

15. Facilitating Trade in Fragile and Conflict-affected States: The gender dimension

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ABSTRACT

Conflict has negative impacts on firms and trade, yet trade is resilient and can be a lifeline for communities living in fragility. Women and men participate in and are impacted by trade differently, and the design and implementation of trade agreements and complementary policies determines the extent to which women benefit. Women are disproportionately represented among small-scale informal traders and are at higher risk of experiencing violence and crime during cross-border trade activities. Trade facilitation measures that improve procedures and facilities at border crossings can therefore offer benefits for women and ensure their participation in trade and sustainable economic development.

1. Introduction

Trade can be impacted by conflict and fragility, with intense conflict severely interrupting trade (Rohner et al., 2013). Damaged infrastructure can disrupt markets and supply chains, reduce labour availability, increase risk and uncertainty, and diminish productivity (as a result of foreign inputs becoming more difficult to access). Higher transaction costs and falling consumer demand constrain business activities and trade (Del Prete et al., 2023; Naude, 2013). Reduced firm output and revenues render firm closures more frequent, especially for firms reliant on foreign inputs (Del Prete et al., 2023).

Additionally, state responses to insecurity, such as curfews, roadblocks, temporary closures of border points, and restrictions on movement are particularly damaging to cross-border trade (WCO, 2022). Trade can also be a weapon of conflict, with different entities fighting for control over trade infrastructure and revenues and enforcing restrictions and blockades or soliciting illegal payments from traders.²

At the same time, trade is driven by need and thus is resilient and may continue even in the face of conflict and insecurity, and in the absence of state control (WCO, 2022). Further, trade and regional integration have the potential to promote peace both politically and economically.

Politically, regional trade agreements may have a pacifying effect on inter-state relations (Mayer and Thoenig, 2016). Increased bilateral trade, trade openness, and economic interdependence reduce the probability of military conflict between countries, particularly for neighbouring states that are susceptible to experiencing conflict (Lee and Pyun, 2009).

Economically, these agreements may have significant effects on trade creation, as well as modest welfare gains (Mayer and Thoenig, 2016). Evidence suggests, however, that it is free trade, rather than merely trade, that promotes peace between trading partners. Free trade removes barriers to international and regional cross-border commerce, and the economic interdependence this creates favours stability and peace in relations between trading partners. Trade increases communication, interaction, and exchange of goods and ideas, bringing societies together (Lee and Pyun, 2009; Wolff, 2022).

Critically, trade allows producers to access larger markets beyond a domestic consumption base, providing an opportunity to achieve larger economies of scale and greater productivity and competition,

which are vital for spurring firm growth. In turn, firm growth creates more jobs and raises incomes, and the greater prosperity experienced under conditions of peace heightens the opportunity cost of violence for both state and non-state actors.

Trade can also support peace and security through its contributions to women's economic empowerment. Increased trade has been observed to correlate positively with improvements in women's economic outcomes, creating higher quality and more secure jobs for women in the formal sector, and in terms of opportunities for entrepreneurship.

The Global Study on the implementation of the UN Security Council's resolution 1325 on equal participation and full involvement of women in peace and security found that higher levels of women's economic empowerment were associated with more rapid economic recovery in conflict-affected countries (UN Women, 2015). This is attributed to women on average investing more in the economic welfare of their households and communities.

Thus, the benefits of inclusive trade for women's economic empowerment can lead to positive peace and security outcomes, and the economic stability brought by trade can also reduce gender inequalities.

The likelihood that these theoretical dynamics translate into practice, however, is contingent on the full participation of various groups in cross-border trading, particularly in ethnically diverse and divided societies, where unequal distribution of potential benefits from trade may aggravate inter-ethnic tensions. Similarly, the distributional impact of trade should be equitable, and specific measures may be required to ensure that economic opportunities are available to those most marginalized by conflict, as this is critical for sustainable economic growth and development. Women play a critical role in this dynamic.

2. Gender and trade in conflict areas

Fragile and conflict-affected states are characterized by institutions with low capacity and limited public service provision, and are often associated with persistent gender inequalities (IMF, 2023). Globally, they are recognized as contexts where significant investment is required to achieve or maintain peace and security, and economic resilience. Without this investment, these countries pose a risk of economic instability spilling over into neighbouring states and regions, disrupting trade and transport corridors,

Box 15.1 Distributional impacts of trade: AfCFTA and poverty impacts

The context in which women operate in conflict settings affects their ability to benefit from trade. Modelling the impact of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement shows that the overall impact on poverty and inequality would be uneven across countries and across individuals within a country, depending on their socio-economic characteristics. Notably, women living in rural areas with limited education and employed in the informal sector would tend to benefit the least from the AfCFTA as it currently stands (Mevel et al., 2023). This illustrates the importance of inclusive implementation of the AfCFTA and complementary policies.

forcing displacement, reducing investor confidence, and increasing the costs of production, potentially leading to social instability.

In the case of the Ukraine conflict, far beyond the borders of the crisis, the rising cost of inputs in production such as fertilizer has disproportionately impacted smaller agribusinesses who cannot remain competitive. Evidence suggests that women are more vulnerable to these shocks due to prevailing economic structures and norms (Papavid, 2023). Trade disruptions may worsen the gender gap in relation to export activities (Korinek et al., 2023). On the other hand, while conflict can disrupt trade, pre-existing trade relationships can create incentives for maintaining stability, peace and security.

Women and men participate in and are impacted by trade differently. Just as between peace and security and trade, there is a bi-directional relationship between gender and trade. Gender inequalities limit the effectiveness of trade, while the distributional effects of trade vary based on how women and men participate in the economy.

Women play various roles in trade, including as entrepreneurs, traders, employees, investors, consumers, and decision-makers. They are disproportionately represented in certain sectors, notably as entrepreneurs of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), in informal cross-border trade (and the informal sector more broadly), and at lower levels of value chains (ILO, 2022).

While trade can create more jobs for women in the formal sector, evidence suggests increased trade may also result in women being segregated in lower-skilled, lower value-added segments of regional value chains (Pham and Jinjara, 2022). This may be because exporters can leverage weak labour policies, and pay women less as a way of driving export competitiveness, thereby widening the gender wage gap.

