

Informal Cross-Border Trade (ICT) between the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo: What Can Be Retained from the Statistical Evidence?

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Abstract – This study provides a statistical description of the functioning of Informal Cross-Border Trade (ICBT) which takes place between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Republic of Congo (RC). Based on original data collected from the economic actors involved in the CIT, the study highlights the fact that ICT between DRC and RC depends primarily on how traders are treated and the conditions they face when crossing the border. However, if the nature of the products exchanged as well as the direction of the flows are well known, the scale of the transactions, the level of organization and structuring of the merchant networks, the socio-economic impacts of cross-border trade are far from being well apprehended.

Keywords – Informal Cross-Border Trade, Informal Tax, statistical evidence, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo.

Résumé – La présente étude procède à la description statistique du fonctionnement du Commerce Informel Transfrontalier (CIT) qui s'effectue entre la République Démocratique du Congo (RDC) et la République du Congo (RC). S'appuyant sur des données originales collectées auprès des acteurs économiques impliqués dans le CIT, l'étude met en évidence le fait que le CIT entre la RDC et la RC dépend principalement de la façon dont sont traités les commerçants et des conditions auxquelles ils sont confrontés lorsqu'ils doivent franchir la frontière. Cependant, si la nature des produits échangés ainsi que la direction des flux sont bien connus, l'ampleur des transactions, le niveau d'organisation et de structuration des réseaux marchands, les impacts socio-économiques du commerce transfrontalier sont loin d'être bien appréhendés.

Mots clés – Commerce Informel Transfrontalier, Taxe informelle, preuves statistiques, République démocratique du Congo, République du Congo

I. INTRODUCTION

Like General Trade, Cross-border Trade (CBT) is a major component of the life of African societies at all times. Whether it was done across the borders of the major political entities of the time or through the distinctive limits of societies with acephalic organizations, it was first of all a man's affair, like the caravan trade which put people in touch with each other. Saharan and forest regions of Africa. Three parameters explain this situation: first, security issues, second, the nature of the products, and finally, the specific role of women in traditional settings. Indeed, the conditions of insecurity marked by the recurrence of raids and wild animals, did not allow easy movement of women. Likewise, the means of transport (on foot and on the back of donkeys or

camels) or the transport of live animals were more the responsibility of men than women. Also, in traditional African societies, the woman is considered as the pillar of the family, in particular, in the education of the children, in the household activities, and in the trade of proximity and retail. State borders, which appeared as dividing lines between peoples, aroused in many populations, atypical reactions that many authors have described as phenomena of recomposition of divided socio-cultural groups[1]. in particular, in the education of children, in household activities, and in local and retail trade. State borders, which appeared as dividing lines between peoples, aroused in many populations, atypical reactions that many authors have described as phenomena of recomposition of divided socio-cultural groups[1]. in particular, in the education of children, in household activities, and in local and retail trade. State borders, which appeared as dividing lines between peoples, aroused in many populations, atypical reactions that many authors have described as phenomena of recomposition of divided socio-cultural groups[1].

In the DRC, there is little information on these cross-border traders and the conditions in which they work. The few rare pieces of information on the question can be found in the work of Dzaka Kikouta (2010) and World Bank (2016) who mention that there is an important gender-specific dimension linked to this question[2], [3]. Results from a study that examined cross-border trade in the Great Lakes region showed that the livelihoods and activities of women traders are undermined by the high rate of harassment and physical violence at the border. A predominance of unofficial payments and bribes are also mentioned[4]. And therefore, instead of promoting the growth and development of nations, cross-border trade appears here essentially as a mode of survival for the players.

