



The 2030 Agenda and the Potential Contribution of Trade to Gender Equality

Jeni Klugman



International Centre for Trade
and Sustainable Development

Think Piece

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Jeni Klugman

Women and Public Policy Program, Harvard Kennedy School



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 International Environment House 2
 7 Chemin de Balexert, 1219 Geneva, Switzerland

Tel: +41 22 917 8492
 ictsd@ictsd.ch

Fax: +41 22 917 8093
 www.ictsd.org

Publisher and Chief Executive:
 Director, Climate, Energy and Natural Resources:
 Programme Manager:

Ricardo Meléndez-Ortiz
 Ingrid Jegou
 Alice Tipping

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RTA	regional trade agreement
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
WTO	World Trade Organization

FOREWORD

Gender equality, this paper accurately argues, is not only a matter of human rights; it is fundamental to whether societies thrive. While gender equality is by definition a question of the opportunities afforded to both men and women, policy efforts often focus on improving women's opportunities, which tend to lag behind men's.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in September 2015 (the 2030 Agenda) includes a specific Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5) focused on gender equality and women's empowerment as part of an ambitious, integrated and universal agenda for the global community for the next 15 years. International trade is an important source of economic opportunities and could therefore potentially contribute to improving gender equality. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development, an integral part of the 2030 Agenda, explicitly refers to the challenges facing women as international traders.

This think piece, which focuses on the 2030 Agenda's objectives around women's economic empowerment and gender equality, was written by Jeni Klugman, a Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School's Women and Public Policy Program. It forms part of a series that analyses the contribution trade and trade policy could make to achieving key development objectives of the 2030 Agenda. The series is designed to help policymakers and other stakeholders to think through the role of trade policy in the implementation of this new framework of global commitments.

The paper reviews the many inequalities in women and men's participation in economic life, particularly in the labour force, where women in both developed and developing countries remain largely segregated into low-return sectors and occupations, and in international trade. It makes the important argument, based on this evidence, that improving women's economic opportunities is a significant challenge for both developed and developing countries.

The paper articulates specific policy challenges facing governments that want to use international trade to support women's empowerment as employees, entrepreneurs and cross-border traders. The absence of generalised evidence of the relationship between trade and gender inequality points to one clear policy priority: the collection of gender-disaggregated data on economic activity within and between countries. Other options include using government procurement preferences to spur the growth of businesses owned or managed by women, and prioritising reforms that would reduce the fixed costs associated with trade, costs which disproportionately affect the smaller businesses that women are more likely to run.

The 2030 Agenda should spur policymakers to think about how trade policy can support the global framework's clear and ambitious objectives on gender equality. We hope that this paper proves useful to this work.



Ricardo Meléndez-Ortiz
Chief Executive, ICTSD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ambitious goals laid out in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development capture the intrinsic importance of gender equality and women's economic empowerment. The challenge is steep. Women are less likely to participate in the paid and formal economy, and when they do they are largely concentrated in vulnerable and low-paying jobs and sectors. Women generally earn less than men for the same jobs and skill levels and they disproportionately bear the burden of unpaid household work and care. These disparities matter, including for growth prospects. Women's economic empowerment and gender parity influence national competitiveness. Ultimately, gender equality is fundamental to whether societies thrive.

While gender gaps in economic opportunities are well established and there is an accepted understanding of trade and gender issues, with some evidence from case studies, there is very little generalised evidence about the trade-gender inequality relationship. The challenges that women face in economic activity are also extremely varied. Women entrepreneurs run around 31 percent of firms, but these are predominantly small in scale and so disproportionately affected by burdensome non-tariff barriers to trade. Women operating as informal cross-border traders often face opaque and inaccessible regulations, as well as corruption and abuse at border crossings. Small enterprises in general, and particularly women, often face difficulties accessing finance, including finance for trade. As employees, sectoral patterns of trade determine whether trade increases opportunities for female workers relative to male workers. Women have gained from employment in export-oriented labour-intensive manufacturing (for example, garments and textiles) and from trade in services (like tourism), although under working conditions that may not be better than other sectors of the economy. Competition from trade can, but may not always, lead companies to invest in technology that benefits women, and to reduce wage discrimination.

The challenge of meeting the 2030 Agenda's gender equality goal applies as much to wealthy as to poorer countries. Policymakers seeking to use trade policy to enhance women's economic opportunities and gender equality face a range of further challenges and options. In the short term, governments could prioritise assessing the impact of trade liberalisation on women's participation in trade-exposed sectors and could shape trade adjustment assistance to expand women's economic opportunities. In the medium term, government procurement, within the bounds of international obligations, could be oriented to source from women entrepreneurs within and outside traditional sectors, boosting demand at scales that could enable women to trade internationally. Importantly, governments could prioritise trade facilitation efforts that would reduce the fixed costs of trade that disproportionately affect small businesses and therefore women's businesses. Regional trade agreements are opportunities for encouraging cooperation around gender equality. In parallel, governments will also need to address key structural barriers to gender equality, including eliminating legal constraints and barriers to access to finance.

1. INTRODUCTION

On 25 September 2015 the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/70/1, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations 2015). The ambitious goals laid out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), capture the intrinsic importance of gender equality and women's economic empowerment. More broadly, there is an unprecedented level of recognition of gender gaps in economic opportunities, and growing commitments to combat these gaps, from governments, multilateral agencies, and major corporations.

International agreements to ensure gender equality are not new. The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women includes Article 3 on ensuring the “full development and advancement of women,” and there are several relevant International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions, dating from the 1950s through to the Maternity Protection Convention (2000, No. 183), and the Decent Work for Domestic Workers (2011, No. 189).

The SDGs provide a catalyst for action. Goal 5, to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, and the associated targets capture significant global consensus around an ambitious agenda. The concrete targets, listed in the Annex, include commitments to recognise unpaid work, to give women equal rights to economic resources, and to enhance the use of enabling technology. Women's economic empowerment is also part of other goals, including the achievement of “full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men” (Target 8.5) and doubling

the “agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women” (Target 2.3). It is thus a crucial means of achieving a range of sustainable development objectives. Similarly, progress towards other SDG targets, like achieving universal access to safe and affordable drinking water (Target 6.1) and ensuring equal access for women and men to technical, vocational and tertiary education (Target 4.3) could help to enable women to participate in economic opportunities.

Trade is a recurring theme in the 2030 Agenda, even if there is no specific goal directed at trade per se. Several areas relate to trade, including increasing Aid for Trade support for developing countries and significantly increasing developing country exports, in particular with a view to doubling the share of least developed countries by 2020 (SDG 17) (WTO 2016; see also Tipping and Wolfe 2016). The Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which is integral to the 2030 Agenda, explicitly links trade and gender equality in paragraph 90: “Recognising the critical role of women as producers and traders, we will address their specific challenges in order to facilitate women's equal and active participation in domestic, regional and international trade.” This paper addresses some of these challenges.

