

Ten “Quick Wins” for More Equitable Trade

**CONTRIBUTION TO DISCUSSIONS ON WOMEN
AND TRADE FROM THE TRADEEXPERETTES**



**TRADE
EXPERETTES**

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This paper builds on the 2020 joint report by the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, “[Women and Trade: The Role of Trade in Promoting Gender Equality.](#)” It consists of a number of deliverables that can be quickly implemented by the international community.

The views and opinions expressed in this report are solely those of the original authors and contributors. These views and opinions do not necessarily represent those of TradeExperettes, the TradeExperettes editorial team and/or all contributors to the report.

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Ten “Quick Wins” for More Equitable Trade

Quick win No. 1: A political statement at the highest levels promoting quick and early vaccination of workers in the textile, footwear and apparel global value chains, especially in the developing world, where women predominantly work.

Quick win No. 2: The adoption of a public commitment at MC12 to maintain many of the trade facilitation measures adopted during the pandemic and review commitments under the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement.

Quick win No. 3: A commitment to increasing market access opportunities for products that bring formal employment to women, especially in sectors such as apparel and footwear which predominantly employ women.

Quick win No. 4: A commitment to empowering women in agricultural trade, including through increasing market access opportunities for agricultural products, and reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers in the agricultural sector.

Quick win No. 5: Promote inclusivity when drafting trade policy proposals, by including diverse voices and expertise from the initial phases of research and policy development.

Quick win No. 6: A public commitment to strengthen and make visible the participation of women in the services sector and the role of women-owned Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), including as suppliers of services to firms in the domestic market, which then export.

Quick win No. 7: Increase contributions centered on better data on trade and gender, including improved data collection methodologies, promoting knowledge sharing and best practices, and encouraging evidence-based policy design.

Quick win No. 8: Increase to 10% the percentage of Aid for Trade allocated exclusively to women in trade, with a particular emphasis on facilitating the inclusion of women in digital trade, especially in the use of digital platforms.

Quick win No. 9: A commitment to integrating gender provisions into WTO and preferential trade agreements, building on existing models – notably the Global Trade and Gender Arrangement– to reduce barriers and empower women to access opportunities in trade.

Quick win No. 10: Spotlight and promote women experts in trade through engagement and professional development, with the goal of not only adding seats to the table, but adding leaves. Women trade experts from all fields of international trade should be encouraged to offer their expertise, and efforts should be made to provide the tools necessary to expand women’s access to the trade community.

Quick win No. 1: A political statement at the highest levels promoting quick and early vaccination of workers in the textile, footwear and apparel global value chains, especially in the developing world, where women predominantly work.

Apparel manufacturing is one of the top five biggest industries by global employment in 2021 according to [IBISWorld](#). Because apparel manufacturing requires a low capital investment, many developing countries have been able to attract investment through providing a readily available supply of workers. However, the apparel industry has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the closure of garment factories in developing countries and resulting loss of jobs. This has led to [calls](#) from the American Apparel and Footwear Association to increase vaccine distribution to partner countries.

The vast majority of workers in the apparel industry are women. In most developing countries, women have limited opportunities to work outside the home. This industry provides a suitable option for employment that reduces poverty and strengthens social stability.

Women's health is a priority. Women are generally the primary caregivers for a family, and the loss of a matriarch can cause familial and societal chaos that can reverberate through communities and countries. Vaccine administration should therefore focus on the key familial access points (ie. mothers/matriarchs) to ensure access to families and lead to greater participation in vaccination programs.

Labor intensive manufacturing bases in developing countries offer immediate access to thousands of employees that can be expanded quickly to their families and their communities. These facilities offer an existing organizational structure that can be harnessed to administer vaccines, including through the use of onsite health clinics or services or shared medical facilities located in industrial zones. There can also be secondary outreach to provide vaccinations to the community in which the manufacturing facilities or industrial zones are located.

Prioritizing employees of labor-intensive manufacturers and their families helps to ensure that basic domestic needs and critical foreign currency are not disrupted due to the pandemic. Minimal disruption in supply chains is also important given the impact on communities. The current disruption to the supply chains threatens to disrupt and displace manufacturing. Those developing countries that are unable to get their workers vaccinated quickly will likely lose jobs to other more developed countries that prioritize workers. Ensuring the return of these jobs to developing countries may be a decades long process and cause further decline in wealth.

