender perspective in national, regional and multilateral trade negotiations;
- support and assistance to help regional organisations undertake research and develop gender-sensitive policies and mechanisms;
- facilitating closer collaboration and partnership between sector ministries on intersecting trade-related issues;
- promoting and encouraging gender mainstreaming in government ministries dealing with trade and related areas as well as at the WTO, Geneva-based missions and regional trade organs (including the gender composition of trade delegations and high-level technical staff at the WTO itself);
- mainstreaming gender in technical assistance/trade capacity-building programmes (WTO, UNCTAD, World Bank, etc., regional and bilateral);
- gender appraisal of the area of special and differential treatment (S&DT);
- advocacy for and assistance with the inclusion of gender specialists in trade negotiation teams set up for national, regional and international negotiations;

- helping to provide gender-awareness training to gender focal points in Ministries of Trade and in regional trade organisations.

There is a need for research and documentation on the impact of trade and trade policies on women and men. A useful intervention might be designing a framework for – and undertaking – gender-aware policy appraisals of trade policy for different groups of countries. IGOs can also undertake or facilitate micro-level studies such as beneficiary assessments and public incidence analysis applied to the area of gender and trade (especially with regard to tariff-induced changes in budget allocation). Gender-sensitisation and analysis training should be provided to a broad cross section of stakeholders, followed up by on-going monitoring of implementation and processes for lesson-learning and capacity-building. Support should be provided for actions arising from research aimed at publicising findings and at achieving gender equity.

IGOs can train and promote awareness among producers of statistics regarding gender concerns in society. They can also assist countries in the collection of gender-sensitive trade statistics; develop trade-related gender statistics and indicators; and enhance existing database capacity to produce more equity and gender impact studies. Another intervention that could be considered to help facilitate participation and public education on trade and gender concerns is engendering public policy debates. This includes actions to institutionalise consultation and participation in, as well as gender analysis of, all policies of government at national and local levels as well as on-going media programmes enabling women's input in national policy debates. Training of civil society, particularly women's organisations, in evaluation methodology could be facilitated by an on-going or irregular series of hands-on workshops, etc., aimed at developing the understanding, use and development of social, gender and environmental indicators. These could also become community-based projects used to map and determine the assets and needs of the community as well as set internal parameters for assessing progress over time.