

# Beyond Barriers

## The Gender Implications of Trade Liberalization in Southeast Asia

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## Abstract

There is little doubt that trade liberalization has had a profound effect on the wellbeing of women in Southeast Asia. Not all of these impacts are negative, however. Indeed, the opening up of the region's economies, at both national and regional levels, has brought about opportunities in the form of new employment that may allow them to access higher incomes and improve their status in society. Given their increasing role in the economies of Southeast Asia, however, women are often the major victims of economic openness. Poor women, in particular, remain vulnerable to economic policy changes that occur in the region. Unfortunately, trade policies are often gender blind and ignore women's interests and aspirations. In the view of most trade policymakers in the region, macroeconomics is all about aggregates, and both policy objectives (e.g. price stability, employment generation, growth and external balance) and traditional macroeconomics policy instruments (e.g. fiscal and exchange rate policies) are gender neutral. As a result, it is not uncommon to find that trade policies adopted and pursued by both the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its member countries further marginalize the role of women in society.

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Beyond Barriers: The Gender Implications of Trade Liberalization in Southeast Asia  
Alexander C. Chandra, Lucky A. Lontoh, and Ani Margawati

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<http://www.tradeknowledgenetwork.net>

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

<b>AEC</b>	ASEAN Economic Community	<b>GDEG</b>	Gender, Development and Economic Globalization
<b>AFAS</b>	ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services	<b>GDI</b>	Gender-related Development Index
<b>AFTA</b>	ASEAN Free Trade Area/Agreement	<b>GEM</b>	Gender Empowerment Measure
<b>AIA</b>	ASEAN Investment Area	<b>HDI</b>	Human Development Index
<b>APRN</b>	Asia-Pacific Research Network	<b>IGTN</b>	International Gender Trade Network
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>BEPA</b>	bilateral economic partnership agreement	<b>MFA</b>	Migrant Forum in Asia
<b>BFTA</b>	bilateral free trade agreement	<b>MRA</b>	mutual recognition arrangement
<b>CARAM</b>	Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility	<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>EPA</b>	economic partnership agreement	<b>SADC</b>	Southern African Development Community
<b>EU</b>	European Union	<b>TWN</b>	Third World Network
<b>FTA</b>	free trade area/agreement	<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>GATS</b>	General Agreement on Trade in Services	<b>U.S.</b>	United States of America
<b>GATT</b>	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade	<b>USD</b>	U.S. dollar
		<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization

## Glossary

ASEAN:	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is a regional organization comprising countries of Southeast Asia. Established in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, the grouping now also has Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam as its members.
Feminization:	a shift in gender roles and sex roles in a society
Gender:	the economic, political, and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female
Gender blind:	without regard to gender
Gender equality:	the absence of discrimination, on the basis of a person's sex in the allocation of resources or benefits or in the access to services
Gender equity:	fairness of treatment for women and men according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different, but considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.
Gender mainstreaming:	the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned actions, including legislation, policies or programs in any area and at all levels. It also refers to strategies for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and social spheres.
Gender neutral:	free of explicit or implicit reference to gender or sex
Gender relations:	the relationship between women and men as demonstrated by their respective roles in power sharing, decision making and the division of labour, both within the household and in society at large
Gender sensitive:	the recognition that women and men differ in terms of both sex and gender. Such an approach has the potential to define the appropriate interventions for men and women accordingly.
Sex:	the biological characteristics that define humans as female and male
Trade liberalization:	the removal of or reduction in trade policies and practices that limit the free flow of goods and services from one nation to another. Trade liberalization generally includes the dismantling of tariffs (e.g. duties, surcharges, export subsidies, etc.) and non-tariff barriers (e.g. quotas, regulations, licensing requirements, etc.).

## Executive Summary

In Southeast Asia, it is uncommon that trade policy deliberation is pursued based on gender consideration. This is hardly surprising, given the prevalent argument among policymakers that trade policies and agreements generally affect people regardless of their class, race and gender. In almost all Southeast Asian countries, governments only consult a narrow industrial interest in their trade policy deliberations, although gender is becoming an important factor in the complex relationship among trade, growth and development. Today, not only is there direct conflict between trade rules and the human rights of women, but trade norms often undermine the livelihoods and wellbeing of women. Moreover, because of the disadvantaged social status accorded to women, trade policies and agreements often diminish the capacity of the state to protect, promote, and fulfil the economic and social rights of women.

As the region enters the 21st century, Southeast Asia has turned itself into one of the most open economic regions in the world. Countries are increasingly convinced that trade liberalization is crucial to their economic growth and have subsequently reoriented their policies and budgets to improve the flows of goods and services that are exported and imported across borders. Most Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members are not only members of the World Trade Organization, but are also parties of various regional trade liberalization initiatives, such as the ASEAN Free Trade Area and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation integration projects. In recent years, these initiatives have also been expanded through what most economists refer to as bilateralism, either in the form of free trade agreements or economic partnership agreements with major trading partners, such as the countries of Northeast Asia, the U.S. and the EU.

Although it is fair to suggest that the overall impacts of these liberalization initiatives in the region have been mixed, with some sections of the society coming out as winners, while others lose, economic liberalization has certainly affected both men and women differently. Poor women, in particular, are generally less likely to be equipped with the appropriate skills, technology and other resources that would otherwise have enabled them to reap the benefits of trade liberalization. They are, in fact, very vulnerable to the changes that emerge in the prices of agricultural and manufacturing products. Moreover, trade liberalization often implicates women's access to basic services, such as health.

This paper analyzes the gender sensitivity of selected trade liberalization initiatives pursued by the countries of Southeast Asia. It primarily argues that trade policies and agreements pursued by both ASEAN and its member countries are far from being gender sensitive. Given the prevalent view among trade policymakers that trade is gender neutral, the absence of substantive considerations of the implications of economic opening for the wellbeing of women risks undermining the sustainable livelihood of this dynamic and important group of society. In order to improve the standing of women in society, this paper proposes a number of recommendations to the countries of the region, both individually and collectively, which includes: (1) putting women at the centre of trade policy analysis and deliberations and ensuring that trade policy changes are not made at the expense of the quality of the lives of women; (2) ensuring that policymakers undertake the necessary gender-oriented review of trade liberalization initiatives; (3) ensuring that women gain easy access to any social safety nets schemes that help them to cope with economic adjustment resulting from trade liberalization; (4) enhancing trade-related capacity building among women so as to enable them to reap the benefits of trade liberalization; and, finally, (5) providing the necessary resources to support the region's commitment to advancing gender equality.

## 1. Introduction

Similar to the trade liberalization process in many other parts of the world today, the impacts of the liberalization of the economies of Southeast Asia, particularly in the last decade or so, have become more pronounced. Overall, the impacts of trade liberalization in the region have been mixed, with some sections of society emerging as winners and others as losers. For example, some would argue that the relative success of the economies of Southeast Asia has been founded on a combination of sound market-based and foreign investment-friendly policies (Rigg, 1997: 3). At the same time, however, economic liberalization also brings about a multitude of economic adjustment costs, normally at the expense of the poor and the marginalized sections of the community. In terms of advancing gender equality specifically, it is fair to say that the policymaking process and the implementation of trade policy have generally been far from gender sensitive. In other words, it is rare that trade policy deliberations have been based on and informed by gender considerations. The prevalent argument among policymakers is that trade policies and agreements generally affect people regardless of their class, race and gender. In almost all Southeast Asian countries, governments in fact only consult a narrow industrial interest in their trade policy deliberations.