Trade can contribute to gender equality and sustainable development. The relationship may also work in the other direction. Levels of gender equality affect how competitive a nation is. We can broadly map this relationship using the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index (WEF 2015)¹ and the United Nations Development Programme's Gender Inequality Index (UNDP 2015).² Figure 1 highlights the

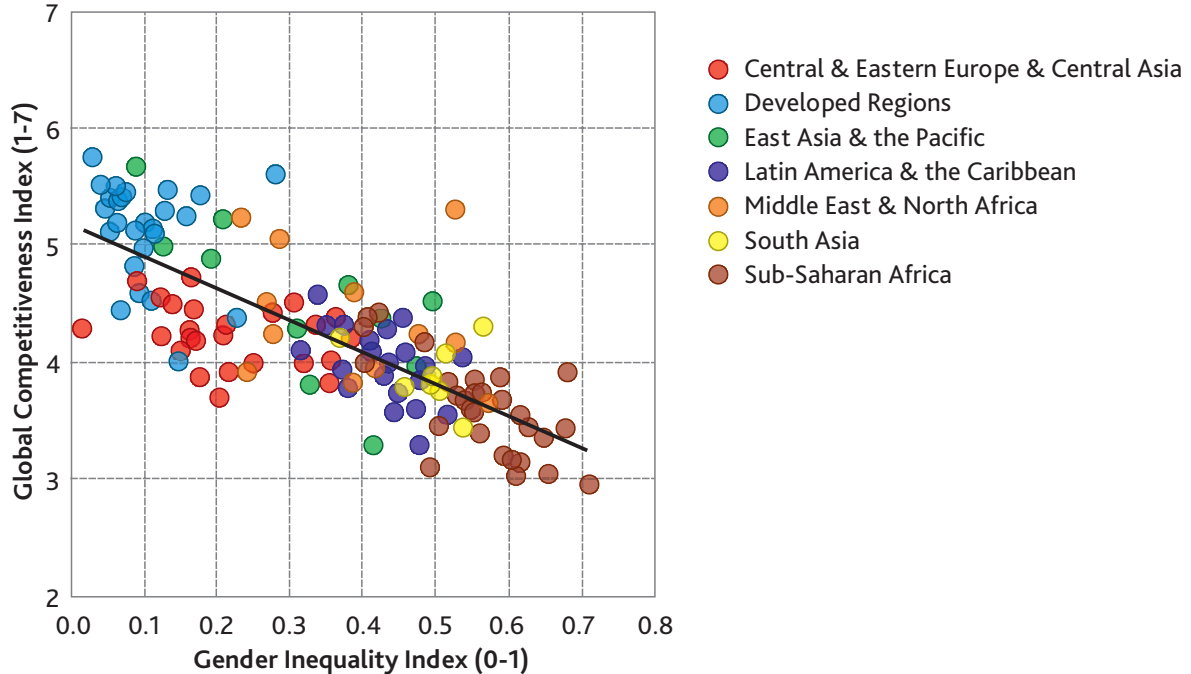
1 This index aims to capture and measure the set of institutions, factors and policies that set current and medium-term levels of economic prosperity—factors that facilitate or drive productivity. A higher score indicates a higher level of productivity of a country.

2 The Gender Inequality Index measures gender inequalities in three important aspects of human development: reproductive health; empowerment; and economic status. The higher the GII value, ranging from 0 to 1, the greater the disparities between females and males and the more loss to human development.

strong correlation across countries—such that higher levels of gender equality are associated with higher levels of national competitiveness—

suggesting potentially positive synergies, as well as negative relations at lower ends of the spectrum.

Figure 1: Close correlation of levels of gender equality and competitiveness



Source: WEF 2015 and UNDP 2015.

At the same time, there is intense debate about the distributional effects of trade. Academic investigations into the labour market impacts of international trade typically differentiate workers by their educational attainment or skills. Gender is a further dimension in which the impacts of trade liberalisation can be expected to differ, given the systematic differences in whether and where women and men tend to work. International trade may amplify or work to offset existing patterns of inequality in women and men's participation in economic activities. Understanding such linkages is complex, as underlined by Bussolo and de Hoyos (2009) and others. More broadly, gender inequality intersects with other inequalities—such as poverty, geography, ethnicity and race or caste—in shaping economic opportunities. While it is important to recognise and take account of these different factors where possible, the focus of this short piece is on gender.

This piece focuses on women's economic empowerment. Women's economic opportunities are of course only one dimension of the

gender agenda—there are major challenges on various other fronts, including freedom from violence, health, and participation in decision-making. Economic opportunities are nonetheless integral to gender equality and women's empowerment, given the evidence of how access to good paid work can expand the well-being and choices not only of women themselves, but also their families. There are also major gains associated with expanding women's economic opportunities which can accrue to firms, communities and economies as a whole. Woetzel et al. (2015) recently estimated these gains to amount to some US\$28 trillion globally.

It is therefore important to understand whether and how trade policy can contribute towards greater equality of opportunities in the labour market. This note explores ways in which trade and trade policy can enhance gender equality in economic opportunities, and help to overcome such structural barriers as discrimination and occupational segregation. Evidence shows that while increased trade

can increase economic opportunities, existing inequalities, including in terms of pay and conditions, persist. We therefore also look

at ways in which complementary policies can help to maximise the potential gains from trade, and minimise its potential costs.

