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*Research Report*

# Gender and Free Trade Agreements: Best Practices and Policy Guidance

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*by*

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# Abstract

This report identifies best practices and provides policy guidance on how public policy can promote the participation of women entrepreneurs, women producers and women-led export firms in accessing market opportunities through free trade agreements. Specifically, the report: provides a brief overview of the evidence on gender and trade liberalization; identifies key obstacles that reduce the participation of women entrepreneurs, women producers and women-led export firms in accessing the market opportunities generated through free trade; sets out global, regional and bilateral best practices in promoting the participation of women entrepreneurs, women producers and women-led export firms in accessing the market opportunities of free trade agreements; and provides policy guidance to stakeholders in Peru and Colombia to further this agenda.

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A shorter version of this report is available as an NSI policy brief at [www.nsi-ins.ca](http://www.nsi-ins.ca). A report titled “Free Trade Agreements in Peru and Colombia: Monitoring Future Impacts from a Gender Perspective” and accompanying NSI policy brief can also be found at [www.nsi-ins.ca](http://www.nsi-ins.ca).

# Introduction

This report identifies best practices and provides policy guidance on how public policy can promote the participation of women entrepreneurs, women producers, and women-led export firms in accessing market opportunities of free trade agreements. It was prepared for regional workshops of the “Gender Equity and Canadian Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)” initiative under the Canada-Americas Trade Related Technical Assistance Program (CATRTA), which is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency and implemented by the Conference Board of Canada.

Specifically, the report:

- Provides a brief overview of the **evidence on gender and trade liberalization**.
- Identifies **key obstacles** that reduce the participation of women entrepreneurs, women producers, and women-led export firms in accessing the market opportunities of free trade agreements.
- Sets out global, regional, and bilateral **best practices** for promoting the participation of women entrepreneurs, women producers, and women-led export firms in accessing the market opportunities of free trade agreements.
- Provides **policy guidance** to stakeholders in Colombia and Peru to further this agenda.

The report is not intended to be an exhaustive review of the literature on gender and trade liberalization, but rather a pragmatic reference guide, which can be used by a range of stakeholders in Colombia, Peru, and Canada.

## Gender and Trade Liberalization

### A brief look at the evidence

Economic growth is central to a country’s development and, overall, countries that have liberalized and opened their markets to international trade have grown faster than those that have not. Increasingly, key components of trade liberalization strategies are bilateral and regional free trade agreements. The broad objective of these agreements is to deepen international trade links bilaterally and regionally by enhancing access to international markets.

It is broadly accepted that while the benefits that accrue from trade liberalization are significant, there are also short-term costs, and as with most economic policies, the benefits and costs are distributed differentially between different sectors and groups of an economy and society. Gender, defined as the social, behavioural, and cultural attributes, expectations, and norms associated with being a woman or man (World Bank 2011, 4), is no exception. It is now widely acknowledged that trade liberalization has gender-differentiated effects.<sup>1</sup>

Trade liberalization has translated into more jobs and better connections to markets for many women. For example, research on the effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement in Mexico found that following the agreement's implementation, women's relative wages increased and both between-industry and within-industry shifts favoured female workers. Beyond job creation, evidence shows that trade liberalization has heightened women's autonomy and resulted in benefits for future generations through investments in human capital (Klugman and Gamberoni 2012). For instance, in a review of the gender implications of trade liberalization in Latin America, Vivianne Ventura-Dias (2010, 15) found that export expansion through the cultivation of new agricultural products has provided jobs for women who had not had access to monetized earnings before, and that this formal employment had resulted in gaining status in the household and achieving relative economic independence. Recent research shows that the arrival of garment jobs in Bangladesh increased the probability that a five-year-old girl attends school, which could be because to access to these jobs, numeracy, and literacy is required, or simply because additional income allows parents to cover costs (Heath and Mobarak 2011 in Klugman and Gamberoni 2012).

But trade liberalization can also exacerbate existing gender inequalities and worsen women's economic and social status. Evidence suggests that trade liberalization can lead to the persistence and widening of wage and occupational gaps, as well as job insecurity. For example, the impact of trade liberalization in Chile was that gross job reallocation rates were often over twice as high for women than men (Levinsohn 1999 in Gamberoni and Reis 2011). A cross-country review of countries in Latin America and Asia found that women's participation in manufacturing is negatively correlated with higher levels of value-added manufacturing and capital intensity in production (Tejani and Milberg 2010 in Gamberoni and Reis 2011).

Women's access to jobs in export sectors also appears less likely where exports are dominated by natural resource and agricultural products. In the case of agriculture,

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<sup>1</sup>. See, for example, Tran-Nguyen and Zampetti (2004) and Bussolo and De Hoyos (2009).

women's limited access to productive inputs and weaker property rights in land constrain their capacities to benefit from trade openness. For example, in the central highlands of Guatemala, women hold only 3 per cent of contracts for snow peas and broccoli, which are two of the most important export crops in the area (World Bank 2011). Differences in human capital can also limit women's access to new opportunities: while gender gaps in schooling have largely closed, women and men are known to choose different fields of study, which affects their work opportunities. Further, cultural norms may mean that domestic responsibilities prevent women from being able to exploit the opportunities that international trade brings (Klugman and Gamberoni 2012).

The gender-differentiated effects of trade liberalization are felt at the macro, meso, and micro levels, and are the result of differences between women and men in their access to assets, human capital, labour markets, and labour earnings. At the macro level, gender gaps in market participation may narrow if sectors that expand through trade liberalization are more female-intensive than the sectors that contract. The inverse holds true as well. At the meso level, public provision of important social services that favour women might be undermined if the loss of government revenue through reductions in tariffs leads to cuts in these services. At the micro level, trade liberalization may extend or reduce female control over household spending, depending on whether liberalization creates or destroys sources of independent income for women (Fontana 2009a, 10).

