

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-55893

Title: Difficulties and Prospects of Cross-Border Trade in the North-West of Atacora in Benin

Recommendation:

Accept after minor revision.....

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓		
Techn. Quality		✓		
Clarity	✓			
Significance		✓		

Reviewer Name: Faheem Abdul Muneeb

Reviewer's Comment

This manuscript examines the structural constraints and development prospects of cross-border trade in the north-western communes of the Atacora Department in Benin, an area bordering Burkina Faso and Togo. Drawing on documentary research, field observation, questionnaires, and focus group discussions with key actors, the study analyses how environmental degradation, poor rural infrastructure, insecurity, and weak regulatory enforcement hinder cross-border commercial exchanges. The topic is regionally significant and policy-relevant, as cross-border trade constitutes a major livelihood strategy in frontier zones of West Africa. The paper contributes by providing a geographically grounded diagnosis of trade bottlenecks and by proposing development-oriented interventions aligned with local realities.

Empirical Contribution and Contextual Strength

A major strength of the manuscript lies in its detailed spatial and contextual grounding. The geographical description of the study area, supported by the location map (Figure 1), clearly situates the communes of Boukoumbé, Cobly, Matéri, and Tanguiéta within a dense transnational trading network linking Benin, Togo, and Burkina Faso. The discussion of rural access roads, agricultural production systems, and market structures demonstrates strong familiarity with local conditions. Empirical evidence showing that only about 20% of rural tracks have a functional layout and that approximately 75% of engineering works are concentrated on a limited number of routes is particularly important for understanding mobility constraints.

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Methodology and Use of Evidence

The mixed qualitative–quantitative approach is appropriate for the study's objectives. The use of focus groups, questionnaires, and direct observation allows triangulation of perspectives from traders, transporters, and local authorities. The application of the SWOT (FFOM) model to synthesise findings is relevant for policy analysis. However, there is some inconsistency regarding the number of focus groups (9 versus 29), which should be clarified. In addition, methodological procedures such as sampling criteria and data saturation could be explained more clearly to strengthen rigor.

Analysis, Findings, and Discussion

The analysis convincingly identifies three major constraints: environmental pressure from agricultural expansion, poor condition of rural roads, and weak application of trade regulations. The discussion of deforestation, soil degradation, and seasonal inaccessibility of roads is well supported by field photographs (Planche 1) and descriptive statistics. The examination of informal taxation, corruption at checkpoints, insecurity, and harassment of transporters provides an honest and nuanced portrayal of everyday trading realities. The proposed solutions—road rehabilitation, improved security cooperation, environmental management, and better fiscal governance—are relevant and grounded in empirical observation, though they remain largely descriptive rather than analytically prioritised.

Writing, Structure, and Presentation

The manuscript is rich in empirical detail but is excessively long and repetitive in places, particularly in the results and discussion sections. Several arguments are restated across subsections and could be synthesised more effectively. Language editing is required to address grammatical inconsistencies, formatting issues, and overly long paragraphs. Tables and figures are useful but could be reduced or consolidated to improve flow.

Final Recommendation

Overall, this is a relevant and well-documented study that sheds light on the everyday challenges of cross-border trade in a strategically important frontier region of Benin. Its strong empirical grounding and policy orientation make it a useful contribution to border studies, regional development, and economic geography. With minor revisions focusing on methodological clarification, analytical tightening, reduction of repetition, and language refinement, the manuscript will be suitable for publication.

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Decision: Accepted with minor revisions...