

**United Nations
Economic Commission
for Africa**

East African Community

**Study on Gender Dimensions of Cross Border
Trade in the East African Community-
Kenya/Uganda and Rwanda Burundi Border.**

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October 2009

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0.1. Executive Summary of General Findings of Trading Activities through Kenya/Uganda and Rwanda/Burundi border

The main finding of the study is that informal cross border women traders across the region do not use available formal systems/structures for most of their transactions. This makes it difficult for regional trade policy initiatives such as under East African Community (EAC) and the Customs Protocol to have any significant impact on this informal trade by women. The women show little evidence of knowledge regarding the East African Community Customs Protocol and even less motivation to use it to facilitate trading activities. Women traders continue to trade, largely the same way they have done for many decades gone by as admitted by majority of respondents who have been in the trade for over ten years.

Preference for the old ways¹ of conducting informal cross border trade was evident in the manner in which women traders operating through Kenya for a considerable period of time² expressed their doubts or outright discomfort with the opening up of trade under the evolving customs protocol. Their reasons are simple enough- opening up trade will attract more traders eager to take advantage of attendant opportunities to the detriment of current traders. This is so despite a lot of misgivings that they have about current conditions of cross border trade- they still felt comfortable with the current status of traders because they know and are handling it. Traders on the Rwanda Burundi border were generally warm to the idea of regional integration but showed the least knowledge of the protocol and EAC partnership. When asked about specific implications such as common currency and elimination of discrepancies in exchange rates, most opposed the union because it would undermine the basis of the border trade that thrives on economic and currency imbalances between Rwanda and Burundi.

Women traders gave several reasons for not being confident that the East African Protocol will assist them. Top among reasons given is fear of taxation with the common argument that formal taxes will eat into their profits and that traders are unlikely to afford taxes. There is a common belief that the new tax regime like the old one favors big traders and it may have been introduced to seal loopholes through which the small traders conduct their largely illegal trade and in this way it may be punitive. Knowing the behavior of customs officials towards them, women traders expressed strong doubts that the stated official rate of taxation will be the one applicable in real terms. They said they know from experience that customs and security agents will still find reason to get them to pay more money to them in their individual capacities. It was their view that any system that appears to make it difficult for customs,

¹ The way they traded before the EAC customs union protocol

² For over 10 years

immigration and security officials to receive bribes from women traders is bound to fail because the officials will not allow it to operate smoothly since that is where they “eat”.³ Stories were told of mysterious “state officials” officials who were not known by the women to belong to customs/security or immigration harassing traders in the presence of the latter. Such officials were said to be common on the Ugandan side of the border⁴. Women traders said the mysterious officials did not usually identify themselves or produce any form of identity on approaching traders or even when the traders asked to see some identity.

Traders on the Rwanda Burundi border saw strict tax enforcement such as (in their view) practiced by Rwanda Revenue Authority as detrimental to their survival. Some said openly that the perceived less stringent tax collection on the Burundi side of the border that is aided by a less enthusiastic official government administration mechanism on the ground favors traders and promotes trade. If the customs protocol helps Burundi organize better to collect taxes, then some had doubts about their trade remaining profitable.

0.2 Perceived benefits of the EAC and Customs Protocol

Top on the list of advantages thought to accrue from EAC is the idea of free movement without harassment across the borders. Women traders in their majority felt that the current ambiguity about

³ Eating here refers to officials making even more money from corruption than from their official salaries which translates into bribes being their economic mainstay and therefore very difficult for them to abandon the practice voluntarily.

⁴ Ugandan officials denied that such people existed or were even encountered by the women.

whether to use national identity cards or to allow free movement of people from the EAC countries is costing them a lot since they have to bribe security officials to stay and buy or sell in countries other than theirs⁵. Kenya and Nairobi in particular was cited as having very harsh and uncooperative security officials who were also “most corrupt”⁶. They (Kenyan security officials) charge exorbitant bribes when one is arrested and mistreat you in remand. Traders along Rwanda Burundi border said they did not experience a lot of problems because they pass their goods mainly through unofficial border routes, besides the people from the two countries being inseparable by appearance and language. Kenyan traders complained that Tanzania security officials were not very welcoming of Kenyans since they fear them. However they acknowledged that their experiences were nothing compared to what their sisters from other countries may go through in Kenya. They said they had assisted a lot of traders from the EAC gain freedom from Kenyan detention centers roughly much more than their “sisters” had done in turn because targeting of foreigners for arrest is more rampant in Kenya.

Free movement was seen by women traders as the most effective way to minimize or do away completely with trade related paperwork within the region. Traders were of the view that such paper work such as to do with immigration only led to expensive delays and expanded opportunities for corruption. Traders from countries other than Kenya and Tanzania, strongly felt that they should be guaranteed safe passage to the ports because of their landlocked status- talk of free movement was therefore the most welcome news.

0.3 Reasons for apparent preference for illegal trade

From our analysis we came to the conclusion that there is not enough information disseminated by official sources or people who know it. We did not find evidence of official structures for disseminating such information to women and even male traders. The average male trader or transporter we interviewed demonstrated more knowledge of the protocol as well as confidence at dealing with customs/immigration using their acquired knowledge. Further, customs officials were of the view that male traders had proved more difficult to handle since the customs protocol because they had learned the changes but unfortunately tended to demand even what was not provided for in the protocol as their right. Women traders did not show similar knowledge and assertiveness which implied that customs officials were more likely to be more careful to do things right when handling male traders than female traders.

⁵ This was a view more readily expressed by respondents in the Kenyan based study- traders on the Rwanda-Burundi border did not worry much about free movement.

⁶ This was an expressed by both non Kenyan as well as Kenyan women traders who had been trading in neighboring countries.

Closely related to the women's knowledge gap is the age old rampant corruption that thrives on ignorance, fear and impunity of government officials at border posts. Corruption and impunity make it difficult for women traders to believe that they should expect professionalism and adherence to the law when going trading across borders. This is the main reason for their preference for aliases such as middlemen and brokers who appeared to smooth the way and shield women traders from what could be unpleasant confrontation with officialdom. It may appear that there is a possibility that officials at the border crossings are silently sabotaging the protocol for their selfish gain from corruption. The conspiracy may include security personnel, local council officials and administration personnel who stand to lose money and/or influence if the protocol is implemented in full.

We also established that conflicting local council by-laws on both sides of the Kenya and Uganda border have not been reviewed with the signing of the protocol. Local council officials present at the borders were seen stopping people they suspected to be traders and even attempting to take away goods they were carrying across the border because they had allegedly not paid some local council tax. When we interviewed the officials they were reluctant to state what exact by-laws were broken but still they felt justified in accosting traders because they know that goods crossing the border must be taxed at a higher rate than locally available goods. The potency of such threats to arrest traders or take away their goods as a consequence of non compliance appears to be under threat by the EAC protocol – so it is in the interest of the officers to prove or at least demonstrate that “the more things change-the more they remain the same.

0.4 Recommendations

0.4.1 All efforts should be made to enable women build trust in formal cross border trading structures rather than continue with the old practice of conducting what may be regarded as costly illegal trade. Apart from the trade costing them in unpredictable ways that makes planning difficult it prevents them from getting recognition in formal government structures as the important traders which leaves their contribution unrecorded and therefore not recognized or documented. The first step is the EAC to communicate better about the protocol and other agreements on immigration and movement of people between the states, by coming out with clear simplified documents in national languages targeting women traders of member states. Such a document should be able to explain the protocol and show how small traders can enhance their participation in trade through it. It may also be necessary to make known official focal points at border crossings and elsewhere, where such information may be accessed. It was better if this function of dissemination was done by and through the initiative of the EAC secretariat rather than leave it to member state structures.

0.4.2 EAC should put in place a practical research based monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the customs protocol in all Member States that should capture the performance and ongoing experiences of small scale women cross border traders. Official border crossing points should be the main monitoring locus but reports of goods passing through un- official border points should also be captured even if it is just in narrative of experiences.

0.4.3 Enforcement of local council by-laws as understood by implementing officers came out as a major problem to small traders and one whose scope is difficult to determine because of the indeterminacy of specific laws being enforced. EAC should enable member states to review by-laws of local councils on border towns to be in tandem with the customs protocol and the spirit and letter of other agreements in the EAC. A beginning point would be to train such local authorities on the customs protocol and its implications and set in place a mechanism of internal monitoring of implementation as well as supervisory oversight by respective state sector ministries/departments. The training should also set to clearly define the role of local authorities in cross border trade since they appear to be working at cross purposes with mainstream government agencies. Local authority organs should be directed to include women representation from their trade related organizations that should assist in reporting on violations and putting in place measures to deal with errant officers.

0.4.4 EAC should facilitate a mechanism across the region by which Partner States may address rampant corruption, theft, intimidation, harassment and general disruption of trade by women traders by illegal means but using state power (even though without authority). There should be put in place a uniform mechanism of posting and identifying state agents, and traders empowered to ask for identification documents from government officials to take away their anonymity. States should investigate allegations of shadowy figures who appear to act with the full force of the state even allegedly in the presence of uniformed state security and other agents but whose identity and purpose remains unclear to traders. The best strategy is to combine awareness/education and training with enforceable punitive measures for officers not behaving.

0.4.5 The apparent weak organizational base for most of the women organizations particularly with regard to trade facilitation will continue impacting negatively on their performance in trade unless state organs and trade/development agencies put serious effort including funding in trade focused institutional capacity development. A number of problems faced by women such harassment from

local council officials can easily be dealt with at respective local levels if women are well organized to confront/lobby municipal authorities. EAC should implement a pilot capacity and institutional building of trade related women's organizations in selected countries and monitor its progress for scaling up in all countries. Training should aim to moving such organizations from a welfare orientation to embrace and enable serious trade facilitation.

0.4.6 More research should be conducted to document experiences of women traders at all border points and within their business premises in respective countries. While it will be important to find ways of quantifying their participation, it will be more strategic to use qualitative methods to assess the experiences and learn from them what the possible implications of opening up regional trade reform regime are there to women traders in order to forestall possible negative impacts they already fear.

0.4.7 EAC should lead a process through which local CSOs, should join hands with government agencies to outreach to women traders with the major aim of informing them about the protocol and changing their largely negative perceptions and historical mindset about formal legal traders and the role of EAC. The best strategy would be to plan and put in place practical cost effective and easy to demonstrate steps and procedures that will challenge deeply held beliefs.

0.4.8 EAC should formally seek to learn from experiences in West and Southern Africa regional trade blocks measures at mainstreaming gender in cross border trade- some of which have been acclaimed as having succeeded in improving women's trading conditions. Such measures include selected and targeted affirmative action particularly relating to small scale trade in food items. A specific desk as well as targeted field collection of data/visits may be a good beginning point.

0.4.9 The UNECA and the Trade Centre in particular should continue supporting the EAC gender department to set up capacity to influence policies on mainstreaming gender internally but also externally in state organs of member states.

1. Background

Trade provides 60% of non agricultural self employment to women in sub-Saharan Africa⁷ with women constituting the largest proportion of informal traders representing between 70% - 80% in Southern and West Africa. Informal cross border traders are a significant part of such traders that play a key role in addressing vital issues of livelihoods such as food and income security. It is estimated that women cross border traders in West Africa traders employ 1-2 people and support an average of 3.2 children as well as 3.1 dependants who were not children or spouses⁸ Majority of women traders in the East African region are small-scale traders who depend on the modest profits generated from their trade to make ends meet. Most of the residents in the region rely on agriculture, thus trade being carried out mostly involves agricultural products⁹. The second category of small business activities include consumables such as sanitary/beauty products, medicines, footwear and textiles etc. Women are involved in trade within the region, but lack the wherewithal to take advantage of trade opportunities to improve their economic and social status in the society. This is so despite studies done in the sector indicating that the informal cross border trade is contributing immensely to the process of regional integration by building on the informal networks that have been developed by people over years, however women clearly have less trade opportunities compared to men.

The Protocol establishing the East African Customs Union mentions the special role of women in trade in the Preamble and Objectives which jointly mandate the Union to mainstream gender in its programmes. In the legal framework, women are again not been well catered for to take advantage of the policy opportunities. Generally the laws have tended to recognize and favour the large-scale trade sector, which is largely dominated by the men as individual traders or corporations.

Informal cross-border trade is coming under the spotlight for purposes of alleviating poverty in general and feminized poverty in particular. For this to happen effectively and efficiently, policy and institutional reforms should create an enabling environment for women cross border traders. Challenges to free and profitable participation in trade have to be identified and documented. The research will draw attention to the true condition of women traders within the context of the evolving protocol recognizing that genuine

⁷ ILO 2004

⁸ UNIFEM Baseline Studies on Women Informal Cross Border trade in Africa, 2008

⁹ *Women & Cross Border Trade in East Africa, Opportunities and Challenges for Small Scale Women Traders*

efforts towards the creation of a functional customs union must fully involve (knowledge of) women and their small-scale cross-border trade activities. Study findings should also lay a basis for deliberate efforts by individual countries to offer concessionary facilities to women traders in order to realize their full potential. This will eventually lead to women traders taking advantage of the opportunities created by the Customs Union.

As part of the implementation of activities to promote women's participation in trade, the ECA has been involved in Organizing an Inception Workshop on Mainstreaming Gender in Trade (April 2009) and Gender and Trade Training Workshop (June 18th- 19th 2009). To contribute to the knowledge base of gender dimensions in cross border trade the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) in collaboration with African Centre for Gender and Social Development (ACGSD) recruited a consultant to assist in undertaking a study on gender dimensions of cross border trade along the Kenya Uganda border and the Rwanda Burundi border.

1.1 Study scope

The consultant undertook to:

Review of literature that will included, studies on (small scale trade) trade in East Africa with specific reference to women's participation and trade policies

- 1.1.1 Document trade activities and types of businesses women engage in as well as identify categories of women traders by nationality and area of trade
- 1.1.2 Analyze data and compile a report
- 1.1.3 Share draft report in an ECA/EAC multi stakeholder consultative forum to critique and input
- 1.1.4 Revise the final report and submit

The consultant prepared a report to the Director, Trade, Finance and Economic Development Division (TFED) of ECA with a view to sharing the final report with regional bodies involved in trade and specifically with an interest in improving participation of women in cross border trade such as East African Community (EAC), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and Southern African Development Cooperation (COMESA) and with relevant government officials, private sector, and civil society organizations in African countries.

2. Introduction

2.1 Process and methodology

The main study was conducted in towns (Busia) along the Kenya Uganda border and (Butare) along the Rwanda Burundi Border targeting cross border women traders from Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania and even DRC Congo. Some data was also collected in Nairobi which is a major buying point for mainly manufactured goods for export in the region as well as a major assembly point for goods and traders en-route from the Kenyan port of Mombasa that has been the major entry point for goods to the landlocked East and Central African Countries. A quick survey was also conducted in Kisumu- an inland Kenyan city on Lake Victoria that is a major transit point for goods to and from Uganda and Tanzania. The consultant worked with a team of research assistants mainly from Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development- a research and policy advocacy NGO based in Nairobi as well as two from University College Rwanda in Butare to collect data from traders mainly using researcher administered questionnaires. We interviewed up to 174 questionnaire respondents among traders operating across the Kenya Uganda border and 41 respondents among traders operating across Rwanda Burundi border.

The main methods used included a researcher administered questionnaire targeting individual women traders. It was administered in a language the trader understood such as English, Kiswahili, Kinyarwanda/ Kirundi and French. Research assistants were partly chosen on their language proficiency in the languages the traders speak as well as ability to translate what they received into English. We also utilized individual informant questionnaire guides for traders who had extensive information on cross border trade as well as customs officials, security and immigration personnel. We also used random group discussions with traders mainly at their business premises in a modified version of focus group discussions. The research teams visited places and premises where traders buy and sell as well traveling and observing what goes on at border points. All research assistants were trained to observe keenly what was going on, what the women were trading in, how they were behaving in terms of apparent freedom to disclose information and their interaction with peers, customers and government officials. The same applied to border officials. The lead researcher closely monitored the work of the assistants and worked alongside them particularly on Rwanda- Burundi border. The teams used random sampling from information known or given on the location of traders. Other methods used on a smaller scale were personal testimonies by traders and casual conversation with respondents. The latter turned out to be a very effective method in Rwanda where respondents tended to want to be “politically correct” when questioned formally, however they gave away more critical details in casual conversation outside of the pressure of the interview. Respondents were largely purposively selected from women traders because we set out to prioritize their

stories and perspectives, however a deliberate effort was made to triangulate their views with those of male interviewees.

Most of the information collected was analyzed quantitatively using SPSS and the results further triangulated with other information derived from direct observation and interviews that derived qualitative data from key informants such as customs officials. Conclusions were largely made from the second stage qualitative analysis of data. 0000

2.2 Limitations of the study

The study had several limitations some unique to the places where interviews were conducted but some general and similar everywhere because they derived from the very nature of the research. Trade and cross border trade in particular is a very sensitive topic when discussed by people who live on it. Everywhere respondents were concerned about why they were being asked questions and what the interest of the researcher really was. Real fear emanated from possibility of collected information being passed on to government authorities such as tax departments. Some traders in Nairobi though we were agents of income tax department disguised as researchers, this may have affected the truthfulness of respondents despite good effort to reassure respondents. Respondents in Kenya from other countries feared security implications of their interviews as most were not sure of their status even when they were found trading in different markets. “Anonymity” became the best strategy for getting information. There were however some challenges unique to countries as below:

2.2.1 Rwanda Challenges

- The time within which the study was conducted was not sufficient to obtain necessary permit to conduct open interviews using questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions- researcher had to use conversational modes of interview and case experience based short personal testimonies (by traders). This limited the number of people that could be interviewed.
- Women are rather shy to talk to strangers and in particular through a translator who may pose/his or her own threats by virtue of whom s/he is.
- Fear by women that information they give may be used against them either by the revenue authorities or political repression
- A certain degree of political correctness was discerned as most appeared apprehensive of appearing to contradict/criticize the government or admit to getting their goods by illegal means
- Time to break the ice and strike conducive rapport within the brief period of the visit
- It was a busy trading season meaning that talking to researchers may cost a trader business.

- Unwillingness to divulge secrets of particular trading activities as rivals may get to know.

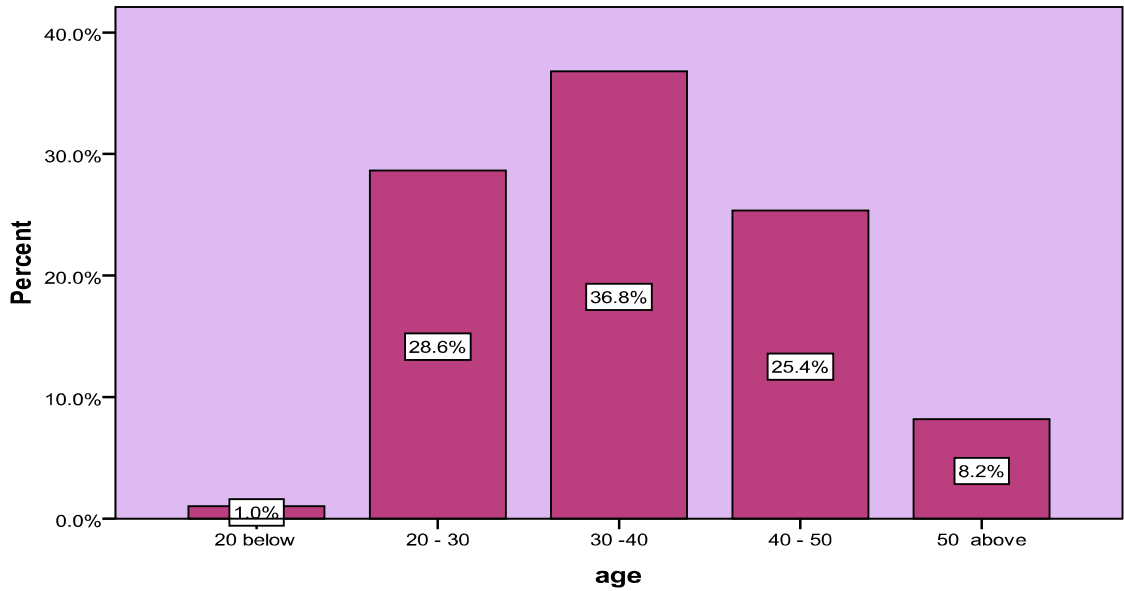
3. Findings of Women Traders Operating From/Through Kenya

3.1 Women Traders Age

Most of the women traders (-see Diagram 1 below-36.8% of interviewees) are between the ages of 30 and 40 years. Reasons given for this are that this is the time when women really need the money for their growing families. Other reasons were that it is the age when divorce/separation was most likely to happen as women were mature enough to make decisions. The same maturity also makes it possible for them to engage in trade. Some pointed out that at the age they have networks with other women who they may rely on for support to start off. At 28.6% the 20-30 group came a second and with the 30-40 group constituted 65.4% of the traders. Reasons were similar to the ones above as having young children is said to create demand. An additional factor more applicable to the latter group was to do with education- they were said to be better educated because standards of education for women are improving within the region and so there are more “educated women” looking for opportunities. Most respondents felt that it was an advantage to be educated to secondary school level to engage meaningfully in cross border trade. At 8.2% the 50 and above were said to be “too old” for the rigors of cross border trade as well as having less needs related to families to worry about since that is the age many women become grandmothers while their under 20 counterparts managed a paltry 1% participation because they are still too young and inexperienced to venture into cross border trade.

