



Reimagining the Indo-Pacific: Using an Inclusive Lens

Policy Brief 4: Towards Gender Intentional Trade

The Federal Foreign Office of Germany and Kubernein Initiative have taken the joint initiative to consolidate past and current perspectives and understand the extent of gender mainstreaming in the Indo-Pacific region, with a focus on climate, trade and economic security, human and non-traditional security. We consider the centrality of human security in the Indo-Pacific and aim to explore ways forward for shaping more inclusive policies within the region, as well as learn from best practices that may be particularly relevant to Indo-German engagement. The policy brief is part of a series of publications under Kubernein Initiative and the Federal Foreign Office's joint project. Our perspective is rooted in Germany's 'Feminist Foreign Policy' vision, and Kubernein Initiative's work on inclusive foreign policy from an Indian context.

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Reimagining the Indo-Pacific Using an Inclusive Lens: Towards Gender Intentional Trade

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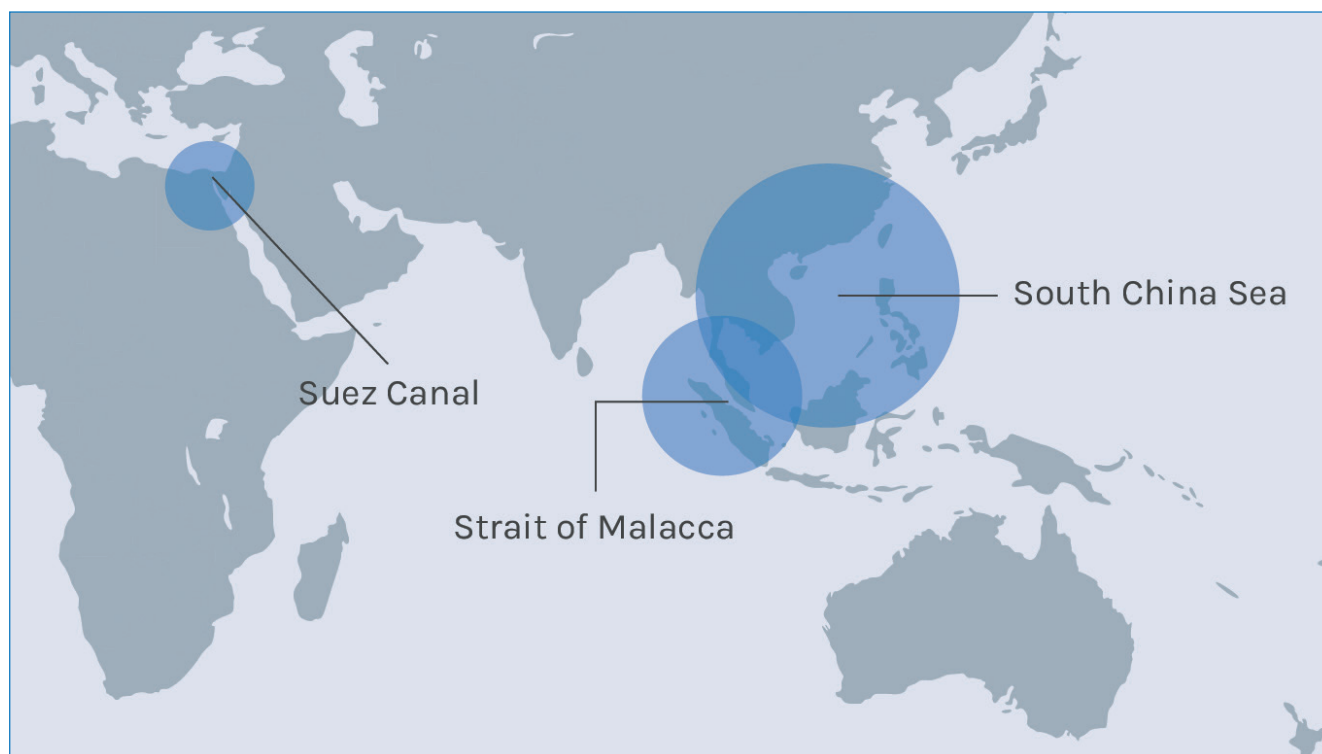
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The Significance of Inclusive Trade for the Indo-Pacific

Geopolitics and trade are intricately connected. Historical evidence shows that significant maritime checkpoints are also geopolitical flashpoints, and trade has often been “weaponised” to achieve national interest ends¹. In the Indo-Pacific, this has often played out with China being at the centre of focus. For example, in 2020, in response to Australia’s call for an investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic², China imposed tariffs of 80% on barley along with a host of other tariff measures on other Australian imports like wine, cotton, lobsters, timber, coal etc³.

