

Challenges Facing Informal Cross-Border Women Traders and Potential Management Opportunities in Busia and Isebania Borders-Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Informal cross-border trade (ICBT) is an integral part and unrecognized component of Africa's economy which has persisted despite the effort to graft it into a formal economy globally. An important observation is that women are the dominant players in all ICBT activities, accounting for more than 60%. This study endeavors to examine the challenges facing informal cross-border women traders (ICBWTs) and the potential management opportunities in Busia and Isebania Borders Kenya. They adopted a mixed research method and a cross-sectional design. Data was collected through interview schedules, questionnaires, and observation which were analyzed quantitatively through descriptive statistics while qualitative data were analyzed and presented thematically. The study found that the challenges were; inadequate capital, harassment by border officials, corruption, insecurity, high transportation cost, sexual and gender-based violence, self-seeking states, and confiscation of goods. This study recommends that states within the EAC should strive toward embracing women-friendly formalization approaches to reduce informal cross-border trader activities which have risks to women.

Keywords: Informal Trade, Cross-Border Trade, Challenges and Opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Informal Cross Border Trade (ICBT) is a common feature among sub-regional economic blocks globally. Nonetheless, the magnitude of ICBT is more pronounced in economic blocks of emerging and developing economies amounting to a significant portion of economic activity with vast socio-economic and political implications (Koroma et al. 2017). In Africa, cross-border trade among various sub-regional economic blocks is primarily informal which directly or indirectly escapes from the regulatory framework and often goes unrecorded or incorrectly recorded onto official national statistics of the trading countries accounting for more than 60% of the GDP (Olabisi, 2014).

Evidence suggests that women account for more than 60% of ICBT players among the various economic blocks in the Sub-Saharan Africa Region (UNCTAD, 2021). In the SADC region, women comprise about 70 percent of those involved in ICBT while in Western and Central Africa nearly 60% of informal traders are women (Afrika and Ajumbo, 2012). Women often play an important role in ICBT, although the extent varies greatly among regions.

Mac Gaffey (1991) points out that the subservient role of women in Congo (then Zaire) was exacerbated by family regulations of the colonial period, pushing women into cross-border trade in Africa into informal trading, which continued into the post-colonial period. In Northern Africa, ICBTs consist of young women and men, with primary or secondary education and four dependents on average with statistics showing that the value of the trade is almost half of the official trade in Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria. Their income puts most of them under the Tunisian national poverty threshold' (Ayadi et al., 2013).

In the East Africa Community (EAC), ICBT has a gender dimension of women being slightly more than Men (East Africa Trade Report 2019). A significant proportion of CBT between Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya is in the form of ICBT (East Africa Economic Report, 2019). Apparently, women constitute a larger proportion of small-scale ICBT. In spite of efforts to promote trade integration among the EAC Partner States and specifically between Kenya and the two neighboring countries of Uganda and Tanzania, formal trade links are still facing several constraints.

ICBT helps in alleviating poverty by providing women with economic opportunities (Chen et al., 2007). Besides it's a source of income, food security, and livelihood support at the household level where women play a significant role (Afrika and Ajumbo, 2012).

This paper is extracted from the result of a study on the Political Economy of ICBT: A Case of Women Traders in Busia and Isebania Borders in Kenya carried out between July 2022 to December 2022. This paper has been able to fill the gap in information on the challenges facing ICBWTs and the potential management opportunities. The remaining part of this paper is organized as follows: The literature review, methodology, objectives, conclusion, and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Njikam and Tchouassi, ICBWTs continue to face a myriad of challenges that not only threaten their businesses but more so their survival. Nonetheless, there exist some potential management opportunities as stated by Ogalo (2010) that ICBTs can tap into for their survival.

UNCTAD (2021) survey on ICBWTs in Kenya reported that these traders face personal insecurity due to the secondary routes that they use to hide from the border officials which exposes them to safety risks but also precludes them the possibility of benefiting from and accessing infrastructure at the border such as toilets, storage space or sleeping facilities when available.