All this is, of course, hardly surprising. Among other things, studies of international trade and gender are relatively new (Senapaty, 2003). Governments, particularly those in developing and least-developed countries, are equally slow in responding to the different impacts of trade liberalization on men and women. However, gender is certainly becoming an important factor in the complex relationship among trade, growth and development. By using a legal perspective in her analysis of the relationship among these factors, Mengesha (2006: 3–4) argues not only that there is a direct conflict between trade rules and the human rights of women, but that trade norms often undermine the effectiveness of human rights norms regarding women. In the context of trade, as Mengesha (2006) further argues, what is often invoked in empirical research is the impact of trade rules on the capacity of the state to implement its obligations in the economic and social lives of its citizens. Because of the disadvantaged social status accorded to most women, trade policies and agreements often diminish the capacity of the state to protect, promote, and fulfil the economic and social rights of women.

Although it is true that trade can serve as a catalyst to promote greater gender equality, the impacts of trade liberalization and economic globalization on women in particular have so far been mixed. While, for example, on the surface trade liberalization has appeared to have improved women's empowerment and livelihoods,<sup>1</sup> many cases also show that the overall benefits accrued to women from trade liberalization have been somewhat marginal, and often less than those acquired by men (McGill, 2004), while in many circumstances trade liberalization has actually exacerbated gender inequalities and undermined the economic and social status of women (Margawati, 2007).

In Southeast Asia, the impacts of trade liberalization are certainly far from being gender neutral, in that they affect men and women differently. Although trade liberalization is aimed, among other things, at enhancing competitiveness, poor women in both developing and least-developed countries in Southeast Asia are less likely to be equipped with the appropriate skills, technology and other resources that would otherwise have enabled them to reap the benefits of trade liberalization. In contrast, such women are often vulnerable to changes in the prices of agricultural and manufactured products. With the current liberalization of trade, it is also often the case that poor women are subjected to the negative implications of the changes that emerge in basic services, particularly health, that accompany this phenomenon.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Nordas (2003).



As the region enters the 21st century, Southeast Asia has turned itself into one of the most open economic regions in the world. Countries are increasingly convinced that trade liberalization is crucial to their economic growth and have subsequently reoriented their policies and budgets to improve the flows of goods and services exported and imported across borders (ICRW, 2009: 3). Most Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members are not only members of the World Trade Organization (WTO),<sup>2</sup> but are also parties of various regional trade liberalization initiatives, such as the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS), the ASEAN Investment Area (AIA), and so on, as well as the wider East Asian and Asia-Pacific integration projects (e.g. the projected East Asian Economic Community and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, respectively). In recent years, these initiatives have also been expanded through what most economists refer to as bilateralism, either in the form of free trade agreements (FTAs) or economic partnership agreements (EPAs) with trading partners. Southeast Asian bilateral FTAs and EPAs are mostly pursued with major developed countries (e.g. the U.S. and Japan) and/or regional groupings (e.g. the EU) from outside the region. These forms of liberalization tend to be wider in scope and coverage when compared to the negotiations at the WTO.

Against this background, this paper analyzes the gender sensitivity of selected trade liberalization initiatives pursued by the countries of Southeast Asia. From the outset, it primarily argues that trade policies and agreements pursued by both ASEAN and its member countries are far from being gender sensitive.<sup>3</sup> Given the prevalent view among trade policymakers that trade is gender neutral, the absence of substantive consideration of the implications of economic opening towards the wellbeing of women risks undermining the sustainable livelihood of this dynamic and important group of society. In order to elaborate this argument further, the paper is divided into several sections. Section 2 argues that gender should be considered an important element in the contemporary analysis of international trade. Section 3 provides a general picture of the overall political, economic and social positions of women in Southeast Asia. Section 4 analyzes the role of Southeast Asian women in trade policymaking, while section 5 identifies several different types of liberalization initiatives that have taken place in Southeast Asia and how they have impacted on women in the region. Finally, the paper concludes with a general overview of the key findings and makes key recommendations regarding approaches that should be incorporated into current and future trade negotiations.

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2 The exception is Lao PDR.

3 This is not to suggest that the absence of trade liberalization in the region would be a model of gender equality, and that trade liberalization is inexorably moving the position of women downwards.

## 2. Why Gender Matters in Southeast Asia's Trade Policy

Trade policymakers and practitioners in Southeast Asia are generally puzzled when asked about the importance of gender in trade policy. As mentioned earlier, there is a preconception among these state and non-state actors that trade is gender neutral. However, there is now abundant literature that suggests otherwise; i.e. that trade policies affect men and women differently, largely because of gender inequalities that persist between the sexes in terms of access to and control of economic and social resources and decision-making. Data in Table 1, for instance, shows the significant discrepancies between the estimated incomes of women and men in Southeast Asia, which still favour the latter. To a large extent, therefore, gender relations in Southeast Asia, as in many other developing parts of the world, are characterized by unequal power (Margawati, 2007). What feminist scholars refer to as 'gender norms' generally assign specific entitlements and responsibilities to men and women. Consequently, these gender norms determine the distribution of resources, wealth, work, decision making, political power, and the enjoyment of rights and entitlements both within the family and in public life (UNDAW, 1999). Moreover, the division of labour is also gendered in the sense that certain forms of work, such as physical labour, cash-crop farming and managerial roles, are seen as the normal occupations of men, while care work and housework (e.g. cleaning, etc.), for example, are highly feminized activities that are associated with the responsibilities of women, both at home and as an extension of their domestic tasks (Chen et al., 2005).

**Table 1: Estimated average earned income of men and women in ASEAN countries, 2006 (PPP\* USD)**

Countries	Women	Men
Brunei Darussalam	15,658	37,506
Cambodia	2,332	3,149
Indonesia	2,410	5,280
Lao PDR	1,385	2,692
Malaysia	5,751	15,861
Myanmar	n.a.	n.a.
Philippines	3,883	6,375
Singapore	20,044	39,150
Thailand	6,695	10,732
Vietnam	2,540	3,604
<b>ASEAN average</b>	<b>6,069.80</b>	<b>12,434.90</b>

\* PPP = purchasing power parity  
Source: UNDP (2007/08)

Feminist economists, such as Seguino (2006) and Hoskyns (2006), maintain that gender should be an important macroeconomic variable and that gender relations can affect economic development and growth. The state of gender relations today, which frequently results in the genders experiencing divergent outcomes, is already observable in several economic arenas in the Southeast Asian region, such as (1) job segregation within the paid labour market; (2) the division of labour between paid and unpaid labour; (3) the distribution of income and resources within the household; (4) access to redistribution

carried out by the state (e.g. access to education and social safety net programs); and (5) access to credit in the financial markets. In general, therefore, the effect of gendered economic opportunities is that men and women occupy different class positions, with the latter more likely to be poor, malnourished, less educated and more overworked relative to men (Davis, 1981; Beneria & Roldan, 1987).

It has become increasingly important to examine the nexus between gender inequalities and trade policies, and to take a broader-than-usual view of development, poverty and wellbeing (Margawati, 2007: 220). Among other things, the politicization of trade policy, the connection being made between trade and development, and the expansion of trade to trade in services have all contributed to the greater impact of international trade issues on the lives of normal citizens, including those of women (Hoskyns, 2006: 2).