The Indo-Pacific is a vast region extending from the western coast of North America to the eastern coast of Africa⁴. It is home to 65% of the world’s population (around 4.3 billion people), comprises about 40 economies, and accounts for USD 47.19 trillion in economic activity⁵. About 60% of the world’s trade passes through the region, one third of which is through the South China Sea⁶. It is also home to key global maritime trading routes for goods and energy. Therefore, it is critical to have safeguards in place to ensure that the geopolitical rivalry between a handful of nations does not destabilise the entire region with global ramifications. As the ongoing US-China trade war continues to affect the region, it becomes critical to ensure that smaller marginalised communities or more vulnerable groups, including women, that often bear a disproportionate brunt of geopolitical tensions are brought into the larger conversation.

Table 1: Key Maritime Trade Checkpoints in the Indo-Pacific and the volume of trade that flows through them. These are also geopolitical flashpoints.



Trade Checkpoints	Significance & Details
Suez Canal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 12% of global trade flows through the Suez Canal. • Nearly 19,000 ships passed through the canal during 2020, an average of 51.5 per day, according to the Suez Canal Authority⁷. • Around 30% of the globe's shipping container volume passes through the canal⁸.
South China Sea (SCS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connects the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean. • Territorial disputes among littoral powers. • Annual trade of around USD 5 trillion⁹.
Strait of Malacca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortest sea route between African and Persian Gulf suppliers and the Asian markets¹⁰. • A third of global crude oil trade passes through the Strait¹¹. • Around 30% of global trade also transits through the Strait of Malacca¹². • Around 94,000 ships transit through the Strait of Malacca annually¹³.

Countries recognise the need for greater stability within the Indo-Pacific to advance their geoeconomic and geopolitical goals. This is seen in the outlook of resident and other powers including Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Germany, India, Japan, the US and others. Currently broad high level economic frameworks include – the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP). The region is also seeing a push for bilateral free trade agreements, such as the European Union (EU) and Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (2019)¹⁴, the Australia-United Kingdom Free Trade Agreement (2021)¹⁵, India-Australia Economic and Cooperation Trade Agreement (2022)¹⁶, and the EU-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (2023)¹⁷, as an alternative inclusive option to large blocks and bodies that are often slow and unwieldy and do not always serve smaller and fragile nations. These smaller groupings can sometimes help diffuse power games and enable targeted focus on specific issues from climate and trade risks to gender, and increase dialogue and possibly trust.

Research tells us that the economic benefits from making trade more gender-inclusive are multi-fold¹⁸. A 2020 World Trade Organization (WTO) and World Bank study observes that the benefits go both ways - greater involvement of women in international trade leads to larger employment generation, economic equality, and rise in wages¹⁹. When developing countries double their manufacturing exports, women's share of total manufacturing wages also rises by 5.8 percentage points on average²⁰. It is estimated that countries of the Asia-Pacific could add USD 4.5 trillion to their annual GDP by 2025 collectively by addressing issues on women's equality in the workforce²¹. A whopping 58% of this increase could come from raising the female labour-force participation ratio in the Asia-Pacific.

Undoubtedly, geopolitical factors and events of the region will continue to influence trade policy, initiatives and efforts in the Indo-Pacific, driven primarily by a need for greater domestic economic security especially for developing countries in the region. **However, with the growing recognition that it is possible to place human security alongside foreign and security policy and not only as an afterthought, bringing a more inclusive lens to trade discussions becomes a way to move the needle and operationalise that recognition. It also becomes an opportunity to build trust for long term stability. The relationship between trade, trust and people-to-people connect is a virtuous triangle, and when one increases, it becomes a tool to deepen peace negotiations or begin mediation with deep human impact²².** It is a hitherto underexplored area of work and has tremendous potential in the region, especially with uncertainties on the geopolitical front. In this fourth policy brief in the series, we explore some of these future trends and the opportunities for greater gender intentional policies in the Indo-Pacific, and avenues for Indo-German collaboration.

