

The contribution of informal trade for food security in developing economies

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Questions

- *What is the evidence on the contribution of informal trade for food security in developing economies?*
- *How can (or should) it be helped or hindered?*

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1. Summary

Informal trade (and Informal cross-border trade, ICBT) has an important impact on food security in developing economies (Fundira, 2018a; Bouët et al., 2020; Fin24, 2018). It can improve livelihoods for women and people living with disabilities. This rapid review will provide additional understanding on the importance of informal trade in food security. Additional data on regional food movement in sub-Saharan Africa, and remittance trends is explored by request. Specific country case studies are also presented.

Key points to highlight:

- Although the types of goods carried by informal cross-border traders varies widely, the trade in sub-Saharan Africa is dominated by food, especially small-scale **groceries and fresh produce**.
- In the existing literature “ICBT” often carries a negative connotation, as ‘informal’ can be easily confused with ‘illegal’ (Brenton & Soprano, 2018). This term also inaccurately reflects the reality of trade flows on the ground.
- Regional food trade makes an important impact on determining numbers of people in need. **Kenyan “kadogo” (informal) economy is still dominating the retail sector in Eastern Africa** (Opiyo & Ogindo, 2018; Battersby & Watson, 2018). However, **ICBT Western Africa is not seen as a major contributor to the economy** (Engel et al., 2013; Torres & van Seters, 2016), therefore informal trade data from there is limited.
- *Estimates in the change in trade patterns specifically linked to food security:* The dearth of reliable data on key indicators of ICBT has accentuated the lack of recognition of its important economic role in national and regional policies and frameworks (Fundira, 2018b: 17). Records hardly exist for exchanges of small amounts of food; **technical observation of borders (monitoring) may be the only option for their quantification** (Nkendah et al., 2014: 10). It is difficult to get an accurate and aggregate overview of the extent of ICBT in the region due to the lack of consistent measurement tools and reliable estimates (Torres & van Seters, 2016). If governments do not have serious **Food Balance Sheets (FBSs)** as national food policy documents, it makes it difficult to track food security, as was found in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania (Njeru, 2011).
- *Food remitting, and informal trade of staples:* More data is available for international remittances; less is known about remittances sent by migrants within countries. Geographical differences have been found in the data. The **impact of remitting was positive** in Mali (Generoso, 2015), Ethiopia (Abebaw et al., 2020) and Nigeria (Obi et al., 2020). However, it needs to be qualified: it enables households to solve temporary food security situations, but had no effect on structural food security issues (Generoso, 2015).
- *Predicted trade patterns related to food security:* The alternative to informal trade for many traders is not formal trade, but rather no trading at all (Engel et al., 2013). Indirectly, the **new African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has the potential to generate significant benefits for informal cross border traders**. The private sector can play a key role in contributing to ICBT initiatives under the AfCFTA.
- *Help and hindrances for ensuring food security:* Governments have a leading role in supporting informal trade – however, evidence shows a mostly **unsupportive policy environment for informal traders**, often excluding informal traders from policy planning (Fin24, 2018; Battersby & Muwowo, 2018; Battersby, 2019a) or enforcing by-laws which

prevent trade. Informal vendor opportunities are often destroyed as a result of these development plans (Battersby, 2019b). Municipalities on both sides of the border benefit from ICBT, including the re-export of rice, as an integral part of an economic model adopted by **both public and private actors** (Tondel et al., 2020). **Some argue that the dual categorisation of trade between formal and informal trade should be removed**, and that formal and informal trade should be viewed as a continuum from small traders to large traders (Ndiaye, 2010; Battersby & Muwowo, 2018).

There is considerable data valuing food security in Sub-Saharan Africa, however, it is not always current. For some regions, data on the scale of ICBT's contribution to food security and food movement (trade, remittances, in-kind, etc.) is limited and based on estimates. Evidence for this rapid review was mostly taken from grey literature, including working papers and policy briefs. Data on the contribution of informal trade for food security was obtained from informal regional economy reports (e.g. Economic Community Of West African States, ECOWAS; Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, COMESA), as well as research projects such as the Southern African Consuming Urban Poverty (CUP) project. Estimates of informal food trade e.g. from USAID's Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), were used when data was unavailable.

2. Food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa

According to the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES),¹ **sub-Saharan Africa has the highest prevalence of food insecurity in the world (55%)**. Evidence shows variations of food security by region:

- **The food security situation in Central and Western Africa is mixed.** The number of food-insecure people rose to almost 22 million in 2020, which is an increase of over 70% from the same period last year (WFP, 2020). Migrant and informal workers in the coastal countries Sierra Leone and Liberia were most significantly impacted as they were particularly vulnerable due to a deepened recession; the majority of the workforce is employed within the informal sector (77% and 86% in Liberia and Sierra Leone respectively) (WFP, 2020: 5). In Central Africa, the Central African Republic (CAR) remains the hungriest country. According to the latest National Food Security Assessment (ENSA)², published in December 2019, 44% of the CAR population is severely or moderately food insecure (1,759,000 people). Some 300,000 people, or 6% of the population, is severely food insecure. However, the prevalence of moderate and severe food insecurity has **decreased slightly from 50% in 2018 to 44% in 2019**.
- **Food insecurity remains a significant barrier to greater regional security, growth and prosperity in East Africa.** Over 27 million people in the greater region are food

¹ Until recently, there was not an individual-level measure that could be used to make valid comparisons of food insecurity across countries to help identify common causes and risk factors. This changed in 2014 when the United Nations FAO Voices of the Hungry project developed an experiential measure of food insecurity, the (FIES). The FIES is the first standardised measure of people's direct experiences of food insecurity appropriate for application on a global scale.

² [in French] Évaluation Nationale de la Sécurité Alimentaire (ENSA) en RCA 2019. Décembre 2019: https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/presentation_car_ensa_2019.pdf

insecure and require humanitarian assistance, **a 39% increase in food insecurity over 2016.**³

- **Approximately 44.8 million people in 13 countries of the Southern African region suffer from food insecurity**, according to the Southern African Development Community (SADC, 2020: 8). **Food-insecurity increased by almost 10%** in the region in 2020 compared to the previous year. The main factors responsible included the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), climate change, conflict and economic challenges (SADC, 2020; Paul, 2020).

