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Strengthening the Gender Dimension in the Trade Policy Review Mechanism

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Executive summary

Reporting on gender measures and gender-disaggregated data in a structured way can help boost women's participation in trade.

Trade and domestic policy interventions can help remove obstacles that women and their businesses face, while gender-disaggregated data can aid in identifying problems and assessing the impact of government programmes.

As more governments recognize this and seek to identify, implement and assess gender-inclusive initiatives, this white paper examines the positive role that the Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) plays in this regard, and how it can be enhanced.

The TPRM aims to improve transparency by reviewing the trade policies of all WTO members, with the frequency of the review depending on the member's share of world trade. For every review, the member submits a report of its trade measures, and the WTO Secretariat submits its own report.

Based on an examination of Trade Policy Review (TPR) documents (the government report, the WTO Secretariat report, minutes of the meeting, and questions and answers by WTO members) from the most recent reviews of 14 developed and developing country members, this paper:

- Proposes a catalogue of gender measures
- Identifies and categorizes gender statistics collected by members and cited in reports
- Highlights best practices among the gender measures reported

The submission of TPR is mandatory for all members. However, the measures reported are on a voluntary basis. The objective of this analysis is to encourage more members to voluntarily report gender measures and data through the TPRM. Better reporting leads to dialogue and the sharing of experience among members, as the minutes of TPRM meetings suggest. It is reasonable to assume that this leads to better policies and, as a result, improved outcomes for women and for economies more broadly. This paper coincides with recent efforts to update the TPRM and mainstream inclusive trade policies. Its findings may also be useful for policies focusing on other marginalized groups.

In the following sections, the paper briefly highlights how trade can benefit women and their businesses and how the TPRM can be used as a tool to encourage better policies and data collection in this regard. It goes on to present a typology of gender measures and gender-related data reported in TPR documents from reviews of selected members before highlighting some examples of measures and setting out some key findings and recommendations.

1

Benefits to women arising from trade and investment

Increasingly, empirical evidence confirms that trade benefits women in several ways.

Firms that engage in international trade and those connected to global value chains employ more women than those that seek domestic markets only. Trade increases women's wages and advances economic equality.

This leads to broader societal benefits. Women are more likely than men to spend their increased incomes on purchasing household goods and necessities for the family, and on their children's education and health. In addition, women-owned businesses participating in trade not only drive employment creation but are also more likely to employ women.¹

Foreign direct investment (FDI) can also have an impact on gender development and gender inequality. FDI inflows can potentially improve women's welfare and decrease gender inequality through increased labour demand, technological

spillovers, corporate social responsibility and economic growth. Women entrepreneurs can also benefit through greater access to foreign capital.²

Women, however, are far from reaping the benefits of the increased opportunities that international trade and investment can bring. Entrenched barriers related to the policy and legal environment, biased sociocultural norms, higher tariff and non-tariff barriers, and the lack of access to technology, finance, skills, education and networks, can greatly hinder women from participating in trade and investment.³

Various governments are testing policies and programmes to address these barriers and improve women's access to the benefits of trade. The next section discusses how the World Trade Organization (WTO) could provide a forum for sharing, reviewing and learning from members' experiences.



Trade Policy Reviews as an instrument for inclusive trade

The WTO's Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM) could serve as a powerful instrument to advance the participation of women in trade.

WTO members are reviewed periodically, with the frequency depending on the size of their share in world trade. Each member prepares a report of their trade-related measures and the WTO Secretariat does the same. Other members have the opportunity to pose questions to the member being reviewed.

Two key forums set up in 2020 to increase women's participation in global trade and investment have advanced the idea of integrating gender in Trade Policy Reviews (TPRs). They are the Informal Working Group (IWG) on Trade and Gender chaired by Cabo Verde, El Salvador and the United Kingdom⁴ and the Global Trade and Gender Agreement (GTAGA),⁵ with Canada, Chile, New Zealand, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Brazil as members. The IWG on Trade and Gender explicitly stated in its work plan for 2023–2024 that members will expand engagement to further integrate gender-related matters into their TPRs. Similarly, Article 7 of the GTAGA requires members to share their experiences of policies and programmes through voluntary reporting in the TPRM.⁶ In some free trade agreements (FTAs), such as the European Union–New Zealand FTA, parties have agreed to cooperate to advance trade and gender through voluntary reports in their own TPRs.

Since then, several developed and developing country members have paid considerable attention to women's participation and women-owned enterprises (WOEs) in their TPRs, referring to

international and domestic developments and providing statistics where available.