Gender and Inclusion Within Trade in the Indo-Pacific

Trade Policies of Countries within the Indo-Pacific

We examined the foreign trade policies, documents, and statements of the top 20 countries and regional organisations that contribute to regional economic development in the Indo-Pacific²³. Some of these countries also have trade as a focus within their Indo-Pacific strategies, yet many do not have gender as a focus in these strategies. The table below provides a summary of where gender mainstreaming was observed alongside trade in their Indo-Pacific trade outlook. Some of the policies range from programmes aimed at direct empowerment to capacity building and monitoring to improving access and removal of barriers for women in this space.

Table 2: Foreign Trade Policies and Gender Mainstreaming in Selected Indo-Pacific Countries and Other Actors

Country / Regional Groups	Details / Positions
 <p>Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)</p>	<p>Trade and Gender:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Declaration On Building A More Sustainable, Inclusive And Resilient Future: Unlocking Women’s Entrepreneurship In ASEAN” commits to undertaking measures and actions to advance and unlock the potential of women entrepreneurs in the ASEAN region²⁴. (November 2022, ASEAN 41st Summit) • In 2022 released a Policymakers Toolkit “Strengthening Women’s Entrepreneurship in National Micro Small and Medium Enterprise Policies and Action Plans” in partnership with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (ACCMSME)²⁵. <p>Indo-Pacific and Trade:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASEAN’s Indo-Pacific Outlook includes trade and economic cooperation with a key focus on - South-South Cooperation, Trade Facilitation, MSMEs, Digital Economy, strengthening economic frameworks/ agreements like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)²⁶.
 <p>Australia</p>	<p>Trade and Gender:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Strategy released by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in 2016 outlines Australia’s approach to integrating gender equality and women in trade and investment, foreign policies²⁷. <p>Indo-Pacific and Trade:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australia’s approach to trade in the Indo-Pacific as articulated in Chapter 3²⁸ and Chapter 4²⁹ of a 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper focuses on the promotion of open markets³⁰, economic integration which is inclusive of and open to all the region’s economies, protecting and shaping rules that promote trade liberalisation, reduction of barriers through free trade agreements like RCEP, TPP (now the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, CPTPP), economic forums like Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and working with Australian businesses in overseas markets.
 <p>Canada</p>	<p>Trade and Gender:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade Policy and Negotiations Branch’s Gender Pledge released in 2019 outlines Canada’s commitments on trade policy and gender³¹. The Gender and Trade Advisory Group established in 2020 acts as a key body in engaging with Canadians across sectors and regions across Canada³².

Country / Regional Groups	Details / Positions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Canada is integrating gender-based provisions in FTAs in 2 ways - i) a standalone chapter on trade and gender. ii) mainstreaming gender by including other gender-related provisions throughout FTAs. These are included in the Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA), Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement (CIFTA), The Global Trade and Gender Arrangement (GTAGA) and others³³. <p>Indo-Pacific and Trade:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Canada's approach to trade in the region as articulated in its Indo-Pacific Strategy focused on providing greater support to SMEs, Indigenous Peoples, Women Entrepreneurs etc.; working with partners to counter economic coercion and non-market practices for economic security and rules based trade³⁴.
 <p>European Union (EU)</p>	<p>Trade and Gender:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The European Commission (EC) launched the "Trade for All" strategy in 2015³⁵, endorsed by the European Parliament resolution focusing on advocating three key principles of effectiveness, transparency and values³⁶. In 2018, the European Parliament resolution on "gender equality in EU trade agreements" outlined general objectives and specific measures of how gender equality can be mainstreamed as a part of the EU's trade policy agenda³⁷. A 2021 press release by the EC on the development of a new trade strategy, also recognises the need and importance of carrying out work to improve the understanding of gender equality implications of trade policy³⁸. <p>Indo-Pacific and Trade:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The EU's approach to trade in the region as outlined in its Indo-Pacific Strategy³⁹, is built on the principle of an open and fair environment for trade and investment. It focuses on building resilient and sustainable value chains, continuing negotiating and implementing trade agreements, supporting and promoting environmental, human and labour rights, due diligence and best practices.
 <p>Indonesia</p>	<p>Trade and Gender:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Indonesian President's decree issued in the 2000 Presidential Instruction Number 9/2000 on Gender Mainstreaming in National Development⁴⁰, requires all relevant government sectors to mainstream gender in their respective mandates, from planning to monitoring and evaluation stages, to reduce the gender gap and to eliminate discrimination against women. Indonesia's Directorate General of Customs and Excise (Indonesia Customs) has issued a guidance document for Gender Equality and Diversity (GED)⁴¹. The Gender Equality and Diversity Taskforce was established in 2006 by the Ministry of Finance in Indonesia. The GED Taskforce works with the Indonesia Customs and with the Human Resource (HR) Department within the Ministry of Finance in Indonesia.