Records show that over a quarter (28%) of sub-Saharan Africa was severely food insecure in 2017 (Smith & Meade, 2019). **Food deserts are a feature in this rapidly urbanising continent.** They have been defined as "poor, often informal, urban neighbourhoods characterized by high food insecurity and low dietary diversity, with multiple markets and market and non-market food sources but variable household access to food."⁴ Research has found **consistently higher levels of food insecurity in the African region than official statistics present** (Battersby, 2020a). Undernourishment and severe food insecurity, as reported by the recent issues of The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, are on the rise again in almost all sub-regions of Africa.⁵

3. Informal trade in sub-Saharan Africa

Informal trade represents commodity flows outside of the formal system, meaning that activity is not typically recorded in government statistics or inspected and taxed through official channels. These flows vary from very small quantities moved by bicycle, to large volumes trucked over long distances. **Informal trade is also known as informal cross-border trade (ICBT), informal intra-regional trade, or small-scale cross-border trade (SSCBT).** However, the distinction between 'small-scale' and 'informal' trade is important. In the existing literature, "informal cross-border trade/ICBT" often carries a negative connotation as 'informal' can be easily confused with 'illegal' (Brenton & Soprano, 2018). It also inaccurately reflects the reality of trade flows on the ground, as traders may indistinctly use both formal and informal crossing channels depending on a variety of factors, such as the value of their consignment, the length of the queue at the border, or the mood of the individual official on duty (Brenton & Soprano, 2018).

The potential benefits of informal trade include better food security, faster job creation, more poverty reduction, increased tax revenues for authorities, and better long-term developmental outcomes (Fundira, 2018a; Bouët et al., 2020). The informal food economy includes transporters, processors, shopkeepers, and takeaway food retailers. Street vending is considered for its potential as a vocational occupation for people with disabling conditions. Although some hawkers are forced into the occupation by necessity or desperation, many acknowledge that it provides well for essential requirements, including shelter, food, education,

³ USAID (2018). East Africa: Regional Partnerships for Food Security:

https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/RIGOs_and_Regional_Food_Security.pdf

⁴ Battersby J, Crush J (2014). Africa's Urban Food Deserts. Urban Forum, 25(2): 143–51. DOI:10.1007/s12132-014-9225-5. S2CID 55960422

⁵ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP & WHO. (2017, 2018, 2019). The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2017. Building resilience for peace and food security. FAO: Rome.

and, in the case of migrants, passage to visit their home countries (Gamiendien & van Niekerk, 2017).

On average, the informal sector is estimated to account for 38.4% of sub-Saharan African economies.⁶ Informal trade is also significant source of jobs for many poor city-living people (Joubert, 2018: 72). Livelihoods for poor women, and by extension poor households, across the region can be secured through increased reliable income flows from informal trade (Masinjila, 2011: 8). It acts as a sort of social security system, absorbing unemployed labour and providing cheap products (IMF, 2017; Joubert, 2018: 129); research by Benjamin and Mbaye in Francophone Africa (2012: 138) states that “if it were not for informal firms, there would be food riots”.

4. Contribution of informal trade to food security

Both maize and rice are now the fastest-growing staple food crops in all parts of Africa.⁷ Among the cereal crops produced, maize and rice have severe implications for economic development in most sub-Saharan African countries, as their contribution to agricultural GDP is high.

The informal sector is a valuable part of food security in sub-Saharan African countries. Surveys indicate that a substantial share of ICBT in sub-Saharan Africa concerns staple food commodities that have a direct impact on regional food security (including livestock, e.g. cattle) (Torres & van Seters, 2016: 22; Fundira, 2018a; Bouët et al., 2020). A large share of regional trade is informal, i.e. not recorded in official data (Bensassi et al., 2019). Therefore, official statistics hide many important features of the real trade patterns and dynamics in each region, and their importance for economic growth, poverty reduction, and food security (Engel et al., 2013).

Consumers of all social groups rely on informal food markets as a source of food, but they are particularly important for consumers in low-income areas (Mwango et al., 2019: 18). For those on low incomes, informal outlets – such as street vendors – are the main, if not only, source of affordable, nutritious and safe food (Gamiendien & van Niekerk, 2017). Informal trade provides food in affordable unit sizes, provides food on credit, sells fresh produce at lower costs than supermarket fresh produce, and sells prepared foods appropriate for households that experience income, time, storage and energy poverty (Battersby et al., 2016; Opiyo & Ogindo, 2018; Opiyo & Agong, 2021: 9).

ICBT flows of staples and other agricultural products play a critical role in guaranteeing food security, especially in remote villages where the population relies more heavily on food items supplied through informal channels than on official distribution (Zarrilli & Linoci, 2020). The importance of informal food markets in food security has also been well-documented across

⁶ This data is for the shadow economy (which is a broader category than just the informal sector): Schneider F, Buehn A, Montenegro C (2010). Shadow Economies All Over the World: New Estimates for 162 Countries from 1999 to 2007, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 5356, Washington DC: The World Bank.

⁷ FAO & UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2019). The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018. Building climate resilience for food security and nutrition. Rome, FAO: <http://www.fao.org/3/I9553EN/i9553en.pdf>

African cities (Skinner, 2019). The Consuming Urban Poverty (CUP)⁸ project has demonstrated that the informal food retail sector, in many forms (markets, street traders of fresh produce, cooked meal vendors, house shops) is a vital component of the food security of the urban poor. However, **poor households depend on a range of formal and informal food retail sources to meet their food needs** (Battersby, 2020a). People still depend on the informal sector for many day-to-day purchases, as a source of traditional foods, however, supermarkets are increasingly present. Informal vendors are re-sellers who often trade in goods that they themselves purchase in formal markets (Ambikapathi et al., 2021).

5. Data on internal migration, remittances,⁹ and food security

Food remitting also has a role to play in urban and rural food security. In 2005, Africa received an estimated USD19 billion in cash remittances, of which USD2.1 billion were from other African countries (Chikanda & Crush, 2014: 75; Crush & Caesar, 2017: 11). However, it is unknown what proportion of these remittances were spent on goods and investments, including food. Due to COVID-19, remittance flows were predicted to fall by 23.1% in the sub-Saharan African region in 2020 - the second largest fall globally, according to the World Bank.¹⁰

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that earnings of informal sector workers in Africa declined by 81% in the first month of the COVID-19 crisis.¹¹ This could result in catastrophic impacts on rural livelihoods throughout the pandemic.¹² Often, migrants carry money and goods with them when they go back to visit their villages. A few hundred dollars could be the difference between subsistence and food insecurity.¹³

Recent studies have addressed the links between migration, remittances and food security in African countries (Mabrouk & Mekni, 2018; Sulemana et al., 2019). Data from Ethiopia (Abebaw et al., 2020) and Nigeria (Obi et al., 2020) show a positive correlation between food insecurity and remittances. In Mali, the remittances impact is also positive, although it needs to be qualified: they enable households to solve temporary food security situations, but they have

⁸ The CUP project is located in the African Centre for Cities (ACC) at the University of Cape Town, and in collaboration with partner research teams at Copperbelt University (Zambia), the University of Zimbabwe, and the Kisumu Local Interaction Platform (KLIP) – a research and policy knowledge hub facilitating urban research in Kisumu, Kenya. The full title of the project is Governing Food Systems to Alleviate Poverty in Secondary Cities in Africa.