2. WHERE DO WE STAND? PATTERNS AND TRENDS IN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

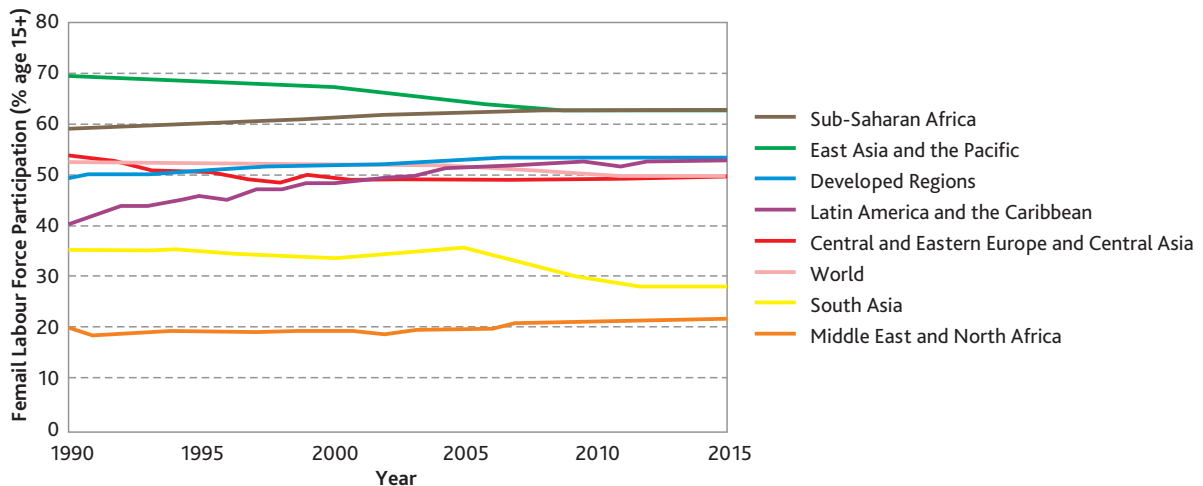
Progress in expanding women's economic opportunities has been far too slow. There are large and persistent gender gaps in economic opportunities and outcomes in almost all countries, whether they are more or less open to trade.³ These disparities matter. The expansion of economic opportunities for women is not only a matter of basic human rights. Ultimately, gender equality is fundamental to whether societies thrive and whether the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda can be realised.

Several facts are clear. Women are less likely to participate in the paid and formal economy, and when they do they are largely concentrated in vulnerable and low-paying jobs and sectors. They are more likely to work part-time, generally earn less than men for the same jobs and skill levels, and hold fewer

top management and leadership positions. They have fewer assets and property rights, sometimes due to legal discrimination,⁴ often face outright discrimination and implicit biases that favour men, and disproportionately bear the burden of unpaid household (family) work and care.

Participation Contrary to conventional wisdom, global rates of female labour force participation have stagnated in recent decades (Figure 2). The only regional exception is Latin America, where participation rates rose, albeit from a low base, and significantly contributed to reductions in income inequality and poverty over the period. In East Asia and the Pacific and South Asia, proportionately fewer women participated in the labour force in 2015 than in 1990.

Figure 2: Stagnating women's labour force participation and Latin American exceptionalism



Note: Weighted regional average

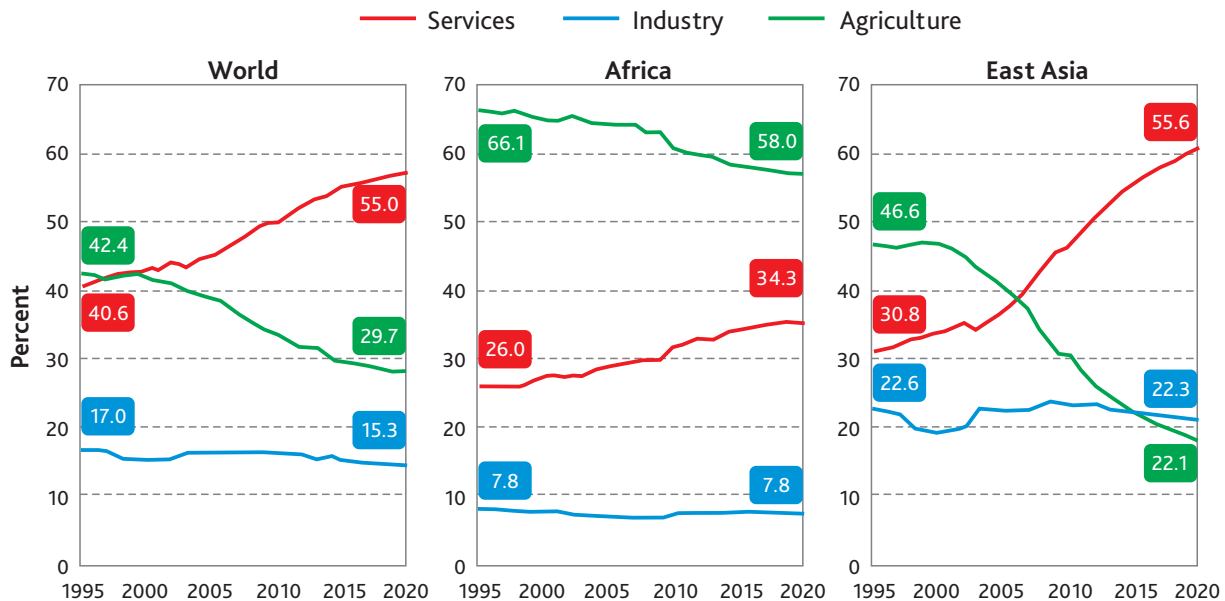
Source: International Labour Organization Key Indicators of the Labour Market (Table 1A)

- 3 In addition to the reports cited below, recent major global reports specifically addressing women's economic empowerment include *Women at Work* (ILO 2016); *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016* (UN Women 2015); and "Building Effective Women's Economic Empowerment Strategies" (ICRW and BSR 2016).
- 4 As documented by the World Bank in its regular publication *Women, Business and the Law*, which looks at legal discrimination across property, contract, inheritance and family law, among others, and finds extensive discrimination around the world (see World Bank 2015).

Types of jobs There are distinct patterns in the sectors and occupations in which women tend to work. In terms of sectoral trends, at a global level and in East Asia and Africa (two regions where women’s employment has been rapidly evolving), participation in

agriculture is shrinking in importance, and the significance of services is rising quite rapidly, as shown in Figure 3. These sectoral patterns are important because they define (in part) how trade liberalisation affects women.

Figure 3: Sectoral composition of women’s paid work, World, Africa and East Asia, by aggregate sector, trends 1995-2020