Unfortunately, mainstream economics literature, as mentioned earlier, is often gender blind when it comes to assessing the relationship among trade, inequality and poverty. Although economists generally acknowledge that gender bias exists at the microeconomic level, such as in the operation of labour markets or the allocation of resources within households, they tend to see little relevance for gender at a macroeconomic or global level of analysis. Moreover, social reproduction, which is the term associated with the roles that women traditionally play, has been undervalued and not counted in classic economic analysis (Picchio, 1992; Hoskyns, 2006: 3). This is mainly due to the general assumption that macroeconomics is all about aggregates and that both the policy objectives (e.g. price stability, employment generation, growth and external balance) and the traditional policy instruments of macroeconomics (e.g. fiscal and exchange rate policies) are gender neutral.<sup>4</sup> Similar views are often held with regard to the analysis of international trade and finance. Gender is, therefore, often ignored in theoretical, empirical and practical terms, thereby perpetuating gender biases in most economies.

Development economists, however, have been investigating the complex relationship between gender inequalities and trade liberalization for several decades. Although the effect of international trade on the gender wage gap and other aspects of discrimination is still unclear, a study conducted by Korinek (2005) finds that trade creates job for women from middle-income developing countries. The question, however, remains as to whether trade liberalization that leads to an increase in women's share of paid employment in the export sector also generates higher incomes and greater empowerment for women more generally. It has been suggested that women's role in production becomes progressively less central and less important during capitalist industrialization in developing countries (Momsen, 2004: 173). As industrialization proceeds, the so-called theory of female marginalization also argues that women are pushed out from higher-paid sectors into relatively lower-paid jobs (Scott, 1986). Yet statistical and sectoral indicators show that in many developing countries the expansion of industrialization has indeed led to the growth of women's share of employment (Margawati, 2007: 221). The prevailing argument today, therefore, is that industrialization does not necessarily marginalize women. On the contrary, from the 1970s onwards, an increase in women's share of employment seems to go hand in hand with successful industrialization in many Third World economies (Pearson, 1997: 224–25).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> It is not usual for trade theorists to be concerned with the detailed social consequences of trade liberalization. The general view is that trade is an activity that is good for the overall performance of the economy, even if it involves changes in the composition of economic activity that advantage some and disadvantage others. Trade theorists tend to argue that the effects of trade policy should be managed by other flanking policies. An example of this is the WTO's Trade Policy Review Mechanism, which investigates how the organization's rules have been implemented by governments and their effects on the multilateral trading system, instead of focusing on the effects of international trade policy on the wellbeing of the world's population. For a more detailed analysis on the reluctance of trade theorists to factor gender considerations into their work, see, among others, Hoskyns (2006).

<sup>5</sup> Pearson (1997: 225) further argues that a major feature of Third World industrialization has been the employment opportunities that have been offered to women, although there has been much dispute as to why women are considered as the new industrial labour force and what such employment offers to women in terms of wages, training, promotion, working conditions, etc.

There is no doubt that economic openness and the development that follows have generated some positive impacts on women's daily lives. Despite this, women's position in society remains unchanged. In many cases, in fact, the economic, social and political positions of women have even deteriorated as a result of economic liberalization (Kabeer, 1994; WHO, 2000). Although trade liberalization allows women to be more integrated into the labour force, a system of gender bias persists that perceives women as inferior to men, which systematically manifests further in the forms of job segregation and wage inequality between the two sexes (Sinaga, 2008). Indeed, the removal of tariffs and quotas as a result of trade liberalization policies pursued by countries and regional groupings around the world has generally exposed the previously protected sectors to competition and opened up new areas for exchanges and commoditization. New trade policies do not only generate changes in employment trends, but also in the patterns of prices, incomes and consumption, all of which affect men and women differently. Overall, suffice it to say that women may be affected by trade liberalization differently from men as a result of (1) their asymmetric rights and responsibilities; (2) their reproductive and motherhood roles; (3) gendered social norms; (4) labour market segregation; (5) consumption patterns; and, finally, (6) time poverty. While these characteristics overlap, they could also reinforce one another. To a large extent, therefore, men and women are confronted with different opportunities and constraints as a result of the liberalization of trade and investment regimes in a society.

### 3. The Political, Economic and Social Positions of Women in Southeast Asia

An analysis of the current political, economic and social positions of women in Southeast Asia helps us understand how Southeast Asian women have fared in relation to their male counterparts. Table 2 provides various gender-related social indicators in ASEAN member countries that are commonly used to measure the level of gender equality in countries all over the world. The UN Development Programme's Human Development Index (HDI), Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) are useful tools to measure the overall level of gender equality in ASEAN countries.<sup>6</sup> The HDI ranks countries around the world based on their overall achievements in attaining the same longevity, knowledge and standard of living among their citizens. Inequalities between men and women, however, are better captured in the GDI and GEM indicators. While the GDI applies the same three basic dimensions as those used in the HDI, the GEM is used to measure the inequalities between the opportunities accorded to both men and women in a country. Political and economic participation and decision making, as well as the power over economic resources, are some of the key components that make up the GEM.

**Table 2: Gender equality-related social indicators of ASEAN member countries, 2006**

Countries	HDI	GDI ranking/value	GEM ranking/value	Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births)	% of women in the parliament	Literacy rate (%)		Life expectancy (years)	
							Female	Male	Female	Male
Brunei	30	31/0.886	n.a.	9.5	28.2	*	95.1	95.2	77.4	74.4
Cambodia	131	113/0.594	83/0.577	80.0	450.0	8.0	61.1	80.2	63.0	59.0
Indonesia	107	93/0.721	n.a.	35.5	307.0	14.5	86.2	93.5	70.3	66.3
Lao PDR	130	114/0.593	n.a.	82.0	530.0	n.a.	60.9	77.0	56.0	54.0
Malaysia	63	57/0.802	65/0.504	6.3	30.6	n.a.	88.4	88.4	75.9	70.3
Myanmar	132	n.a.	n.a.	44.7	150.0	n.a.	92.9	93.7	64.4	61.5
Philippines	90	76/0.768	45/0.590	30.0	108.0	n.a.	92.5	91.4	72.5	67.2
Singapore	25	n.a.	16/0.761	2.5	30.0	6.5	91.4	97.1	80.9	77.0
Thailand	78	70/0.779	73/0.472	20.5	44.0	n.a.	91.4	94.9	75.0	67.9
Vietnam	105	90/0.732	52/0.561	21.0	85.0	26.0	88.4	94.7	72.0	67.0

\*Brunei Darussalam does not have a parliament.

Sources: UNDP (2007/08); ASEAN Secretariat (2006)

In general, data from Table 2 shows that the levels of both development and gender equality throughout Southeast Asia remain diverse. Brunei Darussalam, Singapore and Malaysia are the only countries in the region with a high level of human development (as measured by the HDI), while the remaining members of ASEAN are categorized with medium levels of human development. Although there is continuous debate as to whether economic development is the necessary prerequisite for gender equality, what is apparent from the data in Table 2 is that the promotion of gender equality appears to have improved along with the advancement of economic development. Although the GDI level data for Singapore is

<sup>6</sup> Both the GDI and GEM work on a scale between 0 and 1, with 0 reflecting the perfect lack of what the particular index measures and 1 reflecting its perfect presence.

absent, other relatively higher-income countries, such as Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia, score relatively high in their GDI level, with values of 0.886 and 0.802, respectively. The least-developed countries of Southeast Asia, such as Cambodia and Lao PDR, on the other hand, record relatively lower GDI values of 0.594 and 0.593, respectively. Singapore is, in fact, within the top twenty countries in terms of its GEM ranking and value; in other words, Singapore is the most progressive country in ASEAN in terms of the participation of women in the country's political and economic life.