Many members who do not report on gender in their TPRs are nonetheless implementing laws, programmes and incentives to increase women's participation in the economy as part of their development agenda. They may not see how these initiatives relate to trade and investment and therefore do not feel the need to report them in their government reports. Hence, creating awareness and highlighting best practices on enhancing women's participation in trade and collecting gender-disaggregated statistics reported in TPRs by developed and developing countries could encourage members to report these measures and statistics. Sharing experiences will also help spread better practices and policy innovations.

The report of the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference 12th Session, held in Geneva on June 12–15 2022,⁷ for the first time recognized women's economic empowerment and the contribution of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to inclusive and sustainable economic growth. This is a very significant outcome and can be used to persuade WTO members to report barriers to enhancing women's participation in trade through the TPRM. These developments create a fertile ground for strengthening the gender dimension in members' TPRs.

Categories of gender equality measures and gender-disaggregated data

Categorizing gender measures and gender-disaggregated data will help members identify new measures and data and include them more systematically in their reports.

The categorization in this section is based on an analysis of TPR documents from the latest reviews of 14 members: Botswana, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, European Union, Iceland, India, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand and Peru. Based on an extensive search in 42 TPR documents using the search terms “gender”, “women” and “female”, the relevant texts were extracted from which gender-

related measures and data reported by each of the countries were collated and classified into relevant categories.

This deductive approach is applied only to the reported measures and may be a starting point for classifying trade-related gender measures and gender-disaggregated data.

3.1 Gender equality measures

Gender-mainstreaming policies are implemented by countries through three channels. Some members have included provisions on the social and healthcare concerns of women, and others have covered purely economic and market-oriented interests. The three categories are:

- Gender provisions in FTAs between partner countries
- Gender initiatives incorporated in countries’ trade policies
- Domestic measures adopted to promote women’s participation in the economy

To make trade more inclusive, in recent years partner countries entering into FTAs have included gender provisions. These are sometimes stated only in the preamble, and sometimes throughout the text. However, some members have gone further and included stand-alone gender chapters. A chapter on gender in an FTA indicates that partner countries share a greater commitment to enhancing gender equality and includes, inter alia, two key aspects:

conducting an impact analysis to estimate the potential effects of the FTA on gender and diversity; and cooperation-based commitments related to reducing barriers to women’s participation in trade.

Cooperation between partner countries covers the entire gamut of trade and domestic policies aimed at gender mainstreaming. FTA partners also cooperate by exchanging best practices for enhancing women’s involvement in domestic, regional and global economies. Gender chapters also include institutional mechanisms to oversee the implementation of such cooperation.

Inclusive trade is also a key element of member countries’ trade policies. Members have reaffirmed their commitment to international agreements and conventions, such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),⁸ the Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment,⁹ and the GTAGA.

Some countries advocate for the gender perspective to be central when it comes to

trade policies and strategies, including through its development cooperation and WTO's Aid for Trade¹⁰ initiatives.

To enhance women's participation in trade, member countries have reported: capacity-building initiatives to familiarize WOE's with trade regulations, processes and procedures; facilitating consultations with women entrepreneurs to make them aware of trade opportunities arising in different markets and through FTAs; developing and providing women with access to platforms and networks to promote business partnerships; and organizing women-focused business delegations and events. Equally important is improving the awareness and knowledge base of government officials by familiarizing them with issues related to trade and gender.

Domestic measures aimed at reducing barriers to women's participation in the economy as workers, leaders and entrepreneurs are building

blocks for mainstreaming gender in economic development. To promote WOE's, WTO members have formulated focused strategies that would enable women entrepreneurs to build and scale businesses. Key measures reported include those aimed at: providing financial support through loans, grants, venture funds and guarantees; equipping WOE's with digital tools that would facilitate digital literacy and the digitalization of such firms; offering advice on setting up businesses; and assisting firms in accessing market opportunities including government procurement schemes. Countries have implemented measures to improve women's participation in the workforce, such as providing care facilities and maternity benefits. Measures have also been adopted to promote women in leadership roles and as members of corporate boards. Other steps such as mandatory recording of wages paid to women and men have been initiated to reduce the gender pay gap.