Indeed, the operators of this trade encounter enormous difficulties, including those specific to women, the complex, unpredictable and unknown tax system. A Congolese trader explains that this is equivalent to "walking in the dark". This image describes the situation of small traders and that of women in particular: they are somehow left in the dark, the more they are at the mercy of "border authorities" in the face of their rights, obligations and responsibilities. This does not only concern the nomenclature of taxes, but also the way in which they are confronted with problems of insecurity, mistreatment from the many actors and difficult access to credit. In addition, they rarely and to a lesser extent resort to collective action: associations or cooperatives capable of ensuring that their rights are respected. Relations between traders from different countries are often difficult.

Because of the complexity of official taxation, traders resort to informal taxes, considered lower, informal arrangements with tax agents or smuggling. This does not mean that all small cross-border trade is informal. The state regulatory framework plays a role of reference point, and some traders adhere to these rules. Taxes are paid, and receipts given.

Cross-border trade between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Republic of Congo (RC) is denser than the statistics show and generates an incessant movement of pendular migration between Kinshasa and Brazzaville. Most of the products from this trade are smuggled with the complicity of customs and security officials. In the light of statistics produced by national and international institutions or organizations, the formal taxes paid in the context of cross-border trade are often very high and in some cases constitute the main factor pushing 56.25% among operators to informal.

Studies on the sector indicate that 70% of women are active in cross-border trade which constitutes an alternative to underemployment in rural areas and a source of income in border areas in the Grand Lac Region (Soule and Borgui, 2010)[5]. These results reveal that the income generated by informal cross-border trade, the importance of which has not been the subject of sufficiently in-depth studies, is reinvested in several areas and more particularly in the household: guarantee of food security, education, children, health care, etc.[3], [6].

In this study, it is a question of describing the different contours of informal cross-border trade between the DRC and the RC. By first tracing the theoretical foundations of international trade, the study highlights the debate around cross-border trade in the economic literature. While the third section discusses the methodology and data used, the fourth section presents and analyzes the results thus found and finally, section five concludes the study.

II. ICBT IN THE ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Neither trade as an economic activity nor its regularization through policies are new activities. However, international regularization through trade policy and liberalization measures are relatively recent interventions. Trade is an activity of

exchanging goods and services that manifests itself in different forms and in different places. It may be two people in a village market as well as two companies, two nations selling their products on the international scene, in addition, paid and unpaid workers, business leaders, importers, exporters and consumers. Actors are all economic agents but differ in their roles, as in the degree and type of power and influence they have.

Why then do nations trade with each other? Basically, they trade because they are different and want to take advantage of that difference. The difference naturally leads each nation to specialization whereby production will take place on a larger scale and more efficiently. Specialization may arise from natural or technical conditions, or it may be dictated by economic considerations. Regarding natural conditions, we observe that nature has endowed certain countries with climates favorable to such type of cultures and endowed other countries with a subsoil rich in gold, copper or diamonds. At the technical level, we note that other countries have been able, by developing research, to acquire the know-how enabling them to manufacture cars, boats or planes. International trade thus allows each country to obtain goods that it cannot produce at home. Another difference between nations can be economic conditions. Thus, even if a country is perfectly capable of producing all goods, it may find it advantageous to forgo the production of certain goods in order to buy them abroad where they cost less. This behavior will lead it to allocate the productive resources thus freed to the production of goods that it can produce at a lower cost than other countries. He may find it advantageous to give up the production of certain goods and buy them abroad where they cost less. This behavior will lead it to allocate the productive resources thus freed to the production of goods that it can produce at a lower cost than other countries. He may find it advantageous to give up the production of certain goods and buy them abroad where they cost less. This behavior will lead it to allocate the productive resources thus freed to the production of goods that it can produce at a lower cost than other countries.

Indeed, in its classical as well as neoclassical version, the theory of international trade pursues a threefold objective. It tries, in the first place, to explain the conditions which determine the structures of foreign trade in “different countries, each characterized by its own arrangements” [7]. Secondly, it aims to show that in the free trade hypothesis, specialization (acquired or natural) provides each country as much as the international community with the greatest possible advantage. Finally, the theory in question supports the idea of international solidarity, of interdependence, generated by free exchange relations.

