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Trading across borders: A guide for women in West Africa's agrifood markets



Trading across borders:

A guide for women in West Africa's agrifood markets

About the guide

This handbook is for women who trade food and agricultural goods across West African borders on a small scale. It gives clear, practical guidance to help them understand border procedures, identify the right institutions, and follow the rules of trade.

Many women face unsafe or unfair conditions at the border. This handbook explains what to expect, how to prepare, and where to get help. It is organised in five parts: the role of small-scale cross-border trade in the region; common trade routes and border officials; regional trade rules and tools; how to prevent and report corruption or abuse; and how to trade more safely and formally.

The handbook draws on real stories from women traders and border officials. It shows how clear information and better coordination can make trade safer, fairer and more predictable for women across the region.

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Contents

01	Understanding small-scale cross-border trade	1
	What is small-scale cross-border trade?	3
	When is SSCBT informal or illegal?	4
	How does informal SSCBT contribute to inclusive economic development?	5
	What risks and challenges do women encounter when engaging in informal SSCBT?	6
	What are the advantages and opportunities for women to transition from informal to formal SSCBT?	10
02	Navigating border crossings: Officials, controls and essential documents	17
	What is an official border?	19
	Which officials do women typically encounter when crossing borders?	21
	What types of documents are needed when crossing borders?	24
03	Creating opportunities for women through formal trade: Improving transparency and efficiency	29
	What are the key aspects of the policy environment for formal SSCBT?	31
	What can women do to have a better experience at the border?	41
	What remaining gaps must policymakers tackle?	42
04	Know your rights: How women traders can deal with gender-based violence	45
	What are women's rights and how can they be exercised in SSCBT?	47
	What drives harassment and what forms does it take?	49
	What are the broader effects of GBV on women traders?	53
	What can women do when facing GBV?	54
	Where to report, follow up and seek counsel?	55
	What should governments do to help prevent GBV?	59
05	Understanding corruption at the border as a woman small-scale cross-border trader	63
	What distinguishes honest border officials from dishonest ones?	65
	What drives corruption and what forms does it take?	67
	What are the negative effects of corruption on women?	70
	What can women do when facing corruption?	71
	Where can you report corruption and seek counsel?	74
	What should governments do to prevent corruption?	77



Acronyms and abbreviations

AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
CBTA	Cross-border trade associations
EAT	ECOWAS Agricultural Trade
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ETLS	ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme
GBV	Gender-based violence
NTB	Non-tariff barriers
SPS	Sanitary and phytosanitary
SSCBT	Small-scale cross-border trade
STR	Simplified trade regime

01

Understanding small-scale cross-border trade



Learning objectives

This guide is for women who are engaged in small-scale cross-border trade in West Africa. This section covers the following learning points:

- Develop an understanding of small-scale cross-border trade (SSCBT)
- Learn how informal SSCBT contributes to women's social inclusion, economic empowerment and the broader economy
- Identify the common challenges women face in informal SSCBT
- Highlight the advantages and opportunities of transitioning women from informal to formal SSCBT

01.

What is small-scale cross-border trade?

Ada's business between Nigeria and Benin represents a common profile of small-scale cross-border trade, an important form of trade in West Africa. SSCBT:

- is trade in legal products – items based on foodstuffs and the processing of products of plant and/or animal origin that comply with national legislation and regulations in the country of origin;
- is done by small traders;
- takes place across country borders;
- is not officially recorded by authorities on either side of the border.

A key feature of SSCBT is that most traders are women who rely on it for income to support their families and communities. This type of trade creates employment and contributes to food security and poverty reduction in West Africa – especially for women¹.

Most small-scale cross-border traders operate in a space between formal and informal trade. In formal trade, everything is recorded and traders follow the rules and regulations. In informal trade, like what Ada does, goods cross borders without any records or following regulations. There are different levels of formality between these extremes – for instance, some traders may follow some requirements, but not all of them.



1. World Bank. *West Africa trade and transport facilitation: Evaluation of the implementation of the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS)*. 2020. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/426931590681026830-0090022020/original/WestAfrica.pdf>

When is SSCBT informal or illegal?

SSCBT is informal when traders with permitted goods choose not to pass through the official border post because, for instance, they cannot afford the costs of formal trade or they do not know how to comply with border procedures and regulations. Goods are permitted or legitimate in cross-border trade when they comply with national legislation and regulations in the country of origin.

NGOZI



ADA

Every day I walk many kilometres to cross the border. I do not cross at official border posts because I will be asked to fill in many papers and pay fees and taxes. All these will slow me down and reduce the money I earn.



Traders who act in bad faith – that is, they intend to deceive – to avoid border post controls and duties/taxes at borders are engaging in illegal trade or smuggling. Illegal trade can also mean selling prohibited goods to make a profit.



Ada's practices are informal because her products do not pass any official checkpoints. It is not illegal, because her products are legal in Benin, and she is not intending to bypass the proper channels.

Ngozi's practices are illegal because she is intentionally bypassing official channels and authorities to sell prohibited goods.

03.

How does informal SSCBT contribute to inclusive economic development?

Though it is difficult to measure informal cross-border trade, it is believed to account for 30%–40% of trade in Africa². Despite its nature, informal trade contributes to economic growth and development, as well as women's economic empowerment. This happens because:

1. Informal SSCBT provides employment and livelihood opportunities for women and helps reduce poverty.

Women play a vital role in cross-border trade in Africa, especially in informal SSCBT. This form of trade is attractive to most traders because of the flexibility it offers, its low cost and the earning opportunities it provides in border areas where no other employment option is available. Women make up the largest part of informal traders, representing 70%–80% of informal trade in sub-Saharan Africa³.

About 85% of jobs in Africa are informal⁴. Informal SSCBT provides a source of income for about 43% of Africa's population⁵.

2. Informal SSCBT contributes to food security in regions that lack access to safe and nutritious food.

One of the most common items traded informally across African borders is staple food⁶ such as cassava, rice and yams. The flexibility of informal SSCBT makes

it easier for food to reach regions facing food shortages. In West Africa, on the Ouagadougou–Accra corridor alone, about 17,500 tons of cereals and 96,000 heads of livestock are traded every year, with more than half traded informally⁷.

Women cross-border traders play a key role in food security, nutrition and health in Africa. Through informal cross-border trade, they bring essential foods to places with low supply. In West Africa, women informal traders in essential food represent about 30% of total trade in the region⁸.

3. Informal SSCBT leads to regional integration and development.

Official records often show that the value and volume of African intraregional trade are low compared with other regions. In light of the scale of informal SSCBT, however, intra-African trade has much greater economic significance than is commonly believed.

Informal SSCBT greatly influences the movement of goods and leads to growth and development by enabling goods and resources to flow across borders. By making trade easier between countries, informal SSCBT also supports regional economic integration in West Africa.

2. Aderonmu, F. *Formalizing Africa's informal sector through the AfCFTA: An opportunity for economic transformation*. Journal of Public and International Affairs, 11 September 2023. <https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/formalizing-africas-informal-sector-through-afcfta-opportunity-economic-transformation>

3. UNCTAD. *What future for women small-scale and informal cross-border traders when borders close?* 6 April 2021. <https://unctad.org/news/what-future-women-small-scale-and-informal-cross-border-traders-when-borders-close>

4. International Labour Organization. *More than 60 per cent of the world's employed population are in the informal economy*. 30 April 2018. https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_627189/lang-en/index.htm

5. African Export-Import Bank. *African trade report 2020: Informal cross-border trade in Africa in the context of the AfCFTA*. Cairo: Afreximbank, 2021. <https://media.afreximbank.com/afrexim/African-Trade-Report-2020.pdf>

6. World Bank. *Connecting food staples and input markets in West Africa: A regional value chain approach for ECOWAS countries*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2015. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/918631468197340135/pdf/97279-REVISED-Box393265B-PUBLIC-Connecting0foo0for0ECOWAS0countries.pdf>

7. World Bank. (2020). *West Africa trade and transport facilitation: Evaluation of the implementation of the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS)*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/426931590681026830-0090022020/original/WestAfrica.pdf>

8. Der Boghossian, A. *Remarks at the launch of WTO training module for women cross-border traders in Africa*. World Trade Organization, 7 December 2022. https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news22_e/women_07dec22_e.htm

04. What risks and challenges do women encounter when engaging in informal SSCBT?

ADA

Whenever I cross the border, I'm nervous about being confronted by officials. They could fine me, or take away my produce.



It could be even worse... some of my friends have been robbed or assaulted while trying to cross the border informally. It scares me, but I have no choice – this is my livelihood.



In this example, Ada risks being fined and/or arrested when crossing the border informally. This means she risks losing her goods and more money, which could jeopardize her business. She also may face security risks as she is more likely to be robbed or physically injured when crossing the border informally. This affects not only Ada, but other women cross-border traders.

A United Nations study found that one in two women cross-border traders in West Africa had experienced harassment during their trip⁹. Another study identified the Nigeria–Benin border as a hotspot for such treatment¹⁰.

Women cross-border traders such as Ada face other risks when using informal crossing points.



HARASSMENT at the border is any unwelcome actions, words or behaviour from border officials, vendors, traders, touts or others. This can involve mocking, demeaning, insulting or ridiculing small-scale cross-border traders, making them feel uncomfortable, fearful or aggravated. It also includes unwanted sexual advances or contact without consent.

Guide 4 will present different types of harassment in detail.

9. African Development Bank. *Informal cross-border trade in Africa: Implications and policy recommendations*. Economic Brief, 2012. <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/document/economic-brief-informal-cross-border-trade-in-africa-implications-and-policy-recommendations-30008>

10. United Nations. *Gender equality and trade policy*. WomenWatch, 2004. https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/trade/gender_equality_and_trade_policy.pdf

NGOZI

One day, I was on my way to the border crossing when a group of men approached me and told me that they could help me cross without papers.



At first I was happy to receive the help.



But things turned suddenly. They started harassing me, and telling me that if I didn't pay a large sum, they'd report me to the authorities. I was scared and paid to protect myself. I earned nothing that day.



Inadequate security at informal borders means women like Ngozi often face harassment and corruption. The lack of regulation can lead to increased stigma and violence.



Because they do not use formal channels, Ada and Ngozi are exposed to greater risks – both to their businesses and to their personal safety.

Avoiding an official border post may look like the easier and cheaper option – but in reality, it exposes traders to threats of harassment, crime, and even legal consequences.

While taking an informal route across the border, I encountered a group of traders who offered to help me transport my goods. It seemed like a good opportunity, but as time passed while we traveled together, I heard them discussing plans involving human trafficking and smuggling drugs and weaponed. I was alarmed – I realized that I had unknowingly aligned myself with dangerous individuals.



In this example, Ada risks being linked with human trafficking, drugs and weapons smuggling. She realizes that the risks of informal trade go far beyond simply crossing the border. Every day, many women traders face similar situations that threaten their lives and livelihoods.

Informal SSCBT can lead to other challenges as well, such as unfair competition and greater health and environmental risks. This can discourage official traders and make it difficult for governments to implement trade facilitation measures or procedures that might improve trading experience and efficiency.



SMUGGLING refers to the illegal movement of goods, people or substances across borders. Human trafficking is the exploitation of people for purposes such as forced labour, sexual exploitation or organs removal.



TRADE FACILITATION refers to the process of simplifying the movement of goods and services across borders so trade is faster, cheaper and more efficient.

Guide 3 will describe the trade facilitation processes in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY (SPS) measures are technical measures designed to protect human, animal and plant life or health; promote food safety; and protect against risks from cross-border spread of contaminants, diseases and pests. Women involved in formal SSCBT must present an SPS certificate at the border.

Guide 2 explains the importance of SPS. It also details the documents required and the border officials women may encounter when crossing borders.

Exercises

1. Which of the following could happen if you bypass the border post when taking your goods to sell in another country?

- A** Getting fined
- B** Going to jail
- C** Have your goods confiscated
- D** None of the above

Answer: A, B, C. Besides increasing your chances of becoming a victim of robbery and/or harassment, crossing informally into another country means you could be caught by border officials undertaking random inspection drills. If you are caught, the following could happen to you:

- Officials confiscate your goods as a punishment
- You must pay a fine for trying to bypass the law
- In rare cases, being arrested and forced to spend time in jail

This is why you are strongly urged to opt for the border post rather than an informal route!

2. Choose the correct response to this statement: It is important to ensure that authorities check your plant and animal products before you transport them across the border.

- A** No, you can check the products yourself and decide if they can be transported across the border.
- B** It is not necessary for anybody to check your plant or animal products before crossing the border, as long as you trust that your supplier is honest.
- C** Authorities need to check that your plant and animal products meet the standards required before crossing the border to ensure that they are free of disease and pests that could harm other plants and animals.

Answer: C. Each country has its own standards on pesticides, fertilizers and other agricultural and animal products. Traders cannot guarantee that their plant or animal products are free from harmful parasites or diseases. This is why it is crucial for a professional to inspect your goods before you cross the border, to prevent contamination of animals, people or the environment.

3. There is a greater chance that you could be robbed, harassed or come to harm if you use informal crossing points. Is this statement true or false?

- A** True
- B** False

Answer: This is A – true. Informal crossing points lack clear road networks and official border agent presence to ensure security. This can put traders at greater risk of physical harm or loss of goods when crossing informally.

What are the advantages and opportunities for women to transition from informal to formal SSCBT?

Formal SSCBT can offer women considerable benefits and opportunities. However, it can create major challenges when border post conditions are poor and stakeholders involved in formal trade are not truthful.

In this section, we explore the advantages of shifting from informal to formal trade and summarize the difficulties women may face in the formal trading environment. The following guides will discuss the various stakeholders in the formal trade ecosystem and outline measures to enhance transparency and efficiency.

NGOZI

After that experience, I decided it was wiser and safer to go through an official border post. I went to Seme-Kraké Joint Border Post to get more information about trading formally.

