

SMALL-SCALE CROSS-BORDER TRADE SURVEY

BENIN RESULTS SUMMARY



BRIEF

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The Trade Facilitation West Africa (TFWA) Program is an initiative driven by multiple development partners¹ to improve trade facilitation in West Africa. Its objective is to improve the free and efficient movement of goods in the region and internationally, by reducing the time and cost of trade borne by the private sector in West Africa, and by strengthening regional trading networks' ability to take advantage of these improvements.



5-year trade facilitation initiative

Sept 2018 - Jun 2023

The five-year program was started in September 2018 and is managed by the World Bank Group and the German Development Cooperation Agency, the program's implementing partners. Strategic oversight and guidance are provided by a steering committee chaired by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission and supported by the West African Economic and Monetary Union Commission as deputy chair. Key areas for support under the program include the following: (i) to ensure trade facilitation measures are improved and more efficiently implemented; (ii) to improve the movement of goods along selected corridors; and (iii) to reduce barriers for small-scale traders, with an emphasis on improving conditions for women traders.

To expand the base of evidence required to inform the design of its program activities, the World Bank Group commissioned a field survey on small-scale, cross-border traders (SSCBTs), including women traders, along the six TFWA priority corridors:

Abidjan-Ouagadougou (Côte d'Ivoire–Burkina Faso), Tema-Ouagadougou (Ghana–Burkina Faso), Lagos-Kano-Niamey (Nigeria-Niger), Cotonou-Niamey (Benin-Niger), Dakar-Bamako (Senegal-Mali), and Lomé-Ouagadougou (Togo–Burkina Faso).

The survey aimed to explore: (i) the demographics of small-scale traders and patterns of their trade along target corridors; (ii) challenges faced by traders in their activities at border crossings, including behavioral and gender-specific constraints; and (iii) the institutional framework and support for small-scale border operators. In Benin, the survey completed 247 quantitative interviews with traders, porters, intermediaries, and border officials; 17 key informant interviews; and four focus group discussions.

Benin's field survey on small-scale, cross-border traders

- 247** quantitative interviews with traders, porters, intermediaries, and border officials
- 17** key informant interviews
- 4** focus group discussions

¹ The European Union, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Netherlands, and Germany have provided financial contributions.



Benin survey: a closer look

30% of respondents were 34 or younger

61% have informal or no schooling

60% engage in trader-to-trader sales

71% of respondents were women

On average, women traders travel shorter distances
243 km **414 km**

The SSCBTs surveyed in Benin were relatively young, men (29 percent of the sample) and women (71 percent), and generally poorly educated. The traders often run businesses that are unregistered and/or of limited profitability, and they travel long distances along regional corridors to trader raw agricultural goods, processed food items, consumer durables, and textiles, among other things. The survey also showed that there are some gender-based differences among those surveyed. The survey results suggest that 30 percent of the surveyed traders in Benin are age 34 or younger, and 61 percent of them have informal or no schooling. They have a business formalization rate of 8 percent, which is the lowest among the countries studied, and 56 percent of the respondents who were willing to disclose their revenue said they earn less than \$99/month. The traders in Benin travel on average 308 kilometers (km) along the Cotonou-Niamey corridor, which is significantly longer than traders travel on the Niger side of the corridor (average 162 km). The traders primarily use trucks, and 60 percent of them engage in trader-to-trader sales, which is much higher than in neighboring Niger, where sales to consumers are more prevalent.

Women traders are well represented, at about 71 percent of all the surveyed traders in Benin, which is much higher than the regional average (39 percent) and a stark contrast compared with neighboring Niger, where women make up 10 percent of the surveyed traders. Women traders in Benin are predominantly represented in the food product trade, with only 5 percent of women traders in engaged in trading consumer durables. The women traders are more likely to run unregistered businesses, with a registration rate of 5 percent, compared with 17 percent among men traders. Women traders generally travel shorter average distances (243 km, compared with men's 414 km, although this is still very lengthy).



Women traders engage predominantly in **food product trade**



Women are less likely to run registered businesses





Border officials, along with porters, intermediaries, and transporters (PITs), play an important role in regional trade and exhibit different demographics from traders.