The first objective is to investigate the causes of international specialization and leads to the formulation of the theory of international trade, based on comparative costs, which indicate the products that can be traded[8], [9]. The second refers to the law of proportion of the factors of production existing in the different countries, it indicates the reason for the exchange[10]. The last objective is at the center of the debates opposing supporters and opponents of growth through foreign trade, and gives substance to potential regional economic integration [11]. We can say that there are two fundamental ways of interpreting the phenomenon of foreign trade structures, and of explaining international specialization: the classical conception on the one hand and, Moreover, empirical work on informal cross-border trade indicates that several socio-historical, geographic and economic factors are often put forward by various specialists to explain the omnipresence and recurrence of informal cross-border commercial transactions. The weight of each of the factors depends, in reality, on the socio-cultural context and the nature of the States involved in the transactions, as well as on the current economic situation.

By focusing on the specific case of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the study by Dzaka-Kikouta (2008) analyzes the behavior of actors facing the risks associated with cross-border trade activities[12]. The author shows the advantages of formalizing informal activities in reducing the level of risk associated with cross-border trade. The results of the study highlighted the operational implications of the level of organization of cross-border trade players. Thus, the study reveals that if an actor leaves the status of unaffiliated with an organization (association of tontines, professional association, etc.) to obtain the status of affiliate, his risk decreases by 59% in this sense that the organization generates trust. It appears that cross-border trade takes place in a risky environment marked by information asymmetries and market imperfections. Membership of a trader or forex trader in an organization or network promotes the sharing of information among members and helps reduce transaction costs and increase economic efficiency. Professional or service organizations are therefore key structures in the application of cross-border trade policies and the reduction of risks associated with cross-border trade. Membership of a trader or forex trader in an organization or network promotes the sharing of information among members and helps reduce transaction costs and increase economic efficiency. Professional or service organizations are therefore key structures in the application of cross-border trade policies and the reduction of risks associated with cross-border trade. Membership of a trader or forex trader in an organization or network

promotes the sharing of information among members and helps reduce transaction costs and increase economic efficiency. Professional or service organizations are therefore key structures in the application of cross-border trade policies and the reduction of risks associated with cross-border trade. While in developing countries and very particularly in Africa, the question of the dynamics of informal cross-border trade has sparked a lively debate in the economic literature (quote a few authors), this question remains insufficiently debated in the DRC, and yet it is. There is both a logical and a positive interest in banking on this issue. To this end, the present study considers that the dynamics of the CIT can be grasped through four main variables, namely: the type of business carried out; the status of commercial activity; the type and nature of goods traded; and the operating site.

In the same vein, the study by Blaise Muhire (2020)[13], devoted to the analysis of cross-border trade between the DRC and its eastern neighbors (Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania and Zambia), after a description of the processes and sub-regional initiatives aimed at promoting trade and movement of people, demonstrates the relevance of promoting cross-border trade, explains why this trade arouses enthusiasm among institutional actors from international institutional actors and highlights the difficulties surrounding the exercise of related activities. Among these difficulties, the author notes the importance of the informal sector (representing around 40% of trade flows),

Also, he underlines that "If cross-border trade undoubtedly contributes to the national economies of the countries concerned and by extension to hundreds of thousands of households, the link between this trade and the promotion of peace through dialogue for peace remains to be established".

