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VIOLENCE AGAINST YOUNG WOMEN IN INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER TRADING IN SOUTH-WEST NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION

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Abstract

Nigerian women, through history, actively participate in the social, economic and political development of their societies. This is particularly true of women in southern Nigeria, especially Yoruba women. Women traders working in the informal sector are often subject to harassment and extortion at the border. These constraints undermine their economic activities. Women are more readily denied access to key trader networks than men. Time-consuming trade procedures and documentary requirements impinge more heavily on women, given the time they need for their household duties. And women working to produce exportable goods and services are typically less able than men to get the inputs and materials that would raise their productivity and allow them to compete better in overseas markets. A major setback for women in cross-border trade is violence. This ranges from rape and other forms of sexual abuse, theft, robbery to seizure of goods. This paper therefore, examined the incidence of violence against young women in informal cross-border trading in South-West Nigeria and its implications for economic development and poverty reduction, relying purely on secondary sources of data and relevant sociological theories. Findings in this project will bring to the fore, the constraints to the success of economic activities of young women and the effects on wealth creation and poverty reduction in South-West, Nigeria.

Keywords: Violence, women, informal cross border trading, South-West, Nigeria

Introduction

Women play a key role in trade in Africa and will be essential to Africa's success in exploiting its trade potential. Women make a major contribution to trade in most African countries through their involvement in the production of tradable goods as cross-border traders and as managers and owners of firms involved in trade. In many countries in Africa, the majority of small farmers are women, and they produce crops such as maize, cassava, cotton, and rice that have enormous potential for increased trade between African countries

and with the global market (Cadot, Leonardo, Denisse & Ferdinand, 2011).

Hundreds of thousands of women cross borders in Africa every day to deliver goods from areas where they are relatively cheap to areas in which they are in short supply (Brenton, Gamberoni & Sear, 2013). This is very important not just because of the adverse impact on the families and firms affected but because facilitating the role of women in trade will be essential if Africa is to achieve the enormous potential it has to trade more within its own borders and with the

wider world. Achieving this trade potential will contribute to better food security, vital job creation, and poverty reduction (Brenton *et al.*, 2013). This paper, therefore, looks at the incidence of violence against young women in informal cross-border trade in South-West Nigeria.

Informal Cross-Border Trade

Informal Cross-Border Trade (ICBT), also referred to as parallel trade is informal but with implications for the larger national and global economy. In Africa the parallel/informal economy seems much larger than the formal economy in terms of share and impact (Gross Domestic Product (GDP), employment etc.). It is argued that the real integration process of Africa is taking place in ICBT more than in formal trade and populations of Africa are much more at ease in informal trade. It is often argued that the informal/parallel economy, including ICBT is Africa's 'Real' economy. Recent research has shown that informal cross-border trading activities have cushioned the effects of the financial crisis and the food crisis in African countries (Ndiaye, 2012).

Women's (largely informal) trading activities in South-West Nigeria have always been integral to the region's rural and urban livelihoods, with a substantial proportion of informal cross-border trade in the region concerned with staple foods. In Africa, informal cross-border trade features prominently among women's individual strategies for self-employment, poverty reduction and wealth creation. For instance, a 2004 International Labour Organisation (ILO) study showed that trade is the most important source of employment among self-employed women of Sub-Saharan Africa, providing 60% of non-agricultural self-employment (Ndiaye, 2012).

Despite their evident contribution in African economies, women suffer from various forms of violence such as verbal abuse, sexual harassment, rape, imprisonment, confiscation of goods, corruption, stigmatisation and invisibility. Their operating environment is characterised by a lack of adequate services such as banking

services tailored to their needs, currency exchange bureaus, storage, affordable accommodation, adequate transport and shipping, etc. hence, their realities are not adequately captured by mainstream trade institutions and policies (Ndiaye, 2012).

Women and Cross-Border Trade in Nigeria

Gender differences notwithstanding, trade is one activity women can take up with whatever resources they have at hand. Women's cross-border trade has the potential to contribute significantly to household earnings and resources, and to empower women through giving them financial independence and control of their own resources (Morris & Saul, 2000).