In contrast, projections suggest that some trade agreements, together with implementation of improved

trade facilitation measures, may increase wages for lower skilled workers faster than wages for more highly skilled workers, thereby potentially narrowing the gender wage gap (Echandi et al., 2022). Even when considering losses of low-skilled jobs, evidence shows women's growth in trade-related formal employment is double that of men (Connolly, 2022).

Evidence across multiple countries indicates that FDI inflows improve women's welfare and decrease gender inequality, though the impact is lower in countries where women face barriers to accessing resources and opening a business (Ouedraogo and Marlet, 2018). The predominant dynamic depends on the design and implementation of trade agreements and complementary policies. Inclusive implementation is key to ensuring that women benefit from trade agreements. Insecurity that disrupts trade threatens to reverse these gains.

3. Conflict affects entrepreneurship and labour markets

Fragility and conflict typically inhibit economic activity and shape the nature of the private sector in these contexts. Gender-disaggregated data and analysis on firm ownership are not available in relation to conflict, making it impossible to differentiate between firms owned by men or women. Nonetheless, certain implications can be drawn, since women are overrepresented in owning or managing MSMEs rather than larger firms.

3.1. Entrepreneurship in conflict areas

Firms in conflict contexts are overwhelmingly small and informal. MSMEs dominate in fragile settings, particularly micro and small enterprises. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), for example, firms with between one and nine employees constitute 90 per cent of existing firms (World Bank, 2019). Similarly, in Yemen, over 97 per cent of firms had less than 25 employees (McKechie et al., 2022).

In available data sets, the scarcity of medium- and large-sized firms in fragile contexts could be explained by these firms being more likely than small firms to report political instability as a factor affecting their operations (Kumar, 2017). A gender analysis suggests women and men entrepreneurs are almost equally likely to report conflict as a limiting factor.³

However, there appears to be some regional heterogeneity in findings. Analysis from the Middle East and North African regions (where political instability is reported as a primary concern among firms of all sizes) indicates that domestic-oriented and smaller firms are more likely to report political instability as a severe obstacle when compared with export-oriented and larger firms, suggesting that trade can help balance risks of political instability for larger firms (Hosny, 2017).

Most MSMEs in fragile contexts operate in services trade, in part because the educational requirements and start-up costs for these activities are lower than for other sectors, such as manufacturing (McKechnie et al., 2022). These lower entry barriers can help smaller traders, especially women, who tend to have less access to resources and lower levels of education than men.

Additionally, the vast majority of small firms in fragile settings are informal, with firms eluding formalization for a number of reasons, including burdensome taxation regimes and state predation. Informality is pervasive in conflict and post-conflict contexts where formal livelihoods have been disrupted, with some 84 per cent of total employment being in informal enterprises in these settings, compared to the world average of 61 per cent (ILO, 2019b).

The informal sector is a critical lifeline for populations living in conflict (Clingendael, 2015). At the same time, conflict and informality may reinforce one another as the lack of decent, formal sector jobs (especially for young men) in an area may heighten vulnerability and fragility (McKechnie et al., 2022).

Informality in entrepreneurship in the context of fragility creates increased financial stress, the absence of access to banking services, a lack of access to formal credit, and more expensive (often informal) short-term debt incurred, including for perishable goods. Affordable insurance cover, including to cover losses arising from conflict, is generally not obtainable in fragile settings.

Trade agreements that intend to reduce the costs of trade can address this challenge by incentivizing MSMEs to trade through formal channels. Ordinarily,

formalization of MSMEs more broadly may offer more protection and can improve access to finance and financial management. However, due to less developed financial sectors, low risk appetites, high interest rates on loans, limited integration into global payments infrastructure in fragile settings, and limited state capacity to support formalization, these underlying structural challenges may limit the effectiveness of formalization. In short, MSMEs, in which women are disproportionately represented, have weak incentives to participate in formal trade.

Importantly, MSMEs in fragile settings frequently tend to be focused on survival rather than on growth; nonetheless, even in survival mode they play a critical role in sustaining livelihoods and household incomes, as well as maintaining provision of basic goods and services for their communities (McKechnie et al., 2022).

They may adopt different approaches to survive the risks of operating in contexts of conflict and fragility – for example, they may simplify their business processes and products, diversify their supply chains and economic activities (including into less fragile geographies), and use local rather than imported goods in their production processes (Naude, 2013).

Additionally, the trade in services sectors where MSMEs in fragile contexts tend to predominate are less capital intensive or dependent on immovable assets. This gives them easier mobility, which may be essential when having to adapt to evolving conflict and insecurity. Evidence also suggests operating small businesses under different names makes it more challenging for conflict actors and tax authorities to link a business to a given family or holding. Therefore, even if an entrepreneur is able to grow her operations, she may opt to operate multiple smaller businesses for safety reasons (McKechnie et al., 2022).

More broadly, criminalized war economies may further destabilize vested interests and slow emergence from conflict and fragility (Clingendael, 2015). There is also an indirect longer-term cost of violence on firms arising from the psychological and physical impacts of violence on how society perceives safety and security (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023).

While in some instances MSMEs in fragile environments may be more resilient, agile and adaptable to evolving circumstances, they are less able to cope with conflict and fragility than larger firms. For example, in contexts of criminal violence, small firms are less able to accommodate theft, extortion, constraints on expansion, and revenue loss (McKechnie et al., 2022).

Similarly, small firms often keep business within the family in order to reduce mistrust and uncertainty. This can pose a challenge in settings where women face discrimination in markets and society more generally, particularly in instances when women need to take greater control of family firms, which frequently occurs during periods of civil war (Naude, 2013). At the same time, these circumstances may be opportunities over time to positively shift gender roles and norms.

3.2. Women in labour markets

Conflict contexts present challenges for labour markets, bringing a gender dimension to the fore. Forced displacement, whether internal or across borders, is associated with family fragmentation and an increase in female- or child-headed households. This often means a loss of assets and resources frequently connected to men. This includes land and labour, which serve as inputs in trade-related production and value chains, as well as collateral for accessing finance. Households headed by widows and single females tend to have fewer productive assets and higher dependency ratios than male-headed households (Klasen et al., 2011).

Gender-based violence and lower access to education for girls means that young women are less prepared for the labour market. Women separated from husbands may not be able to register in formal identity systems across borders where they have been displaced (UN Women, 2018).

Conflict can also upset labour markets for host communities – for example, a study on displacement in Syria found that women with low skills or education, and in the informal sector are “displaced” in the labour market and have reduced earnings (World Bank, 2016).