Furthermore, with the exception of Thailand, the democracies of Southeast Asia, including the Philippines and Indonesia, stand in relatively modest positions in their HDI, GDI and GEM rankings and values. This simply suggests that, at least within the Southeast Asian context, democracy has not fully ensured women's participation in the political and economic lives of these countries. In Indonesia – the largest democracy in the region – women only occupy 14.5 percent of the seats in parliament. While it is true that the levels of life expectancy and literacy rates among Southeast Asian women have improved in comparison to their male counterparts, their participation in the political, economic and social decision-making process is still restricted. Further exacerbating the problems faced by Southeast Asian women today is, among other things, persistent social discrimination, including resurgent patriarchies such as the rise of conservative religious or ideological movements that often discipline women's mobility and sexualities.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> As articulated by Josefa Gigi Francisco, general coordinator for Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era and senior programme coordinator for the Gender, Development and Economic Globalization forum, Women and Gender Institute, Miriam College, in her email exchanges with the authors on 25 August 2009.

## 4. The Role of Women in Southeast Asian Trade Policymaking

Advocates of neoliberal economic policy generally claim that trade liberalization is an important prerequisite for national reform.<sup>8</sup> In the context of the status of Southeast Asian women, however, trade liberalization has not necessarily been accompanied by the necessary reforms to advance their position in the society. As mentioned earlier, the preconception among Southeast Asian trade policymakers that international trade is gender neutral contributes to the exclusion of gender considerations in the region's trade policy formulation. Although there are few analyses of the role of women in ASEAN-specific trade policymaking processes, a number of studies focusing on trade policy deliberations in ASEAN and each of its member countries provide a glimpse of the way in which trade policymaking takes place in the region.<sup>9</sup> Although, as shown throughout this paper, the analyses on the impacts of trade liberalization on women, or gender disparity in particular, are vast, none of the trade policymaking studies on Southeast Asia consider gender aspects or the role, concerns and aspirations of women as integral parts of trade policy deliberations in the region.

Several reasons explain the scarcity of gender considerations in Southeast Asia's trade policymaking literature. Firstly, there is an increasing agreement among critical scholars and observers of international trade in the region that trade policy still remains within the realm of economic elites (Chandra & Chavez, 2008a; 2008b). Secondly, international trade is still perceived as predominantly an issue of concern to economic actors. In the relatively democratic political regimes of Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, for example, business groups and associations and large conglomerates have traditionally been considered as key stakeholders in trade policy deliberations, while in most Southeast Asian countries, the academic community also plays an instrumental role in assisting the design and formulation of their governments' trade policies.<sup>10</sup> Thirdly, the two abovementioned reasons contribute to the generally weak dissemination of relevant information on trade policy issues in many Southeast Asian countries. Fourthly, when information and space for engagement are made available, women, particularly poor ones, are often unable to engage in full debates on the technical issues related to the trade policy of their countries.<sup>11</sup> This is partly because, although there are increasing numbers of economically literate women in Southeast Asian society, there are always social barriers that prevent them from making meaningful contributions to the formulation of trade policy.

Having said this, it is interesting to note that some of the high-profile economic policymakers in the region are women. In Indonesia alone, for example, at the time of the writing of this paper, high-profile women, such as Dr Sri Mulyani Indrawati and Dr Mari Elka Pangestu, hold control of strategic economic ministries within the country, with the former currently heading the Indonesian Ministry of Finance and the latter currently serving as the country's minister of trade. In Malaysia, Rafidah Aziz was the country's minister of trade and industry for twenty years, from 1987 until 2008, while Eleanor Briones served as the treasurer for the administration of Joseph Estrada in the Philippines (1998–2001). Even more so, some women have even held top positions in the political structures of some ASEAN member countries. Two women, for example – Corazon Aquino (1986–92) and Maria Gloria Macapagal-

8 See, for example, Soesastro and Basri (2005) and Shafaeddin (2005).

9 In 2005, for example, the journal ASEAN Economic Bulletin issued a special edition (vol. 22, no. 1) that gave extensive analyses on the way in which trade policymaking processes were being carried out both at the regional and country levels in Southeast Asia. A study conducted by Chandra and Chavez (2008a) also looks at the role of civil society in ASEAN's integration as a whole. Meanwhile, for more country-specific critical analysis, see, among others, Chandra (2005; 2007; forthcoming).

10 See also the Annex to this paper for a brief analysis of various advocacy groups that work on trade–gender linkages in Southeast Asia.

11 As articulated by Hira Jhamtani, Third World Network associate for Asia and Indonesia, in her email exchanges with the authors on 26 August 2009.

Arroyo (1998–present) – have been president of the Philippines. Equally, in Indonesia, Megawati Sukarnoputri also held the presidency from 2001 until 2004.

Although it is not uncommon for women to hold very high positions in the political and economic lives of countries in Southeast Asia, there is little evidence that these female leaders advance the specific interests of women as far as trade policy is concerned. It was under the administration of President Arroyo that the Philippines embarked upon aggressive trade and investment liberalization within the frameworks of regional and bilateral free trade and economic partnership agreements. In Indonesia, the administration of President Megawati also pushed for the country's entrance into the ASEAN–China Free Trade Agreement without formal ratification from the country's parliament (Pambudi & Chandra, 2006). Moreover, the current finance and trade ministers of Indonesia, Dr Sri Mulyani and Dr Pangestu, respectively, are also known as neoliberal advocates who have been promoting further liberalization in the country to expand national reforms that have been achieved by Indonesia. In light of this participation by women in the highest levels of trade policymaking and the data given in Table 2, while debate is still ongoing as to whether trade liberalization is harmful to the livelihood and wellbeing of women, it is clear that women's participation in top policymaking processes does not necessarily advance women's economic interests. Or, if there are signs of improvement in the wellbeing of women, they do not necessarily result from gender-specific considerations in the formulation of trade policy.



## 5. Trade Liberalization and Its Implications for Southeast Asian Women

### 5.1 Trade liberalization in Southeast Asia

Trade liberalization is certainly not new in Southeast Asia.<sup>12</sup> Although the region has been a relatively reluctant free trader as a whole, several member countries have pursued unilateral trade liberalization when they have deemed it suitable for their own development. Although some countries have occasionally pursued protectionist policies in pursuit of self-sufficiency, the tradition of open economy remains today. The concepts of an open economy and free trade became more pronounced in the mid-20th century, and some countries, such as Myanmar and Indonesia, started to flirt with multilateral negotiations to remove trade barriers through their participation in the newly established General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).<sup>13</sup> Over the years, other Southeast Asian countries followed suit, and to date only Lao PDR has yet to become a member of the WTO, the successor of the GATT.

