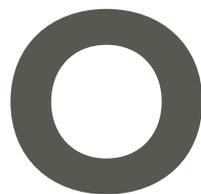


Breaking down the barriers to intra-regional trade

Getting produce to market at the right moment and in the best condition is the priority for producers. It is at this moment when the farmer can reap the rewards of months or years of hard work and investment. After having successfully negotiated weather conditions or animal health issues, getting the produce to market should be a smooth process. This, however, is far from true in many African countries where reaching the marketplace often presents the biggest challenge.

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nerous non-tariff barriers significantly hamper intra-regional trade in Africa and other continents. Transaction costs – in terms of the time and expense of getting to market – can be crippling. Checkpoints, controls, poor road

conditions and old vehicles all serve to significantly increase the amount of time in transit. Coupled with heat and humidity, it is hardly surprising that perishable products like fruit and vegetables are not in a saleable state upon arrival at their destination, or that the animals transported are in bad health, if they have survived at all. The net result is poor trade efficiency. The trader delivers goods to market that are not good quality and are in a significantly poorer state than at the start of the journey. This compromises food security and pushes up the price of the limited food that is available. Poor infrastructure and the persistence of red tape and abnormal practices such as extortion, blackmail and harassment, can seriously impair the development of agricultural trade between countries, rendering intra regional trade uncompetitive and unattractive. This is a tremendous economic waste for the countries and represents an impediment to food and nutrition security.

Despite these non-tariff barriers being a daily reality for traders in many regions, legislation does exist to counteract them. For example the Economic Community of West African Countries (ECOWAS) has a legal framework to address this issue, which seeks to liberalise trade across its member states. Yet this framework has to be properly implemented. Many would argue that nothing can be done to improve the situation. It is simply too great an issue with too many obstacles involved. However, one group of determined media professionals in West Africa have taken on the non-tariff barriers and won.



One of the compulsory checkpoints along the corridor. Photo: CTA.

Witnesses and reporters In 2008, CTA, along with the Conference of Western and Central African Ministers of Agriculture (CMA-AOC), the West and Central African Observatory of the Cattle-Beef Commodity Chain and the Network of West African Agricultural Journalists, organised a study visit for 16 journalists. With representatives from television, radio and press from six countries, they journeyed with animal traders along the Bamako-Dakar corridor (the 1,325 km route that links the Sahel with the port of Dakar, along which cattle and both local and imported goods are transported in both directions). Their objective was to experience the realities for themselves. They witnessed severely delayed journey times caused by several, often unofficial, checkpoints. Not only did the traders have to spend an unreasonable amount of time waiting to pass through these checkpoints, they also were expected to pay tolls. The journalists saw how these caused problems for traders, who had to cope with the health and stress levels of their animals over the longer than necessary journey, often placing the welfare and the lives of the animals at risk. Armed with their experiences, interviews and footage, the journalists set about denouncing the illegal practices, putting pressure on officials and taking politicians to task. In a series of articles and news stories in the press, television, radio and online, they drew public attention to the issues. They also contacted government officials, chambers of agriculture and regional organisations such as the Regional Agriculture Chamber Network (RECAO), demanding

change. Three years on, their campaign has yielded significant success:

- Malian and Senegalese authorities have committed themselves to reducing the number of official checkpoints as well as the duration of controls. In Mali the official checkpoints have fallen from 19 to eight and in Senegal from 27 to three;
- Senegal has reduced VAT on cattle from Mali from 6,900 CFA francs per head to 4,500 (or from 10.5 to 6.8 euros);
- There has been a reduction in the cattle tax levied on the Mali - Cote d'Ivoire border from 1,500,000 to 350,000 francs per cattle truck;
- Cattle export permits in Mali, which used to cost 15,000 CFA francs (22.8 euros) are now issued for free;
- In Mali, the taxes per truck have been reduced from 150,000 to 25,000 CFA francs;
- Today, the journey along the Bamako-Dakar corridor, which three years ago took five days, now takes just three.

More trade, more food The impact of this lobbying can also be seen in the growth of intra-regional trade. The number of cattle trucks travelling every day on the Bamako-Dakar route has more than doubled since 2008, and now averages 15 trucks per day. Prior to the study visit some 200 head of cattle and 600 sheep crossed into Senegal every day. This figure now stands at 350 and 1190 respectively. This has resulted in more money for the transporters through increased business, and more work for the truck drivers.



Journalists and traders discussing during the field visit. Photo: CTA.

Although it is difficult to say that the volume of food is substantially greater at this stage, these positive trends are only expected to increase. Animal welfare has also improved with herders travelling with the trucks to ensure the cattle and sheep are cared for. Fewer deaths in transit have been registered. Before there were on average two to three animal deaths per truck journey. Today, there is only one death for every 50 journeys (with an average of 35 cattle or 170 sheep on board). Animal traders have not been the only group to benefit from these improvements. There is evidence to show that fruit and vegetable traders within West Africa are also enjoying faster transit times with fewer tolls. This is increasing the quality, volume and flow of these fresh products within the region. Not alone does this make for a more dynamic, competitive market environment, but also offers greater choice and better prices for consumers. The achievement of the journalists on the study visit and others inspired by them has been significant. However, the story does not, and should not, stop there. Much work remains to be done if intra-regional trade is to thrive and grow. Key areas to be addressed at a legal, regulatory and policy level have already been identified.

More to do Following their study tour, research was conducted and a workshop held as part of the CTA/CMA-AOC collaboration, to examine legal and regulatory issues affecting agricultural trade in West Africa. A number of issues were identified and it was recognised that several regional rules were not being applied. In addition, there were problems related to harmonisation between regional rules (those from the

Economic Community of West African States and the *Union Economique et Monétaire de l'Ouest Africain*), and also between these and national rules, making them less effective and sometimes unworkable. Many of the laws within the frameworks are obsolete and need to be re-examined and updated.

The next stage in the process involves advocacy and lobbying to encourage countries in West Africa and beyond to promote and harmonise legal and regulatory standards to create a more effective and transparent system. All the stakeholders in intra-regional trade need to become familiar with these legal and regulatory frameworks. They need to have access to these regulations so that they can police the system and highlight bad practices. Farmers' organisations have a particularly influential role to play. The Central African Observatory of the Cattle-Beef Commodity Chain is a group of farmers, traders and transporters who, are campaigning (alongside others) for better trade in agricultural produce. Their aim is to put these issues on the policy agenda.

Finally, media professionals need to continue to be vigilant for any practices that inhibit the development of trade and speak out against them. They should continue to put pressure on policy makers and other actors to make improvements and keep this topic in the public eye.

A unique role It is remarkable what one small group of journalists has achieved – and this is now being replicated by others who want to contribute to agricultural and rural development. Media professionals have a unique role to play in furthering agricultural development. The successes of the Bamako-Dakar corridor can be replicated on other trade corridors across Africa boosting intra-regional trade, creating new job opportunities, wealthier producers and happier consumers.

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More information

CTA, the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation, is an international non-profit organisation established under a joint agreement between the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of countries and the European Union. CTA's mission is to advance food security, increase prosperity and encourage sound natural resource management by facilitating access to information and knowledge, policy dialogue and capacity strengthening of agricultural and rural institutions and communities in ACP countries. CTA offers access to a wide range of products and services in numerous areas including youth in agriculture (www.cta.int).