Trade agreements can address this challenge by creating more stable and formal employment opportunities. For example, the EU-Jordan Association Agreement allows tariff-free access under simplified rules of origin for Jordanian products made in whole or part by refugee workers. This provision has created jobs for refugee women and raised exports in the textiles and garments sector, where women predominate (Al Nawas, 2020).

Such arrangements may also help to create social cohesion between refugee and host community employees working side by side (ILO, 2019a). However, some evidence suggests that women may find it difficult to take up these opportunities due to cultural barriers that prevent them from taking transport to or working alongside men in the Special Economic

Zones designated under this provision (Temprano Arroyo, 2018). As a result, in the first three years of the scheme's operation, only 5 per cent of work permits were issued to women (Al Nawas, 2020).

At the same time, protracted conflict can shift traditional gender roles and create opportunities for increased participation of women in economic and labour market activity, as well as greater autonomy in household decision-making. These windows of opportunity, where the position of women could be improved, should be further explored and built on sustainably, taking into account other possible structural gender barriers or conflict-induced security threats for women. Nonetheless, as women take on increased entrepreneurship and employment opportunities, they face additional burdens, given the expectation that they also carry core household responsibilities.

4. Implications for small, informal firms

Despite the challenges of fragile settings, open trade presents opportunities for MSMEs, including those owned or led by women operating in fragile situations, or engaged in cross-border trade. MSMEs can participate in economic diversification and the development of regional value chains, meeting the standards of international markets, and supplying inputs to larger companies in their regions. However, women and other entrepreneurs in fragile and conflict-affected situations face particular constraints to participation in supply chains, including weaker access to assets, finance, markets, information, networks, skills, standards, and technology.

Limited property rights for women in agribusiness in these settings may lead to excessively low levels of investment, which means the full potential of export-led growth is not achieved. In addition, higher-productivity and exporting firms are likely to benefit more from increased exports. MSMEs not yet engaged in exports, and women-owned businesses or firms operating in conflict and fragility situations tend to face structural constraints to productivity and may take longer to achieve economies of scale. Other obstacles to expansion may, for example, include access to professional networks and market information.

One aspect of free trade agreements, namely the removal of tariffs, can make trade more cost-effective, strengthening the case for investment to enable producers to meet the scale and standards of larger markets.

Alongside this, many preferential free trade agreements, as well as the World Trade Organization, commit governments to removing other types of trade barriers such as non-tariff measures (NTMs) that can be both financial (VAT, withholding taxes, excise duties, and various levies) and non-financial (regulations, standards, and transport, logistics, and infrastructure challenges). Despite the importance of removing tariffs in facilitating increased trade, in practice, evidence suggests NTMs are twice as costly to trade compared to tariffs (UNCTAD, 2019a).

While these measures may fulfil important public policy and sustainable development objectives, MSMEs can find it difficult and costly to comply with them. Additionally, multiple studies confirm that the regulatory barriers imposed by NTMs have a disproportionate impact on the export capacity of both smaller firms and of lower-income countries (UNCTAD and World Bank, 2018). Further, these measures can often turn into non-tariff barriers (NTBs), with a discriminatory or protectionist intent that limits rather than facilitates trade (ESCAP and UNCTAD, 2019).

NTBs, such as complex documentation and procedures, harassment, delays at customs, demands for bribes, and confiscation of goods, dissuade the use of formal border posts (FAO, 2017). Border delays are a particular concern for small-scale traders who trade in perishable agricultural commodities, which is common in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region for instance, and these traders may be pushed into informal trade routes in an effort to avoid delays which risk spoiling their goods.

As a result of these and other barriers, informal cross border trade (ICBT) is prevalent. Estimates suggest that ICBT contributes between 20 and 75 per cent of total intra-regional trade on the African continent, depending on the country (ECA and AfDB, 2010).

Informal trade is defined as unrecorded or under-recorded trade across gazetted and non-gazetted border points, emphasizing the fact that this trade is not recorded in official trade statistics (Afreximbank, 2020). The term is largely used to refer to unrecorded trade carried out by small-scale traders and vulnerable groups, often women, as distinct from smuggling of illicit goods.

However, few countries attempt to measure or track ICBT data and even fewer collect gender-disaggregated data, limiting the ability to use these data to inform policy interventions. Of those initiatives in place, methodologies differ, which makes data difficult to compare. Nonetheless, inferences can be

drawn from a handful of countries and from various data collection attempts.

It is estimated that ICBT is a source of income for about 43 per cent of Africans, with women constituting 60 per cent and 70 per cent of informal cross-border traders in West and Central Africa and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, respectively (ECA and AfDB, 2010). For many women in rural areas near borders, ICBT is often the only source of income: up to 60 per cent of non-agricultural self-employed women in sub-Saharan Africa are engaged in cross-border trade (Parshotam and Balongo, 2020). Consequently, ICBT insecurity tends to have a disproportionate impact on women's livelihoods.

However, some NTBs are also prevalent in informal cross-border trade. For example, payments to state and non-state actors may be required on informal trade routes, with some evidence indicating that women are made to pay more informal payments per transaction compared to male traders in some contexts (Siu, 2019). Siu (2019) finds a significant positive correlation between traders who have encountered officials threatening to confiscate their goods in order to obtain a bribe and those who use informal crossings. ECA field research along the Abidjan-Lagos corridor in West Africa has found that ICBT along unofficial routes creates additional safety and security risks for informal traders, including women, which are heightened in conflict situations (ECA, 2020).

For both formal and informal trade, NTBs have differential impacts on different groups of traders, with evidence indicating that women and small traders are most impacted. Women traders are particularly exposed to NTBs and additionally face gender-specific circumstances, including physical and sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and personal safety issues. Small traders, who are frequently women, also face specific cost barriers to participation in formal trade. They tend to move fewer goods in one transaction, so the costs associated with NTBs and transport may be disproportionately higher. Additionally, small traders may need to carry cash along borders where digital cross-border payments systems are either absent or not designed in an inclusive way, which makes them particularly vulnerable to theft.

Larger traders are able to achieve greater economies of scale and therefore experience lower NTBs and transport costs per unit of goods traded. Larger traders also tend to be more able to adjust to changes that arise as a result of insecurity in border areas (WCO, 2022). This also has the effect of enabling larger traders to gain market power concentration

at border posts, with the result that smaller traders are often pushed either into ICBT or domestic trade (Bergquist et al., 2022).