This report brings the literature and evidence on gender and trade liberalization together in a pragmatic way, and recommends entry points for engagement on these issues for a range of stakeholders. But it is critical to note, as Marzia Fontana (2009b) highlights, that while there is an increased interest in and research on gender and trade policies, sound empirical evidence remains sparse, with analyses limited by the absence of gender-differentiated data, as well as the difficulty of disentangling the effects of trade liberalization from other simultaneous changes.

## Trends in Latin America

In the context of the global picture outlined above, what are recent trends on women, trade, and the economy in Latin America? A recent World Bank report titled *Women's Economic Opportunities in the Formal Private Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Focus on Entrepreneurship* examines trends in women's participation in the formal private sector in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region, constraints for women, and opportunities for them to engage in and benefit from private sector activity (see World Bank 2010). Nicola Jones and Hayley Baker (2008) focus more

specifically on the impact of trade liberalization on gender in the LAC region. Key trends identified by these analyses are outlined in Box 1.

### Box 1.

#### Trends on women, trade, and the economy in the LAC region

- Female **labour force participation** has increased significantly in the LAC region over the past two decades and is now around 57 per cent. Despite this progress, women's participation still lags behind men's participation and a **gender wage gap** remains (World Bank 2010).
- Women's share of total employment in Latin America has facilitated **improvements in education**, as well as **economic adjustment** and **trade liberalization** (Jones and Baker 2008).
- In the **formal sector**, women's participation in the labour force is concentrated in commerce, health, and education but women are increasingly finding work in **export-oriented sectors**. A large proportion of women work in the **informal sector** and remain uncounted (World Bank 2010; Jones and Baker 2008).
- According to the *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor*, **the LAC region has higher rates of female entrepreneurship** and a smaller gap in participation between women and men entrepreneurs than other regions. Higher entrepreneurial activity among LAC women may reflect comparatively better economic opportunities for women, resulting from political advancement. It may also reflect limited options in salaried work or a greater need to supplement household income (World Bank 2010).
- Most women-owned firms in the region are classified as **small enterprises** (World Bank 2010).
- **Traditional household roles** and **cultural norms** in the LAC region help explain higher unemployment rates for women (World Bank 2010).

## Women and Trade Liberalization: Key Constraints

To understand how to best facilitate and promote the participation of women entrepreneurs, women producers, and women-led export firms in accessing market opportunities of free trade agreements, it is useful to identify the particular gender-differentiated constraints that women face.

**Information and business networks:** Access to information and business networks is critical for business success. Yet many women entrepreneurs and producers lack access to crucial information about trade and export requirements and opportunities. In addition, men typically dominate business networks and organizations, such as chambers of commerce and unions (Smith et al. 2004, 32). Women are also typically underrepresented in government institutions established to support exporters.

**Access to and control over key assets:** Relative to men, women globally tend to have lower levels of access to the natural, physical, financial, and human capital necessary to fulfill their trade and export potential (dTS 2009). Access to finance, often facilitated by ownership of land and other forms of physical capital, is particularly crucial to fulfill the requirements and standards of global firms, to initiate upgrading processes, and to be positioned to take advantage of new opportunities in export sectors (Papyrakis, Covarrubias, and Verschoor 2009, 19). Because of unequal access to economic and financial resources, the commercialization and mechanization of export sectors in developing economies has often resulted in “masculinization” of these sectors. For example, when traditionally female-intensive crops become commercialized, men may enter and take over the sector because they have relatively easier access to credit, as happened with groundnuts in Zambia and rice in the Gambia (Wold 1997; Fontana 2003 in Papyrakis, Covarrubias, and Verschoor 2009, 9). Unless women gain broader access to credit, land, and information, they will be relegated to low-return sectors and their capacities to penetrate male-dominated export sectors will be constrained (Papyrakis, Covarrubias, and Verschoor 2009, 19). There is clearly a bias not only in the control over resources and ability to access critical economic and financial resources, but also in terms of how products are marketed to women. For instance, Xavier Giné, Ghazala Mansuri, and Mario Picón (2011 in Klapper and Love 2011, 5) find gender bias in the marketing of microfinance products that targets entrepreneurs.

**Education, skills development, and training:** Typically and historically, women have had less access to education, skills development, and training than men. Increasingly, however, lower levels of access are less overt in primary, secondary, and even tertiary education: in many countries, education enrolment and completion rates between women and men are equalizing. But women still lag behind in skill development programs and on-the-job training, particularly in technical and management-related fields. For example, the International Trade Centre found that only 4 per cent of participants in the centre’s training on the export of services were women, despite the fact that 75 per cent of enterprises in the services sector are owned by women. In many cases, women may not be overtly discriminated against (ITC, UNCTAD, and WTO

2007, 30). Rather, lower levels of attendance or inclusion may be the result of women's family responsibilities and/or access to business networks.

**Trade facilitation, logistics, and transportation:** Evidence suggests that female exporters in particular face constraints when it comes to trade facilitation, logistics, and transport. Women face gender-intensified constraints at border crossings, such as higher levels of corruption and, in some cases, violence (Higgins 2012). Women entrepreneurs are often less equipped to negotiate complex customs procedures than their male counterparts. For example, research conducted in Chile found that female traders found regulatory burdens to be one of the most important barriers to starting a business, especially when sanitary regulations were involved (World Bank 2010, 35). Smallholder farmers or small-scale producers in general, and women in particular, are likely to be in a weaker position when negotiating terms and prices with powerful buyers because of limited experience and low levels of literacy. For many small-scale producers, achieving economies of scale is a major challenge, and as a result, the extra value derived from products through trade is likely to go to intermediaries or "middlemen" (Kunaka 2011; UNCTAD 2008). Further, evidence suggests that women are disproportionately disadvantaged when it comes to transportation infrastructure. Julie Babinard and Kinnon Scott (2011) found that women spend a higher share of their income on transportation costs than men, eroding their profits and reducing their abilities to invest in their businesses and other productive activities. Limited mobility contributes to restricted knowledge of market prices and bargaining power, which again often lead women to sell their products to middlemen who take a large share of profits.

