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An Equal Seat at the Table: Gendering Trade Negotiations

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Abstract

This paper examines the importance of gender equality in trade and asks if an increase in the participation of women in senior roles in trade negotiation processes can result in more gender-equitable trade outcomes. There is now well-established evidence that international trade has a differential impact on women and men across different sectors. These different impacts are driven by a number of factors, including access to resources, endowments, skills levels, regulatory processes, rights and entitlements, that are sometimes enshrined in law, as well as social norms and values. The impact of trade also depends on the goods and services produced within sectors and on whether production occurs in the formal or informal sector, which has implications for the ways in which women and men are employed. This paper presents a statistical analysis of the gender profile of trade negotiators at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and considers whether or not better representation of women in senior roles at the WTO, aligned with an improved trade policy framework at national and regional levels, could result in more gender-equitable trade outcomes.

JEL Classification: F13, F14, J16

Keywords: gender equality, trade negotiations, WTO, trade outcomes

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Abbreviations and acronyms

GDP	gross domestic product
GIAs	gender impact assessments
GPFA	Global Platform for Action
HoM	Head of Mission
ITC	International Trade Centre
LDCs	least developed countries
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIA	sustainability impact assessment
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
STR	Simplified Trading Regime
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WEC	Women's Edge Coalition
WTO	World Trade Organization

1. Background

Globalisation and trade liberalisation have both positive and negative impacts. Trade liberalisation (the removal of barriers to cross-border trade) has historically been negotiated at the World Trade Organization (WTO); trade agreements negotiated there translate into impacts within countries and therefore have significant implications for household wellbeing and gender equality¹. There is now considerable empirical evidence that international trade agreements have a differential impact on women and men at household, firm and national levels (Randriamaro, 2006; Carr and Williams, 2010; World Bank, 2012; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 2012), creating disparities in how the opportunities and challenges of globalisation are experienced. Yet, there have been only limited attempts over the decades during which global trade negotiations have been taking place to mainstream², or integrate, gender concerns into trade policy and negotiations. Historically, trade negotiations at the WTO have been driven by mercantilist trade-offs between powerful countries, emerging market economies, developing countries and least developed countries

(LDCs), in which, to date, considerations relating to gender equality in trade outcomes have been largely overlooked.

An analysis of WTO data reveals an under-representation of women officials, particularly at senior levels in the organisation, at the levels of Head of Council, Committee or Working Group. Our research confirms that the first hurdle, that of holding the position of ambassador or head of mission (HoM)³, shapes progression on to the decision-making and accountable committees and councils of the WTO. In practice, it is generally only HoMs who are nominated to serve as committee or council heads; therefore, the first barrier to entry at this level is navigating the politically charged competition for a HoM position.

The seniority of women trade specialists⁴ in trade forums such as the WTO may be important for gender-equitable trade outcomes for a number of reasons (e.g. the articulation of new perspectives on gender and trade, fostering inclusive growth and progressing priorities in trade important for female economic empowerment). In addition, women's voices, agency and visibility are crucial to a world vision in which gender equality is the norm.

1 Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men, girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Adapted from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Empowered and Equal: UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2008–2011* (2008), cited in Commonwealth Secretariat (2012).

2 'Gender mainstreaming' is 'the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and strategies of women and men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men can benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated' (ECOSOC, 1997 cited Commonwealth Secretariat, 2012). The ultimate goal of gender mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.

3 Head of Mission and Head of Delegation are used interchangeably; in the literature, both titles are used to refer to the same office.

4 Senior trade specialists assigned to the WTO by member countries may in some cases be the Ambassador/ Head of Mission. However Ambassadors are not necessarily trade specialists, in which case the next most senior designation would be Senior Counsellor.

2. Can an increase in the participation rate of women in senior roles in trade negotiations really make a difference for gender-equitable trade outcomes?

One possible indicator that global trade negotiation forums are moving towards gender balance and the mainstreaming of gender perspectives into negotiations could be an increase in the number of senior female trade negotiators participating in negotiation processes. However, this is not the case (Box 1). Women are largely absent from these important high-level decision-making processes at national, regional and multilateral levels. The higher the decision-making arena, from national level to global level, the more likely it is that women will be absent. With the changing landscape of global trade, including the ascent of mega trade blocs⁵, this problem will continue unless concerted, targeted action to improve women's access is taken.

