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Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender

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AUSTRALIA EXPERIENCES WITH GENDER-RELATED PRACTICES AND PROCESSES

COMMUNICATION FROM AUSTRALIA

The following communication, dated 4 January 2021, is being circulated at the request of the Delegation of Australia.

1.1. As discussed at the first meeting of the Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender on 10 December 2020, Australia is pleased to share this information note outlining some of its experiences with gender-related practices and processes. Australia would be pleased to respond to questions or provide further information on its experiences at subsequent meetings of the Informal Working Group.

National Policy

1.2. The Australian Government released Australia's second [Women's Economic Security Statement](#) on 6 October 2020, as part of the Federal Budget, involving an investment of AUD 240.4 million in five priority areas:

- a. Repairing and rebuilding women's workforce participation and further closing the gender pay gap;
- b. Providing choice and flexibility for families to manage work and care;
- c. Supporting women as leaders and positive role models;
- d. Responding to the diverse needs of women; and
- e. Supporting women to be safe at work and home.

1.3. These priorities cover a range of measures to be taken from 2020 to 2025 to create new jobs, support more women into work, expand opportunities for business and build the skills Australia needs to support accelerated economic recovery and growth.

E-commerce Joint Statement Initiative

1.4. Inclusion is a core principle of the E-commerce Joint Statement Initiative (JSI).

- a. The 2019 Davos statement noted the JSI would "take into account the unique opportunities and challenges faced by Members, including developing countries and LDCs, as well as by micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs), in relation to electronic commerce".

- b. MSMEs tend to employ the poorer and more vulnerable segments of society such as young people and women¹ in developing countries, so it is particularly important the e-commerce JSI delivers for MSMEs.
- c. JSI participants regularly raise digital inclusion as a key driver of their participation in the negotiations.

1.5. The overarching objective of the e-commerce JSI – to develop the first set of global digital trade rules – will help promote growth of the digital economy and increase digital inclusion, with potential benefits for women and under-represented groups.

- a. Digital technologies (internet, digital platforms, mobile phones, and digital financial services) offer women opportunities to earn (additional) income, increase employment opportunities and access knowledge.²
- b. Using technology, online platforms and e-commerce can be an easy and inexpensive way to enter foreign markets, expand women-owned businesses and promote women entrepreneurship.
- c. The trust component of the e-commerce JSI (including online consumer protection, spam, etc.) will be particularly important for vulnerable groups by making the internet a safer and fairer place to do business in the future.

Women in Enterprise/Economic Diplomacy

1.6. One in five Australian workers (or some 2 million people) are employed in a trade-related activity. The Australian Government is supporting local businesses to grow and enhance opportunities to export their goods and services. More women are running businesses in Australia some of which are engaging in international trade, for example:

- a. Alana Kaye is a registered training college operating out of the Northern Territory that specialises in vocational training for the international student market. This business is looking to capitalize on Australia's free trade agreements, including the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement ([video](#)).
- b. Magpie Goose is a social enterprise based in the Northern Territory which provides a platform for Indigenous artists to share their stories through textile design/clothing collections with people in Australia and around the world ([video](#)).
- c. Quarry Mining based in New South Wales brings new products and methods to manufacturing of mining equipment, with some of this equipment exported to Mexico, Indonesia, South Asia and Europe ([video](#)).

1.7. Australia is some way off gender parity in relation to MSMEs, with only 36% of MSMEs being owned or run by women – despite MSMEs being an important contributor to the economy and employment generation in Australia (accounting for around 57% of GDP).

1.8. The Australian Trade Commission partners with Chief Executive Women to recognize the contributions of senior Australian business women through its Women in Export Scholarships to Harvard University, and it has documented success stories of [women in business](#).

¹ https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/aid-for-trade-at-a-glance-2017/closing-the-small-business-and-gender-gap-to-make-trade-more-inclusive_aid_glance-2017-11-en;jsessionid=nfCJOxb2Nngow6hcB1nNLOPg.ip-10-240-5-119

² <http://www.oecd.org/digital/more-needs-to-be-done-to-bridge-the-digital-gender-divide.htm>

Other International Economic Fora

1.9. Australia is engaged on trade and women's economic empowerment issues in key economic fora, particularly Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC):

- a. We see the work of The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and G20 complementing that of the WTO.

1.10. Due to COVID-19 potentially setting back the achievement of gender equity goals, Australia has re-calibrated its APEC capacity-building activities to better address the economic impacts of the pandemic on women:

- a. For instance, by leading APEC capacity-building initiatives to boost women business owners' access to export markets, increase women's participation in Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields and improve economies' use of gender data in policy making.

1.11. Australia and New Zealand also sponsored [APEC's 2020 Economic Policy Report on Structural Reform and Women's Empowerment](#) which found that laws and policies still need to be enacted, implemented and enforced in the APEC region in order to eliminate discriminatory policies and practices, counter gender biases and facilitate women's representation in leadership roles.

1.12. Australia will work closely with APEC economies to take forward the structural reform recommendations of that report:

- a. By applying a gender lens across APEC's work; and
- b. Support New Zealand, as the host of APEC 2021, to establish the next steps to support women and inclusive growth.

