



Inclusion of **Women** in the **Negotiation** of **Free Trade Agreements**



Introduction

Trade agreements are important tools for promoting economic growth, increasing trade, including the provision of professional services and creating job opportunities but they can also have unintended consequences that may disproportionately affect marginalized groups such as women. Historically, trade agreements have largely been negotiated by men, and their provisions have largely reflected male perspectives and priorities.

Women have long been underrepresented in international trade and commerce, particularly in the negotiation and implementation of free trade agreements (FTAs). Despite the fact that women make up nearly half of the global workforce, they continue to face significant barriers to participating fully in international trade, including unequal access to education and training, discriminatory laws and regulations, and limited access to finance and markets. This has led to a variety of negative impacts on women's economic opportunities, including discrimination, exploitation, and exclusion from formal economic sectors.

The United Kingdom government are obliged under the goal 5 of the sustainable development goals (SDG'S) of the UN 2030 - Agenda for sustainable development, to contribute towards achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls. In addition, the United Kingdom is also obliged to take cognizance of CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women). One example of a similar international best practice is the approach of the Canadian government to address gender equality themes within its Free Trade Agreements.

The London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) believes that women should be included and involved in free trade agreements. Women represent a significant and growing percentage of the global workforce and have an important role to play in shaping the future of trade and commerce. This is not only a matter of gender equality but also an economic imperative, as studies have shown that gender-inclusive trade policies can lead to increased economic growth and prosperity. As such, we propose a policy position aimed at making FTAs more inclusive to address the disadvantage to women.

Statement of Problem

Free trade agreements are usually negotiated by governments and private entities, with little or no input from women's groups or organizations. This can result in trade policies that fail to address the unique needs and perspectives of women, leading to adverse effects on their participation in the economy. Despite progress in recent years, gender inequality remains a significant issue in the global economy. Women are disproportionately affected by economic inequalities, including access to finance, employment, and education. The underrepresentation of women in trade and commerce, and particularly in free trade agreements, exacerbates these inequalities. Women's experiences and perspectives are often neglected, leading to inadequate protection of their rights and interests. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the unique role and perspective of women in trade and commerce and to ensure their inclusion and involvement in free trade agreements.

Barriers to Women's Participation in International Trade

Despite progress in recent years, women continue to face significant barriers to participating fully in international trade. These barriers can be categorized into four main areas: social and cultural norms, legal and regulatory frameworks, access to finance and markets, and skills and capacity building.

Social and Cultural Norms

Social and cultural norms play a significant role in shaping women's opportunities and roles in trade and commerce. Traditional gender roles often restrict women's mobility, making it difficult for them to travel and participate in trade missions or attend international trade fairs. Women may also face discrimination and stereotyping in the workplace, leading to lower salaries and fewer opportunities for advancement.

Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

Legal and regulatory frameworks can also be a significant barrier to women's participation in international trade. Many countries have laws and regulations that discriminate against women, making it difficult for them to start and run businesses or access finance and markets. In some cases, women may not have legal rights to own property or sign contracts, making it difficult for them to engage in international trade.

Access to Finance and Markets

Access to finance and markets is another significant barrier to women's participation in international trade. Women-owned businesses often struggle to access financing, as they may lack the collateral or credit history required to obtain loans. Additionally, women may have limited access to markets, as they may not have the networks or resources necessary to identify and pursue international trade opportunities.

Skills and Capacity Building

Capacity-building and skills enhancement of women in business, advancing women's leadership and developing women's networks in business and trade is essential for women to participate fully in international trade. Many women lack the technical skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the complexities of international trade, including customs procedures, logistics, and trade regulations. Providing training and capacity building opportunities can help women overcome these barriers and engage fully in international trade.

Importance of Including Women in Free Trade Agreements

The inclusion of women in free trade agreements brings numerous benefits. Women's participation in trade can contribute to economic growth, poverty reduction, and the advancement of gender equality. By including women in free trade agreements, governments and trade negotiators can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impacts of trade on women's lives, identify areas of discrimination and exclusion, and develop strategies to address these issues. Additionally, the inclusion of women in trade can help to create more diversified and sustainable economies, increase competitiveness, and enhance regional and global trade relations.



