

Literature Review - January 23rd, 2016

Informal Cross Border Trade in the East African Community, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan

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Introduction

The aim of this project is to create the foundation for understanding the economies of the borderlands of the East African region, from the perspective of informal trade, and thereby to draw insights to drive the design of interventions for social and economic development.

The objectives include the development of a robust methodology to map the borderland ecosystem, based on the discovery and validation in this, the first phase.

An interdisciplinary approach for the holistic synthesis of the challenge will be applied, drawing heavily on methods from design ethnography as well tools and frameworks from strategy and design planning. Immersion in the field will be supported by analysis and synthesis of secondary data which is covered in this report.

Its purpose is to support the better understanding of the particular issues affecting informal trade in key borders within the region, and to also understand how TMEA can position itself to develop structured programmes to achieve TMEA's objectives of inclusive, sustainable prosperity through increased trade.

There will be a review of the literature on the informal economy, particularly informal cross border trade (ICBT), from the perspective of its perception and positioning, in addition to analysis of available data in order to map trade flows, and identify and prioritize borderland ecosystems of relevant interest.

Preamble

For trade to be truly inclusive and sustainable, it must embrace the informal economy rather than excluding it. When John Keith Hart first coined the term¹ in the early 1970s, he did not distinguish between the illicit and licit aspects of the informal trade he observed all around him on the streets of Accra. In the decades since, this conflation has created more challenges than necessary, throwing up barriers where there were none.

As Kanbur and Keen suggest², unpacking the basic concept of the “informal sector” and describing the various segments will lead to far greater returns on the resources invested and improve the outcomes and impact of the policies and programmes designed for each.

"Informal trade" across Eastern Africa can best be described as a web of interlinked networks³ serving to connect peoples and products across the region. Held together by⁴ trust, kinship and community relationships, it has been seen to be resilient, and persistent. Robust enough to survive natural disasters and manmade upheavals of the decades past, it is flexible, nimble, and responsive to patterns of abundance and scarcity⁵.

The entire region's history is based on international and regional trading networks - from Kiswahili, the lingua franca born on the coast where the inland Bantu met merchants sailing in from across the seas, to the metalsmiths of Katanga, deep in the heart of the Congo, whose ores and knives were prized across the continent. Societies and cultures grew up based on trade – the Nyamwezi of Tanzania were organized around the establishment and maintenance of long distance caravan routes, breaking new ground between the interior lakeshore region from Ujiji to Mrima coast ports; roaming as far as Uganda, Eastern Congo, and Zambia. Their strength only waned with the advent of formal colonization. Further north, Kamba ivory traders from central Kenya opened the route that ended at Mombasa. Eventually, this route crossed Kamba and Maasai country, branching east towards Uganda and north to Lake Turkana.

The label "informal" is a misnomer, as it suggests casual or un-businesslike exchange of goods and services,

with little structure or complexity. The OECD's categorizations⁶ do not capture the immensity of the region's flows of demand and supply, such as those evidenced daily by the flights arriving from China⁷, nor the willingness to take a greater degree of risk in uncertain conditions such as the Ugandan market women in Juba⁸. Their focus is on distinguishing the licit from the illicit.

Employment in the informal sector is no longer a journey, but has become the destination of many.⁹ If the aim is to create jobs and reduce poverty, the debate about the advantages of formal sector vs. the informal sector needs to end¹⁰. Governments need to unequivocally recognize and admit the importance of the informal sector and find ways to encourage its growth¹¹.

They also need, at the same time, to decide how to extend benefits to those in the informal sector, while removing barriers to the formal sector to allow more to participate in the rapidly globalizing economy¹².

In order to do this, the next step is to gain an understanding of the dynamics of informal trade¹³, specifically across borders, as well its economic reach and impact.

Background Analysis - Cross Border Trade in the Region

Chris Ackello-Ogutu's groundbreaking series¹⁴ on unrecorded cross border trade in East Africa for the USAID's Regional Trade Analytic Agenda in the 1990s set the bar for all subsequent research on the topic. Each of his location specific reports^{15,16} - Uganda and Kenya; Tanzania and its neighbours; Malawi and its neighbours; Mozambique and its neighbours - use the term "unrecorded cross-border trade" to describe the activity he and his team observed, recorded and analysed.

With the emphasis on food security, this was the first time that the region's extensive yet ignored trade in agricultural produce and foodstuffs had been measured, and trader behaviour documented. The methodology¹⁷ that Dr. Ackello-Ogutu and his team developed was far reaching and extensive in scale and scope, and nothing has come anywhere close to it since then.