Country / Regional Groups	Details / Positions
 <p data-bbox="172 300 331 327">New Zealand</p>	<p data-bbox="580 215 807 241">Trade and Gender:</p> <ul data-bbox="580 250 1417 542" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="580 250 1417 353">• New Zealand’s foreign trade policy has a “Trade for All Agenda” that is based on promoting an inclusive trade policy agenda. Gender equity is a key principle of New Zealand’s trade agenda⁴². <li data-bbox="580 362 1417 542">• In a document under this agenda “Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment”⁴³, the New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade Department outlines its position on trade and gender equality and mentions their existing initiatives and possible opportunities for gender mainstreaming in trade.
 <p data-bbox="172 680 475 743">United States of America (USA)</p>	<p data-bbox="580 589 807 616">Trade and Gender:</p> <ul data-bbox="580 624 1417 808" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="580 624 1417 768">• The Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) develops and implements trade policy to advance gender equity and equality, and women’s economic empowerment, through the USTR Gender Equity Team⁴⁴. <li data-bbox="580 777 1235 808">• In April 2022, USTR released its Equity Action Plan⁴⁵. <p data-bbox="580 853 868 880">Indo-Pacific and Trade:</p> <ul data-bbox="580 902 1417 1153" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="580 902 1417 1153">• The USA in its 2022 Indo-Pacific strategy⁴⁶, aims to promote broad-based economic growth by introducing initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), in areas of digital economy, supply-chain resiliency, infrastructure, digital connectivity, and the promotion of free, fair, and open trade and investment, and work with G7 countries on the region’s infrastructure gap through the Build Back Better World initiative.

It is evident that various countries and groups adopt distinct approaches to gender, shaped by their unique contexts and priorities. In Canada’s case for instance, gender mainstreaming is visible in some instances within trade agreements, while in others, such as Australia, the focus is on comprehensive gender equality policies. Additionally, support for women entrepreneurs and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) emerges as another facet. Each of these represents integral components within the broader spectrum of trade policy, with the scope to act on existing initiatives or learn from them to bring a more inclusive lens to other initiatives and programmes. While countries might not explicitly state gender as part of their trade foreign policy, their involvement in multilateral organisations offer them the necessary frameworks and ideas for the way forward.

Free Trade Agreements

Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), are a mechanism to reduce barriers to trade and investment⁴⁷ and strengthen economic relations between parties to the agreement, and offer a different set of tools to bring in a gender lens. As per a 2022 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) report, the Asia-Pacific region has the highest number of Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) with 333 PTAs where at least one party is of the Asia-Pacific region⁴⁸. There is a growth in provisions on areas such as e-commerce, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that includes labour protection, human rights, health, environment, SMEs and gender⁴⁹. Some of the aspects in which gender is considered or can be is outlined in Table 2. With the growing focus on SDGs and climate related uncertainties, FTAs are also moving towards ensuring safeguards against future shocks. A stronger gender lens is one such avenue. On mapping the World Trade Organisation

(WTO) Database on Gender Provisions in Responsible Trade Agreements we find gender-related provisions are currently conducted through the following measures elaborated below⁵⁰, which could be directly targeted towards women or fall under a broader human security lens that will benefit women and other marginalised sections of society. This broad 3-part framework, developed by Kubernein Initiative, allows countries that are considering such a lens to be more proactive through targeted interventions that are realistic and context specific.

