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TRADE, POVERTY AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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This paper focuses on women's economic empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa in relation to poverty and trade. The first part presents the conceptual framework for women's economic empowerment used in the paper, and discusses the conceptual and methodological issues raised by the prevailing approaches to trade in Sub-Saharan Africa. The second part assesses the impact of trade[1] on the feminization of poverty at the micro, meso and macro level, as well as the impact of the gender disparities underlying poverty on trade. The third part highlights the gaps at policy and programme levels and offers recommendations for action in the context of the successive crises that have affected the neo-liberal economic system.

I. Methodological and Conceptual Issues

Conceptual framework for women's economic empowerment

This paper is based on two major premises: the first one is that just like empowerment, the feminization of poverty is a process as well as an outcome. It is a dynamic phenomenon that encompasses economic, political, social, cultural, environmental and security dimensions. This paper posits that the feminization of poverty in Africa has tended to worsen over time and is characterised by the high concentration of women among the poor people who do not earn enough from their work to lift themselves out of poverty (ILO, 2004).

The second premise is that economic empowerment can happen only when women are able to accumulate and sustain assets in relation to income, consumption and production. Economic empowerment involves movements and transitions out of poverty, with asset building thresholds in terms of physical, human, social, financial, and ecological capital. Thus, asset accumulation is a pre-condition for economic empowerment, and sustainable accumulation of assets is key to upward mobility beyond survival and towards economic empowerment.

Following from these premises, women's economic empowerment is intrinsically linked with the realization of their social, political, civil and cultural rights. As such, it is not separable from their empowerment in the social, political, environmental and cultural spheres. This implies that women's economic empowerment has not only to do with access to and command over economic resources, but also with access to public, social, human and ecological capital.

Whether or not trade can lead to women's economic empowerment is not only contingent on its effects on asset accumulation and on all the dimensions of poverty mentioned above. It also depends on its impact on gender inequalities —whether it reduces, increases or leaves them unchanged. As trade does not take place in a vacuum, but within legal, institutional and policy frameworks, women's economic empowerment cannot happen without equitable regulatory frameworks, legal protections, supportive domestic institutions and policies, accountable governance, democratic participation, social protection and security.

[1] Throughout the paper, trade refers to trade liberalization and all the issue areas normally treated in trade negotiations, including trade-related issues such as intellectual property rights, investment, competition policy, regulatory policies and so on. It covers domestic as well as international trade, including intra-regional and inter-regional cross-border trade, both formal and informal.

Conceptual and methodological issues

There are serious limitations in the mainstream thinking on trade and women's economic empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa, which tends to assume that growth in trade equates to development, and demands merely women's increased participation. A number of actors in Government, development institutions and civil society have chosen this conceptually easier and simplistic path of conflating growth in trade and development, and women's increased trade income and their economic empowerment.

In the first place, the predominance of the informal trade sector in Sub-Saharan Africa countries means that its contribution to government revenue, employment generation and economic growth is unrecorded and uncounted in most official statistics and national accounts systems. Against this backdrop, it is difficult to make sound and reliable generalizations. It should also be noted that many official reports on trade performance in Sub-Saharan Africa have been prepared without a meaningful analysis of the actual role of the trade sector - both formal and informal - in poverty reduction, and/or a thorough understanding of the constraints and opportunities for different actors in this sector.

It has been underlined that this gap is particularly notable in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs): "… the current round of PRSPs says very little about trade policy … (…)…PRSPs fail to consider the impacts of trade on different groups of poor and vulnerable people. Effects are not disaggregated between consumers, producers and employees, between urban and rural populations, or by gender. Dimensions of poverty beyond income – risk and insecurity, access to services, and empowerment – are almost completely ignored" (Ladd, 2003: 1).

Based on the sparse research and information base, it is uncertain that trade and trade liberalization actually result in increased income, especially for women who form the majority of those who are the most affected by the adjustment and implementation costs of trade reforms (Randriamaro 2004; 2006). Typically, these costs are incurred through the transitional losses of output and employment as trade liberalization leads to the contracting or closing down of some economic sectors. At the micro level, case studies of individual women informal traders reveal how the positive effects of increased income are offset by factors such as high transaction costs and risks, along with increased workloads and time poverty (UNIFEM, 2007).

