

Looking at the trade and gender nexus from a development perspective

A brief overview

*Concepts, definitions
and analytical frameworks*



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1. INTRODUCTION

Before starting any kind of research, there are three basic questions that need to be answered: (1) What is the topic I want to examine? (2) Why is it important to investigate it? (3) How can I carry out my analysis? This document aims to provide an answer to each of these questions in the context of the trade and gender nexus.

Over the last 40 years, globalization has contributed to increased cross-border flows of goods and services (i.e., international trade or simply trade in general), capital, labour, technology and information. *Trade liberalization*¹ has been at the core of globalization. The prevailing assumption during this period has been that lowering economic, geographic and cultural barriers would lead to higher levels of productivity, and expanded production and employment opportunities from which everyone would benefit. Economic policies were often designed based on the assumption that market forces would automatically ensure these outcomes would be realized.

With the adoption of the Millennium Declaration in 2000 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a follow-up in 2015, the discourse in international development has shifted first to the *Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)* and then to the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* as an overarching framework for development. Global *gender equality* goals have been a critical component of the sustainable development agenda. There are also international legal frameworks for *gender equality* in addition to the development goals (box 1).

With regard to trade, the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations, launched in 2001 with a strong emphasis on development, contributed to challenging the view that globalization would consequentially lead to economic growth and development for all. Indeed, a key feature of economic development in this era is a disconnection between economic growth and social development: income disparity, social inequality and exclusion have

Box 1: International instruments and goals related to gender equality

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was signed by governments in 1979, entered into force in 1981, and at present has 189 state parties. CEDAW is the first legally binding instrument that takes a comprehensive approach to prohibiting discrimination against women in all domains of economic, social and political life, and it is considered a significant achievement.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, signed by 189 governments in 1995, is the first international legal instrument to incorporate a detailed action plan that sets out strategies to ensure equality and full human rights for women in 12 areas of concern: poverty, education and training, health, violence against women, armed conflict, the economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights, the media, the environment, and the girl-child.

MDG3, the Millennium Development Goal that specifically focused on *gender equality*, was subject to some criticism for its narrow (mainly social) interpretation of *gender equality* and women's empowerment, and for its limited attention to the impact of economic factors on women's well-being. SDG5, the Sustainable Development Goal that succeeded MDG3, has a broader

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