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WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY IN TRADE FACILITATION: THE ROLE OF CUSTOMS AND BORDER SERVICES

Final Report, December 2020

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY IN TRADE FACILITATION: THE ROLE OF CUSTOMS AND BORDER SERVICES

FINAL REPORT, DECEMBER 2020

Contract No.: **AID-OAA-I-14-00050/7200AA18F00018**

Submitted to: **Wade Channell**

 Senior Economic Growth Advisor for Gender

The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government. This publication was produced for review by USAID. It was prepared by Banyan Global for the Women's Economic Empowerment and Equality Technical Assistance task order under the Advancing the Agenda of Gender Equality indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity contract.

Recommended Citation: Singh, S., and Lepillez, K., Banyan Global (2020), Women's Economic Empowerment and Gender Equality in Trade Facilitation: the Role of Customs and Border Services Final Report, USAID. Women's Economic Empowerment and Equality Technical Assistance Task Order under the Advancing the Agenda of Gender Equality indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity contract.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... 4

ACRONYMS..... 5

DEFINITIONS..... 6

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 7

 FINDINGS: WEEGE AT THE BORDER..... 8

 RECOMMENDATIONS: WEEGE AT THE BORDER..... 9

 FINDINGS: WEEGE WITHIN CUSTOMS..... 9

 RECOMMENDATIONS: WEEGE WITHIN CUSTOMS 10

PURPOSE 14

METHODOLOGY 14

CONTEXT 14

BACKGROUND: WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE 15

 FEMALE-OWNED SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMES)..... 16

 SMALL-SCALE TRADERS AND WOMEN CROSS-BORDER TRADERS (WCBTS)..... 18

 CUSTOMS SERVICES’ DUAL MISSION: ENFORCEMENT AND TRADE FACILITATION 21

FINDINGS: WEEGE AT THE BORDER..... 22

 FINDING 1: CUSTOMS IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LAWS CAN NEGATIVELY IMPACT SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES; MOST WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESS ARE SMES. 22

 FINDING 2: WOMEN NEED ACCESS TO INNOVATIVE TRADE FACILITATION TECHNOLOGY, ON PLATFORMS AVAILABLE TO THEM..... 22

 FINDING 3: LACK OF TRADE INFORMATION IS A MAJOR BARRIER FOR FEMALE-OWNED SMES AND SMALL-SCALE TRADERS; CUSTOMS OFFICERS SOMETIMES LACK SUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE OF RULES AND PROCEDURES. 24

 FINDING 4: MOST ADVANCED ECONOMIES HAVE ENHANCED AUTOMATION AND TRADE FACILITATION, AS WELL AS DECREASED CORRUPTION AND ABUSE AT THE BORDER..... 26

 FINDING 5: MANY EMERGING ECONOMIES LACK FULL AUTOMATION AND TRADE FACILITATION, LEADING TO DELAYS, CORRUPTION, AND HARASSMENT OF WOMEN TRADERS AT THE BORDER. 27

 FINDING 6: IN MANY EMERGING ECONOMIES, SMALL-SCALE WOMEN TRADERS ARE MARGINALIZED, HAMPERED, AND UNRECOGNIZED..... 30

 FINDING 7: IN MANY EMERGING ECONOMIES, BORDER INFRASTRUCTURE DOES NOT MEET THE SAFETY AND PHYSICAL NEEDS OF WOMEN TRADERS..... 30

 FINDING 8: IN EMERGING ECONOMIES, THE LACK OF MARKETS, WAREHOUSES, COLD STORAGE, AND LODGING HAMPERS WOMEN TRADERS..... 32

RECOMMENDATIONS: WEEGE AT THE BORDER..... 35

 RECOMMENDATION 1. IMPLEMENT POLICIES AND REGULATIONS THROUGH A GENDER LENS: GENDER “NEUTRALITY” CAN RESULT IN UNINTENTIONAL BIAS AGAINST WOMEN..... 35

 RECOMMENDATION 2. DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT TRADE FACILITATION TECHNOLOGY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH WOMEN TRADERS..... 35

RECOMMENDATION 3. PROVIDE TRANSPARENT AND EASY-TO-ACCESS CUSTOMS INFORMATION TO EMPOWER WOMEN TRADERS.....	36
RECOMMENDATION 4. IN ADVANCED ECONOMIES, MAINTAIN UPDATED SYSTEMS AND CONTINUE TO IMPLEMENT TRADE FACILITATION MEASURES.	39
RECOMMENDATION 5. IN EMERGING ECONOMIES, IMPLEMENT FULL AUTOMATION AND TRADE FACILITATION MEASURES, WHICH CAN REDUCE DELAYS, CORRUPTION, AND HARASSMENT OF WOMEN TRADERS.	39
RECOMMENDATION 6. PROVIDE UPDATED AND ONGOING TRAINING TO CUSTOMS OFFICIALS.	41
RECOMMENDATION 7. STUDY SOLUTIONS TO PROVIDE RECOGNITION TO WOMEN SMALL-SCALE TRADERS <i>WITHOUT</i> THE NEED FOR FORMALIZATION.	41
RECOMMENDATION 8. BUILD WOMEN-FRIENDLY INFRASTRUCTURE AT THE BORDER.....	43
RECOMMENDATION 9. FACILITATE AVAILABILITY OF MARKETS WAREHOUSES, COLD STORAGE, AND LODGING FACILITIES; FEATURE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY IN TRADE INITIATIVES.....	44
FINDINGS: WEEGE WITHIN CUSTOMS	45
FINDING 1. CUSTOMS WORK REMAINS MALE-DOMINATED, ESPECIALLY IN LEADERSHIP AND ENFORCEMENT.	46
FINDING 2. MANY CUSTOMS AGENCIES USE GENDER-BLIND RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES THAT DO NOT REACH WOMEN WHERE THEY ARE.	46
FINDING 3. THE CHALLENGING AND PUBLIC SERVICE-ORIENTED NATURE OF CUSTOMS WORK IS A KEY FACTOR IN RETAINING WOMEN STAFF.....	47
FINDING 4. MENTORSHIP AND SPONSORSHIP ARE IMPORTANT TO FEMALE RETENTION AND ADVANCEMENT.....	48
FINDING 5. FEMALE LEADERSHIP IS INSTRUMENTAL IN PROMOTING GENDER-BALANCED STAFFING—BUT PROGRESS IS OFTEN TIED TO THE EFFORTS OF FEMALE CHAMPIONS.	48
FINDING 6. MALE-DOMINATED LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES CAN RESULT IN NON-INCLUSIVE DECISION-MAKING AND LIMITED LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN.....	50
FINDING 7. WORK-LIFE BALANCE IS DIFFICULT TO RECONCILE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF ENFORCEMENT AND FIELD OPERATIONS WORK.....	51
FINDING 8. SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE OF POWER ARE A REAL RISK, AND REPORTING SYSTEMS ARE INSUFFICIENT.....	52
FINDING 9. UNCONTROLLED ENVIRONMENTS POSE HEIGHTENED SAFETY RISKS, AS DO MILITARIZED CUSTOMS ENVIRONMENTS.	53
FINDING 10: BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE FOR WOMEN IS GENERALLY IN PLACE, AND AGENCIES ARE BEGINNING TO CONSIDER THE NEEDS OF PREGNANT AND BREASTFEEDING OFFICERS.....	53
FINDING 11. EVERYDAY SEXISM IS COMMON.....	54
FINDING 12. OFFICERS ARE RARELY TRAINED TO UNDERSTAND BIASES AND THEIR IMPACT ON CUSTOMS WORK.....	55
RECOMMENDATIONS: WEEGE WITHIN CUSTOMS	56
RECOMMENDATION 1: USE BEHAVIORAL DESIGN LEARNINGS TO INCREASE THE HIRING, RETENTION, AND PROMOTION OF FEMALE STAFF.....	56
RECOMMENDATION 2: BUILD TARGETED SYSTEMS OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PROGRESS.....	58
RECOMMENDATION 3: REGULARLY PROVIDE CUSTOMS AND BORDER OFFICERS WITH WELL-DESIGNED TRAININGS ON GENDER BIAS, EQUALITY, AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT.....	59
RECOMMENDATION 4: INVEST IN A STRONG AND INTEGRATED GENDER ARCHITECTURE.....	61

KEY WEEGE DATA GAPS	65
ANNEX I: BIBLIOGRAPHY	66
ANNEX II: LITERATURE REVIEW WORKSHEET	74
ANNEX III: LIST OF RESOURCES.....	75
ANNEX IV: LIST OF INTERVIEWS	76
ANNEX V: DESIGN, METHODS, AND LIMITATIONS	77
ANNEX VI: SCOPE OF WORK	78
ANNEX VII: SAMPLE CHARTER OF MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR THE TREATMENT OF SMALL-SCALE CROSS-BORDER TRADERS IN THE COMESA REGION.....	83

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1. Viable interventions to empower women in customs and women engaged in cross-border trade	11
Figure 1. Women-led European companies that export goods outside the EU	17
Figure 2. Reported Frequency of Risks by Cross-Border Traders.....	29
Figure 3. Income of vendors in India.....	34
Figure 4. Income of vendors in Bangladesh	34
Table 2. Viable interventions to empower women traders	44
Table 3. Viable interventions to empower women in customs.....	63
Table A1. Literature review summary.....	74

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Savitri Singh and Karine Lepillez researched and wrote this report under the direction of Malini Patel, Chief of Party for the USAID Women’s Economic Empowerment and Equality Technical Assistance Task Order awarded to Banyan Global. Additional support was provided by Molly Willeford, Banyan Global Program Coordinator.

The team expresses its gratitude to USAID Bureau of Economic Growth, Education, and Environment Office of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment and the Trade and Regulatory Reform office, with special thanks to Wade Channell, Paul Fekete, and Eleanor Thornton.

For further information, please contact:

Banyan Global
1120 20th Street NW, Suite 950
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: +1 202-684 9367
Fax: +1 202-697-5020

ACRONYMS

ADVANTAGE	Advancing the Agenda of Gender Equality
BBIN	Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
CBSA	Canada Border Services Agency
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
E3	Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and Environment
GBA+	Gender-based Analysis Plus
GenDev	Office of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment
GSMA	Global System for Mobile Communication Association
ILO	International Labor Organization
ITC	International Trade Centre
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
Lao PDR	Lao People’s Democratic Republic
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
STR	Simplified Trade Regime
TA	Technical Assistance
TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement
TID	Trade Information Desk
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WCBT	Women’s Cross-border Trader
WCO	World Customs Organization
WEEGE	Women’s Economic Empowerment and Gender Equality
WTO	World Trade Organization

DEFINITIONS

Customs clearance: The completion of customs formalities to allow the goods to enter into the customs home territory, to be exported, or to be placed under another customs procedure.

De minimis: The threshold value below which goods can be shipped into the country before duties and taxes are assessed.

Harmonization: The alignment of national formalities, procedures, operations, and documentation with international conventions, standards, and practices; standardization as a development of internationally agreed formal procedures, documents, and information.

Mutual Recognition Agreements: Agreements based on the principle of equivalence, generally understood to mean that, where the host country's regulatory goal is addressed by home country regulation, the host country should accept the home country's regulation as equivalent.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs): SMEs are non-subsidary, independent firms, which employ fewer than a specified number of employees. This number varies across countries. The most frequent upper limit designating an SME is 250 employees, as in the European Union. However, some countries set the limit at 200 employees, while the United States considers SMEs to include firms with fewer than 500 employees. Small firms are generally those with fewer than 50 employees, while micro-enterprises have at most 10, or in some cases 5, workers.¹

Small-scale traders: The definition of the term "small-scale traders" varies according to the country, value of trade, or mode of transportation. Generally, small-scale trade is defined as a form of trade that is unrecorded in official statistics and is carried out by small businesses with neighboring countries; this definition is generally used in Africa and South Asia. However, a World Bank (WB) article notes that UN Women (2012) defines small-scale trade as "all revenue-generating cross-border commercial activities with a daily transaction value of less than 100 U.S. dollars (USD) per trader." The same WB article also provides a different definition of small-scale trade, as trade across the border in human-powered vehicles or vehicles with less than four wheels.²

Suitcase trade: Refers to goods purchased in one country and brought into another country in small packages such as luggage or bags and which can be imported free of customs duty and taxes. The goods are then sold in domestic market.

Trade facilitation: The simplification and harmonization of trade procedures where trade procedures are the activities, practices, and formalities involved in collecting, presenting, communicating, and processing data required for the movement of goods in international trade.³

¹ OECD, Glossary of statistical terms. <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=3123>

² Seror, Marlon; Record Richard; Clarke, Julian (2018). Glass barriers: Constraints to women's small-scale, cross-border trade in Cambodia and Lao PDR. World Bank, p. 154.

³ WTO 1998. UNECE defines trade facilitation as: the simplification, standardization and harmonization of procedures and associated information flows required to move goods from seller to buyer and to make payment.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental for the realization of human rights, as well as key to achieving effective and sustainable development outcomes. United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has a long history of supporting gender equality and empowering women to lead powerful, transformational changes within society. Recently, USAID—and the development community more broadly—has focused increased attention on the issues surrounding women's economic empowerment and gender equality (WEEGE). Compelling evidence makes it clear that the economic playing field is not equal for women and men. Within this context, the USAID Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and Environment (E3) Office of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GenDev) issued the Women's Economic Empowerment and Equality Technical Assistance (TA) task order under its Advancing the Agenda of Gender Equality (ADVANTAGE) indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity (IDIQ) contract.

To bring clearer understanding of the problems of women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), E3/GenDev requested Banyan Global to conduct a WEEGE assessment in the area of cross-border trade, focusing on three questions: a) to what extent is women's economic empowerment and gender equality integrated into customs and border agency services, operations, and personnel management, across various functions; b) how WEEGE gaps in services affect women participating in trade; and c) how processes, procedures, infrastructure, and systems may need to change to achieve more equitable access, usage, and opportunities for women in trade. This report presents the findings and recommendations resulting from the desk review of literature and the in-depth interviews with customs officials, women traders, and individuals working for supporting organizations. The complete scope of work can be found in Annex VI.

This report first details the ways in which women's economic empowerment and gender equality is integrated into customs and border agencies services, operations, and personnel management. It then identifies key gaps and proposes recommendations. However, these gaps in customs and border services become relevant only when women are engaged in trade. Available trade data show that women are not experiencing the economic benefits of international trade at the same rates as men: fewer women own and manage SMEs, and even fewer own large businesses. However, informal women traders are often in the majority—across Africa, they comprise 70 percent of cross-border traders—and they represent a powerful economic force in their countries' economies.

Even before they confront customs agencies, women face a daunting array of barriers to starting and growing their businesses: unequal access to financial services; higher costs for goods and services, due to their smaller scale and unequal access to distribution networks; and lack of access to legal, marketing, information technology, and trade information. Disproportionate care burdens—for children as well as for the elderly, sick, and disabled in their families—also constrain women in ways that male traders are not constrained. Women small-scale traders additionally struggle with low literacy levels and a lack of entrepreneurial expertise. They tend to lack access to capital, social and political influence, and representation and organization. They operate in male-dominated environments, where they hold little power relative to male customs and border officials.

In their dealings with women traders, customs officers sometimes have high levels of direct contact, particularly where automation does not exist or is limited. In these cases, individual behaviors can make a significant difference in the ease or difficulty experienced by women traders—especially small-scale

cross-border traders—engaging in trade. Even where customs processes are automated and personal interaction with agencies is minimal (and primarily through customs brokers and lawyers), women traders may face more impersonal barriers, ranging from unequal access to information, networks, and capital, to social norms that favor male leadership. In these cases, customs agencies and officers have an opportunity to empower women traders through targeted outreach efforts.

Customs services' operate in a complex environment, serving dual and often competing functions of enforcing the laws of multiple agencies to protect the country's health, safety, and security, while facilitating trade and revenue collection. It is essential that customs policy and rules include efficient, effective, and gender-sensitive border management. Trade facilitation policies and implementation measures must consider and support the needs of women, including cross-border and other micro traders. Gender-neutral implementation is not sufficient.

Progress to support the needs and experiences of women traders becomes more sustainable when it is carried out in the context of organizational cultures and processes—that is, institutional architectures—that are designed to address and advance gender equality and women's empowerment. In this context, customs agencies can and should create work environments that are both more diverse (increasing trust and institutional legitimacy, by reflecting the populations they serve) and more supportive for women traders (through decreased corruption and sexual harassment).

The following sections summarize the Findings and Recommendations for WEEGE at the border and within customs agencies. The suggested interventions are also briefly summarized below in Table 1.

FINDINGS: WEEGE AT THE BORDER

1. Customs implementation of the laws can negatively impact SMEs; most women-owned business are SMEs.
2. Women need access to innovative trade facilitation technology, on platforms available to them.
3. Lack of trade information is a major barrier for female-owned SMEs and small-scale traders; customs officers sometimes lack sufficient knowledge of rules and procedures.
4. Most advanced economies have enhanced automation and trade facilitation, as well as decreased corruption and abuse at the border.
5. Many emerging economies lack full automation and trade facilitation, leading to delays, corruption, and harassment of women traders at the border.
6. In many emerging economies, small-scale women traders are marginalized, hampered, and unrecognized.
7. In many emerging economies, border infrastructure does not meet the safety and physical needs of women traders.

8. In many emerging economies, the lack of markets, warehouses, cold storage, and lodging facilities hampers women traders; women's economic empowerment and gender equality must be part of governments' trade initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS: WEEGE AT THE BORDER

1. Implement policies through a gender lens—gender “neutrality” can result in unintentional bias against women.
2. Design and implement trade facilitation technology in partnership with women traders.
3. Provide transparent and easy-to-access customs information to empower women traders.
4. In advanced economies, maintain updated systems and continue to implement trade facilitation measures.
5. In emerging economies, implement full automation and trade facilitation measures, which can reduce delays, corruption, and harassment of women traders.
6. Provide updated and ongoing training to customs officials (including those at the border) in rules and procedures.
7. Study solutions to provide women small-scale traders with recognition *without* the need for formalization.
8. Build women-friendly and safe infrastructure at the border.
9. Facilitate availability of markets, warehouses, cold storage, and lodging facilities; feature women's economic empowerment and gender equality in trade initiatives.

FINDINGS: WEEGE WITHIN CUSTOMS

1. Customs work remains male-dominated, especially in leadership and in enforcement.
2. Many customs agencies use gender-blind recruitment strategies that do not reach women where they are.
3. The challenging and public service-oriented nature of customs work is a key factor in retaining women staff.
4. Mentorship and sponsorship are important to female retention and advancement.
5. Female leadership is seen as instrumental for promoting gender-balanced staffing—but progress is often tied to the efforts of female champions.
6. Male-dominated leadership structures can result in non-inclusive decision-making practices and limited leadership opportunities for women.

7. Work-life balance is difficult to reconcile with the requirements of enforcement and field or operational work.
8. Sexual harassment and abuse of power are a real risk, and reporting systems are insufficient.
9. Uncontrolled environments pose heightened safety and security risks, as do militarized customs environments.
10. Basic infrastructure for women is generally in place, and agencies are beginning to consider the needs of pregnant and breastfeeding officers.
11. Everyday sexism is common.
12. Officers are rarely trained to understand biases and their potential impact on customs work.

RECOMMENDATIONS: WEEGE WITHIN CUSTOMS

1. Use behavioral design learnings to increase the hiring, retention, and promotion of female staff.
 - a. Anonymize job applications
 - b. De-bias messages and images
 - c. Appeal to both public service motivation and personal benefit
 - d. Institute pay transparency
 - e. Review criteria for promotion
 - f. Equitably assign non-essential tasks
 - g. Implement sponsorship initiatives
2. Build targeted systems of accountability for progress.
 - a. Accountability for progress on gender equality
 - b. Accountability to survivors of sexual harassment and abuse of power
 - c. Accountability to women traders
3. Regularly provide customs and border officers with tailored training on gender bias, equality, and sexual harassment.
 - a. Gender 101 training
 - b. Gendered issues in customs and border training
 - c. Gender equality and bias reduction training
 - d. Sexual harassment prevention and bystander intervention training
4. Invest in a strong and integrated gender architecture.

