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**A DIFFERENT CLASS? BASOTHO WOMEN INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER
TRADERS TO BOTSWANA**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree.

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ABSTRACT

In the global landscape of informal cross-border trade, Basotho women emerge as a distinctive and dynamic force, defying traditional gender norms and shaping the economic landscape of the Southern African region within Lesotho. This thesis delves into the intriguing phenomenon of Basotho women engaging in informal cross-border trading activities with Botswana. It investigates their motivations, the complexities of their experiences, challenges, and contributions to their economic and social situation. It classifies these women as a unique group of women warranting them to be labeled as a “different class”. By adopting an ethnographic approach, this study provides an understanding of the cultural, social, and economic dimensions that shape the lives of these enterprising women traders. The research method involves immersive fieldwork, including participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions within the communities of 15 Basotho women traders operating in different categories as part-time and full-time traders, veterans, and newcomers. This approach allows a holistic exploration of their daily lives, trading practices, and the intricate social networks they navigate to sustain their cross-border enterprises. By presenting the voices and lived experiences of Basotho women as informal cross-border traders, the ethnographic exploration seeks to challenge stereotypical representations and illuminate their role as active agents of change. This study used Giddens’s structuration theory as an analytical framework to examine the social behaviour of Basotho women informal cross-border traders.

Findings reveal that Basotho women traders often navigate many socio-cultural barriers, including limited access to resources, discriminatory practices, and unequal opportunities, further exacerbated by their marginalized status within their communities. Nevertheless, they demonstrate remarkable resilience, resourcefulness, and adaptability in establishing and maintaining informal trading networks across the Botswana border. The study sheds light on the multifaceted impact of these women's trading activities at household and community levels. Economically, their contributions prove vital to local livelihoods, household incomes, and the overall well-being of the Basotho society. At the same time, their cross-border trade endeavors foster intercultural ties and contribute to regional trade integration, strengthening economic ties between Lesotho and Botswana.

The study further revealed that product and market selection are critical factors that influence the success of women traders in informal cross-border trade. Women traders rely on their knowledge of local demand, availability of products, and pricing to select the products or services they will trade. They also select the market where they will sell their products based on their market knowledge, competition, and potential profits. The transportation of products from Botswana to Lesotho is also essential to informal cross-border trade.

Ultimately, the study advocates for policies that recognize the importance of inclusive and gender-responsive economic development, harnessing the potential of these enterprising women to drive sustainable growth and foster social transformation in the Southern African region. It further highlights the need for a nuanced approach that recognizes the unique challenges Basotho women informal traders face and their distinct contributions to the broader economy. Governments and stakeholders can unlock their full potential as catalysts for sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction by supporting these women through targeted empowerment programs, access to finance, and capacity-building initiatives. Moreover, this study calls for re-evaluating the prevailing perceptions of Basotho women as passive victims, challenging the notion that informal cross-border trade is solely a survivalist strategy. Instead, it emphasizes the agency and innovation of these women, positioning them as active agents of change in reshaping economic opportunities within their communities and across borders.

Keywords: Basotho women; Informal cross-border trade; Socio-economic impact; Livelihood strategies; Cross-border entrepreneurship

DECLARATION

This is to certify that this Ph.D. thesis contains my work and has never been submitted for examination or degree at another university previously. All additional materials incorporated in the work have been appropriately acknowledged in the text and as complete references.

Keneuoe Maphosa

Signed:

Date: 26/10/2023

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DEDICATION

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ACRONYMS

BEDCO	Basotho Enterprises Development Corporation
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CAS	Centre for Accounting Studies
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	International Labour Office
Int.	Interview
LRA	Lesotho Revenue Authority
MCC	Maseru City Council
NUL	National University of Lesotho
SACU	Southern African Customs Union
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
US	United States
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Associations

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In March 2019, 13 Lesotho nationals burnt beyond recognition in a car accident in the Free State province of South Africa. The deceased were Basotho women cross-border traders travelling from Lesotho to Johannesburg in a mini-bus taxi (Quantum). These women represented a growing population of Basotho women informal cross-border traders who travel to source products from other countries for resale back in Lesotho. Informal cross-border traders represent a new trend in human mobility from Lesotho, particularly to South Africa. As the cost of living continues to escalate, many Basotho women devise alternative innovative means to earn a living and supplement income for those with low salaries, or to accumulate assets. The women's group shops in various places in South Africa being Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town, and Botswana being the latest popular route, and it is a risky and often life-threatening trade because of the long distances travelled. The emergence of this trade through the Botswana route is perceived to be different by the traders.

Harsh rural living conditions, high in the Lesotho mountains, worsen their struggles. Those who dare to escape these rural conditions meet more insurmountable city life struggles. Hence, they are ready to exploit any idea that has the potential to generate income. Some women travel long distances to look for opportunities outside their home country. These women's involvement in livelihoods opportunities has become a topic of increasing research interest in studies on migration in Lesotho, which have previously focused on the migration of Basotho men who worked in the mines in South Africa, given the country's migration history.

The migration shocks because of mining retrenchments adversely affected households previously supported by the mining sector, ultimately forcing women into the labour market. Authors alerted us to the feminisation of the Basotho textile industry as a result of shifting roles in Basotho patriarchal families (Ansell et al., 2015; Baylies & Wright, 1993; Boehm, 2006; Crush et al., 2007; Gibbs, 2005; Tanga et al., 2017). However, the low wages paid to Basotho female factory contract workers ultimately forced some women into informal economic activities to pursue livelihood survival and sustainability (Tanga & Manyeli, 2007). Despite the feminisation

of the Basotho textile industry, which resulted in the absorption of some women into the workforce, not all women could be absorbed, and the low wages also did not make it any easier for those interested. The gap between the limited absorption into the textile industry, low wages, and harsh living conditions force women to look for alternative ways to make money, and that is how informal cross-border trade became popular. While informal cross-border trade is not a new phenomenon, it has long been taking place among Zimbabwean women and yet its visibility has started growing in Lesotho. Informal cross-border trade and its impact on those involved in it and on their countries', economics have been recognised around the globe by different entities. Afrika and Ajumbo (2012) projected that informal cross-border trade accounts for 30–40% of intra-Southern African Development Community (SADC) trade. This study noted that informal cross-border trade constitutes the most fundamental part of the socio-economic system, ensuring food and goods move from surplus to scarce areas despite the many bureaucratic obstacles, corruption by bribe-seeking officials, and the problematic conditions navigated by those found in this activity. With this background, the focus of the current study was to understand who these Basotho women are and their lived experiences through their engagement in informal cross-border trade and the contribution of the business to social mobility.

The current study explored the circular cross-border movement of Basotho women and analysed their motives, dynamics of their trade, and socio-economic impacts to determine whether they are of a different class than women often portrayed in the literature on Basotho women cross-border traders. The argument I make and emphasise throughout the thesis is that informal cross-border trading is a vehicle for social mobility. Informal cross-border trade is not necessarily a sub-category of migration studies but rather mobility studies, as the study involves movement of Basotho women from one place to another which may not be migratory in nature. However, a detailed background of migration is given to better understand the emergence of informal cross-border trade in Lesotho. The difference is that with migration it is long time, in that people migrate with the intention to settle even though it may not be forever, whereas with mobility the intention is not to settle but rather move between borders to attend to the needs. Basotho women involved fall within a specific category of women that is significantly different from Basotho women migrants discussed in the literature (see for example, Griffin, 2011, 2016; Johnston, 2007; Ulicki & Crush, 2000, 2007). The women in this study take 3 days trips to Botswana to

purchase commodities for re-sale in Lesotho, which is different from Basotho women who migrate to South Africa to take up domestic work.

The current study of women informal cross-border traders who mainly travel to Botswana, is of great significance for our understanding of the transformation of former migrant labour-sending societies because of the changing socio-economic situation in these countries, including Lesotho, as well as the changing demands on women to play more active roles outside the domestic sphere. The study situates this new trend of Basotho cross-border migration within the broader discourses of migration development and women's empowerment in the context of an increase in women-headed households. According to O'laughlin (1998, p. 10), literature provides evidence of structural changes in the labour migration system, including "retrenchments in the mines, resulting in many economically active Basotho becoming commuter labourers". While this has meant a "corresponding decline of the male breadwinner role", women also faced discrimination "both in the labour market and in the organisation of public transfers" (Moore, 1994, p. 26).

Furthermore, this study sought to understand how these factors have interacted with the women's agency to determine the changing trends in migration and create a new category of women that is different from the domestic labour stereotype whose role was the reproduction of cheap labour. The study analysed the dynamics, motives, outcomes, and impacts of circular cross-border trading by Basotho women against the background of a particular historical epoch in Basotho history that shaped how society view the place and role of women and men in social and economic spaces. The understanding of the different roles and places of men and women was captured by Boehm's (2003) observation that "men were supposed to make money" while women and older people stayed at home to do low-status tasks like farming. With these societal stereotypes, the study paid particular attention to the presentation of women in the literature on Basotho migration. Gay (1980) showed how women's migration to South Africa took place along with formal male labour through the labour migration system dating back to the 1930s.

The loss of mining jobs in South Africa resulted in the proletarianization of women and the diversification of livelihood strategies. Substantial research has been conducted on the feminisation of cross-border migration from Lesotho (Baylies & Wright, 1993; Gay & Hall, 1994; Gay, 1980; Griffin, 2010, 2011; Johnston, 2007; Ulicki & Crush, 2000, 2007). However, this body of research focused on poor women migrants, thus presenting migration as a survival

strategy by poor households (some of which had lost mining income) in Lesotho. Gay and Hall (1994) argued that unemployment and poverty are extensive in Lesotho, and Crush et al. (2007) emphasised that poor women are among the major driving forces (except for the most skilled) behind internal and external women migration.

The works of these scholars constructed cross-border migration as directly linked to the retrenchment of Basotho men from the mines (McDonald et al., 2000; Peberdy, 2008; Pule & Matlosa, 2000). The retrenched males could not secure alternative jobs back home as most were uneducated and unskilled because the skills they acquired in the mines were irrelevant to available economic opportunities in Lesotho (Maphosa & Morojele, 2013; Morojele, 2004). Consequently, women had to search for jobs to support their families. The only way women and their families could escape poverty in Lesotho was for the women to migrate to South Africa, and the decision to relocate was often taken out of desperation (Turner, 2005).

Researchers variously emphasised occupations in the informal sector, including domestic services and farm labour (Baylies & Wright, 1993) and illegality and exploitation by employers (Crush et al., 2007; Griffin, 2010, 2011; Ulicki & Crush, 2000). The issue of illegality and informal jobs was well articulated by Griffin (2010) in her study of the employment experiences of Basotho migrant domestic workers, who are often there without identity documents, in South Africa (Griffin, 2010, 2011). She discovered that due to their illegality, they cannot access labour institutions and trade unions, leading to their isolation and dependence on employers, and this leads to exploitative working conditions, including limited leave days. The workers' failure to effectively enforce their rights means they are denied those rights and often tied to individual employers.

Authors like Johnston (2007) and Ulicki and Crush (2000, 2007) conducted studies on Basotho women migrants on the Free State farms. According to Johnston (2007), the experiences of migrants are not determined solely by them as agents, and they are affected by the roles of other actors, particularly employers and their preferences. These preferences depend on the kind of employee the employer wants; for example, age (preferred age limit) and literacy are categories employers consider while making the decision. She emphasised that the oversight of the role of other actors was a severe weakness that led to the exclusion of essential issues in the analysis of migration. Thus, her primary research focused on employer strategies for using migrant labour.

Ulicki and Crush (2000, 2007) examined the experiences and conditions of employment, the regulatory environment within which women migrants are recruited and employed, and their future in the context of changing immigration and migration legislation in South Africa. Accordingly, these studies offered insight into women's engagement in informal economic activities.

The literature discussed above suggested that Basotho women migrants in South Africa who work on commercial farms or domestic or other sectors share common characteristics of desperation, poverty, illegality, exploitation, and survival. While this is undoubtedly part of the story, studies elsewhere in the region suggested that informal cross-border traders depart from the stereotype of woman migrants portrayed in this literature. In a study of Zimbabwean cross-border migrants to South Africa in the early 1990s, Zinyama and Tevera (2002) found that a typical cross-border migrant is a family man/woman engaging in legal, purpose-specific migration who return home after a short time.

Muzvidziwa (1998, 2001) presented Zimbabwe cross-border women traders as highly enterprising individuals who not only use cross-border trading to escape poverty but also as an economic strategy for prosperity, and his findings resonate with the title of this study that name Basotho women cross-border traders as another class. This class is a category of women who fight against all odds to escape poverty. In Lesotho, this kind of economic venture is a relatively recent phenomenon, and therefore, informal cross-border migration in Lesotho has received little attention in literature, and by extension, policy making. It remains a neglected area in policy and research, mainly because the general focus on poverty and opportunities to study poverty offered by seasonal cross-border farm work seems more enticing than women engaged in informal cross-border trade.

Yet, it is possible to conceive of Basotho women informal cross-border traders' activities as a survival strategy or entrepreneurship. I use evidence from this study to discuss in the data chapters whether the assumption, especially of entrepreneurship through informal cross-border trade, exists. The narratives from participants interviewed for this study painted a picture of determined women supported by their relatives in their quest to sustain their families' livelihoods. Informal cross-border trade creates opportunities for other economically active unemployed citizens of Lesotho.

These women informal cross-border traders have a different profile from the general stereotype of women who move as depicted in the existing literature because their migration is short-term and purpose-specific, they are legal and do not take jobs in the receiving country, and they are certainly not poor. Overlooking this emerging trend in literature of women cross-border traders within the migration field from Lesotho deprives migration studies of a crucial perspective for policy.

1.2 Problem Statement

The main concern related to Basotho women informal cross-border traders is the lack of jobs and support for business start-ups, which creates challenges for them and their families. Literature in Lesotho points out that informal cross-border trade presents a unique research problem that is entirely different from Lesotho migration trends of the past and also different from other everyday economic activities (Tanga, 2009). Primarily due to the organised labour system between the two countries (Lesotho and South Africa), a Mosotho cross-border migrant was typically a man who left home to make money, and in contrast, the women were left at home to look after the children, older people, fields, and the home. Women left behind became what Boehm (2003) described as “gold widows” because the men would be gone for long periods without returning home and without their wives visiting them.

This thesis, therefore, sought to investigate the socio-economic circumstances and dynamics of Basotho women informal cross-border traders who travel from Lesotho to source materials and goods from the Republic of Botswana. The study was motivated by the increasing number of Basotho women who have recently joined the cross-border trade business. The situation may be motivated by increasing socio-economic decline in Lesotho, mainly as a result of what others referred to as migration shocks, characterised by the deterioration of the South African labour market, mainly through retrenchments and decreased absorption of Basotho male labour (Meagher, 2021; World Bank, 2017).

This study sought to fill this literature gap and inform policy. It explored the dynamics of Basotho women informal cross-border trading and focused on women who source products from Botswana. In the quest to understand the dynamics involved in Basotho women cross-border

traders that separate them from other Basotho women migrants, the study adopted an ethnography approach to understand the lived experiences of these women.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- Who are Basotho women informal cross-border traders, and in what ways can they be seen or constructed as a unique group of women and their motives for engaging in informal cross-border trade?
- What is the significance of informal cross-border trade and its impact on the lives of Basotho women and their households?
- What social and economic challenges do Basotho women traders in Lesotho face and how do they navigate them?
- What are the government's and any non-state institutions' responses to this new migration trend that is different from the former migrant labour trends?

1.4 Aim and Objectives

The aim of the study was to gain an understanding of the motives and lived experiences of Basotho women in informal cross-border trade. The following objectives were formulated to meet the aim of the study.

- To provide an overview of the nature and scope of informal cross-border trade in Lesotho;
- To explore the motives and lived experiences of Basotho women as informal cross-border traders, particularly focusing on the social and economic situation;
- To empirically investigate whether Basotho women's involvement in informal cross-border trade is a survival strategy or entrepreneurial behaviour; and
- To explore the Lesotho government's responses to women informal cross-border trading in the context of the increase in the proletarianization of women and policy attention on women's empowerment.

1.5 Contributions of the Study

Studying Basotho women cross-border traders adds value to the migration history of Lesotho and Southern Africa. The informal cross-border trade that many Basotho women engage in has long been an important livelihood for many Basotho families in Lesotho and has played a vital role in shaping the migration patterns of the Basotho people. Many Basotho women traders have migrated to neighbouring countries, such as South Africa, for employment in the informal sector to support their families. Their movement has developed transnational networks and communities, with Basotho women traders forming close relationships with other traders from across the region.

Firstly, the experiences and perceptions of the women as informal traders provided valuable insights into the realities of informal cross-border trade in Southern Africa and Lesotho. In particular, the experiences of Basotho women as informal cross-border traders shed light on how gender shapes migration patterns and experiences. Their stories and experiences helped shed light on informal traders' challenges, including issues such as gender-based violence, corruption, and lack of access to finance and resources. Their experiences will help inform research and policy on informal cross-border trade and highlight the need for more support and protection for informal traders. It will encourage discussions on gender and trade and highlight the need for gender-responsive trade policies and programs.

When it comes to women informal cross-border traders the literature highlights the gender norms and expectations that shape women's participation in cross-border trade. Their experiences helped show how women's roles as caregivers and household managers intersect with their roles as traders, and how this can impact their ability to trade and benefit from trade.

The highlight in literature is not only about gender norms and expectations shaping these women but it is also on how informal trade can contribute to poverty reduction and economic development. Their experiences helped demonstrate the importance of informal cross-border trade for livelihoods and economic growth in the region and to highlight the need for policies and programs that support and promote informal cross-border trade.

Thus, Basotho women informal cross-border traders feature significantly in the literature on informal cross-border trade, gender and trade, and cross-border trade and development,

providing valuable insights into the realities of informal trade and the challenges and opportunities it presents for women and development more broadly.

1.6 Discussion of Key Terms

The informal cross-border trade as mentioned already under the introduction came about as a result of what was first migration hence the discussion of keys terms are inclusive of terms like migration, as well as informal sector. Their discussion is meant to better understand informal cross-border trade in particular for this study.

Circular migration is a pattern of human mobility that involves the repeated and temporary movements of individuals or groups of people between two or more places, typically a country of origin and a destination country (Bell, 2000; Castles & Ozkul, 2014; Newland, 2009). In circular migration, people move back and forth between their home country and another country, often for work or economic reasons. The back-and-forth movement can occur over a short or long period, with migrants returning home periodically to visit family or for other reasons. Often, this is seen as a way for individuals to take advantage of other countries' economic opportunities while maintaining their home country. It can also be beneficial for both the origin and destination countries as migrants can provide needed labour while contributing to their home communities through remittances and other means. However, it can also have negative effects, such as disrupting family structures and communities, leading to brain drain in origin countries and creating challenges for integration and social cohesion in destination countries.

Informal cross-border trade refers to exchanging goods and services across international borders that are not officially recorded, regulated, or subject to formal customs and trade procedures (Golub, 2015; Kahiya & Kadirov, 2020). This type of trade often occurs through unofficial channels, such as unmonitored border crossings, and involves small-scale and low-value transactions (Yusuff, 2014). Informal cross-border trade is part of many countries' economies, especially whereby it accounts for a significant portion of trade. According to the UN Conference on Trade and Development, informal cross-border trade accounts for over 40% of total trade in some African countries (Bouët et al., 2018; Gor, 2012; Lesser & Moise-Leeman, 2009). However, the current study adopted the term informal cross-border trade as best describing the activities of small entrepreneurs involved in buying and selling in neighbouring

countries (Peberdy, 2002). It can provide livelihood opportunities for marginalised groups, revenue losses for governments, and health and safety risks associated with unregulated trade. Efforts to formalise informal cross-border trade have been the subject of much policy attention, with some advocating for greater cross-border cooperation and the development of policies and infrastructure to support formal trade. For example, the African Union launched a program to support formalising informal cross-border trade to promote economic integration and reduce poverty.

The **informal sector** refers to economic activities that are not regulated by formal institutions, such as government or labour laws, and are not included in official economic statistics (Benjamin et al., 2014; Webb et al., 2020; Welter et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2015). The informal sector is often characterised by small-scale and low-productivity activities outside the formal economy, such as street vending, small-scale manufacturing, and domestic work. Workers in the informal sector often lack job security, social protection, and access to formal financial services, such as bank loans and insurance (Güven et al., 2021; Lund & Srinivas, 2000). Lack of access to these services can leave them vulnerable to exploitation and economic shocks.

The informal sector is prevalent in many developing countries, like Lesotho, where formal job opportunities are limited and individuals may have to rely on their skills and resources to create income, such as the Basotho women informal cross-border traders who rely on their skills to feed their families. The informal sector was initially noticed and studied in developing countries, followed by rising interest in developed nations (Gerxhani, 2004). Thus, the concept of the informal sector originates from research conducted in developing countries (Hart, 1973). The informal sector plays an essential role in many economies by providing employment opportunities to the low-skilled and goods and services to consumers (Blunch et al., 2001; Chaudhuri & Mukhopadhyay, 2009; Losby et al., 2002; Narula, 2020). However, its unregulated nature can also lead to exploitation and underdevelopment, and efforts to formalise the informal sector have been the subject of much debate and policy attention (Carr & Chen, 2002; Özgür et al., 2021).

Migration refers to the movement of people from one place to another, whether within a country or across international borders (Castles, 2000; Sinha, 2005). This movement can be temporary or permanent, voluntary or forced, and driven by various economic, social, political, and

environmental factors (Castelli, 2018; Douglas et al., 2019). Migration can take many forms, including labour migration, where individuals move to seek employment opportunities; family reunification, where individuals move to reunite with family members; and forced migration, which compels individuals to move due to conflict, persecution, or natural disasters (Black et al., 2013; Vietti & Scribner, 2013). Migration has played an essential role in human history, contributing to cultural exchange, economic growth, and social development. However, migration can also present challenges such as social and cultural tensions, labour-market pressures, and the need for effective migration policies to address integration, human rights, and security. According to Atak (2018) and Rubinskaya (2020), government and international organisations play an essential role in shaping migration policies and addressing the needs of migrants, including their rights and protections, access to education and healthcare, and the promotion of integration and social cohesion.

1.7 Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured into eight chapters, that which guide the reader as discussed here.

Chapter 1 introduces the study and identifies its aims, objectives, and research questions. The chapter begins by discussing the background of circular migration in Lesotho, focusing on the role of Basotho women in migration. It highlights the importance of informal cross-border trade to the livelihoods of many Basotho women. It outlines the research questions the study sought to address. The study's justification focuses on the changing gender roles and increasing participation of Basotho women in economic activities. The shift in gender roles is seen as a departure from traditional gender norms within Lesotho patriarchal society, and I argue that this represents an essential development in the country's social and economic landscape. The chapter also situates the study within the broader literature on gender, migration, and informal cross-border trade, highlighting this topic's significance in Lesotho and the broader African context. Overall, Chapter 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the study and the context in which it took place, setting the stage for the subsequent chapters and the research findings.

Chapter 2 discusses the key literature within the migration and development nexus generally, the historical overview of the origins and evolution of informal cross-border trade in Africa, and how this phenomenon is being studied and understood globally.

In Chapter 3, the focus is on the methodological approach adopted for the research, which was an ethnographic and qualitative research design, and why it best fit the study exploring the experiences of Basotho women in informal cross-border trade. The study aimed to explore the experiences of Basotho women as informal cross-border traders, and particularly the challenges they face and how they cope, and therefore, I chose an ethnographic and qualitative research design.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed profile of Basotho women who engage in informal cross-border trade. The profile is explained by understanding who Basotho women traders are through their backgrounds, family situation, education background. The chapter also explores the reasons that push women to engage in informal cross-border trade. As a result, various categories are then discussed. This categorisation helped to understand how different aspects affect their involvement in informal cross-border trade, their experiences, and their challenges.

Chapter 5 explores the significance of informal cross-border trade in the lives of Basotho women, with a particular focus on the impact of informal cross-border trade on their livelihoods. The chapter provides a detailed discussion of the findings from the fieldwork, which involved interviews with women engaged in informal cross-border trade. The chapter proceeds to examine the contribution of informal cross-border trade to the everyday lives of Basotho women. It discusses how informal cross-border trade has enabled women to generate income and support their households, particularly in economic challenges such as poverty and unemployment. It also explores how informal cross-border trade has empowered women by giving them greater economic autonomy and the ability to make life decisions. The impact of informal cross-border trade on the economic and social wellbeing of Basotho women is also examined in detail. The chapter discusses how informal cross-border trade has improved the economic status of women, enabling them to invest in their businesses, support their families, and improve their living standards. It also explores how informal cross-border trade has contributed to the wellbeing of women by providing them with opportunities to network, gain knowledge, and develop new skills. Overall, the chapter demonstrates that informal cross-border trade has a significant and positive impact on the lives of Basotho women. It allows them to improve their economic and social status and contributes to their empowerment and agency. However, although the positive contribution is noticeable, the challenges they face are addressed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 delves deeper into the experiences of Basotho women engaged in informal cross-border trade by discussing the challenges and social and economic barriers they face, and the opportunities available to them. The chapter explores the root causes of their challenges and explains how they navigate these to make a success of their businesses. It begins by highlighting some significant challenges Basotho women face in informal cross-border trade, including limited access to credit and markets, high transportation costs, and lack of knowledge about trade regulations. It also explores the social and economic barriers they face, such as gender-based discrimination, lack of education, and limited access to healthcare. The chapter provides further insights into the root causes of these challenges and barriers. For instance, it explores how the lack of access to credit and markets results from limited infrastructure, including financial institutions and transportation systems. It also discusses how gender-based discrimination is deeply ingrained in Basotho society and affects women's ability to engage in trade and make decisions about their lives.

The chapter then discusses how Basotho women navigate these challenges to make a success of their businesses. It explores their strategies to access credit and markets, such as forming partnerships and networks with other traders. It also examines how they overcome social and economic barriers, including advocacy for their rights (if any) and participation in community organisations. The chapter highlights the opportunities available to Basotho women engaged in informal cross-border trade, including access to new markets and the potential for growth and expansion. It also emphasises the need for incredible support and resources from the government and private sector to enable women to fully benefit from informal cross-border trade and overcome the challenges and barriers they face.

In Chapter 7, the focus is on the response of the Lesotho government to informal cross-border trade. The strategies and measures are discussed to investigate the government's level of input into and recognition of Basotho women informal cross-border traders. The chapter begins by providing an overview of the government's approach to the informal sector and its recognition of its importance to the country's economy. It discusses the various policies and initiatives to support the informal sector and whether informal cross-border trade is part of the recognition, including establishing trade associations and providing training and capacity-building programs. The chapter then examines the government's response to Basotho women's specific challenges

in informal cross-border trade. It explores the measures implemented to support women to access credit and markets and addresses social and economic barriers such as gender-based discrimination and lack of education.

The chapter also discusses the strategies the government has employed to promote cross-border trade and enhance the competitiveness of Basotho traders. It examines the role of trade agreements and protocols and the establishment of border posts and other infrastructure to facilitate trade. Finally, the chapter evaluates the effectiveness of these strategies and measures in promoting the recognition and support of Basotho women as informal cross-border traders. It discusses the challenges and limitations of the government's approach, including the need for more significant resources and coordination among government agencies. It also highlights the potential for further collaboration between the government and other stakeholders, such as the private sector and civil society organisations. Overall, Chapter 7 provides a comprehensive overview of the role and response of the Lesotho government in informal cross-border trade, focusing on the recognition and support for Basotho women engaged in informal cross-border trade. It explores the various strategies and measures employed by the government and evaluates their effectiveness in promoting the growth and development of this vital sector.

Lastly, Chapter 8 is the study's conclusion, and contains a critical discussion of the thesis' contribution and the knowledge gap fill concerning informal cross-border trade, specifically within the narrative of Basotho women circular migrants. This chapter points out policy gaps and makes recommendations for inclusive policies and further research. The chapter begins by summarising the study's key findings and highlighting its significant contributions to informal cross-border trade. It discusses how the study adds to the understanding of the experiences of Basotho women circular migrants engaged in informal cross-border trade, particularly regarding their livelihood strategies, social networks, and the challenges they face. The chapter also highlights the significance of the study's contribution to the broader academic and policy debates on the role of informal economies in shaping local and national economies.

It explains how the study contributes to bridging the gap in existing research by shedding light on the experiences of this group of women who have been largely neglected in the policies of trade in place. The chapter highlights the importance of the study's contribution to the broader literature on gender and economic empowerment in the Global South. It then turns to a critical

analysis of policy gaps and recommendations for inclusive policies. The chapter highlights the challenges women in informal cross-border trade face, particularly regarding access to credit, markets, and information, and the need for policies sensitive to these challenges. The chapter provides recommendations for policy and practice, such as increasing investment in infrastructure and capacity-building programs, strengthening support networks for women, and promoting gender-sensitive policies.

Finally, the chapter suggests areas for further research. It discusses the need for more in-depth research on the role of informal cross-border trade in shaping local and national economies, particularly in the context of poverty reduction and sustainable development. The chapter also suggests the need for more research on the experiences of other groups engaged in informal cross-border trade, such as men, youth, and people with disabilities. In conclusion, Chapter 8 critically discusses the study's contributions and the knowledge gap it fills in the informal cross-border trade, specifically within the narrative of Basotho women circular migrants. The chapter also highlights the policy gaps, provides recommendations for inclusive policies, and suggests areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE ON MIGRATION AND INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER TRADING

2.1 Introduction

The goal of a literature review is to gain insight into prior research, discuss and review key and current issues surrounding the topic, and identify gaps in previous research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Kumar, 2018). This literature review provides an overview of the shift in migration trends in Lesotho and a chronological overview of informal cross-border trade.

Migration is a complex and diverse topic studied globally and regionally, such as in sub-Saharan Africa. Migration refers to the movement of individuals across national borders, either within the same country (internal migration) or across different countries (international migration), either freely or forcibly, for a variety of reasons (Adepoju, 1998, 2006; Castelli, 2018; Cohen & Sirkeci, 2011; Ghosh, 2009; McAdam, 2012). Economic possibilities, political instability, violence, environmental issues, and family reunification are among the factors that influence migration (Weiner, 1992). It involves physical movement across geographical boundaries and can be characterised as voluntary or involuntary, temporary, or permanent, depending on the circumstances (Adamson, 2006). People undertake migration for many reasons, such as pursuing economic prospects, seeking improved living conditions, accessing better employment opportunities, acquiring education or skills, reuniting with family members, escaping conflict or persecution, or due to environmental factors like natural disasters or the effects of climate change (Castles, 2002). These diverse factors compel individuals or entire communities to leave their original residence and establish themselves in a new destination.

Migration can take different forms, such as labour migration (moving for work purposes), refugee migration (escaping persecution or conflict), asylum-seeking (seeking protection in another country), or forced migration (being displaced due to factors beyond one's control; International Organization for Migration, 2015). According to Massey, (1999) the scale of migration can vary, ranging from individual movements to large-scale population displacements. Furthermore, migration has significant social, economic, cultural, and political implications for origin and destination areas. It can impact demographic patterns, labour markets, social cohesion,

identity formation, and development. Governments, international organisations, and scholars study migration to understand its causes and consequences and to develop policies that address the challenges and opportunities it presents.

Migration can lead to the emergence of migrant traders who move across borders to engage in informal trade. These individuals may have migrated from their home country in search of better economic opportunities, and they leverage their cross-border networks and knowledge to engage in informal trade activities (Peberdy, 2000). Migrants often possess valuable knowledge of markets, consumer preferences, and trade routes in their destination and home countries. They use their social networks and connections to facilitate informal cross-border trade as they may maintain ties with their home communities and engage in trade between the two locations. Migration can also influence informal cross-border trade through remittances (Peberdy and Rogerson, 2000). Migrants often send money back to their home communities, and these remittances can serve as a source of capital for individuals involved in informal trade. Remittances can provide the necessary financial resources for traders to purchase goods, cover transportation costs, or invest in their cross-border trade activities (Little, 2005, Maphosa, 2005). Lastly, migration can contribute to the integration of markets across borders. Migrant traders may act as intermediaries, facilitating the flow of goods and services between countries and fostering trade relationships. Their activities can lead to the integration of informal markets, where goods from one country are readily available in the neighbouring country, meeting the demands and preferences of consumers.

As a complex phenomenon, migration and informal cross-border trade are interconnected phenomena that often go hand in hand. According to Ogalo (2010), informal cross-border trade refers to imports and exports of legitimately produced goods and services (that is, legal goods and services) that directly or indirectly escape the regulatory framework for taxation and other procedures set by the government and frequently go unrecorded or incorrectly recorded into official national statistics of the trading countries. It is typically carried out by individuals or small-scale traders who frequently engage in cross-border activities. It is important to note that informal cross-border trade is a complex phenomenon influenced by various socio-economic and political factors.

The relationship between migration and informal cross-border trade can differ across regions and contexts (Nshimbi, 2017). According to Crescenzi, and Harman, (2023), the researchers, policymakers, and organisations studying migration and trade dynamics explore these connections to understand the impacts and dynamics of informal cross-border trade and develop appropriate policies and interventions to harness its potential benefits.

The convergence of informal cross-border trade and the informal sector creates a dynamic and intricate landscape that challenges conventional economic models. These intertwined sectors serve as catalysts of local entrepreneurship and economic engagement, influencing and being influenced by the regional and local economies (Ramadani et al, 2018, Gallien, 2020). The informal sector, marked by its absence of formal regulations and oversight, aligns with the border-spanning activities of informal cross-border trade. Together, they shed light on the inventive approaches, adaptable resilience, and complex networks that individuals and communities adopt to address economic hurdles and seize opportunities that transcend national borders. Informal cross-border trade is another form of the informal sector, and as a result, the interplay between informal cross-border trade and the informal sector reveals how their intersection empowers local economies while reshaping global trade dynamics.

The definition of the informal sector by the International Labour Organization (ILO) is frequently used and based on the enterprises' characteristics. These traits set the formal sector apart from the informal one. The ILO claims that informal activities are not just associated with employment but are also seen as ways of conducting tasks. According to the ILO, the informal sector is distinguished by its low barriers to entry, reliance on local resources, family ownership of businesses, scaled-back operations, labour-intensive technologies, skills learned outside of the formal education system, and unregulated and competitive marketplaces (Bangasser, 2000).

People who engage in very small-scale or casual self-employment activities may not report in statistical surveys that they are self-employed or employed at all, even though their activity falls within the enterprise-based definition (Husmanns, 2004). The classification of certain groups of employed people by their position in employment, such as out workers, subcontractors, freelancers, or other workers whose activities are on the boundary between self-employment and wage employment, may contain mistakes that impact informal sector data. In the majority of nations, there is a sizeable informal economy. Out of the 162 nations studied by Schneider et al.

(2010) between 1999 and 2007, 107 had an estimated informal percentage of the total gross domestic product (GDP) larger than or equal to 30%, including 18 with a share of over 50%. These national informal economies are built partly on legal or informal international trade of goods and land cross-border trade with a more extensive geographic reach (Dongala, 1993).

In the extant literature on ‘informality’, Goldberg and Pavcnik (2003) used the concept to denote the economy sector conceived as flouting labour-market regulations and that does not offer sanctioned benefits to workers. This history of cross-border trade is linked to the creation of standardised exchanges of goods, services, and currencies by state parties considered legitimate within the international system (Meagher, 2013). Subsequently, applying the concept of ‘informality’ to cross-border trade has a long history that extends back to colonial and pre-colonial periods where colonial regimes prohibited the exchanges of commodities they had no control over or considered it as competition to those engaged by the colonisers (Cantens et al., 2015; Haugen, 2019).

The history of ‘informality’ to cross-border trade has been explored based on other non-neoclassical theories of trade and development that capture the informal sector. A good example is neoliberal economic reform, which argues that policy interventions bring about informal trading, and that corrective policy intervention can remove them. However, Meagher (2003) found that in West Africa, economic structural adjustment failed, which was seen as an ultimate weapon against the extensive informal cross-border trading systems. The cross-border trading structures did not disappear but were restructured and globalised.

Crush and Peberdy (1998) examined the participation of non-South African street traders in regional cross-border trade and its implications for customs and immigration policy. The lack of growth for recognizing informal cross-border trade activities may explain situations in some developing countries and regions, such as in the Southern Africa region, where the influx in the supply of labour has been due to de-industrialisation or shrinking of an existing industrial base rather than an influx of labour migrating from rural areas. When workers get retrenched, the rising level of unemployment pushes them into engaging in informal sector activities.

The methods used in most research on informal cross-border trade carried out in Africa relied on survey data and secondary data, which resulted in quantitative approaches in analysis. However, in most studies, samples were too small to represent the populations correctly, and thus

secondary data were used to augment findings (Tekere et al., 2000). The quantitative data found in some studies were found to be inaccurate, unreliable, or inadequate because of the small survey samples. Studies by Muzvidziwa (1998), Chipeta (2000), and Chari (2004) were mainly based on small survey samples and had to be augmented by secondary data. To circumvent the problem of relying on secondary data, which may have been collected for different purposes, Chalfin (2001) used a much more extensive survey sample that was large enough to represent the population correctly. Metcalfe et al. (1992) also conducted a quantitative study using a bigger sample size. Such surveys produced comprehensive results that do not need to be supplemented by qualitative data. I discuss this in detail in section 2.3.

Chalfin (2001) considered the majority of Africa's regions where pre-colonial cross-border trade has been documented and narrated the history of trade in regions such as Northern Ghana, Togo, and Burkina Faso as extending back to both pre-colonial and colonial times. Since colonial times, highly specialised traders have made a living through cross-border trade. Chalfin observed that borders are not stable nor uniform, change constantly, and are porous and fluid, and secondly, that cross-border trade shows how the formal and informal markets interact negatively and occasionally positively. While cross-border trade is in some ways unregulated by governments, states impact market conditions through contact between traders and government officials at borders.

Thirdly, Chalfin (2001), observed that borders might be reconceived in ways that highlight them as essential assets in social conflicts over survival and the establishment of livelihoods, and that compared to the current numbers of recorded cross-border trading, women have always engaged in cross-border business, albeit in a limited capacity. This account is helpful to understand informal cross-border trade, which is construed in the extant literature to mean trade between national borders that are not sanctioned by governments, designated as 'illegitimate' or 'unauthorised', but not necessarily 'illegal', at least when viewed from the realist perspective (Sinha & Kanbur, 2012). For example, trading maize flour or canned drinks commonly found in the market may be unauthorised but certainly not illegal. Also, trade activities with the label 'informality' involve migration across one or more borders in a transient manner. The current study adopted the straightforward approach to conceptualising informal cross-border trade as trade activities across national borders that are not documented for national statistics, accounting,

and public policymaking. To better understand informal cross-border trade in the Lesotho context, we begin our inquiry by illustrating the nature of migrations as an integral part of informal cross-border trade.

2.2 Changing Migration Trends in Lesotho

Lesotho is a small, landlocked country that shares borders with South Africa and has a population of about 2.2 million people (Mahlakeng & Solomon, 2013; Padra, 2023; Shaw, 2007). Lesotho's type of 'landlockedness' within South Africa is a complete enclave. The percentage of people reported to live in urban areas is 0.69 million, which is 29.48% of Lesotho's population. Lesotho is ranked 205th in terms of urbanisation. Lesotho is a lower- and middle-income country and has a nominal per capita GDP of \$ 1 299 (World Bank, 2020). There are 1.07 million men and 1.09 million women in Lesotho; Lesotho has 27.02 thousand more women than men (World Health Organization, 2019).