This uncertainty is compounded by the dearth of reliable, gender-disaggregated information on the actual share of trade in households' and women's income, and its impacts on development and welfare at different levels, as well as on gender relations. In addition, the conceptual and methodological issues related to the gender, trade and poverty nexus remain largely unresolved. The methodological and analytical tools that have been developed are mostly at an experimental stage and need to be refined in order to allow for a systematic and rigorous exploration of the linkages between trade, gender equality and poverty in different contexts.

Despite all the attention to women's participation in trade, there are still far too few studies that collect sex-disaggregated data on trade flows and markets, and even fewer that do so on entry costs into trade, returns and real incomes from trade. As a result, national and household level data – both quantitative and qualitative - that would provide information on trends are unavailable, especially baseline data from which trends in trade income as a contribution to total income in the transition out of poverty can be evaluated. Longitudinal studies are needed to characterize the dynamics of the movement out of poverty, or otherwise, among women traders, and to supplement the snapshots provided by existing statistics and case studies.

Furthermore, very few studies on gender equality and trade in Sub-Saharan Africa have focused on all the dimensions of poverty and empowerment, and on the intra-household impacts of trade on gender relations. For instance, some case studies found that women tend to have full control over the income brought in by their trade activities (UNIFEM, 2007), by contrast with income from other sources such as farming (Lyimo-Macha and Mdoe, 2002, cited in Whitehead n.d.)). However, studies on such significant changes in gender relations are still too few and cannot be considered as representative in the statistical sense. Only such gender-disaggregated information can allow for meaningful comparisons with the situation of men traders, and reveal how, and to which extent, these gender-specific processes contribute to women's economic empowerment.

These critical data and information gaps make it difficult to develop process and outcome indicators for the pathways leading out of poverty towards sustainable asset accumulation, particularly gender-sensitive indicators to measure changes in gender relations brought about by trade at household level. Without this kind of data and information, it is also difficult to devise policies that can mitigate the negative effects of trade on women and gender relations, or enhance their positive effects.

II. The impact of trade on the feminization of poverty and women's economic empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa

As global leaders gathered in New York to review progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2008, the world is faced with successive crises which threaten the development gains that have been made towards all of the goals. Already, there is ample evidence that most Sub-Saharan African countries will not reach MDG1 to eradicate poverty and halve the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty by 2015 (UNECA and African Union, 2008). Against the background of the food, fuel and financial crisis, poverty levels are likely to increase instead of decrease.

The development policy model that has been promoted in support of the achievement of the MDGs - especially MDG1 - was premised on the assumption that free trade and markets would be the engine of increased economic growth and poverty reduction in African countries. It is therefore high time and worthwhile to ascertain the validity of this assumption against the actual situation of women, who constitute the social group that is the most affected by poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Impact of trade on gender inequality and the feminization of poverty

On the aggregate, the Sub-Saharan Africa countries recorded a high growth rate (5.8 per cent) in 2007, slightly higher than in 2006 (5.7 per cent). As in previous years, robust global demand and high commodity prices were the main drivers of this growth performance (UNECA, 2007). But the picture appears to be more nuanced, with uneven and mixed results of this 'commodity boom' at the country level. In particular, "the recorded real per capita income growth rate (0.3 per cent during 1990-2002 and 3.0 per cent per cent in 2003-2007) is insufficient for Africa to make any significant progress towards achieving the MDGs" (UNECA, 2007).

Of note is the fact that exports from the 13 African oil-producing countries account for the bulk of this export growth, which means that it is not due to the diversification of African economies, where primary commodity exports remain the main source of growth. This leaves African countries particularly vulnerable to internal and external shocks, notably price fluctuations in global markets. In non-oil exporting countries, inflationary pressures due to the cumulative effects of rising oil and food prices have led to considerable increases in the price of basic consumer goods. This has harsh impacts on poor people's real income and well-being, especially in the absence of social protection and safety nets. Because they are over-represented among the poorest segments of the population, women are particularly affected, as evidenced in their huge mobilization during the recent food riots in several African countries.

