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Translating International Gender Norms into Domestic Trade Policy: The GTAGA Experience in Latin American Countries

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Abstract

International norms on gender and trade have advanced rapidly, yet how states internalise and translate them into domestic policy remains underexplored. Moving beyond unidirectional top-down models, this study identifies distinct patterns of domestic implementation of the Global Trade and Gender Arrangement (GTAGA) across eight Latin American signatories: Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Mexico. Adopting a comparative multi-case design anchored in foreign policy analysis and bidirectional norm diffusion theory, we show that state responses vary systematically based on pre-existing institutional capacity. High-capacity states act as active "norm shapers," exporting domestic innovations to multilateral arenas, while states with consolidating capacity leverage the GTAGA as an external catalyst for domestic reform. Conversely, political volatility in low-resilience contexts highlights the vulnerability of gender agendas. The findings contribute to debates on Global South normative agency, policy implementation, and the structural tensions between feminist trade ambitions and market-oriented trade governance.

1. Introduction

Persistent gender inequalities in the global economy highlight the need for a systematic examination of how international commitments undertaken by states are operationalised and internalised within domestic policy arenas. Despite normative advances in the multilateral trading system, only 20% of exporting firms worldwide are led by women, who face greater financing constraints, lower participation in global value chains, and structural limitations related to time and mobility (ITC, 2023; UN Women, 2025; WEF, 2024). Women-led firms tend to be smaller, employ fewer workers, and have more restrictive access to credit, while women perform three times more hours of unpaid domestic and care work, limiting their labour market participation and access to professional training (ITC, 2023; UN Women, 2025). As a result, women earn between 60% and 75% of men’s wages, and nearly 90% of countries maintain at least one legal barrier to women’s economic participation (WEF, 2024). These conditions reveal a paradox: the growing incorporation of gender-related commitments in international agreements contrasts with the slow transformation of domestic conditions shaping women’s economic participation. It is within this context that this article analyses how Latin American countries have internalised the Global Trade and Gender Agreement (GTAGA), identifying patterns through which international gender commitments are translated into public policies aimed at fostering the internationalisation of women-led businesses and examining the role of foreign policy as a vector for more inclusive public policies.

In response to these challenges, international initiatives have sought to integrate gender perspectives into trade policy. The 2017 Joint Declaration on Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment, signed by 120 WTO members, marked a turning point by encouraging the inclusion of gender chapters in trade agreements and promoting public policies that support women’s economic participation (ITC, 2020). Such efforts are particularly relevant given the legal and cultural constraints that continue to hinder women’s participation in international trade, including prohibitions on certain professions and requirements for male consent to travel (WEF, 2024; Shepherd & Stone, 2017; Orser et al., 2013). Latin

America has emerged as a key actor in this process: eight of the eleven GTAGA signatories are from the region (ITAGA, 2020; ALADI, 2025), positioning it as a privileged setting for examining this theme.

The domestic translation of international commitments can be understood within broader processes of norm diffusion and localisation in global governance. Norms such as those enshrined in the GTAGA provide shared expectations about appropriate behaviour (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Checkel, 1999), but their implementation is rarely linear, as global norms undergo adaptation, contestation, and reinterpretation as they interact with national institutions, values, and political arenas (Acharya, 2004; Wiener, 2007). Zwingel's (2012) analysis of CEDAW illustrates how norms evolve as they are negotiated locally, while Winston (2018) emphasises the combination of prescriptive stability and interpretive flexibility. Although the literature on gender and foreign policy has advanced discussions of feminist foreign policies as normative frameworks (Aggestam et al., 2018; Thompson & Clement, 2019; Mirje & Girija, 2025), foreign policy operates within a multilayered governance structure in which global and domestic arenas co-evolve (Kaarbo, 2015; Hudson, 2005; Hartmann et al., 2022). Relatively little is known, however, about how international trade commitments are concretely internalised across varying levels of domestic institutional capacity (Zhukova et al., 2022; Hauschild & Stamm, 2024).

To address this gap, this article argues that domestic implementation of the GTAGA is not a uniform, top-down process of norm absorption, but rather a bidirectional and differentiated dynamic structured by pre-existing national institutional capacity. In states with high institutional capacity, such as Chile, Mexico, and Colombia, domestic policy innovations predated GTAGA, enabling these countries to act as "norm shapers" that exported national standards to international arenas. In countries with consolidating capacity, such as post-2023 Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru, GTAGA functions predominantly as an external leverage point to anchor and legitimise domestic policy reforms. Conversely, in contexts of institutional regression, such as Argentina, formal international commitments failed to insulate gender mechanisms against domestic dismantling. By mapping these trajectories, the study demonstrates the agency of Global South states in producing trade norms, provides a comparative framework for understanding policy implementation, and offers actionable insights for advancing SDGs 5 and 8.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Diffusion and Localisation of International Norms

The diffusion and localisation of international norms constitute interdependent and dynamic processes in which global ideas are reinterpreted, negotiated, and sometimes transformed as they interact with national institutional and cultural contexts. Far from representing a linear movement of global imposition over the local, normative dissemination involves asymmetrical exchanges and active strategies of appropriation by domestic actors. Winston's analysis (2018) and the concept of "norm entrepreneurs" (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998) help explain how individuals, organisations, and transnational coalitions mobilise symbolic resources, advocacy networks, and international references to persuade states and societies to adopt new understandings of appropriate behaviour. Many principles that attain

international status originate domestically and subsequently return to the national sphere in new forms, creating a continuous process of feedback. Thus, normative power does not reside solely in multilateral institutions but also in domestic arenas, where norms are reinterpreted, reframed, and strategically leveraged by entrepreneurs to strengthen internal positions and shape political debates.

The norm life cycle proposed by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) systematises this process into three stages (emergence, diffusion, and internalisation), emphasising the mechanisms and motivations that sustain normative change. Initially, norm entrepreneurs seek to persuade state and societal actors to adopt new norms, creating a critical mass that can trigger a norm cascade through imitation, socialisation, and the pursuit of legitimacy. In the final stage, norms become internalised as tacit behavioural assumptions recognised as legitimate and integrated into the shared grammar of legitimacy between states and societies. This perspective therefore allows normative evolution to be understood not merely as formal adoption, but as a political arena in which debates over appropriateness, justice, and authority unfold and the local and global are continuously co-produced.