Global institutions should thus adopt strong statements promoting the prioritization of the distribution of vaccinations to workers in labor intensive manufacturing operations in developing countries.

Quick win No. 2: The adoption of a public commitment at MC12 to maintain many of the trade facilitation measures adopted during the pandemic and review commitments under the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement.

As the world continues to reckon with the immense human and economic costs of the COVID-19 pandemic, WTO members should:

- Adopt a public commitment during MC12 to maintain many of the trade facilitation measures adopted during the pandemic to ensure the free flow of goods, particularly those most important to the health and development of women, such as food, medicines, and personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Review commitments taken under the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) with an eye to potential strengthening of such commitments through, for example, converting hortatory language to binding commitments, or accelerating implementation.

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, while many governments took trade-restrictive steps to protect domestic supplies, numerous other governments adopted trade-facilitative measures to ensure the free flow of life-saving goods. Such measures, among many others, included moving away from paper-based customs processes and enhanced transparency of customs information.

However, according to the 25th WTO Trade Monitoring [Report](#) on G20 trade measures, as of mid-May 2021, around 22% of COVID-19 trade-facilitating measures by G20 economies had been terminated. A commitment to extend such measures, particularly those most important to the health and development of women, including food, medicines and PPE, will not only support pandemic management and promote economic recovery, but also support a more inclusive form of recovery that benefits women as producers, consumers, and traders.

Maintaining measures that lower trade costs particularly in women's labor-intensive export sectors, including agriculture, supports women's employment and economic opportunity. With some factories across the women-dominant garment industry allocating some production to PPE, facilitating trade in these goods may [support](#) women's livelihoods. The same [holds true](#) in countries with strong women's participation in medical device global value chains. Additionally, with many women around the world acting as primary caregivers and representing the majority of front-line healthcare workers, efficient importation of essential goods like food, medicines and PPE benefits women as consumers as well. Finally, women engaged directly in cross-border trade face not only time and skill constraints, but also higher exposure to harassment at the border. They, too, are [likely beneficiaries](#) of the continuation of trade facilitation measures.

With many developing countries struggling to secure sufficient doses of vaccines, there is important work before us to ensure the free flow of medicines and other critical supplies. Border complexity will not only frustrate these efforts, it will also harm sectors important to women's economic opportunity. The WTO and its members should maintain – and consider strengthening and accelerating – trade facilitation measures and must continue to monitor and highlight these practices.

Quick win No. 3: A commitment to increasing market access opportunities for products that bring formal employment to women, especially in sectors such as apparel and footwear which predominantly employ women.

The apparel industry is one of the most [women-dominated](#) industries in the world. Over 70% of the workers in China (the world largest apparel manufacturer), 85% of the workers in Bangladesh, and 90% of the workers in Cambodia are women. In many developing countries, the footwear industry and agriculture sectors employ a majority of women as workers.

However, these industries face some of the highest market access barriers compared to others. For example, the average tariff on apparel and footwear into the United States is about 11% while the average duty rate paid for all goods is 1.4%. In 2018 (prior to the pandemic) only 30.4% of all goods imported were subject to duty but nearly all apparel (80%) and all footwear (95%) were subject to duties. Further, prior to actions by the United States under section 301, which levied additional duties on Chinese apparel and footwear (the largest supplier of both products to the United States), footwear and apparel imports from China accounted for only about 6% of all imports in 2017 but represented more than half the duties paid.

Tariffs on apparel and footwear into the United States and other countries can further discriminate against gender. For example, the United States tariff system assesses higher tariffs on women's clothing than on men's clothing— the average tariff on men's apparel is approximately 12% while that on women's apparel is nearly 15%.

A priority should therefore be given to removing barriers to market access, focusing on industries that employ the highest percentage of women. Targeting these barriers will build stronger societies in developing countries and enable them to compete with industrialized countries, relying on their readily available labor force.

Developing countries realize that employing women in the workforce will help ensure that societal necessities, including food, health and education may be more effectively met than when employing only men. Allowing developing countries greater market access for products that bring formal employment to women can reduce national reliance on aid and assistance, expand the creation of meaningful jobs, encourage increased trade and reduce societal pressures and disruption arising from poverty.

