

13 Introduction to Part Two

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As was seen in the previous set of case studies, much of the literature on gender and trade has focused on the negative impact of trade policies on women as producers and workers, and on women as consumers, homemakers and care-givers. For example, many traditional non-farm enterprises operated by women, such as basket-making and the processing of cooking oils, are disappearing as a result of import competition; and women's ability to grow food is decreasing as farmers devote more land to commercial export crops and as women's labour shifts from food production into unpaid labour on family farms producing crops for export. Women's work on plantations and in factories producing for export is becoming increasingly less secure as globalisation fuels the 'race to the bottom' in which intense competition drives down wages even lower than they already are; and women's time poverty is increased as health services are privatised and women take on added responsibilities in caring for the sick and elderly (Carr and Chen, 2004).

However, trade liberalisation in general, as well as specific changes in trade policy, also offer new economic opportunities for women if they are enabled to take advantage of these. Thus, while it is important to assess the likely impact of changes in trade policies from a gender perspective and to advocate for such policies to be more gender sensitive, it is also necessary to give attention to national economic and social policies and legislation that aim at overcoming the constraints women face in benefiting from increased economic globalisation (Carr, 2008a). As one researcher puts it:

It is important to remember that what happens in trade is likely to be much less important for reducing poverty than the other national policy and economic conditions that influence how opportunities from trade are transmitted to different groups within the economy. On the other hand, the indirect effects of trade can allow a government which is committed to reducing poverty and increasing opportunities for women to do so, even if there is no direct link through production. (Page, 2004)

The challenges faced by women in becoming involved in productive activities include more restricted access than men to land, credit, improved technologies, skills and business training, and market and price information. These are at once caused and compounded by their reduced mobility and greater time poverty as a result of socio-cultural factors and family responsi-

bilities. And research shows that the constraints faced by women wishing to reach export markets are twice as severe as those faced by women supplying domestic markets (Tandon, 2003). This is because quality standards are so much more stringent in the case of export markets, there are stricter conditions in terms of time and quantities of supply, and the logistics of exporting are so complex.

A number of different policy and programme initiatives have been initiated by governments, NGOs, international agencies and the private sector with the aim of assisting women to adjust to and take advantage of global economic changes. Economic policy initiatives include: financial policies such as guaranteed loan schemes and provision of microfinance and meso-level finance for women; education and training policies that widen women's access to the knowledge and skills important for integration into a globalised economy; and gender policies, including changes in women's rights to the land, which can provide collateral and also a base for economic activities. Other policies that can help women include those that improve national infrastructure for ensuring standards for particular products that are acceptable in importing countries, and national export promotion strategies for particular economic sectors. Often, however, these policies fail to benefit women because they are gender-blind and ignore women's particular needs, even if they relate to sectors in which women predominate.

Various direct initiatives have been implemented by NGOs, international agencies and the private sector. In some cases, women have been assisted to organise into trade associations, producer/marketing co-operatives and community-owned businesses so that they can more effectively bargain with middlemen and gain greater control over the marketing chain. They have also been provided with greater access to improved production/processing technologies and training that will enable them to add value locally and produce high quality goods that meet international standards. In other cases, individual (social) entrepreneurs have set up socially responsible export businesses that either provide markets for individual women farmers and producers through buying raw materials or processed inputs from them, or provide them with (factory) jobs in processing and manufacturing for export.

The important point in all this is to find ways in which informal women workers can maintain their livelihoods at the same time as retaining their sense of security. Both of these aspects are necessary. Throughout the developing world, women's enterprise activities are of key importance in providing the food and income that enable their families to exist. Official statistics estimate this income at up to half of each country's national income. It is earned almost exclusively within the large and growing informal economy, where women are over-represented (ILO, 2002). In Africa, for example,

official statistics indicate that the share of the informal economy in the non-agricultural workforce is over 70 per cent, and that 84 per cent of women non-agricultural workers are informally employed, compared with 63 per cent of men. Moreover, many jobs in large export-oriented factories provide income but no security and therefore no long-term prospects of empowerment.