The same considerations are evidenced by the African Center for Trade Policies Economic Commission for Africa (2020) which, relying on cross-border trade along the Abidjan-Lagos corridor, underlines the crucial role of cross-border trade in the development of intra-African trade and hence the implementation of ZLECAF. Among the main characteristics of this trade, this institution highlights "the presence of convoys of informal traders regularly crossing borders to exchange goods and services". According to some estimates, cross-border trade, which constitutes a major aspect of the African economy and landscape, represents between 25 and 75% of intra-regional trade, generates livelihoods and creates jobs,

III. ICBT METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Due to its complexity and perplexity, the analysis of cross-border trade can only be effectively captured by a participatory approach which would require trade operators to be directly interested so that they make the information at their disposal accessible. The low comparability of the data, due to the non-harmonization of the methodological approaches used by different authors, characterizes the results of the different studies, although the same collection tools were used. Thus, the methodological support used within the framework of this study highlighted in turn the aspects linked on the one hand to the documentary review and on the other hand, to the possible biases and limitations associated with the determination of the sample.

3.1. Documentary review frame

The documentary review, which provides information on existing information, includes five categories of documents which are not always well used in research relating to cross-border trade. These are:

- official documents of national policies and strategies for economic development and growth, poverty reduction and promotion of sectors and / or local products and more generally of new value chains (agro-food craft sector);
- community and bilateral trade policy documents. These policies set the rules for community commercial transactions and are also accompanied by trade defense measures that are often poorly understood by the populations, especially women, the majority of whom are illiterate;
- bilateral cross-border cooperation documents. There are many examples, the best known of which are the cross-border cooperation agreements between Nigeria and its neighbors in West Africa and between Rwanda and its two neighbors: Uganda and the DRC. The crossing of borders by traders is facilitated by tactical agreements between countries, agreements relayed by local authorities in different countries;
- regulations on community and national product standards and on the movement of people and goods. Very few regions have defined precise rules and standards for the products subject to transactions;

- Academic documents, history, geography, sociology and economics in particular which have the merit of developing various methodological approaches.

The documentary review aims to give more time and emphasis to these sources of information to better reflect the nature of the administrative and technical obstacles to informal cross-border trade in the field and to fully understand how this trade draws its substance from history. , operates through relationships between actors that go beyond ethnic and religious identities. In practice, it is observed that these documents, sources of information on cross-border trade, are poorly exploited, if not unknown to operators and researchers in the field.

3.2. Methodological biases and limitations

The surveys borrowed an approach that combines both socio-anthropological and participatory research approaches. It was a question of considering the actors of cross-border trade as economic units, the functioning of which we mainly seek to analyze. The socio-anthropological approach has made it possible to decipher the complexity of the social links which give networks and market organizations all their effectiveness. We are witnessing cross-border populations belonging to the same tribe on both sides of the border, and sometimes from the same family line.

As in any voluntary participation activity, the conduct of field surveys almost never takes place without retaining some shortcomings and / or biases.

- The “confidentiality” bias. During the interview, confidentiality and anonymity were applied. To ensure voluntary participation, the investigator had to explain the difference between scientific research and that of the various services responsible for taxation and security at the Congolese border.
- The “no response” bias. Despite the possession of the academic documents presented, the respondents felt a certain mistrust and disinterest in the subject of the investigation. This mistrust gradually disappeared, giving way to a frank opening of traders towards the team of investigators.
- The evaluation bias of the quantities of products. During the investigation, an assessment of the quantities (weight, number of liters, number of pieces, etc.) of the imported or exported products had to be carried out. This operation was resolved by resorting to numerous discussions during the preparatory meetings.

In total, a sample of 500 individuals was retained in the analyzes. From this sample, a distribution such as: 19.60% for the Maluku site, 77.40% for Beach Ngobila emerges¹ and 3.00% for the Kinkole site. From this information, it is possible to proceed to a description of the CIT between the DRC and the RC. Moreover, out of these 500 individuals, 77% (385 individuals) of them were eligible for all the questions in the survey, while 115 (or 23%) were concerned by relatively specific and optional questions.

IV. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

4.1. Cross-border trade qualified as informal between the DRC and the RC

This trade is qualified as informal in that it is mostly unofficial in the sense that most products are smuggled involving undeclared payments to many customs and security officials. Although the results indicate that there is effective payment of taxes and other customs duties, both formal and informal, as the case may be, there is nevertheless a predominance of activities that take contraband routes. Three major reasons are put forward to justify the choice of informal payments rather than formal ones, namely: the high costs of the formal tax; the existence of a negotiable informal tax and; the hassle when paying the formal tax.

