

POLICY BRIEF FOR EMPOWERING WOMEN TO BRIDGE OPPORTUNITIES AND BREAK BARRIERS TO INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN LESOTHO

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BIOGRAPHY: Matsepiso Majoro is the Co-Founder and Managing Director of MahlaseliEnergy a renewable Energy Company in Lesotho currently offering off-grid Solar Solutions for electrification and water supply. An accountant by profession with the Association of Chartered Accountants(ACCA), She has worked as a business development service provider offering Entrepreneurship training and Mentorship for Basotho Entrepreneurs in the Agriculture and manufacturing sector as well as Clean Tech Entrepreneurs.

She has further received scholarships and certifications in Energy Audit and Financial Modeling For Renewable Energy Projects. She has been recognized internationally as an Ambassador of ONEYOUNG WORLD- Lead2030 for SDG7, an NGO in Europe recognizing young people around the world making change towards Sustainable development. Matsepiso Majoro also advocates for Women/Youth Empowerment, Entrepreneurship and Renewable Energy .

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The participation of women in international trade in Lesotho is essential for economic growth and development. Despite Lesotho being part of Reciprocal Preferential Trade Agreements like SACU, SADC-FTA, SACU-EFTA-FTA, AFCFTA and others, women entrepreneurs face barriers that hinder their full involvement in international trade. This policy brief aims to explore how policy can be created to empower women to bridge opportunities and break barriers to international Trade in Lesotho.

Key recommendations include:

1. To provide training and capacity-building programs that target for women entrepreneurs in order to enhance their knowledge and skills in international trade practices.
2. Implementing gender-inclusive policies and initiatives that promote equal access to resources, connect with experienced trade professionals and expand their business networks.
4. Encouraging partnerships between public and private sectors stakeholders in Lesotho to support women-owned businesses in accessing financing and market opportunities for their products and services.
5. Conducting research and data collection to better understand the specific challenges faced by women in international trade and develop tailored interventions to address these barriers effectively.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Gender Inclusive Trade Policies:** Develop and implement gender-sensitive trade policies that specifically address the barriers faced by women in accessing and participating in international trade.
 - Provide targeted support for women-owned businesses, promote gender equality in trade agreements, and ensure that trade policies do not disproportionately impact women.
 - Set up an Independent autonomous national Policy Body that reviews the progress made by Basotho women in International Trade annually.
2. **Capacity Building and Skills Development:** There should be investment towards business readiness programs that focus on training and capacity building for women in areas such as business development, export marketing, and trade negotiation skills.
 - National Capacity building programs should evaluate their time- frame in training Women Entrepreneurs in order to make them private sector ready
 - Training on Intellectual Property and Quality Certifications should target women in the Textile and Agriculture Sectors
 - RSL and Other trade Stakeholders should hold Information sessions for Women In International Trade Across the Country to strengthen Compliance and access to information
3. **Increase Production Capacity:** Create mechanisms to improve women's access to finance for international trade in order to manage their Capacity, such as:
 - set up dedicated financing programs for women-owned businesses(CAFI ,BEDCO etc), providing financial literacy training, and offering support for women to access credit,debt,equity,venture capital etc.
 - Local Banks and development agencies should increase finance for women Led Enterprises in International Trade, Land Lease should be accepted as collateral towards finance
4. **Networking and Mentorship Opportunities:** Facilitate opportunities for women to network with other women in the international trade sector, as well as access mentorship and support from experienced professionals.
 - *Establish Basotho Women in International Trade business networks, mentorship programs, and training sessions on networking and professional development.
5. **Gender Equality in Trade Institutions:** Ensure that women are represented and empowered in trade institutions and decision-making bodies, to ensure that their voices and perspectives are heard in shaping trade policies and regulations.

CONCLUSION:

By implementing these policies and recommendations, Lesotho can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in international trade, empowering them to break barriers and seize opportunities for economic empowerment and growth.