

RAPID SITUATION AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER TRADERS

at Mchinji Border in Malawi
during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

BCP	border control post
CBTA	Cross-Border Traders Association
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
DODMA	Department of Disaster Management Affairs
FGD	focus group discussion
GBV	gender-based violence
ICBT	informal cross-border trader
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPC	infection, prevention and control
MEPDPSR	Ministry of Economic Planning, Development and Public Sector Reforms
MoH	Ministry of Health
MRA	Malawi Revenue Authority
MSMEs	micro, small and medium enterprises
NEEF	National Economic Empowerment Fund
NICE	National Initiative for Civic Education
PPE	personal protective equipment
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SSCBT	small-scale cross-border trader
STI	sexually transmitted infection
STR	Simplified Trade Regime
TIDO	Trade Information Desk Officer
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has had unparalleled impact on the world since the pandemic started to spread from China at the end of 2019. As the deadly virus keeps crossing the national borders, governments have taken measures to mitigate its spread. Such measures have triggered a new order of trade costs not experienced before.

Some of the measures that have resulted in new costs, as reported worldwide, include additional border controls and a requirement for new documentation for cross-border traders. Besides disruption of the normal flow of trade across the borders, these new measures have affected businesses in many ways including business slowdown, depletion of business capital, loss of customers and reduced profitability, among others.

The study has revealed that the negative impacts of COVID-19 have not spared cross-border traders in Malawi who have had their businesses affected to the extent that some have closed shop. Such impacts have exceedingly affected women who form the majority of cross-border traders.

The study has also uncovered that, much as there has been an improvement in awareness and availability of personal protection equipment over time, there are still improvements needed in capacity-building relating to filling the knowledge, human resource and essential equipment gaps at national as well as border-specific level especially with the new wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study has also revealed that women traders are the most affected by the border closures, because most of them have no alternative business ventures compared to the male counterparts. This entails that the women traders are the most vulnerable in many areas and affected disproportionately by the various constraints pertaining to cross-border trade; hence, trade facilitation interventions must not foreclose the gender element.

Lastly, the study has recommended practicable interventions at the level of the informal cross-border traders (ICBTs), border control post, Trade Information Desk Office and national level in order to address the challenges being faced by ICBTs especially women, and ensure the continued flow of trade amidst the pandemic.

1. Introduction

1.1. Project background

Informal cross-border traders (ICBTs) continue to play a significant role in intraregional trade within both regions of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Its contribution to intraregional trade is estimated at 30 to 40 per cent of all trade and accounting for nearly USD 18 million of trade value in the SADC region and 40 per cent of all trade in the COMESA region (Trade Law Centre, 2021).

By definition, **informal cross-border trade** is trade between neighbouring countries conducted by vulnerable, small and unregistered traders driven by proximity between markets close to the border. It is referred to as informal because the traders are largely unregistered and not the trade itself (captured or uncaptured) (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), n.d). **Small-scale cross-border trade**, on the other hand, can be defined as a form of trade that this unrecorded in official statistics and carried out by small businesses across borders of neighbouring countries (World Bank, 2020).

The two terms can therefore be used interchangeably in as far as the volume of trade and kind of traders is involved. This is also the status of ICBTs in Malawi from the regulatory perspective and hence the reason they are recognized as a constituency in trade. The familiar term though in Malawi is cross-border trader. While both have similar characteristics, the difference is that ICBTs are unregistered, while small-scale cross-border traders (SSCBTs) are registered with the Business Registrar's office as a legal entity.

Among the individuals involved in informal cross-border trade, in Southern Africa, women are by far the dominant force accounting for approximately 70 per cent of the total ICBTs (UNCTAD, 2019). The majority of these women are into trading of low value merchandise that they sell to a wide range of middlepersons, shops and end users across the country. The proceeds of this trade are mostly used to support the livelihood of respective vulnerable families, such as the provision of food, school fees and medical expenses.

These women face a number of risks when conducting their businesses. They encounter incidents of different forms of gender-based violence (GBV) including harassment and exploitation by government officials who take advantage of the women's susceptibility and lack of proper education to understand border issues.

The advent of COVID-19 is expected to have exacerbated the situation of these women and hence widened the financial disparity that is already prevalent between men and women. The outbreak of COVID-19 in the region has led to border closures/restrictions, and the resultant quarantine measures adopted by countries

1. INTRODUCTION

have restricted physical movement of ICBTs and raised the cost of doing business. The ICBTs have, in this regard, been negatively affected through restricted trade and higher cost of doing business across the borders.

It is against this background that IOM, with funding from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), is implementing a project titled “Supporting informal cross-border traders in Southern Africa to do business safely during the COVID-19 pandemic”. The objective of this project is to contribute towards the enhanced protection of the health and economic rights of ICBTs through the facilitation of continued trade during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study is, therefore, multifaceted: first, it is geared towards assessing the situation as it relates to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on operations and welfare of ICBTs; and second, to identify needs that would facilitate cross-border trade during the COVID-19 pandemic without subjecting ICBTs to health risks. The study also zeroed in on unearthing the gender-related challenges, such as GBV and limited access to sexual and reproductive health services at border control posts (BCPs).

1.2. Objective of the study

The main objective of the study is to conduct a rapid situation and needs assessment of ICBTs targeting national-level and border-specific issues. The specific objectives include the following:

- Assess the situation as it relates to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on operations and welfare of ICBTs;
- Identify needs that would facilitate cross-border trade during the COVID-19 pandemic without subjecting ICBTs to health risks;
- Unearth the gender-related challenges, such as GBV and limited access to sexual and reproductive health services at BCPs.

1.3. Scope of the assessment

This national study was undertaken in parallel with studies undertaken in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The national report will contribute to the consolidated regional report. The Malawi report is based on a study that focused on the national informal cross-border trade context in Malawi and focuses at only one BCP on the Malawi side, Mchinji.

The scope of the assignment included both national-level and border-specific analysis of the existing situation against what would be an ideal situation and determine the gap that would constitute the needs with regards to trade among the ICBTs and the SSCBTs in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study also involved the creation of a gender-mainstreamed baseline for the national-level policy dialogue and activities to be undertaken with border officials and the Cross-Border Traders Association (CBTA) at BCP level, which are part of the wider project.

2. Methodology, assumptions and limitations

2.1. Assessment methodology

The study used a combination of desk review, as well as primary data collection techniques. The document review was aimed at understanding national, regional and multilateral dialogue to support cross-border trade in view of the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic.

This literature review was instrumental in getting a deeper understanding of the situation, needs assessment and teasing out important issues that need further investigation through analysis of the relevant primary data.

Interviews were conducted with ICBTs sampled from the membership of CBTA to appreciate their experiences conducting cross-border trade amidst the border restrictions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of those CBTA members who responded to individual interviews telephonically, 50 were women while 6 were men. Interviews were also conducted in a focus group discussion (FGD) with the Mchinji chapter of CBTA to appreciate broader perspective on the challenges faced at Mchinji BCP following the advent of the pandemic. Out of the 10 participants who took part in the discussions, 7 were women and 3 were men.

Interviews were also conducted with BCP officials to ascertain their state of readiness before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the capacity constraints at the BCPs emanating from the challenges availed by the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. These BCP officials included those from Malawi Revenue Authority (MRA), Department of Immigration and Citizenship Services, Ministry of Health (MoH) and Malawi Police Service. Besides BCPs, views were sought from the Trade Information Desk Office, considering the role the office plays in facilitating cross-border trade.