National and Community Level

One of the key arguments for trade liberalization is that it will increase incomes. The literature shows that trade liberalization may indeed lead to growth, and that growth will tend to increase incomes across the board, thereby reducing the absolute numbers of poor people. However, there is little evidence that trade liberalization has significantly changed the incidence of income inequality between and within countries, including in Sub-Saharan Africa.

From a gender perspective, the main argument of the proponents of free market policies - including some gender equality advocates - in relation to women's economic empowerment is that increased trade and investment liberalization can improve economic growth, which in turn can increase women's participation in the labour market (Randriamaro, 2006).

In many Sub-Saharan African countries, trade liberalization has in fact led to increased unemployment (Gender and Economic Reforms Programme in Africa, 2000; UNIFEM, 2004), as it leads to the contraction of some sub-sectors and the expansion of others which may require different skills and/or fewer workers. While there have been increased employment opportunities in some sectors, such as non-traditional agriculture such as cut flowers (e.g. Kenya), clothing and textiles in Export Processing Zones (e.g. Madagascar) and services, this increase in the numbers of women in the formal labour market is coupled with persistent occupational segregation by sex, both vertical and horizontal, and builds on pre-existing inequalities between men and women and gender norms in the division of labour. Women tend to have less skilled jobs and lower wages than men, and they often work in unhealthy and exploitative conditions (Randriamaro, 2006).

In the tourism sector - which is generally considered as having a high potential for women's employment - the introduction of foreign-owned tourist enterprises under liberalization has entailed a gradual loss of small and medium enterprises, as local entrepreneurs are unable to compete. In this process, it has been found that, although they may benefit from incomegenerating activities in the informal sector (for example, selling of handicrafts, etc.), women tend to lose out in formal employment (Williams, 2004).

Moreover, there had been deleterious effects on women's access to land as a result of the development of tourism activities in countries like Tanzania, where it is leading to land shortage, conflicts and speculation (Chachage, 1999). In this context, it has been found that women are the main losers because of their weaker claims to land (Tsikata, 2003).

It has also been argued that market-based reforms under Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and trade liberalization in agriculture under the WTO Agreement on Agriculture have had detrimental impacts on domestic food production and poor smallholders, and hence contributed to the food crisis. "These policies have increased the concentration of agricultural markets in the hands of multinationals, undermined local and national economies, eroded the environment and damaged local food systems…(..)… The emphasis on cash crops for export rather than for domestic consumption has also meant changes in land use and land ownership patterns, and changes in who controls agricultural markets"(ActionAid, 2008:6).

These impacts have disproportionately affected women because of pre-existing gender inequalities in access to and control over productive assets such as land and credit, or storage and transport facilities, and because of their roles as both producers and managers of food security in households. As such, this kind of trade policies that promote cash crops and prioritise export-orientated growth work for the benefit of men who predominate in this area, and tend to further marginalize women (Randriamaro, 2006).

Household and Individual Level

The recent food crisis provides a dramatic illustration of the gendered impacts of trade liberalization on households' incomes and well-being in Sub-Saharan Africa, where agriculture and its associated sub-sectors are essential to growth and to reducing mass poverty and food insecurity (World Bank, 2007).

Households of domestic food producers and traders have been particularly affected by trade liberalization in agriculture, which has largely contributed to the recent food crisis, as mentioned above. They have been confronted with adverse terms of trade, and poor infrastructure and markets and rising costs of inputs have constrained their incomes. Their increased vulnerability is demonstrated by the statistical evidence on the higher incidence and severity of poverty in rural areas, which has led to an increase in non-farm activities, especially trade, as households strive to diversify their livelihoods under conditions of increasing economic stress.