The statistical analysis of WTO 2015 data (World Trade Organization, 2015) suggests that, although the percentage of female HoMs is higher in LDCs than in developed countries,

female HoMs from LDCs are less likely to progress to become the chair of a council, committee or working group than their counterparts in developed countries. Yet it is worth noting that gender composition may not be the only factor at work here; rather, this may be partly a result of the non-developmental focus of the WTO's emphasis and processes, in which the perspectives of the more powerful, networked and prepared richer nations and emerging markets take precedence. The outliers of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of Singapore and Hong Kong appear to be illustrative of this trend, captured in SIDS statistics, namely in that whilst 25% of SIDs HoM are female, they are 50% more likely to become the chair of a WTO council/committee (figure 2), whereas for all states, only 16 per cent of female HoM are. (Figure 2).

This preliminary analysis of the gender-disaggregated composition of the WTO

Box 1. The men's club still persists in trade negotiations

Women are poorly represented at the WTO. Gender disaggregation of trade negotiators and senior officials at various levels of oversight within the WTO architecture reveals a low percentage of women, to the extent that the perception of the WTO as a 'men's club' still persists. If one accepts that the unequal presence of women officials is prevalent at the WTO, this characterisation may be justified. Clearly, it is the member countries of the WTO that shape this characteristic, which has been ascribed to the institution and which has implications for trade negotiation processes.

An assessment of the gender composition of the WTO General Council, councils and committees reveals key gender disparities. As of March 2015, the Ministerial Conference and General Council, which are the highest decision-making authorities in the WTO architecture, were largely all-male forums at the senior technical level. Of the 15 bodies reporting to the General Council, only one is chaired by a female ambassador (i.e. less than 7 per cent).

A recent review (Association of Women in International Trade, Women's Business Society and Women in International Trade, 2015) to assess the percentage of women in senior management⁶ in five international organisations, units or departments that have a significant focus on trade found that the WTO ranked lowest, with only 12 per cent of senior management roles filled by women. In comparison, at the World Bank Group's Trade and Competitiveness Global Practice 63 per cent of senior managers were female; at the International Trade Centre (ITC) the figure was 50 per cent; at UNCTAD it was 25 per cent; and at the Trade and Agriculture Directorate of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) it was 22 per cent.

5 A group of countries, often across regions or continents, that has a trade agreement and forms an exclusive trading bloc, distinguished by high gross domestic product (GDP) and weight in world economic output and trade, and with a deep WTO-plus liberalisation agenda.

6 The definition of senior management encompasses the following roles across the five entities: senior directors, directors, practice managers, executive directors, deputy executive directors, directors, secretaries general, deputy secretaries general, chiefs, chiefs of staff, and other roles at Level A5 and above (roles are not applicable to all entities).

Table 1. Total trade negotiators by country grouping, WTO

	Total female trade negotiators	Total male trade negotiators	Female HoMs	Male HoMs	Number of states	Percentage of female HoMs by country grouping
Developed	72	129	3	22	25	12
New EU states	26	20	5	8	13	38
Developing	209	360	21	55	76	28
LDCs	60	122	7	29	36	19
Transition	11	30	2	8	10	20
Total, all states	378	661	38	122	160	23

Source: Analysis compiled from data in World Trade Organization 2015

institutional framework and member country negotiating teams provides some perspective. Clearly, the analysis covers only one year, 2015, a mere snapshot in the WTO’s history; yet, anecdotally, stakeholders who regularly interact at the WTO note the absence of formal female leadership. Without a significant presence of senior women who are skilled trade negotiators at the WTO and, more importantly, informing trade policy through the national trade architecture, it is difficult to measure the effects their participation might have on trade outcomes. The real issue becomes what women do with that power and the potential impact of women’s leadership on trade policy-making. Experiences from women’s increased voice and agency in parliaments and national development processes confirm that gender-equitable targeted interventions typically increase with women’s greater involvement, leading to transformative

change, as evidenced in a significant number of countries (e.g. Rwanda, Seychelles and Singapore).