In addition, key informant interviews were conducted with the relevant government ministries to appreciate the policy interventions and actions aimed at combating the pandemic and the challenges that have followed. The interviewed representatives included those from the following government bodies: (a) Ministry of Trade; (b) Ministry of Homeland Security; (c) MoH; and (d) Ministry of Economic Planning, Development and Public Sector Reforms (MEPDPSR).

It should be highlighted, however, that for the interviewees who represented the institution, their responses reflect the positions of the respective institutions; hence, the gender aspect of the interviewee may not be material.

2. METHODOLOGY, ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The research team also conducted a walk-through at the border to appreciate the prevailing situation in terms of availability of personal protective equipment (PPE), other facilities and measures for the prevention, control and management of COVID-19, as well as facilitating cross-border trade with focus on women traders' needs.

Purposive sampling was used to identify stakeholders based on their known and perceived roles in cross-border trade either as policymakers, implementers, advocates and traders themselves. Respondents to a structured questionnaire were sampled through convenience method, having obtained a list of CBTA members from their secretariat.

Recognizing that it would not be feasible to interview an adequate number of ICBTs at the border due to its prevalent closure at the time of the survey, a request was made to CBTA to share their database from where a sample was obtained for targeted interview purposes. A call centre was set up and manned with research assistants to help with data collection based on the structured questionnaire.

The regional coordinating team had suggested a sample size of 20 in each country for the individual interviews. However, realizing that this number would suffer from weak statistical power, the study in Malawi aimed at getting at least 50 respondents. The scientific motivation was the central limit theorem, which stipulates that a large sample starts from 30. In total, 56 individual ICBTs were interviewed.

An FGD with the Mchinji CBTA was held to get first-hand insight into the experiences and challenges encountered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, a virtual meeting was held with the executive of the national CBTA grouping to appreciate their general perspective at national as well as border-specific level.

It is worth mentioning that data collection tools were supplied by the client. The consultant simply administered those tools. Similarly, report outline and all headings and subheadings were provided by the client. This helped to have uniformity among the different national reports.

2.2. Assessment assumptions

The study was commissioned on the assumption that there could be an evolving situation at the targeted BCP due to the unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic waves. To this effect, the study prepared for a scenario where it would not be feasible to physically interact with ICBTs at the border due to the closure of the facility. The study also assumes that, regardless of the evolving situation, the key focus should be on identifying measures and interventions that would facilitate risk-free informal cross-border trade once the borders revert to partial or full operation.

2.3. Limitations of the assessment

As captured in the foregoing, the assessment was done when the border was closed due to the new wave of COVID-19 pandemic. This entailed the non-availability of ICBTs at the border. Respondents for individual interview were therefore obtained from a list provided by CBTA of Malawi. This meant that ICBTs whose names are not registered with CBTA did not participate in the interview, as such information from that group was not collected.

The list provided had more names of traders that use Mchinji border. While this helped to understand the experiences at Mchinji border, information from other borders was not proportionately represented. Nonetheless, interview with CBTA executive members helped to close the gap.

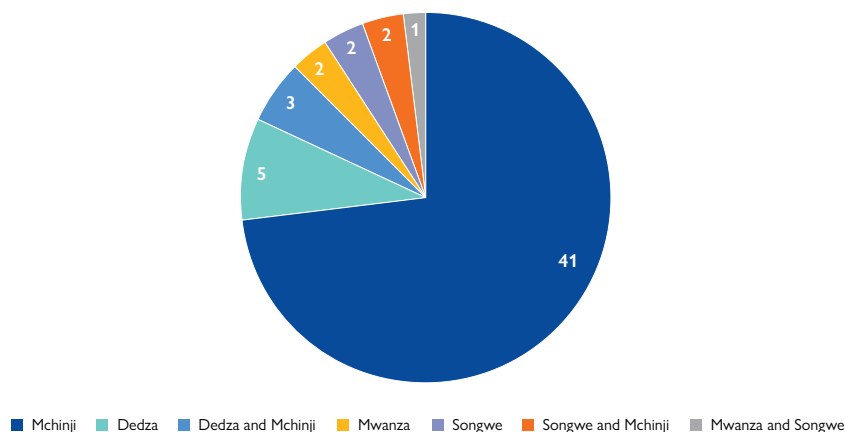
3. Mchinji border

3.1. Description and location

Mchinji border is located 12 km from Mchinji District Headquarters. The border is located to the western part of Malawi about 120 km from Lilongwe. Mchinji BCP is the gateway to Zambia and the nearest-to-destination compared to other borders, such as Songwe to Dar es Salaam, Mwanza and Dedza to Zimbabwe and South Africa. This nearest-to-destination position may explain the high number of ICBTs that use Mchinji border compared to other borders.

Out of the 56 ICBTs who participated in individual interviews, 41 said they use Mchinji border, 5 mentioned Dedza, 2 mentioned Mwanza, 2 mentioned Songwe, 2 mentioned Songwe and Mchinji, 3 mentioned Dedza and Mchinji and 1 mentioned Mwanza and Songwe. The finding shows that while some ICBTs ply their trade between Malawi and one other country, others trade in more than one country. An FGD with selected ICBTs in Mchinji corroborated the skewness towards Mchinji border, suggesting that most traders ply between Malawi and Zambia. Two reasons explain this; first, as mentioned earlier, Mchinji border is the nearest-to-destination border so it is convenient to traders; secondly, during the duration of the pandemic, the other key borders such as Mwanza faced strict closures because of the measures taken by the destination countries, while Mchinji was still on partial operation for some time. Figure 1 shows the distribution of ICBTs by the commonly used borders.

Figure 1. Respondents' commonly used borders



Source: Data gathered from the 2021 survey and elaborated by the authors.

3.2. Demographics and main economic activities at the border

As alluded to in the foregoing, the majority of cross-border traders are women. Out of those registered with CBTA of Malawi, an estimated 80 per cent of ICBTs are women and based on the findings from interviews, they are young adults. The age for respondents in individual interviews ranged from 25 to 62 years, with an average of 39 years.

Generally, the border is a transit point for traders and migrants. This being the case, Mchinji border is a small economic zone with microscale vendors selling fruits, drinks and food. There are no established shops, foreign exchange agencies and banks in the vicinity as is the case at airports. There is a small trading centre about a kilometre away before the border, but it also lacks banking as well as foreign exchange facilities.

The underdeveloped commercial facilities at the border perhaps signals the generally low-income status of the people who frequently use the border. It could also be reflective of the nature of the people who patronize the border the most, who happens to be ICBTs who do not stay long at the border.

3.3. Trade and migration at the border

3.3.1. Informal cross-border traders at the border

Informal cross-border trade involves exchange of legitimately produced goods and services carried out by small businesses across the national borders and usually escape some regulatory and tax burdens at the BCPs (Njiwa, 2013).

ICBTs at Mchinji border happens to be the dominant users of the border facility by number of traders. An interview with CBTA members and the Ministry of Trade affirmed that ICBTs indulge in the exchange of small quantities and modest value merchandise, such as cosmetics, confectionery, clothing and fizzy drinks, hence the sometimes use of the term small-scale cross-border trade interchangeably. This is attributed to a variety of constraints including limited financing, low business capacity, inefficient marketing and distribution channels, among others.

These ICBTs in Malawi escape regulatory and some tax burdens mainly due to the introduction of the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR), which allows such traders to enjoy duty-free status when they import goods originating from member States and such goods should not exceed USD 2,000 (Malawi Revenue Authority, n.d.).

Despite the many shortfalls, informal cross-border trade, as happening between Malawi and Zambia through the Mchinji/Mwami border, helps to deepen economic integration between the neighbouring nations through facilitation of trade that may not have taken place in the absence of concessionary regulatory and tariff arrangements.