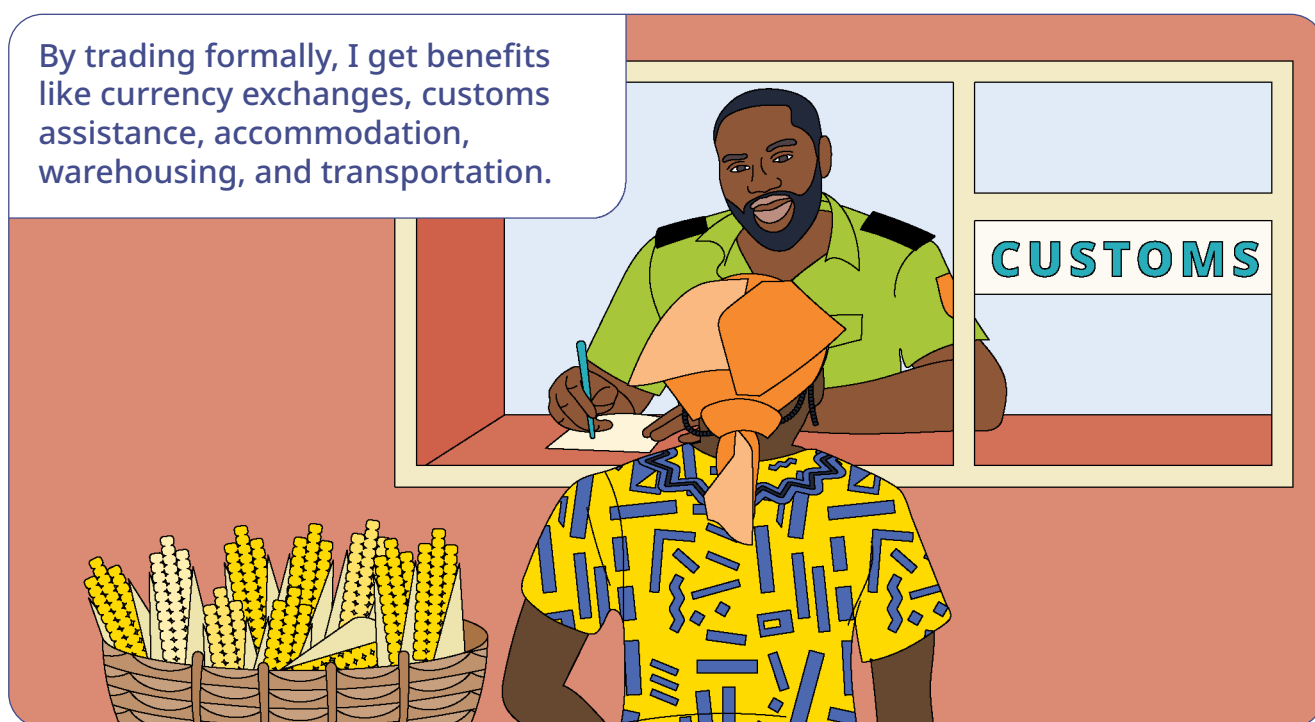


I also learned that trading formally gives me access to benefits through ECOWAS!



THE ETLS¹¹ promotes duty-free trade among member states for agricultural, livestock, fishery, industrial, artisanal and unprocessed goods, provided ECOWAS rules of origin are met. For women small-scale cross-border traders in the agricultural sector, the ETLS offers important benefits. Agricultural and livestock products are exempt from the requirement of a certificate of origin, allowing women traders to cross official borders without paying duties or needing additional paperwork for these goods.

11. For more information about the ETLS, see <https://etls.ecowas.int/about-etls/>



In this example, Ngozi can now cross the border safely thanks to the presence of police, immigration and customs officers. These authorities control and monitor who and what enters and leaves the country to protect citizens and improve security.

NGOZI

Better infrastructure is also available to Ngozi, making her trip safer and faster. At the official border post, she can access official services and save money if the border agent is honest. Finally, she can take advantage of official cross-border trade by using trade-related information to adjust her activities and explore new business opportunities.

One day, at the border crossing, I met Fanta. Fanta is also a trader, and she invited me to join a network of other women traders.



From the network, I've learned all kinds of things. The network taught me about loan opportunities and grants, and they have given me advice for my business. I also learn about training that could help me grow my business.



When women small-scale traders use official border posts, their activities can be registered and formalized, creating opportunities to grow their businesses. Formalization enables them to work with large buyers, access credit and qualify for membership in women's cross-border traders associations. Registering a business and obtaining a tax identification number also allows women traders to engage with the public sector – including participating public procurement processes. It means they can access finance, credit and other services to grow their business.

The benefits of formal trade are not only limited to women small-scale cross border traders, but extend to the whole community and society.

Now that I'm a formal trader, I can get a sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) certificate for my corn at the border. Because my corn is edible and safe for human consumption, my customers are happy to pay higher prices. This covers the costs of my trading practices.



The informal economy creates unfair competition for formal traders because informal traders sell goods at lower prices. Increasing the number of formal businesses can promote fair competition, improve working conditions, generate better job opportunities and boost productivity. Formal trade also helps protect public health and the environment by ensuring that imports and exports – such as pesticides, fertilizer, animals and plant products – comply with health certifications and border regulations.

Exercises

A) You can do nothing if you encounter abuse or harassment when crossing at a border post.

TRUE FALSE

B) Border posts could have better infrastructure than informal crossing points.

TRUE FALSE

C) Informal traders can sell their goods to the government through tenders, increasing their revenue.

TRUE FALSE

D) Both formal and informal traders can issue an invoice, if asked by a customer.

TRUE FALSE

E) Consumers do not care about the origin of the goods they buy and do not worry if phytosanitary controls are absent.

TRUE FALSE

F) Formal and informal traders compete fairly in their businesses.

TRUE FALSE

G) The taxes paid by formal businesses and traders can help governments improve the services offered to citizens.

TRUE FALSE

Answer:

A) This is false. In fact, you can follow procedures to report abuse or harassment at a border post. Traders who cross the border at an informal point are unable to access these procedures.

B) This is true. Border posts can have better road networks, toilet facilities and clean water for traders and livestock than informal crossing points.

C) This is false. Public purchasing initiatives aimed at helping small businesses often require a minimum degree of formality from suppliers. This includes interaction with border and customs agents.

D) This is false. Only formal traders can issue invoices, which allows them to reach more customers, including medium-sized and large companies. Consumers typically want safe products for themselves and families – especially when it comes to food.

E) This is false. Consumers typically want safe products for themselves and families – especially when it comes to food.

F) This is false. It creates unfair competition because formal traders often have to sell goods at higher prices to cover the compliance costs and taxes that informal traders avoid.

G) This is true. A large share of local and national government budgets comes from taxes. Countries with good and transparent governance use these taxes, in general, to finance a variety of services, including schools and hospitals.



Using formal border posts brings important benefits to small-scale cross-border traders like Ada and Ngozi.

By using these posts, traders like yourselves can benefit from:

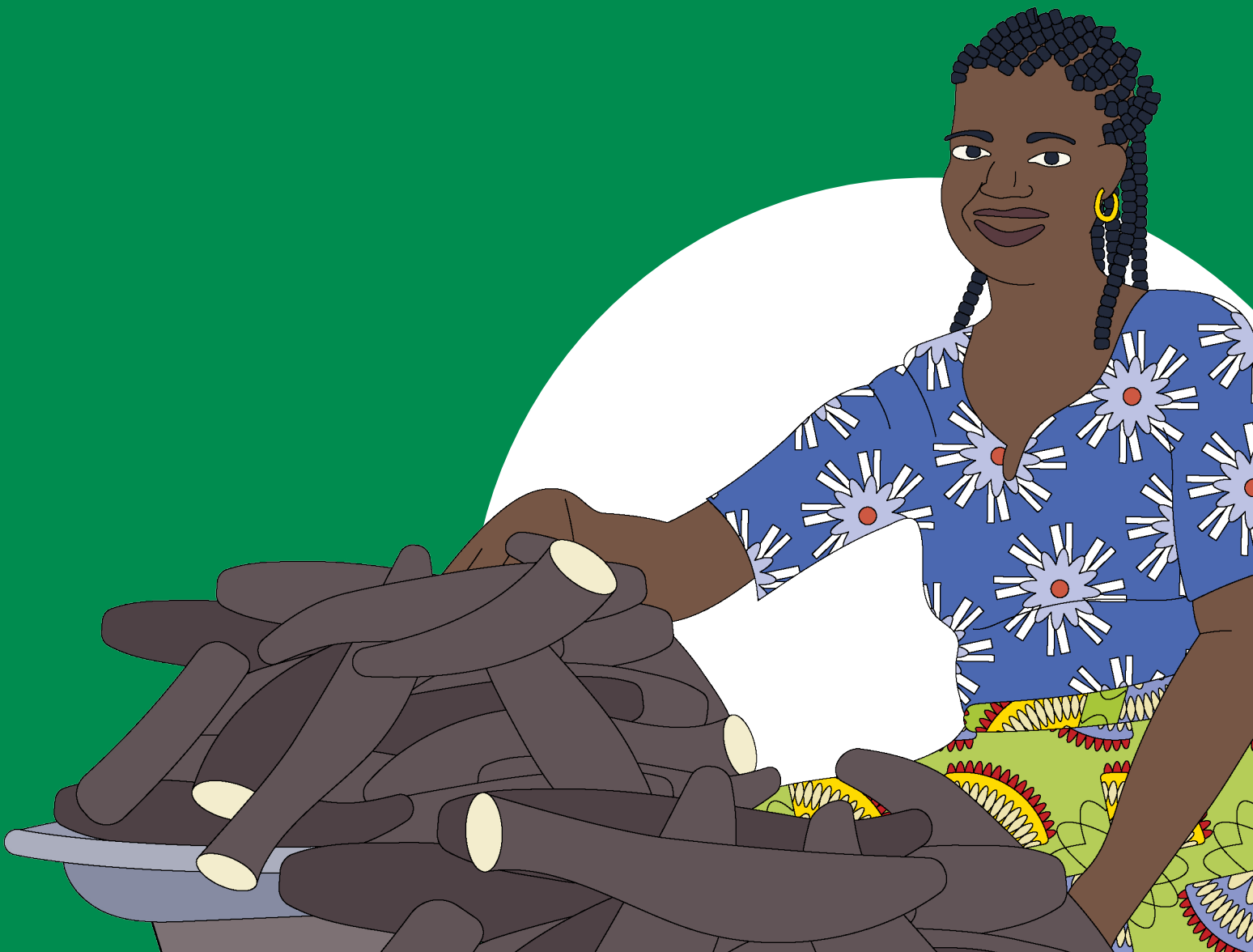
- Legal and protected trade
- Access to ECOWAS trade benefits, such as the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS)
- Avoidance of smuggling fines, extortion and harassment

Summary

1. Small-scale cross-border trade supports women's leadership and skills in West Africa by providing income and employment opportunities and contributing to food security and poverty reduction.
2. Women engaged in informal SSCBT often face challenges including safety risks, harassment, corruption and potential legal consequences stemming from the informal nature of their activities.
3. Formalizing SSCBT can offer benefits to women traders, such as improved safety and access to essential services, infrastructure and trade-related information – as long as the border ecosystem is efficient, ethical and transparent. Formal SSCBT can also open new markets, provide financial support and improve business stability.
4. Switching to formal trade can ensure fair competition, improve border controls and lower the risk of health and environmental hazards, contributing to regional economic growth and integration.

02

Navigating border crossings: Officials, controls and essential documents



Learning objectives

This section covers the following learning points:

- Learn about border posts, border controls and border officials
- Identify the officials women typically encounter when crossing border posts
- Know the roles of the different border officials, the types of border controls and the documents needed to cross border posts

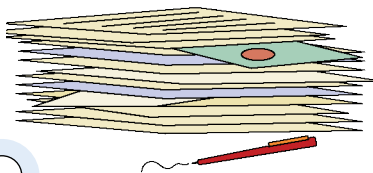
What is an official border?

Borders are boundaries or lines that show where one territory ends and another begins. They can separate countries, states or cities and often represent the control and authority of governments over their land.

In West Africa, however, many communities view these borders as divisions that do not always reflect the shared cultural, family and historical ties between people living on both sides. This interconnectedness, combined with other factors such as limited resources and infrastructure, can make it challenging to enforce trade-related rules and regulations (e.g. customs checks or tariffs) at borders.¹²

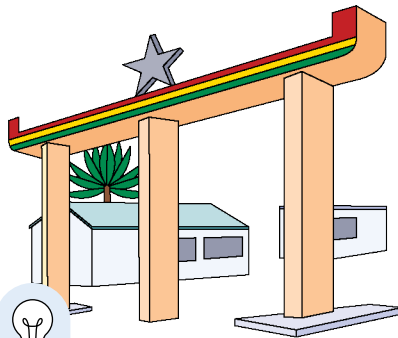
Nevertheless, the significance of borders has changed over time. Today, official borders are not just where countries control the movement of people and goods entering or exiting their territory. They also aim to ensure that people and goods comply with national laws on **security and safety, commercial policy, food and agriculture, customs procedures, environment and migration**.¹³

When women engage in SSCBT at the official border, they need to understand three related elements that refer to different aspects of international border management: border controls, border posts and border officials.



BORDER CONTROLS

are the measures and procedures that countries use to regulate the movement of people and goods across their borders. This includes immigration checks, customs inspections, security measures, health regulations and other checks.



A BORDER POST is a physical location where controls are conducted. It is the place where people and vehicles enter or exit a country.



BORDER OFFICIALS

are government representatives responsible for enforcing laws and regulations and monitoring the regular flow of people, goods and services across borders. They represent everyone with whom women traders will interact when operating across borders.

12. Afreximbank. *African Trade Report 2020*. 2020. <https://media.afreximbank.com/afrexim/African-Trade-Report-2020.pdf>

13. International Organization for Migration (IOM). *Thematic Paper: Border Management*. 2017. https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1486/files/our_work/ODG/GCM/IOM-Thematic-Paper-Border-Management.pdf



Amina is a 26-year-old cross-border trader from Ghana. She lives in Aflao, on the Ghana–Togo border, and owns a small piece of land where she grows cassava for her business. Every week, Amina travels to Togo through the Aflao–Lome border crossing to sell fresh cassava at the border market in Lome town where she has a stall.

AMINA

When I arrive at the border post, I pass through the border controls to declare my goods to customs authorities. I need to fill out declaration forms, show my ID, and hand over other documents like my SPS certificate for my cassava¹⁴. This certificate shows that my cassava comply with the regulations on food safety and animal and human health in Togo.



Like Amina, many women in formal and informal SSCBT – especially those living in border communities – think border controls are unnecessary. In fact, people often see border posts as an obstacle to cross-border trade.

However, border controls serve essential purposes:

- Without these controls, diseases, pests and contaminants could easily spread among animals and plants.
- Removing border controls could lead to increased trafficking of humans, drugs and weapons.

Thus, border controls are important because they aim to ensure the safety and health of people, animals and the environment.

14. Women engaged in formal SSCBT must be aware of the list of goods that require SPS certificates. See <https://www.macmap.org/>

Which officials do women typically encounter when crossing borders?

Borders do much more than simply mark physical boundaries. They form a **complex** network of people, including **women traders** and **border officials**, as well as **cross-border trade associations (CBTAs)**.

Women involved in formal SSCBT play a key role in supporting the local economy by contributing to household incomes, ensuring food availability and diversity, and fostering regional integration.



CBTAs advocate for and represent the interests of both formal and informal traders – especially women – in negotiations with government and international organizations to promote favourable trade policies and regulations. These associations also seek to create a platform where women traders can access networks, markets, training and support services.

For more information on CBTAs in the ECOWAS region, please refer to Guides 4 and 5.