**Cultural biases and gender norms:** Cultural biases and gender norms have implications for women's engagement with export markets. Gendered differences in human capital and norms regarding responsibilities for productive and reproductive activities partly explain occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. But gender norms go beyond this. For instance, gender norms often mean that women are assumed to be better suited for certain types of work (e.g., attitudes about women's better suitability for picking and packing products in the horticultural sector, for sewing in the garment sector, and for repetitive and manual work lead women to only be eligible for those types of jobs). These norms leave women in lower-paying occupations and provide limited mobility (IANWGE 2011, 6). Further, even when women participate in the economy, other female members of the household may become disadvantaged. For example, young women and girls often take on their mothers' household responsibilities while their mothers are at work, which has implications for their education and future opportunities (Papyrakis, Covarrubias, and Verschoor 2009, 13).

**Insecure working conditions and arrangements:** In almost all countries, women are over-represented in part-time work and temporary labour, particularly in manufacturing and agricultural sectors (ILO 2010, 46). Although part-time work may be considered better for women because they have reproductive responsibilities, it often subjects them to job insecurity and denies them benefits, and women generally remain low-wage earners in pools of unskilled workers (UNCTAD 2008, 8). For instance, women account for up to 90 per cent of workers in the horticultural sectors of many LAC countries (e.g., the artichoke and fruit sectors in Chile, cut flower sector in Colombia, and vegetable sector in Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Mexico) (CEPAL 2003 in Jones and Baker 2008). While these sectors offer more employment opportunities for women than men, women are concentrated in the low-skilled jobs, with minimal job security and lower wages.

## Best Practices for Supporting Gender Equality in Trade

The 2012 *World Development Report* titled *Gender Equality and Development* states that gender inequality matters for two reasons: “First, gender inequality matters intrinsically, because 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. Second, gender equality matters instrumentally, because greater equality contributes to economic efficiency and the achievement of other key development outcomes” (World Bank 2011, 3).

Elisa Gamberoni and José Guilherme Reis (2011) extend these arguments specifically to trade, arguing that there are at least three reasons why gender inequality matters, and needs to be addressed, in the context of trade:

- Discrimination against women entrepreneurs and producers may impede their access to information, finance, and markets, which in turn can undermine the real and potential productivity of women-led economic activities, thereby **slowing overall economic growth**.
- Trade policies and initiatives that do not meet the specific needs of women can **aggravate existing inequalities and reverse previously achieved gains**. For example, evidence suggests that as industries upgrade, female-intensive sectors become less female-intensive. Complementary policies therefore need to be in place to ensure that women do not unfairly bear the burden of adjustment processes.

- Women typically devote a larger portion of their incomes than men to the health and education of their families, which enhance human capital. Therefore, addressing gender-differentiated constraints to trade can have **multiplier effects in terms of the overall development impact**.

These reasons demonstrate that the gender gap in trade needs to be addressed.

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Small and Medium Enterprises Working Group conducted research and held workshops on models for supporting women's micro-enterprise development (Whiteduck and Lever 2008). Box 2 provides a useful overview of how support for women exporters and women-owned firms can be facilitated.

Below, five specific approaches to promoting the participation of women entrepreneurs, women producers, and women-led export firms in trade are outlined.

#### **Box 2.**

##### **APEC recommendations for supporting women's micro-enterprise development**

Women's micro-enterprise support programs should:

- Result in **actual trade activity** and **trade partnerships**.
- Foster **collaboration between the private and civil society sectors**, with the **public sector playing a critical facilitation role**.
- Provide a **continuum of services** that take into account the various stages of growth of micro-enterprises and the gender issues involved.
- Recognize the need for and impact of **networking**.
- Facilitate **product pooling** at the local, regional, and economy-wide levels, and provide access to product pooling venues.
- **Increase access to expertise** in product design, business development advice and training, information on new technology, and potential markets.
- Provide **professional and legal advice**.
- Address **intellectual property issues**, including their impact on indigenous women.
- Make links to **affordable credit programs**.

*Source: Whiteduck and Lever (2008)*

## Conducting gendered value chain analysis

Understanding how gender issues play out in value chains is critical for identifying how to better support women's access to export opportunities. A value chain is the full sequence of activities required to bring a product or service from conception, through the intermediaries of production, marketing, and distribution, to consumers (Rubin, Manfre, and Barrett 2009, 7). While attention has been paid to understanding and enhancing value chains to support trade, economic growth, and poverty reduction for some time, the trade and development impacts of gender issues on value chain development has not received much attention.

The Greater Access to Trade Expansion (GATE) project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), led work across the globe on gender-sensitive value chain analysis from September 2004 to September 2009 (Rubin, Manfre, and Barrett 2009). Through the GATE project, an approach for integrating gender issues into agricultural value chains was developed (see Rubin, Manfre, and Barrett 2009). The approach is built on three underlying assumptions:

- **Value chains are embedded in a social context:** Gendered patterns of behaviour condition women's and men's jobs and tasks, the distribution of resources and benefits derived from income generated through the value chain, and the competitiveness and efficiency of value chains in global markets.
- **Value chain development affects gender roles and relations:** Changes in gender roles and relations can stem from new technologies, shifts to high-value crops, and the formalization of ownership and household financial management practices.
- **Gender equality and value chain competitiveness are mutually supporting goals:** Gender inequalities negatively affect competitiveness and trade performance.