The term "gender" refers to the economic, social, cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female. In almost all societies, men and women differ in the activities they undertake, in access and control over resources, and in participation in decision making. A focus on gender inequalities does not imply that all women are worse off than men. Rather, the argument is that gender (being male or female) is an important social division characterised by inequality. Whether you are a woman or man will influence how people see you, the social expectations of how you should behave, people's assumptions about what you might be "good at" or skills you might have, and your life chances (Morris & Saul, 2000).

The crucial aspect is that there are not just gender differences but there are fundamental gender inequalities. No matter where in the world you were born, you will generally tend to have greater options, more opportunities and more resources - if you were born a male. Changing gender inequalities is a long-term complex project. The recognition of gender equality (equality between women and men) as a goal of development in and of itself marks an important evolution in our understanding of development (Aina, 2012).

However, the basic problem is not women's integration into development, or their lack of training, education, credit, self-

esteem, but structures and processes that give rise to women's disadvantage. One source of disadvantage is the pervasive ideology of male superiority (physical and intellectual) which appears to be found in almost all cultures and economies, and which also shapes women's view of themselves and their capacities. Another, is the control men as a gender exercise over valued political, economic and social resources, and thus over the distribution of power. From this perspective, changing the symptoms of disadvantage - giving women credit, training - is not a solution but only a useful first step in women's empowerment (Ndiaye, 2012).

The Women and Cross-Border Trade Project was conceived to increase the participation of women in trade and cross-border activities in Nigeria and West Africa. In volume and value, intra - West African trade is modest. However it involves large segment of the population and has the potential to increase. Informal trade, while largely unrecorded, comprises a significant part of cross-border trade in West Africa, providing employment and income-generating projects for much of the population and distributing food from food-surplus to food-deficit areas.

Not surprisingly, informal cross-border trade has done more for economic integration than formal trade has, because most traders operate formally. Women's involvement in cross-border trade is believed to be substantial, but is not recorded in trade statistics because women often cross informally or transport goods using head-loading, which are not included in trade statistics. Their methods are a function of the scale of their trade, which is usually small.

Men, on the other hand, are more involved in visible cross-border trading, trade facilitation and regulatory activities. A study has found that apart from products such as spare parts, used tyres and cars, which men sell, West African trade is largely a female activity (Morris & Saul, 2000)

It is challenging to address the numerous risks faced by women such as:

- Health risk which includes staying in overcrowded, unhealthy and cheap accommodations, poor nutrition practices in an effort to minimise costs in the country of destination etc.
- Time poverty due to tight work schedules in both the country of origin and that of destination. This is in addition to their usual social and economic activities in the family and community at large.
- Security risk in the country of destination due to thieves, harassment by both the public and authorities, xenophobia, etc.
- Risk of accident as they resort to cheaper forms of transport.
- Social reproduction risk which includes reduced care of family particularly young children
- HIV and AIDS risk due to prostitution.

Women cross-borders traders in Nigeria and West Africa are a resilient group of women. They are very strong and determined in spite of the challenges they face on a daily basis. The majority of the women cross-border traders in the sub-region face the triple burden of childcare, household maintenance and income generating activities. Studies have shown that in addition to the triple burden that most women bear, the number of female-headed households in Nigeria are on the increase; coupled with the ever rising population of widows and single female parents (i.e. never married, separated, divorced) (Morris & Saul, 2000; Darkwah, 2002).

Women are being forced to take up the breadwinner roles and find pathways to economic sustainability due to the prevailing environment and changing gender roles. women cross-border traders have found their own pathways to livelihoods, poverty alleviation, food security and employment generation. They are contributing significantly to regional trade and integration as well as the GDP of the nation. Yet, they are being stigmatised, physically/sexually abused, and discriminated against and either robbed or have their goods seized on a daily basis.

Women traders are not a homogenous group. They include a large group of small scale traders with little working capital, infrastructure and rudimentary literacy/numeracy skills; a much smaller group which is involved in regional trade and international trade with substantial capital (Morris & Saul, 2000; Darkwah, 2002).