Border officials include immigration, health, plant health and veterinary authorities as well as representatives from public health, customs and security agencies. Each official plays a different role.

Official border posts can greatly improve the experience of women traders – provided border officials carry out their duties effectively and with integrity. When police, immigration and customs officers perform their tasks ethically and transparently, formal SSCBT can result in benefits ranging from better safety and health to environmental protection and business growth opportunities.



While the process may seem simple, the reality on the ground can be challenging. However, this model of doing business ensures that Amina's operations are legal and secure, giving her confidence in the stability and legitimacy of her business.

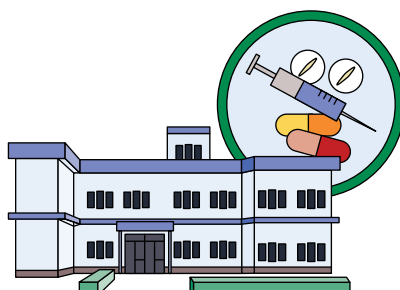
In this example, Amina interacts with each actor as she crosses the official border. As a result, she better understands the role of each actor and the administrative procedures at the border post.

The illustrations below summarize the main actors and their roles when crossing the border. The information here about the agencies and their responsibilities may vary from country to country.



IMMIGRATION OFFICE

- Manages and regulates the movement of people across borders
- Gives entry or exit permission to traders involved in formal SSCBT



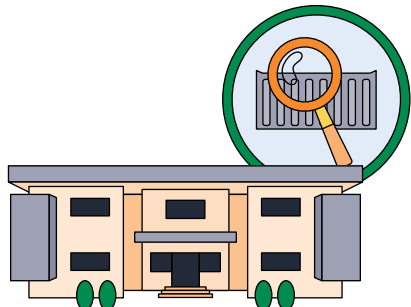
PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY

- Protects and improves the health of populations



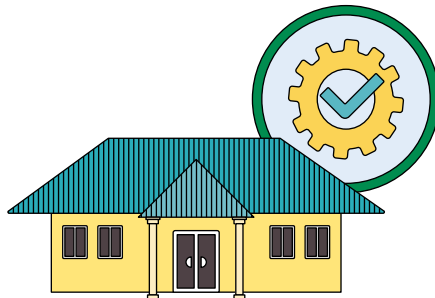
PLANT HEALTH AND VETERINARY AUTHORITIES

- Safeguard agricultural health and ensure food safety



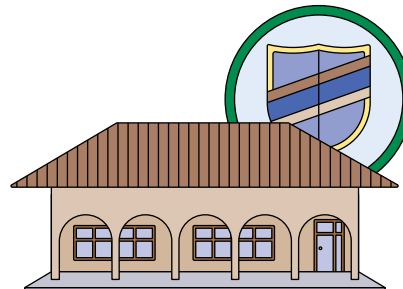
CUSTOMS AGENCY AND/OR REVENUE AUTHORITY

- Collects the duties and taxes and controls the importation, exportation, movement or storage of goods
- Prevents smuggling



BUREAU OF STANDARDS (OR QUALITY CONTROL AGENCY)

- Helps ensure the products that are traded – such as plants, animals and pesticides – are safe by testing, verifying, inspecting and certifying them
- Ensures products meet quality standards to protect the health of humans, animals and plants, as well as the environment



SECURITY AGENCIES

- Prevent illegal cross-border activities such as weapons trafficking, drug smuggling and human trafficking, and detects threats to national security
- Monitor borders and control the movement of people and vehicles entering and leaving the country

Exercises

1. Border controls are designed to ensure safety by preventing:

- ☒ A Smuggling
- ☐ B All traders from crossing the border
- ☐ C Human trafficking
- ☐ D Legal currency exchange
- ☐ E Transnational crimes
- ☐ F The import/export of goods that are unsafe to humans, plants, animals and/or the environment

Answer: A, C, E, F. Borders do not prevent traders from crossing, nor do they prevent legal currency exchanges. Instead, they aim to ensure that formal businesses comply with the laws and regulations to carry out cross-border business activities.

2. Are the following statements about border controls true or false?

A) Removing border controls would not have negative effects on the supply and demand, competition and consumer behaviour inside a country.

☒ TRUE ☐ FALSE

B) One of the goals of conducting border controls is to secure human and animal health.

☒ TRUE ☐ FALSE

C) Border controls aim to improve the security and safety of countries by curbing criminal activities related to trafficking and transnational crimes.

☒ TRUE ☐ FALSE

Answer A): This is false. Official borders and border controls aim to maintain market prices and reduce unfair competition by preventing informal traders who do not pay duties and other fees and can therefore charge lower prices.

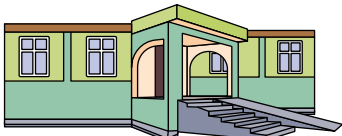
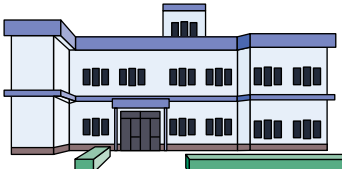
Answer B): This is true. Border controls help stop plant and animal diseases from entering a country and help ensure that sanitary and phytosanitary standards are met.

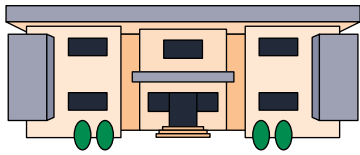
Answer C): This is true. Moreover, border controls help governments to investigate and prevent terrorist activities.

What types of documents are needed when crossing borders?

For women like Amina engaged in formal SSCBT, crossing borders can seem complicated due to the multiple agencies at border posts, each with its own requirements. Knowing what documents are needed, where to get them, what fees to pay and the rules for different products can be confusing.

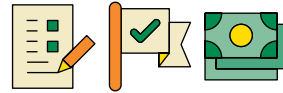
The table below lists the documents required by each agency to cross a border. The information in the table may vary from country to country.

BORDER OFFICIALS	ROLE(S)	REQUIREMENTS
 IMMIGRATION OFFICE	- Checks immigration documents including valid travel documents such as passports, identification or cross-border pass, which can be obtained from immigration authorities (embassies, consulate, passport office in your country). - Stamps the entry or exit permission	 Identification Passport Cross-border pass – An official document or permit that allows people or goods to cross international borders Entry or exit stamps, passes and/or visas
 PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY	Checks proof of vaccination, such as a yellow fever certificate	 Contagious diseases vaccination booklet: Aims to prevent the spread of contagious diseases such as Ebola, tuberculosis and yellow fever while minimizing unnecessary interference with travel and trade
 PLANT HEALTH AND VETERINARY AUTHORITIES	- Checks export/import permits - Checks the SPS certificate	 SPS certificate and/or permit: Aims to limit the spread of diseases transmitted by animals (e.g. bird flu), as well as pests or diseases that affect animals, plants or the environment



**CUSTOMS AGENCY
AND/OR REVENUE
AUTHORITY**

- Checks customs declaration form
- Checks the certificate of origin if products are subject to preferential treatment¹⁵



- **Customs declaration form:** Shows the lists and detailed description of goods bound for import or export
- **Certificate of origin** if the products are subject to preferential treatment. This helps to verify where a product was manufactured or produced. As noted, CoOs are not required for agricultural goods in the ECOWAS region.
- **Pay taxes and duties:** The tax amount or calculation can be obtained through:
 - > The four tariff bands of the Common External Tariff,¹⁶ which applies the same customs duties, import quotas and preferences in ECOWAS.
 - > Customs duty calculators
 - > Trade information portal of your country
 - > One-stop foreign trade portal

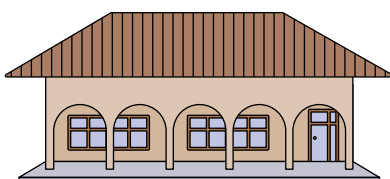


**BUREAU OF
STANDARDS
(OR QUALITY
CONTROL AGENCY)**

- Checks and certifies products' quality standards



- **Quality control and inspection certificate for import and export (if available)**



SECURITY AGENCIES



- ID
- Passport

Women engaged in cross-border trade should know what documents they will need and how to complete them correctly. It is also important to know about any necessary vaccinations, which can vary by country. Cross-border traders should always carry a travel document or pass and ensure that their goods have the appropriate certifications.

15. Certificates of origin are not required for agricultural goods in the ECOWAS region.

16. For more information about the ECOWAS Common External Tariff, see https://ecotis.ecowas.int/?page_id=24111

Exercises

1. Which of the following agencies are you not likely to encounter at the border?

- ☒ A Customs agency
- ☒ B Bureau of standards
- ☒ C Media agency
- ☒ D Immigration agency
- ☒ E Veterinary and public health agencies

Answer: C. Generally, no media agencies are at the border.

2. The purpose of a quality control agency is to:

- ☒ A Guarantee the safety and quality of products and services
- ☒ B Prevent the spread of pests and diseases
- ☒ C Ensure traders have the right travel documents
- ☒ D Protect humans, animals, plants and the environment
- ☒ E Collect duties, fees and taxes

Answer: A, B, D. This agency aims to guarantee the safety and quality of products and services, prevent the spread of pests and diseases, and protect humans, plants, animals and the environment.

3. What are the risks of not securing health clearance when transporting livestock across the border?

- ☒ A I risk spreading animal diseases to people
- ☒ B I risk contaminating the environment
- ☒ C I risk spreading animal diseases to other animals
- ☒ D There are no risks

Answer: A, B, C. When transporting livestock across the border without a health clearance, you may spread diseases both to other animals and to people. You may also contaminate the environment.

4. Are the following statements true or false?

A) The main purpose of border immigration officers is to facilitate the legitimate movement of people across the border.

☒ TRUE ☒ FALSE

B) You must get authorization from the local immigration agency before entering or exiting a country.

☒ TRUE ☒ FALSE

C) Some governments may require that you obtain a yellow fever vaccination certificate to cross the border or enter their country.

☒ TRUE ☒ FALSE

Answer: A) This is true. The key word here is 'legitimate'. Immigration officers aim to facilitate the movement of people across the border, while preventing crime.

Answer: B) This is true. Immigration officers clear you to cross borders formally, usually by stamping your travel document.

Answer: C) This is true. You should verify the required vaccinations before crossing the border.

Summary

1. Borders are complex ecosystems involving various actors with different economic and political functions. Crossing official border posts allows women traders to access formal trade opportunities, avoid illegal activities and receive support for business growth – provided that border officials and controls are efficient, ethical and transparent.
2. Border controls are designed to ensure compliance with health and safety standards, reduce disease and pest spread, and protect the environment. They safeguard women traders by ensuring that goods meet necessary standards, reduce risks of crime and violence, and protect traders from illegal practices.
3. At official borders, women engaging in formal SSCBT typically interact with customs, immigration, human and plant health, and veterinary authorities. They must present the correct documents, including travel documents, SPS certificates and customs declarations.

03

Creating opportunities for women through formal trade: Improving transparency and efficiency



Learning objectives

This section of the trade guide will cover the following learning points:

- The policy environment, activities and tools that can benefit women during formal SSCBT
- Practical steps to prepare for successful formal SSCBT in the ECOWAS region
- Gaps that policymakers should address to enhance trade facilitation for women engaged in formal SSCBT in the region

01.

What are the key aspects of the policy environment for formal SSCBT?

Governments acknowledge the challenges that traders, especially women, encounter in formal SSCBT and have adopted measures to address them. A clear understanding of government policies and regulations, coupled with the integrity and fairness of border officials, can greatly improve the experience of women involved in formal SSCBT at border crossings. Therefore, both these women and border agents must be familiar with measures to improve the transparency and efficiency of cross-border trade.

Trade restrictions



Before Ngozi and Amina began their formal cross-border trade of agrifood products at the Seme-Krake and Aflao-Lome borders, they navigated all the necessary administrative procedures at the border posts. However, they still lacked adequate information about policies and regulations that affect their businesses.

NGOZI



Because I'd been getting more customers, I started to grow more corn. But then, a few days before my corn was ready for sale, the Nigerian authorities announced that the Seme-Krake border was closed.

This took me by surprise. I could not cross the border to sell my corn and lost a lot of money. I was told that the border closure was meant to protect Beninese farms.



Something similar happened to me once. The Aflao–Lome border had closed for security reasons, and I could not sell my cassava for a few weeks. My family and I struggled a lot because I could not bring in money for a while.



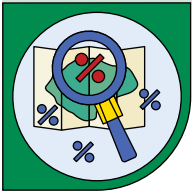
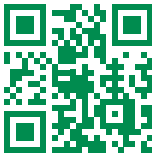
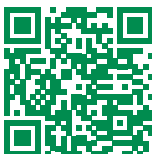
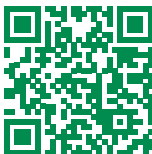
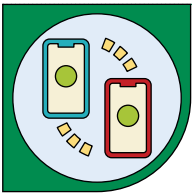
Women can better anticipate their cross-border trade activities by being aware of restrictions and the differences between national and regional policies.

Trade restrictions are rules that countries create based on their own needs and interests. These rules may not always follow the trade agreements made by ECOWAS, which are meant to make trading easier between countries. Sometimes, governments use trade restrictions to keep their people safe or to protect local farms and businesses. These restrictions can include requiring special permits, getting approval from customs or even closing land borders.

Each country in the ECOWAS region has its own rules on what can and cannot be traded. For example, bringing livestock or alcohol into Côte d'Ivoire requires prior authorization or permits. Togo has banned fish imports since 2015. More recently, in 2018, Côte d'Ivoire began to require import permits for smoked fish.

The following trade tools can help women in formal SSCBT find the resources and information they need about trade restrictions in ECOWAS countries.

Table 1. Practical tools to help identify trade restrictions in ECOWAS countries

TOOLS	WHAT CAN YOU DO?	LINK
 MARKET ACCESS MAP	• Identify customs tariffs, tariff rate quotas, trade remedies, regulatory requirements and preferential regimes applicable to your product. • Find tariff information and other market-access requirements quickly, easily and free of charge on the home page. • Compare customs tariffs imposed on your products in multiple markets using interactive charts and maps. • Compare customs tariffs faced by your competitors in the destination market and see if you have a tariff advantage relative to them.	
 TRADE OBSTACLE ALERT MECHANISM	• Report online the obstacles you face when exporting or importing. National authorities and trade operators will be alerted about the obstacles reported and responses provided. Policymakers and trade support institutions can access an up-to-date database on the obstacles faced by the private sector and adopt the appropriate policies to respond to them.	 Visit the Trade Obstacle Alert Mechanism website  Install the Trade Obstacle Alert Mechanism mobile application
 RULES OF ORIGIN	• Learn about import duties in foreign markets that apply to your product, available duty savings, detailed rules of origin and certification procedures.	
 EPING ALERT	• Track sanitary and phytosanitary and technical barriers to trade measure.	
 BORDERLESS ALLIANCE	• Access mobile numbers to facilitate the reporting process of non-tariff barriers (NTBs) by SSCBTs. At the time of writing, the reporting phone numbers are only available in Ghana.	+233 547 38 38 75 (Ghana)

SOURCE: ITC Desk research

ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme

NGOZI

During a recent trip across the Seme-Krake border into Nigeria, officials from the Agricultural Quarantine Service came up to me. They told me that I needed to pay them a fee for inspecting my goods and refused to go until I did so.