Policy proposal

To make free trade agreements more inclusive and address the disadvantage to women, the LCCI proposes the following policy positions:

- 1. Gender impact assessments (GIAs):** Governments and private entities involved in FTA negotiations should conduct GIAs to assess the potential impact of trade policies on women. GIAs should examine how FTAs may affect women's economic participation in the global market place, labour rights, access to healthcare, education, and other services, as well as their social, cultural, and political participation. These analyses should be made public to ensure transparency and accountability.
- 2. Consultation with women's groups and organizations:** Governments and private entities involved in FTA negotiations should consult with women's groups and organizations to get their input on proposed trade policies. This engagement should take place at all stages of the negotiation process. This will ensure that the policies take into account the unique needs and perspectives of women, and that they are not adversely affected by the FTAs.
- 3. Inclusion of gender provisions:** Governments and private entities involved in FTA negotiations should include gender provisions in their trade policies. Gender provisions should address issues such as equal pay, non-discrimination, and gender-based violence, as well as women's access to credit, land, and property rights.
- 4. Capacity building and support for women entrepreneurs:** Governments and private entities involved in FTA negotiations should provide capacity building and support for women entrepreneurs to participate in international trade. This can include training on trade regulations, access to finance, and business development services.
- 5. Inclusion of women in trade-related decision-making:** Women should be included in trade-related decision-making at all levels. This includes government officials, trade negotiators, and civil society organizations. Women's organizations should be consulted and engaged throughout the negotiation and implementation of free trade agreements.
- 6. Gender-sensitive language in free trade agreements:** Free trade agreements should use gender-sensitive language to promote the participation of women in trade. This includes provisions that eliminate gender-based discrimination in trade and measures that support women's entrepreneurship and access to finance.
- 7. Data Collection and Analysis:** To effectively address gender disparities in trade and commerce, there is a need for comprehensive and disaggregated data on women's participation and contributions to international trade. This should include data on women-owned businesses, women entrepreneurs, and women workers in the export sector. This data should be used to inform policies and programs that promote women's participation in international trade.
- 8. Partnerships and Collaboration:** To effectively address the challenges facing women in trade and commerce, there is a need for partnerships and collaboration with international organizations, trade unions, education and research organizations, other non-governmental organizations, and their representatives, as appropriate. This should include partnerships that promote women's economic empowerment, such as public-private partnerships that provide access to finance, technology, and markets for women entrepreneurs.

Expected Policy Outcomes

Adopting the proposed policy positions will have several positive outcomes:

- 1. Improved gender equality:** The proposed policy positions will help to address gender inequalities by ensuring that women's needs and perspectives are taken into account in FTA negotiations. This should include financial inclusion for women, including but not limited to access to finance.
- 2. Increased economic growth and development:** By supporting women's economic participation, the proposed policy positions will lead to increased economic growth and job creation. Women's involvement in FTA's can also help drive sustainable economic growth and development, particularly in developing countries.
- 3. Increased trade and investment:** The proposed policy positions will enable more women entrepreneurs to participate in international trade, which will lead to increased trade and investment.
- 4. Stronger Partnerships and Collaboration:** Partnerships and collaboration between governments, the private sector, civil society, and international organizations can help to leverage resources, expertise, and knowledge to promote women's economic empowerment in trade and commerce.
- 5. Improved Data and Analysis:** Comprehensive and disaggregated data on women's participation in trade can help to inform policies and programs that promote women's economic empowerment and address gender disparities in trade and commerce.
- 6. Enhanced reputation:** By adopting gender-inclusive policies, the London Chamber of Commerce and other relevant organisation that adopts will enhance its reputation as a socially responsible organization that promotes gender equality and women's empowerment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the London Chamber of Commerce believes that free trade agreements must better cater to the unique role and perspective of women in trade and commerce. By adopting gender- inclusive trade policies and programs and ensuring women's participation and representation in trade negotiations, governments and international organizations can help to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment and unlock the full potential of women in trade and commerce.



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