The challenges we face today in attempting to quantify the full scope, scale and reach of trade in the region can partly be traced back to this defining moment in the history of the literature on the topic.

At this formative point of time, a careful read of the introductions by various authors, to each of Ackello-Ogutu's publications shows an indiscriminate use of the words "unofficial" and "informal", often in the same sentence^{1,2} along with "unrecognized" and "unrecorded" to describe this overlooked sector of the region's economic activity.

This was the era¹⁸ that still believed that the formal economy was the only form that the endpoint of economic development could take. Yet ironically, this same foreword acknowledges Dr. Ackello-Ogutu's discovery that not only were these indigenous trading practices critical in meeting the challenges of demand and supply of food in the region, but such trade was "significant and vital to the region's economic development"¹⁹.

Further, the use of these words as synonyms, indiscriminately lumped fulltime traders and the various supporting small businesses, together with subsistence level, livelihood actors living on the edge of poverty,

1 "Despite trade promotions and market reforms which have to a large extent minimized exchange controls and commodity movement restrictions, inappropriate policies and other trading malpractices still inhibit formal trade linkages in the sub-region and tend to distort relative prices in the factor/product markets and as a result encourage all forms of **unrecorded (informal)** cross-border trade." Foreword, page ix, Ackello-Ogutu (1997).

2 "Meanwhile, **informal/unrecorded** trade is thought to be substantial." Foreword, page v, Ackello-Ogutu (1996).

all under the umbrella nomenclature of "informal trade". Consequently, the undifferentiated informal trade sector suffered the impact of policy actions²⁰ of one size fits all development bent on eradicating its existence²¹, while seeking to alleviate its poverty.

In the years since these reports were published, there has been little by the way of follow up on a similar scale, although much has changed in the region's socio-political and economic environment. Affordable communications technology, innovative financial services, and a youthful, unemployed population have all combined to create an entirely different context in which trade is conducted. Assessments of informal cross border trade (ICBT) written as recently as 2012²² still feel the need to reference Dr. Ackello-Ogutu's original work, now sorely out of date³.

Contemporary monitoring and recording of ICBT is fragmented by geography and sectors of interest, while silos divide cross cutting information analysis²³. The undifferentiated has coalesced into the indistinguishable. Thus, everyone in the informal economy is considered equally poor and vulnerable and in the need of the same program, barring gender or age, rather than segmented by occupation or expertise.

There is a clear need to disaggregate the informal sector²⁴, distinguishing wholesale and retail trade from other services, as well as to segment traders by appropriate attributes. Street vending may indeed be the last mile of cross border trade, depending on the products sold, but hawkers and market women are a distinct category from cross border traders of livestock²⁵ or cereals, fresh produce or fish, and certainly from imported or locally industrially manufactured goods. On the other hand, only by collating the total trade volumes of the latter can we get a sense of the whole.

Disaggregating Trade in the Informal Economy

Situation Analysis

On a regional basis, the concern for food security drives the bulk of ICBT data gathering through systems built on Ackello-Ogutu's foundation by current day descendants of the original project. So much so, that one may assume, as Gor (2012) does, that only agricultural staple commodities are traded across most borders. However, this is not the case²⁶.

The mass of literature – social science case studies for the most part⁴ - offers insights on the diversity and variety of merchandise. The observations provide evidence from enough different border towns to conclude that it's not insignificant relative to the trade in agricultural staples, though unrecorded for the most part.

Quite a few borders in the greater Eastern and Southern African region are monitored by a handful of agencies, with the data periodically synthesized into reports by the Famine Early Warning Network (FEWSNET). These are presented on the right. (*Note: This text draft does not include the many visuals and diagrams in the final*)

However, this ongoing effort is deemed insufficient to provide information for comprehensive trade analysis. And the framing of ICBT still conflates the licit with the illicit, clustering fraudulent activity indiscriminately together with livelihood activities, as recently as August 2015²⁷.

On the other hand, Rwanda's CBT strategy (2012, TMEA), clearly stresses "that informal trade is not

3 To be noted is Little's 2007 reference to Ackello-Ogutu's 1997 observations on trader behaviour 10 years after the fact. One also sees mention of Little's observations on the use of faxes and hand radios in Ethiopia for gathering long distance market information such as prices. Smartphones have changed practice greatly since Little and Ackello-Ogutu went to the border. See sheep sales on Instagram, for instance.