Norm diffusion cannot, however, be understood as an exclusive North-to-South or top-down transmission mechanism in which domestic actors passively absorb international mandates. As Acharya (2004) and Zwingel (2012) emphasise, local actors actively localise and translate global principles by adapting them to domestic normative architectures. When domestic capacity and political momentum are high, states may become active norm shapers that feed national policy models back into the multilateral domain (Draude, 2017). This perspective is particularly relevant when gender is incorporated into the global trade architecture, as such incorporation generates important structural tensions.

Critical feminist political economy scholars argue that mainstream trade-and-gender initiatives may reproduce market orthodoxy under the guise of inclusion, a process critiqued as technocratic assimilation or “pinkwashing” (Hannah et al., 2021, 2022; Parisi, 2020). By framing gender equality primarily as a means to unlock economic growth, orthodox trade policy may abstract from structural inequalities, unpaid care work, and labour exploitation in the Global South (Hannah et al., 2022; Macdonald, 2024).

A robust conceptualisation of GTAGA translation must therefore assess whether domestic operationalisation promotes transformative gender justice or merely provides symbolic legitimacy to market-oriented trade agendas (Keller, 2021; Lerner, 2019; West & Zimmerman, 2018). This critical dimension is essential for examining whether the localisation of international gender norms produces substantive domestic change or reinforces existing institutional and economic structures.

The translation of international gender norms into trade and women’s economic empowerment policies can be observed in the evolution of the global gender governance architecture. CEDAW (1979) and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) promoted the integration of gender perspectives into multilateral spaces and contributed to the consolidation of institutions such as UN Women and UNIFEM (UN Women, 1995). International organisations including the OECD, UNCTAD, and WTO have subsequently advanced gender governance in trade through initiatives encouraging women’s participation in

international markets and the collection of sex-disaggregated data (Deciancio & Míguez, 2023; WTO, 2017). In Latin America, regional instruments such as the Montevideo Strategy (ECLAC, 2019), ALADI initiatives, and the Mercosur Women's Business Convergence demonstrate how international norms are localised and reinterpreted through public policies adapted to national and subnational contexts. These processes illustrate that international commitments acquire concrete meaning through their interaction with existing institutional arrangements and domestic policy priorities.

Norm diffusion is further amplified by international networks and non-state actors. The Inclusive Trade Action Group (ITAG), which Ecuador joined in 2023 alongside Canada, Chile, Mexico, and New Zealand, promotes inclusive trade policies through international cooperation (López & Bórquez, 2025), while transnational coalitions such as the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS) connect continental networks across Latin America to advance gender-responsive economic models (Drumond & Rebelo, 2021). Non-state actors such as Pro Mujer, SheTrades (ITC), and civil society platforms from *Encuentros feministas*, the regional feminist meetings held since the 1980s, further drive norm diffusion by building advocacy networks, providing training for women entrepreneurs, and facilitating public-private partnerships that bridge global commitments with local implementation (Kelly-Thompson et al., 2024). These networks exemplify Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) "norm entrepreneurs," who mobilise resources to contest barriers and enhance women's integration into trade value chains. Moreover, Aggestam and True (2020, 2021) highlight the importance of leaders and norm entrepreneurs in mediating between global standards and domestic agendas. Figures such as Hillary Clinton, Margot Wallström, and Justin Trudeau illustrate how individual and strategic engagement can facilitate the internalisation of gender norms, while resistance, including the remasculinization of foreign policy under the Trump administration, demonstrates that normative diffusion remains contested and contextually mediated.

The perspective of multilevel gender games, in dialogue with Putnam's two-level game framework (1988), reveals how leadership, institutions, and gender structures interact to translate international commitments into concrete policies, showing that the implementation of feminist foreign policies is simultaneously discursive, strategic, and institutional. Analysing foreign policy from a public-policy perspective further clarifies how international commitments become tangible practices, requiring multiscale articulation, intersectoral coordination, and attention to domestic and transnational dynamics (Zhukova, Sundström, & Elgström, 2022). The norm life cycle perspective therefore connects directly to implementation analysis: norms that emerge and diffuse internationally only become effective when internalised and operationalised by states, bureaucracies, domestic coalitions, and transnational actors, transforming global commitments into concrete changes at the national level. Within this evolving normative terrain, the GTAGA stands as a pivotal instrument. Originating from the 2017 WTO Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment in Buenos Aires, the GTAGA was formally launched in 2020 by the Inclusive Trade Action Group (ITAG), originally spearheaded by Canada, Chile, and New Zealand (ITAGA, 2020; Dommen, 2023). Aligned with WTO principles, the GTAGA operates through four core pillars: (1) sex-disaggregated data collection, (2) targeted capacity-building, (3) best-practice sharing among domestic agencies, and (4) inclusive policy dialogue involving private and civil

society stakeholders. Rather than functioning as a binding legal enforcement framework, GTAGA operates as a plurilateral catalyst, enabling signatory states to operationalise inclusive trade commitments within their national jurisdictions.

2.2. Foreign Policy and Multilevel Implementation

Most literature on foreign policy emphasises states' international positions, actors' participation in negotiations, and decision-making processes (Kaarbo, 2015; Hudson, 2005). However, the implementation stage remains comparatively understudied (Clarke, 1979), partly because defining the scope of foreign policy is inherently challenging. While signing international agreements constitutes a formal outcome, their effectiveness depends on their translation into concrete domestic policies, programs, and actions.

To address this gap, it is essential to adopt a perspective that transcends a cyclical or linear view of public policy, recognising formulation and implementation as interdependent components that continually inform one another. Clarke (1979) emphasises that implementation is a political process shaped by bureaucratic, cultural, and contextual factors, inseparable from decision-making and formulation stages. Consequently, the implementation process is non-linear, adjusted according to institutional capacities, political interests, and domestic coalitions. Fowler (2024) notes that implementers may perceive problems differently from negotiators and often encounter unforeseen barriers during the formulation phase, highlighting the need for complex, interdependent, multilevel coordination to close the gap between written policy and policy in practice (Figueira et al., 2024).

