

**TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
SIXTY-SECOND SESSION**

GENEVA, PALAIS DES NATIONS, 14–25 SEPTEMBER 2015

DEVELOPMENT  
SEGMENT  
LEVEL  
HIGH

**DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD****ROLE OF WOMEN  
AS A CATALYST FOR TRADE  
AND DEVELOPMENT****15 SEPTEMBER 2015, 10 A.M.–1 P.M.,  
ROOM XVIII****BACKGROUND**

Economic development and social and cultural shifts have led to a decrease in many gender-related inequalities across the world. Prominent among them is the rise in female educational enrolment as compared to male enrolment, as well as increases in participation in the labour force. These shifts, however, cannot be considered an “automatic” outcome of development, but rather the result of concerted policy action and resource allocation for gender equality. Efforts to mainstream gender equality in policymaking have been critical in this regard.

**The double-edged impact of trade liberalization on women**

UNCTAD has conducted analytical studies on the impact of trade liberalization on gender equality in a number of developing countries in different regions. Although the context and history of each country and each geographical region is quite different, UNCTAD's analytical work shows that there are clearly identifiable structural constraints with respect to women's economic empowerment that are common to all. First, gender segmentation is evident in all economic activities. Women tend to be concentrated in low value added and work with low levels of productivity that pays little and in subsistence production that generates no surplus. They are often excluded from high-skilled occupations and from the commercialized and capital-intensive segments of production and trade, thus providing few pathways to advancement unless specific policy interventions are put in place. Second, women have unequal access to productive resources in relation to men. Women often have restricted access to community-managed facilities or receive assets that are of poor quality. Discriminatory customary laws that deprive women of equal rights to land are still prevalent in several countries across Africa. Third, women have low access to vocational and on-the-job training that would increase their chances of obtaining higher-skilled jobs and to support services that could expand their trades and livelihoods. Finally, in all countries and regions, women remain primarily responsible for household work and caring for family members. Given poor infrastructure facilities in low-income countries, such as the lack of regular electricity, supplies of fuel and water and means of transport, the burdens of household work are multiplied and lead to even higher female time poverty, thus curtailing women's ability to advance in their positions or to expand their productive activities.

What can be drawn from UNCTAD studies is that trade liberalization does not have unambiguously positive effects and that the impact on women is sometimes double-edged. Women may thus simultaneously gain and lose from the development of export sectors: they may get stable wage employment, but they may have low salaries and limited opportunities for development of skills. For example, expansion of the tourism sector provides employment for women, but often such employment is in the lower segments of the sector. Women may gain as consumers when agricultural tariffs are reduced, but may lose as producers when the prices of those commodities fall. Specific steps need to be taken to ensure that existing inequalities are not reproduced or exacerbated by shifts in trade policy.

UNCTAD's analytical work also shows that gender considerations have only rarely been taken into account in trade and macroeconomic policy, though such policies affect different groups of the population in profoundly different ways. "Gender blind" trade and macroeconomic policies will no doubt exacerbate existing gender inequalities instead of solving them. There is therefore a need to look at the discrete impact of trade policy on men and women and use the findings to inform equitable and redistributive policy measures. UNCTAD's work also illustrates the need for trade, industrial, agriculture, labour, infrastructure and social policies to be coherent in order to have an overall positive impact on women's well-being.

### **Women as catalysts for rural transformation**

Almost 70 per cent of employed women in Southern Asia and more than 60 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa work in agriculture. In the least developed countries, nearly one working woman in two is a rural worker.<sup>1</sup> Gender-based obstacles undermine women's productivity and entrepreneurial potential in rural areas. Such obstacles include women's limited access to land, credit, farm inputs, extension services, technology, information and markets. Even more crucially, gender-based obstacles obstruct and delay the dynamic and transformative potential of the rural economy, especially in the least developed countries. Indeed, if the critical constraints that women face are not addressed, incentives to bring about an increase in production and marketed surplus will stimulate only sluggish supply response. This is because the female labour force would not be in a position to respond to price incentives. It is thus imperative to identify and address these obstacles. Policy intervention should tackle the low-level productivity equilibria that trap rural women in poverty, while also stimulating non-farm activities in areas upstream and downstream from agriculture.

If the gender-specific constraints that peasant women face are effectively tackled, rural women can be true catalysts for rural transformation.

Closing the gender gap in agriculture is central to enhancing overall agricultural productivity in developing countries. According to United Nations estimates, if women worldwide had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30 per cent, with a rise in total agricultural output of between 2.5–4 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Productivity increases would also favour diversification of the rural economy. Rural women can become important agents of this transformation. They are key players in vibrant micro-entrepreneurial realities, for example, local artisanal agro-processing, that have significant potential to be developed into viable enterprises. Increasing the productivity and earnings of female farmers would free up labour for off-farm and non-farm activities and provide start-up capital for non-farm ventures (women agro-microenterprises).

Peasant women can also play a pivotal role in conserving and improving biodiversity and ensuring household food security. Home gardens, typically tended by women, are important to the nutritional well-being of rural households. They are part of complex farming systems in local/micro-environments, where agroecology works well. In the face of climate change and market volatility, peasant women can build stability and resilience through biodiversity and crop diversification. By furthering agroecological practices in home gardening, they can increase production and food security while contributing to biodiversity.

Finally, the economic and social empowerment of rural women would yield beneficial results in the long run (intergenerational effects). It is well established that families in which women influence economic decisions generally allocate more income to food, health, education and children's nutrition. Hence, there is a need for well-coordinated policies that are gender-specific and, as warranted, gender-redistributive. A strategy would be twofold: (a) close the gender gap in productivity; and (b) harness the synergies between agricultural upgrading and rural economic diversification. Proactive policies are needed in both respects.