Widespread concerns that gender inequality was still entrenched at country level in legislation, policies and programmes led to the adoption of the Global Platform for Action (GPFA) by 189 countries at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995. The GPFA calls on all governments and other key stakeholders to ‘mainstream a gender perspective into all policies and programmes, so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men respectively.’ Twenty years after the adoption of the GPFA, and subsequent to the Declaration on the Millennium Development Goals, specifically MDG3⁷, much remains to be done to reach the

Figure 1. Gender ratio of trade negotiators by country group

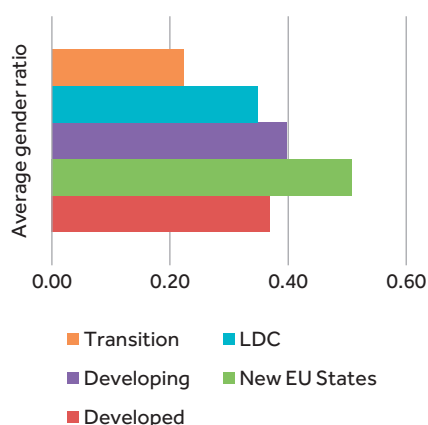
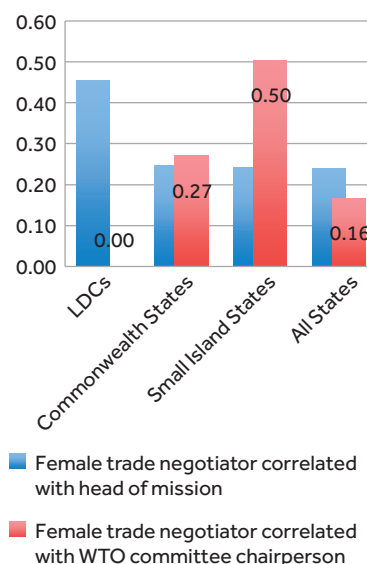


Figure 2. Female HoM correlation with WTO chairperson status



7 MDG3 is the third of eight millennium development goals to be achieved by 2015. Goal 3 was to promote gender equality and empower women. MDGs have now been replaced by SDGs.

overarching goal of gender equality in all areas of public and private life. The new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), launched in September 2015, will seek to accelerate progress down a sustainable, more inclusive development path, including a strong commitment to increasing gender equality and women's economic empowerment, as articulated primarily in SDGs 5, 3, 4 and 8. However, as argued below, ambitious SDGs in the absence of gender-disaggregated data to better inform policy, programmes and interventions at national level may undermine SDG objectives.

Gender-equitable trade outcomes may be defined as outcomes that do not exacerbate gender inequalities within national economies due to changes in the pattern of trade and that do widen opportunities for women and men to

participate equally in the global economy. Gender-equitable trade outcomes are assumed to be driven by sustainable, more inclusive economic growth and export development and are in direct contrast to patterns of trade that increase disenfranchisement and undermine gender-equitable access to resources and tools that can improve the productivity of individuals, households and firms. This paper broadly asks if global trade agreements are shaped by the under-representation of senior women and women's priorities in trade at the WTO. A lack of targeted policies and well-articulated programmes to support women's economic empowerment at national and regional levels and inform trade negotiating positions may also be a factor.

3. Globalisation and trade liberalisation has a differential impact on women and men

Understanding and measuring the impact of trade on women is important not only because they typically represent over half of any population, but also because the constraints that women face in developing businesses or entering the labour market make them less able to benefit from the opportunities created by trade. This means that many women may be prevented from reaching their full potential in their professional, working lives, which may also have implications for social mobility and participation in public life. An underlying factor in this process is the socio-culturally derived differing roles and responsibilities of women and men within the household, coupled with differences in access to resources and entitlements. These realities and the differential impact of trade policy and agreements substantiate the need to recognise women not only as consumers but also as producers and sociopolitical agents in efforts to achieve gender equality.

Negative impacts resulting from globalisation and liberalisation are often sector specific, resulting in shrinking production and loss of jobs and livelihoods for women, who are disproportionately represented within those sectors (Atthill *et al.*, 2007; Floro and Tas, 2010 pp. 12–14 and 17). Globalisation and trade liberalisation may

also provide good opportunities for women producers, traders, business owners and consumers to increase their economic activities. Empirical evidence and case studies document the feminisation of trade in sectors such as garment manufacturing, electronics, and the migration of skilled female professionals from education and health service sectors in Bangladesh, Lesotho, Taiwan and Jamaica to global markets, for example (Carr, 2004; Carr and Williams, 2010). Typically, in those tradable sectors positively affected by liberalisation, the lower wages of women with comparable or lower skill sets to men may lead to an increase in demand for their labour, thus improving women's work participation rates. Thus, gender-sensitive trade policy is a useful tool to enable policy-makers to improve gender equity in work participation rates, albeit often as a consequence of lower wages.