Quick win No. 4: A commitment to empowering women in agricultural trade, including through increasing market access opportunities for agricultural products, and reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers in the agricultural sector.

Agriculture is an important component of the economy for many developing countries and contributes to food security and climate resilience. Women contribute significantly to global food production, including as subsistence farmers. A 2011 [study](#) by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) found that women represent more than 40% of the world's agricultural workforce. Yet if women farmers had the same access to agricultural resources as men, yields on women's farms would increase by 20-30% and agricultural production in developing countries would rise by 2.5-4%.

Women farmers are [disadvantaged](#) by their limited access to credit, agricultural inputs and marketing knowledge. Women usually have less access to high-quality inputs, such as higher yield seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, which improve the quality and quantity of their crops, and assist productivity. It has been [suggested](#) that the lack of marketing knowledge and a lack of integration into regional value chains can impede a shift to cash-crop production and access to domestic and overseas markets. The promotion of access to opportunities and resources to enable women farmers to be more productive would help to ensure a more gender-inclusive economic development.

Women, particularly in developing economies, are also affected by high tariffs on agricultural goods. Other barriers to agriculture exports include non-tariff measures, such as sanitary and phytosanitary measures, hygiene standards and tariff rate quotas that limit exports. Domestic support for agriculture in many developed countries may further limit market access.

Negotiations for the liberalization of agricultural trade have been on the WTO agenda since early 2000. Progress was made at the 2013 Bali Ministerial Conference and at the 2015 Nairobi Ministerial Conference where WTO members adopted a decision to eliminate agricultural export subsidies. The WTO agriculture negotiations will continue at MC12. The negotiations are not specifically targeted at women, but they are highly relevant for women and women's empowerment in agricultural trade. Women are at a disadvantage when it comes to the liberalization of agricultural markets due to the constraints to their participation in the formal agricultural sector. Liberalization of trade in agriculture can play a role in addressing these constraints, together with other interventions to empower women in agriculture.

Women in the agricultural sector would benefit from lower tariffs and nontariff barriers, improved trade facilitation and access to trade finance. Removing trade barriers that impede women's access to international markets can contribute to enhancing women's participation in trade and benefits from trade.

Quick win No. 5. Promote inclusivity when drafting trade policy proposals by including diverse voices and expertise from the initial phases of research to the development and implementation of trade policy.

Inclusivity in trade policy-making in essence aims to ensure that all individuals and groups can have input into the decision-making process. Where a decision may impact women directly, it is clear that women should be stakeholders in the process. Increasingly, economic research highlights that diversity in participation throughout the policy-making process improves economic outcomes. In trade, gender inclusivity may take different forms for the WTO. They include increasing the representation of women in trade negotiations; increasing the focus on trade-related gender issues; including specific gender chapters in trade policy documents and agreements and ensuring their implementation; establishing minimum standards for engaging women in core policy work across the WTO membership; and increasing the participation of women researchers and experts in the trade policy process.

Inclusivity is a cross cutting issue on the WTO agenda. Diverse voices should be included as part of the policy development process: women as business owners and small business owners; women as employees in the labor market; women as consumers and consumers of sustainable goods; women as part of global value chains for development; and women as researchers, academics and scientists. These roles mean that the inclusion of women should be addressed through parallel and complementary channels that target these different functions. The following are specific actions that the WTO and its members could take.

Engagement of ideas

The WTO Trade and Gender Working Group should engage with women academics and practitioners by inviting them to specific trade forums, soliciting their trade expertise and encouraging women to submit written or oral testimonies on a range of topics from negotiating modalities to implementation and evaluation. Giving a voice to women trade experts requires diverse regional and geographic representation, while ensuring that women's expertise is not siloed nor limited to input on gender issues. Rather it should allow women to disseminate their knowledge and expertise into different stages of the decision-making process.

Expertise

The WTO should provide a forum for women who wish to network and participate in the WTO policy community. This could be done by drawing upon a database of women trade experts to increase opportunities and visibility for women who research and practice trade to present their work to WTO Ambassadors, working groups, and others. TradeExperettes is building one such database that includes many thematic areas of interest to the WTO, including trade and gender.