As consumers, since women and girls are overrepresented among the poorest people who typically allocate a large share of their incomes to food (about 80 per cent), they are particularly affected by the food crisis. According to the FAO, even before the current crisis women made up 60 per cent of the chronically hungry (FAO 2006). Moreover, as managers of food security at household level, women are negatively affected by high food prices. They are also exposed to the indirect gender-differentiated effects of the macroeconomic context and policies resulting from the food crisis, namely the balance of payments problems and fiscal impacts.

As the major food producers in the region (about 80 per cent) (NEPAD 2003), women are particularly vulnerable to the volatility in food prices, in addition to their displacement from their share of local markets by imports of cheaper food products from international and regional sources (International Working Group on Gender and Trade, n.d.). In particular, many women in rural female-headed households are likely to see deterioration in already poor living conditions, because they rely more heavily on food production than other social groups.

At the household level, another lesson from case studies is that the trade-induced increases in women's personal income are often too small to significantly reduce the gender gap in income and to allow them to break out of poverty. Gender segmentation is a key feature of the trade sector —both formal and informal; women and men engage in very different kinds of trade activity.

Country case studies across Sub-Saharan Africa[2] show that women are mainly confined to low entry costs and low returns activities (Reardon, 1997; Baden, 1998; Bryceson, 1999; Dolan, 2002; UNIFEM, 2007). Most of the time, trade activities with high entry costs and high returns are a male preserve because women often lack capital[3] and are confined to businesses that require little start-up capital and yield relatively low returns to labour. Thus, men's and women's location within the trade sector and their position in the value chains are significantly determined by the entry costs to trade, with a clear segmentation between male-dominated high entry costs-high return activities, and low entry costs-low returns activities where women preponderate.

This gender segmentation must be considered against the background of the data on the informal sector in Sub-Saharan Africa. In all sub-regions, the data points to "the predominance of informal cross-border trade, which has increased in conjunction with formal trade since the 1990s due to a number of factors"[4] (UNIFEM, 2006: 2). Despite the fact that in some areas, women play an important role and often outnumber men in informal cross-border trade, the large majority are mainly involved in small scale trade activities, especially of fresh agricultural produce with a high degree of perishability (Baden, 1998, UNIFEM, 2007). In many instances, very poor women are not able to start even in these low-level informal activities (Winters, 2000; UNIFEM, 2007).

It is also important to note that in some countries, such as Cameroon, there is increased competition between women and men in informal trade in agricultural products. One case study shows that the key reasons for the displacement of small women traders, and the growing masculinization of informal trading activities in agricultural products, is that men have direct control on agricultural production, and that they are better organized than women (UNIFEM,

[2] Including a series of baseline studies undertaken by UNIFEM in 2007 on gender and informal cross-border trade in the sub-regions of Francophone and Anglophone Western Africa, Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and Central Africa.

[3] Financial, social and human capital, as well as ecological capital.

[4] These factors include population growth, urbanization, changes in subsidies (national and international) under trade liberalization; retrenchments in civil service under SAPs and high rates of unemployment, especially among women and youth ; devaluation of local currencies and chronic shortages of foreign currency; increased demand for imported goods and commodities; decline in household income and related increase in poverty levels among urban households; and increased demand for cash as prices rise. (Morris and Saul, 2000, Meagher, 2003, Community Organisations Regional Network (CORN) and American Friends Service Committee (AFCS), 2004).

2007). While men's greater command over agricultural production is not new, this suggests that men's increased engagement in informal trading activities might be due to the fact that they have become more profitable,[5] as has happened with other economic activities that used to be female-dominated.

The diversification into trade for the majority of poor women in Sub-Saharan Africa has mainly consisted of the addition of trading activities which produce little income and poor returns to labour. As noted by some authors, "although there are some women who are diversifying into better incomes, for the vast majority of rural women, diversification is more of a survival strategy than a route out of poverty." (Whitehead, nd). This sobering statement is corroborated by the findings of other recent studies, which point out that, for many women, the level of their trade income and their patterns of consumption do not allow for an accumulation of assets that can lift them out of poverty (UNIFEM, 2007).