Conflict and insecurity, border closures, and temporary import or export bans may shift trade into informal routes. The situation may be additionally difficult in settings where the authority of the state is contested by non-state armed groups in border areas, who compete for authority to organize and receive revenues from the movement of people and goods (WCO, 2022). Anecdotal evidence suggests conflicts along borders further impact informal traders due to reduced trading hours, as well as possible extended periods of border closure (Mugisha, 2022).

In regions with available data, women traders report higher levels of perceived insecurity in trade corridors that cross fragile and conflict-affected areas. For instance, the World Bank's Trade Facilitation West Africa field survey of small-scale cross-border traders documented high levels of reported insecurity along Burkina Faso's borders with Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo, with women traders being more likely to report higher levels of perceived insecurity (TFWA, 2020). The researchers also note that women may be underrepresented in the data as they are less likely to use unsafe corridors or to report harassment due to socio-cultural norms.

Despite these challenges, informal trade can contribute to the economic and social recovery of fragile societies as it may be the major (and, in some instances, the only) means by which vulnerable communities in fragile contexts connect to the world and access goods critical to their survival (Brenton and Soprano, 2018). This is particularly true in terms of contributing to food security. Border communities often share common cultural, linguistic, and familial links, making trade easier. In fragile situations, ICBT can help to nurture and strengthen solidarity among border communities, fostering a deeper sense of connectedness, thus promoting peace and stability among neighbouring countries (FAO, 2017).

5. Scaling good practices: Trade facilitation measures in Africa

Women are central to cross-border trade in Africa and empowering them economically and improving their ability to participate safely and profitably in cross-border trade is critical for sustainable economic development, including in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Similarly, support for female entrepreneurship could be critical for firms to manage conflict risks,

enable firm survival, and support firms in rebounding after peace is established (Naude, 2013). However, coping mechanisms that some firms may have adopted for survival during conflict may not be appropriate for a peace economy and may undermine competition after the conflict ends (Naude, 2013).

Gender continues to play a role in determining the choice of border crossings for traders, even when taking into account smoother customs procedures and the possibility of lower taxes. Strengthening women's participation in cross-border trade will necessitate a combination of scaling best practices and actively exploring potential opportunities that may offer gains for women (and small-scale) cross-border traders.

Trade facilitation measures that improve procedures and facilities at border crossings often offer benefits for women traders even when they are not gender specific in design; however, additional gains are possible when these measures are designed with a gender-responsive approach to ensure they address obstacles faced specifically by women, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. This is critical to encourage female participation in cross-border trade and to ensure that trade is safe. It must be noted, however, that many trade facilitation measures require state capabilities to implement effectively, as well as close coordination and cooperation with authorities of neighbouring countries, which are particularly difficult to achieve in low capacity and fragile contexts.

Cross-border trade facilitation measures are particularly significant in the African context given the dependence of livelihoods, food security, and economic growth on cross-border trade, including ICBT. This has created a fertile ground for introducing innovative trade facilitation measures and observing their impacts. The continent's sub-regional trading blocs, known as Regional Economic Communities (RECs), alongside implementation of the WTO TFA measures provide good examples and lessons learned on trade facilitation practices that can be scaled.

5.1 Effective implementation of free trade agreements

Focus on the effective implementation of free trade agreements that both lower official tariffs and also address NTBs, such as the AfCFTA and the WTO TFA, seems to have contributed to the successful participation of women in trade in conflict areas. Free trade agreements that consider both tariffs and NTBs make it easier, more affordable, and safer for all traders to operate through formal channels that offer more protection.

Both hard and soft trade facilitation measures implemented by RECs aimed at addressing small-scale cross-border trade in Africa have been shown to improve the situation for women traders and lead to an increase in their participation in formal trade, even when not necessarily designed in a gender-sensitive way. Some trade facilitation measures can specifically address challenges women face as small-scale cross-border traders, including vulnerability to harassment and violence and can significantly shift trade towards formal, safer trade routes.

5.2 Adoption of Simplified Trade Regimes

In the East African Community (EAC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Simplified Trade Regimes (STRs) are operational, whereby customs officials can issue a simplified certificate of origin and simplified customs declaration forms to traders for goods on an agreed-upon list and under a certain value. These innovations have shown promise in reducing NTBs for small-scale traders (Mudzingwa, 2022).

Evidence from the EAC suggests that STRs have benefitted women and young people the most (ECA, 2021). Still, efficacy may be dependent on effective trade information desks (TIDs), capacity building of customs officials, a relevant common list of eligible products and value thresholds, and the availability

and consistency of donor funding (UNCTAD, 2019b; UNCTAD, 2022).

5.3 Introduction of complementary trade facilitation provisions

Complementary trade facilitation provisions implemented alongside STRs, which aim to strengthen the impact of trade facilitation measures, may benefit women significantly. Such initiatives include gender desks at police stations, female gender champions at borders, and TIDs that provide information and may also help traders complete paperwork. Temporary, simple improvements in hard infrastructure, such as those introduced under the Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project (GLTFP), have also proven effective at reducing security risks, including solar panel lighting to extend trading hours safely, and building gender-differentiated toilets.

5.4 Training and sensitization of border officials

Training and sensitization of customs officers and other border officials, as well as improvements in cross-border customs cooperation such as joint border committees (or integrated border management committees) have led to behavioural change among border officials. Reports suggest that these developments have fostered a heightened recognition of the gendered nature of ICBT among border officials and has also led to improved relations between small-

Box 15.2

The Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project (GLTFP)

Personal safety is a key challenge for women cross-border traders. A 2012 study of the Great Lakes region found that 80 per cent of respondents had to pay bribes to cross a border and 50 per cent faced physical harassment and abuse. A lack of gender-differentiated toilets and insufficient lighting, for example, made women traders more vulnerable in terms of safety and security.

The GLTFP aims to reduce costs faced by cross-border traders, especially women, and more broadly increase capacity for commerce by undertaking:

- Hard infrastructure improvements, including establishing cross-border markets and installing pedestrian lanes.
- Procedural and policy reforms, such as establishing cross-border committees that meet regularly to harmonize bilateral trade issues and appointing trade information desk officers to help traders with border clearance procedures and resolve issues with border authorities.
- Interventions to change the behaviour of border officials including through training and sensitization, in order to reduce the incidence of bribery and threats towards women traders.

