

# POLICY BRIEF

## Supporting Trade and Gender Equality: Operationalizing the Women's Economic Empowerment Agenda Through Trade Facilitation, Infrastructure and Logistics Initiatives

United Nations Development Programme

**W**omen's economic empowerment – and its importance for economic growth and gender equality – is attracting much attention in international and domestic policy circles. The 2012 World Development Report, *Gender Equality and Development*, signaled the World Bank's commitment to making gender equality a real priority in World Bank policy and lending operations (World Bank, 2011). The recently established UN WOMEN chose women's economic empowerment as a key area of focus. Bilateral donors, such as Canada, are emphasizing the importance of women's economic empowerment across their aid programming. Countries, such as Uganda, are examining their economic development and export strategies from a gender perspective (UEPB, 2008). And over the last two years, nearly 400 chief executives worldwide have publicly declared their commitment to support women's economic empowerment through the implementation of the Women's Empowerment Principles (UN Women/United Nations Global Compact, 2011).

The reasons for tackling gender inequality, and supporting women's economic empowerment, are compelling. As the 2012 World Development Report states, gender inequality matters for intrinsic reasons: the ability to live the life of one's own choosing and be spared from absolute deprivation is a basic human right and should be equal for everyone, independent of whether one is male or female. But gender inequality is also an instrumental concern: greater gender equality contributes to economic efficiency and the achievement of other key development outcomes (World Bank, 2011: 3).

While high-level commitment to tackling gender inequality and supporting women's economic empowerment must be celebrated, it will only go so far. Real change happens when these commitments are translated into on-the-ground initiatives that empower women to engage with and benefit from economic opportunities.

### Key messages

- High-level commitment to tackling gender inequality and supporting women's economic empowerment should be celebrated. But real change happens when these commitments are translated into on-the-ground initiatives that empower women to engage with and benefit from economic opportunities.
- Trade facilitation, infrastructure and logistics initiatives provide an entry point for operationalizing the women's economic empowerment agenda.
- Integrating a gender dimension into trade facilitation, infrastructure and logistics initiatives can support gender equality, as well as export competitiveness, trade expansion and economic growth.

**Female farmers in Uvira, in the Democratic Republic of Congo.**



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In many low- and middle-income countries both male and female traders face trade facilitation, infrastructure and logistics constraints. But the challenges women face are more acute.

There is much potential for operationalizing the women's economic empowerment agenda through trade facilitation, infrastructure and logistics initiatives. Enhancing trade facilitation, infrastructure and logistics – which typically includes improvements in customs and border management, trade infrastructure investment, port efficiency, transport security, regional trade facilitation and trade corridors – constitutes a key focus of many low- and middle-income governments' development strategies. It is also receiving increasing attention from donors: in 2009, Aid for Trade commitments reached approximately USD 40 billion, a 60% increase from 2002-05 and a 31% increase since 2007. Of this, approximately half was devoted to investments classified as 'economic infrastructure' by the OECD's Creditor Reporting System (CRS) (OECD/WTO, 2011: 48).

**Market stall holder in northern Uganda.**

There is no doubt that in many low- and middle-income countries both male and female traders face trade facilitation, infrastructure and logistics constraints. But the challenges women face are more acute. Despite this, there have been few attempts to identify how trade facilitation, infrastructure and logistics initiatives could be more cognizant of and responsive to these gender-intensified constraints. *Gender Dimensions of Trade Facilitation and Logistics* (Higgins, 2012), a new World Bank guidance note authored by NSI Senior Researcher Kate Higgins, fills this gap by providing practical advice on how gender considerations can be integrated into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of trade facilitation, infrastructure and logistics initiatives. This advice is outlined below.