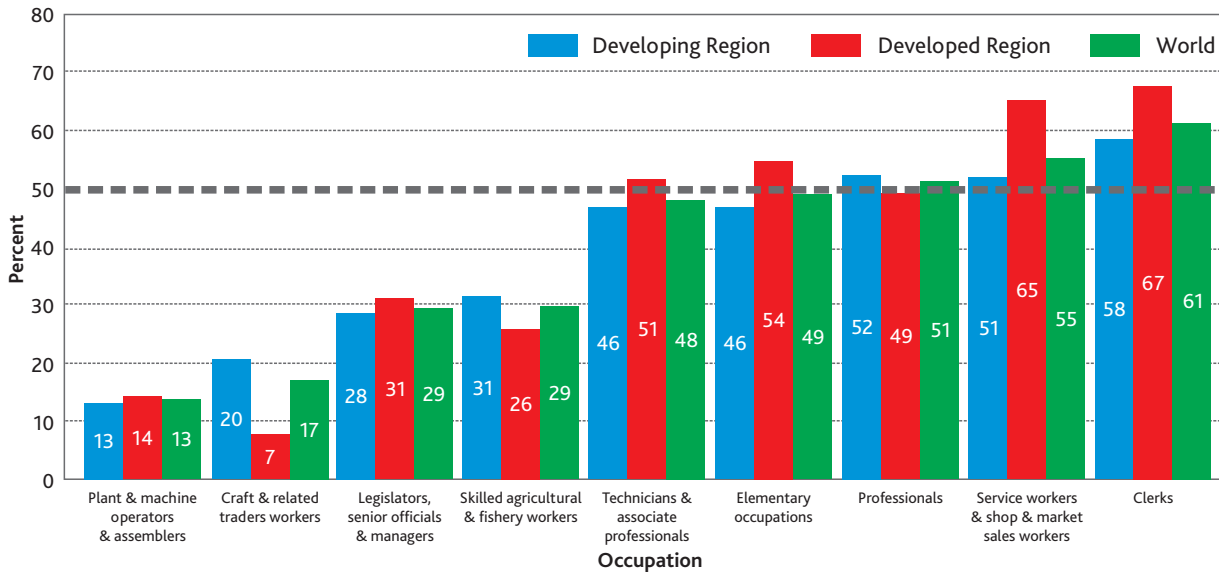
Note: Weighted regional average

Source: International Labour Organization Key Indicators of the Labour Market (Table R4)

Even as the sectors in which women work appear to be changing, the occupations they take up within those sectors are often still divided along gender lines (see Figure 4). Although some women have moved into management and professional occupations—in what Claudia Goldin has termed a “quiet revolution” (Goldin 2006)—women remain concentrated in low-paying jobs in the formal economy, in care and personal services, whereas men are more likely to work in skilled manual occupations and management (ILO 2016). This segregation appears to persist despite the fact that the gender gap

in education has narrowed or closed in many countries. In the United States, for example, over 90 percent of pre-school/kindergarten teachers, hairdressers and dental hygienists are women—a proportion largely unchanged since the early 1970s (Hegewisch and Hartmann 2014). Occupational segregation matters because it contributes to pay gaps: women continue to be disproportionately employed in less well-paid occupations. It might be expected that lower-paid workers with less job security will be impacted more directly by competitive pressures in trade-exposed sectors.

Figure 4: Extent of women's occupational segregation: share of women in total employment in selected occupations by region (most recent available data)



Note: Data is from 2006-2013 (most recent data available) and are not weighted by population.

Source: International Labour Organization ILOSTAT database, International Labour Organization key Indicators of the Labour Market

Earnings Women consistently earn less than men, largely as a result of the significant and persistent gender differences in the type of employment. But even in comparable jobs in the same sectors, women continue to earn less than men. At the global level, the most recent data indicate that in a majority of countries women's wages are between 70 and 90 percent of men's wages, and average about 77 percent, for comparable jobs (ILO 2014).

Informal sector work At the global level women remain over-represented in more vulnerable and informal types of work, as own-account and contributing family workers, especially in developing countries where the informal sector is much larger. A significant but growing share of informal sector workers are domestic workers in households, estimated by the ILO to number some 44 million women (ILO 2013).

Unpaid work In all regions, women spend more time than men engaged in unpaid work, including household chores, as well as caring for children and for elderly family members. On average, in countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), for example, women do

two-thirds of such work (OECD 2016). Ageing populations in both developed and developing countries suggest elderly care will become increasingly important in the future. Unless met by the expanded provision of public and private services, which could be facilitated by increased international labour mobility, this increasing burden of unpaid elderly care is likely to continue to fall on women.

Importantly, the global statistics about women's employment show that patterns and trends in developed and developing countries are somewhat similar, including in the persistence of occupational segregation. This suggests that the challenge of meeting the 2030 Agenda's gender equality goal applies as much to wealthy as to poorer countries.

Projected Trends in Trade and Women's Economic Opportunities to 2030

In the context of the SDGs, it is important to lay out the trends we expect to see through 2030. Broadly speaking, the current trends suggest substantial persistence in gender gaps, and slow, if any, progress. For example, the ILO has projected that at the current pace of progress, the gender pay gap will remain until

2086, at best (ILO 2014). The persistence of occupational segregation over time suggests that this will continue, at least under a business-as-usual scenario.

A more positive trend has been the growth in female employment in services. Falling employment in agriculture and stagnant manufacturing appear set to continue, especially in those parts of the world where the sectoral shifts to date have been limited, including Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The net effects of ageing populations remain to be seen: the rising dependency ratio will put more pressure on women to act as caregivers to the elderly in the family, and limit scope for paid work outside the home, though as paid provision of care expands, women tend to be well placed to enter those jobs.

Rising educational levels of girls and women will increasingly affect the overall profile of the female labour force, not just new entrants, and have reinforcing positive effects in the longer term in terms of investments in human capital and productivity. In many countries, women and girls will increasingly have the levels of education required to take on jobs in the growing services sector and management rather than sales and clerking jobs, for instance. However, trends in women's and girl's education in science-related fields (so called STEM, science, technology, education and mathematics) have not been positive, which means the technical skills profile of female, relative to male, adults will likely continue to reflect major deficits in the decade to come.

Forecasting trends in trade in detail is beyond the scope of this paper, although recent analysis

by HSBC and Oxford Economics, based on expert opinions and 150 years of data from key trading nations, does cast some relevant light (Persio 2015). The analysis foresees a world in which service-led industries are dominant, as export of services expands into new areas like healthcare and education. Given the growing predominance of women in services, noted above, the growth of trade in services can be expected to benefit women, both in terms of new entrepreneurial and employment opportunities but also in providing options to reduce the burden of elderly and child care.⁵

Another identified trend is the rise of “micro-multinationals,” as digital disruption and tightly connected global networks allow small and mid-sized companies to level the competitive playing field against larger firms. Some of these may leverage trade along global value chains. While there is a digital gender gap, especially in poor countries (approximately 200 million fewer women than men have online access, and similar gaps exist for mobile phone ownership; Alliance for Affordable Internet 2015), digital inclusion offers major prospects for growth, as the experience of Alibaba's Taobao shopping website and others are already showing.

Trade costs are also predicted to fall as investment in infrastructure and improvements in border control processes speed up the transfer of goods. As we shall see below, women-owned enterprises tend to be smaller operators, and could benefit from these trends. Likewise the gradual reduction of trade costs and the move (linked to the micro-multinationals) to small and flexible factories located closer to the consumer could expand opportunities for women.

5 For more on the role of services and their trade in supporting women's economic empowerment, see Lipowiecka 2016.

3. TRADE AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

The empirical evidence on the gender-specific effects of trade liberalisation remains limited.⁶ Country-level studies have tended to produce mixed results, reflecting the diversity of national circumstances. Cross-country studies face challenges around the comparability of measures, as well as in the interpretation of the results and attribution of causation to trade liberalisation or other policies.

