

TRADE: EMPLOYING A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE



“Despite the obvious benefits of trade expansion, it does not have the same impact on all sectors and populations. On the contrary, it can have unfavourable consequences for certain population groups and economic activities. The expansion of trade has differentiated impacts on men and women due to a series of factors, such as availability of resources; labour regulations or institutions; systems of property rights; access to markets; and other social and economic conditions (Fontana, Joeques, and Masika 1998; Fontana 2009). Women are still the poorest and most marginalized population group in many countries (Gibb 2012), a situation that is a major obstacle to their obtaining the benefits that trade can generate. Trade expansion can have a direct impact on women’s access to employment, reducing discrimination in pay, opening access to better jobs, and increasing or reducing barriers to access to resources (financial, technological) or services (training, export promotion). In turn, trade agreements can also be instruments that promote or hinder adoption of measures favouring gender equality (by governments.)” (UNCTAD, 2004).

Recognition of this differentiated impact of trade on women has opened a space for generation of knowledge on the existing relationship between trade and gender, as well as the implementation of initiatives to promote women’s access to the opportunities created by trade liberalization and expansion in the Region.

The vast majority of the world’s poor are women. According to the International Trade Center, for example, only 1% of global wealth belongs to women, they obtain 10% of global income and in 2010 only 15% of women held leadership positions in companies. For this reason, it has been proffered that women who do not have an income may face the challenges of social status or class position in society.

In the context of the Millennium Summit in New York 2000, the 189 UN Member Countries agreed on a series of goals aimed at reducing poverty, its causes and manifestations; of these declarations we can emphasize two important:

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

- a. Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people.
- b. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of hungry people.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empowering women

The gender gap must be reduced in order to recognize the importance of women as essential actors and factors in the fight against poverty in an effort to achieve poverty reduction by 2015, as envisaged by the Millennium Development Goals.

As a result of this existing gap, regional trade policy makers are being urged to ensure that gender equality and gender mainstreaming is integral in their future foreign trade policies and national development strategies. Gender equality speaks to equal consideration given to the rights of and opportunities afforded both men and women. Gender equality guarantees that a person is not limited or discriminated against because of their sex. Gender mainstreaming is the process of entrenching and integrating gender differences, needs, and perspectives into the full scope of any organisation, policymaking and practical operations of any area of socio-economic life.

Trade practitioners must become familiar with the required methodological tools needed for gender mainstreaming and introducing a gender perspective into the practice of trade operations. Application of gender analysis in trade policy design at the national level; advocacy among the wider stakeholder groups; capacity-building within agencies and organisations in the respective territories and the infusion of gender sensitive analysis in the national budgeting process must be included in the informing of effective policies, if the Region intends to use trade as a tool for development.

The approach taken in the crafting of initiatives and projects must reject a myopic view of the possible impacts and outcomes that will arise from their (initiative and projects) execution and implementation. Viewing trade from a gender-differentiated perspective enables a more precise handling of the factors associated with sustainable growth, economic development and poverty reduction for all stakeholders.

One path which may be explored in order to achieve this goal is the establishment and building upon the linkages between Women as major economic actors, trade development, and Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) promotion.

Small and Medium Enterprises, and in particular women, represent important accelerators of economic growth. Women are also responsible for almost two-thirds of consumer spending worldwide and they invest most of their income in the education and health of their families, producing real social impact and inclusive growth. From review of the literature and case studies, a number of the challenges faced on a World scale also exist within our Greater Caribbean Region.

Increased trade among countries of the Greater Caribbean is in the interest of all nations because it promotes the quality of life for all. If our goal is to obtain an enhanced economic area, it is necessary to demolish all kinds of barriers in trade. This is why within the obstacles that we must overcome is the reduction of the gender gap. It should be noted that various studies demonstrate that the gender gap in education and employment prevent economic growth of countries.

The Association of Caribbean States has joined the efforts of understanding the channels through which trade impacts gender relations. In the support of trade expansion, gender mainstreaming and competitiveness, the Directorates of Trade, Development and External Economic Relations Sustainable Tourism of the ACS, have partnered to develop “a targeted multi-dimensional project that seeks to bridge the afore-mentioned gaps in the contribution of tourism to local economies as it relates to women’s entrepreneurship and SME development. Project activities include aspects of capacity-building, knowledge-enrichment and the delivery of training and tools, with a specific focus on enhancing the opportunities for trade and entrepreneurship generated by Tourism for Women Entrepreneurs with Small and Medium sized Enterprises in the countries of the Greater Caribbean.” (ACS, 2012) The Association hosted a Regional Workshop on Entrepreneurial Strengthening in the Tourism Sector: Opportunities for Women from the 22nd -23rd October 2014 in Cartagena de Indias, Republic of Colombia. This workshop sought to identify the needs and priorities of women entrepreneurs; identify areas for future interventions; as well as garner support for the development of national and regional initiatives focused on capacity building.

Other Regional Agencies such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration (SIECA) also continue to work on issues of gender and gender relations in the Region. A gendered perspective in the establishment and implementation of policies cannot be ignored and organizations, as well as governments are strongly encouraged to employ gendered vision.

Trade continues to be a catalyst for addressing gender-related concerns. Trade-related policies, as well as other economic policies have gender-differentiated effects. Trade practitioners must remain mindful and vigilant to execute activities in a manner which not only supports trade expansion, but gender equality, and the reduction of the gender gap.

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