

WIDE+ Intervention to the Study commissioned by the EP: the EU's Trade Policy: from gender blind to gender sensitive, 22 September 2015

This brief paper is the basis for WIDE+ presentation during the European Parliament's INTA (International Trade) Committee meeting held on 22 September 2015 in the context of the study commissioned by the EP 'EU's Trade Policy: from gender blind to gender sensitive':
[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/549058/EXPO_IDA\(2015\)549058_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/549058/EXPO_IDA(2015)549058_EN.pdf).

We welcome this Study as it underlines the simple fact that trade has differential impacts on women and men. Globally, women lag behind in participation in the paid and formal labour market compared to men and they are paid less with a significant gender gap. No country has achieved a gender equality in each of these aspects. In addition, women and men are often structured into different economic sectors of the economy. The images of women's workers that were effected during one of the largest industrial failures with the collapse of factory buildings in Rana Plaza, Bangladesh, is but one illustration of how the textile and clothing sector has grown through international trading making use of the cheap labour of mostly women.

Trade is an important policy domain of the EU. We underscore the conclusion in this study that while "the European Commission has made considerable progress in mainstreaming gender equality in some of the EU policy areas. Trade policy, however, has been very much left aside in this policy process and gender equality issues are currently not dealt with in a systematic manner by DG Trade". WIDE+, and its predecessor WIDE, has come to the same conclusion after monitoring EU's trade policy for close to two decades. The study offers important analysis and windows of opportunity to address this deficiency.

More research and impact assessment needs to be done regarding the gender effects of trade agreements, for example regarding the EU-Chili FTA that will be renewed in 2016. We welcome the recommendations in the Study in regard to the improvement of gender assessment in the Sustainable Impact Assessment and separate Impact Assessments, and recommend the Assessments to take place early in the negotiations phase so that the results can be weighed in throughout most of the negotiation. This is not always the case.

For women in the developing world it is key that the European Commission and Parliaments take up avenues for action put forward by the Study. In addition there are several other key actions the EU should undertake, which I will outline here.

Include binding clauses on labour standards, human rights and environmental protection in the trade agreement with an appropriate body appointed or an explicit mechanism to monitor compliance.

Not all trade agreements that the EU signs are equally strong in including mechanisms that enforce clauses on human rights, labour standards and environmental protection. WIDE+ advocates for binding mechanisms in terms of human rights and decent work clauses, that offers explicit protection to women's rights, such as women's domestic workers.ⁱ

Stop with promoting for a further liberalisation of markets and privatization for FDI and services as well as the opening of public procurement.

Instead of protecting the interest of private corporations, EU trade policy must do more to protect public goods and services. The leverage to global sustainable development lies in the development of a large group of poor and middle income consumers. Women need a more balanced interplay between private capital and other sources of capital that will enhance their access to health, education, food and to economic tools.

One major difference between men and women in economic contributions, which is underplayed in the study commissioned by the EP, is that women according to a recent UN Women study, spend two and a half time more unpaid working hours to caring for their families and communities compared to men. Many other research confirms that unpaid care work is mostly done by women, however more sex-aggregated data is needed. This is an often overlooked contribution that women make to economies, but it is a huge one on which other economic sectors depend.ⁱⁱ

While it is argued by neo-liberal believers that opening up markets of services and procurement will automatically lead to more efficient and cheaper services and goods, there is little proof to back this up. Actually we find many examples that illustrate the opposite: that basic services and goods for people in countries become less accessible. For example our case study on the impact of EU trade negotiations in India found that privatized water can bring high prices to households and limit the access to safe water. In India, as in other countries, women are responsible for finding and fetching water for their families they need for drinking, washing, cooking, cleaning, etc. If they have to spend more time, instead of less time, to accessing water, women's opportunities to access paid work are decreased. Water is only one example of how women's unpaid work is increased if affordable access to basic services and goods is not provided.ⁱⁱⁱ

There are reports about the gender effects of the CARIFORUM EU Economic Partnership Agreement, saying that from a gender perspective, the prevailing market-access framework of the CARIFORUM-EU EPA is driven by private-sector-led and export-driven growth, and uses market-based criteria and mechanisms which basically exclude poor women, because most of their work is non-market work. (Analytical Report on the Gender Dimension of Economic Partnership Agreements, Dakar, 27-29 October, 2003, pg. 38, APRODEV and AID TRANSPARENCY, September 2004).^{iv}

One reason why privatization and liberalization has harmful effects on women's and men's rights and dignity is the lack of an international binding legal instrument that commits Transnational Companies to respect human rights. A huge coalition of Civil Society stresses the deep inadequacy of the referred voluntary instruments as mechanisms to protect human rights. Welcoming the establishment of the UN Open-Ended Intergovernmental Working Group on a Treaty on Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises with respect to Human Rights.^v Anamuri, a partner WIDE+ met in Chile recently, just held an ethical tribunal that documents the abuses and pollution women experience around the international mining business in the Copiapo region.

One major barrier for women's full entry into the paid labour market (including setting up businesses) is women's huge unpaid work burden. EU Trade agreements should encourage states to better regulate and provide for social protection which is counter to more liberalization and privatization.

Movements, communities and associations that represents women's rights should be part of public discussions during Trade negotiations taking place on multi- and bilateral level and the negotiations should be transparent.

All agreements and FTAs, secretly negotiated and signed by governments, must be implemented by stakeholders, private sector and citizens among which women. Given the possible

consequences for the peoples concerned, women need to be involved at all levels of the negotiations. It cannot be left in the hands of a group of "specialists" and the pressures of interest groups. There is a need for real transparency.^{vi} That concerns all trade negotiations, FTAs, TTIP and WTO negotiations and agreements, among which the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement that is part of the Bali Package. European Parliament provided its consent to the EU's ratification of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement on 9 September 2015, enabling the Council complete ratification procedure on behalf of the EU, ahead of the 10th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC10) in Nairobi in December 2015, not taking into account global civil society concerns. National EU Parliaments are not involved in the ratification procedure and EU citizens are not informed and involved about the WTO TFA and its impact.

References and further information

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- <http://www.ourworldisnotforsale.org/en/signon/international-civil-society-urges-development-must-come-trade-facilitation-wto>
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ⁱ <http://wideplus.org/wide-critical-reflections-and-key-recommendations-for-the-world-bank-groups-new-gender-equality-strategy-newsletter-3-august-2015/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.idrc.ca/EN/Documents/Care-Economy.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ WIDE 'In Search of Economic Alternatives for Gender and Social Justice: Voices from India', published in 2009, edited by C. Wichterich

^{iv} <http://www.cepal.org/publicaciones/xml/3/38253/lcarl.245part3.pdf> Gender and the Economic Partnership Agreement: an analysis of the potential gender effects of the CARIFORUM-EU EPA* Jason Jackson and Judith Wedderburn, ECLAC – Project Documents collection Caribbean Development Report, Volume 2

^v http://www.fian.org/en/news/article/voluntary_instruments_prove_inadequate_to_protect_human_rights/ 15-09-2015 Voluntary instruments prove inadequate to protect human rights. Civil society calls on Brazil and the EU to support the development of a binding instrument on transnational corporations with respect to human rights and condemns private sector bias in the country.

^{vi} <http://www.alainet.org/active/70467> EU MERCOSUR FTA