TABLE I. VIABLE INTERVENTIONS TO EMPOWER WOMEN IN CUSTOMS AND WOMEN ENGAGED IN CROSS-BORDER TRADE

INTERVENTION	MEASURES	IMPLEMENTATION HORIZON*
WEEGE AT THE BORDER		
Implementation of customs laws through a gender lens (All Economies)	Respond to the needs of SMEs traders regarding delays and timely responses to administrative matters	Long term and ongoing
Inclusive technology (All economies)	Design and implement technology initiatives in partnership with women traders, and with their benefit as an explicit objective	Ongoing
Information dissemination (Emerging Economies and Advanced Economies)	Develop periodic media campaigns, booklets (made widely available in strategic locations), customs forums, and training and capacity-building workshops for small-scale traders (Emerging Economies)	Short term and ongoing
	Outreach, working with Chambers of Commerce and women's associations, to potential SME traders to explain "how to become a trader" including how to engage in e-commerce	Medium term and ongoing
	Establish Trade Information Desk (TID) to assist traders with documentation and compliance for clearance	Short term
	Establish gender help desk at the border	Short term
Trade facilitation (Advanced Economies)	Upkeep systems, continue implementing trade facilitation measures, and continue public-private partnership programs	Ongoing
Trade facilitation (Emerging Economies)	Implement electronic or automated filing and single window for customs clearance	Long term
	Provide regular updated training for customs officials on customs rules, procedures, and automated systems	Medium term and ongoing
	Negotiate Mutual Recognition Agreements	Medium to long term
	Adopt and implement the Charter or a Bill of Rights of Minimum Standards For The Treatment Of Small-Scale Cross-Border Traders	Short term to medium term
	Provide single payment window for payments with mandatory receipts	Short term
	Promote and publicize Simplified Trade Regimes (where applicable)	Short term
	Provide sector guide for cross-border traders	Short term
	Provide and display posters and signs at the border showing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - traders' rights; how to file a complaint regarding trade disputes or prohibited conduct - availability of Help Desk - duties and fees on commonly traded commodities 	Short to medium term
Streamline recorded payments with mandatory receipts	Short to medium term	
Training for customs officials (All Economies)	Provide regular updated training for customs officials on customs rules, procedures, and automated systems	Medium term and ongoing

Solutions to provide women small-scale traders with recognition, without the need for formalization (Emerging Economies)	Establish trusted trader incentives	Medium to long term
	Study the economic impact of increasing the <i>de minimis</i> duty exemption to promote small-scale trade	Medium to long term
Safety and security infrastructure at the border (Emerging Economies)	Maintain dedicated clearance lanes for small-scale traders	Medium to long term
	Install security lighting, fences, and cameras	Short term
	Secure border areas to keep out loiterers. Require customs officials present in the border areas to be uniformed with clearly visible names and badges	Short term
	Make border waiting areas women friendly by installing toilets for women, with running water, nursing areas and baby changing facilities	Short term
Border markets, warehouse and cold storage and lodging (Emerging Economies)	Make available market, warehouse, and cold storage facilities at reasonable cost to small-scale traders — possibly working with the private sector on installation and maintenance	Medium to long term
WEEGE WITHIN CUSTOMS		
Hiring, retaining, and promoting female staff	Anonymize applications	Medium to long term
	De-bias messages and images	Medium to long term
	Appeal to both public service motivation and personal benefit	Short term
	Institute pay transparency	Long term
	Review criteria for promotion	Short term
	Equitably assign non-essential tasks	Medium to long term
	Implement sponsorship initiatives	Medium to long term
Systems of accountability	Conduct Gender Audit or Needs Analysis	Short term
	Develop Gender Action Plan	Medium term
	Conduct sexual harassment and bystander intervention training	Short term and ongoing
	Issue public statements of support and commitment by leadership	Short term and ongoing
	Take steps to create a gender-balanced staff	Medium to long term
	Take steps to promote more women to key decision-making positions	Medium to long term
	Put in place a third-party reporting and audit system for incidents of sexual harassment and abuse of power	Medium to long term
	Regularly track, evaluate, and publish data on sexual harassment and abuse of power incidents	Medium to long term
	Conduct in-depth research, in partnership with women's groups, on women traders' experiences at the border	Medium to long term
Hold regular stakeholder consultations with women traders and women in the trade value chain	Medium to long term	
Partner with women's groups on joint gender trainings	Medium to long term	
Gender trainings	Implement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sexual harassment prevention and bystander intervention training – Gender 101 training – Gender equality and bias reduction training – Gendered issues in customs and border training 	Short term and ongoing

Gender architecture	Develop an organizational gender equality and female empowerment policy or strategy	Medium to long term
	Establish a gender equality and diversity office	Long term
	Hire gender equality and diversity staff: a high-level advisor, plus departmental gender focal points	Long term
	Establish monitoring and evaluation system for progress on closing gender gaps and gender-sensitive indicators	Long term and ongoing
	Create reward process for staff efforts to address gender equality issues	Long term and ongoing
	Develop human resource policies for family and caregiving needs	Medium to long term
	Hold regular, relevant, and tailored gender trainings	Short term and ongoing
	Procure from female-owned and -managed businesses	Long term and ongoing
	Initiate systematic capacity-building and dialogue activities with women traders and groups	Long term and ongoing

* Short term = within 6 months; Medium term = 6-12 months; Long term = 12-24 months

PURPOSE

Gender equality and women’s empowerment are fundamental for the realization of human rights, as well as key to effective and sustainable development outcomes. USAID has a long history of support for gender equality and women’s empowerment to lead powerful, transformational changes within society.

Recently, USAID—and the development community more broadly—has focused increased attention to the issues surrounding WEEGE. Compelling evidence makes it clear that the economic playing field for women and men is not equal. Within this context, USAID E3/GenDev issued the WE3 TA task order under its ADVANTAGE IDIQ contract to Banyan Global.

To bring clearer understanding of the problems of women-owned SMEs, E3/GenDev requested Banyan Global to conduct a WEEGE assessment in the area of cross-border trade, focusing on three questions:

1. a) to what extent is women’s economic empowerment and gender equality integrated into customs and border agency services, operations, and personnel management, across various functions;
2. b) how do WEEGE in services affect women participating in trade; and
3. c) how might processes, procedures, infrastructure, and systems need to change to achieve more equitable access, usage, and opportunities for women in trade. The complete scope of work can be found in Annex VI.

METHODOLOGY

The assessment uses a mixed-method approach, based on primary and secondary information. A comprehensive desk review covered a broad range of secondary data, including: international, regional, and national reports; reports, evaluations, and handbooks; gender literature; sociological research; and relevant studies from universities and research institutions. A full list of literature reviewed can be found in Annex I: Bibliography.

The authors collected primary data through remote interviews with individuals in four main categories: women traders and customs brokers; customs and border officials; women’s trade associations and groups; and institutions involved in the support and regulation of global trade. Interviews took place over Zoom and WhatsApp and consisted of semi-structured questions. Annex V provides more details on the design, methods, and limitations.

CONTEXT

In today’s ever-expanding and interconnected global economy, USAID is concerned with the movement of people, goods, and services across borders. The complicated networks of logistical operations, legal and regulatory frameworks, and market systems impact the businesses and individuals that take part in the global marketplace. These activities are subject to customs enforcement, border management, and trade policies and regulations of the countries of origin, transit, and destination.

Fundamental to women’s ability to participate in the global economy is their access to the opportunities arising from such trade across international borders. As an emerging economic force, women face barriers in participating in the global economy and in engaging with customs and border agencies.

USAID recognizes that women’s equal access to opportunities in international trade will ultimately depend on women having an integral role in formulating trade policies, and on women’s equitable participation in the movement of persons, services, and goods, as well as in related logistical services. However, this study focuses on the narrower—but critical—issue of women’s economic empowerment and gender equality within customs services and operations.

It examines the areas where women face barriers in their engagement with customs and border agencies, and the areas where targeted actions could increase the economic empowerment of women traders as they move toward, through, and beyond the national border. It also examines if organizational cultures and processes—that is, institutional architectures—are designed to recognize and advance gender equality and women’s empowerment. A list of resources pertaining to or useful to the work of integrating gender equality into customs work can be found in Annex III.

BACKGROUND: WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE

This section is a snapshot of the challenges and possible reasons why women globally are not experiencing the economic benefits of international trade on par with men. The gender gaps in customs and border services become relevant only when women are engaged in trade. The data is sparse on the global number of female-owned or -led trading companies—whether SMEs or large-scale companies engaged in international trade—because trade data is not sex-disaggregated.

However, available data show that there are relatively few women owned or led SMEs in international trade, and an even smaller number for large companies. On the other hand, in Africa women comprise 70 percent of cross-border traders, many of them sole operators, and they are a powerful economic force in their countries’ economies.

The paucity of female SMEs in international trade was also acknowledged by interviewees who were unable to provide a percentage, or even an average number, of their female SME customers, including one company employing between 4,000-5,000 employees and filing over a million customs entries per year. International trade experts also recognize this. One senior trade expert stated, “anyone who has a minimum contact with the world of international trade may realize that men’s presence is still predominant. In many cases, this fact makes the presence of women surprising because it is not so common.”⁴

Another interviewee stated, “Generally, in this business, I deal with more men. That’s a statement in and of itself. I work more with men than women; women are just a fraction of the people I deal with in

⁴ International Trade Centre (ITC) (2019). From Europe to the World: Understanding challenges for European businesswomen. Geneva.

http://www.intracen.org/uploadedFiles/intracenorg/Content/Publications/From%20Europe%20to%20World%20Women%20EU_f inal_web.pdf.

trade. When I deal with big businesses, it's a corporation, you deal with a counsel or VP. And frankly, not many of them are women.”

It is widely recognized that women's economic empowerment and gender equality has a positive impact on economic growth and helps to reduce poverty.⁵ There is also increasing cognizance of these disparities, and a gradual societal willingness to take steps to ameliorate gender inequities.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) 2017 Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment accepted the nexus between gender and trade. As of September 2019, 127 WTO Member States and observers have signed the 2017 Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment.

Based on research and interviews, some of the considerations to increase the number of women in formal trade include: a commitment to a gender focus in trade agreements; surveys regarding the type of training women need—and providing such trainings; access to information on trade-related issues, such as tariffs and customs procedures; considering women's concerns in implementation of trade rules; and accessible financing, such as loans.

As a start, countries are showing that they are mindful and are taking steps that expressly acknowledge this nexus; notably, the preamble of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) includes explicit reference to gender equality in international trade.⁶

FEMALE-OWNED SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES⁷

According to a recent International Trade Centre (ITC) Report on European trade businesses, management is a more common role than ownership for women, and women tend to be limited to own and manage smaller-scale enterprises: only 4% of large companies (with more than 250 employees) are owned by women.⁸

The same report found that, although women entrepreneurs in the EU hold higher formal education qualifications than men and they trade in the same markets, women tend to work more often as self-employed persons, have no employees, and trade in sectors with smaller profit margins, such as clothing.⁹ In Canada, of the 16 percent of SMEs owned by women, only about 11 percent exported goods or services.¹⁰

⁵ According to the WTO, the “economic evidence shows that giving women the same opportunities as men improves a country's competitiveness and productivity, which in turn has a positive impact on economic growth and poverty reduction.” WTO webpage: https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/womenandtrade_e/womenandtrade_e.htm; https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/a4t_e/gr17_e/genderbrochuregr17_e.pdf

⁶ Article 3(e) emphasizes the promotion of gender equality as one of the general objectives of AfCFTA.

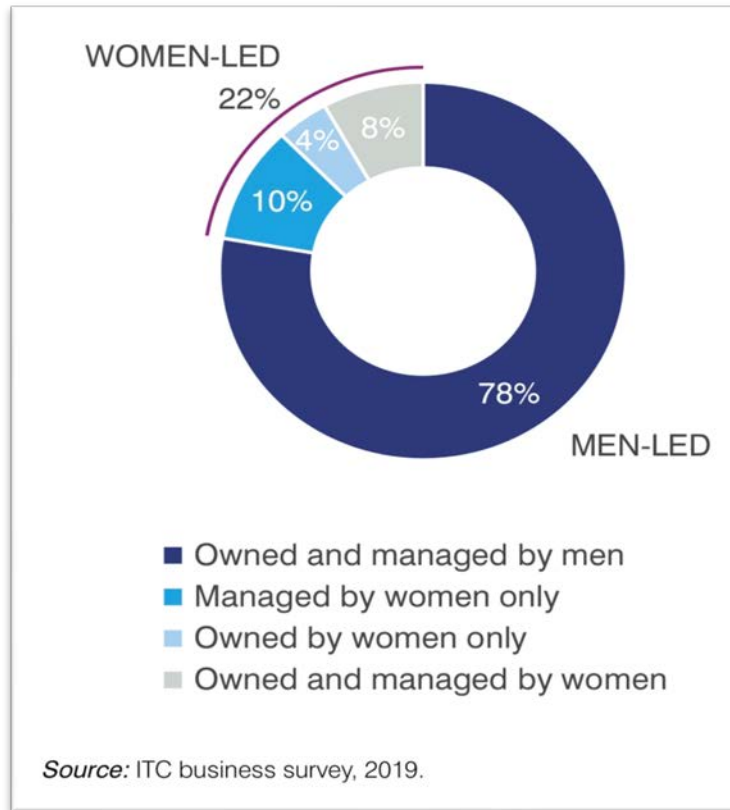
⁷ This Report refers to women small-scale cross-border traders and SMEs, because the number of women owned/led trading companies globally is very small.

⁸ ITC (2019).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ UNCTAD (2020), Gender and Trade. https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/UNWomen_2020d1_en.pdf

FIGURE I. WOMEN-LED EUROPEAN COMPANIES THAT EXPORT GOODS OUTSIDE THE EU



Other research and interviews also strongly suggest that cultural barriers play a role. In some South Asian countries, for example, women are not expected to be traders. In Cambodia, men are not expected to trade in the less profitable sectors. Another interviewee on a different continent stated, “the largest barriers are engrained in patriarchal systems ... where on the surface, you have all the rights and access to networks but when push comes to shove, they’re all old boys’ networks.”

Barriers to female-led SMEs are primarily not trade-related but general. They include:

- *Access to financial services:* Women have more difficulty obtaining commercial loans and often must find other sources of financing.
- *Higher costs:* Women-owned trading companies are usually smaller, with limited access to distribution networks, leading to higher prices for their goods; they tend to be disproportionately affected by trade costs due to delays in processing trade.
- *Lack of needed skills:* Women-owned and -led companies are more likely to lack needed skills involving legal information, marketing and communication, IT/digital sophistication, and language.¹¹

¹¹ WTO (2017), Gender Aware Trade Policy: A springboard for women’s economic empowerment. https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/a4t_e/gr17_e/genderbrochuregr17_e.pdf

- *Lack of access to information:* Women often lack the information to navigate complex and costly import and export procedures and requirements.¹²
- *Less benefit from formal or informal networks:* Women generally do not have access to the networks (including Chambers of Commerce) that might create opportunities for business connections. According to one interviewee, “smaller companies do not join a trade association because the dues are usually too high.” According to the 2019 ITC report, there is anecdotal evidence that informal networks might be more conducive to securing deals—as in the “old boys’ network”—that women are excluded from due to cultural norms.¹³
- *Time constraints:* Women face greater time constraints due to family obligations and sometimes need to take an absence from the business for family reasons.

SMALL-SCALE TRADERS AND WOMEN CROSS-BORDER TRADERS (WCBTS)

Women engage in cross-border trade to survive: “Whatever they make today is a meal for tomorrow.”

This report uses the term small-scale cross border traders and women cross-border traders (WCBTs) interchangeably. Most of the research on customs administrations and the trading community has focused on Africa, with limited attention to Asia and even less for the rest of the globe.¹⁴

There are regional and national differences in cross-border trade, which varies by cultural factors, land infrastructure, political climate, the type of commodities, and the method of cross-border trade. However, one element clearly stands out: small-scale women cross-border traders—whether in Africa or in Asia—share similar profiles.



Rwandan women cross-border traders
WORLD BANK

¹² Critical information may involve such complex topics as the WTO Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreements, as well as labeling, marking, and trade remedies requirements.

¹³ ITC (2019), p. 3.

¹⁴ The examples in this section come predominantly from East and South Africa, unless identified otherwise.

- WCBTs generally have low literacy levels; they often cannot read, write, or calculate at more than a basic level.
- They lack entrepreneurial expertise and other skills needed for trading.
- They are poor, mostly lacking capital.
- They lack social and political influence, representation, and organization.
- They operate in male-dominated environments, where they hold little power relative to male customs and border officials, to the extent that they are sometimes fearful of customs officials.

AFRICA

Women traders operate in male-dominated environments, where they hold little power relative to male customs and border officials.

WCBTs tend to be a powerful but virtually voiceless economic force in their countries. They carry out their trade under dire circumstances, often struggling to make ends meet to supplement their incomes or to survive. As one advocate stated, “whatever they make today, is a meal for tomorrow.” And they feel hopeless to grow into SMEs. One interviewee noted, “if men were engaging in cross-border trade, they would be able to grow their business, work less hard and be more prosperous.”

Cross-border trade constitutes 43 percent of official gross domestic product—an amount almost equal to the formal trading sector.¹⁵ Most of these small-scale WCBTs (up to 70–80 percent) are female.¹⁶ One report estimates that women constitute 83 percent of small-scale traders between the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda.¹⁷ According to an International Monetary Fund report, small-scale cross border trade in 2017 was worth US\$549 million in Uganda and US\$103 million in Rwanda.¹⁸ WCBTs trade in commodities common to their countries or regions, including agricultural products, used clothing, and household items.

WCBT barriers include:

- Lack of information and skills

¹⁵ Lesser, C., and Moisé-Leeman, E. (2009), Informal Cross-Border Trade and Trade Facilitation Reform in Sub-Saharan Africa. OECD. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/trade/informal-cross-border-trade-and-trade-facilitation-reform-in-sub-saharan-africa_225770164564

¹⁶ Brenton, P., and Soprano, C. (2018). Small-scale cross-border trade in Africa: Why it matters and how it should be supported. *Bridges Africa* 7(4), p. 1.

¹⁷ International Alert (2015). Deriving maximum benefit from small-scale border trade between the DRC and Rwanda. Trademark East Africa.

¹⁸ <https://www.imf.org/en/Data/Statistics/informal-economy-data/Reports/COMESA-Cross-Border-Initiative>. See also: BOU and UBOS (2016), The Informal Cross Border Trade Survey Report 2016 (Kampala, Uganda), available at: <https://www.bou.or.ug/bou/bouwebsite/bouwebsitecontent/statistics/Surveys/TradeStatistics/ICBT/ANNUAL-INFORMAL-CROSS-BORDER-TRADE-SURVEY-REPORT-2016.pdf>

- Lack of networking and social connections
- Limited access to value-added products; limited opportunity to grow into SMEs
- Disrespect by customs officials, who are mostly male and whom they sometimes fear
- Long waits at the border, where the infrastructure is often unsafe and unsanitary —increasing their vulnerability to corruption, harassment, and sexual and physical abuse by customs officials, border police, military, and other entities active in the border areas
- Limited places to sleep overnight after crossing the border, inaccessible markets, and lack of warehouses or cold storage facilities

SOUTH ASIA

Throughout the region, and notably in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal (BBIN), women’s participation in cross-border trade is “miniscule and continues to stagnate at low levels.”¹⁹ According to a 2018 working paper, women entrepreneurs and traders see little incentive to engage in cross-border trade: they are discouraged by the lack of information on customs regulations and procedures, and they are constrained by a lack of infrastructure (such as private restrooms), safety concerns, and socio-cultural barriers that place them in an inferior social position relative to men.²⁰



Trader going from Srinagar (India) to Chhagalnaiya (Bangladesh)

CUTS INTERNATIONAL

Where opportunities exist that do not require information on regulations and procedures, women small-scale traders empower themselves by seizing opportunities. Women comprise most cross-border traders in markets that do not require licenses, even though they make up less than 5 percent of traders at government-controlled and regulated border *haats* (local markets). They also engage in suitcase trade, making use of the personal duty-free allowance of Rs 25,000 (\$35) for goods carried in their personal baggage, primarily transporting goods for exporters and importers. As passengers on rickshaws, buses, and trains, as well as on foot, they may carry goods on their heads or load goods in suitcases, whether to participate in exhibitions or to sell their goods to retailers and wholesalers across the border.²¹

¹⁹ Taneja, Nisha; Joshi, Sanjana; Prakash, Shravani; Bimal, Samridhi (2018), Trade facilitation measures to enhance women’s participation in cross border trade in BBIN. Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, Working Paper 350.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

EAST ASIA

“We beg others for the trade.”

At the border between Cambodia and Thailand, women are the primary small-scale traders in the fish industry. They dominate in this industry because it requires less educational, financial, or socio-political capital (including business connections) relative to other sectors.

Additionally, masculine cultural norms dictate that small-scale trade is not the domain of men; rather, men dominate in the more lucrative formal cross-border trade. According to women fish traders, small-scale traders are “subservient to other actors”: they say that “we beg others (*som ke*) for the trade.”²²



Transporting goods via boat

WORLD BANK 2018

CUSTOMS SERVICES' DUAL MISSION: ENFORCEMENT AND TRADE FACILITATION

Customs services operate in a complex environment, serving dual and often competing functions, of enforcing the laws of multiple agencies to protect the country's health, safety, and security, while also facilitating trade and revenue collection.²³ Customs services do not make trade policies themselves, but they serve as the enforcement arm of a country's trade rules.

