



Photo credit: Marta Moreiras (Dakar, Senegal, 2022)

Negotiating & advocating for the rights of informal cross-border traders

Successful engagements from West & Central Africa

About the project

Throughout 2021 and 2022, StreetNet International developed a project to capacitate affiliated organizations in West and Central Africa to advocate and negotiate for the rights of informal cross-border traders.

The project started with a series of webinars between March-June 2021, to explore the issues of informal cross-border trade and encourage affiliates to identify transnational and cross-cutting problems, as well as particularities and differences.

After the end of the webinar series, StreetNet affiliates with common borders worked together to put their acquired knowledge into practical advocacy and negotiation activities, thus bettering conditions and policies for informal cross-border traders. Their experiences up to March 2022 were first documented in the publication *"Advocating for informal cross-border trades Experiences from West & Central Africa"*. This follow-up publication showcases the work of our affiliated organizations during the second round of negotiations, up to December 2022.

This project was developed in cooperation with **SACBTA** (South African Cross Border Trade Association), **ITUC Africa** (International Trade Unions Confederation - Africa), **OTUWA** (Organisation of Trade Unions in West Africa) and **ATUMNET** (African Trade Union Migration Network).



Workshop organized by our affiliates Ligue pour les Droits de la Femme Congolaise (DR Congo) and Confédération Syndicale du Congo (Congo-Brazzaville)

Border of Ghana + Togo

INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER TRADE STAKEHOLDER FORUM



On October 27, 2022, UNIWA in collaboration with FAINATRASIT organized a 2022 Informal Cross-Border Trade Stakeholder Forum on the theme: **Creating an Enabling Environment for Cross-Border Trade for Informal Economy Actors.**

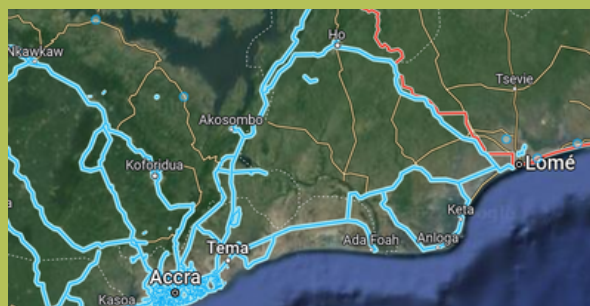
Various State Institutions from Togo and Ghana participated in the forum:

- Immigration Service
- Police Service
- Customs
- Revenue Authority
- Health Institution
- Agriculture Institution
- Freight Forwarders

The various stakeholders tried to answer the question: *What strategies should be implemented to create an environment conducive for cross-border trade?*

The second activity consisted of a **sensitization workshop** about *Emerging trends and new interventions to reduce the challenges associated with cross-border trade*, with the involvement of UNIWA and FAINATRASIT participants and Mr Theophilus Oteng Pabi, Deputy Superintendent of Immigration.

- **UNIWA** (Union of Informal Workers Associations)
- **FAINATRASI** (Faitière National Travailleurs du Secteur Informel du Togo)



Border of Ghana + Togo

INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER TRADE STAKEHOLDER FORUM

The last activity organized aimed at **raising awareness** of actors on the ground. The participants numbering forty (40), including members from UNIWA and FAINATRASIT, descended on the field for mass awareness of actors in the informal economy on both sides of the Togo and Ghana border, with flyers designed for the event.

As a result of the Forum, stakeholders agreed to:



Establish a platform for the stakeholders (UNIWA + FAINATRASIT + the representatives of the Customs Services present at the forum)



Establish of two (2) focal points in Ghana and Togo to facilitate border crossing

To follow-up

The stakeholders requested the implementation of an identification card for the actors of the informal economy in order to facilitate the crossing of the borders.

Leadership of UNIWA and FAINATRASIT will follow-up with authorities on the issuance of ID Card and other important actions to make cross- border trade activities less cumbersome for members of the two organizations.



