

# **Proud and Inclusive Participants In International Supply Chain**



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***Proud and Inclusive Participants in International Supply Chain***

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## Foreword



It is with great pleasure and pride that I extend my heartfelt greetings on the occasion of the release of this publication “Proud and inclusive Participants in International Supply Chain: India Salutes its Women.” As we celebrate International Women’s Day in 2024, this book brings together the invaluable contributions of women to the realm of international trade, with focus on the Indian context. The role of women in the international supply chain is critical. This book delves into the multifaceted dimensions of their involvement, highlighting the stories of women who have emerged as pioneers in the field of International Supply chain. As I flip through the pages, I find that the chapters within this book will serve as a comprehensive guide to understand the depth and breadth of women’s involvement in international trade. The pages that follow provide insights into the transformative journey of women to the mainstream of global trade and building bridges in customs leadership. The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs also collectively salutes the spirit of Nari Shakti and firmly believe in the wisdom of Hon’ble Prime Minister of India: “When women prosper, the world prospers.”

I again compliment the efforts in documenting and celebrating the stories of women leaders in the international supply chain and hope that this publication inspires dialogue, reflection, and, most importantly, action towards generating an inclusive and equitable future in international trade.

Sanjay Kumar Agarwal  
Chairman, CBIC





## Message from Members



Sh Rajiv Talwar

Women make invaluable contribution in the international supply chains that now deep into the hinterland. It is grit, determination, innovation and leadership that elevates their work. At CBIC, we are committed to promoting a strongly inclusive and respectful environment that provides the empowerment through equal opportunity for women and which removes the fetters on their participation.



Sh Shashank Priya

“At the CBIC, we are dedicated to advancing gender inclusiveness in International trade through proactive initiatives and policies. By empowering women in the trade ecosystem, we not only enhance economic opportunities but also foster a more equitable and sustainable global trade environment. Let us work together to create pathways for women to thrive and excel in the international supply chain.”



## Message from Members



Sh Vivek Ranjan

“Breaking barriers and building bridges, women in Indirect Taxes, whether in management position or at cutting edge level have demonstrated exemplary leadership and competence in managing and moulding the taxation architecture and balancing the needs of facilitation and compliance, consistent with the demands of ever-increasing trade in the globalised world. Their contributions are not only commendable but also serve as an inspiration for future generations of women in trade. As we celebrate International Women’s Day, let us honour their achievements and redouble our efforts towards gender inclusiveness in customs administration.”



Ms Aruna Narayan Gupta

“Women play a pivotal role in facilitating trade at India’s borders, contributing significantly to the efficiency and effectiveness of customs operations. Their dedication, expertise, and commitment to excellence are vital in ensuring seamless trade facilitation and revenue administration. On this International Women’s Day, let us recognize and celebrate the invaluable contributions of women in revenue administration and commit to fostering a more inclusive and equitable trade ecosystem.”







## Preface



### India Salutes its Indomitable Nari Shakti

India's rich tapestry unfolds a complex narrative of women's evolving status throughout history. From wielding power in ancient times to navigating limitations under colonial rule, Indian women have navigated a dynamic landscape shaped by social norms, cultural beliefs, and political upheavals.

### From Ancient Echoes to Colonial Constraints: The Evolving Status of Women in India

Unearthing the Indus Valley Civilization (3300-1300 BCE) reveals captivating evidence of a society where women held positions of reverence and possibly even authority. Figurines of female deities and seals bearing women's images suggest a society that revered and possibly empowered women. Literary references further reinforce this notion. Epic tales on the likes of Mahabharata and others weave narratives of powerful women who significantly shaped its course.

The medieval period witnessed a gradual decline in women's overall agency, although they continued to contribute to society in various ways. Social structures became increasingly patriarchal, with practices like child marriage and sati becoming more prevalent. Religious and cultural influences emphasized the concept of "pati vrata," restricting women's mobility and public participation. However, the rise of Bhakti movements offered some solace, with women like Mirabai and Andal finding spiritual expression and challenging societal norms through devotional poetry. For instance, Mirabai, a princess, defied societal expectations by composing and singing devotional songs dedicated to Lord Krishna, even leaving her royal life to pursue her faith.

India's diverse social fabric also includes matrilineal practices, where descent and inheritance flow through the female lineage. This system manifests in unique ways across communities, fostering strong female bonds and ensuring lineage continuity. Among the Khasi tribe of Meghalaya, the youngest daughter inherits the ancestral home and property, creating a more balanced power dynamic within the family. Similarly, the

Garo tribe practices matriliney, with property and social status passed down through the female lineage. In Kerala, the Nair community traditionally practiced a distinct matrilineal system, with the matriarch managing property collectively. These examples showcase the enduring legacy and diverse expressions of matriliney in India.

Despite limitations, women from privileged families received education in Sanskrit and vernacular languages. Literary works like *Abhijñanashakuntalam* by Kalidasa (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century CE) depict educated and eloquent women characters. Beyond literary portrayals, women played vital roles in the agrarian economy, participating in agricultural activities like planting, harvesting, and managing household finances. Evidence suggests women also engaged in trade and commerce, particularly in the textile industry.

The arrival of the British Raj further restricted women's freedoms. Colonial policies reinforced existing patriarchal structures and limited access to education and property rights. Women faced additional challenges like forced widowhood and restrictions on social mobility.

The Begums of Bhopal, reigning from 1819 to 1926 defied societal norms and left a lasting mark on Bhopal's development. Each Begum played a crucial role: Qudsia Begum, the first, established her authority and ensured stability. Sikander Begum cleared state debts, excelled in diplomacy, and trained in martial arts. Shah Jahan Begum contributed significantly to the city's architecture, and Sultan Kaikhusrao Jahan championed education, even supporting Aligarh University. Together, they oversaw the construction of schools, roads, and a postal system, fostering progress across the city. Despite navigating British rule, the Begums' legacy of leadership, development, and women's empowerment continues to inspire.

This historical journey from ancient echoes to colonial constraints unveils a complex story of women's evolving status in India. While glimpses of power and influence existed in the ancient era, the medieval period and colonial rule brought new limitations. However, throughout history, women from diverse backgrounds and communities continued to find ways to contribute to society, laying the foundation for future struggles for equality. Their unwavering spirit and diverse contributions serve as a testament to their enduring resilience and the ongoing pursuit of equality.

### **The Seeds of Change: Early Stirrings of Women's Activism in Colonial India**

While the British Raj undoubtedly presented new hardships for women in India, it also, ironically, ignited the flames of resistance and reform. This era witnessed the rise of pioneering women and multifaceted reform movements, paving the way for greater female participation in the freedom struggle and shaping the fight for women's rights in the following decades.

The rigid social structures imposed by the British Raj exacerbated the existing inequalities faced by women. Colonial policies often reinforced patriarchal practices, making access to education, property ownership, and self-determination even more challenging. Restrictions on movement further limited their participation in public life and economic

opportunities.

Yet, courageous women emerged as champions of reform, defying these limitations and advocating for social change and women's empowerment. Among the most prominent figures were Savitribai Phule, a social reformer and writer, and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, a scholar, educator, and social reformer. Phule tirelessly campaigned for women's education and the upliftment of marginalized communities, establishing schools for girls from all castes. Her revolutionary act challenged both caste and gender inequalities, paving the way for future generations of activists. Vidyasagar dedicated his life to eradicating harmful practices like sati (widow burning) and child marriage. His relentless campaigning and lobbying played a crucial role in the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 and the Age of Consent Act of 1891.

Beyond individual figures, the colonial era witnessed the rise of diverse reform movements focused on improving the lives of women. These movements adopted various approaches, each contributing to the collective effort for change.

### **Beyond Bullets and Barricades: The Multifaceted Contributions of Women in India's Freedom Struggle**

The narrative of India's freedom struggle often celebrates prominent figures leading marches and defying colonial rule. However, this portrayal overlooks the multifaceted contributions of women who, beyond the realm of direct confrontation, played a crucial role in shaping the movement.

Women served as the silent backbone. By managing households and ensuring stability while men participated in demonstrations, they freed them to fully dedicate themselves to the cause without neglecting their families' basic needs. This seemingly mundane yet vital contribution allowed the movement to maintain momentum.

Furthermore, women emerged as the movement's financial engine. They actively engaged in fundraising activities, organizing events, selling khadi (homespun cloth), and collecting donations. These crucial financial resources were necessary for organizing protests, publishing newspapers, and maintaining communication networks. Their economic support played a pivotal role in advancing the cause.

Beyond these contributions, women actively participated in the underground movement, carrying messages, distributing pamphlets, and facilitating the smooth operation of the resistance. Their vital role in ensuring communication and coordination was essential for the movement's success.

Women also defied risks by providing safe havens for revolutionaries on the run. Despite the danger to themselves, they offered shelter, food, and emotional support, demonstrating unwavering commitment to the cause. These acts of defiance against the authorities showcased their courage and dedication.

The spectrum of women's contributions extended further. Historical records indicate Kanwarbai Durgawati's association with Chandrashekhar Azad, a prominent revolutionary



leader involved in the Kakori train robbery. Her story, along with countless others, exemplifies the unseen contributions of women actively involved in the struggle.

World War II saw the formation of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, an all-women infantry unit within the Indian National Army (INA). These women, led by Lakshmi Swaminathan and Janaki Thevar, underwent rigorous training and participated in crucial battles alongside the INA. Their defiance of traditional gender norms and active fight for independence, exemplified by Janaki Thevar who rose to the rank of Lieutenant and led the Burmese contingent, continue to inspire generations.

In conclusion, the multifaceted contributions of women in India's freedom struggle were indispensable. Their unwavering dedication, diverse roles, and willingness to defy societal limitations not only empowered the movement but also paved the way for a more just and equitable society. Recognizing and remembering their contributions serves as a testament to the collective effort that led to India's independence and inspires future generations to fight for their rights and aspirations.

### **A Collective Journey Continues: Women's Rights Advocacy and Local Governance in India**

The fight for women's rights in India extends far beyond the struggles of the independence movement. In the post-colonial era, a vibrant landscape of women's rights advocacy groups has emerged, significantly contributing to the ongoing pursuit of equality. These groups have formed a synergistic relationship with local governance, impacting legal reforms, education, economic empowerment, and political participation, ultimately shaping a more just and equitable society.

Advocacy groups focused on women's rights have been instrumental in catalyzing legal reforms aimed at safeguarding women's rights. Their efforts led to landmark legislation such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (2013). These laws provide legal recourse and protection for women facing domestic abuse and workplace harassment, establishing a stronger legal framework to hold perpetrators accountable.

Furthermore, these women's rights champions have championed initiatives to empower women through education and economic opportunities. They have campaigned for increased budgetary allocations for girls' education, particularly in rural areas, and advocated for policies promoting skill development and vocational training. Additionally, the establishment of self-help groups (SHGs) has empowered women by providing access to microcredit, enhancing financial literacy, and fostering entrepreneurship, leading to increased economic participation and self-reliance.

In the realm of political participation, the advocacy for women's rights has emphasized the importance of their representation in decision-making processes. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments introduced reservations for women in local governance, ensuring their participation in grassroots-level decision-making. This increased engagement of women has resulted in the rise of women leaders across various branches



of government, ensuring that women's specific needs and concerns are adequately represented and addressed in policy decisions.

Local governance serves as a crucial platform for translating ideals of women's empowerment into tangible improvements in their lives. When women actively participate in local bodies, they bring a unique perspective to policymaking, focusing on initiatives such as education, sanitation, hygiene infrastructure, and healthcare. These efforts directly impact women's well-being and contribute to the development of their communities, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

In conclusion, the collective journey of women's rights movements in India has been pivotal in advocating for legal reforms, promoting education and economic empowerment, and increasing political participation. The synergy between these groups and local governance holds immense potential for creating a society where women can thrive and contribute fully to all aspects of life. As this journey continues, it paves the way for a more just, equitable, and inclusive society where women can realize their full potential.

### **A Flourishing Landscape: Celebrating Women's Achievements in Modern India**

The narrative of women's empowerment in contemporary India extends far beyond advocacy and legal reforms. Today, we witness a vibrant landscape where women are shattering societal barriers and achieving remarkable success across diverse fields.

