

## WORLD EXPORT DEVELOPMENT FORUM – W.E.D.F 2008

### PARALLEL WORKING SESSION: SOURCING FROM WOMEN-OWNED ENTERPRISES: ETHICS OR ECONOMICS?

#### **The Issue:**

Women owned enterprises make a significant contribution to the economy, yet the incidence of cross border trade is limited and can be hampered by unequal access to the resources and opportunities necessary to trade – for example, transport, finance and training. Do women need to cross borders to trade? Or can business and governments cross the gender divide to trade with non-traditional partners: women-owned enterprises.

#### **Focus of the debate:**

The debate will focus on why efforts are being made to diversify supply chains to include sourcing from women owned enterprises. Panelists will explore this question from a policy perspective – both in terms of government procurement and corporate procurement – and explore the challenges and benefits experienced by MNCs and women owned small and medium -sized enterprises (SMEs). Participants will also be invited to share experience on the questions of:

1. Do proactive procurement policies targeting women-owned enterprises contribute to economic empowerment or are these more driven by an ethical element of corporate social responsibility?
2. What is the definition of a 'women-owned enterprise' – a registered sole trader or where women are majority share-holders? How can MNCs and Governments justify their selection of suppliers to shareholders, constituents and other scrutinisers?
3. How can we bring more companies into the winners' circle?