Inclusion

There should be a conscious effort at "gender mainstreaming" in trade policy training so that trade and gender is a key component of training for diplomats and government officials seconded to Geneva. "Trade and gender" should also be included in academic courses available to those working in international institutions. Onboarding for diplomats and career officials should include a trade and gender module so that the drafting of initial research strategies as well as policy development and implementation includes impact assessments of gender and trade effects.

Research and career promotion

The WTO should encourage more women to participate in information events targeted at choosing trade policy as a career. While there are often open houses at universities for careers in consulting, finance, and banking, there is less focus on “what to do in trade.” There need to be more concrete efforts to promote trade as a profession for women and marginalized groups. The WTO might consider year-long fellowships for young women professionals from developing countries to increase the recruitment pool. The WTO should also ensure that their reports cite women academics to level the playing field in promoting academic and trade policy research. Citations are a central form of power in academia, so it is crucial to include published work of women trade experts to enhance their visibility in trade circles.

Empowerment and advisory boards

The WTO should also encourage better representation of women on key trade and industrial advisory boards. The WTO should commission a report on the gender representation of trade advisory boards across their membership. If women do not participate in such key decision fora, then gender and trade will be marginalized in discussions.

Having more diverse trade voices will not only improve trade policy outcomes, but will also make trade inclusivity more sustainable in other ways. It will ensure that through including relevant expertise from academia and think-tanks, enhancing women’s representation on trade advisory boards, establishing a pipeline of future women’s trade expertise, and placing education about trade and gender issues as a critical component of WTO training modules, gender inclusivity throughout the trade policy process will be promoted and sustained.

Quick win No. 6: A public commitment to strengthen and make visible the participation of women in the services sector and the role of women-owned Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), including as suppliers of services to firms in the domestic market, which then export.

Trade in services has grown exponentially in recent decades, and services play an increasing role in employment, economic output, and trade in countries at all levels of development. According to [WTO estimates](#), services value-added accounts for close to a half of all world goods and services trade, thus playing a crucial role in global value chains.

Services also play a noteworthy role in women's employment. A 2019 [WTO report](#) shows that women's participation in services has risen gradually over the past three decades and is positively correlated with economic development. Participation ranges from around 30% in LDCs, 50% in other developing economies and over 85% in developed economies. Women's employment also remains uneven across services sectors. Women's employment is largely concentrated in the least traded services sectors, such as education, health and social services, thus reducing their opportunities to engage in trade. Women's employment is at its lowest in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), one of the most promising and highly traded services sectors. Furthermore, services play an important role in women's entrepreneurship: the share of women-owned and women-managed firms is on average higher in services than in manufacturing, a trend that holds across all regions of the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has notably altered the short-term outlook for women. The trade disruption generated by the COVID-19 pandemic has had a larger impact in economic sectors in which women's participation is higher, particularly, tourism and business travel services directly affected by travel restrictions.

Nevertheless, trade in services has enormous potential to generate more employment and income opportunities for women. Despite the opportunities that this sector represents, women are underrepresented in the most traded services sectors. There is therefore a need to strengthen women and women-owned MSMEs' export capacity and make visible their role as suppliers of services to firms in the domestic market, which then export.

It is proposed that the WTO Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender include in its work program the following specific actions.

Mobilization of resources

There is a need to mobilize resources (including donors, international financial institutions and other international organizations) for capacity building programs and initiatives which target women and women-owned MSMEs in the services sector, including through Aid For Trade, as well as the ITC's Women and Trade Programme and "SheTrades." These programs and initiatives can be oriented, *inter alia*, towards:

- providing training on ICT and digital technologies that enable women entrepreneurs and MSMEs to reach customers globally, access information and online training, as well as government e-services, to help to bridge the digital divide;
- helping women engage more actively in international trade and investment by developing sustainable businesses, with a focus on trade in services with greater value added;

- facilitating and promoting women’s access to credit to finance female entrepreneurship and services exports, as well as the reduction of the financial costs of international payments, for example through the promotion of financial technologies, in collaboration with other international organizations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; and
- supporting the post-pandemic recovery in the tourism and travel-related sectors, which are not only an important source of women’s employment at all skill levels but also offer concrete opportunities for women business-owners to trade internationally, including the promotion of women’s entrepreneurship in sustainable and green tourism, a new trend offering further export opportunities in areas not yet touched by tourism development.