Regarding multilevel coordination, Hill and Hupe (2002) identify three interpretative dimensions: (i) the normative and strategic level, involving the definition of objectives in international agreements; (ii) the organizational and programmatic level, concerning the translation of norms into plans, strategies, and instruments; and (iii) the operational level, relating to the execution of policies by public bodies and other actors. Hudson, Hunter, and Peckham (2019) further emphasise the importance of multilevel analysis through five axes—context, clarity, complexity, collaboration, and capacity—which allow comparisons of how different realities translate a single international commitment into practice. When policies involve socio-political dimensions such as gender equality and inclusive trade, complexity intensifies. Implementation requires not only diplomatic action but also the articulation of multiple levels of government, regulatory bodies, the private sector, and civil society. Gender-related policies, in particular, involve dynamic and interactive processes among domestic actors, transnational networks, political actors, and international organisations, often encountering social and cultural resistance (Hauschild & Stamm, 2024).

Structural and cultural barriers persist, as Branisa et al. (2014) identify, rooted in legal systems and social practices that limit women's autonomy. Acker (1992) warns that formal legal changes alone do not guarantee substantive transformation if informal rules, such as subtle exclusionary practices, remain entrenched. Nam et al. (2024) argue that institutional quality is central to reducing gender inequalities by fostering women's labour-market participation and more inclusive dynamics. Similarly, Baughn et al.

(2006) suggest that gender-equality norms underpin support for women's entrepreneurship, but institutions may also reproduce inequalities if discriminatory legal and cultural norms persist. Overcoming these barriers requires targeted legal reforms and public policies designed to address historically constructed disparities (Barafani & Verna, 2020).

3. Method

The objective of this study is to analyse how the eight Latin American signatories of the Global Trade and Gender Arrangement (GTAGA)—Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Ecuador—have internalised international commitments aimed at promoting women's participation in international trade, identifying and comparing national models of domestic implementation. To guide this investigation, we draw on Hill and Hupe's (2002) three interpretive levels of policy implementation — normative/strategic, organizational/programmatic, and operational/delivery — together with Hudson, Hunter and Peckham's (2019) attention to context, clarity, complexity, collaboration, and capacity as conditions shaping implementation gaps. This multilevel governance framework informs the five-dimension analytical protocol detailed below, through which we compare how different institutional configurations translate the international commitment into distinct national models of implementation.

Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative, exploratory, comparative multiple-case design, suitable for capturing institutional variation and the contextual specificities of complex policy arrangements (Eisenhardt, 1989). GTAGA was selected as the normative foundation because it is the first plurilateral, WTO-aligned initiative dedicated exclusively to gender and trade (Dommen, 2023), providing a focused lens for examining the translation of international commitments amid the growing incorporation of gender chapters into free trade agreements. Case selection followed four criteria: (i) the country is a signatory to international agreements promoting the gender agenda at the global or regional level; (ii) it is located in Latin America; (iii) it has undertaken initiatives aligned with the 2030 Agenda, particularly SDG 5; and (iv) it has adhered to the GTAGA. The temporal scope spans 2020–2024, corresponding to the period of GTAGA accession and consolidation and the expansion of gender-related commitments in trade agreements.

Latin America represents a particularly relevant setting for comparison. Of the 11 GTAGA members, eight (73%) are from the region, compared with 27% from other areas, including Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. The ITC SheTrades Outlook (WEF, 2023) reinforces this regional leadership, ranking Latin America highest globally for gender-inclusive trade policies (68/100), ahead of Europe (62/100) and Asia-Pacific (55/100), with frontrunners like Chile (85/100) and Mexico (78/100), contributing to 40% of regional growth in women-led exports.

Table 1: Members of the Global Arrangement on Trade and Gender (GTAGA)

Country	Year of Accession	Latin America
Canada	2020 (founder)	No
Chile	2020 (founder)	Yes
New Zeland	(2020) (founder)	No
Mexico	2021	Yes
Colombia	2022	Yes
Peru	2022	Yes
Costa Rica	(2023).	Yes
Ecuador	2023	Yes
Argentina	2023	Yes
Australia	2024	No
Brazil	2024	Yes

Source: Developed by the authors

Data collection combined primary and secondary sources, including national trade legislation, executive decrees, foreign ministry directives, official program guidelines, institutional reports, and standardised databases. International sources included the World Bank, UNCTAD, WAIPA, UN Women, the Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use (GATE System), WTO, and ITC SheTrades Outlook, while quantitative measures from the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index were incorporated to triangulate the evidence.

At the regional level, the study examined reports from the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), including its 2023 Gender and Trade Indicator dashboard tracking women's SME export participation across Latin America; ECLAC's Gender Affairs Division, including progress reports on the Montevideo Strategy (2019) and the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (2024 update), which provides more than 250 indicators on labour and trade gaps; and ALADI documents on the *Plataforma Pymes Latinas Grandes Negócios* and *Rede Latinas Exportam* (2025), which promote regional trade networks for women-led SME. Documentary evidence was complemented by semi-structured interviews and technical consultations conducted between 2023 and 2024 with public officials, representatives of investment promotion agencies, trade policy practitioners, export promotion specialists, and regional governance experts (N=15). These sources provided complementary evidence for identifying the institutional arrangements, policy instruments, coordination mechanisms, and implementation configurations adopted across the eight countries.

The analytical protocol evaluated each country across five standardised dimensions: (i) inter-ministerial coordination structures, (ii) dedicated administrative resource allocation, (iii) legal alignment between

GTAGA commitments and pre-existing domestic instruments, (iv) public-private collaboration networks, and (v) operational monitoring mechanisms. Secondary institutional data were systematically cross-referenced using standardised databases from the WTO, UNCTAD, ECLAC, ALADI, and national trade ministries to ensure analytical symmetry across all cases (Hill & Hupe, 2002; Hudson et al., 2019).

Of the 320 evidence items, 264 referred to the eight-country sample and 56 to international organisations. Materials were classified into six source categories -News, National Policy, International Policy, Global Reports, National Reports, and Interviews- and analysed through the five-dimension protocol described above. Rather than evaluating implementation performance, the analysis identifies and compares the distinct national models through which GTAGA commitments are translated into policies, programs, institutional arrangements, and delivery mechanisms.