Diagram 1

RESPONDENTS AGE

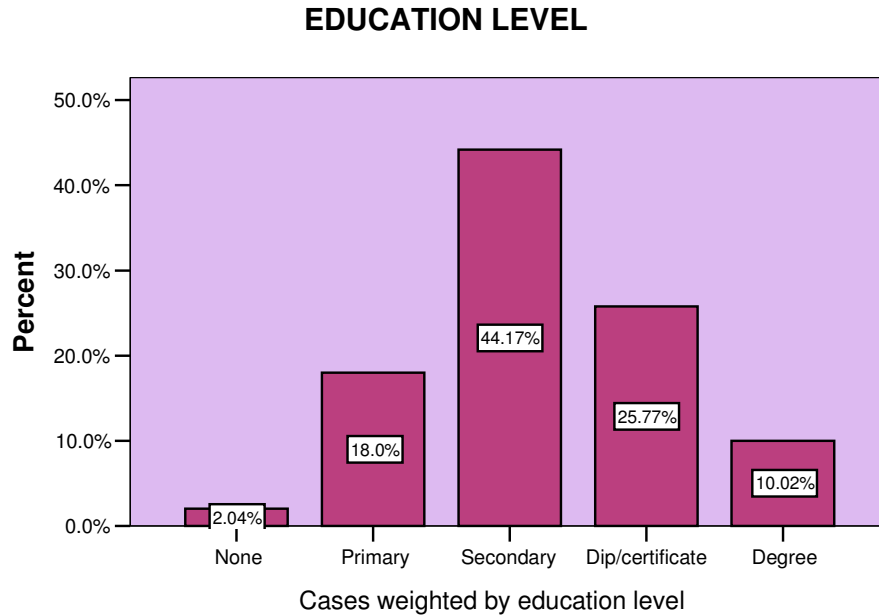


Cases weighted by age

3.2 Level of education

Majority 44.17% (see Diagram 2 below) had a secondary school education for reasons stated above that such education is an advantage. The professional/semi-professional diploma and certificate level traders came second at 25.77%. Even though degree holders came at 10.02%, they outnumbered those who had no education (at 2.04%) and they were said to be on the rise as trade was becoming more sophisticated as well as university graduates finding themselves without jobs.

Diagram 2



3.3 Average earnings a month

It may appear (from analysis in Diagram 3 below) that most women earn less than \$100 (33.5%) followed by \$200-\$400 (33.3). We however noted that this was the most difficult question for women to answer because they feared that we may be have connections with revenue authorities who would have access to the information and target them for higher taxes. This may explain why the graph lowers as you go higher- but still 9.4% earning above \$900 more than 6.1% earning \$600-\$800 showed that this may not necessarily be the case. We were told that some of the women in this sector are “very rich”. At least two of the respondents graded themselves in the rich category. Still, small informal trade is humble undertaking and may not make lots of money for women traders¹⁰. Traders prefer stay in the small informal category even when their income may show otherwise partly because of tax obligations beyond a certain income level. The other possible reason is what they regard as the unpredictability of trading circumstances/conditions to guarantee a stable high income. It may also appear that modesty is a virtue in informal small scale trading- since most women do not make lots of money it may be in bad test to appear

¹⁰ It must be noted that information on income was difficult to collect and was most likely understated because of fears about revenue department getting to know about it. Most traders also said they had difficulty computing the amount because of seasonal variations.

like one is doing too well. An interesting observation by a Ugandan trader with a shop in Nairobi regarding wealth/income status was that in Kenya she felt poor, but back home in Uganda she was rich after exchanging Kenya shillings to Uganda shillings. It may appear that there are no uniform income status across the region.

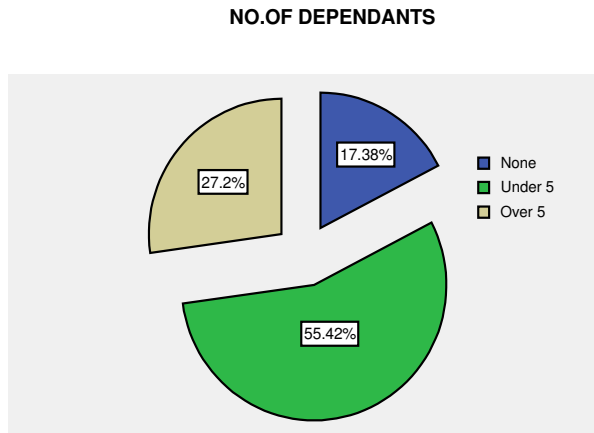
Diagramme 3



3.4 Number of dependants

At 55.42% (see diagram 4 below) most of the respondents were supporting under 5 dependants who ranged from own children, siblings, spouses/boyfriends and other relatives including orphans. A significant 17.38 said they had no dependants- this were largely unmarried women or those who sad their spouses supported them and the income from trade was just additional to what the husband provided. The relatively large number dependants may be a reflection of the high incidence of poverty among families/communities that the traders come from apart from also explaining why they may be in trade.

Diagram 4



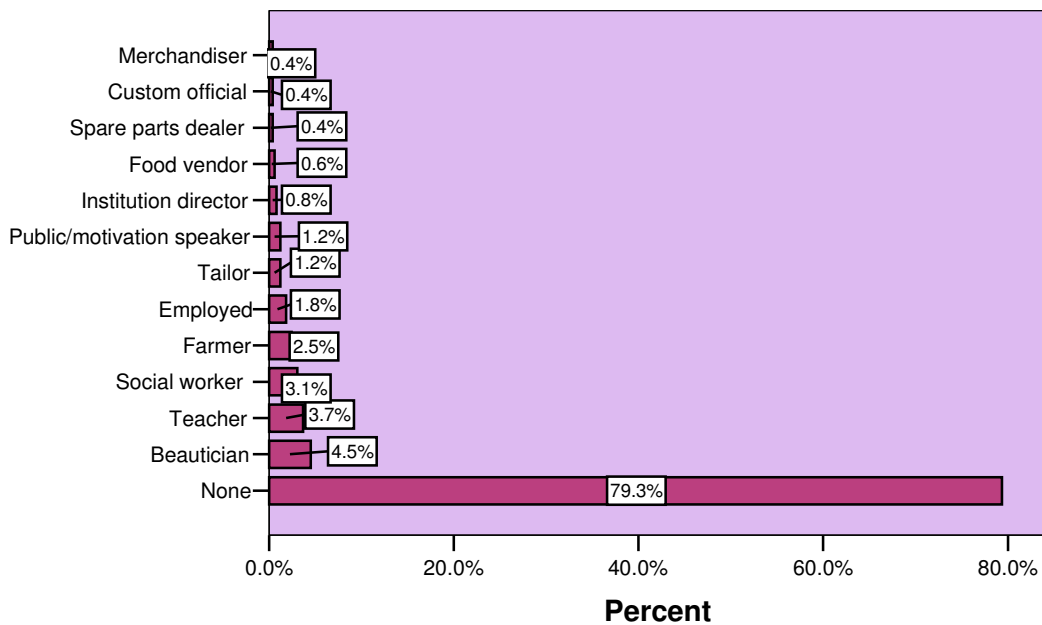
Cases weighted by no.of dependants

3.5 Occupation other than trader

79.3% (see diagram 5 below) respondents were fully dependent on cross border trade for their income and survival. Still 19.7% had other sources of income, majority being teachers. This may imply that women traders look to cross border trade as their mainstay and therefore devote most of their productive time to it as professional traders.

Diagram 5

OCCUPATION



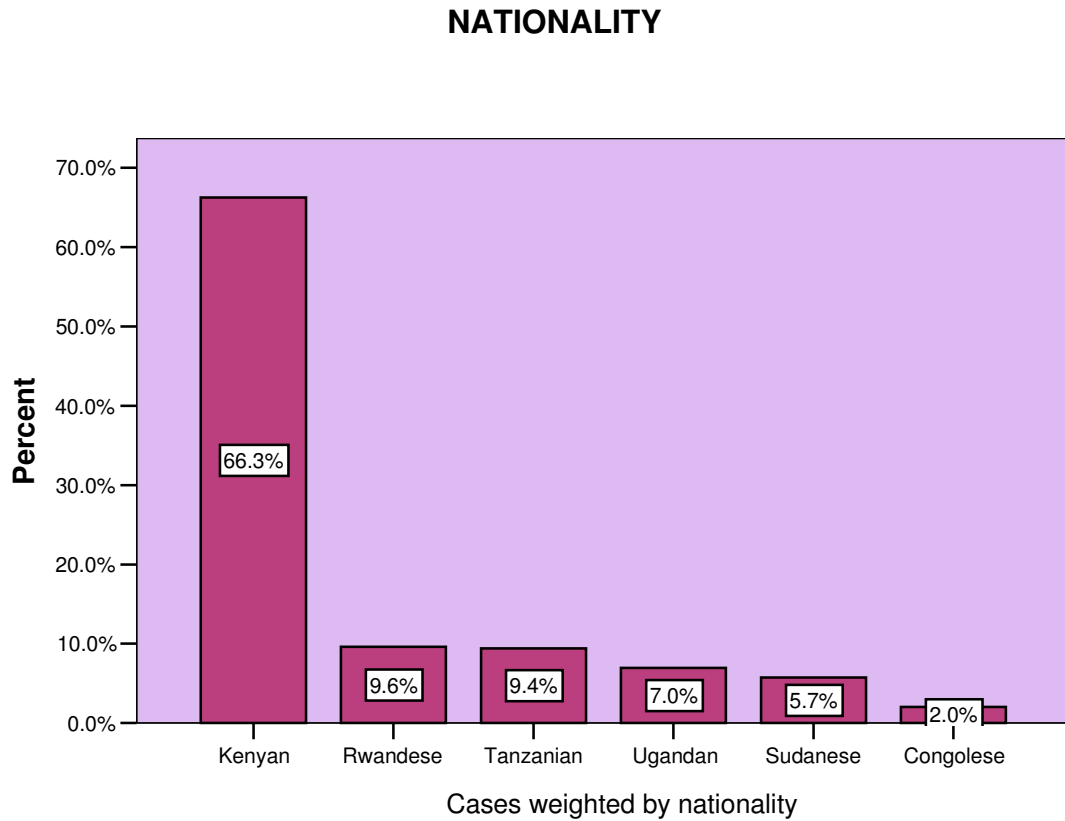
Cases weighted by occupation

However participation of professional women such as teachers shows that cross border trade is valued and may offer opportunities for alternative income for many more women within the community. Further women with an existing income such as from reliable formal employment may have been facilitated or continue to be supported by their income as recurrent trading capital. Places of work are also major markets for certain forms of goods such as textiles and shoes which makes it easier for a woman already employed in such a place to multi-task and tap in the market around her.

3.6 Nationality

Majority of women traders interviewed were Kenyan (see diagram 6 below) largely because most of the study was done from the Kenyan side of the border and in Kenyan business environments featuring cross-border traders. That the port of Mombassa is the entry point of most goods traded by traders from the landlocked neighbors also gives Kenyan women traders an added advantage.

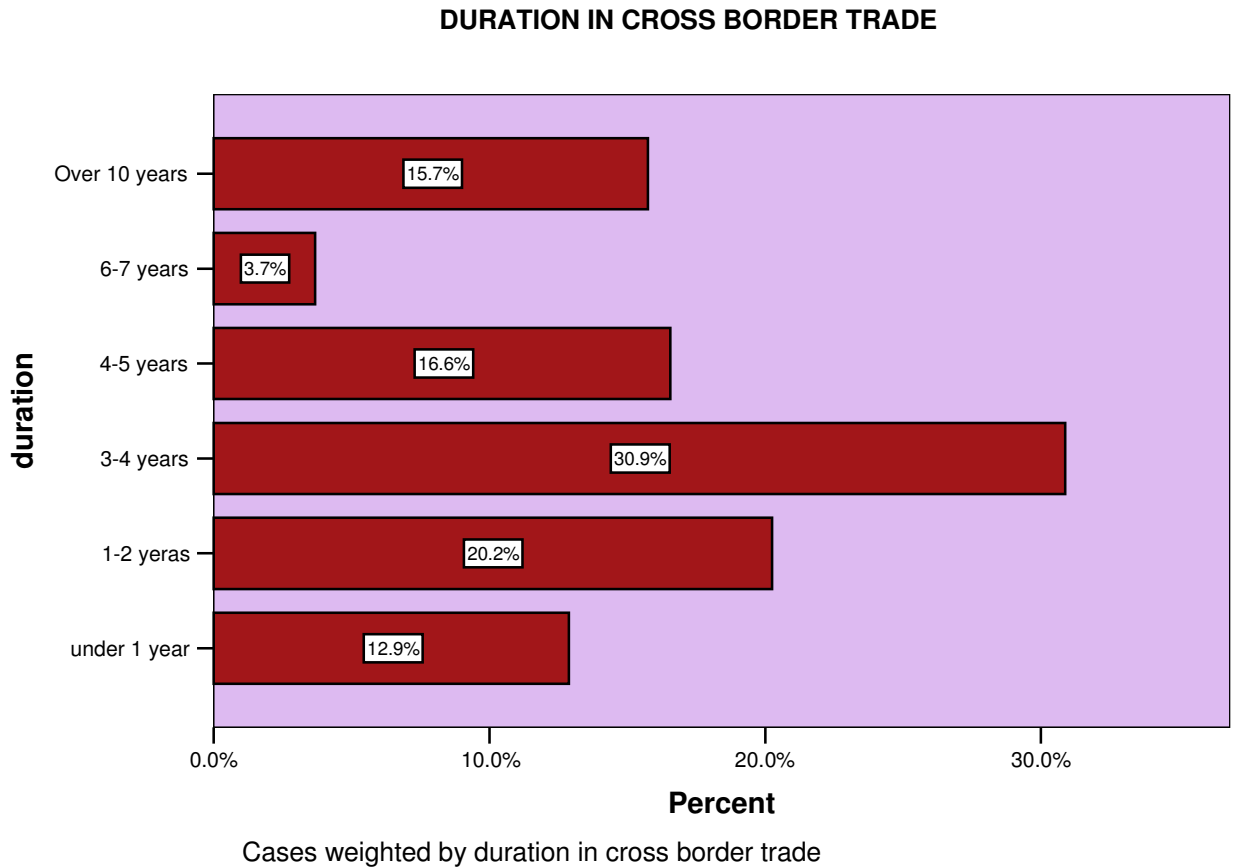
Diagram 6



3.7 Duration in cross border trade

30.9% of the traders (see diagram 7 below) had been at it for between 3 and 4 years followed by those who had been in it for 1-2 years. The fact that those who had been in trade for under 1 year were second last in terms of trading experience may mean that there are relatively few entrants and a number of the women who begin to engage in the trade stay on for longer. Still the larger numbers at 3-4 years may imply an upsurge at the time they joined the trade. The reasonably long time most women have been in the trade also shows it is a dependable source of income.

Diagram 7



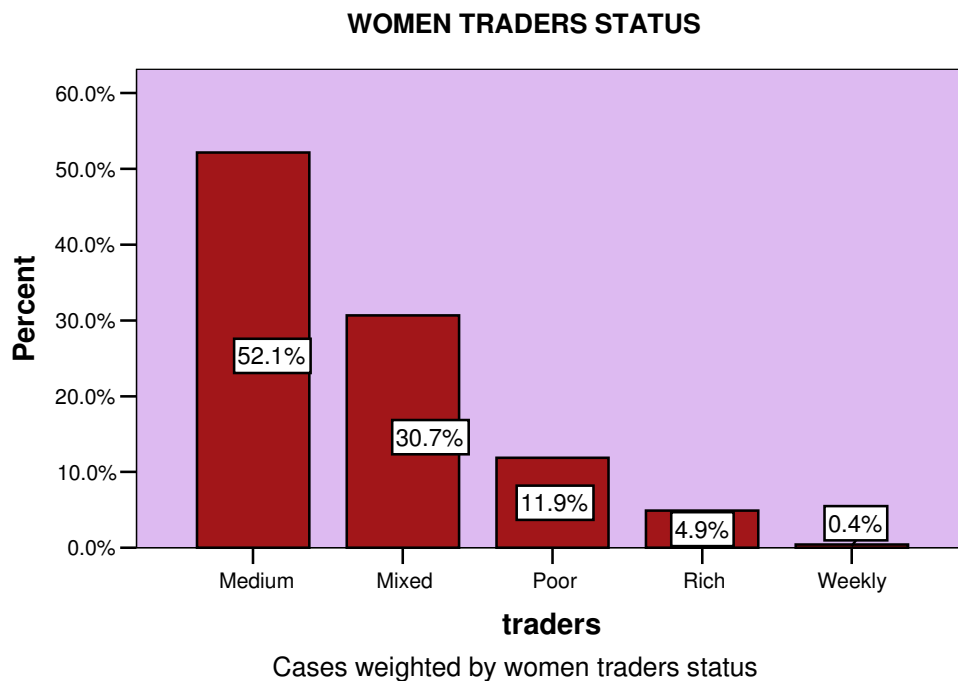
3.8 Socio-economic Status of women traders

Most cross border traders interviewed (see diagram 8 below) rated women traders as being medium¹¹ at 52.1%. 30.7% said mixed by which they meant that there were of different status. Some explained that status was a result of many variables that included the spouses/boyfriends and /or family income levels despite stating that for most traders, their status was most likely a result of their income levels in trade. Most were emphatic that they were not poor because one

¹¹ Medium roughly refers to social status largely derived from trade where one lives comfortably- meaning they meet their basic needs such as food and clothing for themselves and families and other needs such as school fees for children and good living conditions. It was difficult to pin status to income level as other factors such as income of spouse/family sometimes impacted on the status of a trader.

needed money to engage in trade or at least a certain level of creditworthiness that could be verified by the lender. Yet 11.9% of traders were still categorized as poor. It was explained that some poor women join trade to improve themselves but factors that made them poor in the first place militated against their advancement in trade. This applied mainly to women who later gave up and tried something else. Some felt that the poor group either did not have skills or were just unlucky. Most traders recognize luck (good luck) as very important if one is to succeed.