4 Horn of Africa –Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya (Little 2005, 2007, Mahmoud 2010); Eastern DRC (Titeca, K. and C Kimanuka 2012 , Kabamba 2012), Uganda (Titeca 2009, Titeca and de Herdt 2010); Burundi, Rwanda (Masheti Masinjila 2009) and numerous student papers of varying quality.

synonymous with illegal trade", echoing Little's personal observation made²⁸ almost a decade ago, viz., "My work has not revealed overlaps between trade in livestock and food products and commerce in illegal goods."

This lack of consensus has the inadvertent side effect of criminalizing livelihoods and trade; forcing researchers to clarify and distinguish ICBT as within the law, though unrecorded, from all manner of illegal and fraudulent activities such as smuggling²⁹, tax evasion, etc. The majority of the literature contains a substantial section on this topic, often recycling the same arguments ad infinitum.

This constant need for clarifications, years after the perspective has changed (Chen 2007, Sparks and Barrett 2012) on the role and importance of the informal economy in developing countries, acts an invisible non tariff barrier to small traders, their socio-economic networks, and livelihoods alike. The most vulnerable carry the heaviest burden of this ongoing debate between policy makers, researchers and lawmakers. They are harassed, their goods confiscated, and their earnings imperiled by the implicit negative perceptions still surrounding their trade³⁰.

Just as how harmonization of standards, Customs and gender dimensions are promoted for trade facilitation³¹ in the EAC, it would be of great value to distinguish, describe, and then harmonize the terminology for informal cross border trade. Trading must be recognized³² as a profession or occupation in its own right⁵. This is a critical first step on the journey to formalization, and integration with the institutional structures of global trade.

Demographics of Informal Cross Border Trade in the Region

There is no information at all³³ on how many people depend upon ICBT in the region. The Economic Survey of Kenya clusters all informal wholesale and retail trade together with hotels and restaurants and does not distinguish between street vending and cross border trading when providing informal sector employment figures.

The rest of the ICBT literature on various regional borders were either technical in nature, or development research on gender and poverty. The UNWomen Women in Cross Border Trade programme's baseline studies³⁴ were discovered to have surveyed only 95 women in Tanzania to represent the entire region. The remaining dataset was from West Africa, where traditionally women have dominated³⁵ informal trade and retail markets, inheriting multi-generational social networks of trust and repute. In Francophone Africa, women traders have long participated prominently in multiple forms of commerce as well as national and local politics, albeit under a different set of colonial rules.

A careful review of the women in informal cross border trade literature for East Africa shows that women's active participation is a recent phenomena, more often linked to external factors like social and political upheaval (Rwanda³⁶, Burundi³⁷, North Uganda³⁸, South Sudan³⁹, Eastern DRC⁴⁰) and/or marital instability⁴¹. In Kenya, Kamba women were observed to be active in regional trade as early as 1790, but among Kikuyu women, trading was found to be a livelihood activity due to social and economic factors as mentioned above. Interestingly, this same research also offers insight that underscores the importance of identifying the attributes to segment women traders, distinguishing fulltime businesswomen⁴² from livelihood actors. Respect and recognition are other invisible nontariff barriers that women pay in the working world.

“...contemporary poverty and marital instability are forcing women to change how and where they live and

⁵ Snippets from interviews will quote women saying they're not poor, since they have the capital required to purchase merchandise for trade, while the report still labels them all as poor, without segmenting. Similarly, those whose sole source of income is from cross border trade are essentially fulltime traders by occupation, professionals, businesswomen, entrepreneurs; yet again, reports refer to this as livelihood activities, diminishing their agency by choosing not to recognize their occupation as such.

work. The result is that although they are poorer they are also, like their Ghanaian counterparts, more economically autonomous of men, and more committed to that autonomy.”⁴³

This relatively recent trend⁶ also helps explain why women in East Africa tend to trade in lower value, fast moving goods, such as perishable fruits and vegetables, as opposed to higher value commodities with longer shelf life. (or otherwise, in the case of livestock) Trading networks and their concomitant social relationships are predicated on trust, and thus, time. It would take years before newcomers can enter the regional systems and begin trade in higher values or greater volumes. In West Africa, with its long history and tradition of women in trade, daughters inherit their mother’s networks of trust and repute (or apprentices, as the case maybe). Without the ladder of tradition, the informal sector’s “old boy’s network” would prove to be a wall that’s more difficult to scale, at least for less educated women forced to trade for survival. This is not to say that there aren’t women trading higher up in the food chain – educated professionals are entering professionally. Hints of this are evidenced in the anecdotal snippets gleaned from various reports. This underscores the need to disaggregate traders by attributes other than gender or trading role (wholesaler vs retailer), and segment them by scope, scale, reach and value.

