

**GDTFA  
2019  
Gender  
Dimensions of  
Trade  
Facilitation  
Agreement:  
Experience  
from BBIN  
Countries–  
Case of women  
-led MSMEs**

**Facilitating Trade for Economic  
Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs  
in Bangladesh –Identification of Barriers  
and Enhancing Opportunities through  
Gender Sensitive Measures**

# 1. Introduction

- ▶ One silver lining of this global pandemic is the lesson for SMEs that sustainability is the only option left.
- ▶ SMEs are the backbone of the economy of the Bangladesh and women are largely engaged in SMEs.
- ▶ Trade facilitation improves economic status and empowers women's engagement in SMEs through poverty reduction & profitability.
- ▶ Bangladesh can especially use the provisions under the WTO's TFA.
- ▶ In Bangladesh a very negligible (10%) women are engaged in trade (Economic census, 2013).
- Gender specific constraints and importance of gender sensitivity still remaining largely unexplored.
- Huge reforms are needed in the gender impact of services (customs & border management, logistic services, trade infrastructure & transportation and trade related policies) .
- Little attempt has been made to identify and address the needs of women in trade

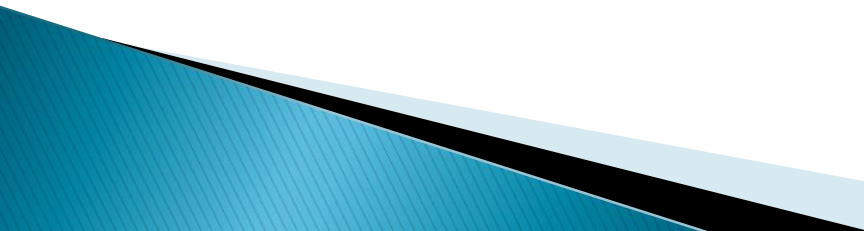
## 2. Cross border trade of goods and issues that hinder women's greater participation

- Low awareness of women due to lack of sufficient information
- Difficulties in accessing cross-border markets
- Complex trade procedures
- **Others:** Weak domestic demand, limited connections to market opportunities abroad, difficulties in meeting international health, safety & other product requirements and limited bargaining power, absence of lowering tariffs on imported products
- **Formal and Informal** trade across borders from Bangladesh takes place largely by road.
- Formal trade takes place through:
  - 49 Land Customs Stations (LCS) , 2 Integrated Check Posts and Border Haats
- Informal trade

### 3. Formal Trade through Border Haats between Bangladesh & India and participation of women

- Traders are issued legal permits to trade once or twice a week,
- with a maximum of 50 vendors from each country,
- estimated value purchases is maximum of US\$ 200 for any particular day.
- the border villages are more prosperous by improved market access for their goods.
- Women's participation is noticeable and the interest among the local women to take part in the haats has risen significantly .
- Following set of challenges need to be addressed properly:
- **Infrastructure deficit:** The physical connectivity to the border haats is poor & mobile and internet connectivity is extremely poor.
  - The access roads are narrow and worsen more during monsoon
  - ▶ Most haats do not have separate toilets and other services for women
  - ▶ The banking facilities are either poor or non-existent
- Predominance of male officials supervising the functioning of the Haats

## 4. Women in Informal Trade

- ▶ Takes place along the long and porous borders because the transaction costs of trading formally are higher
  - ▶ Women residing in the border area are involved in informal cross-border trade through the haats,
    - Carry and transport goods for exporters/importers
    - Travel frequently as passengers by rickshaws
    - Make several daily trips for carrying goods between the two countries
  - ▶ Often goods are carried as head-loads by women
  - ▶ They often are engaged in “suitcase trade” to participate in exhibitions or to sell their goods to retailers/wholesalers across the border.
  - ▶ Informal traders are likely to shift to formal channels if the impediments of trading formally are reduced.
- 

## **5. Measures for Gender Responsive Trade Facilitation**

- To address the challenges faced by women, it is necessary to undertake extensive gender sensitive trade facilitation measures
- Policy-makers should ensure that women's cross-border trading is possible and profitable for them to enter and remain engaged in business successfully.

### **5.1 Gender Mainstreaming in the implementation of cross border trade**

#### **i) Bilateral, multilateral & regional and Gender responsive implementation of TFA**

##### **How:**

- ▶ Direct funds from development partners towards assisting women to comply with customs to take the advantages of PTAs.
- ▶ Include women in consultative processes.
- ▶ Increase the number of women members in all government committees.