4. Results

The international commitments undertaken by Latin American countries within the framework of the GTAGA and trade agreements with gender chapters have been progressively internalised into domestic policies, albeit unevenly. The adoption, in 2024, of the Latin American and Caribbean Declaration on Feminist Foreign Policy at the VIII CELAC Summit, signed by Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Costa Rica, and Ecuador, consolidated a common normative orientation and reinforced the expectation of incorporating a gender perspective into trade policy and national governance structures. In this context, countries in the region have expanded their adherence to multilateral and bilateral agreements addressing gender and trade, as reflected in Tables 2 and 3, which summarise regional and extraregional commitments aimed at women's economic empowerment.

Table 2: Trade Agreements between Latin American Countries that Include Chapters on Gender and Trade

Country	Counterpart	Signed on	Reference
Chile	Argentina	04/01/2018	Chap. 15
Chile	Brazil	12/12/2018	Chap. 18
Chile	Ecuador	13/08/2020	Chap. 18
Chile	Mexico	30/09/2024	Protocol
Chile	Paraguay	30/08/2023	Chap. 13
Chile	Uruguay	04/10/2016	Chap. 14
Ecuador	Costa Rica	01/03/2023	Chap. 19

Source: Developed by the authors

Table 3: Trade Agreements of Latin American Countries from the GTAGA with Extra-Regional Countries that Include Chapters or Provisions on Trade and Gender

Country	Counterparts	Signed on / Status	Reference
Chile	European Union	13/12/2023	Chap. 27 and 34
Chile	Canada	05/06/2017	
Chile	United Arab Emirates	29/07/2024	Chap. 14
Chile	Indonesia	14/12/2017	Chap. 9
Chile	Thailand	04/10/2013	Chap. 11
Chile	Turkey	14/07/2009	Title IV
Chile	New Zealand and Singapore	12/06/2020	DEPA – Module 11
Chile	Vietnam	12/11/2011	Chap. 9
Chile, Mexico, and Peru	Australia, Brunei, Canada, Malaysia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, Vietnam	03/2018	CPTPP: Chap. 19, 21, and 23
Mexico	Canada and USA	30/11/2018	Chap 14, 23, and 25
Colombia	Canada	21/11/2008	Chap. 16
Colombia	USA	22/11/2006	Chap. 17
Ecuador	China	11/05/2023	Chap. 16
Peru	Australia	12/02/2018	Chap. 20 and 22
Peru	Canada	29/05/2008	Chap. 16
Peru	China	28/04/2009	Chap. 12
Peru	USA	12/04/2006	Chap. 9 and 17

Source: Developed by the authors

Despite this formal convergence, countries differ substantially in how they translate such international commitments into national policies, depending on their institutional architectures, the degree of coordination among governmental bodies, and the density of available programmatic instruments. Among the most consolidated cases, Chile presents one of the most coherent structures in the region. In 2024, it received the World Trade Organisation's International Gender Equality in Trade Award in recognition of the innovative character and tangible impact of its trade policies. The country is a signatory to the main multilateral and regional instruments on gender equity and was among the key actors in the development of the Global Trade and Gender Agreement (GTAGA) (Chile, 2022–2023). It was also a pioneer in including gender chapters in bilateral trade agreements. Its Feminist Foreign Policy provides clear guidelines for integrating gender equality into foreign trade decisions, supported by coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Women, and agencies such as

ProChile and InvestChile (Chile SUBREI, 2025; PROCHILE, 2025). Initiatives such as Mujer Exporta, Aduana Conecta, and the Sello Mujer articulate training, trade facilitation, and integration into value chains, with expanded scope following the incorporation of commitments derived from the 2023 review of the Association Agreement with the European Union. As highlighted by the head of Chile's Inclusive Trade Department, these developments reflect a strategic and coordinated effort to integrate gender considerations into trade policy and practice:

In general, both the free trade agreements we negotiate and the global agreements we are committed to are based on public policies; I would say they are based on existing multilateral commitments. The GTAGA reaffirms what we have already ratified through another type of instrument in the 2030 Agenda, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Buenos Aires Declaration (...); all these instruments have their correlate in Chilean legislation or public policies (Interview with the head of the Inclusive Trade Department of Chile).

Mexico also operates with a consolidated institutional framework, based on gender-mainstreaming legal frameworks approved in the 2000s, such as the creation of the National Institute for Women and the launch of the National Program for Equal Opportunities and Non-Discrimination Against Women (INMUJERES, 2020). In addition to INMUJERES and the Secretariat of Economy, the country integrates state-level bodies and the private sector in implementing programs such as MujerExportaMx, guided by partnerships with UN Women, the OECD, and development organisations. The General Law on Equality between Women and Men (2006) made the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in public policies mandatory, establishing the National Equality System and the ProIgualdad Program. These pillars were reinforced by the Feminist Foreign Policy adopted in 2020, structured around: (i) promoting gender equality within the diplomatic service; (ii) incorporating a gender perspective into the country's international agenda; and (iii) adopting an intersectional approach in international cooperation (Mexico, 2024).

Colombia, in turn, adopted a feminist foreign policy that prioritises gender equality, women's empowerment, political participation, and intersectionality (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, 2024; Monroy & Luque, 2023). The intersection between trade and gender constitutes a core pillar of this policy and is reflected in the National Development Plan 2022–2026. Among complementary initiatives, the Fondo Mujer Libre y Productiva stands out for promoting women's economic independence and access to decent work (Cancillería de Colombia, 2022), along with the Ella Exporta a África program, developed by ProColombia in partnership with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism. Colombia also implements the Fábricas de Internacionalización program, coordinated by ProColombia, which offers structured support for internationalisation and promotes foreign direct investment, exports, and tourism.

Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, and Costa Rica have also advanced, albeit with different levels of political continuity and administrative coordination. In Brazil, the resumption of the agenda after 2023 revitalised interministerial mechanisms and renewed cooperation between the Ministry of Development, Industry

and Foreign Trade, the Ministry of Women, and ApexBrasil. Although Brazil is a signatory to major multilateral instruments in the area, the topic had been relatively marginalised in previous years. The election of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva signalled a resurgence of the gender agenda in the government platform, with its incorporation into the Transversal Agenda for Women in the 2024–2027 Multiannual Plan (PPA) (Brasil, 2023, 2024, 2025), aligned with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). Specific initiatives to promote women's participation in international business include the National Export Culture Policy (2023), which supports micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises; ApexBrasil's Women and International Business Program, which provides training, market information, and participation in international business rounds; and the Elas Exportam Program, coordinated by the Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade (MDIC) in partnership with ApexBrasil, Sebrae, Banco do Brasil, UFRJ, and INPI, focusing on mentoring, technical support, and the internationalization of women-led companies. Recognition of these initiatives includes the WTO Gender Equality in Trade Award (2025) for women entrepreneurs. Other relevant actions include the Global Women Program (in partnership with CNI) and the Primeira Exportação – Mulheres no Mundo Program (Banco do Brasil and ApexBrasil), which offer training, mentoring, and operational support for women entrepreneurs entering international trade.

In Ecuador, the incorporation of a gender perspective in trade and foreign policy reflects a dual and conceptually distinct strategy. At the national level, broad equality frameworks, such as the National Gender Equality Agendas (2018–2021 and 2021–2025), employ an expansive understanding of gender that encompasses both women and LGBTI+ populations. This inclusive approach guides policies aimed at combating structural discrimination in areas such as health, education, and labour. Notably, however, these agendas do not articulate trade-related objectives. By contrast, within trade policy, the concept of gender is operationalised in a narrower and more instrumental manner, focusing specifically on women as economic actors. The Gender-Responsive Trade Agenda, embedded in the Institutional Strategic Plan (2021–2025) of the Ministry of Production, Foreign Trade, Investment and Fisheries (MPCEIP, n.d.), along with the dedicated "Trade and Gender" chapters in recent agreements with Chile and Costa Rica, are explicitly designed to enhance women's participation in international commerce. Complementary export initiatives (such as SheTrades and the Ruta del Exportador) reinforce this targeted orientation by supporting the competitiveness of women-led firms. Domestic mechanisms further align with this women-focused approach in trade. Public procurement regulations grant preferential scoring to firms with majority female ownership, while specialised credit programs, including BanEcuador's Crédito Súper Mujer Rural, reduce collateral and consent requirements that have traditionally limited women's access to finance. Additional initiatives—such as the Women's Laboratory, Impulso Violeta, and digital literacy programs- seek to expand women's opportunities in technology-based entrepreneurship and rural production. The Gender Equality Policy (2018), issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, adopts an inclusive definition of gender to institutionalise equality across diplomacy, international relations, and cooperation. At the same time, trade-related cooperation programs, such as ITC's SheTrades and partnerships with Pro Mujer, AWE, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Economic Forum, and the French Development Agency, focus specifically on women's economic

empowerment. International recognition reflects these combined efforts: Ecuador rose from 50th to 16th in the 2024 Global Gender Gap Index, supported by advances such as the Organic Law for the Promotion of the Violet Economy (2023) and the Sello Violeta certification for firms committed to gender equity.

In Peru, recent national frameworks, such as the National Gender Equality Policy (PLANIG, Decree No. 008-2019) and the Sectoral Strategic Plan for Gender Equality (PEMI, Decree No. 002-2020) (Governo Peruano, 2020, 2023, 2025), have sought to strengthen the institutionalisation of gender equality by incorporating an intersectional approach. While the country's legal and policy foundation has historically focused on equality between men and women, the adoption of intersectionality reflects a recent effort to address diverse structural barriers that affect women differently across regions and sectors. This policy environment has facilitated the development of targeted trade-related initiatives aimed at women's economic empowerment. Ella Exporta, launched in 2017 in coordination with international organisations and civil society, exemplifies this approach. By providing training in business management, foreign trade, and sustainability, and enhancing women's visibility through platforms such as the Catalogue of Women Entrepreneurs, the program operationalises national gender objectives in the trade sector. Its decentralised implementation across 17 regions and multiple sectors, including agribusiness, apparel, manufacturing, and services, demonstrates an effort to translate national policy into practical, context-sensitive interventions. Institutional coordination is central to this translation. Ella Exporta is aligned with the National Export Strategic Plan and integrated into broader sustainable development strategies, while the National Commission for Gender Equality (CONAIG) monitors implementation. Challenges identified by CONAIG, including budget constraints, fragmented information, and limited monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, highlight the structural and operational obstacles that affect the effectiveness and scalability of these initiatives. Nonetheless, regulatory progress, including 312 gender-related norms (2019–2023) linked to the Beijing Platform for Action, provides a formal foundation for the integration of gender in economic policy.

Costa Rica, although operating on a smaller territorial scale, exhibits consistent coordination among ministries, Procomer, and the investment agency CINDE. In the World Economic Forum's 2024 Global Gender Gap Report, the country ranks 19th among 146 economies, with a score of 0.785, positioning it as a regional reference in gender equality. As part of its implementation of international commitments, the Gender Parity Initiative (GPI, 2020) was created to expand equal opportunities in the labour market, reduce wage disparities, and strengthen women's representation in leadership positions in both the public and private sectors. Within the GPI, the Impulsa program stands out, aimed at micro, small, and medium-sized women-led enterprises with internationalisation potential. Additionally, the empowerment program promoted by the National Institute for Women (INAMU) provides non-reimbursable resources for women-led productive initiatives. These actions align with the National Policy for Effective Equality between Women and Men (PIEG, 2018–2030) and with updated Free Trade Zone guidelines, which incorporate an inclusive dimension and promote women's employability in strategic sectors.