“Gender lens”

The Working Group can promote the application of a “gender lens” in WTO negotiations on services, including on environmental services, in Joint Statement Initiative (JSI) negotiations on e-commerce and investment facilitation, as well as in regional trade negotiations. This can be achieved through the adoption of provisions prohibiting gender-based discrimination and fostering women’s participation and empowerment in cross-border trade in services and investment.

Trade liberalization

The liberalization of trade and investment in services should be encouraged. It has the potential to increase the share of participation in international trade of women-led businesses in the services sector. In this sense, for example, reducing barriers in trade in environmental services can contribute to a green-recovery, as well as to reducing the obstacles to women’s participation in these types of services.

Exchange of information

The exchange of best practices and information on removing trade-related barriers and increasing the participation of women in trade in services can help to showcase success stories. Workshops and webinars oriented to women entrepreneurs, as well as relevant public agencies can provide a platform for sharing national or regional best-practice approaches.

A public commitment to strengthen and make visible the participation of women in the services sector and the role of women-owned MSMEs, can bring lasting benefits through increasing opportunities for women’s participation in the services sector, enhancing employment and incomes.

Quick win No. 7: Increase contributions centered on better data on trade and gender, including improved data collection methodologies, promoting knowledge sharing and best practices, and encouraging evidence-based policy design.

The efficiency of trade policy depends on how well trade parameters and trade constraints are incorporated into its design. This means that to have a trade policy that has a positive effect on gender disparities, there needs to be appropriate data and an understanding of the effect of certain policies in particular circumstances.

Since the 2017 [Buenos Aires Declaration](#), there has been significant progress in creating gendered data. However, most countries do not have comprehensive data on women and trade and therefore the effect of trade policy on gender is unclear. There is growing interest from countries and organizations in the collection of gender-disaggregated data, and some are piloting new methodologies. However, this requires a more systemic approach to ensure that the benefits of data collection are factored into trade policy settings.

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) [research](#) highlights the complexities facing many countries that wish to develop gender-responsive trade policies to address existing inequalities, but lacks specific data that reflects the different types of inequalities women face as producers, consumers, employees or entrepreneurs.

Data is important for the development of trade policy. It is as crucial when designing technical assistance programs in order to monitor and assess the impact of trade agreements, as well as the accompanying assistance in the implementation process. Some [organizations](#) have even suggested that trade agreements could include specific commitments around the collection and exchange of gender specific data, impact assessment activities, and cooperation. It is recommended that the WTO Working Group on Trade and Gender promote the following specific actions:

Data collection

There needs to be an increase in the collection, analysis and transparency of trade and gender data. Countries need to invest more resources to develop new databases to understand linkages between trade and gender equality. There should also be more transparency on such initiatives, including by promoting access to data, the exchange of best practices among countries, country groups and international organizations, and support for researchers who seek to pilot new methodologies in gender data collection.

Mainstream gender as a part of TRTA

Different trade-related technical assistance (TRTA) programs, including Aid for Trade, should aim to collect and better analyze data on trade and gender. This should be a cornerstone in the design of the TRTA interventions and included as part of the impact assessment of individual TRTA. The impact of TRTA on gender should also be followed throughout the implementation of technical assistance

Gender and trade policy formation

A gender dimension should be included in trade policy formulation. Countries should improve the use of available trade and gender research in the formulation of trade policies, particularly in sectors where women are underrepresented. New data should inform the design of trade or trade-related policies.

It is through actions such as these that trade policy design can be improved and its impact on gender analyzed, assessed, and taken into account.

Quick win No. 8: Increase to 10% the percentage of Aid for Trade allocated exclusively to women in trade, with a particular emphasis on facilitating the inclusion of women in digital trade, especially in the use of digital platforms.

It is well documented that women tend to not only participate less in international trade, but also have lower access to skills, education, finance, networks, and markets. By targeting women's inclusion in international trade, we can generate systemic change that can help flip the socio-economic disadvantages women currently face. Aid for Trade is one of the key international tools that aids trade inclusion globally. Ensuring that there is a mandatory share of Aid for Trade going to programs focused on women in trade will create a higher and more sustainable impact of these programs for women around the world.