**Sporting Excellence:** The rise of Indian women athletes is rewriting the narrative. P.V. Sindhu's Olympic gold and Mithali Raj's leadership in cricket exemplify this, inspiring millions. Leagues like the WPL and Pro Volleyball League are further igniting the flame, showcasing rising talent and public interest. This momentum is bolstered by the historic victory of the women's hockey team in the Asian Championship, symbolically dethroning the sport's "traditional tycoons" and paving the way for a future of equal celebration and support.

**Business and Leadership:** Women are no longer just breaking glass ceilings in India, they are shattering them. Their entrepreneurial spirit is driving the country's economic growth, with nearly one in five enterprises being helmed by women, according to a Bain & Company report. These women are not only leading businesses but also making a social impact across diverse sectors.

Take Aditi Gupta, for example, her innovative Menstrupedia website uses comic books to educate millions about menstruation, tackling a social taboo head-on. Similarly, microbiologist Shaikh Razia transformed the perception of Mahua flowers, traditionally associated with alcohol, into nutritious snacks through her company Bastar Foods, empowering local tribal women in the process. These are just a glimpse into the remarkable achievements of Indian women entrepreneurs.

The government is recognizing this potential and actively supporting them through various initiatives. Schemes like Mission Shakti and SAMARTH provide crucial financial aid and skill development, while Mudra Loans and Annapurna Yojana offer specific financial assistance for businesses in beauty, food catering, and more. The Udyogini

Scheme empowers women from underprivileged backgrounds by providing them with the resources to start their entrepreneurial journeys.

By nurturing these endeavors, India is not only fostering economic growth but also dismantling gender barriers and creating a future where women are not just participants, but leaders, in shaping the nation's destiny.

**Science and Technology:** Women scientists are making significant strides in once male-dominated fields. Figures like Tessy Thomas, known as the "Missile Woman of India" for her contributions to aerospace research, and Rohini Pande, the first woman scientist to lead a space mission at ISRO, are just a few examples. Their achievements not only demonstrate the intellectual prowess and potential of women but also inspire future generations to pursue careers in STEM fields.

**Arts and Culture:** Indian art and culture pulsate with the rhythm set by women. From the captivating grace of classical dance which are predominantly led by women though ably supported by men to construct the symphony, to the meticulous artistry of traditional crafts, women have not just been participants, but the guiding force behind these vibrant expressions. Whether through powerful storytelling, innovative artistic creations, or thought-provoking literature, women are playing a crucial role in shaping the narrative and pushing boundaries in various artistic expressions.

**Celebrating Unsung Heroes:** Women like Tulsi Gowda, who has planted over 30,000 trees and is known as the "Encyclopedia of the Forest" for her knowledge of tree species, and Parbati Baruah, India's first woman mahout, represent the dedication of countless women who contribute significantly to environmental protection and social welfare, often recognized through prestigious awards like the Padma Shri. These are just a few examples of the many remarkable women who are making a difference in their communities.

**Milestones Towards Equality:** The recent passing of the Women's Reservation Bill, mandating 33% reservation for women in state assemblies and the Lok Sabha, marks a historic moment in India's journey towards gender equality. This crucial step towards gender parity aligns with similar successful efforts in countries like Rwanda. Additionally, the abolition of Triple Talaq safeguards Muslim women from discriminatory practices and empowers them to speak up against injustices, reflecting the government's commitment to fostering equality and protecting the rights of all women.

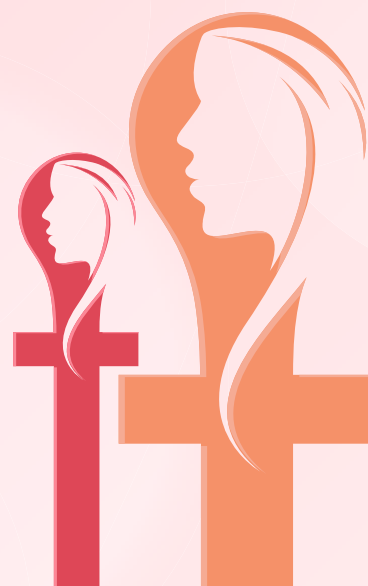
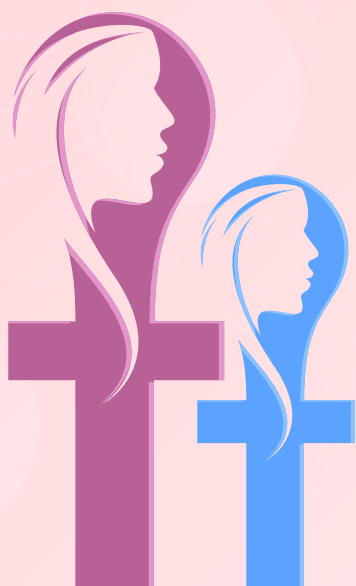
These achievements highlight the collective journey towards a future where women have equal opportunities to thrive and contribute meaningfully to society.

While acknowledging the ongoing challenges, this celebration serves as a testament to the enduring spirit and transformative power of women's empowerment. Continued efforts are crucial to dismantle remaining barriers and create an environment where all women can reach their full potential and contribute to building a just and equitable society for all.

Surjit Bhujabal  
Member Customs, CBIC

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# INTRODUCTION

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In recent years, the global community has made significant strides towards achieving gender equality and empowering women across various sectors. As we delve into the realms of international trade, it becomes imperative to examine how gender inclusiveness can foster sustainable development and economic prosperity for all.

The United Nations' 5<sup>th</sup> Sustainable Development Goal underscores the importance of promoting gender equality by advocating for political, economic, and social parity for women worldwide. This goal not only serves as a moral imperative but also recognizes that achieving gender equality is essential for the well-being of all individuals and societies.

Research conducted by esteemed institutions such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO) has shed light on the pivotal role of trade in advancing gender equality, particularly in developing countries. However, despite the potential benefits of trade, women's participation in international trade remains constrained in many developing economies. World Bank surveys have highlighted the disproportionate impact of trade facilitation on women's entrepreneurship and employment in trade-related sectors across emerging economies.

To harness the full potential of trade as a catalyst for gender equality, it is imperative to ensure women's representation and participation across all levels and functions of the trade ecosystem. This includes empowering women as founders and CEOs of trade-related





businesses, as well as facilitating their involvement in various trade roles such as traders, customs house agents, and freight forwarders.

In India, significant strides have been made to enhance women's entrepreneurship and employment in trade, as evidenced by the improved score for the "Women in Trade Facilitation" component of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific's (UNESCAP) Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation. These efforts underscore India's commitment to gender inclusion and the empowerment of women in the trade sector.

As we commemorate International Women's Day this year, it is crucial to acknowledge the achievements of women worldwide while also recognizing the challenges faced in achieving gender equality. Today, the concept of international trade has evolved beyond mere market opening and tariff reduction. It aspires to be a force for good, addressing the needs of those yet to fully benefit from economic globalization. This aligns perfectly with the core values outlined in the WTO Marrakesh Agreement and the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, emphasizing improved living standards, full employment, and sustainable development for all.

Recognizing the transformative potential of trade for women's economic empowerment, a significant milestone was achieved in 2017 with the adoption of the Buenos Aires Declaration on Women and Trade. This non-binding declaration, endorsed by 127 WTO members and observers, underscores the collective commitment to fostering gender-responsive trade policies and removing barriers that hinder women's participation in international trade

#### **Key Components of the Buenos Aires Declaration on Women and Trade include:**

- Promoting the collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data,
- Sharing country experiences and good practices, and
- Collaborating to raise the profile of the link between trade and gender

India's commitment to making trade more inclusive by fostering the integration of women in international trade mirrors the aspirations of international trade organizations. This book serves as a platform to amplify these shared ideas, values, and the crucial progress made by women in EXIM trade. In essence, this book aims to shed light on the importance of gender inclusiveness in international trade, emphasizing the need for collective action to dismantle barriers and create a more inclusive and prosperous global economy for all. Through dialogue, research, and advocacy, we can pave the way for a future where women excel in fields once dominated by men, thus fostering a more equitable and sustainable world for generations to come.

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN IS DAY AND WOMEN'S ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE: INDIAN PERSPECTIVE



International Women's Day (IWD), celebrated globally on March 8<sup>th</sup>, holds profound significance in recognizing the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. In the context of India's EXIM sector, this day serves as a crucial reminder of the pivotal role women play in shaping and advancing the country's trade landscape. This chapter aims to explore the relevance of International Women's Day from the perspective of India's EXIM trade sector, highlighting the challenges, achievements, and opportunities for gender inclusiveness.

### Historical Context:

International Women's Day dates to 1911, when it was first observed with rallies in several countries for women's right to vote and hold public office, for better working conditions, and for an end to discrimination. Less than a week later, on March 25, 1911, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire took place in New York City, causing the deaths of 146 workers — mostly women and girls — and leading to regulations requiring improved workplace safety conditions.

The United Nations began celebrating International Women's Day in 1975, which had been proclaimed the International Women's Year. In 1977, the United Nations General Assembly invited member states to proclaim March 8 as an official UN holiday for women's rights and world peace. It has since been commemorated annually by the UN and much of the world, with each year's observance centred on a particular theme or issue surrounding women's rights.

International Women's Day is symbolized by a spectrum of colours that embody the diversity, strength, and resilience of women worldwide. Purple signifies justice and dignity, reflecting the historical fight for women's rights and equality. Green represents hope and renewal, symbolizing the ongoing progress towards gender parity and environmental sustainability. White symbolizes purity and peace, honouring the contributions of women to peaceful resolutions and non-violent activism. Together, these colours serve as a powerful reminder of the collective efforts to empower women, promote gender equality, and build a more inclusive and equitable world for all.

### Gender Inclusiveness in EXIM trade: Indian Perspective

India's journey towards gender inclusiveness in trade traces back to historical milestones marked by the struggles and triumphs of women in various spheres of society. From the pre-independence era to the present day, women have steadily broken barriers and shattered stereotypes to emerge as key contributors to India's EXIM trade.

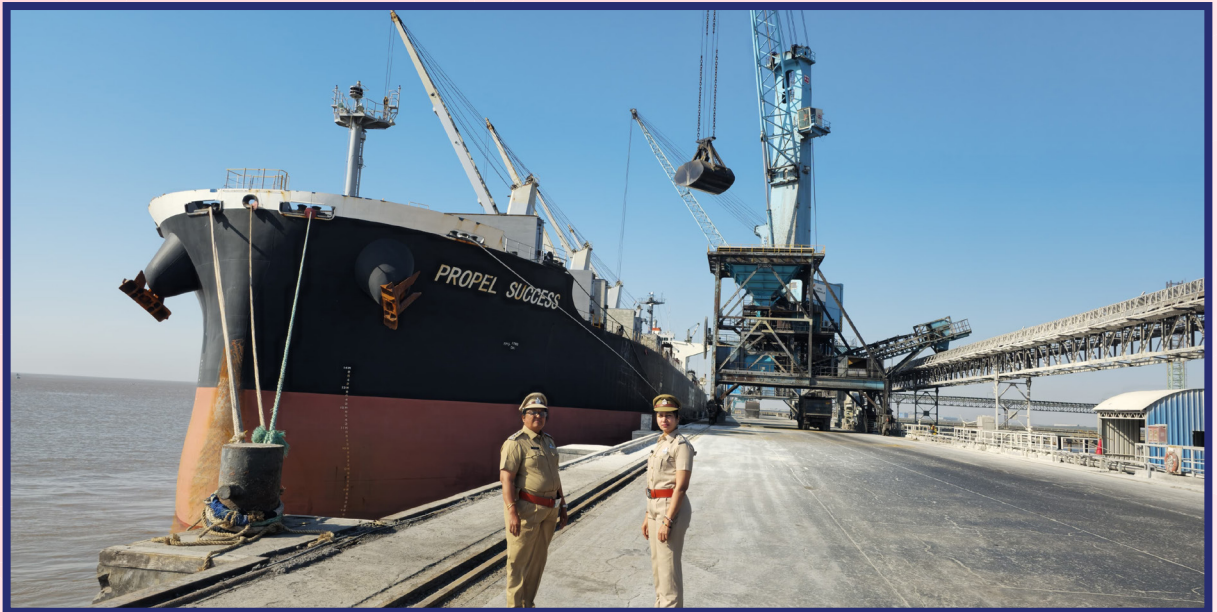
In the pursuit of Viksit Bharat by 2047, the Government of India, is placing a strong emphasis on unleashing the power of Nari Shakti during Amrit Kaal. Guided by the vision of the Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Government of India has initiated a fundamental shift in its approach, from simply advancing women's development to championing women-led development. This innovative strategy is designed to empower women in India to take charge of

their own destiny. This initiative aims to empower women and enable them to become architects of their own destiny, thereby contributing significantly to the development of the nation.