Ngozi's corn, as an agricultural product, is exempt from duties. But because she was unfamiliar with regulations and fees that would apply to her produce, she was easily pressured into paying a fee that she did not actually need to pay.

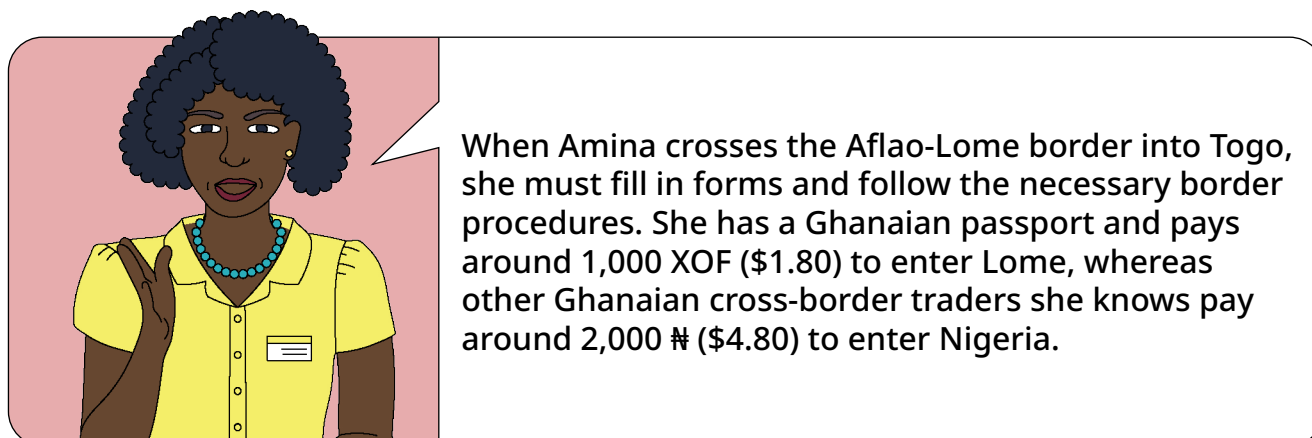
Women in formal SSCBT like Ngozi often face challenges at official borders because they lack knowledge about the policy environment – such as the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS). This instrument allows goods produced in West Africa to be traded without paying customs duties or facing trade restrictions. The ETLS helps businesses expand across ECOWAS countries by removing barriers such as extra tariffs and complicated paperwork.

Women in formal SSCBT can benefit from the ETLS when trading agricultural products, livestock, fish, artisanal goods and unprocessed items. They do not need a certificate of origin for these items, making it easier and cheaper to do business across borders.

Women traders can obtain more information about the ETLS from the focal points of member states' national approval committees.¹⁷

17. To find out who to contact, please visit <https://etls.ecowas.int/contact/>

ECOWAS free movement and travel facilitation



Women traders can take advantage of free movement and travel facilitation in the region. The ECOWAS travel certificate, which acts as a regional passport, allows them to travel freely in ECOWAS countries without needing a visa or paying visa fees.

But even with the travel certificate, some women traders are still asked to pay fees to enter countries in the region. They may encounter unfair treatment, bribery requests and other challenging behaviours from border officials that can increase the cost of engaging in formal SSCBT. This lowers their profit margins and may encourage them to turn to informal SSCBT.

Only six countries in the region – Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Ghana, Benin, the Gambia, and Sierra Leone – use national biometric identity cards to facilitate cross-border trade. These cards aim to facilitate free movement, promote regional integration and enhance security. Traders say the high cost to obtain travel documents and their short validity periods make it more expensive for them to do business across borders.

The lack of transparency and awareness about the ECOWAS travel certificate among border officials and traders, particularly women in formal SSCBT, means some border officials may not apply ECOWAS trade policies. This can increase costs. Governments should support women traders and border officials in understanding ECOWAS trade policies and benefits.

Simplified customs procedures

NGOZI

The other day, I had a smaller than usual harvest of corn that I wanted to sell at the Nigerian border. But this time, when I got to the border, I had to stand in long queues and customs officials asked me for documents I had never heard of. The whole process was really confusing.



Ngozi could have avoided these delays if she had known about ECOWAS's simplified customs procedures. With her goods worth less than \$400, she could have cleared the border faster with the right documents.

Women traders with consignments worth up to 250,000 XOF (about \$400) can benefit from simplified customs procedures for their wares. Some countries in West Africa have introduced national initiatives to lower trade costs and/or simplify clearance procedures:

- By decreasing waiting times at borders, traders can move goods more quickly and efficiently, which is crucial for perishable products.
- By minimizing bureaucratic hurdles, traders can reduce the costs associated with lengthy customs clearance procedures and storage costs.

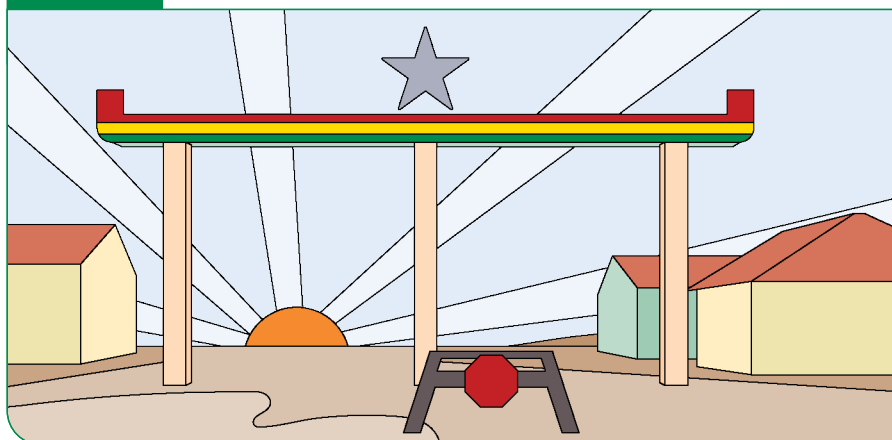
Simplified trade regimes

Simplified trade regimes (STRs) enable women to benefit from preferential trade opportunities. STRs simplify paperwork and streamline clearance processes for small-scale cross-border traders. They are one of the most recognized trade facilitation tools for small-scale traders, designed to ease formal border crossings and promote formalization. So far, STRs have been rolled out in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and the East African Community, but not yet in ECOWAS.

While progress has been made, there is still room for improvement in the ECOWAS region.

National and cross border interagency cooperation

AMINA



Crossing the border can be so frustrating! I arrived early in the morning at the Aflao-Lome border to trade formally for the first time. But the customs office wasn't open and no officials were there.

When the office finally opened and I made it through, there was another issue – the health inspection unit wasn't open. I learned that it had different operating hours, so there was nobody there to check my produce for compliance with safety standards. I only got to the market at the end of the day because of all this.



Sometimes, there can be coordination issues among government bodies that regulate cross-border trade. It is important for cross-border traders like Amina to check the operating hours of the various offices so that they can plan their border crossings.

Like Amina, other women in formal SSCBT may find that border opening hours vary. Governments should address this by setting standardized operating hours for border posts across neighbouring countries. They should also strengthen the joint border committee, which aims to operate as a consultative body, bringing together relevant control agencies to enhance collaboration, inclusivity and efficiency.

Borders that are not open around the clock may also contribute to nighttime trade along illegal unofficial routes. The absence of standardized opening hours could also expose women traders to unsafe conditions when they use unofficial routes after dark.

It is therefore important for women in formal SSCBT to check office opening hours and plan accordingly before crossing borders.

AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offers opportunities to women traders, especially in the agrifood sector. The agreement means:

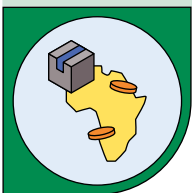
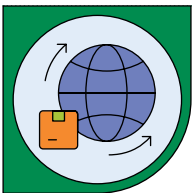
- the elimination of customs duties on many traded goods, so women traders can access markets at lower costs and increase their profit margins;
- the creation of a vast single market for goods and services across Africa, enabling women traders to expand their customer base beyond their national borders;
- support for women who trade informally across borders to move into the formal economy and access better resources and assistance;
- training and capacity-building resources specifically designed for women to improve their skills in business management, marketing and compliance.

By progressively harmonizing standards and scrapping tariffs, the AfCFTA is expected to boost trade across the continent. As a result, intra-African trade will become more seamless and countries will work to tackle inconsistencies in their technical measures.

In addition, the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade – which seeks to promote the participation of women and youth in trade – may represent an opportunity to identify more mechanisms to make trade facilitation in Africa more gender-inclusive and to adapt current initiatives to meet the specific and diverse needs of women agripreneurs.

The following table lists where to find advanced information on how to export in AfCFTA as well as online tools for a better market analysis plan.

Table 2. How to export with AfCFTA and create a market analysis plan

TOOLS	FEATURES	LINK
 INTRA-AFRICAN TRADE E-LEARNING	• Prepares African firms to take maximum advantage of intra-African trade and the AfCFTA • Offers practical guides on how to export in the AfCFTA	
 AFRICAN TRADE OBSERVATORY	• Provides African business with trade intelligence, including trends, opportunities and market access conditions • Enables government officials and policymakers to track the AfCFTA implementation process and assess its impact on their economies • Advanced Harmonized System code search is also available on the African Trade Observatory platform	
 MARKET ANALYSIS TOOLS PORTAL	• Provides a suite of online tools to make global trade more transparent and to facilitate access to markets • Enables business actors to identify export and import opportunities, compare market access requirements, monitor national trade performance and make well-informed trade decisions	

SOURCE: ITC Desk research

ECOWAS regional support programmes

AMINA

Another trader told me about an ECOWAS regional support programme that supports women in agriculture. Through this programme, I got a mentor who taught me new agricultural practices and helped me access financing to grow my business. It's been amazing to have someone who can answer my questions.



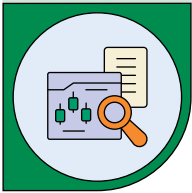
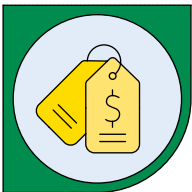
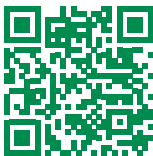
With this new knowledge, I have decided to open a second stall at the market.



Through various ECOWAS support programmes, women are able to access valuable information about trade requirements, procedures and market opportunities, so they can trade formally more effectively. The programmes do this through a helpdesk, a notification system and workshops.

Women can also contribute to the formulation, implementation and monitoring of intraregional trade development policies by participating in capacity-building workshops through their associations.

Table 3. Where to find information on trade requirements, procedures and opportunities

TOOLS	FEATURES	LINK
 GLOBAL TRADE HELPDESK	• Identify and evaluate trade opportunities across target markets • Prepare your business to expand into new markets • Find partners for financing, trade strategy development, distribution and more	
 MARKET PRICE INFORMATION	• Find free and up-to-date information on prices so you can anticipate shifting trends in international markets and make effective decisions	
 YOUR COUNTRY'S TRADE INFORMATION PORTAL OR ONE-STOP FOREIGN TRADE PORTAL	• Access clear and accurate information on trade procedures • Send complaints, report misconduct and propose simplifications	 NIGERIA  CÔTE D'IVOIRE
 ECOWAS TRADE INFORMATION SYSTEM	• Find relevant trade-related information and intelligence so you can make informed business decisions	

02.

What can women do to have a better experience at the border?

Many women in formal SSCBT struggle to cross the border officially. Here are the main steps these women can follow to have better experiences at the border.



1. UNDERSTAND THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

- Learn about the policies in the country where you are crossing the border – obtain information on trade restrictions and trade facilitation measures, duties and taxes, and any requirements.

2. KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

- You must present the required documents and pay duties at the border. You have the right to get a receipt for any payment made, to see the identity card or badge of any official, and to consult public documents about duties, taxes and other required fees. As a woman trader, you have the right to know the reason for a physical check, to demand that a woman official checks you and to be kept safe from harassment.

3. KNOW WHERE YOU CAN GET ASSISTANCE SHOULD YOU FACE ANY CHALLENGES AT THE BORDER

- If you face any difficulties at the border, you can get assistance with the Trade Information and Border Assistance Desk. You can seek help or report any problems you face to your women cross-border traders' association. You can also report online the obstacles you face when exporting or importing through the Trade Obstacles Alert Mechanism.¹⁸

4. PREPARE THE REQUIRED DOCUMENTS AND YOUR PRODUCTS

- Get your certificate of origin if the products are subject to preferential treatment
- Obtain the relevant SPS certificate and/or permit
- Fill out the customs declaration form

You are ready to go to the border!

Crossing officially may seem overwhelming at first, but is worth it in the long run. Formal trade can help you avoid hidden costs and the risks of informal crossings. Plus, it can build your reputation as a trader, opening doors for your business in the future.



18. Report obstacles here: <https://www.tradeobstacles.org/CountrySelection.aspx>

What remaining gaps must policymakers tackle?

03.

ECOWAS has adopted measures to facilitate cross-border trade among member countries. Challenges remain, however.

First, many stakeholders in the cross-border trade ecosystem are not fully aware of trade facilitation measures. Second, the lack of coordination between border posts creates serious issues related to time management and operational harmonization. Finally, inadequate transparency on trade measures and inefficient border operations can lead to more severe issues, such as corruption or extortion by border officials and/or violence against women.

Women often find themselves victims of extortion, sexual coercion and harassment by border officials or non-state actors due to their vulnerable status and limited bargaining power. Guides 4 and 5 will explore harassment and different forms of violence against women traders in greater detail – and propose solutions.

Governments can improve the policy environment for formal women traders by adopting instruments such as an ECOWAS simplified trade regime. Traders and businesswomen's associations should also advocate for the full implementation of these instruments through organizations and associations including the National Trade Facilitation Committees and the West African Association for Cross-Border Trade.

Exercises

Are the following statements true or false?

A) A simplified trade regime is already in place for small-scale cross-border traders in the ECOWAS region.

TRUE

FALSE

B) I can do nothing to improve the trading environment for small-scale cross-border traders in my region.

TRUE

FALSE

C) One of the key objectives of the trade facilitation instruments in the ECOWAS region is to improve access to information for small-scale cross-border traders by simplifying of border procedures.

TRUE

FALSE

D) Only large corporations are eligible to benefit from the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme – not women small-scale cross-border traders or small and medium-size firms.