Notwithstanding the impact of trade on gender equality, there is empirical evidence that the impact of women's work participation rates in particular sectors goes beyond the particular sectors where they are most visible (UNCTAD, 2013). The transmission mechanism for this appears to be that the significant or majority participation of women workers in particular

Box 2. Women's voices: the importance of female perspectives being heard

Women's voices and agency (that is, being in control, being heard and being empowered to act) are the missing dimension in globalisation, international trade and, specifically, global trade negotiations. The fact that women are ill-represented at the forums that typically define and control the global movement of trade is poignant. At a fundamental level, women's voices have the potential to transform the ways in which communities experience globalisation and, in so doing, widen the distributional impact of international trade, improving inclusive access to resources.

Women senior trade negotiators who seek and reach high levels of responsibility within global trade negotiation arenas amplify their voices and their authority. Senior trade negotiators who have a robust understanding of gender analysis married with strong technical skills have the ability to articulate trade policy, enriched with gender analytics, at national, regional and international levels. Admittedly, both male and female senior trade negotiators may have an equally robust understanding of the gender dimension of trade policy and negotiations. However, the assumption is that a critical mass of trade negotiators who embody women's voices and agency are more likely to bring to the negotiating table positions around gender-equitable trade outcomes.

sectors of the economy may influence the pattern of production and trade, skewing economies towards sectors or production at different levels of global value chains. This may be augmented by government policies to increase

export competitiveness by promoting the positive attributes of its female workforce as a marketing factor, or indeed by the profitability of the export businesses themselves, in part driven by the low real wages of female staff.

4. Building gender-equitable outcomes of trade agreements

This section considers some of the underlying factors that should be amplified and used to inform trade negotiating positions, as they have the potential to improve gender-equitable trade outcomes.

4.1 Change in the trade policy architecture is required at national, regional and international levels

Improving understanding of gender and trade within relevant government ministries responsible for trade negotiations, as well as private sector and civil society stakeholders, is crucial. If governments want to improve gender outcomes, they must realise the gender equality implications of the substantive issues on the negotiating table. Ensuring that there are significant mechanisms in place at national and regional levels will assist in building stakeholder perspectives, particularly in the private sector (at all levels of business), which will experience changes in global competitiveness as a consequence of new trade policies and trade agreements. One mechanism to build

capacity and ensure that gender considerations are taken into account as a critical element of trade analysis and the negotiation process would be to develop a comprehensive yet simple checklist system for government agencies to ensure that gender issues are addressed in agenda-setting for regional and multilateral trade negotiations. Another mechanism would be to institute a robust trade policy review process through which critical stakeholders are consulted and sector-specific gender disaggregated data is collected and analysed. In so doing, trade policymakers can determine which and how sectors are affected.

4.2 The need for a gender-disaggregated data revolution: an absence of statistical data to inform positions

One of the key factors that needs to be addressed to inform government policy and donor aid priorities is the urgent requirement for a data revolution. Nowhere is this more crucial than in the area of gender equality and equity. There is a

Box 3. Disaggregating the data: experiences from India

In India, there is an ongoing debate about whether or not trade benefits unskilled labourers in terms of higher wages and more stable incomes. India's labour market is highly dualistic, in that there is a large informal, unorganised sector, in which female workers predominate. Given the complexities of the labour market in India, as well as the links between the formal sector and the larger informal sector (which employs 86 per cent of all workers), it is important to estimate the impact of trade on unskilled and female labour.

A UNCTAD study investigating how trade affects unskilled and female labour wage rates in the agriculture sector found that the poor may be differentially affected depending on the sector they work in, the types of products they produce and the state in which they work. To estimate the impact of exports and imports on the wages of unskilled labourers, an inter-industry analysis of 54 industries over the period from 1997/98 to 2005/06 was undertaken.