In this context, research has shown that participation in trade and trade related services is a powerful driver of gender equality in developing countries. A cross country study by the World Bank and World Trade Organization shows that firms that are part of Global Value Chains (GVCs) tend to employ more women, and jobs in GVC-integrated sectors are more likely to offer higher pay and benefits than firms not directly engaged in trade.

*"To all the strong women out there: May you always know your worth, stand tall in the crowd, never settle for anything less than you deserve and keep striving for balance of convenience in life. Happy International Women's Day!"*

*- Hemlata Rai, Additional Commissioner, Mumbai Customs Zone-I*



## Challenges Faced by Women in EXIM Trade

Despite significant progress, women in India's EXIM trade sector encounter various challenges, including gender-based discrimination, limited access to resources and opportunities, lack of representation in decision-making roles, and cultural biases. These challenges hinder their full participation and contribution to the sector's growth and development.

## Achievements and Initiatives

In recent years, India has witnessed notable achievements and initiatives aimed at promoting gender inclusiveness in EXIM trade. Government schemes such as the Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP), Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC) initiatives for women-owned businesses, and various skill development programs have facilitated women's participation in trade-related activities. The empowerment of women through entrepreneurship, ease of living, and dignity for them has gained momentum in past ten years.

Government of India through various schemes such as MUDRA Yojana and Stand-Up India, have helped women unleash their economic power and put more money into their hands while direct benefit transfers into their accounts have ended pilferages. Thirty crore Mudra Yojana loans have been given to women entrepreneurs. Female enrolment in higher education has gone up by 28% in 10 years. In STEM courses, girls and women constitute 43% of enrolment - one of the highest in the world. All these measures are getting reflected in the increasing participation of women in workforce. Through public sector banks, India has mandated collateral free loan to women startups via the Stand-Up India,

*In the garland of international trade, women embed themselves as beautiful flowers of entrepreneurship, negotiation, and resilience, enhancing the beauty of the global business garland for a better, more inclusive, and prosperous tomorrow*

- MRS. VIJAYALAXMI PURANIK, SENIOR MANAGER, ACCOUNTS, J.M BAXI AND COMPANY



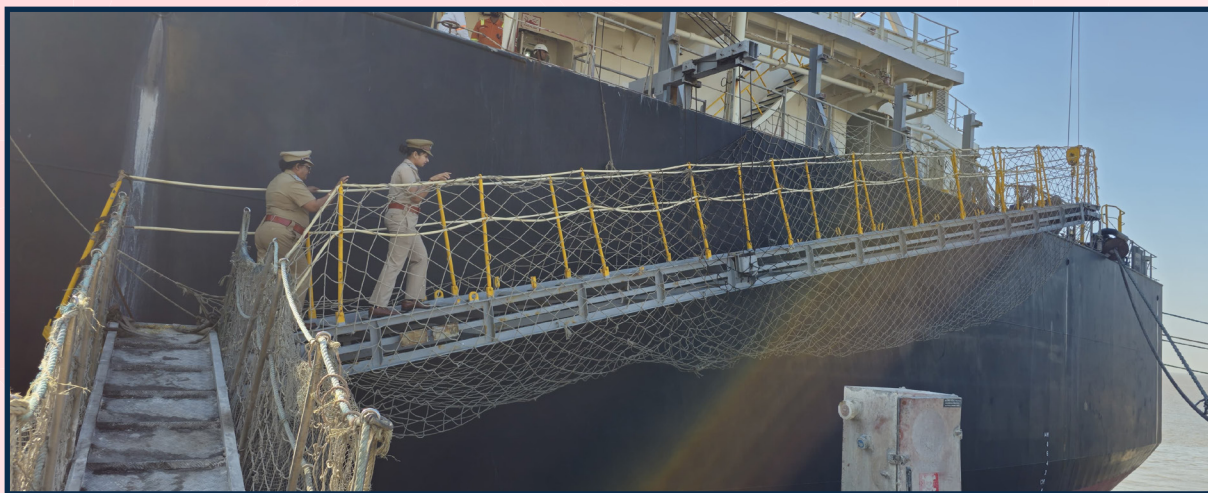
## Role of Women in Driving Export Growth:

Women entrepreneurs and professionals in India are making significant contributions to the country's export growth by venturing into diverse sectors such as textiles, handicrafts, information technology, and agriculture. Their entrepreneurial spirit, innovation, and resilience are instrumental in expanding India's export horizons and enhancing competitiveness in the global market.

Empowering women in India's EXIM trade sector goes beyond economic considerations; it encompasses fostering an environment of gender equality, providing access to education, skill development, financial resources, and supportive policies. By investing in women's empowerment, India can unlock the full potential of its EXIM trade sector and contribute to sustainable economic growth.

To make the most of trade as a catalyst for equality, women must be represented and heard at all levels – as founders and CEOs of trade-related businesses and as employees in trading firms. Women also must be represented across different job roles and functions of trade – be it as traders, customs house agents, freight forwarders, or customs brokers.

International Women's Day serves as a platform to celebrate the achievements of women in India's EXIM trade sector, acknowledge their contributions, and reaffirm commitments towards gender inclusiveness and equality. It provides an opportunity to reflect on progress made, address existing challenges, and chart a course for a more inclusive and equitable trade ecosystem. As India continues its journey towards gender inclusiveness in EXIM trade, International Women's Day serves as a poignant reminder of the indispensable role women play in driving trade and economic growth. By fostering an enabling environment, empowering women entrepreneurs and professionals, and promoting gender-responsive policies, India can harness the full potential of its diverse talent pool and achieve sustainable trade development.



## WOMEN PIONEERS IN EXIM TRADE



In the realm of Export-Import (EXIM) trade, women have historically been underrepresented, facing numerous challenges in a predominantly male-dominated industry. However, despite these barriers, several remarkable women have emerged as pioneers, making significant contributions to global trade dynamics. This chapter aims to highlight the pivotal roles played by these women, their notable achievements, and the impact of their work on shaping inclusive EXIM practices.

Ms. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, a Nigerian economist and former Finance Minister, has also made substantial contributions to gender inclusivity in EXIM trade. As the first female Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Ms. Okonjo-Iweala has been a vocal advocate for women's empowerment in the global economy. Her initiatives prioritize gender-inclusive trade policies, recognizing the vital role of women in driving economic development through international trade.

Ms. Roshni Nadar Malhotra, the chairperson of HCL Technologies, is another leading figure in the Indian business landscape and a role model for aspiring women leaders. As the first woman to head a listed IT company in India, she has shattered glass ceilings and paved the way for others. Her leadership has been instrumental in HCL's continued growth and success, and she is actively involved in philanthropy through the Shiv Nadar Foundation, which focuses on education and social development. Ms. Malhotra's achievements and dedication to empowering others make her a truly inspiring example of female leadership. She has figured in the Forbes World's 100 Most Powerful Women in 2023.

Smt. Arundhati Bhattacharya, the former Chairperson of the State Bank of India (SBI), stands out as a trailblazer in India's banking and trade finance sectors. Under her leadership, SBI played a pivotal role in facilitating EXIM transactions, providing financial support to exporters and importers alike. Smt. Bhattacharya's strategic acumen and commitment to fostering inclusive trade practices have contributed significantly to India's EXIM trade growth.



Ms. Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, the founder and Executive Chairperson of Biocon Limited, has been a driving force behind India's biotechnology industry's global expansion. Under her leadership, Biocon emerged as a leading player in the global biopharmaceutical market, exporting life-saving medicines and biotechnology products to over 120 countries worldwide. Ms. Mazumdar-Shaw's entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to innovation have significantly contributed to India's EXIM trade growth in the healthcare sector.

Another notable figure, Ms. Falguni Nayar, the founder and CEO of Nykaa, has been an exemplary figure in empowering women in India's retail and e-commerce sectors. Through Nykaa, Ms. Nayar has not only revolutionized the beauty and cosmetics industry but has also provided a platform for countless women entrepreneurs to showcase and sell their products. By creating a digital marketplace that caters specifically to the needs and preferences of women, Ms. Nayar has fostered a supportive ecosystem that promotes gender inclusivity and entrepreneurship. Her visionary leadership and dedication to gender equality have not only transformed the retail landscape but have also inspired a new generation of women entrepreneurs to break barriers and pursue their dreams.

Smt. Soma Mondal, the first woman to lead Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) as its chairperson, exemplifies the remarkable strides made by women in traditionally male-dominated industries. Smt. Mondal's appointment not only shattered the glass ceiling but also symbolized a significant step towards gender inclusivity and empowerment in the steel sector. Under her leadership, SAIL had witnessed transformative initiatives aimed at fostering gender diversity and inclusivity within the organization. Mondal's emphasis on providing equal opportunities for women in the workforce, implementing gender-sensitive policies, and promoting leadership development programs has empowered countless women to pursue careers in the steel industry.

Smt. Madhabi Puri Buch, the first woman to serve as the Chairperson of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), exemplifies the pivotal role of women in fostering empowerment and inclusivity in India's financial sector. Smt. Buch's leadership at SEBI has been marked by a steadfast commitment to promoting gender diversity and creating opportunities for women in the field of finance. Under her guidance, SEBI has implemented



various initiatives aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs, enhancing their access to capital markets, and ensuring their participation in EXIM trade activities. Her focus on market regulations and investor protection, particularly for vulnerable groups, further highlighted her commitment to building a more inclusive and equitable financial landscape, not just for women but for all.

In conclusion, the contributions of these women pioneers in EXIM trade underscore the transformative potential of gender diversity in shaping inclusive global trade practices. Their leadership, advocacy, and strategic vision have not only advanced EXIM operations but also paved the way for greater gender inclusivity in the global economy. As trailblazers and advocates for change, these women serve as inspiration for future generations, highlighting the importance of diversity and inclusion in driving economic growth and prosperity through international trade.

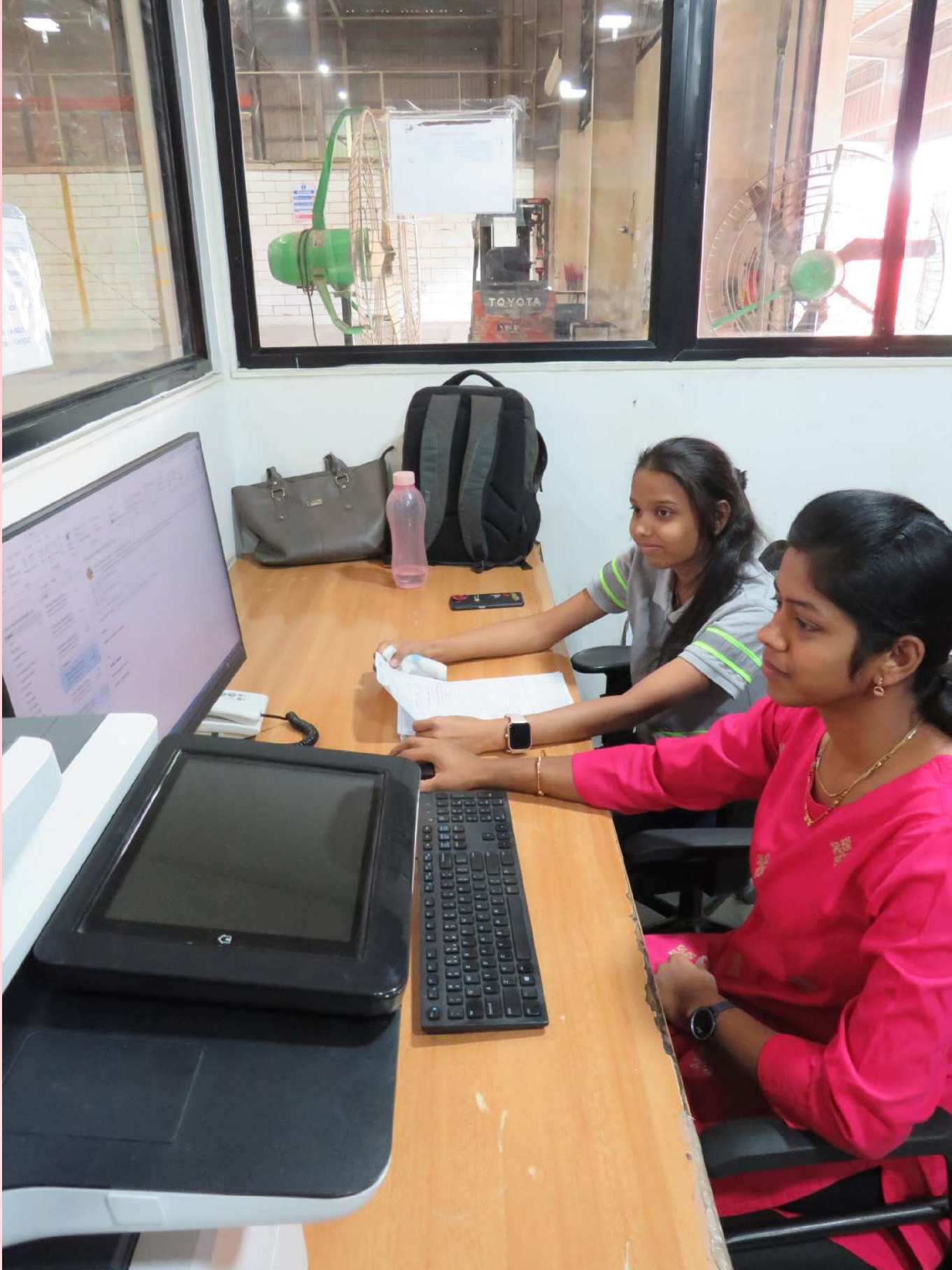
*“Woman is the original and greatest creator of the world. For this beautiful world to survive and flourish, it is essential for a woman to survive within all of us.”*