A decade following the establishment of ASEAN in 1967, the five original member countries of the grouping – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand – agreed to embark on closer economic cooperation by pursuing an ASEAN Preferential Trade Agreement and other complementary economic cooperation schemes. In order to improve economic cooperation among the members of ASEAN, the grouping also launched AFTA, the AIA and AFAS in the 1990s.

It was, however, the 1997/98 economic crisis that served as the catalyst to propel ASEAN to become one of the most open regional groupings today. This crisis not only forced countries such as Indonesia and Thailand to undertake unilateral trade liberalization as prescribed by international financial institutions (e.g. the International Monetary Fund — IMF — and the World Bank), ASEAN as a grouping also took its own initiative to accelerate economic integration among its members. In 2003, for example, through the so-called Bali Concord II, the members of ASEAN agreed to launch the ASEAN Community, which comprises the ASEAN Political-Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. The ASEAN Community and its three pillars of cooperation are expected to be realized by 2015.<sup>14</sup>

The commitment towards pursuing an open economic regime was also apparent through ASEAN and its member countries' pursuance of bilateral free trade agreements (BFTAs) and bilateral economic partnership agreements (BEPAs) with key dialogue partners, such as China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. To date, discussions on BFTAs and BEPAs with other key trade partners such as the U.S. and the EU are ongoing. Apart from being one of the world's most important geostrategic locations, Southeast Asia has some 550 million consumers. These two factors have made the region very attractive to major developed countries. Overall, suffice it to say that open economic regimes, with trade liberalization as one of their components, remain as a key element in the efforts of the region to pursue its economic development objectives.

12 When it was under British administration, for example, Singapore had already adopted free trade principles in the early 19th century.

13 Myanmar formally acceded to the GATT in 1948, while Indonesia entered the forum in 1950, a year after its independence was recognized by the international community.

14 Initially, 2020 was decided as the target date for the achievement of the AEC. At the 38th ASEAN Economic Ministerial Meeting held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, however, ASEAN economic ministers agreed to bring forward the establishment of the AEC to 2015. According to its 'Blueprint', which was signed by ASEAN leaders in November 2007, the AEC will be implemented 'in accordance to the principles of an open, outward-looking, inclusive, and market driven economy' (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008: 5). In order to achieve its single market objective, ASEAN also strives to incorporate the principles of the free flows of goods, services, investment, capital and skilled labour.

## 5.2 Trade liberalization and women in Southeast Asia

Apart from not being part of economic policy considerations, women often become the subject of exploitation of these policies. For example, the success of the export-led strategy adopted by most Southeast Asian countries in the mid-1980s was in fact built on gender differences. Indeed, increasing evidence suggests that the contribution of wages inequality between male and female workers helped to stimulate economic growth in the developing economies of the region (Elbeshbishi, 2009: 13). Following the adoption of this export-led industrialization strategy, however, there was more pressure for Southeast Asian labour market to adopt flexible prices. With limited bargaining power, Southeast Asian women often found themselves in a relatively worse-off economic condition than their male counterparts.

The adoption of a regional free trade strategy in the following decade (the 1990s) further exacerbated the economic difficulties that women had to face. Trade liberalization and the overall process of economic globalization have had profound impacts on the livelihoods and wellbeing of women in Southeast Asia (Westley & Mason, 1998). Indeed, Southeast Asian women now live in an environment that is continuously changing, while their livelihoods depend on being able to understand the challenges arising from global competition (Tonguthai, 2007: 42). Overall, it can be argued that, although trade liberalization affects both men and women in the developing and least-developed countries of Southeast Asia, women appear to have to bear most of the adverse effects of such a trade policy. In relation to trade liberalization initiatives that have been pursued by both ASEAN and its member countries, there are at least three sectoral areas of the economies where such adverse impacts of trade liberalization are felt the most by women in this region, i.e. in the manufacturing, agricultural and services sectors. The following subsections highlight different complexities that are faced by Southeast Asian women in these sectors.

### 5.2.1 Southeast Asian women and manufacturing sector liberalization

Like most developing countries, women comprise a considerable proportion of employees in the manufacturing sector of many Southeast Asian economies.<sup>15</sup> Among other things, international production networks play a significant role in the rise of women's employment in the region (Francisco & Durano, 2008: 171). In a similar line of analysis, Jomo (2001: 13) also argues that

the decline in ... manufacturing employment set in for the first-tier or first generation East Asian [newly industrialized economies at the time], encouraging [firms in these countries] to relocate low-skill labour-intensive production to the rest of Southeast Asia and China.

Following this trend, East Asian economies were transformed into an important production hub where countries in the region could be placed in a hierarchy within international production networks (Ghosh, 1998; Durano, 2004). It is these production networks that have contributed significantly to the rise of women's employment, particularly through their presence in export processing zones and in female labour-intensive sectors, such as garments and electronics (Wood, 1991; Horton, 1996; Standing, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> This is in stark contrast to the trend in middle-income countries where, since the late 1980s, demand for women's labour in the manufacturing sector has been declining (UN, 1999: 9). While it is far from clear as to why this occurs in these countries, the UN study also notes that in some East Asian countries, such as Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea, the composition of the workforce in some manufacturing sectors, such as electronics, has seen the domination of males over females, particularly as production shifts into more sophisticated products (e.g. computers and communication products).

**Table 3: Participation of women in production, 2006**

Country	Labour force participation rate (%)	Employment rate of women (%)
Brunei Darussalam	59.30	93.80
Cambodia	74.80	99.00
Indonesia	46.30	87.00
Lao PDR	74.50	98.30
Malaysia	47.70	96.40
Myanmar	48.60	95.00
Philippines	51.00	89.70
Singapore	53.90	94.70
Thailand	63.90	96.60
Vietnam	48.60	95.50
ASEAN	50.81	91.15

Source: ASEAN Secretariat (2006: 72)

Data on the share of female workers in the manufacturing sector in selected Southeast Asian countries gathered by Jomo (2001: 14) supports this analysis. In Singapore, for example, the share of female workers in the manufacturing sector rose from 18.2 percent in 1957 to around 40.2 percent at the end of the 20th century. Similarly, in Malaysia, the proportion of female workers also rose significantly from 38.2 percent in 1980 to 47.6 percent in 1990, before declining to 40.3 percent following the 1997/98 financial crisis. Thailand and Indonesia also share this trend: in Thailand the proportion of female workers rose from 37.6 percent in 1960 to 49.3 percent in 1999, while in Indonesia the proportion of females in the manufacturing sector rose from 37.5 percent in 1961 to 44.8 percent in 1997.

More recent indicators of women's participation rate in the overall employment sectors of the region are also provided by the 2006 ASEAN baseline report produced by the ASEAN Secretariat (see Table 3). According to this report, female workers' participation rates across the region ranged from 46.3 percent (Indonesia) to 74.8 percent (Cambodia). The average participation rate of women in the labour force was 50.8 percent.

