



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

Enhancing the quality of informal cross-border trade in the Economic Community of West African States





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Abbreviations

ACTESA	Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa
ALCO	Abidjan–Lagos Corridor Organization
Afreximbank	African Export Import Bank
ATPC	African Trade Policy Centre
CILSS	Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
EAC	East African Community
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EDF	European Development Fund
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning Systems Network
GDP	gross domestic product
GPS	Global Positioning System
HS	Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System
ILRI	International Livestock Research Institute
RATIN	Regional Agricultural Trade Intelligence Network
RE-SAKKS	Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SITC	Standard International Trade Classification
TOAM	Trade Obstacle Alert Mechanism
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WAEMU	West African Economic and Monetary Union
WILDAF	Women in Law and Development in Africa
WCO	World Customs Organization
WFP	World Food Programme
WTO	World Trade Organization

Executive summary and policy recommendations

Background

In January 2019, the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Export Import Bank (Afreximbank) launched a joint one-year pilot project to collect data on informal cross-border trade along the Abidjan-Lagos corridor in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The African Union Commission and the ECOWAS Commission served as key project partners and the Eastern Africa Grain Council was identified as the lead project implementation partner.

Official trade statistics typically capture only formal trade, which leads to underestimation of intra-African and intra-regional economic community trade. Although some estimates exist of informal cross-border trade in Africa, they are few in number and are usually incomplete in terms of commodity coverage or location of data collection points. Typically, some components of informal trade, such as night trade and underdeclared goods, are not captured. Meth-

ic role in microeconomic, macroeconomic and regional policy frameworks. Typically, funding constraints and technical capacity gaps within national statistics offices in Africa limit efforts to collect such data.

In order to reflect informal cross-border trade issues more effectively in policy frameworks, the first step is to identify the scale, magnitude and characteristics of such trade. This is crucial to building awareness among policymakers of its importance and to making a case for policy action. This is why it was decided to focus the ECA-Afreximbank informal cross-border trade pilot project on data collection.¹

In 2018, in recognition of the importance of informal trade in the economic and social life of ECOWAS Member States, the ECOWAS Commission launched the five-year regional informal trade regulatory support programme (ITRSP). The programme forms part of the implementation of the strategy for the regulation of informal trade in the ECOWAS region adopted in March 2019, and places particular

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