*- Amit Kumar, Superintendent, Ahmedabad Zone.*

*“Being a part of the Customs administration, I appreciate the tough and challenging conditions under which women work in the cross-border trade and strive to excel there. More power to these women!! May this cohort increase by leaps and folds in the future.*

*-Vaishali Naik L, Commissioner, Bhopal Zone*





## **ADVANCING GENDER INCLUSIVENESS IN EXIM TRADE: A SPOTLIGHT ON INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN BY CBIC**

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In recent years, the global trade landscape has seen a significant shift towards recognizing and fostering gender inclusiveness in the Export-Import (EXIM) trade sector. Women's participation in international trade not only drives economic growth but also contributes to social development and empowerment. Governments worldwide have acknowledged the importance of promoting gender equality in trade and have implemented various policies and initiatives to support women entrepreneurs in EXIM trade.

Governments across the globe have introduced a plethora of policies targeting gender inclusiveness in EXIM trade. These policies are multifaceted, covering aspects such as Customs regulations, logistics infrastructure, trade facilitation, and security measures. For example, many countries have developed gender-responsive trade policies that aim to address the unique challenges faced by women in accessing trade finance, navigating regulatory frameworks, and participating in global value chains. These policies often include provisions for capacity-building programs, access to market information, and financial support mechanisms tailored to women entrepreneurs engaged in EXIM trade.

Furthermore, governments have collaborated with international organizations and regional trade blocs to implement gender-sensitive trade policies that promote women's economic empowerment. These policies focus on mainstreaming gender considerations across trade-related sectors, fostering an inclusive trade ecosystem that benefits women-owned businesses and promotes sustainable development.

Digitization and electronic processing of existing operations in the EXIM space serve as a significant facilitator for female traders and logistics service providers. In addition to improving efficiency in time and cost, digitized processes reduce the need for personal interactions, thereby decreasing the risk of sexual harassment and corruption, which disproportionately affect women. Recognising this aspect, CBIC has endeavoured to streamline cargo clearance through focus on digitization and standardization of Customs process at all the Customs locations.

CBIC has been at the forefront of promoting gender inclusiveness in EXIM trade through innovative digital initiatives. One such ground-breaking initiative is Turant Customs, launched with the aim of revolutionizing the Customs clearance process. Turant Customs leverages cutting-edge technology to make Customs clearance faceless, contactless, and paperless, thereby reducing bureaucratic hurdles and enhancing efficiency in trade facilitation.



This digital transformation not only streamlines the EXIM trade processes but also creates a more conducive environment for women-owned businesses to thrive. By minimizing physical interactions and paperwork, Turant Customs shrinks the space for bribery and corruption, fostering a level playing field for all traders, including women entrepreneurs. The ease of doing business facilitated by Turant Customs encourages greater participation of women in EXIM trade

*A famous quote of Aristotle ‘ there is nothing so unequal as the equal treatment of unequal people ‘ still relevant today, summarizes why we need to know more about Gender Inequalities related to trade. Trade may act as a catalyst for gender equality with rising employment business opportunities for women. Inclusive trade is a true measure of sustainable development which also resonates with the theme of IWD 2024 which is ‘Inspire inclusion.*

*- Anubha Sinha, Additional Commissioner, DG, Systems*

and promotes their economic empowerment. An increasing shift from physical to digital interactions has the potential to level the playing field for women, if complemented with efforts towards enhancing digital awareness and adoption among women.

In addition to digital initiatives, CBIC has undertaken concrete steps to promote gender mainstreaming in the EXIM trade ecosystem. The National Trade Facilitation Action Plan (NTFAP) 2020-23, formulated by CBIC, includes specific measures aimed at promoting gender equality in trade. Notably, Action Point 27 of the NTFAP emphasizes the importance of gender mainstreaming and outlines targeted interventions to enhance the participation of women in EXIM trade.

Under Action Point 27, CBIC has been part of various initiatives to support women entrepreneurs, including targeted training programs, capacity-building workshops, and networking opportunities. These initiatives aim to equip women with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to navigate the complexities of international trade successfully. To create a supportive ecosystem that fosters the growth of women led businesses in EXIM trade, CBIC has collaborated with private trade associations such as FIEO, FICCI, CII etc. For instance, as one of the action owners of the action point 27 of NTFAP 2020-23, FIEO in collaboration with relevant stakeholders regularly conducts outreach initiatives – e.g., Awareness Session on “Developing Districts as Export Hubs- An Interactive Session was organised by FIEO at Ujjain on 10th February, 2020 for Women Entrepreneurs (Total participants: 55), Another outreach programme - Celebrating Women’s Strength”: SwasthNaari, SashaktSamaaj was organised by FIEO in 2022 etc. Further, FIEO managing committee has suitable women representation with companies and firms headed by women as its members and they are engaged in various activities organized by FIEO. Similarly, FFFAI having 28-member association has amended its constitution to include women participation in the FFFAI. FFFAI was nominating women on various platforms and also has a special women’s wing in the committee.

To fostering a gender-inclusive trade environment that empowers women to contribute meaningfully to the global economy, a Circular No. 02/2024 dated 8th March, 2024 has been issued by Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, directing its field formations to ensure representation of women in the Permanent Trade Facilitation Committee (PTFC) and Customs Clearance Facilitation Committee (CCFC) meetings, encourage the Trade bodies/ custodians to establish dedicated help desks and processing mechanisms for women traders and women logistics service providers and to support in upskilling women logistics service providers, freight forwarders and custom brokers by offering relevant trainings for women. Further, keeping in view the growing participation of women in the logistics sector, a Circular No. 03/2024 dated 8th March, 2024 has also been issued to CBIC field formations to ensure provision of safe and secure working environment to women and gender inclusive infrastructure including care infrastructure and services, especially creches, sufficient lighting, panic buttons, regular upgradation of facilities from a gender perspective and to spread awareness by holding regular gender sensitization training sessions for all concerned staff/ stakeholders.

Since, substantial women are employed in MSME sector, recently introduced “Liberalized MSME AEO Package” by CBIC, relaxing compliance criteria to encourage MSMEs to become Authorized Economic Operators (AEOs), will significantly contribute to advance economic empowerment of women. This liberalized MSME AEO Package allows them to access various benefits, including Direct Port Delivery (DPD) for imported containers, Direct Port Entry (DPE) for export containers, significantly reduced cargo release times, exemption from bank guarantees, priority for refunds/rebates/duty drawbacks, and the provision of a ‘client relationship manager’ at the port as a single point of contact (Refer circular no. 54/2020-Customs dated 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2020).

In conclusion, government policies and initiatives play a pivotal role in advancing gender inclusiveness in EXIM trade. By addressing the specific challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and creating an enabling environment for their participation, these policies contribute to inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. The efforts by CBIC, including innovative digital initiatives like Turant Customs and targeted interventions for gender mainstreaming, exemplify the commitment towards promoting gender equality in EXIM trade.

Moving forward, it is imperative for all the stakeholders to continue collaborating and implementing comprehensive policies and initiatives that prioritize gender inclusiveness in trade. By harnessing the full potential of women entrepreneurs in EXIM trade, we can create a more equitable and prosperous global trading system.





## EMPOWERING WOMEN IN EXIM TRADE: GOVERNMENT SCHEMES AND INITIATIVES FOR GENDER INCLUSIVENESS



India's economic landscape is undergoing a significant transformation, and women are increasingly playing a vital role. Recognizing this potential, the Government of India has implemented a multitude of schemes aimed at enhancing the economic empowerment of women and fostering their participation in international trade. This chapter delves into these initiatives, exploring how they equip women with the tools and resources needed to thrive in the global marketplace.

### Financial Inclusion and Access to Capital:

A critical barrier for women entrepreneurs is access to finance. Schemes like the MUDRA Yojana provide loans specifically for women-owned micro-enterprises. Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY), launched in 2015, aims to provide financial assistance to microenterprises, including those owned by women, engaged in manufacturing, trading, and services sectors. This scheme offers three categories of loans: Shishu (up to Rs. 50,000), Kishor (Rs. 50,001 to Rs. 5 lakh), and Tarun (Rs. 5 lakh to Rs. 10 lakh), with priority lending to women entrepreneurs to encourage their participation in EXIM trade. A total of 30.64 crore loans under the PMMY, comprising 69% of the total sanctioned loans, has been given to women till November 2023. Micro-credit through PMMY encouraged female entrepreneurship, raised earnings and employability, and thereby empowered them financially, socially and psychologically.



Stand-Up India offers subsidized loans and incubation support for aspiring women entrepreneurs. The Stand-Up India Scheme, launched in 2016, aims to promote entrepreneurship among women, Scheduled Castes (SC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST) by providing loans for setting up greenfield enterprises. Under this scheme, loans ranging from Rs. 10 lakh to Rs. 1 crore are provided to at least one SC/ST borrower and one-



woman borrower per bank branch, with a special focus on sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, services, and trading. Under Stand-Up India Scheme, out of 209,000 loans sanctioned, 177,000 loans (84%) have been sanctioned to women entrepreneurs till November, 2023. By allocating the target to provide at least one loan to women and one loan to SC/ST entrepreneurs, SUPI encouraged lenders to finance green-field projects to women entrepreneurs, which goes a long way in the promotion of entrepreneurship among women and women-led enterprises.



Additionally, initiatives like Mahila Coir Yojana and Credit Guarantee Trust Fund for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) cater to women in specific industries and offer loan guarantees, easing access to credit.

To address the specific needs of women in international trade, the government has also introduced trade facilitation measures focused on enhancing their access to trade-related information, finance, and infrastructure. The Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (TIES) aims to develop export

infrastructure and provide support for setting up Common Facility Centers (CFCs) for women entrepreneurs engaged in EXIM trade. Moreover, initiatives such as the Trade Information Portal aim to provide women exporters with access to market information, trade facilitation services, and capacity-building programs. To address this problem of information unavailability from the Customs clearance perspective, CBIC has developed the Compliance Information Portal or CIP, which provides to importers/exporters and the general public comprehensive information on the step-by-step Customs clearance procedures, applicable duties of Customs and regulatory compliance requirements of all Partner Government Agencies (PGAs). The coverage of the CIP extends to all the HS codes falling in the Schedules to the Customs Tariff Act, 1975. The CIP is a One Stop solution for all stakeholders engaged in cross border trade.