We do know, however, that gender inequalities and trade interact. Trade is likely to have differentiated effects across the population because people differ in endowments, skills and specialisation, and in degrees of mobility, among other factors. We might expect systematic differences in trade's effects on women and men to the extent that there are gender differences in access to resources—education and skills, assets such as land, and access to markets—and because, as we saw above, women and men tend to play different roles in both the market economy and the household (see Fox 2015).

The relevance of these various factors will differ across countries and regions. Land property rights and access to markets and infrastructure for agricultural goods are relevant to the distribution of gains from trade in Africa, for example.

While there is an accepted understanding of trade and gender issues and some evidence from case studies, there is very little generalised evidence given the lack of disaggregated data and the difficulty of disentangling the effects of trade liberalisation from those of other simultaneous changes. A recent review by Pieters (2015) concluded that no clear global pattern in the trade–gender inequality relationship has emerged from the cross-country empirical

studies to date. However, Pieters also identifies several channels through which trade policy can have positive or negative impacts on gender equality through wages and employment.

The first channel is through changes in productive sectors: if a country has a comparative advantage in products produced with female-intensive labour, international trade can (but does not always) result in expanded opportunities and higher relative wages for women.

A second channel by which trade liberalisation can affect gender equity is via effects on discrimination. Here, there are alternative views. Pieters (2015) points out that gender discrimination in the form of lower wages may be reduced in the face of greater openness to trade because it is inefficient. To the extent that international trade exposes firms to increased competition and thereby reduces market power, it may reduce discrimination, either by driving discriminating firms out of business or by inducing firms to discriminate less. Others have argued that greater exposure to international competition may lead firms to intensify gender discrimination in labour markets—that is, further reduce low wages paid to women—as a way to cut their production costs (Seguino 2000).

A third and related channel is through technology: firms exposed to the competitive pressures of trade can have incentives to invest in new technology which reduces the physical demands on manufacturing workers and thus opens jobs to female workers, although this appears to be more likely in developing countries. Similarly, efforts to upgrade participation along global value chains can have varied effects on gender equality.⁷

6 There is a large literature on the distributional impacts of trade reforms, which typically investigates income or skill distribution (Goldberg and Pavcnik 2007 provide an overview). Important contributions focusing on gender and trade include Bussolo and de Hoyos 2009 and Brenton, Gamberoni, and Sear 2013.

7 For a detailed discussion of the gender dimensions of global value chains, see Bamber and Staritz 2016.

More broadly, a number of observers have highlighted negative repercussions for women from trade.⁸ Because of the highly competitive nature of global business, firms have incentives to shift production sites to locations with cheaper readily available labour and relatively lax regulations. This has been observed for the garment sector, where women account for two-thirds of the global garment workforce (Otope 2015; Delahanty 1999; Doane 2007).

Many criticise export-led sectors for poor working conditions, such as lack of job security, long working hours or forced overtime, lack of freedom of association and collective bargaining, and similar problems (Otope 2015). However, the evidence on working conditions is mostly inconclusive. Working conditions in trade-exposed sectors generally appear to be poor, but not usually worse than in most other jobs open to women.

8 For a good overview see Randriamaro 2006.

4. KEY POLICY CHALLENGES

Given our focus on the Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular closing gender gaps in economic opportunities, it is helpful to distinguish between the situation and challenges faced by three broad groups of women. While all women may face challenges, their circumstances, constraints and opportunities often differ. This means that broad programmes to address gender inequalities may not address specific constraints that some women face (Brenton, Gamberoni, and Sear 2013).

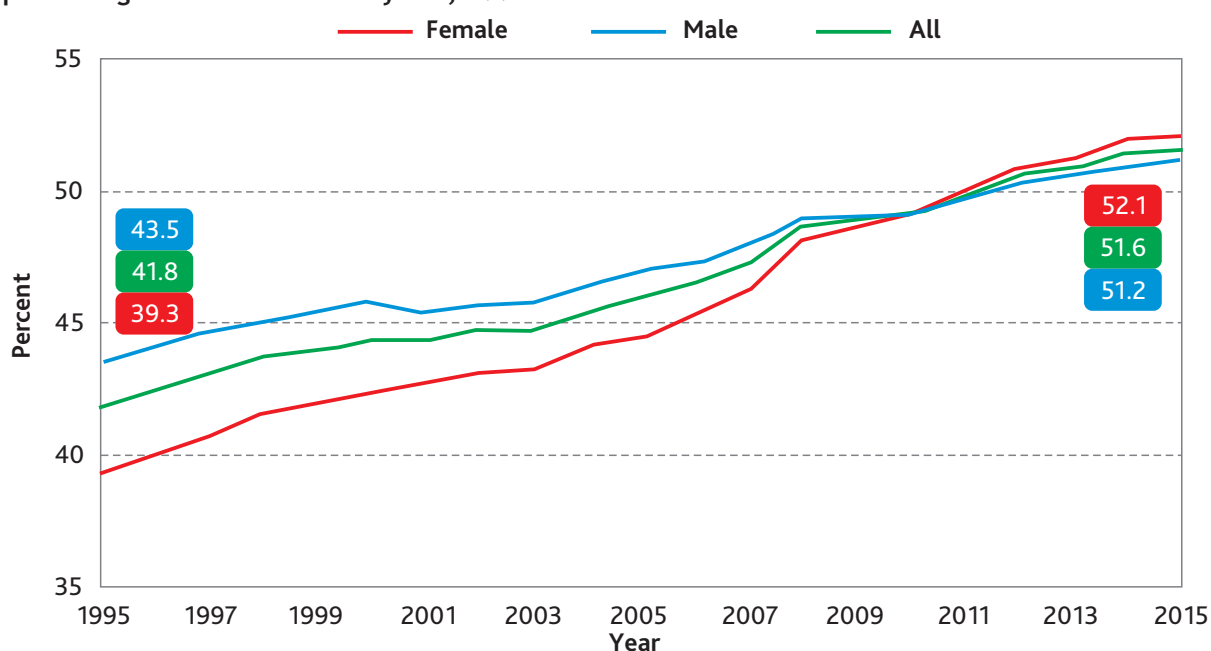
First, and most numerous, are the women who participate in the production of traded goods and services, ranging from rural farmers of cotton to professionals providing legal and accountancy services. Second, and smaller in number, are female entrepreneurs with dominant ownership of trading companies. Informal cross-border

traders, who are especially significant in Sub-Saharan Africa, can be distinguished as a third group.

4.1 Women as Employees

Although women's rate of participation in the labour force globally has stagnated, women's share of wage and salary employment relative to men has been increasing (see Figure 5). Data from the ILO (2015) show that the most significant expansion of the past 20 years has happened in South Asia and Southern Europe, where women's share of wage and salary employment has risen from 15 to 20 percent and from 21 to 38 percent since 1995, respectively. By way of contrast, women's share of wage and salary employment in Africa has hovered around 20 percent.