3.3.2. Migration through the border

According to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship Services, Mchinji border is a gateway to Zambia, Namibia, Botswana and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and at times to South Africa through Zambia and Botswana. Although migration data were not collected since it was not part of the study focus, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship Services reported that the majority of traffic through Mchinji BCP is predominantly traders and in particular, ICBTs and SSCBTs.

According to the Trade Information Desk Office, the increase in small-scale traders' utilization of Mchinji BCP over the recent years can be attributed to the introduction of the COMESA simplified customs clearance procedure, commonly known as STR, to facilitate easy imports and exports for the benefit of SSBTs.

In order to facilitate movement across the border, Malawians going to Zambia either use a passport or a border pass. It is estimated that over 70 per cent of ICBTs use border passes according to the Trade Information Desk Office due in part to the cost of the passport which stands at a minimum price of USD 115 for a 36-page copy. Given the frequency of travel by ICBTs, a border pass provides an affordable avenue to facilitate cross-border trade than the costly passport. The border pass attracts a low limit on the number of days to be spent in Zambia and also the amount of local currency a trader can carry, which is limited to 75,000 Malawian kwacha (MK) (approximately USD 100). Usually, a person travelling using border pass is regarded as a temporary visitor and often to visit friends and relatives, hence the low limit on the amount of money one is allowed to carry. Most of the ICBTs who use border pass return within the same day, as they order their merchandise from the city of Chipata, which is just 20 km from Mchinji/Mwami border. With regards to the valid passport holders, the maximum duration of stay in Zambia is 30 days per visit, and the traveller is entitled to carry Malawi currency not exceeding MK 3.5 million (approximately USD 4,500). Immigration officers record informal cross-border trade transit as business trip.

3.3.3. Cross-Border Trade Association and other informal cross-border trade-related agencies/organizations at the border

Profile of small-scale cross-border traders and informal cross-border traders using the border

This section presents the profiles of ICBTs/SSCBTs in Malawi, but is not particular to the COVID-19 period; it is the normal structure of ICBTs. ICBTs are small to medium-scale entrepreneurs whose majority composition are women. In the context of Malawi, a micro-entrepreneur is too small to be ICBT/SSCBT. As pointed out earlier, according to CBTA, out of a total membership of 2,500, about 2,000 of them are female, representing 80 per cent of the total membership.

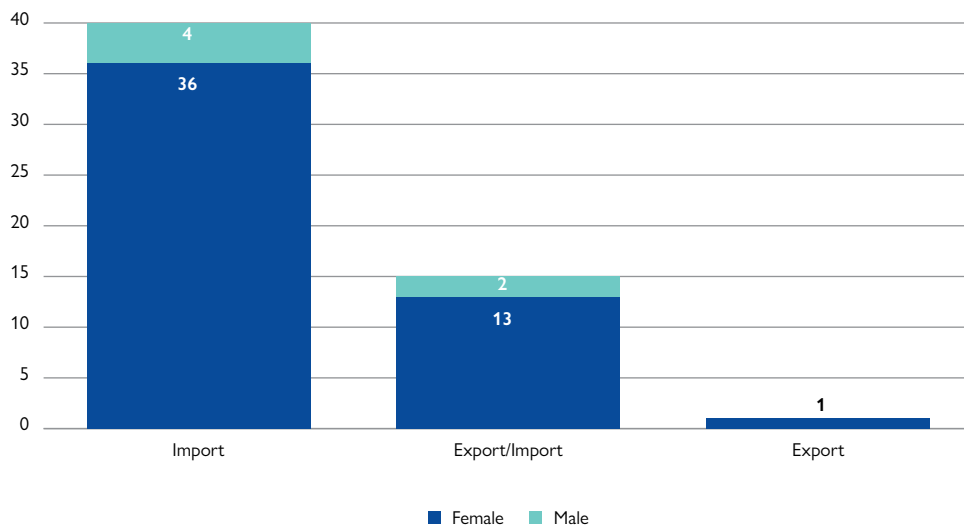
3. MCHINJI BORDER

The CBTA Mchinji chapter engaged in the FGD has a membership of 106 individuals, of which only 6 are men. Out of those CBTA members who responded to individual interviews telephonically, 50 were women while 6 were men. Based on the foregoing demographics, it is apparent that informal cross-border trade is dominated by women, and this is important for policy considerations, as women have specific challenges pertaining to access to credit as they rarely own property that can be used for collateral security at a money-lending institution. In addition, women have proven to be vulnerable to GBV and sexual and reproductive health issues besides the emerging constraints particular to the restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic (UNCTAD, 2019).

With regards to the nature of trade undertaken by these ICBTs, 70 per cent of the respondents said they are engaged in the business of importing goods and selling in Malawi, 28 per cent said they are involved in both exporting and importing, while a mere 2 per cent said they are engaged in exporting. This buttresses the known fact that Malawi is a predominant importer of merchandise. Furthermore, the study confirmed Malawi as exporter of raw materials and importer of processed goods.

In terms of gender disaggregation by trade orientation among ICBTs and SSCBTs, data shows no statistical difference between men and women by form of trade as per Figure 2.

Figure 2. Number of traders by form of trade



Source: Data gathered from the 2021 survey and elaborated by the authors.

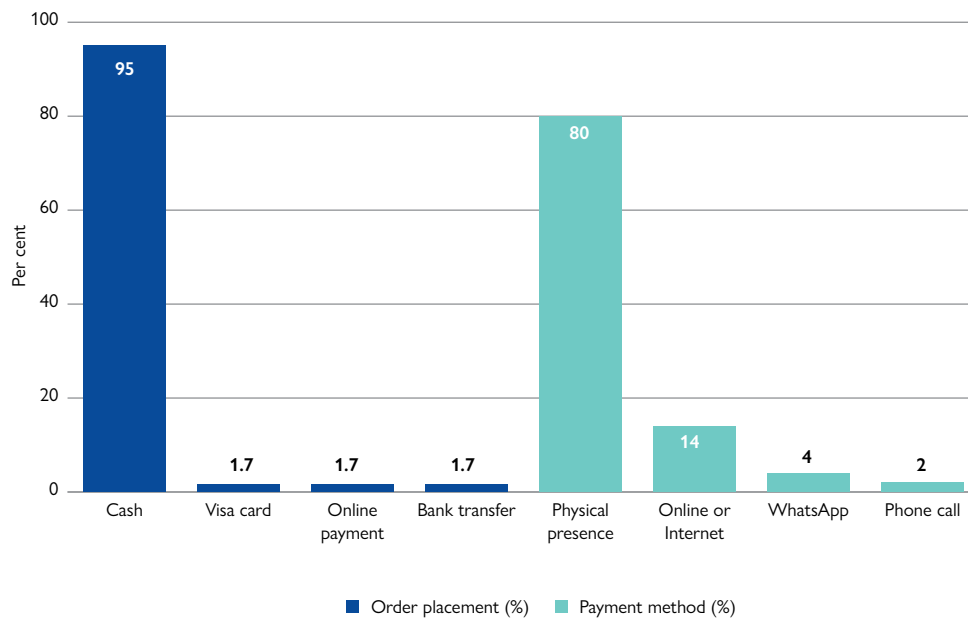
At the time of the study, the common method of payment for imported goods was cash, with 95 per cent of the respondents choosing this mode of payment. Other methods of payment mentioned include Visa cards, online payment and bank transfers, each reported to be used by a mere 1.7 per cent of the respondents.