### **Skill Development and Market Linkages:**

Skill development is paramount for women to compete in the international trade arena. The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) offers industry-relevant skill training programs, empowering women to participate in export-oriented sectors like

textiles, handicrafts, and food processing. Mission Shakti's "Samarthya" sub-scheme includes programs like "Hub for Empowerment of Women" (HEW) that bridge the gap between trained women and market opportunities. HEW facilitates linkages with export promotion councils, chambers of commerce, and international buyers, enabling women entrepreneurs to showcase their products globally.

Ministry of Women and Child Development have launched Mahila E-Haat as an online platform that enables women entrepreneurs to showcase and sell their products. This platform provides a direct market access platform for women artisans, craftsmen, and entrepreneurs to reach national and international buyers, thereby facilitating the promotion of products made by women in various sectors, including handicrafts, textiles, and agro-based products.



### **Building Confidence and Capacity:**

Beyond financial and skill development, the Government recognizes the importance of building confidence and leadership qualities. Schemes like Mahila Samridhi Yojana offer financial literacy training, while initiatives like Nari Shakti Mission provide mentorship and networking opportunities. These programs empower women with the knowledge and connections necessary to navigate the complexities of international trade.

### **Addressing Social Barriers:**

Traditional gender roles can often hinder women's entrepreneurial pursuits. Initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana provide LPG connections, freeing up women's time previously spent collecting firewood. Additionally, programs like National Creche Scheme (Palna) offer childcare facilities, allowing women entrepreneurs to focus on their businesses without worry.



The Government of India's initiatives represent a multi-pronged approach to empower women in EXIM trade. By facilitating access to finance, skilling, market linkages, and social support structures, these schemes pave the way for greater gender inclusivity in the global marketplace. It's important to acknowledge that challenges remain, such as ensuring effective implementation and outreach in rural areas. However, the ongoing focus on women's economic empowerment is a positive step towards a more equitable and prosperous future for Indian trade.

*Women in CBIC work...till work becomes worship. They work at home, from home, and also, away from home, for their home, and for everyone that forms their home...till their work becomes their worship.*

*-Amreeta Titus, Deputy Secretary, Tax Research Unit, Department of Revenue*

## India International Trade Fair held in November 2022



Out of the **205 MSMEs** at the MSME Pavilion



**74% were led by women entrepreneurs** displaying their products



**Across 26 sectors**, such as textiles, food, metallurgy, leather, gems and jewellery among others.

## FROM MARGINS TO MAINSTREAM OF GLOBAL TRADE



*By Shrunkhala Kangale, Additional Commissioner, GST Policy Wing, CBIC*

As the global economy strives towards more inclusive growth, understanding and addressing the gender dimensions of trade facilitation is essential for realising the full potential of trade so as to ensure economic and human development. In this interconnected world, trade facilitation serves as a critical enabler for commerce to access production inputs across the borders. This participation in global value chains will also prove beneficial especially to marginalised indigenous tribal women by giving them equal access to economic opportunities and participation in trade activities. The tribal population in India, comprises around 8.6% of the total population out of which tribal women, constituting around 47% of India's tribal population, possess deep knowledge of their ecosystems and have not only demonstrated their ability to drive behavioural change and influence community dynamics but have also been instrumental in environmental conservation through their traditional ecological knowledge and practices thereby ensuring sustainable development. With their expertise in traditional knowledge, intangible heritage, minor forest produce and various products derived from them, cultural practices, folk arts, handicrafts, handloom, tribal paintings, etc. they must also be a part of the global entrepreneurship.

Inclusiveness of this marginalised section in trade facilitation acknowledges the distinct challenges faced by these women, particularly in accessing markets, finance, educational skills, resources due to their cultural barriers and geographical isolation. Further, language barriers often pose significant obstacles to entering and navigating the international markets. Given the above barriers, helping tribal women entrepreneurs and artists to enter into global trade requires a comprehensive intervention that addresses their unique requirements and challenges. Thus, various measures like access to educational skills and financial literacy and markets including online platforms, financial assistance, promotion of Indigenous Tribal Culture, Infrastructure Development ensuring forward and backward linkages, Policy Support for their representation in decision making processes, Education and Awareness through campaigns, media coverage, and cultural events will go a long way to help the tribal women in overcoming the above challenges. However, the same will not be possible without the cooperation of various stakeholders including the civil society and private sector entities which can be implemented through Collaborative Partnerships.

In this regard, the Government has taken various policy interventions, institutional reforms, and capacity-building initiatives like Van Dhan Yojna, Vocal for Local scheme under Atma Nirbhar Bharat, various Fairs like Aadi Mahotsav (National Tribal Festival), Mahila SHGs Sammelan, Trade Fairs, Border Haat, etc. showcasing their skills and giving them a platform

to reach out to the market not only regional and domestic but also international. Other initiatives like Amazon Future Engineer Programme' in 54 Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) spreading across the States of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Telangana include an Advanced Block Programming and Artificial Intelligence curriculum. These initiatives including Geographical Indications (GI) tagging of tribal products across the country aim at transforming them into a brand, symbolising empowerment of tribal artisans, and recognising and promoting age-old tribal traditions and methods that are in danger of being lost due to urbanisation and industrialisation.



In addition to the above, access to digital technologies and integrating these technologies with their local language can immensely help this section transcend geographical constraints, access new markets, and participate more effectively in the global economy, thereby unlocking their entrepreneurial potential and contributing to their socio-economic empowerment. Digital trade platforms providing e-commerce solutions, mobile banking, and other innovative

tools can serve as a catalyst for transforming the economic landscape for tribal women, fostering greater gender inclusiveness and sustainable development.

As the world increasingly embraces inclusive trade facilitation, it is essential to ensure that this marginalised section of society is empowered to harness the opportunities provided for improving their livelihoods and building a more prosperous future for themselves and their communities.

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**Women's equality isn't just a right, it's key to achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.**

Goal 5 focuses on empowering women and girls, which strengthens economies, improves health outcomes, and promotes environmental sustainability for all.

When women have a seat at the table, we build a better future for everyone.





## WOMEN IN CUSTOMS LEADERSHIP: BREAKING BARRIERS AND BUILDING BRIDGES



*Sruti Vijayakumar*  
*Deputy Director, National Customs Targeting Centre*  
*Directorate General of Analytics and Risk Management*

*“When women lead, we all win.”*

The United Nations Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995 recognized that without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women’s perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. Nearly three decades later, the presence of women in law enforcement leadership, and particularly in Customs administrations, still remains low. The World Customs Organization (WCO) Annual Report 2022-2023 revealed that women constitute only 32% of the global Customs workforce, with an even smaller proportion of women holding senior management positions in Customs administrations at 26%, and merely 17% of Customs administrations are led by women. The World Trade Organization (WTO) endorsed the Buenos Aires Declaration on Women and Trade in 2017, which advocates the inclusion of women in trade by acknowledging that inclusive trade policies have the potential to advance gender equality and women’s economic empowerment, which would ultimately have a positive impact on economic growth and poverty reduction.

### **Women in leadership – why it matters**

Gender equality has long been recognised internationally as a pivotal driver of economic development. Its essence transcends mere equal gender representation in the workforce. True gender equality entails creating the conditions and opportunities to allow all individuals, to have the same rights and opportunities based on their skills within a supportive and respectful environment. Efficient Customs operations, essential for facilitating the legitimate movement of goods across international borders, requires a diverse workforce. Gender diversity throughout all levels of Customs administrations is crucial for optimizing operational procedures, facilitating global trade and ensuring security. Increasing women’s leadership in Customs yields better outcomes, fosters systemic organisational improvements, enhances integrity and disrupts corrupt practices.

Numerous studies affirm that women leaders help increase productivity, enhance collaboration, inspire organizational dedication, and improve fairness. They serve as exemplary role models and offer invaluable mentorship. Women in leadership roles positively influence workplace policies, promote diversity and inclusion, encourage

innovation and improve both individual and organisational performance. Administrations that actively promote gender diversity often excel by harnessing new perspectives and ideas from their diverse human resource pool.

### **Together, we are stronger**

In the recent times, international organizations and Customs administrations worldwide have demonstrated a strong commitment to advancing gender equality through active efforts to improve conditions and opportunities. These efforts have led to significant progress in addressing the barriers women encounter in pursuing a career in Customs, including issues related to working conditions, workplace safety and career advancement.

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has implemented several initiatives to uphold gender equality, provide equal opportunities and prevent discrimination. In accordance with The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) 2018 Act, CBIC has established internal committees tasked with addressing sexual harassment issues. These committees are responsible for promptly investigating internal complaints related to harassment raised by woman. The National Academy of Customs, Indirect Taxes and Narcotics (NACIN) offers gender sensitization training.

The WCO launched efforts to promote gender equality and women's advancement in leadership roles within Customs in 2013, through the international conference "Women in Customs, Trade and Leadership". This initiative led to the development of the WCO Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool (GEOAT) designed to enable Customs administrations to evaluate their policies, practices and processes to address gender equality issues and promote the implementation of gender-responsive Customs reforms and modernisation initiatives. The WCO Compendium on Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs showcases practical examples of how Member administrations are implementing gender equality and diversity in their respective administrations.

Acknowledging the vital role of women in Customs administrations, the Australian Border Force, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), WCO and Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University launched the Container Control Programme – Women's Professional Development Programme (CCP – WPDP) which is a leadership program for women aimed at enhancing their capacity, skills, and confidence and, enabling them to actively pursue leadership opportunities at all levels of Customs administrations.

In the United Kingdom, the HM Revenue & Customs Gender Network, led by staff, aims at ensuring compliance with and promotion of gender and equality legislation and issues within HMRC. Australian Border Force has established Staff Advancing Gender Equality (SAGE) network which focusses on achieving gender equality across the department,

partner with Diversity Champions, and contribute in policy development. The Zimbabwe Revenue Authority launched the Women in Taxation (WiT) forum with the aim being to provide a platform for women employees to address workplace issues. The Central Customs Authority of Germany elects a Gender Equality Officer (GEO) to address the concerns of female employees and monitor the administration on implementation of measures relating to gender equality, discrimination, and sexual harassment. The South African Revenue Service (SARS) initiated Women in Leadership (WiL) programme to foster leadership development among women and empower women overcome challenges they encounter.

## **The arduous journey**

While these measures have the potential to level the playing field for women, significant barriers still impede their career progression. Women in Customs face common hurdles prevalent in male-dominated workplaces, including cultural and social barriers, gendered responsibilities, unconscious bias, lack of encouragement, inadequate safety measures and childcare facilities. Preconceptions and perceptions on women's suitability for certain positions perpetuate inequality of opportunity. These barriers directly affect women's professional confidence, effectiveness and career engagement, and have a severe impact on the mental health. Both men and women need to be aware of such biases and stereotypes and work collaboratively to minimise them.

As Customs administrations work continuously to facilitate international trade and protect the borders, long work hours, night shifts, work duties from isolated offices and remote locations cannot be eliminated. These settings can pose particular challenges for women if issues related to personal hygiene, safety and logistics are not addressed.

## **Fostering women's leadership in Customs:**

Being proactive in engaging women is essential. Failing to create opportunities for women at all levels of Customs administrations means missing out on 50% of the best talent. It is not just about fairness but also about sustainable growth, high performance and building inclusive organisations.

India's commitment to gender-inclusive trade is evident in the National Trade Facilitation Action Plan (NTFAP), particularly Action Point 27, which promotes gender inclusiveness in trade. Achieving this goal can be facilitated through women's leadership in Customs. Active engagement between women Customs leaders and women-led trade associations will contribute to achieving trade facilitation objectives and promoting ease of doing business.



To encourage women's leadership in Customs administration, actionable measures include:

- Pursuing policy reforms: Developing policies and instruments to promote women's leadership in Customs administrations, ensuring that any gender policy is practical, actively shared and well-understood at all levels of the organisation;
- Advancing Women's holistic empowerment: Breaking gender biases, encouraging women to pursue their career aspirations, ensuring fair access to opportunities;
- Reforming the work environment: Providing a safe, secure and conducive work environment free from any forms of harassment;
- Leadership training and mentoring programs for women: Mentoring program to provide guidance and identify opportunities, leadership training programs for capacity building, skill development and professional growth, promoting collaboration among women officers both nationally and internationally to nurture a sense of belonging and proactively assist in career development.