**By Whom – MOWCA, MOC**

## **5.2. Enhance Participation of Women in LCS and ICPs**

### **i) Women friendly border crossing points.**

#### **▶ How**

- ▶ Arranging uninterrupted electricity, mobile network, discounted warehousing & storage facilities for women.
- ▶ Digitizing the processes and introduce one stop service centers.
- ▶ Arranging separate toilets and common areas for women
- ▶ Developing infrastructures like better roads etc.

**By Whom-LGED, PDB, Mobile service providers**

### **ii) Awareness building and information dissemination activities targeting women.**

#### **How:**

- ▶ Arrange training and sensitization of border level government agents & officials.
- ▶ Arrange exclusive help & monitoring desks for women.
- ▶ Establish efficient & helpful banking, and foreign exchange facilities.

**▶ By Whom- MOF, MOIT, Women Chambers and Associations. Banks**

### **iii) Marketing and Support Services to Women for Accessing Cross-border Markets.**

- **How-**
- Arrange positive and periodic media campaigns.
- Disseminate readily available information booklets & pamphlets.
- Establish women help & monitoring desks in relevant government offices.

**By Whom: MOIT, Women Chambers and Associations**

### **iv) Preparation of Gender Disaggregated Database**

**How:**

- Integrate e-commerce among different executing agencies.
- Collect gender disaggregated data for different quantitative parameters by Government agencies
- Collect Qualitative information regularly via consultative dialogues between authorities responsible for trade facilitation and women's business associations and groups.

• **By Whom: BBS , Chambers and Associations.**



## 5.3. Enhance Participation of Women in Border Haat

### i) Gender Affirmative Action for Haat Licenses

#### How:

- Approval of a quota for licenses for women as vendor and vendee by the HMC for one year only.
- There should be a gap of one year before the successful applicants can reapply for license.

#### By Whom – HMC

### ii )Transparency in issuing Haat Licenses

#### How:

- Follow a rotational entry procedure to enable greater number of women to take part in the haat.
- Make information readily available for the application process
- Abolish discretion in the approval process and make selection transparent like random drawing lots or lottery.

#### By Whom - HMC

## **ii) Gender Responsive Infrastructure.**

### **How-**

- Improve communication network.
- Do regular maintenance of access roads.
- Get desk works done preferably by woman officials.
- Arrange efficient banking & foreign exchange facilities.
- Arrange suitable sitting areas ,separate toilets for women with regular water supply.

**By whom: LGED, HMC, PDB and Banks**

## **iii ) Maintaining Gender Disaggregated Database.**

### **How-**

- ▶ Create a computerized and regularly updated gender disaggregated database on vendors, vendees and transactions conducted at the haat.

▶ **By Whom-: BBS**

## 5.4. Adopting gender responsive Trade and Tariff Policies

### i) Export Policy

- ▶ Increases number of women's participation in national & international trade fairs.
- ▶ Create regular trade fair activities throughout the country
- ▶ Provide facilities for exporting the products of the women entrepreneurs
- ▶ Disseminate information on export related matters.
- ▶ Introduce specific provisions for women entrepreneurs export opportunities and import subsidies in different sectors like- leather, boutiques and beauty.
- ▶ **By Whom-: EPB, SMEF, NASIB, different Chambers**

## **ii ) Import Policy :**

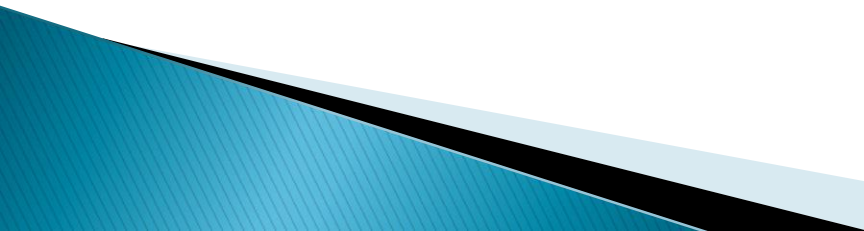
- **Women entrepreneurs need to import raw materials, machineries and technology-**

