

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

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

Background

Economic empowerment of women is necessary in achieving inclusive economic growth and sustainable socio-economic development. More participation of women in economic activities will reduce gender inequality and contribute towards overall economic development. Assuming trade is an engine of economic growth, participation of women in trade related activities can give additional benefits to them.

The main reasons of their less participation in economic activities are lack of access to opportunities and barriers related with backward social system, inequalities in labour market such as unequal access to jobs & differences in remuneration at work in relation to male counterparts, violence at work (physical, emotional, sexual), discrimination at office, and unequal division of unpaid care and domestic work, among others.

Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) have noticeable lack of women entrepreneurs. Research shows that women working in the BBIN

Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of United Nations (UN) emphasise on gender equality by ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls and empowering them economically through their participation in economic activities. It is believed that empowering women will have a multiplier effect and help in achieving inclusive economic growth with better socioeconomic development.

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

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collected from women led/managed/owned Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in BBIN countries.

Objectives

1. Identifying existing barriers (low level of financial & digital inclusion of women and hurdles faced by women traders at selected land ports) that limit women entrepreneurs to access opportunities to engage in economic activities, particularly in trade.
2. Conducting gender based analysis of Trade Facilitation Measures (TFMs) under TFA.
3. Creating awareness on gender-inclusive trade facilitation among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal.
4. 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.

Approach

The study aims to use the qualitative data analysis (QDA) to analyse the primary information received from the field survey. QDA will provide the results on the basis of experiences and views of concerned stakeholders.

Country-specific cases will be presented finally in a project report to highlight country-specific hurdles faced by women entrepreneurs. These case studies will provide the solutions of their problems from their own perspective.

While preparing the case studies, the study will use various statistical tools (tests of hypothesis and indices) to analyse the level of financial and digital inclusion among surveyed women.

All the information will be collected through field visits. The points taken from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), such as stakeholder consultations, will also be a part of the analysis. These FGDs will be conducted at strategic nodes within as well as outside the corridors to know the perception and views from the larger perspective. This will help in understanding the situation at macro level.

Activities

The following activities will be conducted over a period of two years:

- Desk research including literature review, mapping of stakeholders' and review of schemes related to women entrepreneurs in BBIN countries.
- Semi-structured interviews of women entrepreneurs and other concerned stakeholders' involved in trade and trade related activities using interview schedule.
- Research report on the basis of analysis of information collected through field surveys.
- Awareness generation meetings at key locations including exposure visits.
- National and regional policy dialogues among relevant stakeholders.

Expected Outcomes

- Awareness among women entrepreneurs (existing and potential) in BBIN on possible RVCs and their importance in their socioeconomic development in particular and of entire sub-region in general.
- Awareness about TFA and the benefits of gender responsive trade policies to women economic empowerment in BBIN.
- More participation of women in trade and trade related activities in BBIN, if gender-responsive TFA would be implemented as per the study's recommendations.