The WCO has documented successful experiences of global Customs administrations in advancing women in Customs leadership. Key measures, include, inter-alia, implementing action plans and policies to support gender equality and women's advancement in the workplace, developing gender networks for improved women leadership at all levels of customs administrations and implementing training and capacity building programs to support women progressing into leadership roles.

Policies and environments that support women in Customs are essential. Creating a fair and supportive work environment is crucial for encouraging women to pursue their career opportunities confidently. This includes enhancing access to professional opportunities that enable them to try different roles. Providing childcare facilities in the workplace, along with other supportive logistical facilities enable women to continually pursue their career goals. Ensuring safety for women in the workplace is crucial. Strict implementation

*When the nature bestows equality to both men and women in creation of life;  
Why the world should discriminate in creation of economy?  
CBIC leading with the motto of 'PRAGATI'- Progress And Gender Advancement in Trade  
in India.*

*- Megha Bansal, Under Secretary, Land Customs, CBIC*

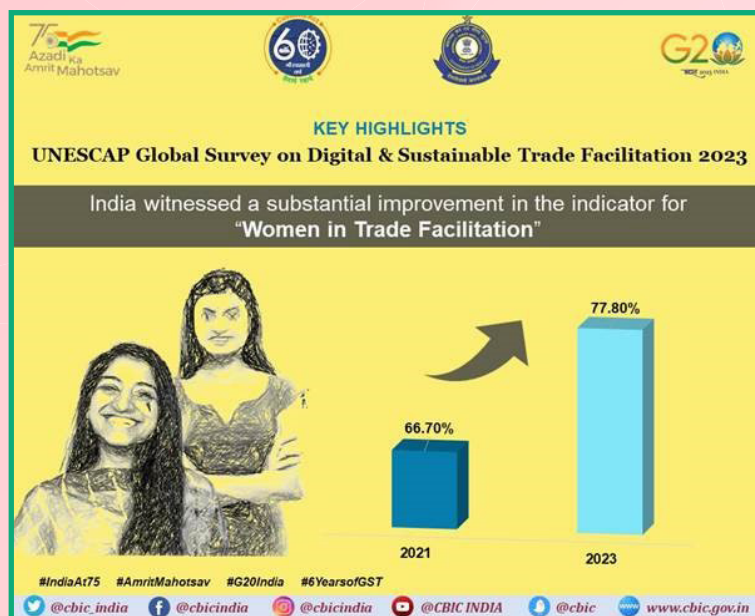
of policies that prohibit and punish sexual harassment, establishing clear and timely disciplinary procedures, a supportive environment to report such incidents and any required support, if needed, can go a long way in improving the morale, effectiveness and engagement of women employees.

Most importantly, there are personal steps we can all take to positively shape our administration. A mindset of gender inclusivity in Customs requires us to realise that positive change isn't someone else's responsibility – it begins with each of us.

### Women leading Customs – A path to progress

Gender equality and diversity are not only fundamental human rights, but also essential prerequisites for achieving sustainable development, growth and competitiveness. Despite the widespread recognition of the crucial role played by women in Customs, various obstacles hinder their career advancement. Gender diversity matters in Customs. It is not just an aspirational goal; it is a matter of human rights and well-being. Women's inclusion in leadership positions is crucial not only for fairness but also for maximizing our administration's potential through diversity and inclusivity.

Promoting diversity and inclusion encourages innovation and improves both individual and organisational performance. While numerous measures towards achieving gender parity have been initiated in our administration over the decades, it is imperative to advance our efforts further. The positive gender decisions we make today will undoubtedly strengthen our organisation's ability to manage the Customs landscape effectively. We all must champion positive change for women in Customs. If not us, then who? If not now, then when?



India's Score in UN Trade Facilitation survey on "women in Trade Facilitation" has substantially increased from 66% in 2021 to 78% in 2023 and this has resulted in overall improvement in India ranking in UN TF survey with an impressive score of 93.55% in 2023 vis-a-vis 90.32% in 2021.





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## PARTICIPATORY APPROACH IN GENDER INCLUSIVE TRADE FACILITATION: NODES AND INTERNODES



*Dr. Kanaga Subramanian G, IRS (C&IT), Deputy Commissioner*

Indian Customs unveiled one more institutional infrastructure for the cross-border Customs clearance in the hinterland by granting custodianship for the international cargo facility in Madurai Airport during the financial year 2016-17, when I was enrolled as a probationer in the National Academy of Customs Indirect Taxes and Narcotics (NACIN), Faridabad. Subsequently, when I was posted as Assistant Commissioner in Madurai, the initiative was seen fulfilling the long pending demand of traders, farmers and exporters alike. Madurai Airport witnessed robust growth in freight movement during the financial year 2018-19 as it had almost doubled compared to the financial year 2017-18. The cargo movement during the financial year 2018-19 was 4,934 MT. The growth is attributed to the international cargo movement, facilitated by Air Cargo Customs Madurai. Vegetables and perishable items accounted for almost 85% of the goods exported from Madurai Air Cargo, serving the rural hinterland of southern Tamil Nadu. Garments and personal effects constituted 10% and the remaining 5% was food products. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in its Policy Brief “Integrating a gender perspective into trade facilitation reforms” (Policy Brief No.98 March 2022) acknowledges agricultural products and garments industry as Women-dominated sectors. It is pertinent to mention Madurai, a tier-2 city, also hosts two AEO-T3 (Authorised Economic Operators) apparel manufacturer exporters specializing in the production of top-notch ready-made garments, employing predominantly women.

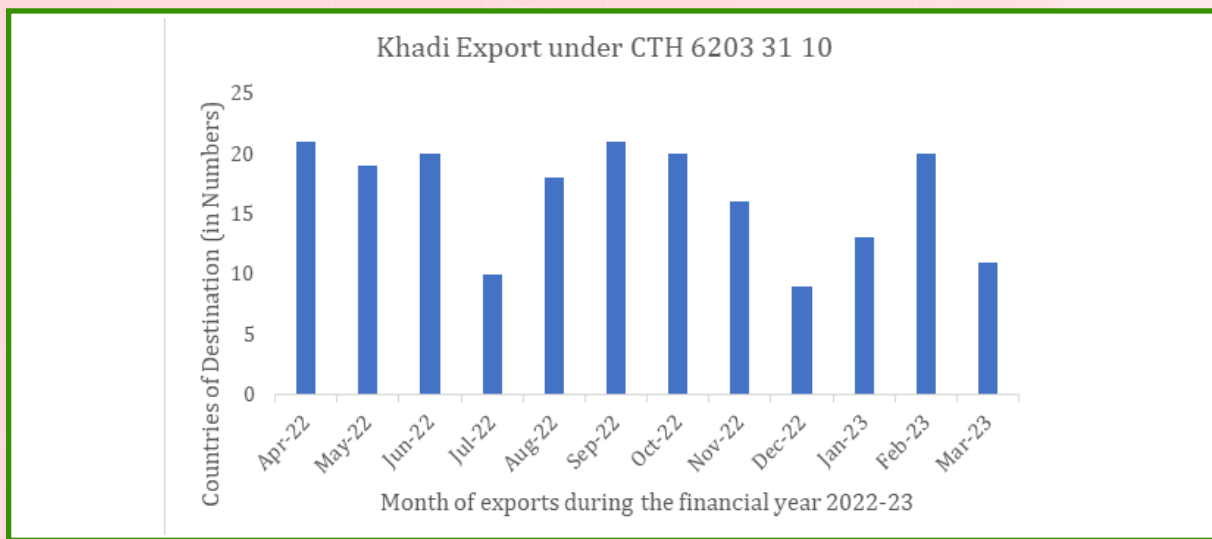
Improving women traders accessibility to information, preferably in local languages, and reaching out to rural areas and offering less informal meetings with women traders are some of the recommendations published in “WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement: A gender lens for action”(2023), by the International Trade Centre (ITC)- a joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations, for incorporating gender-targeted outcomes and activities into the national implementation plans of the TFA. This report advises governments on tackling gender inequality and promoting women’s economic empowerment when implementing the World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade Facilitation (TFA). It recommends helping women traders access vital information about their rights, border crossing times, fees and formalities, and encouraging compliance.

The rolling out of Air Cargo Customs facility in Madurai Airport contributed towards a beneficial socio-economic impact as inferred from doubling of freight volume. It increased the demand for export products and helped to reduce overall logistics costs for the products made by Women-dominated sectors and enhanced the ease of doing business in the region. It offered the possibilities for just-in-time registration of cargo, reduced

storage needs especially for perishable items which require cold storage, enhanced the access to Customs station, speedy claim of duty drawbacks and GST refunds, and reduction in the number of intermediaries. It also provided the operational transparency to the stakeholders in EXIM trade by coming close to their locality.

The ITC report 2023 mentioned above acknowledges that the term ‘women trader’ covers various subgroups with different characteristics and not all groups are equally well researched and mentions that this research bias must be kept in mind when reviewing the findings on women traders.

Madurai is also a traditional centre for Khadi and Village industries. The Gandhigram Rural Institute- a deemed university is located in its vicinity. Khadi is about women empowerment as women are important participants in the weaving process. The proposal for allocation of separate HS code for Khadi came to fruition during the year 2019 with the creation of separate tariff lines (Customs Tariff Headings) by CBIC for Khadi products such as Khadi Jacket, Khadi Ensemble etc. This would help in planning export strategies for women development as these products are eco-friendly and have growing demand in the International Markets.



Source of data: Indian Customs ADVAIT portal, CBIC, Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance.

Institutional infrastructure and technical support such as the ones described above provides the much-needed nodes for gender inclusive trade facilitation. It is pertinent to mention that Indian Customs is a pioneer in automated Customs procedures as per the principle 5 of the WCO Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool to enhance trade facilitation and ensure that all clients, regardless of gender or background, are treated

equally with respect to Customs policies and procedures; further it is ensured that women and men are treated with equal respect and dignity at border crossings.

Gender inclusiveness for enhancing direct stakeholders' participation in cross-border Customs clearance process would involve an online Customs public interface that would serve as an internode to enable exchange of data and promote timely updates on clearance directly with the participants. Such a portal is expected to further boost TFA provisions with a gendered effect.

### World Bank's Women, Business and the Law Report 2023

SCORE



63.7

The overall score for India is higher than the regional average observed across South Asia (63.7). India have received a perfect score for laws related to freedom of movement, women's work decisions, and marriage constraints.



*Women in customs bring empathy and multi tasking which is in built in their nature into handling cross border trade. Our integrity ensure seamless interaction with trade and also boost to the economy.*

*-P Santhi Sudha, Additional Commissioner, Bengaluru Zone*







## WOMEN IN TRADE AT INDIA'S BORDERS



- *Ms. Nikita Singla, International Trade, Logistics, and Inclusion Specialist, and associated with CBIC's National Time Release Study from 2019-2024.*

*This article is based on the findings of the Policy Paper titled "Women's Inclusion in India's Trade Ecosystem", authored by Nikita Singla*

In the 2023 UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, India scored an overall 93.55% as compared to 63.44% in 2015. The score in the "Women in Trade Facilitation" component is 77.8%, a noteworthy improvement from 66.7% in 2021.

The "Women in Trade Facilitation" component is primarily based on three sub-components: a) Trade facilitation policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade, b) Trade facilitation measures to benefit women involved in trade, and c) Women membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies.

Along each of these parameters, there are various signs of India's commitment towards ensuring gender parity in trade.

Signs of Commitment – Policy-level and Capacity building initiatives

### Policy-level:

**National Trade Facilitation Action Plan 2020-23 Action Point 27 to promote gender inclusiveness:** India ratified the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in April, 2016. To effectively carry out the diverse provisions outlined in the TFA, the National Committee on Trade Facilitation was set up to supervise its implementation in India. As part of this effort, the committee has devised the National Trade Facilitation Action Plan (NTFAP). One of the key objectives outlined in the NTFAP 2020-23, specifically Action Point 27, is to advance gender inclusivity in trade through:

- Conceptualizing and developing a "women in global business programme" aimed at capacity building and connectivity
- Providing information and resources, mentoring programme, connection and communication with Indian businesswomen

**Faceless, Contactless and Paperless Customs clearance process:** During the recent crisis, India has taken several measures to facilitate trade and ensure seamless cargo clearance at ports, of which one of the flagship initiatives is the Turant Customs Programme, which made the Customs clearance process Faceless, Contactless and Paperless:

- Faceless Assessment (implemented in October, 2020) provides anonymity, enhanced speed and reduced physical interface between Customs Authorities and importers/exporters and other stakeholders.
- Contactless Customs reduces interface between Customs officials and trade through providing various online features in Customs EDI system.
- Paperless Customs dematerializes documents/ forms and provides for electronic registrations.