The approach is outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

<b>A gendered approach to value chain analysis</b>	
<b>Phase</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
One: Map gender roles and relations along the value chain	Identify gender roles and relations along the value chain
Two: Move from gender inequalities to gender-based constraints	Identify how gender inequalities lead to gender-based constraints
Three: Assess consequences of gender-based constraints	Assess the implications of gender-based constraints on value chains
Four: Take action to remove gender-based constraints	Determine the most appropriate course of action to remove gender-based constraints
Five: Measure progress	Measure success of actions

*Source: Rubin, Manfre, and Barrett (2009)*

Box 3 below outlines how a gendered, pro-poor approach was taken in Peru to assess the country's artichoke sector.

**Box 3.**

**Gendered, pro-poor analysis of the artichoke sector in Peru**

The emergence of an export market for artichokes presented new prospects for promoting agricultural and rural development in Peru and including farmers and labourers in a dynamic and high value-added market. Artichoke production experienced a sharp increase in 2000. By 2006, the crop was among Peru's top five agro-exports, generating an export value of US\$66 million. In 2006, artichoke production generated approximately 20,500 full-time jobs.

The artichoke value chain includes producers, service providers, input suppliers, processors, and exporters. A gendered, pro-poor value chain analysis reveals a number of significant issues:

- The value chain is dominated by 15 agro-export processing companies, which capture 61 per cent of the total value-added generated in the chain. In contrast, 10 per cent of profits stay with small and medium-sized producers.
- While forward linkages in the chain from farmers to producers are strong, backward linkages to the national economy remain weak. Small and medium-sized farmers, who have the greatest backward linkages in the value chain, are also those who

capture a smaller percentage of the total value-added.

- Women hold 51 per cent of full-time jobs generated through artichoke production and processing, but men and women are clustered in different occupations. Female intensity is higher at the processing level, particularly in activities like peeling, cutting, and de-leafing.
- Gender wage gaps exist. Women working on small and medium-sized farms receive 88 per cent of men's wages, but importantly earn equal pay on large farms. In processing plants, women without defined job tenure receive 86 per cent of men's wages while those with contracts receive 93 per cent.

The recommendations that follow from this analysis include:

- Reduce **bureaucratic constraints**, such as licensing, certification, and other regulatory requirements, because they are barriers to entry for many small producers and processors.
- Provide **farmer education and training** that enables farmers to grow export products. Ensure that adequate training is made available to women that will enable them to actively participate in all aspects of the value chain.
- Support the **formation of networks and collaborative organizations** (e.g., co-operatives that can negotiate better prices, surmount credit barriers, and negotiate with governments).
- Develop **appropriate credit markets** for micro and small entrepreneurs and producers. Ensure programs are developed to provide credit to women, particularly in areas where access to land and credit remains a barrier to entry.

*Source: dTS (2009)*

The gendered, pro-poor approach has been used in other countries, and supported by certain institutions (see, for example, Carr 2004). Box 4 outlines how the Ugandan government used a gendered value chain analysis to develop a gender strategy to accompany its National Export Strategy.

#### Box 4.

##### **The Gender Dimensions of Uganda's National Export Strategy**

In October 2007, the Ugandan government launched its National Export Strategy. In partnership with the International Trade Centre, the government then developed an accompanying gender strategy—the Gender Dimensions of the National Export Strategy—which sought to unlock the untapped potential of Ugandan women in trade and make their participation in the export sector more effective.

This process was led by the Uganda Export Promotion Board, which led consultations with a range of national stakeholders. Through a highly collaborative approach, four export sectors (coffee, tourism, commercial crafts, and dairy) were selected as focus sectors. Detailed gender-sensitive value chain analyses were undertaken and cross-cutting sector constraints were identified to be limiting women's participation in exports. These constraints were:

- Lack of access to affordable energy
- Unequal land accessibility
- Unfair commercial environment
- Lack of access to credit finance
- Lack of access to information
- Lack of export competence among women

Strategies and programs were designed to support the realization of women's potential in the focus sectors. Activities included capacity building in export management and related skills for women entrepreneurs, business counselling for women, training in financial management, and business mentoring and training.

*Source: UEPB (2008)*

## Supporting women's networks, associations, and access to information

Business networks are one of the most pivotal resources an enterprise can leverage for growth. Market information, linkages to suppliers and investors, and access to financing can be gained through networks. Chambers of commerce and industry associations have typically been male-dominated, however, and in some cases retain a gender bias against women.

In response to gender bias, women's business associations have proliferated across the globe, including in the Latin American region. These associations and their networks can provide access to information and contacts that are vital to tapping into new distribution channels and supply chains and useful in obtaining credit and gaining access to technology. They can also provide mentoring opportunities for women and increase awareness among female entrepreneurs of policies and programs in place to support them (World Bank 2010). In the case of the Association of Women Leaders-Chile, discussed in Box 5 below, members say that access to international networks such as the APEC Women Leaders Network has helped them with their businesses and raised the profile of women entrepreneurs in Chile.

#### **Box 5.**

##### **Connecting Latin American businesswomen through networks**

**Association of Women Leaders-Chile** was established by a group of Chilean women who attended the 2004 APEC Women Leaders Network meeting in Serena, Chile. The group received support from SERCOTEC (Technical Cooperation Service, the Chilean government's service for technical cooperation) and the mayor of Coquimbo to formalize their association. Members have very diverse businesses, including aquiculture, horticulture, crafts, and services. A coordinator offers training to members in areas such as accounting, business, gender, financing, technology, and exporting. SERNAM, Chile's National Office for Women's Affairs, includes the association in government meetings and has facilitated its participation in international APEC Women Leaders Network meetings.

