Facilitating Women Entrepreneurs in International Trade

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Women in business and trade

• 29.6% of the business establishments led by women; 98.3% are micro enterprises; less than 17% women-led businesses export

• Women-led businesses tend to be smaller, less profitable, operating in less profitable sectors, necessity-based, more informal, limited to domestic market and risk-averse

• In Nepal, women entrepreneurs are involved in export of processed food, textiles & clothing, handicrafts, among others; major markets are Europe, US
Economy as gendered structure

• Socially ascribed gender roles structure the social, economic and political power relations

• More care work expected → time poverty, higher reservation wages, financially dependent, trapped in low value activities

• Domains of gender equality
  • **Capabilities**: access to education, health, nutrition
  • **Access to resources and opportunities**: access to economic resources, information network, decision making
  • **Security**: threat of physical, sexual and psychological violence
Barriers to trade

• Limited knowledge about foreign trade procedures and schemes: difficulty accessing information, such as trade fairs, subsidies, changes in regulations

• Challenges in scaling business: difficulty in establishing new business contacts in foreign markets; issues with productivity and quality

• Limited access to finance: limited access to credit; collateral still an issue; appear risk-averse

• High trade and transaction costs: transport charges too high; less bargaining power as each consignment is likely to be small
Barriers to trade

• Inadequate Infrastructure and logistics: no accredited laboratories; cold storage or warehouses; lack of digital payment network; limited e-commerce footprint

• Lack of female presence: less female presence in trading spaces and policy making (Trade Facilitation Committee, for example)

• Gendered societal conditionings: more care burden; limited network; fear of sexual and physical violence, among others
Gender-aware trade facilitation

- Gender-aware policymaking: conscious efforts towards increasing women’s participation and representation (ex. National Trade Facilitation Committee, Customs Modernization Plans, etc)
- Address information gap: integration in trade network; mobilize govt. orgs, business chambers, civil society
- Leverage digital opportunities: ecommerce, paperless trade etc along with other complementary institutional arrangements
- Build infrastructure: accredited testing laboratories, storage etc; digital infrastructure too; make infrastructure gender sensitive
- Undertake ex-ante gender assessment of trade policy changes and reforms (ex. LDC graduation)
Way forward?

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