⁹ A remittance is a transfer of money, often by a foreign worker to an individual in their home country. Money sent home by migrants competes with international aid as one of the largest financial inflows to developing countries.

¹⁰ World Bank Predicts Sharpest Decline of Remittances in Recent History. 22 April 2020:

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/22/world-bank-predicts-sharpest-decline-of-remittances-in-recent-history>

¹¹ ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Third edition. Updated estimates and analysis . 29 April 2020:

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_743146.pdf

¹² However, there is evidence that informal employment has increased during economic downturns as a result of declining opportunities in the formal economy: Some entrepreneurs have capitalised on the COVID-19 pandemic's unique challenges to launch businesses that deliver food to people stuck at home, or run errands for those who live abroad but want to help their families living in Zimbabwe: Muronzi C (2021). In Zimbabwe, some businesses struggle, others adapt and thrive. 11 February 2021:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/2/11/in-zimbabwe-some-businesses-struggle-others-adapt-and-thrive>

¹³ Adhikari S (2020). COVID-19 is reducing domestic remittances in Africa: What does it mean for poor households? 9 June 2020. Blog: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/africacan/covid-19-reducing-domestic-remittances-africa-what-does-it-mean-poor-households>

no effect on structural food security issues (Generoso, 2015). Most of the food insecurity coping strategies used by households in South Africa have had long-term detrimental effects (Musemwa et al., 2015). Karamba et al. (2011) point out that migration does not impact the total food per capita – the only exception are highly migratory regions in Ghana. Poorer rural households in Ghana have increased their dependence on food remittances (Kuuire et al., 2013). In general, results indicate that migration creates a shift toward the consumption of less nutritious food categories (Mora-Rivera & van Gameren, 2021).

Geographical differences in remittances have been found:

- *International cash remittances*: **Receiving international remittances is positively associated with more household food security in sub-Saharan Africa** (Sulemana et al., 2019). More remarkably, however, is that the frequency of receiving remittances matters more for this relationship. International remittances represent a critical strategy that can improve food security during crises (Obi et al., 2020).
- *Internal cash remittances*: Less is known about remittances sent by migrants within countries. The World Bank African Migration Project surveyed households in Burkina Faso, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda in 2010.¹⁴ In each country, **a greater proportion of internal rather than international cash remittances was spent on food**. In Kenya, for example, the proportion of cash remittances spent on food was 30% for internal remittances, 14% for South-South remittances, and 13% for North-South remittances. The equivalent figures in Senegal were 82%, 72%, and 63%, respectively (Crush & Caesar, 2017: 11).¹⁵

6. Data on sub-regional variances in food-related ICBT

Surveys conducted by USAID for several food staples **estimate that between 66% and 80% of intra-regional staple food trade is not accounted for in official statistics** (The World Bank, 2015). Access to food in sub-Saharan Africa is highly dependent on cross-border markets, **however, regional estimates vary**. For example, Eastern and Southern African countries have been more likely to engage in the production and marketing of staple food crops, while West African countries intervene in the supply chains of export crops and are much less influential in grain markets (Engel et al., 2013: 13):

Western region

ICBT contributes 40% in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) region (Sommer & Nshimbi, 2018: 8; Parshotam & Balongo, 2020). The goods most commonly exchanged are **staple food commodities** that play a key role in meeting food security needs (Jouanjean et al., 2016). Parshotam and Balongo (2020) found that the goods traditionally traded informally include **non-processed foods** (i.e. basic food supplies) and re-exported goods

¹⁴ Plaza S, Navarrete M, Ratha D (2011). Migration and Remittances Household Surveys in Sub-Saharan Africa: Methodological Aspects and Main Findings. Preliminary publication. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265307111_Migration_and_Remittances_Household_Surveys_in_Sub-Saharan_Africa_Methodological_Aspects_and_Main_Findings

¹⁵ For more information on rural-urban differences, see African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN) study: (Crush & Caesar, 2017: 11-16).

(including **value-added agro-processed foods**¹⁶). There are indications that ICBT rice flows from southern Burkina to northern Ghana (Tondel et al., 2020: 36). Unfortunately, CILSS¹⁷ has not collected data on ICBT between these two countries. Research on informal intra-regional trade in the region suggests that coastal West African countries (Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Senegal) mainly export **cereals, tubers, fruits and vegetables to land-locked countries** (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger), who in turn export mainly **livestock to coastal countries** (Engel et al., 2013). Even if these north-south trade flows are the most important ones, other east-west and more complex intra-regional trade flows also exist in the region. However, as these trade flows are mainly informal, they are not completely captured by official data.

Nigeria dominates total Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) imports (52%) as well as food imports specifically (51%). The second and third economy of the region, i.e. Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, are the main ECOWAS food exporters, largely due to cocoa, followed by Nigeria. The main products in informal imports from Nigeria to Benin include **transformed food products (e.g. wheat flour, non-alcoholic beverages), and vegetable products** (Bensassi et al., 2019). Nigeria's heavy dependence on oil and several dysfunctional economic policies, along with Benin's poor business climate, have created an environment for ICBT to flourish (Tondel et al., 2020: 76). In Benin and Nigeria, customs are in some way involved in the transshipment of imported rice. **Municipalities on both sides of the border benefit from ICBT, including the re-export of rice, as an integral part of an economic model adopted by both public and private actors** (Tondel et al., 2020: 88).

The European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) reviews official statistics for informal trade, and also compiles available information from studies on informal undocumented intra-regional trade (which mainly concerns food staples). It found that **trade figures differ considerably between West African countries**. It is difficult to get an accurate and aggregate overview of the extent of ICBT in the region due to the lack of consistent measurement tools and reliable estimates (Torres & van Seters, 2016: 21).

The World Bank (2015)¹⁸ distinguishes three types of intra-regional trade in ECOWAS:

- i. the "arbitrage trade", as **informal transit re-export and trade deflection of staples** imported from outside the region (e.g. rice and poultry);
- ii. the "border trade" as local international trade motivated by proximity, the porous nature of borders, and the local patterns of excess supply and demand, and
- iii. the "regional trade" which occurs along corridors for a handful of foods for which important complementarities arise between surplus production and demand areas.