The analysis revealed that changes in the production structure of India, as a consequence of trade liberalisation, may result in different industries or new avenues of employment favouring one gender over another. Increased exports may lead to higher employment rates for women, but only if the intensity of women's employment is high in export-oriented units. Similarly, a rise in imports may adversely affect the employment of women if the imports are mainly in those sectors where women are disproportionately represented.⁸

Source: summarised from ITC, 2013.

clear disjuncture between the global community's declaration of new SDGs, as part of the post-2015 development framework, and the dearth of gender-disaggregated data. If such data had been available, it could have better informed the SDGs and indeed their ongoing implementation. The absence of the requisite gender-disaggregated data across all countries, particularly LDCs and developing economies, will throw into question the ability of governments to achieve these targets. At present, governments do not know enough about gender disparities across all sectors to construct good evidence-based gender-sensitive policies, particularly for trade and finance. Unless this is effectively addressed, as

committed to under SDG 17.18 (by 2020), countries will not have effective tools at their disposal to robustly inform decision-making processes and evaluate what the implications of trade deals on the table are.

In short, an absence of gender-disaggregated data is seriously undermining governments' capacity to build effective trade policy and, more broadly, at international level, hindering the efforts of the global partnership to eradicate poverty and deliver sustainable development. To address this challenge, more resources must be put into the development of national systems for collating gender-disaggregated trade data.

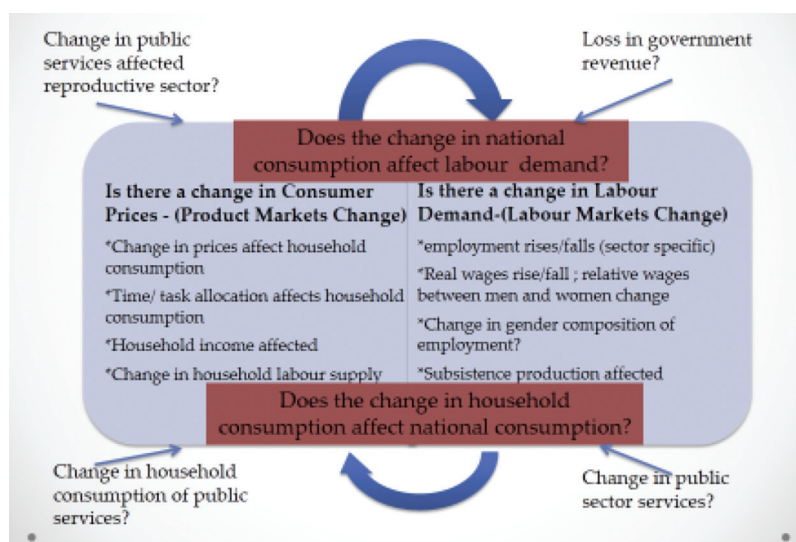
5. An important tool: gender impact assessments – what isn't measured *really* isn't taken into account

Policy decisions taken at global trade negotiations may appear to be *gender neutral*, but they are in fact *gender blind*, affecting women and men differently. Policy-makers may realise this, but political will is required for evidence-based gender

impact assessments (GIAs) to be conducted prior to trade negotiations in order to inform country negotiating positions. A GIA is a very useful tool for collecting data on how policies affect women and men differently and should be conducted as

⁸ This type of analysis forms part of the work that the Trade Competitiveness Section at the Commonwealth Secretariat undertakes for member countries: identifying new products for new markets, identifying gender-sensitive products and accounting for the gender dimension in trade.

Figure 3. Tracking the gendered impact of a change in trade policy



Source: adapted from Women's Edge Coalition (WEC), 2002.

early as possible in the run-up to the decision-making process to achieve optimal results.

A GIA enables policy-makers to analyse the impact of trade policy and international trade on prices and therefore household consumption; on changes in labour supply and how labour demand affects wages; and on national consumption and public services. A well-articulated GIA may also take into account how trade policy and globalisation has a gender-differentiated impact on subsistence production and unpaid work (e.g. the reproductive and care sectors). A GIA is a comprehensive tool that aids gender mainstreaming and widens policy-makers' understanding of how changes in international trade can have a wide-ranging

gender-differentiated impact on the domestic economy. It poses a number of key questions of trade policy and prospective trade agreements to determine the extent of any differential impact on women and men (Figure 3). These impacts are typically experienced at sector or industry level, and, therefore, measuring the extent of positive or negative disruption at these levels is important when planning adjustment policies or interventions to mitigate these effects.