While the relative increase of the share of women's employment in the workplace has been regarded as a positive impact of the export-led growth policy and the subsequent trade liberalization initiatives adopted by Southeast Asian countries, women's position in society remains debatable. Feminist scholars, for example, observe a significant tradeoff between gains in the quantity of female workers generated in industries and the losses of welfare associated with their poor working conditions (Francisco & Durano, 2008: 172) and the quality of life of women and their households (Margawati, 2007). It is common, for example, for female workers in Cambodia to experience sexual harassment from their male superiors and to find their pay cut with little or no explanation (Khus, 2007). Moreover, despite a broadly open economic regime, Indonesian women on average still earn only 76 percent of the salaries of their male counterparts (World Bank, 2006).<sup>16</sup> Overall, Indonesian women are still over-represented in the unpaid and low-paid informal sector, but are under-represented in the more lucrative formal wage sector. Worse still, increased stress, the use of children as unpaid family labour and isolation from other workers that inhibits collective organized action by women are common problems arising from the impacts of trade liberalization in the informal sector in Thailand (Floro & Antonopoulous, 2005). In fact, Barrientos,

<sup>16</sup> See also Table 1 for a comparison of the earnings of women and men in other Southeast Asian countries.

Kabeer and Hossain (2004) also observe that there is a declining trend in women's share of employment in export processing zones in the Asia-Pacific region. Although it is true that women's share of employment in the region has generally increased, there is also another growing trend today where women are facing fierce competition from their male counterparts for the same jobs, particularly as the latter are more willing to accept lower pay in order to compete with women. To a certain extent, trade liberalization has certainly put into question the sustainability of women's position in the working environment.

### 5.2.2 Southeast Asian women and agricultural sector liberalization

As with liberalization in the manufacturing sector, similar liberalization efforts in the agricultural sector are putting significant pressure on women. Agriculture is an important component of the economy of many developing countries, and Southeast Asia is no exception. In this region, the agricultural sector not only serves as a catalyst for export earnings and rural development, but also underpins food security. Structural changes that come with the introduction of trade liberalization often undermine the sustainability of the region's agricultural production. The expansion of industrialization as a result of the aforementioned structural changes resulting from trade liberalization in Southeast Asia, for example, has propelled a significant shift in female employment from the agricultural sector to the manufacturing and services industries. Not only has this shift permanently changed the landscape of rural economies in Southeast Asia (Rigg, 1997: 219), but it also requires governments in the region to reassess the ways in which food production can be sustained in the future.

Throughout Southeast Asia, the representation of women and men is also varied across different agricultural sectors, and thus impacts generated by policy changes, such as trade liberalization initiatives, affect the sexes differently (García, Nyberg & Saadat, 2006: 1). Apart from the fact that women and men acquire different levels of education, skills and incomes, they are also placed differently in their role in the agricultural sector, and, as such, both sexes also possess different capacities to access and use agricultural resources. Indeed, a study conducted by Francisco and Durano (2008: 169) argues that, when trade volumes and values increase, control over traded agricultural commodities generally goes to men instead of women. Key to this analysis is the society's perception of what both these studies refer to as public and private spheres and how both men and women are placed in these two spaces. In Southeast Asia, men generally dominate the public sphere and women the private sphere. It is, they argue, common to find evidence of men securing more benefits from trade liberalization than women.

In other instances, Rigg (1997: 244) postulates that the marginalization of women is a result of technological change generated by trade liberalization. For example, in Malaysia, the use of combine harvesters and mechanical hullers in rice cultivation and processing has tended to displace women from their traditional role in agricultural production. It is not uncommon to find women looking for alternative employment beyond their villages, or for them simply to retreat into housework (De Koninck, 1992: 109–21). To a large extent, therefore, technological changes are often accompanied by a decline in the importance of women in the agricultural sector (Parnwell & Arghiros, 1996).

### 5.2.3 Southeast Asian women and services sector liberalization

Services sector liberalization plays a significant role in the integration of member countries in ASEAN, as well as in the integration of the region to the global economy. The services sector accounts for about 40–50 percent of the total gross domestic product of many ASEAN countries (ASEAN Secretariat, n.d.). Apart from the WTO's services liberalization commitments, member countries in the region have also been cooperating to expand trade in this sector through AFAS, as well as extensive plans for the liberalization of trade in services under the various BFTAs. Although AFAS follows the structure and approach of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) at the WTO, ASEAN aims for its liberalization in the services sector to go beyond what has been achieved at the multilateral level (i.e. GATS-plus).<sup>17</sup> The same also applies to most BFTA arrangements that both ASEAN and its member countries are involved in. In this context, therefore, both ASEAN and its member countries are encouraged to pursue trade liberalization in services beyond what have been achieved at the GATS level. Some ASEAN member countries also pursue unilateral liberalization in selected services sectors as part of their commitments to pursue extensive liberalization with international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the IMF. Health sector liberalization in Indonesia and Thailand is a case in point.

The overall approach towards services sector liberalization within the frameworks of GATS, AFAS and the various BFTAs pursued by ASEAN and its member countries is likely to have disproportionately negative impacts on women, particularly poor women, in the region. Overall, there are at least two areas of concern in the area of services liberalization for the region's women, i.e. the liberalization of public services (e.g. healthcare) and what is normally referred to as Mode 4 of services liberalization under the GATS, or the movement of natural persons. In the area of health-related issues, for example, an analysis provided by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW, 2009: 2) suggests that while trade liberalization in the services sector affects women positively as a result of the creation of new employment and the better access that is accorded to women by health services and technology, it may also lead to higher costs of health services and supplies, lower quality of services, and a shortages of medical personnel due to increased migration. The so-called 'brain drain' of medical professional to foreign countries could also further restrict poor women's access to proper healthcare, particularly affecting those living in remote areas.

The liberalization of the tourism and entertainment industries provides another example of how women's wellbeing and dignity can be jeopardized. Although tourism can be a positive development, particularly when it engenders a strong inflow of foreign exchange and positive intersectoral linkages that promote the growth of other sectors (Williams, 2002: 4), it is very common to see the segregation of male and female into different occupations in this sector as a result of gender stereotyping and sex segregation.<sup>18</sup> In general, women also tend to predominate as the majority of the workforce in the relatively menial, semiskilled, domestic and service-type occupations in this industry. Some observers, such as Francesco and Durano (2008: 174–75), would even argue that the commitment of most Southeast Asian countries to various types of services sector liberalization also raises concerns about the backward and forward sectoral linkages between tourism and the entertainment industries and their links with prostitution and human trafficking. Indeed, as Williams (2002: 7) postulates, sex tourism has been raised as a key factor in the appeal of ASEAN destinations, and this is particularly the case of Thailand and Cambodia, where there is an influx of young girls from Indonesia, Myanmar and Lao PDR to work in bars and brothels.

17 To date, AFAS covers seven services sectors, including air transport services, business services, construction, financial services, maritime services, tourism and logistics. Full liberalization of the services trade is aimed to be achieved by 2015.

18 Williams (2002: 4) also adds that the conventional wisdom that tourism is unambiguously good is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, it does not recognize the drain of resources and loss of revenues in tourist-sending countries. Secondly, it often ignores distributional and other key factors associated with the goods and services used by tourists. Finally, it also ignores the social, gender equity and environmental impacts of tourism.

Another aspect of services liberalization that risks undermining women's rights and wellbeing is the issue of migration, both regular and irregular (or undocumented). ASEAN includes both migrant workers' countries of origin and destination countries. Migrant workers from this region seek employment not only in the relatively more developed Middle Eastern (e.g. United Emirates Arab and Lebanon) and Northeast Asian countries (e.g. Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea and Japan), but also in their more developed neighbouring ASEAN countries, such as Singapore and Malaysia. For migrant workers from countries in the Greater Mekong Sub, such as Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam, Thailand is often the target country of their destination.