Another reason is the high number of state services which extort tips from traders. For all the agencies involved, border posts are particularly lucrative, and a significant portion of border revenues escapes state control as agents are busy extorting bribes from traders. This situation pushes traders to the illegality of informal cross-border trade (see Figure 1) which Pugh and Cooper (2004) call a “shadow economy” which exploits the possibilities offered by the erosion of state authority versus like informal payments that are undervalued, to the detriment of the state.

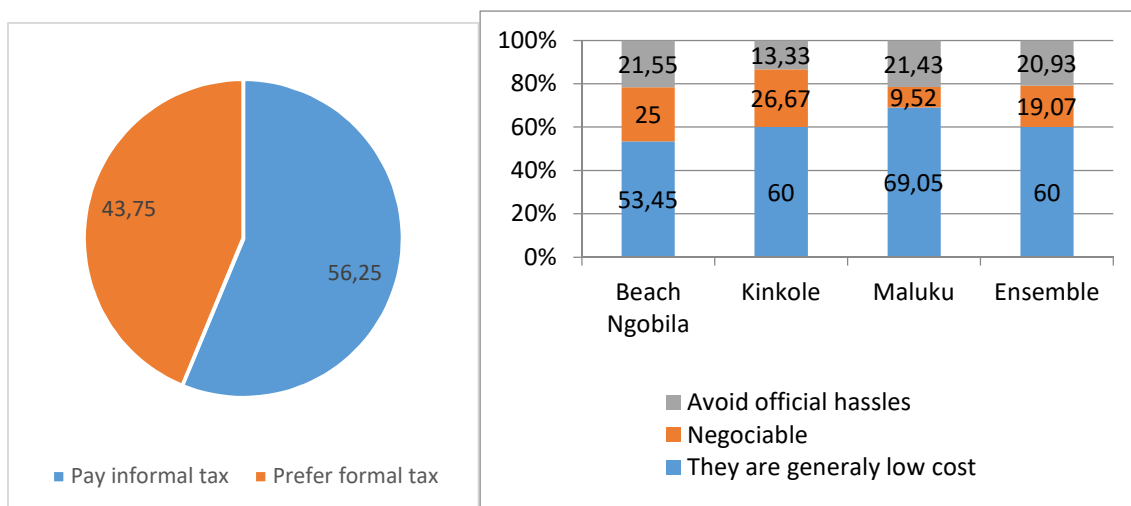


Figure n ° 1: Nature of the tax paid and reasons for resorting to the informal tax by traders

Source: Obtained from the survey. Note: the values are expressed in%.

Also, it appears that some formal traders also use these illegal routes. Two facts explain this situation: the costs to be borne are lower and therefore expect a greater profit on the one hand, the goods exchanged are in principle prohibited, on the other hand. This is called a sustained informal economy. A good part of cross-border traders take advantage of the weakness of the State and make cross the goods, sometimes prohibited, in clandestinity, with all the risks and possible harassment. These passageways are mainly maintained by cross-border populations.

Several reasons explain, in part, the intensity of trade between the two cities:

- The first is undoubtedly due to the political events which marked, in the DRC, from the year 1990, the failure of democratic opening and that of structural adjustment programs. The looting of factories and businesses in 1991 and 1993 and the subsequent collapse of the economy contributed to a sharp increase in unemployment, pushing many people to engage in the peddling of goods between Kinshasa. and Brazzaville.
- In addition, the civil war which took place in RC between 1997 and 1999 cut off the capital Brazzaville from the economic city Pointe-Noire, the urban supply of basic products mainly provided by hawkers coming from Kinshasa.