→ **Activities for Cooperation and Capacity Building:**

Initiatives and activities that bolster the opportunities created by trade agreements for all stakeholders including women entrepreneurs. For example, under Chapter 21: Cooperation and capacity building of the CPTPP⁵¹, in Article 21.2, areas like technology and innovation have been recognised as important to be incorporated into cooperation and capacity building activities in the agreement. Through modes of dialogue, workshops, seminars, conferences, collaborative programmes, and projects there is a positive cascading effect for women.

→ **Labour/ Multilateral Labour Standards and Agreements:**

Where parties in trade agreements reaffirm and commit to the implementation of existing rules and conventions under matters relating to labour policies and standards under the trade agreement reached. These include International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions, multilateral declarations such as the 2006 Ministerial Declaration of the UN Economic and Social Council on Full Employment and Decent Work, ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. For example, under Chapter 23: Labour of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)⁵², all three parties commit to measures of cooperation, labour rights, enforcement of labour laws that directly or indirectly benefit women.

→ **Women or Gender:**

Where parties explicitly recognise the importance of enhancing opportunities for women business owners and outline objectives of promoting gender equality and inclusive trade policies. They operationalise these by committing to gender equal laws, rules and policies, and organising capacity building initiatives, and skill enhancements, that reduce barriers for women entrepreneurs. For example, under Chapter 25: Trade and Gender Equality of the UK-New Zealand FTA⁵³, the countries commit to a host of objectives and measures to advance gender equality. One such commitment is to develop a framework for analysing gender-disaggregated data and gender-focused analysis of trade policies in Article 25.5⁵⁴. To monitor the progress of commitments such as these and other areas of the FTA, an Inclusive Trade Sub-Committee is also mandated to be created under Article 30.8 of the FTA⁵⁵.

Based on this 3-part framework, we present several free trade agreements that currently exist within the Indo-Pacific with elements of inclusion. Not only do these agreements have the opportunity to expand their current scope and marry them to a strong gender intentional foreign policy where possible, but also offer positive experiences for countries embarking on this path. These are presented below:

Table 3: Trade Agreements in the Indo-Pacific that have Direct or Indirect Gender Related Provisions

- China-Peru Free Trade Agreement (2009)
- Free Trade Agreement between the Republic of Korea, of the one part, and the European Union and its Member States, of the other part (2010)
- Agreement Establishing a Free trade Area between the Republic of Korea and the Republic of Turkey (2012)
- Free Trade Agreement between Chile and Thailand (2013)
- Chile - Indonesia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (2017)
- Agreement between the United States of America, Mexico, and Canada (2018)
- Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Singapore (2018)
- Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)(2018)
- Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement between European Free Trade Association (EFTA) States and Indonesia (2018)
- Free Trade Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Korea (2019)
- Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (2019)
- Free Trade Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Singapore (2020)
- Free Trade Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Vietnam (2020)
- Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Japan for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership (2020)
- Pacific Alliance - Singapore FTA (2022)
- Free Trade Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and New Zealand (2022)
- Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Australia (2022)
- Free Trade Agreement between New Zealand and the European Union (2023)
- EFTA-India Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) (2024)

Source: Data collated and analysed from World Trade Organisation Database⁵⁶

Trade Facilitation

Trade Facilitation plays a pivotal role in enhancing economic integration. Aspects of trade facilitation such as customs and border management policies, and trade and transport infrastructure, impact men and women differently⁵⁷. Women in trade face significant challenges, including barriers related to regulations (such as limited access to credit), operational issues (such as insufficient information on border agency policies), and non-operational issues (such as lack of representation in trade bodies and decision-making positions)⁵⁸. Globally, 96 economies do not legally prohibit gender discrimination on access to credit⁵⁹. A 2018 Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) study on customs administration in BBIN countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal) identifies challenges for women in cross-border trade including difficulties in establishing businesses, limited access to trade-related information, challenges in accessing cross-border markets for marketing and payment processing, and gender disparities in business and trade associations along border areas⁶⁰.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines Trade Facilitation as: **“A specific set of measures that streamline and simplify the technical and legal procedures for products entering or leaving a country to be traded internationally. Trade facilitation covers the full spectrum of border procedures, from the electronic exchange of data about a shipment, to the simplification and harmonisation of trade documents, to the possibility to appeal administrative decisions by border agencies.”**⁶¹