Diagram 8

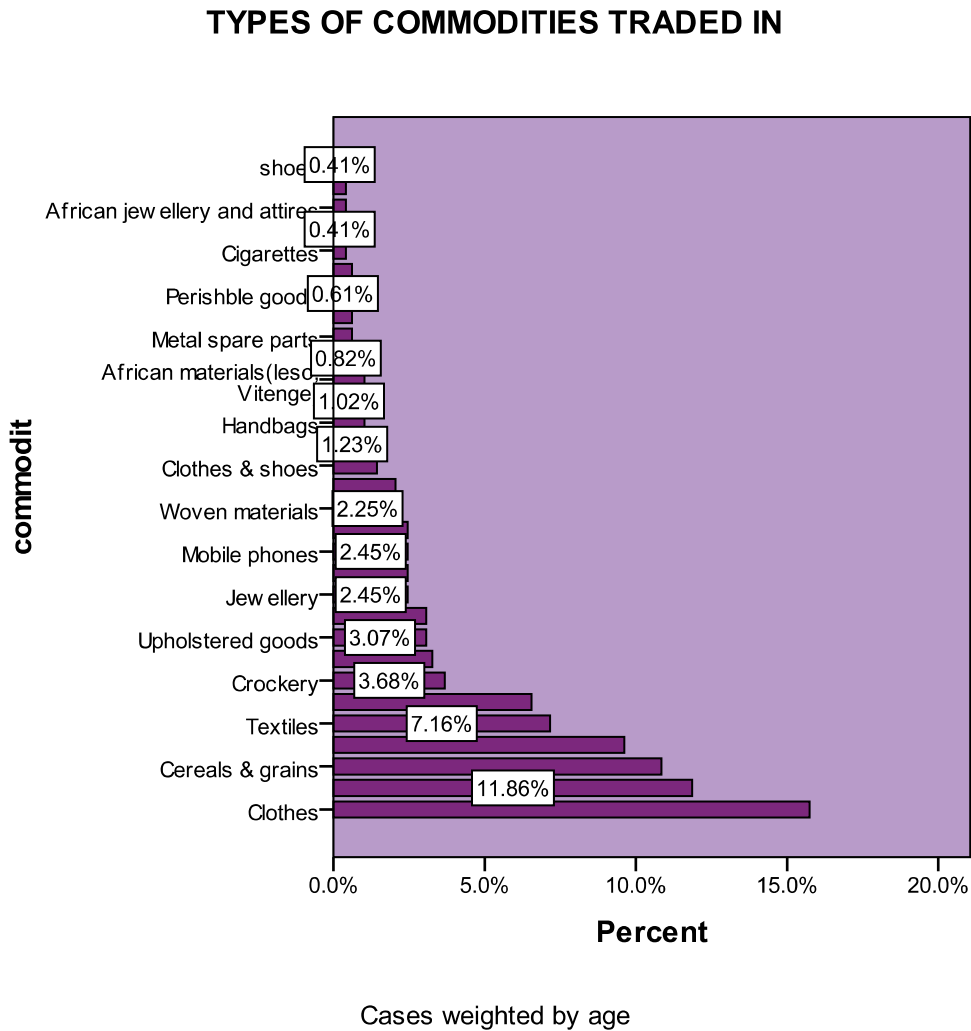


3.9 What type of commodities do they trade in?

Majority of women traders interviewed (see diagram 9 below) were trading in textiles, shoes and beauty ornaments and products. In second place were those trading in cereals. Choice of goods had to do with availability and accessibility to markets as well as a traders knowledge and skills at conducting certain businesses. Those in the textile market for instance said they knew or had to learn a lot about fashion trends and what different women and other clients like at what times and in what quantities- even from what source. Cereals were said to be the most accessible trade for most women because some could get it from their own farms or purchase it relatively cheaply from neighbors. It was reported that what was seen at the markets was just a small fraction of the trade in cereals that had over the years seen establishment of

many networks of seasonal movement of goods. What we inferred from interviews is that most women are to be found trading in cereals at different levels right from the farms.

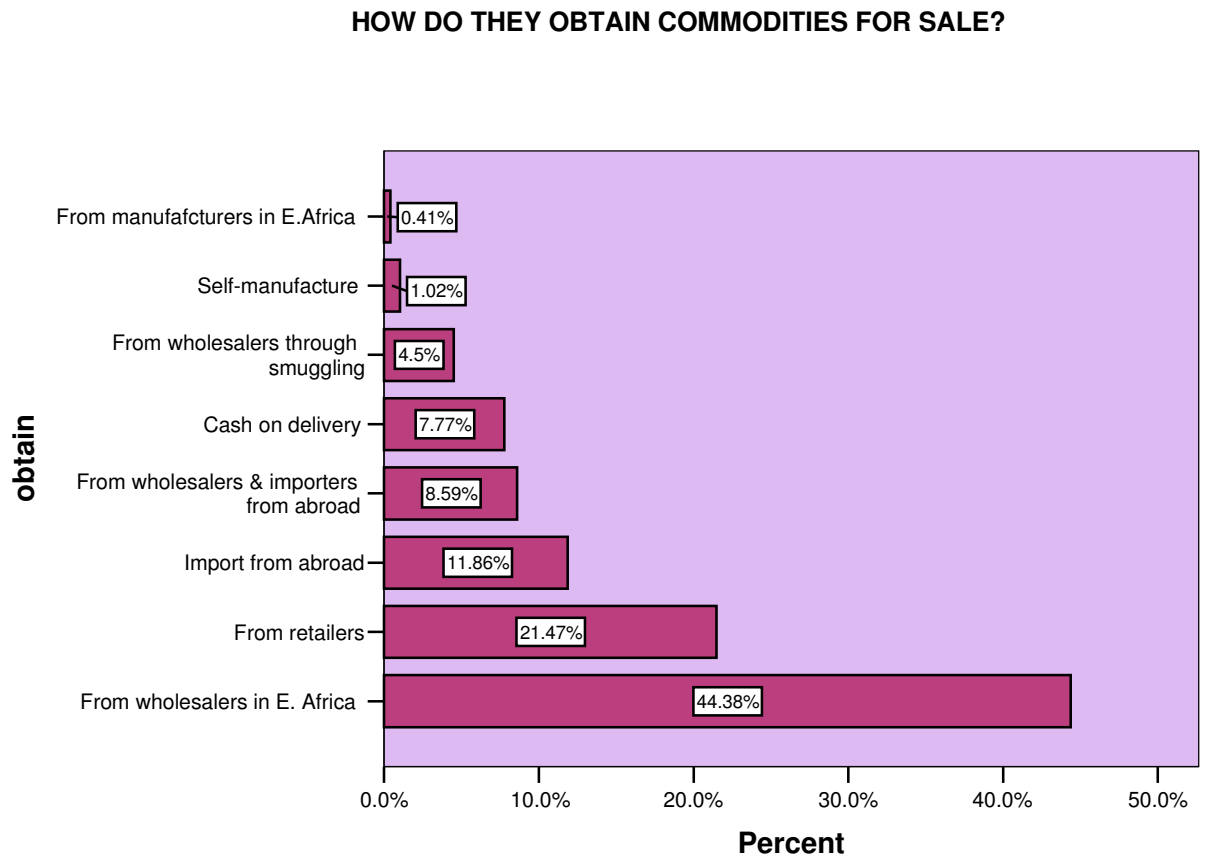
Diagram 9



3.10 How do they obtain commodities for sale?

Majority 43.38% (see diagram 10 below) obtain their goods from whole-sellers somewhere in East Africa. Nairobi was said to have a big concentration of such trading stores and thus the presence of many traders. Still a good number obtained from retailers. It was explained that this were women who bought in very small quantities in one country and sold at a profit in a different country that the goods were difficult to come by or were more expensive. Beauty products such as skin lightening creams were said to be very expensive in Nairobi but cheaper in Uganda and DRC, even women who bought from retailers in Uganda ended up making a profit. Also some beauty products were said to be difficult to obtain on a whole sale basis.

Diagram 10



Cases weighted by how traders obtain commodities for sale

There are also reported cases where goods are bought in larger quantities and subdivided by the traders into smaller packages and re-sold. Even when originally bought from a retailer, the subdivision increases profit margins. Such sub-division is done to make the goods more easily affordable. The category of goods imported “from abroad” meant not from within the EAC or its vicinity- such as from the Gulf states, India, China, Thailand, Malaysia and in rare cases Europe and the United States of America.

3.11 What difficulties do they experience in obtaining commodities for sale?

Customs officials topped the list of difficulties (see diagram 11 below). It must be noted that this was regardless of whether the goods were smuggled in or passed through official designated border points. A popular way of transporting goods across official border points is to arrange with a public service vehicle driver to pay (read bribe) customs officials who inspect the bus to see if they are any goods that need to be charged duty. Most are paid to “look the other way” so the bus is cleared but at a price determined by the customs officials. While official duty may not have been charged and the women traders have gotten in the goods “duty free”, they will still have paid customs. It was also shared that customs officials determine the amount of unofficial duty (bribes) to be paid on contraband. Police inland used this figure when they caught women with goods that did not have customs receipts. Closely related to customs officials and taxes is transportation costs that refers to both real cost of transportation and acquired cost of transportation where the final cost includes bribes paid to security and customs officials along the way.

It emerged that cross border trade is inseparable from the means of transport and the largely male transporters who control it. Interviews with the male motor-cycle and bicycle transporters¹² at the Busia border confirmed that they regarded themselves as central to the successful operation of cross border trade by women. Apart from providing discreet and reliable transportation, small scale cycle transporters also act as middlemen and agents of women in trading ventures. Most had knowledge of where to find trade goods at the best deals. Traders from both sides of the border use them as contacts with specific women traders or as marketers for their goods. Cycle transporters claimed to know government and local council officers as well as other players in the field that “allowed” flow of goods from one side of the border to the other. They boasted that without them women traders may not get anywhere as they could sabotage them at will- but were quick to emphasize that they related very well with their women trader clients and that such traders were their biggest source of livelihood. They also claimed that even different categories of state officials such as police and immigration relied on them to remit monies collected on

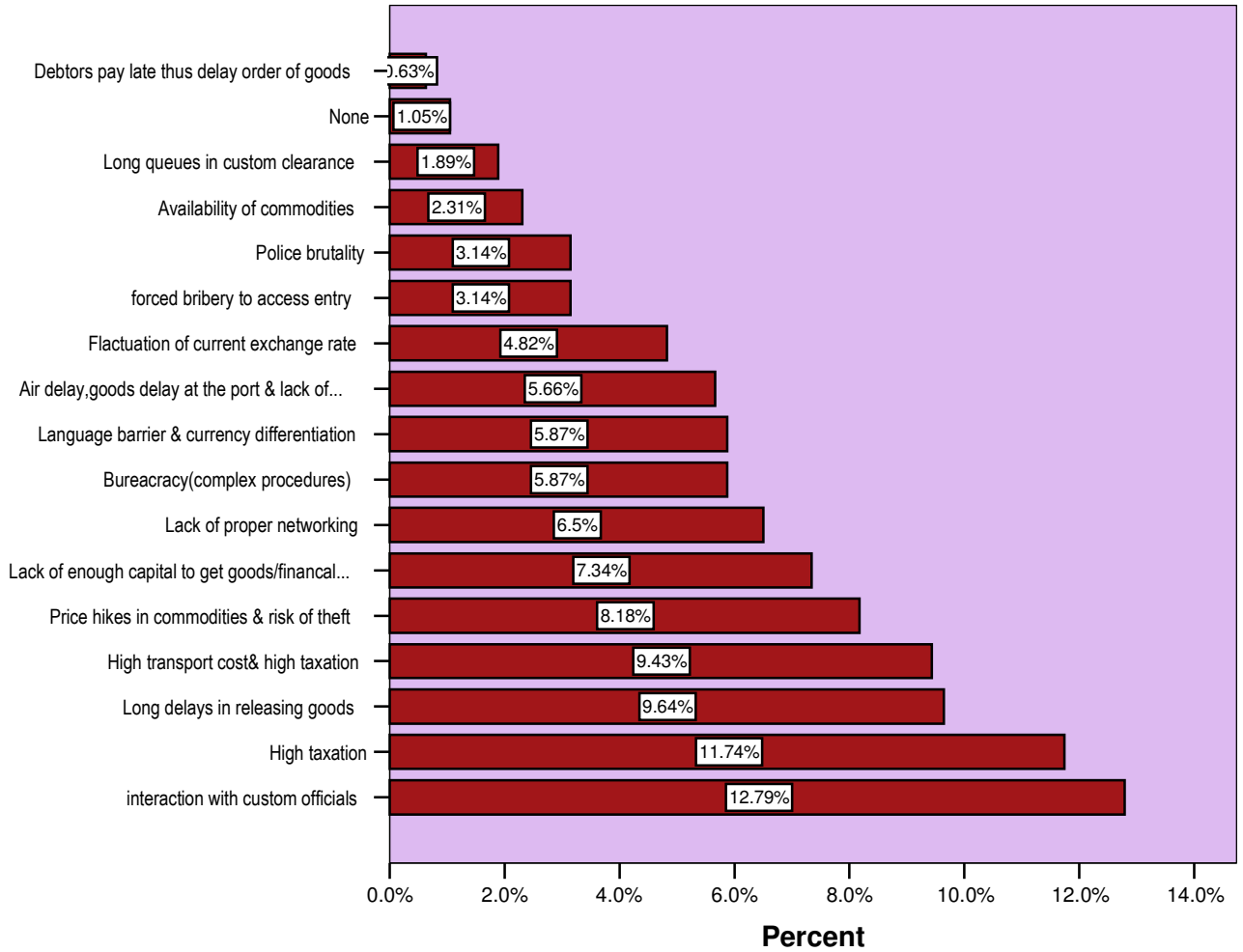
¹² Locally referred to as “Boda Boda” derived from the cross border transportation activities

their behalf from women traders and even for information on what was being traded, by whom and from where.

Women traders had very few complaints against transporters on the contrary they expressed gratitude to them for enabling them to cross the border with few hustles. There appeared to be so much business trust between them that women traders routinely entrusted transporters with relatively large volumes of goods and sometimes money for trading purposes. This is the trusted mode of doing business. There is a special category of disabled cycle transporters who use their wheel chairs. Traders said that these transporters were not harassed by the police/immigration on both sides of the border and that they could transport even high value goods such as minerals without being detected. They were also said to be more trustworthy than other cycle transporters.

Diagram 11

DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED



Cases weighted by difficulties experienced

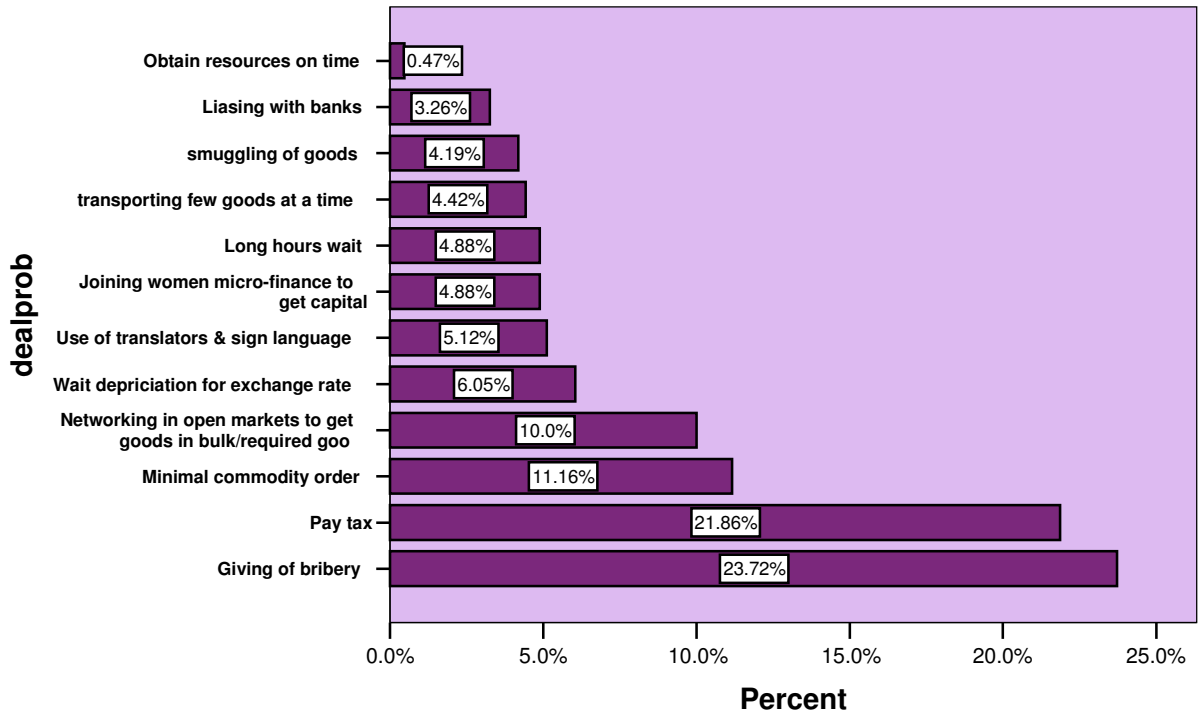
3.12 How do they deal with these problems

As discussed earlier women traders have devised own copying mechanisms to suit the situation with bribery being top on the list (see diagram 12 below) at 23.72%. Next in line is paying taxes at 21.86% which incidentally includes bribes paid as taxes. Monies paid by transporters are often disguised as taxes but they do not get into official records. When asked if they pay taxes, women

traders still list such bribes as taxes they pay so the percentage of bribes being the biggest problem should be higher.

Diagram 12

HOW DO THEY DEAL WITH PROBLEMS



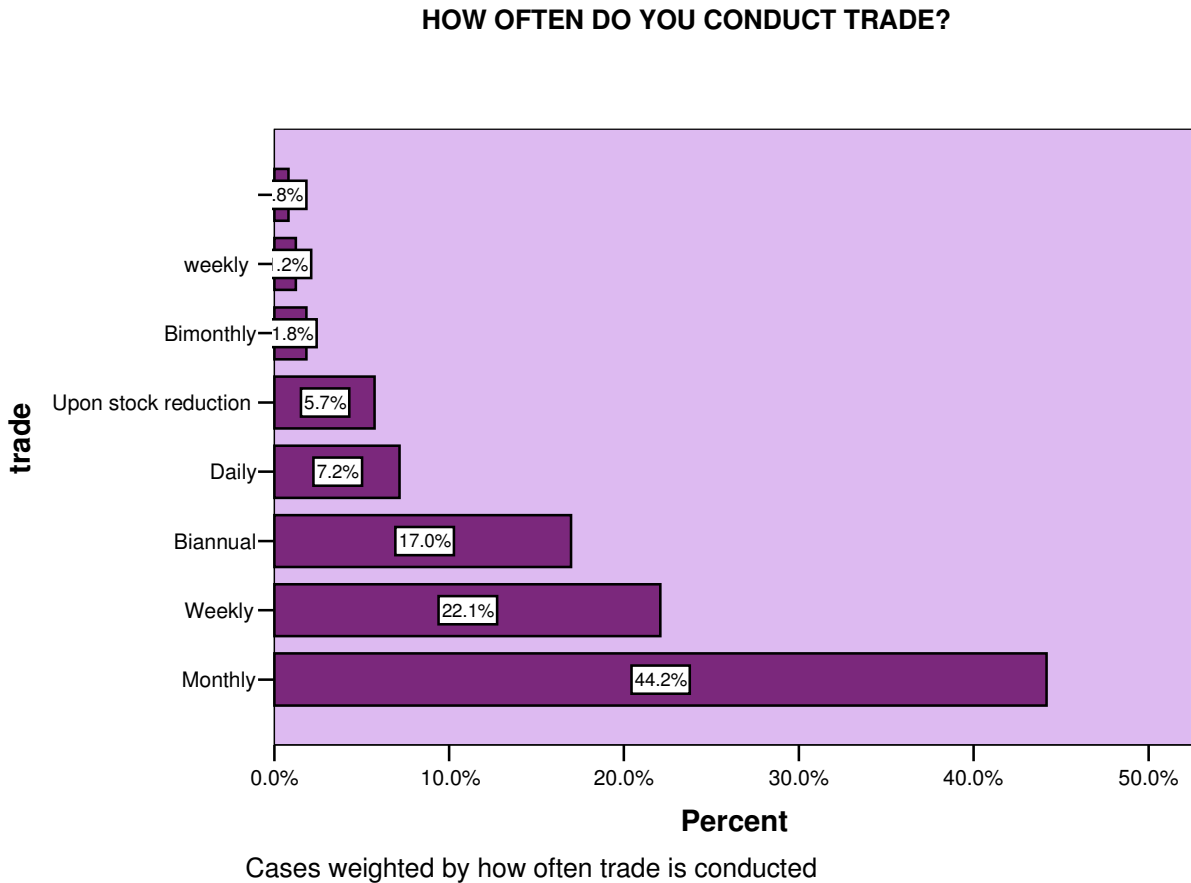
Cases weighted by how they deal with problems

Other problems to do with unavailability of credit was not coherently answered save for some saying they join credit societies and approach banks. Tested ways of dealing with problems such as taxes on high volumes of goods included organizing with cycle transporters to carry across goods in smaller volumes that may not attract too much attention and smuggling of the same.