With regard to volume and economic value, **the regional trade (iii) is the most important, with livestock and maize being the two most important traded staples in ECOWAS** (Torres & van Seters, 2016: 22-23). An estimated 30% of staple foods evade formal customs, and the

¹⁶ These can include breads, cakes, sauces, or other processed foods.

¹⁷ The Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) has been collecting data on informal trade flows of staple food commodities across the borders of West African countries, including volumes and prices. These data are collected daily at several border crossings and reference markets in the vicinity of borders.

¹⁸ The World Bank combines existing data on formal and informal trade in staple foods.

proportion can be **much greater for highly perishable fruits and vegetables** (Bouët et al., 2020).

Eastern region

TradeMark East Africa (TMEA) – a key institution for enhancing trade in the region – states that **ICBT accounts for around 60% of all transactions in the East African Community (EAC)**¹⁹ (Koigi, 2018: 31). **Maize** grain was the main commodity traded in the region between October and December 2020 followed by **dry beans, rice, and sorghum; livestock exports from East Africa to the Middle East declined in 2020** due to reduced demand linked to COVID-19. The main staple food commodities informally traded across selected borders in Eastern Africa are listed in FEWS NET reports (FEWS NET & EAGC, 2021), **however, they do not capture all ICBT in the region, just a representative sample.**

Case study: Kenya

Kenya is a maize-deficit country necessitating importation mainly from the EAC countries, with a significant portion of the imports being contributed by ICBT, according to USAID.²⁰ It is common to find informal traders selling sugar, milk, cooking oil, and maize meal in smaller measures than would ordinarily be found on supermarket shelves. These small unit measures are not meant to make items cheaper but rather to enable households with low daily incomes to purchase food – this informal economy is locally referred to as “kadogo” economy (Opiyo & Ogindo, 2018: 191). **Kadogo is the dominator of the retail sector**, as 2019 figures from market insights firm Nielsen show that approximately 70% of fast-moving consumer goods came from this sector.²¹

Southern region

ICBT contributes between 30% and 40% of total intra-regional trade in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region (Sommer & Nshimbi, 2018: 8). The cities of Mwami and Mchinji, located between Malawi and Zambia, jointly constitute one of the most active informal trade hubs in Southern Africa. Here, COMESA has determined that informal trade amounts to €2.4 million (USD2.9 million) per month, compared to €1.35 million (USD1.63 million) for formal trade. Latest FEWS NET and World Food Programme food security and market analysis show that maize flows from Zambia to DRC were the largest, although there were some substantial volumes from Mozambique to Malawi, and from Zambia to Tanzania (FEWS NET & WFP, 2019). Compared to January 2018, **volumes of maize grain traded were significantly lower by 79% in 2019; volumes of rice and dry beans also decreased** (by 35% and 39%, respectively).

¹⁹ The East African Community (EAC) is a regional intergovernmental organisation of 6 Partner States: the Republics of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania, and the Republic of Uganda, with its headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania.

²⁰ Revamping East Africa’s grain trade: <https://www.world-grain.com/articles/13288-revamping-east-africas-grain-trade>

²¹ Njanja A (2019). ‘Kadogo’ economy rules retail sector. 17 July 2019:

<https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/bd/corporate/companies/-kadogo-economy-rules-retail-sector-2257816>

Central region

It is difficult to separate the official and informal trade in Central Africa. Cameroon seems to have a comparative advantage in producing and exporting food products from the west, northwest, and southwest regions (The World Bank, 2013: 8):

Case study: Cameroon

Cameroon is the first trading partner of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC)²² countries. The western regions of Cameroon are the breadbasket of the country. Plantain, cassava, and palm oil are primarily smallholder crops and are important for employment and poverty reduction. Approximately 80% of food produced is sold on the markets of major urban centres. Products are also exported to Abakaliki and Enugu in south-eastern Nigeria; tomatoes and beans are exported to neighbouring countries in the South.²³ Trade flows of food commodities such as **bananas, maize, beans, fish, fruits and vegetables, appear to move freely across the border, especially when the amounts involved are small.** Records hardly exist for these types of exchanges of small amounts of food; technical observation of borders (monitoring) may be the only option for their quantification (Nkendah et al., 2014: 10).

7. How informal trade can be hindered

Informal cross-border traders face several challenges, which prevents the full developmental potential of ICBT from being realised (based on evidence from Bugingo, 2018: 12):

1. Limited literacy skills

The majority of informal cross-border traders are partially literate or illiterate, which makes it difficult for them to read, understand, and complete the numerous mandatory forms and procedures at borders (Brenton & Soprano, 2018: 7). If any support measures provided to them are complex, they can also be hard to understand.

2. Limited access to finance and inadequate start-up capital

Informal cross border women traders (WICBTs) 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 those under EAC and the Customs Protocol to have any significant impact on informal trade by women (Masinjila, 2011). Some traders have no place to keep their savings, and have to pay hefty bribes to avoid being arrested (Koigi, 2018: 31).

The financial sector sets burdensome conditions on obtaining loans, such as high interest rates, and requirements for collateral lacked by most women engaged in ICBT (Brenton & Soprano, 2018: 7). **No banks will issue loans to unlicensed traders** without a clearly outlined

²² CEMAC is made up of six States: Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon.

²³ CIRAD (2006). Quantification des flux transfrontaliers - Etude des flux transfrontaliers de produits agricoles et horticoles sr les frontières sud du Cameroun – Rapport Final.

development plan.²⁴ Money lenders tend to lend to cross-border traders at punitive rates, and borrowers can end up repaying twice what they borrow (Chikanda & Tawodzera: 2017: 18).

Kenya: In Kisumu, which is largely driven by small-scale informal traders, capital is evidently hard to come by as 63% of the traders surveyed have never had any form of financial support for their businesses. For those who have received financial support, the most common form of support came from savings club members (16%) and family members (8%) (Opiyo & Ogindo, 2018: 193). These small-scale, underfinanced food retailers are further burdened by several taxes and operating fees, including inspection fees, food handlers license fee, market fees, and in some instances protection fees to market cartels and criminal gangs. These costs are passed on to the consumer, making food more expensive (Opiyo & Ogindo, 2018: 193).