The adage, “time is money,” is at the heart of trade facilitation—a priority that customs services must balance against their enforcement mission. It is essential that customs policies and rules support efficient and effective border management that is gender sensitive. This should be part of a whole process that is viewed holistically to ensure that trade facilitation policies and implementation measures recognize and support the needs of women, including cross-border and other micro traders.

Gender-neutral implementation is not sufficient.

²² KusaKabe, K.; P. Sereyvath; U. Suntornratana; N. Griputinibondh (2006), Women in fish border trade: The case of fish trade between Cambodia and Thailand, p. 99. Web page: http://pubs.iclarm.net/Pubs/Gender&FisheriesDec04/11_GD.pdf

²³ Customs services also do not track the gender of the trader; in most countries, traders must use an importer/exporter code, which may have a different name depending on the country. Some countries require that all commercial importations be made through a customs broker, and only the broker's code is shown. Since commercial importations are most often made by a business entity, no gender is shown. For commercial imports by individuals, sometimes the individual social security or tax identification number or national ID number is shown for that individual.

FINDINGS: WEEGE AT THE BORDER

FINDING 1: CUSTOMS IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LAWS CAN NEGATIVELY IMPACT SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES; MOST WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESS ARE SMES.

SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

Interviewees said that customs laws were gender neutral, and that customs officers implemented the rules in a gender-neutral manner.²⁴ Nevertheless, the same interviewees believed that customs services' implementation of the laws negatively impacted SMEs. Most female-owned or -led companies are SMEs, and so implementation of the rules adversely affects women-led SMEs.

Customs services in all economies impose regulatory burdens that are costly to SMEs. These burdens are magnified with administrative delays: traders claimed that customs agencies do not meet the statutory deadlines,²⁵ agents provide muddled explanations of the rules, and the lack of predictability creates uncertainty for (female) SMEs. One interviewee stated, "I think they definitely don't treat smaller business that well. ... I think they're really busy, and some people are kind and give you time, but they're probably very stressed right now." Another interview explained, "Everything else is in a black hole and financing to sustain such long delays and administrative costs" so "sometimes you just walk away." In some cases, interviewees believed that customs officials were sometimes not knowledgeable or sometimes "do not care."

WOMEN CROSS-BORDER TRADERS

WCBTs are also negatively affected by customs implementation of the customs laws. Based on interviews, customs officials are disproportionately disrespectful and unhelpful to female traders; they sometimes charge fees inconsistent with the rules—charging duties on duty-free items or charging an unauthorized amount—and may then seize their goods. In some cases, this is intentional, but sometimes it is because customs officials do not know the rules and are not properly trained. Some female traders complained that even if they are knowledgeable of the rules and the rate of duty they should pay, they are afraid to speak up because "then they [customs officials] overreact and overcharge you. So, we keep quiet just to go through."

FINDING 2: WOMEN NEED ACCESS TO INNOVATIVE TRADE FACILITATION TECHNOLOGY, ON PLATFORMS AVAILABLE TO THEM.

The global customs community is currently exploring a number of new and promising disruptive and inclusive technologies to help promote women's access to and benefit from trade.²⁶ Today, however,

²⁴ One interviewee, a customs official, said that some male officials might be more lenient with male traders in a customs clearance ("yeah, you know, the old boys' network"), but this was not a common response.

²⁵ Delays can result from pre-trade requests, clearance, and post-clearance procedures (including issuing advance rulings), seizures, disputes, and protests.

²⁶ WTO (2019). Aid for trade global review 2019.

https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/a4t_e/gr19_e/glossy_summary_report_e.pdf

the most powerful technologies for many women, and especially those engaged in small-scale trade, remain cell phones and the internet. While in most of the global north the gap between women's and men's access to cell phones and the internet has shrunk or even closed, the gap has widened since 2013 in most Arab and African states, as well as in Asia and the Pacific.²⁷

The 2020 Global System for Mobile Communication Association (GSMA) Connected Women Report²⁸ finds that, although 54 percent of women in low- and middle-income countries are now using mobile internet, they are still 20 percent less likely than men to do so. Women in low- and middle-income countries continue to be 8 percent less likely than men to own a mobile phone. These are established technologies, thoroughly integrated into knowledge systems. Women traders who lack access to cell phones and the internet have limited access to information on prices, standards, and customs regulations, as well as to services such as banking and training.

For those women who do have access to mobile phones and the internet, new technologies and applications can improve the ease and reduce the risks of trade, as in the following two examples. For women in all economies to grow and expand their businesses on equal footing with men, including in the areas of e-commerce, the technology gap needs to be lessened.

TRADE ROUTE INCIDENT MAPPING SYSTEM²⁹

The Trade Route Incident Mapping System is a phone application through which traders can record and report requests for unofficial payments as well as incidents of sexual or physical harassment. Trade route incidents are mapped and are accessible to the public in real time, providing women with valuable information on safety and risk. Because the application collects sex-disaggregated data and asks about issues that affect women traders, it allows for a more nuanced gendered understanding of trade incidents and can help customs officials develop safety and security solutions for women traders.

SHETRADES INITIATIVE³⁰

An initiative launched by the International Trade Center, SheTrades is a web platform for women traders to showcase their products, connect with buyers, and build their capacity through online trainings. It includes a Market Access Map with information relating to specific goods' admissibility and duty rates. The initiative also conducts advocacy on behalf of women traders among large international institutions and corporations.

²⁷ International Telecommunication Union (2019), Measuring Digital Development, Facts and Figures 2019. <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/FactsFigures2019.pdf>

²⁸ GSMA (2020), The mobile gender gap report 2020. <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/GSMA-The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2020.pdf>

²⁹ von Hagen, M. (2014), Trade and Gender – Exploring a Reciprocal Relationship: Approaches to Mitigate and Measure Gender-related Trade Impacts (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH).

³⁰ ITC: SheTrades website. <https://www.shetrades.com/en/about#about>

FINDING 3: LACK OF TRADE INFORMATION IS A MAJOR BARRIER FOR FEMALE-OWNED SMES AND SMALL-SCALE TRADERS; CUSTOMS OFFICERS SOMETIMES LACK SUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE OF RULES AND PROCEDURES.

SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

While women SMEs generally have access to online trade information, there remains a digital divide between men and women in their ability to access and understand complex information.³¹ Although most customs services in advanced economies usually have comprehensive websites, the information is not always easy to find or understand. As one interviewee remarked, “you have to dig and dig [to find the information], and it is very legalistic, and you don’t know if it applies to you.” The same interviewee explained that her own country’s customs website used to be more user-friendly, but since it was redesigned and made more attractive, it is much harder to find information, partly because there are not enough links on the home page. Sometimes access to trade information can be chaotic because of the ever-changing trade rules;³² if traders are not aware of the changes, they may experience missed opportunities, customs penalties, and additional logistical costs. Traders and customs brokers must stay alert to these changes or risk penalties for lack of compliance. One interviewee stated, “I don’t think anyone has good access to customs rules and regulations right now.”

Interviewees also stated that, when they reached out to customs services for information, some customs staff were not well trained. An interviewee noted, “You can’t really trust what customs says, sometimes they’re wrong.” Some trader interviewees complained that some customs services “need capacity building.” This complaint was echoed by some of the customs officials interviewed, who stated that while they do receive training, sometimes they still needed a better understanding of the rules and procedures. As one customs official stated, “That’s something I always thought would be more useful to have. Especially sometimes when it came to implementing regulations.”

One interviewee explained that some customs officials were not well trained because customs officials no longer sit together, learning from the more experienced staff. They now work remotely and communicate online or by telephone. According to the interviewee, this has contributed to a general decline in knowledge.

Sometimes a woman-led SME will retain a customs lawyer to help them, but this is costly and not always financially feasible. One interviewee noted that there were some duty exclusions under the trade laws³³ “which might have been very beneficial to female SMEs, but it was not publicized enough, and a lot of companies missed the opportunities. Maybe it’s because it’s too much information and these people [trade agencies] don’t know what’s important and what’s not important. And people [traders] don’t want to pay [a lawyer].” One interviewee remarked on having advised a female SME to retain a lawyer for a complicated custom issue, but the client was unable to do so for financial reasons and suffered negative consequences.

³¹ ITC (2019).

³² *E.g.*, the imposition or waiving of sanctions, and trade remedies duties on certain imports or retaliatory tariffs.

³³ Usually under a country’s trade remedies law.

Customs services felt that their websites functioned well, and that the information was readily available. One North American interviewee stated, “There shouldn’t be any barriers to women having access to information and getting their questions answered. I would be quite shocked to hear if that was the case.” This suggests that there is a divide between how customs services and traders perceive the customs services’ websites and information.

SMALL-SCALE WOMEN TRADERS

According to interviewees, customs and trade information is often provided in formats and methods that are not accessible to women; even when women are able to find the information, it is not clear or simple enough for them to use it. Although the trading information might be available online, the websites can be complex and not user-friendly for small-scale traders to navigate, many of whom may lack ready access to the internet, lack internet skills, and have low literacy levels. According to a recent WTO report, low levels of literacy and lack of knowledge about cross-border trade regulations and procedures are more prevalent among female than male traders.³⁴

In both advanced and emerging economies, many women engage in small-scale or suitcase trade, making use of a country’s *de minimis* duty exemption to trade. Often, these female traders are not aware of the rules, and their merchandise is seized by customs officials or they must pay fines.

In many African countries, women do not know their trading obligations until they arrive at the border. Even then, according to interviewees, there are no signs, notices, or public information at the border, so they are at the mercy of customs officials. In some cases, women traders are intimidated by the power of customs officials and are unaware of their rights. One trader noted that most traders “do not have the information and are scared and traumatized when dealing with customs officials,” who are mostly male. Interviewees complained that custom officers calculate the duties and tell them the amount. Even when a trader is experienced and informed and tells the customs official that the duties are incorrect, the official tells them “you are wasting my time’ and they make you wait three to four hours.” Another interviewee said that when she told the customs official that she had been trained and knew her rights and the correct duty amount, the customs official replied, “Oh, you want to do our jobs.” According to interviewees, customs officials are often unhelpful in providing the information women traders require, sometimes using their position of power to extract illegal bribes and unauthorized fees—and, in some cases, to harass women physically and sexually.³⁵ Traders also complained that sometimes the available information was not in the native language: at one border the information was in English and Portuguese, and not in the trader’s local language.

Most emerging economies have some online information, and some countries also have some type of online customs trade information system in place. For example, Zimbabwe’s ZimTrade (National Trade Development and Promotion Organization) can be helpful to SMEs. But traders are not always aware of the existence of this information. Based on interviews, the information can be insufficient or too complicated to be beneficial for WCBTs.

³⁴ WTO Women in Trade (2017), Gender Aware Trade Policy: A springboard for women’s economic empowerment (World Bank).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

In the BBIN region, interviews and research revealed that women may be discouraged from becoming traders, because they do not know where and how to find the information they would need to become a trader. For example, the Indian and Bangladeshi governments established border *haats* to promote trade between the two countries. Participating in the border *haats*, whether to buy or sell, requires obtaining a license. More than 95 percent of the participants have been men. As one interviewee explained, women did not know about the border *haats*, and they are generally not literate enough to know how to apply for a license.

FINDING 4: MOST ADVANCED ECONOMIES HAVE ENHANCED AUTOMATION AND TRADE FACILITATION, AS WELL AS DECREASED CORRUPTION AND ABUSE AT THE BORDER.

AUTOMATION

Virtually all developed countries use electronic customs filing and automation systems, including preclearance procedures, all of which expedite customs clearance and reduce costs—thereby facilitating trade. Electronic filing also reduces the interface between the trader and customs officials. Most advanced economies have also tried to put measures in place to decrease delays and bottlenecks. However, there can be long delays at North American borders, for example, especially due to long truck lines and delays in customs clearances.

Trade facilitation helps SMEs, and traders expressed hope that full implementation of the trade facilitation agreement (TFA) will bring positive changes. One interviewee summarized:

Any improvements to customs entry and all these types of things help SMEs, including women. Trade facilitation is an important thing, but the problem is that we've moved backwards in the US. We usually lead the way, but now we're leading the way in not a positive direction. Tariffs, barriers, and all that has happened. We were trying to modernize and simplify customs. They really are trying at the top level, but it's a big organization. It's an ongoing challenge.

CORRUPTION AND SEXUAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE AGAINST WOMEN

CORRUPTION There were no known reports of corruption in advanced economies. Some interviewees offered that, while they had no knowledge of corruption, they could not be certain; others were certain that it did *not* occur. According to an interviewee, this might be because in advanced economies customs officials are well paid, and the sanctions for corruption are often swift, including dismissal. Another interviewee suggested that corruption in advanced economies is not about small amounts from traders, but instead occurs at a higher level, in smuggling drugs and other prohibited high-value items.

SEXUAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE All interviewees in advanced economies were certain that sexual abuse or violence against women traders did *not* occur, citing reduced interface with customs officials, the presence of cameras in many places, and the fact that the consequence for such behavior can be dismissal. One interviewee noted that even if the female trader does not report an incident of harassment, if the supervisor sees it on the camera, there would be consequences for the customs official. To the extent that this type of abuse is taking place, it would seem to be minimal.

FINDING 5: MANY EMERGING ECONOMIES LACK FULL AUTOMATION AND TRADE FACILITATION, LEADING TO DELAYS, CORRUPTION, AND HARASSMENT OF WOMEN TRADERS AT THE BORDER.

AUTOMATION

Most emerging economies use some level of electronic filing or automation system, even if only in a preliminary or transition phase. However, in some emerging economies, the level of automation is not always adequate, or the system might be down due to power failures or may not have been maintained sufficiently—all leading to long delays. Also, even in countries where automation is functional, a lack of adequate training for customs officials—on the rules and procedures as well as the automated systems—can result in incorrect admissibility decisions and duties assessments.

CORRUPTION, HARASSMENT, AND SEXUAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE WHEN CROSSING THE BORDER

CORRUPTION In customs administrations of emerging economies, particularly at the border, corruption is an endemic problem facing virtually all traders at borders. There is a general consensus that corruption by customs officers and administrations is the most important barrier facing traders.³⁶ International research from 2013 on corruption in customs operations indicates that “corruption continues to plague customs administrations around the world, regardless of their level of development ... that no country is immune to the problem and that there are no quick-fix solutions available.”³⁷ Women are particularly targeted, due to their lower social status relative to men in many countries.

“Bribes take ¾ of my profit, but I still trade because I say, if I slow down, what am I going to eat? So, I continue like this.”

WCBTs complained of long delays at the border, increasing their vulnerability to corruption and abuse. Small-scale women traders are targeted by customs officials’ demands to pay additional illegal fees, because they have less understanding of the rules and procedures as well as their rights as traders. These illicit payments cut into women’s profits, which are often already meager. One interviewee reported that sometimes “the bribes take 3/4 of my profit, but I still trade because I say, if I slow down, what am I going to eat? So, I continue like this.” Another interviewee gave the following account:

I know some of these experiences. Of course, yes, one of my friends. Because she failed to pay the customs duties, she was forced to be in a relationship with one of the officers, so she could go freely. Even two friends were forced to be in relationships because they had no money to pay. Yes, also, my friends who are complaining to me, they were told they would not go until they paid the custom duty. So, one of my friends said, I don’t have anything. If I have nothing I

³⁶ Contributing factors, in many developing countries, include poor infrastructure, lack of human and institutional capacity, low levels of automation and computerization, lack of training and professionalism, low public service salaries, and weak controls and oversight. In some countries, the corruption rises from the bottom up, where superiors protect the border officials in return for a share in the illicit proceeds. See also: Transparency International, *Corruption at the Borders* (u4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre), available at: <https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/assets/uploads/helpdesk/Corruption-at-borders-2018.pdf>

³⁷ McLinden, G., and Durrani, A. Z. (2013), Corruption in customs, *World Customs Journal* 7(2), 3-10.

have only the things there till I have the money. Now, I don't think she's continuing that, because it was only money. Of course, that one, she just left her luggage and goods, because she was overcharged. So, she went home without anything.

There was limited information regarding SMEs, but interviewees in some African countries stated that customs officers, in order to extract bribes, “misinterpret the rules and the back and forth takes so much time and soon the demurrage will be due and they know you will not want to pay it.” Another female SME said that she and other SMEs who cannot afford to hire intermediaries for their customs clearances just “take our chances with customs and deal with the corruption.”

One customs interviewee wondered whether such demands for additional illicit fees should even be considered corruption: “This is difficult to ascertain because customs has some discretionary authority, and this can become a rent-seeking opportunity.”



Illustration from “A Simplified Guide for Micro and Small-Scale Women Cross-Border Traders and Service Providers Within the EAC”

ILO 2017

VERBAL OR PHYSICAL ABUSE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT Women face verbal, physical abuse and sexual harassment at the hands of customs officials, border police, the military, and other (unauthorized) persons at the border, including forcible stripping and sometimes even rape in emerging economies.³⁸ One interviewee described the situation:

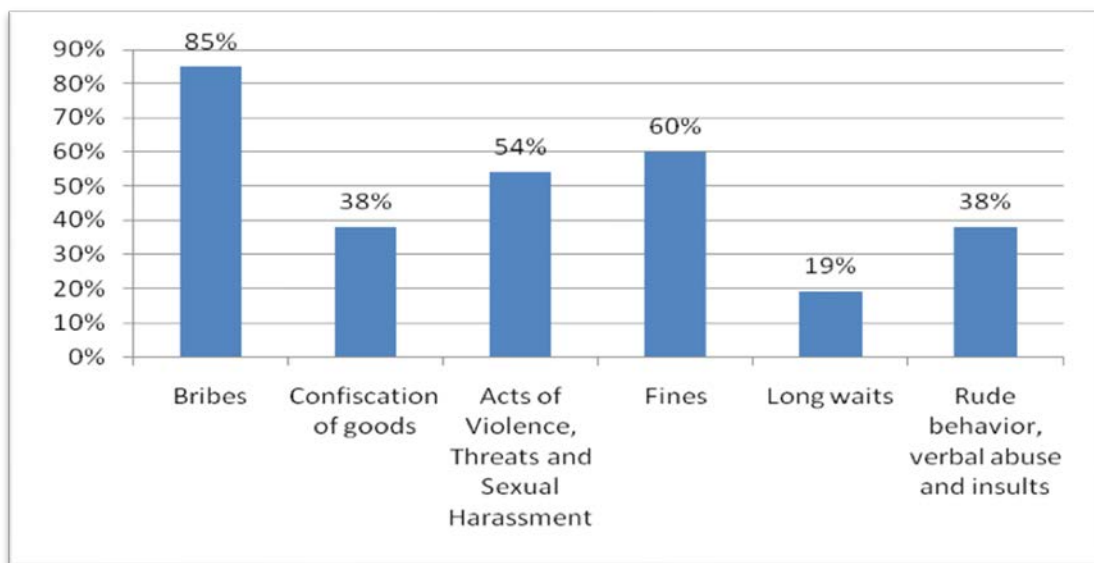
Because I remember one time I was passing, and a certain lady was trying to get her passport, the official refused to stamp her passport. When I asked why, the lady told me ‘No, he wants me to be his girlfriend.’ Most of the time, when you are passing, other men are just standing around the border, calling you names, maybe you have a big buttock, so the men are saying ‘oh, wow,’ so that’s harassment. So, there are a lot of women who have been proposed by those government officials. They say ‘Oh, you have to be my girlfriend and you won’t have to pay this and that.’ Yes, [the women do take that up].

³⁸ Brenton, Paul, et al. (2011). Risky business: Poor women cross-border traders in the Great Lakes region of Africa. *World Bank Africa Trade Policy Notes*, Note 11. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278369354_Risky_Business_Poor_Women_Cross-Border_Traders_in_the_Great_Lakes_Region_of_Africa

There was limited available information on physical abuse or sexual harassment of female SMEs. Anecdotal reports indicate that they are less likely to experience physical abuse or sexual harassment, partly because they have more economic power.

LACK OF MANDATORY RECEIPTS Women traders complain that they often do not receive receipts for payment of taxes, fees, and duties, and they must pay the same taxes multiple times. This can occur with more than one tax or fee because the charges are levied at different windows.

FIGURE 2. REPORTED FREQUENCY OF RISKS BY CROSS-BORDER TRADERS



Note: Percentages represent findings from interview and focus group discussions with women cross-border traders.

CAMBODIA Women small-scale traders at the Cambodian and Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) borders are not generally subjected to the high levels of harassment and violence seen in some African countries, but they do experience violence as well as difficulties relating to infrastructure, corruption, and higher taxes. They are delayed longer than men by quarantine at border crossings, and they spend more on transportation. Women often must hire brokers, which further reduces their profit margins, or they must seek assistance from officials, who are mostly male and are not trained to respond to the needs and rights of women traders.³⁹

SOUTH ASIA There were no known reports of physical or sexual abuse, but female small-scale traders cross-border reported being subjected to illegal fees and bribes by customs officials, police, and the military.