In the EAC, women are involved in sorts of trade selling everything from agricultural to manufactured products. The products range from cereals, fruits, vegetables, marine products, leather and leather products, clothes, and textile products (EASSI, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Due to the complexity of the ICBT, the study used three theories for complementarity. First from the prism of Neo-liberal theorists (Desoto, 1989) ICBT by Women traders is a result of the cumbersome state bureaucracy, high taxes, and duties which make formalization of the trade quite costly. Secondly, from the perspective of vulnerability theorists (Fineman, 2015) ICBT emanates from inequalities created by the state by not responsibly dispersing development opportunities which have the potential to make other communities and groups economically endowed and resilient while some are excluded (marginalized) and ill-equipped to move out of poverty. Thirdly, to rationalists(Friedman 1953), the actions of ICBWTs are the result of individual choices guided by self-interest and preferences based on strategic calculations involving carefully weighing the costs and benefits of certain actions before undertaking them, the cumbersome legal regulations, high taxes, costly duties in an environment where women are marginalized in regard to education, health, training, employment and broader economic opportunities by the state leave them with no option other than participating in informal economic activities to survives.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a mixed research method, which was preferred due to its ability to combine both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2003). A cross-sectional research design was adopted as it was a snapshot

study (Zangirolami-Raimundo et al., 2018). The research site was Isebania and Busia Borders in Kenya. A target population was drawn from ICBWT, Border Officials, Government Officials, Community Opinion leaders, the Chamber of Commerce, Civil Society Organizations, and Development Partners. A target population of 47 key informants was selected purposively and a sample size of 25 was determined using Krejcie & Morgan's (1970) formula. A total of ICBWT 103 were interviewed, 55 in Busia and 48 in Isebania Borders respectively who were identified through snowballing sampling technique due to their hidden nature. Primary data was collected using direct observation, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires. Data analysis was done with the aid of the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26, which was analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies and percentages presented using tables, graphs, and charts. Qualitative data was analyzed and presented thematically corroborating with secondary data to yield meaningful results.

OBJECTIVE ONE; CHALLENGES INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER WOMEN TRADERS FACE

The challenges facing ICBWTs in Busia and Isebania Borders in Kenya are divided into three categories as discussed below;

State-related challenges

These are challenges that are attributed to the actions of the state either through the agents (officers), policies, and programs. In a discussion with respondents, they explained that lack of capital was a result of the unregistered nature of their businesses, high-interest rates, and absence of collateral to guarantee loans from banks and financial institutions forcing them to look out for shylocks and illegal lenders whose demands and interest are even higher than the mainstream financial institutions. Many of the respondents did not have bank accounts while some did not have the requisite documents like national identification cards to enable them to open accounts. Njikam and Tchoussi (2011) in supporting these findings noted that incidences of harassment occurred to ICBWTs with perpetrators being border officials and security officers who demanded bribes.

According to the respondents, the various forms of harassment included physical and verbal abuse, threats to harm, and sexual. Studies done in Southern Africa, Liberia, and EAC as reported by Blumberg et.al (2016), Brenton et al. 2011, and Higgins and Tuner (2010) respectively, in supporting these findings contend that ICBWTs face pressure for bribes, sexual harassment, and violence, extending from verbal sexual harassment to confirmed rape, and demand for transactional sex mostly from the male border and security officials and bribes were common challenges ICBWTs are exposed to.

Respondents noted that cross-border traders (CBT) do not have a modern market with good storage facilities particularly perishable goods that need refrigeration in addition to good sewer systems, lighting to support 24-hour business, and even restrooms. A look at the border open revealed huge piles of solid waste littered everywhere, the absence of common restrooms, and a lack of clean and safe running water. An ICBT respondent in Isebania said;

“Traders here don't have a good market. There are no toilets and even clean water. We use the water from the river and boreholes. The government has neglected us completely”. (C38, 61yrs, Isebania, 24th August 2022)

Respondents also reported that the high inflation rate weakened the Kenyan shilling-making against the dollar and currencies of Uganda and Tanzania. This means that traders were paying more when using Kenyan shillings. At the time of this study, 1 Kenyan shilling was selling at 20 Tanzanian shillings which was the lowest ever. Study respondents additionally complained of scarcity of basic commodities like

cereals making traders travel into the interior parts of Tanzania and Uganda looking for these products resulting in high overhead costs. Besides, this study illustrated that respondents' goods were confiscated by the security and border officials who would demand huge bribes should they fail to pay. Respondents, similarly, lamented over the high transport cost of goods particularly when using illegal routes to bring goods into Kenya from Uganda or Tanzania which is worsened by poor road infrastructure. Blumberg et al. (2016) argue that unmanageable border procedures, delays at the border, and unwarranted confiscation of commodities and goods are challenges that women traders face.