FIGURE 1 Categories of gender equality measures reported in TPRs



Source: World Economic Forum

3.2 Gender-disaggregated data

Gender-disaggregated data reported by members and considered here can be classified into five broad categories:

1. Participation of women in trade
2. WOE
3. Labour force participation rates
4. Women in leadership positions
5. Gender gap

Most countries covered in this study have reported statistics on labour force participation rates and unemployment rates among women. However, in all other aspects, member reporting on the

collection of sex-disaggregated data is inadequate even though the range of issues on which one or two members have reported is quite large. Sources of gender-disaggregated data and gender-disaggregated statistics reported by members include: data on women's participation in the labour force; women's employment in MSMEs; women's participation by economic activity; women's participation by occupation; WOE; women's employment in export firms; women-owned export firms; women on corporate boards; political representation of women; and women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) occupations. Some countries have reported their overall gender gap, from the World Economic Forum's [Global Gender Gap](#) report, but only political empowerment and pay gaps were reported from the wide range of indicators covered in the report.

FIGURE 2 Categories of gender-disaggregated data reported in TPRs



Source: World Economic Forum

4

Best practices

The most innovative policies and initiatives for mainstreaming gender can be adapted to different contexts.

Countries have reported several programmes and initiatives for mainstreaming gender as part of FTAs, trade and foreign policies and domestic

policies. Members have also reported gender-disaggregated statistics.

4.1 FTAs

As more and more countries include gender provisions and gender chapters in their new and revised FTAs, measuring the impact of such FTAs on women's participation in trade is becoming increasingly important. Recently, **Canada** has sought to mainstream gender considerations in its FTAs with its analysis tool Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+),¹¹ which can be used to measure the potential impacts and effects of all FTAs. The GBA+ is rooted in Canada's 2018 Federal Budget Act, which mandates its application throughout all of its policies, programmes and policies, including trade policy and FTAs. In its TPR, Canada stated that for the first time it proposes to use the GBA+ analysis to conduct impact assessment (IA) for the Canada–MERCOSUR (Southern Common Market) FTA negotiations.

Following the submission of the TPR by Canada in 2019, the results of the impact assessment for the Canada–MERCOSUR FTA were published. This showed that the sector predicted to add the most jobs was services, including retail/wholesale

trade. The sector was projected to create a larger demand for women than men (3,810 jobs for women against 1,896 for men); in the goods and services sectors combined, the potential agreement would also generate a more significant demand for women workers.¹²

A trade and gender equality chapter was included in the **New Zealand–United Kingdom** FTA. New Zealand attempted to assess the impact of the FTA on employment of women at the sectoral level. The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) developed distributional data on goods-exporting firms, using administrative data. The distributional data was combined with traditional computable general equilibrium (CGE) modelling outputs in the assessment.

The New Zealand–European Union FTA includes a trade and gender equality article with groundbreaking commitments on women's economic empowerment and gender equality that are subject to binding dispute settlement.

4.2 Trade

One of the biggest challenges for women entrepreneurs is to progress from domestic to international markets. In **El Salvador**, the MSE law covering micro- and small enterprises was amended to incorporate a gender dimension to ensure that the operating mechanisms created to disseminate information about export opportunities and access to international markets promoted entrepreneurship among women.

Costa Rica has developed a comprehensive strategy that lays down clear guidelines and priorities for the promotion of equal access to international markets for women entrepreneurs who are exporters

or could potentially become exporters. It is based on four pillars: information, awareness-raising, capacity-building and internationalization. Such a strong and well-defined framework can help in addressing barriers that constrain WOE's from accessing international markets.¹³

Peru's "Ella Exporta" programme trains businesswomen in the development of business models and strengthens their knowledge of export logistics, the use of financial tools, digital marketing and electronic commerce. With the aim of expediting the internationalization of enterprises led by women, **Costa Rica's** Foreign

Trade Promotion Agency (PROCOMER) adopted a “Women Export” programme to provide tools and services to women selected for the scheme. To be eligible, enterprises must meet criteria governing capacity for production, keeping sanitary registers up to date and meeting requirements on packaging and labelling, and must have participated in the domestic market for a minimum of two years.¹⁴

New Zealand’s trade promotion agency, New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE), has established a Women in Export Lead to help improve the agency’s support of women-led and women-owned exporting firms. The NZTE website, the government’s foremost trade-promotion platform, showcases women business leaders talking about their careers and export journeys.¹⁵ Women also share their experiences of how they funded their export businesses and used their networks to become successful exporters.

4.3 Domestic measures

Countries have reported a range of domestic measures in their TPRs. Some best practices stand out in the areas of institutional cooperation, financial inclusion, decreasing the gender pay gap and the care economy.

Mexico established the Inter-Institutional Committee for Gender Equality in Financial Institutions, which has been instrumental in aligning the sector on women’s financial inclusion to promote greater participation by women in the financial sector.

