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# POLICY BRIEF

# BETTER DATA AND STATISTICS FOR GENDER-RESPONSIVE TRADE POLICY

Gender-responsive trade policy requires sound data and statistics. The interactions between gender and trade are complex and intertwined with social norms and institutions. Trade policies interact with the gendered structures of societies and have multiple gender-differentiated effects. These effects are difficult to analyse due to a lack of data. Furthermore, there is no statistical framework to measure the interactions between gender and trade, particularly for developing countries where women often face severe economic constraints compounded by gender.

The proposed conceptual structure tackles the multi-dimensional measurement challenges presented by the compounding effects between gender and trade in a cohesive methodology. This brief also sets out an action-orientated policy framework to address the current lacuna of official statistics for gender-responsive trade policy consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals and wider UNCTAD policy mandates.

## Key points

- Governments are committed to using trade to foster gender equality and women's economic empowerment.
- Lack of data on complex interactions of gender and trade is holding back progress.
- UNCTAD calls for collaboration to develop official statistics in support of gender-responsive trade policy.

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## Why do we need better data on gender and trade?

Trade and gender are linked in many ways. Changes in trade policies impact the sectoral composition of the economy affecting job opportunities and the welfare of women and men. Trade policies, therefore, can have important redistributive effects within an economy, which can magnify or reduce existing disparities, including gender inequality.

It is crucial for policy makers to be able to assess how policies affect gender equality to reinforce current measures or introduce corrective actions.

There are multiple channels of interaction between gender and trade, and better data is needed to inform effective policies. In many countries lack of data threatens to become an impediment to developing gender-responsive and inclusive trade policies.

We need reliable data to measure and set baselines for effective decisions and to assess their impact over time. Regardless of recent efforts to improve statistics disaggregated by sex, statistics that allow analysis of the gender and trade nexus are scarce.

Governments are committed to advancing equal and inclusive trade. Already in 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action (para. 206) called for statistics that" reflect problems, issues and questions related to women and men in society", and statistics "on the full contribution of women and men to the economy, including their participation in the informal sectors".

The need for data on gender and trade has been increasingly voiced over time, most recently with the signing of the Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment in December 2017.

The Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) also stressed that (para. 21) "evidence shows that gender equality, women's empowerment and women's full and equal participation and leadership in the economy are vital to achieve sustainable development and significantly enhance economic growth and productivity". The AAAA also (para. 90) recognized "the critical role of women as producers and traders" and noted the

importance of facilitating "women's equal and active participation in domestic, regional and international trade".

Gender cuts across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There are 53 indicators that refer to gender, and of these 20 relate to economic empowerment and participation. In addition, target 17.10 calls for the promotion of "a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system…" that would benefit from better data on gender and trade.

In July 2016, member States mandated UNCTAD to "reinforce the work on the links between gender equality, women's and girls' empowerment and trade and development"[1]. To fulfil the mandate, UNCTAD launched a work stream on measuring gender and trade, among other initiatives.

This brief is based on the results of the first work phase: a literature review to understand the issues that should be measured, an inventory of available official statistics, and a stock take of international initiatives to improve data on gender and trade. Based on this review, UNCTAD calls for collaboration to develop official statistics in support of gender-responsive trade policy.

## Key dimensions of gender and trade – what to measure?

There is a two-way relationship[2] between gender and trade: the distributional outcomes of trade vary by gender, and gender inequalities affect trade strategies and desired impacts of trade measures on economic performance.

Collecting the necessary data on the multiple interactions for analysis is challenging. The literature review provided a greater understanding of the gender dimensions of trade by identifying issues for measurement:

- **Preconditions** for participation of women and men in trade: motivations and aspirations, resources and constraints;
- **Outcomes** reflecting the degree of participation and roles of women and men;
- **Impacts** including the effects of trade on employment, division of labour, income, empowerment and wellbeing etc.;
- **Trade policy** and other government interventions that may influence gender equality.

