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## 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: Dr Abdul Haseeb Mir

### *Detailed Reviewer's Report*

The article addresses a highly relevant and policy-oriented theme by examining the constraints and opportunities associated with cross-border trade in the north-western part of the Atacora department in Benin. The topic is significant both academically and practically, particularly in the context of West African regional integration, borderland studies, and local economic development. By focusing on frontier communes bordering Togo and Burkina Faso, the study situates itself within a dynamic transnational space where formal and informal exchanges intersect, making the research timely and socially meaningful .

Conceptually, the paper demonstrates a good understanding of border dynamics and draws upon a relevant body of geographical and socio-economic literature. The introduction successfully situates the study within broader African cross-border experiences and highlights the colonial legacy of borders, ethnic continuities, and everyday economic practices. This theoretical framing strengthens the relevance of the study and helps justify the choice of the research area. The linkage between border trade, marginality, and local development is clearly articulated, and the authors convincingly argue that border zones often have stronger economic ties with neighboring countries than with national cores.

Methodologically, the study adopts a mixed approach combining documentary research, field observations, questionnaires, and focus group discussions. The use of focus groups involving traders, transporters, and local authorities adds depth to the analysis and allows for the incorporation of lived experiences of border actors. The inclusion of spatial descriptions, tables, and photographic evidence of

**REVIEWER'S REPORT**

degraded infrastructure further enriches the empirical dimension of the article. However, while the methodology is generally appropriate, certain aspects require clarification. The paper mentions different figures for focus groups and participants at different points, which creates some ambiguity. A clearer and more consistent presentation of sample size, selection criteria, and data collection procedures would enhance the methodological rigor and replicability of the study.

The results and discussion section is one of the strongest parts of the article. The analysis of key difficulties—such as poor road infrastructure, insecurity, environmental degradation due to agricultural expansion, and administrative harassment—provides a comprehensive picture of the challenges facing cross-border traders. The discussion on road degradation, seasonal isolation, and their impact on market access is particularly well substantiated through empirical examples and visual documentation. Similarly, the treatment of corruption, lack of transparency in customs procedures, and excessive roadblocks reflects well-documented realities of cross-border trade in West Africa and adds credibility to the findings.

The paper also succeeds in linking local-level challenges to broader institutional and governance issues, such as decentralization, fiscal weakness of communes, and dependence on central government transfers. The use of the SWOT/FFOM analytical framework helps structure the discussion and allows the authors to move logically from diagnosis to prospects. That said, the analytical sections sometimes lean toward descriptive narration. A more explicit engagement with comparative cases from other West African border regions, or a stronger linkage between findings and existing theoretical debates on informal trade and border governance, would further strengthen the analytical depth.

In terms of structure and language, the article is generally coherent, but it would benefit from careful editing. There are noticeable repetitions, occasional grammatical inconsistencies, and long sentences that could be streamlined for clarity. Some sections, particularly those dealing with recommendations, are very detailed and could be slightly condensed without losing substance. Additionally, aligning the discussion section more closely with the stated objectives in the introduction would improve overall coherence.

The conclusions are consistent with the findings and appropriately emphasize infrastructure development, security reinforcement, institutional coordination, and better governance as key levers for improving cross-border trade. The recommendations are practical and grounded in field realities, making them valuable for policymakers and local authorities.

**Recommendations and publication decision**

Overall, the article makes a meaningful contribution to the literature on cross-border trade and regional development in West Africa, with a strong empirical base and clear policy relevance. It is recommended that the authors address minor revisions, particularly by clarifying methodological details, reducing

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repetition, improving language and style, and strengthening the analytical linkage with broader scholarly debates. Subject to these minor revisions, the article is suitable for publication.