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In terms of order placement, 80 per cent of the respondents said they order through physical presence or person-to-person interaction upon visiting Zambia. Of the respondents, 14 per cent reported favouring online orders, while very few (4%) order through WhatsApp and 2 per cent order through phone calls.

These findings show that ICBTs are yet to embrace technology in doing their business. There was no difference between men and women. In view of the imperative for digital trade in the wake of COVID-19, the importance of accelerating their adoption of technology cannot be overemphasized. Figure 3 depicts the common order placement and payment methods used by ICBTs and SSCBTs.

Figure 3. Commonly used order placements and payment methods (%)



Source: Data gathered from the 2021 survey and elaborated by the authors.

Despite restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, 82 per cent of the ICBTs reported that they are still conducting trade mostly within the country and few as cross-border traders, although not at the levels that prevailed pre-COVID-19 pandemic.

As mentioned in the previous sections that majority rely on physical visit and cash payment in normal times, the pandemic might be a catalyst for the use of non-physical means. Interviews with the immigration officer and MRA officer revealed that some ICBTs might have continued crossing the border using illegal means following the closure of borders by the Government. This was confirmed by the presence of products such as maize floors, usually spotted on Mchinji markets and on the roadsides and yet such products are not recorded to have crossed the formal border due to import permit requirements.

3. MCHINJI BORDER

3.3.4. Services provided by Cross-Border Traders Association and Trade Information Desk Office to small-scale cross-border traders and informal cross-border traders

This section presents services that CBTA and Trade Information Desk Office offer to ICBTs/SSCBTs. The services discussed are those offered routinely and as per the mandate of CBTA and Trade Information Desk Office. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased scope of work as they have had to produce a guidebook and distribute to members, as well as coordinate sensitization initiatives for COVID-19, which they could not do if the pandemic had not struck.

CBTA and Trade Information Desk Officers (TIDOs) render a range of services to ICBTs. When asked to explain their operational roles and responsibilities, CBTA highlighted that they offer their membership services, such as the following: (a) facilitation of training in trade agreements such as those within SADC and COMESA regions; (b) facilitation of training in HIV prevention and mitigation; (c) advocacy on issues affecting cross-border traders; (d) sensitization of the membership on trade issues, such as STR, non-tariff barriers and taxation; and (e) support members when having problems with border control agencies or when they are detained on the Zambia side of the border. TIDOs are part of CBTA as employees and strategically stationed at the border to carry out, among others, the facilitatory functions of CBTA as highlighted in the foregoing for the benefit of ICBTs. The establishment of the office of TIDOs is one major accomplishment of CBTA, and ICBTs confirmed and expressed their gratitude to the support this office renders to them.

Not all ICBTs and SSCBTs however are members of CBTA. Out of the 56 people who responded to individual interviews, 52 reported to be members, while 4 reported that they were not members of the association. Interviews with CBTA and FGDs with ICBTs in Mchinji revealed that membership fee for new members is MK 5,500 (USD 8) per person, while the annual renewal fee is MK 3,500 (USD 5) per person. According to members of CBTA Mchinji chapter who participated in an FGD, the amount is considered manageable by the ICBTs themselves, suggesting that membership fee may not be a barrier to ICBTs and SSCBTs becoming members of the association.

CBTA reported to be intensifying the sensitization drive with the view to register as many new members as possible. This, according to CBTA, will help many traders to benefit from the services offered by the association, as well as the Trade Information Desk Office.

4. COVID-19: Challenges and impact

The closure of the land borders has restricted the movement of people while allowing the passage of relief and essential freight supplies under strict conditionalities. These restrictions have had a huge negative impact on the livelihood of ICBTs and SSCBTs.

According to the feedback from ICBTs, the restrictions have meant that they cannot carry out their trading activities the way they used to do pre-pandemic, and this entails an income deprivation to the already vulnerable small-scale traders most of whom, as reported, are women living at subsistence level. The subsistence nature of the business and lack of sustainable capital reserves entails that the restrictions have compounded the financial stress for ICBTs, especially women who rely on short-term loans to conduct businesses with the view of making a profit out of the borrowed funds.

The majority of the women respondents also bemoaned the restrictions as aiding in the misery of women traders who were attracted to cross-border trade as a means of ensuring economic empowerment and financial independence in the male-dominated households.

It is evident from the responses that the COVID-19-induced restrictions on cross-border trade have led to an erosion of the gains the country had made this far in ensuring economic empowerment of women through trade, as most of the women will be drawn back to destitute levels due to closure of businesses.

The male respondents also reported similar challenges that the loss of trading opportunities has exacerbated household poverty and livelihood, which has served them so well to enable them to take care of the families.

During the pandemic period, the borders were not closed perpetually. The closures were being done occasionally in response to the assessment by the National COVID-19 Task Force.

The challenges add to the already existing bottlenecks they face, which include the following: (a) detention of goods without convincing explanations; (b) paying for goods multiple times due to lack of common understanding of STR by MRA officials; (c) unavailability of foreign currency (Zambian kwacha) in the banks; (d) ill treatment by officials who ask for bribes especially in transit; and (e) cumbersome and delayed processes to obtain export and import permits.

4.1. COVID-19: National, regional and global trends

The COVID-19 infections have taken different trajectories for different countries, although the general trend shows an increase in the number of infections and fatalities. Globally, the United States of America has registered the most infections and fatalities, while South Africa leads the chart on the African continent. With regards to the national trend, Malawi has, as of 10 February 2021, recorded 28,050 COVID-19 cases with 900 fatalities.

4.2. Incidence of COVID-19 and its management at the border

4.2.1. COVID-19 awareness by border agency personnel

The study's terms of reference also sought to get the views of the BCP agencies as regards their state of awareness and preparedness in view of the raging pandemic. The consultations covered the heads of the four key border agencies namely Department of Immigration and Citizenship Services, MoH, MRA and Fiscal Police. The consultations also covered the Trade Information Desk Office, which plays a crucial role in facilitating trade by ICBTs. At the time of the consultations, only the head of MRA at the Mchinji border was female while the rest were male.

With regards to awareness of the prevalence of the COVID-19 outbreak, all the institutional heads reported that they, together with their staff members, were aware of the outbreak of the pandemic even before a single person was declared to have contracted the disease in Malawi. The officers reported that they benefited more from the messages being aired on the radio and television about the spread and dangers of this pandemic before the sensitization materials started arriving at the border.

Despite having the general knowledge about the pandemic, the agencies reported to have been at varied levels of preparedness to deal with the pandemic especially with regards to the availability of PPEs, as well as infrastructure to cater for possible quarantine of the suspected travellers.

The health official at the border reported that through its Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response, the office got organized to deal with the pandemic, but the initial impact was limited due to resource constraints to mount an effective community sensitization initiative, as well as carry out massive testing of border users. Observation at the border revealed that the office has PPEs in stock, including the basic equipment for measuring temperature and oxygen concentration.

The one in charge of Immigration reported that the office was initially ill-equipped to handle the requisites of the pandemic due to the non-availability of critical materials, such as face masks, sanitizers, running water and tanks. However, the office had in stock such PPEs, as evidenced by the time of the visit, and the consulting team was able to verify such availability.

Similar predicament befell the Trade Information Desk Office, which reported that it was not in a state of preparedness at the onset due to non-availability of adequately packaged information to feed to ICBTs and other users of the border. However, according to the Trade Information Desk Office, the situation gradually improved when – with funding from the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights Africa Trust (SAT) and in collaboration with CBTA – the office managed to produce and disseminate a booklet on COVID-19 prevention, as well as border procedures for the benefit of ICBTs. A visit to the border post revealed the availability of posters depicting extracts from the handbook, suffice to say most of them were in English.