The first phase of GLTFP has shown that even temporary infrastructure can lead to significant improvements for women traders. For example, solar lighting has extended hours of operation and lighting has improved security for women traders. Building border markets has ensured that traders in agricultural goods (the vast majority of whom are women) do not have to travel long distances to markets in neighbouring countries in order to reach the nearest markets (Parshotam and Balongo, 2020).

scale traders and border officials (Parshotam and Balongo, 2020). For instance, as part of the GLTFP (see Box 15.2), officials in Burundi, DRC, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda have pledged collaborative efforts to tackle obstacles faced by cross-border trade in the region, such as building border markets and establishing early childhood development centres for trading mothers (Parshotam and Balongo, 2020).

5.5 Establishment of one-stop border posts

One-stop border posts (OSBPs), where all government agencies responsible for various aspects of cross-border trade are co-located, have reduced NTBs associated with complex processes and procedures. OSBPs are often located in the neighbouring country, meaning traders only need to enter the customs office of the destination country rather than of both countries. Assessments of OSBPs prevalent in the East African region suggest they reduce the time taken to clear customs, as well as diminishing opportunities to harass or demand bribes from cross-border traders (Siu, 2019).

In some instances, such as in Uganda (see Box 15.3), the introduction of OSBPs has even led to a slight decrease in ICBT, with informal traders opting to use official border posts due to their relative safety, better facilities, and lower costs, thereby achieving the objective of incentivizing participation in formal trade (Siu, 2019).

5.6 Capacity building and training for small-scale traders

Capacity building and training for both women and men small-scale traders have been shown to address the lack of information often identified by traders as the main challenge impeding their cross-border activities. Training cross-border traders on certificate of origin requirements, in particular, has been seen to raise the likelihood of traders using formal border crossings (Siu, 2019).

Additionally, simplified manuals on border procedures for women involved in small-scale cross-border trade and accompanying training of trainers for leaders of women associations in EAC have been effective. Courses for women traders on rights and trade procedures in the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) have also been effective.

A COMESA Traders Charter prescribes rights and obligations in relation to minimum treatment standards for small-scale cross-border traders. It also addresses many of the challenges frequently encountered by those traders, including high fees and duties, burdensome bureaucracy, corruption, and harassment. The Charter has a clear focus on eliminating sexual harassment and other gender-related abuses, reflecting the prevalence of women among cross-border traders in the COMESA region (ECA, 2021).

The above measures are intended to facilitate customs clearance in established customs posts, and ultimately reduce trade costs for informal cross-border traders, including women. In some cases, they have also been combined with other measures meant to make borders more sensitive to ICBT needs and preferences, including via the establishment of trade information desks, the introduction of identity systems for small-scale traders, and the creation or strengthening of cross-border traders associations.

While research points to the effectiveness of these measures, specific evidence on their effectiveness in conflict-affected areas is lacking. Insecurity along these border crossings and the inability to track informal trade routes safely limits data collection efforts.

The World Bank's Trade Facilitation West Africa project illustrates these challenges. The project surveys found that, in some instances, traders reported feeling secure along certain corridors known to be unsafe. Additional insights revealed that women may avoid these unsafe

Box 15.3

The impact of one-stop border posts in Uganda and Kenya

Evidence from the Busia border crossing between Uganda and Kenya illustrates how minor adjustments to hard border infrastructure, including overnight lighting and accommodation facilities, can improve safety and enhance the day-to-day trading experiences of women in informal cross-border trade (Parshotam and Balongo, 2020).

Women traders who were interviewed also confirmed that the implementation of the OSBP, along with the STR-enhanced mutual rapport between traders and governmental authorities, resulted in a decrease in instances of corruption and the solicitation of bribes (Parshotam and Balongo, 2020). Research shows that improvements brought about by the OSBP led to an increase in formal trade between Uganda and neighbouring countries (Siu, 2019).

corridors due to socio-cultural norms limiting their mobility in conflict areas. Therefore, reporting along unsafe corridors is primarily undertaken by men who feel safe enough to use these corridors, contributing to a gender bias in the results.⁴

New approaches to collect these data, for instance through the upcoming continental methodology for measuring ICBT, may provide innovative methods of data collection along conflict-affected borders (ECA, 2023). Lower trade costs would be reflected in lower prices for cross-border traded products, thus enabling greater participation of smaller traders in cross-border trade (Bergquist et al., 2022). This would reduce the concentration of market power that larger traders have at border posts, thus improving competition in both cross-border trade and domestic markets on both sides of the border, resulting in lower costs and a higher quality of goods.

6. Promising innovations and areas for further investigation

6.1 Digital and sustainable trade facilitation

Digital solutions for trade facilitation have already registered success in addressing NTBs in parts of the continent, including in mitigating the effects of measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 and increasing the harmonization of trade rules.

One such example comes from transport facilitation. Electronic cargo tracking can facilitate trade and address transnational organized crime. Trafficking also has a human and more notably a gender dimension. With advances towards free movement of persons as part of regional integration efforts, digital solutions can be designed to help combat human trafficking, including of girls, for labour and sexual exploitation. These illicit activities are more common in contexts of insecurity and where states lack the capacity to enforce the rule of law.

Second, digital single windows – part of the WTO TFA – may reduce the scope for corruption and simplify complex processes, although it is unclear whether they would widen or narrow the gap for women due to the gender digital divide in access, literacy, and infrastructure that is particularly challenging in fragile settings.

Finally, the introduction of digital identity systems can facilitate easier border crossing for small-scale traders, thereby incentivizing formal trade, while also supporting border officials in data-based monitoring of security risks.

An example of where this has been tried is the Ponds Lourds Border Post on the DRC-Rwanda border, where biometric identification of travellers linked to the issuance of border passes and automated gates was introduced. Authorities have found significant anecdotal evidence of improvements to cross border trade, border control, worker productivity, and traveller satisfaction (Rwanda Directorate General of Immigration, 2018).

More widespread implementation and testing of these solutions and their rigorous evaluation is necessary to validate evidence on its effectiveness and identify improvements.

6.2 Instant and inclusive payments systems

Digital payment solutions can also help address the issue of inclusion. A joint report by AfricaNenda, ECA, and the World Bank (2022) indicates that women achieve similar access to instant payment systems as men despite facing greater constraints, indicating the potential of digital financial tools to foster inclusivity if designed well. Similarly, ECA research indicates that in many African countries, gender inequality is less pronounced with mobile money than with formal accounts held with financial institutions (ECA, 2022b). The report finds that broadly, but particularly in the case of digital finance, digitalization can empower women indirectly if fewer intermediaries are involved.