The survey results indicate that the categories of officials and PITs are 20 percent men with no women in either group. While women are virtually absent among PITs across the region, their share among border officials is well below the regional average of 12 percent. PITs are generally better educated than traders, with a higher proportion of them having completed secondary education. Officials are even better educated, and their period of active service varies widely, from one to 24 years. Since traders do not always cross borders for trading purposes, but rather travel along part of a corridor to relay their goods to other traders who will carry them further, the role of PITs in facilitating exchanges of goods is quite important and deserves greater attention.

Officials and PITs are **better educated** than traders

In Benin (at the border with Niger) there are **no women PITs or border officials** at all

In Benin, survey respondents generally expressed concerns about the current status of the border and market infrastructure as well as overall safety; further, they complained about the complexity of clearance requirements and procedures and, on these, the traders showed extremely limited knowledge.

Among the interviewed traders, 53 percent judged at least five facilities at the surveyed border or market site as “inadequate” or “very inadequate,” with women being slightly more negative (54 percent). PITs were also critical of the infrastructure, albeit generally less negative than traders.

Similarly, respondents’ perceptions about clearance requirements and procedures were generally negative, with formal traders being less critical.



Concerns

Status of the border and market infrastructure



Overall safety



The complexity of clearance requirements and procedures

Awareness of trade-related rules and provisions (including regional provisions such as the ECOWAS Common External Tariff and Trade Liberalization Scheme) was extraordinarily low among the traders: only 0.7 percent could describe some features of the provisions. There are notable differences between men and women, by the formalization status of traders (formalized businesses tend to find procedures more complex, possibly because of the goods in transit), and by product.

The survey results show that, compared with men, women traders are more critical of the border infrastructure, deeming areas such as lighting, roads, toilets, rain covers, and pedestrian lanes as needing improvement. Women also identified health and safety issues as problematic along the border crossings.

In three corridors—Dakar-Bamako, Abidjan-Ouagadougou, and Lagos-Kano-Niamey—women find the border clearance experience more troublesome than men do, but less so in the other three corridors. This may be because of the mix of products traded by women compared with men on each border.

In Benin, respondents repeatedly highlighted the lack of transparency in border clearance and reported relatively high incidence of abuse.

Corruption was highlighted as a major issue by traders and PITs in the quantitative interviews and focus group discussions, and more than half of the traders stated that they had been exposed to bribery. Twenty-four percent claimed that they receive formal receipts, which is one of the lowest proportions among the countries surveyed. Forty-six percent of the respondents indicated that they have heard about or witnessed harassment, sexual or otherwise, in the past six months. Seven percent of the respondents preferred not to respond to this question. The survey results may underestimate the level of harassment of women, partly because women are less likely to mention verbal or physical abuse due to the risk of stigmatization.



Corruption was highlighted as a major issue by traders and PITs



Access to finance is a major constraint for women and men traders: personal savings and microfinance institutions are the most common channels through which they access financing. Formal financial products and services are seen as more challenging to adopt. Personal savings are the primary form of finance for men and women traders in Benin, representing 34 percent of total financing. Borrowing from family members, friends, and neighbors is less common among the traders; 6 percent rely on this form of financing. Men traders in Benin seem to have an advantage over women in commercial bank loans: 29 percent of the surveyed men traders have access, compared with only 9 percent of women. In contrast, women traders in Benin seem to have an advantage over men in accessing microfinance loans: 29 percent of the surveyed women traders receive these, compared with 19 percent of men. Low financial literacy levels, complex documentation, and stringent loan requirements (for example, collateral, interest rates, and/or repayment terms) are among the major challenges preventing women and men traders from extensively using formal financing channels.

The TFWA Program has designed several preliminary interventions to address constraints and concerns identified by the SSCBT survey findings. They include the following, among others:



- **Put in place measures that increase transparency at the border (for example, by clearly displaying regulations and procedures) and strengthen capacity and awareness levels among border and market users (for example, through training, dissemination campaigns, and other awareness-raising efforts).** The establishment of help desks (physical or virtual), mandated to inform traders of rules and regulations and assist them with clearance procedures, should also be considered in close coordination with community service organizations and relevant associations, including those representing women traders. Easy-to-follow guides designed for mobile phones could also be considered.



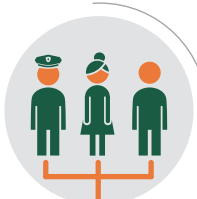
- **Engage in dialogue on gender equality and the specific roles of women traders with key stakeholders of TFWA stakeholders.** Convey the message that policies for inclusive economic empowerment and sustainable poverty alleviation need to recognize and include the role of women. Bolster the collection and analysis of gender disaggregated data to be able to identify and document gendered differences in the needs and perceptions of women and men traders.