Due to its rugged topography, information does not spread easily and therefore, collecting accurate data may pose a challenge. For decades, Lesotho has struggled with poverty and inequality, and these continue to be the fundamental problems in Lesotho's socio-economic system. Lesotho is classified as one of the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa because of declining agricultural production, high domestic unemployment, rising child mortality, and falling life expectancy, and about 49.4% of the population, or more than one million people, living in poverty (Canning et al., 2015; McFerson, 2010). Given the persistent problems and poor economic growth, 2019–2020 recorded exceptionally high levels of unemployment at 33% and 6.2% inflation (Mahlakeng & Solomon, 2013; Padra, 2023; Shaw, 2007). The continuous drop in revenue has affected the government's investment in numerous high-priority areas. Lesotho's economic situation and location have resulted in massive dependence on South Africa.

The history of migration in Lesotho dates to the 19th century when Basotho supplied the grain required in the Free State and the Cape Colony for a long time, and Lesotho came to be called the 'granary of South Africa' (Crush & Namasasu, 1985; Germond, 1967; Palmer & Parsons, 1977; Turner, 1978). Despite Lesotho's relative economic independence and prosperity in the 19th century into the 20th century, there was migration for wage employment from Lesotho to South Africa. According to Crush and Namasasu (1985), Germond (1967), Palmer and Parsons

(1977), and Turner (1978), around 1850, several Basotho sold their labour to white farms in South Africa. The country of Basuto furnished the Cape Colony every year with a great many workmen who easily found employment owing to the confidence inspired by their reputation for loyalty and honest (Casalis, 1889).

Before the loss of most of their arable land in the 1840s and the introduction of the Southern African migrant labour system soon after, Basotho entrepreneurs exported grain to the budding industrial mining establishments in what are now South Africa's Free State and Gauteng provinces and imported guns, drinks, and manufactured goods (Bardill & Cobbe, 1985; Omer-Cooper, 1987). Two main externally induced misfortunes halted the ambitious spirit and development of essential skills and networks. There were skirmishes and wars with European settlers' intent on securing as much land as possible, and the British colonising power supervised a series of 'peace treaties' that successively moved the boundaries of the territory of Basotho inward. This reduced arable land and the domestic capacity to produce surplus agricultural trade for the Basotho. Since the surplus could no longer be maintained after most of the fertile lowlands had been confiscated by the Boers of the Orange Free State, there was exhaustion and severe soil erosion of the available land. The failure of the Basotho to continue with agricultural trade and the imposition of various taxes forced more and more young Basotho men to seek paid employment in the mines.

2.2.1 Organised labour system migration and retrenchments

In one way, the history of Lesotho migration to South Africa can be applied to understand the context of informal cross-border trade between Lesotho and Botswana and its relation to economic and livelihood improvement. The migration from Lesotho to farms in the Free State province of South Africa dates back to the early 19th century in the history of the Dutch and British colonies. As a result of the discovery of diamond and gold riches in Kimberley in 1886 and in Johannesburg and other locations during the two World Wars, British colonists hired a black labour force and set them up in camps. Therefore, labour migration in Lesotho started in the middle of the 19th century before the discovery of diamonds and gold in Kimberley and the Witwatersrand (ILO, 1979). According to Crush et al. (2005), Basotho men working in the mines in 1920 had 10 439 labour contracts, which rose to 108 780 in 1990.

The end of apartheid in 1994 also signalled the start of a drop in the Basotho workforce, which had 58 224 workers registered in the mines in 2000. In addition to these labour migrants, there have been large migration flows related to employment in various industries, including transportation, construction, and industrial farms. There has been a considerable unrecognised movement of women who dedicate themselves to work in the domestic sector and informal trade domains. Even though more women are literate nowadays, most still work in lower-skilled occupations like domestic service. Additionally, they work in small businesses, the commercial sector, and the informal sector.

As a result, remittances have been a substantial source of income for many rural communities and households. A study conducted in 2006 by the Wayem (2007) found that the “remittances from Basotho migrant labourers in South Africa have helped households to reduce their dependence on agriculture and undertake investments to support their farming activities”. Although the reliance on remittances dates back many years, Crush, Dodson, Gay, and Leduka (2010) reported that migration patterns to South Africa had undergone a meaningful change since 1990. The drastic changes include a sharp rise in legal and unauthorised cross-border travel or migration between Lesotho and South Africa, as a result of a fall in Basotho men’s employment options in South Africa. Remittances, which were a significant source of income for many households (and frequently the only one), decreased as a result. Crush et al. (2010) contended that rather than reducing remittances to Lesotho per se, the decline in mine employment resulted in an increase in overall remittance flows due to rises in mining pay. However, as fewer and fewer homes were receiving the expanding remittance flows, more households without a mine worker experienced poverty and food insecurity.

During this period, circular migration between Lesotho and South Africa influenced Basotho’s economic, social, and cultural life, dividing families, weakening domestic social structure and organisation, compromising health, exacerbating rural poverty, and intensifying gender inequality. A substantial body of research from the 1970s to 1980s suggested that women were compelled to stay behind to manage the fields and raise the family while men migrated to work in the South African mines (Crush et al., 2007; Thebe, 2011; Ulicki & Crush, 2000). Many women undoubtedly had this experience but not all of them. Although it was never as prevalent as male migration to South Africa, female migration existed. Female Lesotho migrants were

typically young women or widows fleeing poverty at home and started in the early 20th century. Desperation was a common factor in the decision to relocate. Women moved because they had no other choice, “despite the dismal conditions, social isolation, and possibility of arrest” (Murray, 1981).

In South Africa, Basotho immigrants have had to contend with various legal restrictions over the years, and women faced incredibly stringent limitations. The legal restrictions promoted illegal immigration to South Africa, where these uncontrolled labourers may have travelled to several destinations. One of these destinations was white-owned farms in the Free State. As Ulicki and Crush (2002) observed, seasonal agricultural migration from Lesotho to South Africa has a lengthy, if somewhat understudied, history.

Since the 1990s, there have been fewer Basotho migrant mine workers, which was not caused by market forces but by political and legislative developments in South Africa. These adjustments drastically reduced household income in rural Lesotho. This study makes a case for training in skills and entrepreneurship to use Lesotho’s comparative advantages to generate domestic employment and absorb laid-off and prospective migrant mine workers’ households because current migrant households typically do not have skilled workers or run family businesses.

2.2.2 Organised migration and changes in gender roles

The massive outmigration of Basotho men from South Africa led the women of Lesotho to change how they live from the traditional practices of confining them to a home. The change in gender roles was caused by the shortage of wage-earning options in the country and the lengthy history of Basotho men working in South Africa, particularly in the mines. Ulicki and Crush (2000) referred to Basotho women and girls as significant casualties of mine retrenchments and remittance drying (Coplan & Thoalane, 1995). After the period of retrenchments, over 40 000 young and primarily unmarried Basotho women were the only group of people with skill sets to work in Lesotho’s textile industry as migrant men through the organised labour systems began to experience retrenchments but lacked the required skills to work in the booming textile industry (Boehm, 2003). Even though factory earnings are pitiful mine wages, these textile workers were called the ‘new miners. Many of these women would undoubtedly immigrate to South Africa if the textile industry did not exist or shut down.

The factories had mushroomed in the past years, the 1990s to early 2003 (of which 2003 was a peak of about 54 000 worker) under the African Growth and Opportunity Act 2000, and in 2006 they provided formal employment to over 60 000 Basotho, most of whom were women (Sun, 2017). Therefore, as a result of global economic conditions, many Basotho women were left stranded after some of the textile industries began to close down from October 2022.

This history showed that the fall of migrant Basotho men's employment chances in South African mines can be linked to the rise in Basotho female migration to South Africa. According to Crush, Dodson, Gay and Leduka (2010)'s report, half of the increasing number of female migrants from Lesotho work as domestic workers in South Africa, and the remaining half is distributed in professions life self-employed businesses, the informal sector, commercial farm work, and the informal sector Crush, Dodson, Gay, & Leduka, 2010).

Notably, many immigrants who work in industries other than mining do so illegally because the South African government hesitates to provide them with work permits (Crush & Dodson, 2010). Their illegality makes them more susceptible to being exploited (Griffin, 2010). Most women are in South Africa on 30-day visitor's visas that they must renew every 30 days by travelling back to Lesotho. They must pay a 'fine' when they eventually go home if they stay beyond the 30 days. Additionally, compared to male miners, South African domestic employees send less money to Lesotho.

The smaller remittances by women in the informal sector are primarily because they make around one-third as much money as their male colleagues; however, many Basotho informal cross-border traders avoid this problem. Unquestionably, the rise of Basotho women moving to South Africa is due to the decline in the prospects of migrant Basotho men in South African mines and in Lesotho because of a lack of relevant skills in Lesotho (Maphosa & Morojele, 2013).

Basotho women's movement is not only to work in domestic services because scholars such as Johnston (2007) and Ulicki and Crush (2000, 2007) conducted studies on Basotho women migrants on Free State farms. Johnston (2007) observed that the experiences of migrants are not determined solely by them as agents but that they are affected by the roles of other actors, particularly 'employers' and their preferences. Griffin (2011) emphasised that the oversight of the role of other actors is a severe weakness that leads to the exclusion of essential issues in the

analysis of migration, and therefore, her primary research focused on employer strategies for using migrant labour. Similarly, Ulicki and Crush (2000, 2007) examined the experiences and conditions of employment, the regulatory environment within which women migrants are recruited and employed, and their future in the context of changing immigration and migration legislation in South Africa. The literature above suggested that Basotho women migrants in South Africa who work on commercial farms or in domestic and other sectors share characteristics of desperation, poverty, illegality, exploitation, and survival. While this is undoubtedly part of the story, studies elsewhere in the region suggested that informal cross-border traders depart from the stereotype of the woman migrant portrayed by Griffin (2011), Johnston (2007), and Ulicki and Crush (2000, 2007).

2.2.3 Background of informal cross-border trade in Lesotho

A growing number of academics from various fields, including gender studies, sociology, political science, urban planning, economics, industrial relations, and anthropology are studying the current informal economy (Bromley & Wilson, 2018; Chen, 2005b; Chi et al., 2011; Etim & Daramola, 2020; ILO, 2014; Nguyen & Mogaji, 2021; Portes, 2003; Rogerson & Letsie, 2013; Webb et al., 2009). The recent research on informality in Africa covered a variety of topics, including the scale and makeup of the informal economy, what motivates or causes informality, what effects it has on welfare or productivity, and how informality is related to formality, growth, poverty, and inequality (Bromley & Wilson, 2018; Chen, 2005b; Etim & Daramola, 2020; ILO, 2014; Rogerson & Letsie, 2013; Webb et al., 2009). This renewed interest has led to the informal economy undergoing a considerable reassessment, and official measurements of the phenomenon have been improved.

Despite the growing literature by academics, little is known about Lesotho's informal economy. Therefore, it was essential to investigate the historical context of the informal sector in this nation because the goal of this chapter and the study in general was to add to this body of knowledge by examining the opportunities and barriers to the growth of this untapped sector in Lesotho during the colonial and postcolonial periods. According to Musi (2002), Lesotho, like many other developed and developing countries, has seen a surge in informal sector activity. During the 1990s, a period of growing globalisation and liberalism, this phenomenon developed substantially. In 1991, Lesotho had approximately 103 000 small-scale companies, employing

approximately 161 000 people (Musi, 2002). This figure accounted for around 20% of Lesotho's total labour force.

Using the typology of Rogerson and Letsie (2013), Gladstone (2013) studied the contribution of undeveloped scholarship around domestic tourism in the Global South but they did not directly study informal cross-border trade. Their research focused on a particular type of domestic business tourism, namely informal sector business tourism, and they studied empirical data from Lesotho. While the past decade has witnessed an upturn and growth in tourism research volume across Africa, Lesotho tourism remains overlooked. A recent review of published tourism research between 2000 and 2010 for 15 SADC countries disclosed the lack of research on Lesotho tourism, showing there has been minimal published material on the country in recent years (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2011). Researchers under Sechaba Consultants (1994, 2000) studied the informal sector in general but did not focus on informal cross-border trade. In 2000, Lesotho informal cross-border traders operated in huge numbers between Lesotho and Durban (Musi, 2002). Musi (2002) emphasised that these informal sector operations are a key but underrated part of trade relations between Lesotho and South Africa. It is therefore clear that there is still more to be discovered about the informal sector in Lesotho, especially informal cross-border trade. Hence it is difficult to trace when or who were the first traders in the emergence of the Lesotho-Botswana cross-border trade route. Yet, the route is interesting to the study because there is no border between the two countries and also Botswana has a stronger currency than Lesotho bringing into play issues of arbitrage. The choice of Botswana will be discussed in the findings chapter.

2.3 Informal Cross-border Trade in Context

The dualistic division between informal and formal sectors at national levels has been overtaken by research on informality's effects on global markets and governance (Meagher, 2013). The term 'informality' seems to resonate since it can describe various phenomena, including lack of control, small size, and competition, which are frequently associated with one another (Husmanns, 1996). According to Kraemer-Mbula and Wunsch-Vincent (2016) and Pratap and Quintin (2006), the informal sector is generally defined as units that produce goods or services on a small scale, typically with low levels of organisation, with little to no separation between

labour and capital as factors of production, and with a significant blurring between labour and management or ownership.

Therefore, numerous factors, including petty trading, have contributed to the expansion of the informal sector in many African countries and other developing nations (Chen et al., 2002; Moser, 1978). In the context of Lesotho, the informal sector's growth is substantially impacted by gender issues. Studies by (Chen, 2005, Derera et al, 2020, Peprah, 2023) on this topic showed that women comprise most of those who participate in the informal economy. In many cases, low-income black women are the majority in the informal economy, and they frequently display courage and inventiveness under challenging situations to generate income for their families. In addition, they are typically the 'managers' of a sizeable part of urban homes, bearing a two-fold role and load. Therefore, it is critical to consider gender concerns in developing the informal sector in Lesotho.

According to Modo, (2002) in Lesotho, the average Basotho community favours customary marriages. Christian marriage was, however, equalised with Basotho customary marriage with Proclamation 74 of 1871 (Modo, 2002). Currently, Lesotho has two distinct legal systems: Basotho Customary Law and British or inherited Roman Dutch Law from the Cape Colony. The two legal systems should have resulted in two distinct cultural groups. According to the Sechaba Consultants' (2000) report, not much had changed for women in Lesotho. As demonstrated by the 1997 Law Reform Commission that was tasked with reviewing legislation discriminating against women and had not finished its work. Women are underrepresented in the National Assembly, and there is no national policy on gender issues. As of 2018, the condition was still present in Lesotho, because of the persistent gender gap that disadvantages women over males in both socioeconomic and political areas which poses as a problem in gender representation in Lesotho (Kali, 2018).

2.3.1 Overview of informal cross-border trade globally

Everyone wants to live a better life and values learning new strategies to overcome difficulties they face and to raise their standard of living. In Europe, informal cross-border trade has evolved as an essential economic phenomenon, contributing to local livelihoods and regional economic dynamics. Scholars such as Nkendah, (2013), Nkoroi, (2015), Rogerson, (2018) and Kayiha and

Kadirov, (2020) emphasised a wide variety of commodities and services involved in informal cross-border trade. Among the variety of commodities and services, Caselli and Karkatsoulis (2018) highlighted the exchange of electronics, agricultural items, and textiles, which takes place along the Albania-Greece border, indicating the adaptability of informal traders to fulfil local market demands. Elsig et al. (2019) studied the Swiss-Italian border and found that luxury products, such as watches, fashion items, and accessories, are mostly traded.

While there is evidence of both men and women engaged in this type of trade in Europe, it is critical to recognise that the gender dynamics in informal cross-border trade are not uniform across locations and industries (Morokvasic, 2006, Faist, 2014). It is worth noting that women frequently play a crucial role in informal trade operations (Caselli & Karkatsoulis, 2018). Geiger and Sprenger (2018) emphasised that gender inequities continue, and women are frequently consigned to lower-value parts of informal cross-border trade due to limited access to resources and societal norms. Furthermore, gender-specific issues such as managing cultural expectations and juggling family duties might impact women's experiences in this industry. An understanding of gender dynamics is required to both unearth complexities and push for more inclusive and fair opportunities.

Kuzmanovic (2021) investigated women's engagement in informal trade activities in the Balkans and found that women work in industries that include food, handicrafts, and textiles, and therefore, the institutional settings and policy consequences of informal cross-border trade are worth consideration. Hence, De Lombaerde and van den Bosch (2019) analysed the influence of European Union legislation on informal cross-border trade and found that it is necessary to strike a balance between encouraging legitimate trade and allowing informal traders to operate. Furthermore, Salmi and Wollenschläger (2018) investigated the influence of European Union policies on informal cross-border trade patterns in the context of the Schengen Agreement and found tension between enabling cross-border trade and enforcing border restrictions. Such concerns about institutional settings reveal the importance of measures catering to informal cross-border trade.

Social networks and digital platforms are crucial despite the complexities involved in informal cross-border trade. Blaise et al. (2020) investigated the impact of social networks on informal cross-border trade activities and discovered that friendships, family ties, and community

affiliations facilitate trade transactions and information exchange. Radhuber et al. (2017) found that digital platforms have revolutionised informal cross-border trade by allowing traders to connect, negotiate, and grow their networks outside physical borders.

In Asia, informal cross-border trade reflects a diverse landscape influenced by diverse cultural, economic, and geographical factors. Research by Chitiga et al. (2018), Sarjono et al. (2021), and Sarjono and Rudiatin, (2022) stressed the significance of informal trade activities in Asia. The evidence suggested that women play a pivotal role in this realm and engage in similar sectors as in Europe, such as textiles, agriculture, and handicrafts (ILO, 2019; Kuzmanovic, 2021). However, Kabeer (2005) found that while women's participation in informal cross-border trade can be empowering and income-generating, it is often constrained by unequal power dynamics, limited access to resources, and the perpetuation of traditional gender norms that restrict their mobility and bargaining power.

It appears that in both Europe and Asia, traditional gender norms affect women traders. For instance, Mukherjee (2006) found a complex interplay of gender, informality, and cross-border trade, underscoring the need for nuanced approaches to address women traders' gender-specific challenges. Additionally, ILO's (2015) found that social networks and family support play a role in shaping women's engagement in informal trade, indicating that these factors often influence decisions to enter this sector. The intricate relationship between informal cross-border trade and gender dynamics in Asia demands a deeper scholarly inquiry and policy interventions that promote gender equality, recognise women's agency, and address the barriers they encounter in this trade.

Research on informal cross-border trade in North America is scarce compared to other areas of the world, but the available research emphasised its importance. Informal cross-border trade in North America takes place in a unique setting and as in other areas, there are economic variables. Herrera (2016) observed that women frequently engage in informal cross-border trade, particularly the sale of apparel and handicrafts, along the Mexico-US border. These activities can be understood to respond to economic insecurity and a lack of official employment opportunities (Herrera, 2016). However, Schuster (2005) pointed out that women's experiences in informal cross-border trade are complex as they encounter problems linked to legal restrictions, transportation barriers, and gender-based violence. Furthermore, Molina and Alexiadou (2019)

studied the influence of social networks and family ties on women's participation in informal trade across the US-Mexico border.

Research on of informal cross-border trade in Australia provides insights into more extensive studies on the informal economy, even though it is less studied than other areas. The Australian Government (2018) defined the informal economy as informal employment that includes activities such as cash-in-hand work and small-scale trade that involve both men and women. Gender-specific features of informal cross-border trade in Australia, however, remain unexplored. Breckenridge and Abbott (2016) highlighted the relevance of the informal sector in enabling marginalised populations, particularly women, to access economic possibilities but also exposed the lack of regulatory protection and social safety nets. Lack of regulatory protection shows that a complex interplay of factors, such as access to resources, economic necessity, and legal contexts, may impact women's engagement in informal cross-border trading in Australia.

This section showed that informal cross-border trade exists globally in the regions discussed but that there is limited literature on the topic.

2.3.2 Overview of informal cross-border trade in Africa

Upon gaining political independence in the early 1960s, most sub-Saharan African economies adopted the import substitution strategy to achieve long-term economic development goals, and the sub-Saharan Africa region remained prosperous and stable until the late 1970s. Following the economic crisis that Africa experienced in the 1980s, informal cross-border trade expanded. This means informal cross-border trade has been happening for a while and is a crucial cash-earning venture (Njikam & Tchouassi, 2011). According to Mijere (2006), informal cross-border trade has developed into a safety net for the continent's unemployed, offering income without a formal degree. Çağatay and Özler (1995) and Jackson (1996) indicated that informal cross-border trade is essential for reducing poverty and increasing prospects for work and income.

Cross-border business activity is crucial to the social and economic growth of communities (Çağatay & Özler, 1995; Jackson, 1996; Njikam & Tchouassi, 2011; Tsikata, 2009). Activities in this sector support the economy through the development of new businesses, their expansion, and the wise use of their revenues (Njikam & Tchouassi, 2011). Revenues show that informal cross-border trade is a legitimate business with the potential to generate significant profits rather

than just a survivalist venture (Çağatay & Özler, 1995; Jackson, 1996). Many people, particularly women, engage in unauthorised cross-border trading because they wish to better their lives and the lives of their families (Bouët et al., 2020; Muzvidziwa, 1998; Ama et al., 2014).

The colonial era restricted women's access to the urban regions and they were confined to rural areas under the control of chiefs. These conditions caused the labour force to be segmented by gender, forcing women to remain on the periphery of the colonial order, providing desperately needed services to migrant men and establishing themselves in the informal distribution of commodities and services. These colonial patterns have lasted into the postcolonial age and is exacerbated by ongoing gender inequality in access to formal employment and education and increased labour formalisation due to economic liberalisation policies (Tsikata, 2009).

The region's rural and urban livelihoods historically depended heavily on women's commercial activities. In the past, women cross-border traders sold both uncooked and processed food, such as fish, salt, and foodstuffs. Men and women traded in different markets because of the division of labour in manufacturing and distribution. According to estimates, around 70% of women of working age participate in cross-border trade, and women make up between 70% and 80% of informal cross-border traders in Africa, with about 80% of informal cross-border trade in Nigeria being done by females (Nakayama, 2022; Nkendah, 2013; United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2010). Cross-border collaboration among Africans is still strongly influenced by their shared historical past, cultural and ethnic affinities, and functional interdependences.

In Africa, informal cross-border trade is a well-known phenomenon, and its magnitude is significant. Informal cross-border trade considerably impacts the way of life in developing countries (Bouët et al., 2020; Fundira, 2018; Muzvidziwa, 1998). In West Africa, informal cross-border trade is a well-documented and a robust economic activity (Ayilu et al., 2016; Ayilu & Nyiawung, 2022; Bensassi & Jarreau, 2019; Shola & Olanrewaju, 2020; Yusuff, 2014). Since the colonial era, West African women have participated in trade domestically and internationally, especially in the exchange of services and the delivery of food and small consumer goods. Their active participation in small-scale trading is related to the colonial economies and society's gendered construction, which gave men access to formal education, employment in the bureaucratic colonies, and other formal employment opportunities.

Dhanani and Truelove (2018) researched women's essential role in this trade, particularly in the Economic Community of West African States setting, and found that women work in various industries, including food, textiles, and home items, typically due to a lack of official employment possibilities. However, their participation is not without complications, and women traders frequently experience gender-based discrimination, harassment, and bureaucratic barriers, emphasising the gender-specific challenges faced in the informal cross-border commerce sector (Sow, 2007). Furthermore, Mougoué (2018) found that social networks determine women's cross-border economic involvement because these networks are gendered.

North African countries also engage in informal cross-border trade. Danna and Alfieri (2015) found that women traders are prevalent in North Africa, notably in the context of commerce between Morocco and Algeria, and because of economic necessity and family ties, many women work in industries such as textiles, clothes, and food goods. Gendered issues persist here as Ibrahim and Al-Asaad (2020) found that women experience obstacles due to limited access to resources, restrictive societal norms, and legal restraints.

Informal cross-border trade in East Africa has substantial gender implications and sheds light on the complexity of economic participation. McCormick (2018) highlighted the important position women hold in this commerce and demonstrated their involvement in textiles, food, and small goods. Women traders' experiences, on the other hand, are shaped by a variety of problems. According to Waramboi and Odhiambo (2015), women frequently face limited access to financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, and gender-based violence. Furthermore, Mwabutwa (2018) emphasised how cultural norms, family duties, and their roles in sustaining household livelihoods influence women's engagement.

Informal cross-border trade is a complex phenomenon in sub-Saharan Africa and there is varied activity levels between nations. According to Maïga and Swinnen (2019), countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have a high incidence of informal cross-border trade due to their proximity to borders, limited formal employment possibilities, and the necessity of trade for subsistence. According to the UN Economic Commission for Africa (2020), women play an essential part in this trade in countries such as Benin, Nigeria, and Togo, where they work in various industries such as food, textiles, and agricultural products. Furthermore, ILO (2018) highlighted the significant contribution of informal cross-border commerce to economies in East

African countries such as Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, emphasising its significance in poverty alleviation and economic resilience. While informal cross-border trade is common in sub-Saharan Africa, the volume and nature of this trade vary due to a complex interplay of geographical location, economic conditions, and gender dynamics.

Due to women's standing in society, there is a belief amongst these women that the living standard for underprivileged and marginalised people, particularly women, can be raised via informal cross-border trade. As 'informal' can be mistaken for 'illegal', informal cross-border trade frequently has a negative connotation in the current literature (Brenton & Soprano, 2018). According to several studies by Gexhani, (2004), Bouet et al, (2018), Mauganidze, (2020), informal trade's value may equal or surpass the value of formal trade for specific goods and countries. For instance, Ama et al. (2014) estimated that informal trade between Zambia and Malawi totals US\$ 2.9 million per month, while formal trade at this border is projected to total US\$ 1.6 million per month. Ogalo (2010) reckoned that in 2006, Uganda's informal exports to its neighbours were about 83% of the value of Uganda's official exports to these nations during the same time (Nakanjako et al., 2021; Nkoroi, 2015; Titeca, 2014).

The informal economy's role in Uganda's informal economic activities is considered crucial in the country's borderlands, and in particular, in settlements in north-western Uganda. This consideration must be understood within Uganda's national politics as certain settlements feel marginalised by those in authority. Since the informal sector is particularly significant in Uganda's borderlands, it has played a significant role. According to a study conducted by the Abanis et al. (2013), an estimated US\$ 9.1 million worth of unregistered goods were transported between Uganda and Sudan through the official border crossing locations. This was due to greater security and increased trading opportunities because of the Southern Sudan peace agreement.

Similarly, Eastern Africa's retail market is still dominated by Kenya's *kadogo* (informal) economy (Battersby & Watson, 2018; Donovan & Park, 2022). However, informal cross-border trade in Western Africa is not considered a significant economic contribution (Engel et al., 2013; Torres & van Seters, 2016). Therefore, there is a shortage of information on informal trade in this area.

Dzawanda et al. (2021) claimed that informal cross-border trade is a viable activity that many Zimbabweans rely on for economic survival during tough economic times. They found that informal cross-border trade produces livelihood outcomes through cash exchange in the cash economy, enabling traders to buy land and items and create jobs. For many traders, the alternative to informal trade is not formal trade but not trading at all (Engel et al., 2013).

Indirectly, the new African Continental Free Trade Area has the potential to generate significant benefits for informal cross-border traders. The private sector can play a crucial role in contributing to informal cross-border trade initiatives under the African Continental Free Trade Area to ensure food security. Governments have a responsibility to support informal trade; however, evidence showed a mostly unsupportive policy environment for informal traders, often excluding informal traders from policy planning or enforcing by-laws that prevent trade (Ama et al., 2014; Battersby & Muwowo, 2018). These development plans often destroy informal vendor opportunities (Crush et al., 2017; Rogerson, 2016; Musoni, 2016). Municipalities on both sides of the border benefit from informal cross-border trade, including the re-export of rice, as an integral part of an economic model adopted by public and private actors (Tondel et al., 2020). Some argue that the dual categorisation of trade between formal and informal trade should be removed, and that formal and informal trade should be viewed as a continuum from small to large traders (Battersby & Muwowo, 2018; Ndiaye, 2010).

The informal sector still constitutes an integral part of developing country economies. In Africa, it is estimated to represent 43% of the official GDP, which is almost equivalent to the formal sector. While this phenomenon may provide short-term solutions to poor households, it can seriously challenge the economic development of African countries (Ama et al., 2014; Tsikata, 2009). In the SADC, the activities of people involved in informal cross-border trade appear to have been overlooked, even though national and regional policy initiatives, notably the SADC Free Trade Protocol, portray regional trade as an essential way of promoting growth and reducing poverty (Akinboade, 2005). Similarly, it is estimated that 40% of the SADC's 200 million people live in poverty (Chingono, and Nakana, 2009).

According to the World Bank (2005) report, the SADC region is getting poorer, and more than 70% of its people rely on subsistence agriculture, one-third of the population in the region live in poverty, and about 30–40% people are unemployed or underemployed in the formal sector,

resulting in the expansion of the informal sector. Akinboade (2005) suggested that Africa may overlook much of its trade by ignoring informal workers and estimated that informal trade contributes between 30% and 40% of SADC Trade (Ackello-Ogutu & Echessah, 1998; Macamo, 1999; Minde & Nakhumwa, 1997).

2.3.3 *Social-economic nexus in informal cross-border trade*

In the proceeding sections, the evidence from the literature showed that informal cross-border trade is not only a livelihood but also makes up for the shortfall of job opportunities because of the reduction in formal employment under structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s (Muzvidziwa, 2005; Tsikata, 2009). As a result, informal cross-border trade plays a crucial role in poverty alleviation and complements objectives sought under regional integration. For many economically low-income countries, informal cross-border trade has become a means of survival, income, and employment. Tekere et al. (2000) studied informal cross-border trade between Zimbabwe and South Africa and between South Africa and Zambia and concluded that informal cross-border trade provides an opportunity for many unemployed people to earn an income higher than the minimum salary in the formal sector. However, their finding may have been limited since they only concentrated on household traders who use commuter buses. Informal traders use other means of transport, including small couriers (using small cars, pickups, and wagons).

Informal sector cross-border trade comprises a significant proportion of regional cross-border trade (Ackello-Ogutu & Echessah, 1998; Macamo, 1999; Minde & Nakhumwa, 1997). Ackello-Ogutu and Echessah (1998), Macamo (1999), and Minde and Nakhumwa (1997) had similar analysis that by engaging in informal cross-border trade, people who would otherwise have no jobs become self-employed. In turn, a chain of other service providers, such as transport and commuter operators, get jobs. The employment gains therefore improve social relations among the different actors. They also established that some families depend on informal cross-border trade as a source of income for school fees and other expenses, and that cross-border trading contributes positively to women's empowerment and food security. These findings were supported by Bracking and Sachikonye (2006), Mwaniki (1998), Muzvidziwa (1998), and Meagher (2003).

Mwaniki (1998) supported the view that several people in the region are shifting to the informal sector where they hoped to earn a living, and this includes cross-border traders who frequently travel to neighbouring countries to sell their products and return home with more goods for resale and some foreign currency. Furthermore, Mwaniki also noted that all the cross-border traders they interviewed managed to raise incomes that took their households out of poverty as their incomes were above the prevailing official poverty threshold. It has become increasingly popular to represent informal cross-border trade as a sphere of activity that opens up economic opportunities (Igué & Soulé 1992).

The informal sector not only impacts the livelihoods of individuals, but as Mwaniki (1998) noted, informal contacts strengthen regional integration networks and relationships. He noted that informal cross-border trade contributes immensely to regional integration and concluded that regional integration processes demand the participation of all sectors of the economy, including the informal sectors. The SADC countries agreed to remove all trade barriers and non-tariff barriers as a step towards integration. The protocol was designed to be consistent with regional trade arrangements stipulated in the open global economy procedures of the World Trade Organisation. Such a uniform policy for all member countries may not be appropriate in a region of varied sizes and various levels of development like the SADC (Junior, 2018). Tekere et al. (2000) noted that despite the economic benefits of informal cross-border trade, such as alleviating poverty, there is some evidence that informal cross-border trade contributes to high divorce rates and single-parent families headed by women. However, they did not further establish whether or to what extent relations are being indirectly amended through possible positive attributes of informal cross-border trade. The positive attributes being considered are employment and job creation, bringing about the affordability of goods and services, and thereby, social rest. On the other hand, Mupedziswa and Gumbo (2001) noted that relations with parents and relatives are strengthened since the traders are remitting some of their proceeds as assistance, and their spouses are not against cross-border trade; however, they could not support them with start-up capital.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The study of migration has been a subject of interest for scholars from different disciplines and schools of thought. Cohen's (1996) collection of articles in *Theories of Migration* offers a

detailed and comprehensive exploration of various theories and perspectives on migration. Given the complex and diverse nature of migratory movements, the book highlights the challenges of constructing a general migration theory. The book contains over 25 articles initially published in different professional disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, political science, and geography. The articles offer a unique perspective on migration causes, patterns, and consequences, and is a nuanced discussion of migration theories, which is essential given the complexity and diversity of migration. Each type of migration requires a different set of theoretical frameworks to understand its causes and effects. The articles provide insights into the role of individual decision-making, social structures, economic factors, political institutions, and cultural norms in shaping migratory movements.

One of the significant challenges in constructing a general theory of migration is the wide range of migratory movements that must be considered. The various types of migration include professional and unskilled, internal, and international, settler and temporary, compelled and voluntary, and legal and illegal migrations.

2.4.1 *Giddens's structuration theory*

Theories are critical to structure and organise ideas and presumptions about various subjects in order to connect and explain what occurs (Tracey & Morrow, 2017; Babbie, 2020; Fouché et al., 2021). Theory-building is essential to research and helps researchers develop explanations for the phenomena they investigate. Theories can be borrowed from other disciplines or be developed within the research context. This study used Giddens (1999)'s structuration theory as an analytical framework to examine the social behaviour of Basotho women informal cross-border traders.

According to Steevensz (2016), the theory offers a valuable perspective for understanding human social behaviour by resolving competing structure-agency and macro-micro perspectives. The structuration theory recognises that social action cannot be fully explained by structure or agency theories alone and recognises that social actors operate within the context of rules produced by reinforced social structures (Steevensz, 2016). The theory conceptualises social reality as an interplay between structure and agency and recognises knowledgeability and discursive consciousness as a reflexivity of actors (Maphosa, 2011). Knowledgeability refers to the actors'

knowledge about the circumstances of their actions and those of others, and discursive consciousness refers to the actors' ability to verbally express the social conditions, including the conditions of their actions (Giddens, 1999, 2004).

According to Muzvidziwa (2005), it is necessary to document what actors do, and therefore, the current study documented what Basotho women informal cross-border traders do. Therefore, the study adopted a grounded theory approach to data gathering. Grounded theory is well suited to generating a theory from real-life occurrences in which the social processes and their meaning are explained (Dougherty, 2017; Mfinanga et al., 2019). It is based on the symbolic interactionist theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In some studies, the symbols or symbolism within the data provide the basis for theorising about the participants' experiences that are being investigated, their behaviours, responses, and processes, and the meanings embedded in these. The emphasis on the interplay between structure and agency is essential as it recognises the complex relationship between individual action and social structures. The structuration theory argues that just as an individual's autonomy is influenced by structures, such structures are maintained and adapted through the exercise of agency (Bakewell, 2010; Jones & Karsten, 2008). The theory provided a valuable framework for examining the role of social structures in shaping the behaviour of Basotho women informal cross-border traders because it suggests that social structures are not static but are constantly being reproduced and transformed through the actions of individuals.

In the case of Lesotho, unemployment and a poor economy are structural conditions that may constrain Basotho women to act in particular ways. However, within those external constraints, women react differently to the same structural conditions by exercising agency. The different reactions of women towards informal cross-border trades due to structural conditions are also affected by issues of ability and capability. Though the reasoning is that women engage in the trade for survival and to supplement incomes, it is not possible for every woman who aspires to do cross-border trade to do so due to ability and capability. Capability may include social networks or social capital which enables one to actually move across the border to trade. Therefore, any woman can aspire to be a cross-border trader, but may not be able or capable of doing it because they lack social capital or economic capital too. However, as agents, women informal cross-border traders venture into this activity as a rational choice within the limitations

imposed by structural conditions. According to Giddens (1984), individuals' choices are influenced by structure; structures are maintained and adapted by exercising agency; and both structure and agency affect behaviour.

2.4.2 The theory of structuration and cross-border trading in Lesotho

According to Afrika and Ajumbo (2012), informal sector is a source of income for about 43% of Africa's population. It contributes 30–40% of the intra-SADC trade, supports livelihoods, and creates employment for disadvantaged and marginalised groups. Muzvidziwa (2005) emphasised that informal cross-border trade is a livelihood strategy. Mupedziswa and Gumbo (1998) believed that it enables families to build savings for investment and to cater to basic needs, such as food, clothing, shelter, and education (McDonald et al., 2000; Tevera & Zinyama, 2000).

Some studies found informal cross-border trade to be an integral part of the economy, requiring government research and involvement (Jawando et al., 2012; Raimundo & Chikanda, 2016). Other studies observed that informal cross-border trade remains invisible and undervalued by policymakers, and that in government circles it is negatively perceived and often associated with tax evasion, smuggling, and illegality rather than with innovation, enterprise, and job creation (Afrika & Ajumbo, 2012; Alusala, 2010; Cheater & Gaidzanwa, 1996; Crush & Peberdy, 1998; Muzvidziwa, 1998; Njikam, 2011; Njiwa, 2013; Peberdy, 2000; Peberdy et al., 1999; Southern African Migration Programme, 2015).

According to United Nations Development Fund for Women (2010), Jawando (2012), and Ama et al. (2014), several structural factors lead women into this type of trade across Africa, including in Lesotho. These include high unemployment rates, poor economies, low wages, and a lack of formal employment. Informal cross-border trade is a recent development in migration in Lesotho and is propelled by the changing social, economic, and gender configurations. This phenomenon requires different analytical lenses from the traditional migration theories, which this study sought to do. Giddens (1999)'s framework differs from traditional theories and assumes that the structure or agency theories cannot fully explain social action. Instead, it recognises that actors, in this case women informal cross-border traders, operate within the context of rules produced by social structures. Thus, social structures depend on human actions as they are socially constructed. It is within this context that the analysis in this study was conducted.

2.5 Chapter Summary

The chapter provided an overview of migration history from Lesotho to South Africa in the 19th century. Migration was comprehensively examined as a multifaceted phenomenon that manifests on both global and regional scales, including in sub-Saharan Africa. Internal and international movements are driven by an array of motivations, as outlined in the introductory section of the chapter. The diverse factors that compel individuals and communities to relocate were scrutinised for its implications for migration. The interrelation between migration and informal cross-border trade was also interrogated. In many countries and regions, people, primarily women, engage in informal cross-border trade to have a means of living. I also discussed the shift from organised labour migration from Lesotho to the feminisation of migration. Lastly, I looked at how the feminisation of migration started because of informal cross-border trade among Basotho women. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology employed to gather data.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The study was qualitative in nature because it sought to investigate the experiences of Basotho women traders who engage in informal cross-border trade. According to some authors, qualitative research allows the researcher to describe in detail the participants' accounts of meaning and perceptions, enabling participants to relate their own experiences (Babbie, 2007, 2020; Creswell et al., 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Fouché et al., 2021). The qualitative research method was selected to explore ideas, thoughts, and meaning because it generates descriptive data based on the words of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Furthermore, the method was used because it provides space for perspectives that are not often heard, such as those of Basotho women and informal cross-border traders who provide for their families. The study offers insight into their daily lives by emphasising their experiences (Chilisa, 2012). Finally, the approach was appropriate for the study because of the nature of the research objectives, which needed qualitative data. Participants' data were gathered through semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Kumar, 2018; Patten & Newhart, 2018).