Traditional methods and data sources of risk assessment can be a barrier for MSMEs and women entrepreneurs. GSMA's Mobile for Development report 2023 identifies promising innovations that use mobile money transactions in agribusiness or asset purchases to build a credit history for those in rural areas who are unbanked (GSMA, 2023). These opportunities for the use of new data sources should be explored, especially for those in conflict-affected areas without access to financial services, or those who are displaced and lack the identification required to open a bank account.

Banking infrastructure, and particularly the ability to carry out cross-border transactions, is limited in conflict areas, either due to low capacity or externally imposed restrictions. This can further limit the ability of small businesses to use e-commerce to trade across borders, which would reduce their need to physically travel for trade and would also facilitate wider market access.

Trade finance challenges could be addressed through improved collaboration and dialogue between the private sector, policy makers, and various stakeholders aimed at crafting inclusive, evidence-based policies. Such initiatives would include improved commercial banking infrastructure for MSMEs, start-ups, and women-owned or -led firms.

While restrictive regulatory environments can hinder innovation in the digital space, harmonization or mutual recognition of regulations on digital services could be negotiated through trade agreements or regional integration instruments to promote trade in digital financial products across borders. Given the significant role of MSMEs in supporting the continent's recovery from the triple shocks of COVID-19, high basic commodity prices, and climate change, governments and development finance institutions should take the lead in supporting the financial services sector to work better with MSMEs.

6.3 Organized private sector

Women entrepreneurs in trade often lack the social capital to overcome barriers to trading, accessing relevant information, developing cross-border business linkages, leveraging available financing, advocating for favourable policies, and meeting the volumes required to participate in trade.

Traditionally, men seem to access business connections through formal networks while women, especially in small-scale activities, tend to rely more on informal networks (Mbo'o-Tchouawou et al., 2016). However, evidence suggests women cross-border traders are more likely to participate in associations than men, which may provide an opportunity to address some of their barriers to participation in cross-border trade (TFWA, 2022).

Associations of cross-border traders may hold particular value, including for aggregating goods to supply larger actors, supporting market access, pooling savings and credit resources, initiating public-private partnerships, attracting investments, and helping businesses orient towards accessing and operating in new and larger markets.

Particular to inclusive supply chains, associations can foster business linkages between larger and smaller firms, focusing on value addition and integration in regional value chains for MSMEs. In some cases, these associations have taken a gender lens and represent women traders, focusing on addressing the specific challenges women face when trading across borders.

One successful example lies in the 50 Million African Women Speak platform implemented across three African RECs to support networking and access to information. The platform has been found to be highly responsive to the specific needs of African women entrepreneurs and has expanded to 36 countries with 9,990 monthly users (AfDB, 2021).

However, smaller cross-border traders associations face governance, resource, and technical capacity

challenges (Atuheirwe et al., 2020). These may include, for instance, low payment rates of membership fees that deprive the associations of resources to support a secretariat with skilled staff and activities that would impart value to their members.

Trade agreements often lead to an increased demand for transport services and infrastructure (ECA, 2022a). However, meeting these needs depends on collaboration between traders and companies that supply logistics and connectivity, including in transport, energy, infrastructure, and supply-chain traceability. Associations can coordinate smaller businesses to access cost-effective transport and logistics solutions and participate in supply chains. Associations can also leverage data to communicate the demand for these services to transport and logistics providers.

Finally, associations can ensure that the benefits of increased trade are inclusively distributed. Business support organizations can conduct sensitization and capacity building efforts on compliance with trade agreement provisions, cross-border trade processes and documentation, and in supporting access to finance solutions like credit guarantee schemes. Associations can also make a concerted effort to represent traditionally excluded youth and women, and to advocate for improvements in access to finance, productive resources, and assets for MSMEs through inclusive public-private dialogue.

More broadly, the trade facilitation measures covered above support increasing trade between neighbouring countries, making them more economically interdependent on one another and therefore less likely to initiate military conflict against each other. This can contribute substantially to regional peace and stability.

However, while these trade facilitation measures and interventions have shown success in reducing unsafe trading through informal channels and have improved gender-sensitivity at borders, they are often donor-driven and lack dedicated budget allocations. This complicates effective long-term implementation. Policy-level interventions are therefore critical to ensure sustainability.

6.4 More research is needed on further areas

There are notable gaps in the existing evidence base on the gender dimension of trade in contexts of conflict and fragility – little rigorous research has been conducted in fragile settings (likely due to insecurity and the high costs associated with undertaking research in unstable environments) and data are not generally disaggregated by gender, thereby limiting analysis and insight into how dynamics vary in this

dimension. It is critical that future data collection ensures disaggregation by gender and resource needs to be made available for more rigorous research on fragile border settings.

There are also specific areas where more research is needed, including:

- The intersection of the gender digital divide with the implementation of digital trade solutions.
- Most MSMEs in fragile settings orient their businesses exclusively towards family imperatives. However, for those who want to scale up, more evidence is needed on whether growth in the same product lines or diversification are optimal growth strategies for women entrepreneurs in conflict environments. Growing larger within the same industry may be too risky. Possible diversification opportunities may include, for instance, participating at various points along the value chain and linking with value chains across borders, thus creating more stable demand and demand beyond the domestic market.
- Another issue is in what ways voluntary sustainability standards can be further leveraged to achieve supply chain improvements, such as supplier diversity programmes where large corporates commit to making efforts to engage women entrepreneurs and smaller suppliers. In addition, supply chain traceability can guarantee that traded products and services are conflict-free and meet Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards.
- The introduction of measures supporting free movement of persons across borders would enable cross-border women traders to participate in trade more effectively. Alternatively such arrangements may create additional safety and security challenges in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

7. Policy interventions: Mainstreaming gender

7.1. Building on a global agenda

Recognizing the importance of the participation of women in trade, global commitments have been made to address the challenges they face in participating in and benefiting from trade.

The 2017 Buenos Aires Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment acknowledged "the key role that gender-responsive policies can play in achieving sustainable socioeconomic development",

and that "inclusive trade policies can contribute to advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment, which has a positive impact on economic growth and helps to reduce poverty" (WTO, 2017).