3. Slow implementation of existing policies on cross-border trade

Food insecurity in Africa is severely exacerbated by trade-related barriers, which hinder the movement of food from surplus production areas to consumers in neighbouring markets in food deficit areas (Bonuedi et al., 2020). Food availability and food access can be significantly hampered by higher documentation requirements, and lengthier export and import times (Bonuedi et al., 2020).

4. Limited knowledge about taxes, duties, and tax exemptions

The informal sector is a hard-to-tax group. Therefore, adoption of presumptive taxation, which at least levies a modest tax on the self-employed, can thus lead to greater horizontal equity.²⁵ A presumptive tax regime can mean that substantially lower tax rates are paid than under the standard regime. However, **presumptive tax on informal traders is seen as not being practical unless it is supported by a friendly government informal sector policy framework that regulates their operations.** This is the case in Zimbabwe, where not many traders can afford the tax.²⁶

The **introduction of punitive duties on imported goods** by governments means that it mostly became cheaper to buy food and goods in the country than to import through the informal system (Chikanda & Tawodzera: 2017: 10).

5. The threat of informal fines and confiscation of goods

Customs officials at some border posts take advantage of this by asking informal cross-border traders to pay duties on commodities that should not attract any levies. In the event of failure to pay, bribes are solicited to allow the uninformed traders to cross with their goods (Brenton & Soprano, 2018: 7).

²⁴ Ousmane Badiane, director for Africa at the International Food Policy Research Institute:

<https://www.mamopanel.org/news/in-the-news/2017/dec/4/agricultural-trade-transforming-informal-economy/>

²⁵ Tadesse H, Taube G (1996). Presumptive Taxation in Sub-Saharan Africa:

https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/IMF001/05389-9781451842135/05389-9781451842135/05389-9781451842135_A001.xml?language=en&redirect=true

²⁶ Wisborn Malaya- secretary-general of the Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Association. 10 January 2021: <https://www.thestandard.co.zw/2021/01/10/presumptive-tax-on-informal-traders-not-practical/>

Informal traders are also frequently treated as criminals and illegals, which makes them particularly vulnerable to abuse, corruption, and harassment at the hands of state authorities such as border officials, immigration, and the police (Brenton & Soprano, 2018: 7). Faced with uncertainty about tariffs and taxes applicable to consignments, many traders will choose to travel through a panya (smuggling) route, where personal safety and security is compromised (Fundira, 2018: 16).

6. Inconsistent and non-harmonised national laws and policies and their regional instruments

Existing policy frameworks to address food security and to govern the informal sector tend to neglect informal retail in the food system. **African governments have a history of treating informal traders severely, especially during public health crises. Local governments tend to favour supermarkets and other formal outlets**, often marginalising informal food traders either through passive neglect or outright exclusion (Joubert, 2018: 11). Supermarkets are now offering goods that were traditionally sold in municipal markets and kiosks, e.g. fruits and vegetables, and they are also **moving into residential areas, pushing small-scale informal traders out of business**.

Zambia: When the government used the military to close down markets during Lusaka's 2018 cholera outbreak, farmers who sold their fresh produce to informal traders lost a significant amount of income (Resnick, 2020: 73). The **National Agricultural Policy** is focused on improving production and productivity through formal enterprises, including farmers' co-operatives and groups, **but does not involve informal food trading** (Mwango et al., 2019: 21). Many of the activities of informal food traders are under the direct purview of the Ministry of Agriculture, **but it was very difficult to include the informal traders in the incentive structures in place as they were not known**. For instance, when there is a shortage of maize during the lean period and the government, through the Food Reserve Agency (FRA), offloads maize to millers in order to stabilise prices, the focus is on the large well-established millers, rather than the unregistered hammer millers (Mwango et al., 2019: 23).

Enforcement of discriminating by-laws

Kenya: By-laws give and remove the legitimacy to vend (Onyango et al. 2012: 112). The Kisumu Municipality by-law states that vending is allowed upon payment of the prescribed fee. However, the **General Nuisance By-law** overrides this provision and can be used to declare street vending a public nuisance and therefore illegal. The General Nuisance by-law requires a permit issued by the medical officer of health. Health therefore trumps any other consideration. As a result, the existing biases against street trade are reinforced over and over again (Battersby, 2020b: 19).

South Africa: An imbalance between regulation and support is particularly evident in the informal food retail sector. The City of Cape Town's Single Zoning Scheme, passed in 2013, has been criticised for acting in conjunction with the **Informal Trading By-Law** to further repress the informal sector. This effectively rendered 70% of spaza (informal convenience) stores in Cape

Town illegal. There are legitimate concerns from a variety of organisations²⁷ that the new Informal Trading By-Law places **unreasonable conditions on informal traders**, thus undermining its stated intention of enhancing informal trade.

Poor policy design frameworks

Although informal trade accounts for the overwhelming share of regional trade in food staples, **informal traders are not included in policy planning**. City management often favours the elites and forgets the experience of the urban majority (Joubert, 2018: 7). Therefore, informal vendor opportunities are often destroyed as a result of these development plans (Battersby, 2019b; Haysom et al., 2020: 27).

South Africa: Haysom et al., (2020) found that **food is absent from almost all urban planning and wider urban governance practices and strategic thinking in South Africa**. In urban areas these controls were activated through by-laws restricting raw milk sales, informal food vending, slaughter, waste removal, etc. Haysom et al. (2020: 30) concludes: “Not only is the design of the current South African food system driving food insecurity, the obsession with outdated (and often colonial informed) planning rules and ordinances, and the enforcement thereof, often turn many urban citizens, those trying to eke out a living in the absence of formal employment, into criminals, through the enactment of laws and by-laws that criminalised activities.” This is particularly the case with informal traders, but spans the entire food system.

Zambia: For the Kitwe municipality, informal trading was seen as a blemish. Getting rid of the traders was in line with their ‘Keep Kitwe Clean’ campaign, aimed at polishing up downtown Kitwe as the local government tries to transform it into a modern African city, where supermarkets and shopping malls replace informal food traders (Joubert, 2018: 59).

Zimbabwe: Kadoma City Council has a long running antipathy towards informal traders, common across Africa (Kamete, 2013²⁸ in Battersby & Watson, 2018: 135-136). There is no consideration of the role of street trade in the food system, or of the service it offers in terms of food security for the urban poor.

Imbalanced urban planning policies

Although the food desert concept may be valuable for African researchers to provoke debates about systemic inequality, **the food desert policy narrative should be rejected** as it is ill-informed by the lived experiences of food insecurity in African cities. It may also promote policy interventions that erode rather than enhance the capacity of the food system to meet the food security needs of African urbanites (Battersby, 2019a; Mirzoev and Tull et al. [in preparation]).