Programmatic density and modes of operation also vary significantly across countries. Chile, Mexico, and Colombia have broad portfolios encompassing training, trade facilitation, certifications, productive

integration, and gender-focused investment attraction. Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru present expanding initiatives but are still marked by fragmentation, overlapping competencies, and variations in interinstitutional coordination. Costa Rica compensates for its smaller scale with a mature institutional framework and stable cooperation arrangements. Argentina, meanwhile, illustrates how political-institutional changes can interrupt ongoing policies: the discontinuity of bodies and programs dedicated to gender equality reduced the coherence of actions related to the theme. The country underwent significant restructuring after the 2023 political transition and the election of Javier Milei. The resignation of the first Special Representative for Feminist Foreign Policy (REPEF) was formalised (Decree No. 685/2023), and the new government abolished the position (Decree No. 87/2023), reorganising the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity into a subsecretariat with a reduced mandate. These changes coincided with lower visibility in multilateral forums, such as the III Ministerial Conference on Feminist Foreign Policy in Mexico (2023), and with a more discreet presence at the United Nations and the OAS. Until then, Argentina had demonstrated a growing commitment to integrating a gender perspective into both public policies and international action, including the creation of the Gender and Diversity Directorate within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the establishment of the REPEF (Decree No. 881/2022). The REPEF operated at the secretariat level and sought to integrate feminist perspectives into foreign policy, addressing areas such as sustainable development, international cooperation, gender parity, and violence prevention. In 2023, the office developed an action plan with six priority pillars, in dialogue with the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity (MMGyD), the National Gender Mainstreaming Office, and civil society organisations. Furthermore, the Emprender Mujeres program, resulting from interministerial and civil society collaboration, supported women's entrepreneurship through financing, training, and market access, reflecting an approach that linked international engagement, economic empowerment, and gender mainstreaming.

Appendix 1 synthesises these findings by positioning each country across the three levels of governance and highlights structural differences that explain the diversity of observed trajectories. This heterogeneity becomes even clearer when examined in light of the proposed comparative matrix, which organises empirical data according to the dimensions of context, normative clarity, institutional complexity, collaboration mechanisms, and administrative capacity. Three general patterns emerge from this comparison. First, although there is normative convergence in adherence to international commitments, internalisation capacity depends on institutional stability and the priority given to the gender agenda within government. Second, programmatic expansion occurs in all countries analysed, but with uneven intensity: cases such as Chile, Mexico, and Colombia present broader and more interconnected strategies, while Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru are still consolidating their arrangements. Third, interinstitutional coordination is the key differentiating factor, as countries operating with formal and continuous mechanisms (interministerial working groups, inclusive trade committees, public–private partnerships) achieve greater coherence in translating international commitments into effective policies. In contexts of fragmentation or political instability, implementation tends to be partial or discontinued.

This panorama shows that the adoption of international commitments related to gender equality in trade does not automatically imply their internalisation as equivalent national actions. Implementation depends not only on the content of the agreements but also on institutional capacity, coordination mechanisms, and the political conditions that sustain, or interrupt, these agendas.

5. Discussion

The analysis of international commitments and gender-focused trade policies in Latin America indicates that, although the region has increasingly adopted normative frameworks such as the GTAGA and trade agreements with gender chapters, the translation of these commitments into domestic policies varies significantly according to institutional, political, and programmatic conditions. Crucially, this variation does not follow a linear, top-down trajectory. Instead, cross-country evidence reveals a differentiated, bidirectional dynamic where state institutional capacity determines whether a country operates primarily as a “norm shaper” or a “norm recipient” (Acharya, 2004; Zwingel, 2012; Draude, 2017). Structuring the comparative analysis around these institutional capacity tiers resolves the tension between GTAGA commitments and pre-existing domestic agendas:

High Institutional Capacity and Norm Shaping (Chile, Mexico, Colombia): These countries demonstrate high alignment between international commitments, feminist foreign policies, and domestic trade initiatives, exemplifying the bidirectional co-evolution between supranational and domestic levels (Zhukova et al., 2022; Draude, 2017). In these cases, key trade-and-gender legal frameworks predated GTAGA. Chile, for instance, pioneered gender chapters in bilateral trade agreements as early as 2016 (with Uruguay) and co-founded GTAGA in 2020. Rather than passively receiving external norms, Chile and Mexico (via its 2020 Feminist Foreign Policy) operated as active norm shapers, exporting domestically tested tools, such as *Mujer Exporta* and *MujerExportaMx*, to international arenas. For these states, GTAGA serves as an international legitimising vehicle and country-branding instrument (Aggestam & True, 2021) that reinforces structured programs (*Mujer Exporta, Aduana Conecta, Sello Mujer, Ella Exporta a África*) backed by awards like the WTO International Gender Equality in Trade Award.

Consolidating Capacity and Norm Adoption (Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Costa Rica): In states with medium or developing coordination architectures, GTAGA operates as an external lever and policy catalyst. In post-2023 Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru, multilateral commitments provided key momentum for bureaucratic realignment, prompting initiatives like *Elas Exportam*, *Ruta del Exportador*, and *Ella Exporta* (Peru). These programmatic expansions reflect mechanisms of institutional isomorphism and normative adaptation, where domestic agencies emulate practices perceived as successful elsewhere (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Deciancio & Loza, 2023). In these contexts, GTAGA provides external legitimacy for domestic norm entrepreneurs pushing for inter-ministerial collaboration (MDIC, ApexBrasil, BanEcuador) and gender-responsive certifications such as *Sello Violeta* (Ecuador), supported by multiscale governance structures (Hill & Hupe, 2002; Hudson et al., 2019).

Institutional Vulnerability and Policy Discontinuity (Argentina): Policy discontinuity has emerged as a critical factor conditioning norm resilience. Argentina illustrates the fragile nature of normative translation when domestic political coalitions shift. Despite substantial early progress, including the creation of REPEF (2022) and programs like *Emprender Mujeres*, the political transition in late 2023 led to the dismantling of institutional gender structures. This case proves that formal adherence to international commitments like GTAGA is insufficient to secure long-term policy translation unless backed by entrenched administrative capacity and resilient domestic support networks (Herrfahrdt-Pähle & Pahl-Wostl, 2012).

Simultaneously, initiatives aimed at business internationalisation and development, such as Aduana Conecta (Chile) and programs by ApexBrasil and Sebrae (Brazil), seek to reduce market entry barriers, while public–private support networks, including Inclusive Trade Tables (Chile) and the Gender Parity Initiative (Colombia), strengthen articulation between government, private sector, civil society, and international organisations. These initiatives reinforce the importance of multiscale governance mechanisms to reduce gaps between international commitments and domestic policies (Hill & Hupe, 2002; Hudson, Hunter & Peckham, 2019). Care and corporate social responsibility policies, through certifications such as Sello Mujer (Chile) and Sello Violeta (Ecuador), promote equitable corporate practices, while targeted programs for rural, indigenous, and vulnerable women expand their economic participation.