Research indicates that what is needed is to find ways of helping women to:

- Upgrade quality and/or reduce prices so as to compete with imports;
- Upgrade quality and organise in such a way as to supply large volumes of products that are acceptable in export markets; and/or
- Diversify into products that can find regional and global markets – either directly or through a socially responsible business or intermediary.

(Carr, 2008b)

This section contains ten case studies that provide a wide range of examples of how governments, NGOs, international agencies and the private sector have been working – either alone, or more often together – in order to link rural poor women with export markets. The case studies come from diverse Commonwealth countries – Cameroon, Fiji Islands, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Mozambique, Swaziland and Uganda – and most of the authors either own or are intimately involved in the enterprises being described.

Three of the case studies relate to traditional primary commodity exports: cocoa in Ghana, coffee in Jamaica and cashews in India and Mozambique. In all cases, special efforts have been made to link with export markets in ways that emphasise the livelihoods of poor farmers and rural communities, and especially women, and have introduced innovative ideas in the process. In Ghana, cocoa farmers are linked with the fair trade market in the UK and USA and are shareholders in their own chocolate companies in these countries. In Jamaica, ways are being found for small women farmers to overcome constraints in exporting organic coffee to niche markets and organise in ways that allow them to also get Fairtrade certification. And in India and Mozambique, alternatives to large-scale cashew nut processing factories are being promoted that offer decentralised, rural-based employment opportunities.

Four of the case studies relate to exports based on natural products that are aimed at niche markets: beauty products made from marula oil in Swaziland; natural body-products from virgin coconut oil in Fiji Islands; dried flowers in India; and honey and other bee-products in Uganda. In all cases, although the products use traditional resources that have been used by

local communities for generations, they involve new and/or more sophisticated types of products for which there are growing markets in Europe, Japan and the USA. In Swaziland, a local community organisation has linked with an international NGO to process marula nut oil supplied by thousands of women to a factory in which they are shareholders and that exports high quality beauty products to commercial buyers and fair trade organisations. In Fiji Islands, a woman entrepreneur and her family run a successful natural body product export business that provides incomes for rural communities that supply the central factory with raw materials and semi-processed and processed goods in a way that keeps alive local skills and traditions. In India, a local entrepreneur runs a dried flower export business that sources raw materials from a complex network of rural women and men farmers and provides work for 2,000 poor women in a central processing factory. And in Uganda, women's co-operatives, community-owned businesses and private companies are all helping women to increase the quality and quantity of bee-products to replace imported goods and then increase exports.

Three of the case studies relate to manufactured exports: shoes in India, embroidered goods in India and ready-made garments in Cameroon. In the Indian examples, innovative ways have been found to provide high quality goods and enable rural women to link with global markets without being exploited in large-scale export factories or as home workers earning less than US\$1 per day. In the case of shoes, hundreds of women and men artisans have been assisted to form their own collaborative organisation and to undertake their own international marketing. In the case of embroidered goods, thousands of women who are members of India's largest women's trade union have been helped to reach export markets through a complex network including a trade facilitation centre that is owned by its members. In both cases, the goods being exported are based on women's traditional skills for which there is a limited domestic market. In the example from Cameroon, the women involved in exporting ready-made garments are fairly well educated, and although they provide some work for other women, the project is obviously different from the other nine case studies in terms of its outreach to the poorest women in the informal economy. It is included, however, because it is one of the few examples of how ICT has helped women to break into export markets.

Although there are only ten case studies in this section, they include many different types of organising structures, from small women's groups to community-owned businesses and commercial businesses owned and operated by social entrepreneurs. They target all types of markets: fair trade, organic and niche, and mainstream retail and chain stores. At the same time, all of them to a greater or lesser extent seek to establish and run a profitable and

expanding export business, while also taking into consideration the livelihoods, skills and traditions of poor and mainly rural women. Most also have a concern for the environment and their carbon footprint.

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Traditional Primary Products