The analyzes carried out at this level relate primarily to the surveyed population, age, household structure, level of education of traders and their dependents, as well as the activity itself.

4.2. From the description of the ICBT between the DRC and the RC

From the analyzes carried out, the following main findings emerge:

Cross-border trade between the DRC and the RC is carried out by traders residing in urban-rural areas on the one hand, and urban areas on the other. Overall, 35.12% of respondents live in urban-rural areas. In the private port of Kinkole, 100% of respondents live in urban-rural areas, against 81.82% of that of Maluku, and only 8.11% of Beach Ngobila located in the city center of Kinshasa.

A population in their thirties (30-39 years old) carries out this cross-border trade. This broad domination is justified, in part, by the weakness of the Congolese State (DRC) in absorbing the active workforce available in the formal economy. Indeed, 47.84% of all traders are of the age of this interval, with 45.74% among women and 50.49% among men.

Regarding the general level of education, more than half of traders have reached secondary level. The study counts 58.40% of traders as a whole, 63.16% among women and 52.09% among men. The city of Kinshasa has a net secondary school enrollment

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rate of 56.2%. It is in the Kinkole site where we find the greatest proportion of traders who have not passed primary school because of the recourse, from an early age, to commercial activities.

Three main reasons explain the low school attendance: (i) lack of financial means, (ii) involvement in a remunerative activity from an early age and (iii) distance from schools, as shown in figure n° 2 below.

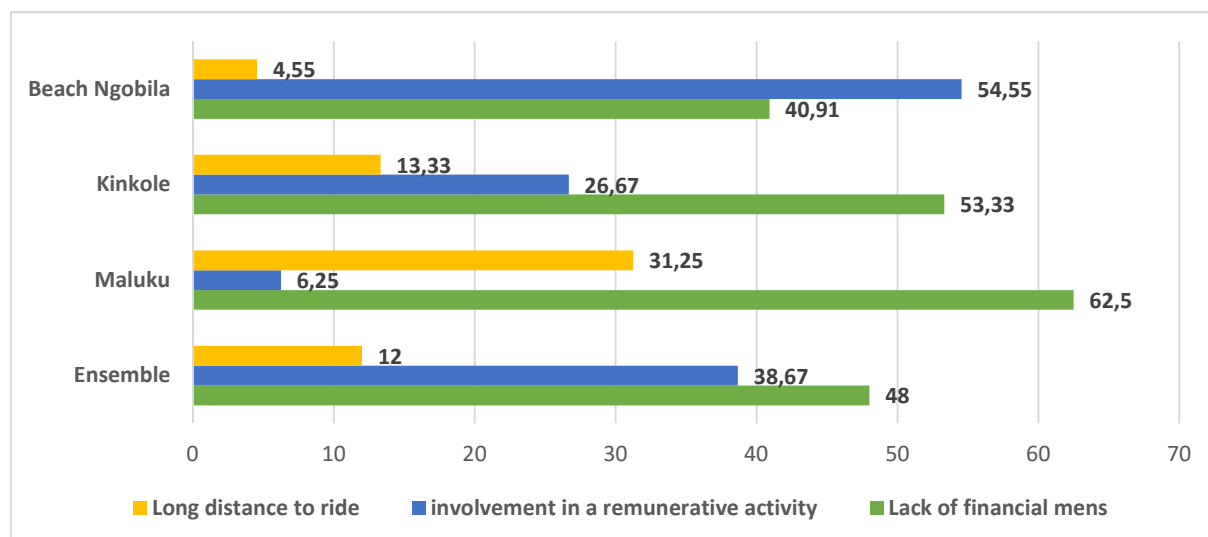


Figure n ° 2: Proportion of out-of-school children by reason according to the site

Source: Obtained from the survey. Note: the values are expressed in%.

The household size of traders is slightly small with an average of 4.42 people per household. The average household size is a determining factor in the living conditions of traders. Despite the low income it provides, informal cross-border trade is a means of survival for a large number of people. Across the sites, the average household size of traders is 4.42.