Delamont (2013) believed that what people do is more essential than what they say, and she lamented that too much research relies on interviews rather than ethnography. Using interviews instead of ethnography involves isolated interviewing, whereas ethnographic interviewing allows the researcher to employ the interviewing approach within an anthropological project. According to Sherman-Heyl (2007), ethnographic interviewing challenges the positivistic paradigm of the interviewer, and she used the travel metaphor to position the interview as a 'wandering together with', marked by twists, turns, and creativity.

This chapter describes the research philosophy and design, the study area, the data collection techniques adopted by the study, and the data analysis procedures. It emphasises the significance of ethnography as a study tool for documenting the lived experiences and circumstances of Basotho women who have become famous for cross-border trips to source materials and wares from Botswana. The chapter also highlights the ethical issues associated with any study that

involves long-term interactions with humans and the methodological and practical constraints of applying ethnographic research during a pandemic, during which the fieldwork was carried out, which had restrictions imposed by various governments that severely constrained travel and interaction.

3.2 Research Philosophy and Design

The study used a qualitative ethnographic approach to understand Basotho women cross-border traders and their circumstances. According to Najafi et al. (2016), a qualitative researcher tries to answer the following two questions: ‘What do people do?’ and ‘Why do they do it?’ Ethnography is a type of qualitative research in which the researcher uses self-reflection to explore anecdotal and personal experiences of a relatively homogenous group, such as a sect, community, movement, or society, to construct a narrative that links broader cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2016; Ellis et al., 2011; Muncey, 2005). The rationale for such an approach lies in the purpose of the study and the objectives the study seeks to achieve (Chang, 2016).

Unlike many ethnographic studies that adopt a “strictly worm’s eye view of interaction dynamics” (Worby, 2001, pp. 478–479), this study sought to extend the inquiry and examine the subject concerning a popular narrative on women cross-border traders generally and Basotho women cross-border migrants in particular. It was essential to understand the motives behind the cross-border trading activities, which entailed first understanding common perspectives on women’s cross-border migration and the situation of women in Lesotho before focusing on the women informal cross-border traders and the dynamics of cross-border trading.

Qualitative research helped me access the thoughts and feelings of the research participants (Basotho women), enabling the development and understanding of the meaning that Basotho women traders ascribe to their experiences. Whereas quantitative research methods can be used to determine how many people undertake such behaviours, qualitative methods can help researchers understand how and why such behaviours occur. The factors in qualitative research resonated with my study as I sought to understand, for example, what Basotho women informal cross-border traders buy, how they navigate borders, and to whom they sell their wares. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) and Creswell et al. (2007) emphasised that the qualitative technique is

critical because it goes beyond simple facts and superficial appearances. This was especially evident in this study that focused on the importance of Basotho women's experiences and how these experiences have shaped their lives and households.

I started the fieldwork for this doctoral study in November 2020. However, my research builds on earlier interactions with Basotho women informal cross-border traders that began in 2013 when I relocated from Lesotho to Botswana. I frequently interacted with women in informal cross-border trade who often spent the night in Botswana before embarking on their shopping trips in the morning. Some women were close to my sisters and I had known them for years before relocating to Botswana and had supported them by ordering items brought from Botswana. I therefore had some understanding of their activities and circumstances. My prior interactions with these women informal cross-border traders gave me eight years of casual observation and understanding, which provided a starting point for my research.

However, field research for this study was conducted between November 2020 and October 2021. The duration of the study was planned to allow for extended interactions and to observe these women over longer periods. The women mostly travelled to Botswana once a month, and the study period was planned to capture the dynamics during these trips and to understand their situation in Lesotho. As such, the study took place in two geographical settings: Gaborone in Botswana, where the women bought their wares and materials, and Lesotho, where they had homes and spent most of their time.

As a Mosotho woman, I shared nationality and a language with the women I studied and could easily relate to them. This allowed me to collect detailed and comprehensive data about their lives and experiences. As women, there is a lot that we share, and I could relate to their circumstances and understood the Basotho culture and the situation of women in the culture. I was born and raised in Maseru, Lesotho, to a labour migrant father (mineworker from 1975) and a mother who remained behind in Lesotho, looking after the home and the children until my father's retrenchment in 2010. Our family situation was also affected by migration in specific ways. The research problem is one that I am enthusiastic about because it is partially a reflection of my life and that of other families in Lesotho who experienced the life of 'gold widows' and the effects of retrenchments. When I relocated to Botswana, I had been observing the changing social environment in Lesotho and the changes that this brought to women.

I somehow lived through and experienced changes in migration trends in Lesotho, which piqued my curiosity about the recent informal cross-border trade phenomenon among Basotho women. The research's focus on recollections of my own life experiences made it simpler for me to connect with the research participants as values and meanings overlapped to a greater extent than they would have with someone of a different ethnicity and language group¹. The study's primary goal was to identify these women and learn more about who they are and their motives for engaging in informal cross-border trade. Without a doubt, I became immersed in the lives of these Basotho women informal cross-border traders and those of their families through my frequent interactions and relations, which influenced the responses I received.

Following the research approach adopted by the study, I began by reviewing selected literature to provide a context and background. I started with a literature review and background study, and the background and context are discussed in Chapter 4. The second phase involved empirical studies of Basotho women traders. The empirical discussions are divided into the study of cross-border trading dynamics in Gaborone, Botswana, and the study of the women's situation in their homes in Mafeteng and Maseru. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 present data from the empirical study. The following section discusses the research philosophy. It highlights the significance of adopting an ethnographic qualitative study to study human and social dynamics.

3.2.1 Research philosophy

Paradigms inform scientific research. Despite the numerous paradigms scholars present, one of the field's leading experts claims they can all be categorised into three taxonomies, namely positivism, interpretivism, and critical theory (Candy, 1989). Other scholars, such as Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), suggested a fourth paradigm, the pragmatic paradigm, which incorporates features from all three (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The methodological approach for this study

¹ On the disadvantages of language divides, Griffin (2010, p. 63) said, "My knowledge of the Sesotho language being only cursory, I could not converse with Basotho women, many of whom spoke limited or no English. In addition to language divides, social barriers and migrant's concealment compelled me to rely on research assistants not only to carry out interviews (as I had planned) but also to find potential participants".

arose from the study research questions and complemented the theoretical framework of the thesis's applied structure. The focus of these study questions was Basotho women as informal cross-border traders, their experiences in the trade, and their dynamics. The approach was based on the interpretivist paradigm, often known as the constructivist paradigm, which emerged as a counter to positivism's supremacy (Grix, 2004).

The interpretivist paradigm seeks to comprehend the subjective realm of human experience as a critical goal and is focused on understanding the subjects being studied and interpreting what they think or the meaning they derive from the context (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). For this reason, I attempted to understand informal cross-border trade through the experiences of Basotho women traders, who were the focus of this thesis, rather than depending entirely on what other scholars have written about informal cross-border trade.

When using an interpretivist paradigm, every attempt is made to understand the point of view of the subject (Basotho women) who is being observed or researched rather than the observer's point of view. The adoption of this paradigm was justified by the study's aim to understand who Basotho women informal cross-border traders are, their ways of doing business, the significance of informal cross-border trade in their families, the socio-economic barriers and limitations they come across, and how they overcome or minimise them.

In contrast, the positivist paradigm, to which interpretivism arose as a reaction to, claims that reality exists independently of humans. Interpretivism necessitates that social phenomenon be understood "through the eyes of the participants rather than the researcher" (Cohen, 1996, p. 22), which was the focus of this study. Understanding the individual and their interpretation of the world are emphasised as interpretivism's critical tenets because reality is socially constructed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). One criticism of positivism is that scientific procedures are appropriate for studying natural phenomena but fall short when studying individuals and social phenomena (Gage, 1989; Gall et al., 1996; Grix, 2004; Richards, 2003).

Interpretivism does not lead research but supports it to be grounded on the data generated during the research process. Therefore, the paradigm choice was significant as it allowed me to be part of these Basotho women's lives, such as their travel arrangements from Lesotho and their trips to Botswana. Whereas, the positivist paradigm is driven by its pure form as the scientific method, which entails a process of experimentation that is used to examine observations and answer

questions (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Researchers using this paradigm use deductive logic, hypothesis development, hypothesis testing, operational definitions, mathematical equations, computations, extrapolations, and expressions to arrive at results. Researchers who use interpretivism have a very different approach, and I had to observe Basotho women's ways of doing things over time, and therefore, I spent time with them and their families to understand their social and economic situations.

The critical approach, the third research paradigm, attempts to explain research within social justice issues by addressing political, social, and economic issues. Some characteristics that can be attributed to research conducted within the critical paradigm are its respect for cultural norms, concern with power relationships within social structures, and focus of the research effort on uncovering agency, which is hidden by social practices, leading to liberation and emancipation.

3.2.2 *Research design*

The study employed both descriptive and exploratory research designs. These designs were selected based on the nature of the study's objectives. A study that describes a problem, service, or situation or gives information about the living conditions of society is descriptive (Kumar, 2018; Rubin & Babbie, 2017; Yegidis & Weinbach, 2018). The goal of a descriptive study is to describe the circumstances of the lived experiences under study (Babbie, 2020; Kumar, 2018; Patten & Newhart, 2018). As a result, a descriptive research design was appropriate for the study because I intended to produce a comprehensive picture of the lived experiences of Basotho women as informal cross-border traders. Furthermore, it allowed me to depict the present status of Basotho women informal cross-border traders' needs and the support expected from the Lesotho government.

The four methodological approaches used in social science research are qualitative, quantitative, mixed techniques, and structured historical research methodologies. The need to understand Basotho women's perceptions of their reality concerning informal cross-border trade demanded a descriptive qualitative analysis. Hence, this study used a qualitative method. According to Bell (2000), qualitative researchers dispute the existence of social 'facts' and wonder whether a scientific approach can be applied when working with humans. In contrast, Grove et al. (2012) defined qualitative research as a systematic and subjective approach to highlight and explain

everyday life experiences and give them further meaning. Holloway and Wheeler (2002) emphasised that qualitative research allows researchers to deeply explore behaviours, different perceptions, and life experiences to discover situations' complexities through holistic frameworks.

Thus, the data gathered for this study determined how different Basotho women informal cross-border traders are from typical Lesotho migrants and women migrants, like those seeking jobs on Free State farms and as domestic workers². The data presentation is in narrative form as influenced by Geertz's (1973) concept of 'thick description'. Geertz defined thick description as an ethnographic method in which researchers write as they immerse themselves within a particular culture, noting specific, detailed references to participants' social actions and behaviours. This is a term he adopted from the British philosopher Gilbert Ryle (1971), who provided a conceptual frame for interpreting culture that changed the face of qualitative research³.

Thick description is a qualitative research technique used in the social sciences that provides thorough descriptions and interpretations of occurrences the researcher sees. It entails the creation of elaborate narratives or 'vignettes' that explain circumstances and their context (Parkinson & Manstead, 1993; Saarni, 1999), which was the focus of this study. The purpose was not just to describe events, namely the daily activities of Basotho women, but also to provide details of how these women strategize through, among other things, social networking to make a living and comprehend the important and complicated cultural meanings that underpin any visible occurrence. It involved more than merely taking notes and summarising what I saw during my fieldwork. It necessitated giving background information about these women, their education level, and marital status to comprehend the significance, meanings, and intents underpinning social interactions within informal cross-border trade.

² See Ulicki and Crush (2007) and Johnston (1996, 2007) for farm work articles, and Griffin (2010) and Makoro (2015) for domestic work.

³ For the origins and evolution of 'thick description', see Ponterotto (2006)'s brief note.

However, it is simple to make up long descriptions, and often, there is little choice but to trust the researcher's findings. The researcher must believe in what they say in qualitative thick description analyses, unlike people who can go back to the field and redo a study in quantitative analysis. The quantitative approach dominated social sciences from the late 19th to mid-20th century. The popularity of qualitative research grew in the latter half of the 20th century (Mohajan, 2018). Among the different research approaches and methodologies used, qualitative approaches and methods are increasingly being applied in various studies. According to Given (2008), human topography often requires describing complex themes like the human environment, individual experiences, and societal processes. This study aimed to discover the socio-economic features of informal cross-border trading among Basotho women, and therefore, qualitative research instruments and methodologies were deemed appropriate.

The ethnographic design was opted for over other designs because of its ability to expose the richness of engagements in a study. As a researcher, I had to study the shared patterns of behaviour, language, and actions of Basotho women informal cross-border traders in a natural setting over a prolonged period, and data collection involved observations and interviews.

It is important to note that qualitative research can also be used to collect specific data on a community's culture (Flick, 2013; Kozleski, 2017; Leavy, 2014). Cultural data include the social contents, behaviours, conventions, perspectives, and values of a people in a particular place. According to Rubin and Rubin (2011), qualitative researchers are responsive to unanticipated research discoveries and can quickly go with the flow, refocus, or forsake the original study themes. Qualitative research involves procedures that allow the researcher to understand the participants' judgements and terms/concepts to learn about their experiences, perceptions, and complexities. Interviews, narratives, and focus group discussions are examples of such tools (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2013). A researcher must enter the field with no preconceived classifications or words that limit participants' responses, and as a result, the instruments (in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation) grasp other people's or participants' minds and gain insights.

3.3 Study Area, Population, and Sampling

The study was undertaken in Maseru District, the capital town of Lesotho, and Mafeteng District (Figure 3.1). Maseru has a population of 519 186 (2016 population census) and is Lesotho's most populous district. It is also the largest district, with an area size of 44 279 square kilometres. Preliminary observation indicated that most informal cross-border traders come from Maseru, and some of them are Maseru settlers because of urbanisation. Mafeteng district has a population of 192 795 and an area size of 2 119 square kilometres. Maseru and Mafeteng are urban settlements in the lowlands, and women from these places are more likely than those from rural areas to be exposed to outside opportunities. This made it possible for me to get enough participants from these areas.

I also chose Maseru and Mafeteng for logistical reasons. I am originally from Maseru, and conducting my research in these towns was less costly because the distance between Maseru and Mafeteng is 77 km, which is less than the distance to other districts. This made it easier for me to meet the participants, spend a day with them, and return home without paying for accommodation. It also enabled me to cover more distance and cases than it would have been in other areas.

used to define the sampling frame, which is the list or set of elements from which the study sample is drawn.

In this study, the target population was Basotho women in informal cross-border trade. This means I studied women from Lesotho who engage in informal cross-border trade activities. I wanted to know about this population's demographic, economic, and social characteristics and their experiences and challenges in the informal cross-border trade sector. However, the size of the population was unknown as there is a lack of statistics on the overall number of people who engage in informal cross-border trade. This is because Lesotho has no existing database on Basotho women informal cross-border traders. This is evidenced by the lack of legislation specifically for people engaged in informal cross-border trade in Lesotho. This can present a challenge for researchers because they need to understand the size and composition of the population size and its characteristics.

3.3.1.1 Sample size

The sample size in qualitative research depends on various factors, including the scientific paradigm used for the investigation (Boddy, 2016). For instance, positivist qualitative research requires larger samples to obtain a representative image of the studied community than interpretive qualitative research. According to Morse (2000), the scope of the study, the subject matter, and the amount of contact time needed with each research participant all serve as justifications for the chosen sample size (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). There are no 'hard' guidelines for how many subjects should be contained within the research sample due to the nature of qualitative research and the type of data that is collected (Kindsiko & Poltimäe, 2019; Lichtman, 2012; Vasileiou et al., 2018). The appropriateness of the sample size is assessed as a "matter of judgement" based on the milestones the researcher keeps in the field (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 179). The number of participants depends on how many are necessary to adequately understand all essential aspects of the examined topic. When more focus groups or interviews do not lead to the discovery of novel concepts, data saturation is reached, and the sample size is deemed enough (Sargeant, 2012).

With the above descriptions concerning sample size in mind, the study was conducted in two phases. During the first phase, I sought permission from the participants for in-depth interviews

by issuing consent forms explaining everything about the study. I explained the study and anonymity issues to the current participant as referrals occurred. While there are no hard and fast rules around how many people should be involved in research, some researchers estimate between 10 and 50 participants as sufficient, depending on the type of research and research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Therefore, I interviewed 15 Basotho women informal cross-border traders using snowball sampling because of the nature of the study and the contact time needed with each participant. Notably, though the 15 women were the main focus of the study, I informally interacted with three of their drivers of which the conversations brought about rich that collaborated with the women stories. Same as the two border officials.

Participants who were followed up with for interviews after referrals were women still active in cross-border trade, either as full-time or part-time traders, directly or indirectly trading. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. Initially, I planned to conduct face-to-face interviews, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions, I tried telephonic and WhatsApp interviews, which were not fruitful as the women participants were not interested in doing interviews over the phone. As a result, the initial plan had to be revisited. The second phase of interviews involved three drivers transporting Basotho women informal cross-border traders to Botswana and two Lesotho officials, one who is a Lesotho Revenue Authority [LRA] official and one who is a Maseru border immigration official. The initial plan was to interview only the women; however, it became necessary to engage some key participants to get rich data and verify some of the data already collected.

The inclusion criteria for the study was Basotho women who are informal cross-border traders in the Maseru and Mafeteng districts. Though the number of years in operation did not qualify women as participants, those who had been in the business for some years provided richer data. Finally, the study only included participants who were willing to take part.

The study excluded Basotho women informal cross-border traders in the other eight districts of Lesotho because of the scope and period of the study, as well as those who did not want to participate.

3.3.2 *Snowball sampling*

In the study of Basotho women in informal cross-border trade, I faced the challenge of identifying an appropriate sample size. The study population is hidden and informal in nature, and there was no existing database or sampling frame that could be used to select a random sample of participants. As a result, I adopted a non-probability sampling technique known as snowball sampling. Snowball sampling involves identifying initial participants who fit the criteria for the study and asking them to refer other potential participants (Nikolopoulou, 2022). This approach is often used when the target population is difficult to access or identify, and it allows the researcher to gradually build a sample size based on referrals from participants (Barglowski, 2018; Naderifar et al., 2017; Noy, 2008; Parker et al., 2019; Guest et al., 2013). I identified informal cross-border traders as a hidden population, similar to other groups such as drug dealers, homeless individuals, and undocumented or irregular migrants. These groups are considered ‘invisible’ because they are either engaged in illegal activities or are not in public (Nikolopoulou, 2022). Before the study it is not known who they are, how many they are, or where they are, and therefore, the sample size cannot be ascertained before starting the research. Sampling considers decisions regarding visible locations, social processes, events, people, and behaviours (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). To overcome this challenge, I used snowball sampling to identify research subjects from an unknown population (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The targeted participants were from Maseru and Mafeteng towns and engaged in informal cross-border trade.

The snowball sampling technique allowed me to gradually build a sample size based on participant referrals and access a group of individuals who might have been challenging to reach through other sampling methods (Parker et al., 2019). Overall, using snowball sampling highlighted the importance of adapting sampling techniques to fit the target population’s characteristics. By recognising the unique challenges hidden or informal populations posed, I ensured my findings were accurate by using triangulation. Triangulation is using several techniques or data sources in qualitative research to understand a phenomenon thoroughly (Patton, 1990, 1999). Triangulation is also considered a qualitative research technique to examine validity by combining data from many sources. There are four basic types of triangulations described by Denzin (1978) and Patton (1990,1999): theory triangulation, technique triangulation, investigator triangulation and data source triangulation.

Different variables, such as age, level of education, occupation, and family background, were considered when selecting participants. These variables helped in answering who these women are and their *modus operandi*. The interviewed participants were both from the part-time and full-time categories. The initial plan was to talk to one of the drivers to introduce me to one or two women and take it from there; however, since I had interacted with them before, it was easy to talk to one of them because of an already existing relationship. Therefore, the first participant was approached through the contact I had kept while I used to travel a lot with these women before the commencement of my study.

The researcher had an A4 counterbook with clearly marked and divided pages according to the number of participants. All participants' names and contact information were recorded, including appointments, cancellations, and postponements. It is worth noting that even though the participants' real names were recorded for follow-up purposes, pseudonyms are used in the following chapters. A record of the calls and scheduled interviews was written down to avoid double booking. This also helped me schedule random visits between interviews throughout the fieldwork process. I kept a portable diary when travelling to avoid missing any information or forgetting certain events. These tools made it easier to keep track of commitments and appointments. I took notes for the official and informal interviews, talks, and words the participants might have spoken. For the voice recordings at the end of the day, I would write a recap of what happened, focusing on the participants' essential statements. I also made reflective notes on how the interviews were personally challenging. I took photographs with the permission of the participants to showcase some of the products they sell and for data interpretation. Moreover, I also kept field notes on observations made during visits to the participants' homes and workplaces, including how they interacted with their spouses, children, neighbours, fellow workers, and customers, and details of their homes and locations.

3.4 Data Collection Techniques

Collecting data from primary and secondary sources for this study involved a range of strategies. Secondary data were gathered from various sources, including official records, past studies, book publications, journal articles, reports, and other related sources. These sources provided a comprehensive overview of the research area (informal cross-border trade) and identified key trends and issues relevant to the study. The primary data collection was the study's principal

activity, and fieldwork was employed to collect this data. This involved being in the field and observing the research subject (Basotho women informal cross-border traders). The main tools used for primary data collection were field observation, documenting, recording, in-depth interviews, and informal conversation, especially during trips taken with these women and key participants.

An interview guide was used to conduct all the interviews and ensuing discussions. These conversations took place in either English or Sesotho, based on what was most comfortable for the participants. I used an audio recording device during all interviews, with the participants' permission, to make easier to revisit key details. I transcribed all the recorded conversations. All electronic data were saved on a password-protected laptop used only by the researcher and on Microsoft OneDrive. Information on hard copies from the interviews, including consent forms, are kept safely by the researcher.

Field observation involved observing the research subjects (Basotho women informal cross-border traders) individually and as groups and taking notes on their behaviours, attitudes, and interactions. The behaviours, attitudes, and interactions were mainly captured during the trips, especially around the borders through immigration ports. The documentation involved taking photographs (at the border while queuing, at their workstations, and for some at their homes), videos, and other forms of visual media to capture important details and record events. Recording in this study involved using audio to capture interviews, conversations, or other forms of communication.

In-depth interviews were used to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and perceptions of Basotho women informal cross-border traders directly involved in the study. Informal conversations were also used to gather information from individuals who may not have been willing or able to participate in formal interviews. Key participant interviews were conducted with individuals with specialised knowledge or expertise in the subject of the study and were used to provide additional insights and perspectives on the research area. Overall, primary data collection strategies provided a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research area, which was critical for the study's success. When all strategies were considered, ethnography was chosen to be the best for the study to collect detailed and rich data.

It is clear that the most influential research method used for this study was ethnography. Through participant observation, ethnographic research allows the researcher to immerse themselves in participants' daily activities. This method improves research's overall data quality because it takes the researcher closer to the action, and it is one technique that creates empathy. Spending more time with participants allowed me to obtain a more nuanced understanding of a broader range of perceptions from the participants as they emerged. Investing more time with the participants helped me identify issues surrounding the research topic.

To satisfy the researcher, longevity is essential to capture the research participants' realities and not ones presented under pretence. In this study, spending more time with the participants allowed me to better to comprehend the area's social and cultural aspects. Furthermore, it allowed me to monitor, check, and recheck information without interfering with participants' daily activities. Being part of participants' lives differs from a questionnaire or once-off interviews where the participants may tell the researcher what they think the researcher wants to hear because when more time is spent with participants, more information is revealed because they cannot pretend forever. As participants got more comfortable with me, they likely carried out their everyday activities as they would in normal circumstances, allowing me to assess their actions more accurately. As the trust between me and the participants increased over time, they were more willing to provide more detailed and reliable information. In short, spending more time performing research allowed me to obtain more precise and extensive information, which improved my comprehension of the issues and interpretative skills. Although the information provided by the participants restricted the quality of data collection and interpretation, the material gathered through an ethnographic approach was sufficient for a detailed description of the case study based on social expressions of culture.

In the dynamic tapestry that the social sciences have become in the 21st first century, ethnography plays a multifaceted and shifting role, and maybe this complication has made it harder for researchers to acknowledge their practice as ethnography and understand their place within an ethnographic base. In its simplest form, ethnography could be a type of social research emphasising the value of observing first-hand what people do and say in certain circumstances. However, concentrating on what ethnographers do can provide a more nuanced insight. Ethnography entails relatively prolonged contact with people in every day rather than

experimental scenarios that incorporates participant observation and comparatively open-ended interviews, as well as the analysis of artefacts and documents related to their lives (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Reeves et al., 2008).

Ethnography yields deep holistic insights into people's perspectives on behaviours, including the nature of the environment in which they live. According to Reeves et al. (2008), the critical aspects of ethnographic research include a substantial emphasis on understanding the nature of a particular social phenomenon rather than testing its theory. It primarily deals with "unstructured data from a small number of cases", which necessitates a detailed interpretation of the meaning and purpose of human actions during data analysis (Merriam, and Tisdell, 2015). The key to ethnographic research is the observational strategy. This means employing the following techniques: 1) Participant observations, 2) non-participant observations, and 3) discussions. In its totality, ethnographic research involves observing and listening. Verbal narratives and explanations are used in the ethnographic analysis.

Several types of ethnographic techniques, such as classical, natural, interpretative, and critical, have been studied in depth elsewhere (Atkinson et al., 2001; Koro-Ljungberg & Greckhamer, 2005), yet there are certain commonalities. The focus of ethnographic research is generally small scale to allow for in-depth study, and data analysis entails the interpretation of meanings and their relation to local and global contexts. Van Maanen (2009, p. 16) described this process as an attempt to put into words "what it is like to be someone else". The contemporary ethnographer may use various research methods, but the definition of ethnography remains rooted in first-hand exploration of the research setting. As Mannay and Morgan (2015) argued, this sense of social exploration and long-term investigation gives ethnography its abiding and continuing character.

3.4.1 Participant observation

Participant observation is an ethnographer's primary research technique to collect field data (De Munck & Sobo, 1998). The objective is to learn of the circumstances and activities of those being studied in a natural setting through active looking, listening, and participating (Musante DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). I observed how these women operated when we met in their natural spaces, spent time with them at their homes and workplaces, and saw customers come, get served, and go. This allowed me to verify what they would have initially said during the in-depth

interviews regarding how they live their daily lives, how they relate with their customers, and the relations among themselves as traders.

Ethnographers frequently conduct informal or conversational interviews throughout their observations, which allow them to discuss and investigate developing concerns, or ask questions about uncommon happenings in a naturalistic way. This type of interview strategy can be beneficial to obtain particularly truthful accounts from individuals due to its casual nature.

Participant observation took place en route to Botswana, in Botswana where these women source their goods, at border posts, and back in Lesotho where they live. This occasional travel with them on their cross-border journeys and sharing the same means of transport allowed me to observe the dynamics of their interactions, negotiations, cross-border processes, network building, and constraints. The reason why interviews were mainly done in Lesotho and not Botswana, is because of the limited time these women have for shopping. Moving from one location (shop) to another, but also that their minds are so focused on getting all the items the need and negotiations with shop owners. The processes were worth observing.

In Lesotho, I spent time with these women as their guests in their natural spaces, such as their homes and public spaces (workplaces). This helped me familiarise myself with their circumstances and the dynamics of trade in Lesotho, their economic and social circumstances, and the contributions of cross-border trade to those circumstances. These kinds of interactions helped me understand their daily lives, who they interact with, the category of their clients, and their niche market. Sometimes, I would find them working in their vegetable gardens at their homes and would join in. As some of the visits were not formal meeting, I always channelled the conversations toward informal cross-border trade and their way of life. Through these visits, I discovered and saw that the informality of their business is not necessarily an inferior option because these women have kept their households, and in some cases, extended family members afloat financially. These are not impoverished women; some are married, and others are single.

The time I spent accompanying them during their shopping in Botswana is a process referred to as understanding “processes of the people” (Robson, 2002, p. 191). As a participant-observer, I joined cross-border trading to gain access and social acceptance among them (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and to understand the dynamics of cross-border trading better. I needed to gain the trust of

the participants I was investigating, and for that, I had to be one of them, or rather, be seen as one of them. Figure 3.2 is a picture I took during one of the trips on 10 April 2021 at six in the morning while waiting for a COVID-19 rapid test at the Tlokweng border post in Botswana. The opening time has always been six in the morning, even before COVID-19, as Botswana borders do not operate on a 24-hour basis. Kopfotein border post operating times in South Africa are similar to those of the Tlokweng border post times, which is 6 a.m. to midnight.



Figure 3.2: Basotho women upon arrival at the Tlokweng border post in Botswana, queuing for a COVID-19 screening (Source: Author, 2021)

Some information was volunteered during the interaction process as rapport increased between me and the women and they became more comfortable to share with me. This helped me learn about their social dynamics, such as cooperation, competition, jealousies, conflict and conflict resolution, shared beliefs, and behaviours. Understanding why they chose Botswana and not South Africa was crucial since I had interacted with and observed many Basotho women over the years. Being part of them as a participant-observer and engaging in trade was hassle-free. I know what to buy and sought information on how best to sell during our casual conversations. Figure

3.3 shows some of the items I bought and sold. The picture shows four winter sheets, and three duvet covers.



Figure 3.3: Some of the winter sheets the researcher sold (Source: Author, 2021)

However, some information was solicited and gathered in one-on-one interviews. While the participant observation strategy is a process of exchange between participant and researcher, sometimes the researcher may require specific information or may need to follow certain leads from the observation through interviews. Such interviews are generally open-ended and designed to allow participants to share their experience, knowledge, motives, perceptions, and understanding of a particular phenomenon. Such discussions tend to be lengthy and detailed. They are not the usual interviews, which Kahn and Cannell (1957) call “conversations with a purpose.” These discussions were guided by the research questions and themes emerging from the study and were planned and controlled. Planning and control are crucial since the study usually takes long.

3.4.2 *In-depth interviews*

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that entails conducting in-depth individual interviews with a few participants to learn about their perceptions of a specific subject, program, or situation (Boyce & Neale, 2006). For example, I questioned Basotho women informal cross-border traders about their personal experiences, the importance of informal cross-border trading in their lives, their techniques, and the obstacles they face. In-depth interviews are essential when a researcher wants to learn deeply about a person's beliefs and actions or when they want to dig deep into a new topic (Kvale, and Brinkmann, 2009). After observing an increase in Basotho women informal cross-border trade to Botswana over the last eight years, I conducted in-depth interviews to learn more about their strategies and networks. According to Kvale, and Brinkmann, (2009) in-depth interviews are frequently used to fine-tune questions for future surveys of a specific demographic.

I conducted in-depth interviews with individual informal cross-border trade Basotho women, and some of interviews were carried out at their homes and others at the marketplace, wherever was convenient and comfortable for them. The interview guide (Appendix 1) covered several areas related to Basotho women informal cross-border traders, such as socio-demographic characteristics, level of education, the impact of informal cross-border trade on their socio-economic situation, decision-making processes at household level, access to resources and services, implications and effects of informal cross-border trade (living conditions), constraints related to it (travel patterns), and strategies used to overcome the constraints. I asked open-ended questions to obtain concrete opinions about the various issues involved.

For most participants, their homes, which often functioned as a workplace for the women, provided a quieter and more convenient environment. Many of the interviews took place during the week. Conducting interviews in their homes allowed me to observe how they live and manage their spaces. As far as I could tell from their comments, they were willing to participate in the study project and seemed to enjoy their time in the interview setting with satisfaction and contentment. A common question most of them asked was “what are you going to do with this information we are giving you?”

3.4.3 *Informal discussion*

I also conducted informal conversations with the participants as part of data collection. Informal interviews, such as talks or dialogues, significantly enriched my fieldwork experience. These conversations were intended for my encounters during travels to and from Botswana, passing by their workplaces, and being in their immediate surroundings. Sometimes, it was easier for me to check on them over a phone call. These casual interviews were frequently conducted in the company of others, such as acquaintances, family (children and husbands), and friends. With these interactions, their reality was best observed during such times.

3.4.4 *Focus group discussions*

I held two focus group discussions with Basotho women informal cross-border traders in groups of 6 to 8 people from each district. One of the participants, with whom I had been in contact from the start of the fieldwork organisation, helped me organise the first group of research participants. She served as a sort of go-between, and I met with the first set of seven participants on a Sunday afternoon. The second group of eight members gathered mid-weekly, and four of these women were not among the 15 individually interviewed. One of the drivers organised this cohort with whom I had also developed a trusting relationship; it was not difficult to meet up because of that trust. They were given the option of picking the day and time. Focus groups are more than group interviews and are instead a collective conversation and should value and emphasise group interaction (Dilshad, and Latif, 2013). The primary aim of a focus group is to describe and understand the views and experiences of a selected group of people to gain a deeper understanding of a specific issue from the perspective of the participants of the group (Dilshad, and Latif, 2013).

The participants were informed about the topics that I wanted them to discuss before the focus group discussions. These topics included the dynamics of informal cross-border trade, its impact on their households, opportunities for empowerment, their mode of operation, including their selling practices, and the problems they face. I acted as a facilitator and took careful notes to capture the dialogue. The focus group was held in their home language (Sesotho) to increase member participation. The focus group discussions are handled similar to in-depth interviews and audio recording and notetaking is used to record them, but I had to forego recording to

create a comfortable atmosphere for participants to express themselves freely. Allowing the participants to set the schedules for the focus groups resulted in very active and open talks. I deemed the open and honest discussion as more valuable than the information I would have gained from recording the conversations.

3.4.5 Key participants

I used open-ended interviews with key participants to gather data. This allowed me to collect data from both verbal and nonverbal communication and acquire participants' perspectives through unconstrained conversation. The open-ended questions could quickly shift to the conversational circumstances that arose. Interviews with key participants were used to acquire insights on informal cross-border trade from the viewpoints of Lesotho border officers, the LRA, the drivers in the transport industry that transport *bo 'mathoto* (the term used to refer to these women; it means 'women with luggage') to Botswana, and relevant government officials in decision-making from the Ministry of Trade and Industry and Ministry of Small Businesses, Cooperatives, and Marketing. I took notes during the conversation or recorded them, depending on the situation.

These conversations and observations were used to triangulate the facts gathered using the other data collection methods. Verifying traditions was not complex because they are well-known. Interviews were not one-time events, as expected, with a qualitative technique and were instead repeated until no new data emerged. When this happened, I took it to mean that data saturation has been reached. This procedure also ensured the data were valid.

3.5 Data Analysis Approach

Data analysis is a critical component of any research study as it involves condensing a vast amount of data into a manageable size for interpretation and analysis. In this study, the data analysis process was influenced by Geertz's (1973) concept of 'thick description'. This concept emphasises the importance of providing a detailed account of fieldwork experiences, and this required me to make the participants' actions, voices, meanings, and feelings explicit to reveal the patterns of cultural and social relationships of women informal cross-border traders and put

them in context. The use of thick description in this study prevented me from drawing conclusions based on preliminary, often mistaken, impressions.

The detailed account of the participants' experiences provided a more nuanced understanding of the social and cultural dynamics that shape the behaviour of Basotho women informal cross-border traders. This, in turn, helped generate richer and more meaningful data for analysis. I employed thematic analysis to analyse the data collected in this study, and I used this approach to identify key and common themes from the interviews conducted with the participants. The process involved reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to identify patterns and trends within the data. Related patterns were combined into themes to provide a purely qualitative, detailed, and nuanced data account. The use of thematic analysis in this study allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the data, as it provided a way to identify patterns and trends that may have otherwise been overlooked. This approach also helped to uncover the complex interplay between individual agencies and social structures that shape the behaviour of Basotho women informal cross-border traders. By providing a detailed account of the participants' experiences, the analysis process revealed the underlying social and cultural dynamics that influence their behaviour.

I began the process by reviewing the transcribed responses to explore common themes among the various participants from the open-ended interviews, and then I developed main themes and classified the responses under them and wrote about them. The main themes were further arranged into subthemes and categories (Rubin & Babbie, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Kumar, 2018). Therefore, the data were analysed following the study's objectives, emphasising issues concerning Basotho women who work as informal cross-border traders, such as their activities and the dynamics surrounding their way of life and that of their households.

3.6 Research Ethical Considerations

This section discusses the ethical issues I considered during the data collection and analysis period (Fouché et al., 2021). The study involved human subjects, and as such, while carrying out this study, I complied fully with the University of Pretoria's ethical principles and guidelines for conducting research involving human participants, and my research was approved by the Faculty

of Humanities Research Ethics Committee (Approval Reference number HUM036/0820; Annexure 2). I followed the following guidelines at all times during the research process:

- Informed consent: The aim and purpose of the study were explained verbally to the participants when we were first met. Participation was voluntary and involved no remuneration. The participants were not coerced into participating in the research, and therefore, they all participated willingly. The participants were asked to sign a consent form before they were interviewed and were free to withdraw at any stage without any negative implications. They were also made aware of their right to refuse participation. The interviews were audio recorded with their consent.
- Anonymity: Participants' identities were protected using pseudonyms instead of real names throughout the written work. This ensures that no responses in the published work can be linked to the participants.
- Confidentiality: I maintained confidentiality throughout the fieldwork to avoid misuse of personal information. Data were also stored safely during the write-up phase, and only I had access to the data. The final copy of the thesis will be stored in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology for 15 years and may be used for further study.
- Dissemination of data: The collected data were used to develop a thesis and will be disseminated in writing articles and conference proceedings.

The Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2018 (POPIA) applies to research activities that involve identifiable personal information of individuals or organisations. Considering the impact that research has on participants' right to privacy is not just a POPIA obligation, it is also an integral part of research ethics. Therefore, given that researchers in universities in South Africa are bound by the POPI Act I also took this Act into consideration.

I also adhere to the Government of Lesotho protocols on COVID-19 as the research interviews were carried out during COVID-19 pandemic. The following procedures were observed upon meeting participants, that is social distancing, the use of mask, sanitizing in case of possible infections.

3.7 Fieldwork Challenges

Despite the tailor-made research ethical considerations, ethical issues arose during the fieldwork, such as fears about what I would do with the information. Another issue was the question about what was in it for the participants. Some participants felt uncomfortable being asked for personal information by a ‘stranger’; however, they opened up once they understood the information was explicitly for academic study purposes. To begin with, Basotho women who work as informal cross-border traders came across as ‘protective’ of their way of life because of their unwillingness to meet for interviews, yet this was not the case for all the women. I phoned them and introduced myself after I received a referral from a woman who was already a participant, and I would mention the referring participant’s name. One of the most common questions I received was “*Hobaneng nna, o itseng ka nna?*” (What made her select me? Did she tell you anything about me?). However, after meeting with me and after thorough introductions, these worries would fade away. Frequently, the appointments would have to change, and when I called, the participants would say they had forgotten and were busy I had to remove a few from the referral list because they were uninterested in meeting me.

Apart from the women, another stumbling block was the LRA, where I was moved from one office to the next with no apparent sign that I was being helped. The first office I went to, was the Head Manager at the LRA, who referred me to the Public Relations Office. The Public Relations Office referred me to the other two offices. I eventually knocked at the tax revenue office, and after introductions, the officer directed me to the human resources office. Despite showing them the proof that I was a student, the Public Relations Office was unable to assist, and from what I initially witnessed, they were unwilling to give the information they had for fear that I was doing an undercover investigation. However, between moving offices and brief conversations with one LRA tax officer, I discovered that informal cross-border traders are not treated the way they ought to be according to the tax regulations as they are charged lower amounts, according to the officer to whom I spoke.

Nevertheless, as stated in the following chapters, the study primarily focused on Basotho women informal cross-border traders who buy their goods in Botswana. There were limits regarding key participants, mainly from government officials, because informal cross-border trade is not given attention, particularly for *bo ‘mathoto*. Due to the scope of my research, I needed to establish

strong relationships with other available participants, such as drivers, immigration border personnel, and LRA representatives, to gather in-depth information.

