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The Policy Implications for Trade of Gender
Equality Issues in APEC

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Introduction

It is a pleasure to be asked to speak on these issues in a country where women are known across the world for their leaderships and excellence in business and in the professions. In Canada, we benefit greatly from the education, high energy and motivation of women immigrants in general and from the Phillipines in particular.

My purpose is to provide a context for some questions we must ask of our governments as they move forward on the APEC over the next two to three years. The years of formation of an important trading relationship such as this one is are crucial and there is much that must be done.

The arrival of the World Trade Organization in 1995 signalled the end of the beginning of globalization, the new system of interconnected trading relationships driven and facilitated by changes in transportation and communication technologies in the hands of capital.

Highly significant is the opportunity presented to nation states through this new system. Globalized trading corporations have existed in one form or another for hundreds of years, that is, companies have bought and sold commodities from around the globe and delivered them to customers everywhere. Sometimes these international trading companies have been run by national governments but national governments have long played some role as lawmakers for tariffs, import/export rules, and as health/safety/environmental regulators.

Through the GATT, WTO and other international trading treaties, national governments have inserted themselves - or been inserted - into these trading relationships in order to facilitate private sector trades and boost their national economies. While concerns are raised about national sovereignty as the WTO rules extend into areas of domestic policy, no government can now afford to be outside these arrangements.

APEC represents - at least for Canada- an extremely important set of relationships in a marketplace with which we have traded since we became a country in 1867 and with which we have a long history of exchange of people, ideas, innovations, cooperation at

times and hostilities at other. It is a relationship of great significance for our Government and for businesspeople and entrepreneurs. It is a relationship from which, at present, we are learning a great deal about ourselves - our education system, our public-private partnerships and our future (cf Lipsey and Wills, 1995). It is a relationship in which women have the potential to prosper.

The Importance of National Governments

The significance of national governments - as compared to private corporations - is that they have an obligation to all their citizens. That is, they need to inform all interested parties of the trading possibilities, to publish records of agreements and their processes, and to manage their trade involvements through the public service to a greater or lesser extent.

One of the fields of investigation in this area is the forms and processes of national governments which permit the greater open involvement of women in advisory, elected, expert or management roles. Legislative and executive authority over trade arrangements vary across the world but both must be involved at some point. (cf Joeke and Weston, Part III). Private firm/government partnerships will define the next stages of trade development especially in technology-driven industries.

Trade arrangements require constant maintenance-modifications, dispute resolutions, exchanges and negotiations at

all levels- which involve a wider range of people than might be found in private corporations. While privately held - or even publicly traded- corporations select their employees and partners from a profit-making viewpoint governments are usually more open employers, balancing their concerns for high levels of skill with other representational concerns for geographic areas, ethnic groups and, increasingly, gender. In Canada, for example, women form a very significant number of those employed in the public service and in top jobs in international trade.

More than three-quarters of Canada's trade is with the USA. The push to greater free trade in the Americas is at the top of the Canadian trade agenda (cf. Senate of Canada, 1995). In the negotiation of the Free Trade Agreement with the USA (CUFTA) and the subsequent agreement to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) our Government was preoccupied with mobilizing expert knowledge, therefore many of the negotiating team members were women. Lawyers, economists and statisticians are key in trade matters for both the public and the private sector. Women's business associations, labour unions with predominately female membership, and sectoral/industrial organizations are increasingly involved in significant decision-making. NGO's from many sectors are forcing more open debate on multilateral trade arrangements.

The presence of women, the representational or democratic concerns of national governments, and the rising importance of trade in all industries opens new opportunities to concern ourselves with the impact of trade on the economic lives of women

in the national economy at all levels and on the policies that shape these relationships.

The Importance of APEC

Furthermore, since APEC is still formulating its relationships, we can influence its direction to ensure that gender issues are taken into account and APEC has reflected these concerns in developing policy in the countries involved.