Impact of gender inequality and the feminization of poverty on trade

The widespread expansion of trade as a means of diversification in women's livelihoods, in both rural and urban areas, provides evidence that poverty is a key push factor for their engagement in trade - especially informal trade -, which is part of poor people's survival strategies in the context of the uncertain and high risk environment resulting from trade liberalization and market-based reforms.

While poverty is partly a result of women's inability to diversify into higher return activities (Dolan, 2002), it has also been found that diversification - including into trade – is a survival strategy that may entrench poverty, because incomes earned are so poor that diversification "does not contribute to the achievement of sustainable livelihoods but to a cycle of impoverishment" (Hussein and Nelson, 1998, cited in Whitehead, nd), which constitute a major obstacle to increasing women's productivity and competitiveness in trade.

This suggests that microcredit and microfinance - both formal and informal -, which are the main forms of financing available to most women, are not likely to enable them to upgrade their activities and to develop the competitiveness of their businesses. While such micro-financing schemes have helped in the start-up stage of their activities, the available evidence shows that in most cases, they are not sufficient for women to move beyond small-scale trading activities.

Women's heavy burden of household responsibilities, as well as their weaker property rights to land and other resources, are likely to have contributed to the weak supply response of African agriculture to export opportunities in countries such as Burkina Faso, Tanzania and Zambia (Smith and Chavas, 1999; Tibaijuka, 1994; Wold, 1997, cited in Randriamaro 2006). Gender inequalities contribute significantly to the relatively poor trade performance in Sub-Saharan Africa and should be integrated into any analysis and policy action of trade performance in Sub-Saharan Africa.

[5] In the case of Cameroon, the availability of lucrative markets in the oil-producing countries on its borders is an important push factor.

In this regard, it has been estimated that gender inequality accounts for 15-20 per cent of the difference in growth performance between sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia. In the case of Uganda for example, it has been argued that addressing structural gender-based inequalities in education (total years of schooling) and in formal sector employment could allow Uganda to gain up to two to five percentage points of gross domestic product (GDP) growth per year (Klasen, 1999; Foreign Investment Advisory Service (FIAS)/ Gender Entrepreneurship Markets (GEM) Gender and Growth Assessment 2005: 26).

Most of the constraints that prevent women from entering into higher returns activities and more lucrative trading markets are well-known. In the main, these are the same as the gender-based obstacles facing them in other economic sectors, such as their lack of access to productive assets, information and decision-making. In regard to trade and women's economic empowerment however, the gender segmentation deriving from women's willingness to work for low wages and returns to labour is emerging as a critical issue that affects not only their income and well-being, but also has potential negative impacts on trade performance.

III. Making Trade Work for Women's Economic Empowerment

In light of the effects of trade described in the previous section, there are three key questions that should be asked in order to provide adequate policy responses:

- Are women traders able to take advantage of new opportunities offered by trade? If not, why and how can the causes of this inability be addressed?
- How can the returns to their work in trade be increased in order to lead to sustainable asset accumulation? and
- What kinds of policies are needed in order to ensure that trade-induced changes in gender relations will truly empower women?

The key role of institutions

The national trade policy arena is key to understanding the dynamic relationships between gender, poverty and trade. The starting point for any attempt at engendering trade policies is at the national level, where the role of institutions, in particular the State, is critical in mediating the impact of trade on poverty and gender inequality, as well as the impact of poverty and gender inequality on trade. Supportive domestic institutions and policies are instrumental in changing the quality of any impacts.

The impact of trade on women's economic empowerment must be examined against the background of the sustained and relatively high growth rates in Sub-Saharan Africa over the last few years (an average of 5.8 per cent in 2007, up from 5,7 per cent in 2006, with a projected 6.2 per cent in 2008). The fact that this sustained economic growth which has been driven by trade "has not yet translated into meaningful social development and inclusion of vulnerable groups" (UNECA AND AFRICAN UNION 2008:5), and is coupled with increasing feminization of poverty, suggests that women have not been able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by trade and that their benefits have not been equitably redistributed between men and women. This confirms that women are disproportionately negatively affected by the transition associated with trade liberalization, particularly in the absence of adjustment programmes or social safety nets.