Women's Cross-Border Trader's Association's leaders informed this study that ICBTs suffered from high taxes and unfair exchange rates due to the fluctuation of the currency. Interviewed representatives from EASSI, TIMEA, Sauti Afrika, and Chamber of Commerce officials observed that ICBWTs suffered from constant intimidation and huge bribes from state officials working in the border post. Similarly, the county levies are also high that many traders are not able to pay forcing them to operate informally even if they desire to trade formally. UNCTAD (2021) reported that as a result of the lack of a formal exchange bureau, ICBWTs face problems with the exchange rate as a result of going to informal /black market exchanges where the premium rates are always high and volatile. These challenges make it difficult for many women traders to make a profit which they can re-invest back into their businesses.

Beyond the aforementioned, state-related challenges, some respondents cited poor access to market information, inadequate information on business development, price oscillations, lengthy and tiresome legal processes in formalizing businesses, high and costly taxes, weak and selective implementation of CBT policies that favor certain traders, non-recognition of one EAC member state's trade documents by customs officials of another member, especially where documents have not been harmonized like bureau of standards are other bottlenecks women face. Brenton et al. (2012) acknowledge that the state's trade formalization procedures, corruption, hefty bribes, varied taxes, protectionist policies, and lack of prioritization of ICBWTs remain a challenge. Additionally, these ICBWTs have no access to social protection, health coverage, and other social security benefits in the formal sector thereby creating a situation of vulnerability and social marginalization that are perpetuated through their lives.

ICBWTs-related challenges

In analyzing the findings on the challenges ICBWTs face, this study noted that some of these bottlenecks emanated from the traders themselves. According to Tayo and Amoo (2017), some of the challenges that ICBWTs experience stem from them seldom the state or the environment. In the midst of the many difficulties, this study found out that ICBWTs suffer from ignorance and illiteracy which exposes them to the vagaries of trade informalities. Interviews with border officials and other government officials acknowledged that some of these traders are illiterate and lack the ability to read and write thereby predisposing them to exploitation by the middlemen and other rogue security and border officials.

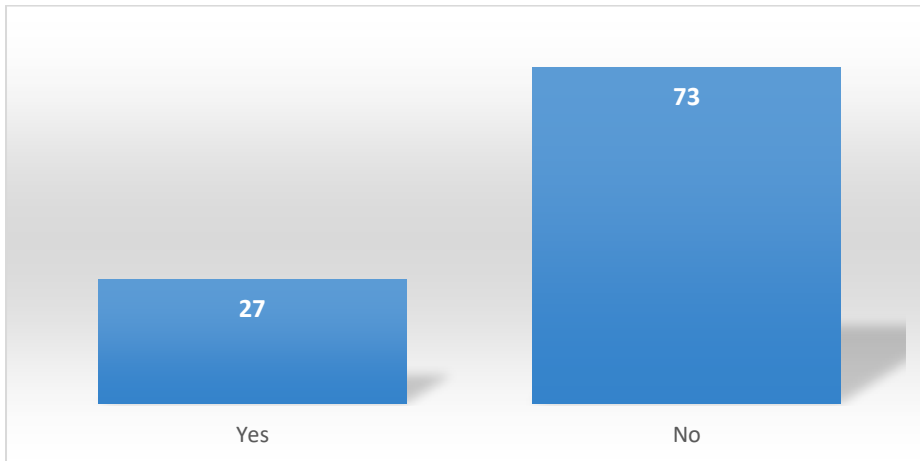
Similarly, the majority of ICBWTs are ignorant of the cross-border procedures as reported by officials from TIMEA, Sauti Afrika, and EASSI making it hard to take advantage of the simplified trade regime and the EAC common market and customs union opportunities to formally trade. As shown in Table 1, 41% of the respondents dropped out of primary school, 12% never completed secondary school, 5% never went to school and 18% only got primary-level education. The County Commissioner of Busia commented;

"Informal cross border women trades are ignorant of cross border rules which are very good and sensitive to their needs with little requirements to meet. Many are confused by individuals who make money through exploiting them when they use such illegal roots". (KI, C26, Busia, 3rd September 2022)

UNCTAD (2017) points out that the extremely low education levels among ICBWTs reflected in poor reading, writing, and counting skills is a challenge to a successful business as many are not able to

understand the various existing cross-border trade policies to facilitate trade. The study found as shown in Table 1, that 73% (73) of the respondents were not aware of the existence of the EAC customs union and common market protocol while 27% (28) reported being aware of the protocol.

Table 1: Awareness of the existence of the EAC Customs Union and Common Market Protocol.