Because APEC is relatively new, we can ask ourselves perhaps the most difficult question of all "How do we know what the effects of trade relationships are - directly or indirectly?". It is not enough to say that our policy is to "take women into account". How do we do this?

There are many possibilities at the level of governments. The first is the possibility of accurate information. Some say that precise data will be the foundation concept of the 21st century. In order to provide a good foundation for estimating the impacts of trade and other relationships in APEC, it is essential that government statistical agencies examine the quality and coverage of the data they collect and the standardized measures to ensure that we can analyse the extent to which female intensive industries are changed by the new trading relationships. In addition to industry and sectoral groups as they are presently define, these need to include a study of the informal sector, home workers and any other

significant female dominant segment of the economies. (cf. United Nations, 1990)

Governments can be instrumental in creating or supporting sectoral organizations and firms that are inclusive of female intensive parts of the economy as well as supportive of women entrepreneurs.

Governments can also provide special opportunities to women in trade: training courses, trade fair opportunities, trade mission experience, mentoring by experienced trade officers, and access to expert advisors.

Creating consultative opportunities to governments and their departments while policy is being developed is an important contribution of governments as is supporting the appointment of women in senior positions in the public and private sectors.

Government plays a crucial role in creating pairing and partnerships in particular sectors and even firms among the APEC countries. That vital direct experience can make the difference between competitive success and failure (cf. Lipsey and Wills, 1995).

Secondary levels of support can be given in the parts of the economy on which women rely while they are working - child care and good schools, safe and accessible public transport, decent housing and safe healthy working conditions. Labour laws, wage laws, and health and safety codes are crucial and need to be examined on a comparable basis among trading countries.

But how can we at this conference help to make these things happen? We do this, as will be suggested below, by self-education, research, involvement, lobbying, networks and associations, and mobilizing the public services to consider our interests.

In this fashion, we will engender trade policies and practices.

What Analysis Has Been Done?

Fortunately, the concern with trade relationships and their impact on women has been under study for some time. Ester Boserup's pathbreaking study published in 1970, Women's Role in Economic Development, drew attention to the gender differences in production primarily in rural economies. At that time, the focus was still on economic development issues.

In the last decade, attention has swung to a new agenda referred to critically as the "neo-liberal agenda". This has two components, one being trade liberalization and the other structural adjustment. The latter came onto the scene first as the World Bank and the IMF changed practices to force national governments to come to terms with their debt and their economic futures. Some measures have been extremely harsh leading to dislocation, poverty and a sharp decline in living standards for whole populations. In developing countries, in particular in Africa, structural adjustment has been such a shock in the lives of women producers that any positive approach to the trade liberalization agenda and

its impacts has taken second place and is often viewed negatively without consideration of its possible mobilization for women's interests.

As trade liberalization through new international and global agreements moved to the top of the agenda, a number of regional conferences have been held - a series sponsored by UNIFEM and the GSD Group of the IFIAS- and several papers have been written on the overall questions involved in engendering trade policy and relations.

Two papers in particular are helpful to our discussion: Susan Joekes and Ann Weston's monograph written for UNIFEM Gender and the New Trade Agenda, (Women, Ink, UN Development Fund for Women, New York, 1994), and Lourdes Beneria and Amy Lind, "Engendering International Trade: Concepts, Policy and Action", GSD, IFIAS, 1995. Both these papers are outcomes of the Gender, Science and Development Program of the International Federation of Institutes for Advanced Studies and both of them are survey papers to set the scene for our future work. Neither would have been possible without the leadership of Dr. Marilyn Carr, of UNIFEM.