Figure 5: Share of wage and salary employment by gender: wage and salaried workers as a percentage of total workers by sex, 1995-2015



Note: Weighted regional average

Source: International Labour Organization Key Indicators of the Labour Market 2015 (Table R3)

In virtually all countries of the world, the same ILO data show that female employees are more likely to work in the services sector, while men are more likely to work in manufacturing. Women are also under-represented in wage employment generated by capital-intensive industries, such as mining and petroleum-related production.

What matters for gender inequality in waged and salaried employment in the context of international trade is not so much the overall level of trade, but rather the sectoral pattern of trade, which determines whether trade increases the demand for female workers relative to male workers (Braunstein and Seguinto 2012). For example, textiles and apparel

production are, typically, female-intensive, whereas the production of motor vehicles, for example, is very male-intensive. This means that women have gained opportunities for wage employment generated by export-oriented, labour-intensive manufacturing (for example, garments and textiles) and services (for example, tourism) and from large-scale, non-traditional agricultural production.

A number of country-level studies have documented a positive association between export orientation and female employment at the firm level (e.g. Ozler 2000; Ederington, Minier, and Troske 2009; Aguayo-Tellez et al. 2013). While some caution is needed in interpreting causality, these studies nonetheless cast some useful light on potential effects:

- Honduras's preferential trade agreement with the United States led to export growth of the manufacturing *maquila* sector, whose value added (in US dollars) grew rapidly—averaging 33 percent annually—between 1990 and 2006. Around 7 out of 10 *maquila* employees were women, and the gender wage gap in the *maquila* industry was 16 percent smaller than the gap for other firms, supporting the conclusion that in Honduras, the expanding *maquila* sector contributed to the economy-wide reduction in the gender wage gap (De Hoyos, Bussolo, and Núñez 2009).
- In Lesotho, trade expansion brought about an increase in export-intensive sectors, particularly clothing, over a period of 30 years, and this development was accompanied by a significant increase in paid employment for women in the formal sector (UNCTAD 2012).
- Increased competition and new export opportunities in Mexican manufacturing reduced gender inequality in blue-collar manufacturing jobs, as technology upgrading by exporting firms reduced the role of heavy manual labour traditionally done by men (Juhn, Ujhelyi, and Villegas-Sanchez 2014).

Some of this evidence reflects the operation of different channels of impact (sectoral shifts, incentives to reduce discrimination and invest in technology) identified above.

Overall, however, the available empirical evidence is limited, and few studies examine the impact of sectoral reallocation at the level of the entire economy rather than within an individual sector. One interesting economy-wide study investigating the effects of trade liberalisation across the Brazilian economy found that trade liberalisation contributed to a convergence of male and female labour force participation and employment rates. Low-skilled men in localities more exposed to trade liberalisation experienced faster reductions (or slower growth) in labour force participation and employment—which closed gender gaps (at the expense of men). Thus, while tariff reductions were not systematically larger for more male-intensive industries, the (negative) employment effects on men were stronger than on women, because the tradable sector as a whole is relatively male-intensive in Brazil (Gaddis and Pieters 2014).

The evidence above on the impact of trade liberalisation on women's economic opportunities as employees points to some potential policy challenges, given the ambition of the 2030 Agenda around full and productive employment and closing gender gaps:

- Understanding the profile of employment at the country level, including the location and skills of workers and the existing structure of occupations and employment by sector, in order to obtain an adequate understanding of how economic changes associated with trade are likely to affect different groups of workers;
- Assessing the impact of major trade policy decisions, like liberalisation under regional trade agreements (RTAs), on women's employment in affected sectors (see UNCTAD 2014);
- Considering how trade policy can increase the competitive exposure of domestic

industries in a way that supports decent work for female employees, while reducing gender wage discrimination;

- Pursuing opportunities for expansion of services sectors in which women are employed, through exports, greater international competitiveness and foreign direct investment—while ensuring that labour standards are upheld.

Analysis of these challenges on a country-specific basis can inform trade policy and related decisions that enhance economic opportunities for women.

4.2 Women-Owned Enterprises

Women-owned businesses are estimated to account for about 31 percent of all registered firms globally.⁹ Surveys carried out by the World Bank and others find that women-owned enterprises are on average much smaller than enterprises owned by men, including in Sub-Saharan Africa (Amin 2014), transition economies (Sabarwal and Terrell 2008), and across several developing regions (Bardasi, Sabarwal, and Terrell 2011).

Women-owned enterprises are characterised by sectoral segregation, which is important because the sector in which a business operates is a very strong predictor of its profitability and thus its potential impact on women's economic empowerment (see for example Campos and Gassier 2016). When women do create a firm they tend to enter sectors with lower entry barriers and cluster in sectors that are less profitable, such as retail, beauty, and food service, mirroring the occupational segregation found in the workplace (Hallward-Driemeier 2013; see also De Mel, McKenzie and Woodruff 2014). Some of these services are inherently less likely to be traded internationally.

Data on women-owned businesses and trade are scarce, although recent analysis by the International Trade Centre across 20 countries¹⁰ found that far fewer women-owned businesses engage in trade, whether export or import, because of their smaller size, cultural and regulatory barriers, limited access to capital (finance and land), and more restricted access to information and networks (ITC 2015). This study found that among the trading businesses, only 15 percent of exporting firms were led (owned and/or managed) by female entrepreneurs. Women-owned enterprises are more likely to export than import, are concentrated in textiles and clothing sectors, and tend to employ relatively more women. Such enterprises are more common in Latin America and the Caribbean and East Africa—less so in the Middle East and North Africa.

Because women-owned firms tend to be smaller, they are disproportionately affected by standards and regulations that affect trade-related fixed costs. Smaller firms are also less likely to have in-house capacity to deal with bureaucratic and legal issues (ITC 2015). The centralisation of the issuance of physical (hard copy) permits may be prohibitively costly for smaller firms and especially for women traders who have child care, household tasks and other demands on their time. Making the forms available electronically, or through other avenues, would help to make them more accessible. In addition to centralised physical permits, opaque export and import procedures can be difficult for small traders to manage, especially if they are inexperienced or illiterate, and may lead to their not claiming advantages to which they are entitled (Brenton, Gamberoni, and Sear 2013).¹¹

Looking ahead, however, new technologies are increasingly enabling smaller players to deliver

9 International Finance Corporation database, data for 177 countries for small and medium-sized enterprises, latest available data; <https://www.smefinanceforum.org/data-sites/ifc-enterprise-finance-gap>.

