

Background Note

Gender Dimensions of Trade Facilitation Agreement: Evidence from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal

Cases of Women Led/Managed/Owned Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) have noticeable lack of women entrepreneurs. Research shows that women working in the BBIN are mostly involved in labour work and ownership is disproportionately at the hands of men. Social expectations and traditions, along with lack of access to resources, are common reasons for women not being able to participate more in economic activities to the extent men do. There is a need for assessment of market entry barriers to ensure increased market access for women entrepreneurs.

In December 2017, at WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, 118 WTO member countries and observers have agreed to make collective efforts in curbing gender discrimination and start the same by emphasising on building gender inclusive trade and development policies. Joint declaration on 'Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment' has been issued in which all WTO members and observers have agreed to collaborate on making trade and development policies more gender responsive. This declaration on women and trade emphasised on removing barriers to foster women empowerment.

CUTS International along with its country partners from Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal with the support from U.K's Department for International Development is implementing this project with an aim to prepare cases in favour of gender inclusive trade policies to enhance participation of women in trade and related income generating activities. Here, the main focus would be on studying the gender dimensions of Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) signed at WTO by all four countries. The evidence will be collected from women led/managed/owned Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in BBIN countries. Main objectives of this study are:

- Identifying existing barriers that limit women entrepreneurs to access opportunities to engage in economic activities, particularly in trade.
- Creating awareness on gender-inclusive trade facilitation among BBIN and suggesting country-specific policy recommendations in favour of women responsive TFA in particular and trade policy in general for enhanced participation of women in trade and trade related activities.

This meeting will present the strategy of pursuing above mentioned objectives and seeks valuable suggestions from partners and project advisory committee (PAC) members in finalising the contours of the study, its objectives, strategies and envisaged outcomes.