Cross-border trade in which women take an active part is an opportunity for them to creatively reinvent relations between women and men. Indeed, it should be placed in the context of the pauperization of the urban population and the struggle for survival in Kinshasa, which notably results in the decomposition of family structures. We are therefore witnessing a situation where women get richer and become business owners.

As in any human community, day-to-day social interactions in cross-border commerce are structured by tension and conflict. Tensions and conflicts can arise when social actors develop social practices that no longer meet reciprocal expectations or that depart from the rules of reciprocity, thus blocking the reproduction mechanisms of interpersonal relationships. These tensions and conflicts sometimes lead to social and relational violence. For example, some traders at Beach Ngobila accuse others of trying to divert their loyal customers by offering them products at a lower price than that offered by all the wholesalers in the market.

The different situations of tension and confrontation that can be observed in the different sites surveyed and in the relations between the traders reflect the contradictory requirements of living together today, which consist in supporting at the same time a tension and a cohesion between two poles of relational commitment. There is on the one hand the need for a link which results in the desire to reduce social distance by increasing interdependence, and on the other hand the desire for autonomy resulting in the desire to take distances by reducing the 'interdependence.

The presence of the State through public services is widely observed. However, it is clear that economic operators are sometimes directed by agents at the border to smuggling routes with the consequences associated with their practice. Taxes are paid regardless of the route taken to move the goods. Informal taxes are preferred by traders because they are generally less expensive and are oddly negotiable.

A large part of this cross-border trade is not the exclusive practice of traders who exercise it wholesale, but that of small traders residing in urban-rural areas on the one hand, and urban on the other. For this study, cross-border trade is defined as any small trade in any foodstuff, merchandise or object of current consumption carried out by the sale or the offer for sale to the buyer and which is carried out by nationals operating in the neighboring provinces of two countries, making a stay in the zone border for economic reasons, lasting no more than seventy-two hours. In general, micro-commerce and the peddling of goods are carried out by women, allowing them to creatively reinvent the relationship between women and men. The reversal of male and female roles in Kinshasa by taking charge of households by the latter thus confirms the result obtained by the survey. This role reversal sometimes creates ambiguous relationships and statutory inconsistency between men and women. Men remain statutory dominants, while women remain statutory dominants but become economic dominants.

In terms of household responsibility, it appears that women involved in cross-border trade are more heads of households. We retain that the head of household is the reference person from whom we have identified the other members of the household. It is a declarative notion which implies the existence of a relation of dependence between the chief and his cohabitants. Generally, the study informs us that 62.20% of the households of traders headed by women. This percentage is well above the national average of 19.8% (Survey 1-2-3, 2012). In addition, women traders who are heads of household are more frequent in the Beach Ngobila site (46.88%), which reflects, to a certain extent, the tendency towards a great empowerment of women doing business in this site.

Cross-border traders experience physical violence, harassment and loss of income. The study reveals that these behaviors attributed to officers at border crossings are linked to the harassment of which traders are the main victims. In addition, the latter are not aware of the potential of collective action through associations or cooperatives, although often non-existent, in order to ensure respect for their rights.

V. CONCLUSION

At the end of the analyzes carried out within the framework of this study, it should be noted on the one hand that informal cross-border trade constitutes one of the essential components of trade between the two countries and in its functioning. While women are omnipresent, they have also managed to achieve levels of accumulation which have helped to change their status in society. However, if the nature of the products exchanged, the direction of the flows are well known, neither the scale of the transactions, the level of organization and structuring of the merchant networks, nor the socio-economic impacts of cross-border trade are not yet well understood. . On the other hand, it emerges that, ICT between DRC and RC depends primarily on how traders are treated and the conditions they face when crossing the border. Also, the success of this business depends on the ability of individuals to cross the border, free from large payments, violence and harassment.

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