One of the important ingredients contributed by Dr. Carr was to commission a paper by Susan Joekes, a Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, and Ann Weston, Vice-President, the North-South Institute, Ottawa which fed into a UNIFEM seminar in the fall of 1993. Published in 1994, the paper poses some important questions for policy makes: "Insofar as it affects women, does trade merely perpetuate women's inferior

status? Or does it have the potential to contribute to the longer-term improvement of women's economic status?" They go on to specify questions to be asked of any new trade agenda: "Are the new trade rules likely to have a particular impact on women, or particular groups of women? Are there policies in place to deal with these gender impacts? What types of rules might help to promote women's entitlements and capabilities? Are there mechanisms to ensure the gender dimensions of trade are addressed" (Joeke & Weston, p3).

From the point of view of women, these questions are exactly the right ones and we might well encourage the advocacy groups in our countries to consider them. But national governments must answer them. Indeed, asking these questions and finding the answers will sharpen the skills of researchers, advocates and policy makers.

Joeke and Weston also identify the issues facing trade policy makers such as the traditional issues of tariffs, non-tariff barriers and commodity prices and the new issues of services, intellectual property rights and foreign investment rules. Rising rapidly on the agenda are the environment, labour standards and competition policy. They examine the contentious issues of the struggles between legislative and executive powers and between levels of government; the transparency of policy-making in governments and the participation of agencies representing women's interests; the presence of independent review bodies and the role of the private sector (Joeke & Weston, p 23). This report is a

very useful guide to the general issues in international trade and their potential impacts on the lives of women and concludes by citing seven ways in which advocates can promote gender issues in trade: monitoring employment conditions; using trade agreements to promote gender equity; seeking improvements in the informal sector; improving access to credit, training and marketing support services for women farmers; compensating women displaced by trade; helping women entrepreneurs reorient their output to export opportunities; and improving education and training facilities for women (see Chart 1 reproduced from Joeques & Weston, p. 81).

Another major review of the impact of trade liberalization on the lives of women was given in a paper by Lourdes Beneria and Amy Lind at the regional trade meeting held by UIFEM and GSD in Zimbabwe in June last year. This meeting followed the January meeting in New Delhi of the seven south Asian countries and will be followed later this year by a meeting in Bangkok of the ASEAN countries. Beneria and Lind question the extent to which gender is a notion that is even relevant in trade discussion. And, indeed, in most standard papers on trade (cf. Lipsey and Wills) gender is not raised as a relevant issue.

Like Joeques and Weston, Beneria and Lind are concerned by the extent to which the WTO, IMF and World Bank policies coincide to force countries to conform to the joint requirements of these agencies in order to receive loans and other favourable arrangements (e.g. Mexico). They point to the need to monitor the impact of these agreements on regions and local economies taking

ADVOCACY TO PROMOTE GENDER INTERESTS IN TRADE

If trade openings are to produce long-term gains for women, local women's groups and national agencies need to give priority in their agendas for action to:

Monitoring employment conditions — In the case of TNCs, local women's groups could collaborate with groups in the home countries of TNCs and in other countries with subsidiaries to carry out social audits, focusing on the treatment of women workers. Building on the successful example of environmentalist pressure on TNC's, women's groups could lobby companies to follow the lead of better employers, with the use of social labelling as an incentive. TNCs with bad employment practices towards their female employees would risk blacklisting and the opprobrium of world public opinion, especially women's.

Using trade agreements to promote gender equity — In particular, trading partners should be required to adhere to local labour standards which in most countries include the provisions of ILO Convention No. 100 on equal pay. In addition the use of trade incentives (such as preferential tariff schemes) for the adoption of 'best practices' might be considered.

Seeking improvements in the informal sector — TNCs should be required to exercise influence over employment practices with respect to pay equity, health and safety in the small enterprises to which they sub-contract. This is consistent with the just-in-time and flexible production methods, which rely on very high quality standards in the product and all its components.

Improving access to credit, training and marketing support services for women farmers — Payments for agricultural produce should be made jointly to men and women; purchasers should extend contract growing to female farmers directly.

Compensating women displaced by trade — It is critical that policy makers be alerted to the possible special needs (in credit, employment guarantee schemes, food aid or training) of displaced women and their families.