Ecuador exemplifies the tension between broad national gender frameworks, which adopt an inclusive conception encompassing women and LGBTI+ populations, and specific trade interventions that focus exclusively on women, operationalised through the Gender-Sensitive Trade Agenda, SheTrades, preferential procurement, and specialised credit programs. Similarly, Peru has implemented targeted interventions, notably the Ella Exporta program, which operationalises an intersectional approach to address regional and sectoral barriers. Despite an extensive regulatory framework, implementation challenges, such as budget constraints, fragmented information systems, and limited monitoring, highlight structural limitations for the internalisation of international commitments. Costa Rica, in contrast, demonstrates that smaller-scale operations can achieve high coherence when institutional mechanisms and interministerial coordination are stable, as reflected in programs such as the Gender Parity Initiative and Impulsa.

Policy discontinuity has emerged as a critical factor. Changes in political orientation have directly impacted the gender agenda in some countries. In Brazil, engagement with this theme occurred late, reflecting the resistance of the previous administration (2019–2022) to the gender agenda; however, a reversal is observed following the 2023 elections, with the resumption of policies aimed at women's economic empowerment. In Argentina, after significant progress under the previous government (2019–2023), a marked regression occurred under the most recent administration, which dismantled institutional structures and interrupted previously established initiatives. These cases reinforce what the literature highlights regarding the influence of leadership styles and gender sensitivity on the consolidation of public policies. Such episodes illustrate the vulnerability of gender agendas to changes

in political orientation and institutional fragmentation, highlighting the relevance of coalition stability and institutional capacity to sustain the implementation of international commitments.

Additionally, it is necessary to consider, from a conceptual standpoint, the issue of *pinkwashing*, that is, the symbolic use of gender initiatives to legitimise institutions or promote an image without necessarily producing structural change. Certifications, awards, and high-visibility programs can generate positive effects, but their symbolic character highlights potential limitations in the effective internalisation of international norms. This perspective underscores the need to analyse not only the existence of policies and programs but also their capacity to translate global commitments into tangible, context-sensitive outcomes (Keller, 2021; Lerner, 2019; West & Zimmerman, 2018).

From a comparative perspective, three analytical conclusions emerge: (i) normative convergence through international commitments does not guarantee domestic internalization; (ii) programmatic scope and coordination vary according to political stability, institutional capacity, and interministerial articulation; and (iii) mechanisms such as training programs, export promotion initiatives, public procurement policies, and gender-focused certifications act as instruments that operationalize norms, reduce barriers, and align international standards with domestic results. In sum, the effectiveness of the trade and gender agenda depends on multilevel governance, sustained political coalitions, and the capacity to translate normative commitments into concrete, context-sensitive interventions.

There is, therefore, a need for further research to better understand the role of institutions, implementation strategies, and domestic coalitions in consolidating this agenda. Observed results in Latin America point to the importance of examining governance mechanisms, implementation strategies, and institutional factors that enable the realisation of the trade and gender agenda, in dialogue with the literature on multilevel games and normative translation (Aggestam & True, 2021; Deciancio & Loza, 2023).

To connect these findings to the conceptual framework, this study presents Fig. 1, the Multilevel Governance Framework for GTAGA Implementation, integrating four central dimensions, States/Governments, International Organizations, Businesses, and NGOs, articulated with normative references (SDGs, CSR) that guide actions promoting gender equality, empowerment, access to training, leadership, and financing, business development and internationalization, creation/strengthening of support networks, as well as care and social responsibility mechanisms.

Through this architecture, the translation of international commitments into national public policies occurs through a multidirectional flow – multilevel and multi-actor – that traverses the supranational, national, and subnational spheres, mediated by coalitions between State and non-state actors and by formal and informal structures. In this movement, intersectoral coordination and the pressures/supports from different coalitions, as well as institutional capacity, emerge as central determinants of the effectiveness of the agenda. The literature on normative diffusion (Draude, 2017; Zwingel, 2012; Deciancio & Loza, 2023) and on multilevel games (Aggestam & True, 2021) suggests that the success of

implementation depends on how well these dynamics are translated into practice, an aspect that this framework seeks to capture across the cases addressed.

In practice, the application of the framework would allow the identification of which actors operate at which levels, which policies connect to gender goals, and which governance mechanisms facilitate or hinder cooperation between sectors. Thus, the Framework serves not only to describe what has been done but also to explain why certain patterns of implementation emerge and how public policies can be strengthened to achieve the desired outcomes.

5. Final Considerations

This study evaluated the implementation of the GTAGA among the eight Latin American signatory countries from 2020 to 2024, seeking to understand how international commitments to gender equity translate into public policies that promote the internationalisation of women-led businesses. It was found that the dissemination of pro-gender norms does not occur automatically; the internalisation of institutional capacities, the quality of political coalitions, and the effectiveness of coordination among normative, organisational, and operational plans are crucial. This movement of diffusion and normative translation (Draude, 2017) presents distinct trajectories according to national contexts, administrative capacities, and leadership strategies, configuring a co-evolutionary process between the supranational and domestic levels (Aggestam & True, 2021).

In practical terms, successful implementation requires governance structures that articulate governments, the private sector, and civil society, as well as networks that support the internationalisation of women entrepreneurs. Representative cases – Chile, Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil – illustrate how programs dedicated to training, mentoring, and access to financing, integrated with public-private cooperation platforms, can translate commitments into effective actions. National initiatives of those countries demonstrate the reach of these policies, while governance mechanisms such as the Inclusive Trade Tables in Chile and the Gender Parity Initiative in Colombia highlight the importance of stable institutional networks to sustain the agenda amid various pressures.

Despite these examples, institutional continuity remains sensitive to political fluctuations. Changes in government that rearrange priorities or administrative structures can reverse gains achieved, as seen in recent Latin American cases, such as the resumption of gender policies in Brazil and institutional changes in Argentina. Such situations reinforce the need for broad coalitions and institutionalisation mechanisms that transcend political cycles to reduce the vulnerability of gender policies in trade to ideological variations. From a theoretical perspective, the study corroborates the view that global norms do not translate uniformly into national practice; the process is dynamic, with distinct trajectories shaped by leadership, institutional context, and implementation strategies adopted.