TRUE

FALSE

Answer:

A) This is false. While some trade facilitation instruments have been adopted, there is no simplified trade regime for small-scale cross-border traders in the ECOWAS region. B) This is false. Everyone has a key role to play in advocating for full implementation of trade facilitation instruments and the introduction of a simplified trade regime in the ECOWAS region. For instance, women small-scale cross-border traders can start by building networks of women traders in their region. This will allow you to gather insights from others who face similar challenges and to present a collective voice advocating for change. You can collaborate with the women cross-border traders associations in your country to strengthen your advocacy efforts. You can also use evidence-based arguments and testimonials from other traders to simplify the trading process, including reducing bureaucratic hurdles, harmonizing regulations across borders and creating exemptions for small-scale traders. C) This is true. D) This is false. The ETL is open to all businesses, including large corporations, small and medium-size enterprises, and small-scale traders. The ETL can encourage participation from various economic actors, especially in informal and small-scale sectors, to boost regional trade and support local producers.

Summary

1. Women small-scale traders deal with many issues related to the cross-border trade environment – including trade restrictions, complex procedures, high costs and harassment at borders – that may drive them towards informal trading routes.
2. Simplifying trade procedures, reducing paperwork, and improving transparency at the border crossing can be crucial to making formal trade more accessible and cost-effective for women traders.
3. The ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme, alongside other regional trade facilitation efforts, can offer important opportunities to women traders. However, they need better implementation and awareness to reach their full potential. Establishing a simplified trade regime in West Africa may streamline cross-border processes and benefit women small-scale traders.
4. Women small-scale traders need to understand the policy environment, know their rights, know where they can get assistance when facing challenges at the border and prepare the required documents for their products.

04

Know your rights: How women traders can deal with gender-based violence



Learning objectives

This section seeks to support women small-scale cross-border traders in dealing with gender-based violence (GBV) and harassment at borders. It aims to help them defend their rights and take steps to protect their well-being and safety.

This trade guide will cover the following learning points:

- Understanding your rights
- How to react and protect yourself when faced with GBV
- Know the reporting channels and how to ensure that GBV and harassment cases are investigated, and justice is served
- What should governments do to prevent GBV?

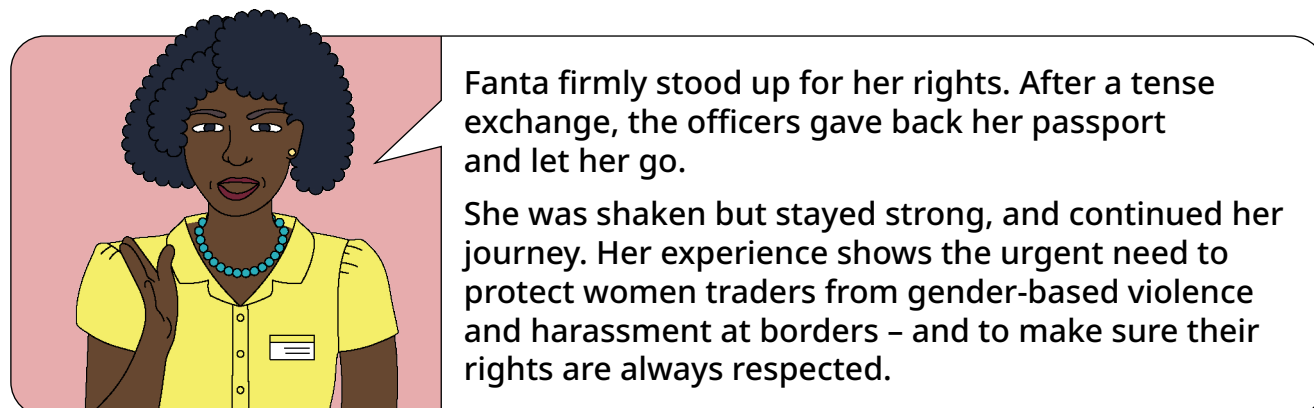
01.

What are women's rights and how can they be exercised in SSCBT?

Although harassment and GBV can affect all genders, women cross-border traders are the main victims.

Harassment is when someone repeatedly bothers, intimidates or pressures another person, making him or her feel uncomfortable or unsafe. At border crossings, this may happen when officials or traders abuse their power to demand things unfairly. There are different types of harassment – such as verbal, personal, physical, psychological, gender-based and sexual – that will be examined in this part of the guide.

FANTA



HOW MIGHT FANTA BE FEELING?	EXAMINING THE OFFICERS' BEHAVIOUR	WHAT THIS COULD LEAD TO:
Scared: The officers' behaviour made her feel unsafe, especially when they blocked the door and invaded her space. Helpless: She felt powerless because they held her passport and controlled the process. Frustrated: She waited patiently but was insulted and delayed for no reason. Embarrassed: The officers made personal and rude remarks about her.	Control over the process: Holding Fanta's passport and unnecessarily delaying her showed that they had full control over her ability to continue her trade. Gender bias: Their comments suggested a belief that women are not suited for cross-border trading. Use of intimidation: Blocking the door and speaking harshly created a stressful and unsafe environment for Fanta.	Emotional impact on Fanta: She may feel anxious or unsafe when she crosses the border in the future. Barriers for women traders: Women like Fanta may avoid trading if they fear harassment or discrimination. Unfair trade environment: Such behaviour makes border crossings harder and less predictable for small-scale traders, especially women.

Just like Fanta, many women in formal SSCBT have been harassed when crossing borders. However, some traders do not understand what counts as harassment – even if it happens to them.

Regulations are in place to explain how border officials should treat women in formal SSCBT. They also take account of the rights of women traders.

Basic rights and obligations for traders and officials at the border:

- Traders have the right to never experience harassment.
- Traders have the right to get a receipt for any payment made.
- Traders have the right to view any official's identification or badge.
- Traders have the right to know the reason for a physical check. Woman traders have the right to demand to be checked by woman officials.
- All documentary requirements, duties, taxes and other charges must be posted visibly at border offices and any changes must be announced ahead of time.
- Traders must present the required documents and pay appropriate duties at the border.

Key things to remember:

- Harassment cannot be stopped at the borders unless victims report cases.
- Victims of harassment should not feel ashamed to report that they have been harassed.
- Traders are encouraged to report harassment to senior officials, business associations, non-governmental organizations or other enforcement agencies, such as the police.
- The behaviour of officials should never violate traders' rights.

What drives harassment and what forms does it take?

02.

Women involved in formal SSCBT may encounter different types of harassment, which usually stem from factors beyond women's control. The following examples describe situations where women face gender-based violence when crossing borders and interacting with border officials.

FANTA



Fanta pays a man to carry her goods. He crosses easily. She stays behind – safe, but with less money.



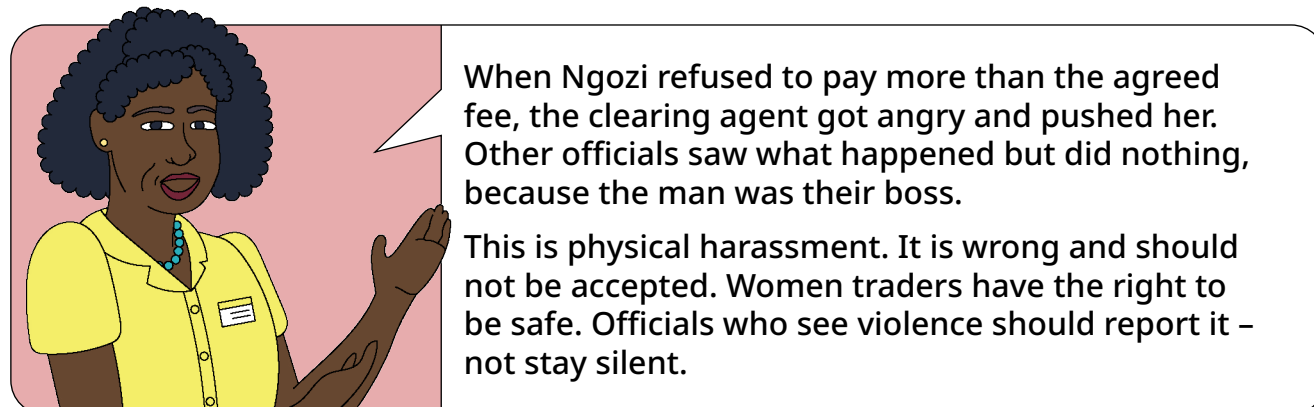
Because Fanta had faced harassment at the border before, she decided to pay a man to carry her goods across. She observed that men traders are less likely to be stopped, delayed, or harassed by officials.

By hiring a man, Fanta could avoid further mistreatment – but she also had to give up part of her income. This is a choice many women traders are forced to make to feel safe, even though it limits their earnings and independence.

In this example, Fanta faces **personal harassment** and **gender harassment**, which were motivated by gender inequality.

Many women in formal SSCBT are treated unfairly based on stereotypes and their gender as they are typically seen as the 'weaker sex'. They are often perceived as petty traders rather than serious business owners. Such attitudes make women more likely than men to face gender-based violence and harassment.

Personal harassment involves bullying and often includes inappropriate comments, offensive jokes, name-calling or public humiliation, which creates an uncomfortable or intimidating environment for women traders.



Physical aggression may occur when women cross the official border. It involves any violent act in which women traders are physically attacked – that is, hit, slapped or shoved. It also includes damaging property to intimidate someone as well as threatening gestures, such as shaking fists angrily.

The lack of transparency and information on the taxes and customs fees women traders must pay to border officials can lead to situations of misunderstanding, frustration and harassment, which can degenerate into physical aggression when the woman trader reacts.

Border officials' lack of courage to report illegal behaviour enables harassment. People who witness harassment often think it is not their problem and they do not want to get into trouble. Unfortunately, they encourage harassment by remaining silent.

Because the border was so slow,
I had to sleep there overnight – and
an officer wouldn't leave me alone.



Another day during a search, a male
official touched my chest on purpose.
The worst part is, this wasn't the first
time. I cross this border every day.
I hate that I have to get used to their
shameful behaviour. It's not right.



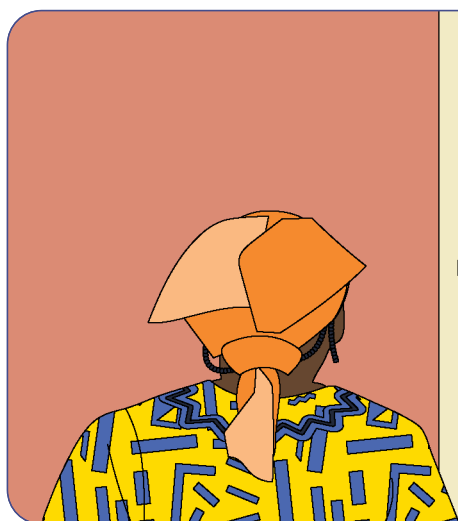
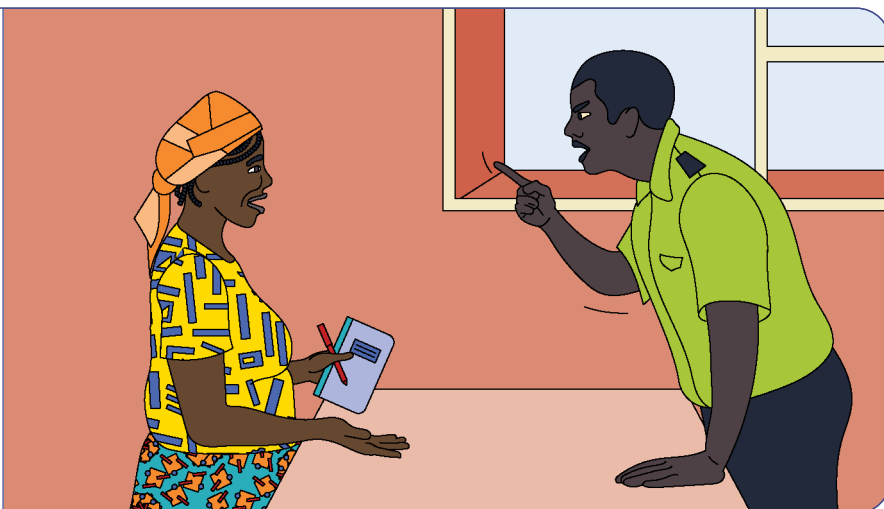
Many women traders stay silent when officials behave
badly – out of fear, shame, or because they worry no
one will believe them.

But what Fanta faced is sexual harassment. No one
has the right to touch a woman without her consent.
Wearing a uniform does not give permission to
abuse power. Every woman has the right to feel safe
and be treated with respect at the border.

In this example, Fanta experienced **unwanted sexual advances**, conduct or behaviour. Such behaviour includes inappropriate touching, sexual assault or rape. Indirect sexual contact, such as sending unwanted pornographic images, is also sexual harassment. Furthermore, the border official's behaviour was hostile, inappropriate and unwanted, which led to **psychological harassment**. This includes verbal comments, actions or gestures that make the victim feel personally and/or professionally demeaned. It harms a person's psychological well-being.

Fanta was afraid to report her attackers. Women small-scale cross-border traders who are harassment victims are often scared to speak up because they fear they will be targeted even more. Some believe that if they complain about harassment from officials, they will not be allowed to trade there anymore. This makes it easier for the harassers to continue their behaviour, because they think no one will ever report them. Women traders can report incidents of harassment or violence to a cross-border trade association that can offer protection, resources and advocacy.

One time at the border, I asked an official for help with a form. He shouted at me and insulted me. Even though I was scared, I told him his behaviour was wrong. I wrote down his name and badge number and later reported him to a women's rights group.



Another time, an official wouldn't give me back my corn. I knew he wanted a bribe. He only returned it after I paid, and he didn't give me a receipt. I was scared, but I told him that asking for money like that is wrong, and I would report him.



Ngozi faced verbal abuse and was asked for a bribe at the border. Both are illegal.

Traders have the right to ask questions without being insulted – and no one should keep their goods to get money. When women know their rights and speak up, they help stop bad behaviour and protect others too.

Ngozi faced **verbal harassment and unwanted behaviour** stemming from **unequal power**. Verbal harassment involves strong criticism, insults or ridicule. She also encountered **abuse of power**, as the border official used his position to mistreat her. Some people in positions of power use their authority to get what they want, even if it makes others uncomfortable. They ignore how their actions affect others because they are focused on their own gain. This mistreatment can take the form of psychological bullying or intimidation.