Among the growing trends in the current migration pattern of Southeast Asia is feminization, which is mainly due to the rise in the number of women seeking work outside their home countries.<sup>19</sup> In the Philippines and Indonesia, for example, the comparative distribution of male and female migrant workers over time is quite striking (Gois, 2008: 123–24). In the Philippines alone, the percentage distributions of female and male migrant workers in the early 1990s were nearly the same, with both accounting for about 50 percent of the total migrant workers sent by the country. By 2002 the number of Filipino women leaving their home country to seek employment abroad rose to 70 percent of all migrants. In Indonesia, by contrast, although the percentage distribution between female and male workers remained relatively stable over the period of 1992–2002, the distribution gap between the two sexes was very wide, or roughly 65 percent for female and 35 percent for male workers. In Cambodia, the percentage distribution of female and male migrant workers stayed at an average of 50 percent for each in the early 1990s, but the percentage distribution for female migrant workers increased to 51 percent in 2002, while the percentage distribution of their male counterparts declined to 49 percent.

Overall, a number of factors lead to the increase feminization of migration today (Gois, 2008: 122–23). Firstly, as a result of massive demand for cheap labour from poor and developing countries, there has been an increase in the number of women who independently seek employment abroad (INSTRAW, 2007: 2). Secondly, the demand for more women workers in some sectors enables women to augment family incomes, which provides added incentives for women to migrate for work. Thirdly, there is also the emerging 'mail order bride' phenomenon, which normally involves women who publish their intent to marry someone from other, usually more financially developed, countries. This phenomenon is certainly common in many Southeast Asian countries, particularly in the Philippines and Vietnam. In 2004, for example, the statistics produced by the Taiwanese government suggests that Vietnamese women accounted for 69.8 percent of female foreign spouses.<sup>20</sup>

Despite their increased importance to the economic development of the region, female migrant workers remain marginalized in the regional economic integration initiatives within and beyond ASEAN. A major absence in ASEAN's social dimension, as Chavez (2007: 369) argues, is the non-recognition of low- and unskilled labour in official discussions and as a target for regional action. A number of frameworks for mutual recognition arrangements (MRAs) carried out to complement the AFAS agreement, such as the ASEAN MRA Framework for Accountancy Services, the ASEAN MRA on Architectural Services, and so on, are targeted to cater to the economic interests of skilled and professional migrant workers. A number of migrant worker advocacy groups have raised this point to ASEAN policymakers. For example, Philippines migrant worker advocates argue that the GATS Mode 4 approach adopted by ASEAN in its AFAS agreement is not inclusive (Rivera, 2005). Instead of recognizing the importance of semiskilled and unskilled labour, ASEAN's adoption of the GATS

19 The issue of the feminization of women began to emerge in the 1980s among women's rights advocates, who called on governments and migrants' rights policies to pay more attention to the gender aspects of migration, particularly regarding the failure of programmes and policies to address the specific vulnerabilities of women migrant workers (Carling, 2005).

20 As quoted in Gois (2008: 123).

approach reflects only an existing structural and institutional bias against the majority of migrant workers from this region.

Finally, as far as irregular or undocumented migration is concerned, the number of women involved in this form of migration remains significant.<sup>21</sup> In 2000 alone, for example, it was estimated that 1.8 million Filipino migrant workers were abroad, with many of these irregular migrants being women (AMC & MFA, 2000). So far, recognition of undocumented migrant workers is limited to the recognition of trafficking in people. The absence of undocumented migrants from official ASEAN policy does not only preclude these groups from the potential advancement of economic integration, but also endangers ASEAN health initiatives, especially with regard to the prevention and control of communicable diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and avian flu (Chavez, 2007: 370). Indeed, as pointed out in studies conducted by Cheng (2005) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2005), undocumented migrants are disproportionately more exposed to health risks due to the inadequate working conditions they experience and their irregular movement.<sup>22</sup> The same studies also suggest that undocumented migrants are less likely to seek medical attention when they are ill, because of their status.

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21 This is despite the difficulty that persists in obtaining reliable statistics on the number of undocumented migrant workers in the region.

22 As quoted in Chavez (2007: 370).

## 6. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

There is little doubt that trade liberalization has had profound effects on the wellbeing of women in Southeast Asia. Not all of these effects are negative, however. Indeed, the opening up of the region's economies at both the national and regional levels has brought about new opportunities in the form of new employment, which may allow women to access higher income levels and improve their status in society. In line with the region's commitment to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals, of which gender equality is one of the core components, efforts to improve gender equality have also improved recently. Given their increasing role in the economies of Southeast Asia, however, women are often found to be the major victims of economic openness. Poor women in particular remain vulnerable to economic policy changes that occur in the region. Unfortunately, trade policies are often gender blind and ignore women's interests and aspirations. As a result, it is not uncommon to find that trade policies adopted and pursued by both ASEAN and its member countries further marginalize women in society.

Given such circumstances, a number of policy recommendations should be considered in future research and actions in the region.

1. Women, along with other marginalized economic actors, should be put at the centre of trade policy analysis and deliberations in the region. As mentioned earlier, women increasingly play significant roles in the economies of Southeast Asia. Any trade policy changes that affect society at large must take into account the concerns and aspirations of women's groups.
2. Trade policy changes should not be made at the expense of the quality of the lives of women in the region. Southeast Asian women do not only contribute to the economic development of the region, but also to the maintenance of healthy family life, which in turn contributes to the social and, potentially, further economic stability of the society.
3. As a regional organization, ASEAN could improve its gender sensitiveness by ensuring its commitment to undertake the necessary gender-oriented review of its trade liberalization initiatives as currently done by other regional groupings, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC).<sup>23</sup>
4. Women should be given easy access to any social safety net schemes initiated by ASEAN and its member governments, should the adjustment costs generated by trade liberalization prove greater than its benefits.
5. Trade-related capacity building is a very crucial element in the efforts to promote gender equality in the region. Although women are often both the beneficiaries and victims of trade liberalization, they often lack the capacity to either reap the benefits from or minimize the negative impacts of this trade policy. Empowering women in trade policy formulation is a necessity for sustainable economic development in the region.

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23 Article 7(7) of the SADC Gender and Development Protocol specifies that member states have until 2010 to (1) review their trade policies, protocols and declarations to make them gender responsive; (2) include regional women's networks in trade policy structures; (3) create gender quotas in all their trade missions; and (4) ensure equal access by both women and men to financial and other markets, including trade negotiation processes.



6. Capacity building to eradicate discrimination against women in society is imperative. In many Southeast Asian communities, women are still perceived as second-class citizens. In the absence of such efforts targeted at the community at large, women will still likely be the subject of harsh and persistent discrimination, which might either hinder them from benefitting from the positive impacts of trade liberalization or expose them to its negative impacts.
7. Finally, the implementation of various commitments adopted by ASEAN and its member countries to improve gender equality, such as the 1988 Declaration on the Advancement of Women in ASEAN and others, is critical to the wellbeing and welfare of the region's women. However, commitment alone is certainly not sufficient without the appropriate amount of resources to support such implementation.