The following trade-adapted 'Evidence and Data for Gender Equality' (EDGE) conceptual framework[3] disaggregates the interdependent measurement challenges for gender in trade, by the four key dimensions of: preconditions; outcomes; impacts; and trade policy. Here a 'policy' element was added, as trade policy may influence other dimensions of gender equality.

## Statistics on gender and trade – what data do we have?

Despite significant progress in gender statistics' availability, incomplete country data and comparability problems persist in many domains. Current data availability can be roughly summarized as follows:

- Education and health statistics lead the way in country coverage;
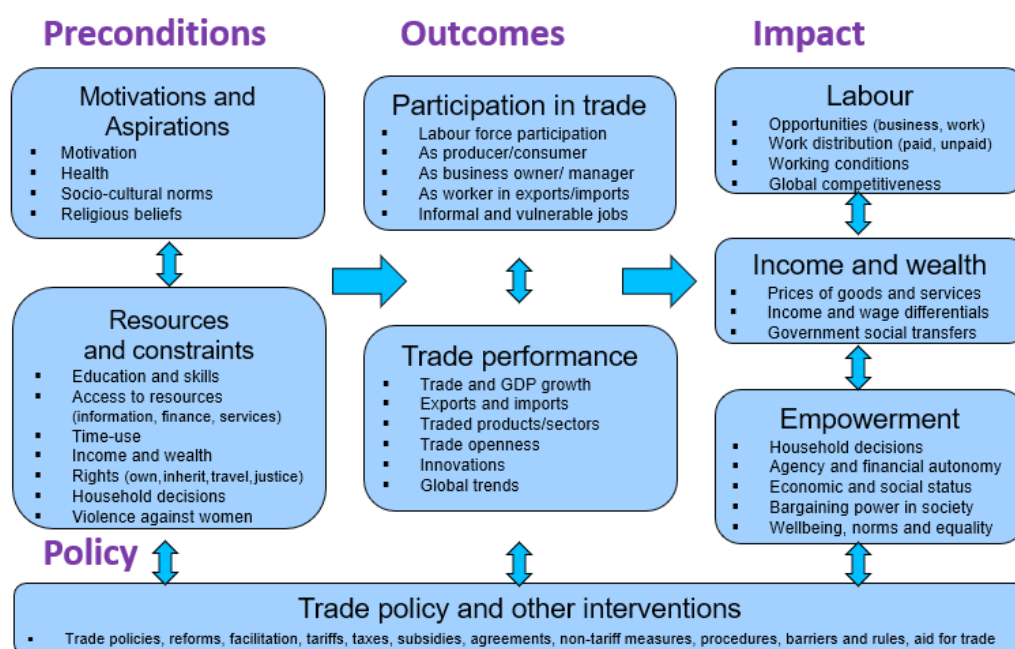


1 Nairobi Maafikiano, paragraph 55(bb)

2 UNCTAD (2014) Virtual Institute Teaching Material on Trade and Gender. Geneva.

3 Initially developed to measure entrepreneurship from a gender perspective UNSD: EDGE project pages: https://unstats.un.org/edge/methodology/entrepreneurship/

- Rates of labour force participation are often available, as well as political participation;
- Statistics on working conditions, consumption and time-use are available at long intervals;
- Data on economic opportunities and entrepreneurship are available by gender from ad-hoc surveys but need be improved;
- Statistics on policies and laws that influence gender equality remain difficult to find;
- Statistics on subjective wellbeing and intrahousehold decision-making are scarce; and
- There is little information on the gender dimension of security and conflict.

Over the years, national statistical offices have developed gender statistics, and international organisations conduct surveys and collate statistics from national sources. Country variations in the availability of statistics are large. The UNCTAD review of available statistics on gender and trade found many relevant statistics, but also limitations and data gaps.

A special difficulty is the inability to link data across domains. Samples of households and businesses are based on different populations. Statistics are collected for specialised purposes for different statistical units. For instance, trade statistics collect data on products, and social statistics on individuals and households.

Sometimes statistics are not granular enough for disaggregation: household data cannot always be divided to individuals to reveal gender dimensions. Many subjective measures[4] are lacking due to the high costs of interviewing and the burden on respondents. Data on agency, cultural norms, social relations and household decision making that affect participation in trade are scarce.