However, because the LRA officials classified their work as sensitive, and they could not provide appropriate information. I could not map their specific role in informal cross-border trade regarding taxes. However, the research was not hampered by these constraints. The quality of information obtained through *bo 'mathoto* was crucial to the research's success. As a result, trust was of great value between me as the researcher and the participants. Because informal cross-border trading entails variable degrees of informality, some participants were wary of disclosing information for fear of causing problems for themselves, especially those with other businesses. I discovered this in the early stages of my fieldwork because they thought I was an undercover LRA agent. Once they realised, I was a student, they accepted me as part of their family in some cases, and more information was willingly revealed.

This validated my conviction that building a trusting relationship with the 15 *bo 'mathoto* was more effective than enlisting a large number of them to participate in the study through the distribution of questionnaires or other methods. However, the thesis focused on determining who *bo 'mathoto* are in reaction to the current increase in informal cross-border trade along the Lesotho-Botswana route. I investigated why they prefer Botswana since the Pula currency is stronger than the Loti currency. Although the study focused on the lived experiences and significance of informal cross-border trade in this group of Basotho women, there were limitations regarding available numerical data (database of *bo 'mathoto*) during my fieldwork.

When I conversed with Lesotho immigration officers, for example, they all said that *bo 'mathoto* are treated the same as any other Mosotho citizen at the border post. All they verified was that they have legitimate passports. Another constraint was that I had to move from one government ministry to the next in search of information (statistics) on Basotho women informal cross-border traders. As a result, while participant observation was used, I cannot guarantee that the information gathered was free of bias or correctly interpreted.

3.7.1 Positionality

My social and cultural positioning within Basotho women informal cross-border trading was crucial to understand the experiences and perceptions of these women. Factors, such as gender

and nationality, influenced my positionality on Basotho women engaged in such trade. Gender plays a significant role in shaping the experiences and opportunities available to Basotho women in informal cross-border trade. Women and men have different access to resources, networks, and markets, leading to variations in their standing within the trade sector. My nationality influenced my positionality and that of Basotho women involved in cross-border trade. I was better positioned to understand the historical, cultural, and political factors shaping these women's relationships through the borders, their access to networks, and the reception they receive in host countries. Not only that, but also to understand their geographical location, their proximity to borders, their access to transportation networks, their market access, and their interactions with border authorities, which can influence their trade opportunities.

Another factor was their socio-economic status, which involves their education, wealth, and social connections, which influence their ability to trade, access markets, and negotiate favourable terms. Understanding my positionality was crucial for analysing inequalities, power dynamics, and opportunities within informal cross-border trade. It helped me recognise Basotho women's diverse experiences, challenges, and agency in this trade, which inform policies and interventions to promote inclusive and equitable outcomes.

3.8 Chapter Summary

The chapter introduced the methodology employed in this study covering issues ranging from research philosophy and design to issues of population, study area, sample selection and data collection and analysis. The chapter highlights ethnography's importance in documenting Basotho women's experiences, particularly their cross-border trips to source materials. It also addresses ethical issues and the methodological constraints of ethnographic research during the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative research method was selected to explore ideas, thoughts, and meaning because it generates descriptive data based on the words of the participants. The approach was appropriate for the study because of the nature of the research objectives, which needed qualitative data. Given the study area, population and sampling, snowball sampling better suited the study. All key themes of the fieldwork process were addressed. The study focused on Basotho women informal cross-border traders who trade between Lesotho and Botswana. The study was founded on personal insight and used in-depth interviews as the fundamental instrument for gathering information and also employed participant observations and informal

discussions. This aided the gathering of ethnographic data that could clarify and depict why Basotho women choose informal cross-border trade, how the trading system works, how these women operate, the nature of their businesses, and the constraints they come across. It should also be emphasised that the selected cases of informal cross-border trade may not represent all informal cross-border traders in Lesotho. The following chapter contains the research findings, analysis, and results.

CHAPTER 4

BO 'MATHOTO: BASOTHO WOMEN CROSS-BORDER TRADERS' PROFILES

4.1 Introduction

Basotho women informal cross-border traders are referred to as *bo 'mathoto*, which means women with luggage. In singular, it is *'mathoto* for one woman. The etymology of this word is a symbolic word derived from the Sesotho word *thoto*, which means luggage. Therefore, by the number of bags or luggage informal cross-border traders carry from their shopping, this word became common among Basotho. It is common among Basotho people to give symbolic names to events or situations. Even children can be named after an event or a situation; for example, a girl born during the rainy season can be named 'Mapula, which means the one who comes with rain. As a result, throughout the presentation, the word *bo 'mathoto* is used interchangeably with Basotho women informal cross-border traders.

While the image of a Mosotho cross-border migrant is historically that of a male migrant labourer who leaves his dependent wife behind in Lesotho, the image of a Mosotho woman is that of a dependent wife left behind in Lesotho waiting for her husband to return (Gay, 1980). I begin this chapter with this excerpt from Gay (1980, p. 16) that highlights the relevance of Wilson's model, which assumes the continuity of labour force circulation based on push and pull factors, and its implications for Basotho women engage in informal cross-border trade:

Wilson's model assumes that the labour force continues circulating if the push and pull factors are maintained. But to the extent that women participate in circulatory migrant labour they no longer guarantee a dependable domestic base in the rural areas. As women are allowed to become settled urban dwellers in South Africa, either as permanent workers or as wives living with husbands and children, they threaten the entire oscillating system and the structure of apartheid that maintains it. Prevention of female migration appears necessary for preserving circulatory male migration under conditions that threaten to dissolve the subsistence mode of production and the rural social system and undermine the continuing reproduction of cheap male labour (Wolpe, 1972: 425).

Gay (1980) suggested that Wilson's model may have consequences for Basotho women's ability to maintain a stable domestic base in rural areas. The passage also suggests that the participation

of women in circulatory migrant labour challenges the traditional structure of the oscillating system that relies on the subsistence mode of production and cheap male labour. If women can settle as permanent workers or live with their husbands and children in urban areas, it threatens the existing social system and the reproduction of cheap male labour. Preserving circulatory male migration, integral to the economic and social structure, appears to require preventing female migration. This perspective highlights the gendered dynamics and power relations within migration, where the control of female migration is seen as necessary to maintain the existing social and economic order. The relevance of this excerpt to Basotho women engaged in informal cross-border trade lies in its depiction of the tensions and complexities between gender, migration, and the socio-economic structures of both rural and urban areas. It sheds light on how women's mobility and settlement patterns can challenge existing power dynamics and social systems.

While women have also migrated and taken jobs in South Africa, this was often treated as an exception, a departure from the norm, and something that could threaten the system. However, the collapse of the migrant labour system changed these realities for women, and women's cross-border migration has become a norm. The migration of women seeking work in South Africa's farming and domestic sectors is well documented (Griffin, 2010, 2011; Ulicki & Crush, 2000, 2007), and this trend became prominent after the 1990s and was characterised by 'illegal' migration.

The chapter is about a different category of women cross-border migrant, namely the informal cross-border traders who operate between Lesotho and Botswana. Unlike those who migrate for casual employment, who are mostly impoverished and vulnerable to exploitation, some with illegal status only use South Africa as a transit point and engage in legal, formal, and short-term, purpose-specific oscillatory migration (Griffin, 2011). The name *bo 'mathoto* defines these women and recognises that their migration is about sourcing and transporting goods to Lesotho. It also implicitly acknowledges the difference between these women and those described in the literature whose purpose for migration is to acquire jobs, work, and return after accumulating. This chapter aims to provide a demographic profile of these women cross-border traders, examine their background to understand them better, and identify and analyse why they engage in cross-border trading activities and why they focus on Botswana.

The first section focuses on the question of who these women cross-border traders are and attempts to understand their demographic profile. The second section presents their backgrounds and attempts to understand their social and economic environment, particularly their occupations, education, and social standing. The concluding section presents the reasons for engaging in cross-border trading and the significance of Botswana as a country to their business. I attempted to present these women as different and not falling into the usual category of the poor and vulnerable because they have agency and have responded to opportunities to challenge the popular image of typical Basotho female migrants who are poor and looking for survival opportunities.

This chapter relies on primary data collected between January and November 2021 in Botswana and Lesotho. I drew information specific to the women and their profiles, social backgrounds, and motivations for engaging in cross-border trading from the data. More specifically, I focused on these women as an entrepreneurial group seeking specific products for a specific clientele.

My data relate these women to similar groups covered in literature, particularly by Muzvidziwa (2005) and Zinyama and Tevera (2002) on Zimbabwean migrants to South Africa. Zinyama and Tevera (2002) identified the migrants as family individuals who engage in purpose-specific migration. Muzvidziwa (2005), on the other hand, brought up the issue of agency and portrayed the women as entrepreneurial individuals who responded to the economic challenges in Zimbabwe and opportunities in South Africa to navigate the changing economic environment and create a better life for themselves. Similarly, Kachere (2011) conducted a study that focused on informal cross-border traders who traded between South Africa and Botswana while their country of origin is Zimbabwe.

4.2 Understanding Basotho Women Cross-Border Traders to Botswana

While recognising that there has recently been an increase in the cross-border migration of women from Lesotho, as covered in the literature (Adepoju, 2006, Crush et al., 2005; Dodson, 2000; Griffin, 2011; Kihato, 2007; McDonald et al., 2000; Shaw, 2007), it is important to note that women cross-border migrants fall into different categories. In this study, I focused only on those women cross-border migrants who purchase goods in Botswana and sell them back in Lesotho.

There are also some Basotho women who order goods from South Africa (Musi, 2002), and therefore, there is likely a reason why some prefer Botswana over South Africa. Their suppliers' location may be due to the preferences of their clientele back in Lesotho. The reason for *bo 'mathoto's* preference for Botswana over South Africa as a place to source goods cannot be related to costs because the Botswana Pula has a higher value than the South African Rand, which has an equivalent value to the Lesotho Maluti currency,⁴ and therefore sourcing goods in Botswana is more expensive than sourcing them from South Africa when taking into account the relative value of the Pula against the Rand and transport.

4.2.1 The women cross-border traders

The women who participated in the study and bought materials and goods from Botswana were quite diverse and their years of involvement differed immensely. Some women have been in cross-border trading for over 10 years and others can be considered newcomers. Although some women were new and had recently started cross-border trading, the sample was biased towards women who had been in the business for some time because their experience allowed me to assess various aspects of cross-border trading. Newcomers would have been unable to provide enough detail to allow me to satisfy the study objectives. As such, all the women who participated in the study had three years or more experience in cross-border trading, as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Number of participants by the years in trading

Number of years in trading	Number of participants
0–5 years	5
6–10 years	3
10–15 years	1
16–20 years	3
+ 20 years	3

⁴ 1 pula equals 1.40 Maluti which is at par with rand (09/10/2023)

Three of the 15 women had started cross-border trading in the 1990s and have travelled to various South African towns, including Botshabelo, Ladybrand, Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town. At that time, the Botswana market was not open, and no one knew about Botswana goods. Everyone knew about Durban (Musi, 2002) and Johannesburg because these were popular places among Lesotho traders. Despite the buzzing trade activities in the 1990s, Botswana trips began in early 2000. Eight of the 15 women had less than 10 years of experience in informal cross-border trade; five of the eight women had four to five years of experience, and three had between 6- and 10-years' experience in trading. Only one woman had 10–15 years' experience in informal cross-border trade, and she had 14 years' experience. Three of the women had between 16 and 20 years of involvement in trade. From this category of women, I learned that cross-border trading to Botswana only became popular in the 2000s. Lastly, only three women had over 30 years of trade experience and are considered veterans. Women between zero and five years in business are categorised as newcomers. Even though some of these women had been in the business for fewer years than others, they are already reaping the benefits and making a living out of the trade. Early traders are by now established and stable.

All the women cross-border traders who joined later started trading businesses from products bought in Botswana, which they stated had a market in Lesotho and was not open to the South African market. 'M'e Khalalelo put it as follows:

Everyone knows Johannesburg. Many people from Lesotho work there. They buy goods for their family members, and those who do not buy reveal the original prices to Basotho in Lesotho, making it difficult for women traders to sell. Another issue is that goods from South Africa are common in Lesotho. ('M'e Khalalelo, interview int.).

The above quotation shows that women are considerate of the clientele that they have built over the years, and therefore, they ensure they sell good quality and sometimes unique products to their clientele.

Table 4.2 shows the women cross-border traders and their ages. Three women were in their 30s, two of whom were 30 and the other 34. The 30- and 34-year-olds had less than five years in trade. The dominant age group in the study was 40–45 years. However, most traders were between the ages of 30 and 49 years. Only two women were in their 50s, and were 53 and 58 years old, respectively. There was no one in the sample who was over 60 years old.

Table 4.2: Women cross-border traders and their ages

Age	Number of participants
30–35 years	3
36–39 years	2
40–45 years	5
46–49 years	3
50–55 years	1
56–59 years	1
Total	15

The age category shows that age is considered to play a crucial role in informal cross-border trade because it affects how traders perceive and approach their business, challenges, and opportunities. Younger traders often have more energy and are more willing to take risks, while older traders have more experience and knowledge. This makes them better equipped to navigate the complex dynamics of cross-border trade. At the same time, age can be a barrier to entry for many traders. Younger traders may lack the resources and experience needed to establish themselves, while older traders may face discrimination or bias due to their age.

Mma Peete, for example, is 30 years old and full time in cross-border trading activities. Her mother, who is now elderly, was a cross-border trader but is no longer involved in the stock purchase, although she still depended on materials and goods bought from Botswana. Mma Peete is the one buying stock on her behalf. She indicated that she preferred to buy the stock for her mother because her mother did not want her to undertake these long trips. She put it as follows:

My mother has played her part, and she now needs to rest, though she still manages to sell once the stock gets to her. At her age, she needs someone to do the shopping, and I prefer to assist her in paying for the service to someone to do errands for her. Shopping for her is easy because I often buy her stock while I am out buying mine (Mma Peete, int.).

Despite these challenges, age diversity can be a source of strength in informal cross-border trade. The different perspectives and approaches of younger and older traders can complement each other, leading to more innovative solutions and better business outcomes. Furthermore, age diversity can also help create a more inclusive and equitable trading environment. Older traders can serve as mentors and role models for younger traders, and younger traders can bring fresh perspectives and new ideas.

Mareitu, for example, was 30 years old and had started cross-border trading after being invited by a veteran, her supplier. She joined this group of veteran traders who were mostly older than her, and became an active member. She admitted to feeling insecure travelling with people her mother's age, but with time, she became comfortable in their company. She said, "I have come to relate to the veterans like my mother, and due to the age difference, they provide motherly advice" (Mareitu, int.).

Mentorship plays a critical role in the success of informal cross-border trade because it allows experienced traders to share their knowledge, skills, and expertise with younger or less experienced traders. By offering guidance and support, mentors can help newer traders avoid common pitfalls and navigate the complex dynamics of cross-border trade. They can also help them develop critical business skills, such as negotiation, marketing, and financial management. In addition to providing practical support, mentorship can help build confidence and resilience in new traders.

4.2.2 The women and their family situations

Nine of the participants are married, one is a widow, and another is a divorcee. Four of the women are single, and one of them hoped to get married one day; the other three are single mothers and not interested in marriage. Thirteen women have children, and two women, 30-year-old single women and a 58-year-old married woman, do not have children. The participating women's children's ages range from a three-month-old baby to a 33-year-old. The typical age range among the children is between 10 and 25 years, with more children in their teens. The single mothers mentioned that their partners had abandoned them with the children. Abandonment is common in Lesotho, and most women-headed households are a result of men's abandonment. Abandonment is common among labour migrants, but it also happens within Basotho society where men leave their families and start new ones, and 'm'e Mampho referred to it as "men who die when they are alive".

Crush, (2010) and Mensah and Naidoo (2011) showed that in Lesotho, despite the migration of men and the prospect of remittances, some women never received these life-serving remittances. The one divorced participant shared how her desire for financial independence strained her marriage and led to divorce. This woman is among many who had joined cross-border trading

not as a strategy to survive but as a strategy to reach financial independence. In a patriarchal society, women striving for financial independence pose fear on some men, and often results in separation. 'M'e Mamochesane, who is 45 years old, indicated that she divorced because her cross-border activities were not benefiting her because of her husband's behaviour. She explained as follows how her husband misused the proceeds from her cross-border activities:

Sometimes, he would take all the money and spend it on beer. He was not working at the time, and I was the one supporting the family. In some cases, he would hide my passport when the time for travelling for restocking came because he associated the activity with prostitution. I was getting discouraged and wanted to quit. I did not know what I worked for. ('M'e Mamochesane, int.)

She eventually divorced, left her marital home, and continued participating in cross-border trade without interference. Divorcing her husband meant she could concentrate on her business and be in control of her finances without worrying about how someone felt or thinking of wasteful expenditure.

4.2.3 The women and education

The formal education system in Lesotho follows a 7-3-2-4 framework, with seven years of primary schooling, split into lower primary (Standards 1-4) and upper primary (Standards 5-7); five years of high school, split into junior (Forms 1-3) and senior (Forms 4-5); and four years of tertiary school (Johnson, 2016). The collected data showed that four women went to school until upper primary (Standards 5-7), and of these, three had completed Standard 7 and one had completed Standard 5; five women went to school until junior high school (Forms 1-3), and of these, two had completed Form 1, two had completed Form 2, and one had completed Form 3; five women went to school until senior high school (Forms 4-5), and of these two had completed Form 4 and three had completed Form 5; lastly, only one participant had a tertiary qualification (a degree from the NUL).

Therefore, most of these Basotho women can be considered literate but not educated. All of them had gone through the primary stage of education, and only one had failed to proceed beyond Standard 5. For many women, informal cross-border trade is a way to provide for themselves and their families in the face of limited economic opportunities. It offers a flexible and accessible

income source without formal qualifications or training. However, it is critical to understand how broader social and cultural variables influence women's involvement in informal cross-border trade. Women may experience discrimination or bias when accessing formal employment prospects in many places where they are expected to take on caregiving responsibilities. Therefore, one of their few realistic options may be informal cross-border trade. For example, the participants attested that informal cross-border trade was one of their few options, even for those in textile factories. Pont'so explained it as follows: "Life has changed, and jobs have become scarce. These days, it is not easy to get a job at the textile factories because even people with tertiary education come looking for jobs with the same people without tertiary education" (Pont'so int.). Another woman put it this way:

Employment is a problem these days. Because of a lack of employment, I decided not to look for a job but to continue with informal cross-border trade since I started trading while in tertiary. My friends never understood why I would not look for a job. Unfortunately, most of them are still unemployed, and it has been five years since we graduated. (Mma Peete, int.)

The literacy levels recorded in the interviews were expected because Lesotho's education policy states that education is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 13 (Johnson, 2016). Though there are no fees for lower classes, the education policy also covers adults who do not know how to read or write by availing evening classes for inclusive education. The data are somewhat valid concerning low education attainment and its association with informal cross-border trade because it only tells the stories of the women who participated in the study. However, it showed that educated women, like Mma Peete, also take part in cross-border trading. 'M'e Liteboho, a full-time trader mentored by a veteran (mma Khalaf) and now also mentoring other women, told me how she had two encounters with women with tertiary qualifications involved in informal cross-border trade:

I remember one of the nurses I introduced to informal cross-border trade wanted to quit her nursing job because of the many orders she was receiving and focus on informal cross-border trade. However, I advised her against that and told her to build a solid customer base first and save more money to buy a plot that she could develop with time for income

purposes so that by the time she quits her nursing job, she would be having another stream of income. ('M'e Liteboho, int.)

It is possible that there are more *bo 'mathoto* with tertiary degrees in the country. Kachere (2011) confirmed that people with university degrees, teaching, accounting, secretarial, clerical, and bookkeeping certificates were among the participants in their study on cross-border trading in Zimbabwe.

4.2.4 Full-time and part-time cross-border traders

Another aspect closely related to education and literacy is that cross-border trade is not only undertaken by women who depend entirely on buying and selling goods, whom I called full-time traders. Eleven women were full-time traders and four were part-time traders because they worked at textile factories. According to these women, cross-border trading is becoming increasingly popular among women who can be considered Basotho middle class rather than people experiencing poverty. Their confirmation showed that they know women who hold stable and respectable full-time jobs and have secure livelihoods who engage in informal cross-border trade. Some participants confirmed they know professionals working as civil servants in various government parastatals who are also in informal cross-border trade.

Mma Thembi, for example, knows a woman who works at Lerotholi Polytechnic College as a lecturer yet participate in informal cross-border trade. She believed colleges pay relatively well and that the part-time trade is economically stable. People like mma Thembi did not understand how someone of that stature could be actively involved in cross-border trade. Mma Thembi also knows an immigration officer who is actively involved, and mma Thembi admitted that she initially did not think the immigration officer was part time because of her involvement. I could not interview the mentioned women highlighted by Mma Thembi because of snowball sampling. I could not influence whom the current participant referred me to. Similarly, 'm'e Liteboho knows someone employed at the Ministry of Education in a middle management position. She has worked for the Ministry for over 15 years but is far from retirement age. She knows this woman travels to Botswana with the other women every month and is part of the organising group. It emerged that she has been involved in cross-border activities for the past 15 years and

is among the core group of women who pioneered the Botswana trips. *Bo 'mathoto* mainly sourced their goods from Johannesburg before starting the Botswana trips.

The participants who know the category of traders described above observed that the women with alternative sources of income, mainly if they are in full-time employment, can manage their cross-border activities and time to make trips to buy stock while increasing their income portfolios. They can also buy stock in significant quantities using income from their employment without compromising their financial situation. The risk in cross-border buying and selling is investing all income into buying goods, which leaves the women financially exposed. Many women often take such risks and then do not have enough to pay for goods to pass the border. There is always a risk of women failing to navigate border processes. However, they quickly bail each other out, and it is usually those who have extra money who come to the rescue of colleagues.

The women with alternative income sources pointed out it that is helpful because they can purchase large quantities of stock to satisfy demand. It also saved them the costs of border charges, unlike those with one source of income who often encounter problems when most of their income is exhausted on stock and transport and have to wait for payment from clients. Most cross-border trips occur once a month, yet there are exceptional cases where women travel fortnightly. Women who travel once a month must maximise these trips to make a profit. 'M'e MaBoiumelo explained as follows:

We only travel to Botswana once a month to stock. These trips are the only opportunity for us to stock the goods we need, and the strategy is to stock as much as possible to take advantage of the transport and to avoid running out of stock before the month has ended. To achieve this, you must invest and sometimes use all the money available. ('M'e MaBoitumelo, int.)

Other participants also made this point and talked enthusiastically about taking advantage of these trips and ensuring their profits are realised. The trips are costly since the women have to hire their own transport.

Despite the above, the findings suggested that the women who participate in cross-border trading activities are from lower social and economic backgrounds. Some of these women have stable

families, some have children who are studying at university, others have children in high school, and younger women have children in primary schools who need looking after. One of the younger unmarried women who does not have children stays with her parents, and she does not feel pressured to move out because she felt she would incur unnecessary costs.

Importantly, most of these women have financial resources, especially those with a second income stream, that they can plough into the cross-border buying business. As alluded to earlier, cross-border trade requires financial resources to start since the women must buy stock and pay for transport. Eight women already had homes before starting cross-border trading, but they have extended and renovated them once they started making profits, and some women were initially renting and built houses later.

The women's background and family history determine the level at which they participate and their plans and goals. Some women have lost the men in their lives through separation and do not have the same support as those with spouses. As a result, they initially found it difficult to sustain themselves without the support of men until they engaged in informal cross-border trade. For example, 'm'e Mampho had lived with her husband until he died and left her with their two children. Since her children were still at school, there were a lot of expenses, and her late husband's pension could not cover all their needs.

I work for a textiles and clothing firm. My wages there are not enough. I learned about informal cross-border trade from some colleagues informal cross-border trade and started going to Johannesburg in 2017. In 2018, I joined those attending Botswana, and my life improved. I am satisfied with the business's profits. (Mampoi, int.)

Some women like mma Khotso, Mampoi, and 'Matempi are single mothers and the sole source of support for their children. Two of them are full-time traders, and the other (Mampoi) is part time and has a salaried job, which she felt cannot sustain their lives as she works in a textile factory.

4.2.5 *The women and their homes*

To complete the presentation on the women's profiles, it is essential to understand where they live because their place of residence is an indicator of their status, and the assumption is that

affluent individuals own homes and live in affluent areas. The findings on the women's residences showed that most women traders do not stay in ordinary low-income or poor communities, and instead, they own land and have built houses in prestigious Maseru locations, such as Ha Motloheloa, Lithabaneng, Upper Thamae, Khubetsoane, and Nazareth. These are typically middle-income residential areas. These locations are suburban areas within a radius of 4–40 km of Maseru city. Maseru experiences large rural-urban migration flows, especially within the economically active group, and rural-urban migration results in most unemployed residing in urban areas and engaging in informal economic activities (Crush et al, 2005). The rural-urban migration has contributed to urban expansion and sprawl as the city expands into neighbouring villages and farms. For example, Ha Motloheloa is an emerging suburb, and Ponto said the following about living there:

I never imagined we could afford a plot in this area, let alone build our house. Though we started with two rooms, we knew it was not befitting of the location, so we extended it to the state it is in now because we are also surrounded by big houses. (Ponto's int.)

As the urban area expanded, land in the periphery was commodified and households started selling land for resettlement. This is expensive land, and the fact that some of the women informal cross-border traders can afford it attests to their economic empowerment and social mobility. They either bought the land or inherited it from their family. Nevertheless, the fact that some have land and others reside with family in these areas tells a story that I revisit later (section 5.4.2).

4.3 Reasons for Engaging in Cross-border Trade

Understanding the women's reasons for engaging in cross-border trade is essential to create a profile of the Basotho women. It provides insight into the social and economic factors that shape their behaviour and decision-making processes. For instance, women who engage in cross-border trade for survival may be more likely to engage in riskier trading activities. In contrast, those who view it as supplementing their household income may be more cautious and risk averse. The reasons for engaging in cross-border trade are diverse and complex and vary between individuals. Some women engage in cross-border trading to survive, others view it as an

opportunity to supplement their household income, and others want to fulfil their entrepreneurial aspirations. For example, mma Reitu explained her involvement as follows:

At first, I thought my engagement in informal cross-border trade was just a survival strategy because I needed to meet the needs of my family members, especially my siblings, who were still in school. As the eldest in my family, I took it as my responsibility. But now that I have interacted with other women, my thinking and aspirations have changed. I want to expand and go to the highlands to open a shop and sell winter apparel because of the cold weather. I am targeting my maternal grandmother's village. (Mma Reitu, int.)

Understanding the women's reasons for engaging in cross-border trading can also help identify the support and resources needed to facilitate and sustain their trading activities. For instance, women who engage in cross-border trading to fulfil their entrepreneurial aspirations may benefit from training and mentorship programs to enhance their business skills. Understanding women's reasons for engaging in cross-border trade is crucial for developing policies and interventions that support and empower Basotho women in their trading activities.

The differences between various categories of women traders are highlighted in their reasons for becoming informal cross-border traders, but the common reason is to make a living for their households, which means their motive is the same. Cross-border trading attracts women because they have seen how it changed other women's lives for the better. All the women were drawn into cross-border trading by prospects of a better life, and most became entrepreneurs to improve their lives. The main reason both full-time and part-time women traders gave for their involvement in cross-border trade, especially why they opted to buy their goods from Botswana, was the need to earn income or buy household products that are not readily available in Lesotho.

Trading has become full-time traders' sole source of income and livelihood, and some of the women have brought their families into the business, making cross-border trading a family business. Some of the women work with their husbands in the business, and other have involved their children, who help them part time. Figure 4.1 shows one of the women's husbands who had joined his wife in the business as he is updating the credit page of a customer while his wife is attending to those who are ready to buy.



Figure 4.1 'M'e Mampho's husband, helping her at work (Source: Author, 2021)

According to 'm'e Mampho, her husband's involvement in the business improved their sales because they share responsibilities and ideas and help each other come up with solutions to their challenges. She explained it as follows:

Monn'a Mosotho o hlooho e thata (a Mosotho man is difficult to convince). When we bought our first car, my husband realised how much money I made in informal cross-border trade. That was when he quit his self-employed job, which was not bringing in much. We plan to get a prime location to build a warehouse for rental. ('m'e Mampho, int.)

Unemployment is very high in Lesotho, and the national economy struggles to create enough jobs to absorb the growing population. Young people used to be most affected by these economic problems, but now almost every age category is affected, and people must find innovative ways to make a living. Mma Peete, for example, emphasised that she graduated from the NUL in 2016 and decided not to go look for a job but to focus on informal cross-border trade as she had been doing it part time for her mother while she was still a student.

Other women were drawn to cross-border trading by higher returns in terms of income compared to the income derived from their work at the textile factories. After starting cross-border trading

as a supplementary activity while they were still working, they resigned from their work to focus on cross-border trading. For example, 'm'e Maboitumelo told her story as follows:

I think I have about four years being consistent in this business to Botswana. I started long back, but it does not matter. Before, I worked at the textile factories for 15 years, and the money was insufficient for my family's needs. I think I was earning M700 then, which is insufficient for my transport fare to Botswana now. ('m'e Maboitumelo, int.)

Lineo has been working at a textile factory for 19 years now, and she said, "I work at the textile factories, and the salary is insufficient. The plan is to leave and have my own business. Since I started going to Botswana, I saw a big difference in my finances (int.)." 'Masentle has a similar story and had been working at the textile factories for 18 years at the time of the interview where she earned M2 000, and she said:

I am working at the textile factories. I started going to Botswana in 2019, and every day I return from shopping, I realise there is more I get from the trade than what I earn at work. I want to start a business and leave the textile factories. ('Masentle, int.)

These women want to focus on cross-border trading and generate income for a better life. Some of the women were inspired to venture into cross-border trading by the success of early cross-border traders in their community. These are women who were introduced into the business by the early traders. Some women complained about the working conditions in their previous jobs in the textile factories where they worked long hours. Ponts'o, a 36-year-old trader who had resigned about eight years ago (at the time of fieldwork) from her job in the textiles and clothing industry, stated the following:

My health was deteriorating due to my work environment, which involved long working hours, standing on cemented floors without carpets, which was very cold. I had to choose my health over wages, around 800 Maloti then. It was painful to be home doing nothing as my husband works as a government driver and does not earn much. We could not survive on his salary alone. Another source of income had to be there, yet I had no idea what I could do at the time, until my neighbour visited me at my home, and she talked about an informal cross-border trade venture. Since I knew my neighbour, I had seen the changes in her household that she attributed to her engaging in informal cross-border trade. Having

witnessed that it was not difficult for me to get convinced, more so that I was looking for something to do to earn money but also the fact that this form of trade seemed flexible. (Ponts'o, int.)

Ponts'o explained that her neighbour had visited her a few months after her resignation when she noticed she had not found another job. That is when she introduced her to informal cross-border trade. So, she ventured into the informal cross-border trade business to explore the income opportunities because she did not have another option. She knew she needed to pursue cross-border trade after her first sale because of the excellent profit.

Informal cross-border trade is an indispensable source of livelihood for countless women who rely on it to sustain their families and support their way of life. With limited access to formal employment opportunities, women often resort to cross-border trading to earn a living. Moreover, given the prevailing gender bias in formal career prospects, education, and resource allocation, informal cross-border trade has emerged as a critical income-generating avenue for women. It is imperative to recognise that women engage in cross-border trade not only out of economic necessity but also to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations. Therefore, informal cross-border trade represents a valuable platform for women to launch and expand their businesses.

The ultimate goal of the participants is to have other income streams and to invest. Cross-border trade offers them the opportunity to start off. Three (Mma Peete, 'm'e Liteboho, and 'm'e Nthoi) of the 15 women started successful poultry businesses from the proceeds of informal cross-border trade. These women indicated they are satisfied with the returns they were getting from their poultry businesses since the demand is high. The other two women ('Matempi and 'm'e Khalalelo) own accommodation rental properties (*malaene*) as their other income stream. Apart from informal cross-border trade, other women have piggery businesses and sell to their local butcheries and to individuals.

As alluded to earlier, some of the women are part-timers and travel occasionally to buy stock and for their households. Some go to Botswana for items that are unavailable in Lesotho and buy goods to sell back home. These women tend to purchase particular items or orders. Some women, especially those who started cross-border trading in the 1990s when only a few women were involved, had seen a profitable opportunity that 'm'e Mampho explained as follows:

It was a new opportunity. Very few people were involved, and the demand for goods in Lesotho was very high. It was easy to make money then. Most women were sceptical about it until they started seeing changes in the lives of those who started early. Slowly, women kept joining, and now the market is flooded compared to back then. ('m'e Mampho, int.)

Some women who joined later seem to want quick cash, which is possible but not sustainable. They do so by pricing their goods high, and when clients discover this, they disappear. One of the veterans, 'm'e Mampho, explained that one aspect of cross-border trading that breeds consistency and sustainability is establishing trust and developing a clientele at the beginning of the journey. She explained it as follows:

As much as it was about making a profit, it was not about making quick money. We had gone into this business with a long-term objective. We knew that we had to be patient. We had to build our clientele. This was easy because we were not desperate for money. In any business, every cent counts, and we use that to build a reputation. ('m'e Mampho, int.)

'M'e Nthoi emphasised the following:

So many women are now involved, and they think it is an easy way of making money. The challenge is that the upcoming informal cross-border traders make many mistakes as they try to achieve what some of us have achieved over a decade or two. They lack patience. Some even overpriced their stock, which does not benefit them as customers go for reasonable prices for the same product. ('m'e Nthoi, int.)

This statement shows how women traders view cross-border trading and what motivates them to take it up as an occupation. It also shows that they see it as an occupation that they value and cherish. However, this does not tell us how they operate their business. In the following section, I address the issue of how these women operate to buy goods in Botswana and bring them to Lesotho.

4.4 Women Informal Cross-border Traders' *Modus Operandi*

The findings in this section makes it clear that informal cross-border traders are a distinct class of women. It is important to note that all cross-border journeys made by these women are legal and that they possess the necessary travel documents. Once in the taxi, these women fill out a form

that requires their full names as they appear on their passport, home village, next of kin, and contacts. This form is left at the Maseru border with the immigration office. The purpose is to have this information in cases of emergency when next of kin may be needed. The process differs significantly from irregular cross-border migrants who enter South Africa clandestinely and work primarily as undocumented labourers. The women in this study travel to Botswana almost every month to purchase goods for sale back home.

Unlike other informal cross-border traders in Southern Africa, such as those described by Muzvidziwa (2005), who mainly use public transport, Basotho women informal cross-border traders use specially hired buses such as 7–8-seater mini-buses, 11–14-seater Toyota Quantums, or 22-seater buses. The bus size depends on the number of women travelling to purchase goods. These vehicles are legally registered in Lesotho and operate differently from formal commuter taxis, which operate from formal ranks. These specially hired vehicles pick and drop off their passengers at a temporary rank away from the formal taxi rank.

Among these specially hired vehicles are those that use only the Botswana route, those that follow the Johannesburg route, and others that follow routes to specific destinations such as Durban and Cape Town. Transport dedicated to service a particular route cannot be diverted to another route, except under exceptional circumstances. As such, the drivers specialise in their routes and therefore become familiar with both their routes and places of destination as well as the women they serve. One of the three drivers interviewed for this study said, “There is an order through our taxi association in Lesotho. We have different routes, and we adhere to them” (Driver 1, int.).

The women traders usually book the journey well before the travel date. The booking is done through the driver through a call or a WhatsApp message. The vehicle owners encourage this process to determine the number of travellers to make appropriate arrangements to avoid overloading or leaving someone behind. It also allows vehicle operators to budget, allocate an appropriate vehicle (suitable capacity), and take the right trailer size. The booking system also allows the drivers to take a register of travellers, accommodate cancellations, and take additional passengers if need be.

This amount paid per individual to hire the vehicles is fixed. Before COVID-19, the return fare was R700 per individual, was increased to R1000 in 2020 because of challenges associated with

the COVID-19 pandemic and was dropped to R900 in 2021. The increase in prices during the COVID-19 pandemic was because less women than normal would travel due to the travelling requirements that were in place, such as a COVID-19 test certificate every time one travels. Some women feared travelling during the pandemic because they were scared of getting COVID-19. Women who do not want to travel but want others to bring them orders pay the same amount as those travelling.

The vehicles are hired for a particular trip and is locally referred to as a 'special', meaning the vehicle is hired for a particular assignment or purpose. They have no fixed timetables and do not necessarily need to fill up before they make the journey. The vehicles hired by the women leave Lesotho to help them conduct their businesses efficiently. They can either be fully or partially filled up before they leave. These drivers have been on these journeys numerous times and know most women in the business. They often have people on the waiting list in case a woman who had booked cancels. However, it does not mean that if one of the women fails to get a seat on the trip, she cannot buy her stock. The women have arrangements, and they help those who cannot travel for some reason by purchasing the stock for them. These women have been travelling together for a long time and have solid relationships.

Basotho women have their money in rands and not Maloti for exchange in Botswana. Although the Maloti currency is equivalent to the South African Rand, it is not accepted in Botswana. The claim is that it is not legal tender and cannot be accepted for exchange in banks, bureau de change, or the black market. Once all the checks have been conducted and the driver is satisfied that all the women conform to the legal requirements, the right-size of a trailer is attached to the vehicle. The vehicles pull a trailer to ferry the goods, and the trailer's size depends on the number of passengers. Figure 4.2 shows one of the trailers, and the picture was taken upon arrival at the Botswana Tlokweng Border Post during one of the trips the researcher had joined these women.



Figure 4.2: Trailer at the Kopfotein Border Post (South Africa side) at 5:30 in the morning (Source: Author, 2021)

The journey from Lesotho to Botswana and back often takes about three days. The women leave Lesotho on a Friday at 8 p.m., travel through South Africa at night, and arrive in Botswana on Saturday morning. One of the drivers explained it as follows:

The idea of travelling overnight is so that we arrive in the morning, change the South African currency to Botswana Pula [currency exchange at the time of writing R1=P0.70⁵ official or black market], and start shopping early to avoid delays. To avoid delays, the women fill in the same address at the immigration desk and usually request a minimum of three days in Botswana to cater for eventualities. The travelling arrangements are also meant to cut costs to avoid looking for accommodation. During these trips, there are no use

⁵ Currency exchange rate at black market (March 2020)

hotels to change or take a bath but public bathrooms. We also have breakfast at local garages, but most of us pack our food. (Driver 2, int.)

Upon arrival in Botswana, the women go to the different factories to purchase their stock. Once they have completed their shopping, the return journey begins. They mostly leave Botswana in the evening and travel through the night through South Africa to arrive in Lesotho on Sunday morning. They travel to Botswana throughout the year; however, the peak months are between March and August because this is when they buy a lot of winter stock due to demand. Some traders indicated that they travel every two weeks during peak months, others travel once a month, and still others every two months. The frequency of travelling differs per trader and depends on how big their clientele is and the financial scale of their business. Those with stable finances start stocking in February when variety still enables them to choose the best in the shop.

The frequency of their trips also depends on how well their customers pay and how fast the imported goods are sold. Most of the traders sell their goods on a two-month payment arrangement. It was noticeable that these women do not travel to Botswana and buy anything but that they work on pre-orders. To some extent, this guarantees that the goods they buy will sell and they will get their returns. This implies proper planning and budgeting, which are rational business methods. When the women traders have some cash left after buying their required stock, they may buy something different to introduce to their customers. They stated that this strategy has worked for them as this is how they introduce their customers to new products, thereby creating demand.

These women operate on existing clientele and orders; they are women with purpose. They move because they already have existing orders before travelling. They buy things they know are in demand by using their unique skills and expertise in the field, and they buy things they know will not last a month. They engage with their clients to better understand their needs and preferences and tailor their services accordingly. Women traders also leverage their networking skills to expand their client base and explore new growth opportunities.

