

Gender dimensions of trade facilitation

April 27, 2020: Experts have cautioned that flawed policies that do not recognize the gender-differentiated impacts of policies and reforms may end up hurting women entrepreneurial ecosystem during a webinar titled 'Gender Dimensions of Trade Facilitation: Evidence from Nepal' by South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), today.

Making a presentation of the findings of the study, Ms. Dikshya Singh, Senior Research Officer, SAWTEE, said that women entrepreneurs' participation in international trade can be attributed to engaged in producing unsuitable products, such as easily perishable food items, high concentration on the domestic market, and most importantly, the lack of knowledge about foreign markets and buyers. The findings are based on a two-and-a-half-year study conducted by SAWTEE, along with CUTS International, India, to examine the constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in international trade.

Along with the issues related to productive capacity and quality, lack of information about foreign markets means they face difficulty in establishing new business contacts in foreign markets, the findings suggest.

Likewise, the absence of female representation at the policy-making level and at the operation level, customs and other logistics chain, mean many women entrepreneur-specific issues are not addressed at the policy level, she said.

Dr. Posh Raj Pandey, Chairman, SAWTEE, emphasized that although trade and export help economic growth through employment and income generation if policies are flawed then they might further deteriorate gender inequality by inadvertently discriminating against the sectors that employ more women.

He also pointed out that existing gendered norms that discriminate against women may multiply the intensity of the problems for female entrepreneurs compared to males in a similar position.

Dr. Bina Pradhan, Senior Economist, pointed out that enterprise development policies designed in such a way that equates women entrepreneurship only as part of poverty alleviation programmes do not help to scale up women-led enterprises.

Policies have been looking into women's economic activities through a flawed gendered lens condemning women to the sectors that do not offer opportunities to climb up the value chains, even the language used in the National Trade Integration Strategy shows that, she added.

Mr. Rajan Sharma, Former President, Nepal Freight Forwarders Association, pointed out that workers in the trade logistics chain –behind the border, at the border and beyond the border—are predominantly male thus to increase participation of women in these chains requires sensitizing existing participants to accommodate women's involvement at different levels of trade.

Ms. Shobha Gurung, Vice President of Federation of Nepalese Cottage and Small Industries, said even veteran entrepreneurs lack the information about dealing in foreign markets. Capacity building training are instrumental and the area that all the concerned stakeholders need to come together so that access to finance, information and technology is increased among women entrepreneurs, she added.

Mr. Rabi Shankar Sainju, Former Joint Secretary, Ministry of Industry Commerce and Supplies, called attention to the importance of increasing market access for women entrepreneurs. He suggested mobilizing diplomatic missions of Nepal all over the world so that at least they can act as trade envoys.

Ms. Mona Shrestha Adhikari, CEO, Enterprise for Management, Economic Reform and Gender Equality (EMERGE), emphasized that policies need to recognize and address that even among a group of women their socio-economic backgrounds may vary so that opportunities they receive may be the same but constraints they face may not be the same.

The participants in the webinar included women entrepreneurs, representatives from civil society organizations, policymakers and academia. The participants pointed out limited access to information for the women entrepreneurs and the need for coordinated efforts from stakeholders to build the capacity of entrepreneurs.