National ICBT Monitoring

Uganda takes the lead in tracking, recording and monitoring informal cross border trade, having comprehensively done so for the past decade. In 2008, an extensive qualitative ICBT baseline study⁴⁴ was conducted by UBOS, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics.

The Bank of Uganda regularly publishes the annual ICBT survey report, and the most recent⁴⁵ defines ICBT simply as "trade transactions between residents and nonresidents across the economic boundaries of two or more countries that are not recorded by Customs Authorities."

Uganda's consistent monitoring of informal cross border trade provides data on product categories, volumes, values, modes and flows. It covers nineteen gazetted border posts with Uganda's neighbours - Kenya, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, and Tanzania – and four bus stations in Kampala.

Rwanda has instituted⁴⁶ regular ICBT surveys as part of its external merchandise trade data collection since 2012. Fifty three crossing points are covered along the four neighbouring countries, viz. the DRC, Burundi, Tanzania, and Uganda. The methodology frames ICBT as unrecorded, and considers the attempts to conceal the value or the merchandise as challenges to accurate data gathering, rather than as criminal activity.

The remaining countries specified as “the region” under study – Kenya, Tanzania, South Sudan, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burundi, do not have any consistent or comprehensive national program to record informal cross-border trade.

Uganda Country Analysis

Uganda's informal trade sector is heavily oriented towards exports outwards to all her neighbours. Consistently over the past 5 years, informal exports are easily 6 to 8 times greater by dollar value than reciprocal informal imports. In contrast, formal imports tend to be only 3 times or so greater than formal exports. Is the informal economy cannibalizing the formal?

No. Data shows that after the precipitous drop in trade with South Sudan after 2010, informal cross border exports (ICBT) stabilized at just under 20% of formal exports. With the growth of formal trade, the proportion of ICBT exports to formal exports dropped from a high of 1/3rd in 2010 to 1/6th in 2014. The

⁶ Ackello-Ogutu’s 1998 study states “ICBT along Tanzania’s borders is dominated by male traders residing in the border towns.”

spread of mobile phones, along with policy changes, initially boosted ICBT from 19.7% in 2006 to a peak of 34.4% in 2009 before dropping back to normal. Between 60-65% of these informal exports are to the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, both of which are weak states with higher insecurity than their neighbour.

Kenya and Rwanda's imports from Uganda, relative to each other, are approximately proportionate to their relative population size. Exports to Tanzania are proportionately lower, given its population relative to Kenya. But both Uganda and Tanzania are net food exporters, thus their trade with each other might be based on seasonal demand and supply. One can see the drop after Tanzania's bumper harvest in 2013.

Meanwhile, formal imports are growing in dollar value, and informal imports have consistently hovered around 1% of the formal import trade. Kenya accounts for around half of all informal imports. However, there is a gap here in the data collected by the UBOS surveys which do not record goods in transit. There is also no indication of the volumes and values of re-exports.

However, data gleaned from sector specific reports on the regional timber trade, as well as Transparency International's Bribery Index, suggests that Uganda is a major hub for redistribution, even in the informal economy. This reflects the Ecobank Research on the EAC's formal trade flows, as can be seen in the slide extracted.

Further, one can say⁷ that Kampala acts as an important "borderland economy" – providing a critical bridge between the formal global trade systems, and the informal ones in the neighbourhood. In a way, this is the role that Uganda plays in the middle of the African continent, and this is reflected in its formal vs informal trade flows. Formal imports are greater than exports, but the opposite is true in ICBT, where the balance of trade is to Uganda's benefit.

It seems as though the informal sectors of Uganda's economy are reasonably healthy. Most recent data⁴⁷ from the World Bank shows that between 2002 and 2012, the percentage of Ugandans living below their poverty line halved from a peak of 38.8% to 19.5%, although their average income is still low. Among the countries indicated in the region – the East African Community members, the DRC and South Sudan – Uganda's poverty headcount is the lowest.