Border of DRC + Congo Brazzaville

RAISING AWARENESS OF TRADERS' RIGHTS



A delegation of LDFC travelled to Congo Brazzaville to meet with CSC to evaluate the work accomplished by the two organizations so far.

Raising awareness on the ground

The mission in Congo Brazzaville began with an awareness-raising session with female traders. The women were advised to create **an association themselves and become affiliated with CSC**, so they can accompany the work of the union regarding matters of informal economy workers, advocate to decision-making bodies of the country and defend their causes before the national, municipal and local authorities.

Joining forces

Delegates of LDFC, CSC and of the FIVC Association (Femmes Vendeuses du Congo Brazzaville) came together to share experiences of their work. CSC shared their long history as a trade union and LDFC shared their experience organizing women informal economy workers and striving towards their empowerment.



It was decided that LDFC will assist CSC in organizing informal economy workers

- LDFC (*Ligue pour le Droit de la Femme Congolaise*)
- CSC (*Confédération Syndicale Congolaise*)



Kinshasa and Brazzaville, at the border between Congo Brazzaville and DRC

Border of DRC + Congo

RAISING AWARENESS OF TRADERS' RIGHTS

Evaluation of the project

A meeting was held to evaluate activities on cross-border trade initiated between the two organizations since January 2022. CSC has continued their efforts in organizing informal economy workers, and LDFC has continued to engage authorities to better the conditions of workers in the informal economy and reduce police and administrative harassment at borders, markets and in the streets. LDFC has also continued to develop awareness raising, information and training on entrepreneurship empowerment, gender-based violence.



CSC will create a department focused on the informal economy



CSC will ask for affiliation to StreetNet International, as a way to continue to develop their work for informal economy workers



Border of Niger + Benin

FIGHTING CORRUPTION AT THE BORDER



A delegation from SYNAVAMAB travelled to the border town of Malanville to participate in a series of engagements with traders and authorities.

Discussions with traders

The SYNAVAMAB delegation met with the Autonomous Authority for the Management of the International Market of Malanville and its members representing different sectors of the market, who expressed their dissatisfaction related to poor sales in the market and **hassles caused by taxes.**

On the ground observation

As a way to gather more information, the SYNAVAMAB delegation also observed the movement of passengers and trucks at the border posts in the Benin-Niger border, where they saw customs officers operating as intended.

- **SYNAVAMAB**
(Syndicat National des Vendeurs, Vendeuses et Assimilés des Marchés du Bénin)
- **UGSEIN** (Union Générale des Syndicats Economie Informelle Niger)



Border between Benin and Niger - with the indication of the two cities of Gaya and Malanville

Border of Niger + Benin

FIGHTING CORRUPTION AT THE BORDER

The SYNAVAMAB delegation met with the UGSEIN delegation to share their observations from 2022 and 2021, in the town of Gaya. Customs officers from Niger and Benin insisted that **the informal economy is not recognized by the State**. Therefore, traders must formalize and get a professional import card, IFU and trade registry.



SYNAVAMAB and UGSEIN must raise awareness and inform their grassroots activists of the need to formalize their informal economy activities

However, the UGSEIN delegation noted that since both organizations have started engaging authorities in 2021, the managers of the Gaya market and the traders' delegates noted and recognized an improvement in relations between them and the security forces.



Commissioner of Gaya will take steps to remedy the issues with police.



UGSEIN and SYNAVAMAB also stress that Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and West African Economic and Monetary Union must carry out a control on the borders (UEMOA).



There are still issues with some police officers demanding bribes, even when the traders present identification documents.

Despite some encouraging developments, such as a betterment of relations between traders and authorities, there are **still many issues that need to be resolved**. The traders asked UGSEIN and SYNAVAMAB to follow-up more often on the progress of engagements with authorities.