**Congreso Permanente de Mujeres Empresarias de Nicaragua** (CPMEN) is a national movement that supports Nicaraguan businesswomen in the national economy. It helps women entrepreneurs find business opportunities and solutions at the local and national levels. CPMEN provides capacity building and public policy advocacy.

**Endeavor** is a non-profit organization that supports "high-impact" entrepreneurs. Its programs are not specifically geared toward women entrepreneurs, but provide training, operational support, and access to financial networks to selected scalable entrepreneurs. Endeavor has programs in Chile, Brazil, and Argentina. Endeavor Chile is one of the executing agencies of the Chile *Emprendedoras* program supported by the Inter-American Development Bank.

*Sources: World Bank (2010) and Gibb (2008)*

Support for women producers to form producer groups can facilitate an enabling environment for sharing information on market opportunities, as well as better terms in export markets. Such support is being advocated at the local level, to facilitate access to domestic, regional and global markets (see for example Higgins 2012; ITC, UNCTAD, and WTO 2007, 53; UNCTAD 2011, 58).

Information and communication technologies are proving to be an effective vehicle for bringing information to women traders and entrepreneurs. By facilitating better access to information, information-and-communication-technology services have the potential to play an important role in transforming markets and making them sites of cooperation in which otherwise disadvantaged producers and users of goods and services can interact without the intervention of large powerful intermediaries. Mobile phones, for example, are increasingly used by women farmers in many remote rural areas to learn market prices for inputs and crops. In Senegal, the Grand Coast Fishing Operators Union, an organization of women who market fish, set up a website to promote, produce, monitor export markets, and negotiate prices with overseas buyers before they arrive in the country (Hafkin and Taggart 2001 in World Bank, FAO, and IFAD 2009).

But as Heather Gibb (2008) emphasizes, women executives, entrepreneurs, and producers are not homogeneous groups, and their capacities to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by trade agreements are mediated by this diversity. For instance, research conducted on gender, information, and communication technologies in micro and small enterprises in Peru found that women with lower levels of education and whose first language is not Spanish used the internet and phones less frequently (dTS 2009). Women entrepreneurs—particularly rural women—are often marginalized from mainstream business networks, and can benefit from initiatives that help to reduce women’s exclusion from formal economic structures, develop networks and systems for information exchange, provide advocacy channels, and promote women entrepreneurial role models.

## Supporting women entrepreneurs through trade and export authorities and missions

Historically, women as a group have not been specifically represented by trade and export authorities, or equally represented in international trade events and missions. Including women in international trade missions and delegations sends a clear signal that a government is proactively encouraging, promoting, and supporting women in business and exporting (ITC, UNCTAD, and WTO 2007, 34). Given the important roles that women can play in driving exports and export-related economic growth, and the

emphasis of global commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals on improving women's situations through gender equality and empowerment, the inclusion of women in trade missions and delegations can enhance the image of a country while advancing economic and human development.

Many countries have sought to address this imbalance over the past two decades. For example, one of the services provided by the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service is **Business Women in International Trade** (BWIT).<sup>2</sup> BWIT supports women entrepreneurs in the export sector by representing and advocating their commercial and economic interests. Representing 47 per cent of Canadian small and medium-sized enterprises, women-owned businesses are growing at a faster rate than those run by men. Further, women business owners generate almost 40 per cent of their sales in foreign markets and provide 1.7 million Canadian jobs. BWIT facilitates access to information specific to women entrepreneurs, including support networks, government resources, events, and services available to Canadian business women. BWIT also helps women entrepreneurs partner with key stakeholders to leverage supplier diversity procurement opportunities with Fortune 500 companies through trade missions. All-women trade missions, which provide an important vehicle for businesswomen to reach out to foreign markets, have been sponsored by the Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (DFAIT). In September 2011, 24 Canadian women participated in the APEC Women and the Economy Summit hosted by then US secretary of state Hillary Clinton in San Francisco, California. The group included businesswomen, as well as representatives from DFAIT and other government departments, academia, and associations. The delegation was led by Rona Ambrose, minister of public works and government services and minister for status of women. In 2012, BWIT organized a trade mission to the annual Women's Business Enterprise National Council National Conference and Business Fair in Orlando, Florida. The world's largest conference and business fair for women-owned enterprises, it offers businesswomen access to contract opportunities with Fortune 500 companies and governments through supplier diversity programs. It also includes training and workshops about selling to Fortune 500 companies, opportunities to connect with buyers and potential partners, and support from the Canadian trade commissioners who have insight into opportunities in markets (DFAIT 2012).

The **Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation** (MATRADE) introduced in 2005 a special programme, the Women Exporters Development Programme, to assist women exporters. This program targets women entrepreneurs who want to expand

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<sup>2</sup>. For more information, see [www.businesswomenintrade.gc.ca](http://www.businesswomenintrade.gc.ca).

beyond Malaysia's borders, and seeks to improve their understanding and knowledge of regional and international markets. With a network of 42 offices worldwide, MATRADE supports women to network with buyers and partners abroad to secure export opportunities, and provides advisory and mentoring services. Since its establishment, the program has succeeded in supporting women entrepreneurs from a wide range of sectors to become sustainable exporters. More than 3,200 women-owned or women-managed companies have already registered as exporters with MATRADE. The program supports women to participate in international trade promotion events, and offers skills development opportunities and international marketing support, focusing on access to markets, financing, and leaderships, areas identified to be keeping Malaysian women entrepreneurs from reaping the full benefits of international business (Sum 2012).

## Building capacity through skills development and training

To enhance women's participation in the production and export of products through their integration into global supply chains, attention needs to be paid to skills development and training. To ensure that women's products are competitive internationally, access to suitable training programs that improve production capacities and upgrade product quality to meet standards and demand is crucial (ITC, UNCTAD, and WTO 2007, 27). To identify areas where skills development and training for women entrepreneurs, women producers, and women-led export firms is required, gendered value chain analysis is instructive.