At a multilateral level, articles^{62 63} under the WTO’s Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) that govern trade facilitation globally, offer opportunities for more inclusive actions⁶⁴. For example, Article 10 on Single Window as a single-entry point to fulfil all import, export, and transit-related regulatory requirements can benefit women and marginalised sections of society. A gap exists however in initiatives to build women’s capacity to utilise such systems effectively.

The UN Regional Commissions and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) have suggested criteria to measure gender responsiveness in Trade Facilitation⁶⁵:

- Trade Facilitation policy/strategy to incorporate special considerations for female traders.
- Women’s membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) or similar bodies.
- Trade Facilitation measures to benefit women involved in trade.

Based on these criteria, as per the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation Dashboard for 2023⁶⁶, the highest score amongst Indo-Pacific countries was for Australia at 88.89%, and the lowest for Nauru, Fiji, Solomon Islands and Nepal at 11.11%. India’s score stood at 77.78%, and Germany’s at 55.56%⁶⁷. However, limitations to such a scoring method are noted in that a high proportion (30% to 60%) of countries report “data not available” or “don’t know”⁶⁸.

Avenues for Indo-German Cooperation

Germany has strong trade ties with countries in the Indo-Pacific. In 2023 China was Germany’s biggest trading partner with goods worth EUR 254.1 billion traded in import and export⁶⁹. Trade with United States stood at EUR 252.5 billion, Japan at EUR 45.9 billion, the Republic of Korea at EUR 33.9 billion, and India at EUR 30.7 billion⁷⁰. Germany’s approach to trade and gender as outlined in the Feminist Foreign Policy Guideline 5 on Foreign Trade and Investment Policy states⁷¹: **“We build networks in international economic policy and promote the participation of women and members of marginalised groups in economic processes. We work towards international standards to contribute to a fair and safe digital world and to ensure that the use of artificial intelligence is gender-equitable and discrimination-free by design.”** Germany’s trade engagement is also heavily dependent on European Union (EU) policy as the responsibility of trade policies of EU member countries remains with the EU⁷². Gender in EU’s policy is guided by the “Trade for All” strategy⁷³ and the European Parliament resolution on “gender equality in EU trade agreements”⁷⁴.

Similarly, India’s trade relations within the Indo-Pacific are growing. With around 90% of its trade flowing through the Indo-Pacific region⁷⁵, India’s economic security is tied to the region. Prime Minister Modi’s 2018 speech at the Shangri La Dialogue underscored India’s commitment to a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific order, emphasising respect for sovereignty and adherence to international law, as well as recognising ASEAN centrality⁷⁶. Additionally, India’s Ministry of External Affairs established a Division for the Indo-Pacific in April 2019⁷⁷, overseeing engagements with ASEAN, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and other regional bodies. India’s initiative ‘SAGAR’- Security and Growth for All in the Region - aims to bolster maritime security in the Indian Ocean by fostering partnerships with neighbouring nations.

India's approach regarding gender and trade has been ad-hoc, but is evolving, where it has implemented measures to mainstream gender, in its land ports for example⁷⁸. Additionally, gender has been a consideration in the IORA as well, that established Women's Economic Empowerment as a special area of focus in 2013⁷⁹. Member states have pledged to: achieve and maintain a women to men ratio across all IORA meetings and activities, restate the IORA's commitment to achieving SDG 5 on gender equality, and "recognizes that women's full, equal and meaningful participation in decision-making is crucial to achieve the first objective in the IORA Charter."