A Developmental State

In order to redress these gender inequalities in the benefits from growth, it is imperative to move away from the widespread view that the State's role in trade should be limited to facilitate the free movement of goods and capital. This conceptual shift would focus on re-thinking the role of the State in a human rights framework, and on the development of a domestic agenda for policy actions to help ensure that trade and trade liberalization lead to women's economic empowerment.

To that end, such a developmental State would recognize and value women's pivotal role in trade, and not merely use their cheap labour as the basis of competitive advantage in international trade. It would uphold women's rights to participate in trade policy processes at all levels and to demand accountability of governments and donors alike.

IV. Conclusion: Towards An Alternative Trade and Development Paradigm

Gender-responsive Macroeconomic Policies

Gender-responsive macroeconomic policies are also required to ensure that trade supports women's economic empowerment. In many instances, there are biases against poor women small-scale traders in monetary and fiscal policies. These biases are compounded by their lack of access to financial capital and information. For instance, it has been found that most women lack sufficient capital to enable them to enjoy the tariff exemptions of various products, and that they have very little or no information on taxation policies and how they operate (UNIFEM, 2007).

It is also important to recognize that regulation in trade as well as in other sectors is key to women's economic empowerment, and to carefully consider the kind of regulation that can best serve women's strategic interests and economic empowerment, in the face of the evident failure of the highly de-regulated neo-liberal regime. More attention should be paid to the significance of appropriate market regulation mechanisms, and to the key role of traders organizations in terms of trading networks and bargaining power within markets.

There is also an urgent need to address all the implications of the concentration of poor women's activities in the unrecorded and unregulated informal trade sector. Beyond the overemphasis on prescriptions about how to formalize their businesses, promoting their empowerment means restoring their dignity. The first step in this direction should be a paradigmatic change in the attitude of actors in public institutions, who must understand that informal trade is not a criminal activity, and that women informal small-scale traders "should not be seen as marginalized women in need of special or temporary programmes, but as full-fledged citizens with entitlements to respect and adequate support from public institutions" (UNIFEM, 2007).

Renewed Global Trade Regime and Economic Governance

Although increased openness has provided new income opportunities for some producers and traders, exposure to world markets has also brought about increased vulnerability. In Sub-Saharan Africa, it has also exposed households and individuals who depend directly or indirectly on export crops for their living to the volatility in world commodity prices, which is compounded by unfair competition with highly subsidised exports from donor countries[6].

Furthermore, "aid has been used to impose a damaging macroeconomic framework, based on the orthodoxy of free markets. This has diverted aid away from what it should be spent on, in particular making smallholder farming systems resilient, and helping farmers access local markets and productive resources." (ActionAid, 2008:2)

Policy space is key for the emergence of developmental states that can promote women's economic empowerment. For this to happen, the current aid regime and global economic governance should be transformed in order to ensure that Sub-Saharan Africa countries will have the flexibility and policy space to define their own trade and development agenda, and to uphold women's rights.

A renewed global trade regime and economic governance will also have to take into account the likely impacts of the financial crisis, and to ensure that the subsequent global economic crisis will not affect development finance, especially financing for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Last but not least, there will be need to recognize that in the context of growing global interdependence, women's economic empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa is more than ever linked to the realization of the right to development.

Recommendations

A number of policy recommendations to make trade work for gender equality have already been made by gender equality advocates within international development and women's organizations, and United Nations agencies, since the end of 1990s, including in terms of trade-related capacity building, training and various types of support for women traders. At the mid-term of the MDG process, it will be important to capitalize on these contributions and to focus on their implementation. The following recommendations seek to supplement these earlier contributions with a focus on the emerging policy issues.

Among the immediate actions to be taken in order to respond to the urgent needs resulting from the food crisis, the Comprehensive Framework for Action of the High-Level Task Force established by the UN Secretary-General underlines the urgent need to adjust trade and tax policies. The recommended actions (High-level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis, 2008: 12) below are particularly relevant to the theme of this paper:

[6] For example in Uganda, where the basis agricultural growth has been a major expansion in coffee production for exports. Following the sharp decline in global coffee prices, the incomes of coffee producing households are also likely to have sharply declined. With respect to the negative impacts of US and EU subsidies to their cotton producers, the example of Burkina Faso is well known.