### Customs and border management

Female traders have lower levels of knowledge about customs and border requirements and processes, and face higher levels of corruption, harassment and violence at border crossings than their male counterparts (Andjouza, 2009; Ndiaye, 2010; Brenton et al, 2011). These gender-intensified constraints to trade can be tackled by supporting:



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- Culturally appropriate **training and outreach for female traders** on customs and border requirements and processes.
- **Women's trading organizations** to increase their capacity to educate and support women traders on customs and border issues.
- **Public information campaigns** (e.g. posters at markets, radio announcements, bulletins in local newspapers) on customs and border requirements and processes that appeal to women.
- **Gender training** for customs and border management officials (including management).
- Initiatives to **improve gender balance among customs and border management staff** (including management).
- **Advertising of customs and border requirements and costs** in public areas to increase transparency and reduce corruption.
- Investments in **safer and more secure infrastructure** at border crossings.
- Initiatives to **improve policing and prosecution** of corruption, harassment and violence at border crossings.

### Trade and transport infrastructure

Women tend to have less access to private forms of transport than men, and therefore rely more heavily on public transport to move their goods to market. This means they are disproportionately affected by

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poor road and transport infrastructure and spend a higher share of their income on transport. In addition, they face higher incidents of robbery and physical assaults en route to market (Jones, 2007; World Bank, 2007). Inadequate access to storage facilities for perishable goods at border posts also disproportionately affect women. These gender-intensified constraints to trade can be tackled by supporting:

- Initiatives that improve the **regularity, reach and affordability of public transport** to markets and borders.
- The development of **feeder roads**, which connect remote areas with larger roads, and enable female traders to connect to larger markets.
- Initiatives that **improve safety**, particularly for women, on public transport and at transport hubs.
- Initiatives that support the implementation of **low-cost, reliable storage facilities at border crossings**.

### Trade logistics

Small-scale female traders in remote areas are likely to lack easy and affordable access to efficient logistics services which would help link them to global supply chains. They are also likely to have lower levels of market information about the costs of logistics services, potentially resulting in female traders paying inflated prices for these services (Kunaka, 2011). These gender-intensified constraints to trade can be tackled by supporting:

- **Cooperation among female traders** to pool their goods and access logistics services at lower prices.
- **Education of women about real trading costs and requirements** so they can negotiate fairer prices with intermediaries.
- **Efforts to use technology** (e.g. mobile phones) to disseminate information on market prices and logistics costs.

From trade expansion and gender equality perspectives, governments, bilateral and multilateral donors, and civil society would benefit from

enhancing the gender focus of their trade-related initiatives. There appears to be much room for improvement: despite heightened commitments to women's economic empowerment, only 3% of the US\$42 billion invested in Aid for Trade in 2008 had a gender focus (Lammerson, 2010).

Trade-related initiatives that integrate these ideas into their design and implementation are starting to emerge. For example, the Uganda Export Promotion Board and the International Trade Center have launched a project that seeks to increase exports by reducing the trade facilitation impediments that female informal cross border traders face. The World Bank has initiated a project in the Great Lakes region which aims to improve the conditions that female traders face when crossing borders, and also support an environment where female cross-border traders can become better informed and organised, and benefit from the dynamics of greater scale (Brenton et al, 2011).

### Conclusion

This policy brief has identified how policy makers can operationalize the women's economic empowerment agenda through trade facilitation, infrastructure and logistics initiatives. Doing this need not be cumbersome and resource-intensive, but it is important. Ignoring the very real gender inequalities women face in their efforts to trade and export will limit the contribution trade can make to gender equality. Critically, it may also hamper a country's export competitiveness. By taking gender into account in the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of trade facilitation, infrastructure and logistics initiatives, trade support to developing countries can enhance its development impact by better promoting trade expansion and gender equality. 🌐

This policy brief was written by Kate Higgins, Theme Leader of the Governance for Equitable Growth program at The North-South Institute. She is the author of the World Bank report *Gender Dimensions of Trade Facilitation and Logistics*, published in April 2012.

Indigenous  
Hmong women  
plant rice  
shoots in Bac  
Ha, Viet Nam.



UN Photo/Kibae Park

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