Source: Author,2022.

This study further revealed that 54%(56) of the respondents were unaware of some of the documents that traders are required to produce or have in their possession at the border while 46%(47) reported being aware of the documents as shown in figure 1.

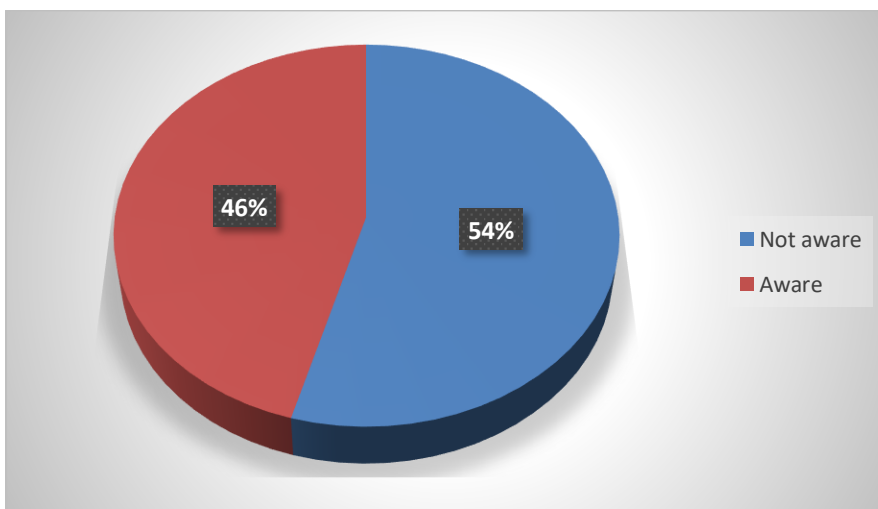
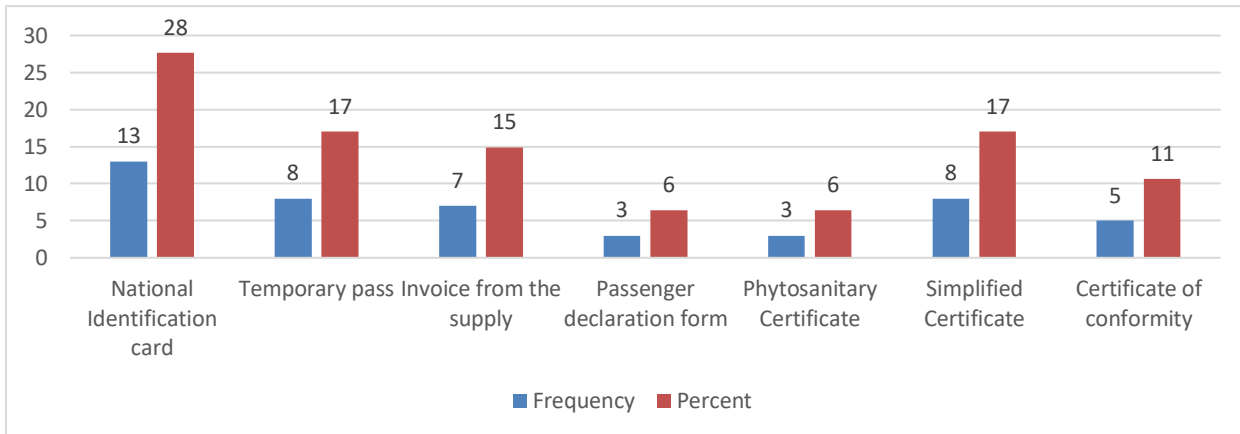


Figure 1: Awareness on the documentation

Source: Author,2022

Concerning awareness on the documentation and cross-border trade procedures, the 46% (47) of the respondents were cognizant of the requirements and named documents required for cross-border trade such as national identification card, temporary pass, invoice from the supplier, passenger declaration form, phytosanitary certificate, simplified certificate and certificate of conformity as shown in figure 2. These findings mirror the results of a survey by UNDP (2022) on the awareness of trade rules and regulations among youths and women in relation to the African Continental Free Trade Area in Africa revealed that only 39% of the respondents on average were aware of some of the requirements for successful cross border trade. Similarly, in Malawi for example, surveyed respondents reported a limited understanding and awareness of the regional bodies’ trade agreements and protocols which ICBWTs were unaware(USAID,2014).

Figure 2: Awareness of the various documents needed by ICBWTs



Source: Author, 2022.