Border of Benin + Nigeria

CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP WITH CROSS-BORDER TRADERS



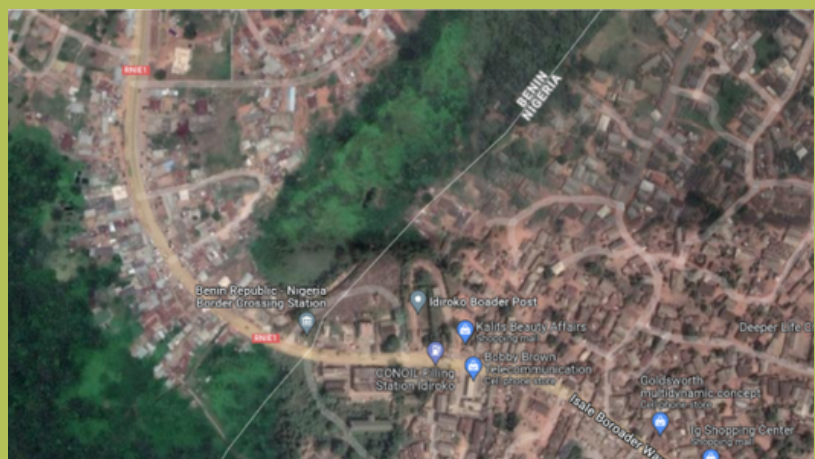
A **two-day capacity building workshop** with informal cross border traders was held on November 18 & 19, 2022, at the Idi Iroko border town in Nigeria, with key leaders drawn from 7 border communities including Oniro, Oke Odan, Ilase, Ita Egbe, Ajilete, Owode. There were **27 women and 2 men participated** in the workshop.

Empowering women traders

The themes included in the workshop included:

- raising the awareness and understanding of informal traders about their **fundamental human rights**,
- familiarize traders with **key international human rights instruments** and the Nigerian constitutional human rights provisions,
- share the basic principles of the **Simplified Trade Agreements (STRs)** and other protocols of the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS),
- familiarize them with **leadership skills**, including holding democratic meetings, running rules-based workers' organization, **basic advocacy skills** such as petitioning, making representations, and holding mass workers' actions

- **FIWON** (*Federation of Informal Workers Organizations of Nigeria*)



The Idiroko border between Nigeria and Benin

Border of Benin + Nigeria

CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP WITH CROSS-BORDER TRADERS

The last session of the workshop on the second day took the traders through the principles of **Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)** in relation to cooperatives while they were also introduced to FIWON Cooperatives and how it operates. 15 participants formally registered as members of the FIWON Multipurpose Cooperative Society and fully paid their registration fees.



Participants at the workshop agreed to form the Idiroko Traders Organizing Committee with a mandate to organize more traders and informal economy workers in the area. A 5-person Steering Committee to oversee the organizing process was constituted.



Before the workshop started, a 5 - person delegation of the informal cross border traders paid a visit to the Idiroko Western Command of the Nigeria Customs Service. However, key officials were absent to receive the delegation despite prior appointment.



Border of Burundi + DRC + Rwanda

PROTECTING THE CHILDREN OF BORDER TRADERS



After the implementation of the first round of engagements in the context of the ICBT project, SYTRIECI proceeded with a situational analysis of the **children of informal cross border traders** in the 4 provinces where Rwanda is bordering with other countries (DR Congo, Uganda and Burundi). This research will set recommendations and baseline for policy makers in the country and the region while tackling the child protection issues of the children of informal economy workers, especially those crossing borders.

Way forward

The final deadline for the research project is at the end of 2022. The research is expected to be published on January 2023. Various institutions, authorities and border officials will be **invited to follow the presentation of the findings**.

This research on the situational analysis of early children's life conditions of women-informal cross border traders will stand as a special tool for SYTRIECI that will enhance advocacy that is based on the research.



Members of SYTRIECI who are working as cross-border traders are playing a significant role, providing data and being interviewed by researchers.


