

**Gender in Global and Regional Trade Policy Workshop: Contrasting Views and New Research.**

**University of Warwick, 5 – 7 April 2006**

**TRADE AND GENDER**

**Summary**

The UK Government is committed to reducing overall levels of global poverty and achieving the Millennium Development goals, which include some gender specific outcomes. The UK Government is working to ensure gender considerations are mainstreamed into UK and EU trade policy development.

More broadly, the EU has a long-standing commitment to promoting gender equality and has a number of policies, guidelines and declarations that explicitly call for the mainstreaming of gender.

**EU Trade Policy**

The EU has a common trade policy that is based on uniform principles. European Union Member States have agreed to pool their sovereignty and follow a common policy on international trade, a complement to the single market.

The external trade administration of the European Commission – so called “Directorate General Trade” - is the negotiator, responsible for conducting trade negotiations, and the enforcer, responsible for ensuring compliance by third countries with international trade accords. The Council, where each of the 25 Member States is represented at the ministerial level is the decision-maker. It issues “directives for negotiation” to guide the Commission in its work and decides ultimately, whether to adopt an accord. The European Parliament is associated to the overall conduct of European Union trade policy and kept regularly informed by the Commission.

**UK Position on Trade and Gender**

The UK firmly believes that trade can be a key driver of economic growth for both women and men; evidence shows that countries with higher income per capita have higher gender equality. Trade liberalisation offers developing countries the prospect of selling their own produce, but also the chance to buy the goods and services that they need on better terms.

A World Bank study<sup>1</sup> shows that economic growth is good for reducing differentials between men and women, and that equal treatment of men and women is good for economic growth: the relationship is mutually reinforcing. Overall, employment empowers women, enhancing their bargaining position within the household and providing less quantifiable benefits, such as increased self-esteem.

As consumers, women stand to benefit from the lower prices that trade liberalisation brings in the longer term. There is evidence to show that women have different consumption patterns to men and will therefore benefit in different ways. They typically act as the carer in the household and rely more heavily on certain services such as healthcare. Improvements in these sectors that may come about as a result of a trade policy will tend to disproportionately affect women.

The UK Government strives to ensure that the different impact of trade liberalisation on men and women is considered in trade negotiations and addressed in trade-related programmes. The UK includes a gender representative in negotiating delegations to ensure a gender perspective informs the Government's position.

More and more research into the gender impacts of trade policy is being carried out, but the effects are difficult to identify or quantify. Mindful of this, the UK works with the Commission on the effective use of Sustainability Impact Assessments (SIAs) to ensure that trade policy takes into account economic growth, the environment (resources stock, pollution, biodiversity) and social development (social equity, gender equity, education, health).

A SIA is undertaken during a trade negotiation to identify the potential economic, social and environmental impacts of any given trade agreement. By informing negotiators of the possible effects, the research can help policy-makers to integrate sustainability into trade policy or provide material for the design of possible accompanying measures to maximise the positive impacts of an agreement and to reduce any negative impacts. A methodology for SIAs has been developed from scratch and is regularly reviewed to ensure trade policy is designed in a way that meets the requirements of good governance. The UK has fed into the development of the methodology, regularly feeds in comments on individual SIAs and is working to ensure they are applied to their full potential.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Gender Inequality, Income and Growth: Are Good Times Good for Women?' David Dollar and Roberta Gatti, 1999. The World Bank Development Research Group.

## **Gender Expert Group on Trade (GEGT)**

The DTI sponsors the GEGT, which was launched in February 2004 with the support of the Women's National Commission (WNC). The main role of the group is to ensure that gender considerations are mainstreamed into UK and EU trade policy, and to provide independent expert advice to the DTI on gender as appropriate.

The group consists of academics, NGOs, representatives from other Government Departments and DTI officials. The membership allows for wide understanding of existing research and so the group is in a position to highlight areas in which new studies might be required. The group also acts as a forum (both virtual and actual) where policy officials can both engage and consult with women's organisations on trade and gender issues.

The group's primary aim is to work towards creating a fairer and more sustainable multilateral trading system, without which gender equality is unlikely to be achieved. Within this the group aim to develop a wide basis of shared knowledge in order to develop a better understanding of the gender impact of trade policy decisions and also to mainstream gender issues into trade policy negotiations in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and elsewhere.

To date the group's key achievements have been providing a gender response to the Trade and Investment White Paper: Making Globalisation a Force for Good; presenting a discussion paper on trade and gender at UNCTAD XI; lobbying to increase European Commission awareness of trade and gender issues and developing a comprehensive position paper.