

# African Trade Policy Centre and Gender – In brief

*Under the aegis of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the African Trade Policy Centre works with member States to develop trade policies that support the continent's sustainable development and promote inclusive income from trade. As a result of the new results-based framework introduced in 2018, the Centre has strengthened its focus on gender equality. The purpose of the present note is to explain: (a) the ways in which the Centre's work contributes to increased gender equality in trade; (b) the focus of the trade and gender work of the Centre; and (c) the partnerships developed by the Centre in the area of trade and gender.*

## Introduction

Trade is an important channel for economic and social development, which assists in job creation, increased income and productivity, and improved living standards. In Africa, the milestone Agreement on the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area is expected to bring dynamic changes in the way Africa trades and, through the diversified nature of intra-African trade, contribute to the structural transformation on the continent. However, it must be noted that the costs and benefits will not be distributed equally. Strategic supporting policies are required to facilitate adjustment and to ensure that trade liberalization is not accompanied by greater inequality, including gender inequality. Empirical evidence shows that trade has the potential to contribute to either the widening or closing of gender gaps in the economy, depending on how the process is managed.

Trade policies can impact women and men differently in several ways. First, trade affects sectors of the economy differently, and creates gender inequality impacts through the distribution of labour in the economy. Second, access to resources, such as finance, information, time and training, is gender-biased, with women facing more barriers to accessing opportunities presented by increased trade. Finally, women traditionally lack access to the trade negotiation processes. This may adversely affect the consideration of the potential gender-related impacts of the liberalization of trade. Such inequalities are increasingly being acknowledged and taken into account. The high profile signing of the World Trade Organization Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Empowerment in Buenos Aires in December 2017, and the inclusion of gender chapters in trade agreements, have recently pushed gender inequality into the mainstream trade policy dialogue. In Africa, several regional economic communities have introduced policies to support women in trade. Similarly, countries have increasingly implemented programmes to support women involved in trading.

## **African Trade Policy Centre work on gender**

In its role as a think tank, the African Trade Policy Centre conducts research to generate and disseminate knowledge on trade and provides policy advice, training and capacity development pertaining to critical issues related to policy reform and on a demand-driven basis. The Centre also engages stakeholders to leverage strategic partnerships and support catalytic and innovative projects at the national and regional levels. Its principal stakeholder in all of its activities are the Governments of member States. In addition, the Centre interacts with composite bodies of those Governments in order to be more efficient, with regard to disseminating information or engaging in activities. Those bodies are principally the regional economic communities and the African Union. The Centre also works with other stakeholder groups, such as those representing the private sector, civil society and academia. It is in that context that the Centre carries out its work on gender.

Many gender inequalities stemming from trade are driven by structural inequalities in the economy and society, which are not within the mandate of trade policy. With regard to the trade policy, gender inequalities, such as differences in legal rights to trade, may not be apparent. As a result, trade policy is often considered to be gender neutral – even when experience has shown that the outcomes from trade may differ for women and men. Accordingly, a key action of the Centre is to change trade policy on the continent from being gender-blind to being gender-sensitive, which will contribute towards making trade an instrument for development and gender equality.

In addition to lack of awareness of the linkages between trade policy and gender inequality, capacity gaps related to the topic need to be addressed. Gender inequalities in trade are contextual in nature; there is no single solution. This highlights the need for policymakers to be able to analyse trade policies with a gender lens – in their local context – and to understand the ways in which women should be included in the policymaking processes. The Centre, therefore, is aiming to provide African trade negotiators and policymakers with the increased knowledge and skills required to develop and implement gender-sensitive trade policy.

## **Current activities**

The current results framework of the Centre explicitly includes gender equality as an outcome. In the near term, the interventions of the Centre are intended to increase the access of stakeholders to trade policy information that addresses gender equality. The interventions are also aimed at increasing their knowledge and skills in that area, which will enable them to formulate gender-sensitive trade policy. In the medium term, such interventions are expected to contribute to efforts to increase the integration of gender issues into the implementation and monitoring of trade policy at the African Union, regional economic communities and the national level.

The level of knowledge and skills in gender mainstreaming in trade policy is addressed through three different pillars: the development of knowledge products, the translation and transfer of knowledge, and stakeholder engagement (advocacy).

The current knowledge creation work is directed towards the gender-sensitive implementation of Agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area. More specifically, the Centre has an ongoing project on the role that regional economic communities can play in boosting the capacity of member States in implementing gender-sensitive trade policies. Additionally, the Centre works

to provide African trade negotiators with policy documents that highlight issues of gender and inclusiveness, including through the analysis of African Continental Free Trade Area from a human rights perspective. Ongoing work on informal cross-border trade will enhance the understanding of policymakers on gender-related aspects of trade in Africa beyond the formal sector.

In terms of knowledge transfer, the Centre and the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, the training arm of ECA, developed a course on trade, gender and development aimed at mid-level trade policy officials. The course has been taught since 2016, in English and French. It familiarizes the participants with the relationship between trade and gender equality, and introduces them to key analytical tools and policies to address gender inequality in trade. The Centre hosts the annual Continental Workshop on Trade and Gender, which brings together gender experts and policymakers to share information and best practices, and to discuss key developments in gender-sensitive trade policy. The Centre also contributes to other ECA activities on trade and gender equality, including the annual ECA training workshop for economic negotiators.

The Centre actively engages in advocacy on gender equality in trade policy. It frequently sends representatives to events organized by partners to highlight opportunities and challenges for gender-sensitive trade policy in Africa. Through its own events and by influencing key partners, the Centre aims to increase the meaningful incorporation of gender considerations into trade policy dialogue at the continental level. The African Trade Forums led by the Centre will feature women's business round tables for high-level engagement and visibility.

In addition, pilot projects are planned to support the implementation of the Centre's policy research on the ground and provide success stories for further advocacy related to promoting gender equality through trade. The Centre's support to the development of the national implementation strategies of the Agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area also includes gender mainstreaming as a key pillar. Technical assistance can be provided to member States if requested.

## **Partnerships**

The Centre is actively striving to build partnerships in the area of trade and gender concerns. The Canadian Centre for Trade Policy and Law has contributed to the Centre's trade, gender and development course materials. In addition, the Centre has an ongoing partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung on the nexus of trade and human rights, which contributes to the Centre's knowledge base on gender equality in trade. A partnership with Afreximbank supports the Centre's work to improve gender-segregated data on informal cross-border trade.

In addition to the above-mentioned formal partnerships, the Centre maintains informal networks on trade and gender to support its work and complement its capacity. At the continental level, the Women, Gender and Development Directorate of the African Union Commission is viewed as an important player in gender issues. Through research work on gender mainstreaming in regional economic communities, the Centre has developed contacts with the regional female entrepreneurial organizations, which offer the potential for further collaboration. Within the United Nations system, the International Trade Centre is a leader in the area of trade and gender through its SheTrades initiative and thanks to the strong focus on gender placed by Arancha Gonzalez, the Executive Director of the Centre. Similarly, the Centre

is working with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, which has considerable experience in gender analysis in trade policy.

At the ECA level, the African Centre for Gender is an important partner as the in-house gender experts. Advice is sought from the Centre when designing and implementing gender activities. The Centre also oversees the overall gender mainstreaming efforts of ECA, including the implementation of the ECA gender strategy.



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