

International Women's Day: We still have a lot to learn

International Women's Day has a long history associated with women's issues in the world of work and in getting the right to vote. This is a long learning curve for what we call "gender parity" or "gender equality", but we are reminded of the remarkably poetic ways of Maya Angelou who once – and probably more than once – said "I've learned that I still have a lot to learn." Here we are in 2017, caught up with an occasion that stirs our passion for a goal that seems to be so well laid out but that remains beyond our reach. Some say that it is even multiple generations away. Although we have learned a lot about this goal, it is clear that we still have a lot to learn. On 8 March 2017, there were many events around the world to address the women's perspective on ending discrimination and achieving gender equality.

WTO Panel on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment:

The GSO was pleased to play a role in one of these events at the WTO. It was indeed an honour for GSO's Executive Director and International Geneva Champion Katherine Hagen to moderate a panel at the WTO on "Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment". The panel featured excellent panellists – two ambassadors, a senior executive, an entrepreneur, an economist and a communications expert – all with lively and compelling insights. See the full programme below. Our thanks to the WTO for this opportunity to moderate a truly remarkable learning session. And our deepest thanks, too, to the fine panellists.

Speakers:

- **Yvette Stevens**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the WTO and Chair of EIF Board
- **Terhi Hakala**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Finland to the WTO
- **Coulibaly Aïssata Touré**, Mango Exporter, Manager of the Société de Valorisation des Fruits (SOVAFY) and President of the Network of Women Economic Operators (RFOE) of Mali
- **Dorothy Tembo**, Deputy Executive Director, International Trade Centre
- **Anoush der Boghossian**, Economic Affairs Officer, Development Division, Aid for Trade Unit
- **Simon Padilla**, Economic Affairs Officer, Agriculture and Commodities Division, Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF)

Moderator:

- **Katherine Hagen**, GSO Executive Director, CEO, Hagen Resources International and Executive Director, Council for Multilateral Business Diplomacy; former Deputy Director-General of the ILO

Learning Path Messages:

Here is our GSO summary of the messages they delivered. Some of the messages may be obvious, but it is the dynamic flow of accumulated messages, including some key points from participants in the audience, that provides a new learning path. .

- Gender-sensitive components to any programme require specific indicators to measure gender progress.
- How to make projects catalytic means measuring both the direct and indirect impact.
- Gender-neutral policies might not work if there are cultural barriers to overcome.

- We need to look at gender implications across the whole value chain of any product or service line.
- This involves a commitment to partnerships and inclusiveness.
- Inclusiveness means involving all stakeholders. Both men and women need to be involved to understand the reality of trade opportunities.
- Why are gender discussions only involving women? Isn't it time for gender interests to be all inclusive?
- Women are able to do much more. They will reinvest and contribute to their communities.
- So it isn't about a gender-blind policy. It's about looking at the impact of policies on women.
- We can mobilize women with specific strategies oriented to the sectors which have a lot of women available to be mobilized.
- Training, certification and networking are important enablers for women to develop businesses and markets and to compete in quality assessment systems.
- We need to take things up a notch. Think bigger; scale will create impact.
- Agriculture is a sector where inputs, services and knowledge make a huge difference but are costly. Policies oriented to moving women's opportunities and monitoring access through the whole value chain can increase productivity.
- Having gender evaluations in programmes like Aid for Trade is leading to more and more countries putting gender as a priority in their own national plans.
- There is growing recognition that gender-neutral trade policies are not necessarily gender-neutral. We need to look at trade policies that HELP women. There should be an analysis of trade rules and their impact on women, perhaps even a session devoted to this at the next WTO Ministerial Conference (MC11) in Buenos Aires next December 2017.

Looking Forward:

In general, the emphasis was on policies affecting women's opportunities in small and medium enterprises, but we are also aware of the impact that trade policies can have on working women in all settings, whether as self-employed women in the informal economy or as factory workers or as rising professionals or even as unpaid care workers. We are encouraged by work coming out of the UN Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on tools for assessing the impact of macroeconomic and trade policy on women in the world of work. Check out the UNCTAD work [here](#).

We also note that International Women's Day at the WTO continued with more discussions launching a report on gender statistics within the WTO itself, a message from Director-General Roberto Azevêdo and an exhibit featuring "Portrait of a (Working) Mother". The D-G's remarks were very much on point – gender discussions should concern both men and women equally. He also observed that both men and women should be concerned about a healthy balance between work and family/personal interests. See the statistical report [here](#) and the D-G's speech [here](#). In conclusion, then, we know that the learning process is never-ending, but we welcome the learning path that the panellists and participants from this day's event have shown us. And again, a special thank you to the panellists!