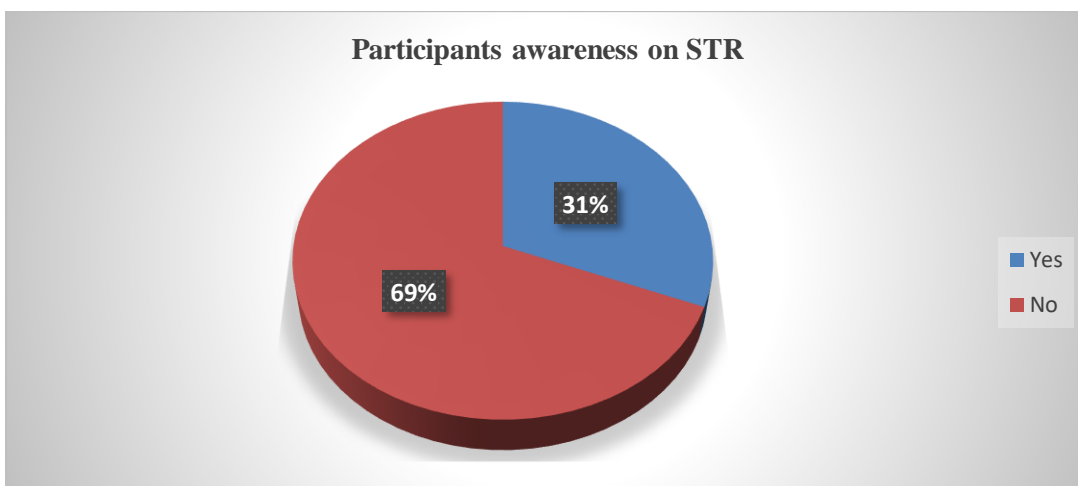
Charlotte (2013) from her study of Ghanaian ICBWTs observed that overly few women knew of the rules and regulations on CBT due to ignorance of the documents required and inability to read and write making it easy for brokers and scrupulous customs officials to take advantage of them.

Finally, this study found that the majority of ICBWT respondents 69% (71) were not aware of simplified trade regimes while only 31% (29) were aware of them as shown in Figure 2. Respondents who were aware of STR mentioned it as a policy that supports small-scale traders importing goods worth less than US\$ 2000 within EAC. A respondent in explaining the Simplified Trade Regime said;

“Simplified trade regime is paper that cross border traders whose goods are less Ksh 200000 are required to fill to trade free in Jumuiya.” (C25,49yrs, Isebanai,20th August 2022)

Interviews with border officials noted that many of the ICBWTs are not aware of the simplified trade regime notwithstanding its existence for several years since its inception by the EAC member states. Low education and ignorance were quoted as the main challenges women face in benefiting from STR. Similar reasons were provided by Women Cross-Border Traders(WCBTs) association leaders, representatives of the civil society organization supporting women traders, and county government officers in charge of trade in Isebania and Busia.

Figure 2: Respondents’ awareness of the simplified trade regime



Source: Author, 2022

These findings are supported by Ogalo (2010) who argues that the majority of ICBTs have little knowledge of the benefits of trading within EAC due to information asymmetries. Under the Simplified Trade Regime (STR) traders dealing with goods less than US\$2000 are only required to produce a simplified certificate of origin showing goods are from the EAC region, a declaration form, a travel document (passport, national identity card, and temporary border pass), export or import permits and Sanitary and Phytosanitary certificate only (UNCTAD, 2021). The WCBTs association leader in Busia informed the study that these documents require women who can read and write to be able to fill them correctly. However, the document required to be filled and produced by ICBWTs is still so many and complex to be filled by women who have little education forcing them to venture into ICBT activities. Sauti Afrika official said;

“A lack of information in an environment full of misinformation results in a complex engagement between informal cross-border traders and border officials. The majority of women cross border traders are unaware of the East African Community tariff exemption for goods under \$2,000 and believe that they are illegally avoiding tariffs”. (KI, C24, Isebania, 29th August 2022).

Kenya National Chamber of Commerce Migori chapter noted that the information provided on simplified trade regimes is not friendly to illiterate women traders such as the legal texts like the protocols. Siu (2019) argues that these technical documents present a challenge to women who cannot read and write thereby exposing them to fraudsters and exploitative border officials who take advantage of demanding duties on goods that are free. These findings contradict Ogalo's (2010) study which concluded that a significant number of ICBWT are well aware of the various general provisions of the Customs Union, including most of the regulatory requirements.