Gender impact assessments are derived from the sustainability impact assessment (SIA) methodology and literature, which are now widely used by donor agencies, intergovernmental organisations and governments to inform policies and programmes.

Box 4. Cross-border trade: supporting women producers and traders

Cross-border trade is a large component of overall regional trade. Informal cross-border trade (in which small-scale women traders participate) is thought to be worth approximately 30–40 per cent of the value of total formal trade between countries in southern Africa, or US\$20 billion per year (South Africa Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC), 2008 cited in Brenton et al., 2013). It is accepted that the volume of this trade is probably under-recorded, as a result of seepage and the fast movement of goods and people. This invisibility in comparison with formal trade undermines the development of systems that would support this trade and the women traders who rely upon it for their livelihoods.

Without the development of appropriate systems or a framework to support informal cross-border trade, obstacles will remain. Women traders in particular face challenges in participating in and benefiting from this trade; road blockages and physical barriers to trade along key export corridors hamper women traders' movements. Furthermore, rules and regulations may be arbitrarily applied, reducing certainty of transactions and raising the cost of trading across borders. For example, export permits and rules of origin are frequently used as a means of over-regulation and to enable corrupt practices. The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, through the implementation of its Simplified Trading Regime (STR), is seeking to address this problem by using simpler paperwork (a single document) for goods valued below US\$1,000.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

This paper examines the importance of gender and trade for improving gender equality globally. There is incontrovertible evidence that international trade affects women and men differently; however, there is less clarity about how best to design policy interventions that will allow for smooth adjustments or transitions within expanding and contracting industries.

Our research reveals an under-representation of women officials, particularly at senior levels in the WTO. The first hurdle, that of holding the post of ambassador/HoM, shapes progression to the role of chair on the decision-making, accountable committees and councils at the WTO. Chairs of councils are crucial in shaping the nature and scope of the debate between member countries and command the authority to broker consensus for consideration by the General Council.

The following six recommendations are made for undertaking gender-aware trade negotiations and developing a conceptual framework for gender-sensitive trade policy:

1. **Strengthen** the national systems through which ministries of trade collate data on gender and trade issues from key stakeholders (private sector and civil society) who may be affected by changing regional and international trade agreements. Test how this framework is performing in practice.
2. **Commission** GIAs and SIAs on a regular basis at regional level, as standalone activities but also as part of the trade policy review process, and widely distribute the analyses to all stakeholders.
3. **Identify** which organ of the WTO is dealing with gender issues at the level of mainstreaming gender into WTO processes. Establish gender perspectives in targeted negotiation processes through the establishment of a Working Group on Gender and Trade. Monitor the effectiveness of this work.
4. **Secure** more women negotiators at the WTO. Access budgetary resources to sponsor female trade officials from LDCs/small states to shadow their missions' participation in WTO negotiations. This would provide much needed mentorship and help to build the technical capacity of future female trade negotiators.
5. **Advocate** for the creation of a new senior role/designations of gender and trade officer (reporting directly to the director of trade) within ministries of trade. These senior technical officials should be experienced economists with considerable gender training/orientation. Aid for Trade could have a role in capacitating this new function.
6. **Grassroots women's voices** need to be heard in order for poor women's concerns to receive traction. Strategic alliances of gender advocates, regionally and internationally, would increase the prospects of these perspectives effecting change at higher decision-making levels of trade policy and negotiations.

Bold action is required to improve gender-equitable global trade outcomes. The global trade negotiating process appears to be failing to deliver the results that both rich and poor countries seek, as well as the gender equality that the global partnership states it wants to achieve, as articulated in the new SDGs. Trade negotiation processes and the trade outcomes that result cannot easily be disentangled from the vision of the SDGs, due to the wide-ranging impact of trade on development. The SDGs provide a key opportunity to increase women's representation in trade negotiation forums and to reassess the methodological tools through which governments derive trade policy. Taking bold action in this regard will make it more likely that, as pledged in the Agenda for Sustainable Development, 'no one is left behind'.

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