

Remarks by the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD

Women and Trade in Africa: Realizing the Potential

Geneva, 20 January 2014

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Ms. Gonzales,
Distinguished colleagues from the World Bank,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to open this event, which UNCTAD is pleased to co-host with the World Bank and the International Trade Centre. Our Secretary-General - Dr. Kituyi - is on mission, but he sends his best wishes for a productive meeting.

Unfortunately, Ambassador Amanda Ellis of New Zealand, who was planning to moderate today's session, has been taken ill and will not be able to join us. But Ms. Arancha Gonzalez, the Executive Director of the International Trade Centre, has graciously agreed to step in and I am very grateful to her.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past decade, many countries have experienced a disconnect between economic growth and social development. Income disparities, social inequality and exclusion have increased even in countries that have recorded high levels of economic growth and strong trade performance. Yet for growth and development to be sustainable, it must be inclusive and equitable, and therefore address the needs of women and other neglected segments of society.

In this context, UNCTAD is working to examine the link between trade policy and gender equality. We are conducting a series of country case studies to assess the impact of trade liberalization on gender, and in particular whether there is a gender bias in the gains from trade. My colleague Ms. Simonetta Zarrilli will share with you the main findings of the country studies conducted in Africa, namely Angola, Cape Verde, the Gambia, Lesotho and Rwanda.

Many interesting lessons are emerging from this analysis. While many of these countries have seen substantial improvements with regard to female participation in education and political activities as well as in female literacy rates, those notable achievements have not adequately translated in equal economic opportunities for men and women. The studies found that trade integration, be it at the global or at the regional levels - does not automatically reduce existing gender disparities: instead, there is a tendency towards employment polarization, whereby women tend to be employed in the less dynamic sectors - which tend to be informal and non-tradable; while men are more able to benefit from the opportunities emerging in the expanding sectors.

Yet, women could well benefit as much as men from expanded international trade. A key recommendation of our studies is the need to "dynamize" the sectors where women operate; and to create opportunities for women in expanding sectors. Proactive measures are needed in this direction. Gender-based constraints need to be acknowledged and redressed by means of gender-specific and, as warranted, redistributive measures. To be effective, these measures should acknowledge the gender-differentiated impacts of trade. Indeed, trade - and trade policy - tend to have a distinct impact on women in all of the economic roles they play: as producers or waged workers and traders; as consumers; and as users of public services and tax payers. Policy makers need to

be cautious about the gender ramifications of trade in all these areas, and take gender-specific and gender-redistributive measures, as appropriate.

The newly published book by the World Bank "Women and Trade in Africa: Realizing the Potential" showcases the key role that African women play in trade and stresses how essential they are for Africa to fully benefit from its significant trade potential. However, as Mr. Brenton recognizes in his book, this potential is undermined by the many constraints that women face. These barriers often push women traders and producers into the informal sector where lack of access to finance, information, and networks limits their capacity to grow and develop their business and prevents them from taking full advantage of the opportunities created by trade. This in turn undermines the aspirations of African countries to use trade as a tool for poverty reduction and as a driver of growth and employment. The report includes a number of useful recommendations to ensure women's full and beneficial involvement in trade, including clear and transparent rules at the border, the simplification of documents and regulatory requirements, and the design of interventions to develop trade in ways that ensure benefits for women.

The inclusion of a gender perspective in the design and implementation of macro-economic policies, including trade policy, is a way to give substance and meaning to the commitments that countries have taken on gender equality and women's empowerment. One way in which gender can be promoted in such policies is through multilateral development assistance frameworks, such as Aid-for-Trade and the Enhanced Integrated Framework. Let me recall that an essential part of the Enhanced Integrated Framework process is the preparation of a Diagnostic Trade Integration Study (DTIS) as the analytical foundation for policy recommendations and related capacity-building interventions at the country level. To enhance the usefulness of Diagnostic Trade Integration Studies

as tools for inclusive development, UNCTAD is supporting the inclusion of gender considerations and pro-women interventions in related analysis and action plans. It is in this framework that our Division on International Trade and Commodities and the Division for Africa, LDCs and Special Programmes have joined forces to support the updating of the DTIS of The Gambia and have produced a study that analyses the fishery sectors and its prospects for women's employment creation and economic empowerment. The wider UN Development Assistance Framework can also be a catalyst for leveraging funds and promoting a broader uptake of policy commitments at the national level in the area of women's economic empowerment.

Allow me to once again express my gratitude and appreciation to the International Trade Centre and to the World Bank. I am looking forward to continuing UNCTAD's cooperation with you on these crucial issues.

Thank you.