According to a United Nations Women publication, women in cross-border trade exhibit the following traits:

- Women's trading activities contribute to poverty reduction, employment, and wealth creation in Africa.
- In Sub-Saharan Africa, informal cross-border trade features prominently among women's individual strategies for self-employment, poverty reduction, and wealth creation.
- Women informal cross-border trade makes an important contribution to economic growth and government revenues.
- Women's informal cross-border trading activities have cushioned the effects of the financial crisis and the food crisis on African countries.
- Women informal cross-border traders address vital issues of livelihoods such as food and income security (UN WOMEN Fact Sheet).

Theoretical Explanation – Sociological Viewpoints

Inequality in gender and trade exists all over the world (Charles & Grusky, 2004); young women are victims of violence, and quite a number have suffered from torture, rape, and then murder. An understanding of the dynamics of intersectionality theory, based on the intersection of patriarchy and capitalism, helps to explain why and how this violence occurs on cross-border trade (Pantaleo, 2006).

The sexual harassment and violence towards women who engage in cross-border trade and why it continues can be explained using sociological theory. The intersection of two major sociological theories, patriarchy

and capitalism, produce a theory known as intersectionality theory. Evaluating these theories leads to an understanding of how social and cultural characteristics of Nigeria influence the violence towards women and affect the responses of officials to this violence.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy functions as a significant part of Nigerian society, especially because the Nigerian culture is structured within a patriarchal order. Traditionally, men not only control the home where they have all the power, but also trade. Women's role in the home focuses on the care of children, attending to the needs of the husband, and socialising children to honour their families. According to Hartmann (1981), patriarchy is a form of class domination by males over females. Two types of patriarchy exist in the society: individual and collective. Individual types of patriarchy occur in the home where the male has sole, private control over the women. Collective types of patriarchy occur in trade or workplace where larger numbers of men can publicly exert control over the women (Ruiz & Tiano, 1987). Patriarchy then becomes a double-edged sword for the women, but a powerful tool for the men. There is no escaping the pain and suffering of being female and being controlled, since it is experienced both in the home and at work (Pantaleo, 2006).

Since women, as mothers and wives, are expected to centre their lives around taking care of their family and to not be involved in long distance trade (Livingston, 2004), it, therefore, requires that women become self-sacrificing martyrs who accept violence and abuse from men because of their inferiority to them (Dreby, 2005).

Similar to the above facts is a belief that Western tradition creates a dichotomy between males and females. It is as follows: “man/woman, public/private, knowledge/experience, culture/nature, and rational/emotional” (Wright 1997). The first term in each pair refers to men and the second term refers to women. These reflect the attitudes towards men and women; the male

terms are considered to be dominant and respectable while the female terms are degrading and inferior (Pantaleo, 2006).

Capitalism

Capitalist theory also plays an important part in gender issues (Ruiz & Tiano, 1987). Karl Marx observed that capitalist enterprises operate in order to generate profit. Capitalism works with patriarchy to force women into doing more work in the home than endorse cross border trade. This forces them into the secondary labour market where female stereotypes prevail and where they have to work for lower wages. According to Livingston (2004), "For capitalism to benefit maximally from women's participation in both capitalistic and domestic modes of production, the gender-based division of labour and the patriarchal relations that support it must be maintained." When capitalism and patriarchy come together, they form patriarchal capitalism, where the males control the means to production and control the women themselves.

According to Cravey (1998), the concept of social reproduction describes the work women do in the home. Social reproduction refers to domestic work, such as laundry, preparing meals, and cleaning, and also biological reproduction and caring for children. Cravey (1998) also believes that even though this area of work is not compensated for, it is vital to society. While this may be true, it can be concluded that the concept of social reproduction, since it mainly pertains to women, is a result of patriarchal capitalism.

Intersectionality Theory

The intersection of patriarchy and capitalism leads to intersectionality theory. This theory states that all women experience discrimination because of their gender and that they are oppressed on the basis of other intersections of inequality (Anderson & Collins, 1997). Patriarchy and capitalism are the two strongest forms of oppression against women primarily because of their emphasis on power. In a patriarchal society, gender relations are structured by it, therefore, any

reversal of roles is viewed as unwelcome change. Alpizar (2003) notes that the changes in gender roles initiate the violence towards women.