Additionally, they keep themselves updated with the latest market trends and news and use this knowledge to make informed decisions and provide valuable insights to their clients. Overall, women traders can bring a fresh perspective and innovative ideas to the trading industry while

building solid relationships with their clients and delivering exceptional results. They do so by buying extra items that they sell on the side.

4.5 The Women and Botswana Merchandise

Studies on cross-border trading, mainly from Zimbabwe, found traders mostly buy their merchandise from South Africa (Jamela, 2013; Muzvidziwa, 2015; Chikanda and Tawodzera, 2017, Manjokoto and Ranga, 2017 and Dzawanda et al 2023). I also noticed that some Basotho women buy merchandise from Johannesburg and Durban. Therefore, I sought to understand why Botswana is a preferred country for this group of women. It is important to note that some of these women had started sourcing merchandise from Johannesburg and Durban. The women indicated that they prefer Botswana because of the kind of products they get from the Botswana market. The women indicated they wanted specific quality merchandise from retail stores, which is expensive in Johannesburg or Durban. 'M'e Mampho explained it as follows:

In Botswana, we buy from warehouses often in bales, which mostly have unique apparel. South African markets we can buy from are flooded with the same goods, some of them being replicas with lower quality. Some of them are available from street vendors in South Africa and Lesotho. Botswana market always offers something different. ('m'e Mampho int.)

They also reported that in Botswana, they find rare and unique items, which is what most of their customers enjoy. Therefore, one of the considerations for buying from Botswana and not South Africa is the issue of quality because they consider Botswana-sourced goods superior to those from South Africa. This makes them popular among clients interested in good quality products. These women have also discovered that buying bulk in Botswana is more affordable than in South Africa. Some traders who have been in the informal cross-border trade for decades have been able to observe the changes in the informal trade market and move with the times as things change. Two of the women ('m'e Nthoi and mma Thembi) who have been in this trade for more than 30 years indicated that they started buying goods from various places in South Africa, like Botshabelo, Lady Brand, and Welkom, moved to sourcing goods from Durban, Johannesburg, and Cape Town, and eventually started sourcing them from Botswana.

This change in source areas over the years resulted from a combination of factors, including inflation, customer requirements, and taste changes. The shift over the years indicates how the women informal cross-border traders adapt to change and channel their skills into what is happening in the market. It is important to note that these traders do not exclusively travel to Botswana, especially those who have been in it for a long time. Yet, there is a growing trend of traders who recently started trading and exclusively travel to Botswana. In addition to the preferred quality of goods the traders get from Botswana, these goods bring good profits as customers often do not question their pricing because the perceived quality of the goods seems to validate the pricing. This allows the traders to maximise their profits. The participants pointed out that their customers can tell the difference in the quality of goods from Botswana. This is discussed in the following section that deals with the types of goods traded. Lastly, the Botswana market is said to have various good quality winter products, and thus, the traders use the winter to sell winter products as Lesotho experiences freezing winters, including snow, especially in the highlands.

4.6 The Types of Goods Traded

The traders responded that clothing items are the main items they typically buy in Botswana and bring back to Lesotho, whether for sale or personal use. Lesotho has a textile sector, and therefore, it is expected that most clothing items are easily accessible, but this is not the case as the items manufactured in Lesotho are exported. The items include bed linen, curtains, and clothes for men, women, and children. One would expect to find these items anywhere, including in South Africa, but the woman specified that the bedding items are fleece blankets, winter and summer sheets, duvet covers, and comforters. These are the most in demand items in the country, and all women traders purchase these items. The fleece blankets are trendy during winter and are mostly purchased in May, June, and July (Figure 4.3). This is not surprising since Lesotho winters are frigid, and fleece blankets are a collector's item for every woman in winter.

These items are purchased throughout the year, and the women indicated they are popular with clients. The women also buy clothes such as fur winter stockings, fur boots, fur jackets, and socks. These winter items are popular because of the freezing winters in Lesotho. Besides these winter items, the women also order nightgowns, pyjamas, lingerie, panties, bras, shoes, and sneakers. A few who have extra money buy additional goods, such as non-clothes and bicycles.



Figure 4.3: Some of the fleece winter sheets sold by Basotho women traders (Source: Author, 2021)

While it would be expected that the women also purchase and trade in household items such as home decorations and fragile ware, these are not popular because of the packaging challenges, the transport mode, and the distance between Botswana and Lesotho. The challenge with transport is that the goods are loaded onto trailers, and the goods must be in closed bags to avoid being blown away during transit (Figure 4.4). There is also no space inside the taxis to put these things. There is the possibility that fragile items can break during loading and offloading at the source and the borders during customs inspections, and on damaged roads, especially in the Free State, Welcome, Maquard, Chlocolan, and Senekal areas. As much as the women want to trade in these items, and some indicated that they sometimes do get orders, the risks of damage in transit are high for these goods, and the women avoid buying these goods because of the possibility of breakages along the way. Fragile items also require special packaging, such as bubble wrap, and it is not worth it for these women to go through the trouble if the risk of breakage is so high. The women who do sometimes bring such items also indicated that they are lucky if the goods arrive in Lesotho unbroken. According to 'm'e Nthoi,

Home decoration items are popular among customers in Lesotho, but they are a risky purchase. The roads we use, especially in the Free States, are mostly farm and poorly

maintained, so transporting these items in a trailer further complicates matters. I bought ornaments once when I started trading and lost all of them. I never retook such orders. I only buy items that cannot break easily. ('m'e Nthoi, int.).



Figure 4.4: Packaged stock, ready to be loaded at one of the shops in Gaborone, West Botswana (Source: Author, 2021)

The women also do not trade in electronic goods like cross-border traders from countries such as Zimbabwe, who primarily purchased electronics, such as radios, CD players, and television sets (Muzvidziwa, 2005). This is because most of these items are available in Lesotho because of the expansion of South African chain stores into the country.

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented five critical aspects of Basotho women cross-border traders to Botswana. The chapter looked into their age, level of education, marital status, number of children, years in cross-border trading, and part- and full-time traders. Through interrogating who these women are, it was revealed that despite Basotho women being categorised as cross-border traders, they do not travel to Botswana to trade but to stock materials and goods from Botswana and bring to Lesotho for sale. The chapter also showed that the women differ in age and their experience in

the cross-border trading business, with some women having a long history of cross-border trading and others being relatively new. The data showed that Basotho women cross-border traders represent a broad spectrum of women of different ages, family backgrounds, and experiences. They include middle-aged and young women; urban dwellers and those from rural communities; full-time traders and part-timers; heads of households and single mothers; married and divorced women; and high school dropouts. They all have different reasons and motivations for engaging in cross-border trading activities.

These women are not the stereotypically poor Basotho women as they are perceived. They turned to informal cross-border because they could not find formal employment and used cross-border trading to escape poverty. All the women interviewed are literate, but only one has a tertiary qualification. Some are married and have stable families and support systems, while others are single mothers with their support systems. There are also women who are full-time traders and solely focus on cross-border trading activities, and other who are part-time traders with a 'formal' job on the side, such as in a textile factory.

Finally, the women started trading for different reasons. Their reasons ranged from moving out of poverty and accumulating to supplementing their incomes. However, their interests in cross-border trading converged, and they all saw a business opportunity and took it. Some of these women were attracted to cross-border trading by the success of other women, while others were invited by those already involved.

The literature by Griffin, (2010), Coetzee and Kelly, (2016) and Moeletsi (2017), describes the stereotypical Mosotho migrant woman as an irregular migrant leaving their country to seek employment, staying at the place of destination, and their income depending on their continued stay in that foreign country. However, there are differences between the stereotypical Basotho migrant women and those described in this study. The Basotho women in this study are women with a purpose who responded to their agency differently while staying back in Lesotho. They are circular migrants who legally cross borders for a specific purpose and return to Lesotho after fulfilling the purpose of their visits.

Tevera and Zinyama's (2002) description of a cross-border migrant as a family person engaged in purpose-specific migration applies to Basotho cross-border women traders to a certain extent. More importantly, Botswana as a destination choice is strategic because it offers something

different. The types of goods they bring into Lesotho from Botswana differ from those of other cross-border traders, setting them apart. These women have a vision, and they start small and build towards their dreams with patience. Their resilience is one of their attributes that manifests in their long-term plans. These women are not in it for ‘quick money’ but for the long run.

Some of the women see cross-border trading as a better occupation than the ones they had before, despite it still being in the informal sector. It is an elevation of their status. As indicated earlier, some of the women are former textile workers, and although they had a regular income, it was not enough for their needs, and they were often forced to augment their income streams. Cross-border trading represented an opportunity for them to retire and focus on something that provide an income that can satisfy their needs. It also allowed them to move away from an exploitative environment where they worked long hours with little pay and do something with less pressure, less stress, and no health concerns. Unemployment has continued to rise in Lesotho because of the political instability and lack of economic growth. A large proportion of the working population is unemployed, which forced the women to search for an alternative source of income.

The women joined informal cross-border trade as an income-earning activity to sustain their livelihoods. Informal cross-border trade helped them earn an income, provide for their family, augment existing incomes, and move out of poverty.

CHAPTER 5

THE CONTRIBUTION OF INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER TRADE TO THE WOMEN AND THEIR HOUSEHOLDS

5.1 Introduction

In recent decades, informal cross-border trade has emerged as a critical economic activity that continues to play a significant role in the livelihoods of women across various regions of the world (Brenton et al., 2011; Crush et al., 2005; Kaminski & Mitra, 2012; Sassen, 2000). Women often face limited formal employment opportunities because of persistent gender-based inequalities and biases. As a result, women tend to seek alternative pathways to economic empowerment and financial stability. The Southern African nation of Lesotho is a compelling case study in this regard. Basotho women have increasingly used informal cross-border trade to reinforce their household financial security and navigate a harsh national economic environment, which is caused by Lesotho still struggling to create a stable economy and jobs due to, among other things, political instability, which is ongoing amid the growing optimism that the new political dispensation can turn the country's fortunes around. This is based on the current Prime Minister's (Ntsokoane Matekane) large business empire and what many perceive to be good business leadership.

However, the new administration inherited a host of challenges, which makes its task more difficult in a country with very limited resources. It will also take a long time to reverse the adverse impacts of many years of corruption, political instability, and state mismanagement. As a result of these ills and in the absence of state provisioning, individuals and households have to look for ways to provide for themselves, which often fall within the informal sector of the economy. The structural patterns of Lesotho's politics have resulted in the agency that Basotho women portray.

The previous chapter presented the profiles of the Basotho women traders, considering their backgrounds, and unpacked their social and economic environment, including their education level, marital status, and occupations. The chapter further presented the reasons behind their engagement in informal cross-border trade, which helps in the development of the following

chapters. This chapter sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted contributions of informal cross-border trade to the household economies of Basotho women.

Through their known profiles and backgrounds, the contributions of informal cross-border trade are better understood. Against socio-economic challenges, including high unemployment rates, limited access to formal financial services, and the closing of textile factories, Basotho women have demonstrated remarkable resilience and resourcefulness by engaging in cross-border trade. Through this economic activity, women have found avenues to secure their financial wellbeing and navigate the intricate web of gender norms, transforming their roles within their families and communities. Therefore, this chapter presents findings on the socio-economic contribution and significance of informal cross-border trade on the lives of Basotho women and their household income, food security, and wealth creation.

The chapter presents three main themes, namely social benefits, economic benefits, and the significance of informal cross-border trade. This is accomplished by focusing on their participation in informal cross-border trade and personal spaces, and by relating their background profiles to the changes brought about by informal cross-border trade. It addresses this by identifying the significance of informal cross-border trade in these women's lives. The last section is about the significance of informal cross-border trade in the households of *bo 'mathoto* and the achievements made through this trade. The significance in this context does not only refer to materialistic terms but also includes psycho-social factors such as a sense of ownership, empowerment, fulfilling relationships through social networking, acquisition of knowledge and skills through exchanges, freedom to travel and see places and meet people from other cultures, opportunities for service, negotiation skills, and skills that can be applied to other areas of business and social involvement. These factors are engaged with throughout the chapter.

5.2 Social Benefits of Informal Cross-border Trade to Basotho Women Traders

Lesotho's post-independence challenges have been attributed to the failure of the state through poor governance, including corruption and mismanagement of funds (Daemane, 2012; Mosabala & Fombo, 2021; Mots'oene & Esenjor, 2016; Qobo, 2007). These challenges have led to high unemployment rates, which have forced some citizens, especially those without qualifications, to find a means to earn a living outside the formal economy. Structural factors beyond these

women's control caused by the poor economy have enabled Basotho women to find other ways of earning a living through informal cross-border trade.

The ability to control the nature and quality of one's existence lies at the heart of humanity (Bandura, 2001). Human agency is defined by key characteristics that operate via phenomenal and functional consciousness, including the temporal extension of agency through intentionality and planning; self-regulation by self-reactive influence; and self-reflectiveness about one's capacities, functional quality, and the meaning and purpose of one's life activities (Bandura, 2001; Donald et al., 2020; Kabeer, 2005, 2017).

Personal agency exists amid a complex web of socio-structural factors. Agency is important and for other characteristics of empowerment, such as converting resources into wellbeing results (Donald et al., 2020). In the context of informal cross-border trade, 'agency' refers to the ability of individuals, particularly women, to make independent choices, take purposeful actions, and exercise control over their economic activities and lives (Kabeer, 2005). It signifies their capacity to act as proactive agents in pursuing their goals, responding to challenges, and seizing opportunities within the informal cross-border trade sector.

This agency is not found only among Basotho women but has been observed and studied in informal cross-border trade across Africa (Bandura, 2003; Donald et al., 2020; Kabeer, 2005, 2017). For example, in a study of informal cross-border trade in Zambia, Akinboade (2005) and Nshimbi (2015) found that women traders can gain a sense of economic independence and agency through their involvement in the sector. The authors noted that many women use their earnings from trade to support their families, including paying for their children's education and healthcare.

5.2.1 Empowerment and agency

The concept of women's empowerment has two components. The first concerns their subjectivity and consciousness, which relates to 'the power within', and the second involves the material and human resources necessary for women to exercise control over important aspects of their lives to manifest 'power' by participating in the wider society (Bayissa et al 2018). Together, these components enable women to challenge and tackle the injustices they face. According to Mosedale, (2005), women's empowerment connotes expanding the right,

resources, and capacity of women to make decisions and act independently in social, economic, and political spheres. Similarly, Mandal (2013), and Tandon (2016) defined empowerment as women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and access opportunities and resources and determine their choices; their power to control their own lives inside and outside of the home; and their ability to influence and create a just socio-economic order.

This study adopted Kabeer's (2005) definition of empowerment, which defines women's empowerment as women having the capacity to manifest strategic control over their lives, and having the ability to renegotiate relationships with others who matter so they can participate on equal terms with men in societies to ensure a fair democracy and contribution to overall development. Kabeer emphasised the practicality of material and non-material resources for women's empowerment and challenged the inequality in the distribution of land, income, diseases, violence, and laws that disadvantage women over men.

Empowerment and agency are essential for Basotho women involved in informal cross-border trade because it refers to how these women achieve greater control over their economic activity, make informed decisions, and challenge traditional norms and inequities. On the other hand, agency refers to their ability to manage problems, capitalise on opportunities, and design their trading endeavours following their goals and aspirations. All 15 women from the Maseru and Mafeteng districts who participated in this study indicated that they are where they are today because of the proceeds from informal cross-border trading. The women reminisced about the changes they saw in their families compared to when resources were scarce. They reminisced about the difficulty of not having enough funds to meet daily needs and recalled when they thought owning a motor vehicle and having their own modern house were only a dream.

Three women laughed as they remembered how they perceived life before engaging in informal cross-border trade, especially the newcomers. Some expressed their gratitude towards their engagement with other traders. For example, Ponto is a married woman with two children, living in Maseru with all her family members. It is essential to reconstruct Ponto's family history and look back at her family livelihood before informal cross-border trade. Her family occupied a two-room house built seven years into her marriage because they were renting before that. Ponto's children were 17 and 10 years old when I conducted the fieldwork in 2021. Before the marriage, Ponto lived in her maternal village, Mants'onyane, in the highlands in the

Thaba-Tseka district. Ponto moved to her husband's homestead in Mafeteng in the lowlands. Eventually, they both moved to Maseru in search of work. She found a job at the textile factories, where she worked for 16 years until she left to be an informal cross-border trader. At the time of the interview, she had been in the trade for four years. She explained as follows how it has impacted her life apart from the visible materialistic achievements:

As we participate in this trade, the social networks and connections we form serve as a place for discussing our personal lives and other difficulties, allowing us to benefit from one another's experiences. Lately, most people are stressed about many issues in life. I was one of them and did not have anyone I could trust. I view my trips to Botswana as a retreat trip because during these trips we talk as women, sometimes without personalising issues. However, there is always comfort and counsel shared among these women. The things that used to trouble me about life are a thing of the past. I am happier now. (Ponto, int.)

In an interview, another woman described how relieved and at peace she is with the life she created for her children. Mma Thembi, a 45-year-old from Maseru with three children, explained how she had always wanted a better life and opportunities for her three daughters. She acknowledged that her parents had done their best to provide for her and her siblings but she was unable to complete high school. She explained that life today is different from when she was growing up. Her wish is for her girls to be exposed to better opportunities. She understands that the decision to educate her girls was the best gift she could offer. She believed that with education, her children would likely make informed choices for their lives. She had sent all three girls to an English medium school in Maseru. Her eldest daughter, aged 25 years at the time of the interview, is studying for her honours degree at Rhodes University in South Africa, and Mma Thembi is taking care of her tuition, accommodation, and food. This is her second degree as she had obtained her first bachelor's degree from the NUL. Her second-born, aged 22, is in her final year at the NUL. Mma Thembi's last-born girl, aged 18, had just completed her high school exams and was awaiting results. She expressed herself as follows:

I only studied up to Form 4 and did not complete my high school certificate, but the fact that all my children have completed Form 5 gives me joy. I have peace of mind and am so humbled that none of my daughters experienced teenage pregnancy. I must admit that I

managed to make better choices for them because of the money I make from this trade.
(Mma Thembi int.)

Ponts'o's experience shows that involvement in informal cross-border trade did not only impact her materially but also impacted her psycho-social wellbeing. Ponts'o and mma Thembi's examples show that mental health is important in living happy and fulfilled lives. Both women emphasised that it is important to consider one's peace of mind and that they are better mothers and spouses when they are emotionally fine. The opportunities provided by informal cross-border trade have also contributed to changing roles within their household, particularly women's participation in decision-making. The women stated that their ability to earn a living gave them this chance.

5.2.2 Social networks and solidarity (*pitiki*, *mochaellano*)

The success of Basotho women traders in informal cross-border trade rests on the successful cultivation of interpersonal relationships and social networks. Ntseane (2002, p. 272) noted the following:

The major strategy that is perceived as the backbone of the success of small businesswomen is non-competitive networking defined as the tradition of relying on one another for financial assistance, labour, comfort, moral support, transportation and problem-solving for both business and family issues.

In this study, the term 'social network' is defined as a set of people or organisations or other social entities connected by a set of social relationships, such as friendship, co-working or information exchange (Berkowitz, 2013; Garton et al., 1997; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The focus in this study was on a set of people being *bo 'mathoto*. During the interviews, it was established that *bo 'mathoto* also operates through social networks, and two of the social networks identified among the Basotho women are *pitiki* and *mochaellano*. *Bo 'mathoto* indicated that *pitiki* and *mochaellano* are the backbones of their success apart from the profits they make from selling the goods.

Pitiki is a traditional music celebration exclusively for Basotho women and is unique to Lesotho. Men are not part of this music celebration. Basotho women come together at this gathering to

share ideas and find solutions to their daily challenges, such as how to build strong families, either socially or financially. The term *mochaellano* is also unique to the Lesotho context. However, it means the same thing as *stokvel*. Both *pitiki* and *mochaellano* operate as strong ties for social networks.

According to Lukhele (1990), a *stokvel* is an informal group savings program in which members agree to contribute a specific amount to a shared pool every month. This can be done on a weekly, biweekly, or monthly basis. *Stokvels* are also known worldwide as rotating savings and credit associations. Verhoef (2001) classified *stokvels* into four types, namely savings, burial, investment, and high-budget *stokvels*. *Stokvels* serve both economic and social purposes. The economic function is concerned with using *stokvels* to enhance income stability, and the social function is concerned with social capital, which is manifested through friendships and social networks. It is important to note that Lesotho has an established culture of collective organisations like burial societies and savings clubs, which comprise NGOs, savings and credit cooperatives, village savings and loan associations, and rural savings and credit groups. These organisations provide financial assistance to their members and social and emotional support to help them cope with socio-economic challenges. According to Mabote (2017), the Central Bank of Lesotho reported that informal financial groups comprised 304 500 of their customers or members.

These two social networks are similar because they involve money. The difference is that *pitiki* is social capital on a larger scale because women from across the country participate in it. It is not an informal cross-border trade network but a nationally recognised women's network in Lesotho, usually coordinated at district and national levels. At these levels, it focuses on gender-based violence issues and empowerment. Nevertheless, at the community level, it combines both Sesotho dance competitions and monetary contributions. Regarding *bo 'mathoto*, *pitiki* is in smaller groups of three or six people and often does not comprise only women from the same community. 'M'e Nthoi said,

“I know some women who have built homes and have cars because of *pitiki* contributions” ('m'e Nthoi, int.).

Pitiki for *bo 'mathoto* focuses on contributing significant money to help each other better their lives. *Pitiki* is therefore a mutual benefit association where women individually meet every

month. In the meetings, they discuss family matters, primarily marriages, and advise each other on how best to deal with problems such as infidelity and gender-based violence within families and how to build strong marriages. The end goal for members of *pitiki* is to raise money for projects they have in their families. For example, there are *bo 'mathoto* who hold *pitiki* events to contribute to buying cars and building houses. Women develop these groups as they travel together to source goods, form friendships, and develop trust over time.

There are different categories for contributions starting from any amount and this is dependent on agreement between participants. Therefore, among the participants some indicated that the minimum contribution of each member in *pitiki* is M10 000. If they are six, they are all expected to contribute the same amount as the recipient or the host. The meetings are held monthly, and hosting rotates among members. Members of this particular *pitiki*, who are also informal cross-border traders, highlighted that at the end of their meeting, the host would have received M60 000 if they were six in the group or had more than six members. Mma Mochesane was involved in various *pitikis*, and she explained it as follows:

It does not matter how little money one has. *Motho o ts'oanetse hore a tsebe ho bapala ka chelete* (a person should know how to play around with money), through us holding each other's hands as women. I participate in different *mochaellono* groups; I have daily (M50), weekly (M500), fortnightly (M2 500), and monthly (M5 000) contributions. *Leha e le hore ke se ke iphumane* (even though I am now well-established) and make a monthly profit of a minimum of M13 000 monthly. I participate in daily and weekly *mochaellono* to encourage people in my vicinity and not necessarily in cross-border trade. These people sell sweets, airtime, and fat cakes next to my stall. (Mma Mochesane, int.)

'M'e Mampho added the following:

We help each other depending on who you are. We do have societies, though, *pitiki* and *stokvel*. In some groups, we are four, six, and 10 people. I have about four groups that I participate in monthly, and I manage to contribute to all of them. My lowest contribution is M530, the highest is M2 250, and each time, we see improvement in how we do things. ('m'e Mampho, int.)

Furthermore, Basotho women's continued engagement in social networks and reliance on them for success manifest at several levels within families, their communities, and community projects. These networks function as a resource. *Bo 'mathoto* can access markets and improve their business success through such networks. This was emphasised by Cheater (1998) and Muzvidziwa (1998, 2005) in studies on Zimbabwean women traders when they noted the importance of social networks in cross-border trade and argued that networks are critical resources for the success of women cross-border traders. Basotho women's perceptions of the importance of social networks in informal cross-border trade align with the above statement. 'M'e Liteboho stated the following to demonstrate the importance of social networks:

I was mentored and groomed by a veteran in the informal cross-border trade. Mma Khala would often call me to her house to inspire me with whatever achievement she would have made. She is the one who told me and modelled that it is possible to achieve whatever I wanted through informal cross-border trade if I worked hard and remained committed to what I did. She introduced me to other women in her circle who inspired me. What I saw and witnessed in their lives and families at the time seemed impossible until I started achieving some of it. ('m'e Liteboho, int.)

These networks are non-kinship-based and cut across communities. Women traders formed them with the common purpose of making a living for their families. However, the effects of social networks on the lives of *bo 'mathoto* depend on the type of people with whom the traders are connected. The networks help Basotho women traders with access to suitable suppliers while buying and pricing their goods once they are back home and selling. Through the networks, they learn strategies that help them in areas like debt collection. One of the newcomer traders acknowledged that social networks helped her a lot at the beginning of her journey. This is what she had to say:

I recall vividly how, on my first trip, one of the veterans called for attention in the taxi, and she shared how the goods are priced once back in Lesotho. Her concern was that sometimes newcomers tend to undercharge customers so that they build a clientele fast. She was aware that there were three of us who were new. This information was shared in solidarity, that this is a livelihood for many households, so it should not be tainted or

questionable by those from outside. She indicated that although traders' selling prices may not be the exact amount, the difference should not exceed M20. (Mma Sentle, int.)

The women traders credited their unity to social networks because it helps them face some obstacles, such as economic and psycho-social challenges when they travel across the border. The women's stories revealed their tenacity and resolve to survive and grow their businesses and how they use these informal networks to address personal and private matters. A crucial component that contributes to and maintains these active networks is the reciprocity and trust among these women. At the heart of informal cross-border trade is a significant catalyst of social networks. These intricate webs of personal contacts and affiliations extend far beyond their direct social purposes, and significantly impact the establishment, maintenance, and extension of informal cross-border economic activity.

'M'e Liteboho, aged 45, is an excellent example of the value of networking in cross-border trading. She met with a veteran woman in informal cross-border trade named mma Khala during her early days as a trader. Mma Khala is now in her mid-70s and can no longer travel. All her children are grown up, married, and have moved out of their parental home. As a result, they are not available to help her with shopping, and she would occasionally send 'm'e Liteboho since they are friends. They became friends after they met at one of the selling spots once and would occasionally have a conversation, and then mma Khala became a mentor to 'm'e Liteboho and made her fall in love with informal cross-border trade and groomed her into the woman she has become in informal cross-border trade today. She remembered:

“Mma Khala would occasionally call me to visit her at her home and share some tips on how best to do the business” ('m'e Liteboho, int.).

Initially, 'm'e Liteboho felt uncomfortable about their friendship because of their age gap and would be reluctant to respond to her calls and visits. She could not understand what a successful old businesswoman would have in common with a new entrant in the business of informal cross-border trade. During her occasional visits, 'm'e Liteboho got more insight into how networks operate. She heard about and saw the money that mma Khala would collect from *mochaellano*. She learned that informal cross-border trade is not necessarily about crossing the border and coming back but that women strategically plan their money, and as a result, achieve a lot while working together. When exposed to this information, she could not join this particular

mochaellano immediately because of their high monthly contributions of M15 000 per person. However, at the time of the interview, she was part of *mochaellano*, not the one she had initially been told about by *mma Khala* but one she discovered along her journey with other women.

Without government-provided empowerment opportunities, women's economic empowerment opportunities are birthed and nurtured within social networks formed by Basotho women informal cross-border traders. These women traders have found ways that work for most of them, including selling and charging customers. The unemployment challenges may have encouraged them to work hard in this business for a great impact. Some women had been in this business for decades and had now established how to best run informal cross-border trade, with changes occurring over the years and more women joining in. As households' lives improved, so did other areas of their lives through the accumulation of assets, which saw other women starting new income-generating projects apart from informal cross-border trade for growth and sustainability.

5.2.3 Support structures by family and friends

Support structures in informal cross-border trade refer to the various mechanisms, systems, and strategies to facilitate and enhance the activities of informal traders engaged in cross-border trade. In many cases, structures and relationships within a trader's circle of family and friends play a critical role in establishing and sustaining cross-border trading activity. These relationships provide various forms of support that can directly impact the success and continuity of informal trade. The importance of support structures strengthens the relations within the nuclear family and among relatives and society. While family and friends are key in facilitating informal cross-border trading, it is important to recognise that not all traders can access such structures. Other support structures, such as community associations or local cooperatives, may be more important to some traders. *Mma Reitu* said the following: "I have support from my co-workers more than from my family. It is the same co-workers that we teamed together at the beginning of our journey in informal cross-border trade by contributing to start-ups." (*Mma Reitu, int.*)

Family and friends play a significant and multifaceted role in facilitating cross-border trade entry and operation. They contribute as valuable sources of knowledge, particularly at entry, and they

provide emotional and social support and practical assistance in various aspects of their trade, thus adding to the experiences of Basotho women traders. In the case of emotional support, when a trader suffers a setback due to fluctuating currency rates, the encouragement and emotional support offered by family and friends help them maintain a positive view and continue their trading activity. For example, mma Reitu said, “When my business is not doing well, I get encouragement from other trade to press on, and knowing that I am not the only one who goes through such a stage helps a lot” (int.). Another woman added the following:

My community is really helpful during this trying time of COVID-19. We came together as women in my community and started a project together of rearing pigs. Rearing pigs is a great initiative because it is open to most interested people. Others were growing vegetables. The fact that there is this kind of an environment lessens our stress levels because when we meet, we talk about how we are being affected as families. (Ponts’o, int.)

Families and friends may help build networks and connections in the trade sector by introducing traders to potential customers or providing information about market trends and opportunities. The precise nature of support differs from one person to another. Family members provide significant insights into the demand for specific products in the community and varying seasons, prompting the traders to pursue new trade prospects based on this information. One of the women explained it as follows:

The best support I have had is from my younger sisters at the University. They add so much value to my business. My sister always alerts me of what is trending among varsity students. This way, I often find myself getting more customers through them. I sometimes reward them with items for free to appreciate that support. (‘m’e Maboitumelo, int.)

Similarly, another woman said the following about the value of family support in her business:

My family is very supportive because they know how far we have come. My husband had to leave his informal sector work, which was not paying much, when he saw I needed help. While we sell at different locations with him, my daughter also sells some items to her classmates. (‘m’e Khalalelo, int.)

Mma Mochesane said the following about family support:

The only people I can trust with selling on my behalf when I am not around are my daughters. I trust them because they know this is the business that pays their fees and feeds them as I am a single mother. They also know how much we struggled before having this business. If my daughters are engaged with their school activities and when I need to go somewhere, I lock my shop and leave a notice on the door. (mma Mochesane, int.)

As a researcher, I can attest to mma Mochesane's statement being true because one day on my way from another interview, I passed by her stall for a second visit after our first interview. However, I found her elder daughter in charge of selling that day because mma Mochesane had errands in town that needed to be done in person. This unannounced visit gave me a chance to acquire more information through the casual conversation we had. This kind of support is recognised and shown in different ways by the children of traders, their siblings, parents, and neighbours. Many Basotho women have caretaking responsibilities in their families, such as caring for their children, elderly relatives, or sick family members, and this is where the support from family and friends is most visible as they may provide support by caring for the dependents of the traders on their behalf so they can focus on their trade activities. 'M'e Liteboho, for example, described her experience with her family as follows:

We are only two siblings in my home, my sister and me. My sister is a degree holder and government employee. I only studied up to Form 4. You would think that when our mother is sick, we will contribute towards her doctor's consultation, but I always have to settle the bill, and I have made peace with that. My sister will jokingly say I make more money than her, which is true. ('m'e Liteboho, int.)

Business and emotional support are integral parts of successful trading. Family and friends provide practical support for Basotho women traders in their trade activities. For example, family members may help with the transportation of goods to places of sale or help with marketing and sales. Though 'm'e Liteboho's was paying bills alone for their mother, she appreciated that her sister markets her goods and that she has a stable clientele from her sister's workplace and the neighbouring offices where her sister introduced her.

The long hours of travel sourcing goods from Botswana and selling them back in Lesotho at different locations are both physically and emotionally demanding. Basotho women traders experience stress and isolation, and therefore, support from family and friends comes through

encouragement, listening, and providing a sense of belonging. Some children of *bo 'mathoto* help their parents with selling either at their schools for those in tertiary schools or by accompanying their parents to the different places where they sell their goods. When the children are not involved in the day-to-day selling of goods, some traders pointed out that their children are helping at home with chores, cleaning, and cooking.

Mma Khotso, for example, is aged 49, unmarried, and has one daughter. She is one of the traders who appreciated family support, especially with chores like cleaning and cooking at home. Because they are only two people at home, it means responsibilities must be shared. Though they do some of the chores interchangeably, often her daughter cooks as mma Khotso is out all day selling. She described their situation as follows:

I have a friend and a counsellor in my daughter, especially when I come home feeling down because of what I would have experienced during the day. My daughter sometimes shares a light moment with me, and we laugh off some things. (mma Khotso, int.)

On the other hand, parents of *bo 'mathoto* who are still alive also play a significant role in their lives by, among other things, assisting with childcare wherever possible. For those whose parents are in the villages, it is also an advantage as they help with the marketing of the goods as *bo 'mathoto* sells some of their goods through them. The siblings' role is the same as that of the parents. They assist with sourcing customers or looking after their nephews and nieces in the absence of their *bo 'mathoto* siblings. They also offer moral support to the women traders.

Neighbours are also included in this support structure. They can act like an extended marketing channel as they tell other people in their different networks about the goods their cross-border trade neighbours sell. Pont'so explained it as follows:

I had been working at the factories for 16 years since I left school until I could no longer bear the pressure, stress, and ill health caused by the working conditions, so I decided to quit. After quitting, I was just home without a plan for the next move and was struggling; my neighbour, who was already in the informal cross-border trade business, advised me to start and encouraged me to go to Botswana. Since she had been in informal cross-border trade for over 10 years, she had noticed that Botswana was much better than Johannesburg, as she used to go to Johannesburg before. I managed to be part of this business with

financial assistance from my family. We saved some money for three months from my husband's salary so that I could start. We had to save for three months because my husband is not earning much, and his salary is the one that is taking care of our family's monthly expenditures; thus, it is already strained. I managed because I also had a neighbour who guided me through every step of the business, from how to source clients to how to market the goods, the pricing of goods, and alerting me of the common challenges associated with this undertaking. Everybody's experience is different, but often some challenges are common among informal cross-border traders. (Pont'so, int.)

This shows the importance of support structures in the informal cross-border trade business. Although these two women (mma Khala and 'm'e Liteboho) were not neighbours (they live in adjacent villages) nor relatives, their relationship grew to a point where they are now like mother and daughter. They had met at one of the post offices where they used to display their goods for selling, and that is where the veteran would tease 'm'e Liteboho and ask her to help pack when it was time to knock off since she would have a lot of goods compared to 'm'e Liteboho who would have just a few paper bags of goods for sale. In her own words, 'm'e Liteboho narrated the following story with laughter as she recalled her journey with the veteran:

As we were chatting with Mma Khala in her home, she would, for example, tell me to go to the kitchen, and I would find that she had upgraded the kitchen with fitted wall cupboards, replacing the movable kitchen unit. I would go home with many questions, wondering if it was possible to make enough money and achieve all that mma Khala had achieved. Whenever mma Khala had done some renovation or upgrading to be done in her home, she would call me, and in some instances, it would be to see her new development, such as ensuite bathrooms and bedrooms with lovely wall wardrobes and nice bathtubs. She would then tease me and say she wonders how it feels like to use a pit latrine toilet at my age, and we would laugh it off. She told me about stokvels, that once a group of women have identified and can trust each other, they start a stokvel and contribute money (for example, M10 000 per person), which is rotational and done monthly. Each month, one member receives contributions from the rest of the group members until the last one has been attended to, and then they start from the first member. Mma Khala's society then

contributed M15 000 monthly without fail. It was my first time seeing money counted from a big oval washing basin. ('m'e Liteboho, int.)

In their conversation, 'm'e Liteboho would be reminded not to despise her small beginning as that is where most of them had started. She was encouraged to be patient, hardworking, and resilient. Mma Khala told her that before she could own cars, she used to transport her goods with a wheelbarrow from her house to the bus stop, where she would catch a taxi to her place from selling for that day. When it was time to return home, the children would wait for her again at the bus stop in the evening to carry the leftover goods home. Sometimes 'm'e Liteboho would be selling at the exact location with mma Khala, and when it was time to knock off in the evening, she would put her goods next to mma Khala's car to get a lift. However, mma Khala would tell her driver to leave 'm'e Liteboho with her goods, and then later, when she thinks she is home, she would call and check if she arrived well. She would tell her that it was to encourage her to work hard so that she could buy her own car. When 'm'e Liteboho was interviewed at her home, two cars were parked outside under the carport; she had bought them using the proceeds from informal cross-border trade.

Despite what 'm'e Liteboho perceived as an unusual relationship with a much older woman, she always looked forward to meeting her veteran mentor or receiving a call from her. Occasionally, the veteran would call and tell her problems, and when she said she did not have money to assist, she would be told that money was not the problem, she just needed a listening ear. Back then, before she had grown her business, the veteran would call when she was going to travel to buy stock and ask for a certain amount of money so that she could bring her some goods and would not even charge her for transport. Now they relate well, like mother and daughter. The veteran saw potential in 'm'e Liteboho and helped her achieve it. The mentee acknowledged that she would not be where she is with informal cross-border trade without mma Khala's support and grooming. Hence, she also felt the need to share information and guide other upcoming Basotho women informal cross-border traders who could make it if they were willing to learn and be guided.

Basotho women experience informal cross-border trade in different personal ways, although they share some everyday experiences. Therefore, the support they receive and give out differs in some ways. Informal cross-border trade activities involve spending time away from home,

family, and relatives. This is where the support structures play an important role. The time Basotho women traders spend away from their families is a bit different from other informal cross-border traders across Africa where traders spend more time, up to a month, in destination countries where they sell. Basotho women traders' case is different because they do not sell in other countries, and therefore, only spend a day away from home, usually their shopping day. However, people have different opinions on the lifestyles of other family members often being on the road or missing and not participating in family activities because of the nature of their work (Peberdy, 2000; Manjokoto and Ranga, 2017).

Therefore, involvement in informal cross-border trade can either have a positive or adverse impact on family relationships. Nonetheless, some women help their relatives financially or in other ways, such as paying fees for nieces and nephews or paying hospital expenses from the proceeds of informal cross-border trade, which strengthens family ties.

'M'e Khalalelo, aged 47 and originally from Mount Tabor in Mafeteng, is settled in the Maseru District at Ha Ts'iu, 5 kilometres from the city centre. Her husband passed away six years ago, leaving her with their two children, aged 28 and 18 years at the time of fieldwork. She also lost her only sister in 2015, leaving four children with their father behind. 'M'e Khalalelo is responsible for looking after her sister's children as their father works in the highlands and only comes home occasionally after losing his wife. Since her home is close to her sister's home in Khubetsoana, she was able to pass by and check on her nieces and nephew frequently. She ensured they have food and were progressing at school (though their father pays the fees). She is proud that her eldest niece completed her first degree and married in South Africa. Her second niece, a twin with a nephew, also graduated with an accounting degree and is married. The nephew is self-employed and not yet married. She admits to playing the role of mother to them. She put it as follows:

I had to step in because my sister's children are like mine. I am grateful that I managed to be there for them, and I doubt I could have made it if it was not for informal cross-border trade. I am left with the last-born niece in tertiary. ('m'e Khalalelo, int.)