Environmental-related challenges

Besides the State and informal cross-border-related challenges, this study further discussed the environmental associated difficulties. According to the findings, 7% of the study respondents reported sexual gender-based violence, 3% conning by paper pushers and middlemen, 4% insecurity, and 2% reported witchcraft. Respondents informed this study that cases of insecurity and sexual violence such as rape and sexual harassment are too common, particularly for those using illegal routes in Isebania and Busia borders who experience such abuses from mostly Bodaboda (Motorbike riders). A 38 yrs old informal cross-border woman trader respondent said;

“I was crossing into from Tanzania through Nyamutiro routes at around 5 am in the morning while on a motorbike whose rider I found across the border. When we reached a place where there were no nearby homes or bushes, he stopped pretending that he wanted to repair and fix his break. He removed a panga and told me to remove my clothes threatening to kill me if I shouted. He raped me and after fled with his motorbike back to Tanzania leaving me stranded in pain and confused”. (C28, 38yrs, Isebania, 21st August, 2022).

A representative from EASSI in supporting these claims said, that ICBWTs suffer threats of physical and sexual violence which worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic period because of the illegal routes which are quite risky particularly because of the absence of security officers. Brenton et al. (2011), survey on informal cross-border trade in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, and Rwanda reported similar findings on sexual and gender-based violence that ICBWTs face. Similarly, in Liberia, USAID (2014) studies report that ICBWTs face a lot of sexual and gender-based violence with many remaining with prolonged psychological trauma.

In Isebania and Busia, ICBWTs face daily insecurity threats from criminal groups such as Marachi and Bulanda Boys who demand frequent protection fees for these trader's failure to which the goods can be confiscated or inflict harm to traders. Charlotte (2013) agrees based on cross-border traders in Ghana that

insecurity and ICBT are compatible as a result of the players whose identities are hidden and the absence of security officers to protect traders. Similarly, Olabisi (2014) points out that ICBT creates other informalities such as the creation of gang groups which are a threat to the security of traders in the long run as is the case of ECOWAS.

This study divulged that ICBWTs were exposed to the constant risk of being conned by the paper pushers also called wasuagaji or middlemen who act on their behalf. These paper pushers are aware that some of the goods particularly those falling under the simplified trade regimen are duty-free and still go ahead to ask these traders for such payments. Respondents noted that sometimes these middlemen can disappear with the monies of the ICBWTs and you cannot report them because of the illegal nature of the trade. A respondent said;

“When I started this trade, because of the fear of being arrested, I engaged an agent/middleman to bring me rice every morning from Tanzania because he knew how to talk to the customs officer. He did that until I trusted him to go alone to Tanzania to bring the rice. One day he disappeared with Ksh 50000 which I gave him to bring rice. After one week he came back and I couldn’t do anything because this thing is illegal”. (C30, 51yrs, Isebania, 21st August 2022)

In Boogaard and Jibao’s (2018) study of Sierra Leone, identical findings were noted with traders reporting that *chata* men or middlemen are known to swindle ICBTS money. Moreover, Higgins (2012) holds that ICBWTs face rampant swindlers who are cunning and smart with a high level of coordination and protection from officers with little chance of arrest or recovering money once it is stolen.

Interestingly respondents informed this study that witchcraft was another challenge that ICBWTs face. Respondents noted that ICBWTs to acquire good fortune out of the trade, sought the services of the witch doctors. An informal cross border woman trader said;

“This business is not as direct as you think. You have to get a witch doctor to protect your business from people with ill motives, protect you from arrest and competition from other people”. (C23, 60yrs, Isebania, 20th August 2022)

This study found that the services of witchdoctors are highly sought after by ICBWT notable customers who travel as far as Shinyanga or Simuyu regions of the Mwanza area to consult the famous Sukuma sorcerers to get fortunes from trade.

This study further noted that ICBWTs in Isebania and Busia faced a lot of competition from Tanzanian and Ugandan illegal hawkers who sell the same products even into the deep border villages in Kenyan border areas and nearby satellite areas at a cheaper price thereby denying ICBT traders from Kenya the market opportunity. An informal cross-border respondent noted;

“We are tired of Uganda traders who after bribing Busia County officials and Customs officers are allowed to sell the same product we buy from them to our customers. Where will we sell and yet customers follow them?” (C76, 48yrs, Busia, 20th September 2022)

Trade officials in Busia and Migori acknowledged that indeed these Tanzanians and Ugandans were so common and sold their products cheaper than our traders. However, there is little that can be done because of the existence of the EAC customs union and common market protocol which allows free movement of goods and people. Whenever we arrest them, our traders suffer more.