Helping women entrepreneurs reorient their output to export opportunities — Various suggestions include improved credit for small enterprises, market research and marketing support, promotion of business networks for women, and public education campaigns to inform them of the changing nature of formal-informal sector links and the high quality control standards required of informal producers in the new open trade era.

Improving education and training facilities for women — There are several other policies, not directly related to trade, which could promote women's employment prospects as economies evolve. Improvements in education for girls are needed, especially changes in curriculum and broader specialization options. Employers need to ensure that training opportunities allow for women's family responsibilities, and that promotion procedures are equitable.

into account the costs and difficulties of adjusting to liberalized trade policies.

The Mexican case in NAFTA is an instructive one with real direct effects on the employment of women and indirect effects in the social sector on health, education and welfare. Throughout NAFTA, plants are relocating to lower wage or, sometimes, higher productivity areas leaving behind unemployment but creating new employment conditions in the areas in which they relocate. Beneria and Lind discuss the effects of prices, incomes and the consequent effects for women because of the price of their labour.

The European Union - by far the most comprehensive of the agreements extending well beyond trade into integrated labour markets and social regimes - has attempted to bring higher labour standards and social benefits to workers throughout Europe. In other trade arrangements, however, differentials in wages, prices and labour standards are maintained and it is these differences that require advocacy and policy review in APEC. These authors advocate country and regional specific monitoring and policies to look at the factors in gender effects resulting from trade agreements.

There has been a number of studies of particular industries, of particular geographic regions and of particular labour markets. Focussed studies of this nature are useful and those in existence are reviewed in both the major studies cited here (Joeke & Weston; Beneria & Lind). The issues here revolve around the difficulty of carrying out large-scale and systematic studies of the agricultural

economy as it involves women - and especially small traders - and the informal sector.

Two other issues stand out as being of great importance to any work in the APEC group of countries. One is the relations of women to the new transforming technologies. These are the robotic, materials, computer and biotechnology inventions which are pervasive in the workplace and in the consumer marketplace. In the financial sector, these are already affecting the lives of millions of workers - mainly female- who work on data entry and record maintenance. But in transportation, communication and automated production, the sweep of technological change through industry has changed the nature of competition among firms and countries and has certainly changed the skill levels of workers. *Considerably more study needs to undertaken on the role of the transformative technologies in the workplace on the work, wages, and future of women in the economies of all our countries.* Furthermore, this is not difficult and simply requires systematic and careful data collection.

In addition - and important to us - is the need to retain the knowledge of craft and skilled work that women have so often carried out - in herbal and other forms of medicines, in sewing, weaving and other traditional and decorative skills, in cooking and domestic skills. Because of technology, world mandates and corporate dominance these skills are in danger of being lost in some places. Trade related aspects of intellectual property rights have already been identified at a high level and will bear fruit.

But in addition to this, we know that eventually a very high premium will be put on many of these skills as having "hand made" goods and "traditional" services will become the high-priced privileges of the well-to-do. A formal agreement to retain with government support the traditional knowledge mostly but not exclusively practised by women would be a useful outcome of the APEC meeting of 1997, especially if it were to occur with the endorsement of MNE's.

Second, the very high rate of emigration of women from Asian countries (Lim & Oishi, 1996), especially since the majority are independent economic migrants, has an impact on their sending and receiving economies unlike that in other parts of the world. This will be of special interest in a study of the APEC countries. Asian emigrants are found at all levels of the labour market from the highly trained and skilled to relatively unskilled labourers. Canadian emigrants on the other hand are found, mostly, in the North American countries.