This finding contrasts with prior research in informal cross-border trade elsewhere that found a negative female cross-border traders' families portrayed them negatively as smugglers, prostitutes, and greedy (Cheater & Gaidzanwa, 1996; Devereux, 1999; Fadahunsi & Rosa, 2002;

Howson, 2012; Muzvidziwa, 1998; Scheiterle & Birner, 2021). The women shared different experiences on how informal cross-border trade strengthens family relations, demonstrating the activity's value to the broader family. 'M'e Liteboho said the following:

I helped my niece, who was having marital problems due to lack of finances, start selling some items. They often fought with her husband, who was working in the informal sector, not earning enough and spending most of his earnings on alcohol. That led to them not being able to meet their basic needs. She would call asking for money for a maize meal. I knew this was not sustainable, and one day before I sent her money, I told her to buy something she could sell. She started selling newspapers and kept adding more items with the little profit she made. Eventually, she could afford to buy stock from trading, and I used to buy on her behalf until she had saved enough. She is established and empowered financially. She is involved in decision-making in her household, and eventually, her husband limits his drinking and contributes more to the family funds. They are in better space. ('m'e Liteboho, int.)

Interactions within the intricate support structures of informal cross-border trade promote economic activities and create a tapestry of stronger familial relationships, generating a sense of unity and shared purpose. These combined endeavours strengthen bonds and create chances for intergenerational learning as family members engage in financial assistance, logistical support, and market knowledge. The acts of pooling resources, providing direction, and celebrating everyday triumphs foster a sense of belonging, strengthening family ties. These exchanges serve as powerful reminders that beyond economics, the support systems of informal cross-border traders serve as conduits for cementing the emotional and social bonds that constitute the essence of family. Therefore, the relationships often based on kinship ties primarily help mitigate some of the dangers connected with trading and business, providing a foundation for underlying personal trust (Rivera-Santos & Rufín, 2010; Williams & Baláž, 2002). 'M'e Mampho shared the following story:

I had a grocery shop for about six years. Employees were stealing from me, and books were often not balanced when we reconciled. I hired my late husband's niece to work at my shop and stayed with her here. Other assistants that I had hired before were stealing a lot from me. Even if they were tempted, it would not be easy for my late husband's niece

to steal any items at once as she would have nowhere to hide them because we stayed together. Also, I have talked seriously with her about stealing and how it can affect both of us. ('m'e Mampho, int.)

'M'e Liteboho said, "But also, my siblings often borrow money from me as they know I always have it because of informal cross-border trade" (int.). 'M'e Liteboho is the Mosotho woman trader who mma Khala mentored, and now she is helping both her family and other traders. From time to time, Basotho women traders mentioned that they found themselves with the responsibility of helping their relatives. The role played by other family members within the support structure towards Basotho women traders and their involvement in informal cross-border trade is evident.

Mma Peete, aged 30, originally from Nazareth Maseru, is married and living in Khubetsoana but was at her maternal home in Nazareth at the time of the interview. She had moved out of her house to stay with her mother when she was eight months pregnant. It is a Basotho custom that when a married woman gets pregnant, she moves back to parents at some stage during the pregnancy until she gives birth. Once she has given birth, she stays there until the baby is three months old, and then moves back to her homo. Mma Peete was taken care of by the mother during this time.

5.2.4 *Relations with spouses*

Informal cross-border trade activities involve women spending a considerable amount of time away from home, often apart from their spouses. There is a common perception that the informal cross-border trade business negatively impacts relationships between traders and their spouses and contribute to high divorce rates and single-parent families headed by women (Muzvidziwa, 1998). However, evidence from this study indicated that a woman engaging in informal cross-border trade may improve marital relations. Some of the participants who are married mentioned that since informal cross-border trade is a source of income, their spouses are very understanding and supportive. Out of the nine married women, three mentioned that their husbands have joined them in the informal cross-border trade business, enhancing family unity and quality of life. The women pointed out that they feel empowered in different areas and that their spouses have been

of great support and motivation to do better. Three of the participants described the influence of cross-border trade on their relationships as follows:

My husband assists me with selling to his colleagues. I share the pictures of goods I would have bought with him on WhatsApp, and he also puts them on his WhatsApp status for advertising where his colleagues view them and then inquire about buying. My husband has now developed an interest in visiting Botswana as a tourist, and our marriage, too, is being strengthened. (Ponts'o, int.)

I sell at many trading places, especially post offices where the old-age grant is paid to recipients. There are different dates for different post offices. However, sometimes the dates for specific recipients clash, and when I take one car, my husband takes the other, and we go in separate directions. We will then meet at home in the evening. ('M'e Khalalelo, int.)

My husband has been so supportive. He is now the one who drives us to the trading place we choose daily. We are full time in informal cross-border trade with him. He also assists with taking care of the record books when payments are made while I attend to other customers. ('M'e Mampho, int.)

Pont'so also stated that as her husband works for a government ministry as a driver, he knows other drivers (colleagues) based in the highlands of Lesotho where it is very cold, and those colleagues often inquire about warm clothing through her husband. This leads to pre-orders from her husband's colleagues for heavy jackets, boots, fleece blankets, woollen socks, scarfs, gloves, and winter hats. According to her, she has built a good client base from her husband's colleagues.

5.2.5 *Children's welfare*

Previous research by Kachere, (2011) found that parents often neglect caring for their children in their endeavours to provide for their families, especially in activities such as informal cross-border trade because there is a lot of travelling involved and they are often away from home. As a result, they miss out on opportunities to shape their children's personality development, which is their responsibility. Lack of parental attention, particularly in early childhood, can adversely

impact a child's personality, and as a result, their long-term wellbeing (Zaslow & Eldred, 1998). However, as mentioned in section 5.2.3, Basotho women cross-border traders do not leave their homes for long periods, and the brief periods of absence, an average of three days, do not constitute absent parenthood. This is where support structures become important. The women make different arrangements to ensure their children are taken care of, such as older siblings looking after younger siblings, fathers looking after their children, relatives looking after children, or babysitters.

Two of the 15 women do not have children, and of the 13 with children, two have children between 3 and 16 years old. There was also a first-time mother with a newborn (a month old) at the time of the interview. The rest of the women have children who are now old enough (older than 10) to understand the nature of their parents' informal cross-border trade involvement and some are helpful around the house. It is also important that these women relate well with their children. As already demonstrated in section 5.2.3, some children assist their parents by advertising on their WhatsApp statuses or Facebook or by cleaning and cooking at home.

5.3 Economic Benefits of Informal Cross-border Trade to Basotho Women Traders

Informal cross-border trade has increasingly become an important source of income for Basotho women traders. The economic benefits of this trade are immense, providing opportunities for women to support their families and contribute to the growth of their local communities. This type of trade is characterised by its informality, with transactions often taking place without the involvement of formal institutions such as governments or financial institutions. Despite this, it has proven to be a valuable economic activity for many Basotho women as it allows them to access markets and goods they may not have been able to otherwise. Their way of life presents them as a unique group who women who defy the odds in their trade business and achieve goals that would have seemed impossible before their engagement in this business. In this section, the economic benefits of informal cross-border trade to Basotho women traders are explored in more detail.

5.3.1 *Income generation*

Informal cross-border trade positively contributes to the lives of Basotho women traders by enabling them to accumulate assets, improve their standard of living, and gain greater control over their financial futures. As such, informal cross-border trade has become a significant means of empowerment for Basotho women. Their ability to generate income and improve their standard of living have changed their social situations and let them gain some form of power.

According to Pinnawala (2009), power can be either overt or covert, and it can take several forms, including 'power with', 'power to', 'power within', and 'power over'. I use these types of power to explain some situations in which direct control is absent. Basotho women engaged in informal cross-border trading have 'power within', which refers to the power and agency they had within themselves that enabled them to work hard despite their husbands not earning enough to ensure their children's survival. The women had the confidence, assertiveness, and agency to ensure their families' survival is sustainable, even in the absence of jobs. These Basotho women have been able to earn an income and accumulate assets such as houses, livestock, and vehicles, which has increased their economic power and status within their communities. For example, two of the women managed to extend their houses. Ponts'o extended her house from two rooms to six rooms, and 'm'e Mampho had also extended hers. Mma Mochesane and mma Peete had built new houses, and other women already had houses but had furnished them. Among the newcomers, three had purchased land and had plans to start construction once they have saved enough from informal cross-border trade.

5.3.2 *Access to resources and services*

Access to goods and services by the households of traders is another significant contribution brought about by Basotho women's involvement in informal cross-border trade. Some of the goods and services available to them may not have been available or affordable in Lesotho. These goods and services range from necessities such as food and clothing to more specialised items such as electronics and construction materials. An example of services they now have access to are medicines and doctors. Traders manage to source essential medicines and pharmaceuticals, addressing gaps in local healthcare systems and providing access to previously unavailable or unaffordable treatments.

Through informal cross-border trade, the women have access to a broader range of goods and services at lower prices than they would have, enabling them to save money and improve their standard of living. 'M'e Nthoi described it as follows:

She bought a glamour coating paint. This is the new trendy and expensive type of paint. She bought in South Africa with the proceeds from Botswana's informal cross-border trade activities. It is cheaper in South Africa because that is where it is manufactured, and often, shops that sell it in Lesotho put up too high a price, thus making it more expensive. ('m'e Nthoi, int.)

These women now have access and the flexibility to choose where to purchase specific items because of their involvement in the trade. This is particularly important for women who live in rural areas where access to goods and services is limited.

In terms of goods, informal cross-border trade provides access to a wide variety of products, including foodstuffs such as maize, wheat, and rice, as well as consumer goods such as clothing, shoes, and electronics. Women in cross-border trade can access specialised products, such as automotive parts, construction materials, and machinery. Services accessed through the proceeds of informal cross-border trade include healthcare, education, and financial services. For example, most women with school-going children explained how trade has helped them take care of their children's education (section 5.4.1).

Women in cross-border trade can afford to travel across the border to access better healthcare services, and they can also access financial services such as microfinance (within their social networks), which help them to grow their businesses and become financially independent. Access to goods and services has allowed them to improve their standard of living and achieve greater financial independence. As mentioned before, these women's lives have improved and they can now afford balanced meals, to school their children, and to travel for leisure. They can also afford to buy the latest mobile phones for their family members.

These women have been empowered economically and socially, and informal cross-border trade has enabled them to challenge gender norms and stereotypes by providing a means for women to take on leadership roles and become breadwinners for their families. For example, 'm'e Liteboho

explained that “the community members encourage me to stand in for local community council elections” (int.).

The Basotho women informal cross-border traders emphasised the need to invest in their children’s education. They argued that they missed opportunities to further their education because of the circumstances they encountered growing up, and therefore it is important for them to create education opportunities their children can explore. The significance of informal cross-border trade in their lives and households can also be viewed through the lens of the schools to which they sent their children. ‘M’e Khalalelo, one of the veterans who is still actively in the business, stated the following:

Education comes first when it comes to my children. I encourage them a lot because I still believe education is valuable. My other daughter got married after Form 5 and had a baby. Since they were not working with her husband, I took their baby so she could continue her studies and focus on school. She did not disappoint me, and she is back at school. I even bought her data to access school materials online easily. My eldest daughter is a teacher. (‘m’e Khalalelo, int.)

‘M’e Khalalelo is not the only woman interested in her children’s education, and ‘Matempi said the following:

I managed to take both my sons to school until they completed Form 5. One is at Lerotholi Polytechnic College, and the other is at the Centre for Accounting Studies [CAS]. The one at Lerotholi course is sponsored, while I pay for the one at CAS. It’s a massive success because CAS is very expensive, but I manage as an informal cross-border trader. (‘Matempi, int.)

Like ‘m’e Khalalelo, ‘m’e Mampho believed that her two children should at least attain a degree because she had studied up to Form 5. She acknowledged that education is important and therefore she supports her son. She said the following:

My son is yet to complete as he is in his fourth year. He has repeated each year and wanted to give up at some point. But I had to encourage him. He repeats that he does not get sponsored yearly, so I have to pay fees, his accommodation, and buy him food and clothes. He is at the National University of Lesotho. The amount of money I pay is very steep, but

each year, I encourage myself. I also want him to pave a good way for his 18-year-old sister not to give up no matter what. ('m'e Mampho, int.)

Access to goods and services is essential for Basotho women who operate as cross-border informal traders because it enables them to participate in the market, make money, and effectively compete. They can access products not offered locally, diversify their product line, and buy products for less money. Their success also depends on having access to financial, communication, and transportation facilities, enabling them to generate income for their families.

5.3.3 *Financial independence*

The opportunities provided by informal cross-border trade have contributed to changing roles within households. Participants stated that their ability to earn a living provided them with the chance to be involved in household decision-making. For example, mma Peete explained that after getting married, she sat down with her husband to talk about the area where they would like to build their home. They both had their preferences but eventually agreed on Khubetsoana after considering its proximity to services in town. She further said the following:

I doubt my partner would have listened to my opinions if I had not had my finances set. I started selling when I was still at the university because my mother is in trade. I believe education also contributed to my assertiveness because of the kind of knowledge one gets through reading. (mma Peete, int)

Mampoi shared her experience as a newcomer with four years in business as follows:

Since I started trading, I have seen a big difference in my life because I have managed to buy a plot, though I have not started building a house. I have always wished to have my house, a place to call home. With the years I have worked at the textile factories, it became impossible because of low wages and demands at home. (Mampoi, int.)

Mma Boitumelo explained her experience as follows:

Financial freedom means a lot to me as a woman, and I always knew I had to do something from way back. With my financial state, I can afford many things I want, which I thought were impossible when I look back, like owning cars. When I need something, I do not have

to wait for month-end. Informal cross-border trade has uplifted my life. (mma Boitumelo, int.)

The perseverance of Basotho women as informal cross-border traders in the face of adversity has enhanced their position in the informal cross-border trade market. Their accomplishments through informal cross-border trade have given them a sense of fulfilment and empowerment. They have gained economic independence and can contribute to the financial wellbeing of their households and the economic and social development of their communities. This supports Jamela's (2013) finding that women's cross-border trade in Zimbabwe has empowered women because becoming breadwinners has boosted their self-worth. According to Muzvidziwa (2005), informal cross-border trade has resulted in the emergence of a powerful, independent, and mobile class of women. Some Basotho women traders stated that being economically active allowed them to participate in micro-lending schemes and support groups such as the *pitiki* and *mochaellano*, informal credit and saving schemes (section 5.2.2).

The more money they generate, the more support and savings groups they can join. A few traders stated that income generated from their activities in informal cross-border trade enabled them to achieve personal goals, such as renovating and extending their houses, buying cars, and building new houses. Other women perceived cross-border trading as a better option than what they were doing before, including working at textile factories. For example, mma Thembi declared, "I am a qualified hairdresser, but I had to leave it around the year 2000 because then hairdressing pay was not enough" (mma Thembi, int.).

Section 4.2.4 described how some of the women are former textile workers, and although they had a regular income, it was not enough, and they were forced to find other income streams. The working conditions in the textile and clothing industries are characterised by excessive overtime that is not sufficiently remunerated, deductions from wages, sexual harassment, verbal and physical assault by supervisors, body searches of female staff, poverty wages that do not meet workers' basic needs, unfair treatment of pregnant workers, poor toilet facilities, refusal of employers to recognise unions, and locked emergency exits (Moses, 2014). Therefore, trading allows women to leverage their existing skills and knowledge to generate income, often in a flexible and informal setting that can be adapted to their personal and family needs.

5.3.4 *Other income-generating projects*

Bo 'mathoto admitted that even though the proceeds from informal cross-border trade sustain their families to some extent, they need to expand and venture into other income projects for sustainability as the businesses grow. One reason is that they will get old and be unable to travel, so they should have other streams of income that can sustain them in their old age. Others ventured into their second income stream because of demand, and they grabbed the opportunity to fill the gap. Poultry is a popular business among the women because of the demand in their respective communities, it is relatively affordable to start up, and it is not difficult to manage. Therefore, five women's second significant income stream is raising chickens, primarily for meat. However, some participants are not into the poultry business because in their communities, the market is already flooded, they have different interests, they do not have space, or they fear the chickens will die and the business will not be sustainable. Below is a picture of 'm'e Liteboho poultry business which is set up right inside her yard.



Figure 5.3: 'm'e Liteboho's poultry business, located by the corner of her yard (Source: Author, 2021)

Two women are in the piggery business. One is a sole owner ('m'e Mampho), and the other (Ponts'o) is part of a group of women in the community who own the business. Ponts'o explained,

We have community-based initiatives in my area. The aim is to empower community members. The one I am part of is the poultry one. There are other groups involved in community gardens. (Ponts'o, int.)

The figure below illustrates 'm'e Mampho's piggery business. She had seven female pigs and one male. One of the seven female pigs had just given birth and she was happy about its production.



Figure 5.4: 'M'e Mampho's pig and its piglets (Source: Author, 2021)

None of the women are engaged in both poultry and piggery businesses. Apart from the illustrated pictures of other income projects, there is also ownership of a grocery store. Only one of the women owned this shop and that is 'm'e Mampho. Other participants' income projects had designated areas of operation and not at home hence their pictures are not available, while some were not comfortable with pictures being taken.



Figure 5.5: 'm'e Mampho's grocery store with multiple fridges and household essentials. (Source, author, 2021)

Some women mentioned how tuck shops are of great value in villages where people used to struggle to get basic household items, and therefore, some of traders had constructed tuck shops. These tuck shops result from informal cross-border trade and create opportunities for women to start businesses and become financially independent. Lastly a picture of the rented property for one ('Matempi) of the women will be shared as a way of showing that, indeed some women have other income streams apart from engaging in informal cross-border trade.



Figure 5.6: 'Matempi's double roomed rented houses (Author, 2021)

These types of rented house are common in Maseru and are always in demand because of the proximity of communities where they are located, like the one above is at Ha Abia, Maseru.

5.4 Significance of Informal Cross-border Trade in Basotho Women's Lives

Informal cross-border trade is a significant economic activity across Africa, particularly in countries with limited formal employment opportunities, high poverty rates, and limited infrastructure. It provides a means for individuals, particularly women, to generate income, support their families, and accumulate assets. Informal cross-border trade contributes to countries' overall economic growth by increasing trade volumes, promoting regional integration, and providing cheaper goods to consumers (Golub, 2015; Moyo, 2017; Rippel, 2011). Moreover, informal cross-border trade plays an essential role in the livelihoods of marginalised communities, particularly those in rural areas, by providing them with access to goods and services that may not be readily available in their communities.

In many cases, informal cross-border trade also fosters cross-border social networks and cultural exchanges, contributing to a sense of regional community and shared identity. Informal cross-border trade has become an increasingly important economic activity for Basotho women, providing them a source of income, economic autonomy, and social networks. For many women in Lesotho, where formal employment opportunities are limited, informal cross-border trade has become vital for generating income and supporting their families.

Evidence from this study shows notable improvements in Basotho women informal cross-border traders' household economies. Their income from informal cross-border trade activities have accorded their households food security and non-food goods essentials to support life, as discussed sections 5.2 and 5.3. As a result, informal cross-border trade is deemed to have positively contributed not only to alleviating poverty but also to creating entrepreneurial behaviour in women who engage in this activity for survival and wealth accumulation. Some of these women even employ other people, such as 'm'e Mampho who have three employees for her various income streams. She said the following:

I have three employees. This fulfils me because I know I am making a difference in someone's life. I have a lady who works at the grocery shop. Another is working at my clothing stall in town. Then a young man who takes care of the piggery business. ('m'e Mampho, int.)

'M'e Mampho's comment shows that informal cross-border trade has contributed positively to poverty reduction and positively impacted the participants' social relations. Some participants affirmed that marital relations have improved because they have less stress and worry and they focus on diversifying their profits. 'M'e Mampho emphasised that she works well with her husband and that their dream is to build generational wealth. Pont'so also shared that she has witnessed a lot of improvement in how she relates with her husband since money is no longer the most significant issue in her family. She said the following:

Money was causing unspoken tension in marriage because what we could make before I joined informal cross-border trade was never enough. Having to prioritise has to be done first in terms of spending would cause some tension. However, that is no longer an issue. This time around, we plan to go to Durban for a holiday once things return to normal after COVID-19. ('m'e Mampho, int.)

Some of the women's relations with their children and their social networks have also improved, which goes beyond borrowing money for business. The participants have made friends with whom they interact in non-business-related environments, such as inviting each other to their social functions, like celebrating birthdays and supporting each other during grief. 'M'e Liteboho had to postpone the first date for her interview appointment because she was attending the funeral of a mother of one of the women traders who is a close friend of hers.

'M'e Liteboho mentioned that residents in her community encouraged her to represent them in the committee council, and they were willing to nominate and vote for her. She said, "I talk and know how to express myself to get what I want. Even people in my village know this, so they want me to represent them so our community can get services." ('m'e Liteboho, int.)

Informal cross-border trade improved food security for most households and positively impacted child welfare through education paid for by the traders. These topics are discussed in the following subsections.

5.4.1 *Education of children*

This section presents the significance of informal cross-border trade in these women's lives and considers their experiences to understand their decisions. The previous sections detailed how Basotho women's involvement in informal cross-border trade positively affected their lives; for example, some women detailed how their involvement in informal cross-border trade enabled them to care for their families, including paying for their children's education.

Although primary education in government schools is free in Lesotho, some women prefer to send their children to private schools, which charge higher tuition fees. This is because of the perceptions or fact that pass rates are higher at these schools than at public schools. There is also an English medium school phenomenon, which means the women prefer English medium schools because of the status associated with children who speak English fluently, which they learn in these schools. There is also a perception that children who attend English medium schools are exposed to opportunities that may not be accessible to those who attend government schools.

Sending children to English medium schools has become a common practice among women cross-border traders who can afford it, particularly those who have been in informal cross-border trade for many years. These positive outcomes extend beyond primary schools as some women highlighted that their children are at tertiary institutions of education for which they pay the fees. The tertiary institutions that were mentioned are the NUL, CAS, the Institute of Extra Mural Studies, and Rhodes University in South Africa. The women expressed that the ability to afford school fees for their children at private schools and tertiary institutions gave them a sense of pride and fulfilment.

Informal cross-border trade has positively impacted the education of Basotho women's children. The income from informal cross-border trade has provided these families with additional financial resources to support their children's education. Many participants declared that their families could pay school fees, buy school uniforms, and purchase educational materials, such as textbooks and stationery, that they may not have been able to afford otherwise. They manage to enrol their children in schools that provide quality education. Some participants indicated that their children went to South African Universities where they are paying everything for them (fees, accommodation, and food allowance).

Additionally, informal cross-border trade has created self-employment opportunities for women, allowing them to earn an income and support their families. This has positively impacted their children's education, as they can provide for their children's basic needs and invest in their future. As a result of informal cross-border trade, many Basotho women and children can now access education and training, which can help break the cycle of poverty and create a brighter future for themselves and their communities.

The entry into informal cross-border trade has been a breakthrough for most families. 'Matempi, a 45-year-old single mother of two sons, shared her story with pride. She has never been married and has taken care of her sons since birth, and the need to provide for them was her motivation to join informal cross-border trade. She did not complete primary school and only completed Standard 5. Her first son is now a university graduate and employed. She still pays her last son's fees at CAS. The total fees are M6 000, plus a yearly subscription fee of M3 804, paid in two instalments of M1 542, as is governed under Cambridge. Besides the fees, she must buy her son books and other educational materials. She also pays for his transport to and from school and his

lunch money. She emphasised that informal cross-border trade has helped her greatly because she would not have managed to pay the high fees required by CAS without it.

She lives with her two sons in a five-room house with a fence. She owns a used Toyota Noah, a seven-seater minivan with two rear sliding doors, and five single-roomed rental apartments (*maelane*) in the same yard as her main house. I met the first-born son and was later introduced to the last-born son, who welcomed her. 'Matempi stated that she was selling second-hand clothes before getting into informal cross-border trade. She bought the clothes from the Butha Buthe district in Lesotho for sale in Maseru. She later sourced her stock from HIFI City, a shop that stocks second-hand clothes in bulk for resale in Maseru before eventually joining informal cross-border trade.

5.4.2 Accumulation of assets (movable, immovable, or both)

As women traders become more successful, they often expand their business activities and increase their earnings. This can lead to further accumulation of assets as they reinvest their profits into their businesses or use them to purchase additional assets. Women traders sometimes use their earnings to support their families by paying for education or healthcare. Asset accumulation refers to building wealth over time by acquiring assets that appreciate and generate income. Asset accumulation is important for individuals, households, and businesses as it provides a means of securing financial stability and achieving long-term financial goals. Asset accumulation has become increasingly important for individuals and businesses in today's rapidly changing economic environment. With the rising costs of living, changing job markets, and uncertain economic conditions, building a solid and diversified asset base can achieve financial security and stability. The traders indicated that they manage to acquire various household goods, and some bought property, including houses, vacant plots of land for building houses, and land for agricultural purposes. Most of them mentioned that they also managed to acquire vehicles.

Mma Peete, who is now full time in the business with her husband, said they have five cars and have renovated and extended their house. They were also planning to buy their daughter, who was studying Business Management at the Institute of Extra Mural Studies, a car as her graduation present. They have been paying for her tuition as she did not have government

funding. She explained that they bought their first car in 2010. When people saw the car they bought, they thought someone had left it at their home as she and her husband did not know how to drive. They hired someone who would drive them, and her husband learned how to drive and got his licence; he then taught her, and she also got her licence. Their objective evidence that they had made it in business was when they bought their second car. She said they overtook her sister-in-law, who was already in business when they married, and is now learning from mma Peete. She said the following:

I have progressed so much in life now. Back then business was so good as we were not many like now. Then, other women started to join, including those leaving factories, those women whose husbands had been retrenched from South African mines, and the unemployed. Now, even women still working at the factories are joining the trade. They go shopping on Friday and by Sunday; they are returning to work on Monday. (mma Peete, int.)

Textile factory workers are a category of women who used to be predominantly customers, and now they are becoming informal cross-border traders. Factories are a market area that is slowly shrinking because of the competition. The participant said she now sells a variety of things because in business you listen to your customers' needs and incorporate them. She said the following:

There was a time when I would get a headache from counting a lot of money, wondering if it was all mine. I am glad I used that opportunity well when business was booming; I would not be where I am today ('m'e Khalalelo, int).

Regarding the accumulation of assets, some of the women had bought Japanese manufactured vehicles and had either built their own homes or renovated and extended their existing houses. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show Ponto's house when it was a two-room house and after it was extended to a six-room house. She explained it as follows:

My husband is a driver in a government department and does not earn much, but with this business, we managed to extend our house from a two-rooms to six rooms with a single garage, which is such a great achievement for my family. (Ponto's, int.)



Figure 5.1: Ponts'o's house in the process of extension from two rooms (Source: Ponts'o's archives)



Figure 5.2: Ponts'o's house after extension and renovation (Source: Author, 2021)

Another participant, 'm'e Mampho, like most of *bo 'mathoto*, is taking care of her children's education at tertiary and high school. She takes care of their school needs, including fees. She built a modern four-roomed house with a beautifully fitted kitchen and sliding doors in Maseru, Maseru. She also built 16 single-rooms with electricity connected and four two-rooms (*malaene*) for rentals. Apart from the rental houses, she has a grocery shop, which had been operating for

six years at the time of the interview and is right at the entrance of her residential plot. The rental houses are on the same residential plot, which is very big. She is also rearing pigs that she sells to butcheries and to the community once slaughtered. All these assets, the rental rooms, grocery shop, her house, and piggery business, are on the same plot. Her plot is quite big at around 2,000 m². She bought it long ago with her now deceased husband before plots became more expensive. I was not allowed to take pictures of her rental property because she felt uncomfortable, but she let me take pictures of the pigs and the grocery store. The participant also owns two cars, a Honda CRV and a Nissan single-cab van. She uses the van mostly when she goes to restore for the shop, and also when she is making deliveries for pigs, while she uses Honda CRV for her daily up keep.

5.5 Chapter Summary

Evidence from this study shows that informal cross-border trade positively affects Basotho women's households. Chapter 4 showed that most women cited job scarcity, which forced them to find a way to earn an income, as their primary reason for engaging in informal cross-border trade. Despite the positive effect of informal cross-border trade activities at the household level, its contribution to development at a macro level is still a significant topic of debate in academic and policy spaces globally. According to some scholars such as Tekere et al. (2000), the perceptions that informal cross-border trade is not only economically unviable but also socially undesirable continue to drive policy dialogue in many developing countries. However, Tekere et al. discovered that cross-border trading enables specific households to escape poverty, which is what the current study also found among Basotho women. According to the findings of this study, Basotho women's lives and those of their households have been improved by the proceeds of informal cross-border trade activities.

The improvement is both economic and social. With social benefits, relations were highlighted through social networks and the importance of these social networks in informal cross-border trade for Basotho women. The commonality is that social networks consist of individual actors, organisations, or other entities that are connected by relationships, social capital, information and resources, structures, and dynamics (Brass et al., 2004; Granovetter, 1973; Walther, 2015; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Social networks do not just exist to meet business needs but also to

share ideas and strategies for expansion and other possible streams of income. These social networks also contribute to the social status of these women in their communities.

The second section presented findings on how the women operate, where *bo 'mathoto* sell their goods, how they sell their goods in terms of payments, and to whom they sell. These factors affect informal cross-border traders' contribution to household economies. By exploring their strategies, the chapter showed that informal cross-border women traders are not passive poor migrants but that they are active and rational entrepreneurs who influence the outcomes of their businesses and their impacts on their household economies.

Women informal cross-border traders can be regarded as the *nouveau riche* of Lesotho. They have acquired their own movable and immovable property through their ability to identify opportunities, risk-taking, and thrift. They have changed the popular narrative and image of a cross-border Mosotho woman as a poverty-stricken, desperate job seeker. The findings portray these women as a distinctive class of newly rich, whose wealth is not the result of the intergenerational transfer of wealth but was created by them. The goal of this chapter was to situate the findings explicitly in the lived experiences of Basotho women. Despite its significant contributions, informal cross-border trade faces various challenges, including harassment from border officials, lack of access to credit and finance, and limited infrastructure, which are addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FACED BY BASOTHO WOMEN IN INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER TRADE

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5, I demonstrated the strong linkages between women's cross-border trading engagements and their improved socio-economic wellbeing. I highlighted the empowerment effects of cross-border trading and how the women have assumed positions in decision-making within households and have been able to position themselves in a different social stratum in a society where employment is scarce, and poverty is generally high. The presentation showed how women achieve their goals, accumulate assets, build homes, diversify into other business activities, and invest in material items such as motor vehicles.

This puts these women in a different category than general stereotypical poor Basotho women cross-border migrants or poor Basotho women whose place is the home and whose sole function is reproduction. There was also an indication that informal cross-border trade for Basotho women who trade between Botswana and Lesotho is booming. Nonetheless, the significance of informal cross-border trade for these women's wellbeing and their households does not eliminate the fact that they experience challenges in this form of trade.

Informal economic activities are widespread in the developing world, such as Africa and Lesotho. According to a study-based report, a considerable share of 30–40% of regional trade in Africa is informal (Chen, 2001). Indeed, Peberdy et al. (2015, p. 207) asserted that informal sector cross-border trade represents “a significant feature of regional trade flows in Southern Africa”. According to Timothy and Teye (2005, p. 83), activities such cross-border traders constitute a “form of business traveller that is unique to the developing world”. Due to various economic and social factors, women in Lesotho face limited employment opportunities in the formal sector, and when they find formal employment, the wages are often low and insufficient to support themselves and their families (Mutsagondo et al., 2016). Arguably, many women are involved in informal cross-border trade across the globe due to high unemployment rates, and Southern African countries are no different. Countries such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia, and Malawi are particularly noted for their high numbers of women cross-border traders in the

SADC region (see Kachere, 2011; Nshimbi & Moyo, 2017), and Lesotho is not an exception. Therefore, a distinguishing characteristic of informal cross-border trade is the predominance of female traders for whom the trade is commonly their primary or even sole source of income (Benjamin et al., 2015; Gudhlanga, 2021; Peberdy et al., 2006). Informal cross-border trade is also the sole source of income for most Basotho women participants in this study. According to Ulicki and Crush (2000), women in Southern African countries often enter the cross-border trade due to poor integration of women into the formal economic sector and its effects, and it is no different for Basotho women cross-border traders who have failed to get jobs in the formal sector due to the structures in place.

Similarly, Basotho women feature prominently in informal cross-border trading, although there are no official statistics to place an estimated figure on their numbers. Lesotho faces severe economic and unemployment challenges, and the informal sector has become important for livelihoods, employment, survival, and accumulation for most of the population. This is particularly true for women whose situation is further complicated by other societal pressures and the added burden of supporting a family when they are single, widowed, or abandoned.

However, like any other economic activity, informal cross-border trade comes. Manjokoto and Ranga (2017) studied Zimbabwean women engaging in informal cross-border trade and found that these women frequently face a myriad of challenges, such as harassment by border officials, family disconnect, high revenue charges, and no accommodation in their country of destination, especially in South Africa, as they cannot afford to pay for hotels. These challenges cut across countries, although some challenges are context specific. This chapter presents the findings on the challenges Basotho women traders face during their informal cross-border trading activities and how they have devised mechanisms to mitigate these challenges. The primary argument of this chapter is that irrespective of the impediments Basotho women informal cross-border traders face, they have been able to surmount these challenges using individual and collective mechanisms.

This chapter focuses mainly on the economic, social, and institutional challenges Basotho women face; the women's agency in overcoming the challenges; and the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on women and their economic situation.

6.2 Challenges Faced by *Bo 'Mathoto*

Informal cross-border trading activities present a myriad of economic challenges to the many women trading along the Lesotho-Botswana economic corridor. The challenges Basotho women encounter emanate from their business's informality due to Lesotho's economic situation. The word 'informality' refers to a wide range of unrestricted human actions that occur beneath the radar, above or outside the reach of the law, or that get around the law by exploiting loopholes. Informality refers to the world's well-kept secrets, unwritten laws, and unspoken conventions for carrying out tasks. Therefore, informality is often stigmatised. It is frequently related to crime, corruption, and illegality, symbolising the shadowy aspects of human nature, like jealousy and greed.

As in much of Africa, Lesotho cannot adequately advance its citizens' human security and welfare and provide them with adequate employment, education, and health (Mapetla & Petlane, 2007). Economic informality seems to be less a by-product of underdevelopment than a way that an increasing number of markets, economic activities, and working lives are organised as state-based economic regulation has declined under neoliberal systems. The Basotho women state is vulnerable and has limited resources and options; water is its most significant natural resource and is exported to South Africa (Motsamai, 2018).

This chapter presents the challenges Basotho women traders face while engaging in informal cross-border trade. It also discusses how cross-border trading has become a pathway to entrepreneurship for the women involved through agency. The presentation pays close attention to the social, economic, and institutional concerns that relate to their regular business operations, such as issues around capital and expenses related to travel; the logistics and risks associated with travel; the challenges with marketing, sale of goods, places of trading, and interactions with their clients; intense competition among traders; and institutional matters that revolve around policy and customs related issues. While some of these challenges are deeply embedded in the sector and have been there for a long time, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated regulations brought new challenges, threatening the women's livelihoods.

Finally, the last sub-section under challenges discusses the institutional practices that affect the smooth operation of Basotho women informal cross-border traders through the structural

integration of informality and opportunities for entrepreneurship. It highlights that the women cross-border traders are mostly businesspeople who trade in cross-border products.

6.2.1 *Financial challenges*

Economically, Lesotho is a primary commodity-exporting country with a limited manufacturing base (Lall, 2005). The economy is woven around revenue from exports of natural resources and remittances from its citizens working in different economic spaces in South Africa and the sub-region. Although one of Lesotho's major economic sectors is agriculture, it imports most of its agricultural goods from South Africa. Therefore, the government's economic policy is heavily targeted at the extractives and remittance sectors, which it considers formal and regulated. Therefore, informal cross-border trading activities fall outside what the government considers the formal economy. This chapter analyses the economic challenges Basotho women engaged in informal cross-border trade face within this context.

6.2.1.1 Lack of access to finance from financial institutions

One of the challenges informal cross-border traders face is lack of financing from formal financial institutions. Six of the 15 women cross-border traders who participated in this study were relatively new to cross-border trading. Three of these six women had no finances as they had no income source, and two had a little savings, which was insufficient to start a business. Four of these relatively new traders were still operating on a small scale. They did not have access to formal banking services, except for the mobile money provided through cell phone networks. The lack of financing affects women traders mainly at the beginning of their engagement in informal cross-border trade when they need start-up capital. However, it is still a challenge for those already in the trade. When they experience financial problems, especially with cash flow, and need backup to boost them, it is difficult to go to financial institutions for assistance. This challenge can potentially limit the growth of their businesses and prevent them from taking advantage of new opportunities.

Additionally, informal cross-border traders often do not have the collateral or documentation required by formal financial institutions, making it difficult to obtain loans or credit. The lack of collateral results from their informality and being unregistered. Therefore, these challenges force

the women traders to strategize and find innovative ways to deal with their challenges; this is discussed in section 6.3.

Women's participation in informal cross-border trade in Lesotho has progressively become a popular and vital safety net against unemployment. As is the case elsewhere, Basotho women find themselves in informal spaces of the economy because of neoliberal economic governance that has reduced the reach of the state. Chen (2001) emphasised that informality is increasingly evident in the global growth of economies because of the outsourcing and casualisation of industrial outworking as state-based economic governance has waned in the neoliberal era. Similarly, Meagher (2021) discussed how globalisation and rapid technological change have served to intensify pressures of deindustrialisation, jobless growth, rising unemployment, and expanding informality, giving mounting agency to the question of how to make economies more. The mounting agency of inclusive economics is elicited already in existing poor economies.

Given the inability of national economies to engage the productive capacities of their population, especially men, and the rising inability of families to meet their daily needs, women have taken up the responsibility to engage in informal economic spaces to help meet the needs of their households. Nevertheless, the efforts of many of these women engaged in informal cross-border trade are hindered by limited access to start-up capital, which applies to a specific category of women. It is important to note that this constraint was repeatedly emphasised by some of the women in this study, especially those who are still new in the business. For example, one of the women said the following:

I engaged in informal cross-border trade three years back, and I had planned out the improvements and projects I would do once I started making profits. Unfortunately, COVID-19 happened, and I used my savings for survival. I have to start fresh and need capital. (mma Khotso, int.)

Basotho women continue to seek ways to earn a living for their survival and that of their households, especially now that the textile factories that used to absorb large numbers of these women are closing. This is exemplified by those who already work in textile factories yet have started engaging in informal cross-border trade. As a result, the causes mentioned above have exacerbated the already bleak living conditions of the average Mosotho citizen, particularly women, who are the primary victims of the crisis's precarisation of labour and pauperisation

(Tanga, 2009). Mma Thembi explained that “the painful part is the current situation of retrenchment from textile factories as well as the closure of some of the factories, which have worsened the unemployment situation in our country” (mma Thembi, int.).

The very nature of cross-border trading demands financing, and traders entering the business find it difficult. The engagement involves travel issues, capital for stock, and transportation of goods. When travelling, one has to have a valid passport, and for an ordinary Mosotho woman, especially those never employed at textile factories, it means applying for a passport first, incurring more costs. Those who work at textile factories are hired with their passports as a form of identification, so the travel documents are not a problem for them. The estimated costs involved in a trip to Botswana are M1 000 (price at the time of fieldwork) for the transport fee for a return trip, M150–200 for a contribution towards the Maseru customs duty fee for clearance upon return, a minimum of M3 500 for the cost of stock, and an estimated M500 for local travel cost for transportation of goods to and from places of sale for a month. Therefore, the average cost is M5 350 for a beginner, which is difficult to raise without savings or a husband and family to inject capital. The cost was even higher during COVID-19 as traders had to pay M850 for COVID-19 screening every time they travelled to Botswana.

Lineo also alluded that informal cross-border trade needed financial support, especially start-up capital. Lineo is a 39-year-old married woman with three children. Sadly, her husband was not working at the time of the interview, and she worked at the textile factories. Driven by the low salaries that were not enough to care for their families, she is among three Basotho women informal cross-border traders who are part-time traders. These three women had joined hands to save money for start-up capital from their low salaries from the textile factories to engage in informal cross-border trade. She explained, “There is no support from the government, so we had to come up with the plan” (Lineo, int.).