The station manager for Mchinji border, on the other hand, reported that her organization was not caught unawares. She reported that MRA was ready and prepared to deal with the pandemic and protect their staff members and other users of the system from the pandemic. MRA reported to have initially had one officer responsible for health matters, but later after the outbreak, they recruited three more officers for the three regions of the country to look into health matters especially COVID-19. This enabled the organization to have PPEs in place and also put in place new working modalities to cater for COVID-19 prevention among staff. However, most of the interventions were targeting staff members as opposed to ICBTs. There was no single poster on COVID-19 awareness erected by MRA at the border despite being the key agency at the area. The interventions were specific to staff of the organization; as such, ICBTs were not specifically considered in the response.

On its part, the Fiscal Police reported to have been caught unawares and were not ready to handle the pandemic. However, they eventually managed to source masks and sanitizers for their own protection. Since the task of the Fiscal Police involves the use of hands to conduct body and luggage checks, they realized the need to ensure they are protected and sanitized at all times.

4.2.2. COVID-19 awareness of informal cross-border traders

Most ICBTs reported to be aware of COVID-19, how it is spread and the dangers it poses to humans and society. About 87.5 per cent of the respondents said they were sensitized on COVID-19 infection, prevention and control (IPC) measures. When asked to explain the basic COVID-19 prevention measures, they were able to articulately mention such things as: (a) washing hands with soap when entering and leaving public places; (b) avoid touching the nose, eyes and mouth; (c) maintaining social distancing; and wearing of face masks in public places.

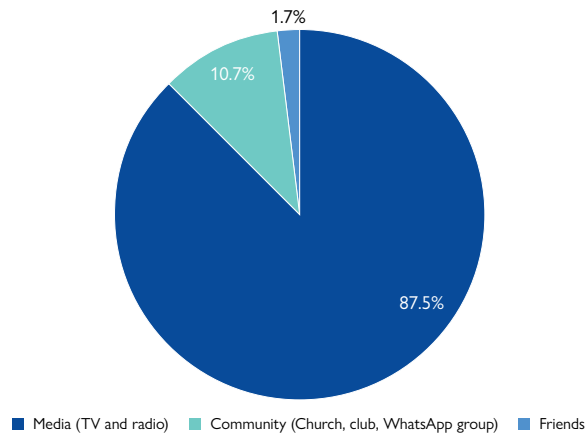
The knowledge level did not differ between men and women. In any case, for a study population that is heavily skewed towards one gender (hence almost all of same gender), a situation of no difference is nearly guaranteed. Similarly, there was no difference in knowledge between those who use Mchinji border from those who use other borders. As it was indicated in the foregoing that 41 out of 56 (73.2%) reported they use Mchinji border, the difference in awareness level by border would

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be hard to find because majority were those who use one border any way. This notwithstanding, CBTA sensitization efforts have covered all ICBTs/SSCBTs, hence the difference by border could not be expected.

With regards to the source of awareness information as depicted in Figure 4, the frequently cited source of education was the media (television and radio, 87.5%) and followed by the community (church, family and WhatsApp group). Participants in the FGD corroborated this trend. It was also apparent that border sensitization and the COVID-19 guidebook that CBTA distributed to members has had a positive impact.

Figure 4. Source of obtaining COVID-19 information



Source: Data gathered from the 2021 survey and elaborated by the authors.

Unlike at the beginning of the pandemic, ICBTs reported to have eventually benefited from the COVID-19 posters on the BCP walls, as well as the leaflets distributed by CBTA. This is in addition to the regular messages aired on the various radio and television stations, as well as the information dissemination efforts of the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE).

With regards to the action plans by the border agencies towards sensitization of ICBTs, the Trade Information Desk Office reported that it has, in collaboration with CBTA, formulated and distributed a border guideline booklet that guides on COVID-19 prevention and mitigation measures at the border, as well as the customs clearance procedures in place. The office, in collaboration with CBTA and NICE, has also intensified awareness campaigns on COVID-19 targeting ICBTs and SSCBTs.

The office, however, called for support towards intensification of training of SSCBTs on border guidelines, understanding of STR by both SSCBTs and Customs officials, business management and marketing strategy skills. The office also highlighted the need for regular availability of leaflets on STR and border procedures, as well as the installation of digital screens (signpost) depicting critical information on both COVID-19, as well as border procedures.

With regards to the border restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, as high as 83.9 per cent of the respondents reported that they are aware of COVID-19 border-related travel restrictions. The commonly mentioned restrictions include the following: (a) ban on people movement across the border; (b) mandatory requirement to produce COVID-19 negative test certificate; (c) use of hand sanitizers; and (d) washing of hands with soap before entering the BCP buildings.

Participants in an FGD added that they are encouraged to order goods through online but reported that most small-scale traders have technical challenges to engage in online transactions. Further, it was highlighted that online purchase has at times its own disadvantages in that the quality of products delivered is often poorer than the quality paid for. Avoidance of online transaction has therefore forced some ICBTs to resort to smuggling to continue earning a living.

4.2.3. Resources to manage COVID-19 at the border

The BCP is a multi-agency-managed office. As alluded to in the foregoing, different border agencies expressed varied levels of preparedness that largely depended on their focus and resources. However, the issue of inadequate resources to manage the pandemic featured among all the agencies.

A walk-through at the border revealed that there were four handwashing facilities at the time of the survey. Two of them had running water and soap. All the four were not labelled. However, they were accessible, and all respondents in the individual interviews and participants in the FGD said they had used the handwashing facilities.

There are pit latrines at the BCP, but these have no proximity to the handwashing facilities. The toilets are demarcated for male and female. However, the premises neither has ablutions nor facilities to cater for women's hygiene needs. Individual interviews with ICBTs corroborated this observation on lack of ablutions.

Mchinji BCP has a tent shelter for sample collection, but there is no purposely built quarantine facility in case of an emergency. These samples are mostly collected when a traveller showcases COVID-19 symptoms such as abnormally high body temperature. The samples are also collected where a COVID-19 negative certificate is required to cross the border to or from the Zambian side. The actual test and verification of results is free, but where a cross-border trader requires a COVID-19 negative certificate for onward travel, the cost is roughly USD 50 (USD 65 for a polymerase chain reaction test). The validity period for the COVID-19 certificate varies depending on the mode of travel but commonly limited to 72 hours, although ICBTs are now being offered validity up to 7 days. Such a certificate is very vital because during strict lockdown, only travellers with valid COVID-19 negative certificates are allowed to cross the border.

In addition, there are no laboratory facilities at the border or nearby Mchinji district hospital to analyse the samples collected; hence, the samples are sent to Lilongwe, which is 120 km from the border. The tested person has to wait for a minimum of

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72 hours for the results, by which time he or she has already intermingled with the unsuspecting community. This entails that a cross-border trader willing to travel to Zambia with the COVID-19 negative certificate has to wait longer than would be likely the case if the testing and laboratory services were right at the border. Table 1 is a summary of existing facilities and gaps at the border as per the walk-through observations.