DOMINANCE OF MALE OFFICIALS AT THE BORDER In all the regions studied, there was an overwhelming dominance of male customs officials, police, and the military. For women traders, the

³⁹ Seror et al. (2018), Glass Barriers.

optics of complete or almost complete absence of female border agents at border points can be a deep deterrent to engaging in cross-border trade.

FINDING 6: IN MANY EMERGING ECONOMIES, SMALL-SCALE WOMEN TRADERS ARE MARGINALIZED, HAMPERED, AND UNRECOGNIZED.

The literature on cross-border trade in general, and in Africa in particular, often proposes formalizing small-scale cross-border traders. Such proposals are not always clearly detailed, but they imply bringing these traders into the status of formal SME traders. Formal trade can be costly and complicated, often requiring the assistance of customs brokers or intermediaries. Small-scale cross-border traders are already stretched thin due to costs and corruption (i.e., illicit payments).

Many WCBTs would like to grow and become SMEs, but not every WCBT has the ambition or means to do so. Many just want to supplement their incomes—or merely to survive, with dignity and respect. In the near long-term, there is likely to be a large group of women traders who simply want to make extra money trading without being marginalized. Governments must look at other, less formal measures to recognize and legitimize these traders, creating the conditions where they can be empowered and can prosper in their trade with dignity.

FINDING 7: IN MANY EMERGING ECONOMIES, BORDER INFRASTRUCTURE DOES NOT MEET THE SAFETY AND PHYSICAL NEEDS OF WOMEN TRADERS.

Women traders operating in emerging economies typically confront a range of logistic difficulties, often including:

- Congested lanes and improper fencing
- Lack of private toilets and sanitary facilities, nursing areas, changing rooms for babies
- Unsafe areas due to inadequate lighting
- Border hours of operation that do not align with women’s needs
- Loiterers who attack women traders

A recent study surveyed small-scale African traders regarding the infrastructure they would like to see provided, at or near the border, to facilitate their activities. The majority first mentioned appropriate markets (69.6 percent), followed by washroom facilities (68.1 percent), storage facilities and good roads

Survey: Needs of women cross-border traders

- Markets – 69.6 percent
- Washroom facilities – 68.1 percent
- Storage facilities and good roads – 65.4 percent
- Lights – 45.8 percent
- Affordable accommodation – 15.8 percent

(65.4 percent), lights at the border (45.8 percent), and affordable accommodation (15.8 percent).⁴⁰

Unsafe and insecure border infrastructure has been shown to constrain women traders more severely than men. In many cases, small-scale women traders struggle through congested lanes, competing with trucks and vehicles to make their way to customs clearance.

Often, there is a lack of proper fencing, lighting, and private restroom facilities, creating unsafe conditions for them. Many times, female cross-border traders are bringing their children with them, including infants.

The border facilities are often not sanitary, lacking places where women traders can nurse their infants or change their diapers. Sometimes there are separate toilets for men and women, but often they are not sanitary. The border *haats* between India and Bangladesh mostly lack toilets and running water.

In some African countries, unauthorized persons (loiterers), sometimes posing as customs officials, also stop women traders and demand more fees, even when they produce an official receipt. In the Great Lakes region of Africa, another report summarizes:

Not only do officials harass traders, but young men called *les viseurs* (watchers) are hired by state officials and given *carte blanche* to apply force as needed to extract money and goods from traders, particularly those who move by foot with goods strapped on their backs or carried by head. A typical occurrence is that women traders are often encircled by a group of men after they cross the border.⁴¹

In Zimbabwe, unauthorized men called “touts” get into the border areas and physically and sexually abuse women traders, in addition to demanding fees.

Hours of border operations are critical to both large- and small-scale traders across the globe. Cross-border women traders in Africa are often hampered when the border is closed before their return journey home.

In a recent report by Trademark East Africa, women cross-border traders operating between Rwanda and the DRC explained that they were often forced to spend the night away from home because they arrived after the border was closed.⁴²

In South Asia, according to reports and interviews, infrastructure and connectivity are inadequate at border points, which operate under chaotic conditions. Borders are not trade-friendly and are far from women-friendly.⁴³

⁴⁰ Mwanabingo, Dr. Nene Morisho, (2015), Deriving maximum benefit from small-scale border trade between the DRC and Rwanda. International Alert, Trademark East Africa, p. 24.

⁴¹ Brenton, et al. (2011), p. 4.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Diya Nag (2018), Four things about women and trade in the BBIN (Asia Foundation).



Lining up at the Rwanda-DRC Border (Goma)

KT PRESS

FINDING 8: IN EMERGING ECONOMIES, THE LACK OF MARKETS, WAREHOUSES, COLD STORAGE, AND LODGING HAMPERS WOMEN TRADERS

WAREHOUSES AND COLD STORAGE

Women traders usually do not have facilities to store their goods after they cross the border, or to store their leftover merchandise at the end of the day. They often suffer losses from theft or through loss of perishables.

Many African countries have only limited markets at the border, which are critical to the success of small-scale cross-border traders. Some women traders have low access to mobile technology that could alert them of market opportunities, making physical market spaces even more critical. Men are more likely to have cellphones to access up-to-date market data, as well as a vehicle, bicycle, or other means of transportation to take their goods further inland.

In the absence of markets, women traders must search for selling space, go door-to-door, or travel to offices to sell their commodities. Sometimes they are harassed by police, suffer physical and sexual abuse, or are even taunted by children on the streets.

MARKETS



A market at the Gambian border

WASHINGTON POST

Some governments have recognized the importance of markets for boosting trade, spurring economic growth, and increasing prosperity. The Government of Rwanda allows traders from the DRC to set up stalls at the Rwandan border; it is considering opening border markets to other nationals. A 2019 report⁴⁴ found that establishing border *haats* between Bangladesh and India resulted in increased trade and prosperity; incomes of the vendors on both sides of the border increased—especially on the Indian side, where vendors experienced an income increase of nearly 300 percent (see figures 3 and 4). However, due to design and implementation factors, both sellers and buyers were 98 percent male in Bangladesh and 89 percent male in India. As a result, women cross-border traders in both Bangladesh and India did not have equal access and equitable usage to this cross-border opportunity.

LODGING

Due to long journeys and delays at the border, women must often stay overnight after they cross the border. If they cannot afford lodging, they must sleep on the bus (even in winter), risking theft of their goods, or they may forego sleep to safeguard their goods. One interviewee explained:

I think you have to spend the night. We have to sleep in the lodges and do business with the country where you are going. Women just sleep anywhere just for a night or a cheaper place, which is also dangerous for security purposes, because the lodges for women to sleep, the costs are too high. Yes, they sleep on the bus or they find a cheaper place to sleep in.

⁴⁴ CUTS International (2019), *Bordering on happiness: An assessment of socio-economic impacts of Bangladesh-India Border Haats*.

FIGURE 3. INCOME OF VENDORS IN INDIAN CITIES/TOWNS

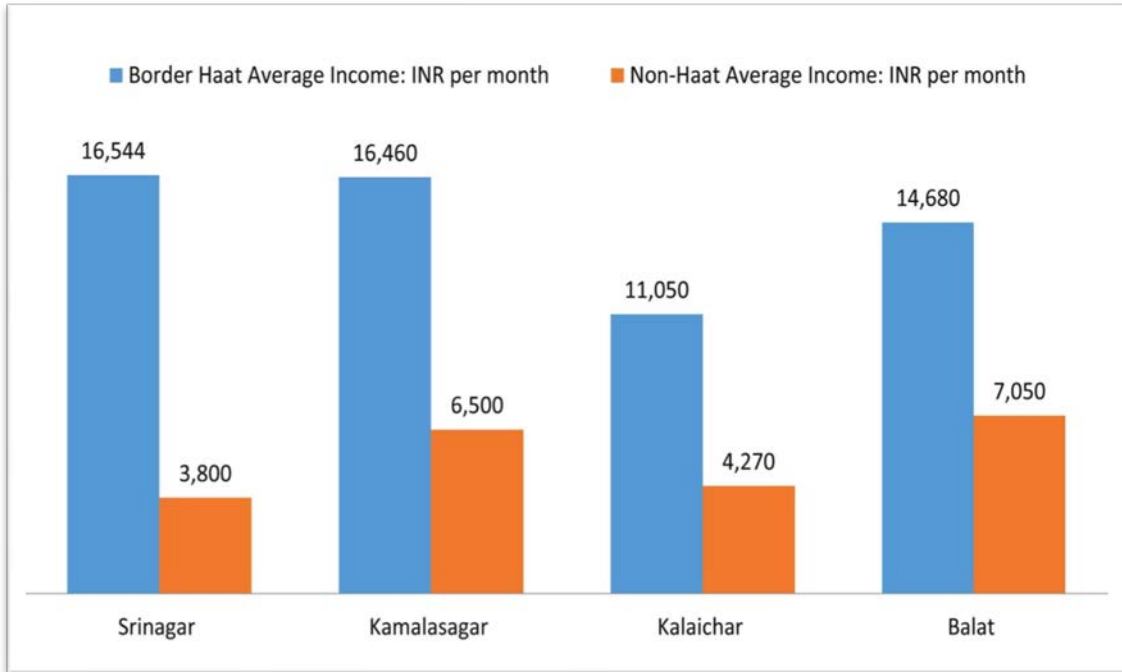
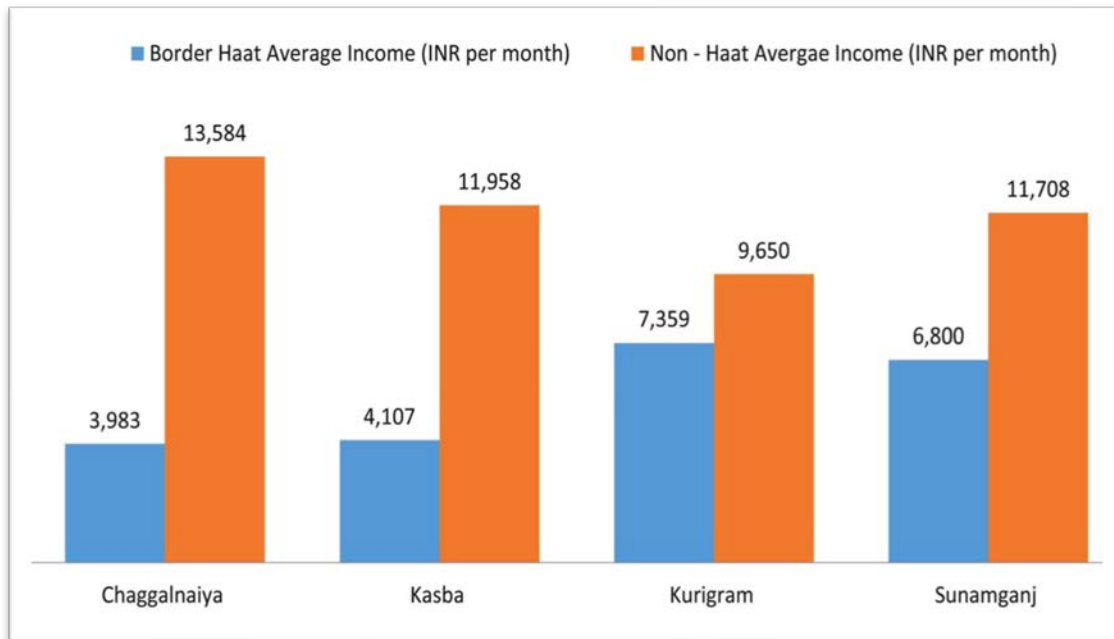


FIGURE 4. INCOME OF VENDORS IN BANGLADESHI CITIES



CUTS INTERNATIONAL, BORDERING ON HAPPINESS

RECOMMENDATIONS: WEEGE AT THE BORDER

The following recommendations respond to the findings of the previous section. They can be referred to in summary form in Table 2, at the end of this section.

RECOMMENDATION 1. IMPLEMENT POLICIES AND REGULATIONS THROUGH A GENDER LENS: GENDER “NEUTRALITY” CAN RESULT IN UNINTENTIONAL BIAS AGAINST WOMEN.

Customs administration must become aware that gender neutrality can result in (unintentional) gender bias. Customs services often negatively impact SMEs: because most female-owned or -led trading companies are SMEs, gender neutrality results in a bias against female-owned SMEs.

Specific recommendations:

1. Consider the impact of information dissemination and rules implementation on SMEs, which often do not have the resources to quickly obtain and understand technical information.
2. Adhere to regulations in a predictable and transparent way, and meet statutory deadlines, to enable SMEs to formulate business plans.
3. Recognize that administrative processes impact different-sized companies differently.

EMERGING ECONOMIES

Sensitize customs officials to women traders’ needs, using creative ways if necessary, to build respect for women small-scale traders. Inform customs officials of the contributions that these traders make to the country’s economy and society so that WCBTs feel more respected and empowered.

One interviewee in the Great Lakes Region of Africa described a World Bank project to sensitize cross-border customs officials and facilitate the interaction between customs officials and women traders using a role reversal. In a six-day training program, customs officials assumed the role of female traders, and female traders assumed the role of customs officials. According to the interviewee, there was positive feedback, as the exercise built empathy and understanding on both sides. This type of creative approach can be used to help customs officials and female traders develop mutual respect, as well as responsibility for customs procedures and processes.

RECOMMENDATION 2. DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT TRADE FACILITATION TECHNOLOGY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH WOMEN TRADERS.

Recognize the gender divide in digital technology and the need to provide help to women traders in accessing innovative technology, through customs agency websites and on screens at the border. Customs agencies can make product or commodity information available on apps and can send texts to women traders, many of whom can receive texts on their cell phones. Customs services can also work with women’s trade associations and cooperatives to help bridge the divide, by providing training workshops.

Any technology intended to streamline, simplify, and improve customs procedures will likely not equally benefit women traders unless it is designed and implemented in partnership with women traders—and with women’s economic empowerment and gender equality as an explicit goal.

RECOMMENDATION 3. PROVIDE TRANSPARENT AND EASY-TO-ACCESS CUSTOMS INFORMATION TO EMPOWER WOMEN TRADERS.

SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

ACCESS TO INFORMATION Stay vigilant to ensure that official websites are user-friendly, with explanatory links to rules and regulations as well as real-time updated information. For example, during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020, entrepreneurs in the personal protective equipment (PPE) sector sprang up globally, and they needed quick information on import and export requirements. Traders complained that the information on customs’ website was difficult to find and complicated; they needed lawyers to assist them in understanding the information, especially because the import/export requirements spanned several agencies. Customs has the potential to play a role in facilitating female SMEs entering, and remaining in, the trading sector, by providing easy to access and detailed information, including links to relevant information.

INCLUSIVE PUBLIC OUTREACH Conduct outreach events in partnership with chambers of commerce and trade associations, using in-person events (after the COVID-19 pandemic has abated) as well as webinars and online videos, to reach large and diverse audiences. Explain how leveraging customs information can facilitate women traders in e-commerce, with potential benefits for economic empowerment. These activities should be publicized to reach potential (as well as current) traders. Customs can consider hosting, on a recurring basis, an event targeting women (e.g., “So you want to become a trader”) to explain the steps necessary to become a successful trader. Customs services must also target outreach efforts to reach “suitcase traders” in their communities and provide them with trading information, because they are often left behind.

Many customs services around the world host public outreach events, sometimes jointly with the private sector, as well as webinars that are open to everyone. Female practitioners and women employed in compliance departments of male-owned companies are well represented at these events. Customs services do not yet host public outreach events to attract *potential* women entrepreneurs. Because women are so underrepresented in SMEs, including trading companies, customs should consider outreach to potential entrepreneurs with an emphasis on how to become a trader, providing details about existing opportunities under current laws.

For example, US Customs has increased the *de minimis* duty-free amount to \$800. Traders need to file an Entry Type 8645 form to receive a maximum \$800 shipment duty free. Based on interviews in the United States, large companies such as Amazon and Best Buy appear to be maximizing their benefits under this duty exemption. One interviewee noted, “Companies are figuring out ways of breaking down shipments. Now they come across as hundreds of manifests that clear [customs] as individual shipments

⁴⁵ Shipments qualifying for Entry Type 86 are not subject to duties, taxes, and fees. Shipments must comply with required standards and pay required fees (e.g., agricultural fees).

rather than one shipment. Amazon has [adopted] that model” as a means of lowering its duty liability. This exemption benefits trading companies worldwide, which are generally male-owned or -led. Some suitcase traders have been using this duty exemption, but often they are not fully informed of the rules, and sometimes their goods are seized because they are not in compliance. Most other countries also have a *de minimis* threshold duty-free amount, which varies from country to country, and traders use it mostly for e-commerce. Customs services are well positioned to inform and facilitate women’s entry into international trade.

PUBLIC WORKSHOPS Continue hosting public workshops, ideally including hands-on demonstrations. Interviewees said that they benefit when customs services host such events, particularly using demonstrations, and they look forward to them. One interviewee lamented that a customs service had stopped doing demonstrations at the port level, and she wished they would “start doing it again.”

WOMEN CROSS-BORDER TRADERS

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

ACCESS TO INFORMATION Provide information in a manner and form that facilitates comprehension by all, including less literate women traders who lack access to the internet or cell phones. Using the gender lens of the WTO TFA, customs agencies should consult with cross-border associations and women’s associations to understand the most beneficial format and accessible platform to make information available to them and to women small-scale traders (e.g., internet, app, or SMS), and also provide training for women traders on navigating these information platforms.

ENCOURAGE DIALOGUE Hold awareness (“meet, greet, and learn”) events targeted to cross-border traders on how to be a successful trader, including question-and-answer sessions and refreshments. This type of multi-purpose event can build social rapport between customs and traders, give traders more confidence, and reduce their fear of male customs officials. By building mutual respect, it might also reduce corruption and violence (by officials) and enhance compliance (by traders). In targeting women small-scale traders, customs agencies should make sure that the public campaigns appeal to women, by using the language and communication modes most often used by women traders.⁴⁶

- Hold public workshops and capacity-building activities for women traders to explain trading basics.
- Find ways to accommodate more WCBT at public events, including by using large screen TVs.
- Work with women’s and cross-border trade associations to help target WCBTs to inform them on issues including:
 - their rights and obligations
 - existing trade facilitation and trade initiatives (e.g., a simplified trade regime or STR)

⁴⁶ Some customs services in the developing world already conduct public outreach, but small-scale women traders complain it is not enough. For example, the Malawi Cross-Border Trade Association has over 3,000 members, but any customs event is usually limited to 20-30 persons.

- trade requirements and procedures
- (if present) a Trade Information Desk (TID) or Gender Information Desk at the border

BOOKLETS, POSTERS, AND VIDEOS Distribute booklets, posters, and information packets in the languages most spoken in bordering countries. These materials should outline the policies, rules, procedures, exemptions, sources, and facilities available to cross-border traders, as well as information on traders’ rights. Place and distribute them in strategic locations frequented by women traders, including trading markets, women’s trade associations, chambers of commerce, and savings and loans groups. Create online videos to present trading information, both in town and at the border, to reach women who are less literate.

RADIO AND TELEVISION Use radio and television advertisements to inform traders of sources of information, events, and training, if these are media sources commonly accessed by women traders. Short, pointed advertisements can offer a tip each week or month.

SIGNS, POSTERS, AND ONLINE ACCESS AT THE BORDER Provide information at the border via readily visible signs and posters, using clear language and image-based explanations, to summarize traders’ rights and other relevant topics. Information presented could include: step-by-step processes; applicable fees, taxes, and duties, including a list of duty-free products; documentary requirements for commonly traded goods; availability of assistance and information desks; and safety instructions. Provide internet access at the border, including stations where women can access online customs platforms. Train customs staff to aid traders who have low reading or technological literacy.

SUPPORT WOMEN’S COOPERATIVES Promote and provide information on cooperatives at the border in the form of posters and booklets, with guidance on how to form or join a cooperative as well as contact information for local and national women’s cooperatives. This is helpful to women traders, because they can pool resources and goods and reduce their transportation costs. Traveling in groups also lowers the risk of harassment and assault by customs officers. One female cross-border trader stated, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

TRADE INFORMATION DESK AT THE BORDER Make the border trader-friendly; set up a TID to assist cross-border traders with trade information queries and on-site disputes. Customs officials are not always adequately trained and might not know or understand laws or traders’ rights. Female traders are sometimes intimidated by customs authorities, and having a friendly official resource has the potential to empower them. A properly functioning TID could aid traders as well as resolve simple trade disputes at the border, thereby facilitating trade while empowering women traders. An effective TID should be identified by signs at the border, including arrows pointing to it, and should be manned by knowledgeable persons.⁴⁷

GENDER HELP DESKS AND INFORMATION CENTERS AT THE BORDER Some countries in Africa have introduced Gender Help Desks and Information Centers at their borders.⁴⁸ Such desks

⁴⁷ New TIDs are being implemented. Web page: <https://www.comesa.int/two-new-information-desks-established-at-the-rwanda-dr-congo-border/>

⁴⁸ EAC borders by the United Republic of Tanzania; UNCTAD, 2019a. Borderline: Women in informal cross-border trade in Malawi, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. <https://unctad.org/en/pages/PublicationWebflyer.aspx?publicationid=2589>

could also be established in other countries, including in South Asia, especially near rural borders where women are not comfortable dealing with male customs officials.