3.13 Frequency of cross border trade

Most women conduct cross border trade -bringing in or taking out commodities across borders- on (roughly) monthly basis followed closely by those who do so on a weekly basis (see diagram 13 below). This is an indication that there is frequent travel for trade purposes by women across the borders. 7.2% cross the border on a daily basis. The frequency is determined by need for more goods and also seasonal availability of say agricultural produce. Traders who buy and re-sell to other traders with retail outlets were said to be the most frequent travelers since they act as suppliers and their income depends on how frequently they can keep up with demand and supply. However the fact that women traders may not be crossing borders is often not an accurate indicator of the rate of trade since as we saw earlier, their goods may be delivered to them by trusted transporters.

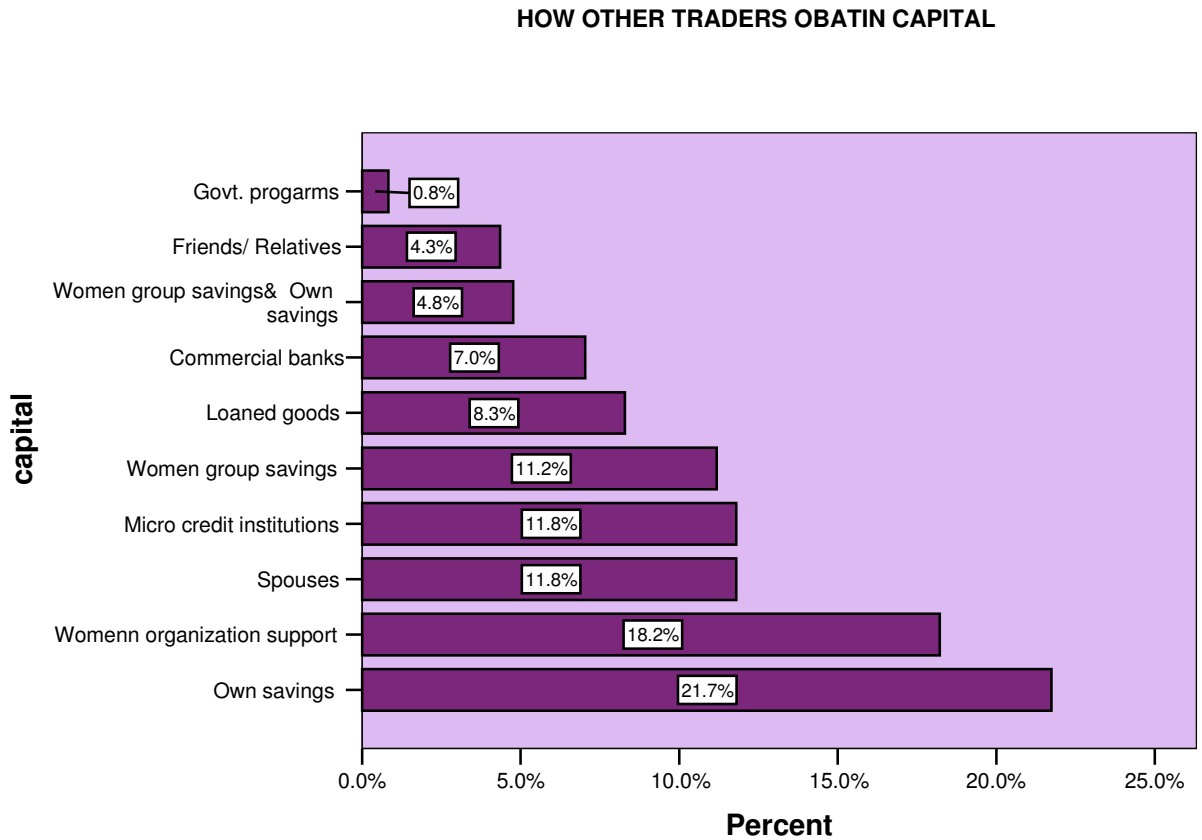
Diagram 13



3.14 Source of capital for trade

Consistently we found out that own savings (see diagram 14 below) are the major source of funding for trade activities at 21.7% followed by funds from women’s organization at 18.2%. Most of the women’s organizations are welfare organizations where women arrange to borrow from what they have saved so it may still come back to own savings about 40% of capital. If we added the 11.8% that is acquired from spouses- as much as 51.8% may be from own/spouse sources. A similar arrangement is followed in micro-credit organizations that usually lend against a percentage of the borrowers savings. Commercial banks contribute a paltry 7%.

Diagram 14



Cases weighted by how traders obtain capital

Women traders owned up that they were generally suspicious of banks in particular and a number of formal credit options such as credit societies. Fear for banks has to do with bank charges such as ledger fees and other formal requirements of opening an account. They said they knew hat

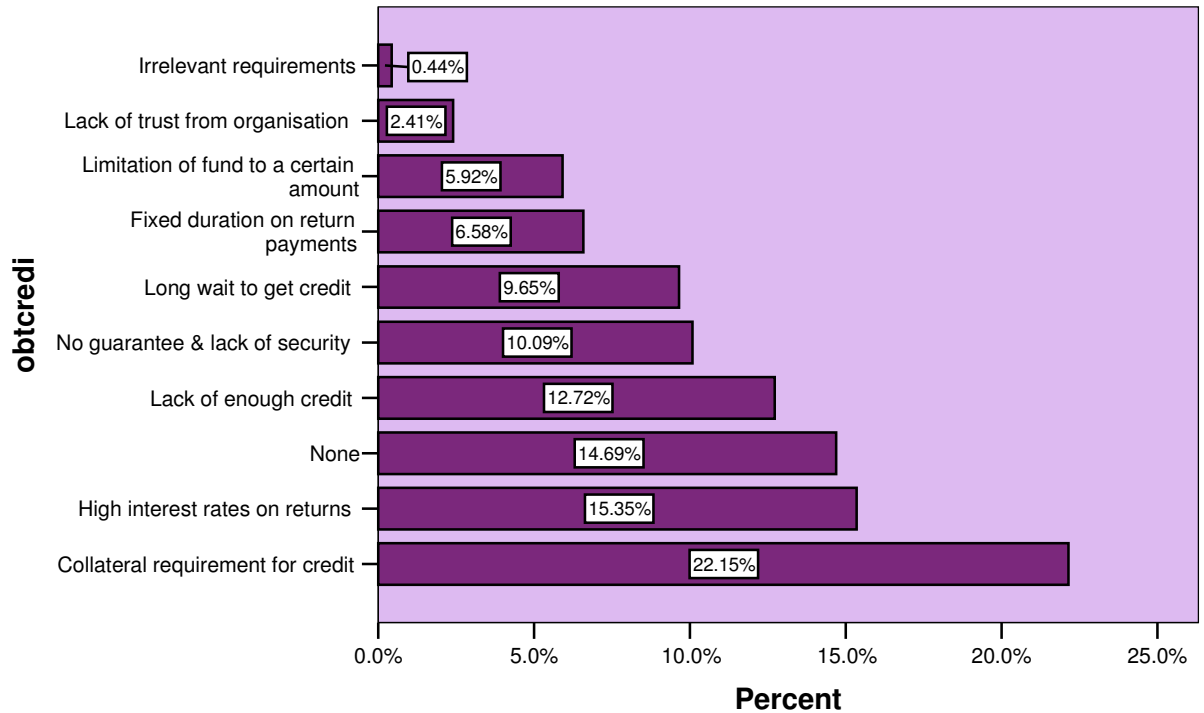
even after banking with them, it was an uphill task obtaining a loan since their kind of business did not involve keeping good records of accounts so there was no way they could prove their credit worthiness. Micro credit institutions were more acceptable, however a number of (the poorer) traders said they did not feel confident enough to join because of uncertain cash flow that would make it difficult to keep up with the regular contributions they said credit societies ask for. In a few cases some of the credit societies did not operate above board and one may have to bribe to get a loan- according to some interviewees.

3.15 Problems experienced in obtaining credit

Collateral at 22.1% (see diagram 15 below) is the leading hindrance to obtaining credit. Women traders complained that even micro-enterprise lenders including women specific ones have punitive requirements for collateral that include attaching and auctioning property of defaulters. Interviewees also said the collateral requirements hit women disproportionately because most of what they could give is registered in the name of their spouses because of socio-gender economic arrangements prevailing in marriages. Next in the order of concerns are the high interest rates charged that may not be serviced by income from businesses. The high interest rates are charged because of the calculated level of risk of lending by institutions. Women were concerned that even women focused institutions still charged exorbitant interests despite saying they were supporting women.

Diagram 15

PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED IN OBTAINING CREDIT



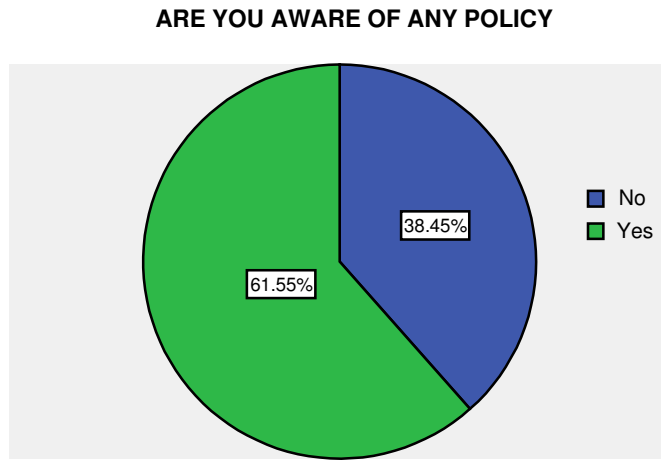
Cases weighted by problems experienced in obtaining credit

Some traders who claimed to have obtained money from women focused credit organizations said often the money they gave was not enough to meet the needs of business since it was pre-set and not dependent upon ones credit needs. Another requirement they described as irrelevant was that women be in groups in order to receive credit- this they saw as time wasting especially for those who felt they could manage individual loans. The group requirement also delays credit which may not work well with business fundamentals in cross border trade.

3.16 Awareness of policy/laws

More than half of the respondents (see diagram 16) – 55.4% are aware of trade policies and laws but the rest do not know or are not sure. Such is a very high percentage of those engaged in business.

Diagram 16



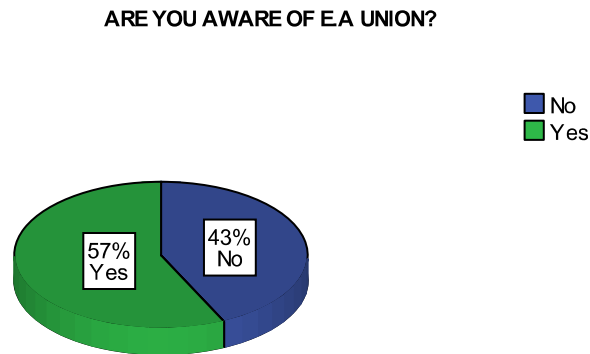
Cases weighted by policy awareness

Among those who were aware of policies were the large majority who knew that taxes have to be levied on all goods entering the country save for a few select ones.

3.17 Awareness of the existence of the East African customs union.

Slightly more (57.06%- see diagram 17 below) of the respondents were aware of the customs union but with a worrying percentage that is still ignorant. Most of those who had had of the customs of union had gotten the information through the electronic media as well as through friends and other traders. Awareness did not largely include knowledge of what the customs union entails. Most said they had heard that some goods would be removed from the tax role and some would be allowed free passage across the ECA countries. We did not come across any respondent who was aware that the protocol had specific affirmative statements about participation of women in trade. The knowledge is to a big extent vague or general at best. Women traders are not in a position to know what to demand or lobby for under the protocol. They did not even seem to care a lot that it portended possible support for them.

Diagram 17



Cases weighted by awareness of E.A union

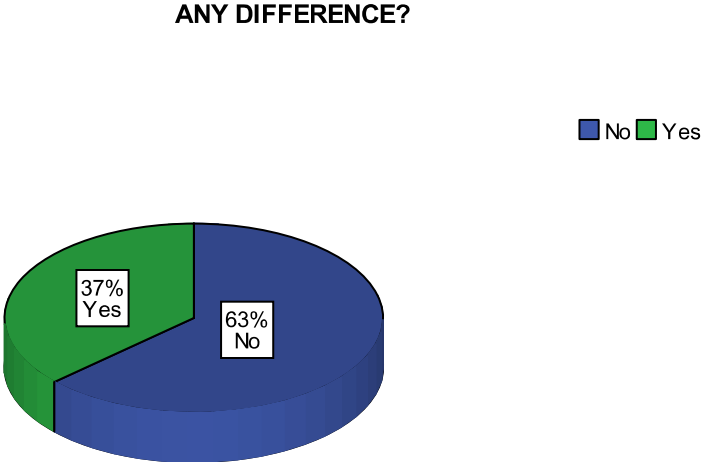
3.18 Is the customs union protocol making a difference?

A worrisome 60.1% (see diagram 18 below) of women traders have not seen a difference to the conditions of trade attributable to the customs union. Only 36.8% have noticed a change. Among the ones who said there was a change were some who confessed to not having tried using official channels of importing or exporting goods for trade. Subsequently they failed to specify what change they had noticed. The impression that the protocol is making a difference is therefore just that for some who are yet to try the official trading routes and processes to test their long held perceptions. The most consistent response was that not much difference had been noticed with regard to trade since they (women traders) continue to trade as before. It may be the case that discussions about the protocol have been at a very high level and they have not involved small scale cross border traders such as the ones that were the subject of the research. Since nobody appears to have targeted them for information or outreach on the changes they have not felt motivated to take a keen interest in it. Random interviews with male cycle transporters and (very few) traders revealed that they knew much more about the protocol on the average than women traders did. Asked where they got information, most had read it in the newspapers or had been briefed by someone who had read. It turned out that they had even discussed it informally among themselves at their work stations. Some said they had shared the information with women traders but in their view the women traders were not really interested. It was apparent that save for the press even men had not received information on the protocol from official government sources such as administration circulars to the public. We tried to find out the motivation for the male interest in information on the protocol aside from curiosity and established that as middlemen they regularly use such information to negotiate with

state officials and other interested parties in cross border trade on what they should pay to let goods through. Even customs officials acknowledged having a more difficult time dealing with male traders and men in general on trade matters than with women.

It was also the view of male traders/transporters that the customs protocol had made little difference so far. They said (what they knew of) the protocol is confusing making it difficult for them to use it to benefit themselves and trading partners. They said the only change they have noticed is in the movement of people across the borders that has eased somewhat and security officials on both sides are more tolerant.

Diagram 18



Cases weighted by respondents view

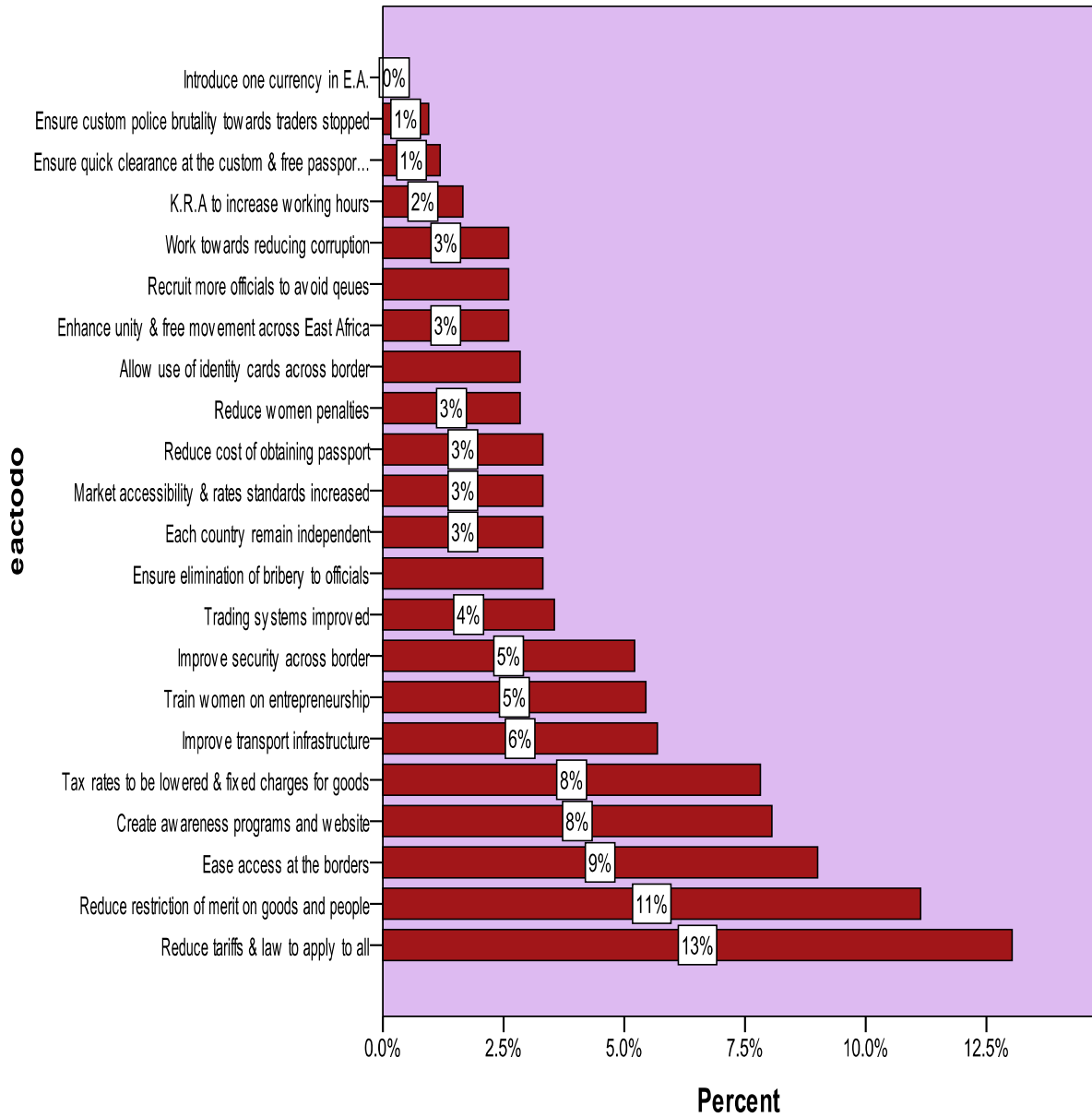
3.19 What women would like to be done to improve cross border trade

Women traders made many suggestions (see diagram 19 below) to improve trade most notable being the reduction and equity in tariffs, restriction on movement of goods and people, creation of awareness and improvement of trade transportation networks and infrastructure top the list. Ironically most of the policy/ legal recommendations are already provided for by the customs union but the women traders do not seem to realize as they are not well acquainted with it. It may be that such recommendations are an indicator of the big gap between policy formulation by the

organs of the EAC and implementation. The intended beneficiaries of policy are not aware and are still waiting for such a policy to be enacted and implemented. Some of the recommendations contradict others, for example while most are for greater integration and free flow of goods at least one recommends independence or continued separation of the EAC countries. The main reason for this is that small –scale cross border traders have in the past reaped from differences in economic policy among the EAC states where some set higher taxes for goods that can easily be accessed from across the border -an illicit market is immediately facilitated to get cheap goods to the side that has higher taxes. The same happens when say one country bans importation of second hand clothes as happened in the 1980s between Kenya and Tanzania- a very lucrative smuggling trade obtained where the clothes were smuggled from Tanzania and sold at more profit in Kenya by traders. The lifting of the ban by Kenyan authorities may have been welcomed by consumers but certainly not by traders who stood to gain more through illegal trade.

Diagram 19

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE CROSS BORDER TRADE

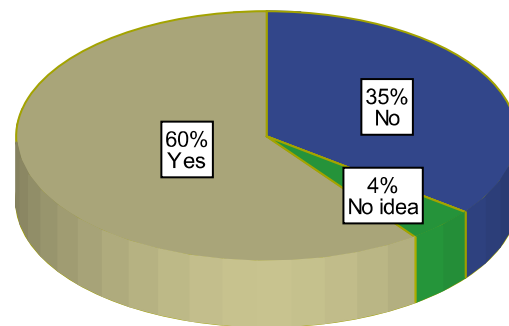


Cases weighted by recommendations to improve cross border trade

3.20 Level of interaction between women cross border traders in EAC

Diagram 20

DO WOMEN CROSS BORDER INTERACT?