Germany and India both bilaterally and within the India-EU framework could play a role in promoting more inclusive trade in the Indo-Pacific. There already exists demonstrated action that shows its commitment towards gender mainstreaming in trade. We present below some avenues where greater gender mainstreaming can be actioned on trade related issues within the Indo-Pacific where India and Germany could work together as well as with other like-minded partners in the region:

Free Trade Agreements

Free Trade Agreements within the Indo-Pacific are an avenue to bring in gender and inclusion. In March 2024, India and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) member states (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland) signed the EFTA-India Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA)⁸⁰, where under "Article 11.3 Promoting Environmentally Sustainable and Inclusive Growth" Clause 2 and 3 incorporate gender perspective and gender responsive policies to enhance participation of all⁸¹. They also reaffirm commitments to international agreements pertaining to gender equality. Germany, at the EU level, can advocate for the need of gender based and related provisions in the ongoing EU-India FTA negotiations. A July 2022 EU Parliamentary resolution on EU-India trade and investment cooperation also calls on the Commission and related bodies to promote gender equality and women empowerment in trade cooperation. This includes the ongoing FTA negotiations with India⁸².

Trade Facilitation

The German Alliance for Trade Facilitation (a public-private partnership supported by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development [BMZ] and The Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action [BMWK]) carries out projects and activities in the implementation of the WTO's TFA, and in alignment with Germany's Feminist Development Policy⁸³. This is executed through a Gender Task Force, Associations for Female Traders, Gender Guidelines, Gender KPIs in Projects, and Code of Conduct. In the Indo-Pacific, the German Alliance has ongoing projects in Cambodia and Sri Lanka focusing on themes of digitising global and maritime trade⁸⁴. Germany also funds The Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation (also a public-private partnership) alongside the governments of the United States and Canada, where gender equality is amongst the key goals and objectives of projects⁸⁶, and guided by 'GENDER MAINSTREAMING GUIDELINES and tools released in 2021⁸⁷. Some of the notable examples of The Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation's recent projects⁸⁸ that have had a key focus on gender in the world have been in Peru⁸⁹, Cambodia⁹⁰ and the Dominican Republic⁹¹ with themes like digitalisation⁹², process reform and regulatory reform⁹³.

Trade facilitation is a sub-area within India's Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) where gender considerations exist⁹⁴. India's last National Trade Facilitation Action Plan (NTFAP) 2020-23, under Action Point No. 27 recognises the need for gender inclusive trade policies⁹⁵.

"Action Point 27 of the National Trade Facilitation Action Plan: Promote gender inclusiveness in trade:⁹⁶

- i. Conceptualise and develop a "women in global business programme" aimed at capacity building and connectivity.
- ii. The programme shall provide information and resources, mentoring programme, connection and communication with Indian businesswomen."

An example of gender mainstreaming in practice can be seen at India's Integrated Check Posts (ICPs), commonly known as land ports. India's trade through land borders is conducted via these ports, which also serve as points of transit for passenger movement. In 2021, the Land Ports Authority of India (LPAI)⁹⁷ outlined targets to make land ports gender-friendly over a three-year period^{98,99}. Studies by the grassroots development organisation, Mahila Housing Trust (MHT)¹⁰⁰, and Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER)¹⁰¹, have shown some improvements in terms of gender responsiveness.

There is scope for more inclusive action within the Indo-Pacific for trade facilitations. This could be through existing platforms such as The Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum (APTFF) - an open regional platform for knowledge sharing on trade facilitation in Asia-Pacific that is co-organised jointly by UN-ESCAP and Asian Development Bank (ADB). India, along with other countries within the Indo-Pacific participates regularly in this forum. Challenges faced by women in trade have already been discussed at the 10th APTFF held in 2022^{102,103}. The APTFF could be an avenue to push for adoption of more inclusive action.

Gender Disaggregated Data

When it comes to measuring the impact of policy on trade, there is a dearth of gender-disaggregated data and analysis on how trade policies affect men, women, and marginalised groups differently. This limits the understanding of potential risks such as the varying experiences of men and women in supply chains: from the type of contract, where women are usually hired on temporary contracts; to health and safety measures that are usually designed for men; and complex workplace issues including harassment and access to professional networks that impede the growth of women¹⁰⁴. The lack of gender-disaggregated data in such cases hinders the development of effective policy action.