- **SYTRIECI** (*Syndicat des Travailleurs Independents de l'Economie Informelle*)
- **ASSOVACO** (*Association de Vendeurs Ambulantes au Congo*)
- **SYVEBU** (*Syndicat des vendeurs de Rue du Burundi*)



Additional Resources

- Informal Cross-Border Trade (ICBT) Webinar Series Report
<https://streetnet.org.za/document/informal-cross-border-trade-icbt-webinar-series-report/>
- Article "All you need to know about informal cross-border trade"
<https://streetnet.org.za/2022/02/14/all-you-need-to-know-about-informal-cross-border-trade/>
- Pamphlet "How to improve conditions for informal cross-border trade?"
<https://streetnet.org.za/document/how-to-improve-conditions-for-informal-cross-border-trade/>

HOW TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER TRADE?



Demands of SNI affiliates which are part of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

STOP HARASSEMENT AND VIOLENCE

- Decency and dignity in treatment at border posts when authorities are engaging cross-border traders;
- End all forms of intimidation and harassment to which traders become victims
- Ban on extortion;
- Negotiation of ICBT facilities and decency in treatment at border posts concerning tariffs and violence;
- An end put to the various harassments of which traders are victims;
- Security for traders and their goods (often victims of the lawless);
- Provide facilities for women who engage in cross-border trade;
- Clean up the customs and police corridors of certain countries (e.g., Nigeria) and make them respect the rules established in the ECOWAS or FTAA area.

TAXATION

- Custom Tariffs harmonization at border post to allow for free movement of people and goods;
- Access to certificate of origin to cross-border traders;
- Simplified custom tariffs at all entering post of our borders;
- Everything concerning goods i.e., paying of duty, checking goods and other relevant documents are carried out at one particular point;
- Special tellers for informal traders with fast tracked declarations/transactions without extortion at borders.
- Harmonize the different fees to be paid;
- A border access document is available; significant reduction of taxes within borders;
- Exchange of different currencies;
- Reduction of customs duties on quantities and specific products.

ACCESS TO RIGHTS AND SUPPORT

- Identifying & organizing all ICBT across our countries which are not recognized or organized;
- Promotion of Social Protection, workers' rights and active/participatory social dialogue;
- State provision of informal cross-border traders' loans with reasonable interests/grants to enable them to restart their businesses where there have been casualties and losses on the borders due to abuses suffered; Psychosocial support for ICBT especially those who lost their jobs within the COVID-19 period. Direct investment to generate more wealth in place/reduce poverty;
- Promotion of ILO recommendation 204 and formalization of activities and recognition of informal economy actors.

POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

- Compliance with agreements between ECOWAS countries;
- Introduction and enforcement of ECOWAS ID Cards;
- Close monitoring of harmonization of regulations;
- Proper documentation allowing easy crossing of the border through legal routes;
- Ratification of international documents and instruments to facilitate trade in Africa sub-regions.

INCLUSIVE NEGOTIATIONS

- Creation of a platform of decision-making forums;
- Create a framework for consultations between related stakeholders who work at the borders of neighboring countries;
- Establishment of a border listening and guidance office for traders;
- Establishment of a bipartite consultation framework (Government-Trade Union).

Additional Resources

- Advocating for informal cross-border traders – Experiences from West & Central Africa
<https://streetnet.org.za/document/advocating-for-informal-cross-border-traders-experiences-from-west-central-africa/>



Photo credit: Marta Moreiras (Dakar, Senegal, 2022)

Advocating for informal cross-border traders Experiences from West & Central Africa

First publication showcasing the experiences of affiliates during the ICBT project



STREETNET INTERNATIONAL 2022



media@streetnet.org.za



+351 938 291 185



www.streetnet.org.za



@StreetNetInternational



@street_net_international



@Streetnet1

Photo credit: Marta Moreiras (Dakar, Senegal, 2022)