RECOMMENDATION 4. IN ADVANCED ECONOMIES, MAINTAIN UPDATED SYSTEMS AND CONTINUE TO IMPLEMENT TRADE FACILITATION MEASURES.

Continue investing in automated and electronic clearance systems to facilitate trade, while applying a gender lens that recognizes the gender divide in digitization and information. Continue public partnership programs and continue investing and implementing the Trade Facilitation Agreement.

RECOMMENDATION 5. IN EMERGING ECONOMIES, IMPLEMENT FULL AUTOMATION AND TRADE FACILITATION MEASURES, WHICH CAN REDUCE DELAYS, CORRUPTION, AND HARASSMENT OF WOMEN TRADERS.

AUTOMATION AND ELECTRONIC FILINGS

Continue investing in automated and electronic clearance to facilitate trade. Automation is an expensive undertaking, but it has been proven to facilitate trade, reduce corruption, and address sexual harassment. Cost-benefit analysis in international trade has shown that implementing the highest level of automation feasible repays the expense.

SINGLE WINDOW

Implement a single window to facilitate trade, enabling traders to submit all their trading documentation at a single electronic window, including making a payment. As one interviewee stated, “even with COMESA [Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa], a single window would reduce the barriers we face.”

SIMPLIFICATION AND HARMONIZATION

ENTER INTO MUTUAL RECOGNITION AGREEMENTS (MRA) AND HARMONIZATION By recognizing each other’s standards, countries can ease documentary procedures and thus simplify trading across borders. Harmonize documents with neighboring countries; set up electronic communication links with trading countries to minimize duplication of information submission requirements.

STR FOR LOW-VALUE TRANSACTIONS Implement, promote, and publicize simplified trade regimes. There is great potential for STRs to benefit small-scale women traders, but only if they are implemented in partnership with women and if they adopt women’s economic empowerment and gender equality as an explicit objective. The list of products must include the commodities commonly traded by women cross-border traders, since an STR is only as effective as the list of products it contains. Therefore, the list should be reviewed regularly in the light of women cross-border trade patterns, to ensure that it is meeting the needs of these traders. The STR list should be easily available

at border posts and at the offices of cross-border traders' associations and other locations frequented by women cross-border traders.⁴⁹

SINGLE PAYMENT WINDOW AND REQUIRED RECEIPTS Install a single payment window with recorded payments and mandatory receipts to decrease the potential for customs officials to charge women traders additional or duplicate fees deliberately or inadvertently.

SECTOR GUIDE FOR WCBTS Empower women traders by developing clear and transparent procedure guides for those sector-specific products in which women typically trade. The guides should be tailored to the literacy levels of small-scale women traders and should be made available at the border as well as in venues such as women's trade associations and groups. This will help women traders access information to make better business decisions and plans, understand required trade procedures, and understand their rights.

INCREASE THE NUMBER OF FEMALE CUSTOMS OFFICIALS AT THE BORDER, INCLUDING IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS More female customs officers are needed in both services and operations worldwide, and a priority should be increasing women's visibility in senior positions. The presence of female customs officials at the border, especially with decision-making power, can be reassuring to women traders.

Some female traders reported that women officials have not made a difference in corruption: "they turn away" because they, too, share in the illicit gains. One interviewee laughed out loud when asked if more female officials would make a difference. However, even if increased female presence at the border does not reduce corruption or harassment at the outset, this may happen over time with an increase in female presence, especially female officials in leadership positions. The same interviewee agreed that it would be better to have more female officials to make female traders feel more comfortable. Given that some female traders are intimidated by (male) customs officials, more female customs officials at the border would lessen the fear these women share.

IMPLEMENT TRANSPARENT ACCOUNTABILITY OF CUSTOMS OFFICIALS WHO VIOLATE THE RULES AND CODE OF CONDUCT Customs agencies should adopt and implement clear rules of conduct as well as transparent procedures for accountability. Customs services should install cameras in strategic locations and monitor all interactions between traders and customs officials. Infractions of the rules should be met with predictable sanctions. To monitor customs interactions with traders, according to one interviewee, some countries in Africa have installed time-stamped "Happy Or Not" machines, where traders press a smiley face button to rate their experience with the particular customs official: this identifies the customs official and allows the head of the agency to see in real time the traders' experiences and note the conduct of customs officials. According to the interviewee, this has been effective in improving customs and WCBT interactions.

ADOPT AND IMPLEMENT A CHARTER OR A BILL OF MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR THE TREATMENT OF SMALL-SCALE CROSS-BORDER TRADERS Customs services should adopt and

⁴⁹ The EAC, working with the International Labor Organization (ILO), has developed a "Simplified Guide for Micro and Small-Scale Women Cross-Border Traders and Service Providers within the EAC," to assist cross-border traders. This includes information referenced in Recommendation 2. Webpage: https://www.ilo.org/empent/areas/womens-entrepreneurship-development-wed/WCMS_551147/lang--en/index.htm

implement a charter or a bill of minimum standards of treatment for small-scale traders, publicizing it and making it widely available. The charter should include basic rights of traders, processes and procedures, and expectations for both customs services and traders. As an example, a Charter for the COMESA Region⁵⁰ has been attached in Annex VII.

RECOMMENDATION 6. PROVIDE UPDATED AND ONGOING TRAINING TO CUSTOMS OFFICIALS.

In all regions and all economic levels, provide regular updated training on customs rules and procedures and automated systems to border officials. This will enable them to have current information and knowledge and to be better able to help traders.

Particularly, in emerging economies, customs should provide gender training as well as sensitizing training to customs officials, emphasizing that they are public servants with the responsibility to serve traders with respect and dignity, regardless of the volume of their trade. Customs services should also be sensitized to the contributions of small-scale traders to their country and society, and they should expressly acknowledge women small-scale traders as a valued part of society.

RECOMMENDATION 7. STUDY SOLUTIONS TO PROVIDE RECOGNITION TO WOMEN SMALL-SCALE TRADERS WITHOUT THE NEED FOR FORMALIZATION.

Consider conducting studies regarding the two recommendations below, on how to provide women small-scale traders with recognition without the need for formalization. Countries concerned about the loss of customs revenue in adopting these recommendations can conduct cost-benefit analyses, balancing the loss of customs revenue against the benefits that small-scale traders contribute: spurring economic growth, creating jobs for producers and suppliers, using transport and other logistical services, and pumping their cash earnings into commerce (for example). These recommendations do not, of course, preclude small-scale traders from becoming formalized. Rather, they provide a step facilitating the growth of small-scale traders' business.

The following are two proposals that would contribute a win-win to both traders and the economy.

TRUSTED TRADER INCENTIVES

Partnerships programs, such as Trusted Traders and Authorized Economic Operators, have had a positive impact on facilitating trade by building trust between the trading communities and customs authorities. They are public-private partnerships between customs and traders: the customs agency verifies the trader's supply sources and customs operations, and in turn provides the trader expedited clearance. These are complicated undertakings, and most participants are large and medium-sized businesses, due to the cost constraints and customs oversight burdens. However, it would be worth undertaking a feasibility study to determine whether simplified public-private partnership programs might be implemented to facilitate trade for small-scale women cross-border traders.

⁵⁰ https://glftp.comesa.int/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/The-CHARTER_translation.pdf

A working recommendation might include the following components. Customs provides capacity-building and training programs designed to meet the needs and consider the responsibilities of female small-scale traders (ideally, in conjunction with women trade associations and chambers of commerce). Female (or male) small-scale traders who complete an identified set of events, capacity-building exercises, and training programs would then be certified as knowledgeable or trusted, and could be designated a “certified trusted trader” or an “authorized small-scale trader.”

In return for trade facilitation and ease of border crossings, the certified trader would commit to compliance with the rules and regulations. There could be periodic checks, backed by the potential loss of certification or other penalties for lack of compliance. Updated trainings would be required to keep abreast with changes in the rules. Such a program would give dignity and instill confidence to small-scale female traders. They would be more informed and knowledgeable, not only of the rules but also of their rights; suppliers would likely be more careful and more willing to source commodities, and customs officials would potentially be more respectful of the women who have earned customs certification.

This could also help small-scale traders in the case of disasters, as with the current global COVID-19 pandemic: having certification might make them eligible for business assistance in the case of available funds, whether governmental or non-governmental. Currently, despite their economic contributions to society—for which they risk their lives and lose their dignity—and despite their large numbers, they are largely socially invisible, remaining a marginalized and neglected segment of society.

Undoubtedly, such a program would need a buy-in from both customs and women traders, but it would result in a win-win for both. Interviewees welcomed this idea; one interviewee stated that in her country, there are special buses that transport traders across the border. One particular bus operator helps traders understand the trading rules so that they are in compliance. Because customs officials are aware of his activities in ensuring compliance, this bus operator crosses the border with very little delay, thus facilitating the traders’ border crossing

STUDY THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF INCREASING THE *DE MINIMIS* DUTY EXEMPTION THRESHOLD AMOUNT, TO PROMOTE CROSS-BORDER TRADE AND E-COMMERCE.

To empower small-scale women traders, countries should study the impact of increasing the *de minimis* threshold level to an amount that would make it worthwhile for traders to engage in trade under this duty-free amount.⁵¹ In some countries, traders, especially women, already use the *de minimis* duty exemption to engage in “suitcase trade.” Raising the threshold also has the potential to spur e-commerce, which has shown to be beneficial to female traders.

WCBT interviewees reported that they turned to e-commerce during the global COVID-19 pandemic when they could not go to the border to trade. According to one interviewee, when small-scale women traders interacted with buyers online, they were much more successful. Although women traders still face greater hurdles due to the digital divide between men and women (and other factors),⁵² e-

⁵¹ In most countries, *de minimis* imports (US, Entry Type 86) must comply with required standards and might be required to pay certain fees (e.g., agricultural).

⁵² Of the total African population, 34 percent of those using the internet are men, while only 23 percent are women. Also, internet subscriptions and smartphones are relatively costly. See: UNCTAD (2020), Women owned smart phones are

commerce has the potential to expand and empower women traders far beyond the neighboring borders.

RECOMMENDATION 8. BUILD WOMEN-FRIENDLY INFRASTRUCTURE AT THE BORDER.

DEDICATED LANES AND ROADS

Install dedicated lanes and pedestrian roads with proper fencing to protect the physical safety of women traders, and so they do not have to compete with trucks and large vehicles during the customs clearing process.

CREATE A WELCOMING AND FEMALE-FRIENDLY BORDER WAITING AREA

Ensure that waiting areas are safe and welcoming. Create women-friendly waiting areas by ensuring that there are private toilets and washrooms for women, with running water and proper lighting. Make available areas for nursing and changing places for babies. To the extent possible, install feminine hygiene product dispensers and appropriate trash receptacles in the toilet areas.

INSTALL PROPER LIGHTING AT THE BORDER AREAS

Ensure that the border areas and waiting rooms are properly lit for the safety and security of traders. The Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project successfully introduced solar-powered lighting at borders between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which improved the safety and security of both traders and officials.

SET BORDER HOURS IN CONSULTATION WITH WCBTS

Consider women traders' border-crossing patterns and set border hours to accommodate their needs. Many women travel with children and have no place to sleep after long journeys. Women traders must meet family obligations, so when the border is closed and they cannot get home, the family suffers. In the previously-cited Great Lakes project, the installation of solar powered lighting enabled customs to extend the border opening hours, which benefited women cross-border traders, allowing them to better organize their trading activities around family commitments.⁵³

KEEP THE BORDER SAFE BY CONTROLLING ACCESS TO LEGITIMATE BORDER CROSSERS

Have clearly demarcated customs zones and allow only persons with legitimate reasons to be in the zone. Require customs officials present in the border areas to be uniformed, with clearly visible names and badges. This will help eliminate loiterers from having access to the border and enable female traders to identify customs officials both for security purposes and to report any wrongdoing. This should

equipping East African women digital entrepreneurs with skills to thrive.
<https://unctad.org/en/pages/newsdetails.aspx?OriginalVersionID=2418>

⁵³ Fundira, T. (2018). A Look at the Simplified Trade Regimes in East and Southern Africa. *Bridge Africa* 7(4).
<http://www.ictsd.org/bridges-news/bridges-africa/news/a-look-at-the-simplified-trade-regimes-in-east-and-southern-africa>

reduce the harassment and exploitation that female cross-border traders face. According to an interviewee, this is being implemented in the Great Lakes Area of Africa. Together, with the installation of cameras, it has significantly reduced the exploitation and harassment of women traders crossing the border.

RECOMMENDATION 9. FACILITATE AVAILABILITY OF MARKETS, WAREHOUSES, COLD STORAGE, AND LODGING FACILITIES; FEATURE WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY IN TRADE INITIATIVES.

Provide markets. When customs services are unable to provide markets, they should work with the private sector to make markets—as well as warehouses, cold storage, and lodging facilities—available at reasonable cost. In making markets and trade opportunities available, governments should consult with women traders and must ensure that women’s economic empowerment and gender equality features in both design and implementation. Improved infrastructure will enable WCBTs to trade more efficiently with less hardships. Making border infrastructures more conducive to trade will lead to expanded trade and increased prosperity, especially in the border areas.

TABLE 2. VIABLE INTERVENTIONS TO EMPOWER WOMEN TRADERS

INTERVENTION	MEASURES	IMPLEMENTATION HORIZON*
Implementation of customs laws through a gender lens (All Economies)	Respond to the needs of SMEs traders regarding delays and timely responses to administrative matters	Long term and ongoing
Inclusive technology (All economies)	Design and implement technology initiatives in partnership with women traders, and with their benefit as an explicit objective	Ongoing
Information dissemination (Emerging Economies and Advanced Economies)	Develop periodic media campaigns, booklets (made widely available in strategic locations), customs forums, and training and capacity-building workshops for small-scale traders (Emerging Economies)	Short term and ongoing
	Outreach, working with Chambers of Commerce and women’s associations, to potential SME traders to explain “how to become a trader” including how to engage in e-commerce	Medium term and ongoing
	Establish Trade Information Desk (TID) to assist traders with documentation and compliance for clearance	Short term
	Establish gender help desk at the border	Short term
Trade facilitation (Advanced Economies)	Upkeep systems, continue implementing trade facilitation measures, and continue public-private partnership programs	Ongoing
Trade facilitation (Emerging Economies)	Implement electronic or automated filing and single window for customs clearance	Long term
	Provide regular updated training for customs officials on customs rules, procedures, and automated systems	Medium term and ongoing
	Negotiate Mutual Recognition Agreements	Medium to long term
	Adopt and implement the Charter or a Bill of Rights of Minimum Standards For The Treatment Of Small-Scale Cross-Border Traders	Short term to medium term

	Provide single payment window for payments with mandatory receipts	Short term
	Promote and publicize Simplified Trade Regimes (where applicable)	Short term
	Provide sector guide for cross-border traders	Short term
	Provide and display posters and signs at the border showing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - traders' rights; how to file a complaint regarding trade disputes or prohibited conduct - availability of Help Desk - duties and fees on commonly traded commodities 	Short to medium term
	Streamline recorded payments with mandatory receipts	Short to medium term
Training for customs officials (All Economies)	Provide regular updated training for customs officials on customs rules, procedures, and automated systems	Medium term and ongoing
Solutions to provide women small-scale traders with recognition, without the need for formalization (Emerging Economies)	Establish trusted trader incentives	Medium to long term
	Study the economic impact of increasing the <i>de minimis</i> duty exemption to promote small-scale trade	Medium to long term
Safety and security infrastructure at the border (Emerging Economies)	Maintain dedicated clearance lanes for small-scale traders	Medium to long term
	Install security lighting, fences, and cameras	Short term
	Secure border areas to keep out loiterers. Require customs officials present in the border areas to be uniformed with clearly visible names and badges	Short term
	Make border waiting areas women friendly by installing toilets for women, with running water, nursing areas and baby changing facilities	Short term
Border markets, warehouse and cold storage and lodging (Emerging Economies)	Make available market, warehouse, and cold storage facilities at reasonable cost to small-scale traders — possibly working with the private sector on installation and maintenance	Medium to long term

* Short term = within 6 months; Medium term = 6-12 months; Long term = 12-24 months.

FINDINGS: WEEGE WITHIN CUSTOMS

Progress to support the needs and experiences of women traders becomes more sustainable when it is part of a broader effort, to ensure that organizational cultures and processes—that is, institutional architectures—are designed to recognize and advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

In this context, customs agencies can create work environments that not only are more diverse—increasing trust and institutional legitimacy by reflecting the populations they serve—but that also provide a more supportive setting for women traders, through decreased levels of corruption and sexual harassment.

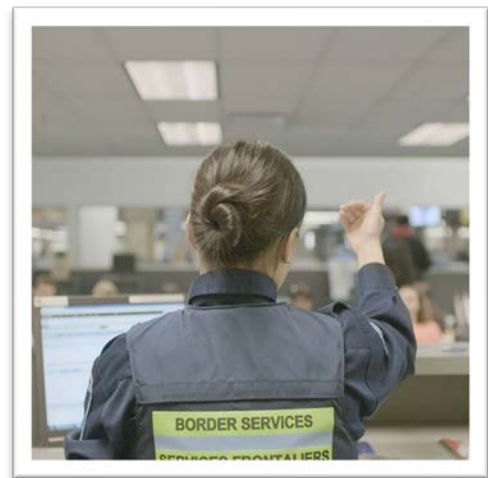
FINDING 1. CUSTOMS WORK REMAINS MALE-DOMINATED, ESPECIALLY IN LEADERSHIP AND ENFORCEMENT.

In 2019, the World Customs Organization (WCO) surveyed its members on the extent to which they were integrating attention to gender equality and female empowerment across their operations. While the bulk of the findings are not publicly available, the data released on the gender-balance of staffing and leadership in customs and border agencies revealed a largely male-dominated sector, especially in higher levels of decision-making and leadership.⁵⁴ On average, women made up 38 percent of customs staff, with high variability across countries, ranging from 5.9 percent to 73 percent. Women only made up 29 percent of senior management positions and 34 percent of middle management positions worldwide. However, 17 countries reported female-dominated administrations. In interviews with female border agents and commissioners, many noted that border patrols and enforcement were particularly male-dominated and difficult environments for women to work in. Several officers described conditions of marginalization and ostracization for women who sought to advance in enforcement positions: individual men might not be held accountable for bad behavior, and other women might not be available to provide support. On the other hand, several officers noted that offices working on trade and legal issues were especially diverse, hiring women at all levels of leadership; jobs that dealt with tax collections and law were also attractive to many women. Countries with strong national legislation and social support for gender equality, unsurprisingly, saw greater numbers of women across the range of customs positions and at all levels of decision-making.

FINDING 2. MANY CUSTOMS AGENCIES USE GENDER-BLIND RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES THAT DO NOT REACH WOMEN WHERE THEY ARE.

Balanced sex ratios in workplaces, and especially in customs and border work, are important for two key reasons. They bring substantial benefits in creative problem-solving, decreased corruption, and less sexual harassment;⁵⁵ and they allow customs and border agencies to reflect the populations they serve, which can help increase trust and institutional legitimacy.

When asked about hiring methods, many of the customs officers interviewed indicated that no particular efforts were made to reach out to women. General vacancy announcements were sent through official channels or advertisements were placed in newspapers. Some women were brought in during reorganization and merger efforts. One agency, in the recent past, recruited field agents exclusively through the military, resulting in entirely male



Canadian border agent
CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY

⁵⁴ WCO News: <https://mag.wcoomd.org/magazine/wco-news-89/wco-releases-new-customs-tools-to-advance-gender-equality-and-diversity/>

⁵⁵ Dobbin, F., and Kalev, A. (2017). Training programs and reporting systems won't end sexual harassment. Promoting more women will. *Harvard Business Review*; <https://hbr.org/2017/11/training-programs-and-reporting-systems-wont-end-sexual-harassment-promoting-more-women-will>

cohorts. However, a few agencies described tailored initiatives to recruit women using communication tools and channels most likely to reach them, as either a one-time effort or a sustained campaign. As one officer described: “A few years ago, there was a solicitation for only women officers, to help increase that pool. When you do general solicitations, they attract more men. So, one effort was to send out a solicitation where positions were open only to women.” In another effort, an agency conducted a series of road shows, speaking one-on-one with women about the range of jobs available to them in customs. Some agencies targeted women in high school and college, at periods in life when they are considering their future career options. As an officer explained, young women are urged to consider all types of customs jobs, “[by] saying that even though you’re a woman, there’s no reason you can’t do enforcement jobs at the front line.”