One area in particular where such programs could focus are digital technologies and the use of digital platforms. It is [acknowledged](#) that digital technologies can create new employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for women, enhance access to information, networking and finance, improve women's access to trade, and help women balance other familial and societal obligations. However, women tend to have less access to these technologies, especially in developing countries.

For example, in the developing world, women are less likely to use or own a [mobile phone](#), a basic means to communicate and access the internet. Some women are also entering the digital economy with a distinct disadvantage, due to their poor access to education. This affects not only their confidence but also their capacity to use digital tools in order to access diverse online resources. It is also important to promote the collection of data regarding women's access and use of the internet across the board to measure progress in this area.

It is proposed that the WTO Working Group on Trade and Gender promote the following specific actions:

Women in trade

National and regional Aid for Trade programs should be devised so as to target the inclusion of women in trade. In order to have a better understanding of the evolving situation, there should be global action on women's inclusion in trade based on a transparent review process at national and regional levels and include the exchange of best practices as well as the identification and analysis of obstacles to implementation of women in trade programs.

Digital trade

Targeted programs that focus on women's access to digital trading platforms should be created. Digital platforms provide additional opportunities for women, as they enable women to escape some of the traditional obstacles that they face in trading. At the same time, women tend to be less educated and may have problems using digital platforms. Therefore, targeted programs that address these related challenges are necessary to reap the benefits of digital platforms for women in trade.

Quick win No. 9: A commitment to integrating gender provisions into WTO and preferential trade agreements, building on existing models – notably the Global Trade and Gender Arrangement – to reduce barriers and empower women to access opportunities in trade.

Women are underrepresented in trade. Globally, only [one in five](#) exporting firms is led by women. Such businesses are typically small, and face considerable impediments including: disproportionately high market access barriers; cultural, social and legal hurdles; and capacity challenges. In effect, women do not enjoy a level playing field in trade.

These barriers, challenges and information deficits can be tackled through trade agreements, but to date, across 83 [relevant agreements](#), gender-related provisions have tended to be modest, heterogeneous, and largely based on best endeavors obligations. However, the recent [Global Trade and Gender Arrangement](#) (GTGA) launched by New Zealand, Canada and Chile, has broken new ground. It mandates cooperation aimed at improving women's opportunities, including on financial inclusion, capacity-building, education, government procurement, access to networks, fostering leadership and entrepreneurship, and internationalizing small businesses. The GTGA also recognizes the importance of not weakening or reducing the protection provided in national gender equality laws in order to encourage trade or investment. In addition, there are novel provisions on trade in services, committing the Parties to avoid gender-based discrimination in licensing and certification. Finally, the GTGA acknowledges the need for gender-disaggregated data and evidence-based trade policy-making.

Four years after the Buenos Aires Joint Declaration on Women's Economic Empowerment, it is time to move from rhetoric to concrete action in trade negotiations. Business as usual is not working for women entrepreneurs, business people, workers, and consumers. WTO members should use the GTGA as a model, by using its cooperation, capacity-building and data-analysis provisions to form the basis of a new Understanding on Trade and Gender. Members should also consider mainstreaming binding and enforceable provisions into WTO and preferential agreements, including market access reforms in sectors such as services, textiles and agriculture; non-discrimination commitments in labor, services and investment agreements/chapters; and new rules on digital trade, environment, and government procurement.

Enhancing women's participation in trade [promotes](#) economic development, inclusive growth, and gender equality. As countries face severe pandemic disruptions and the grueling process of economic rebuilding, fostering inclusion will be critical to increasing trade and prosperity. Reducing barriers and empowering women to achieve their full potential to trade through gender-responsive trade agreements is not just the right thing to do, it is also the smart thing to do.

Quick win No. 10: Spotlight and promote women experts in trade through engagement and professional development, with the goal of not only adding seats to the table, but adding leaves. Women trade experts from all fields of international trade should be encouraged to offer their expertise, and efforts should be made to provide the tools necessary to expand women’s access to the trade community.