Thus, the work advances understanding of the interface between norm diffusion and institutional translation, providing evidence that the transformation of international commitments into domestic policies varies according to administrative capacities and leadership choices. Practically, it points to

pathways for consolidating implementation: strengthening interministerial governance structures, expanding public-private cooperation platforms, improving the availability of gender-disaggregated data in trade policies, and maintaining training and financing programs for women entrepreneurs, as well as promoting international recognitions that value inclusive business practices through certifications.

The implications for public policies highlight the importance of multilevel governance with verifiable goals (Hill & Hupe, 2002), as well as the continuous production of gender data to monitor the impacts of women-led export policies. Public procurement policies with explicit gender criteria, associated with training programs and access to financing, emerge as promising strategies to increase women's participation in global value chains. Finally, institutional resilience emerges as a critical condition for the sustainability of achievements, requiring stable support networks and institutional incentives that preserve advances even in the face of political changes (Herrfahrdt-Pähle & Pahl-Wostl, 2012).

Among the limitations, the geographical and temporal focus on the eight signatories of the GTAGA and the period from 2020 to 2024 is notable, as it may not capture dynamics occurring after this period. The predominantly qualitative evidence leaves room for future studies to focus on quantitative metrics that allow the assessment of direct impacts on women's participation in trade or on the creation of women-led businesses. The absence of effectiveness evaluations also limits scrutiny of potential pinkwashing, where formal commitments may outpace tangible empowerment. Additionally, institutional variations between countries and the availability of public sources hindered direct comparisons. As suggestions for future research, it is proposed to expand the set of cases, extend the temporal scope to observe the effects of subsequent political changes, and employ mixed approaches that integrate policy evaluations with economic performance metrics of women entrepreneurs. It would also be useful to compare the implementation of gender-focused foreign policies between the Global North and South to better understand the contextual conditions that favour the translation of norms into effective public policies.

Declarations

Author Contribution

A.F. and E.R. conceptualized and designed the study, developed the theoretical framework, and analyzed the empirical data. A.F. conducted the primary empirical data collection. A.F. and E.R. wrote the main manuscript text, revised all sections, and approved the final version.

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Figures

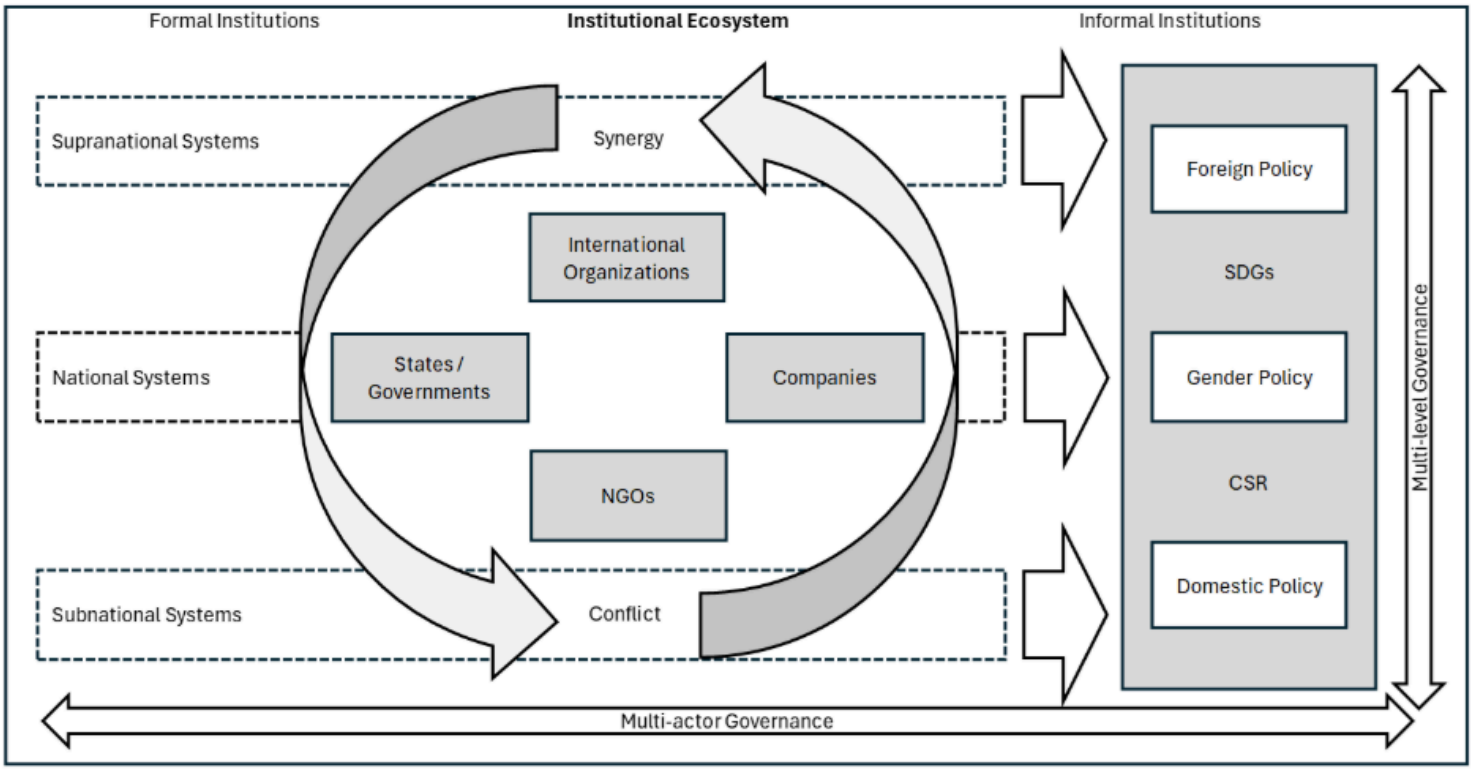


Figure 1

Multilevel Governance Framework for the Implementation of the GTAGA

Source: Developed by the authors

Supplementary Files

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- Appendix.docx