Several examples of skills development and training programs exist. The Inter-American Development Bank and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development partnered for a three-year capacity-building program in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Panama, the objective of which was to create sustainable capacity for entrepreneurship promotion. The program was focused on making extra efforts to reach out to women entrepreneurs, university graduates, and technology-based entrepreneurs (UNCTAD-IDB Partnership for Central America and Panama 2003 in Coche, Kotschwar, and Salazar-Xirinachs 2006). The Mexican government, as part of its campaign "More and Better Jobs for Women" and in cooperation with the International Labour Organization's Gender Promotion Unit (GENPROM), launched an initiative in the state of Guerrero to train 400 women working in the urban informal sector in entrepreneurship skills as well as improve their knowledge of the financial system and available opportunities for technical training (International Labour Organization 2003 in Coche, Kotschwar, and Salazar-Xirinachs 2006).

In Chile, SERCOTEC, which operates within the Chilean government's Production Development Corporation, has the mandate to support micro and small entrepreneurs. SERCOTEC pays special attention to women entrepreneurs and has adapted its services to their needs, especially focusing on their need for accurate information about how to access credit or markets. The Competence Generation Program for Business and Entrepreneurial Women offers capacity building through courses covering issues such as financial and human resource management. In 2008, 1,306 women received training through the program and 1,904 places were made available for female entrepreneurs the following year. SERCOTEC also works with private banks, offering subsidies and guarantees to reduce risks faced by banks and encourage lending to micro entrepreneurs. Female applicants are given priority; between 2007 and 2009, 42.5 per cent of loans issued with this program's support went to women entrepreneurs. A Seed Capital for Women program, which is supported by the National Development Fund, also exists (World Bank 2010, 114).

## Leveraging supplier diversity initiatives

Globally, women-owned firms are looking to capitalize on supplier diversity initiatives. Supplier diversity emerged in the United States in the late 1990s. Today, 97 per cent of Fortune 500 companies have programs in place that set aside a specific dollar or percentage amount for purchases from diverse under-represented groups, such as women, disabled, and visible minorities entrepreneurs. Notably, Walmart's supplier diversity commitment was C\$9.2 billion in 2009 (DFAIT 2011).

WEConnect International<sup>3</sup> is a corporate-led non-profit that helps to empower women business owners to succeed in global markets. It provides knowledge, networks, certification, and a platform that women business owners can use to reach new markets. WEConnect partners with a range of supporting organizations to identify and certify businesses that are at least 51 per cent owned, managed, and controlled by one or more women. WEConnect upholds the universal certification standard developed in collaboration with the Women's Business Enterprise National Council in the United States. It serves corporations that pay membership fees and have an active supplier diversity program or are soon to have one. Members gain access to a global online community, guidance on supplier diversity, and capacity building, mentoring, and networking opportunities. Critically, WEConnect certifies women's businesses, which gives them the ability to compete for business opportunities provided by WEConnect member corporations. Box 6 illustrates WEConnect's operations in Peru.

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<sup>3</sup>. For more information, see [www.weconnectinternational.org](http://www.weconnectinternational.org).

## Box 6.

### WEConnect Peru

**WEConnect** is operating in Peru through collaborations with government agencies, a regional development bank, and a major multinational corporation. It works with **USAID Peru** and the **US Department of State Pathways to Access Initiative**, which supports US corporations seeking supplier diversity and inclusion in Latin America by identifying, training, and certifying women-owned businesses that qualify as diverse suppliers of goods and services. While supporting US corporations, the Pathways to Access Initiative has the long-term objective of increasing access to markets for Peruvian women-owned businesses so that they can compete for contracts and increase productivity.

The **Inter-American Development Bank**, through its Integration and Trade Sector, is collaborating with **WEConnect** and **Walmart** on a project called “Incorporating Women Businesses in International Global Chains.” The goal of the project is for women-owned businesses in Peru, Chile, and Costa Rica to gain access to new markets, increase their productivity, and become or improve as community leaders. The project focuses specifically on education, training, and outreach processes required, while women-owned businesses that participate seek to gain the networks and knowledge they need to compete for larger contracts. The program also seeks to assist multinational corporations to become more aware of the business opportunities provided by women-owned businesses. WEConnect links member corporations to women-owned businesses, and trains and certifies these businesses so that they are ready to fulfill contracts with large multinational corporations.

*Source: IDB (2012)*

## Supporting Gender Equality through Trade: Practical Guidance for Colombia and Peru

Before providing specific policy guidance, contextualizing the Colombian and Peruvian experiences and recognizing successes and remaining challenges is necessary.

### Gender equality and trade in Colombia

A number of laws, a council, and a recent national plan seek to support gender equality in Colombia. These include:

- **Law No. 823 concerning equal opportunities for women (2003):** This law sets out the basic fundamental rights of Colombian women (i.e., the political, civil, and economic rights as well as the principles upon which government policies and programs that promote equal opportunities for women should be based).
- **High Presidential Council for Gender Equity (*Alta Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer*):** This council has a mandate to spearhead activities (including government programs and donor-funded technical assistance) that promote Law No. 823, in collaboration with other ministries. The council is currently developing an operational framework, based on community consultations undertaken in 2011, to identify priority areas requiring government attention. One of the components of this framework is on “autonomous economic empowerment.”
- **National Development Plan 2006–2010:** This recent national plan for sustainable economic and social development, with corresponding regional plans, included gender elements (e.g., promoting equitable female participation in labour markets and agricultural production).

Colombia also has a number of laws for specific groups of women and specific harms facing women:

- Law No. 1542 concerning domestic violence against women (2012).
- Law No. 731 concerning promoting the rights of rural women (2002).
- Law No. 82 concerning women heads of households (1993).