Likewise, the Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP), integrated within the National Logistics Policy, aims to establish a technologically advanced, seamlessly connected, cost-effective, robust, and sustainable logistics ecosystem. This initiative is designed to facilitate accelerated and inclusive growth across various sectors of the economy.

The growing transition from traditional face-to-face interactions to digital engagements presents an opportunity to create a more equitable environment for women. This potential can be fully realized by accompanying the shift with initiatives aimed at improving digital literacy and encouraging women to embrace digital technologies.

### **Capacity building initiatives vis-à-vis digital access, financial literacy and trade up-skilling**

Different capacity building initiatives have been undertaken, some of which are Government of India-led, some with international support and a few others driven domestically.

Initiative	Key Area of Intervention	Key Highlights
<b>Government of India-led</b>		
Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development (TREAD) Scheme for Women, under the ambit of Start-up India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial Assistance</li> <li>- Training and Development</li> </ul>	This scheme envisages economic empowerment of women by providing credit (through NGOs), training, development and counselling extension activities related to trades, products, services etc.
Women Empowerment Platform (WEP) by the NITI Aayog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incubation and Acceleration</li> <li>- Entrepreneur Skilling and Mentorship</li> <li>- Marketing and Taxing Assistance</li> <li>- Financial Assistance</li> </ul>	A Government of India initiative by NITI Aayog to promote and support aspiring as well as established women entrepreneurs in India, assist and handhold them in their journey from starting up to scaling up and expanding their ventures.



Womaniya on Government e Marketplace (GeM) under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry	- Access to market (Government Marketplace)	GeM is a 100% government owned company setup under the aegis of Ministry of Commerce and Industry for procurement of common use goods and services by Government ministries. In January 2019, Womaniya on GeM was launched to enable women entrepreneurs and women self-help groups to sell handicrafts and handloom, accessories, jute and coir products, home décor and office furnishings, directly to various Government ministries, departments and institutions.
<b>With international support</b>		
IPEF Up-skilling initiative by the US Department of Commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comprehensive digital tool kit</li> <li>- Digital literacy and entrepreneurship training</li> <li>- Training in data science, cyber security, AI and robotics</li> </ul>	Over the next decade, the initiative will bring 7 million or more training and education opportunities that use digital tools to women and girls in the IPEF emerging economies and middle-income partners including India. Fourteen U.S. companies will each provide 500,000 or more up-skilling opportunities by 2032.
SheTrades and UPS project Empowering Women Entrepreneurs in India	- Training and Capacity Building	Facilitates tailored capacity building activities to improve women entrepreneurs' competitiveness - at the global level through online offerings, and at the national level, with in-country activities in Vietnam, Mexico and India
USAID Women in Trade Initiative	- Access to market	'Women in Trade' is creating more entrepreneurial opportunities for women in South Asian region. Their web portal – part of their collaboration with TradeKey.com – is a platform removing scale constraints for women. The portal increases the size of potential market for existing female entrepreneurs and encourages women thinking of initiating a global business.

Social Transformation and Economic Empowerment of Women Artisans in India (STREE), European Union funded project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development of unorganized sector</li> <li>- Improved market conditions</li> <li>- Environmentally friendly trade practices</li> </ul>	A European Union project that aims to help revive the livelihoods of India's marginalized women artisans.
UN-based Better than Cash Alliance to support India's Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Digital payments and transactions</li> </ul>	India's first and largest trade union of self-employed women has joined the United Nations-based Better Than Cash Alliance to achieve 50% increase by 2025 in the digital payments' transactions of its 2.1 million members.
<b>Domestically-driven</b>		
Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with National Skill Development Corporation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Live training sessions</li> <li>- Digital skilling drives</li> <li>- Sustainable economic opportunities at grassroots, medium and senior levels</li> </ul>	<p>FLO, Women's wing of FICCI signed a MoU with NSDC to provide free access to learning resources and digital skilling awareness drives through e-skills. This has increased home-prenuers in urban and semi-urban areas in India, giving them a flexible work environment, direct connection to buyers, and cutting out the middlemen.</p> <p>Similarly, Microsoft collaborated with NSDC to skill more than 1 lakh underserved women in India over a span of 10 months in 2020.</p>
India's first International Women's Trade and Research Centre (iWTC) in Kerala	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Women's-only start-up incubation centre</li> <li>- Business facilitator</li> <li>- Space for rent and retail trade</li> <li>- Women's health and welfare centre</li> </ul>	International Women's Trade and Research Centre (iWTC) envisages a secure and sustained ecosystem for women entrepreneurs and includes a multi-storey complex and space for women to market products.

Ima Keithel – an all women market in Manipur	- Exclusive access to market	A unique all women's market, Asia's largest, solely managed and run by women, having 3000 "Imas" or mothers who run the stalls, it is split two sections on either side of road. Vegetables, fruits, fish and household groceries are sold on one side and exquisite handlooms and household tools on the other.
First Fairtrade Women Farmers' co-operative in India - a Fairtrade Producer group formed exclusively for women by women	- Sustainable practices - Access to market	Women are engaged in multi-crop agriculture which includes coffee, spices, coconut, vegetables, and cocoa. The association believes in improving the lives of women farmers by training them in sustainable farming practices, equipping them for newer markets, and contributing to their health and family needs.
All women FLO Industrial Parks	- Promotion of women owned manufacturing industries	For promoting entrepreneurship and empowering women across the nation, FLO, Women's Wing of FICCI, has launched all-women first-of-its-kind Industrial Park in Telangana, to be followed by Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. These industrial parks will be 100% owned by women.

### Local initiatives championing diversity

India ratified the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in April 2016, aiming to expedite the movement, release and clearance of goods, including goods in transit. In accordance with the Article 7.6 of the TFA and commitments as per the above referred NTFAP targets, the NCTF has been conducting annual National Time Release Study (NTRS). NTRS is a crucial tool for evidence-based policy making. NTRS serves as a tool to measure the effectiveness of reforms undertaken by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) and other ministries/ cross border regulatory agencies.

It is in this context that field visits were undertaken to all 15 port locations in India, covering 04 Seaports, 03 Inland Container Depots (ICDs), 06 Air Cargo Complexes (ACCs) and 02 Integrated Check Posts (ICPs). At most of these locations, there were few women.

Including women in trade is an important part of achieving women's economic inclusion. The 2020 joint World Bank and World Trade Organization (WTO) report on 'Women and



Trade: The Role of Trade in Promoting Women's Equality' shows that firms that engage in international trade employ more women, and women are better represented and have relatively higher wages in firms that are part of global value chains.

In absence of gender disaggregated data at the firm-level, anecdotal evidence from the ports suggests that while women representation is low, over the years, some noteworthy initiatives are being taken at the local level, which reflect the commitment towards making the local ecosystem conducive for greater participation of women. A particularly noteworthy example is the installation of a vending machine for sanitary napkins at the land port in Agartala, situated along the India-Bangladesh border.

Furthermore, during a recent trip to Dawki, a newly opened port along the India-Bangladesh border, the port manager expressed a sense of pride in the proactive steps taken to hire women from the local community. As a result of these efforts, nearly 40% of the port's workforce comprises women.

At the land port of Petrapole, women make up approximately 12% of the workforce with roles centered around data entry operations, security duties and housekeeping.

### **Steps to further advance women's inclusion in trade**

To further advance women's participation and representation in trade, some of the following steps can be considered:

- **Collection of gender-disaggregated trade statistics:** For informed policymaking and impact assessment, it is recommended to collect the entire universe of the gender-disaggregated data at a pan-India level and make it accessible to third-party research organizations. Enhanced data granularity can enable accurate evaluation of women's involvement in international trade and identification of barriers to gender equity. Consequently, this will facilitate the development of more targeted and effective policy interventions and reforms aimed at promoting gender equality in trade.
- **Enhancing participation of women in regular trade interaction forums:** Regular interactions at the port level in India, such as the Permanent Trade Facilitation Committee (PTFC) and Customs Clearance Facility Committee (CCFC), commonly known as PTFC/CCFC meetings, should include participation from women representatives as a mandatory practice. A notable example worth studying is the PTFC/CCFC at the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust, which is the largest container port in India and has a

higher representation of women, partly attributable to the presence of the All-Women Customs Brokers Association in Mumbai. Such associations are not as prevalent in other Tier 1 and 2 cities. Regular involvement in these forums can also help familiarize women with initiatives such as the faceless, contactless, and paperless procedures implemented by Indian Customs. These initiatives have the potential to create a more equitable environment for women and decrease reliance on intermediaries.

- Supporting women's transition to higher levels of trade value chains: Gap in education, skills and training undermines women's ability to engage in and move up to higher-value activities. Dedicated training programs focusing on areas such as business development, quality control, marketing, distribution, access to finance and use of higher-grade agricultural inputs and technologies are crucial in supporting women's participation and movement up the value chain in export sectors.
- Exchange of global good practices: Good practices with respect to advancing women's inclusion in trade can be shared between ports at a global level. For instance, the Port of New York and New Jersey demonstrates exemplary dedication to fostering diversity and inclusion. This commitment is evident in initiatives such as expanding opportunities for minority and women-owned business enterprises, cultivating a diverse workforce, implementing mentorship programs for female employees, and ensuring women are well-represented in senior leadership positions.

Gender equality is not just a women's issue; it's a societal issue that affects everyone. All stakeholders can come together and play a crucial role in challenging and dismantling gender stereotypes, advocating for equal opportunities for all genders, and creating inclusive environments where everyone can thrive.

*Every year, we witness a significant rise in the number of women achieving success in passing the Rule 6 examination and acquiring F card certification. This trend signifies their increasing commitment to the profession and the broadening opportunities for career advancement within the industry. In 2022, women accounted for 10% of the total successful candidates, a figure that doubled in 2023, highlighting the expanding inclusivity and potential within the field. On a personal note, I extend my sincere gratitude to Indian Customs for fostering an environment that encourages greater female participation and leadership roles in the logistics sector.*

*- SREELATHA GIRIDHAR TIRUMALA VINJAMOORI, DIRECTOR, SYNERGY GLOBAL LOGISTICS PVT LTD*









*Pooja Sharma, Additional Director DGGI (CBIC)*

India has emerged as the fastest-growing economy and is expected to be one of the top three economic powers in the world in coming years. To achieve the above goal, there is need to further encourage the role and contribution of the women, who are almost half the population of the country, in all fronts including the administration and to make the administration more gender balanced and inclusive.

In economic growth of any country the revenue administration plays a crucial role by collecting tax revenue, thus assisting the government to finance the areas of development of critical and marginal sector of the society. At the same time another important roles of the revenue administration are to investigate the economic offences and enforcement of economic laws.

Traditionally, the female officers selected by the government have preferred Indian Revenue Services as their career, apart from the popular choice of Indian Administrative Services. One of the reasons for the same may be that, unlike policing, the revenue administration requires different skill set such as analytical and technical skills rather than skills based on physical strength and attributes. Although the above trends are also changing and women are breaking these stereotypes, and have started preferring the core policing as well as enforcement functions within revenue administration. However, there is a lot needs to be done for making the administration more inclusive and ensure proportionate representation of women in all wings of the department.

The first and foremost step towards gender inclusive administration is to create the data base for the organisations taking the gender perspective into the account. The Directorate General of Human Resource Development (DGHRD) of Central Board of Indirect Taxation and Customs (CBIC) can take lead role in preparing the data base of women's participation at various levels of the organisation which in turn can help in targeting and understanding the specific need of women officers and staff members and help the organisation to formulate gender sensitive policies for encouraging their participation and bring in more efficiency in the organisation.

In fact, gender equality should not be merely seen as the number of women being posted in the administration but it must be represented through a framework, free from gender bias and favouritism while assigning the charge or specific task within the administration. In the past, many of the assignments in revenue administration such as enforcement / anti evasion are predominantly held and led by male officers for the reasons that these assignments may require the physical strength or fitness of the officers, late or odd working

hours and are essentially a field job. The glass ceiling is broken and now women officers are not only present at the cutting-edge level of executive formations, enforcements wings such as Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI) and policy making such as Tax Research Unit (TRU) but are also leading these wings and giving marvellous outcome, which is very encouraging. The female officers at the senior and leadership level are being the role models for all the officers of the department, both male and female. Their increased participation has brought enhanced and diverse skill set in the organisation.