In an innovative scheme, the Ministry of Economy in Mexico and Mastercard entered into a public–private partnership agreement with the aim of promoting financial inclusion and gender equality through the use of digital tools offering knowledge products to improve productivity and increase competitiveness, as well as linking platforms that provide a range of business tools and similar valuable content. The scheme also facilitates participation in events and programmes aimed at developing and strengthening the business skills and abilities of entrepreneurs.

Peru launched the “Mujer Produce” programme, which promotes the use of digital tools and their benefits for SMEs led by women. This programme has five lines of intervention: digital literacy; digital tools to assist in the design of an online footprint; selling products online; integrating management and financial processes; and digital tools to access financial services.

Several countries have adopted policies and promoted initiatives that focus on combating the gender pay gap and its causes. An initiative that

may set new frontiers in this area is an equal-pay standard that **Iceland** reported in its TPR in 2018: companies and institutions establish management systems to ensure and certify that there is no gender-specific wage discrimination. Subsequent to the submission of the TPR, in 2018, Iceland introduced a requirement for companies and institutions with more than 25 employees to prove that they pay men and women equally for jobs of equal value, the first policy of this kind in the world.¹⁶ The equal wage management standard job evaluation tool is used to implement the policy; companies that show they are paying equally for the same positions are granted certification. Being certified became a requirement in 2020 and organizations without a certificate receive a daily fine.¹⁷

To create an enabling work environment for women, the **New Zealand** government has made flexible working the default across the public service, allowing employees to more easily balance commitments and participate in the workforce.¹⁸ This approach allows flexible working arrangements governing hours, roles, leave and location, which contribute to creating an enabling environment for women’s cross-sector economic participation.

Women often drop out of the workforce, particularly after becoming mothers. **Malaysia** has reported in its TPR the adoption of a Malaysia@Work incentive programme providing cash incentives for a two-year period to encourage women returning to work after a career break of at least one year. Malaysia also offers tax exemption to encourage women to return to work, a childcare fee subsidy to ease the burden of working parents and social security scheme tailored for homemakers and self-employed women as a safety net.

4.4 Gender-disaggregated statistics

Very few countries have reported data on women in trade. Statistics **Canada** uses a database that links businesses to their employees and owners, thus allowing a detailed analysis of business-owner characteristics, including by gender. The data has been used to conduct studies indicating that women-owned businesses tend to be smaller and grow more slowly than those owned by men, have more difficulty accessing financing and are less likely to export.

New Zealand's MFAT has developed distributional data on goods-exporting firms using official administrative data. The data provides information on women's participation in trade as workers,

leaders and business owners/entrepreneurs. In addition, MFAT has developed top-down estimates of the number of women employed in the export and tradeables sector, while the **European Union** has reported statistics on gender gap in employment supported by exports.

Iceland has reported statistics on the number of women on boards in state, public and private limited companies. **Peru** has reported on the political representation of women. Canada's Standards Council examines women's rates of participation on technical committees as compared to sectoral labour rates to achieve various public policy objectives.

5

Key insights and suggestions

Checklists and model questions could be a valuable aid for WTO members seeking to rectify the under-reporting of gender data and equality measures in their TPRs.

The TPRM offers WTO members a good opportunity to report measures, initiatives and policies adopted to enhance women's participation in trade and gives members the space to share sources, methods and procedures for the collection of gender-disaggregated data.

Examination of the various TPR reports prepared by WTO member governments indicates that overall there is under-reporting of gender equality measures. One possible reason for this is that there are multiple agencies responsible for these initiatives.

In addition, there is under-reporting of gender equality measures in TPR reports prepared by the WTO Secretariat. The reporting level of the Secretariat could be strengthened to encourage member countries in this direction.

Similarly, there is an under-reporting of gender-disaggregated statistics and the sources and methods of such data. Such reporting could greatly strengthen the analysis of gender-focused statistics related to trade.

Members have actively participated in the question-and-answer sessions, seeking clarification and details of measures and obstacles relating to gender issues in trade and requesting information

on data disaggregated by sex. This engagement is an indication of the interest that certain members have in gender equality measures.

Public-private partnerships can be an important and effective vehicle for gender mainstreaming. Such measures are often not reported and members should be encouraged to do so.

Learning from and adapting the best practices detailed above can help WTO members seeking to improve trade outcomes for women, as well as other marginalized groups.

There is a need for WTO members to improve their reporting systems. A coordinated approach among different departments and agencies at the national level can contribute to a more systematic collation of information on gender equality measures. A checklist could be provided by the WTO Secretariat to members preparing for their TPR. The categorization of measures and data put forward above could serve as a basis for this.

A set of model questions for member countries could serve as a valuable guiding tool. The task could perhaps be taken up by the chairs of the IWG and GTAGA.

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