Gendered structures are deeply rooted in societies and are difficult to capture. These structures and habits influence how the roles of women and men are identified for statistics. For example, the established cultural values may affect whether women are identified as managers of family businesses.

Many limitations arise from the intended use of statistics. Business statistics, for instance, often concentrate on larger enterprises, while in many countries women are more often employed in informal activities and smaller businesses.

Consistent time series are not easy to find as many variables come from ad-hoc surveys or surveys carried out every five or ten years, such as time-use surveys that provide valuable information on gender.

Increasing the capacity of national statistical systems to improve existing data would be a sustainable way forward. Developing the national data infrastructure will also be important[5] so that new statistics build on existing practice, methodologies and tools.

Statistical sources containing information for analysing gender and trade include:

- Economic, population, agricultural censuses;
- Household surveys, e.g. on labour force;
- Enterprise and establishment surveys;
- National or global ad-hoc surveys, for instance on gender, business owners and managers; and
- Administrative and other registers.

Global databases bring together some of these statistics. As these statistics were mostly developed for other purposes, their use for analysis of gender may require assumptions. For instance, assessing women's role in trade by simply identifying how many women work in each export or import-oriented industry does not really tell us about their economic status in trade.

## Linking gender and trade across statistics

As gender is not traditionally measured in trade statistics, it is necessary to establish links between gender and trade data across statistical systems. These links can be defined by looking at the roles women and men can play in trade:

- **Employment** – women and men as employees of businesses engaged in international trade as exporters or importers;
- **Entrepreneurship** – women and men as owners or managers of businesses engaged in international trade;
- **Production** – women and men as producers of goods and services traded internationally, using imported inputs or sold in markets that compete with similar imported products; and
- **Consumption** – women and men as consumers of traded goods and services.

In addition, research looks at women and men as tax payers, but this is not considered separately as the relevant data can be derived from statistics on employment and consumption.

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[4] Subjective measures analyse person's own feelings and judgements about issues.

[5] See Goal 9 in: UNCTAD (2016): *Development and Globalization Facts and Figures*

Regarding the employment role, linking between employer (in trade) and employees (by sex) would enable analysis of the impacts of trade participation on economic outcomes, income and employment etc. Such links may be analysed based on enterprise or household surveys but are typically not available for total populations.

Analysing entrepreneurship role requires information on the gender of businesses' owners or managers. This is usually not collected in business statistics but may be available from occasional censuses, registers of the Chambers of Commerce or administrative sources. Some national statistical offices conduct ad-hoc surveys on entrepreneurship that allow analysis of gender dimensions.

The production role can be reviewed using business statistics' data on business structures and performance, products and services, engagement in trade and changes in business activities linked to employees and their sex.

Consumption can be measured through household consumption surveys, but these are often only conducted every five or ten years. It may be difficult to identify who consumed the product. There are no registers or censuses for linking between traded products and their consumers. The possibilities to review the consumer role in trade is, therefore, limited.

## Key actions for a gender-responsive trade policy

Governments are taking important steps towards gender mainstreaming in trade policies and agreements. Official statistics need to be developed in parallel to inform policy action. To this end, UNCTAD will launch its new work stream in collaboration with interested governments and partner organisations aiming to:

- Seek advice from trade and gender policy makers on data needs and invite statisticians to consider how to respond to the needs;

- Improve access to existing statistics as proxies for assessing the roles of women and men in export and import-oriented industries;

- Develop a statistical framework for the analysis of gender and trade;

- Develop a survey module for measuring gender and trade in countries with significant data gaps through collaboration among international organisations; and

- Invite country case studies to test data sources and methods for compiling these statistics.

These activities will feed into a capacity building programme, which UNCTAD is planning to carry out with partners to strengthen countries' statistical capacity to measure gender and trade.

This initiative contributes to more gender-responsive and inclusive trade and development towards achieving the global goals of the 2030 Agenda.

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