

Non-Tariff Barriers to Trade in West Africa: The Plight of Cross-Border Drivers and Informal Sector Traders

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ABSTRACT:

Background Intra-Community trade among Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) currently stands at an estimated 15%. Some analysts believe that this percentage is rather low for a region that constantly finds itself marginalized by globalization and unfair world trade practices. Several factors account for the low volume of trade among the Member States. These include non-tariff trade barriers such as prohibitive transportation costs inadvertently occasioned by stringent customs procedures, incessant checkpoints and sometimes illegal roadblocks. The result is bribery and corruption, leading to delays along the regional transport corridors. Reports from the West Africa Trade Hub (WATH) indicates that on the average, a truck embarking from the Tema Harbour en route Ouagadougou will be stopped 36 times, delayed for 4 hours and pay bribes amounting to \$32. This paper takes a critical look at these circumstances that inhibit free flow of trade within the region. The emphasis will be on the Tema-Ouagadougou transport corridor.

Methodology The paper will review studies conducted by WATH through its Road Governance Reports (2009 to 2012) and measure its impact on cross-border transport owners and operators. It will also focus its attention on informal sector traders, especially those who trade in perishable goods like vegetables. This is because the plight of the drivers often has a direct and proportional bearing on the fortunes of the traders. Beyond the literature review, the author will engage in field interviews with drivers and traders who ply the Tema-Ouagadougou corridor.

Conclusion The paper will conclude with recommendations for policymakers on how best the situation can be improved to increase trade in the region. The recommendations will mostly be sampled from views and opinions expressed by cross-border drivers and traders. That way, the voice of non-state actors can adequately be heard and captured in policy formulation.