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Summary of the UNCTAD side event

Trade and gender: Perspectives for sustainable growth and poverty reduction

Summary prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat

1. The side event, organized in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat, was introduced by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, and chaired by the Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Ransford Smith.
2. In his introductory remarks, Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi emphasized the need for growth to be more inclusive and spoke of both the challenges and opportunities that trade impacts had on women in the labour market. Although women's incomes had a multiplier effect on the economy and society and trade had improved women's incomes, the impact of trade on women looked less positive in some countries. Disparities remained in labour laws such as male–female wage differentials and the fact that, in times of adversity, such as a food crisis, women often bore the hardest burdens. Moreover, there was a need for more empirical evidence.
3. Other panellists included Ms Rachel Mayanja, United Nations Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, who gave the opening statement; Shri Gopal Pillai, Permanent Secretary, Commerce Ministry, India; Anh-Nga Tran-Nguyen, Director, Services Infrastructure for Development and Trade Efficiency, UNCTAD; and Savior Mwambwa, National Coordinator of the Civil Society Trade Network, Zambia.
4. In her opening statement, Ms Mayanja noted that urgent attention was needed to accelerate progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women, across all levels and sectors, emphasizing that resources had to be allocated for activities aimed at the elimination of persistent obstacles to gender equality and the empowerment of women if the international community were serious in the pursuit of gender equality as a central pillar in poverty reduction and sustainable development.
5. The “invisibility” of women's contribution to growth, along with the subsequent absence of women within business delegations and the policymaking process in general, was one of the greatest obstacles. There were several ways

forward, including legislation to ensure greater employment opportunities for women; the framing of national policy by getting all departments to adopt gender-sensitive approaches; and increased access to credit and capital for women entrepreneurs.

6. Broader opportunities existed for a gender lens in trade analysis and policy. Efforts to promote gender mainstreaming and utilization of entry points and policy spaces were a first step. One speaker outlined the multidimensional impacts of trade liberalization on gender equality, such as wage differentials, the displacement of women from the food subsistence sector, and an increase in the casualization of the work through competition on costs in labour-intensive industries, calling for more impact assessments of trade and gender and the mainstreaming of gender policies across all ministries.

7. The final presentation provided a grassroots and civil society perspective on the impact of trade policy on gender and poverty reduction. The focus was on the Zambian country context, where modest and sustained growth rates had not translated appropriately into human development. Poverty in the country had a gender dimension, particularly in rural areas and within the agricultural sector. There was a need to conduct a clear diagnostic analysis of gender impacts at the policy level and to empower women traders and small groups on the practical aspects of trade agreements, allowing for their views to be fed into the national process.

8. Questions and an active give-and-take with participants followed the presentations, including a lively debate on the implementation of quotas; innovative financing for poor women producers to transition from microenterprises to small and medium-sized enterprises; and the potential impacts of the EU-ACP Economic Partnership Agreements on competitiveness, poverty reduction and gender equality.

9. In conclusion, the Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General summarized the key outcomes of the presentations and the discussion through the following recommendations:

- (a) Promoting increased capacity-building among policymakers to ensure that a gender lens was applied to all stages of trade policy formulation, implementation and negotiation;
- (b) Creating an enabling environment for market access for women producers and workers by strengthening trade support services, such as financial and business services, and by developing gender-sensitive projects targeted at increased export promotion;
- (c) Adopting a gender-sensitive trade-related regulatory framework at both regional and international level;
- (d) Providing incentives in national-level policies for poor women on the one hand to access global markets and on the other to protect their livelihoods from the negative impacts of globalization;
- (e) Encouraging increased involvement by women in the formulation of trade policies and in global negotiations all levels;
- (f) Promoting public debate and access to information on trade processes and agreements;
- (g) Strengthening data analysis and collection and other empirical evidence on gender with a view to inclusion within policymaking;
- (h) Strengthening access to education, information and technologies for women and girls.