²⁷ Western Cape Informal Traders Coalition, Somali Association of South Africa, Cosatu Western Cape, Passop, National Consumer Forum, South African Council of Churches, Scalabrini Foundation and Legal Resources Centre (2013). Cape Town Zoning Schemes and By-Laws Challenged in the Informal Sector: <http://www.streetnet.org.za/show.php?id=49172>

²⁸ Kamete AY (2013). Missing the point? Urban planning and the normalisation of ‘pathological’ spaces in southern Africa. Transactions Institute of British Geographers, 38, 639–651.

South Africa: Evidence of this is seen in Cape Town where spatial planning and business support departments approve the development of shopping malls but seldom engage departments who are responsible for managing the informal retail environments (Battersby, 2019b).

Lack of market infrastructure near borders

This has been a major stumbling block for business interactions between traders and customers. Coupled with poor quality, or absence of storage facilities, this often results in losses, especially for perishable stock, affecting mainly the women traders who deal primarily with low value products.²⁹ Due to infrastructure discrepancies (such as a lack of water, sanitation, and shelter), border conditions for the traders vary from bad to health-threatening, including unsanitary or non-existent toilets, contaminated food and water, as well as exposure to malaria (Wegerif, 2020; Macheng, 2021).

7. External shocks, and food shortages due to logistical constraints

There is evidence from East Africa which shows that food shortages in parts of the region are caused not by scarcity, but by inability of traders from the region to access those markets (Masinjila, 2011: 9). Before the introduction of any transit restrictions in Africa due to COVID-19, WICBTs had already stopped crossing borders for business because of disruptions in food markets of neighbouring countries and in supply chains (Zarrilli & Linoci, 2020). Climate variability and extremes, conflicts, economic slowdowns, and downturns are some of the drivers of the recent increases in global hunger rates.³⁰

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, trade has become not only a question of economic activity but, more importantly, of survival. After already a few weeks with no gains, there are pressing fears that the COVID-19 crisis will eventually push WICBTs out of business (Zarrilli & Linoci, 2020). Research from the International Growth Centre found that the urban poor engaging in informal trade with little social protection have been pushed further into the margins, and are struggling simply for survival (Haas et al., 2020). Besides the immediate economic impacts on the livelihoods of cross-border traders, the inability to continue business as usual is having wider negative spillover effects. More effective and targeted social safety nets for the informal sector are therefore needed.

8. High transport costs

High transport costs remain an impediment to trade, however, **market size matters here**. If the magnitude of transport costs increases, the range of tradable goods narrows:

Nigeria-Cameroon: Eru³¹ plays an important role in trade between countries in West and Central Africa, especially between Cameroon and Nigeria. Roads on the Cameroon side are particularly

²⁹ COMESA to Construct Border Export Zones for Small Scale Traders – Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA): <https://www.comesa.int/comesa-to-construct-border-export-zones-for-small-scale-traders/>

³⁰ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP & WHO. (2017, 2018, 2019). The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2017. Building resilience for peace and food security. FAO: Rome.

³¹ Eru is a vegetable found in the forest. Its leaves are used mainly for food and are especially prominent the preparation of soups. They are very popular among Nigerians.

bad, *eru* is transported in relatively small vehicles, and it is a particularly perishable good (The World Bank, 2013: 47). **Transport costs were estimated to make up 42% of the gross margin for Eru exported from Cameroon to Nigeria.** Small traders engaged in the export of *eru*, bananas, and plantain incur average transport costs of USD 2.67 per ton-km. This is due to informal payments to forestry guards, councils, customs, police, quarantine and commerce officials along the route make road transport unpopular and undesirable to exporters.

8. How informal trade can (or should) be helped

There are several ways where informal trade can be facilitated:

1. Improving knowledge in the context of increased market linkages through information and communications technology (ICT)

The dearth of reliable data on key indicators of ICBT has accentuated the lack of recognition of its important economic role in national and regional policies and frameworks (Fundira, 2018b: 17). A handful of African countries – such as Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda – have, however, now started to collect data on informal trade. Data on ICBT is also consistently collected by the East African Grain Council (EAGC), Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), Alliance for Commodity Trade in East and Southern Africa (ACTESA), and Brahima Cisse (CILSS). Further, the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR) has proved to be an important tool for capturing ICBT's contribution to total trade through the STR form, whereby information is captured in the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA).

Besides giving indications of food insecurity (Nyariki & Wiggins, 1997³² in Njeru, 2011), **Food Balance Sheets (FBSs)**³³ are critical tools for food traders (Ziegler, 2010³⁴ in Njeru, 2011). They facilitate food trade by enabling food traders to link supply and demand, reflecting quantities imported and exported through informal trade to assist governments, traders and donors with decision-making.³⁵ Yet despite its importance, researchers and policymakers tend to ignore food remitting (Crush & Caesar, 2017). The COVID-19 Food Security Response Plan developed by COMESA was adopted by the 7th Joint Ministerial Virtual Meeting on Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources in July 2020. This Plan recognises the need for regional FBSs, and also for the need for food security statistics. This has given impetus at the regional level for food

³² Nyariki DM, Wiggins S (1997). Household Food Insecurity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons from Kenya. *British Food Journal*, 99(7), 249-262.

³³ Food balance sheets (FBSs) show a brief picture of the pattern of the food supply of a country. For each food item, it sketches the primary commodity availability for human consumption i.e. the sources of supply and its utilisation in terms of nutrient value. However, the FBS exercise can be time-consuming and require additional resources for agricultural statistics and analysis (FAO, 2017: 3). This was the case for national FBSs in the three EAC member countries (Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania), which contained **inaccurate, unreliable and/or obsolete data** due to lack of timely research by professionals (Njeru, 2011). In some cases, food data were prone to political manipulation, and cross-border trade was difficult to capture as most of it was illegal.

³⁴ Ziegler S (2010). Application of Food Balance Sheets to Assess the Scale of Bush Meat Trade in Central Africa. *Traffic Bulletin*, 22(3).

³⁵ WFP and FEWS NET (2005). Monitoring Informal Cross-border Trade In Staple Foods In Southern Africa. Presented at the FANRPAN Workshop on Maize Marketing and Trade Policies in Southern Africa, 21-22 June 2005: https://www.fanrpan.org/archive/documents/d00056/presentation_Mhlahla.pdf

security statistical analysis.³⁶ More statistics will be produced from household surveys to be used for better policies and implementation of concrete projects.

