

**CSW 61 Side event on "The impact of the Trade Environment on Women's Employment"**

**Statement on behalf of Dr. Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary-General of UNCTAD**

**17 March 2017, 11:30-12:45, Conference Room A**

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Women are important players in trade. They manufacture products, they trade goods across borders, and they manage and own trading firms. Women also make up a large part of the workforce in export-oriented businesses.

But despite growing participation in the economy – as workers, as managers and as entrepreneurs – women’s potential in trade is still too often held back by the many constraints they face. These constraints in turn hold back development.

The expansion of global trade has had an ambiguous impact on women. Trade has enabled more women to find wage employment – but often at low salaries with limited opportunities for skill development.

Similarly, women as consumers have often gained when agricultural tariffs are reduced, but as producers they’ve also lost when commodity prices fall and when competition in the domestic market increases.

Across many different developing countries, women play an outsized role in the agro-processing industry, in the garment manufacturing sector, and in the export of high-tech ICT services. However, in all these cases, we see that even where women have benefited, it is often their marginalization and their lack of skills or assets that has made them profitable additions to global value chains.

Consequently, precarious low-skill jobs with limited opportunities for development and persistent gender wage gaps continue to hold back women’s enjoyment of the benefits from trade.

Today, this state of affairs has become even more challenging with global trade now facing its slowest decade of growth in 70 years, and with globalization under fire because it has left too many people behind.

In fact, it has become clear that women themselves are among the largest groups of those who can indeed say they have been left behind by globalization.

A shift in public policies to upgrade the role that women play in trade will not only help redress these inequalities – it can also help reform trade to make it more inclusive and sustainable.

Public-private dialogue and partnership in industries that disproportionately employ women is an important place to start.

Upgrading the female workforce through training and skills development and investing in time-saving, labour-saving technologies that respond to women's needs is important, as well. This includes provisioning for women's disproportionate role in unpaid care work.

For these efforts to be successful, it is important that promoting gender equality becomes part and parcel of all economic development policy interventions, especially in the trade space.

Aid for Trade funds and Trade Facilitation capacity building efforts, for example, should also be used to redress obstacles that constrain women's ability to profitably engage in international trade.

At UNCTAD, as part of our Work Programme on Trade, Gender and Development, we are trying to successfully mainstream gender equality into all of the support we offer Member States.

We will continue to push for more efforts to make trade a stronger instrument for women's empowerment, but we also trust that women's empowerment can itself help us reform and improve trade.

We hope this side event contributes to these efforts, and we would like take this opportunity to thank the governments of Finland and Sweden who make UNCTAD's Trade, Gender and Development Programme possible through their generous support.

Thank you.