

Navigating livelihoods in the midst of COVID-19: experiences of women in informal cross-border trading in Accra, Ghana

Abstract

Studies have indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on businesses, and that female-led businesses have been more negatively affected than male-led ones because of their fragility, unpredictability, and lack of state support. One such group that has suffered because of the official closing of borders during the pandemic is informal cross-border traders. Using the empowerment framework and semi-structured interview guide, this study highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the livelihoods of Ghanaian women in informal cross-border trading. The findings show that the pandemic affected participants' livelihoods as well as their sociocultural and psychological lives creating a sense of dis-empowerment. Women in informal cross-border trading had however, used a variety of strategies to get themselves through those difficult times, including switching suppliers, using illegal routes to get their products into the country, and utilizing various social networks created to facilitate their businesses. The authors recommend that women in informal cross-border trading are provided with financial and institutional support as well as bettering their access to communication tools to streamline their commercial dealings.