10 Namely, Cambodia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka; Jamaica, Paraguay, Trinidad and Tobago; Egypt, Morocco, State of Palestine, Tunisia; Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, United Republic of Tanzania; Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal.

11 See García Mora and Roshan 2013 for examples.

goods and services, and compete anywhere in the world. A study by online commerce platform eBay found that 95 percent of small and medium-sized enterprises on eBay were exporting (eBay 2016). The capacity of smaller enterprises to get online, including in developing countries, has opened up major new opportunities to trade—which may thus create opportunities for new players that have been marginalised to date. Digital platforms can overcome many fixed costs that previously held such actors back from trading small goods internationally.

This evidence points to several possible questions and challenges for policymakers seeking to harness international trade to support women's economic empowerment under the 2030 Agenda as entrepreneurs and economic decision-makers, including:

- How to make trade regulations and documentation requirements, like import and export permits, simpler and more accessible to small businesses, many of which may be owned and run by women;
- How to support women entrepreneurs in traditional sectors and encourage women entrepreneurs to participate in non-traditional sectors that present opportunities for higher returns; and
- How to make trade finance more accessible and flexible, so that women entrepreneurs can better manage the risks, and take on the scale, of international trading activity.

It is important to underline that the constraints that women-owned enterprises face are generally not exclusively specific to trade, and vary across countries and regions. Most notably, legal barriers—including more limited ownership and property rights, restrictions on business registration, and so on—limit women's

access to finance and entrepreneurship in a number of countries.

4.3 Informal Cross-Border Traders

Finally here we review the constraints facing informal traders, drawing on Brenton, Gamberoni, and Sear (2013). In southern Africa, informal cross-border trade is estimated at 30-40 percent of total recorded formal trade between countries in the region, or some US\$20 billion per year (SARDC 2008), and a majority of traders are women. According to Brenton, Gamberoni, and Sear (2013), this amounts to almost half of total development assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. Not only does this contribute to SDG objectives around poverty reduction, but Brenton et al. also point out that the trade contributes to supporting food security, another key SDG objective.

At the same time, informal traders face various obstacles, as documented in contributions to Brenton et al. Recent quantitative and qualitative work in the Great Lakes region of Africa reveals problems facing such traders, ranging from paying bribes and the risk of confiscation of goods, through to sexual and gender-based violence (García Mora and Roshan 2013). A key feature that makes cross-border trading relatively accessible to women is that little start-up capital is required. However, a lack of access to finance and an aversion to risk can also prevent women traders from scaling up activity and growing their business.

In addition to the policy challenges listed above with respect to supporting women entrepreneurs, governments seeking to support women cross-border traders (including food producers) face specific challenges, including tackling corruption, building infrastructure (e.g. lighting) to make border crossings more secure, and helping cross-border traders to access financial services.

5. ENHANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH TRADE POLICY

The global picture suggests that women's economic opportunities are changing, as women's participation shifts towards services, but are not necessarily expanding and remain segregated in "traditional" service sectors and occupations. This contrasts with the ambitious objectives laid out in SDG 5, (on gender equality), SDG 1 (on poverty), and SDG 8 (on sustainable economic growth and decent work). It is therefore important to consider how trade policy can increase women's economic opportunities, and thus support a range of SDG objectives, from achieving food security to ending poverty.

It is also important to remember that a broader set of structural and other conditions not related to trade policy—including adverse norms and laws—often constrain women's opportunities.

Eliminating legal barriers and enforcing the right to equality are critical for many countries. According to the World Bank (2015), across 173 economies, 100 restrict women's work in certain jobs, and in 18 countries women cannot get a job without their husband's permission. Access to land is a major constraint, especially for rural women and farmers. Recent OECD analysis found that gender-based institutional barriers impede economic growth beyond their effect on gender inequality in outcomes by lowering female acquisition of human capital, labour force participation, and total factor productivity; the OECD estimates the associated loss of income at up to US\$12 trillion, or 16 percent of current global gross domestic product (Ferrant and Kolev 2016).

Overcoming constraints in access to finance, including trade finance, is another structural barrier that needs to be addressed. According to the World Bank Financial Inclusion Database, 42 percent of women worldwide are unbanked, compared to 35 percent of men—with the gap varying widely across regions, ranging

from 18 percentage points in South Asia to 4 percentage points in East Asia and the Pacific (see Demirgüç-Kunt et al. 2015). These gaps have persisted over the past several years, even as overall levels of access have improved. Measures needed to expand women's financial access include simplifying requirements to open accounts and exploiting opportunities offered by digital payments.

While there is a growing literature on women's economic empowerment exploring the potential of policy and programme interventions to overcome constraints, evidence on trade-related interventions is very scarce. As underlined by Campos and Gassier (2016), this means that we are unable to conclude which interventions have worked, relative to what would have happened in the absence of the interventions. We also have very little data on costs, so it is impossible to determine whether and which interventions are cost effective. What we can do is highlight approaches which appear to be addressing the key constraints, and which appear to hold promise.

Another critical point to flag is the diversity of country circumstances, and the importance of understanding country context. While we have highlighted major recurring constraints that limit women's economic opportunities, there are important country specificities. Likewise, the country context will differ in terms of economic openness, nature of and prospects for trade, and policy objectives. Addressing this variety of circumstances is beyond the scope of this note, but clearly the differences in economic, social and institutional conditions, as well as political factors, affect the appropriateness and possible effectiveness of alternative interventions. All of the proposed policies and changes would need to be accompanied by sound monitoring and evaluation systems in order to be able to capture the relevance, outcomes, and impact of such measures.

5.1 Assessing the Impact of Trade Liberalisation on Women's Economic Opportunities

The first and most obvious, although perhaps the most difficult option is that, starting in the short term, governments build their own understanding of how and where women work in sectors that may be affected by trade liberalisation, and the key constraints, including by collecting gender-disaggregated data at the firm level. This analysis is needed to assess *ex ante* the impacts of trade liberalisation initiatives on women's participation in the economy, both as employees and entrepreneurs. For example, policymakers could consider shaping trade adjustment assistance programmes to be responsive to gender differences. Programmes that support the adoption of technology to reduce the physical burden of manufacturing work could expand opportunities for women, and businesses benefiting from support programmes could be required to ensure gender parity in earnings, for example.

5.2 Trade Facilitation Initiatives to Lower Barriers to Trade

The fact that businesses run by women are more often small in scale and, in the case of cross-border traders, also particularly vulnerable to corruption suggests that a short-term unilateral priority for governments should be to ensure that the rules and regulations governing trade, including required documents and fees and taxes, are clear, transparent and widely available at the border. Given time and mobility constraints as a result of household responsibilities, efforts to simplify and streamline the number and nature of documents that have to be submitted and regulations that have to be satisfied are likely to substantially benefit women (Brenton, Gamberoni and Sear 2013). Allowing documents to be obtained and

submitted online or close to where women traders reside is of particular importance.