Table 1. Summary of COVID-19 facilities gap at Mchinji border

Facilities	Available	Not available	Comments
Handwashing	✓		There were 4 handwashing facilities at the time of the study; 2 had soap.
COVID-19 posters	✓		Available in English and Chichewa, with more in English.
Wearing masks		✓	Some ICBTs were seen wearing face masks and others were not. There is no strict enforcement. N95 masks are not available.
Social distance demarcations		✓	There are no visible demarcations.
Quarantine structure		✓	There is only a structure to collect samples. There are no quarantine structures.
COVID-19 testing		✓	No testing is done, yet this would be very important to contain the pandemic if people are tested and given results at the border before they mix with the community.
Oxygen cylinders and accessories		✓	The border is not prepared to handle COVID-19 emergencies.
Toilets	✓		Pit latrines are available but not connected to an immediate water supply.
Ablutions		✓	These are not available, which affects women's hygiene.
Sexual and reproductive health services	✓		Family planning services including male condoms are available. HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STI) testing services are also available.

4.2.4. COVID-19 prevention, control and management measures at the border

The management of the Mchinji border is under the Border Management Committee, which ensures that there is proper coordination among the border agencies and stakeholders in dealing with issues affecting the border environment.

Besides customs and immigration issues that have dominated the agenda for the committee, the advent of COVID-19 has necessitated the need for the stakeholders to respond to COVID-19 emergency in a coordinated manner. Through this coordination, the stakeholders have ensured that there are COVID-19 preventive, control and management measures in place.

A spot check at the border revealed the availability of basic PPEs such as face masks, as well as other minimum standard health protocols, such as use of hand sanitizers, temperature checks and foot and wheel baths; however, there is a lot to be done in enforcing social distancing at the border and efficiency in producing a valid COVID-19 negative certificate which that facilitates border control. There were no proper markings on the floors to direct social distancing when queuing to passport control or goods clearance offices.

There was presence of posters – both in English and Chichewa, with more in English – on client charters and COVID-19, specifically on preventive measures, such as handwashing, social distancing and use of facial masks. However, there was no evidence of strict enforcement on wearing masks, as some travellers could be seen queuing without putting on face masks. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship Services reported that no one is allowed to have the passport stamped if one is not wearing a mask, but there is no evidence of strict enforcement.

Besides the travellers, it was also observed that the front-line BCP officers were not putting on masks except for the health worker. Officials from the Health Department attributed the inadequate adherence to the natural slow change in human behaviour. The standard procedure, however, remains that a passport cannot be stamped if the bearer is not wearing a face mask and has no proof that he/she underwent the health screening process. In addition, the process of capturing fingerprints at passport control offices has been suspended to minimize the spread of the pandemic.

Among the other strategies being implemented, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship Services, in collaboration with the police, has intensified border patrols and roadblocks to minimize travellers who use unchartered routes to enter, transit and leave the country. These people pose a serious threat to the spread of the virus as they go around without undergoing proper screening.

4.3. Impact of COVID-19 on informal cross-border traders at the border

ICBTs reported to have been hit hard economically by the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the notable measures that the Government has employed to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 is the closure of the borders for a limited time frame. At the time when the researchers visited Mchinji border, it was closed for a period of 14 days due to the spike in the second wave of infections. Under strict border closure requirements, only relief and essential products are allowed entry by freight

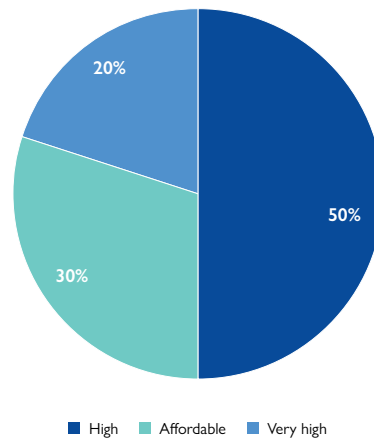
4. COVID-19: CHALLENGES AND IMPACT

under tight controls, as per the SADC Guidelines on Harmonization and Facilitation of Cross Border Transport Operations Across the Region.¹ This entails that most ICBTs are cut off from business because they cannot satisfy the requirements as per the guidelines.

Even where the movement for ICBTs is allowed due to partial opening of the border, there are other restrictions that remain a hurdle to ICBTs and SSCBTs, principally the requirement to produce a COVID-19 negative test certificate to facilitate passage. ICBTs unanimously submitted that the MK 36,000 (roughly USD 50) payment required for the test certificate is too high and militates against the profitability of the businesses for ICBTs and SSCBTs.

Another new challenge that has emerged as a result of COVID-19 outbreak is the sharp rise in transport cost. One-way transport fare from Lilongwe to Lusaka has increased from MK 15,000 (USD 20) to MK 30,000 (USD 40). This has been necessitated by the reduction in seating capacity, as well as a decrease in the actual buses operating on the route due to the emerging restrictions. Both men and women interviewed had a unanimous view that transport cost is high and crowding out their margins, as per Figure 5. However, there was no assertion that such a cost would hamper trade if allowed to be conducted freely across the border, but has the potential to make the business less rewarding.

Figure 5. Perception on COVID-19-induced transport fare



Source: Data gathered from the 2021 survey and elaborated by the authors.

In addition to the trade restriction measures, ICBTs and SSCBTs have to navigate a tedious process of obtaining an import and export licence to facilitate movement of certain goods across the border. Under the Control of Goods Act of Malawi, one requires an import permit or an export permit to enable certain kinds of goods to cross the border. These licences are applicable whether an importer operates under STR or not. In particular, the process of acquiring an import licence remains

¹ Relief and essential products are as follows: (a) food; (b) medical supplies and PPEs; (c) fuel; (d) agricultural supplies; (e) chemicals, packaging, equipment, spares, maintenance materials, production and processing supplies for food products; and (f) security, emergency and humanitarian relief services (SADC, 2020).

fragmented, as a trader will have to journey through a number of institutions and pay multiple fees before acquiring such a licence. The fees payable for an import licence is pegged at USD 30, while the export licence is issued for free.

ICBTs and SSCBTs are of the view that it could have been ideal if the process was decentralized to have such permits issued at the BCP or at the district council. This would help to reduce the amount of money traders spend and also facilitate more trade on the goods being either exported or imported especially now that the businesses have already been suppressed by COVID-19 restrictions. In order to minimize physical contact as a means of reducing the spread of the virus, ICBTs and SSCBTs are of the view that such permits should be processed and issued electronically, unlike the current practice of having hard copy documents in duplicates.

4.4. National response to COVID-19: Health measures, lockdown and others

The Government of Malawi has played its rightful role in ensuring that lives of vulnerable citizens are protected during the COVID-19 pandemic by mitigating exposure. Realizing the need for a structured and coordinated manner in dealing with the pandemic, the Government formulated the National COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan (Government of Malawi, 2020).

This Plan was developed to establish operational procedures for preparedness and response to COVID-19 based on risks identified by the Ministry of Health (MoH) and WHO to ensure timely, consistent and coordinated response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The Plan's implementation is being spearheaded by the Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DODMA) and MoH with support from other clusters including communication, transport and logistics, protection, food security and nutrition.

As depicted under Figure 6, the national plan covers a number of interrelated multi-institutional interventions aimed at the preventive and curative interventions to COVID-19, as well as other socioeconomic interventions that help mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the vulnerable societies.

Figure 6. COVID-19 preparedness and response coordination for Malawi



Source: Department of Disaster Management Affairs, 2020.

The Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 has been in the forefront instituting and reviewing public health guidelines on the fight against COVID-19. Some of the common measures instituted so far include movement restrictions and border closures. The country has also encouraged use of handwashing with soap, social distancing, limiting public gatherings to at most 50 people, mandatory wearing of masks and staying at home where possible.

Other latest measures include the following: (a) restrictions in opening and closing of social joints to between 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.; (b) no consumption of beer within premises of drinking joints; (c) reduction by half in seating capacity of public transport vehicles; (d) observing social distance in gatherings; (e) burying of dead bodies within 24 hours; and (f) ban on preparation of communal food during funerals and other gatherings.

