

Gender and Trade: How to engender India's National Foreign Trade Policy?

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Organisers: CUTS International and Partners

Objectives

The National Foreign Trade Policy of India, 2004-09 is under implementation and the next policy is due in a couple of year's time. The objectives of this policy are: 'to double India's percentage share of global merchandise trade within the next five years; and to act as an effective instrument of economic growth by giving a thrust to employment generation.' While this Policy is an improvement over the earlier Export-Import Policy of India, there is a need to look at from a gender perspective in order to better understand the human development aspects of international trade. This series of workshops will attempt to do that by:

- Providing a space to develop ideas on how to mainstream gender concerns into the National Foreign Trade Policy of India so that there are more benefits from trade for the marginalised sections of our society;
- Gaining a better understanding of the ways in which liberalised trade has influenced gender inequalities and relations in specific sectors, and women's experiences in particular;
- Providing feedback on the launching of a forthcoming CUTS initiative on Gender and Trade, which will further delve into issues raised at the series of workshops.

Background

CUTS International is implementing a project on issues of linkages between trade, development and poverty reduction over a period of four years (January 2005 to December 2008). It manifests the policy relevance of international trade on poverty reduction and helps in articulating policy coherence (in particular between the international trading system and national development strategies). However, a gender perspective is needed in order to more fully understand the hindrances that unequal gender relations place on enhanced development through trade-stimulated economic growth.

It is widely recognised that trade policies have far reaching consequences, but it must also be noted that these policies will have different implications for men and women, and equally among men and women of different castes, classes, regions, etc. It is necessary to examine in depth whether and how trade reforms perpetuate, accentuate or erode existing gender inequalities.

Context

"Trade must be re-evaluated – going beyond the social *impact* of trade, based on growth and market access, to look at social *content*, that is, the social relations across and within nations (class, gender, race, etc.) that form the context in which trade policies are enacted." – Cagatay, *Trade, Gender and Poverty* (2001)¹

There is an urgent need for enhanced understanding of the gendered effects of trade reform in the Indian context. This must take into account: patterns and conditions of work; gender gaps

¹ http://www.siyanda.org/docs/cagatay_trade.pdf

in earnings, ownership and control of assets; consumption and technology use; public service provision; and empowerment.

One of the difficulties associated with doing gender research is a lack of gender-disaggregated data, especially when many female workers are in the home-based or informal sectors and hence invisible in most statistics. The proposed project aims to fill some of these gaps by doing research in the sectors of agriculture, handloom/handicrafts, and marine products, three thrust areas as specified in the National Foreign Trade Policy.

These workshops will begin to assess the impact of India's National Foreign Trade Policy on gender relations by addressing questions such as:

- Whether and how has women's employment been affected in the formal and informal sectors? With the Indian economy doing well, is women's role in the value chain improving or becoming worse?
- How have gender inequalities in both productive and reproductive spheres been impacted by trade liberalisation?
- How can gender concerns be more adequately addressed in the trade policy? Is there any way of building positive discrimination into the Foreign Trade Policy for gender mainstreaming?
- How have gender inequalities in wages helped India's exports, especially regarding the informal sector? Or does gender equality enhance export competitiveness?
- What should be the role of public and private institutions in ensuring women experience the benefits of trade liberalisation?

Agenda/Format

The workshops will follow the following agenda/format:

- Inaugural: Elaborating the gender dimensions of trade
- Session 1: The impacts of trade liberalisation on gender relations
- Small focus group discussions on various proposed topics
- Session 2: Panel discussion and presentations on how to engender India's National Foreign Trade Policy. Presentation of CUTS proposal for Gender and Trade project to get feedback.

Participants

Participants will include civil society organisations, community-based organisations including members of self-help groups, government officials, local business, academics and other stakeholders. These workshops will be organised in association with local civil society organisations who are a part of CUTS' GRANITE (Grassroots Reachout & Networking in India on Trade & Economics) project.

Expected Outcomes

The series of workshops will present a coherent framework for CUTS to develop its Gender and Trade project in India. It will also provide a platform for further advocacy on mainstreaming gender in the National Foreign Trade Policy of India.