### **How:**

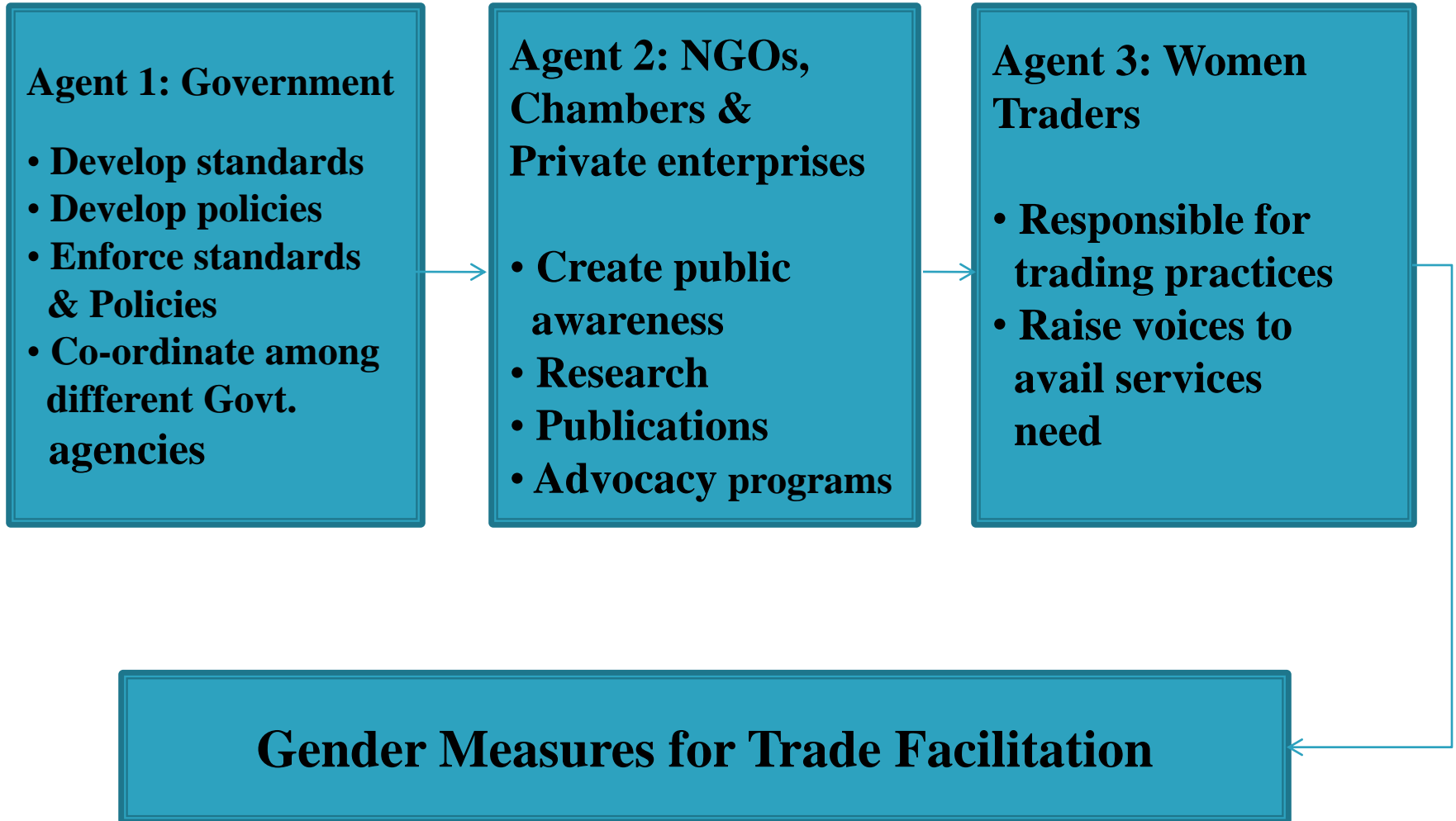
- Provide lower tariff for imports generally used in sectors where women's participation is predominant.
- Abolish the system of import & export registration;
- Open an information window for women traders in the Department of Imports & Exports within the MOC
- Engage a customs official in each port of clearance to handle women importers' cases on priority basis;
- Develop a system that allows waiver of pre-shipment inspection requirement for women-owned businesses.

**By Whom: EPB, SMEF, MOC, MOI**

## 6. Way Forward

- Make formal trade through the land borders more facilitative and less cumbersome for women.
  - Strengthen and increase the presence of Border Haats at strategic points to normalize cross-border trade with India & Myanmar
  - Collect more data and information on the quantum and nature of informal trade and the extent of women's participation.
  - Current studies on informal trade in South Asia, including the BBIN, are limited in scope.
  - Expand the knowledge base on prevailing situations will help policymakers in adopting more targeted measures.
- 

## 7. Conclusion





**Thank You**