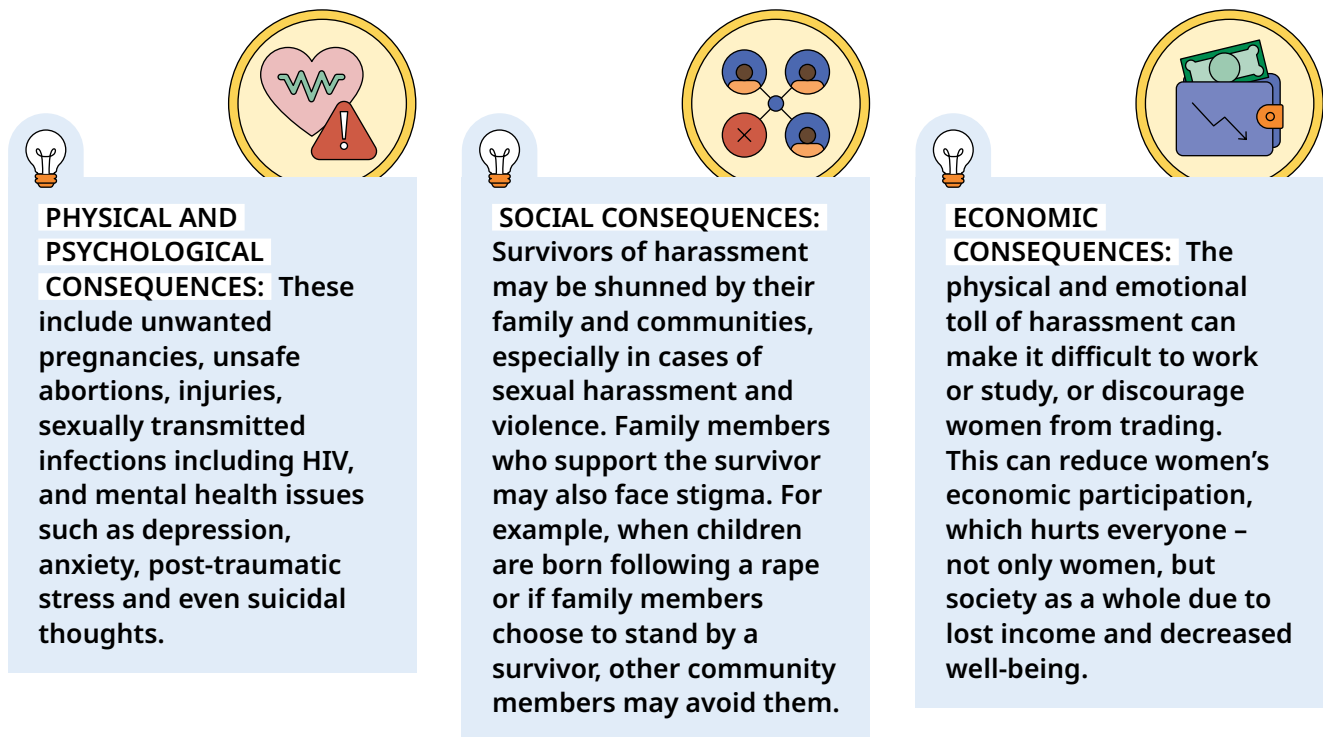
Negative behaviour tends to build on itself. When many people, especially those in leadership positions, engage in harassment, it may seem acceptable. This creates a culture where women cross-border traders are less likely to speak up against bad behaviour.

What are the broader effects of GBV on women traders?

03.

Harassment can have serious and immediate negative effects not just on the victims, but also on the wrongdoers, organizations and wider communities.

The consequences of harassment can be severe and far-reaching for the victim. For example:



Perpetrators may feel guilt, shame or regret if they come to recognize the harm their actions have caused. They may lose the trust and respect of their peers, friends and family, damaging professional and personal relationships. The offenders may face legal repercussions, including lawsuits or criminal charges, depending on the nature of the harassment. Their behaviour can also damage the reputation of their organizations and hurt team dynamics at official borders and in public agencies.

Crossing the border has become so hard for me. Sometimes I can't breathe just thinking about what might happen. I don't feel like myself anymore. I find it hard to trust people or talk to new customers, and that's holding back my business. I've been staying away from others because I'm scared they'll judge me if they knew what I've been through. Even my family doesn't fully understand. I feel like I'm carrying this alone.



Gender-based violence does not only hurt women when it happens. It can also leave deep emotional, social and economic pain. Some women feel scared, alone, or find it hard to trust others. This can make it harder to trade, talk to people, or grow a business. Women traders need support, kindness, and safe spaces to heal and keep working with dignity.

What can women do when facing GBV?



HERE ARE ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE WHEN FACED WITH HARASSMENT:

1. Stay calm and tell the official that his behaviour makes you feel uncomfortable.
2. If the official continues the inappropriate behaviour, ask for a search by a woman official. Inform the man official that you have this right.
3. Move away from the official, creating space between you and him.
4. Be aware of your surroundings. Avoid isolated areas. If possible, walk with others or head towards a crowded area.
5. If the official persists or approaches, move towards other people – especially security personnel or authorities such as police. You can report this official to a more senior border official or seek the help of a trade information and border assistance desk officer or a cross-border traders' association.

Where to report, follow up and seek counsel?

NGOZI

An official started touching my legs while he was explaining something to me. That's when I decided I wouldn't accept this behaviour anymore. I went to a women's rights group, reported the harassment, and gave details about the officer. They supported me and helped me file a formal complaint.

For the first time, I felt heard. I realized I'm not alone – and my voice matters.



When a border official touched Ngozi inappropriately, she chose not to stay silent. She went to a local women's rights group, shared what happened, and got support to file a formal complaint. Her action inspired other women traders to speak up too. Reporting abuse is not always easy, but it is a powerful way to protect yourself and others.

When engaging in formal SSCBT, it is important to identify and join a cross-border trade association. These associations can represent the interests of women small-scale cross-border traders near the border. However, trade associations in West Africa are typically located in major cities along the corridor. This makes it difficult for them to effectively influence the border environment or share information on cross-border trade requirements and procedures with traders.

The lack of local representation at borders limits traders' access to support and resources that could make it easier for them to navigate formal cross-border trade processes.



THERE ARE OPTIONS FOR TRADERS WHO ARE UNCOMFORTABLE REPORTING HARASSMENT CASES TO SENIOR OFFICIALS. HERE IS WHAT YOU CAN DO:

1. Seek the help of a cross-border trade associations or a trade information and border assistance desk.
2. Seek help from a different border official or the police.
3. Send a text to a relevant helpline or call a relevant harassment report hotline.

The table below shows national and regional institutions where you can report GBV directly.

ENTITIES	ROLES	CONTACT	COUNTRY
REGIONAL LEVEL			
TRADE INFORMATION AND BORDER ASSISTANCE DESK OFFICER	Provides essential information on trade regulations, customs procedures and border policies to help traders navigate cross-border trade. Assists traders facing challenges at border posts, including guidance on how to deal with harassment or bureaucratic hurdles.	Seek help directly at the border.	Available in all ECOWAS countries and managed regionally by the ECOWAS Commission
TRADE OBSTACLES ALERT MECHANISM	Serves as a tool to monitor NTBs such as customs and administrative entry procedures, SPS measures or procedural problems (discrimination, lack of information on procedures, lengthy procedures). Reports and tackles trade barriers that small and medium-sized businesses face, such as customs procedures, administrative burdens, import licensing, standards and conformity assessment labelling or packaging requirements.	See the list of online mechanisms for each ECOWAS member here: https://www.tradeobstacles.org/CountrySelection.aspx The platform is also available on mobile phones at: https://mobile.tradeobstacles.org/	Available in all ECOWAS countries at the official border posts
WEST AFRICAN ASSOCIATION FOR CROSS-BORDER TRADE	Advocates for the rights and interests of women involved in cross-border trade in West Africa. Supports informal traders and enhances trade obstacle reporting systems.	(+234) 802 478 2037 (+228) 91 30 08 14 / 99 73 10 05 (+225) 01 72 79 90 E-mail: contact@aocata-wacta.org	Available in all ECOWAS countries
WOMEN IN LAW AND DEVELOPMENT – WEST AFRICA	Protects women and girls whose rights have been violated by upgrading the Digitalized Legal Aid Center (CAJUD) in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo. It is being implemented in Senegal. The CAJUD tool provides contact, assistance, support and follow-up for women who have suffered harassment or gender-based violence.	Tel.: (+221) 33 8 25 74 29 E-mail: wildafeddafsen@gmail.com CAJUD website: Senegal: https://cajud-sn.org/ Togo: https://cajud-tg.org/ CAJUD Green Number: 90 24 37 86 Ghana: https://cajud-gh.org/about/ Côte d'Ivoire: https://cajud-ci.org/	Women in Law and Development – West Africa is represented in all ECOWAS countries. CAJUD is available in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal and Togo.
SECURITY PERSONNEL OR AUTHORITIES SUCH AS POLICE	Monitor the movement of people and ensure traders' security at the border.	Seek help directly at the border.	Available in all ECOWAS countries

COUNTRY LEVEL			
WOMEN CROSS-BORDER TRADERS' ASSOCIATIONS	Advocate for the interests of women small-scale cross-border traders and support initiatives that benefit them. Raise awareness about issues affecting women small-scale cross-border traders, addressing challenges they face and participating in domestic and regional trade-related activities. Educate women traders on trade-related issues and how to deal with them. Equip women traders with the skills to handle issues such as harassment and teach them their rights. Promote change that leads to a better trading environment. Speak with one voice by having the support of a group with a presence of policymakers, lawmakers and the public to negotiate as a group, particularly with border officials.	Ghana: info@crossborderwomentraders.org +233 55 303 8645 https://crossborderwomentraders.org/ OWIT chapter: https://www.linkedin.com/in/owitghana/ Nigeria: OWIT chapter: https://owitnigeria.org/ FEBWE Nigeria: Federation of Business Women and Entrepreneurs of Nigeria https://anwbn.org/febwe/ Benin: Agro Women and Women In Business Association (AWOASS) dasro28@yahoo.fr Togo: Togo's women business association (AFCET) lafcet@yahoo.fr National Network of Women Farmers of Togo (Renafat) https://www.facebook.com/renafattogo/ renafattogo@gmail.com Senegal: Union Of Women Entrepreneurs (UFCE) https://www.senegal.org/fr/mouvements/women-movements/orgdetails/124 ufce.senegal@gmail.com West African Cross-Border Women Traders Association (WACBWT)¹⁹	Available in all ECOWAS countries
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF BENIN, BENIN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, AND THE WEST AFRICA ASSOCIATION FOR CROSS-BORDER TRADE IN AGRO-FORESTRY-PASTORAL, FISHERIES PRODUCTS AND FOOD	Fight against corruption and mistreatment of women at the border.	Green number: 21 30 33 34 WhatsApp: 69 19 00 00	Benin
AKWABA MOUSSO	Provides free medical, psychosocial, legal and judicial care and accommodation for women and children who are victims of gender-based violence.	WhatsApp: 07 69 84 84 84, 05 07 48 60 70 https://www.akwabamoussso.org/bonjour@akwabamoussso.org	Côte d'Ivoire
NATIONAL COMMITTEE TO FIGHT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE	Provides a green number available 24 hours a day to the public to report, guide and inform on GBV. Helps the Ministry of the Family implement programmes to combat violence against women and children.	Green number: 1308 https://famille.gouv.ci/mffe/?page_id=4753	Côte d'Ivoire

19. tralac. A Push for the Formalization of Women Cross-Border Trade in West Africa. 2019.

<https://www.tralac.org/news/article/13494-a-push-for-the-formalization-of-women-cross-border-trade-in-west-africa.html>

ORANGE SUPPORT CENTRE	Offers an integrated support system for victims and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence through a mobile app, a toll-free call centre and a volunteer platform, BoameApp technology, which works with certified professionals to facilitate psychosocial, legal, medical and physical support, among others.	Green number: 0800 111 222	Ghana
MINISTRY OF GENDER AND CHILDREN'S AFFAIRS	Offers a comprehensive package of services of medical treatment, legal services and psychosocial support to both men and woman survivors of GBV.	Toll-free hotline: 116	Liberia
DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGENCY	Manages complaint mechanisms such as call centres for women to report domestic violence and sexual harassment to trained professionals. Provides legal, medical, emergency assistance, counselling and psychological and psychosocial support.	08000333333 info@lagosdsva.org See the list of advisories on sexual and gender-based violence in Lagos State ²⁰ .	Nigeria
GBV SUB SECTOR	Provides a list of gender-based violence helplines in the various states and regions of the country, with the local language spoken to help women, telephone numbers and addresses.	See the list of helplines ²¹ .	Nigeria
ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN LAWYERS	Provides free legal assistance to report harassment and supports women who experience gender-based violence.	Green Number: 800-805-805	Senegal
MINISTRY OF GENDER AND CHILDREN'S AFFAIRS	Offers a comprehensive package of services of medical treatment, legal services and psychosocial support to both men and woman survivors of GBV.	Toll-free hotline: 116	Sierra Leone
GENDER MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM	This helpline offers a safe and confidential option for survivors and people who are vulnerable to speak out against violence and abuse. The call centre is available to survivors, at any time and from any location in The Gambia. All survivors have access to medical and healthcare services, psychosocial support and legal services, and they can consent to the involvement of the police.	Call 199. Visit https://gbvims.africa/login to report an incident. Stop centres: non_genderbased@yahoo.com	The Gambia
GROUP FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION ON WOMEN, DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT	Provides a virtual assistance platform SOS AKOFA to support women victims of gender-based violence.	Green number: 1011 WhatsApp: +228 93 96 89 89	Togo

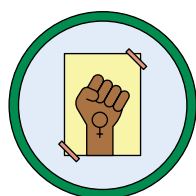
20. <https://lagosdsva.org/an-advisory-on-sgbv-in-lagos-state/>

21. https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/2020-06/GBV_Helpline_Mgt_Rapid_Assessment_Report_Final.01.pdf

06.

What should governments do to help prevent GBV?

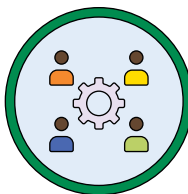
ECOWAS member governments are committed to stopping gender-based violence. However, the problem remains widespread and seriously affects women's cross-border trade. It is crucial to step up efforts and adopt a zero-tolerance policy on GBV. Governments need to:



Clearly communicate a zero-tolerance policy on gender-based violence by anyone, especially border agents. Do this by putting up posters and conducting awareness campaigns. Gender-sensitivity training for border agents should accompany this zero-tolerance policy.



Define procedures for investigating cases of GBV, ensuring that investigations are fair, impartial and conducted in a timely manner.



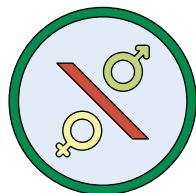
Describe the roles of staff or committees responsible for dealing with cases of GBV.



Specify the consequences for those found guilty of GBV, including disciplinary measures such as suspension or dismissal of border officials and employees of official entities.



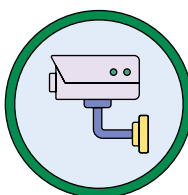
Provide information on available support services for victims, including counselling, medical assistance, legal aid and shelter.