FINDING 3. THE CHALLENGING AND PUBLIC SERVICE-ORIENTED NATURE OF CUSTOMS WORK IS A KEY FACTOR IN RETAINING WOMEN STAFF.

Most of the customs officers interviewed had only limited insight at first into the career options available in customs and what the work might entail. One officer—who later said that joining customs was one of the best decisions she had made—quipped: “I didn’t think I wanted to have an entire career digging through people’s dirty laundry.” The path to a career in customs often felt haphazard. Many had earned advanced degrees in other fields—political science, legal studies, information technology, biology—and had passed national examinations for civil service, making them eligible for a range of government positions, including customs.



Dubai Customs Woman Award, 2019

EMIRATES 24/7 NEWS

While they may not have set out to work for customs agencies initially, many quickly became captivated and motivated by the broad, complex, diverse, and public service-oriented nature of the work. One officer explained, “The mission always calls you. My agency has this diverse, amazing mission, international mission, border mission, trade mission.” Another officer described her work as follows:

Once I was exposed to what was involved in customs and trade and transactions, I found it incredibly interesting and just stayed within and tried different positions and learned so much. There’s a whole gamut of jobs you can do, whether it’s facilitating trade or the security side of it, the anti-contraband and migration. Helping with ensuring there’s no importation of food, plant, and animal risk. So, opportunities for all sorts of things.

Another officer explained that the public service nature of the work also created a sense of purpose: “I am persuaded that customs is a noble profession that covers many domains, and to be useful in customs is one of the best things. I feel useful to my country and my people.” Customs agencies have an

unrecognized opportunity to showcase the challenge, diversity, and public service mission of customs jobs in their outreach to women.

FINDING 4. MENTORSHIP AND SPONSORSHIP ARE IMPORTANT TO FEMALE RETENTION AND ADVANCEMENT.

In general, the female customs officials interviewed felt that customs agencies were good places to work for women. Female mentorship and leadership made a particular difference for many, both in creating a support structure and in championing issues such as work-life balance and policies to support women at various stages of life, including pregnancy, breastfeeding, and caring for school-aged children. As one customs officer summarized: “I think [customs] is [a good place to work] and I’ll tell you why. I had a mentor; ... she helped me along. She advocated for women in general and me as well. And I have paid it forward.” In places where supportive policies existed, female leaders effectively modelled work-life balance, as one officer explained:

It’s one thing to say you’re all about work-life balance, but unless you demonstrate it, people think they’re going to be penalized if they take time off. This means to say, ‘I’m going to my son’s event, where I have to leave early.’ ... My [supervisor’s] son is in [secondary school] and last fall she made it known that on Fridays, [she was] leaving [early] because she wanted to be [at his school events].

Another officer with managerial duties noted that her current emphasis on work-life balance came from the difficulties she had faced without it: “I wanted to give back to the [younger] me who was crying every day because I had to drive my son to a [distant daycare] every day. I don’t want any woman working for me to have to go through the same thing. I promote telework.” Many officers also spoke of the importance of mentors, sponsors, and champions within their agency, who were intentionally encouraging and opening opportunities for women at different levels of leadership. As one officer explained: “There has to be champions, women and men, who see talent and potential in younger people and encourage them to take responsibilities, to volunteer, to stretch.”

FINDING 5. FEMALE LEADERSHIP IS INSTRUMENTAL IN PROMOTING GENDER-BALANCED STAFFING—BUT PROGRESS IS OFTEN TIED TO THE EFFORTS OF FEMALE CHAMPIONS.

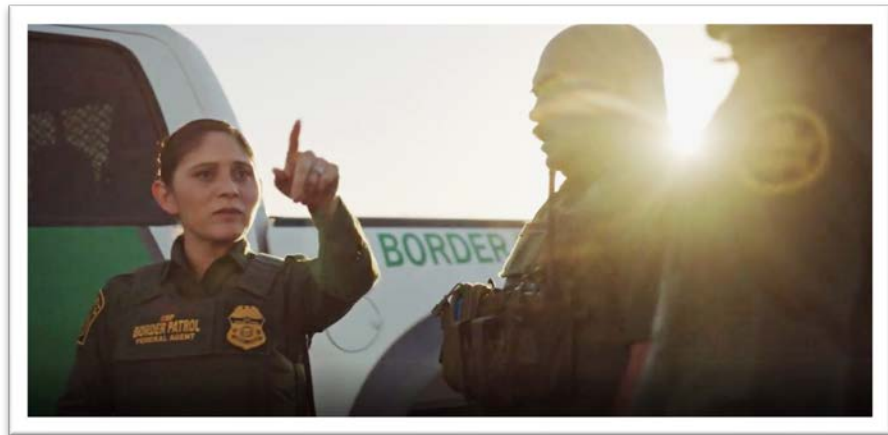
Most officers felt that their customs agencies were places in which women could grow, progress, and succeed. In places where women were present at all levels of leadership, respondents attributed this to advances in gender equality within the broader culture and legal system. However, the path to leadership was not always easy. Many felt that as women, they had to work hard to prove themselves: “You have to work harder to get to the same place as men, there’s no getting around that. ... You can’t be a C student as a woman. It’s rare. You have to have thick skin.” For some, taking on leadership responsibilities was even more difficult because of restrictive social norms, as one officer explained: “We live in a culture that doesn’t look favorably on women who advance, and we’re not used to seeing women in leadership. So, we do not valorize the competence of women, we harass them and criticize them. It’s a challenge for women to be able to surmount all of this.”

Many officers worked in environments with male-dominated leadership at the highest levels that did not reliably champion the advancement or leadership of women. As one officer explained: “As long as the

leaders are men, it's hard for them to really understand the significance of some of the policies in place, that can limit women from being able to compete equally for jobs and promotions.” For some, the informal behaviors displayed by leaders directly contradicted their formal support for gender equality and reinforced cultures of impunity. One officer described this:

When I see the actions of those they've placed into leadership, how they behave in some of these meetings, when I see how they personally select and have allowed certain things to happen, this sends a more powerful message to me than anything else. ... Gender equality will never be better than the mission.

Another officer similarly observed that “[leaders] talk more than they do. ... They always say that they respect gender equality, but if you have a man and a woman with the same education and the same history of work running for a position, they will always choose the man.”



United States Border Patrol agent
U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

“As long as the leaders are men, it's hard for them to really understand the significance of some of the policies in place, that can limit women from being able to compete equally for jobs and promotions.”

Several officers identified the dangers in relying on individual champions for progress on gender equality in customs, especially in places where policies and accountability mechanisms are inadequate. Any progress made was seen as tenuous, especially in the recruitment and advancement of women. If there were no longer champions for gender equality at the highest levels, progress could easily be lost. As one officer explained: “It's prioritized because I'm there. I'm aware of the issue because I'm there and I bring it up.” Another noted that female leaders in her agency had “always been very vocal about gender equality:”

Especially my colleague, she really pushed the envelope, would always speak up in meetings about the imbalance in the agency and at our [station], between women and men, and said we have to do more to make sure it's equal across the board, or fair. ... Diversity is something you always have to look at and make sure you're actively doing it. ... [But] the initiative to stop and look at it usually comes from a woman of some sort in leadership.

FINDING 6. MALE-DOMINATED LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES CAN RESULT IN NON-INCLUSIVE DECISION-MAKING AND LIMITED LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN.

Some officers spoke of male cronyism that excluded women from key decision-making spaces and from speaking out even when present in these spaces. One officer explained:

At my level, there's clear cronyism, where the guys will go [on outings], not invite the females. ... Discussing business during these pleasurable moments. And then they come back and make these decisions, and these conversations happen during these men-only activities. They're making big decisions that affect the [post], and affect me, and I'm unable to be in those discussions."

One officer noted that cronyism was a deterrent for women to seek leadership positions: "If you have ambitions, if you want to grow up at the organization, you might be a little put aside. ... It's not an open thing, but you realize, as the years go by, that you're not going to make it. You're not going to reach the higher position. So, you start giving up."

Female leadership was seen as essential in order to address the types of barriers that might exist for women wanting to advance in customs: "If the commissioner surrounds himself with people that look like him, it's hard for a woman to get in that inner circle. So, if a woman's not in that inner circle, they are tone deaf to things they may be doing that ultimately exclude women or don't encourage them."

In one case, the culture of cronyism in leadership was said to be so severe as to outweigh any mentorship or sponsorship effort, unless it came from men at the top: "You may have all the courses, all the mentors, they're not going to choose you if you're not close [to] or friends of one of the highest positions. You might be good, really good, but they're not going to choose you."

"...conversations happen during these men-only activities. They're making big decisions that affect the [post], and affect me, and I'm unable to be in those discussions."

Where adequate legislation and policies exist—including mechanisms for accountability—the goodwill of individual leaders might not be critical for the agency to nonetheless make progress on gender equality issues. One officer explained: "In the end, because they had to report back, the leadership itself, whether they were happy or not, had to be champions of that particular policy."

In several cases, the March 8th International Women's Day celebration prompted their agency leaders to commit to some action on gender equality: "This year, the Commissioner promised female staff that he would review the condition of women, and redress certain injustices. Their condition of motherhood, nursing, physical conditions." **Policies and reporting systems were seen as useful tools to compel attention and progress on gender equality, whether or not champions exist among leadership.**

FINDING 7. WORK-LIFE BALANCE IS DIFFICULT TO RECONCILE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF ENFORCEMENT AND FIELD OPERATIONS WORK.

“Some of the border posts, they couldn’t take their families there. Living on those particular borders was just difficult ... Didn’t have schools, so you couldn’t take your kids there.”

While work-life balance was seen as important for creating women-friendly workplaces, many agencies were said to struggle to reconcile the needs of their officers with the needs of certain positions, especially those in the field. One officer gave this example:

Because of corruption and anti-corruption policies, you couldn’t keep an officer in place for over two years. You didn’t want them to be over-familiar with people there. That was the hardest policy to implement of all of them. Because it was disruptive to families, to their lives. ... Some women actually left because of this.

For many officers, border posts were seen as generally more challenging environments for women to work and live in. As one officer described:

Some of the border posts, they couldn’t take their families there. Living on those particular borders was just difficult. Very remote, far away from any form of entertainment. The closest town might be 100 kilometers away ... Didn’t have schools, so you couldn’t take your kids there.

Border posts were said to often be predominantly staffed by men and have fewer accountability mechanisms in place, which one officer identified as increasing the risk of sexual harassment and abuse of power: “The boy’s club is still there. It’s still alive and kicking. A lot of the guys band together and protect each other. Give explanations for why something has happened or justify why actions have been taken, when you say this seems extreme for dealing with a [complainant].” To avoid this type of risk, leadership might choose not to post women to border positions—a decision intended to protect, but one that might also limit women’s path to leadership, given the importance of field experience to advancement. As one officer noted: “For me, there was a decision to send women to [the capital], because out here, there’s not enough decentralization. [The capital] has all the facilities, so it’s better than being in the interior. Schools and facilities are in [the capital], so it’s easier for women to make it.”

Several officers noted that inflexibility on the part of their agencies contributed to their own decisions not to pursue higher leadership positions. One officer explained: “I made the conscious decision to end here; I’m not going to the next level. ... You’re expected to be on 24/7; it’s very personality-driven. It comes down to what kind of support you have at home.” Flexibility was often said to be dependent on individual managers, rather than enacted as a broad policy that might protect all workers, male or female. One officer noted: “As they can’t offer this flexibility to every officer, usually they’re not flexible. If you decide to stay with your family, you can no longer stay in a higher position.” Stories were told of supervisors not allowing women to take time to pump milk so they could feed their babies, and women who took medical leave to be with a sick child in the hospital had the time taken out of their vacation days instead of sick leave. Even where policies might exist for women to take time off during pregnancy or after childbirth, this was seen as a risky thing to do in some places. One officer explained:

The job doesn't significantly ... support women in law enforcement positions to be able to manage those normal human rights or family aspects, and still be able to come back and not lose time because they were out for four months, and not lose credibility in the position. There's an unconscious bias that if you have kids, or just had a kid, you will want more kids, so you can't take on responsibility because you'll be out with kids or being pregnant.

However, several customs agencies were seen as models for providing strong policies and infrastructure in support of parents, both women and men. One officer noted that she could take up to a year of maternity leave, with 80 percent of her salary after the eighth month. At one point, she recalled, childcare had been provided for employees. Another officer described a one-time leave option for federal government employees: up to five years leave without pay to care for young children, with a guaranteed federal government position at the same level as when they left. Another officer noted that her agency provided six months of maternity leave.

FINDING 8. SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE OF POWER ARE A REAL RISK, AND REPORTING SYSTEMS ARE INSUFFICIENT.

“In [our] culture, these are things women cannot talk about. They feel that if they speak of it, they will be scorned by others.”

Many of the respondents who had worked for customs for many years acknowledged improvements in the work environment for women; however, sexual harassment and other forms of abuse of power were still seen as a real risk, especially in field positions or in countries with patriarchal social and gender norms. Officers told stories of coercive relationships and unwanted romantic pursuits. Officers who had themselves experienced harassment, in some cases, had confronted their harasser; in other cases, they used official reporting mechanisms but suffered negative repercussions. One officer recounted: “I heard some guys talking about what they had done over the weekend to their wives and girlfriends and told my boss it was crude and didn't have a place in the workplace. I was told that if the heat was too hot, I should get out of the kitchen.”

When cases of sexual harassment were brought forward, officers with management duties noted that there were formal processes in place, in which an investigation might take place. Managers might give offenders a “cease and desist” warning, might move the offender or complainant to another unit, or might terminate the employment of the offender. Several officers noted that they had whistleblower legislation, and some had anonymous tip lines or email addresses.

However, reporting was not seen as a good option for many women, as one officer explained: “If you speak up for yourself, you become one of those [women] — are you going to file? If you become associated with filing, no one will touch you. It has career implications.” Another officer admitted: “I regretted reporting it, very much so. Because the negatives I got back haunted me not just then, but later on when I became a supervisor.” Many officers speculated that sexual harassment was happening under the radar, as one noted: “For the most part, women are afraid to complain, because they will suffer negative consequences at work. These are situations that are talked about in the hallways. In [our] culture, these are things women cannot talk about. They feel that if they speak of it, they will be scorned by others.”

FINDING 9. UNCONTROLLED ENVIRONMENTS POSE HEIGHTENED SAFETY RISKS, AS DO MILITARIZED CUSTOMS ENVIRONMENTS.

Officers as a whole felt physically safe in their places of work, notably those working in airports and ports. As one officer explained: “In an airport environment, you’re surrounded by officers from customs and immigration that can come and help you. I never felt not supported in an airport environment.” Some locations might be more insecure than others, such as warehouses or baggage areas, which were seen as outside the controlled environment. In these environments, one officer noted that they generally go two officers at a time.



Brazilian customs agents inspecting containers 2019

BUSINESS INSIDER

Militarized customs agencies, in which officers might have military training or backgrounds and carry weapons, seemed to be associated with higher risks of harassment and increased impunity. In militaristic sub-cultures, which might be created in field offices or on enforcement teams, certain forms of masculinity might be

valued over others, and over traits associated with femininity—such as the use of force, toughness, hierarchy vs. cooperation, transparency, and partnership building. Both women and men in these sub-cultures might find it more uncomfortable to challenge the status quo or report incidents. As one officer explained, this extended to requests for work-life balance: “We don’t easily get authorization to see our families. As a paramilitary group, there’s a military understanding. We can’t say we don’t want to go here or there. It’s seen as an indiscipline, not wanting to obey orders. If we ask you to leave, you leave, we don’t ask your opinion.”

FINDING 10: BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE FOR WOMEN IS GENERALLY IN PLACE, AND AGENCIES ARE BEGINNING TO CONSIDER THE NEEDS OF PREGNANT AND BREASTFEEDING OFFICERS.

Most officers reported that their agencies had the basic infrastructure in place for the privacy and security needs of women, such as separate restrooms and changing rooms; however, this was not necessarily the case in all locations—and, in particular, in field offices—and many had not yet put in place infrastructure for the specific needs of pregnant and breastfeeding officers. While these were seen as helpful, they were not tied specifically to retention issues, as many felt that women were simply taking leave and not coming to work during these periods. As one officer explains: “For women who are nursing, ... it’s rare to find; you will not find them in administrations. It’s extremely rare. So, customs

doesn't do much on that." Most agencies did not provide access to menstrual hygiene products, and this was seen as a difficult issue to champion, as one officer recounted: "As for access to menstrual products, we don't have that. It was mentioned some time ago, but something stopped it. People felt it was a little strange. I wanted to take that discussion further, but I couldn't do it at the time." However, in a few countries, national policies requiring lactation rooms prompted changes, and these were now available in many sites, with refrigerators to store women's breast milk. These policies and structures allow women to make the decisions about how and when they want to return to work after having a child, rather than having that decision made for them out of lack of support.

FINDING 11. EVERYDAY SEXISM IS COMMON.

"People would say to your face that men are better customs officers. That women get pregnant, and you'll lose hours when they're gone. They get married and ... want to be sent to a post that is family-friendly."

Beyond the physical infrastructure, most officers reported that their work environments felt comfortable and that they worked with colleagues who were respectful. However, many officers also recounted incidents of "everyday sexism"—sexism that is seen as so common that it is almost not recognized as such—ranging from dismissible comments and insensitivities to discrimination that could impact their ability to do their jobs. Often, incidents revealed gendered beliefs about the roles and responsibilities expected of women versus men, as one officer recalled: "The culture was ... more like the uniformed forces. Very military from their outlook, and so their expectation is, if we're bumping into women, they're probably out dealing with administrative work. ... Not really the guys out there doing stuff." In other instances, male leaders might call meetings during times when they could rely on their spouses to take care of their children, but where women might not have that same support at home, as one officer recalled: "We had a meeting once that ran late. All the gentlemen wanted to call home and let their wives know they were coming home late. And one woman sighed: 'I wish I had a wife!' For them, they wanted to continue with the meeting. And we thought, we have to get home and we can do this tomorrow!"

Sometimes, bias was overt, as one officer described: "People would say to your face that men are better customs officers. That women get pregnant, and you'll lose hours when they're gone. They get married and start becoming a problem and want to be sent to a post that is family friendly. ... People will have an outright bias." At the other end of the spectrum, biases could lead to discrimination in access to information or the ability to take part in crucial decision-making, as one officer recalled:

"When you go to meetings ... you may be the only woman at the table. I've been in meetings where the [supervisor] will go around the table and ask: 'What do you think? What do you think?' And will skip over me. And then he's done. I'm thinking, 'Hey, [am I invisible] today?'"

These incidents—also called micro-aggressions—can impact a female officer's sense of belonging and confidence. As one officer recounted, after an incident she would need to mentally remind herself of her accomplishments, skills, and value. Another officer noted the impact on feelings of belonging: "You're told over and over you're part of the team. And then, as it turns out, the team rejects you. And this whole time you think you're a part of the team."

FINDING 12. OFFICERS ARE RARELY TRAINED TO UNDERSTAND BIASES AND THEIR IMPACT ON CUSTOMS WORK.

The complexity of customs and border agency work requires long-term, intensive training, described by many officers as up to a year-long process taking place in customs academies as well as on-site—often followed by regular to semi-regular online or in-person training on changes in customs-related policies or regulations, or to address particular issues. Where mandatory trainings touched on the subject of gender, it was said to be usually in the context of ethics and compliance. Often, gender-related trainings were provided by human resources staff, in the form of sessions on the code of conduct or management-related efforts such as the recruitment and retention of female officers. As one officer noted:

Because we have a combination of male and female staff, we were really concerned; because for some time there were allegations of sexual harassment against our female staff and we didn't want any of that. So, we have also a code of conduct they were trained on.

Many officers indicated that there was no gender-related training at all for customs officers. In a couple cases, this was tied either to the assumption that gender equality was no longer a problem in society or that it was a matter of common courtesy, and thus not needed:

There is a policy related to [gender], but people think it's so normal and it should be like being polite. It's so normal we shouldn't discuss. You might use clothes, it would be absurd to say you cannot be naked, you have to put clothes. It's the same. They're not going to train you on that because it's not allowed.

Rarely were trainings said to cover the importance of understanding gender biases or the ways in which gendered beliefs and stereotypes can impact the work of customs officers and those they interact with, including traders and other customs officers. Where officers indicated that gender training took place, it was mandated in response to national and sometimes customs-specific policies on gender equality: “We have courses on [gender]



Malaysian customs department taking corruption-free pledge, 2017

NEW STRAIGHTS TIMES

when we run the Customs Academy, and it's a part of our Gender Equality and Diversity policy that trainings have to take place.” Another respondent described hiring a gender expert to provide training to staff, in response to the passing of national gender equality legislation. However, gender trainings that

were offered were not necessarily made relevant to the everyday work of customs officers: “In trainings from the customs office, we had trainings on gender. ... I sought out seminars and trainings on this. There was no particular links made to customs work. These were trainings that were proposed, but without a link with our work.”