Kenya is the only country that is not Low Income but its percentage of population living below the poverty line is more than double that of Uganda's, at ~ 45%. Tanzania comes a close second to Uganda, and its poverty headcount is also almost half of Kenya's. This pattern seems to reflect the economies of these two countries – more agricultural and rural, and they tend to export food to their neighbours through informal cross border trade, at the local level, and this has been observed to be inelastic. But there is more here that needs to be discovered, in order to observe links between type and scale of ICBT and lower poverty headcounts. Based only on Uganda, it seems as though the enabling environment for ICBT, and the country's role as a major node, particularly between the formal and the informal parts of the region, have some relationship to the dramatic drop in poverty.

Patterns of trade in the region

Broadly speaking, the pattern of trade flows in the region reflects both geography and urban development. While little data is easily accessible on contemporary north/south ICBT trade, a comparison of major trade flows documented by sector specific research studies provides visual evidence of their similarity, and thus,

⁷ The DRC's troubled history in recent decades has provided reams of scholarly works on the eastern region that borders western Uganda. Numerous papers are available primarily in the political and social sciences. An accompanying slew of reports on various illicit activities of concern to a wide variety of natural resources (gold, wood, minerals, etc.) focused organizations are also available.

the inference of regional flows and directions. The pattern seems to reflect a combination of sector specific comparative advantage, and the level of industrial development. For instance, Nairobi and Dar es Salaam are considered production hubs for construction materials for the region, but neither is a source market for cereals, grains or fish. There is evidence, however, that lately, the traditional patterns of informal trade and the relative importance of these regional markets has undergone significant change from the days of Ackello-Ogutu's comprehensive work. News reports speak of increasing investment in industrial production in both Uganda and Tanzania as contributing factors.

Livestock, from pastoralists in the arid regions, flows from north to south, and food staples, grown in the higher potential agricultural lands, flows northwards. Towns such as Isiolo, and Garissa, in Kenya, have been noted as frontier markets acting as "borderland economies" for these north/south trade flows. Nairobi, followed by Mombasa are described (Little 2007) as major source markets for meat, and this trade is estimated to be 90% informal. This points to the importance of the market towns along the Tanzania/Kenya border for those involved in informal cross border trade.

The research shows that in the case of ICBT in perishable foodstuff, farmers seek the nearest market that is accessible, even if its across the border. Thus, unlike trade in food staple commodities which evidences regional flows, perishable produce flows tends to be linked to transport infrastructure. Both, however, respond to demand and supply, and take advantage of cross border price differentials. The advent of the mobile phone has only improved the flow of information, and thus, the speed of response.

On the east/west axis, trade flow patterns sourced from various sector specific reports reflect economic development and prevalence of formal economic institutions more than geography per se. The vast resources of the Democratic Republic of Congo's eastern lands require formalization at some point in their journey outwards into the global value chain. This seems to occur primarily in Kampala, where the informal meets the formal on its way to Mombasa's port. The same seems to happen for South Sudan's trade flows.

Nairobi is referred to as the central hub in the hub and spoke distribution model prevalent in the informal trade of consumer electronics and white goods⁴⁸. Even if goods arrive in Mombasa, the locus of their re-distribution takes place out of CBD rather than Mombasa itself. Local shopkeepers claim that traders come from as far away as Juba to source mobile phones and other electronics, while Little mentions the livestock traders stocking up of industrial goods in Nairobi.

There seems to be a need to map the informal trading system on a regional basis, and insights from prior fieldwork, as well as hints from news articles, suggest that these flows may well be discovered through a focused exploratory survey in the CBDs of Kampala and Nairobi. There are enough hints that the value web of ICBT, observed at the local level at the border markets, may be reflected on the regional level, and that these CBDs act as key nodes in this web. While the variety of reports are available on the ICBT and economic activities of DRC and South Sudan at the borderlands with Uganda offer us some insights on the role of Kampala, there is no comparable research to draw upon for inferring the role played by Nairobi and its CBD in the regional informal trading economy.

There are sufficient indications, however, that this type of survey would reveal some of the spatial dimensions of informal cross border trade on a regional basis. And bring to light the trade links and economic flows that currently support the geographic borderlands themselves. This could possibly even lay the foundation for understanding the regional informal trading system, and thus, a roadmap towards its integration with the greater global value chains.