The 2012 *World Development Report* titled *Gender Equality and Development* celebrated Colombia’s progress in gender equality and women’s economic empowerment. The Colombian economy has expanded one and a half times in size since 1980. During this time, there have been significant improvements in the status of women. Notably, the country’s fertility rate dropped from 3.2 children to 2.4 children between 1986 and 2005. Women reversed the education gap and now have higher completion rates than men in primary, secondary, and tertiary education. In 1980, the labour force participation rate of Colombian women in the 13 largest cities was the second lowest in Latin America, but by 2004 it was the second highest, next to the rate in Uruguay. Remarkably, the highest increases were among women with children under the age of six—women least likely to work in most countries (World Bank 2011, 12).

Certain programs and rules have facilitated progress in gender equality. The Colombian government subsidizes and regulates the public provision of daycare through a program called *Hogares Comunitarios*. Evidence suggests that countries with similar schemes

increase the number of hours worked by women, as well as lead women to more formal employment (World Bank 2011, 26–27). In addition, the mandating and enforcement of joint titling for land parcels has increased the share of female beneficiaries from agrarian reform from 11 per cent to 45 per cent (Deere and León 2001 in World Bank 2011, 230). Thirty per cent of all political appointees, including in the cabinet, must be female in Colombia, a rule that promotes greater levels of participation and representation in decision making (World Bank 2011, 307). Some challenges remain, however. The lack of social assets and property rights still constrain women in negotiating the right to work, controlling income, and contesting domestic abuse (Friedemann-Sánchez 2006 in World Bank 2011, 88).

The Colombian government strongly supports Colombian businesses and intervenes to facilitate access to international markets. This is led by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism.<sup>4</sup> Women are, of course, able to access available policy incentives and initiatives, but some gender-intensified constraints exist. In one of the ministry's recent reports (see MinCIT 2011), the word “women” appears only once to point out a specific training activity.<sup>5</sup> The word “gender” does not appear at all. In this sense, this document and associated initiatives are blind to gender concerns.

Focusing on the textiles and cut flower sectors, Barb MacLaren (2012) outlines some of the opportunities and constraints that women face in export sectors in Colombia. These are outlined in Box 7 below.

### Box 7.

#### **Women in the textiles and cut flowers sectors in Colombia<sup>6</sup>**

**Textile and garment exports in Colombia** were valued at US\$1.1 million in 2011. In line with the the 2004 Domestic Agenda for Productivity and Competitiveness, the Colombian government promotes the manufacture of cottons, fibres, textiles, and garments. This trade promotion policy seeks to strengthen distribution channels, access new markets, and to further integrate global value chains. The textiles sector has experienced sustained growth over the past few years and in 2010 it supported 8,905 firms, mainly in Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali. These firms generate a significant number of permanent and contractual jobs (129,434 in 2007), 60 per cent of which are held by women.

<sup>4</sup>. For information on the ministry's 2012 strategic sectoral plan, see <https://www.mincomercio.gov.co/publicaciones.php?id=1964>.

<sup>5</sup>. *Curso internacional “Micro emprendimientos Turísticos para el Empoderamiento de la Mujer Rural”* (MinCIT 2011, 25).

<sup>6</sup>. References for sources cited can be found in MacLaren (2012).

A key concern from a gender perspective is that outsourcing, which affects both male and female workers, has become common. A recent study on textile business conglomerates in Bogotá found that the vast majority of firms subcontract assembly, pattern-making, and sewing processes, which are labour intensive and imply third-party subcontracting labour savings. Furthermore, *maquilas*, or small and informal satellite businesses that depend on contracts from medium and large-sized enterprises, have proliferated. These businesses employ a predominantly informal female labour force, illustrating typical gender inequalities in the sector's labour force and business ownership. Another concern relates to how trade liberalization has affected small and medium-sized enterprises, by which women are disproportionately employed. The textiles sector has been particularly hard hit by international competition. Trade liberalization instigated an increase in imports, which dampened growth. This impacted women in a number of ways: as workers, they were most affected by falls in wages, economic insecurity, and job precariousness; as small business owners, women were adversely affected by the increase in international competition; as consumers, however, women benefited from lower prices and a larger variety of available products.

From a gender perspective, the **cut flower sector** has also seen positive and negative impacts of trade. Colombia's cut flower sector has grown over the past few decades to be almost solely export-oriented and highly competitive globally (Colombian flowers represent 14 per cent of the world market in flowers). One hundred sixty-nine Colombian export firms operating in the sector have benefited from market access to the European Union, the United States, and, since signing a free trade agreement in 2010, Canada. Through FINAGRO (Spanish acronym for Fund for Agricultural Financing), the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development provides income protection incentives for Colombian firms in the agro-export sector, including floriculture firms.

Employing more than 180,000 Colombians, the cut flower sector is a significant source of income for urban and rural women and men. The sector has demonstrated a preference for female labour over male labour, since women are perceived to be best suited for the delicate nature of many of the sector's occupations, such as pickers, sorters, arrangers, and packers. An estimated 65 per cent of workers in the country's cut flower sector are women.

Academic studies draw mixed lessons from Colombia's experience in promoting this sector. Recent research commissioned by the Latin American chapter of the International Gender and Trade Network cites precarious and casual work, food

security, and gender discrimination as key concerns arising with the sector's expansion. While the link to international flower markets has, to some extent, improved the labour standards to which exporting firms are held accountable, labour standards enforcement continues to be a problem, particularly with regard to small and medium-sized firms and subcontractors. Owing to the increasing number of hectares diverted away from domestic food production to flowers, food security is cited as a gender-related concern by aid programs that provide incentives for workers to move into cut flower production. A trend of female migration to large export-processing regions to seek work has sometimes resulted in changing family structures and water contamination near Bogotá, lack of adequate occupational health standards, and mental health issues are other concerns female facing workers and communities.