A major objective of this work is to get a gender viewpoint into policy making at the highest level and yet without the data and analysis, the myth of trade policy as "gender neutral" is likely to continue. For example, Lim & Oishi's work carried out with the ILO may lead to some influence in migration policies but the economic effects need also to be examined. In short, integrating expert studies from economics, statistics, migration, labour and environmental law, health and demography is an

important task which needs to be undertaken by academics and independent foundations concerned with the gender questions. In particular, formal agreements among APEC governments and university and other research institutions on programs of research going beyond science, engineering and technology transfer to consider economic, social and equity questions will strengthen the opportunities for women in these areas of expert knowledge. Such agreements could be signed in 1997.

The Importance of the Beijing Conference to our Task

We have been encouraged by the Platform for Action which emerged from the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women which, in section F, Article 165 (d) on women and the economy, among many other action planks calls on government to "devise mechanisms and take positive action to enable women to gain access to full and equal participation in the formulation of policies and definition of structures through such bodies as ministries of finance and trade, national economic commissions, economic research institutes and other key agencies as well as through their participation in appropriate international bodies". Strategic objective F.2 is to "Facilitate women's equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade" and section 166 calls on governments to take a variety of steps to do this.

What better to encourage our governments to get on with the tasks they agreed to than to get these types of questions onto

the agenda of the heads of APEC governments at their meetings? What better task can be perform than to be involved in preparing signing-ready agreements for 1997?

Getting Women and Trade on the APEC Agenda

In order to do this, we need to make the case - the "business case" it would be called in some circles for the priority of our concerns. The benefits to economic growth and job creation, the data on women in entrepreneurship, the existence of trade arrangements among women-led firms are potential evidence for this case. History tells us that we will have to supply it. One useful approach is to point to the exciting growth in the entrepreneurial group of women. In Canada, for example, a recent study by the Institute for Small Business of the Bank of Montreal, The Economic Power of Women-led Firms in Canada looked at the one-third of Canadian firms that are led by women in comparison to those led by men and those led by women in the USA. The data show the solid economic performance of these firms, sharp increases in the numbers of firms, and growing diversification by industry. These data are important in convincing our Government that women need to be at all meetings having to do with important policy and trade discussions - 1.7 million jobs depend upon it. In my own city of Waterloo, Ontario, the regional newspaper, The Record, runs a weekly page on small business and frequent articles on women-led businesses.

The difficult task is to break into the category of very large businesses. The glass ceiling works in large private and public sector organizations as it has for a long time. But it is significant for us in Ontario - a province whose economy is highly dependent upon automobile manufacturing - that GM Canada is led by Maureen Kempston-Darkes, a very influential person in our economy. In BC and Alberta, the most western provinces, the growth in female-led businesses is the highest in Canada. Such data and such examples shine out in all our countries. Partnerships among women-led firms in the various APEC countries to be signed at the 1997 meeting would make real to governments the power of women in these industries, raise the profile of women in the public perception, and advance the general cause of trade.

But the women working at the lowest level of the economy are one of our major concerns. They and the skilled workers are the immediate cause of economic growth as they produce the goods and services for trade and maintain the conditions that make work possible. We need to remind governments of the need to keep these women - and men - healthy, adequately remunerated, protected and educated about their work and role. Agreements on training, education, working conditions and wages to be signed in 1997 between, for example major trade unions of the various APEC economies, or by the International Federation of Business and Professional Women who will be meeting in Vancouver that year, or by similar bodies, would also attract policy attention to these

issues. Again, I suggest that we would have to organize such action.

We are too late to affect the agenda for the November APEC meeting, although we can usefully meet with and press upon our delegations the concern for gender issues. But for the 1997 meeting of heads of governments in Vancouver I suggest there are three targets:

- to get the right issues on the agenda
- to get the right people and more women on the delegations
- to get an action plan with resources committed to the achievement of the goals set.

Summary

In this paper, I have tried to propose a number of actions which might serve to advance the objectives of getting women and gender issues on the trade agenda of APEC. Now is the time to take action, now is the time to embed in our national policies and in the policies of the APEC a bedrock commitment to equity issues, developed in our unique cultures and traditions, but advancing the general cause to which all those present are committed.

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