And training on gender did not always reach those that could have a large impact on gender equality in the workplace: “They always skip leadership and focus on lower levels. But in the meantime, this middle management is pervasively toxic and causing damage. That middle layer makes a lot of decisions, and that’s where education really needs to happen.” Some female officers had the opportunity to attend women’s leadership trainings, which were said to provide a sense of community and shared identity. As one respondent described: “It’s helped me understand the solidarity that can exist between women, that one woman can be a lever for other women. If we look at it from this angle, we can help each other instead of being in conflict with each other.”

RECOMMENDATIONS: WEEGE WITHIN CUSTOMS

RECOMMENDATION I: USE BEHAVIORAL DESIGN LEARNINGS TO INCREASE THE HIRING, RETENTION, AND PROMOTION OF FEMALE STAFF.

Behavioral design learnings provide insights into possible strategies to address gender-based biases and stereotypes in hiring and staff management, and to promote female empowerment and advancement.

ANONYMIZE JOB APPLICATIONS⁵⁶

When human resources staff remove identifying information from applications for jobs—such as names, pronouns, and sometimes even school names—it helps remove the possibility of gender and race-related biases by the reviewing team and helps increase the number of women and minorities hired to positions.⁵⁷ This strategy is particularly useful to prevent the resentment and delegitimization that might occur if women were felt to be hired to fill a quota.

DE-BIAS MESSAGES AND IMAGES⁵⁸

De-biasing messages and images can be helpful to counteract stereotypes associated with customs and border work, especially the idea that it is “for men.” This means showing images of women from different backgrounds in recruitment materials, highlighting successful female customs and border agents, and using both masculine and feminine language in job advertisements. Words like “assertive,” “ambitious,” “individualistic,” and “leader” are often unconsciously associated with men, while words

⁵⁶ Linos, E. (2018), More than public service: A field experiment on job advertisements and diversity in the police, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 28(1), 67-85.

⁵⁷ Johnson, S. K., and Kirk, J. F. (2020), Dual-anonymization yields promising results for reducing gender bias: A naturalistic field experiment of applications for Hubble Space Telescope time, *Publications of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific* 132(1009), 034503.

⁵⁸ Del Carpio, L., and Guadalupe, M. (2019), More women in tech? Evidence from a field experiment addressing social identity ([CEPR Discussion Paper No. DPI 3234](#)).

like “support,” “committed,” “interpersonal,” and “compassionate” tend to be associated with women.⁵⁹ Use a full range of gendered words in recruiting language, rather than typically masculine terms.⁶⁰

APPEAL TO BOTH PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION AND PERSONAL BENEFIT⁶¹

A recent study of police force recruitment strategies found that three times more women applied to positions when the recruitment messaging focused on the personal benefits they might gain from the job—either the challenge involved or the career benefits—than when they simply appealed to candidates’ public service motivation (“for the greater good”). This aligns with findings about women’s retention and the appeal of customs as a challenging, complex, diverse, and public-service oriented career.

INSTITUTE PAY TRANSPARENCY⁶²

Pay transparency has been seen to reduce gaps in salaries between women and men, which can contribute to the retention of female staff. Pay transparency often means that salaries for all staff are readily available and published online. This practice could also serve as a motivating factor for potential female recruits.⁶³

REVIEW CRITERIA FOR PROMOTION⁶⁴

Masculine language and norms may inadvertently be featured in criteria for promotion. Customs and border managers should carefully review criteria for promotion to ensure that they include activities that might be seen culturally as more feminine, such as working with community groups, making referrals to social services, or promoting collaborative problem solving.

EQUITABLY ASSIGN NON-ESSENTIAL TASKS⁶⁵

Research has found that when women and men are working together in mixed-sex environments, women volunteer twice as often as men for assignments that are not directly tied to promotions—especially when it is clear that no one else will do the job. Women who spend more time on volunteer assignments are likely to spend less time on work leading to promotion. Customs and border managers

⁵⁹ Gaucher, D., Friesen, J., and Key, A. C. (2011), Evidence that gendered wording in job advertisements exists and sustains gender inequality, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101(1), 109-128.

⁶⁰ <https://v4w.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-VFW-Communications-and-Gender-Checklist-fv.pdf>

⁶¹ Linos, E. (2018), More than public service: A field experiment on job advertisements and diversity in the police, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 28(1), 67-85.

⁶² Baker, M., Halberstam, Y., Kroft, K., Mas, A., and Messacar, D. (2019), Pay transparency and the gender gap (National Bureau of Economic Research, Paper No. w25834).

⁶³ <https://www.equalpayinternationalcoalition.org/>

⁶⁴ Gaucher, et al. (2011),

⁶⁵ Vesterlund L., Babcock, L., and Weingart, L. (2013), Breaking the glass ceiling with 'No': Gender differences in declining requests for non-promotable tasks (Carnegie Mellon Working Paper, Pittsburgh, PA).

should assign “non-essential” work equitably to both women and men, rather than allow staff to volunteer themselves.

IMPLEMENT SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVES⁶⁶

Sponsorship within an agency—when a senior staff member uses their knowledge and networks to help advance the career of a “protégé”—has been studied as a way to promote women’s career advancement. Research suggests that sponsorship helps increase women’s confidence, compensation, and willingness to compete for positions. However, male sponsors tend to have a greater positive impact than female sponsors on the careers of women; and when both men and women are part of a sponsorship program, men tend to benefit disproportionately.⁶⁷ Customs and border managers wanting to test a sponsorship program may want to consider limiting it to women, while making sure that both men and women serve as sponsors.

RECOMMENDATION 2: BUILD TARGETED SYSTEMS OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PROGRESS.

Several gender-related systems of accountability are important to ensure that customs and border agencies are not only creating and sustaining woman-friendly and inclusive workplaces but are also making progress on promoting women’s economic empowerment and gender equality.

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PROGRESS ON GENDER EQUALITY

Building an accountability system for progress on gender equality requires an initial commitment to gender equality goals, as expressed in a Gender Action Plan or a Gender Strategy, endorsed by senior leadership. Direction for the Gender Action Plan most often comes from the implementation of a Gender Analysis or Gender Audit, to identify needs and gaps organizationally and across service areas. The Gender Action Plan or Strategy should include specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound indicators that will show not only if you have accomplished the tasks you set out to accomplish, but also to what extent those actions had the impact that you hoped to achieve. Goals and actions in the Gender Action Plan or Strategy should be assigned to individuals responsible for carrying them out and for reporting regularly on progress to senior leadership. Work on gender equality is never easy, and it does not progress in a straight line. Difficulties and resistance should prompt reflection, evaluation, and re-direction. Successes should be celebrated and rewarded.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE OF POWER

Creating an environment in which all customs and border staff feel equally safe, protected, and valued requires a system of action and accountability to prevent and respond to incidents of abuse of power and sexual harassment. Actions to prevent abuse of power and sexual harassment include regular trainings, as well as clear, communicated, and enforced consequences for those who harass and aggress.

⁶⁶ Hewlett, S. A., Peraino, K., Sherbin, L., and Sumberg, K. (2010), *The sponsor effect: Breaking through the last glass ceiling*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review.

⁶⁷ Baldiga, N. R., and Coffman, K. B. (2018), Laboratory evidence on the effects of sponsorship on the competitive preferences of men and women, *Management Science* 64(2), 888-901.

Bystander intervention trainings seem to have some of the best results.⁶⁸ Customs and border leadership should regularly make strong public statements against sexual harassment and abuse of power, in support of victims both within their agencies and among those they encounter at the border. Having a balanced sex-ratio across the agency, with women in key decision-making positions, also helps reduce the prevalence of sexual harassment.⁶⁹ Third-party reporting and auditing systems are best, where possible, as human resources departments are often structurally incentivized to protect the organization over the individual. Reporting mechanisms should be confidential and allow for anonymous complaints. Data on the number and type of complaints received at the border should be tracked, publicly reported, and analyzed for ways in which the agency can create safer interactions and spaces.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO WOMEN TRADERS

Remaining accountable to the goal of women's economic empowerment and gender equality in customs and border services requires regular communication with women traders as well as with women in the logistics and customs brokers sectors. This could take the form of bi-yearly or yearly stakeholder meetings with women's trade organizations, women's business associations, and other private and public sector trade groups dedicated to women's economic empowerment and gender equality, notably those located in communities along the border. A point desk with reporting responsibilities to senior leadership should be tasked with maintaining relationships and contacts with women's groups. Strengthening trust and communication with women's groups could be promoted through capacity-building initiatives for customs and border staff, for example through gender trainings or workshops on women and trade.

RECOMMENDATION 3: REGULARLY PROVIDE CUSTOMS AND BORDER OFFICERS WITH WELL-DESIGNED TRAININGS ON GENDER BIAS, EQUALITY, AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT.

Gender-related trainings and workshops are important to enable customs and border agency staff to understand the different issues faced by the men, women, and non-binary people crossing their border every day, as well as the issues faced by staff internally that may be exacerbated in male-dominated workplaces. These trainings might include a Gender in Customs introductory training for all new hires, as well as tailored gender courses on gender integration in the work of particular departments and positions, or on particular issues such as cross-border sex trafficking and gender-based violence. Workshops on sexual harassment and abuse of power are sometimes considered gender trainings, given their relevance to harmful forms of masculinity across cultures and gendered interactions between men, women, and non-binary people.

A range of gender-related trainings can be useful for increasing the effectiveness and performance of customs and border officers and creating safe and women-friendly workplaces and services.

⁶⁸ The University of New Hampshire showcases an initiative called "Bringing in the Bystander."
<https://www.unh.edu/research/prevention-innovations-research-center/bringing-bystander>

⁶⁹ Miller, C. (2017), Sexual harassment training doesn't work. But some things do. *New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/11/upshot/sexual-harassment-workplace-prevention-effective.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FSexual%20Harassment>

GENDER 101 TRAINING⁷⁰

A Gender 101 training should be mandatory for all new hires. The WCO online gender training, available to member customs administrations, is a good example of relevant customs-oriented Gender 101 training. It includes scenario-based modules addressing human resources issues such as sexual harassment, increased hiring of female staff, and family-friendly benefits; and it covers external customs policies relating to stakeholder engagement, theft and safety issues, inclusive communication, and the bureaucratic burdens that disproportionately impact women. It also includes a helpful introduction to “gender mainstreaming,” *i.e.*, implementing gender equality actions and improvements across an organization’s structures, systems, policies, and processes.

GENDERED ISSUES IN CUSTOMS AND BORDER TRAINING

Building on Gender 101 training, customs administrations should invest in tailored training to improve customs and border officials’ skills and knowledge on specific gender-related issues such as sex trafficking and gender-based violence. A note of caution: a recent study of the Liberian National Police found that simply increasing female staff did not affect the force’s ability to identify gender-based violence.⁷¹ Rather, competence and training made the difference, for both men and women. Recognizing and addressing gender issues is not necessarily an innate capacity—it is a learned skill that requires attention, training, and experience.

GENDER EQUALITY AND BIAS REDUCTION TRAINING⁷²

A recent study of gender equality and bias reduction training found that using a habit-breaking approach that views bias as a deeply-ingrained habit could significantly increase participants’ awareness of any bias they may hold, enhancing their internal and external motivation to promote gender equity, their confidence in their ability to promote gender equity, and their expectations of beneficial outcomes from promoting gender equity. One workshop⁷³ first introduced evidence on stereotype-based gender biases and their negative impacts, followed by three habit-changing modules: 1) research on the origins of bias as a deeply ingrained habit; 2) bias “literacy,” describing expectancy bias, prescriptive gender norms, occupational role congruity, redefining credentials, stereotype priming, and stereotype threat; and 3) five evidence-based behavioral strategies to overcome gender bias, including stereotype replacement, positive counter stereotype imaging, perspective taking, individuation, and increasing contact with counter-stereotypic examples.

⁷⁰ World Customs Organization Online Gender Training, <https://clikc.wcoomd.org>

⁷¹ Karim, S., Gilligan, M. J., Blair, R., Beardsley, K. (2018), International gender balancing reforms in post-conflict countries: Lab-in-the-field evidence from the Liberian National Police, *International Studies Quarterly* 62(3), 618–631.

⁷² Carnes, M., Devine, P. G., Manwell, L. B., Byars-Winston, A., Fine, E., Ford, C. E., Forscher, P., Isaac, C., Kaatz, A., Magua, W., Palta, M., and Sheridan, J. (2015), The effect of an intervention to break the gender bias habit for faculty at one institution: A cluster randomized, controlled trial, *Academic Medicine* 90(2), 221-230.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

SEXUAL HARASSMENT PREVENTION AND BYSTANDER INTERVENTION TRAINING⁷⁴

Recent studies on sexual harassment prevention trainings indicate that many such trainings do not result in decreased sexual harassment, and, in some cases, they can in fact increase incidents of harassment and abuse of power against women. One type of training that has been shown to produce helpful changes in behavior in workplaces is *bystander intervention training*.⁷⁵ One of the most rigorously studied programs included single-sex group discussions and active learning exercises including role-playing opportunities.⁷⁶

RECOMMENDATION 4: INVEST IN A STRONG AND INTEGRATED GENDER ARCHITECTURE.

“Gender architecture” refers to the mutually reinforcing policies, structures, systems, and positions that support the work of closing gender gaps, creating safe and inclusive workspaces, and promoting the advancement of women. A strong gender architecture would be based on a high-level gender equality and female empowerment strategy, with the following components:

- Leadership that consistently and publicly supports gender equality and is held accountable for progress
- A dedicated Gender Equality and Inclusion office and a high-level advisor, ideally with gender focal points within each department
- Monitoring and evaluation systems, with indicators that measure real change
- A reward process that regularly acknowledges and rewards staff efforts to address gender equality issues
- Human resource policies that do not penalize women or men for parenting and care responsibilities
- Regular, relevant, and tailored gender trainings that allow staff to see the importance of gender in their work and to make practical changes
- Concrete sexual harassment and abuse of power training, and third-party reporting systems with consequences for offenders
- Explicit initiatives to procure from female-owned and -managed businesses
- Systematic capacity-building efforts and dialogue with organizations of women traders, to maintain accountability to their needs and experiences

⁷⁴ Dobbin, F., and Kalev, A. (2020), Why Sexual Harassment Programs Backfire. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2020/05/confronting-sexual-harassment>

⁷⁵ Bringing in the Bystander: <https://www.unh.edu/research/prevention-innovations-research-center/bringing-bystander>

⁷⁶ Moynihan, M. M., Banyard, V. L., Cares, A. C., Potter, S. J., Williams, L. M., and Stapleton, J. G. (2015), Encouraging responses in sexual and relationship violence prevention: What program effects remain 1 year later? *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 30(1), 110–132.

Most customs and border administrations have opaque internal systems and processes, which are not made available to the public online. However, a few public examples exist of customs agencies that have prioritized gender equality in their policies, structures, and processes.

ICELAND: EQUAL PAY CERTIFICATION⁷⁷

In 2016, Iceland’s Directorate of Customs (Iceland Customs) implemented the country’s Standard IST 85:2012–Equal Pay Standard to ensure that their staff, regardless of gender, were paid equal wages and given equal employment benefits for the same jobs or equivalent jobs. They implemented the standards with a technical committee that included the Centre for Gender Equality and the Icelandic Association of Women Entrepreneurs. The process included assessing its current pay policies, classifying jobs, conducting wage research based on the classifications, and formalizing decision-making processes and policies related to salaries. The certification process also included a monitoring and accountability system that required Iceland Customs to create an equality and equal pay strategy, to develop an equal rights implementation plan, and to issue an annual report on gender equality issues—produced by an equal rights officer—that is made accessible to all customs staff. Iceland Customs was the first organization to be certified according to the Equal Pay Standard, and it reported that this initiative improved transparency, predictability, and organizational culture.⁷⁸



Iceland’s Equal Pay Symbol

UNITED STATES: PRIVACY AND DIVERSITY OFFICE⁷⁹

The U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency (CBP) has created an office of Privacy and Diversity whose Executive Director reports to the Commissioner—a direct line of accountability to senior leadership to ensure that diversity issues are considered at the highest level. Policies related to gender equality are clearly stated and posted on the agency website; simple instructions are provided for staff (and others interacting with the CBP) to file civil rights or civil liberties complaints with either the CBP or the Department of Homeland Security. Alternative methods to file complaints are provided, including email, phone, fax, package/overnight delivery, and U.S. postal mail. Complaints are accepted in all languages, and forms are provided in English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese. The website includes a question and answer page that addresses key questions about diversity, inclusion, and complaints procedures, in simple and clear language. The agency also publishes online *quarterly reports* of equal employment complaints that have

⁷⁷ Regulation No. 1030 of 13 November 2017 on the certification of equal pay systems of companies and institutions according to the ÍST 85 Standard: https://www.government.is/library/04-Legislation/Regulation_CertificatinOfEqualPaySytems_25012018.pdf

⁷⁸ WCO News (n.d.), Gender equality through equal pay: Iceland Customs takes the lead. <https://mag.wcoomd.org/magazine/wco-news-83/gender-equality-through-equal-pay-iceland-customs-takes-the-lead/>

⁷⁹ CBP (n.d.), Equal Employment Opportunity/Diversity. <https://www.cbp.gov/about/eeo-diversity>

been filed against them, as well as *annual reports* assessing CBP efforts to prevent, detect, and respond to sexual abuse in its holding facilities.

CANADA: GENDER-BASED PLUS (GBA+) PROCESS⁸⁰



Canada's "GBA+" Logo

The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) endorsed a policy in 2019 to incorporate Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) as an integral part of its policies, programs, and initiatives, in order to understand the impacts of gender and diversity on their work and to help inform decision-making. GBA+ is an analytical process used to assess how diverse groups of women, men, and non-binary people may experience policies, programs, and initiatives.

To implement the process, the CBSA named a GBA+ Champion for the agency, created a GBA+ Responsibility Center to provide resources and guidance, and issues routine reports to the Department for Women and Gender Equality on its GBA+ activities. The analysis resulted in changes to recruitment processes for border service officers, as well as an employment equity targeted selection process for management positions, to increase the representation of women and other groups.⁸¹

Although having a strong and transparent gender architecture does not guarantee that workplace culture will reflect gender equality values and priorities, it is a key element that allows important stakeholders, such as women traders, to more easily engage and communicate their priorities and experiences.

TABLE 3. VIABLE INTERVENTIONS TO EMPOWER WOMEN IN CUSTOMS

INTERVENTION	MEASURES	IMPLEMENTATION HORIZON*
Hiring, retaining, and promoting female staff	Anonymize applications	Medium to long term
	De-bias messages and images	Medium to long term
	Appeal to both public service motivation and personal benefit	Short term
	Institute pay transparency	Long term
	Review criteria for promotion	Short term
	Equitably assign non-essential tasks	Medium to long term
	Implement sponsorship initiatives	Medium to long term

⁸⁰ CBSA, 2019-20 Departmental Plan Supplementary Information Tables. <https://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/agency-agence/reports-rapports/rpp/2019-2020/subprog-sousprog-eng.html#a2>

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Systems of accountability	Conduct Gender Audit or Needs Analysis	Short term	
	Develop Gender Action Plan	Medium term	
	Conduct sexual harassment and bystander intervention training	Short term and ongoing	
	Issue public statements of support and commitment by leadership	Short term and ongoing	
	Take steps to create a gender-balanced staff	Medium to long term	
	Take steps to promote more women to key decision-making positions	Medium to long term	
	Put in place a third-party reporting and audit system for incidents of sexual harassment and abuse of power	Medium to long term	
	Regularly track, evaluate, and publish data on sexual harassment and abuse of power incidents	Medium to long term	
	Conduct in-depth research, in partnership with women's groups, on women traders' experiences at the border	Medium to long term	
	Hold regular stakeholder consultations with women traders and women in the trade value chain	Medium to long term	
Partner with women's groups on joint gender trainings	Medium to long term		
Gender trainings	Implement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sexual harassment prevention and bystander intervention training – Gender 101 training – Gender equality and bias reduction training – Gendered issues in customs and border training 	Short term and ongoing	
	Gender architecture	Develop an organizational gender equality and female empowerment policy or strategy	Medium to long term
		Establish a gender equality and diversity office	Long term
		Hire gender equality and diversity staff: a high-level advisor, plus departmental gender focal points	Long term
		Establish monitoring and evaluation system for progress on closing gender gaps and gender-sensitive indicators	Long term and ongoing
Create reward process for staff efforts to address gender equality issues	Long term and ongoing		
Develop human resource policies for family and caregiving needs	Medium to long term		
Hold regular, relevant, and tailored gender trainings	Short term and ongoing		
Procure from female-owned and -managed businesses	Long term and ongoing		
Initiate systematic capacity-building and dialogue activities with women traders and groups	Long term and ongoing		

* Short term: within 6 months; Medium term: 6-12 months; Long term: 12-24 months

KEY WEEGE DATA GAPS

Significant research exists on women cross-border traders in Africa, including on the barriers they face in accessing and participating in formal trade systems and in benefiting from trade liberalization. However, there is limited data on women traders in Asia and even less data for the Americas. There is similarly limited data on women's involvement in providing trade facilitation and logistics services, such as transport, warehousing, freight forwarding, and customs clearance. There is also a need for disaggregated data on women in trade. Such data could serve as a guide for policy makers when negotiating free trade agreements and setting domestic trade policies agenda.