Borderland Economies

There are about 18 major boundaries in Eastern Africa stretching from Sudan to Tanzania. Most are products of a series of colonial treaties and agreements, and reflect the super-imposition of physical and political limits on socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic discontinuities⁴⁹. This concept of borderlands has been articulated in the literature to denote those administrative regions of a country that coincide with the country's international boundaries. More important, they are regions whose economic and social life is directly and significantly affected by proximity to an international boundary.⁵⁰ Such borderlands of prosperity in Eastern Africa include the Kilimanjaro-Arusha-Taveta area on the Kenya-Tanzania border, the Busia-Malaba-Busia-Tororo area on the Kenya-Uganda border, the Mbeya-Tunduma area on the Tanzania-Zambia border, and the Songea-Mtwara-Palma area on the Tanzania-Mozambique border. As Khadiagala states, "they are power centers in their own right because of location on major trade routes, abundance in natural and human resources."

Khadiagala also notes the emergence of economic activity centered around key refugee camps at specific borders, such as in western Tanzania, eastern Congo, northern Kenya, and southwestern and northern Uganda, which have settled into a semi-permanent state.

Less conventional approaches to the concept of the borderland are gaining ground on the academic level, particularly from the social sciences. What is interesting about these is that they explore the dimensions of the "borderland" from a broader perspective than purely geographic or political. Ferissa and Hoehne⁵¹ consider intangibles such as identity and status, in addition to the economic and political resources. Their view is that these resources are not a ready-made good, but embody potentials to be exploited "...people have to strive to realise the opportunities entailed by borders and borderlands." In a different way, Elliot frames⁵² Isiolo, a town in the middle of Kenya, as a frontier economy on the boundary between the arid wastelands of the North and the more developed urbanized South. These approaches inspire new ways of considering borderland economies, as ecosystems of informal economic activity and opportunity.

Meanwhile, a Ugandan conference paper⁵³ on urban/rural transformation offers perspective on the spatial dimension of borderland ecosystems, while the potential for greater impact through strengthening rural-urban linkages is alluded to by an urban development study⁵⁴ on Malaba town that leaves the recommendations incomplete. On the other hand, small border towns, such as Katuna/Gatuna on the Uganda/Rwanda border have been noticed for their ability to enable regional integration "from the bottom up", and have greater economic impact than meets the eye. Their economic reach and scale, through the web of trader's networks has not been mapped.

Conclusions

Trade Mark East Africa has the unprecedented opportunity to break new ground in the Eastern African region by taking the informal economy seriously. What is currently known as "informal cross border trade" or ICBT can be recognized as a commercial sector in its own right, and its definition harmonized at the regional level. This would provide the foundation for the first steps towards integration and formalization, allowing for the players to be professionalized, rather than criminalized. Recognition of trading as a fulltime profession, regardless of one's scale of operations, can be as empowering as any tangible intervention.

This can also open doors to special categories of tools and services, such as those related to travel or financial access. Gender dimensions need not overshadow one's own ambitions or agency. Women traders might need more assistance with working capital to visit China or to network and share shipping containers. This requires segmentation of the trader demographic by relevant and appropriate attributes so as to customize interventions and provide opportunities at a higher stage than simply livelihoods alone.

This recognition also opens up the way that informal cross border trade is currently framed. Entire flows of

trading activity, such as those between China and the informal traders in the region, are currently overlooked entirely in both the trade related literature and the surveys, though not unnoticed by African and Chinese airlines. Further, acknowledging the commercial importance of the informal sector in providing goods and services to less established states (Titeca 2009, 2012; Little 2005, 2007) allows for the mapping of links and nodes in this critical support system, and thus, a more holistic view of the region's trading system and dynamics. This would also refresh the now obsolete version of the centers of demand and supply in the region, as originally visualized by Ackello-Ogutu et al more than twenty years ago. Ecobank's research arm has already recognized Uganda's role as a regional redistribution hub. Evidence shows it is also a bridge between the formal and the informal trading systems.

Informal Cross Border Trade (ICBT) as a recognized, if still unrecorded, sector of trade also gives legitimacy to commercial study of its scale, reach and economic potential. More than just agricultural staples are traded, yet little is known about this market for goods and services. Market analysis of product categories, assessment of opportunity spaces for new services and products, as well as purchasing potential of this sector has the power to open a whole new market for trade facilitation and B2B innovation. Just as farmers are not required to be registered formal businesses prior to purchasing crop insurance, traders might need risk mitigation tools. Literature repeatedly mentions currency exchange at the border towns, yet no formal systems are in place.

The African Development Bank has highlighted the need to disaggregate the informal trade. The literature review underscores the need to understand the traders and their needs.

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