Tracking ICBT progress

Progress on ICBT can be tracked through policy frameworks and data collection. The **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)** was launched on 1 January 2021. Hailed as a catalyst for continental integration, the agreement aims to “create a single market for goods and services, facilitate the movement of persons, and promote industrial development and sustainable and inclusive socio-economic growth on the continent”.³⁷ While the AfCFTA promises to boost intra-Africa trade as a whole, little is said on the impact it will have on ICBT (Macheng, 2021). ICBT is not unequivocally and ambiguously reflected in the AfCFTA agreement, and the separate African Union (AU) Protocol on Free Movement of People. However, **indirectly, the AfCFTA has the potential to generate significant benefits for informal cross border traders.** It can help with reducing the costs of ICBT, since it includes provisions on non-tariff barriers, trade facilitation, transit, and customs co-operation (Sommer & Nshimbi, 2018: 9; Bensassi et al., 2019).

National strategies for formalisation of ICBT are needed to complement the opportunities offered by the AfCFTA. This year, Nigerian manufacturers have reported their readiness to compete in the continental market, especially in food.³⁸ AfCFTA will provide an expanded market for Nigerian products and services; ensure remedy actions against injurious practices by foreign companies and countries; contribute to the formalisation of operations in the informal sector; enhance the potential for Nigeria’s business growth, and create opportunity for those in the services sector to serve the rest of Africa.

2. Improving access to technology for informal traders

Informality means that there is no access to the best production technology, financing structures, or innovation capacity building instruments (Malabo Montpellier Panel, 2017). However, **transformation of the informal sector can also occur through technological innovations:**

Kenya: One initiative, launched in 2014 by the Twinga Foods start-up, has already proven beneficial for 2,600 informal traders. The app enables traders to access supplies quickly and while saving time by having traceable goods delivered. Meanwhile, producers can avoid intermediaries, as well as receive market information and quick payments, overcoming many uncertainties inherent to the informal sector (Malabo Montpellier Panel, 2017).

South Africa: Mastercard and a local technological innovation firm, Spazapp, are offering small staple food shops the possibility of connecting to formal markets and digital payment systems through a mobile phone app. The Spazapp platform gives traders collective bargaining power to order a large variety of products at competitive prices, which they can pay for via their mobile

³⁶ COMESA: <https://www.comesa.int/individual-consultant-food-security-statistics-expert/>

³⁷ The African Continental Free Trade Area: <https://au.int/en/african-continental-free-trade-area> . However, experts caution that full implementation of the historic pact, signed in March 2018 at the AU Kigali Summit, may take years to materialise.

³⁸ AfCFTA: Mapping Nigeria’s foray into Africa’s single market. 17 February 2021:

<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/02/afcfta-mapping-nigerias-foray-into-africas-single-market/>

phones using Mastercard's digital wallet, Masterpass. The innovation has already directly linked 4,500 informal traders to leading consumer brands like Unilever and Tiger Brands food and beverage company (Malabo Montpellier Panel, 2017).

3. Improving access to start-up capital

Financing and access to capital is another challenge to the informal food retail sector. **Mobile money** can help small-scale traders access credit to seize opportunities for higher value addition by bridging the information gap between borrowers and financial institutions.³⁹

4. Inclusion in policy planning

It is essential to understand the dynamics of the informal food retail sector because of its vital role in ensuring greater access to food (Battersby et al., 2016; Haysom et al., 2020: 52). Policies and planning should also support food retailing in places where there is plenty of foot traffic, such as around public transport hubs (Joubert, 2018: 33). Re-inserting the informal food system into governance and planning decisions could provide new ways for local government to plan their market management strategies (Battersby & Muwowo, 2018: 128).

Kenya: Kisumu City is in the process of developing a detailed spatial plan for the extended areas of the city. Mixed land use is recommended for informal settlements in transition like Kogony (Opiyo & Agong, 2021). This should include commercial and residential premises, and support for informal food retailers to develop food retail outlets that comply with hygiene and safety standards within residential areas and along transport routes (Battersby, 2021).

Zambia: Different line ministries and government agencies are tasked with implementing policy and regulations relevant to the informal food sector. The **Local Government Act**, Chapter 281, provides the general framework that defines the functions of local authorities. Given that food markets operate under the purview of local councils, this Act provides a very important context for informal food vendors (Mwango et al., 2019: 22). The **Markets and Bus Station Act**, Chapter 290, gives municipal and city councils wide-ranging powers to control and manage markets and bus stations, and is thus a key piece of legislation affecting informal food markets.

Recognising women in informal trading activities

Cross-border trade facilitation must integrate a gender element (Brenton & Soprano, 2018: 4). In order to strengthen the notion that women informal traders are also an important client of Ministries of trade and RECs, it is essential to address the subject of informality in mainstream trade policy making. If these and other gender-specific constraints are effectively tackled, ICBT can turn into a vibrant micro-entrepreneurial reality with significant potential to help alleviate poverty, contribute to food security, and empower women in Africa (Machenga, 2021). WICBT should also be viewed as an important constituency of RECs, Ministry of Trade, and other government institutions. Because they create wealth and employment, WICBT should deserve

³⁹ Zarrilli S, Lopez M (2020). Leveraging digital solutions to seize the potential of informal cross-border trade. 29 April 2020. UNCTAD: <https://unctad.org/news/leveraging-digital-solutions-seize-potential-informal-cross-border-trade>

the same tax reduction incentives as those given to multi-national enterprises (MNEs) (Ndiaye, 2010; Joubert, 2018: 32).

Improving border market infrastructure

Providing potable water, sanitation and adequate protection from the elements for markets and informal traders is important for helping to ensure food safety (Smit, 2018: 99). In recent years RECs in Eastern and Southern Africa have begun harmonising their phytosanitary (SPS) rules (Engel et al., 2013: 19). COMESA plans to construct at least six **border export zones** for the Small-Scale Cross-Border Trade Initiative (SSCBTI) project in the selected sites between Zambia and Malawi, Zimbabwe, DRC and Tanzania (Gakunga, 2020a). These zones are based on the stakeholders' needs, and will contain border security teams, and a restroom, amongst others.

5. Harmonised national laws and policies and their regional instruments

The alternative to informal trade for many traders is not formal trade, but rather no trading at all (Engel et al., 2013: 8). Therefore, supportive laws and policies are important. Research shows that **reductions in delays from documentary and border compliance** promise to be the most effective trade facilitation reforms to enhance food security in Africa (Bonuedi et al., 2020).

