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Informal Cross-Border Trade Valued at GH¢7.4 Billion in Fourth Quarter of 2024 – Ghana Statistical Service

Informal cross-border trade between Ghana and its three land neighbours, Togo, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire, was valued at GH¢7.4 billion in the fourth quarter of 2024. This represents 4.3 percent of Ghana's total trade for the period. The figure is from the first national Informal Cross Border Trade (ICBT) survey conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) to measure informal cross-border trade that occurs outside formal customs systems.

The 2024 fourth-quarter Informal Cross-Border Trade (ICBT) survey covered the period October to December 2024. Data were collected from 321 active border points across ten regions through direct observation and interviews with traders. The results provide an evidence-based understanding of how informal trade supports livelihoods, food supply, and regional integration, which are key to policymaking under the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Introducing the findings, the Government Statistician, Dr. Alhassan Iddrisu, emphasised the importance of the data for national policy. He noted, "By measuring informal trade systematically, we are strengthening the foundation for better economic planning."

"These results help ensure that national policies capture the full range of economic activity, not just what passes through formal systems. Informal trade is part of everyday life for many Ghanaians, and bringing it into view allows us to recognise its real value and contribution to livelihoods." He added.

Ghana recorded a trade surplus with Burkina Faso of GH¢576 million and with Côte d'Ivoire of GH¢378 million, but a trade deficit with Togo of GH¢539 million. Informal trade accounted for 61.2 percent of all trade with Togo, 55.7 percent with Côte d'Ivoire and 37.1 percent with Burkina Faso. The main informal exports were alcoholic drinks valued at GH¢187 million, soft drinks at GH¢170 million, petrol and second-hand clothes. The main informal imports were cooking oil valued at GH¢270 million, mattresses at GH¢171 million, rice at GH¢143 million, and livestock at GH¢159 million. Food products made up 49.6 percent of informal imports and 41 percent of informal exports, indicating their central role in regional food supply.

The Upper East Region remained Ghana's main trade corridor, recording GH¢1.27 billion in informal exports, fifteen times higher than the Savannah Region, which recorded GH¢82.9 million. Paga was the most used border for informal imports. Gender participation in informal cross-border trade showed that 65.7 percent of export transporters were men, while 41.3 percent of import transporters were women, especially in the Savannah, Western and Northern regions. Tricycles and motorbikes were the most common means of transport, reflecting small-scale and frequent trade movements.

The Informal Cross-Border Trade survey marks a major step in Ghana's effort to measure and understand the informal economy. **Integrating it into national planning will help bridge the gap between formal and informal trade and improve the accuracy of trade statistics, promote inclusive economic policies, and strengthen Ghana's participation in regional trade under the African Continental Free Trade Area.**

The findings confirm that informal trade is an important part of Ghana's economy. It connects producers and consumers across borders, supports food availability and provides income for many households, particularly in border communities where formal employment opportunities are limited. At the same time, informal trade presents policy challenges, including limited accuracy in trade measurement, reduced tax collection and exposure of traders to risks from inadequate regulation, weak infrastructure and limited access to finance.

The Ghana Statistical Service recommends the formalisation and support of informal traders through simplified registration, access to microcredit, and training in record-keeping and quality standards. It also calls for improved border infrastructure and trade facilitation through better roads and inspection systems, enhanced regional cooperation with neighbouring countries to harmonise customs procedures and share trade data, and promotion of domestic production of key imports such as cooking oil, rice, and mattresses to reduce import dependence and improve the trade balance.

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About the Ghana Statistical Service

The Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) provides comprehensive, reliable, quality, relevant, accurate and timely statistical information to guide national development as stipulated in Section 3 of the Statistical Service Act, 2019 (Act 1003). The organisation's vision is to be a trusted provider of official statistics for good governance and its mission being the efficient collection, production, management, and dissemination of quality official statistics based on international standards, using competent and motivated staff for evidence-based decision-making, in support of national development.

The Statistical Service produces monthly and quarterly data on important economic indicators such as inflation, Consumer Price Index, Producer Price Index, and Gross Domestic Product. GSS also regularly generates periodic population, housing, demographic and economic data at the locality, district, and national levels from routine surveys and censuses. The statistics generated by GSS can be utilised by a wide cross-section of users including public sector, businesses, academia, civil society organisations, and development partners. For more information visit www.statsghana.gov.gh.