### **Gender-sensitive implementation of the post-2015 development framework**

The Millennium Development Goals have provided over the last decade an overarching framework for development. As we near the end date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, it is clear that though a few targets have been met, much more remains to be done to fulfil the vision underlying those Goals. The consensus on the need for a new development framework has resulted in a set of 17 ambitious and universal sustainable development goals and 169

<sup>1</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2011, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010/2011: Women in agriculture: closing the gender gap for development*, Rome.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Inter-agency Task Force on Rural Women, 2011, *Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals*, p. 2. Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/ruralwomen/documents/En-Rural-Women-MDGs-web.pdf> (accessed 4 September 2015).



targets that delineate the areas of focus. Discussions are ongoing at the technical level on around 120 indicators that will be used to measure the progress achieved.

Goal 3 – on gender equality – of the Millennium Development Goals has been criticized for not paying enough attention to the structural causes of gender inequality, such as violence against women, systematic gender-based discrimination and lack of access to economic resources, while focusing mostly on education and agency. Sustainable development goal 5 – achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls – remedies some of those gaps by including targets on violence against women, unpaid care work and access to economic resources, land ownership, inheritance and natural resources.

While access to productive resources is a precondition for fighting poverty and hunger and achieving productive employment, none of the indicators of Millennium Development Goal 1 – eradicate extreme poverty and hunger – refer to it. In particular, no attention was paid to the fact that women's lack of access to land and other productive resources was a key obstacle to achieving the vision of Goal 1. Within the new framework, sustainable development goal 1 – end poverty in all its forms everywhere – and sustainable development goal 2 – end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture – remedy this serious shortcoming by including targets on ensuring that all men and women have equal access to economic resources, basic services, property and inheritance, technology, financial services and markets as a means of fighting poverty and improving food security.

Once the new development framework enters into force, it may be useful to ensure that it is implemented in a gender-sensitive manner across the 17 sustainable development goals. UNCTAD suggests some elements and data that could help to verify such an approach. For example, to track gender-sensitive compliance with target 1.4 of sustainable development goal 1 (which includes ensuring equal access to economic resources), the following data may prove useful: (a) female share of landholding and immovable property; (b) female share of bank/savings accounts; (c) female participation rate in technical and vocational training programmes; (d) female participation rate in government support programmes (extension services, inputs, credit); and (e) proportion of microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises owned by women that have access to mobile phones and the Internet. The same elements may also be useful to verify that target 5.a, which refers to the need to ensure women's ownership and access to productive resources, the cornerstone of women's economic empowerment, is fully implemented. For sustainable development goal 17 – strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development – a gender-sensitive implementation of target 17.10 (which promotes the multilateral trading system) could be assessed by looking at elements such as the gender wage gap, work conditions and social benefits in the export sector relative to the domestic sector, the female underemployment rate in import-competing sectors and the female share of permanent, high-skilled and managerial jobs in export-oriented sectors.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of the high-level event is threefold:

- To take the gender issue to a new level of political prominence within the debate on trade and development, also in view to the next UNCTAD quadrennial ministerial conference to be held in March 2016 in Lima;
- To yield new insights into the relationship between trade and other macroeconomic policies, development and gender;
- To provide a forum for the exchange of experiences and good practices on women's economic empowerment.

## ORGANIZATION

The high-level event will revolve around a high-profile, interactive round table.

The round table will bring together multiple stakeholders, ranging from policy leaders to academia, the private sector and civil society, including the media.

Presentations will be organized around three sessions and followed by a question and answer session. Discussions will be framed by a set of thought-provoking questions, likely to stimulate debate and generate new insights.

## AGENDA

10–10.15 a.m. Opening remarks

**10.15–11 a.m. SESSION I: THE IMPACT OF TRADE LIBERALIZATION ON WOMEN**

The session will discuss the multiple transmission channels through which gender relations affect trade performance and country competitiveness and are affected by trade policy.

*Questions:* Who has benefited from trade liberalization policies and, in particular, has there been a gender bias in the gains from trade? What is the link between gender inequalities, supply side obstacles and export competitiveness? Women's low-paid work has been used by several countries to build up their productive and export capacities – can this be called "smart economics"? Which policy instruments have proved effective to close the gender wage gap?

**11–11.45 a.m. SESSION II: WOMEN AND RURAL TRANSFORMATION**

The session will yield new insights into agricultural productivity, off-farm activities and the economic empowerment of rural women.

*Questions:* How can credit institutions, agricultural extension services and marketing outlets be made more responsive to the needs of women farmers? How can women move to more stable and remunerative contractual schemes in export-oriented agricultural sectors, without losing their comparative advantage as "a pool of cheap labour"? How can women's entrepreneurship potential, for example in artisanal agro-processing, be harnessed?

**11.45 – 12.30 SESSION III: IMPLEMENTING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN A GENDER-SENSITIVE MANNER**

The session will discuss possible elements to ensure that the post-2015 development framework is implemented in a gender-sensitive manner.

*Questions:* Which tools can be used to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment are mainstreamed into the implementation of the sustainable development goals? What support can UNCTAD and the United Nations system at large provide? How can support from high-income countries be mobilized? What can be done to ensure that sustainable development goal 17 will not be implemented in a "gender blind" manner and that the mutual relationship between trade and gender will be taken into account in policy formulation and implementation?

**12.30–1 p.m. SESSION IV: DEBATE AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