Parties to the Declaration agreed to collaborate in making trade and development policies gender-responsive by sharing best practices, removing barriers to women's participation in trade, and improving aid for trade. As the first global acknowledgement of the economic links between gender and trade, this Declaration became important for norm-setting and changing narratives. Constituted as a follow-up to this Declaration, the Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender at the World Trade Organization seeks to enhance actions in these areas.

The implementation of global frameworks faces a key challenge in relation to the lack of data to inform effective implementation. For example, four of the ten countries with the largest internally displaced populations worldwide (Syria, Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia) are missing from the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Gender Index due to the unavailability of data. This likely results in an underestimation of the dimensions of key issues, such as the impact of conflict and displacement on the relevant populations, the contributions of women and girls, and the different experiences of men and women, boys and girls in such situations. A lack of data presents limitations for investigating or accurately understanding these dynamics.

Available data suggest, however, that there is a positive correlation between economies emerging from conflict – in particular the fastest growing economies globally – and an increased role of women in production, trade, and entrepreneurship, supporting the theory that women's economic empowerment can contribute to economic recovery and growth (UN Women, 2015).

UN Women notes that policies and strategies include promoting girls' education and expanding access to credit for women in agriculture. They also reflect on the importance of addressing discrimination and stereotypes as well as removing structural barriers that exclude vulnerable women and girls in conflict environments from participating in public and private life and, in particular, the economy.

As previously stated, the opportunity that conflict and fragility creates for changing norms can be leveraged around women-headed households, women's land ownership, and women-owned businesses, for instance. These openings must be reflected in policy in order to ensure their sustainability.

The effectiveness of the strategy is affirmed by the Peacebuilding Commission's 2013 Declaration, which goes further to state that women's economic empowerment leads to improvements in the quality and effectiveness of economic recovery policies and strategies. The fact that women's economic empowerment is critical to the effectiveness of policies creates an imperative to include women in their formulation and to ensure trade policies mainstream gender considerations.

Some efforts have encouraged women as decision-makers in economically strong post-conflict recovery, for instance as peacebuilders to identify opportunities for livelihoods and skills development in traditionally male-dominated sectors (Atkinson, 2018). The fact that these jobs depend on regional cooperation provides an incentive for political stability and addressing state fragility (Lee and Pyun, 2016).

Nevertheless, greater efforts are required to mainstream gender in trade policy. One such example in this direction is the AfCFTA, where many state parties have mainstreamed gender considerations in their national and regional AfCFTA implementation strategies (see Box 15.4). This includes stakeholder consultations with both public and private sectors, a gender analysis of key sectors and industries where the state party has competitive and comparative advantage, and complementary policies and strategies to ensure the Agreement is implemented in a gender-sensitive and even gender-responsive manner (ECA, 2019). This affects both job creation as well as entrepreneurship, targeting policies to minimize the risks to women of increased trade.

Notwithstanding deliberate efforts to craft gender-responsive trade policies, a crucial link with peace and security is often absent. It is also challenging to include non-state actors in the relevant processes, as they may have important roles to play in the security environment in national consultations, depending on their level of organization, representativeness, ability to be accessed, and willingness to sit at the same table with the public sector.

8. The aid ecosystem

8.1. Aid for recovery and post-conflict development

The funding and prioritization of gender equality within humanitarian endeavours, recovery efforts, reconstruction initiatives, and broader development endeavours remain inadequately addressed. Despite the disproportionate impact of crises on women and

girls, a mere 1.7 per cent of humanitarian programming is directed towards advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

Furthermore, in 2016, a mere 1.6 per cent of the Central Emergency Response Fund allocation was allocated to combat sexual and gender-based violence. Similarly, only 2 per cent of total aid allocated to peace and security initiatives in fragile states and economies was designated towards advancing gender equality as a primary objective (UN Women, 2018).

Humanitarian response has also begun taking into account its impacts on market dynamics, including (informal) cross border trade. Where supply chains of food are not significantly interrupted and sufficient and varied food is available in the market, food aid disrupts market prices and trade. Now, cash transfers are taking more precedence as the preferred tool for humanitarian relief, which helps sustain food supply chains, businesses, and trading. This also includes cash for work schemes that create employment. The gender dynamics of these interventions have been well-researched, including for instance that cash transfers to women in the household have proved to be more beneficial in terms of spending on essentials, children, and long-term investments (Rubalcava et al., 2009).

8.2. Aid For Trade

The Aid for Trade initiative has taken women's economic empowerment into account since its inception. The WTO suggests that as of 2022, 84 per cent of Aid for Trade strategies of donors and 85 per cent of national or regional development strategies of partner countries aim to promote women's economic empowerment.

However, these Aid for Trade programmes often target women in their entrepreneurial roles, leaving out women in other trade roles, for example, as employees and investors. Further challenges are faced in translating objectives of women's economic empowerment into concrete programmes, creating the additional challenge of assessing the impact that Aid for Trade might have on women's economic empowerment (der Boghossian, 2019).

Overall, developing economies broadly face a capacity gap in trade negotiations and related policy. This extends to the technical nature of mainstreaming gender considerations in both trade negotiations and policy, which requires targeted capacity building that can be undertaken by well-designed Aid for Trade strategies. These strategies can also leverage lessons from developing economy contexts that are leaders in

Box 15.4

Entrepreneurship and job creation: Gender-sensitive AfCFTA implementation

Conflict can disproportionately impact girls' education, creating long-term effects as women are less prepared for the labour market in the future and are less able to participate in trade, or else can only participate at the lower levels of value chains. The gender-sensitive implementation of the AfCFTA has the potential to create jobs and opportunities for SMEs and entrepreneurs in sectors critical for women's economic empowerment, which can, in turn, reduce instability.

The AfCFTA amplifies prospects for entrepreneurship and economic advancement among women-led enterprises. This demographic stands to gain from economies of scale and heightened entry into new export markets. Simultaneously, the upswing in demand for manufactured goods engenders the potential for sizable export-oriented industries to engage suppliers from smaller, women-led businesses spanning international borders.

This expanded trade landscape concurrently widens avenues for women to actively partake in commerce through restructured regional value chains. This will also support youth, who are 1.6 times more likely to be entrepreneurs, and can help address the challenge of youth unemployment, which may otherwise be a source of instability. Partnerships with women and youth associations can support this.

