

ITC Executive Director speaks at a WTO-ITC-EBRD seminar on Enhancing the Participation of Women Entrepreneurs and Traders in Government Procurement

Good morning everyone!

Welcome to the second seminar under the Buenos Aires Declaration on Women and Trade, which bore fruit thanks to the efforts of the many countries and organisations that constitute the International Gender Champions' Trade Impact Working Group, chaired by the Ambassadors of Sierra Leone and Iceland and the International Trade Centre (ITC).

Thanks once again to the WTO for hosting this dialogue and to DG Azevedo for painting the backdrop to the Buenos Aires Declaration as well as the statistical state of play of women's inclusion in public procurement markets – although the current statistics suggest that “exclusion” is closer to the reality.

In international trade, too many women are still excluded from access and gains of the global economy. ITC data tells us that women-owned companies tend to be on the smaller side and engaged in lower levels of value addition and are therefore underrepresented in sectors that require large outputs such as export sectors and the \$15 trillion dollar public procurement market.

This shortfall of women-owned companies matters for inclusive economic development objectives. After all, we know that women-run companies who win government contracts tend to scale faster than those that don't; employ more women than men-owned firms; and in turn boost GDP growth.

My team tells me that I should already be in Liverpool to welcome the close to one thousand women entrepreneurs coming to our flagship SheTrades Global event, which starts tomorrow. But I wanted to be here to share with WTO government procurement experts why this is an issue they should care about.

The Buenos Aires Declaration speaks to a number of challenges, which need to be tackled collectively by countries, if we are to deliver on our global development target of ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities in the economy. However, among these challenges – which include the lack of gender-inclusive trade policies, access to finance for women in business and gender-disaggregated data ... just to name a few – the one which seems to attract the most questions is how to make public procurement work better for women in business.

Today's session is about demystifying the notion that engaging more women in trade through public procurement markets is an insurmountable task. It does not have to be. If we consider that there is no “one-size-fits-all” to leverage public procurement opportunities for women, we can then tackle the practical day-to-day challenges in a way that suits each country's legal framework and cultural context.

This can be done through basic sensitivity training of government procurement officers who write the tenders, through government certification schemes or to legally mandated preferential set aside quotas and schemes to name a few. For government wishing to act on this matter, ITC has published a useful how-to guide on empowering women through public procurement <http://www.intracen.org/publication/Empowering-Women-Through-Public-Procurement/>

Tapping into public procurement opportunities is possible and we know this because several countries are already doing it. And we will have a chance to hear from day during today's seminar. Let me highlight a few concrete examples of how countries are doing it – some of which are outlined in greater detail in the TradeLab “Trade & Gender in Public Procurement” report at the back of the room.

In countries like the United States (US) and Kenya, the government has mandated preferential set-asides for women suppliers, including in industries where the rate of engagement of women-run companies are low. In the US, the government has set a procurement goal of 23% of contracts needing to be awarded to small business and a sub-goal of 5% for companies that are certified as being at least 51% owned and controlled by American women. In the case of Kenya, the set aside is as much as 30% for businesses owned by certain economically disadvantaged groups – including women. After only 2 years, some 6,500 Kenyan women-run companies have won government contracts.

South Africa also has a preferential public procurement system in favour of historically disadvantaged groups, including women, but with its own twist with its use of a points-based system, monitored by the Department of Works.

In Chile, known to have one of the most open and transparent public procurement systems in the world, they have successfully increased women suppliers to the government, by 20,000 women in under 2 years, thanks to training (some of it with ITC) and certification of women entrepreneurs; an online marketplace for matching offer and demand; and through regulatory reform. Their e-marketplace has been particularly useful in pulling more women-owned companies into the government market because of the ease of doing business online. This fits with recent ITC survey data which shows that 1 in 4 women trade offline but 2 in 4 trade online (it even runs to 3 in 4 in some parts of Africa).

Before closing, I encourage countries and organizations to continue working in concert to move the needle from only 1% of the government procurement market being supplied by women. The WTO Government Procurement Agreement and procurement guidelines from international financial institutions are key ingredients to helping countries re-visit how they address the challenge to boost the participation of women in public procurement.

On that note of cooperation and in the Buenos Aires Declaration's spirit of exchange of good practices, I thank you for your attention and wish you a productive morning of discussions.

And, please participate in our SheTrades Global panel discussions over the next three days by joining our FaceBook Live transmission which you can easily access from either ITC's Facebook page and the SheTrades' Facebook page.

Thank you