



REPORT BY SESSION ORGANIZER

Session title: Mainstreaming Gender in Trade Agreements: A Whole Agreement Approach

Organizer: Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI)

Date: Friday, 11 October 2019

Women represent half of the world's population but are substantially under-represented in the global trading system. Significant barriers to women's economic empowerment and participation in trade — as entrepreneurs, workers and professionals — still exist in developed and developing economies. The 2017 Buenos Aires Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment emphasized the key relationship between trade policy and gender, and WTO members are beginning to take steps to improve transparency, share best practices, gather data and include gender considerations in trade negotiations.

Important work has been done to date by the WTO and its members, UNCTAD, the ITC and the World Bank in scoping the problem, sharing best practices, raising awareness, and increasing transparency. It is now time to discuss how to develop international law rules that advance gender equality in the WTO and free trade agreements. Gender provisions could be incorporated in specific chapters of free trade agreements. A whole agreement approach to mainstream gender would help to implement gender equality in trade. With examples from across the Americas and beyond, this session demonstrated the way to negotiate gender in trade agreements of the future.

Following on its essay series on women's economic empowerment through international trade (<https://www.cigionline.org/publications/reshaping-trade-through-womens-economic-empowerment>), the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) was pleased to partner with female trade practitioners, academics and NGOs from across the Americas to present this WTO Public Forum Working Session on a whole agreement approach to mainstreaming gender in trade agreements. With panellists Padideh Ala'i, American University; Renata Vargas Amaral, Women Inside Trade, International Trade at BMJ; Valerie Hughes, Bennett Jones LLP, CIGI; Jan Yves Remy, University of the West Indies; and moderator, Oonagh Fitzgerald, CIGI, there was a focused and lively discussion about what international trade law could contribute to women's economic empowerment.

Panelists considered how to look at the gender and trade linkage within the larger historical and legal framework and how the policy direction for women's economic empowerment could affect the actual wording of trade treaties; whether a reference to gender in a preamble (e.g. in AfCFTA) could be leveraged meaningfully in the implementation of a trade agreement; whether the criticism of gender chapters in trade agreements as mere fluff was warranted or whether they could meaningfully advance gender equality; how best to address the digital gender divide when negotiating provisions on e-commerce; whether it was really possible for willing trading nations to start to implement the BA Declaration by agreeing to enforceable provisions on gender in trade agreements; and how best to overcome the challenges and begin to mainstream gender in trade agreements. The audience then contributed to an engaging question and answer period.

The working session was supplemented by a new online essay mini-series <https://www.cigionline.org/mainstreaming-gender-trade-agreements> featuring contributions by all the panellists as well as Nadira Bayat on *Turning the Promise of the AfCFTA into Lasting Progress for Women in Africa*, and Debra Steger on *Moving from Principles to Progress on Women's Economic Empowerment*.