Having such data could increase impact. For example, two recent circulars issued by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs (CBIC) in March 2024 have also incorporated suggestions from ICRIER's 2023 study on land ports^{105,106,107}, and included commitments such as ensuring women's representation in key trade committees, establishing help desks for women traders, and enhancing gender-responsive infrastructure and services at logistics facilities. India and Germany could work together with other countries within the region to create a more robust model for data collection that is country and context specific, on the basis of which more inclusive policies could be designed.

Knowledge Sharing from Existing Programmes

At a bilateral level, there exist several programmes and capacity-building initiatives that allow knowledge sharing. They focus on gender spanning areas such as business, start-ups, science, and technology. Notable examples include:

➔ **Female Entrepreneurship in Berlin and India (FEBI)**¹⁰⁸, launched in 2018 by the Berlin Senate Department for Economics, GIZ, and the BMZ, FEBI aims to support women led companies in both countries. This was done through training, delegation trips, networking between female start-up founders and business leaders that also included civil society organisations. The first FEBI project ran from 2018 to 2020¹⁰⁹. Some of the key outcomes of the programme included workshops on challenges faced by women-owned businesses, best practices for stakeholder mapping etc, and new partnerships with Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between platforms like WE Connect and Nexus Incubator to promote new opportunities across India for women entrepreneurs^{110,111,112}. The list of delegates for the programme also included a diverse set of women entrepreneurs across sectors of technology and manufacturing¹¹³. The second iteration, FEBI II was continued with a project duration from 01.02.2020 - 31.12.2021¹¹⁴.

- ➔ **Her&Now - Economic Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs**¹¹⁵, was a project initiated by the BMZ and implemented by the GIZ in partnership with the Ministry for Skill Development in India, during 2018 – 2023, with the aim to support women entrepreneurs and start-ups in 12 Indian states¹¹⁶. Incubation and acceleration programmes were implemented in partnership with local partners like Mann Deshi Foundation, Dhriiti, Startup Oasis, Empower Foundation, and WE Hub¹¹⁷. Project activities also included focus on mentoring, networking and peer support, training modules like WINcubate, access to finance, and media campaigns to promote women entrepreneurs.
- ➔ **Women Involvement in Science and Engineering Research (WISER) Programme**¹¹⁸. A joint initiative launched by the Department of Science & Technology (DST), Government of India and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) under the Indo-German Science & Technology Centre (IGSTC). The programme aims to support and build scientific capacity, retain and promote women researchers in India and Germany, and address barriers for women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Since its introduction in 2021 there have been 23 awardees of the WISER programme across India and Germany. WISER has recognised the efforts of women scientists by awarding them support in diverse fields in STEM, from the development of solid-state solar thermal fuels, to nutrient dynamics and functional aspects of microbial diversity in saline soils and other varied areas within STEM etc^{119 120}.

Some of these successful programmes could be introduced to other countries leveraging the 2022 Indo-German Joint Declaration of Intent for Triangular Development Cooperation that recognises women's empowerment as a priority area and draws from India's SAGAR vision and Germany's Indo-Pacific Guidelines¹²¹. The Development Partnership Administration (DPA) of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and the GIZ should consider, triangular cooperation projects that can be centred around areas such as entrepreneurship training, skills and capacity building, digital literacy and access and reduction of barriers. Development and trade must thus be viewed as complementary efforts.

Conclusion

As the Indo-Pacific region navigates the interplay of geopolitics and trade, fostering inclusivity is crucial, as is a deeper understanding of the overlap between gender, trade, and foreign policy. In this evolving landscape, adopting a more gender intentional and/or Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) lens becomes pivotal for shaping more inclusive policies across the board. We emphasise context-specific tailored approaches rooted in partnership building. Trade is an inherently partnership-based activity, where the addition of a gender lens is also an opportunity to enhance economic outcomes for all countries involved. While the application of such a lens remains challenging and context-specific in the vast and diverse Indo-Pacific, its necessity cannot be overstated. To this end, the avenues recommended in the previous section could serve as a starting point.

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About Kubernein Initiative:

Kubernein Initiative is an independent, female led, geopolitical advisory firm based in Mumbai, India, working to mainstream issues that need greater intellectual capacity and focus. Our vision is to build an organisation that considers critical questions with a perspective that balances traditionally 'western' thought in the field of international relations and diplomacy with new and emerging ideas from the global south.