RECs and development partners have been implementing dedicated measures to support informal traders (Brenton & Soprano, 2018: 6). The most ambitious efforts to facilitate ICBT are from the EAC and COMESA, which have adopted a **simplified trade regime (STR)** consisting of instruments and mechanisms tailored to the trading requirements of small-scale traders that are decentralised to border areas where informal trade is rampant. For example, the Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project (GLTFP) is funded by the World Bank to facilitate cross-border trade between the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda; as well as increase the capacity for commerce and reduce the costs, time and harassment faced by traders (Nkendah et al., 2014: 22) - especially small-scale and women traders (Skinner, 2016: 32; Brenton & Soprano, 2018: 6; Zarrilli & Linoci, 2020) - thereby increasing availability of food (Gakunga, 2020b).⁴⁰

Linking with the formal food sector trade

Informal traders already do a lot of business with the formal sector, **therefore, their economies are already linked** (Battersby & Muwowo, 2018: 137; Fin24, 2018). **Long-standing practices and formal rules** form a resilient rural informal economy that runs parallel to the formal economy, interacting with it along the value chain. This is the case for the groundnut and coffee sectors, for instance, where smallholders sell their crops to duly licensed processing companies, often via intermediaries or co-operatives (Malabo Montpellier Panel, 2017).

⁴⁰ STRs do not rule out the relevance of import and export permits for certain agricultural foods and animal products, meaning that traders are required to apply for such permits where necessary (Fundira, 2018b: 15).

Formalisation

Formalisation of ICBT in Africa is seen as a popular viewpoint. Some governments acknowledge the size and existence of the informal food sector, but policy is strongly biased towards formalisation, as in Zambia (Mwango et al., 2019: 25). Reductions in red tape and other non-tariff barriers should also encourage the formalisation of Africa's huge – but difficult to quantify – informal trade flows, further boosting revenues, tempering food price increases, and improving food security (Castell, 2021).

Some argue that the dual categorisation of trade between formal and informal trade should be removed, and that **formal and informal trade should be viewed as a continuum from small traders to large traders** (Ndiaye, 2010). Rather than criminalising those engaged in informal commerce, it would be advisable to focus on facilitating formal trade while also focusing on the providing safer conditions for informal traders (Engel et al., 2013: 38).

Inclusivity of informal trade in policy planning

Local government potentially has an important role to play in deciding where supermarkets are located, how big they are, how they are designed (for example, whether they are accessible to pedestrians) and whether they offer surrounding space for informal traders (Smit, 2018: 98).

Civil society organisations (CSOs play key roles in shaping food security efforts through food system interventions in the form of food banks, community gardens, and activism (Hunter-Adams, 2020: 3; Wegerif, 2020). For example, informal economy workers' organisations across the global economy call on governments at all levels to partner with Streetnet International Alliance of Street Vendors.⁴¹

The **non-recognition of the private sector and heavy regulation of agri-food marketing and trade**, for cereals in particular, has favoured the development of a vast informal sector, including ICBT in locally produced staples in Sub-Saharan Africa (Tondel et al., 2020: 47). However, the private sector can play a key role in contributing to ICBT initiatives under the AfCFTA and BIAT⁴² Action Plan. In fact, the African Export Import Bank (AFREXIMBANK) has expressed significant interest in supporting the extension of trade finance and payment products to informal cross-border traders, and many e-commerce players identify the informal sector as a crucial market (Sommer & Nshimbi, 2018: 9).

Regarding food security, there is an example of **collaborative urban governance** in Africa that is worth learning from:

Kenya: In Kisumu City, like most urban areas in Kenya, legal and illegal forces shape the local food system. One example of these co-operatives is Jubilee Community Based Organization for

⁴¹ The aim of StreetNet is to promote the exchange of information and ideas on critical issues facing street vendors, market vendors and hawkers (i.e. mobile vendors) and on practical organising and advocacy strategies: <http://streetnet.org.za/2020/05/22/covid-19-and-the-worlds-two-billion-informal-economy-workers/>

⁴² The Boosting Intra-African Trade (BIAT) Action Plan, which provides the leading framework for addressing challenges to intra-African trade that are particularly acute for ICBTs. It is the sister initiative of AfCFTA.

informal traders (Hayombe et al.⁴³ in Battersby & Watson, 2018: 123). The Kisumu Action Team brought together a range of stakeholders (including local government, informal traders' and civil society organisations) to develop an inter-sectoral strategy for Kisumu that included a number of planned interventions relating to food, such as the upgrading of marketplaces, and promotion of local food production (Onyango & Obera, 2015; Smit, 2018: 100).

6. Responses to external shocks

A new report commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat proposes recommendations on how governments can help ensure informal trade survival during COVID-19.⁴⁴

7. Transportation aids

Countries should consider **creating a special travel document for informal cross-border traders** to make it easier for them to legally and affordably cross borders for trade purposes. Currently, a substantial percentage of informal cross-border traders are unable to acquire passports on account of cost. The high frequency with which small-scale traders cross international borders exacerbates the often already high cost of passports, due to the need to renew their passport several times a year. Informal cross-border traders instead tend to use temporary entry provisions (such as day passes) to travel for business in neighbouring countries (Sommer & Nshimbi, 2018: 9-10). Alternatively, an approach similar to the one adopted by the EAC, where citizens of EAC member states can use the national registration/identity documents of their respective country to travel to other member states of the EAC, could be considered.

⁴³ Hayombe PO, Owino FO, & Awuor FO (2018). Chapter 8: Planning and governance of food systems in Kisumu City. In Battersby J & Watson V (Eds.) "Urban Food Systems Governance and Poverty in African Cities". pp116-127. Routledge, ISBN 9781315191195. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315191195>

⁴⁴ Saha A, Abebe O (2020). Five ways governments can help small businesses in the informal sector survive COVID-19. Blog: 29 June 2020: <https://thecommonwealth.org/media/news/blog-five-ways-governments-can-help-small-businesses-informal-sector-survive-covid-19>

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Key websites

- Global Price Watch - January 2021 Prices (February 26, 2021): <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-price-watch-january-2021-prices-february-26-2021>
- RATIN cross-border data: <https://ratin.net/site/about/3033>
- Southern African Migration Programme (SAMP): <https://scholars.wlu.ca/samp/index.2.html>
- World Bank Estimates of informal intra-regional trade of key food staples in ECOWAS (Annex 3): <https://www.tralac.org/images/docs/10274/overview-of-trade-and-barriers-to-trade-in-west-africa-insights-in-political-economy-dynamics-agricultural-trade-ecdpm-july-2016.pdf>

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