Another repercussion of this change in gender roles is the fact that many of the violence against young women in cross-border trade are not investigated completely or at all. There is a constant tendency of disillusionment to the public and denial of access of family members to case files of violence against young women. The overall responses of the Nigerian criminal justice system to the violence that occurs are a product of the intersection of patriarchy and capitalism. First of all, many individuals consider young women in informal cross-border trade to be prostitutes, and therefore, feel that there is no need to investigate further (Portillo, 2001).

Current Women and Cross-Border Trade Findings in South-West Nigeria

Women traders from South-West Nigeria have not been able to leverage on their relationships with political leaders to the extent of securing a place in the Trade Environment Landscape at the macro-level; thereby leading to a formal recognition of their role as economic contributors. For example, women control the markets both as traders and administrators. Their structure is so regimented that the politicians normally leverage on those structures around election time (DFID, 2009).

Furthermore, women traders in the South-West have not been able to leverage effectively on the market machinery that they place at the disposal of the politicians at election time to ensure their role as economic contributors is duly recognised. Instead, only the leadership enjoys the gains of this relationship and the majority of the market women are denied the opportunity to take their rightful place in the nation's economy. These women traders who function within the market structures are the exception to the rule because their dual roles are not replicated in any other region of the country (DFID, 2009).

However, despite the fact that women

cross-border traders are perceived as active, they are not seen as economic operators or contributors by government. The informal status of most women traders is partially to blame for this. This has led to an absence of support mechanisms or structures aimed at maximising their productivity and incorporating them into broader economic and trade frameworks, whether it is from the public or private sectors and civil society (Akyeampong & Fofack, 2013).

The prevailing condition of the women cross-border traders has not improved over the years, in spite of the existing ECOWAS Trade & Immigration Protocols. There has been failure on the part of the authorities - both at the national and regional levels to mainstream these women who are contributing to the national, and by extension, the regional economy. The women cross-border traders are contributing to regional trade and integration. They are also generating employment and ensuring food security in the sub-region (Akyeampong & Fofack, 2013).

Women cross-border traders face stigmatisation from their male partners, relations and friends. They are generally regarded as "loose women" because it is a known fact that they face immense pressure from the border agents to yield to their sexual advances. They constantly face physical/sexual exploitation and lack the knowledge/means to enforce their rights. The majority of these women are widows, single parents, divorcees and heads of household. It is critical for them to have a means of livelihood to support their dependants and settle other financial obligations (Brenton et al., 2013).

The majority of the women cross-border traders lack formal education and are not conversant with the ECOWAS Trade & Immigration Protocol, thereby making them vulnerable and open to exploitation by the border law enforcement agents (predominantly male). The women cross-border traders lack access to credit and market information and are often at the mercy of moneylenders who charge exorbitant rates of interest. Due to inconsistency of government

policies, the current prohibition list changes very frequently. This gives room for bribes to be demanded and paid thereby leaving the women with marginal profits (Brenton et al., 2013).

The women cross-border traders lack cohesion and coupled with the fact that they belong mainly to the informal sector, organising them into groups or associations is difficult but not impossible. The Trans-Border Traders Association with branches in Seme and Badagry has started to bring women cross-border traders into its fold and will ultimately provide a useful platform to advocate for these women (Jawando, Adeyemi & Oguntola-Laguda, 2012).

Issues and Challenges

Women cross-border traders are primarily engaged in small-scale trade and remain largely within the informal economy. This puts them outside of formal approaches being prepared by governments and regional organisations for wider trade facilitation and economic growth, which means they are often less likely to benefit from any of these. As a result, they are more vulnerable to trading barriers that hamper their productivity. This is an issue they experience in a variety of ways. Small-scale trade is often more negatively affected by duties, customs controls and other more complex regulations, at the hands of border officials who take advantage of the vulnerability of such traders. This is a situation exacerbated by a lack of empowerment on the part of small traders, women in particular, in terms of knowledge surrounding trading processes and procedures, and their rights (Cadot et al., 2011).