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## Annex: Gender Advocacy Groups in Southeast Asia's Trade Policymaking

<b>Gender-specific Organizations with Trade Programs/Projects</b>		
<i>Organization</i>	<i>Geographical scope</i>	<i>Focal issues/activities</i>
International Gender Trade Network (IGTN)	International, regional and domestic	IGTN primarily pursues research and advocacy on the linkages between gender and regional and global economic integration.
Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)	International and regional	DAWN mainly works on gender-related issues and it has provided research input to ASEAN-related institutions on gender and trade.*
Asia-Pacific Women, Law and Development (APWLD)	Regional	APWLD covers a wide range of activities, including rural and indigenous women; women and environment; violence against women; women's participation in the political process; labour and migration; and cross-cutting initiatives.
Women's Solidarity (SP – <i>Solidaritas Perempuan</i> )	National (Indonesia)	SP works primarily on the promotion of gender equity, but also has specific programs dedicated to gender and natural resources and gender and food sovereignty.
<b>Non-gender-specific Advocacy Groups with Gender–Trade Linkages Programs/Projects</b>		
<i>Organization</i>	<i>Geographical scope</i>	<i>Focal issues/activities</i>
Third World Network (TWN)	International, regional and domestic	TWN primarily works on trade- and sustainable development-related issues, but also has a specific program on women and gender, which covers issues such as (1) gender and global economic issues; (2) gender and health; (3) gender, media and culture; and (4) gender, land and resource use.
Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA)	Regional	MFA primarily works on addressing migrant-related issues, but it also has an initiative to create alternative sustainable economic models, processes and practices for migrants.
Coordination of Action Research on Aids and Mobility (CARAM) Asia	Regional	As a network organization, CARAM Asia generally coordinates research and advocacy work on migrants' state of health, foreign domestic workers, and so on. The network also works on migration, health and globalization issues.
Asia-Pacific Research Network (APRN)	Regional	APRN pursues coordinated research among members on economic liberalization-related issues. It has also initiated a coordinated research project on the issue of globalization and women's labour.
Focus on the Global South	International	This organization generally works on trade liberalization- and globalization-related issues, but it also assigns some individual staff members to work on trade and gender-related issues.
Institute for Global Justice (IGJ)	National (Indonesia)	IGJ pursues research and advocacy on economic globalization issues.

## trade knowledge network

Monitoring Sustainable Globalization (MSN)	National (Malaysia)	MSN pursues research and advocacy on the issues of economic globalization.
FTA Watch	National network (Thailand)	This organization is primarily used to advocate on issues concerning trade liberalization in Thailand. Apart from the country's critical intellectuals, it also involves the participation of women-related organizations interested in pursuing collective actions against FTA initiatives involving Thailand.

\* DAWN carried out one region-wide study in 2006 for the ASEAN Secretariat.

Source: The official websites of the mentioned organizations and networks (accessed 3 September 2009)

While women's participation at the top trade policymaking level generally fails to advance the economic interests of women, some advocacy groups actively push for trade policy reform, both at the national and regional levels. However, the number of these advocacy groups remains minimal at both levels. One of the most active gender-specific trade advocacy groups or networks in the region is the International Gender Trade Network (IGTN). This is a network of gender specialists, hosted by the Philippines-based Gender, Development and Economic Globalization (GDEG) forum of Miriam College, that provides technical information concerning gender and trade issues to women's groups, NGOs, social movements and governments.<sup>24</sup> Scholars and activists from both IGTN and GDEG pursue active advocacy work around national and regional trade and gender issues in Southeast Asia. Another relatively active gender advocacy network is the Thailand-based organization Asia-Pacific Women, Law and Development, which attempts to promote gender equality from a human rights perspective. Its programs on 'Women and the Environment' and 'Labour and Migration' are often interlinked with trade liberalization initiatives at the multilateral, regional and bilateral levels.<sup>25</sup>

Apart from these gender-specific advocacy groups, there are also a host of different regional advocacy groups that do not necessarily work on gender and trade linkages specifically, but have either a program or research or advocacy projects centred around this issue. NGOs and alternative research networks, such as the Third World Network (TWN), the Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA), Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility (CARAM) Asia, Focus on the Global South and the Asia-Pacific Research Network (APRN), are examples of such advocacy groups or networks. Although, for instance, TWN's primary focus is in the area of trade and development-related issues, it has a specific research agenda linking gender and economic issues.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, MFA has also been active with its partner organizations at both the national and regional levels in promoting the rights of women migrant workers under the various trade liberalization initiatives pursued by ASEAN and its member countries. Similarly, CARAM Asia is a regional network that tackles migrations issue, but it has a more specific focus on health policy. In relation to trade liberalization, this particular network works to strengthen analysis, perspectives and awareness around globalization, the WTO and international financial institutions.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, scholars and activists from Focus on the Global South have also carried out research

24 For further information, see <<http://web.igtn.org/home/>>.

25 For further details concerning APWLD's work programmes that touch on gender and trade linkages, see <<http://www.apwld.org/programs.htm>>.

26 For the range of gender and economic-related issues advanced by TWN, see <<http://www.twinside.org.sg/women.htm>>.

27 For further details concerning CARAM Asia's program in the area of trade liberalization and migration, see <[http://www.caramasia.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=200&Itemid=328#MHG](http://www.caramasia.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=200&Itemid=328#MHG)>.



projects that touch on the linkages between trade liberalization and gender issues.<sup>28</sup> And, finally, APRN has also carried out a research project on the issue of the impact of globalization on women labour.<sup>29</sup>

It is, however, more difficult to find gender-specific advocacy groups that pursue advocacy work on trade-related issues at the national level. Similarly, it is an equally painstaking task to identify general advocacy groups that have specific programs or projects on gender–trade linkages. In Indonesia, for example, although gender-oriented advocacy groups have blossomed since the early 2000s, only a handful have some interest in engaging in debates on trade policy. One such organization is Women’s Solidarity, which has a specific program on women and food sovereignty.<sup>30</sup> While the type of stakeholders involved in trade policy deliberations varies across ASEAN countries, there are probably only four countries that have active national trade advocacy pressure groups, i.e. Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. Given the extensive coverage of trade liberalization issue nowadays, gender equality and international trade linkages are often overlooked as key programs of these national-level trade advocacy groups. Trade-specific advocacy groups in these countries, such as the Institute for Global Justice of Indonesia, the Monitoring the Sustainability of Globalization of Malaysia and the FTA Watch network of Thailand, all generally have small or weak programs dedicated to trade and gender linkages.

Although the issue of gender equality is gaining more importance in the region, advocacy work around gender equality and international trade linkages is stronger at the regional than the national level. As mentioned earlier, the issue of gender equality in general is still a matter of key concern for many national gender-oriented groups in Southeast Asian countries. Moreover, despite extensive analysis on the linkages between gender equality and international trade, the issue is not always an obvious concern for many national-level gender-oriented organizations. In other words, the priority given to the international trade issue among national-level gender-oriented advocacy groups is still relatively low. The same can also be said of national-level trade-specific advocacy groups, whose commitment to work on gender equality and international trade linkages remains modest. Given this reality, therefore, there is little doubt that gender equality is still far from being a major factor in trade policy consideration at both the national and regional levels in ASEAN. While challenging, there is certainly ample space in which the issue of gender equality could fit into the trade policy processes in the region.

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28 See, among others, Chavez (2007).

29 For further details of this project, see <<http://www.mfasia.org/mfaActivities/MFASchedActivities2007.html>>.

30 For more details on this program, see <[http://www.solidaritasperempuan.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=54&Itemid=60&lang=en](http://www.solidaritasperempuan.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=54&Itemid=60&lang=en)>.