In April 2020, the Government announced a 21-day lockdown to contain the spread of the coronavirus that had claimed 2 lives then. The lockdown was to be effective up to 9 May 2020, subject to extension depending on prevailing circumstances. However, the lockdown was successfully challenged in court by the Human Rights

Defenders Coalition for lack of accompanying measures to protect the livelihood of Malawians during the lockdown.

Nonetheless, on 20 April 2020, the Government ordered all public servants who are not providing essential services to start working from home with immediate effect to protect government employees in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the movement restrictions have not been mandatory, as people have continued to carry out their day-to-day activities with the hope that they are protecting themselves from exposure through use of face masks, sanitizing and other measures.

4.5. National economic recovery plan

Malawi had not yet prepared an economic recovery plan at the time of the survey. The consultations with the Ministry of Economic Planning, Development and Public Sector Reforms (MEPDPSR) revealed that the process is underway to develop such a plan. Consultants have already been engaged and are in the stakeholder consultation phase with the plan out in the end of March 2021. The formulation of the recovery plan is being financially and technically supported by the United Nations Development Programme and coordinated by MEPDPSR and the National Planning Commission.

Currently, there is no special stimulus package that has been put in place to help any group, let alone businesspeople, but the Ministry of Trade reported that, once consulted, they will prioritize issues pertaining to safety nets for the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which include the membership of the cross-border traders associations. The Ministry of Trade also highlighted that discussions were already underway with the Ministry of Finance to explore the possibility of support towards small and medium enterprises, including ICBTs, post-COVID-19 pandemic. The available loan facilities are those which have existed before such as the National Economic Empowerment Fund (NEEF).

4.6. National strategies and action plan for informal cross-border trade in relation to COVID-19

The Ministry of Trade reported that there is currently no elaborate strategy and action plan to cushion informal cross-border trade due to the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the Ministry has worked with ICBTs – under the National Trade Facilitation Committee – to develop national and regional guidelines as regards procedures to be followed at the borders, not much has been done within the same framework to address the broader needs of ICBTs.

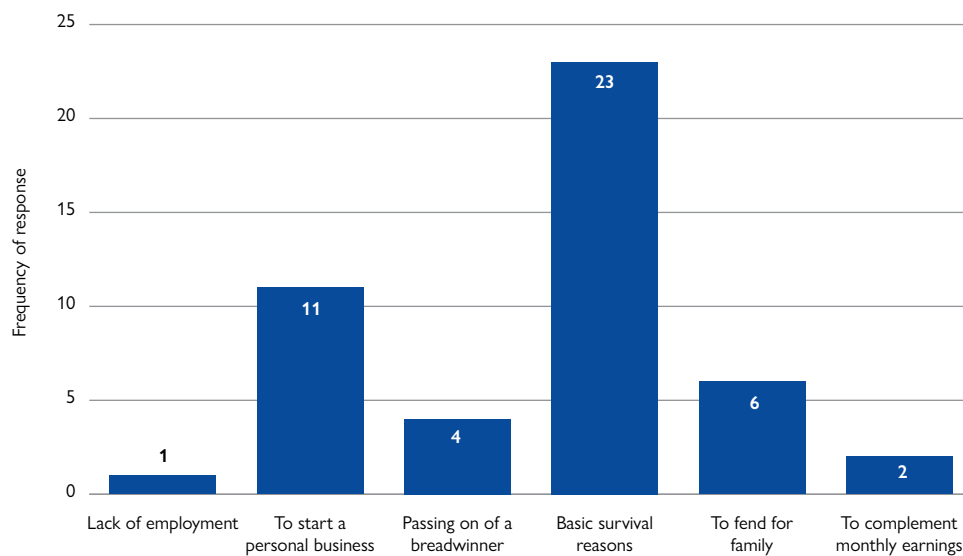
The Ministry reported to have proposed for the establishment of a facility to cushion MSMEs including ICBTs during and post the pandemic. However, such deliberations with the Ministry of Finance are not conclusive yet, hence it is not clear yet as to what form of facility or support will come into fruition at the end of the day. The

hope is that the national recovery plan underway will help to elaborate such issues so that they are done in an informed and coordinated manner for the benefit of ICBTs and SSCBTs.

4.7. Informal cross-border traders' viable alternative livelihoods in response to COVID-19

Consultations with ICBTs revealed that there were different reasons and motivations for joining cross-border trade, but for many, basic survival was the main motivation. Half of the respondents indicated that they actually became cross-border traders for survival, as per Figure 7.

Figure 7. Frequency of response on main influencing factor to join informal cross-border trade



Source: Data gathered from the 2021 survey and elaborated by the authors.

The scenario as presented on Figure 7 entails that the COVID-19 restrictions have the potential to wipe out the livelihoods of over half of the cross-border traders. With regards to business diversification that could offer survival avenue to the depressed ICBTs, the study found that diversification is moderate.

About 68 per cent of the respondents reported that cross-border trading is the only means of income and survival. By gender, 70 per cent of all women respondents said it is the only means of survival, while the rest of women said they have alternative means. With regards to men, 50 per cent of all respondents reported to have cross-border trade as the only means of survival, and the remainder have alternative means. On this basis, it can be said that male cross-border traders tend to have multiple means of earning income compared to female counterparts.

The remaining 32 per cent of the total respondents (18 respondents) reported to have explored alternative livelihood sources. Out of these, 13 respondents (72%, n = 18) reported to be engaged in selling farm produce and livestock, while 1 respondent each reported to have diversified into confectionery, wage employment, operating restaurant, becoming premier bet agent, casual labour and director of ceremonies. The women dominate the grain business, accounting for over 80 per cent in grain trading.

When asked to rate the level of viability of the business alternatives, over 90 per cent of both men and women respondents reported that they offer a lifeline in distressed times but are nowhere near becoming fully viable replacements to the earnings from cross-border trade, and most of these alternative businesses are also becoming victims of the prolonged pandemic.

5. Gender and COVID-19 management in national responses, strategies and action plan

5.1. Gender and COVID-19 management nationally

As alluded to in the foregoing, the Government of Malawi developed the National COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan from March to June 2020. Among the clusters within the implementation framework of the Plan was the protection and social support cluster. This cluster tackles gender issues in the national management of COVID-19. The protection cluster is led by the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare and co-led by UNICEF. The cluster mainly deals with issues of GBV and child protection.

This cluster has been providing support to strengthen the reporting and referral mechanisms for sexual exploitation, abuse and negative coping mechanisms, including child marriage during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through this effort, community-based mental health and psychological support has been provided to 23,500 children, parents and primary caregivers who are largely women (UNICEF, 2021). In addition, 169,000 children and women have been supported with essential health-care services, including prenatal, delivery and postnatal care, essential newborn care, immunization, treatment of childhood illnesses and HIV care through community health workers and health facilities (ibid.).

The cluster has also disseminated COVID-19 messages across the nation through the radio and has so far reached out to over 8 million people. Through the social protection arm of the COVID-19 response, 457,000 households have been provided with food items to cushion them from the pandemic-induced economic shock.

5.2. Gender and COVID-19 management at the border

Mchinji border has a wellness centre (clinic) that operates like an outpatient department of a health facility. The wellness centre provides a range of health services, such as family planning and HIV and STI testing. The health desk also provides male condoms to mitigate the spread of STIs.

However, the border lacks proper facilities to cater for women's hygiene. The toilet facilities are not conducive for the health needs of women, and the absence of showers makes life even difficult at the border. It was further noted that the facilities at the BCP are not disability friendly. The one-stop BCP facility under construction at the joint border is expected to address such challenges.