The lack of access to institutional finance, which is a significant constraint because it means that the women have to source capital to inject into the business, mainly affects those new to the business. However, everyone is not affected in the same way. For example, some, like Lineo and her colleagues, save money from their salaries. This is mainly women who are part-timers and who get some money from their husbands. One of the newcomers said the following:

We cannot deny that it is regrettable that the textile factories are no longer hiring like before. There are many Basotho women we see daily when we get to work at the gates of these textile factories queuing, with the hope that recruitment will occur. I strongly believe that some are looking for start-ups, and some are from our communities. If only the government would consider and give financial assistance for starter-ups. (Mma Sentle, int.)

Due to the lack of access to institutional finance, women use contributions from family, friends, or colleagues. For women like Lineo and her colleagues, the meagre wages they get for their work at the textile factories are often too little for their families to survive on, and therefore, they pooled their resources to enable them to use their off-duty days (usually their weekends) to travel and stock goods for resale. The associational risk-pooling of resources shows how the informal space still represents an enduring source of survival for many Basotho families due to the neglect of formal financial institutions.

6.2.1.2 Basotho Enterprises Development Corporation

While there are formal financial institutions that lend start-up capital to businesses or enterprises, these institutions do not cater to *bo 'mathoto* because most of these women do not qualify. To address the challenge of businesses classified as informal accessing financial assistance, the government of Lesotho established a financial cooperative called the Basotho Enterprises Development Corporation (BEDCO) to deal with access to finance for small, medium, and macro enterprises. The primary aim of Ramonyatsi (2020) is to promote the development of Basotho-owned enterprises and indigenous entrepreneurial skills for connected purposes.

However, Basotho women traders do not meet the requirements set by BEDCO for indigenous businesses because of the very formal structural requirements for accessing capital from Ramonyatsi (2020). The lack of access to start-up capital has seen women navigating through their filial and self-help networks for financial assistance to start or expand their trading ventures. These challenges indicate neoliberal economic policies' inability to respond to specific countries' economic realities, especially for funding for informal businesses.

This lack of access to financial resources for doing business is not limited to Basotho women. Chikanda, (2017) found that this is a chronic problem for women in the sub-region, particularly those engaged in informal cross-border trade. The report further noted that nearly 80% of women

in informal cross-border trade obtain their capital from informal sources, and about half use their savings. A similar study found that about only one-fifth of informal traders in the sub-region have access to bank loans, which is different for Basotho women traders because none of them had access to bank loans at the time of fieldwork (Blumberg et al., 2016). Thus, financial support from family and friends is a significant finance source for up to 68% of women. These gaps in funding are also attributed to the highly formalised nature of state economies, which exacerbates issues of employment, inclusive economic growth, and the wellbeing or livelihoods of many families in informal spaces. One full-time trader said the following:

I have heard about institutions like BEDCO and thought when I am ready to expand my business by opening a shop, I could seek funding. However, as I was asking around, people mentioned that a business plan is required during the application, something I know nothing about, so I might as well forget about it. (mma Thembi, int.)

As Brendon et al, (2013)'s findings from this study show a disconnect between the experiences and expectations of women engaged in informal cross-border trades and private or public financial institutions like BEDCO. This accounts for the lack of support for informal businesses.

6.2.1.3 Different categories of Basotho women's perceptions of financial institutions

The women traders shared several perceptions concerning financial institutions. Given the categories these women fall under as part-timers, full-timers, veteran traders, and newcomers, they did not share the same perceptions. The veterans have other income streams and savings that they feel can sustain them, yet they do support the need for the government to have financial support for other categories of women traders. On the other hand, these women also do not trust financial institutions because they have a long history of operating outside formal financial systems, which has made them sceptical about dealing with formal institutions due to unfamiliarity and fear of bureaucratic processes. The perceived risks associated with interest rates make them afraid they may lose everything they have worked hard for over the years.

It is harder for newcomers to access financial support from informal networks because it takes time to develop these networks. Without access to formal loans or credit, they struggle to secure the necessary funds and are forced to start with smaller-scale operations. Sometimes, they struggle with purchasing goods for resale or covering transportation costs. Financial constraints

therefore limit newcomers' ability to take advantage of more extensive market opportunities. They are likely to miss out on bulk purchases, peak season, or favourable deals because of their inability to access funds quickly. They cannot invest in larger quantities of goods, diversify their product range, or explore new markets, leading to slower growth rates. Lacking a financial cushion or access to credit, newcomers are more vulnerable to unexpected shocks, such as changes in market conditions, currency fluctuations, or natural disasters. Due to a lack of resources to adapt to such challenges, they can be forced to exit the market. For example, Mma Peete said, "COVID-19 has affected me, and the business has gone down because most customers lost their jobs" (mma Peete, int.).

Concerns about financial institutions affect the newcomer women traders more than veteran traders. Part-time traders in this study had limited capital to invest in their trading activities, and with no access to financial assistance, they struggle to fund their trading ventures adequately, restricting their ability to purchase goods, cover transportation costs, or expand their operations. This limitation results in inefficiencies in their operations. Part-time traders also have less flexibility in their trading schedules due to other commitments like a full-time job or family responsibilities. The lack of financial assistance further constrains their ability to seize market opportunities during their available trading times.

In summary, the lack of access to financial institutions can create significant barriers for newcomers in informal cross-border trade, limiting their growth potential, increasing their vulnerability, and impeding their ability to seize opportunities in the market.

6.2.1.4 Non-paying customers

By its very nature, informal cross-border trade comes with challenges due to the structures within which it operates. One of the challenges that emerged among some participants was customers who do not pay. Women traders use different payment methods according to their preferences. The women explained that they sell on credit and give customers a deadline to pay, often in instalments, they sell for cash, or they use lay-buy. The veterans sell for cash or on deposit.

'M'e Nthoi, for example, explained how challenging it is to get payment at times and that when people have taken stock, they disappear and no longer pay back, especially those who rent

houses nearby. She further explained that sometimes customers move houses without notice. She would have given credit to them as neighbours only for them to move back to their villages and disappear, and often she fails to locate them. Customers who do not clear their debts affect the business and hurt the traders. Apart from those who disappear, mainly young people, are the old ones who pass away. *Bo 'mathoto* who experience this are those who deal with *maqheku*. (old-aged people). 'M'e Nthoi told the following story:

I remember one old lady, she died owing me money amounting to M2 000. She would keep taking stock until the amount was too much. Unfortunately, at the time, I did not have a strategy or limit for credit like other informal cross-border traders. They tell their customers that they can only take stock worth up to M1 000 and finish paying off first before taking more goods. This old lady who died had a strategy that I would say was manipulative. Every time she paid M200 or M300, part of the balance while I was still excited about clearing her name from the monthly instalment, she would take more goods, amounting to more money. Sometimes, she would take assorted items, saying she has many grandchildren. I know such personalities and have agreed with the person assisting me on the maximum amount of credit we can give. Whenever a customer wants more goods, we always double-check with each other. ('m'e Nthoi, int.)

For traders, non-payment or delayed payment results in immediate financial losses. Given the traders' capital, non-payment impacts them at varying levels. Since some traders operate on slim profit margins in informal cross-border trading, non-payment also lowers profit margins. Without prior sales income, this also restricts investments. Non-payment can also cause cash flow issues, which makes it difficult for traders to meet their immediate financial responsibilities like restocking and covering transportation costs. Dealing with non-paying clients also causes emotional stress for traders, which affects their general wellbeing and trade motivation.

6.2.1.5 Challenges with finding a suitable space for selling

Lack of secure and suitable spaces to sell goods is difficult because the available spaces are shared among street vendors, and there is a process for applying for allocation. As a result, there is competition for space in prime selling locations, like outside post offices. It is often a struggle to secure spaces in high-traffic areas. The unregulated spaces lack basic amenities such as

sanitation facilities and limited access to services. Inadequate shelter, electricity, and water infrastructure make trading conditions difficult. Extreme weather conditions also impact traders' ability to display and protect their goods effectively. For example, some women sell from open spaces where they display their goods, and in the rainy season, they cannot display items like they always do, which means they miss several days of sales. Those with market stalls do not suffer as much from the seasons because they have shelters. Some markets have high rental costs, so traders avoid them due to limited finances.

6.2.2 Social challenges

Socially, Lesotho is seen as a conservative society that heavily relies on traditional social values. Traditionally, a woman's place in Lesotho was at home, nurturing the children and taking care of the fields in the absence of her husband, who was typically working in the mines in South Africa. However, there has been a shift in family roles since the 1990s when structural adjustment policies led to massive retrenchments in the mines (Crush, 2016; Crush et al., 2005). This shift saw women leaving their place in the 'kitchen' and move into the broader economic sphere. The social issues are fundamental because *bo 'mathoto* have homes, families, and children. They embark on cross-border trips, which can affect their expected female roles. For women living in a patriarchal society where a woman's place is defined by society, these women are social outcasts and risk being labelled as women of loose morals since they spend time away from home. Both women and men find themselves in the same economic spaces, requiring that they complement each other socially. For instance, men assume the responsibility of care when their partners travel to source goods for trading.

Public policies serve as the institutional framework governments use to manage competing interests in society through the authoritative allocation of resources and exacting compliance. The lack of policy attention to this sector of the economy creates institutional barriers that hinder the effective operation of informal cross-border traders. This section discusses the social challenges Basotho women face in informal cross-border trade within this context.

6.2.2.1 Conflict with taxi drivers

Once the traders have secured start-up capital and are ready to travel to Botswana, they encounter challenges across the border. They sometimes encounter a problem once they have crossed the South African border. This problem concerns the conflict between South African taxi drivers and Lesotho taxi drivers. Lesotho taxi drivers are hired explicitly by *bo 'mathoto* for their trips and they do not use ordinary taxi drivers from Lesotho. On the South African side of the border at Maseru Bridge, there is a mini taxi rank with taxies that operate between Maseru Bridge and LadyBrand, Botshabelo, Bloemfontein, and Johannesburg. Some women described their encounters here as emotionally exhausting because there are sometimes conflicts, including threats, between *bo 'mathoto*'s drivers from Lesotho and the South African drivers. For example, 'm'e Khalalelo told me about the following experience:

I remember one time the South African drivers threatening to set our taxi on fire when our driver refused to open the door for us to get down" ('m'e Khalalelo, int.).

Another woman added,

"I do not like the fights between our drivers and the South African one. I think our transport fare is partly expensive because our drivers have to pay a certain amount to South African driver to avoid arguments" (Lineo, int.).

The threats come from the South African drivers who claim that Lesotho drivers have no right to trespass in their country and transport passengers that South African drivers should transport. However, the Lesotho drivers I interviewed argued that they do not take passengers to the destinations mentioned earlier in the text and there is no operating route from Maseru Bridge to Botswana.

The conflicts between Lesotho and South African drivers often leave these women feeling vulnerable and fearing for their safety. From time to time, South African drivers block *bo 'mathoto*'s taxis or instruct them to get in their South Africa taxis so they can transport them. Taking Basotho women from Lesotho drivers does not benefit the Lesotho drivers because they lose income or *bo 'mathoto* because they feel vulnerable. This is not only a problem for taxi drivers from Lesotho but also for the increasing number of private vehicles transporting Basotho

women to parts of South Africa. According to the women and drivers, this problem between drivers has not received any attention from the governments of these neighbouring countries.

Lesotho drivers were forced to fetch the women from the border to maintain relations with their customers, and in other instances, *bo 'mathoto* would have to arrange to cross with their luggage independently. This is stressful and time-consuming for the women. One of the women mentioned how they once left the Maseru border in the morning of the day they were supposed to be arriving in Botswana because of these interruptions. One of the drivers interviewed explained,

Before we could agree on an amount to be paid to these South Africa drivers, I had to surrender my customers twice (Ntate John, int.).

When the South African drivers have their way and force *bo 'mathoto* to take their taxis, it is very inconvenient for the *bo 'mathoto* because when they return from their shopping, the South African taxis leave them on the South African side with their luggage as they do not have permits to enter Lesotho.

6.2.2.2 *Long and arduous journeys*

The journey to Botswana can be difficult, and once the women negotiated the drivers' conflicts at the border, an uncomfortable, long night journey awaits them. This section looks at the journey of Basotho women traders from the border in Maseru to Botswana and back, considering the distance covered and that Basotho women traders use two country borders (South Africa and Botswana borders) to reach their destination as they travel through South Africa. I experienced the discomforts they experience when I travelled with them. I focused on all the trips to observe how these women navigate and negotiate borders. The journey averages seven to eight hours, covering approximately 750 km. This is a three-day journey, and the arrangement is that women leave Lesotho at night on their chosen day, which is mostly from Monday to Friday or Sunday night. They travel overnight and arrive to go shopping the following day once they have changed their money to Botswana currency and the shops are open. When these women are done shopping and packing, they leave Botswana at six in the evening the same day and return to Lesotho. The time for departure from Botswana is early to cater for the time spent on border clearance. It should also be considered that they drive at a reasonable speed as the trailers are

heavily loaded and they travel at night. Arrival time back home in Lesotho is usually between four and five in the morning.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the trips are taken using hired taxis. The journey to and from Botswana is particularly long and tiresome and there are many hazards on the journey. The journey itself lasts two days. The women traders who travel to Botswana must overcome obstacles associated with the travel, such as border rules and regulations. My understanding of the challenges they face was enriched when I travelled with them. The hired taxis pull trailers that are extremely useful because of the kind of luggage the women typically carry because if they used public transport, the extra luggage is charged separately from the passengers.

6.2.2.3 *Women traders' travelling experiences*

Lesotho is known for its frigid weather in winter and hot summers. *Bo 'mathoto* often dress heavily for their night journey and take off these heavy jackets and leave their fleece blankets in the taxi when they arrive at the shops. Some women wrap the blankets around their waists as Basotho women usually do back home. The women believe that wrapping the blankets around them differentiates them and often works in their favour to get discounts because of their known bulk buying. *Bo 'mathoto* avoid buying food on the way at all costs because they travel at night, and although they have one stopover at a garage, they do not buy anything because they think it is very expensive. Once they finish shopping, they buy food in Botswana while waiting for the drivers to load. They eat here and keep some food for the journey.

Their only challenge is not just the rough eating but also sleeping while seated with no room to stretch their legs in the taxi. This arrangement often results in *bo 'mathoto* complaining of knee pain and swollen feet due to lack of adequate blood circulation because of sitting in one position for a long time. The stopover helps them stretch their legs a bit. Another discomfort is the public toilets they have to use at the Botswana and South Africa borders to freshen up. While some women queue to get through immigration, others queue to use the bathrooms, wash their faces, and brush their teeth in the toilet sinks. They pack small toiletry bags with face towels and face cream, toothpaste, and brushes. Those who finish with immigration first go to the Botswana side to freshen up. The challenge with this arrangement is that on some occasions, there is no water, and although this does not happen often, it is a big inconvenience when it happens. The women

pack wet wipes in case this happens. They find ways to navigate through any barrier they come across.

6.2.2.4 Limited time for shopping

Limited time for shopping is another challenge the women face. Since these women do not spend many days in Botswana to buy stock, their shopping is often rushed because they have to visit different shops at various locations to cater to all their orders. During shopping, traders cannot afford to be indecisive as that may affect how much they get to buy. Although their time is limited, they do not buy everything at one shop because they know where to find what and the price differences on certain items between shops.

Unfortunately, because of their limited time for shopping, they do not have the luxury of going through every single item to check its condition. Sometimes, they only notice flaws when they unpack at home. This means they end up selling at a lower price than they expected. Unfortunately, because Botswana is far and they only go once a month or once in two months, it is difficult to return such goods for exchange or refund, which translates into a loss for them.

6.2.2.5 Journey hazards

Physical safety is a concern during their travels, especially with accidents and health issues. Some women told me how they had heard of friends and other cross-border traders who got injured or died during their business travels. Some also told me of their own near-death experiences during one of their journeys. This is a considerable challenge faced by informal cross-border traders, yet they find themselves on the road often. The long and arduous journeys affect the women's health and hygiene because there are no proper facilities for personal care. Long and uncertain journeys can lead to time constraints, affecting women traders' ability to balance their trading activities with other responsibilities. There is also the possibility of being hijacked. Criminals may know that they will buy goods in Botswana and therefore have money, which makes them a target. However, nobody mentioned cases of hijacking during the interviews.

In addition, traders are subject to arbitrary searches, confiscation of goods, or other forms of harassment by border officials, which further add to the risks and challenges they face. Once

they reach their destinations, they face additional challenges, such as lack of access to safe and affordable accommodation. These challenges significantly impact the health and wellbeing of the traders and their families, limiting their ability to grow and succeed in their businesses. ‘M’e Khalalelo explained it as follows:

This journey is difficult for us and the families we leave behind when travelling. I still cry after the accident, though I was not part of the trip. I lost my neighbour in that accident, and she came back home as ‘ashes’ as their combi had burnt down. I feel sorry for her family. Every time we leave home, fear creeps in, but we must brush it off and continue with the journey because this business puts food on the table and children through school, *re phela ka mohau* [we live by grace]. (‘m’e Khalalelo, int.)

‘M’e Nthoi, a 59-year-old trader, narrated her experience of a horrific accident as follows:

I was involved in a car accident on the 24th of April 2018 in Mafikeng, South Africa, on our way to Botswana. After the accident, I was in critical condition and stayed in a South African hospital for a month before being transferred to Lesotho. I was in bed for six months. I could not move or do anything, and I could not travel for the whole of 2019. That is when I asked for assistance from fellow informal cross-border trade women. That was after my transfer to Lesotho when I started giving others money to buy on my behalf. Despite our challenges and competition among ourselves, sometimes in informal cross-border trade, some traders work in unity and support of each other. I will forever be indebted to a woman called Mamentu from Kholokoe, who never got tired of me. She would get much money from me for my stock and never disappointed me (‘m’e Nthoi, int.).

‘M’e Nthoi's story was confirmed by ‘Matempi, another informal cross-border trade woman who was involved in the same accident and who live in the same neighbourhood as ‘m’e Nthoi. The accident in Mafikeng in 2018 claimed two lives of Basotho women informal cross-border traders. The vehicle had a tyre burst, and the driver lost control since he was driving too fast to gain control. The accident happened around 11 at night. There was no other vehicle close to them when the accident happened, even though ‘Matempi knew that three vehicles left Maseru together that evening; one vehicle was ahead by an hour, and the other was about 15 km behind them. ‘Matempi was awake when the accident happened but lost consciousness afterward. Those

who were conscious managed to call for help, and by the time the vehicle that was behind arrived, the injured people were already being taken to the hospital by ambulances. Two ladies died in that accident and some were severely injured, such as 'm'e Nthoi who was bedridden for six months. After being hospitalised that night, they were transported to Lesotho the next day, except for 'm'e Nthoi who was in critical condition. 'Matempi gave the following details:

I did not think she would recover to be where she is now. Her face was disfigured; it was my first time seeing someone like that. She spent six months bedridden. We were in the same taxi. The taxi was alone when it fell; it had not collided with any other car. The accident affected my life, too, because my shoulder was dislocated. I can no longer carry heavy things, not even 10 litres of a water bucket. I also experienced memory loss, and I am still on my way to recovery. ('Matempi, int.)

Apart from bodily harm, 'Matempi also had memory loss. She became so forgetful after the accident that she would drive her car to open her stall in Maseru but return home with public transport. Her sons advised her not to drive but to use public transport until she was fully recovered. However, things got worse as she would often go home and leave the stall open and even forget the money she made that day. Sometimes she would forget where to get off when in a taxi. At this point, her sons advised her to close the stall for a while and seek medical attention until she is fully recovered. She plans to rent space in town after fully recovering from the 2018 accident. She stated the following:

The accident harmed me. I no longer have the stall as it was allocated to a different person since it was closed for a long time. This stall was at the marketplace under the authority of the Maseru City Council. I might get back into business, especially renting a space, about three years from now because now I am so forgetful, and I am focusing on my recovery until I can be in a state where I used to be with my memory. Even when I cancelled our first interview appointment [with me, the researcher], I was in Cape Town seeing doctors who are helping me with my recovery journey. ('Matempi, int.)

Her business was affected because she could not travel but relied on other women to buy on her behalf. Travel is more dangerous without adequate roads and other transportation facilities; therefore, accidents and delays can result from poor road conditions.

All *bo 'mathoto*, without exception, described the journey to Botswana as long, tiresome, and potentially hazardous. Given their hazardous journey, I observed that during the trips I took with *bo 'mathoto* that they pray once the taxi leaves the Maseru border. One of them or the driver announces that it is time for prayer, and one starts a hymn known by most of them, and then they all pray for a safe journey and their families left behind.

6.2.2.6 Challenges with depending on other traders for shopping

When *bo 'mathoto* cannot travel and have to rely on other traders to buy them stock, it affects them in various ways. They have less control over their purchasing decisions when they rely on other traders, and their decisions may be affected by the preferences and availability of the traders they rely on. It also restrains their ability to negotiate prices and terms, which can lead to higher prices and less favourable bargains. Depending on other traders also exposes them to risks regarding the quality and authenticity of the goods because the other trader may lack the skills to accurately judge an item's quality or confirm its validity.

'Matempi mentioned that she tried to work with other traders to buy stock on her behalf but realised that she was spending more than when she does it herself. Her experience was that the other traders took advantage of her and used most of her leftover money for their own goods. When a trader asks another trader to buy them stock, the arrangement is normally that they the other trader money for food and share transport costs. There is also a customs duty contribution of M100 or M150 per trader, depending on how much they are charged on a particular trip. The customs duty is mandatory when asking another trader to buy on one's behalf. However, sharing the transport costs depends on the travelling trader, and some are understanding and do not share travel costs.

'Matempi also found that when she relied on others to get stock, it affected the choice of goods when they were asked to bring specific items. The travelling traders would often buy lower quality products to what they would get for themselves. For example, she would ask that they bring her tracksuits for men, and they would bring pink or white ladies' tracksuits and claim there was no stock. Then she would have to sell these tracksuits at a lower price to women because they were not ordered and she had to clear the stock fast. This also affected her

relationship with her customers as they had pre-ordered the items only to be disappointed. She felt that sometimes the travelling traders sabotaged those left behind by their choice of goods.

Mma Peete also attested to the challenge of using other traders. She claimed that both the choice of goods and the price was a challenge, which affected the number of goods she could order. She explained that when you ask others to buy for you, they put a markup on the prices. For example, if a jacket is P70 (Botswana currency), they would say it was P90, and they used the difference to buy more goods for themselves. Mma Peete would always find out because although there is no price tag, she saw the stock other traders bought or on social media groups where other traders post their items and prices. The travelling traders would reassure Mma Peete about the price and she could not ask for proof because the receipts were left at the border at customs. She continued explaining that she once asked for a specific fleece blanket but got the wrong size. The sad part is that it was for a pre-order, and she had written down the sizes and colours she needed and gave them the necessary money.

6.2.3 *Institutional challenges*

Chikanda, and Raimundo, (2017) acknowledged that informal cross-border trade is a real aspect of life in Africa and helps generate revenue, sustain lives, and create employment. The Simplified Trade Regime, which incorporates measures to help informal cross-border businesses comply with customs processes and requirements, has been independently implemented by the two Regional Economic Communities. Therefore, the Regional Economic Communities help using informal cross-border trade and the potential already there in the informal sector to enhance human welfare and provide favourable macroeconomic and social results (International Organization for Migration, 2015).

6.2.3.1 *Basotho women traders' perceptions of the Lesotho Revenue Authority taxation*

Basotho women traders perceive tax as customs duty as another significant challenge at the Lesotho border. They claimed that the tax is high and affects their profit margins. The high taxes are often imposed arbitrarily, and I understood that traders do not know how charges are calculated at customs. Yet, they think they are paying a lot of money. Because of the traders' beliefs, they engage in informal or illegal trade, concealing some receipts for declaring goods.

It is risky and can lead to further challenges, such as confiscation of goods or fines. They mainly conceal receipts because they witness inconsistencies with how much money they pay at customs during their trips. The lack of transparency and consistency in tax regulations discourage the women traders from providing all information (receipts) for capturing. In the words of Ponto'o:

There are also border issues as we feel we are paying a lot of money. Our main issue is at the border regarding clearing stock at customs (Ponto'o, int.).

Ponto'o is not the only trader who complained about high border charges. However, none of the women explained how the charges are high and compared to what. I understood that this is because the women do not know how much they are supposed to pay for the goods they buy because they cannot access this information. Other regional studies documented similar experiences, and Nelson and Francis (2019) noted that in Malawi, one of the significant challenges women face in their trading activities is high taxes due to corrupt practices by customs and tax officials.

A report by Akakpo (2022) revealed that due to the excessive tax on uncustomed goods at borders, in most cases, women traders have no choice but to resort to bribing customs officials. Akakpo (2022) also identified that some of the challenges women face in informal cross-border trade are cumbersome border processes, bribery, and corruption at the border posts. These findings are consistent with the narrative shared by participants interviewed for this study. The following is one of many similar stories I was told by the woman:

When it comes to customs duty in Maseru, it's unclear how things work because the way we get charged is not standard. *Basotho ke Basotho*, today you find this one customs official who charges differently, the next time is another one, and so on. Sometimes, things go smoothly; for example, they can say everyone must pay M150. The amount of tax is not dependent on the total cost of goods but rather on the person who assists us. On our side, as traders, it is impossible to cross the border without paying. In a way, we honour and respect laws and customs. The driver collects M150 from each trader together with our transport fee to avoid stories when coming back, and he is the one who goes to the window to pay. If we get charged less [than what they contributed] on some days, he brings back the change because he will even show us the receipt showing how much he paid. ('Matempi, int.)

These experiences confirm participants believe that customs officials often take advantage of the fact that many informal cross-border traders do not have the necessary information or knowledge of tax regulations to challenge the rates they are given. This creates a situation where officials have considerable discretion in setting rates and can use this discretion to engage in extortion or other corrupt practices. Furthermore, the lack of transparency and consistency in tax regulations and rates affect their business plans and budgets, leading to unexpected expenses.

Basotho women's arrangement to put their receipts together and give them to the driver with money to pay for customs may be another challenge, though they view it as timesaving. At the border, the driver pays on their behalf on the Lesotho side, and they contribute M100 each for clearance. Unfortunately, whether their stock is M10 000 or M1 000, they contribute the same amount. One of the participants emphasised this point as follows:

Another issue is at the border, and we share the customs money equally whether my stock is very little or not. Often, we pay between R100 and R200 for each woman. We sometimes come across customs officers who want to charge us for looking at the luggage, and they come and uncover the trailer and assess the load. Sometimes, the representative will come back and say the money is not enough, so we have to contribute equally to top up. The amount of contribution brings disputes among us as traders; for example, one would refuse to pay M150, claiming their luggage is not worth that much, but eventually, they will contribute. (Mma Mochesane, int.)

Mma Reitu added the following:

Sometimes, I wonder who is behind the charges because I was pained by the charges this time. This time, I was left with M100 and did not know what to use for a special taxi to get to my house. When we got to the border, the first policeman demanded M1 100. After passing, the second one demanded M800, and the last asked for M300. This was during COVID-19 when movement was still restricted. Each demanded whatever amount they wanted, yet they are at the same workstation, just a little from each other. For the last one, I honestly did not have any money left; even the lady going to Thaba-Tseka said she was left with M200 for transport. Unfortunately, we do not have a voice to complain about these charges. I am fed up and irritated, even by the drivers, because they treat us like children. The driver would get out and meet the policeman and come back to say the policeman

wants M10 000, for example, but he said we could go down to M8 000, but we would not know the truth. Unfortunately, you cannot ask the police officer because we found corruption already existed; not even one of us would dare ask the driver to go with one lady. You cannot just come out alone and suggest that because you would be creating problems. (mma Reitu, int.)

The above experience for mma Reitu was particularly during COVID-19 pandemic and travelling was only done by a few women. However, these quotes are the views of the women traders, but my conversation with some customs officials revealed different information, and that is the women traders are not necessarily charged as much money as they should. Yet, the concerns expressed by the informal cross-border traders about being overcharged and tricked by the LRA are overwhelming. A study reported that corrupt customs officials may use the lack of knowledge about customs policies and procedures to harass traders to extort money (Tax Justice Network Africa, 2011).

The revenue lost in the form of customs taxes and tax evasion is one of the contentious challenges surrounding informal cross-border trade. Some traders try to avoid and evade duties by making false declarations and hiding goods. High duty rates imposed by governments to generate revenue or prevent importing certain items that would ordinarily compete with local production may have influenced traders' behaviour. However, although most informal trade is illegal in the narrow sense that it is unreported and fails to comply with statutory tax rates and other regulations, the products involved are generally not illegal to trade or use (Golub, 2015).

Furthermore, all the economic transactions at the borders are not systematically documented in data and statistics, making it difficult to capture and understand the different dynamics that could inform the development and implementation of gender-sensitive trade policies and processes (Afrika & Ajumbo, 2012). This is evidenced by the comments of one immigration official at the Maseru border who said that there are no records of Basotho women informal cross-border traders in their database because their office only captures valid passport information and no other information about the people who cross the border that is, whether they are from shopping or not. Women informal cross-border traders are often at the mercy of customs and border officials who implement diverse tariffs and regulations while importing goods.

6.2.3.2 Seizure of goods at the border

Seizure of goods at the border is another challenge informal cross-border traders face. In some cases, customs officials seize goods they believe are being imported illegally or without the necessary documentation or permits. This results in significant financial losses for traders who had invested time and money in sourcing and transporting the goods. In addition, the seizure of goods creates uncertainty and discourages traders from pursuing new opportunities or expanding their businesses. The lack of transparency and consistency in seizure procedures also create opportunities for corruption and abuse of power by customs officials. This becomes a significant financial burden for informal traders. Furthermore, the seizure of goods affects the relationship between traders and customs officials, eroding trust and further undermining the legitimacy of the customs and tax system.

The Basotho women traders indicated that there are times when they are forced to leave some of their items at the border because customs officials had declared it prohibited goods. This situation is compounded by the lack of clarity and knowledge about permissible goods to trade. In my research, it was evident that as much as the women try to familiarise themselves with permitted goods, they sometimes find themselves in conflict situations with customs officials who declare their goods prohibited products because of the inconsistencies at the borders regarding what goods are permissible. During the field trips with women traders on their journey, I observed some of these irregularities. The lack of access to the specific regulations and the low sensitisation by LRA about these regulations further worsen these situations.

6.2.3.3 Lack of representation

There is no representation in terms of formal registered associations for Basotho women informal cross-border traders. The only way that the women are able to connect is through their social networks. This is different from other countries where women in informal cross-border trade have an association where they get to collectively share their needs and grievances. Basotho women have been operating as individuals despite networks that sometimes bring them together for a common purpose. It was not until the COVID-19 pandemic that they realised the importance of having a representative body. During this time, other women informal cross-

border traders came together to try and mobilise others to form a representative body to present their grievances to the Ministry of Trade and Small Business in Lesotho.

Their first concern was that while other informal businesses, like street vendors, received COVID-19 relief funds, they were not considered. Secondly, when COVID-19 restrictions, especially travelling restrictions, were put in place, they were still not considered for travel permits because they were not classified as essential service providers. Despite their grievances, informal cross-border trade is their source of income, and therefore, they had to return to work to feed their families. There was a way made for them to travel by providing them with temporary travel permits. However, these women stated that they would be harassed by government officials and had to pay bribes because they were told they were not essential service providers as the government only allowed essential service providers with relevant permits and other relevant documents about COVID-19 protocols to cross the border.

They wanted to form an association to present a unified voice to the relevant authorities about their importance as informal cross-border trade entrepreneurs in order for them to be issued with permits so they could resume their jobs. At the time of the interviews, the association had not yet been formed. The women know they do not have proper representation; however, a group of women informal cross-border trade had delivered a letter of their grievances concerning resuming their businesses to the Ministry. The interviewed women mentioned they had heard about an association being formed, but they did not have any information beyond that. One participant indicated that she found out about the possibility of an association because she had seen one of the women who was said to be leading the drive to form the association being interviewed on Lesotho Television after submitting the grievance letter. I also saw the interview on the news, but the rest of the women were unaware of any existing informal cross-border trade association.

6.3 Basotho Women's Agency to Overcome the Challenges They Face

Basotho women engaging in informal cross-border trade exhibit remarkable resilience and resourcefulness as they navigate a myriad challenge in pursuit of economic opportunities. With an indomitable spirit, they transcend societal norms and geographical boundaries to carve a path in the complex world of cross-border commerce. In the face of gender biases, limited access to

prime selling locations, and the hazards of travel and trade, these women demonstrate their ability to adapt, strategize, and innovate. This sheds light on the inspiring journey of Basotho women as informal cross-border traders, highlighting their determination to overcome obstacles and create sustainable livelihoods against all odds. Given the economic situation of Lesotho, the country's state does not deter the women cross-border traders from pursuing livelihood salvation and accumulation, and they often find ways to navigate these challenges.

Therefore, the sector has grown and is increasingly becoming an occupation and pathway for navigating economic hardship in Lesotho and other low-income countries. Just as Muzvidziwa (2001) showed how women in Zimbabwe use cross-border trading to climb out of poverty. All 15 women who were interviewed indicated that they would press on and achieve their goals and those of their households through informal cross-border trade. The following subsections discuss the strategies these women use to overcome the challenges they face.

6.3.1 *Strategies employed by women traders to meet their challenges*

The strategies collectively employed by Basotho women informal cross-border traders demonstrate their agency and determination. By leveraging their strengths, networks, and resourcefulness, these women forge paths to economic empowerment while inspiring positive change within their households and communities. One noticeable skill these women possess is negotiation, which enables them to secure favourable terms for trading spaces, transportation, and other services. This skill helps them overcome gender-based discrimination and establish themselves as respected participants in trade. As stated in section 6.2, paragraph one, it is crucial to clarify that *bo 'mathoto's* income-generating activities have nothing to do with crime, corruption, or illegality. The Basotho women traders use legal ways to make a living and care for themselves and their families. Like any economic activity, they encounter challenges and obstacles, occasionally involving unethical behaviour. Informality is frequently linked to underdeveloped and highly impoverished emerging civilisations in the Global South; therefore, it is becoming increasingly evident with the rise of outsourcing, casualisation, and industrial outworking worldwide (Chen, 2005a).

Embracing technology, such as mobile phones and social media is another strategy that helps women traders connect with customers, stay updated on market trends, and access valuable

information even when they are not physically present. Embracing technology empowers them to adapt to changing market dynamics, and building robust social and family support systems allows the women traders to manage and pursue their trading activities more effectively.

The women are expected to pay customs duty at the border post because they are bringing in foreign products. However, paying customs duty represents a leak in their finances and eats into potential profits, and the women often avoid these financial leakages. Under ordinary circumstances, they would prefer to smuggle their goods into the country and avoid paying but this is often impossible because of the bulk purchases transported in an open trailer. However, the women have avoided substantial financial leakages and often collude with their drivers and customs officials. Some women have been in the business long enough to develop relationships with their transporters and the officials at the border post (Baudron et al., 2022). There is a similar situation at a Zimbabwe border post where goods and people pass through clandestinely because of the social nature of the process. Thebe (2011) described how *omalayisha* (informal cross-border transporters servicing the South African and Zimbabwe routes) could move anything at a price.

The women indicated that they neither handle the processing of goods themselves nor pay the total value. The process is handled by the transporter, who engages with the officials at the border post. One of the women explained the process as follows:

We all contribute M100 or M150 and give it to our transporter when we arrive at the border. The transporter takes the money and gives it to the officer, who clears us and issues a receipt. The challenge was that some women would have used all their money to stock goods in Botswana and would therefore have nothing to contribute. Sometimes, this generates conflict because some women feel used to that. One would have bought stock for M20 000, for example, the other for M5 000, yet the contributed amount for customs duty is equal. In some cases, some women were taking advantage and making it a habit. We then decided that when any of us have used all their money, they should inform us in advance so that one of us will pay for them, and they will pay them back their money when we arrive in Lesotho. This was fair to everyone and eliminated conflicts among the women. ('m'e Khalalelo, int.)

The transporters have also devised a strategy where the women pay customs clearance and transport fees before they leave Lesotho. This ensures no one overspends, fails to contribute, and leaves the customs clearance process entirely to the transporter. Sometimes, the transporters pay in advance or their people in Maseru pay, allowing the women to proceed without delays at the border.

However, this is not the only source of conflict. The system used at the border post to circumvent official processes also means that the women pay the same amount of money regardless of the goods they bring into the country. The women complained that it is unfair because some buys stock worth M5 000 and pays the same amount as another who buys stock worth over M15 000. One woman explained it as follows:

This is where the driver would intervene and ask women with more stock to pay more (M200), not the standard contribution. This limits conflicts, which often threaten the relationships among the women. It is also very fair because no one rides on another person. (Mma Thembi, int.)

Sometimes, the large load of goods alerts other officials, leading to the women being asked to make official declarations. This ultimately disadvantages other women. This is explained here:

If the amount given to the officials is large enough, they will always look the other way. Paying a large amount also means that the official can give a receipt with a large amount, which will cover the fact that no official declaration was made. ('m'e Mampho, int.)

It is essential to note that these traders spend a lot of money on their stock, and that the bribes they pay are less than the amounts they should pay. One Lesotho customs officer indicated that they are quite considerate when it comes to the charges paid by the traders. For example, they do not convert the receipts from Pula to Rand before charging, which is the proper procedure. For instance, a few women mentioned that they do not travel with less than M15 000 each, which is

equivalent to approximately P11 334.42 (currency converted was at M1-P0.76)⁶, meaning they could be paying more.

The women also indicated that they realised that the customs officers do not necessarily charge according to the book, thus confirming what the official said. Sometimes, the amount charged cannot not be determined by the amount on the receipts and the officers use their eyes to judge what should be in the trailer. Thus, if they believe there is more, they charge more, and if they believe the amount of stock is not large, they charge less, thus ignoring the submitted receipts. The women admitted that sometimes they get away without paying customs for a lot of their stock by partially paying or concealing stock.

In addition, the women mentioned that the amount they paid at Maseru customs is unpredictable and depends on the customs officials on duty. One participant explained it as follows:

Sometimes we pay M1 000, sometimes M1 500, or M2 000. Sometimes, we can get change from the amount of money we have contributed. When we get some change, we can share it equally among ourselves or give it to our transporter, who is often the contact person. Sometimes, the officer can charge M2 000 but give the driver a receipt for M1 000; if the charge is M1 000, they may write M800 receipt. (Mampoi, int.)

This shows that the women often negotiate, and Thebe and Maombera (2019) termed it ‘negotiating the border’. According to Baudron et al (2022), the process involves social networking and is a very social process. As alluded to earlier, beneficiary relationships are developed between the parties involved. The officials at the border can sometimes ask the women to buy them goods in Botswana, which the women do without adding markup and charging transport fees.

Regarding the issue of selling spaces, the women fell into different categories, and 5 of the 15 women mentioned they sell house to house and at stalls. Four women have stalls and do not sell anywhere else. The rest sell between various post offices where they display goods. Those who

⁶ (March 2021)

sell house to house believe those who have designated selling spaces are better off as they can sell using the deposit payment method.

6.3.2 *Negotiating borders*

At the Botswana immigration desk/window, the women traders fill in immigration (visitor's) forms that require the address of the place they will be visiting. The women usually fill in Oriental Plaza, the popular marketplace where they find most of their stock, though there are other established places like Mataweng, Gaborone West, and the Station. On these forms, they must also indicate the number of days they intend to spend in Botswana, and they usually write two days, which is sufficient for their purpose unless they encounter unforeseen delays. One of the participants shared her experience travelling with a different group of traders. They warned her that if she overstays the time she stated on the form in Botswana, she would have to pay a fine. Overstaying in Botswana is considered unlawful, irrespective of the challenges one might have, and if one does not contact the responsible office immediately to request an extension, one has to pay a fine. Since they discovered this information, the women now request a maximum of three days in Botswana in case of delays. They are not allowed to stay more than five days given their purpose of entry.