Cases weighted by women cross border interaction

It became clear that majority 59.7% (see diagram 20 above) of women cross border traders interact with one another across nationality lines. Conversations with traders characterized the interaction as informal and one that was based much more on mutual needs of goods and information or protection than on sound calculated and planned business contacts. Women traders said they rely a lot on their “sisters” (nationals) within the countries they trade with to give them information, make business contacts for them, advice them, sometimes accommodate them and even bail them from police custody when arrested for trespassing or conducting illegal trade. Such interactions also include purchasing goods for traders from other countries often on the basis of trust. Two Kenyan traders said they were even accommodating children of friends from Uganda who were studying at Kenyan Universities in Nairobi. The same women traders said they believed that there were probably more Ugandan traders doing the same for Kenyan

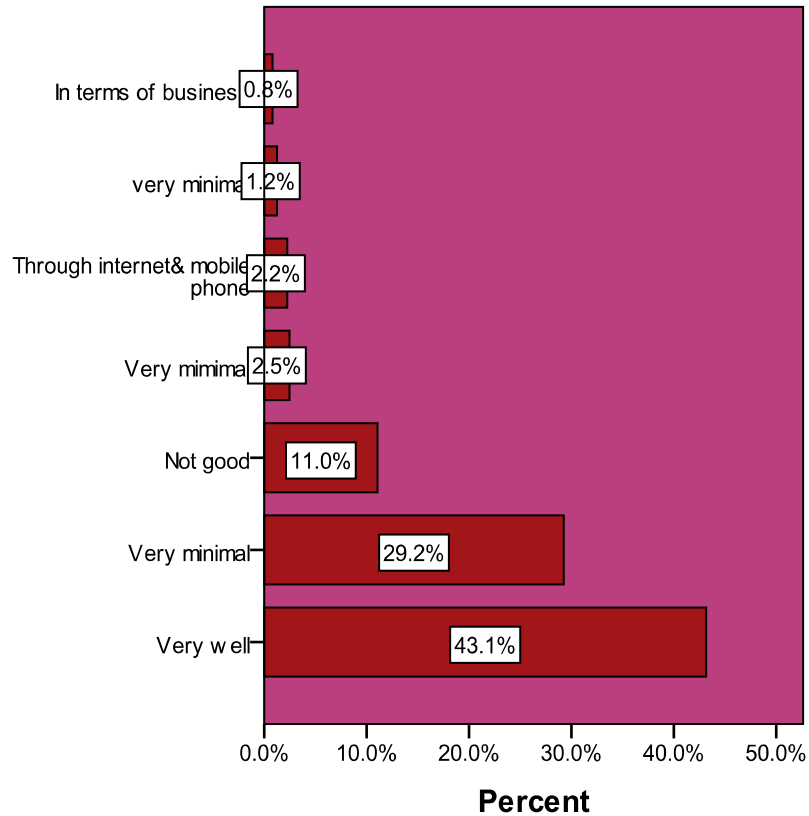
children since university education is cheaper in Uganda than in Kenya and Kenyan families often send their children to Uganda, some from the time they are in high school so as to make it easier for them to be admitted to good courses colleges in Uganda. So the links go beyond narrow business interests to encompass strong family friendship ties based on reciprocity.

3.21 Interaction between women and male cross border traders

As for the relationship between their male counterparts majority 43.1% (see diagram 21 below) said it was good while 29.2% put it at very minimal. Most interviewees said they dependent upon male traders largely for transportation purposes and as middlemen. Relationship is more businesslike than obtains among women to women traders. A considerable number of the closest contacts between male and female traders has to do with transport as reported above where male transporters also double up as middlemen for trade contacts and transactions.

Diagram 21

HOW DO WOMEN & MALE TRADERS RELATE?



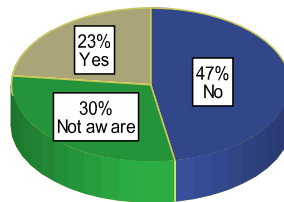
3.22 Status of groups or associations to enhance women in cross border

Majority of respondents (see diagram 22 below) 57.6% said there were groups supporting women in cross border trade. Most added that the groups concerned themselves much more with welfare needs of women as opposed to purely business interests. This may be because most of the groups like similar forms of women organizations, were started for welfare purposes or as kinship groups that later take up other issues as members see new uses they can put them to. Interviewees also said that membership of such groups is not homogeneous – they come from diverse interests and may therefore not easily focus on one aspect such as trade. It was also apparent that smaller groups may emerge from such groups that may caucus around interests of members. Where that is the case such informal caucuses within bigger organizations fail to generate enough

potential to make a significant impact on the interests they coalesce around. The challenge is enabling the groups that have considerable cross border trader membership and interests to organize professionally around issues of trade.

Diagram 22

ARE THERE WOMEN GROUPS?



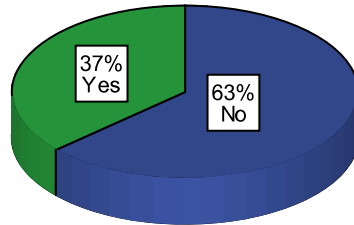
Cases weighted by respondents retort

3.2.3 Are you engaged in anything else when you are not practicing cross border trade?

From the response below in diagram 23 most (63%) of traders are fully involved in cross border trade with 37% practicing something else.

Diagram 23

ARE YOU ENGAGED IN ANYTHING ELSE



Cases weighted by respondents answer

4 Analysis of Trade on the Rwanda- Burundi border

4.1 Rwanda Findings

Overview of findings

Nearly all small scale business for women traders between Rwanda and Burundi is informal and this has always been the case as far as all interviewees know. Small scale women traders do not trade in the formal sector and show little interest in what goes on there- save for devising coping mechanisms when aspects of their trade are threatened by new policies/laws or change of government. Being informal and small scale the business has its own logic that is derived and driven by the prevailing conditions of poor people on both sides of the border who are the main beneficiaries and drivers of the business. The trade is so resilient that unlike mainstream trade, it still thrives even in times when the border is officially closed to movement of goods and people. It is so closely intertwined within the economic fundamentals of survival of the main players and the market they serve that its cessation may sound the death knell for the survival of hundreds of thousands and possibly millions of people and communities. Like similar findings

in past research¹³ this group of traders and their activities remain largely unrecognized, undocumented and unplanned for in respective formal government policy legal processes.

Women traders exhibited low awareness of formal structures of trade and with it of their rights as traders within the EAC catchments and low motivation for getting informed. Women traders appear to have accepted or resigned to the trading environment as it is and are either skeptical of the possibility of any good coming out of formalizing the sector through greater mainstream facilitation by government or out rightly hostile to such a suggestion. The main fear is that more government involvement would place a double burden on them as they stood the risk of continuing to support the old informal structures of corruption that currently facilitates the trade as well as pay government formal taxes without requisite services. They simply cannot afford that and fear that the goods they trade in would be out of reach of their main clientele- the poor.

Women traders are the first to acknowledge that things are far from being perfect and that they do need a helping hand to cope with the many challenges highlighted below- their main problem is that they are not new to respective government styles of dealing with the poor as themselves and see no reason to hope that things may change this time round¹⁴. Their main contention is that governments have neglected them at best and suppressed and exploited them through security and tax structures particularly when their activities showed potential to impact negatively on the business and political interests of the status quo. That the business is a clandestine operation as a surrogate backdrop to the formal sector is an advantage to them because the system lacks knowledge of its operations to deal it a death blow if it suits it. They however recognize their strength as a group- as a social security support mechanism that nurtures and sustains a large population far out of proportion to the total financial output when compared to the formal sector. In Rwanda and Burundi, business women repeated time and time again that they have seen to the sustenance of life even in the worst economic and civic crisis in the past when government all but crumbled living people to their on devises. In a nutshell they feel they not only need but deserve mainstream government support but it should be with their participation in identifying solutions and working to change their condition.

¹³ See earlier research findings in ***Women and Cross Border Trade in East Africa- Opportunities Challenges for Small Scale Women Traders*** Nairobi, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development, 2006.

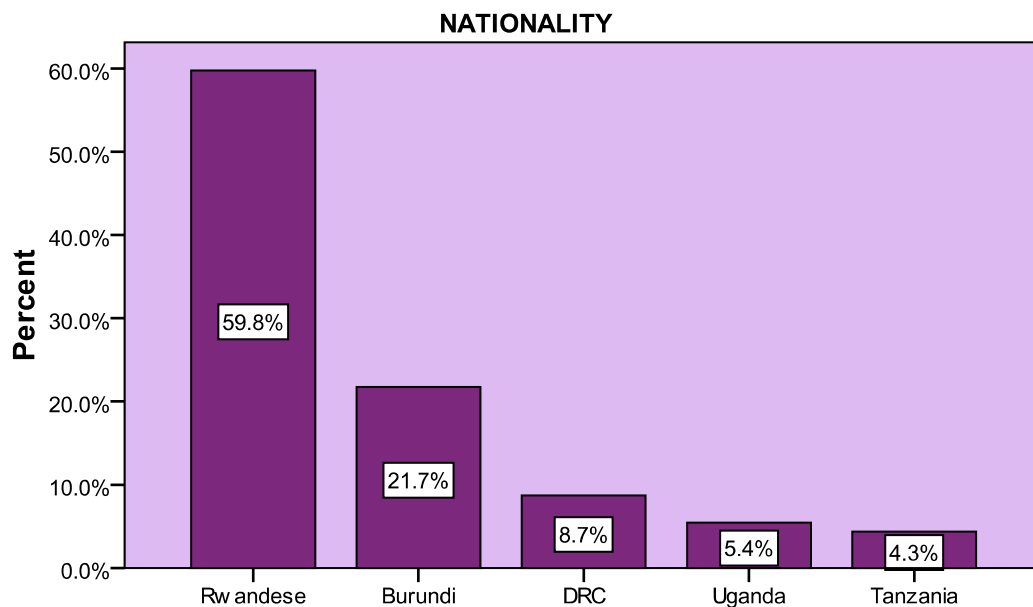
¹⁴ In the context of the EAC and customs union protocol

4.2 Specific findings

4.2.1 Nationality

Since most of the interviews took place on the Rwanda side of the border that also had more visible cross border business activities, most of the interviewees were (see diagram 24 below) Rwandans, with Burundians coming in second place and representation from DRC, Uganda and Tanzania cross border traders.

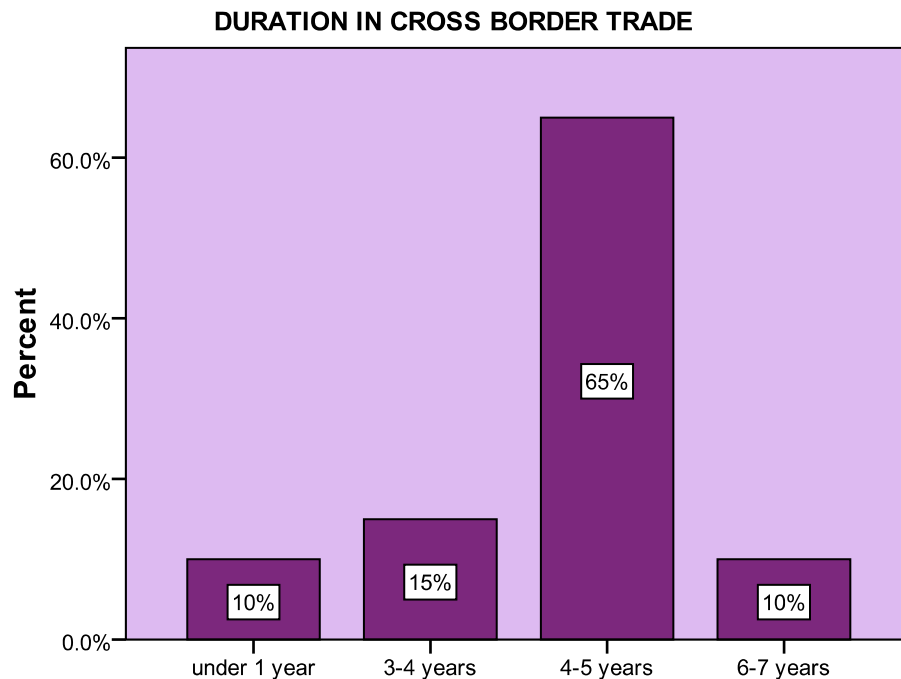
Diagram 24



4.2.2 Duration in cross border trade

It was apparent that most traders were in it to stay (see figure 25 below) as 4-5 years was the time 65% of respondents had done. This was followed by those who have done 3-4 years (15%) with those who had 6-7 years and under one year sharing 10%. This also means that women in cross border trade along Rwanda Burundi border consider themselves settled to earn a living trading rather than as people who are trying it out for a while.

Diagram 25

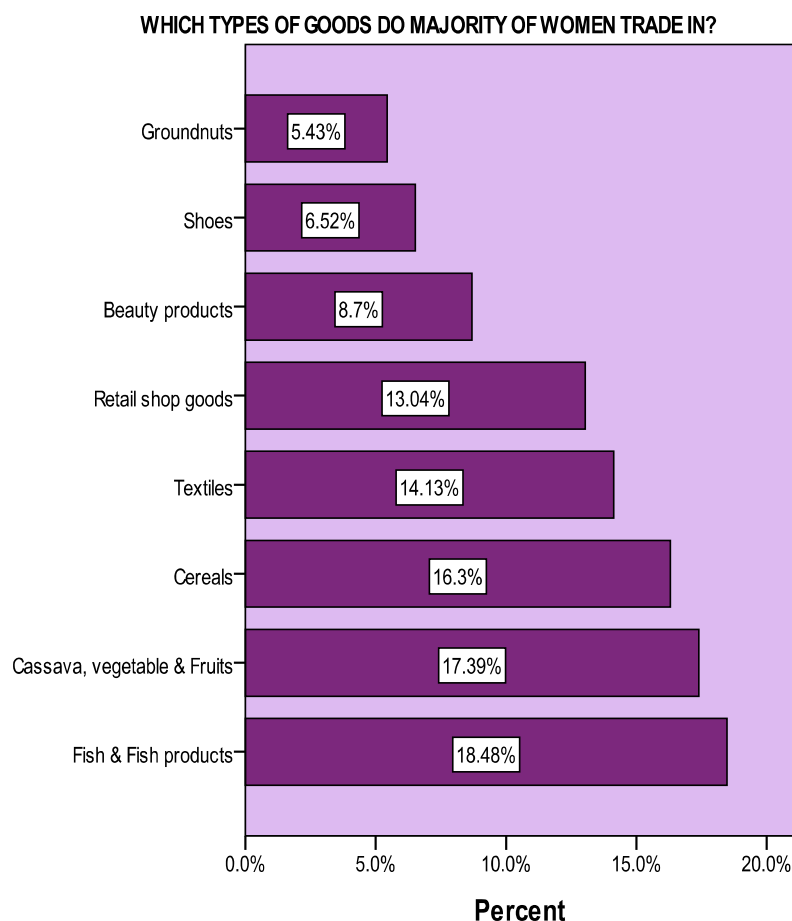


4.2.3 Types of goods majority of women trade in

These include but not limited to, agricultural products mainly vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers, cabbages, traditional vegetable varieties, carrots, peas, cucumber, cereals such as maize, sorghum, beans, rice /maize flour and cassava (see diagram 26 below). Cash crop products such as locally processed tobacco for sniffing are the other frequently traded commodities as well as sale of chicken, charcoal trade, second hand clothes, new clothing materials and finished products such as dresses. Other commodities included ladies toiletry/beauty products such as perfumes, soap and creams. Women traders were also to be found running pharmaceutical shops, basic retail shop goods such as cooking fat, soap, sugar and mattresses. Majority of women trade in fish and fish products mainly derived from tuna imported from Burundi's Lake Tanganyika- trade in bigger fish such as Tilapia is not as visible. A major related activity is processing/collecting of "tuna into flour" used for industrial as well as domestic feeding purposes- virtually all small shops/kiosks run by women stock this product and many women can be seen engaged in different forms of related activities in its acquisition and processing. It is an almost exclusively women product.

Second in visibility is largely retail selling of vegetables and fruits to immediate customers but also in a few cases wholesale of the same. Next line is trade in textiles mainly materials largely imported from/through Tanzania/Burundi as well as Kenya and Uganda. A good number of women are engaged in tailoring activities in the same materials/products for local consumption rather than onward transmission to other areas however materials and half ready products such as shawls, *khangas and vitenges* are sold to women traders who ostensibly resell them elsewhere including away from the border areas. It is notable that this trade involves larger capital outlays, relatively more sophisticated trading skills including foreign exchange transactions and travel to far lands or at least communication with the same. Other trading activities include processing of food related agricultural products from maize-meal and sorghum/cereals before offering for retail and wholesale. Relatively fewer women are involved in sale of chicken and even fewer in hawking activities that are male dominated. It was noted that hawking involves accosting customers for trade and even hiding from local council officials (in Rwanda) when operating in non designated areas – something women traders said discouraged them from hawking since such behavior is not expected of a woman.

Diagram 26

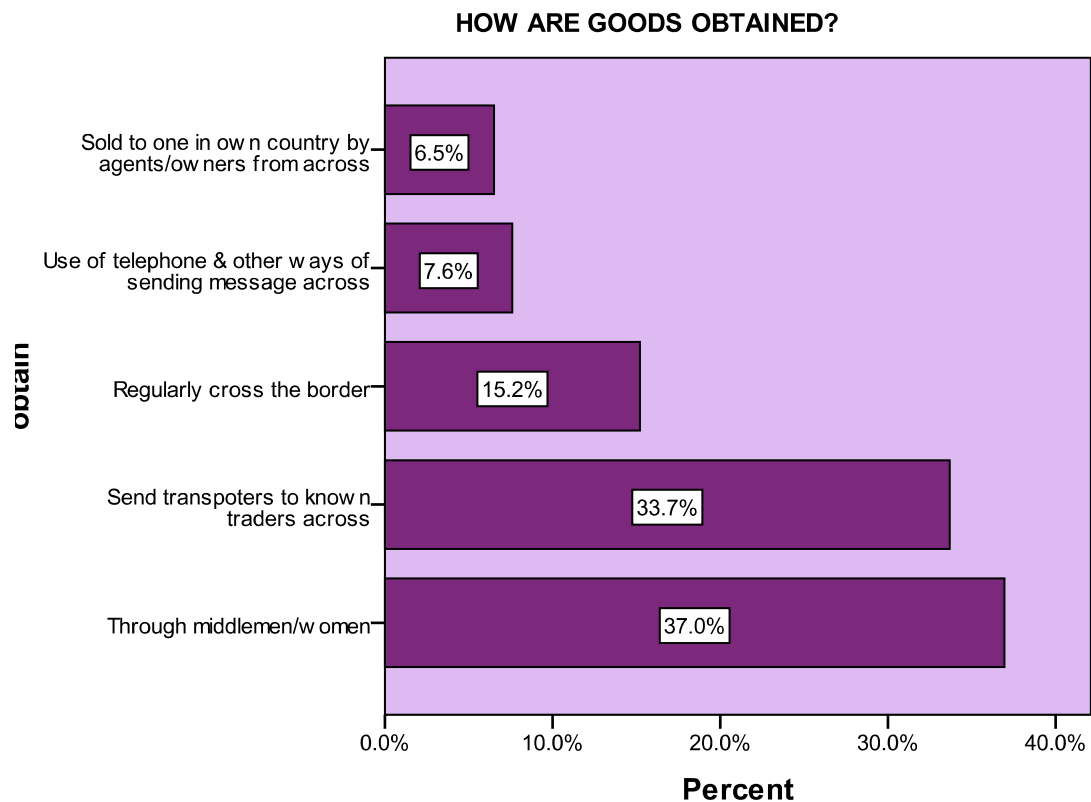


4.2.4 How they obtain commodities for sale

Most commodities are obtained from own and other peoples farms. The trade involves direct buying from farmers in Rwanda/ Burundi or buying from fishermen/fishmongers in the case of fish. Most goods- 37% are also bought from middlemen/women who get in touch with sellers (see diagram 27 below). Some of these middlemen are transporters (33.7%) who frequently cross the border- these may be even those not directly involved in similar business but who have transportation facilities such as Lories, pickups, motorcycles and bicycles. Not infrequently, manual transportation of the same on a smaller scale by women but largely by male porters who are perceived to be stronger makes them a strong link in obtaining goods. A lot of vehicular transportation activities are noticeable in Butare more than other neighboring towns. Both women and men traders/transporters acknowledged supporting each other in the acquisition and movement of goods. A common reason given why women rely heavily on men for transportation particularly of goods from Burundi is that it is their traditional role as well as that

insecurity on the Burundi side¹⁵ that has been running for a while keeps most women from venturing there- men are perceived to have better skills at trading in conflict situations.