As revenue officers are required to interact with trade and businesses on daily basis for various statutory compliances and enforcement functions, the increased participation of women officers would help in making the revenue administration more sensitive and would help in recognizing the unique needs of female taxpayers and women led businesses, wherever needed.

While going forward, there is also a need to collectively understand the specific barriers being faced by the women officers and staff members which are generally not faced by their male counterparts, identify them and address them with interventions at appropriate level.

For instance, in the present socio-economic scenario, wherein the domestic work and childcare are considered as the responsibility, primary of the women, the women officers generally take a long leave from the work resulting in a temporary disconnect with the work. There is need to take initiatives such as creating crèche, conducting special training and courses to re-instil the confidence and update their skill making them ready to take any assignment in the department. Further the department may design and conduct gender sensitive capacity building programmes, specially for the officers at the senior levels, to further enhance inclusiveness and optimal utilisation of the human resource, considering the gender sensitive needs of women officers and staff, while assigning posts and tasks in order to bring out maximum and best outcome.

As is the saying that the journey of thousand miles begins with a step, even the small initiatives and endeavours at field formations towards the goal of inclusiveness can bring a significant change in the organisation and its functioning.



*As goods cross borders Women in frontiers raise the limits"*

*-D.S. SANGEETHA, ADDITIONAL COMMISSIONER OF CUSTOMS,  
CHENNAI CUSTOMS ZONE*



## THE CURIOUS CASE OF HIDDEN WOMEN

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*-S. Vandana Raj, Deputy Director*

When one walks through the bustling corridors of Custom House, Chennai – one can find that the sound of footsteps is loud and quick. The hustle and pace of work and the volume of trade is directly proportional to the same. However, there is one stark and visible sight – the lack of adequate women in this office space - both as officers and as members of the trade. Herein lies the paradox of “hidden women”.

There are however few women interspersed in the building but mostly in specific areas – more in facilitation than enforcement, more in reports/audit than in assessment/examination/docks/shed. Essentially, women are present in document-based roles rather than field-oriented positions.

Similarly, women in business as entrepreneurs or as members of trade associations are a much rarer sight. Again, when they are present, it is mostly as exporters than as importers, mostly as labourers/accountants/office staff than as leaders/CEOs. And women in logistics sector are almost a handful.

Well, this brings us to fundamental problem of representation and gender parity. They say economy is the super-structure over the sub-structure of society. The social norms, complexes and disparities get reflected in the economy too. The fact that women as primarily viewed as caregivers in the family while the men are viewed as breadwinners leads to perceived “occupational segregation”. Women shy away from responsibilities that are more “out there”- field oriented, risk-heavy and top-salaried and during other times deprived of such opportunities too.

Ms. Claudia Goldin, the 2023 Nobel Prize Winner for economics, calls this as a “problem with no name”. She says that the fundamental reason for this gender inequality is couple inequity. She further adds that, “Occupational segregation is the idea that man and woman are self-selecting or being railroad into select professions that are stereotypically gendered. Further men step up in their career because women step back, and at the end both lose.”

Apart from the structural inequalities in the society, there are certain other difficulties faced by women too – access to finance, technology, shock absorption capacities given the global uncertainties, growing protectionism in trade etc. Women face high entry barriers, are mostly engaged in sectors involving high in out tariffs like textiles, food and beverages,



leather (referred as “pink tariffs”) along with non-tariff barriers of regulatory and product quality standards. Being mostly in MSME sectors and exports, women-oriented businesses face high burden of compliance.

In this context, now that we have actually named the problem, let’s try to identify the solution. Gender mainstreaming in trade negotiations can be a good place to begin. Free Trade Agreements can have specific chapters dedicated to gender related provisions and how the women-oriented businesses can be nurtured. Chile set a global example in this regard when its FTA in 1997 had the first ever gender sensitive trade provisions.

Secondly, with the ongoing emphasis on Trade Facilitation, it’s time to give additional and exclusive focus Trade Facilitation with a gender sensitive approach. The United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation highlights that gender mainstreaming of the NCTF agenda (National Committee on Trade Facilitation) needs to be done. Greater market access for products and sectors where women work, and own businesses will be great boon for the EXIM ecosystem.

Thirdly, policy reforms to boost women entrepreneurs can be brought in. Given that digitisation has reduced costs and improved flexibility and mobility for women, services sector and exports can be given targeted focus. Though women are not apparently visible in the global supply chains, it is to be noted that services sector inputs (where women have major presence) constitute around one-third of manufacturing exports and one-fourth of agro exports. Hence women are “hidden” in the entire ecosystem and systemic policy reforms can definitely increase their productivity and presence. Startup India scheme of the government, emphasising women entrepreneurs is a notable initiative in this regard.

Fourthly, office spaces can be made more women friendly. In Chennai Customs, a modern crèche facility with teachers was a big boon to the working mothers and helped eased the burden of caregiving. Women’s Welfare Association, was a vibrant space for women to come together, share their concerns and seek interventions towards a decent and safe working space. More women representation in field-oriented positions can not only increase diversity in the work environment, but will also help increase empathy, inclusion and productivity.

Finally gender disaggregated data can help make targeted policy interventions. With due focus on sustainable development goals, gender inclusive trade policies can help attain both SDG 5 and SDG 8 goals simultaneously. Women can be guided and mentored to understand international business and trade procedures and this in turn will lead to decent work and economic growth.

And wasn’t the World Bank right when its Chief once said, “When countries trade, women win.” Let’s walk towards a more inclusive and gender sensitive trade ecosystem for the entire country to grow faster!

## CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY IN LOGISTICS



- Shankar Shinde, FFFAI

International Women's Day, celebrated globally on 8th March every year holds special significance for the logistics industry as we come together to honour and acknowledge the invaluable contributions of women in leadership roles within our sector.

As we reflect on International Women's Day, let us take a moment to celebrate the remarkable achievements of women in the field of logistics. We extend our deepest appreciation to the dedicated and talented women who have played pivotal roles in shaping the logistics industry, breaking barriers, and paving the way for future generations.

The positive shift in the landscape of the logistics industry is evident, with an increasing number of women actively participating in key roles. It's truly inspiring to witness the crucial roles played by women in various facets of the industry, including supply chain management, technology, soft skills, and automation.

In every corner of the logistics landscape, women are making a significant impact—from supply chain management and transportation to warehousing and distribution. Their expertise, resilience, and innovation have been instrumental in driving efficiency, promoting sustainability, and ensuring the seamless flow of goods worldwide.

While we celebrate the progress made in promoting women's involvement in logistics, we recognize the substantial opportunity to bridge gaps and encourage more women to join our dynamic industry. The International Federation of Customs Broker Association (IFCBA), the International Coordinating Council on Trans-Eurasian Transportation (CCTT), and the Federation of Freight Forwarders Association in India (FFFAI) remain steadfast in our dedication to creating an environment that fosters the active participation of women and the next generation.

The theme of "Nari Shakti," female power, resonates strongly in the inherent strength that women bring to the logistics industry. It is not merely about empowerment but showcasing the natural leadership positions that women excel in, attracting the interest of both male and female youth to explore rewarding careers in logistics.

The development of the logistics industry into a more professional and technology-driven sector has created diverse opportunities for women in technology, soft skills, and the operation of sophisticated automated handling equipment. We proudly recognize the achievements of our women colleagues in logistics. Their commitment to excellence, problem-solving skills, and

leadership qualities have been crucial in navigating the complexities of the modern supply chain.

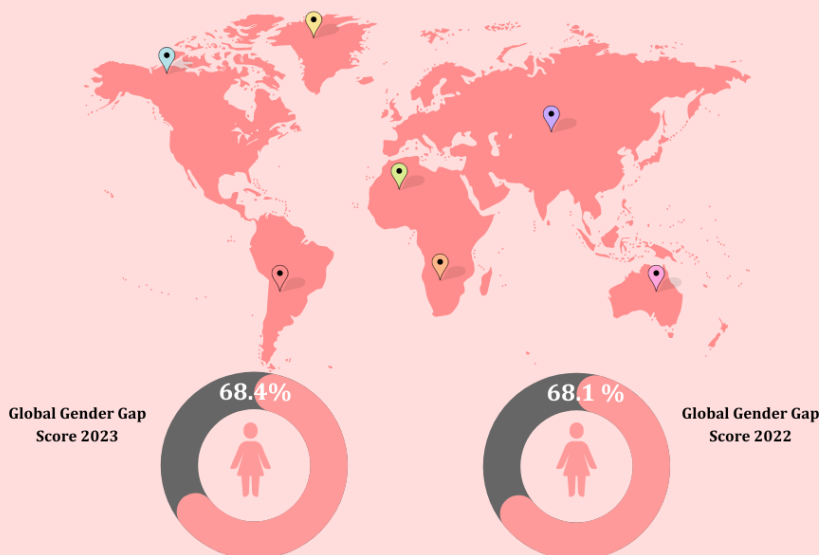
We also commend the efforts of the World Bank in promoting women in logistics, as highlighted in the insightful report “Driving change: Empowering women for greater productivity in Europe and Central Asia.” This initiative has played a pivotal role in raising awareness and encouraging greater participation.

On this International Women’s Day, we extend our heartfelt congratulations to all the women in our industry. Your enthusiasm, willingness, and leadership qualities contribute immensely to the growth and success of the logistics sector. Let us continue working together to create an inclusive and supportive environment that uplifts industry trust and respect.

*From a taxpayer standpoint, steps taken to include women in global trade has helped to bridge the gender gap and help boost economic growth. The last decade has witnessed the CBIC appointing Smt Praveen Mahajan as its first woman Chairperson, a women-led Board during her stint, and Smt Vanaja Sarna at its helm, as the country navigated the transition into GST and through path-breaking customs reforms. This is a testament to the Board’s commitment to gender inclusivity and empowerment.*

*-Shefali Goradia, Chairperson, Deloitte India*

### Gender GAP Score 2023



**It would take 131 years to achieve full gender parity, showing a significant slowdown in the overall rate of change.**

**As per the Global Gender gap score, India has closed 64.3% of the overall gender gap.**



## CBIC – WORLD BANK TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ON ‘TRADE FACILITATION AND GENDER’

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CBIC is currently engaged with the World Bank (WB) in a long-term partnership on the India Trade Facilitation Program. CBIC has identified ‘Trade Facilitation and Gender’ as a priority under the WB program, and accordingly, in partnership with CBIC, an in-depth study is being undertaken on gender dimensions in trade facilitation. This study is based on quantitative (consisting of Quantitative Survey Assessment) as well as qualitative (consisting of Focus group discussions, visits to logistics facilities (ICDs, private Customs warehouses)) findings. Nine field visits at multiple ports locations, such as ICD Tughalakabad, JNPT etc. & Focused Group Discussions with CII, FFFAI Kolkata, India SME Forum Mumbai etc. have been undertaken as part of this study. Major preliminary findings of these port visits and focus group discussion are as follows:

- CBIC is making efforts to promote women in the leadership positions within the trade ecosystem;
- CCTVs are installed at all corners of the ICP and are regularly monitored;
- Regular trainings for the female employees once in every three to six months;
- Dedicated washrooms for female employees, with access card facility;
- Internal Complaints Committee have been duly constituted at major Customs locations;
- Fixed work hours for women (10:00 am - 5:30 pm) have been followed;
- At some of the locations, Shuttles provided for employees twice a day from the Facility.

Drawing on recent qualitative research through Focus Group Discussions and site visits, the findings indicate that social norms, gender stereotypes and mindsets of employers, peers, and families present sticky barriers to women’s work participation in the International Trade sector. Safety concerns, and mobility barriers also create gender gaps – deterring women from visiting logistics facilities, particularly during late evening hours or those in very remote locations.

CBIC recognizes that enhancing women's participation in trade facilitation, especially in priority sub-sectors require an ecosystem approach with complementary, intentional actions by all government agencies and private sector, i.e. measures that acknowledge, appreciate and mitigate gender gaps.