Complementary measures identified by national and regional AfCFTA implementation strategies are clustered around the following areas:

- Close the gender gap in access to finance
- Build the export and trading capacity of women-led business in the AfCFTA
- Empower women in the export sector and representation of women at corporate levels
- Empower women in regional value chains, corporate supply chains and public procurement
- Empower women's participation in e-commerce and digital trade solutions
- AfCFTA sensitization and inclusion of women's voices in AfCFTA national implementation efforts
- Leverage business associations and other organized private sector groups for aggregation of goods, capacity building, public-private dialogue
- Design and implement a gender-responsive trade facilitation agenda that incentivizes formal trade
- Ensure equal participation of women in AfCFTA national coordinating and oversight structures.

While not explicitly linked to peace and security agendas, these complementary policies speak to several best practices that are identified in other contexts as supporting economic growth while emerging from conflict such as access to finance for women-led or -owned SMEs as well as gender-sensitive interventions to address non-tariff barriers and issues of discrimination and harassment.

However, more direct links to peace and security frameworks may ensure these measures are financed and that efforts are not duplicated. For instance, the African Union committed 2020 as the Year of Silencing the Guns, including a focus on eliminating gender-based violence, which is also a policy issue that arises when speaking of structural barriers to trade for women. Yet, the links to trade policy through AfCFTA implementation were unfortunately not leveraged.

Similarly, the RECs have within their structures objectives around peace and security as well as complementary agreements relating to free movement of persons, for instance. They often rely on *ad hoc* interventions to advance peace and security at a sub-regional level. Unfortunately, the African Peace and Security Architecture has relied heavily on donor assistance and is not well linked to *ad hoc* peace and security initiatives of RECs (European Court of Auditors, 2018). Similarly, regional AfCFTA strategies could be better linked to these overall structures.

Finally, the Gender is My Agenda Campaign engages civil society in monitoring progress on the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, with economic empowerment and peace and security as two relevant pillars. This provides an opening for facilitating engagement of civil society and private sector associations with the African Union and, lately, has begun engaging on the nexus between the AfCFTA and addressing structural barriers to women's participation.

this area such as the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade, the first of its kind.

Considering donor programmes focused on financing, according to the IFC, women-owned SMEs already face an estimated credit gap of US\$ 1.4 to US\$ 1.7 trillion (IFC, 2022). Given this gap, combined with the fact that conflict disincentivizes investment, it is likely that this has a disproportionate impact on women seeking financing.

The IFC and the World Bank propose blended finance through their dedicated facilities as a solution for addressing both the gender financing gap for women-owned SMEs as well as the gap in investing in fragile and conflict-affected settings. A gender-lens investing approach to these types of blended finance facilities could address this nexus more effectively. Gender mainstreaming in trade policy and gender-responsive Aid for Trade aligned to this for fragile settings can therefore present an opportunity to address this nexus.

9. Conclusion

Trade and regional integration can promote peace as increased bilateral trade and economic interdependence can reduce the likelihood of military conflict between neighbouring countries. The relatively greater economic prosperity of peacetime, including growth created by trade, raises the opportunity cost of participating in violence, particularly where participation is needs-based, thereby lowering incentives to contribute directly to violence. However, ensuring that trade activities are inclusive and equitable is key, especially in ethnically diverse and divided societies.

Conflict brings a number of challenges to labour markets and firm operations in settings affected by conflict and fragility, and these challenges frequently affect women more than men. For example, forced displacement often results in loss of assets and resources, particularly those connected to men, leaving women in more vulnerable circumstances.

Gender-based violence and threats and lower access to education for girls also mean that women are less equipped to participate effectively in the labour market. At the same time, conflict may bring windows of opportunity for improving gender norms, as circumstances often require women to take on greater economic responsibilities, including in MSMEs, during times of conflict.

Women play a range of roles in trade: as entrepreneurs, traders, employees, investors, consumers, and decision-makers. Amid fragility and conflict settings, where formal employment tends to be low, women play a critically

important role in cross-border trade, constituting between 60 and 70 per cent of informal cross-border traders in west, central, and southern Africa. This is highly relevant since informal trade may be the primary means by which communities living in contexts of fragility or conflict are able to access essential goods.

ICBT comprises between 20 and 75 per cent of total intra-regional trade on the African continent, depending on the country, and it is a source of income for around 43 per cent of Africans. Additionally, informal trade can contribute to economic and social recovery in fragile areas, including by strengthening connections between border communities and promoting stability between neighbouring countries.

However, women are differentially impacted by constraints to cross-border trade due to lower access to assets, finance, markets, information, networks, skills, standards, and technology. Women cross-border traders are also more affected by NTBs, including facing complex documentation and procedures, delays at customs, demands for bribes, confiscation of goods, harassment, and additional gender-based obstacles such as lower physical safety and security.

Trade facilitation measures that improve procedures and facilities at border crossings often offer benefits for women traders even when they are not gender specific in design. However, additional gains are possible when these measures are designed with a gender-responsive approach to ensure they address obstacles faced by women specifically, particularly in settings of fragility and conflict. Trade facilitation practices that have shown impact and could be scaled include:

- Inclusive implementation of free trade agreements, such as the AfCFTA, to ensure that women, including those in rural areas, active in the informal sector, and with limited education, are to benefit appropriately from such regimes.
- Effective implementation of complementary trade facilitation provisions such as installation of lights at border posts, extended opening hours (even 24 hour/day opening), and trade information desks at border posts that provide information and can assist traders with completing paperwork.
- Adoption of gender-responsive trade facilitation mechanisms, including separate sex toilets at border posts, gender desks at police stations, and female gender champions at border posts.
- Adoption of Simplified Trade Regimes, which lower NTBs for small-scale traders, who are predominantly women.

- Training and sensitization for customs officials to improve relations between small-scale traders and border officials, as well as improvements in cross-border customs cooperation.
- Establishment of one-stop border posts, where all government agencies responsible for various aspects of cross-border trade are co-located, have

reduced NTBs associated with complex processes and procedures.

- Capacity building and training for small-scale traders, such as on certificate of origin requirements, to address the lack of information often identified by traders as the main challenge impeding their cross-border activities.

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Endnotes

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- 2 This is seen, for example, in the conflict in Yemen today.
- 3 Constructed by the authors using the World Bank Enterprise Surveys (2006-2022). This does not account for informal businesses, in which women predominate in conflict settings.
- 4 Carmine Soprano, interview by authors, 8 September 2023.