Regional trade agreements and economic integration organisations provide a useful platform for this work. The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), for example, has simplified its trade regime. The pilot scheme for small traders allows exemption of consignments of less than US\$1,000 from import duties (CBC 2016).

These efforts complement multilateral efforts at facilitating trade. As tariffs have generally fallen, the transaction costs associated with moving goods and services have become relatively more important barriers to trade. In 2013, members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) adopted the Trade Facilitation Agreement, which contains provisions for expediting the movement, release and clearance of goods, including goods in transit, as well as measures for effective cooperation among various authorities on trade facilitation and customs compliance.¹² Governments implementing this agreement could prioritise for implementation those reforms that would reduce the fixed costs both of importing inputs and exporting finished products, and those that would particularly facilitate trade in small shipments, which would be of particular benefit to small businesses and, among these, women-owned businesses.

Governments could also prioritise reforms that use new technology to simplify and enable access to trade procedures. This holds particular promise for entrepreneurs of small companies, including women, who find red tape especially burdensome. There is some evidence of the gender-specific benefits—in Ghana, for example, where computerised services for cross-border trade and regulations reduced reported sexual harassment and abuse, which had been a major problem (USAID 2012).

12 As of 29 June 2016, 84 WTO members had ratified the agreement, three-quarters of the number required for it to enter into force.

5.3 Procurement Policies to Support Female Entrepreneurship

Public and private procurement measures affect the demand for the products and services of women-owned enterprises and/or female employees. The underlying assumption is that the supply of women-owned enterprises, and of women, with the characteristics needed to succeed is adequate, such that changed business practices can generate more and better opportunities.

Government procurement accounts for around US\$10 trillion of global expenditure on goods and services, of which just 1-5 percent is sourced from women-owned businesses (Erogbogbo 2016). In the short term, streamlining government procurement so it is more accessible to small businesses could make it easier for women entrepreneurs to secure government contracts (ITC 2014).

Procurement policies can be used to advance policy objectives, like the use of sustainable energy goods and services, within the bounds of international obligations, such as under the WTO Agreement on Government Procurement (Herve and Luff 2012).

Governments could, over the medium term, unilaterally or collectively test methods for prioritising procurement from women-owned businesses, on a non-discriminatory basis between national and foreign providers (see ITC 2014). These measures could cover sourcing from women entrepreneurs both inside and outside “traditional” service sectors in order to address sectoral segregation. This could provide women entrepreneurs with stable supply relationships and demand at a scale that could enable them to trade internationally.

5.4 Regional Trade Agreements and Labour Issues

Many service sectors in which women are proportionately more heavily employed, like the tourism sector, are already characterised by

a wide range of (typically private) certifications related to social and environmental sustainability. These certifications could be expanded to include gender equity and should be appropriately monitored (Brenton, Gamberoni, and Sear 2013). Governments could use regional trade agreements to record their support for but also establish principles governing the use of these certifications. The Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, for example, includes provisions that encourage, but also establish guiding principles for, the use of private mechanisms for environmental purposes (Article 20.11). More generally, governments could seek in the medium term to use, or continue to use, regional trade agreements as platforms for cooperation around labour issues, including gender equality in the workplace.

A further question worth exploring in the medium term would be whether or how governments might use RTAs and investment agreements to ensure that foreign direct investment works to support efforts to address gender discrimination in the workplace, for example in wage levels.

5.5 Services

The growth of trade in services and women’s increasing participation in services underline the potential importance of the sector in expanding women’s economic empowerment to achieve the goals laid out in the 2030 Agenda. Several ideas above relate to improving women’s engagement in the services sector, including targeted government procurement and the use of private certifications for labour standards in sectors like tourism. Measures that facilitate trade in services could help women to engage in both traditional and non-traditional service sectors to access export markets. While lack of data means we do not have a clear idea of the main costs facing services exporters, studies do suggest that investments in information and communications technology and transport infrastructure could help to reduce costs and facilitate the cross-border movement of people, for instance (see Lipowiecka 2016).

6. CONCLUSION

The SDGs put the spotlight on women's economic empowerment. This is important intrinsically—as a matter of basic fairness and rights—and because such opportunities can increase household consumption and investment, reduce poverty, and benefit future generations.

An optimistic view is that trade liberalisation can help close gender gaps if it is associated with greater female employment in export sectors, and if it leads firms to invest in technology that benefits female workers and to reduce discrimination as an inefficient practice in doing business. However, while there is some evidence that trade has been associated with expanded economic opportunities for women, and, in some cases at least, less discrimination, it is also clear that policymakers cannot be sanguine on this front.

In the short term, policymakers need to deepen their understanding of gender gaps in the labour market, and consider how such disparities are likely to play into the effects on trade opportunities. This evidence could also contribute to the review of the trade elements of the 2030 Agenda (see Tipping and Wolfe 2016). Concerted efforts are needed to address the structural barriers underlining such disparities in the short and medium term. The longer-term agenda requires enabling women to move into high-growth jobs, occupations and sectors to boost overall productivity and growth. Interventions to develop trade should be designed in ways that benefit women.

The 2030 Agenda envisages a world where sustainable development leaves no one behind, which correspondingly means trade and investment frameworks should work to include women in the global economy.

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ANNEX: THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA AND GENDER EQUALITY

The post-2015 development agenda was led by member states, with broad participation from a range of stakeholders. In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly formally adopted the 2030 Agenda, with a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 associated targets. The fifth goal is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, and there are nine associated targets, as listed below.

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

ICTSD has developed a series of papers that explore the contribution that trade and trade policy could make to key objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- Trade in Transforming Our World: Options for Follow-up and Review of the Trade-related Elements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By Alice Tipping and Robert Wolfe, 2016.
- Priority Trade Policy Actions to Achieve the 2030 Agenda and Transform African Livelihoods. By David Luke and Lily Sommer, 2016.
- Trade, Food Security, and the 2030 Agenda. By Jonathan Hepburn & Eugenio Díaz-Bonilla, 2016.
- Trade, Natural Resources and the 2030 Agenda. By Chatham House, 2016.
- Trade, Public Health and the 2030 Agenda. By Xavier Seuba, 2016.
- Climate Change and Sustainable Energy in the 2030 Agenda: What Role for the Trade System? By Kasturi Das, 2016.

About ICTSD

The International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD) is an independent think-and-do-tank, engaged in the provision of information, research and analysis, and policy and multistakeholder dialogue, as a not-for-profit organisation based in Geneva, Switzerland. Established in 1996, ICTSD's mission is to ensure that trade and investment policy and frameworks advance sustainable development in the global economy.