Diagram 27



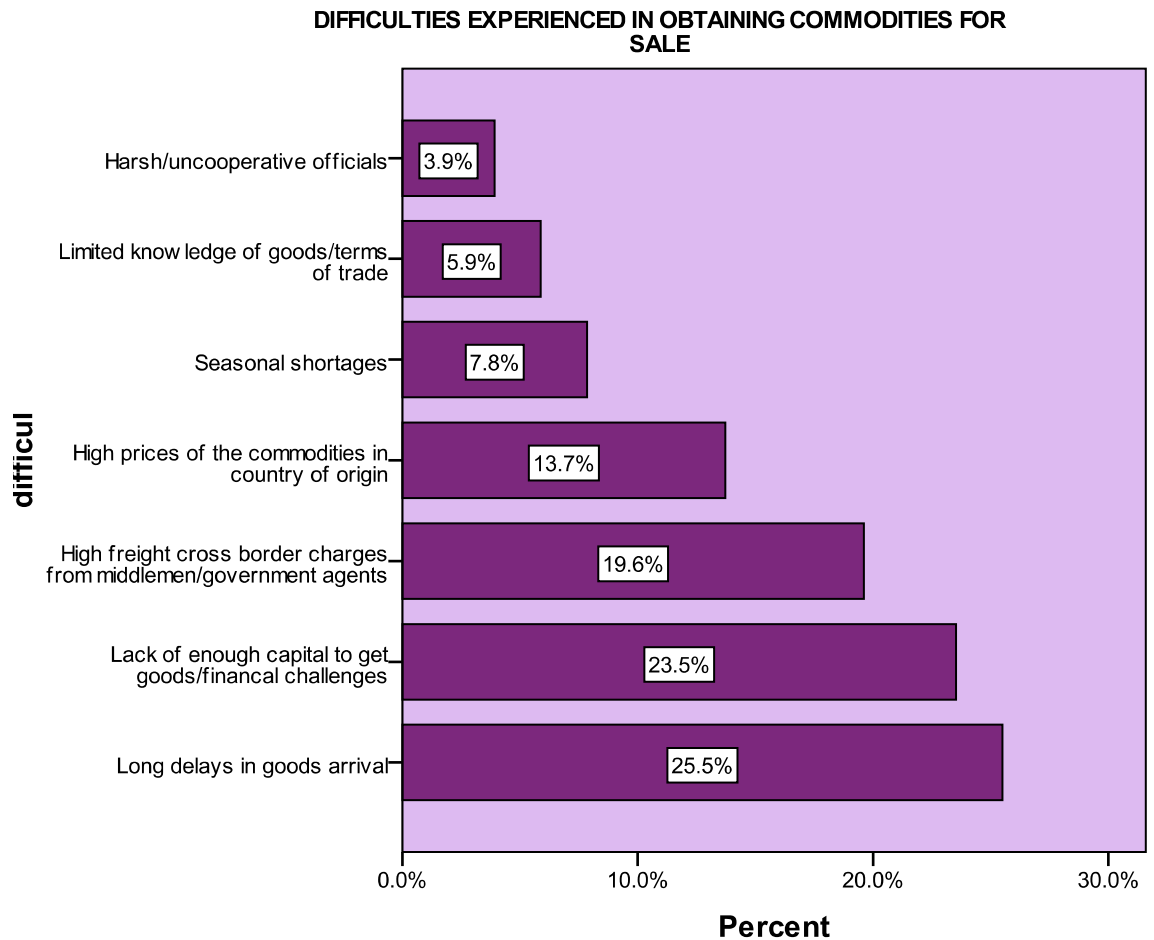
Other tested ways of obtaining goods is by establishing long term links with suppliers such as in the textile trade where orders may be made via phone (7.6%) and money carried by trusted friends, middlemen/women or even wired. Obtaining goods also involves physical travel to Tanzania, Rwanda/Burundi, Uganda, Kenya and the Gulf/India. In few cases some form of batter trade involving exchange of farm and non farm products such as cereals with fish/textiles is the preferred method of trade. According to some traders, such exchange is largely practiced by traders in the lower end market who may not have purchasing power.

¹⁵ Traders interviewed mainly from Rwanda but also Burundians perceived insecurity as higher on the Burundi side of the border. They did acknowledge that recent political developments that culminated in a peace agreement across political parties and holding of successful elections has seen some improvements but not reinstated security in full.

4.2.5 Difficulties experienced in obtaining commodities for sale

Interviewees came up with a long list of hindrances to cross border trade prominent among them delays in arrival of goods. Such delays make it difficult to keep business running due to seasonality of some products.

Diagram 28



Other problems included, working on trust with middlemen/women sometimes just to avoid spending more money or time away from family/business premises¹⁶. Obtaining credit and other forms of financial support remains a major challenge and even after it is obtained high interest rates for short

¹⁶ It appeared to matter a lot to Rwanda and Burundi women traders that they stay lose to their families- more so than was the case in Kenya/Uganda.

term loans from “shylocks”¹⁷ because other people may not consider them credit –worthy even a more pressing challenge. Traders need to update skills in view of changing trade requirements and even skills to excel better in trade. They have to cope with insecurity¹⁸. Foreign exchange transaction problems particularly in the face of “unreliability”¹⁹ of Burundi currency is a constant headache and occasional use of some form of batter trade makes it difficult to know if one is really cutting even.

Socio-gender challenges arise from family responsibilities to children and spouse within the expectations of Rwandan society or alternatively difficulty of running the business in circumstances of widowhood. In addition, wider family expectations of care and support from proceeds of trade were cited as stressful particularly since women depended on same (extended) family members to take care of young children/spouses- related, fear of family breakup such as in spouse having other lovers or marrying a second/third wife or having a mistress. Very closely related in the fear that money remitted for children’s care may be misused by spouse or relatives at the detriment of child welfare

4.2.6 Frequency of cross border trade

For a good number of traders, business that keeps them going is depended upon the flow of cross-border goods so it is every other time (see diagram 29 below). 29.6% of respondents said they were in full time cross border trade meaning 70% are not. This may be because for a largely farming related trade and that in goods derived from on farm or similar farms, the season of the year really matters- for example when the study was going on Irish potatoes were in season and related traders were in full action including to satisfy the export market. Some traders attributed their engagement in trade to availability of finances and contacts- these were largely those also involved in own farming activities. Very few said that it depended on pressing needs that made it inevitable that they get out of the home and earn some income. Trading in general or cross border trade in particular may then be a supplementary activity for most traders that is conducted when time and conditions are right.

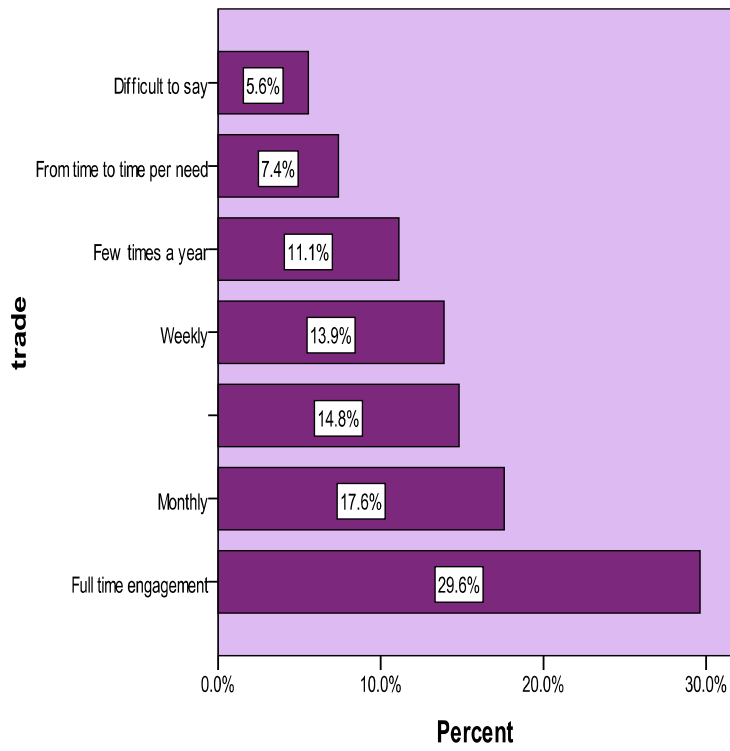
¹⁷ Informal and unlicensed money lenders who use extra judicial means/threats to get debtors to pay

¹⁸ Particularly on the Burundi side of the border according to traders accounts shadowy figures who may be rebels, thugs or even security forces disguised as thugs or desperate local populations of men pose a serious threat to traders.

¹⁹ Many respondents described Burundi currency as unreliable by which they meant it did not maintain a stable exchange with the Rwandan franc as it kept shifting. In their view Rwanda currency has more stable exchange rates.

Diagram 29

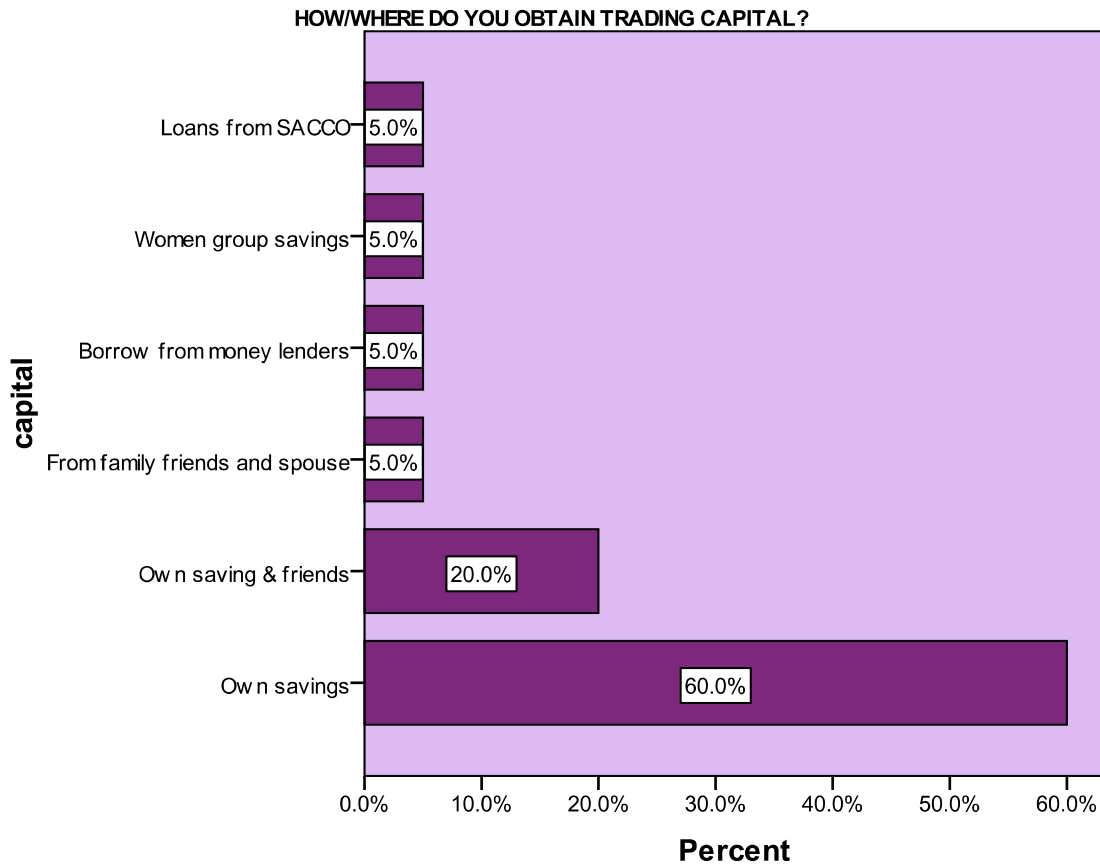
HOW OFTEN DO YOU CONDUCT CROSS BORDER TRADE?



4.2.7 Where traders obtain capital for trade

Women Traders largely rely on their own savings to fund trading activities as shown in diagram 30 below. Even other sources not directly their own largely have their contribution such as SACCO loans and loans from family groupings. Micro and larger financial credit organizations therefore have minimal impact on cross border trade involving small traders.

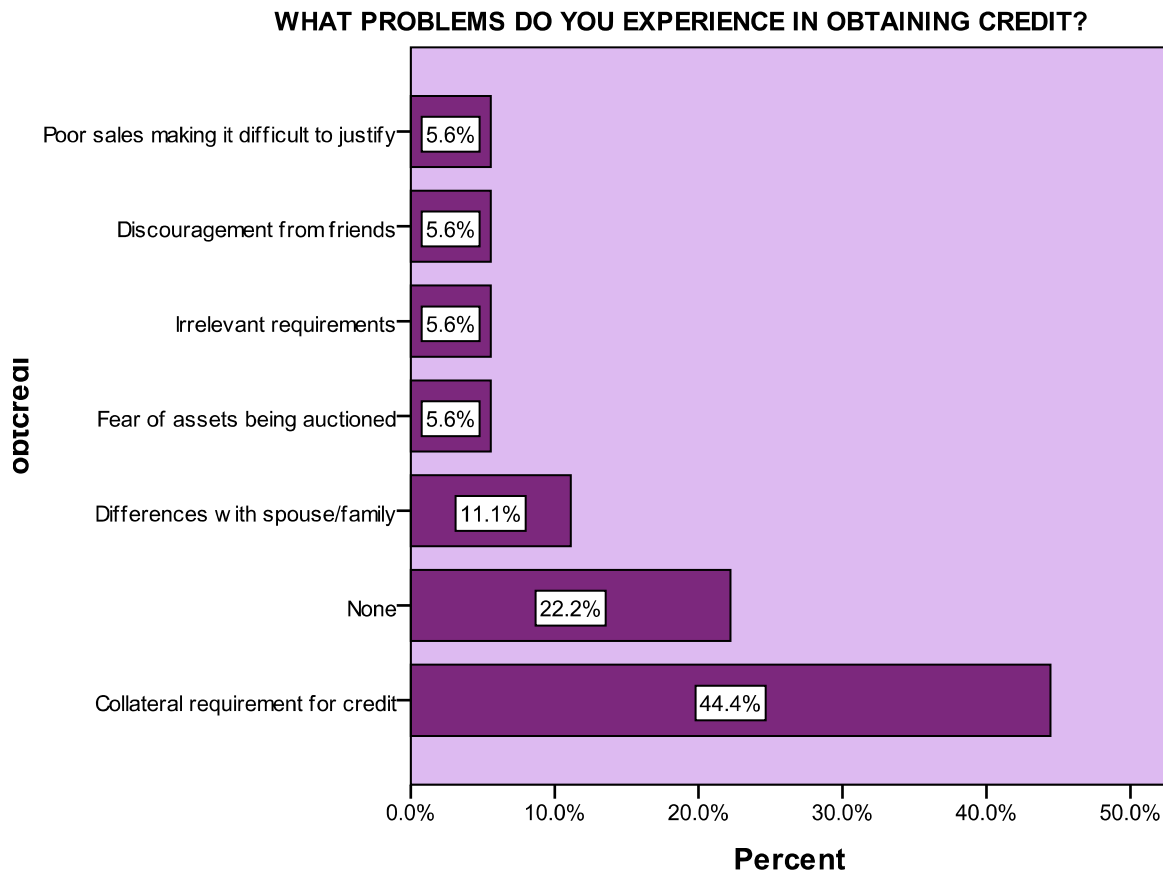
Diagram 30



4.2.8 Problems experienced in obtaining credit

Diagram

31



Most women gave collateral requirements (see diagram 31 above) as the biggest hindrance to obtaining credit. Apart from the fact that they may need to negotiate with their spouses in order to give family assets as collateral, women also expressed strong fears about something going wrong which would lead to their property being auctioned. For many, it is just too risky to take a loan since returns from their kind of business were unpredictable as they were dependent upon many factors being constant key among them safe and inexpensive passage of goods across the borders. Among the 22.2% who said “non” were those who were content to draw from their own savings as opposed to shopping for credit.

Asked how they deal with the need for credit traders said they had solidarity with friends and relatives through give and take arrangements. They also form financial solidarity in women and community based groups and seeking assistance from government or relevant NGO groups in the areas of skills building and financial services support. Some said they offer own assets as collateral for loans rather than negotiate with spouses on family assets. Some get into informal credit arrangements with suppliers who include transporters when times are hard. A more tactical approach is to withdraw from the businesses

53

when returns are low or the season is not favorable- such as in times of rains shortfall which is even said to affect the fish market. The impression we got is that at the current moment in the development of cross border trade by small scale women traders, both supply and demand factors for credit are not favorable. Women traders told us that availability of micro-finance opportunities is a relatively new phenomenon in Rwanda and one that is yet to be fully understood as well as simply saving and using savings in their totality to do something. The idea of “recurrent credit” for trade is yet to catch on. There was evidence of growing micro-finance opportunities/facilities in Rwanda from what appeared to be banking facilities for “micro savers” however traders said those who can are still mainly using them for saving purposes.

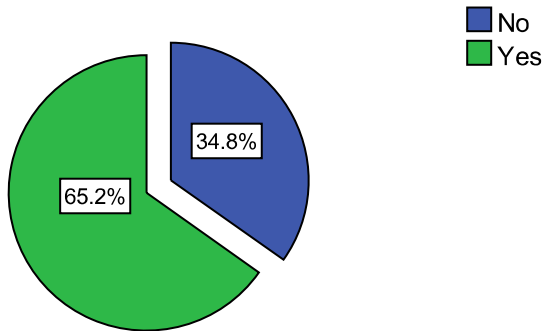
4.2.9 Awareness of regional policy/laws on trade

There was general awareness (see diagram 32 below) that respective governments had laws/policies and procedures on cross border trade that needed to be respected however not much was given when asked to be specific and name or explain the policies laws. There was also general awareness that the East African Community was in operation however how it affects trade was not well known except that it is expected to make it easier for all EAC citizens to cross borders hopefully with goods to trade in²⁰. When asked specifically if they had noticed any difference since the protocol was introduced, like other questions that elicited little evidence when specifics were required, women traders were quick to say that there was a difference but could not say specifically in what areas. More confusion was apparent when some attributed the difference to the prevailing atmosphere of peace in Burundi that may have little direct relation to the implementation of the customs protocol.