Due to sexual harassment, rape, and transactional sex, ICBWTs risk exposure to sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS which is quite rampant in the borders, while others risk having unintended pregnancies. ICBWTs also face a lot of challenges due to gender and societal expectations which they have

to do such as raising children and taking care of the sick alongside going to the market to look for food. Finally, ICBWTs faced a lot of economic challenges as a result of COVID-19 which increased the prices of goods, limited movements, and reduced the supply of some goods.

These findings clearly demonstrate that ICBWTs face myriad problems which are state, border environment, and traders. Despite the difficulties which make them more vulnerable, these informal cross border women traders are nonetheless willing to continue with the trade due to the benefits. Rationalists Hall and Taylor (1996) argue that people are calculative and strategic, and they carefully weigh the costs and benefits of certain actions despite the challenges they face. ICBWTs have fixed, well-defined, ranked, and consistent preferences, and they behave instrumentally to achieve those preferences even with the myriad. Addressing these challenges ICBWTs face is crucial in helping the trade get formalized.

OBJECTIVE TWO; POTENTIAL MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR ICBWTs

The study noted that there are available potential opportunities that if managed can reduce the challenges by encouraging formalization. First, ICBWT needs to be sensitized to the existence of the EAC Customs Union (2004) and common market protocol (2010). Protocols on the customs union and common market provide for the free movement of goods, people, labor, services, and capital within EAC member states. Moreover, the customs union provides for zero duty on certain goods originating in EAC particularly non-processed agricultural goods which are majorly traded informally. As the protocol states, small-scale traders only need to produce the certificate of origin of the goods and pay the requisite documentation fees then they will be allowed to import the goods. Women cross-border traders can take advantage of the customs union and common market protocol to formally trade.

The second opportunity that study respondents reported is the existence of the STR which provides traders whose consignments are below US\$ 2000 and originating from EAC. In agreement with Koroma (2017), in the EAC, goods eligible for clearance through the Simplified Certificate of Origin (SCO) like the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR), are provided in a list of goods, known as the EAC List of Originating Goods Commonly Traded by Small Scale Cross-Border Traders. From the eligible list, 370 products currently qualify, which include agricultural commodities like maize and beans, fish products, textiles, cosmetics, office supplies, and household goods mostly traded on a small scale by ICBWTs. Women Cross-Border Trader's Association leaders informed this study that the use of SCO has changed the way ICBWTs are doing business, as it has allowed traders to clear their consignments quickly, safely, and with less hassle unlike before. This study however noted that many of the informal cross border traders are not aware of STR despite its existence this calls for more sensitization.

One Stop Border Post is the third opportunity that this study noted is available for ICBWTs. Juxtaposed One Border Stop Post located on each side of the border was observed in Busia and Isebania. In Busia, One Border Stop Post, officers from Kenya and Uganda share the border facility located in Kenya and vice versa. Similar arrangements were observed in Isebania where Kenya officers are stationed in the One Border Stop Post located in Tanzania and vice versa. In this model, passengers and vehicles do not stop in the country that is exited but rather stop in the Country of entry where exit and entry are carried out. In the Country of entry, exit formalities are conducted before entry formalities. According to EAC (2019), the OSBPs Act of 2016, aimed at improving efficiency in the movement of goods, persons, and services across the EAC in a more coordinated way where all the cross-border related services and documentation are provided under one roof.

Civil society organization representatives supporting ICBWTs agreed that with the OSBP, all the government agencies with a role to play are stationed in the same building. This reduces time in processing

the documents and costs which can benefit ICBWTs. Parshotam (2018) based on the study of the OSBPs in the COMESA region agrees that they are at the core of a 'whole of government' approach to border coordination owing to their ability to time and costs associated with clearing goods into countries and goods in transit minimizing routine duplications beneficial to small scale women traders. One remarkable thing with OSBP is the presence of the WCBT association leaders' official office where issues of women traders are being addressed real time.

Fourthly, the presence of Civil society organizations like EASSI, Sauti Afrika, TIMEA, and CCGD in Isebania and Busia borders which assist WICBTS to get access to finances that they can't access in the formal financial markets, educate them on cross-border trade rules, documents, and procedures. Furthermore, they offer market information on the movement of goods across the borders besides encouraging women to form small self-help groups and assisting them to register and open bank accounts for savings and internal lending (merry-go-rounds). They act as advocates either at the policy level or within the border management committees where they push for the interest of the traders. Finally, they encourage ICBWTs to register their businesses and get waivers and other additional government support. ICBWTs can work with these organizations to benefit from cross-border trade.