Include guidelines in the zero-tolerance policy on how border agents should interact with traders. This could include requiring merchants and border agents to keep a minimum distance when interacting. Visibly communicate this policy via posters and signs that everyone at the border can see.



Clearly mark designated waiting/transaction areas for women traders at border checkpoints and ensure that these areas are secure and well lit.



Where feasible, install CCTV cameras in all designated customer areas to monitor interactions between merchants and border agents. Ensure that complaint/investigation bodies have full access to CCTV footage.

Exercises

1. While explaining border crossing procedures, a border official starts touching a woman trader without her consent. How should she react to protect herself? Choose the correct answer (more than one correct answer possible):

- A** Politely tell the official that she would like him to stop touching her
- B** Move away from the official, creating space between the two of them
- C** Report this official to a more senior border official
- D** Seek the help of a trade information and border assistance desk officer or a cross-border traders' association

Answer: A, B, C, D. Politely tell the official that you would like him to stop touching you. Move away from the official, creating space between you and him. If the official persists, you can report this official to a more senior border official or seek the help of a trade information and border assistance desk officer or a cross-border traders' association.

2. A woman trader walks past a group of men. One man yells that she is 'so sexy'. She ignores him. He gets angry and approaches and insults her. What should she do? Choose the correct answer (more than one correct answer possible):

- A** Hide herself and stay in isolated areas
- B** Walk with others
- C** Head towards a crowded area
- D** Seek help and move towards security personnel

Answer: B, C, D. Walk with others. Head towards a crowded area. Seek help and move towards security personnel

3. A man wearing a new black suit approaches a woman trader and tells her that he is a customs official. He asks the woman trader for customs fees. What should she do? Choose the correct answer:

- A** Pay customs fees
- B** Request to see the man's identification or badge

Answer: B. Request to see the ID or badge of any border or customs official

4. A border official informs a woman trader that a physical check must be conducted before she can be granted clearance. What should she do? Choose the right answer (more than one correct answer possible):

- A** Accept politely
- B** Ask for a woman official to undertake the physical check

Answer: B. Ask for a woman official to undertake the search

Summary

1. Women SSCBTs face various forms of harassment, including verbal, physical, sexual and psychological abuse, which may be due to factors such as gender stereotypes and gender inequality, lack of transparency and knowledge, long journeys and safety risks, and unequal power. Understanding what counts as harassment is critical to asserting your rights.
2. GBV and harassment may have physical, psychological, social and economic consequences on women SSCBTs and society as a whole.
3. Women SSCBTs need to know their rights at border crossings, including the right to respectful treatment, transparent procedures and the ability to request a same-gender search. Reporting incidents of harassment to senior officials, law enforcement or trade associations is crucial to stop this behaviour.
4. Joining women cross-border traders' associations can provide valuable support, resources and a collective voice for negotiating better trading conditions and addressing challenges such as harassment.
5. Besides the initiatives launched by ECOWAS to fight GBV at the border, governments should strengthen platforms to easily report GBV and establish a zero-tolerance policy on GBV by further training border agents and giving them specific guidelines to limit the number of cases of violence against women.

05

Understanding corruption at the border as a woman small-scale cross-border trader



Learning objectives

This guide will help women small-scale cross-border traders understand corruption at borders and how to deal with it. It covers the following learning points:

- What is integrity?
- How can corruption harm women and society at large?
- How can you react and protect yourself against corruption?
- Understanding reporting channels to ensure corruption cases are investigated and justice is pursued
- What can governments do to prevent corruption?

01.

What distinguishes honest border officials from dishonest ones?



Fatou is a 30-year-old small-scale cross-border trader. She bought tomatoes and onions in Nigeria to sell in Benin and has decided to use the formal crossing point for the second time.

FATOU

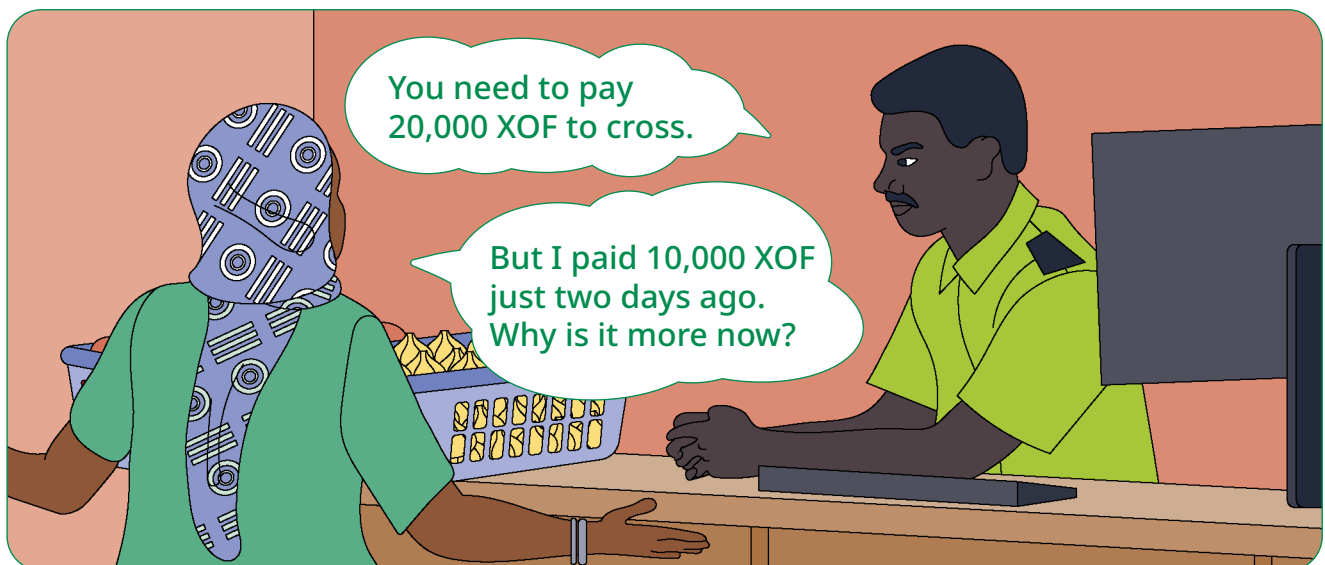
Good morning, sir. I'm here to declare my goods.

Give me your ID. Step aside and wait.



You need to pay 20,000 XOF to cross.

But I paid 10,000 XOF just two days ago. Why is it more now?





Fatou started to panic. She said sorry and gave the officials 20,000 XOF and a bag of tomatoes. They did not give her a receipt. She left with the rest of her goods, feeling upset and afraid.

Like Fatou, many women small-scale cross-border traders have faced corruption when crossing borders. However, some traders do not understand what counts as corruption, even if it occurs to them.

This chapter aims to help women small-scale cross-border traders understand the essence of integrity, what corruption is, the different forms it can take and who may be corrupt.

Regulations specify how border officials should treat women in formal SSCBT. These rules apply when women traders use the formal border crossing.

Basic rights and obligations for traders and officials at the border include the following:

- Traders have the right to conduct their business free from corruption.
- Traders have the right to get a receipt for any payment made.
- Traders have the right to view any official's identification or badge.
- Traders have the right to know the reason for a physical check. Woman traders have the right to demand to be checked by woman officials.
- All documentary requirements, duties, taxes and other charges must be publicly visible for traders, and any changes must be announced ahead of time.
- Traders must present the required documents and pay appropriate duties at the border.

Key things to remember:

- Corruption cannot be stopped at the borders unless victims report it. This is everyone's responsibility.
- Victims of corruption should not feel ashamed to report their experience.
- Traders should report corruption to senior officials, business associations, non-governmental organizations or other enforcement agencies, such as the police.
- The behaviour of officials should never violate traders' rights.

What drives corruption and what forms does it take?

02.

Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.²² It happens when someone in a position of authority uses his or her power for personal benefit.

Corruption can primarily occur in two ways:



VOLUNTARY: Corruption is voluntary when a trader willingly offers money or a favour to an official. Traders may do this to get their goods across the border faster, avoid paying taxes or gain an advantage over other traders. Even if a border official suggests this and the trader does not argue, it is still considered voluntary corruption.

COERCED: Coerced corruption occurs when border officials force a trader to pay money or give them something in exchange for doing their job. They may threaten the trader or make things difficult if the trader refuses to pay.

In case of voluntary corruption, both the trader and official can be held liable. The exact criminal liability will depend on the laws of the country. Voluntary corruption can result in loss of reputation, fines, imprisonment or a combination of all three for traders and border officials. A border official may also lose his or her job.

Traders are usually not held criminally liable in case of coerced corruption by a border official. The border official may face fines, imprisonment, loss of reputation or employment, or a combination of all.

FATOU



Offering a bribe is illegal, even when it seems like the easiest option. In the example on the left, the official accepted the bribe. In the other example, the official acted with honesty and explained the risk. Instead of offering goods or money, women traders should ask for clear information and request a receipt. Staying honest protects you and helps stop corruption.

22. Transparency International. (n.d.). *What is corruption?* Transparency.org. <https://www.transparency.org/en/what-is-corruption>

Bribery at the border usually involves giving money, but it can also include items such as clothing or food. Border crossing rules can be confusing to women SSCBTs. Corrupt officials may take advantage of this by making things seem more complicated than they are – and ask for extra money to ‘help’ you navigate the process.

Corruption can also be caused by a focus on short-term needs. Many women small-scale cross-border traders, such as Fatou, are trying to earn enough money to support their families. Without a financial safety net, they may feel compelled to participate in corruption.

Women engaged in formal SSCBT can encounter two primary types of bribery at the border:

- **Demand-side bribery.** This is when border officials demand a bribe from a trader in exchange for something, such as a service or return of goods.
- **Facilitation payment.** This type of bribery involves a trader giving money or goods to a border official to receive or speed up services to which they are entitled – for example, faster border crossing or having their documents checked.

An important difference between the two forms of corruption is that a facilitation payment is made to obtain a legitimate service that should be provided without any payment. Demand-side bribery, on the other hand, is designed to get special treatment or illegitimate services.

FATOU

I lost my border permit. Now I don't know what to do. If I ask for help, they might ask me for money. But if I say nothing, I may not be able to cross and get back home to Nigeria.



Losing your border permit can feel stressful, but it is not a crime. Do not offer money.

Ask to speak with a senior official or someone in charge, and explain what happened. You have the right to ask for help and to be treated fairly – even when something goes wrong.

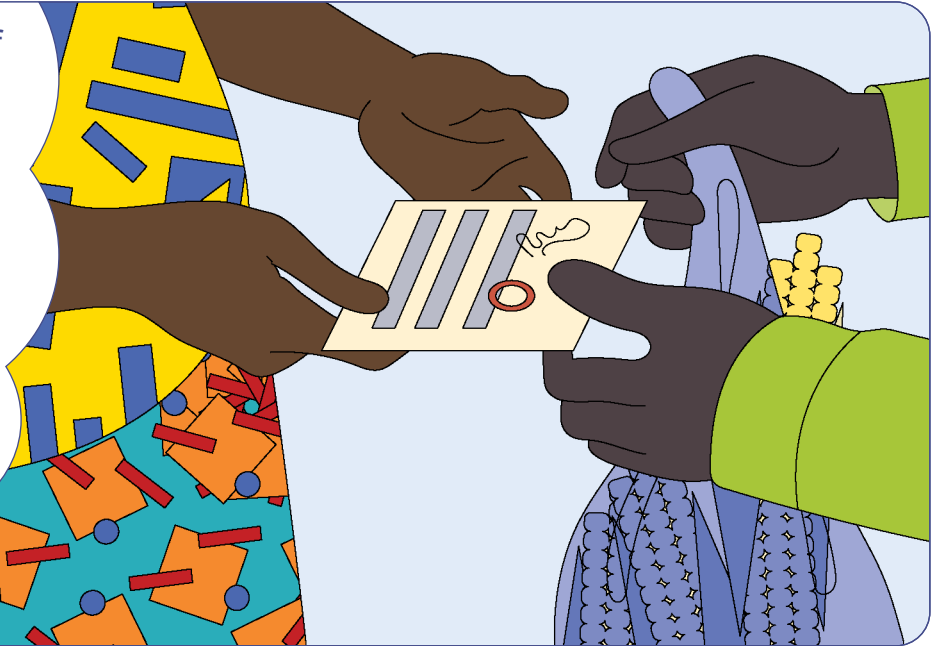


EXTORTION occurs when border officials threaten traders to get something valuable from them, usually cash or power. It is often motivated by stereotypes and gender inequality. Women traders are often seen as less serious businesspeople and more as 'petty traders'. These attitudes make them more vulnerable to corruption. Also, they often do not report corruption because they fear that doing so may make it harder for them to continue trading. This silence allows corrupt officials to keep asking for bribes.

Furthermore, in tough economic situations, officials can act without integrity to raise money for their families.

NGOZI

I'm expecting a truck of corn from Benin soon. Taxes are too high, so I spoke to some officials I know. They'll make fake documents saying the corn is just passing through Nigeria. I just need to give them some of the corn, and I'll save a lot of money.



This is called collusion. When traders and officials work together to create false documents or hide goods, it is a serious crime. Even if it feels like a simple arrangement, it can lead to fines, arrest, or loss of your business. Always use the correct documents and follow the legal process.



COLLUSION occurs when a trader or group of traders cooperates with border officials to deceive the government. This can be enabled by a cultural environment that condones corruption, inefficient controls, long travel times and safety risks, which frustrate women in the border crossing process.

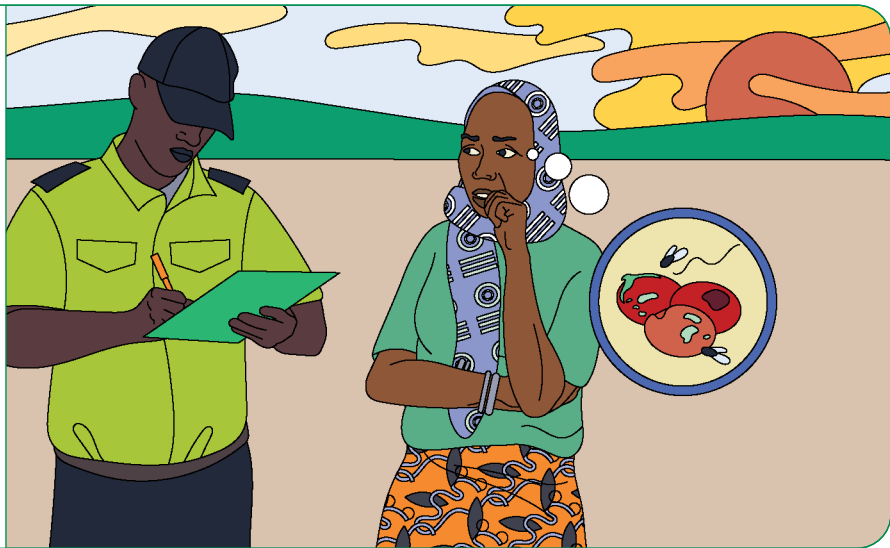
Unfortunately, negative behaviour tends to build on itself. When corruption is widespread, it creates a perception that such behaviour is acceptable. This environment may result in a decline of personal ethics, leading to an increase in corrupt practices. In addition, the absence of effective reporting mechanisms can indirectly promote corruption. When corrupt officials are not held accountable, it encourages others to follow suit.