- “Review trade and taxation policy options;
- Use strategic grain reserves to lower prices;
- Minimize use of export restrictions;
- Reduce import tariffs;
- Improve efficiency of trade facilitation; and
- Temporarily reduce value-added taxes (VAT) and other taxes.”

As noted by the High-Level Task Force, in general, any new policy measure to address the food crisis needs to reconcile consumer interest in low priced food and the interest of producers in higher returns to increase agricultural production. From a gender perspective, this implies the crucial need to be cognizant of the supply-side constraints, resulting from gender inequalities in access to productive assets and markets, which are likely to make it difficult for women producers to benefit equally with men from higher prices.

Since there is ample evidence of the inadequacy of one-size-fits-all approaches, equally important is an improved knowledge of women’s location in the different trade sub-sectors and value chains in order to have a better understanding of the constraints and opportunities facing the different categories of women traders.

Given the deadlock in multilateral trade negotiations and the subsequent proliferation of bilateral and regional trade agreements, a gender analysis of their impacts is much needed in the Africa region where such studies have focused on the economic partnership agreements (EPAs) with the European Union, and tend to overlook both intra-regional and South-South agreements.

This points to the urgent need to fill the data gaps, especially on the informal trade sector where poor women are concentrated. While important steps in this direction have been made in countries such as Uganda where a survey on informal cross-border trade is conducted every year, gender disaggregation and analysis are critically missing in these surveys.

In the mid and longer term, there will be need for coherent efforts to pursue women’s economic empowerment, rather than partial approaches, such as trade liberalization. In order to improve targeting and ensure that support will reach the women who need it most, more attention should be paid to gender segmentation in trade and markets and to gender-specific value chain analysis. In particular, there is need to better understand the root causes and dynamics underlying the gender segmentations in trade activities, especially the intra-household dynamics in relation to women’s labour and their willingness to work for low wages and returns to labour.

While there may be a relationship between openness to trade in goods and services, and increased personal incomes, the link will remain uncertain in the absence of appropriate supporting policies and mechanisms that are necessary to fully exploit the potential gains offered by trade. These include policies outside the trade sector, such as:

- gender-aware macroeconomic policies, including stable exchange rates, low inflation, progressive taxation and fiscal policies; and reduced debt burden;
- pro-poor financial policies;
- investment in health and education, with an emphasis on accessibility for poor women; and
- investment in infrastructure, particularly in the sectors of water, transportation, communications and energy.

These policies should be supplemented with the following actions at the sectoral and programmatic levels:

- In trade policy making and implementation, special attention should be paid to women's multiple roles and unpaid work in production and social reproduction.
- A coherent and contextualized framework for engendering trade and trade-related programmes should be developed at national level, including transparent, inclusive and gender-sensitive processes for the integration of trade into the PRSPs.
- A trade monitoring framework based on the international conventions on development and women's human rights, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the African Protocol on women's rights, should be developed and adopted. This involves the systematic collection of sex-disaggregated data and the production of gender-sensitive statistics and indicators.
- Trade diagnostics, studies and assessments should include gender analysis and pay special attention to the needs of women's small and medium enterprises in both the formal and informal sector, as well as to the sectors that might be adversely impacted by trade reforms.
- Programmes and projects targeting women small scale traders need to question the actual results of micro-credit and micro-finance schemes, which have proved to be most effective in women's survival strategies. As such, they can be seen as more efficient in terms of social protection than economic empowerment.
- In their partnerships with donors, Governments should (i) provide for people-centred and gender-sensitive flanking measures to deal with the negative effects that might result from the implementation of trade agreements; (ii) exercise their sovereign right to demand for independent, inclusive and transparent monitoring of the implementation of trade agreements, and for the integration of social, gender equality, environmental and poverty impacts in their evaluation.

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