5. GENDER AND COVID-19 MANAGEMENT IN NATIONAL RESPONSES, STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLAN

As pointed out earlier in the report, one key border agency at Mchinji is the Fiscal Police. The personnel from this agency conducts physical checks of travellers to curb drug trafficking and money laundering. The physical checks are mostly done without the use of gloves on the human body, as well as other belongings such as handbags. The standard procedure is that female police officers are responsible for searching female travellers and male police officers are responsible for searching male travellers while using gloves, which had run out at the time of the assessment.

During the FGD comprising 12 respondents of which 9 were women, ICBTs reported that there have been incidents where male police officers have conducted intrusive searches of female travellers. There were claims of incidents where, even though the searches have been done by female police officers, such searches have been dehumanizing. ICBTs reported of an actual formal complaint that was once lodged by a female trader who felt violated with the way the female police officer handled her indecently. The case was dismissed by the authorities on the basis that the officer conducting such an intrusive search was a fellow woman. With regards to sexual harassment, ICBTs as well as the police concurred there has not been such complaints lately.

6. Conclusion

Going by the findings of the study, it is apparent that ICBTs and SSCBTs have faced considerable disruptions in their business undertakings due to the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak. Although there have been measures at national- and border-specific levels to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, there are still challenges that need to be addressed at policy and strategy levels to ensure that ICBTs and SSCBTs continue to earn a living amidst the pandemic.

Much as the country has made strides to address issues affecting women in business and other undertakings, the study has revealed that there is still much to be done to ensure that the rights and dignity of women are protected.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings in the foregoing, the following recommendations are proposed to help address the plight of distressed ICBTs and SSCBTs, prevent further spread of COVID-19 and address the gender concerns prevailing at the borders:

7.1. Interventions to support the needs of informal cross-border traders

- The border agencies and Trade Information Desk Office should prepare and distribute leaflets with easy-to-read information about the COVID-19 pandemic, such as how it spreads, the risks and prevention measures. These leaflets would be better distributed at entry points or trade information/ passport control desks.
- IOM should collaborate with the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare as well as BCP stakeholders and CBTA to enhance sensitization, reporting and handling of GBV issues at the border.
- IOM and MoH should provide support towards COVID-19 testing capacity to ensure testing is done right at the border and results are known right there. This will help contain the virus before the person has mixed with the unsuspecting community.
- IOM and the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare should establish a desk office at the BCP where issues of sexual harassment can be reported and people can also access psychosocial support, in addition to awareness and trainings of BCP stakeholders on sexual harassment and GBV issues. Alternatively, CBTA can engage a donor to have a gender specialist just as there is a TIDO at the border.

7.2. Interventions to strengthen prevention, control and management at the border

- Police and health officials at the border should enforce IPC measures, such as wearing of masks, handwashing with soap, observing social distancing and taking temperature for those entering the offices at the border. There is also a need to demarcate where people should stand to keep recommended social distance. Enforcement of the same should apply to staff members who handle documentation as well as conduct searches.
- IOM should work with the relevant border agencies, such as police and Immigration, to strengthen border patrols as a means of combating COVID-19 arising from the increasing use of unchartered routes, as well as encourage the use of the formal BCPs to boost national revenue.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- IOM and MoH should support the establishment of a purpose-built quarantine structure for COVID-19 and other diseases at the border, including resources for feeding those on quarantine. This will help the authorities to keep hold of the proven and suspected infected people.

7.3. Interventions to support the interventions by the Cross-Border Traders Association and Trade Information Desk Office

- IOM should work with the leadership of CBTA to facilitate capacity-building training for ICBTs and SSCBTs, with particular focus on advancing knowledge of online business transactions to facilitate orders amidst the pandemic. The training should also cover deepening the understanding of regional and bilateral trade agreements including the provisions and procedures of STR, which provides tax relief to ICBTs and SSCBTs.
- IOM and CBTA should strengthen the Trade Information Desk Office by providing it with adequate resources and materials to ensure that it adequately caters to the information, advisory and support needs of ICBTs and SSCBTs on COVID-19 and border procedure issues among others.

7.4. Interventions of national policy considerations in improving the plight of informal cross-border traders and fighting the spread of COVID-19

- Relevant stakeholders, such as MoH, Ministry of Trade and Ministry of Finance should urgently address the proposed USD 50 cost for COVID-19 certificate. Considering ICBTs have already been negatively affected, the amount is exorbitant especially given the short validity. While the duration of validity is dictated by the epidemiological knowledge, the amount should be considered for downward review as a way to cushion traders.
- Ministry of Trade and CBTA should work with the Reserve Bank of Malawi to ensure the availability of Zambian currency in commercial banks. This will help to facilitate formal acquisition and transfer of foreign currency by ICBTs and SSCBTs who currently rely on the illegal informal foreign currency traders for supply of Zambian money.
- MEPDPSR, in collaboration with other stakeholders such as the Ministry of Trade and Ministry of Finance, should speed up the formulation of a business-friendly economic recovery plan to trigger relief for ICBTs and SSCBTs through NEEF and other channels. Such a plan should ensure that it takes into account the gender element in support of women's business initiatives.

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Annex: List of stakeholders consulted

Name	Organization	Position
Interview: Focus group discussion		
Mr Charles Mathambo	Cross-Border Traders Association (CBTA) Mchinji Chapter	Secretary
Mr Peter Tsirizani	CBTA Mchinji Chapter	Member
Mrs Florence Kondwerani	CBTA Mchinji Chapter	Women's secretary
Mrs Grace Moyo	CBTA Mchinji Chapter	Member
Mr Richard Batchi	CBTA Mchinji Chapter	Member
Mrs Hellen Makukula	CBTA Mchinji Chapter	Member
Mrs Regina Kanyimbiri	CBTA Mchinji Chapter	Member
Mrs Bridget Mbeta	CBTA Mchinji Chapter	Member
Mrs Gertrude Mulinde	CBTA Mchinji Chapter	Chairperson
Mr Steve Yohane	CBTA National Chapter	Secretary General, CBTA
Interview with border officials		
Mr Roboson Kayira	Mchinji District Environmental Officer	Health Department
Mr Landirani Mwale	Assistant Environmental Health Officer	Health Department
Mrs Lucy Chikhawo	Acting Station Manager	Malawi Revenue Authority
Mr Gladson Luhanga	Acting Immigration Officer In charge	Immigration Department
Mr George Jubeki	Detective Inspector	Fiscal Police Department
Mr Richard Batchi	Trade Information Desk Officer	Trade Department
Interview with individual informal cross-border traders and small-scale cross-border traders		
56 individual interviewees	CBTA	Members (50 women and 6 men)
Interview with Cross-Border Traders Association executive members		
Mrs Esther Tchukambiri	CBTA of Malawi	Executive chairperson
Mr Steve Yohane	CBTA of Malawi	Secretary General
Mrs Lucy Kanjira	CBTA of Malawi	Board member
Mr Lackson Kapito	CBTA of Malawi	Chairperson of Board of Trustees

ANNEX: LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED

Interview with central government officials		
Mr Dimon Chikhasu	Chief Trade Officer/Desk Officer for Cross-Border Trade under TradeMark East Africa	Ministry of Trade
Mrs Flora Dimba	National Focal Point for Ports	Ministry of Health
Mr Rodwell Chizumila	Second-in-charge to Immigration Desk Officer	Ministry of Homeland Security, Immigration Department
Mr Adwell Zembere	Deputy Director of Planning	Ministry of Economic Planning and Public Sector Reforms



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