Fifth, the presence of EAC offices at the border presents another opportunity for ICBWTs. This study found out that the EAC offices in Busia and Isebania are involved in mobilizing resources to assist ICBTs. They train women informal cross border traders on trade rules, documentation, and procedure, and sensitize the communities and traders on the benefits of integration either through public Barraza's (meetings), school outreaches, and stakeholders meeting in the meeting. The EAC office organizes for registration of ICBWTs operating at the border which enables them to get waivers, and funding for their businesses and negotiate trade opportunities within the EAC. These traders can benefit from EAC programs at the border.

Sixth, the existence of various management committees that are critical in addressing the plight of cross-border traders. There are stakeholder management committees that include agencies in the OSBP, civic leaders, civil society organizations, business group representatives, County government representatives, and Officials from the National Government Administration, coordination, and security departments. Then there is the Border Management Committee that brings together the heads of various agencies on the border, business groups representatives, community representatives, County national government administrative, coordination, and security representatives.

The Joint Border Committee involving Kenya and neighboring Country representatives meets quarterly with government officials, the border post agency head, representatives of traders, and chamber of commerce representatives. This study noted that these border committees are very important as they agree on how better to serve traders using those borders. The EAC official informed the study that these ad hoc committees promote coordination between government agencies and businesses to enhance efficiency at borders. According to USAID (2016), the presence of border management committees has improved border efficiencies, reduced corruption, enhanced security, and supported information flow to the traders. Informal cross border traders can therefore benefit from the presence of border post committees to formalize their trade.

Seventh, cross-border associations and other forms of association among women cross-border traders are other available opportunities that can benefit these traders. According to the information obtained from women cross-border trade leaders, these associations are beneficial to traders in the following ways; increased awareness of rights to information, protection, and access to resources, the opportunity for credit, skills, and entrepreneurship development programs, the opportunity to hold leadership positions empowering WICBT and articulating women-specific ICBT issues with various stakeholders, effective lobbying for a conducive operating environment at border posts, including adequate banking facilities, storage, accommodation, safe water and sanitation, and basic health facilities, networking and information

sharing about WICBT business practices and opportunities, the opportunity to organize safe transport and participation in trade fairs and business expos and finally in the countries of destination, the opportunity to lobby for such needs as market space, warehouses, and safe and hygienic accommodation. A respondent in Busia who is a member of association said;

“This group has empowered me through training and taught me how to save and spend money wisely. Many times they have given me loans for my businesses or for school fees”. (C97,54yrs, Busia,25th September 2022)

This study further noted that ICBWTs belong to the informal saving clubs known as ‘merry-go-round’ or *Chama* or Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCA). According to the study respondents, these *chamas* provide ICBWTs with the opportunity to save money in the form of shares and also borrow against the strength of the share at a low interest. These saving groups are potential avenues for financing informal cross-border businesses where access to formal financial sources is limited.

Finally, this study identified the Kenya Trade Network Agency (KENTRADE) established in January 2011 as another opportunity that ICBWTs can tap into. This online platform has seen harmonization of payments as it serves as a single online platform entry point for parties involved in international trade and transport logistics to lodge documents electronically, for processing, and approvals and to make payments electronically for fees, levies, duties, and taxes due to the Government, on goods imported or exported in the country. This has reduced cases of exploitation by border officials and corruption. ICBWTs can take advantage of the platform to reduce cost and time constraints associated with cross-border payment.

Despite the aforementioned opportunities the protocol for the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTA) in January 2021. According to Zhuawu and Enos (2021), there is no doubt that the agreement would play a significant role in boosting trade in the informal sector which is often neglected by the government. African Continental Free Trade Area, therefore, holds significant potential to support the participation of ICBWTs in regional integration. The government can provide more opportunities to ICBWTs through group marketing via Cooperative societies aimed at reducing transportation costs and fostering competitiveness and bargaining power which would result in low costs and higher profitability.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the challenges are the state, traders, and environment-related. The potential management opportunities are to a large extent sanitization of traders on existing protocols, documentation, procedures, financing, and rights of traders. This study recommends that states within the EAC should strive toward embracing women-friendly formalization approaches to reduce ICBT activities which have risks to women.

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