What are the negative effects of corruption on women?

FATOU

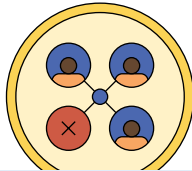
Every time I reach the border, customs officers ask me for money, even when my documents are complete. They say I cannot pass unless I pay.

If I delay too long, my tomatoes and onions could rot, and I will lose my income for the day.



Fatou faces the same problem again and again. Even with the right documents, she is pressured to pay bribes. Many women traders experience this. It reduces their income, wastes their time, and creates stress and fear. For women trading perishable goods like fruits and vegetables, delays at the border can mean losing everything.

Women are often targeted because they are seen as easier to pressure, especially when they are alone. While officials benefit in the short term from asking for extra money at the border, corruption hurts everyone in the long term.



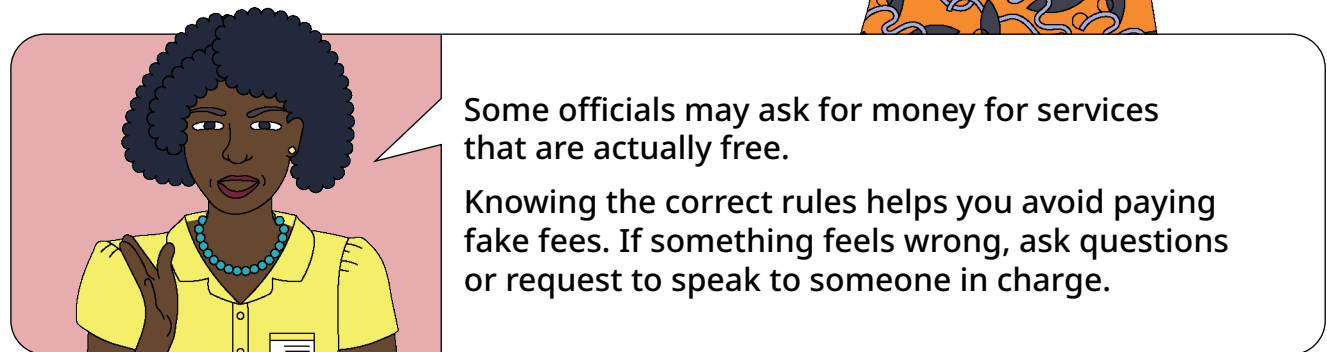
SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES: Corruption damages trust within communities. It fosters a culture of mistrust between traders and border officials, discouraging women traders to use formal border crossings.



ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES: Traders pay more than they should have to pay, which reduces their profits and discourages business. The government also loses money because of corrupt practices, affecting public services and the economy. People affected by corruption may struggle financially because of the bribes they pay or their effects.

What can women do when facing corruption?

The following examples illustrate situations of corruption that women small-scale cross-border traders may encounter at the border, as well as actions they can take.



IF YOU FIND YOURSELF IN A SIMILAR SITUATION, HERE IS WHAT YOU SHOULD DO:

1. Politely refuse to pay the bribe and inform the official that you are aware that there is no fee for the stamp.
2. If the official persists, inform him that if you pay the fee, you will need a receipt to verify the payment with other officials.
3. If the official refuses to give you a receipt, demand to speak with a senior official or seek the help of a trade information and border assistance desk official or women cross-border traders' association.



This is extortion. The official is using fear and pressure to make Fatou give him money. This is illegal and wrong. Women traders have the right to feel safe at the border. If you feel threatened, walk away and report it to someone you trust or a local support group.



IF YOU FIND YOURSELF IN A SIMILAR SITUATION, HERE IS WHAT YOU SHOULD DO:

1. If you feel unsafe, you should pay the money. It is better to pay a bribe than to endanger your safety.
2. Make a record of the event if possible. Try to remember details about what happened – the date, time and any details about the official and what he said.
3. Once you are in an environment where you feel safe, report the issue either by seeking a senior official or using the help of a trade information and border assistance desk official or women cross-border traders' association.

I'm trying to get my corn cleared at the border, but the official told me to wait. I've been here for two hours, watching other travellers pass while I sit.

I think he's waiting for me to offer him money.



Some officials delay traders on purpose, hoping they will offer money to speed things up. This is also a form of corruption. It can make women feel confused or unsure of what to do.

If you are being delayed without reason, ask calmly for an explanation or request to speak to someone in charge. If possible, note the official's name and speak to others around you.

You have the right to be treated fairly and to know what is happening with your goods.



IF YOU FIND YOURSELF IN A SIMILAR SITUATION, HERE IS WHAT YOU SHOULD DO:

1. Politely ask the official for the reason for the delay.
2. If the reasons are inadequate, ask to see a senior official.
3. If the request to see a senior official is refused, or if the senior official is unhelpful, seek the help of a trade information and border assistance desk official or women cross-border traders' association.

Where can you report corruption and seek counsel?

05.

The border trade environment presents gender-specific challenges and corruption, which mainly affect women. Woman traders are often unfamiliar with the required procedures at border posts, making them vulnerable to bribery and, at times, discrimination or sexual harassment by border officials.

Formal small-scale cross-border traders should identify and join a cross-border trade association, which generally represents the interests of women traders. Traders who feel uncomfortable with reporting corruption cases to officials can do the following:

- Seek the help of cross-border trade associations or a trade information and border assistance desk
- Send a text to the relevant SMS helplines or call a relevant corruption hotline

ENTITIES	ROLES	CONTACT	COUNTRY
COUNTRY LEVEL			
WOMEN CROSS-BORDER TRADERS' ASSOCIATION	Advocates for the interests of women small-scale cross-border traders and supports initiatives that benefit them. Raises awareness about issues affecting women small-scale cross-border traders, addressing challenges they face and participating in domestic and regional trade-related activities. Educates women traders on trade-related issues they may face and how to tackle them. Equips women traders with the skills to handle issues like harassment. Promotes change that leads to a better trading environment.	Ghana: info@crossborderwomentraders.org +233 55 303 8645 https://crossborderwomentraders.org/ OWIT chapter: https://www.linkedin.com/in/owitghana/ Nigeria: OWIT chapter: https://owitnigeria.org/ FEBWE Nigeria: Federation of Business Women and Entrepreneurs of Nigeria https://anwbn.org/febwe/ Benin: Agro Women and Women In Business Association (AWOASS) dasro28@yahoo.fr Togo: Togo's women business association (AFCET) lafcet@yahoo.fr National Network of Women Farmers of Togo (Renafat) https://www.facebook.com/renafattogo/ renafattogo@gmail.com Senegal: Union Of Women Entrepreneurs (UFCE) https://www.senegal.org/fr/mouvements/women-movements/orgdetails/124 ufce.senegal@gmail.com West African Cross-Border Women Traders Association (WACBWT)	Available in all ECOWAS countries

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF BENIN, BENIN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, AND WEST AFRICA ASSOCIATION FOR CROSS-BORDER TRADE, IN AGRO-FORESTRY-PASTORAL, FISHERIES PRODUCTS AND FOOD	Fights against corruption and mistreatment of women at the border.	Green number: 21 30 33 34 WhatsApp: +229 69 19 00 00	Benin
AKWABA MOUSSO	Provides free medical, psychosocial, legal and judicial care and accommodation for women and children who are victims of gender-based violence.	WhatsApp: +225 07 69 84 84 84, +225 05 07 48 60 70 https://www.akwabamoussou.org/bonjour@akwabamoussou.org	Côte d'Ivoire
NATIONAL COMMITTEE TO FIGHT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE	Provides a green number available 24 hours a day to the public to report, guide and inform on GBV. Helps the Ministry of the Family implement programmes to combat violence against women and children.	Green number: 1308 https://famille.gouv.ci/mffe/?page_id=4753	Côte d'Ivoire
INDEPENDENT CORRUPT PRACTICES & OTHER RELATED OFFENCES COMMISSION	Investigates, prosecutes and prevents corruption offences.	+234 0800 2255 4272 to report corruption	Nigeria
THE NATIONAL OFFICE FOR THE FIGHT AGAINST FRAUD AND CORRUPTION	Prevents and fights fraud, illicit enrichment and related practices and offences.	Green number: +221 800 000 90	Senegal
REGIONAL LEVEL			
THE WEST AFRICAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION	Regional women's organization composed of members from 15 countries of the ECOWAS region, promotes and defends the economic status of women.	siege@afaowawa.org info@afaowawa.org	Available in all ECOWAS countries
TRADE INFORMATION AND BORDER ASSISTANCE DESK OFFICER	Provides essential information on trade regulations, customs procedures and border policies to help traders navigate cross-border trade effectively. Aids traders who face challenges at border posts, such as offering guidance on how to handle harassment or bureaucratic hurdles.	Seek help directly at the border.	Available in all ECOWAS countries and managed regionally by the ECOWAS Commission
TRADE OBSTACLES ALERT MECHANISM	Serves as a tool to monitor NTBs such as customs and administrative entry procedures, SPS measures or procedural problems (discrimination, lack of information on procedures, lengthy procedures). Reports and tackles trade barriers that small and medium-sized businesses face, such as customs procedures, administrative burdens, import licensing, standards and conformity assessment labelling or packaging requirements.	See the online list for each ECOWAS country member here: https://www.tradeobstacles.org/CountrySelection.aspx The platform is also available on mobile phone at: https://mobile.tradeobstacles.org/	Available in all ECOWAS countries at official border posts

WEST AFRICAN ASSOCIATION FOR CROSS-BORDER TRADE	Advocates for the rights and interests of women involved in cross-border trade in West Africa. Supports informal traders and enhances trade obstacle reporting systems.	(+234) 802 478 2037 (+228) 91 30 08 14 / 99 73 10 05 (+225) 01 72 79 90 E-mail contact@aocata-wacta.org	Available in all ECOWAS countries
SECURITY PERSONNEL OR AUTHORITIES SUCH AS THE POLICE	Monitor the movement of people and ensure traders' security at the border.	Seek help directly at the border.	Available at all official borders in ECOWAS countries

What should governments do to prevent corruption?

06.

ECOWAS has established a Regional Anti-Corruption Programme aimed at harmonizing anti-corruption laws and promoting good governance across member states. This includes efforts to build stronger institutions to monitor and combat corruption at borders.

The ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and Goods is designed to simplify cross-border trade, reduce bureaucratic red tape and minimize opportunities for corruption at border posts.

Trade information and border assistance desks have been set up at borders in many African countries. They are managed by trade information and border assistance desk officers whose role is to facilitate cross-border trade by providing information, training and assistance to small-scale cross-border traders without discrimination based on race, religion or gender. These officers provide information on trade laws and regulations, necessary documents for clearance procedures, complaint mechanisms and other information needed to complete a formal border crossing process.

Challenges remain, however, including weak enforcement, limited resources for anti-corruption agencies and cultural norms that tolerate corruption.



GOVERNMENTS NEED TO TACKLE CORRUPTION IN THE ECOWAS REGION BY IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF COMPLAINT MECHANISMS TAILORED TO ADDRESS CORRUPTION AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE. THIS SHOULD INVOLVE:

1. Strengthening GBV call centres
2. Piloting the development of inclusive national legal frameworks in the region to remove trade barriers
3. Conducting a detailed and independent study to review and assess the different complaint mechanisms
4. Delivering a comprehensive awareness-raising campaign on complaint mechanisms to ensure they are sustainable and developing tailored materials illustrating key successes and targets
5. Strengthening trade information and border assistance desks in the region to address gaps
6. Helping these desks reach their full potential by ensuring close cross-border collaboration among relevant stakeholders, raising awareness among stakeholders and enhancing their infrastructure so they are more sustainable and inclusive

Exercises

1. Match the following scenarios with the rights of a trader

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1 A trader finds that information on border procedures, taxes and other fees is only displayed in English. The trader does not speak English.</p> | <p>A A trader has the right to request information on border procedures in a language that he/she understands.</p> |
| <p>2 An official asks a trader to pay an additional fee about which the trader is unaware. The official does not give the trader a receipt.</p> | <p>B A trader has the right to ask for a receipt for every payment made.</p> |

Answer: A. corresponds to scenario 1.
B. corresponds to scenario 2.

2. Do the following situations constitute corruption? If yes, what kind of corruption (demand-side bribery, facilitation payment, collusion or extortion)?

- 1** A women trader has been waiting for an hour to clear her goods at the border. An official approaches and says he will help her go through the border crossing procedures in the next 10 minutes if she pays him \$50.
- 2** A female trader named Salamatou has a relative named Souleymane who is a customs official at the border. Salamatou expects her goods to arrive on Tuesday. She informs Souleymane and tells him that she would like his help to clear her goods cheaply. Souleymane tells Salamatou, 'Don't worry, if you come during my shift at 6 pm tonight, just give me a call and I will help you get your goods without paying any fees. Just give me a little something on the side afterwards.' Salamatou arrives and calls Souleymane. After 15 minutes, Souleymane brings Salamatou her goods. She pays him a commission and leaves.

Answer: 1. Yes. This is facilitation payment. 2. Yes. This is collusion.

3. Are the following statements true or false?

A) The role of a trade information desk officer is to help traders understand the clearance procedures and help them complete any documentation required by border officials.

TRUE FALSE

B) Small-scale traders cannot ask border officials for help in understanding border procedures. Border officials only help large traders to cross.

TRUE FALSE

Answer: A) This is true. Trade information desk officers can help traders carry out border clearance procedures correctly and efficiently. B) This is false. If you are unable to find a trade information desk officer, ask a border official for help. It is part of their duties to ensure that everybody crossing the border understands and knows how to comply with the border procedures.

Summary

1. Women small-scale cross-border traders often face corruption at the border, including bribery, extortion and collusion.
2. Several factors drive corruption, including a lack of transparency, fear of reporting, long waiting times, gender stereotypes and economic pressures, all of which create unfair conditions for women traders.
3. Corruption may have negative impacts, such as social and economic consequences for women SSCBTs and society generally.
4. Women traders must know their rights at the border, including fair treatment and protection from harassment. They should report corruption through available channels such as trade information and border assistance desks, women cross-border traders' associations and national hotlines.
5. ECOWAS governments should strengthen platforms so corruption can be easily reported and to raise awareness about complaint mechanisms.

Notes