They are also vulnerable to challenges that impact their physical integrity and infringe on their human rights. While not completely unique in this area (women engaged in other economic activities are also vulnerable to violence and dangers related to security), the nature of their work, particular in regions of the world where women traders travel alone or only in the company of other women, makes them particularly susceptible

to sexual harassment and sexual and gender-based violence (DFID, 2009).

Overall, these issues and challenges faced by women cross-border traders are myriad and in most cases integrated. However, it is possible for many of these issues to be loosely blocked into the following challenges:

- Vulnerability to corruption
- Sexual exploitation and gender-based violence
- Lack of knowledge and/or trust of trade procedures, including those aimed at facilitating trade.
- Transportation expenses and inadequate infrastructure
- The integral problems of female illiteracy, a lack of access to finance, and absence of empowering women's bodies.

As a whole, the problems themselves flow into one another on several levels.

Vulnerability to Corruption, Sexual Exploitation and Gender-Based Violence

Women in particular are more likely to be subject to this exploitation of their lack of knowledge surrounding their rights. Following through from monetary exploitation, the very real issue of sexual exploitation and gender-based violence is an unfortunate relational aspect of their realities when transporting goods. The fear of various forms of violence, ranging from sexual harassment to rape, is not only an unfortunate aspect of female travel globally, but one that female cross-border traders are vulnerable to, particularly where they travel alone. Many roads are dangerous, some of which have claimed many lives.

However, sexual harassment and violence is not limited to just a lack of security on the road for female travellers: women traders experience this at border crossing/check points across Africa. This is an on-going challenge that women traders feel incapable of tackling, as the majority of them are young and undermined by high level of harassment, physical violence and unofficial payments and bribes at border crossings. This

is compounded by a stigmatisation of their independence as women cross-border traders who have often left their husbands in order to partake in economic activity. Deep-rooted gender prejudices that refuse to tackle these issues are in effect contributing to an overall neglect by the Nigerian government.

Lack of Knowledge and/or Trust of Trade Procedures, including those aimed at Facilitating Regional Trade

A lack of knowledge and awareness of existing legal provisions is a relational factor to the issue of corruption and vulnerability to violence. Lack of proper knowledge surrounding existing tariffs and visa regulations allow women to be more susceptible to exploitation at the hands of officials, while a lack of awareness regarding their rights, coupled with an inability to exercise their rights where a culture of impunity prevails, are all prevalent areas that need to be addressed.

Conclusion

In the whole region of Nigeria, South-Western women are known to be most industrious and enterprising. Hence, there is the ardent need to bring about the behavioural changes at all levels in society that would underpin inclusive trade in Nigeria. It has been concluded that women cross-border traders have suffered abuse and are not perceived as economic operators in spite of their contributions to regional trade and integration. This lack of recognition has in turn led to all forms of discrimination and stigmatisation, even as these women seek to earn a means of livelihood, alleviate poverty and support their dependants. Therefore, it is presumed that women cross-border traders must be viewed from a fresh perspective and fully integrated to enable a win-win situation for all stakeholders in the trade sector in Nigeria.

Recommendations

This analysis leads to a set of key recommendations to help policy makers facilitate the participation of women in trade and in so doing, assist the nation in achieving

its trade potential. In particular, governments need to do more to:

- Recognise the role that women play in trade and ensure that officials at all levels understand the importance of that role.
- Ensure that rules and regulations governing trade are clear, predictable, and widely available at the border, which is critical for women traders working with very limited margins in the informal sector.
- Prioritise the simplification of trade documents and regulatory requirements, since this will benefit women in trade given the time and mobility constraints that arise from household responsibilities.
- Design interventions to develop trade in ways that ensure that women benefit. For example, programmes that support improved access to information will miss women traders and entrepreneurs if the support is channelled through existing male-dominated trader networks.
- Help women address the risks that they face in their trade-related activities, given that they are typically more risk averse than men and respond to risk in different ways.

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