

CSW61 side event:

**“The impact of the trade environment on Women’s
Employment”**

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Statement by

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The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNCTAD"

Ambassador, ladies and gentlemen,

Honoured speak side event “The impact of trade environment on Women’s Employment”.

Refreshing coming to UN – break day job in DC interpret a new trade agenda evolving in the transition to a new Administration.

We see clear tendencies towards protectionist views on trade globally.

Sweden, a small country of 10 million, means that 99,86% of consumers live outside our borders. Trade provides half of Swedish wealth and a crucial job creator. Many of our companies are interlinked to the global value chains. Sweden always driven free and fair trade and higher standards to enable our country to compete.

Women’s economic empowerment increasingly seen as important driving force behind economic growth and the fight against poverty.

Women’s economic participation as entrepreneurs, employees and leaders is recognised as a measure of a country’s economic viability and dynamism.

We see that countries where a large proportion of women participate in the labour market enjoy greater economic growth than the countries that restrict the right of women to work on the same terms as men.

In the case of Sweden, women's economic empowerment and participation in the labour force were made possible mainly through three reforms: 1. the abolition of the joint taxation system, 2. the expansion of publicly-funded affordable child and elderly care, and 3. the reform of the parental insurance that allows mothers and fathers to take parental leave on equal terms.

Our feminist foreign policy aims at achieving gender equality by eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and girls, and improving general conditions for women and girls.

Gender equality encompasses all areas of Sweden's foreign policy – development cooperation, security, trade, promotion and public diplomacy.

The link between trade and gender equality is complex and depend on national circumstances. The effects can go both ways. Trade and trade liberalization can affect equality, but the equality situation in a country may also affect its ability to trade.

Generally, trade liberalization has helped to create more jobs and stronger connection to markets for both men and women. But, although trade rules are generally gender-neutral designed, international trade liberalization affect men and women differently.

The different effect is due to women's and men's different roles in production and imbalances over control of land, power and resources.

In addition, the majority of informal cross-border traders are women. They lack legal frameworks and face challenging, hostile working environments, like poor transportation, complicated customs procedures and lack of safe and cheap accommodation.

Thus, opening up trade so that it benefits women remains a challenge.

We need to reach poor women who are landless labourers, small agricultural producers, cross-border traders and factory workers.

Another challenge is the slow progress with regard to gender analysis, which is complex but crucial. An accurate picture will enable us to advance more convincingly and formulate adequate responses.

Analytical work made by organisations like UNCTAD, World Bank, International Trade Centre, and International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development are very important. But more needs to be done.

The UN estimates that there is currently only available reliable data to follow up a third of the global targets.

Even worse in terms of gender-specific data. Only a third of the world's nations gather data that makes it possible to measure and understand women's and girls' economic situation. Hundreds of millions of women and girls are therefore statistically invisible.

Moreover, we must push for gender equality in trade negotiations. Here, making gender impact assessments of trade and investment agreements may contribute to inclusive development.

The Sustainability Impact Assessment is a tool for supporting major trade negotiations. It provides in-depth analysis of the potential economic, social, human rights, and environmental impacts of trade negotiations.

Individual-based statistics should be broken down by gender to enable systematic gender analysis. Essential to identify actions to 'maximise the benefits', to 'minimise gender inequalities', and vice-versa.

Where relevant, the statistics could also point at areas for regional and international development assistance priorities.

Now to trade and its effect on women's employment: While it is not clear that trade liberalization always reduces gender inequality, some research indicate channels by which trade policy can improve gender inequality in wages and employment.

For example, the pro-competitive effects of liberalization could be associated with lower gender inequality. Less discriminating practices may be an advantage for firms, allowing them to perform better and export.

The pro-competitive effects of trade liberalization can reduce gender inequality by inducing technology upgrade, which can make manufacturing jobs less physically demanding. As a result, the productivity of women could increase relative to that of men. For this to

occur, it is important that firms have access to advanced technology from more developed countries.

Trade liberalization policies can also induce a change in the sectoral structure of production, which can have positive or negative effects on gender inequality. There is research suggesting that the actual effects on gender equality could depend on the female intensity as well as the capital intensity of those sectors in which a country has a comparative advantage.

To sum up– more in depth analyses are urgently needed. UNCTAD's work is therefore of great importance.

I am looking forward to the discussion today, which could contribute to giving us a better picture of what we need to do in order to enhance the possibilities for women arising from international trade and trade policy negotiations.

Thank you!

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