

**Expert Meeting on Trade as a Tool for the Economic Empowerment of Women
Geneva, Switzerland, May 23, 2016
“Empowering Women through Trade”
Statement by the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD**

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Good morning,

Thank you for coming. I am pleased to see so many of you here today.

In New York last September, the international community made a firm commitment to tackle inequalities wherever they exist: within countries, between countries, and also, between —women and men.

This expert meeting is inspired by that commitment.

And this is not an isolated event. It is part of an overall effort to ensure that half of the world’s population has exactly the same opportunities as the other half.

To give a recent example, in March UNCTAD co-organized with Finland a very successful event on trade and gender during the 60th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

While I’m on the subject, let me take this opportunity to thank, on behalf of UNCTAD, the Finnish chair of this meeting, Mr. Juha Niemi, for his government’s generous contributions to this work program. Thanks to your support, we are making important progress towards women’s economic empowerment.

Before I begin, it’s perhaps worth asking: What do we actually mean by women’s economic empowerment?

In our definition, it can be understood as a woman's ability to exercise agency to change her own life. And more broadly, it also encompasses her ability to change the structures that put her in subordinate positions relative to men.

The fact is that empowering women is not only good for women. It's good for all of us.

Just to give you one example from the FAO: If women had the same access to resources as men, total agricultural production in developing countries would rise by between 2.5 and 4%. That may sound like a small percentage, but it would be enough to reduce the number of hungry people by 100 to 150 million.

Empowering women can unlock tremendous gains.

In the context of this meeting, however, the question is the following: What are the specific links between women's empowerment and trade?

Over the next two days, we will hear several presentations that explore this question in more detail.

What we can say at a general level is that trade affects women's empowerment because it alters the distribution of income and resources.

Trade by its very nature, of course, has distributional implications. The task for us is to assess how these distributional shifts affect women in their roles as employees, producers, consumers, and taxpayers.

And in this regard, it's useful to assess these shifts at **three levels: the national, the sectoral, and the household levels.**

Let me give some examples.

At the national level, trade openness is likely to decrease tariff revenues, especially in developing countries lacking a broad tax base. This, in turn, may have gender-specific effects on the size and composition of government spending. Lower revenues may, for example, put pressure on budgets in the areas of childcare or primary education.

At the sectoral level, trade can lead to changes in the structure of production. Export-competing sectors could expand and generate new jobs. Import-competing sectors could contract, leading to job losses or lower wages. Sectoral reallocations of this kind may also have gender-specific effects, particularly if certain gender is associated with certain jobs or even entire sectors. And when economic shocks hit these sectors, they tend to disproportionately affect small-scale and low-skill workers, many of whom are women.

Finally, **at the household level**, trade causes changes to the relative prices of goods and services. These relative changes can have gender-specific implications for real incomes, with consequences for both time and resource allocations within households.

Thanks to the expertise that you bring to this expert meeting, I am confident that we can make important progress on assessments at these three levels.

These assessments are not designed to be printed, bound, and stored on a shelf in our library. They are designed to feed directly into UNCTAD's policy recommendations.

This is why UNCTAD has set up a work program on trade, gender, and development. We know policies can be effective. They have already helped to reverse – and in some cases even close – several gaps, for example, in education.

We aim to replicate the successes in other areas.

Our current efforts help policymakers incorporate gender objectives into trade policies. They encourage academics to include gender considerations in their research and teaching. And they equip civil society advocates with sound data and analysis.

Many countries still struggle to translate the political resolve for gender equality into concrete actions.

Today, gender considerations are still too seldom taken into account when trade policies are under negotiation. Our hope is that our research and advocacy work will prompt policymakers to give substance to women's empowerment.

So far, we have studied and published reports on trade and gender impacts in a range of developing and least developed countries. These studies are important in their own right, because they make women visible. But they also offer policymakers guidance on how trade can promote gender equality.

These studies have also provided content for our first-of-a-kind teaching package. If you are not already familiar with it, this package includes a two-volume publication on the theoretical and empirical links between trade and gender. It also features a set of multimedia presentations. The team here has used the package as the basis for two successful online courses.

We hope that many more will follow.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This July, UNCTAD is keen to use its ministerial conference in Nairobi as an opportunity to advance gender equality.

We're organizing no less than three events on gender issues:

- A ministerial round table on women as agents of change in agriculture;
- A private sector development and gender dialogue;
- And the Empretec Women in Business awards ceremony.

I hope that many of you will be able to join us at these events in Nairobi. And I thank you already for joining us on this journey to an inclusive global agenda that empowers women through trade.

Working together, we can make good on our commitment to rolling back gender equalities.

Thank you for your attention.