²⁰ Rwanda respondents in general and men in particular appeared very enthusiastic about the EAC idea

Diagram 32

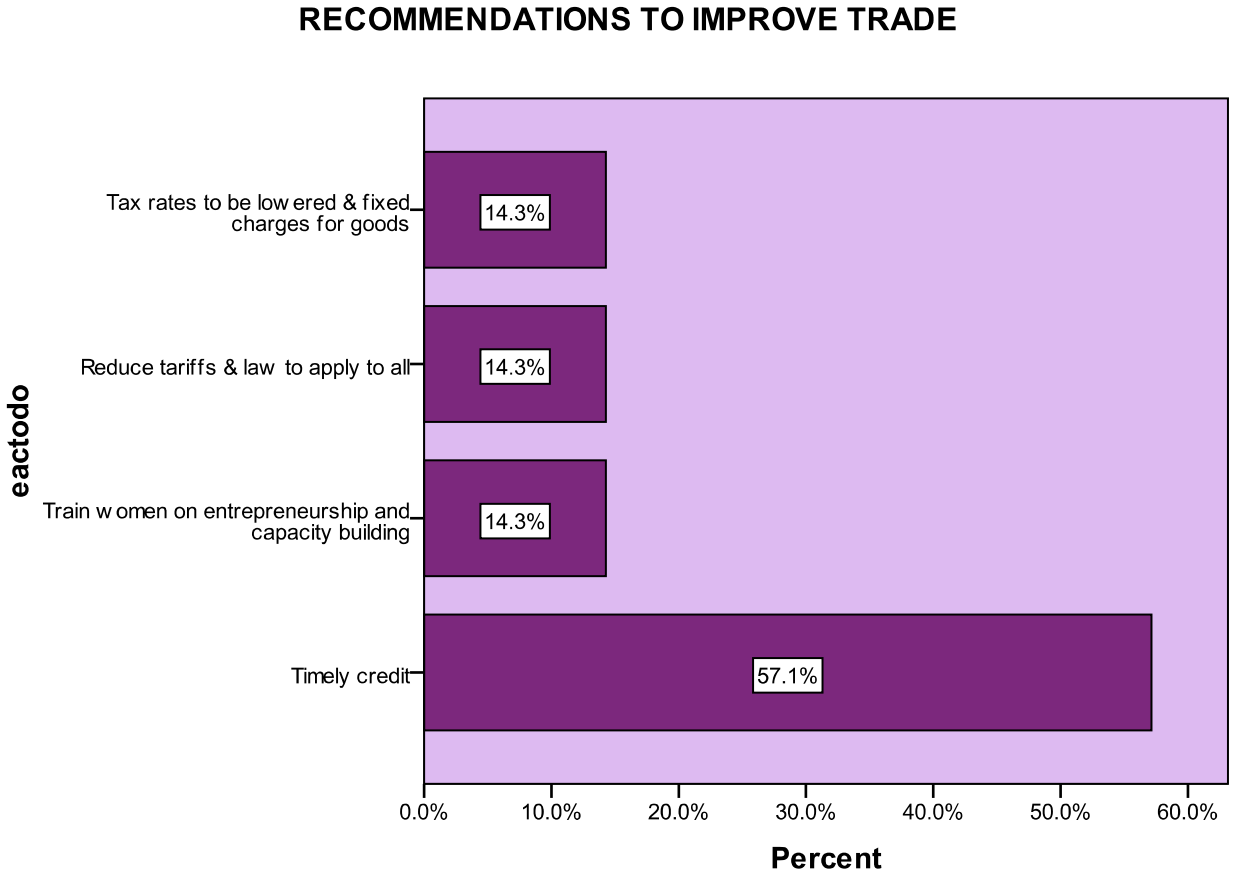
ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY POLICY?



4.2.10 What women would like to be done to improve cross border trade

Most respondents appeared not sure how to respond to the question as they felt it was not for them to advice on what should be done. Some suggested that sharing forums on trade between women traders may help. However they still came up with several suggestions as below in diagram 33:

Diagram 33



It was curious that availing credit at 57.1% topped the list of changes that could boost trade yet earlier questions had not elicited evidence of a high level of credit awareness or usage.

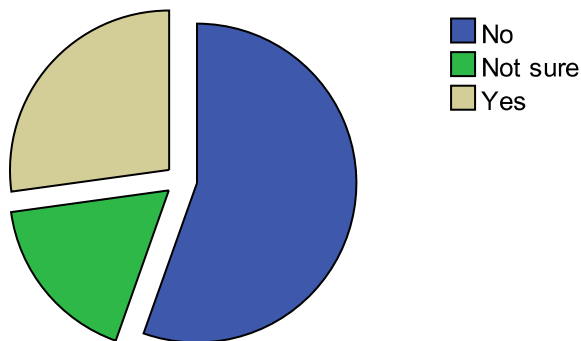
4.2.11 Existence of women groups or associations to enhance their cross border trade

Most traders (see diagram 34) said there were no associations to promote cross border trade. Some said there were women groups but were vague on specifics. The groups mentioned were general welfare oriented groups. It may appear that there are no specific women initiatives in trade geared to boosting cross-border trade through training and capacity building and credit support. We visited premises of two women organizations that were supposed to be having trade related programs, but

they were largely devoted to welfare and social empowerment issues. Economic empowerment was mentioned as an objective without trade coming out clearly as a viable activity.

Diagram 34

ARE THERE WOMEN GROUPS PROMOTING CROSS BORDER TRADE?



4.2.12 Interaction with fellow women cross border traders across their boundaries

It was pointed out that there was a vibrant SACCO environment in Rwanda and women traders interact in those sessions including on issues not directly related to trade. Other forums cited included, community organizations meant for rural development or mobilization for donor funded capacity enhancement activities. USAID and SIDA were mentioned as donors who had activities with government of Rwanda even though such activities were not seen as directly related to trade but still they offered women a chance to meet and interact.

Regarding interaction with women across their borders in other countries- yes but strictly for business and not all do as some do so mainly through intermediaries- none cited a cross border organization that had trade as the main basis.

4.2.13 How do they relate to male traders?

Most said male traders featured as partners in trade, as transporters and middlemen. They described the relationship as cordial based on reciprocity and mutual support to keep one another in trade. Some saw male traders as the mainstay of their survival in trade because of their role as intermediaries - even allowing a long grace period before repayment when they supplied goods or mediated the same. Some had gotten informal financial credit and support from male traders that include being loaned goods to sell and return the money or being granted long repayment grace period.

4.2.14 Whether they are involved in activities other than cross border trade

Most said being women meant that their hands are full all the time to fulfill obligations of a Rwandese woman. Among them a significant number said they were also involved in farming activities largely for consumption. Very few said they were fully engaged in trade at the exclusion of other activities.

4.2.15 Interviews with customs officials/government agents

Since we had not obtained official authorization to interview customs officials and government agents, we proceeded to interview them with the understanding that they were not testifying in their individual capacity but as anonymous respondents. Security agents said that even if we had official authorization to interview them, they would still need their immediate supervisors to allow them to give information- however they also agreed to be interviewed if they remained anonymous. Following are views collected from them:

- Since EAC was enacted and protocol discussed, officials routinely implement government policy
- Government does a good job at educating and updating them on protocol progress by issuing circulars/training seminars for officers whose duties are affected by certain legislation/policy
- They treat everyone equally
- Women are not very good/regular traders compared to men
- Only concerned with what passes through official border and may not comment on activities on un official routes
- Allow women to get in with small quantities of commodities without paying taxes

- Insecurity at border not a big issue
- Work well with counterparts the other side of border and cooperate
- Agents/middlemen cheat women
- Have not personally educated women/public as they have not been instructed to do so.
- Regularly prepare and issue circulars on new custom terms so those who do not know may only blame themselves.
- Are invited by media to educate public on new rules/policies and those concerned take the opportunity
- Think trade is increasing and the benefits will be visible to everyone shortly.
- Cannot confirm or deny accusations against security officials as they have different roles and do not supervise them- but have heard complaints
- People apportion blame liberally out of ignorance of the functions of different government agents
- It is possible that some people may pretend to be immigration officials and spoil the name of genuine ones.
- With time everyone will know rules
- Women do not need any special consideration- they should come to the border like everyone else since policies and laws do not discriminate against them
- Often have staff and other shortages that affect their work negatively

4.3 Concluding observations on women and cross border trade on Rwanda Burundi border

The situation in trade closely mirrors what happens on the ground in terms of gender distribution of roles and responsibilities in the larger society. Women are described as homemakers while men are expected to fend for their families, primarily by tilling the land but also engaging in outdoor income generating activities to support the family. Society largely discourages women from engaging in activities that expose them to danger and or interaction with strangers- meaning men other than their husbands and immediate family members. Men are expected to protect their wives, daughters and other women members within their families. It is this expectation that appears to determine the degree and scope of women's participation in trade. It was observed that most trade activities- even the ones also done by women are dominated by male traders. Cross border trade is a point in question as it involves a lot of travel and interaction with many people away from home- so it is seen as a male affair.

The other determinant of more male participation in small scale cross border trade is when it involves physical transportation or movement of goods. Women are protected from carrying heavy goods particularly away from the home environment in the wage sector. That many goods have to be physically carried across the border makes the task more suitable to men who are already engaged as porters²¹. Closely related is the history of conflict between and within the two countries that has made cross border trade risky for everybody but for women in particular. Even where women may cope, we were informed that many male members of society could use fear of conflict as a legitimate ground for barring women from participating in cross border trade. The male control of women's movement makes engaging in constant trade more attractive to unattached women such as widows, the divorced and single/never married/unmarried mothers. This is because in the absence of a controlling resident male figure they take on responsibilities usually stereotyped as for men out of necessity and they tend to be accountable largely to themselves.

4.4 The Context for Small Scale Trade Between Rwanda and Burundi

The general flow of goods between Rwanda and Burundi is relatively low even by casual observation and crude comparison to similar major crossing points connecting capital cities such as the main Kenya Uganda border post and Kenya Tanzania/Daresalaam posts. For the period we were there we observed that the crossing border points have not attracted more settlement than say neighboring towns so there is little business activity within the vicinity that one may attribute to the goings on at the border. The few shops are typical of similar rural areas which is unlike comparable crossing points such as Busia Uganda and Busia Kenya (along the Kenya Uganda border) that are booming trading centers where traders from far and wide beyond the local population have migrated to and created a very cosmopolitan urban environment markedly different from neighboring villages and towns that tend to be local. There is limited vehicular movement across the two borders particularly Burundi registered vehicles moving to Rwanda²². Unlike comparable border points there is no pile up of vehicles, in particular long haul goods vehicles and it was clearly not because border officials are more efficient than elsewhere- the few vehicles packed by took a very long time to clear and drivers complained as much. On both sides there is no

²¹ We noted that most of the goods are physically carried across the border usually at night through alternative routes.

²² For the 5 hours the researcher sat strategically at the border point he counted more Ugandan registered vehicles crossing from Burundi to Rwanda than Burundi registered. Nearly all the cross border passenger vehicles had Rwanda registration.

reservation of large packing spaces for goods and other vehicles most likely because they are not anticipated. There is also little extra security forces deployed to protect goods or watch the border crossing. We also heard from interviewees that generally border officials are not very friendly to people who cross²³ so this discourages ordinary Rwandese and Burundians using the official border crossing in preference of unofficial ones that are not manned. The cross border transport business is not booming- there are no motorcycles or bicycles taxi transportation services to assist travelers across instead there are quite a few porters available, which is an indicator of the kind of goods/luggage expected.

From interviews of respondents (largely from Rwanda but also from Burundi), it may appear that there is more flow of goods that small business women engage in from Burundi to Rwanda. The main reason for this is the stronger purchasing power of Rwandese that is acknowledged by both Burundi and Rwanda respondents. It therefore makes more business sense for Burundi businesswomen/men to want to sell their goods to and in Rwanda as well as Rwanda businesswomen to purchase goods in Burundi- even same goods as found or manufactured in Burundi and sell at a profit in Rwanda. Burundi francs exchange at a lower rate than Rwandese which makes it easier for goods to flow from Burundi, besides there is a perception that the cost and standard of living is generally higher in Rwanda than Burundi which means that there is higher demand for certain fast moving consumer goods such as sugar, fish, beer and edible oils. Rwandese staying close to the border, say within 100 kilometer radius, largely try to benefit from the lower cost Burundi goods. The other reason is that Burundi is perceived as in the process of strengthening government structures (in the aftermath of civil strife) to organize trade in general and to monitor and tax goods in general which means that goods from Burundi may remain officially untaxed when they get to Rwanda or only be charged illegal fees by middlemen and local influence peddlers. When they ultimately reach Rwanda they will be considerably cheaper than similar Rwanda goods that have been taxed by their revenue authority.

Most business women expressed faith in the illegal cross border trade networks ability to work efficiently if not at least deliver to expectation. There is always lurking danger of one losing their goods completely and having no recourse for compensation in Burundi but the risk of such was complemented by the realistic possibility of success when things work. Many a woman trader attributed such misfortunes (of

²³ We noted that there is constant flow of people on foot on the Kenya Uganda border between the two towns of Busia at any one time- security personnel selectively stop and question people crossing rather than seek to stop and question everyone as is the case on the Burundi Rwanda border.

losing ones goods) to bad luck. Majority of those we interviewed had been trading for a while and they cited their experience over the years as concrete evidence of how to conduct trade. A Congolese interviewee²⁴ trading in Butare strongly proposed that anyone who fears to take risks cannot make it in business and that what risks there were in Burundi were in keeping with the nature of risk in business as she understands it. In her view if you cannot stand the heat then you may as well get out of the kitchen. Among the factors that makes illegal trade relatively predictable for women is the availability of reliable transporters and transport system through alternative routes not covered by security forces and customs, collaboration of local leaders/individuals who had enough influence to prevent loss of goods or even falsification by middlemen and the vulnerability of security forces on both sides to corruption and bribe taking to look the other way. Traders opined that since everyone found the trade mutually beneficial it would be suicidal for security forces and peddlers to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs by making it more difficult for small scale women traders to do their thing. Some attributed smooth continuation of trade to the resilience of Burundians even in times of marked insecurity to transport goods across. One woman trader swore that she was yet to come across a rebel or government leader who was not interested in gaining from trade- to the extent that conflict is even fuelled by the desire to control illegal businesses and business routes.

The largely illegal cross border small business also thrives ironically because it is fed by poverty- poor people in Rwanda may not be able to afford the expensive goods legally offered within their territory but they still constitute an important market sector (in their totality) in numbers. That small traders can avail goods at a cheaper rate makes it possible for say this sector of the poor to afford commodities such as sugar that they would otherwise find difficult to afford. Since they have some disposable income some use must be found for it commensurate with their needs. That the sector is known to buy and sell goods in small affordable quantities means that even goods carried manually on the head or on a bicycle or wheel barrow will satisfy the needs of many among the poor because that is what they can afford. For example, cheap and possibly unhealthy cooking fat locally referred to as “*amamesa*” is brought into Rwanda from Burundi and increasingly from DRC (because of short supply in Burundi) in drums and subdivided²⁵ into small portions in polythene paper to be sold to the poor who may not afford cooking oil that meets the

²⁴ See Januarenes testimony in Appendix...

²⁵ The researcher witnessed unrefined cooking fat from a dirty drum that originally transported petroleum products being subdivided in small portions that were neatly displayed on shelves in shops nearby.

standards of the formal market²⁶. That the business succeeds despite the questionable quality of the goods has to do with weaknesses in formal standard certification, inspection and enforcement as well as corruption fuelled by the poverty of those enforcing adherence to standards²⁷. It may appear that the poor protect one another through keeping the market that enables them to purchase goods they need for their survival going even if it is against professional requirements.

More women from Rwanda trade directly with Burundi products than is the case for Burundi women in Rwanda products. This is because the market for goods illegally derived from Burundi is in Rwanda so it is there that a larger network of distribution and selling is established. Secondly perceived insecurity in Burundi and along the border with Rwanda in particular has meant that free movement of people not physically enabled to counter unpredictable attacks is difficult. Women (culturally) fall within the limitations of the latter so they cede ground to men who are the combatants as well as capacitated to move goods within the circumstances from Burundi. It was claimed even during times of heightened conflict between security forces, the combatants somehow conspired to let goods through to Rwanda because they needed the proceeds from trade sustain themselves²⁸. Another reason for Burundi and Rwanda women traders' participation in trade in goods from the other country comes about because purchasing power in Burundi for Rwanda goods is low. Since Rwanda currency is stronger, even smuggled Rwandese goods are more expensive and as a result unaffordable by the poor who need them most when they get to Burundi. Also on the Burundi side one of the most labor intensive activities is the transportation and protection of such goods which is a preserve of men. Women perceive themselves as facing greater risks in situations of conflict than men so men take up particularly the direct income generating activities that could have been in their domain because they come with a security qualification that is requirement during such times.

²⁶ See separate case/testimony by Esperence.

²⁷ Esperance testified that even the security forces and some government health/standards people charged with inspecting businesses could not afford the approved product and used the oil she sold instead. She believed that such connivance gave the product a clean bill of health as opposed to foreign imposed standards that favored the rich.

²⁸ A Burundi Woman who still lives and trades in Butare claims to have at one time personally contacted two relatives on opposite sides of the conflict to release goods that had been captured by a rebel group on the route from Tanzania to Rwanda. Despite being enemies both understood the value of letting the goods get to their destination.

4.4.1 Can the situation change to increase participation of women traders?

We noted that there is a sense in which the low key business environment between Rwanda and Burundi is expected because the two countries are very similar even to the knowledge of the interviewees- there is therefore little difference in what is available on each side of the border. Since trade is driven by customer needs, availability of goods and services and the existence of a market and prevailing as well as potential purchasing power, the Rwanda -Burundi domestic situations do not create demand to move it because they tend to generate similar goods and services. We also noted that there appears to be an unspoken mistrust, even simmering animosity between the two countries that is said to have to do with security considerations but that may have a deeper history that is a factor in discouraging vibrant and open cross border trading activities by citizens. The question to consider is whether the inclusion of Rwanda and Burundi in EAC and the introduction of the customs protocol could change the situation in particular for women traders. It is our view that the protocol may certainly have impact on formal trade- but little or nothing on informal small scale trade conducted by women and largely poor male traders unless certain factors are in place among them:

- Improvements in transportation and general free accessibility to goods and services by small scale traders from both countries
- More professional customs, immigration and security officials purposed to promote trade between the two countries
- Curbing or bringing into the mainstream the operations of illegal middlemen networks and influence peddlers that currently control small scale informal cross border trade
- More confidence by the women small scale traders in the official mainstream trading opportunities and facilitation mechanisms
- Uplifting of the purchasing power of the largely poor consumers and women in particular of goods and services exchanged in the small scale trade.
- Ability of women from the two countries to participate in business in larger numbers that will enable them to constitute a critical mass that is difficult to ignore or that can use local activism, lobby and advocacy to force/persuade government to mainstream their contribution in trade into the formal economy
- A change in the orientation of women's traders organizations' from securing the welfare of members to promoting their performance in business.

5. Recommendations

Recommendations

- 1) All efforts should be made to enable women built trust in formal cross border trading structures rather than continue with the old practice of conducting what may be regarded as costly illegal trade. Apart from the trade not costing them in un predictable ways that makes planning difficult it prevents them from getting recognition in formal government structures as the important traders which leaves their contribution un recorded and therefore not recognized or documented. The first step is the EAC to communicate better about the protocol and other agreements on immigration and movement of people between the states, by coming out with clear simplified documents in national languages targeting the women traders of member states. Such a document should be able to explain the protocol and show how small traders can enhance their participation in trade through it. It may also be necessary to make known official focal points at border crossings and elsewhere, where such information may be accessed. It were better if this function of dissemination was done by and through the initiative of the EAC secretariat rather than leave it to member state structures.
- 2) EAC should put in place a practical research based monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the customs protocol in all member states that should capture the performance and ongoing experiences of small scale women cross border traders. Official border crossing points should be the main monitoring locus but reports of goods passing through un official border points should also be captured.
- 3) Enforcement of local council by-laws emerged as understood by implementing officers came out as a major problem to small traders and one whose scope is difficult to determine because of the indeterminacy of specific laws being enforced. EAC should enable member states to review by-laws of local councils on border towns to be I tandem with the customs protocol and the spirit and letter of other agreements in the EAC. A beginning point would be to train such local authorities on the customs protocol and its implications and set in place a mechanism of internal monitoring of implementation as well as supervisory oversight by respective state sector ministries/departments. The training should also set to clearly define the role of local authorities in cross border trade since they appear to be working at cross purposes with mainstream government agencies. Local authority organs should be directed to include women representation from their trade related organizations that should assist in reporting on violations and putting in place measures to deal with errant officers.

- 4) EAC should facilitated a mechanism across the region by which member states may address rampant corruption, theft, intimidation, harassment and general disruption of trade by women traders by illegal means but using state power (even though without authority). There should be put in place a uniform mechanism of posting and identifying state agents and traders empowered to ask for identification. States should investigate allegations of shadowy figures who appear to act with the full force of the state even allegedly in the presence of uniformed state security ad other agents but whose identity and purpose remains unclear to traders. The best strategy is to combine awareness/education and training with enforceable punitive measures for officers not behaving.
- 5) The apparent weak organizational base for most of the women organizations particularly with regard to trade facilitation will continue impacting negatively on their performance in trade unless state organs and trade/development agencies put serious effort including funding in trade focused institutional capacity development. A number of problems faced by women such harassment from local council officials can easily be dealt with at respective local levels if women are well organized to confront/lobby municipal authorities. EAC should implement a pilot capacity and institutional building of trade related women's organizations in selected countries and monitor its progress for scaling up in all countries. Training should aim to moving such organizations from a welfare orientation to embrace and enable serious trade facilitation.
- 6) More research should be conducted to document experiences of women traders at all border points and within their business premises in respective countries. While it will be important to find ways of quantifying their participation, I will be more strategic to use qualitative methods to assess the experiences and learn from them what the possible implications of opening up regional trade reform regime are there on women traders in order t forestall possible negative impacts they already fear.
- 7) EAC should lead a process through which local CSOs, should join hands with government agencies to outreach to women traders with the major aim of informing them about the protocol and changing their largely negative perceptions and historical mindset about formal legal traders

and the role of EAC. The best strategy would be to plan and put in place practical cost effective and easy to demonstrate steps and procedures that will challenge deeply held beliefs.