- **Put in place measures that help simplify, streamline, and/or decentralize existing procedures and requirements,** as well as create incentives for more systematic application of existing regional provisions, such as the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme. Among others measures, attention could be given to options for a simplified regime for small-scale traders, such as measures to reduce the documentary requirements on smaller consignments, streamline procedures, and reduce the time and cost of trade. Prior to the process of simplification, it would be useful to document what the procedures and requirements are at each border, where they are defined, who is responsible for their implementation, and what documents traders need to carry. As well as making the simplification of procedures a smoother process, this action also helps to identify areas where transparency most needs to be encouraged (for example, by removing discretion from officials implementing rules).



- **Strengthen the gender capacity of relevant public and private actors at the regional, national, and local levels** to enhance their ability, respectively, to conduct gender-responsive programming and budgeting, deliver public services that respond to the specific needs of women traders and entrepreneurs, and participate actively in relevant policy-making processes and forums.



- **Put in place measures to improve behavior at the survey sites and relationships between traders, PITs, and border officials**, such as joint workshops, grassroots campaigns, town hall meetings, and ad-hoc trainings, including on the gender ramifications of trade facilitation and challenges affecting women traders. Systems that allow traders and PITs to report abuse in safe ways should be devised. The participation of trusted organizations, especially community service organizations—with focus on those representing women—should be encouraged.



- **Consider and implement measures to increase the number of women staff** in the ranks of border agencies. Promoting staff diversity and enhancing gender sensitivity among border officials is urgent and crucial.



- **Implement relatively small-scale infrastructure development interventions, such as the introduction of surveillance cameras, installation of solar-powered lighting facilities, systems to report problems, as well as designation of night patrol guards.** These actions could be discussed with the stakeholders and traders for further prioritization. Separately, issues concerning the condition of the markets and road-related and similar infrastructure could be forwarded to other donor-funded programs with heavy emphasis on physical infrastructure development.



- **Pay greater attention to the key features of PITs.** The main survey teaches that it is important to understand the role PITs play and the challenges they face. Study and analyze why there are no women present in this group and the consequences this has for women traders.



- **Address the challenges identified in the survey results on access to markets, information, and finance.** Recognize the diversity of needs between women and men traders, addressing these needs through targeted interventions. Financial constraints were cited as the biggest concern for traders in all the countries. Given that access to finance requires a comprehensive approach, the TFWA Program will need to work with other ongoing initiatives to improve financial inclusion and access to finance in the region, to fill existing gaps. Support toward increased financial awareness among the traders will be contemplated, and innovative solutions—including through novel information and communications technology—will be explored to enhance their bankability. The aim is to develop awareness-raising campaigns to address the information asymmetry faced by women traders.



- **Develop a simplified charter of traders' rights and obligations,** with visible signage at the borders in local languages as a first step in improving relations between traders and officials.



- **Explore the role of trader associations and trade information officers (locally hired or under a regional program) as an interface between officials and traders** to improve awareness, understanding, and mutual respect. Such mechanisms already exist in West Africa (to varying degrees in different countries), but the challenge has been their effectiveness and sustainability.



- **Require that any confiscation of goods is validated by the head of the border station** and an invoice is provided, with a full explanation of the reason for confiscation and the conditions under which the goods will be returned. The survey showed that confiscation and the threat of confiscation of goods are key issues and often lie behind corruption and gender-based violence.



- **Establish systematic data collection on SSCBT.** Detailed, relevant, and organised data and information on SSCBT trade between Benin and West Africa are essential for policy making on a phenomenon which affects large sections of the country's poorest population. Putting in place a data collection system on SSCBT should be considered under the TFWA Program. Setting up a data collection system on SSCBT, ideally in a common effort across West Africa, could draw on lessons from countries that are regularly collecting such data, and show where the information has influenced policy discussions at the local and national level.





The Trade Facilitation West Africa (TFWA) Program is a five-year, multi-partner initiative that aims to promote trade facilitation and regional integration in West Africa. The program strives to reduce the time and cost of regional trade by improving the movement of goods along six selected corridors including for small-scale cross-border traders (SSCBTs), especially women. To inform the design of TFWA interventions addressing SSCBT constraints, including gender-based limitations, a large-scale regional field survey was conducted across nine West African countries – the findings for Benin are detailed in this report.



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