

CSW 61 Side event:

**"The impact of the Trade Environment on Women's
Employment"**

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

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is great pleasure to be here again this year with you. First of all, I would like to thank UNCTAD and Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden for co-organizing this event with us.

Promoting women's rights and empowering women and girls has been a consistent policy goal throughout our history. One of the reasons Finland transformed from a poor country to a modern high income country is the fact that both women and men participate fully in the society. Gender equality is not only a matter of fairness and justice, it also makes economic sense.

Enhancing the rights and status of women and girls is a cornerstone of Finland's Development Policy. We see that empowering women strengthens the society as a whole, thus promoting the achievement of also other development goals.

This is particularly true in the context of the Agenda 2030. Eradicating extreme poverty is one of the key sustainable development goals. It is clear that this, and other sustainable development goals, cannot be achieved if gender equality and women's economic empowerment is not addressed fully and brought from the margins to the centre.

In today's event we are focusing on the trade environment and its impacts women's employment.

First of all, I would like to say that we believe firmly in the positive effects that international trade can have for women's employment and empowerment. This is important to keep in mind as we have witnessed an increasing anti-trade –rhetoric from different quarters.

Taking part in the global trade and investment networks offers important opportunities for both women and men. It is clear that international trade has increased employment of women and raised many out of poverty. Trade has created millions of jobs in developing countries in textiles and clothing, agriculture and electronics, for example.

However, the potential of international trade in poorer developing countries is still far from being fully utilized, while some developing nations are already major trading powers. A possible increase of trade protectionism would hurt developing countries and cause job losses.

This would also affect especially women, who are more prone to stay home in unpaid labor when paid jobs are reduced.

International trade can empower women. For many women this has meant a first formal job, own salary and independence. Evidence shows that international trade in general improves employment opportunities of women. Open trade is also positively correlated with better economic rights for women.

However, engaging in international trade may also create some new challenges as companies adjust their operations and structures of production and employment change. In some cases jobs may be lost due to increased competition. In these cases it is important there are different support mechanisms for helping women to find new jobs in other sectors.

It is important that there is sufficient capacity to assess these impacts of trade environment so that informed policy-choices can be made. One must see these impacts in the broad context and assess impact of policy measures for women in different roles they play in the economy: as workers, entrepreneurs and consumers. The capacity to assess the links between trade and gender in the local social context is essential for making the right choices from the gender perspective and to be able to enhance the positive development effects of trade. The tools that UNCTAD has developed can be very valuable in this work.

We believe that in general, the impact of trade on women's employment is positive. In addition to the quantity of employment there is also the quality of jobs, the working conditions that matter very much.

We have seen that working in companies that are connected to global value chains often provide women with better wages and working conditions than domestic firms. For example they offer permanent formal contracts and social and health insurance. As companies are engaged in trade they will gradually start adapting to international standards – labor and human rights as well as environmental standards.

Of course, there is still lot of work to do and challenges. Abuses are not acceptable under any conditions and we should find better ways to abolish these practices in global production networks wherever they occur. Our belief is that an open and transparent global trading system supports well these objectives.

It is also very important that companies and governments integrate gender equality in the implementation of their different responsible business conduct policies and initiatives. These issues should be discussed together with the private sectors, trade unions and other civil society organizations. This is something we have tried to do as part of our multi-stakeholder discussions on implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights with aim of identifying best practices.

Trade and gender is an important area where there are lot of opportunities and work to be done by all partners. This is also an area where UNCTAD could take even stronger role. We are happy that the 14. UNCTAD Conference in Nairobi last July decided to strengthen UNCTAD's mandate and work on trade, gender and women's empowerment. We would like to encourage UNCTAD to seize this opportunity to strengthen its role in trade and gender and to work in close partnership with partners such as the WTO, ITC and the EIF (the Enhanced Integrated Framework)¹ for women's economic empowerment.

Both gender equality and trade are at the heart of Finnish Development Policy. And we have responded to the call for reinforcing UNCTAD's trade and gender work. Finland will contribute with 400.000 dollars (386.000 EUR) to that end in 2017-2018.

Finally, I would like to thank UNCTAD and Simonetta Zarrilli's team for the excellent work they have done over the years and we are very much looking forward to our continuing collaboration in this field.

Thank You !

¹ A global partnership between the least developed countries, the donors and the agencies that brings together the key players to address women's economic empowerment through trade.