- 8) EAC should formally seek to learn from experiences in West and Southern Africa regional trade blocks measures at mainstreaming gender in cross border trade- some of which have been acclaimed as having succeeded in improving women's trading conditions. Such measures include selected and targeted affirmative action particularly relating to small scale trade in food items. A specific desk as well as targeted field collection of data/visits may be a good beginning point.
- 9) The UNECA and the Trade Centre in particular should continue supporting the EAC gender department to set up capacity to influence policies on mainstreaming gender internally but also externally in state organs of member states.

6. Appendices

6.1 Appendix 1: Testimonies of women traders from Rwanda/Burundi border

6.1.1 Januerine (Under 50 years of age)

I have been engaged in cross border trade for over 15 years now. There is nothing that I do not know and that I have not experienced. Over the years I have traded in goods from the DRC, from Cameroon, from Tanzania, from Uganda and even from Kenya. I have traded through war and peace as well as when there are hostilities between respective countries and borders are closed- what should I say, I have seen it all. Women have there weaknesses in trade but they also bring to trade what men do not have. We women traders know both our customers and the people we buy goods from we therefore only purchase what we know is needed and that will sell. I have bought and sold in times of war- just supplying what the customer may not do without. I trade mainly in textiles from Congo such as the ones displayed in my

shop²⁹, but my customers have made me import and trade in other things such as sugar from Congo and Burundi- can you imagine even from Malawi. Rwandese love sugar and they can never produce enough to satisfy themselves. What they produce they tax and sell at a high price that my poor customers cannot buy- so what do I do? I bring them sugar from other places that they can afford.

Of course it is a difficult trade- but my customers rely on me and give me hope to overcome problems. I have been beaten by soldiers, confined in cells for smuggling, had my goods confiscated accused of being a spy for the rebels, in turn accused by rebels of being a government informer. My late husband separated from me and married another woman because she said traders are prostitutes- he had been fed stories by my business rivals who even slept with him to convince him- but that did not stop him from accusing me of the same. What can I do? I am a beautiful woman and looked even more sterling then- even if it were you, do you think you would believe that other men do not see what you saw and that you will resist what they offer? Men are like that- this trade is not good when you are looking after a man- better your children because they have no one else to turn to.

Why am I still in the trade? How do I manage? It is a long story- to begin with it is God- the things I have been through would have killed me long time ago had he not intervened on my behalf and protected me. I serve mainly poor women and poor people who cannot afford expensive things. Yes I sometimes buy and sell beauty products to rich women on order- some of my textiles are also exclusive and only the well off can afford them, but most of my faithful customers are struggling. They even pay in small installments. They trust me, some start paying before I even bring the goods- they have known me for many years and they know I deliver. The world is small- mountains do not meet but people are always meeting in the most unlikely places, trust a constant traveler- you told me you travel a lot so you know what I am talking about. If you cheat people out of their money- you will never be rich it will haunt you and trust me you will never be able to ran away from them- besides God will not help you. I am not rich but thank God I am far from being poor- many people do not eat enough and put on frightening rags. Their children are cold and suffer from diseases because they do not eat well- I am just fine. I have educated my children. One is at this University³⁰ he tells me that when he becomes a rich doctor he will ask me to rest and look

²⁹ The interview took place outside her shop that she shares with 5 other women who belong to a self help group with her.

³⁰ The University of Rwanda- In Butare

after me. I laugh and he thinks I am looking forward to that which keeps him reading hard. Trade is my life- I shall not give it up except that he who created me tells me that my work is done.

Why do we survive in trade? I have never known a situation that made people not need something for themselves and someone to supply them with what they need. Even in war, people need things- certain things- if you are clever and God keeps you, you supply them and you make money. Kill you? Harm you? Of course anything can happen to you- but so can bad things happen to you even in the safety of your home. Besides there is no safety in war- a lot of people who had never left their homes were butchered in the genocide. Death is a constant companion in DRC where my mother came from and where I lived and continue to visit for trade purposes. You cannot be too clever about things- leave it to God. I have secured safe passage for my goods from both rebels and government forces- this people understand that life must continue- they talk even while fighting and they allow those who ensure that they get supplies supplying them. There is no situation where people do not talk- except when they have crossed to the other side. In our business we talk to people who make things move, not to government paper in offices. Even the revenue authority has people. They keep coming to demand money every month. When you get in through the main border post they count your materials one by one and charge you an impossible tax- you cannot sell and even recover the money you bought the goods at. Do government people want us to die of hunger? No we shall not die. The women traders shall use their brain and connection with real people. People who help us get the goods in through other openings along the border and safely deliver them to our doorsteps. People who warn us when the revenue authority is planning a raid, people who let us know what we must give to the people even within the revenue authority- yes it too has people who understand how poor people live. Yes we talk to people. Men carrying guns are the same whether they work for government for war lords or for themselves- we know how to talk to them so shall we be defeated by people carrying pen and paper and government stamps?

Our trade defies description it cannot be changed by East African Community. We hear that they have opened trade, that they have removed tariffs, that certain quantities of goods are not taxed...I am not becoming an old woman and you can be sure I have heard many stories- take a simple test, approach the border with goods that are not to be taxed and tell the customs that. Our years in trade have made it wise. How will the people who live on getting goods from one country to another feed their families if everyone can walk in and out with goods through the official cross border points? Would they be fools to implement such a policy that threatens their livelihood? For us poor people, policy is just paper- it cannot get you anything and you will only annoy someone who will help you and others by telling him what policy says.

Who do you think you are? What do you take him for? A fool? Do you really believe that he does not know about that policy? That he has not been told the correct thing by government to do? Do you expect him to collect large sums of money for government and his children go hungry? If you really believe so, then you do not know people- I know people and I know that policies will not change how officials conduct themselves at the border. They need to talk to us to know what there officials do. As someone in business you do not need trouble- I am not going to look for it by believing that a policy will change human nature.

6.1.2 Esperance

I have been a shopkeeper in this town for 10 years. Many people know me as a woman who helps poor people by selling at prices they can afford. Even the revenue people and district people buy from me. When they bring trouble, I talk to them and they come round- they understand, how would they afford sugar when they put me in prison? People are not the same, so they cannot afford the same things. The cooking oil you see there on the shelf³¹ is too expensive for most of the poor customers. I sell it to those who can afford but for those who may not I have the other one in plastic papers. Do not frown at it- most of the people here use it- they can afford it. If they do not use it – it means they have to cook without cooking fat- tell me if it were you, what would you do? I used to get this oil from Burundi for a number of years but the supply has dwindled over time because we are told the “tree” from which they get it is being finished. Because people need it, I asked around and somebody told me I can get it in the Congo- so to the Congo I went and got it. My customers need the oil so why can’t I get it even as far as the Congo? I always say borders cannot prevent people from trading and helping others.

There is war and disorder in the Congo but business creates its on order. We get this oil through powerful people who control the trade. It is cheap from the Congo. Cheaper than the one that comes from Burundi but we pay more to get it here because of the distance and the hunger of those who help us give it safe passage to Rwanda. Still it is cheaper than the Burundi one. So we have it here and people- poor people are happy. Where would I be without my poor customers- I look at their needs to make families happy and I tell myself that I have to do something. My husband helps in the business transactions- I send him to

³¹ The interview took place in her shop. She was referring to a refined oil product from a big regional manufacturer

collect supplies and to talk to people- he is my husband and he has given me no reason to doubt his sincerity. I am the brains behind the business so he appreciates it- if he does not then I may have to start traveling all over and this will not make him happy and we will quarrel and our family will suffer. Rwandese men love their women staying at home. You should have married a woman from Rwanda they really know how to make their men happy and the men want to keep them where they can see them. They just want to look at their beauty and congratulate themselves for having them, but poverty and other needs makes it necessary for women to go out. Yes there are women who misbehave and some have been divorced or thrown out of their homes- some have had their men walk out on them. A lot of other women have suffered because of women and relatives jealous of their success. Even in-laws see how you are beautiful and they admire you but they cannot say so, in anger they start telling your husband stories. You know in business you have to talk to many men who are not your relatives- and to sell your goods you have to talk to them nicely, so relatives and your enemies will not lack examples when they are giving false information about you. When you are in business you have to look attractive for your customers- it is not only men who swam around attractive women, even poor women customers do not like clumsy unkempt shopkeepers. You are there role model so you have to look good. My husband understands- we have had our problems but in the end he appreciates me.

I also trade in sugar from Burundi but some of it just passes through Burundi- I think it is from Tanzania. Rwanda people eat a lot of sugar- but they cannot afford so we bring from elsewhere. My husband used to bring in beer from Burundi and sell to hotels and bars since we do not own a bar, but he stopped because the government got too strict. Even though we are the same people, our government does not like us buying things from Burundi. Even when they say there is the East African Community our government will not fully open up to Burundi because Rwandan's will buy from there because their goods are cheaper- then there will be nobody to buy from Rwanda and the revenue people will not have money. That is how life is here- we are watching what the EAC will bring.

6.1.3 Victoriene (Under 30 years of age- runs a beauty salon)

I am a young woman who got into cross border trade by chance. My mother ran away with me to the Congo when I was still very young to escape the genocide in Rwanda. I am told we were the lucky ones- relatives and friends I only remember vaguely were slaughtered worse than animals. We lived in Goma at first, then there was trouble in Goma. They did not like Rwandese so we migrated to Kinshasa. There was

also fighting in Kinshasa but Rwanda people were not targeted, at least not women. Congo women liked me and they always congratulated my mother about my beauty. The men also, but my mother warned me that Congo men are sly, they like having fun with women then they leave them when they get pregnant- and look for other girls. They will spend the last franc on you but when they see another brown woman- they will run for her and shift the money. Rwanda men are more responsible, they take care of the women- my mother said. Poor mother, she died in the Congo after a short illness and distant relatives there assisted us to bury her. I was devastated but I had to live on. I was around 19 years of age when she passed on.

What can I say, there was this Congo man like the rest of them he was very charming and romantic- I was a young girl whose heart easily melted given such attention even by a Congo man. He had known my mother and he really helped me when she died. I do not recall how it started but we were soon living like husband and wife- but we were not married. He came from Eastern Congo. I lived my mother's nightmare, before I knew quite how I was pregnant. That is when the wife of that man heard- and she came to beat me- the man ran. I was thrown out. Congo people are good at helping others- even though the men are sly but they are always trying to help others. Some women who had lost their husbands in the war and were being supported by missionaries to set themselves up took me in. They fed me and my baby girl. They used to trade in perfumes, lotions, skin lightening creams- name it. You know Congo people really hate black color. Men and women spend a lot of money trying to change the skin. It destroys some women's skin and makes beards grow on others- but this does not stop them. The women taught me how to choose perfumes for different people and occasions. They taught me how to mix them and how to apply to different types of skin. Most of their supplies came in from France- but they said others came from Dubai, West and North Africa through networks. Different clients bought and used different beauty products depending on their needs. Musicians for instance like expensive and strong scented perfumes- these were a big market because all the attractive young men with some connections were in music- most not making it but really trying. The women taught me how to get them to buy my perfumes- in a way they used me. They were not as good looking as I am- Congolese women really try but most are not naturally as good looking as Rwanda women- even though they use more beauty products and they are more confident with men.

They taught me how to play around with men without necessarily doing anything with them. Rwanda women are shy so they let the men lead them on- Congolese women mostly have the men where they want. The men shower money and things on them and they throw them out when they get a new man or get tired of them. I am from Rwanda and I am a good girl. My mother taught me Rwandese etiquette and how to respect myself. That is how I started having problems with the woman who controlled the trade- one of the well known Congo musicians wanted me to be his mistress. He was already married and he used to buy all the stock of male perfumes I had in the women's shop. They encouraged me and told me that was my luck as hundreds of women were begging to sleep with him let alone be his concubine. I was already a victim of Congo men's charm so I declined and left their shop for another shop on a good street where I got into partnership with another Congo woman with relatives in Rwanda. The women then spread bad gossip about me and even lied to the wife of the musician man that I was after him and that I had strong medicine from Rwanda and his man would leave her or fail to make love to her. That is another thing about Congo women, they really believe in love portions. I sometimes pity their men even though they are themselves liars. The things the women say they fed men and did to them when they were asleep? Believe me, they could target your man and he would disappear from home never to come back until a medicine man removed the spell on him. No wonder Rwanda women say men are like puppies, you flick your fingers and wiggle your behind and they are drooling all over you if not licking the ground on which you walk. No man can be strong before a beautiful woman – Rwanda women believe and you can understand why we beauty traders shall remain in business. But at least we do not feed our men love portions- we bind them to us by treating them well, until they do not look at other women and work for you. Rwanda men are very hard working and they could die working for women they love. They are shy and even the most educated among them may not find half the words of Congolese men to drive a woman into his arms- but they are patient and win you over by their honesty and devotion to you. You have heard Congo men sing- they are born smooth talkers and women killers- God have mercy on the women they ensnare with their charm because it is short lived- as soon as they meet another beauty they are singing off their hearts like birds. This is why I prefer our own even though they are grumpy and awkward- poetry does not flow naturally from their lips, and I must add they do not even know how to try hard enough but they compensate by being there for us and we Rwanda women know it.

I am sorry you asked me about trade but I digressed. Yes, as you can see my shop is well stocked and beside it I have a salon where I take women through the paces. I still buy my supplies from the Congo-

where else? I went to Nairobi³² once. It was better than any place I had been to, but it was very, very expensive and life is so fast. The women are so sharp and rude- most dress well but they would do with some help from people like me. I could be very rich if I opened a shop in Nairobi- some people have told me- the women spend so much money on themselves to look good, but the city has a lot of robbers who target foreigners. But it is so beautiful and the women speak English the way Congo men speak French. They are highly educated and they show off their education. They drink in bars in groups and with men and look at them straight into their eyes. But Rwanda women are more elegant- Kenya men told me so. If Rwandan women went there with their humility, they would take away all their rich men who drive around in big cars because I know Kenyan men are like other African men everywhere and do not appreciate the rudeness of their women. I will not talk about Kenya men because you may be offended- I think all things considered Rwanda men are the best even though they are poor compared to Kenyan men.

You ask why I am in this small town and not in Kigali- two things, this town is very high on culture because it is a University town so the people are more refined and appreciate what I have to offer. Believe me, the university brings in so many worthy clients that one may be hard put to find in Kigali. It also draws in a lot of well paid foreigners who appreciate the services and goods I offer. The second thing- it is on the border so I get well healed Burundi customers who have heard of my shop. Although Warundi are not as rich as Rwandans, let alone Kenyans, they have their own who are well to do and they still pay enough for my products- I am not complaining. My customers tend to be among the well to do. Students are my poorest customers- they also want to look good and the girls often need to catch some well off foreigners if just for the time they are here.

I do not sell skin lightening creams. I think it is immoral. I was told that I could make a lot of money if I smuggled skin lightening creams into Kenya because they are banned yet Kenyan women crave for them. You see they want to match their skins with the English. Beauty is a big industry in Rwanda and as people get more money women can only spend more on themselves so it has a bright future.

³² Capital city of Kenya where the researcher comes from

Occasionally I travel to the Congo but most of the time I get supplies from trusted friends there who keep me informed about the latest products and trends. We know one another and work on trust- even money is often delivered by trusted friends long after the goods have been delivered.

6.2 Appendix 2: Tools

6.2.1 General questionnaire

1. Personal details

Name _____

Sex _____

Age _____

Level of education _____

Average earnings (month) _____

Number of dependants _____

Any other occupation (please specify) _____

Country _____

Duration in cross border trade _____

a) Who are the women traders in the East African Trade Union? Tick where appropriate

Rich	Medium class	Poor	Mixed

b) What types of commodities are traded across the border?

c) Which types of goods do *majority* of women trade in?

Consumables_____

Hardware_____

d) How do they obtain the commodities for sale?

e) What difficulties do they experience in obtaining commodities for sale?

f) What difficulties do women experience while moving their goods for sale across the border?

g) How do they overcome these problems? _____

h) How often do they conduct cross border trade? Tick where appropriate

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Biannual	Any other (specify)

i) At what level do women traders trade? Large scale small scale

j) Where do they get capital for their trade?

k) Are they accessible to credit facilities and financial services, to help boost their trade?

l) If yes which institutions provide credit to the women?

Government _____

Banks _____

Micro-credit institutions _____

Co-operatives _____

Women organizations _____

Women groups _____

Others (specify) _____

m) And if not what are the factors hindering women traders access to these credit facilities?

n) Are women aware of any policy(ies) regulating cross border trade?

o) Are women aware of the cross border regulations and the associated penalties following the regulations default? Which ones

Regulations	Penalties
(i)	
(ii)	
(iii)	
(iv)	

p) How do these regulations and penalties affect them as women?

q) Are women traders aware of the existence of the E.A. Customs Union? What do they know about it

r) Is the Customs Union Protocol accessible to the women traders?

Yes No

s) Do they understand/comprehend the content Customs Union?

Yes No

t) If no what would you recommend to enhance your understanding of the same?

u) What benefits will the Customs Union bring to women traders when implemented?

v) What are the perceived obstacles to women traders that may come along in the course of its implementation? _____

w) What would women like to be entrenched in the Customs Union to their advantage?

x) What do women like to be eliminated in the Customs union to their advantage?

y) Do women cross border traders (from the different countries) interact? If no why?

z) If yes how, when, why, and where is this interaction?

Nature of interaction	When	Why	Where	Benefits of interaction

aa) Is there interaction between men and women traders practicing cross border trade and how, when, why and where do they interact? If no why?

bb) If yes how, when, why, and where is this interaction?

Nature of interaction	When	Why	Where	Benefits of interaction

cc) Have the women traders formed a kind of trading groups or associations to enhance their cross border trade? If no why

dd) Are the women full time cross border traders and if not what else are they engaged in when they are not practicing cross border trade?

ee) Are there any possibilities of environmental degradation as a result of implementation of this protocol?

ff) How has the existing trade threatened the environment in totality?

gg) What are some of the commodities traded across the border that have a negative impact on the environment?

hh) What measures that can be taken to preserve our environment from degradation?

6.2.2. Questionnaire for customs officials

- a) What main role do the customs officials play in the cross border trade?
- b) For how long have they served as the customs officials?
- c) What are some of the difficulties/ challenges do they experience in carrying out their duties as far as cross border trade is concerned?
- d) What strategies do they carry out in order to deal with the challenges and problems they go through?
- e) What is the approximate number of the cross border women traders?
- f) What is the ratio of cross border women traders to that of cross border men traders?
- g) How many women traders do they serve in a day, in comparison to the male traders?

- h) What type of commodities do the women traders trade in?
- i) How often do the women traders purchase their goods?
- j) How long does it take to clear with the customs office?
- k) Are the women traders conversant with customs rules and regulations?
- l) Between the men and women cross border traders, who violets the customs rules more and why?
- m) What are some of the penalties regarding violation of the cross border regulations?
- n) Are the penalties gender sensitive?
- o) What nature of trade do the women traders engage in (wholesale, retail, national, international etc)?
- p) What are some of the reasons/ factors that contribute to the violation of the cross border trade rules and regulations e.g. trade through smuggling
- q) What are some the strategies adopted to stop the exploitation of cross border trade through illegal ways such as smuggling?
- r) Are the customs officials aware of the Customs Union Protocol?
- s) Is the Customs Union Protocol accessible to the customs officials?
- t) If yes are they in a position to interpret it?
- u) How will the implementation of the customs union impact on the customs operations?
- v) What else will you want to be entailed in the customs union before it is implemented?
- w) What will you want to be eliminated in the customs union protocol, before it is implemented, so as to make it easy to carry out your tasks?
- x) Will the implementation of the customs union enhance or regress cross border trade?
- y) To your opinion, how will the implementation of the customs union impact on the cross border small-scale women traders?
- z) Does the protocol have specific impact on women traders across the border?
- aa) To your opinion, what are some of the environmental impacts (ecological, biological, economical, social, physical, cultural and political) that will be posed by the implementation of the Customs Union Protocol?
- bb) What are some of the commodities traded across the border pose a negative impact on the environment in totality?