Corruption, Gender and Small-Scale Cross-Border Trade in East Africa

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Photo courtesy: Sauti East Africa
Project Overview & Motivations

Small-scale cross-border trade is important to livelihoods, regional integration and food security in East Africa and beyond-

Yet corruption and harassment are serious problems that need to be better understood for improved interventions.
Gaps

- Anti-corruption interventions and border service improvement programs tend to focus on the predominantly male large-scale vs. women dominated small-scale trade.

- How **gender dynamics** work at borders need to be factored into policies (most small-scale cross-border traders women; customs/police are men).

- **Data are patchy**, small N surveys, interviews, not real time, continuous (tension with informalities).

- **Potential of mobile phones**
Questions

1. How can we leverage mobile phones to acquire better data and hence insights from traders on experiences with corruption of small-scale traders crossing East African borders?

2. What new insights can we glean from observing the impacts of Covid border restrictions?

3. How might reporting using mobile phones work as an anti-corruption tool?

4. In which ways can we use this research to improve support for small-scale cross-border traders and advocate for improvements in border governance?
How do traders choose and how do these pathways interact?

Covid restrictions (severe barrier at formal customs)
Multi-Methods + Trader Collaboration

Strong Partnerships
Columbia University + Busara + Sauti East Africa + Traders +

Qualitative Research/Interviews with a Gender Focus
Policy Report on How Corruption Border is Gendered (SIPA)/Contextualization Study

Smaller N studies, surveys, interviews ethnographic work (Tyson 2018, Hadley and Rowlatt 2019, Wiseman 2020)
Methods: Iterative Phone Surveys

2,280 traders from Busia, Malaba and Taveta with Kenyan phones (mostly Kenyan), 80% women, 20% men

Recruited pre-Covid February-March 18th 2020;

4 monthly surveys December 2020 - June 2021 (Diagnostic and three waves)
Methods: Reporting Experiment

Tested a Mobile Border Experience Reporting Tool on Sauti East Africa Platform: 199 traders from Busia reporting April-September 2021

ROUTE USED | AMOUNT PAID | VALUE OF GOODS | TIME CONSUMPTION | COMFORT/ WELL BEING
Border Reporting on Sauti’s USSD Platform

Exit Interviews of all participants
Validation Workshop with Traders

Busia, Kenya November 2021
Finding: Covid (Restrictions) a Big Shock

Covid had an enormous impact on small-scale cross-border traders; women disproportionately dropped out; majority hope to return

Data: 3 Waves of Survey Data
Finding: Corrupt Actors Adapt

A majority of traders reported corruption & harassment worsened with Covid; large percentages reporting paying “Kitu Kidogo” but not being asked for Covid documents (suggests mostly using ungazetted routes).

Data: 3 Waves of Survey Data
Finding: Corrupt Actors Adapt
Police are the most feared actor; with evidence of extraction on non-gazetted routes; kitu kidogo goes up on ungazetted routes when customs restricts movement

Taita Taveta Cross-Border Traders: In your view are there too little, too many or just the right amount of police at the border?

Data: 3 Waves of Survey Data

Formal Border Opens

“One Ugandan police officer once shot dead my broker while crossing with goods via the alternative route 'panya route.'
Finding: Gender Dynamics Shift

Men report higher than average “kitu kidogo” and more harassment compared to women. Young men using boda-bodas are at particular risk especially during times of COVID restrictions as women traders relied on them for help.

We asked traders their perception... most men and around half of women agreed that men paid more and faced more harassment at this time...

“I encountered bad cops who demanded exorbitant bribes.”
Finding: Ungazetted Routes Offer Advantages

Traders appear to prefer the ungazetted border if they have lower value goods, appears cheaper...extraction goes up with value of goods

Data from reporting platform 2021
Some Overall Insights

- Covid restrictions were a “natural experiment” in severe restrictions for small-scale traders at customs. It created great, gendered hardship: More women dropped out; men (including transporters used by women) disproportionately faced harassment and elevated extraction-lesson in unintended consequences of policies that ignore “ungazetted routes” & how they interact with customs.

- Money paid by traders to police and others when taking ungazetted routes is seen as overwhelmingly unjust (extortion) even as it facilitates passage around customs yards- these ungazetted routes are seen as de facto legitimate by traders, money making for police who are mobile.
Selected Policy Recommendations

❖ Strong evidence for making customs more friendly to small-scale traders in consultation with them, paying attention to gender and facilitating other modes of transportation besides trucks; this may help reduce extractive power of police.

❖ Traders raised the desire for formalization of ungazetted routes since the lack of recognition facilitates extraction and harassment. How this would be done needs careful thought.

❖ Police reform must be explored at borders (not just customs). A large fraction of traders felt that there are too many police at the border.
Some Final Thoughts

- We can creatively leverage mobile phones to acquire better data from traders on experiences with corruption & how it works: More to explore on how to make that work (incentives) & move towards accountability.

- Traders wanted more opportunities for transparent bottom up feedback mechanisms (they liked the idea of reporting via mobile phones on border service quality and sharing information on platforms and the public) whether this can be structured to deepen accountability dynamics is a next phase of research.
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