1.13. In the G20, Australia has been working to support greater focus on women's economic empowerment:

- a. Including efforts to achieve the Brisbane Goal to reduce the gap in labour force participation between men and women by 25% by 2025.

1.14. Our work in multilateral institutions is complemented by analytical work at the OECD:

- a. Contributing to the evidence base and global policy discussion on gender and trade issues; and
- b. Critically highlighting the important role women play in driving and contributing to international recovery.

Gender in Standards

1.15. Australia supports the integration of women's economic empowerment into the work of regional and international standards and conformance fora:

- a. The Australian Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources (DISER) leads on Australian policy and implementation of Australia's standards and conformance commitments under the WTO TBT Agreement.
- b. DISER has noted opportunities for Standards Australia, the National Measurement Institute and our other peak technical bodies to participate in such discussions by the WTO TBT Committee.

1.16. We commend WTO Members, particularly Canada, for promoting discussion of gender inclusive standards in the WTO TBT and APEC context.

1.17. We have engaged in similar discussions in the context of the [APEC Sub-Committee on Standards and Conformance](#):

- a. Including by co-sponsoring the Mexico-led project on [The Role of Standards for Driving Gender Equality](#).

International Development

1.18. Australia seeks to mainstream gender across its international development cooperation.

1.19. Australia's Gender Equality Fund enables us to partner with other organizations to provide targeted development assistance, for example:

- a. The Investing in Women initiative (AUD 102 million, 2016-2023) promotes economic growth, business development and workplace gender equality in Indonesia, the Philippines, Myanmar and Vietnam;
- b. Partnering (AUD 20 million, 2014-2020) with UN Women on the Markets for Change program in Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to make marketplaces safer and market vendor associations more inclusive of women who constitute 70 – 90% of vendors; and
- c. Partnering (AUD 19.9 million, 2016-2024) with Women's World Banking, a global non-profit network of 40 financial institutions, to reach 24.5 million low-income women in 29 countries, working to roll out innovative financial products and services for poor women, including savings, credit, micro-insurance and financial literacy programs.

1.20. Given the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women, Australia's [Partnerships for Recovery Strategy](#) aims to drive an inclusive and sustainable recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 in the Indo-Pacific. For example:

- a. Our Business Partnerships Platform is implementing a COVID-19 recovery window to assist organizations invest in new business opportunities which support green and resilient economic recovery, create livelihood opportunities, and enhance gender equality in Bangladesh, Nepal, the Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, and Tonga.
- b. An emergency financing facility under the Investing in Women Initiative has supported 11 women's MSMEs in Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam to be more resilient to the effects of COVID-19 by enabling:
 - i. Technology platforms with public health information reaching over 300,000 users;
 - ii. Access to medicines and food supplies for over 6,600 families; and
 - iii. 7,000 women smallholder farmers to participate in markets and supply chains vital to food security.

Trade and Sustainable Development

1.21. Australia's multilateral aid for trade program mainstreams gender and will seek to enhance women's economic empowerment through its trade and development investments.

1.22. For example, the E-commerce Aid for Trade Fund provides gender-sensitive assistance to the Cambodian Government to implement national e-commerce regulation and develop its positions in the WTO E-Commerce JSI. We also fund training of Cambodian and Myanmar women negotiators. Such investments aim to enable developing countries to engage in the multilateral trading system.

1.23. Assistance to the International Labour Organization's Better Work Program helps to improve workplace standards and reduce gender discrimination, including through greater involvement of women in decision-making and leadership roles, in exporting garment factories – where around 75% of workers are women. This program has reportedly led to:

- a. Improved labour conditions, wages, access to maternity leave and labour relations for over 2.2 million workers across 1,500 factories in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia and Vietnam (e.g. the gender pay gap has been reduced by up to 17%);
- b. Increased wages flowing through to improved health and education outcomes for children; and
- c. Increased factory productivity and profitability.

Statistics

1.24. The Australian Bureau of Statistics produces annual Gender Indicators disaggregating outcomes for women and men across the domains of economic security; education; work and family balance; safety and justice; democracy, governance and citizenship.

1.25. Each [release](#) tracks how Australia is progressing on greater equality for women.

1.26. The 2020 Gender Indicators (released on 15 December 2020) showed mixed outcomes for men and women towards equity.

- a. Women are more likely than men to have attained a Bachelor degree or above qualification but, for graduates of most fields of study, women are paid less than their male counterparts.
- b. Most senior private sector leadership roles are still occupied by men, but the number of women in public sector executive level positions has surpassed men for the second consecutive year.
- c. Women's full time adult average weekly ordinary time earnings were 86% of that of men, which reflects the same ratio in 2019.

1.27. Consistent with the UN's World's Women 2020 Report – which suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating pre-existing disparities in labour market participation, share of unpaid care and domestic work – the Australian Workplace Gender Equality Agency [recently noted](#) that the number of women working fewer than their usual hours (or no hours at all) for economic reasons decreased more than it did for men.
