

# WHY GENDER MATTERS TO TRADE IN THE CARIBBEAN

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This document presents evidence to demonstrate that it is important to take a gendered view of international trade in the Caribbean.

At a very basic level, trade and the promotion of trade is about enhancing the lives of people. The objective of trade is, fundamentally, about development for the purpose of improving economic opportunities and livelihoods.

Trade continues to be important to the Caribbean region, and the services industry as well as the agricultural industry, are cornerstones of the economy of many island states. Small and medium sized (SMEs) businesses play an important role in the economy and have the potential to play an increasingly important role in international trade. A report by the International Financial Corporation estimated that 39 percent of SMEs in the LAC region are owned by women. (IFC)

**“There is still a very high level of invisibility of women in trade. In trade in goods, and also [...] trade in services. The glass ceiling is still very much in place.”**

*Dame Billie Miller*

**“I don’t have as much of a voice because it is a women’s owned business. As a women’s owned business you get less respect.”**

*Dorienne Rowan-Campbell, Rowan’s Royale*

Simply put, failing to ensure that all SMEs are operating at their fullest potential, represents an inefficiency and might constitute a barrier to creating inclusive growth. Not only does the promotion of all businesses, including women owned SMEs, make economic sense, it also supports international commitments made to achieving gender equity, in for example, the Millennium Development Goals ( MDG 3).

Research supports what we heard from the women entrepreneurs we interviewed: it has been demonstrated that women tend to re-invest their earnings into their families to a larger extent than men do. Women tend to invest in education for their children, ensuring better nutrition and basic needs to a larger extent than men. (Higgins, 2012) In terms of improving conditions for the population at large, investing in women is effective.

The project has undertaken to provide easily accessible, open access online training content to bring attention to the importance of taking a gendered view of trade.

We heard woman and men speak about the gendered challenges and opportunities that exist when it comes to trade in the Caribbean and it is striking that despite regional variations, the issues are similar for many of them. Certainly, there was mention of the challenges of competition, the cost of doing business, the difficulty of keeping up with rules and regulations. Primarily, however, at the heart of the issues identified by the interviewees was gender equity.

**“From the beginning, major challenges were accessing the market place, finding reliable trading partners and finance. When I started my business, a women could not access finance..”**

*Rita Hilton, Carita Jamaica Inc.*

## The issues

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***Less respect for women entrepreneurs.*** During our project, we kept hearing from women that they were not seen as serious actors. A woman’s dedication to her business is questioned, particularly if she is also a mother and wife. It is assumed that her first priority is her family rather than

her business. Women we spoke with acknowledged that multitasking can be a challenge, but that having several responsibilities does not take away from the commitment to their business. The responsibility for family might mean that women entrepreneurs miss out on opportunities, such as for example training sessions and networking.

***Lack of access to finance.*** It is still harder for women to get access to finance than for men. In fact, among the women we interviewed, they didn’t even think that obtaining a loan was an option for them. Instead they relied on alternate ways to secure funding, including family loans and savings.

***Access to networking opportunities.*** This point flows from the first issue above. Women are seen as less serious actors, and it was noted by several interviewees that it is difficult to find out about relevant trade shows, access information required to run a business and make contacts that would facilitate growing a business.

***Lack of reliable data.*** A weakness across the region is the lack of reliable data. Without sex disaggregated data on, for example, the number women entrepreneurs vs. men, what type of products and services are being provided by male and female owned SMEs respectively, it is difficult to come up with sound policy solutions where a policy intervention might boost efficiency and profitability.

## The policy implications

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The policy recommendations can be simply summed up by urging governments to continue to strive for gender equity. To meet the specific challenges outlined above, governments should:

**Promote gender equity in all policies**, and ensure that work done related to helping build SMEs and trade facilitation includes a gender analysis. Awareness of gendered impacts and opportunities of trade can help create better mitigation strategies when required.

**Continue work with the banking sector to make credit available to all entrepreneurs.** Grants through export agencies can be an effective way in which to achieve this. SMEs generally have limited amount of need for finance, but it can be critical to get a business established.

**Hosting networking events specifically targeting women.** Several export agencies, such as JAMPRO in Jamaica, or the Caribbean Export and Development Agency based in Barbados, for example, have several events targeting women entrepreneurs and innovators. This work should be supported by governments.

**Targeted technical training** can respond to specific challenges female entrepreneurs and traders are experiencing, while also ensuring that the events are easily accessible to women who might have practical challenges such as a lack of available child care.

**Good data and statistical material promotes evidence based policy making.** Keeping track of how many exporting businesses are led by a women; how many women and men are employed by exporting businesses can help identify where interventions might be useful. Government should be encouraged to provide sex disaggregated data, and maintain up to date data sets.

### SOURCES:

Centre for Trade Policy and Law homepage. Visit the on-line content [here](#)

Higgins, Kate (2012). Gender Dimensions of Trade Facilitation and Logistics: A guidance note. Washington: the World Bank.

International Finance Corporation (IFC), World Bank Group. (2014) Washington: IFC. Available [here](#)

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