

Unlocking Markets for Women to Trade



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Centre

TRADE IMPACT FOR GOOD

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This publication provides insights to decision makers on women's participation in trade and the challenges they face - includes data from importers and exporters in 20 developing countries; outlines where the barriers to trade are; shares models of good public and private sector initiatives; and provides recommendations for policymakers to engage women entrepreneurs more fully in the global economy; includes bibliographical references (pp. 47-50).

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Foreword

This year we have reflected on, and celebrated, the gains made in the 20 years since the launch of the United Nations Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a progressive blueprint for advancing women's rights.

Much has been achieved. Women live longer. More women are being educated and have outpaced men in university enrolment. The number of women in the global labour force continues to rise.

The progress is encouraging; but the business of achieving gender equality is far from finished. Gender equality remains a prerequisite to achieving the Global Goals for Sustainable Development, which are ultimately about ending extreme poverty in the world.

When women earn an income they spend a higher proportion of it than men do on their children's health, food and education – a trend which, if encouraged, can help break intergenerational cycles of poverty. Evidence also suggests that countries which provide more economic opportunities to women, including entrepreneurship, are more competitive in the global economy.

Despite this, persistent gender disparities remain between women and men's participation in the economy, earnings and asset ownership. Today, 155 countries still have laws and regulations that impede women's economic opportunities and hold back their full participation as entrepreneurs, employees and business leaders.

We know that women-owned SMEs that export tend to earn more, pay more, employ more people and be more productive than firms that only operate domestically. Yet, the International Trade Centre (ITC) data in this report indicates that only one-in-five exporting companies is owned by a woman, and that women-owned businesses are more likely to face obstacles to trade.

It is time for us to overturn the status quo. The first step is knowledge and gaining a better understanding about the impact of women's participation in the global economy.

This is why ITC launched a global Call to Action in São Paulo, Brazil, in September 2015 to bring at least one million new women entrepreneurs to international markets by 2020. The Call to Action represents the views of stakeholders from the development community, private sector and governments who are keen to create opportunities for women to trade, including through global value chains, by levelling the playing field in their respective public departments and businesses.

Drawing on sex-disaggregated data from individual trading company surveys, this publication provides unique data and analysis that can support policymakers and the private sector to shape more effective interventions to support women entrepreneurs.

The ability to achieve well-functioning economies and prosperous societies requires us to think beyond economic growth, to who benefits from this growth and how. If we can close this gender gap by bringing women everywhere more fully into the economic mainstream, it would be the equivalent of adding a new China or India to the global economy. This should motivate all of us. Let's act now to transform mindsets, laws and practices to ensure that women take their rightful place in the economy and in society.



Arancha González
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