



# Looking at trade policy through a "gender lens"

## SUMMARY OF SEVEN COUNTRY CASE STUDIES CONDUCTED BY UNCTAD





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# I



## Introduction

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Economic development and social and cultural shifts have led to the decline of 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 female life expectancy and labour-force participation (World Bank 2012). However, these shifts cannot be considered an “automatic” outcome of development. Rather, they are the result of rights-based movements for change, concerted policy action, and resource allocation for gender equality. For instance, vibrant women’s movements that demand justice in the areas of gender-based violence, better access to health services, resources and employment, and mainstreaming gender equality in policy-making and national and international institutions have been critical to fomenting these changes. Making gender visible by looking through a “gender lens” has helped to reveal many structural inequalities between men and women in social, economic, and political spheres, and then to take steps to redress those inequalities. However, just looking through a “gender lens” may not be sufficient. To achieve more equitable outcomes, it may prove necessary to go beyond gender issues alone and identify the disadvantages women face due to their race, caste, ethnicity, religion, and class.

As of today, women as a group continue to be paid as much as 30 per cent less than men in some countries. Some 600 million working women, representing 53 per cent of the total number of working women, are engaged in vulnerable jobs in self-employment, domestic work, and unpaid work on family farms and enterprises that are not protected by labour laws (UN Women 2012). Persistent segmentation by gender in economic activity, unequal burdens of care

has been highlighted in the debates around the post-2015 Millennium Development Goals agenda.

The international environment within which economic and trade policies are shaped has also changed dramatically in recent years. The 2008 financial crisis that sparked the “Great Recession” has signalled structural shifts in the global economy. Although world trade quickly recovered from the effects of the crisis, it grew at only a modest rate of about 2 per cent annually between 2011 and 2013, as compared to more than 5 per cent annually in the pre-crisis period. This is due to the combination of sluggish import demand in many countries and lower commodity prices. Developing-country growth rates have generally surpassed those of developed countries for both goods and services (UNCTAD 2014a). As pointed out in UNCTAD’s Trade and Development Report (UNCTAD 2013b), the burden of re-balancing the global economy has fallen on developing countries that were previously highly dependent on export demand. Promoting growth in these developing countries will now have to include a strong domestic demand component, as pursuing a solely export-led growth model may no longer be sufficient. How does this affect gender inequality in developing countries, considering that women have been crowded into the lower rung of export-related manufacturing activities? What will be the gender impact of greater South-South trade? The questions that will need to be asked in a new international environment will likely be different than in the past, and they will have to consider the gender dimension of shifts in trade policy.

Through its country case studies on the impact of trade liberalization and facilitation on gender equality and women’s well-being, UNCTAD has tried to clarify the gender-differentiated outcomes of trade policy. It has also attempted to draw larger lessons for policymaking.

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