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Inequality ‘hampers trade’

Working women must ‘break glass ceiling’

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THE issue of gender imbalance has been singled out as the major impediment to the growth of the trade industry as women continue to be marginalised worldwide.

This view was expressed at the end of the UN conference on trade development held North West University’s (NWU’s) Potchefstroom campus.

Delegates from 25 countries gathered to look at the role of gender inequality in the trade industry.

Carike Claassen of the NWU’s school of economics said: “We have certainly come a long way since the ’60s, but much still needs to be done. I think that statements we have seen in the media over the course of the past year by high-profile people such as President Barack Obama and actress Patricia Arquette serves as a litmus test for how far we still have to go.

“In terms of how we approach gender inequality pertaining to issues such as the economy and trade, I would say that we are still very far. Mainstream eco-

nomics tends to overlook these issues and the study of trade and gender specifically, for example, is quite new,” she said.

The view was expressed that women in trade and economics have to break the ceiling every time, putting them at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts.

“Women everywhere have to contend with the so-called glass ceiling and the fact that the majority of household chores are still done by women, meaning that businesswomen have to deal with big trade-offs in trying to juggle trade and families.

“Looking at developing countries more specifically, female traders face many obstacles with cultural norms and taboos about what is appropriate for a woman being only one of them. Women in a country such as South Africa, which generally has quite liberal attitudes towards females, might not even begin to understand this, but in some cultures the most basic taboo, such as women not being supposed to ride bicycles, can severely hamper female traders’ access



GLASS CEILING RAISED: Some of the delegates who attended the UN conference on trade development at NWU Potchefstroom campus.

to transport. In many societies, women also are not as educated as men, and this, of course, negatively influences women’s performance as traders and business people,” Claassen added.

Delegates also argued that gender inequality was a form of inefficiency that

not only marginalises women but also hinders economic progress.

“In many developing countries, which are reliant on agriculture, female food producers are not as productive as males, since they do not have equal access to resources. This means that

gender inequality keeps potential female producers from producing, and agricultural exports will not be as large or productive as they could be if everyone had equal access to resources and opportunities,” Claassen said.

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