Private sector-driven initiatives are in place to improve the sector's labour and environmental track record. The sector's business association Asocolflores, for example, created its own social responsibility code ("Flor Verde") in 1996 and has since funded a number of community development programs, including health and education.

## Gender equality and trade in Peru

A number of laws and agreements seek to support gender equality in Peru. These include:

- **Constitución Política del Perú (1993):** The national constitution enshrines equal access to representation for women and men in municipal elections (see article 191).
- **Acuerdo Nacional (2002):** This national agreement includes equal opportunity and anti-discrimination clauses.
- **Law No. 28983, Law on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (2007):** This law sets out a broad range of equal rights, including the right to equality of the sexes, autonomy, well-being, and access to public resources at the local, regional, and national levels.

Strategies and regulations relating to gender equality include:

- **National Plan for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (2006–10):** This plan includes a section on the economic empowerment of women, particularly government support for women-run businesses and improving incomes in rural and urban areas. Legislative Decree No. 027 promulgated in 2007 establishes

legal obligations on local, regional, and national governments to implement the plan.

- Regional Plans for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (PRIOs) have been developed, with technical assistance from the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations and its General Directorate of Decentralization (*Descentralización Dirección General*).

There have been some notable improvements in the status of women in Peru in recent decades. Importantly, the percentage of employed women who completed secondary or tertiary schools increased from 68 per cent in 1986 to 81 per cent in 2001 (Ñopo 2004 in World Bank 2010, 16). Women own 44 per cent of micro firms in the country, 20 per cent of small firms, and 23 per cent of medium-sized firms (Bruhn 2009 in World Bank 2010, 19).

Strategies to advance the economic empowerment of women and increase women's participation in trade are often delivered at the regional or local levels. For example, when a regional government decides to put financial resources toward supporting women-led businesses, the decision is a result of a PRIO. Meetings that NSI held with civil society and businesses in Lima suggest that there is often a gap between policy and practice at the regional level. PRIOs have been formed in collaboration with civil society, such as in the Puno region, but are not implemented. Efforts have also been made to establish projects to track important gender indicators at regional levels (*observatorios sobre equidad de género*).

Focusing on agriculture, MacLaren (2012) outlines specific opportunities and constraints that women face in Peru. These are found in Box 8.

#### **Box 8.**

##### **Women and agriculture in Peru<sup>7</sup>**

In Peru, agricultural exports—including asparagus, grapes, mangos, and coffee—have recently experienced accelerated growth due to the signing of various free trade agreements, including one with Canada. According to the export promotion branch of Peru's Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism, in 2011 agricultural exports grew by 29 per cent over the previous year, amounting to just over US\$2.8 billion. Growing demand for agricultural workers has resulted in the creation of new towns around agro-export businesses in regions like Ica and La Libertad.

<sup>7</sup>. References for sources cited can be found in MacLaren (2012).

This agro-export sector is highly labour-intensive and a major employer of rural Peruvians. Over the past few years, Peru has seen a significant increase in female employment in fruits and vegetables. In fact, female employment has risen faster than male employment in the main agricultural regions of the country. Women are employed at all stages along the sector's value chain, however employers tend to hire women with low levels of education, including indigenous women; the majority of jobs have poor health benefits and are temporary in nature.

Peru's agro-export sector is dominated by large producers. These firms tend to have low re-investment rates in local economies, despite high profit margins. While many of these firms provide useful services that benefit both men and women (e.g., roads and infrastructure) and espouse corporate social responsibility codes, critics argue that they, along with the government, should do more to improve decent work conditions (e.g., social security, health insurance), especially for women.

At the same time, the majority of small agricultural businesses—where female workers are overrepresented—produce for local, as opposed to international, markets. These businesses tend to be less competitive and dynamic than those in which male workers dominate, marginalizing rural women from greater access to trade benefits. There is currently an ongoing debate about reforming Peru's Agricultural Promotion Act (Law No. 27360), signed in 2000, in order to improve labour regulations and provide more support to small and medium-sized businesses in the sector. This is a step in the right direction.

## Policy guidance

What steps can stakeholders in Colombia and Peru, and those seeking to support them, take to promote the participation of women entrepreneurs, women producers, and women-led export firms in accessing the market opportunities of free trade agreements, particularly the free trade agreements with Canada?

- **Gendered value chain analysis**

Conduct gendered value chain analyses in key value chains to understand the specific constraints that women face in leveraging export market opportunities. For instance, in-depth value chain analyses of textiles and cut flowers in Colombia and agro-exports in Peru could be conducted. Such analyses should point to gender-intensified constraints in export sectors, and policies can then be formulated to respond to the specific needs of women participating in particular value chains.

- **Skills development and training**

Provide skills development and training to support women entrepreneurs and women-led export firms in becoming competitive in export markets, and women producers in securing higher wages and more secure employment. Ensure that training is provided in ways that are accessible to and appropriate for women.

- **Facilitate access to credit**

Support initiatives that facilitate access to credit for women entrepreneurs and women-led export firms.

- **Support women's business networks and associations**

Support women's business networks and associations and women-led producers groups and cooperatives to raise the profile of women in trade. Provide opportunities for information exchange. Support women in their coordination to achieve economies of scale and get better terms in export markets.

- **Include gender in the mandates and initiatives of trade and export authorities and missions**

Specifically promote women entrepreneurs, women producers, and women-led export firms through initiatives and mandates in trade and export authorities and missions.

- **Capitalize on supplier diversity initiatives**

Support women-owned businesses to help them capitalize on multinational corporations' supplier diversity initiatives. Leverage global value chains through initiatives such as WEConnect.

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