In 2018, a conversation between two trade experts on Twitter served as the catalyst for the TradeExperettes. Commenting on an article in a prominent American newspaper that cited a dozen experts on trade policy, they noted both a lack of diversity and women’s participation. This evolved into an exciting global conversation within the trade community where many had observed or experienced the same phenomenon. This prompted “Trade Twitter” to spotlight their “Awesome + Female + Trade + Experts = #TradeExperettes” colleagues, resulting in the collection of 150 names of women trade experts within the first 24 hours. It was the unfolding of this event that led Hanna Norberg, a Swedish economist and independent trade policy advisor, to start the TradeExperettes.

The bias towards or exclusion of women in the trade profession is not limited to citations in the news. When analyzing the role of trade in promoting gender equality, the World Bank and the WTO [report](#) that in the professional sphere there are implicit biases and distinctions made when evaluating women in areas such as job announcements, recruitment and hiring decisions, retention in the workplace, education, inclusion in academia and even mentoring choices. These biases help to keep women out of trade-intensive firms or sectors.

TradeExperettes is a social enterprise, which is a cause-driven business whose primary reason for being is to improve social objectives and serve the common good. The organization serves a dual purpose: to showcase our dynamic network of women trade experts, and to empower women to grow professionally and position themselves as thought leaders in their area of expertise. In a few years, we have built a network of women trade experts from around the world who share their expertise, knowledge and perspective with policy makers, international organizations, the media, and other stakeholders that are crucial to the development and implementation of national and international trade policy.

Since 2018, we have called for a variety of policies, measures, and programs to promote inclusivity in trade and ensure that diverse voices have a seat at the table. Diversity in trade contributes to a richer dialogue, especially when it’s based on data and research that is more comprehensive. Understanding how women participate in trade as business owners, traders, workers, and consumers can help to identify policies that support opportunities for women’s involvement in trade. It leads to the adoption of more sustainable and inclusive trade policy and measures.

The TradeExperettes have also been active in formal and informal networking and mentoring in order to build its community, both of which are important elements in advancing women’s empowerment. A 2019 [study](#) commissioned by the European Union and prepared by the International Trade Centre found that women-led companies valued business networks most when it came to gaining information on new business opportunities and market access information, as well as training and mentoring opportunities. A University of Bradford [study](#) concluded that women continue to be underrepresented in senior level positions and in certain professions, and that existing mentoring programs can be improved in order to promote the inclusion of women in these roles. Strategies to do so include the adoption of complementary policies in the workplace, including flexible approaches which support work-life balance.

Studies have also found that certain occupations, such as in the fields of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) tend to be male-dominated. Efforts need to be made to encourage

processes which socialize young people away from traditional gender roles and encourage girls and young women to enter whatever professions interest them. The same is true in the trade policy field, although there are positive signs of this changing at the top levels. For the first time, the WTO leadership team now has more women than men, and the WTO, ITC and UNCTAD are all headed by women. Hopefully, this change can usher in a shift in gender-oriented perceptions of the characteristics of leadership. While the importance of role models should not be underestimated, it is also crucial to provide women with the tools necessary to enhance their leadership and other skills.

This is where organizations like the TradeExperettes can make an impact. We have developed a range of programs to respond to the demands of our network and offer professional development opportunities in an inclusive and supportive environment. In addition to a mentorship program for early career women in trade, we also host workshops on writing and public speaking, practice sessions for job talks and presentations, and off-the-record panels on timely trade topics in a collegial setting. Our internal programming is intended to make outward facing activities less daunting and more accessible through providing both rising stars and established professionals the tools to succeed in their careers.

At the TradeExperettes, we believe the international community should support more programs dedicated to networking, mentoring, writing and public speaking skills, and promoting collaboration among professionals in various trade-related disciplines. The experience and know-how of the TradeExperettes in developing such programs can assist the international community to promote the growth of women experts in trade. But we can't do it alone. We are committed to our mission in every form that it takes. We want to build synergies with other organizations that enhance women's roles in the trade arena, and see countless opportunities to collaborate on our shared goals.

The TradeExperettes calls on the WTO and other international organizations to therefore work together for our common aims and to shine a light on women's expertise in trade, to encourage engagement in the trade community, and to empower women in trade at all stages of their careers and areas of expertise.