Outside the WCO gender surveys, very little data is publicly available on how, and to what degree, customs and border agencies mainstream attention to women's economic empowerment and gender equality in their services, operations, and personnel management. A few customs and border agency websites publish sex-disaggregated personnel information;⁸² on websites showing their organizational charts and key personnel descriptions, gender breakdown in leadership can be determined. For a few customs and border agencies, information on accountability systems also exists online, including public reporting on sexual harassment incidents and other complaints—where mandated by domestic legislation, such as the United States' 2002 [No Fear Act](#).

The present report represents one of the first attempts, outside of the WCO surveys, to understand gender mainstreaming globally in customs and border agencies, beyond the numbers—that is, in organizational culture, systems, policies, and practice.

Another important gap in research relates closely to women's economic empowerment and gender equality in customs and border agencies. This is the study of cultural concepts of masculinities, and their impact on gender relations at work and on the border. Organizational efforts to empower women cannot succeed without involving men. Understanding the concepts of masculinities that exist within customs and border agencies can help agencies to develop effective ways to promote healthy and constructive interactions and collaborations between the men, women, and non-binary people on staff, in ways that will benefit women customs officials as well as women traders.

Finally, global attention to race inequities has highlighted the persisting need for intersectional research, that is, research that examines the ways in which our varying identities, backgrounds, and bodies can provide intersecting advantages or disadvantages. Future research might look at the ways in which gender interacts with race, socioeconomic status, age, disability, physical appearance, and other factors to impact the work of customs and interactions with women traders.

⁸² For example, the French Douane uses an [Open Data platform](#) to publicize the sex-disaggregated results of the national tests used for hiring in customs work.

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ANNEX II: LITERATURE REVIEW WORKSHEET

RESEARCH CATEGORY	FINDINGS	POTENTIAL QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING INTERVIEWS
Gender-balanced workforce	In a largely male-dominated industry, eastern and southern Africa stand out, as women make up most of the workforce of customs and border agencies (58.5 percent).	What difference does it make to WEEGE to have a majority-female customs and border agency staff?
Gender policies	Of the 57 members of the WCO who responded to the 2016 Gender Survey, 37 percent reported that they had developed an action plan for gender equality in their administration.	What do gender action plans currently look like in customs and border agencies? Do they meet international best practice or minimum standards?
Organizational culture	U.S. CBP has one of the most transparent and thorough accountability structures to prevent and report on discrimination, sexual harassment, and ethics violations by and against CBP staff.	To what extent does the presence of a highly visible accountability structure – complaint mechanisms and regular public reports – make a difference for women in customs processes? To what extent does it impact organizational culture?
Masculinities	Sexual harassment and abuse of power by male customs and border officers are prevalent behaviors that violate the rights and dignity of women traders and act as a deterrent to their pursuit of cross-border trade.	What forms of masculinity (both positive/healthy and negative/unhealthy) are enacted in customs and border agencies, and especially in those that are male dominated?
Customs automation	Automation has been widely accepted as a trade facilitation and anti-corruption measure	What is the level of automation, trade simplification and harmonization, and its impact on women's cross-border trade?
Dissemination of trade information and customs outreach	Women small-scale cross-border traders do not have meaningful access to customs information.	To what extent is the information disseminated by customs reaching women traders?
Women traders	Customs border officials sometimes are unhelpful to women small-scale cross-border traders in some African countries, either deliberately or because they lack the necessary knowledge and/or information.	To what extent are customs officials equally professional with male, female, and non-binary traders, and helpful in explaining rules and procedures? To what extent do customs officials understand how to use automation and know the rules and procedures?
International donor community	The international donor community has been providing technical assistance in customs modernization to some countries. Some measures, e.g., implementing Simplified Trade Regimes have had mixed results.	To what extent have international donors been contributing to countries' modernization and trade facilitation, and to what extent are countries receptive to such assistance? What donor-funded trade facilitation measures have had the most impact?

ANNEX III: LIST OF RESOURCES

AGENCY	RESOURCE
DCAF Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance	Border Management and Gender Tool
European Parliament	Gender Equality in Trade Agreement Study 2016
Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation	The Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) Through a Gender Lens 2020
Harvard Kennedy School	Gender Action Portal
UN- International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women	SSR Toolkit: Border Management and Gender 2008
UNCTAD	Trade and Gender Toolbox (Effect of partnership between EU and East African Community on Kenyan women) 2017
WCO	Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool (GEOAT)
WTO	Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment 2017
WB	Women, Business, and the Law 2020
World Bank International Trade Department	Gender Dimensions of Trade Facilitation and Logistics: A Guidance Note 2012

ANNEX IV: LIST OF INTERVIEWS

To protect the privacy and anonymity of interviewees, the following list includes only the categories in which the interviewees fall and how many were conducted in each category. Interviews took place in June and early July 2020.

Customs officers and senior managers

1. Bangladesh Customs (1)
2. Brazil Customs (1)
3. Canada Border Services Agency (1)
4. Iceland Revenue and Customs (1)
5. Serbia Customs (1)
6. Togo Customs (2)
7. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (6)
8. Zimbabwe Customs (1)

Customs brokers

9. Organization for Women in International Trade
10. National Federation of Customs Brokers
11. The Crowley Company
12. The Suarez Firm

Women traders

13. Malawi (3)
14. Nigeria (1)
15. Zimbabwe (1)

Researchers

16. CUTS International
17. Indian Council for Research

Support Organizations

18. UNCTAD (2)
19. WB
20. WCO
21. WTO

ANNEX V: DESIGN, METHODS, AND LIMITATIONS

The assessment uses a mixed-method approach, based on primary and secondary information. A comprehensive desk review covered a broad range of secondary data, including: international, regional, and national reports; reports, evaluations, and handbooks from a broad cross-section of donors, multinational agencies, trade associations, women’s organizations, and private sector organizations; gender literature, sociological research, and psychological studies; national customs and border agency services, operations, and personnel management policies and procedures related to WEEGE (as available online); and relevant research from universities and research institutions. A full list of literature reviewed can be found in Annex I: Bibliography. Annex II: Literature Review Worksheet summarizes the key findings of the desk review by research category and outlines potential questions to explore during the interviews.

The authors collected primary data through remote interviews with individuals in four main categories: women traders and customs brokers; customs and border officials; women’s trade associations and groups; and institutions involved in the support and regulation of global trade. A complete list of interviews can be found in Annex IV: List of Interviews. Though literature reviewed primarily covered research from African and North American countries, in-depth interviews covered a broader geographic scope, across Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. Purposive sampling⁸³ was used to identify participants for interviews, based on their experience related to customs and border agency functions and women’s cross-border trade, as well as their capacity to positively influence women’s economic empowerment and gender equality in trade. USAID provided contact information for many of the interviews. Interviews consisted of semi-structured questions, allowing flexibility to explore important unanticipated topics and issues.

The authors were unable to conduct in-person interviews and field observation given the timing of the research, which took place during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Being limited to online video and phone interviews limited the depth of the analysis and the authors’ ability to triangulate their data as thoroughly as they might have hoped. This limitation reduced the authors’ ability to reach women traders from lower socioeconomic groups and, especially, women who lacked access to technology such as cell phones; it also meant that the authors could not carry out visual inspections of various customs and border facilities to assess gendered structural and environmental issues. These gaps are partially addressed and triangulated through a wide review of global, regional, and national reports and analyses. Nevertheless, future research on gender equality in customs and border agencies would benefit from further on-the-ground discussions with a variety of women traders from different backgrounds as well as critical observation of customs and border operations and environments.

⁸³ Purposive sampling is non-probability, non-random sampling in which participants are chosen based on the relevance of their profile to the needs of the study—in this case, to understand the experiences of women traders at the border, and how W3 is promoted in the internal structures and cultures of customs and border agencies.

ANNEX VI: SCOPE OF WORK

USAID Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and Environment (E3) Office of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (GenDev)

Promoting Women’s Economic Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEEGE) in Customs and Border Agency Services, Operations and Personnel Management to Support Women in Trade

I. OBJECTIVE

In today’s interconnected global economy, USAID is concerned with the movement of people, goods, and services across borders. As an emerging economic force, women face particular barriers in participating in the global economy and engaging with customs and border agencies. USAID E3/GenDev seeks to understand if, and how, women’s economic empowerment and gender equality is a) integrated into customs and border agency services, operations and personnel management across various functions; b) how WEEGE gaps in services affect women participating in trade; and c) how process, procedures, infrastructure and systems may need to change to achieve more equitable access, usage and opportunities for women in trade.

To support this objective, E3/GenDev requested that Banyan Global, through its women’s economic empowerment and equality technical assistance (WE3 TA) task order under the Advancing the Agenda of Gender Equality (ADVANTAGE) indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity (IDIQ) contract, conduct a WEEGE assessment and present findings and recommendations.

2. BACKGROUND

The movement of goods, people, and services across borders involves several actors and a complex network of systems. The movement of people may include licit and illicit movements, such as voluntary migration for economic reasons, human trafficking, or forced migration. The movement of goods is perhaps the most common form of international business, with items being shipped or moved across borders, subject to search and customs enforcement. Services that move internationally may include advisory services, e-commerce, and other entrepreneurial activities that may or may not include a physical product. All these movements are subject to customs enforcement, border management and trade policies and regulations of the country of origin, transit, and destination. The complicated networks of logistical operations, legal and regulatory frameworks, and market systems impact businesses that take part in the global marketplace, and impact individuals, specifically women, differently.

Part of women’s ability to participate in the global economy is interacting with global markets, including the movement of goods, people, and services across national and international borders. Recognizing that women account for one-half of the potential human capital in any economy and more than half a billion women have joined the world’s work force over the past 30 years, USAID works with governments around the world to ensure women’s full participation in the economy. USAID E3/GenDev plays a significant role in ensuring women can access markets in an equal manner as men and that their risks associated with global trade are mitigated. However, a greater understanding of

both the global customs and border agency services, operations and personnel management related to WEEGE and the differential impacts on women in trade is needed. Further in-depth research is required to propose evidence-based approaches for USAID's support.

3. METHODOLOGY

The project will include three tasks: a desk review; remote interviews; and the production of a report on WEEGE-related findings and recommendations. Each of these items is described below in further detail. To fulfill these tasks, WE3 TA's assessment questions may include the following:

- I. Do customs and border agency services, operations, and personnel management support WEEGE? How? What are the opportunities for improvement? The following secondary questions may be useful in exploring the primary question further.
 - What is the internal gender architecture of the agencies? Number of women? In what roles? What percent of each role is held by women?
 - Are the agencies perceived by women as a good place to work? Is there a recruiting and hiring strategy to attract female candidates? Is there a supportive and inclusive onboarding process? Is gender, unconscious bias, and code of conduct training incorporated into onboarding processes?
 - Do agencies have flexible policies to meet gendered demands (unpaid care burden, menstrual hygiene management, etc.)?
 - Have customs and border agencies adopted a work environment and culture that promotes WEEGE? Do leaders model and incentivize gender equality and equal opportunity at all levels?
 - Is equal treatment of men and women guaranteed across the country's custom's policies, procedures, and regulations?
 - Are men and women, regardless of the background, treated equally in practice with respect to custom policies, procedures, and regulations?
 - Do customs and border agencies utilize incentives to increase women's participation in trade?
 - Does the customs administration make effective use of technology and address the differentiated impacts of technological reforms in custom procedures on women and men?
 - Are border regulations and procedures implemented consistently between men and women?
 - Is there equal access to and understanding of such regulations and procedures? What support mechanisms (brochures in multiple languages or for illiterate populations; web-based information) does the government provide to ensure the availability of such regulations and procedures?
 - Are men both men and women treated with equal respect and dignity at the border? Are there any safe means (anonymously or online) for women and men to report any wrongdoings (such corruption and harassment) at the border? Are there systems (training, procedures, enforcement, harassment free organizational culture) in place to avoid harassment and intimidation of customs officers, customs officials, or security officers?
 - Is there an effort to make the border a safe place for women? Are female customs officials available to carry out inspections on women traders, when appropriate?

- Do custom's officials and security personnel receive gender-sensitive training and is their behavior monitored? Is appropriate behavior enforced?
 - Is there proper infrastructure (also accessible to the public) at the border for female customs officials - like accommodation, lighting, changing rooms and toilets?
 - Is there an unbiased, non-retaliatory complaints policy and procedure for all suppliers, customers, and third parties with 24/7 access and anonymity of the person making the complaints?
 - Do customs officers provide relevant and updated information on custom policies and procedures to women traders, through various associations of women traders? Through organized training and familiarization workshops on all the custom policies and procedures? Do these trainings and workshops include WEEGE concepts and content?
 - Do customs and border agencies consider gender in the collection or imposition of fees and the planning and execution of services?
2. How do WEEGE gaps in custom and border services affect women participating in trade. Do these services aggravate or alleviate the situation for women?
 3. What are the most viable and impactful WEEGE related evidence-based interventions for customs and border agencies to implement to achieve more equitable access, usage, and opportunities for women in trade?
 4. What are the key WEEGE data gaps related to customs and border agency services, operations, and personnel management?

Desk review report

The desk review should address the research questions and include an overview of WEEGE findings, recommendations, and gaps in customs and border agency services, operations and personnel management and its impact on women in trade. The desk review may include the following:

1. Review of international, regional, and national reports.
2. Review of reports, evaluations, and handbooks from a broad cross section of donors, multinational agencies (UNCTAD, ITC, WTO, UN Women, AfDB, ADB etc.), trade associations, women's organizations, and private sector organizations.
3. Review of feminist and feminist economics literature, sociological research, and psychological studies.
4. Review, where remotely accessible, national customs and border agency services, operations and personnel management policies and procedures related to WEEGE.
5. Review of research from universities and research institutions.

Interviews and interview instruments

Approximately 15-20 remote interviews will supplement the information gathered during the desk review. USAID will provide a list of stakeholders to interview and WE3 TA will develop the interview instruments.

WEEGE Report

Utilizing the information gained from the desk review and interviews, WE3 TA will create a report on Promoting WEEGE in Customs and Border Agency Services, Operations and Personnel Management

to Support Women in Trade of approximately 30 pages in length, not including potential annexes, outlining key findings and recommendations.

The report may include the following sections:

1. **Executive Summary:** provides an overview of the report including high-level explanation of the background, context, purpose, design, methods, limitations, findings, and recommendations.
2. **Background and context:** describes the USAID office requesting the assessment and provides global, regional, or country context for the relevance of the work. It may be important to include relevant historical context, current events impacting the context, and key actors.
3. **Purpose:** summarizes the overarching purpose of the assessment, its emphasis on WEEGE, and how the findings and recommendations are expected to be used to inform USAID decision-making.
4. **Design, methods, and limitations:** discusses the overall methods and design; specific data collection and analysis methods linked to the research questions; and limitations of the data, methods, or other issues that affected the findings.
5. **Findings:** addresses the findings discovered during the desk review and interviews. The findings should point to specific gaps discovered in the literature and/or data and should provide specific reference to that data.
6. **Recommendations.** specifies actionable WEEGE evidence-based recommendations, based on the findings, that customs and border agencies could undertake in services, operations, and personnel management to support women in trade and that USAID can integrate into its programming. If possible, prioritize recommendations for different country contexts.
7. **Data and Resources.** The report should include specific references to data, reports, documents, or other resources used to come to the findings and recommendations identified in the report. These documents should be provided as part of the report. This can be done either in the text of the report, or as an annex.

4.RESULTS AND GOALS

The expected result is approximately a 30-page report (and any appropriate annexes) on Promoting WEEGE in Customs and Border Agency Services, Operations and Personnel Management to Support Women in Trade.

5.DELIVERABLES

The tasks below provide an overview of the anticipated activities to be completed for this scope. Dates and timelines are best estimates.

1. **Draft Desk Review – May 2020**
USAID inputs for Draft Desk Review
 - Share/upload relevant documents from both USAID and non-USAID sources globally, regionally, and at the country level
 - Review desk review and provide feedback
2. **Final Desk Review – end May/early June 2020**

USAID inputs for Final Desk Review

- Review desk review and provide feedback
- Approve the desk review

3. Draft and Final Interview Guides and Interviews – end May-end June 2020

USAID inputs for interviews:

- Provide a list of key stakeholders to interview
- Review interview questions and provide feedback
- Send out an introductory email connecting the WE3 TA consultant(s) to key stakeholders about interviews

4. Draft Report – July 2020

USAID inputs for Draft Report

- Review draft report and provide feedback

5. Final Report – end July/early August 2020

USAID inputs for Final Report

- Review final report and provide feedback
- Approve the report

6.SCHEDULES AND LOGISTICS

N/A

7.TEAM COMPOSITION

WE3 TA may choose to engage two consultants with complementary expertise, including one WEEGE specialist along with one WEEGE-aware customs and trade specialist. The WE3 TA consultant(s) should have knowledge of gender/WEEGE, international trade and travel, customs and/or border crossing policies and law.

8. DISSEMINATION PLAN AND DEC

N/A

ANNEX VII: SAMPLE CHARTER OF MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR THE TREATMENT OF SMALL-SCALE CROSS-BORDER TRADERS IN THE COMESA REGION⁸⁴

Small-scale trade accounts for 35 percent of total cross border trade. Small-scale cross-border traders however face difficulties complying with border formalities which sometimes lead to violation of their rights. To address this challenge, the COMESA Council of Ministers adopted (in 1994) the following COMESA Regulations on the Minimum Standards for the Treatment of Small-Scale Traders which spell out the rights and obligations of both the traders and border officials:

Basic rights and obligations for traders and officials at the border:

1. All individuals shall be able to cross the border without verbal or physical abuse or harassment, including but not limited to sexual and gender-based violence.
2. Documents for traders shall be processed at the border in an efficient and timely manner without discrimination. A receipt must be provided to the trader for any payment made and the payment properly recorded.
3. Only officials of the approved agencies should be present at the border and all border officials should wear uniforms or ID badges that allow the identification of their respective agency.
4. Physical checks of traders must be recorded with the reason and outcome provided. Female traders have the right to receive a physical check by female officials in a private but regulated and accountable environment.
5. All duties, fees and taxes and the basis for their calculation must be publicly available at the border.
 1. Any change to duties, fees and taxes must be publicly announced at the border, with reasonable time for traders to prepare before their application.
 2. No unpublished fees or charges should be demanded at the border.
6. Documentary requirements should be clearly stated and publicly available at the border.
 1. Any change in documents required must be publicly announced at the border with reasonable time for traders to prepare before implementation.
 2. Simplified procedures should be applied to small traders.
7. Traders should be aware of their rights and obligations when crossing the border.

⁸⁴ World Bank, https://glftp.comesa.int/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/The-CHARTER_translation.pdf

1. Traders must present required documentation and pay appropriate duties at the border and obtain a receipt for any payments made to an official.
2. Traders shall not attempt to bribe any official to avoid payment of duties or obtain preferential treatment in any way, including avoiding queues.

With the support of the International Community, Governments commit to:

1. Ensuring that the basic rights and obligations governing cross-border movement of goods and people are clearly stated in the local language and visibly apparent at all border crossings.
2. Ensuring that at every border post there is at least one agent that has received gender awareness training.
3. Ensuring that 50 percent of officials at any border post have received gender-based awareness training.
4. Ensuring that at all border posts traders have recourse to an independent and confidential mechanism to register violation of any of these basic rights. Female traders must be able to register the violation of any basic rights with a female staff.
5. Ensuring the strict application of disciplinary measures against officials found to have violated the rights of a trader.
6. Supporting organizations of informal cross-border traders in disseminating information on these rights and obligations and in delivering advice and information to enhance the capacities of the traders.
7. Continuing to improve the quality of infrastructure at all border crossings to provide an open and safe environment for traders, with attention to the specific needs of women traders, and appropriate facilities for officials to undertake their work.
8. Improving the quality of data collected at all border posts on small traders, including the number passing through the border each day and the nature of the goods traded.

This publication has been produced by COMESA under the Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project (GLTFP) supported by the WB. The objective of the GLTFP is to facilitate small-scale cross border trade especially among women traders at selected borders point between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda and Uganda.