6.4 Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women and Their Economic Situation

The women cross-border traders have encountered and navigated numerous economic and institutional challenges, but in 2020, they encountered a novel challenge to themselves and the world. The new challenge did not only threaten their primary source of livelihood and survival but also their social lives and health. It also threatened the support systems central to their business, such as customers who lost their lives. The women talked about the COVID-19 pandemic with much sadness, fear, and disbelief. Some had lost close relatives, associates, and even colleagues with whom they used to conduct cross-border trade.

COVID-19 is a virus that caused a global pandemic, which started around December 2019 in China, that affected every country in the world. The rate at which the virus spread prompted governments to adopt preventive measures and pass regulations to contain and help combat it. Countries worldwide implemented measures like lockdowns, restrictions on the movement of

people, social distancing, shelter-in-place orders, quarantines, cancellation and suspension of international flights, and closure of borders. Global organisations saw this pandemic as a threat to humanity. While the effective implementation of these measures yielded positive outcomes in the context of health, it negatively impacted economies, leading to retrenchments, closures of companies, and a decline in disposable income. Therefore, entrepreneurial resilience played a crucial role in the economic crisis (Bullough & Renko, 2013; Liguori & Winkler, 2020).

Thus, it was feared that the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns reversed years of gains in alleviating and reducing poverty, undermining pre-existing global efforts to eradicate poverty by achieving specific Sustainable Development Goals by 2020. UNICEF and Save the Children warned that the pandemic could push 86 million children into poverty, an increase of 15% relative to the baseline. The fear was that as the pandemic spread across developing countries, eradicating extreme poverty, affecting around 680 million people, became almost unattainable (ILO, 2020; Kanu, 2020).

The pandemic has caused a significant economic crisis around the world, and has had a catastrophic effect on both large and small businesses (Maritz et al., 2020), and informal cross-border women entrepreneurs were not an exception. The pandemic has seriously threatened the sustainability of small businesses across Africa, Asia, and Latin America since most entrepreneurs in these areas are necessity-driven entrepreneurs. It is worth mentioning that there has always been informal cross-border trade all over the world. For instance, informal cross-border trade exists in countries like the US, China, India, North Korea, Pakistan, Thailand, Myanmar, and other countries in Eastern Europe (Aung, 2009; Hastings & Wang, 2018; Richardson & Pisani, 2012; Sword, 1999; Taneja & Bimal, 2017; Xheneti et al., 2013). Although informal cross-border trade happens all over the world, it appears to be more prevalent in Africa due to various socio-economic and political problems. African economies are dominated by informal cross-border trade activities in the face of fragile economies associated with extreme levels of poverty, youth unemployment, prominent levels of import and export duty levies, and complex tax frameworks. Informal cross-border trade contributes 30–40% of the intra-SADC trade, and women contribute significantly to informal cross-border trade (Ama et al., 2014; Makombe, 2011; Peberdy et al., 2015).

6.4.1 Overview of the COVID-19 pandemic in Lesotho

While COVID-19 cases rapidly increased in other sub-Saharan African countries, the government of Lesotho swiftly declared a state of emergency in March 2020 before a single case was confirmed. The COVID-19 virus was confirmed to have reached Lesotho on 13 May 2020, and by that time, Lesotho was one of the last two countries in the world to confirm cases of the virus within their borders. The other country was Comoros. Like many countries, Lesotho had to implement measures like lockdowns, restrictions on the movement of people, cancellation and suspension of international flights, and closure of borders. Lesotho closed its borders from 7 April 2020 until at least 21 April 2020 and suspended international traffic. Unnecessary movements within the country were also prohibited (Shale, 2020).

Like other countries, Matamanda et al (2022), Lesotho had to develop a COVID-19 Risk Assessment and Mitigation Framework with colour-coded stages of the COVID-19 pandemic through the National COVID-19 Secretariat. Representatives from different stakeholders were engaged across sectors within the country, including a World Health Organization representative. The government of Lesotho approved the framework as a guide for decision-making to manage and control the spread of COVID-19 to protect all citizens and residents from needless deaths. The World Health Organization labelled the four stages of the pandemic outbreak as follows: no cases (countries/territories/areas with no confirmed cases), sporadic (countries/territories/areas with one or more cases, imported or locally detected), clusters (countries/territories/areas experiencing cases, clustered in time, geographic location and by common exposures), and community transmission cases that is countries/area/territories experiencing more significant outbreaks of local transmission defined through an assessment of factors, (Akrofi, and Antwi (2020; Mashinini, 2020).

Lesotho adopted a suitable model to manage the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The risk levels were based on transmission classified as per World Health Organization guidelines. In response to increased COVID-19 cases by 1 January 2021, the government imposed a two-week 'red-level' on 12 January 2021, including a 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew and restrictions on inter-district travel. Lesotho used colour coding to help manage the spread of the virus. To maximise the leverage of the interventions, specific social and economic super-spread activities were identified, assigned an intrinsic risk colour, and included at the appropriate risk colours for

incremental mitigation. Only essential services such as supermarkets and pharmacies could comply with safety protocols (Sanders et al, 2021).

6.4.2 *Effects of lockdown on Basotho women traders' business*

Sectors that mainly contribute to the country's GDP suffered because of the national lockdown. Among the sectors that face economic challenges was small and medium enterprises, which include informal traders. Small and medium enterprises and informal traders comprise 80% of the domestic private sector and contribute 9.1% to GDP in Lesotho (Dzawanda, et al, 2021). Like other businesses, informal traders could not operate during the national lockdown. This affected them negatively as most of them survived and fed their households through the income generated from day-to-day selling on the streets of Lesotho.

Due to the lockdown, Basotho women informal cross-border traders were not spared as part of the informal sector. The closure of borders was another challenge because it meant they could not replenish their stock even from South Africa, let alone from Botswana. Lesotho depends on South Africa for its basic supplies and essential goods. For Basotho women traders, restricted movement was a massive blow to their businesses and households as they frequently travel to Botswana to buy their stock for resale back home. These women indicated that it was difficult to know how to access stock from Botswana for the whole of 2020 until February 2021. Some had to completely place their business on hold. One trader narrated her experience as follows:

I have never experienced so much stress in my life like that of COVID-19 before. The lockdown made matters worse. I thought I was going to die due to stress. Firstly, there was no clear information from the authorities about what to expect. That lack of information from the government made me feel unprepared and fearful for tomorrow. I did not know what to expect the next day. The lack of face-to-face interaction with other family members made me feel isolated and lost. Seeing my 2020-year plan go down the drain hurt so much. I had big plans for 2020 and wanted to extend my three-roomed house and connect electricity. I ended up using most of the money that was saved for restocking to make ends meet. I was part of the stokvel comprising of upcoming traders. However, in my case, I have not been doing it since COVID-19 started. Because we could not travel across borders, I failed to keep up with the monthly contributions. Part of the money for

restocking ended up being used for other family needs during and throughout the 2020 year. (Mma Khotso, int.)

The lockdown was not the only challenge the informal cross-border traders had to face, and the post-lockdown situation also posed a threat. As restrictions were eased with the opening of borders, health protocols were put in place as COVID-19 infections slowed. The primary threat to these women was increased prices due to global inflation. Even though this was a threat to them resuscitating their business, it is crucial to note that well-established (veterans) informal cross-border traders acknowledged that they did not feel the pinch of the pandemic as much as their counterparts who were new in the business because they had a lot of pre-ordered goods and had operational stock. They admitted to losing daily income, but this did not knock them down.

The easing of travel restrictions still left them in an uncertain place because other measures, like COVID-19 screenings, were introduced. This meant that people who wanted to travel across borders had to take a COVID-19 test, which added cost (R850 per test) to the already increased cost of travelling. Even though people were allowed to test and travel, those who were asymptomatic but tested positively were not allowed to travel and had to quarantine, which they viewed as wasted money. One trader explained how she had to pay “unrealistic” amounts of money after the travel restrictions were lifted. She told the following story:

I was confident that I would not be going to Botswana ever again. Only four women had travelled on one of the trips and were stocking on behalf of some who were left behind to cut costs. On our way back, we arrived at the Maseru border at 9 p.m. and left at 3 a.m. the next day because the combi had only four women traders, but the trailer was packed to the brim, and some empty seats were packed with luggage. The officers demanded M11 000 for tax for the kind of stock we had. One would find that M11 000 was capital for a trader's stock. It was challenging to generate such tax money as we were only four. I noticed that they were taking advantage because of COVID-19. Eventually, we paid M2 300 in the wee hours of the morning after searching every pocket we had and pleading. I do not go to the office for tax clearance as I have never gone to pay, but our driver often pays on our behalf the amount that we would have contributed as women traders. I know that before COVID-19, what we were paying was not much, *e ne se chelete e ka llisang* [it was not the amount of money that would make one cry]. (Mma Thembi, int.)

Therefore, the cost of travelling to Botswana became another obstacle for newcomers to informal cross-border trade. The transport fare had increased from R600 per return trip to R1 000. The reason the drivers gave for the increased fares was that very few traders were operating at the time, which meant they had to ask more to cover their costs.

Another woman described her situation after the pandemic as follows:

COVID-19 has hit me hard. We planned to furnish our house, which we had just finished extending. As you can see, the ceiling is not yet complete, and the kitchen floor tiles are. In my plans, my target was to have accomplished all these by June 2020. It is now February 2021, and still, there is nothing to show. During this lockdown, I had to wait for the month's end for my husband's salary, which was already insufficient given our commitments. Informal cross-border trade had become the backbone of my family. But I hope to bounce back and start travelling to stock (Ponts'o, int.).

The high prices resulted in the traders making other plans to make ends meet. They were introduced to runners through their informal cross-border trade networks. A runner does small tasks for particular people or a company. Runners already existed in South Africa, and the Basotho women traders learned about the possibility of using a runner in South Africa to buy them stock. They would group together to pay transport money and customs duty fees. At other times, drivers would travel with two or three women, but the women who travelled were not very helpful because put their own interests first. Even though runners were very useful, it was a risk using them because some of them were unreliable and would disappear with the money. Reputable ones were fully booked and had a limit on the money they could receive to avoid temptation. The Basotho women traders feared losing their money, so they would group and let two or three women go shopping. These were helpful to those with a strong network among the traders.

Collaborating with runners also had its downside because they would buy the wrong sizes or colours and mix orders up. Using runners also came with its own cost and was not accessible to everyone. They charged 10% of the total amount to buy the stock above R3 000; if it was less than R3000 the charge was a standard fee of R200; for example, if the total amount for buying stock is R10 000, they get R1 000. The traders would deposit the money into the provided account and share their order list over WhatsApp. The runners created WhatsApp groups on

which they shared what was available at the shops. Some runners would call the traders during shopping to confirm certain things. If items on the list were unavailable in a requested size, they would buy any size they could get.

Those who did not phone the traders while shopping said that it took too much time and that it was not safe for them to be on the phone in the streets of Johannesburg. Unfortunately, there were no runners to Botswana, although some started when they found out about the demand on social media post-lockdown. However, Basotho women traders prefer to do their own shopping. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the way they do business, and those who had the means to travel feared contracting the virus and putting their families in danger. One participant explained, “Even now that we have found a way of travelling [screening], we do it fearfully, thinking we have come to get corona. Everyone keeps their hands to themselves”.

6.4.3 *Lost incomes and projects on hold*

When the lockdown began in February 2021, informal cross-border traders could not operate since law enforcement officials were deployed everywhere to ensure adherence to the lockdown regulations (Khambule, 2022). Even when travel restrictions were eased, most traders could not travel yet because they did not know the requirements, especially in Botswana. The women mentioned that they feared travelling all the way only to be denied entry into Botswana. However, a few women mentioned that before they could get permits that allowed them to cross borders, they were doing it illegally without permits because it was necessary for their families’ survival. This was risky as they were not following COVID-19 protocols, such as testing, which put their family and customers at risk of contracting COVID-19 and because they could be caught by the police for violating the laws and regulations that were in place at the time. For example, there were often roadblocks in South Africa to check whether people had the proper papers and COVID-19 test certificates. These certificates (negative) were crucial to avoid carriers travelling from one location to another. These women’s actions show their agency for the survival of their households. Ponts’o narrated her experience during one ‘illegal’ travel during COVID-19 restrictions as follows:

I have been to Gauteng several times but have never tested for COVID-19. I do not know how they do it. All I have had is that it is painful. Some bravery comes with informal

cross-border trading, maybe because of travelling at night, being in other countries, and being responsible for their safety. During these travels, I usually keep R500 aside just in case we wash the hands of law enforcement officials along the way. We were not using the combis during this time, but a private of any of us, the traders, or have a driver assist us. I would disguise when I get to the immigration vicinity by observing how busy it is at the window where people stamp their passports. I would then go to the bathroom, walk confidently a distance from the immigration window, and pass through to the other side. However, as I do this, I am always alert for anything like being called by the patrolling officers. (Pont'so, int.)

She further told of how they were four in the car returning from Gauteng and had to drive past the Maseru turn from Ladybrand because there was a police car that had stopped them, and to avoid showing the police officers their “Lesotho passports” and reveal that they did not have COVID-19 certificates, they told them that they were on their way to Bloemfontein. As a result, the police officers drove behind them for some time and eventually passed when they believed they were going to Bloemfontein. Once they did that, Ponts'o and her crew turned around to Maseru. They had wasted time and fuel but at least they were safe from dire consequences. However, they enjoyed their trips dodging the police officers, and some of them are now friends.

Some women had to make risky decisions to return to their business. The new way of doing things, ‘the new normal’ as it became known, came with stringent measures requiring a lot of money that some women informal traders did not have. The pandemic exacerbated the loss of income for some Basotho women informal cross-border traders and affected them directly and indirectly. Not only were the traders affected, but their families and their customers were also affected. The inability to travel was a huge setback, and the beginning of them losing income for their households. Furthermore, global trade fell sharply, investments were postponed, industries closed, and domestic demand decreased, and in the process, innumerable jobs were jeopardised (UN-Habitat, 2020). Since some of their clients were cut off from their jobs or breadwinners, there was a decline in demand, making them vulnerable to poverty. The ILO estimated that relative poverty among informal workers increased in the first month of the crisis (ILO Monitor, 2020). Some clients were also reluctant to take goods because the future felt so uncertain.

Due to the decline in demand, income was reduced, and some women struggled to restock for resale. That was why they started using runners, as explained in section 6.4.2. However, although the runners helped them get stock, they often bought incorrect stock, and therefore, the women had to sell at a lower price. Furthermore, some of their customers disappeared or died still owing them money, especially the old ones (*maqheku*). Some older people were tricky and would send their relatives who would deny that their grandparents or parents sent them. One of the women mentioned that it affects her business because 10% of her clients fail to make payments. Some customers also took advantage of the masks everyone had to wear as protection against the COVID-19 virus to hide from the traders.

Apart from the loss of income, some women had to put projects on hold. They mentioned during the interviews that they had to strategize and make new plans to pick up the pieces and rebuild. Some of the women pointed out how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected them. One indicated that she could not use runners as she found them not beneficial. She also mentioned how her business had gone down as some of her customers had lost their sources of income. Another trader could not imagine how much she could have made in 2020. Despite the loss, she did not intend to give up because of the potential she had seen in informal cross-border trade to transform her life and that of her household. The pandemic had affected all the women in one way or another; for example, one woman stated that her customers refused to take stock because they feared they might die of COVID-19 at any time or because they lost their jobs. The well-established traders were also impacted, but it was less severe; for example, one trader stated that her stall had been fully stocked since December 2019 as her clientele is extensive and she usually stocks six months ahead.

6.5 Chapter Summary

Women who engage in informal cross-border trade usually experience difficulties. In various countries, strong informal cross-border trade has been promoted because of the pervasive unemployment and escalating shortage of necessities. Informal cross-border trade has many challenges that affect the quality of life, efficiency, and organisation of Basotho women, which I witnessed during their journeys as they source goods to sell back home. I also investigated the strategies they use to overcome these difficulties. The challenges they face can be divided into economic, social, and political challenges.

In Lesotho, informal cross-border trade is becoming an essential safety net against unemployment. Therefore, several traders face challenges trying to source capital, and this is a persistent concern. Family and friends are a significant source of funding because *bo 'mathoto* do not have access to bank loans because they cannot meet the requirements. The challenges are not only at the start of the business but also along the journey as these women meet a lot of challenges to and from their destination, such as car accidents. The COVID-19 pandemic was another challenge that hit women traders in many ways because they could not travel due to travel restrictions. However, once travel restrictions were lifted, the COVID-19 protocols meant that travelling involved a lot of administration, such as COVID-19 screening, which also meant they had to spend more money to travel. Job losses due to closed workplaces meant many traders lost clients who were employed in the formal sector. However, despite all the challenges the Basotho women informal cross-border traders encounter, they often find ways to navigate them.

CHAPTER 7

THE ROLE AND RESPONSE OF THE LESOTHO GOVERNMENT AND NON-STATE ACTORS TO INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER TRADE

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed how Basotho women informal cross-border traders overcome the constraints in their everyday lives and business operations, and some of these challenges require intervention by the government of Lesotho. Therefore, this chapter explores whether there are any responses by the Lesotho government and non-state institutions to informal cross-border traders along the Maseru-Gaborone trade corridor. The aim is to understand how these responses contribute to betterment and running these women's businesses. During my fieldwork, the participants gave their views concerning government assistance. Though this chapter is about state and non-state institutions, it is important to note that most of the operational data about this institutions was sourced as secondary data therefore the voices of participants are not coming out as would have been expected, mainly because some were not even aware of their existence or how they operated. Yet the study had to find out if there is a role being played by the government of Lesotho.

The following sections discuss the role of the Lesotho government in response to informal cross-border trade by presenting what it has done and not done concerning Basotho women informal cross-border traders. I also discuss non-state organisations' role in the informal sector and cross-border trade. Their roles are identified to examine what they have done and whether their interventions extend to cross-border trading. Lastly, the expectations of Basotho women traders are discussed.

The concept of the informal sector has been recognised in many African cities since the 1960s. However, the term itself was not coined until Hart (1973) used it to describe the situation in towns in Ghana. Working in the informal section is not new and has been a part of pre-capitalist cities across the world (O'Connor, 1983). However, the significance and scale of this type of employment have increased due to the large numbers of people who rely on it for their livelihood (Potts, 2008). Before the 1970s, the informal sector was labelled as old-fashioned, conventional, and inefficient as it involved many people producing goods and services that could be

accomplished by a single individual in the formal sector. It was characterised by low technology, productivity, capital use, and income. However, during the 1970s, these attitudes began to shift. The informal sector had rapidly contributed to growth, and concerns about urban poverty and unemployment were becoming increasingly prevalent in development. Alternative viewpoints, often described as neo-populist, were gaining prominence and were exemplified by a sequence of reports from ILO (1972) about countries such as Kenya. The sector was now regarded as a means to tackle poverty and unemployment. Many of the qualities that were previously deemed unfavourable were now being reconsidered as beneficial. As a result, the new approach was to promote the sector. There is a dual economy in developing nations, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, with formal and informal sectors. Women in sub-Saharan Africa frequently find jobs in the informal economy.

7.2 Non-state Organisations and Their Role

This section examines non-state organisations in Lesotho and their role in informal cross-border trade. In some countries, governmental and non-governmental bodies support women's empowerment, although they generally do not specifically support informal cross-border trade. For example, Muzvidziwa (2005) mentioned the Zimbabwe Women's Finance Trust, which to some extent has managed to source funds for some entrepreneurial women. There is also an Indigenous Businesswomen's Organization, which does not specifically focus on informal cross-border trade. At the time of the study, there was no organisation known by the women traders that provided any assistance to women informal cross-border traders. The lack of formal support for women in informal cross-border trade has not caused these women to lose focus.

Given the remoteness of many rural communities in Lesotho, accessing formal financial services has always been difficult and expensive, increasing the importance of informal providers to supply credit (Chingono, 2016; Mabote, 2017). According to Mabote, (2017, p 12), 62.4% of Basotho adults access financial services from informal providers. Despite the difficulties accessing financial services, there are measures in place to assist in this category through programmes and some financial institutions, as detailed in the following sections. In light of these findings on microcredit outcomes, the 2012 report on the *State of the Micro-credit Summit Campaign* noted that a different approach to microfinance was necessary (Maes & Reed, 2012). Therefore, NGOs started promoting a decentralised savings-led approach to microfinance that

emulates and improves on the model of indigenous rotating savings and credit associations. CARE International, Save the Children International, PLAN International, and Catholic Relief Services have big programmes that promote similar savings groups.

Nevertheless, women still have inadequate access to finance, and more specifically, to working capital for their businesses. Limited access to financial resources for businesses is a chronic problem for women in informal cross-border trades (Chikanda, 2017). It was found that nearly 80% of informal cross-border traders obtain their capital from informal sources, and about half use their own savings (Chikanda, 2017). Financial support from family and friends is a particularly important finance source for up to 68% of women. Only one-fifth of traders have in Southern Malawi access to bank loans Ndala and Jnr (2021), but none of the Basotho women traders have access to bank loans (Blumberg et al., 2016).

7.2.1 CARE

CARE is a leading humanitarian organisation fighting global poverty and providing lifesaving assistance in emergencies and was founded in 1945. With stakeholders, CARE International works together across more than 100 countries to save lives and end poverty. CARE has worked in Lesotho since 1968 and has a deep relationship with the communities and the government. The food crisis means that women are among the most vulnerable groups because they experience higher levels of violence as men cannot handle the anger and frustration of not bringing home money for their family. Basotho men used to work in the mines in South Africa, but many mines have closed. Hence, there is an increase in the number of women who leave their homes to look for jobs. CARE focuses on working alongside poor girls and women to equip them with the proper resources so they can help lift families and entire communities out of poverty.

While CARE International works alongside people of all ages, backgrounds, and genders, 70% of the world's poorest people are women. Women and girls experience poverty, hardship, climate change, conflict, and health emergencies very differently from men because of gender inequality and require specialised approaches. Therefore, CARE has economic empowerment initiatives, such as supports programs to economically empower low-income and marginalised communities. Within CARE's health projects, vulnerable and poor families are supported to run

very effective village savings and loan groups to generate income for partners in health and food security projects. Village savings and loan programmes work with community women who contribute weekly to their savings group. With training from CARE staff, loans are facilitated to start or grow their small business.

In 2018, CARE launched a 12-year Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) scaling strategy to support 50 million women and girls and 65 million people overall to form savings groups by 2030. Four years into the global VSLA strategy, it continues to serve as an effective vehicle for economic justice and long-term resilience. Since 2020, the Women Respond initiative has surveyed over 17 000 women in 23 countries and found that VSLAs increased resilience and decreased challenges around income, food, and healthcare (Carrasco et al, 2022).

According to Beaman et al. (2014), VSLAs allow many group members to engage in income-generating activities, and they use the loans for investments in small businesses, farming, and animal husbandry. With a strong emphasis on gender equality and women's empowerment, CARE is known for implementing programmes that assist women in various ways, including economically. However, in the context of Lesotho, the Basotho women informal cross-border traders are unaware of this organisation. This is an indication that there is a knowledge gap among these women.

Organisations like CARE use a trickle-down approach of how the government of Lesotho has a hand in bettering the informal sector by working hand in hand with CARE to reach out to vulnerable communities, especially women and girls. VSLAs have shown that when power is returned to even the most vulnerable women, they can improve their situation.

7.2.2 *Catholic Relief System*

The Catholic Relief system specifically designed Savings and Internal Lending Communities. This holistic programme approach offers households a strategy to smooth their cash flow and increase income. The model has expanded to 27 countries: 6 in East Africa, 8 in West Africa, 7 in Central Africa, and 6 in Southern Africa. This savings-led microfinance helps communities create highly sustainable savings and lending platforms that does not allow for excessive debt or interest charges. The accumulation of savings and the ability to access flexible credit promotes financial resilience among participating households and investment in productive assets. It also

helps protect members' limited resources by shifting their money from informal hiding locations in the house to investments in group members (Vanmeenen, 2010).

Savings and Internal Lending Communities allows self-selecting groups of people (15 to 25 members) to put their money into a fund from which members can borrow and pay back the money with interest. Members meet regularly (weekly or fortnightly) to mobilise the required savings. After a specified time (typically 12 months), members share funds in proportion to their total savings. A social fund covers unpredictable expenses such as funeral costs and natural disaster emergencies. Members agree on a fixed contribution and the fund, and everyone contributes the same amount. At the end of the period, the fund is not part of the share-out. It is through initiatives like Savings and Internal Lending Communities, which is operational in Lesotho, that the government's general involvement in the informal sector is at least noticeable (Mwaisaka, 2012).

The microfinance from various initiatives promotes entrepreneurship among the participants, which aligns with the widespread assumption that microfinance creates entrepreneurs and enables the poor to escape poverty (Mngadi, 2016). There is a two-way relationship between access to microfinance and business ownership. On one hand, having access to microfinance promotes entry into business, and on the other hand, for one to be able to repay loans and continue participating in microfinance, one has to have money, which is guaranteed by owning a business and making profits.

Though none of the participants in my study mentioned anything about getting help from microfinance, one mentioned that she knew a woman who received her capital for cross-border trade from microfinance. She mentioned this during a conversation to Botswana because sometimes women from other districts come to Maseru to join those travelling to Botswana because transport for cross-border traders is easily accessible in Maseru. Therefore, the commitment to engage in cross-border business is perceived as a reflection of boldness and empowerment among women. It also illustrates the agency of women willing to take action to gain financial freedom for their families. Having none of the participants in this study directly benefit from financial support from micro finances to the informal sector, does not rule out that there may be informal cross-border traders who have benefitted. There are likely many non-state organisations, and further investigation is necessary to determine how they operate.

7.3 Government of Lesotho's Role

Like any other country, Lesotho is governed by a constitution with residual laws, rules, and regulations that guide the making and implementation of public policies. Chapter 2 of the current constitution of Lesotho mandates that government, institutions of state, or any assignment in this regard to that policies are in the public's collective interest. It notes that the enjoyment of fundamental human rights shall not be discriminatory and that the state and its assigns shall ensure that the enjoyment of the said rights and freedoms by any person does not prejudice the rights and freedoms of others or the public interest (Mosito, 2014). It follows that government policies should not discriminate against any group of persons engaged in activities that are not detrimental to the progress of the wider society.

The constitution further implores the government in Article 29(2) (c) to ensure achieving steady economic, social, and cultural development and full and productive employment under conditions safeguarding fundamental political and economic freedoms to the individual (Mosito, 2014). Therefore, it is my view that the government's national development plan or trade policy must include informal cross-border trade in its quest to achieve stable economic and social development. As in many African countries, the informal sector in Lesotho contributes substantially to the GDP growth.

There is evidence that at least the government of Lesotho recognises and promotes the informal sector (Musi, 2002). However, informal cross-border trade is not necessarily included or excluded in these activities. An examination of the government's trade policy revealed that the government of Lesotho is yet to recognise informal cross-border trade. Public policy measures may be considered to maximise the potential of this sector of the economy for household livelihood improvements and general socio-economic advancement. This can be done through the backward linkages of informal cross-border trade that have been proven in studies, mainly from Eastern and Western Africa in general, but also concerning specific case studies from these regions (Skinner, 2008; Lesser and Moisé-Leeman, 2009; Rogerson and Letsie, 2013).

From my examination of publicly available government information and interactions with some civil servants at the Ministries of Finance and Economic Development Planning, Trade and Business Enterprises, the absence of any form of government policy on informal cross-border

trade is mainly due to government's lack of appreciation for informal cross-border trade and the fact that it considers informal sectors a nuisance. This understanding was succinctly strengthened by the following words of a key government official from the United Nations conference on Trade and Development 15th session (UNCTAD15) which was extracted from the UN website.

According to the written speech of the representative (Dr Sefali) of Lesotho, the Micro-Cross-border trade can transform Informal Cross-Border Trade (informal cross-border trade) into formal businessmen and women. This, the Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, The Lesotho representative, said there is need to bridge the divide between formal and informal cross-border trade discussion held in Maseru, running from 3rd to 8th October 2021. UNCTAD15 was held under the theme 'From Inequality and Vulnerability to Prosperity for All', thus offering the world's nations a platform to devise new ways to use trade as an enabler of sustainable development. Dr Sefali said informal cross-border trade is a safety net for unemployed people in Lesotho, saying trade provides sources of income to people without wage employment. More importantly, it promotes entrepreneurship skills for people without formal education. He stated that at the regional level, informal cross-border trade has proven to be responsive to shocks compared to formal trade as they have been able to import domestically unavailable goods to meet domestic demand in times of crisis. Dr Sefali, however, mentioned that governments are typically concerned about the negative aspects of informal cross-border trade, including those informal imports present unfair competition for domestic demands (UN 2021).

Similarly from the same conference, the UN Resident Coordinator (Ms Wabunoha) who was present made remarks that the UNCTAD conference theme reminded the commitment to Agenda 2030 to leave no one behind by bridging the gaps within societies and households. She mentioned that Lesotho depends heavily on trade with South Africa, which was intermittently disrupted due to border closure during the COVID-19 pandemic, saying both informal and formal traders have been affected mainly medium-sized traders have generally been able to navigate border closures and maintain their trade closure routes and supply chains. Further, as Lesotho recovers from COVID-19 and seeks to stabilise trade, there must be a consideration as to how to recognise informal cross-border traders, protect their safety and livelihoods, support their formalisation, and ensure that nobody is left behind, adding that this will further strengthen

the national efforts towards accession to the African Continental Free Trade Agreement. The UNCTAD15 discussions aimed at deliberating on the challenges and safety of informal cross-border traders, formalisation of informal traders, and increasing the economic contribution of informal cross-border traders (UN, 2021).

These statements showed that the government only took cognizance of informal cross-border trade because of the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics from African continent suggested that informal cross-border trade accounts for 30–40% of GDP, (Nguyen and Paczos, 2020; Charles, 2023; Moyo, 2023). Applying the term informal to a group or section in society facilitates their exclusion from state support and their effective integration into economic and social development.

Lesotho is a member of the SADC Trade Protocol, which governs trade between SADC member states and aims to liberalise intra-regional trade in goods and services, guarantee efficient production, improve the environment for domestic, cross-border, and foreign investment, and promote economic growth, diversification, and industrialisation of the area. While implementing these policies is commendable, the needed policy objectives are yet to be actualised (World Bank, 2020). In this regard, the government must reconsider its economic and social growth priorities for developing informal cross-border trade and use a livelihood approach to development in the medium term.

The absence of an effective central government policy on informal traders beyond that of small- and medium-scale enterprises means the local or municipal authorities cannot harness the potential of informal cross-border trade since their powers are devolved from the central government. Hence, my research at the municipal council revealed no formal policy to aid informal cross-border traders except for the general services provided to traders at the various markets. These markets are specific places or shelters designated for informal sector businesspeople (street vendors and traders). These shelters are provided by the local city councils at subsidised costs. Despite the low cost of renting shelters at the market spaces, there are limited spaces, and it is not visible to customers because of its isolated locations. Participants expressed concerns about the lack of essential services besides the location issues. One issue is the lack of water and sanitary facilities, which makes engaging in meaningful transactions difficult.

Lesotho's urban administrations are not an exception in this regard. Officials have routinely removed street vendors from the town centre and the sidewalks along the main roads because they impede traffic and detract from the aesthetics of the city centre. According to Musi (2002), the same mentality has consigned many traders to backyard marketplaces that shoppers avoid. Musi found that there are tensions between informal sector operators, municipal authorities, and the state in Maseru. It is a common observation that once in a while a Maseru City Council (MCC) truck can be seen evicting street vendors from Kingsway Street in Maseru and relocating them to a marketplace.

7.3.1 Basotho Enterprises Development Corporation

Among the general formal institutions is a corporative called BEDCO that deals with access to finance for macro, small, and medium enterprises through venture capital. BEDCO is a parastatal of the government of Lesotho and was established through the BEDCO Act No. 9 of 1980 (as amended) and mandated "to promote the development of Basotho-owned enterprises and indigenous entrepreneurial skills and for connected purposes". BEDCO fulfils this mandate by facilitating the establishment and growth of micro, small, and medium enterprises. Venture capital is financing investors provide to small and medium enterprises that are believed to have long-term growth potential. In a venture capital deal, the business owner sells shares to the investor in exchange for capital investment.

For a business to qualify for venture capital, the owner must be creative and innovative, and the business must be scalable. Innovative means creating value by implementing new ideas and creativity is having or coming from original thought or imagination with new ideas. Scalable is when the business can adapt quickly to increased or market demand. For a business to be scalable, it must focus on improving the profitability and efficiency of services even when its workload increases. The profitability and efficiency improvement can only originate from the core of the business structure and workflow strategy (Barnard, 2019).

However, Basotho women traders often do not meet the requirements at the start of their business due to the economy's structure. Limited access to start-up capital has seen women navigating through their networks to get the needed assistance with start-up capital. Some of

these challenges indicate the gaps in funding institutions due to economic structures and exacerbated by political instability.

A key finding from the field research is the enormous information gap between informal cross-border traders, especially women informal cross-border traders, and financial institutions like BEDCO, which offers training and support for formalising informal businesses (Blumberg et al., 2016). For example, Lineo said the following:

We had to save money as a group of women to start engaging in informal cross-border trade because nobody knows anything, especially within our circles. Financial support would save us a lot of headaches. (Lineo, int.)

Though the Basotho women traders face other challenges, access to finance for start-up was identified as one of the most pressing challenges for them. This was verified by the fieldwork findings that showed that most women traders had trouble with start-up capital. The challenges Basotho women traders face do not start and end with start-up capital and they experience more throughout the journey in informal cross-border trade.

7.3.2 The role of Maseru City Council

The MCC has implemented several initiatives to promote and support the informal sector in the city. Among the key initiatives is the formalisation and licensing of informal businesses operating in the city. The informal sector operators can access formal markets, finance, and other services through formalisation while ensuring their businesses comply with local regulations. The MCC has also invested in providing infrastructure and services to support informal sector activities in the city. This includes the construction of informal markets, vending sites, and public toilets, as well as providing waste management services and other basic amenities.

The third initiative is capacity building and training, and there are several training and capacity-building programs aimed at improving the business skills and practices of informal sector operations. This includes training on financial management, record keeping, marketing, and customer service, which fall under business skills training. There is also product development training, which focuses on product development and quality improvement to meet the needs of

customers. Under health and safety, informal traders are trained in food handling and hygiene, occupational health and safety, and fire safety.

The MCC has also worked to improve access to finance for informal traders by establishing partnerships with microfinance institutions and other financial service providers. This provides informal traders with access to credit, savings accounts, and other financial services. There is also advocacy and representation for which the MCC works closely with informal sector associations and civil society organisations to advocate for the interests and rights of informal sector operators. This includes representation in policy and decision-making processes and support for lobbying and advocacy efforts. At the time of data collection, the Basotho women informal cross-border traders had no association.

The MCC also collaborates with other stakeholders, such as government agencies, development partners, and private sector organisations, to support the growth and development of the informal sector in the city. These partnerships are intended to improve access to finance, markets, and other services for informal sector operators. The MCC has demonstrated a commitment to promoting and supporting the informal sector in the city and has implemented several initiatives to create an enabling environment for informal sector activities to thrive. Despite these initiatives by the MCC, it does not seem to trickle down to Basotho women informal cross-border traders.

7.3.3 Permitted stalls in the city

The MCC issues permits for street vendors who wish to operate stalls or sell goods in designated areas within the city. These permits are part of the council's efforts to regulate and formalise street vending activities while ensuring vendors comply with local regulations. Applications are submitted to the MCC by street vendors and a fee is paid. Sometimes, the council also requires the vendors to undergo health and safety inspections, depending on the type of business they want to operate. Proof of identity and residency are also required when applying for a permit.

Permit holders are typically allocated designated stalls or vending sites in specific city areas, such as markets or street corners. The council manages these stalls, and vendors must comply with regulations governing the use and maintenance of the stalls. The ease with which informal cross-border traders can apply for permits to operate in Maseru city depends on various factors, such as the regulatory framework, which governs informal trading activities. If the regulations

are unclear and complex, it can make it more difficult for traders to understand the requirements for obtaining permits. These are the views of two participants on the permits:

I think the allocation is not fair because you will find that other street vendors own two stalls, yet there will be people on the list waiting to be allocated. It also takes a long time, discouraging one from pursuing it. (‘M’e Maboitumelo, int.)

I like straightforward things, so the information about the application for permits to be allocated stalls is unclear. That is the one I can learn from people I work with. I wish there were a way for this information to reach us so that we can make informed decisions. (Mma Khotso, int.)

Lack of access to information on the permit application process, the fees involved, other requirements, and delays or bureaucratic processes in the administration of permits pose challenges for informal cross-border traders. The council has taken steps to simplify the application process for informal cross-border traders and street vendors by providing clear guidelines and simplified application forms and help desks to assist traders with the application process have been established. Some of the Basotho women informal cross-border traders who participated in the study highlighted the administrative processes as one of the challenges for getting permits to operate in stalls as the process takes so long that they often give up checking to see if they have been allocated a space. One of the women said, “I would rather sell in the open and go house to house than wait to allocate a stall that takes time. My strategy is convenient for me” (Mma Khotso, int.).

The size and capacity of stalls provided varies depending on the number of people for which the MCC can cater. Primarily, the stalls are designed to accommodate one trader, but at the market, one or more traders can be accommodated, depending on the size and nature of the goods sold. The stalls are typically designed to be compact and efficient to maximise available space while providing adequate display and storage space for goods. The number of people catered for by a single stall depends on factors such as the stall’s location, the level of foot traffic in the area, and the demand for the goods sold.

7.3.4 *Role of Mafeteng City Council*

As an important commercial hub in Lesotho, Mafeteng City Council recognises the crucial role informal cross-border traders play in the local economy. The council has implemented various initiatives to support and facilitate the needs of these traders. The Mafeteng City Council caters to informal cross-border traders by developing and maintaining market infrastructure, such as stalls and trading spaces, accessible to informal traders, just like the MCC. The various ways traders are catered for are almost identical, and it is just the locations that differ.

7.3.5 *Southern African Customs Union*

Five nations, including Lesotho, comprise the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), a regional economic confederation (Gibb, 1997). SACU was created to promote economic cooperation and ease trade among its members, and therefore, plays a key role in Lesotho's trade and economic policies (Tsolo et al., 2010). SACU's customs union component, distinguished by a shared external tariff and common revenue pool, has significant ramifications for trade within the union, and consequently, the lives of Basotho women cross-border traders (Kirk & Stern, 2005). It encourages the free flow of commodities among its members, effectively forming a single market inside SACU's borders (Fontaine et al., 2011).

The revenue-sharing system of SACU has a considerable effect on Lesotho's economy, and SACU member nations, especially those with smaller economies like Lesotho, gain a lot from this arrangement. Customs and excise charges collected at the common external border are distributed among the member states following a specified formula (Kirk & Stern, 2005). Much of Lesotho's annual budget comprises SACU money, which is a crucial source of income for the country (Honda et al., 2017).

It is possible to analyse SACU's effects on Basotho women cross-border traders from various angles. Firstly, the customs union within SACU and the ensuing free movement of products can potentially improve these traders' access to the market. Lowering administrative burdens and tariff obstacles make it easier for Basotho women traders to conduct cross-border business with nearby nations (UNDP, 2016). Because of their easy access to local markets, these women may have more business options and earn more money. But it is important to understand that SACU's effects on Basotho women cross-border traders may not be positive. While regional trade is

facilitated by tariff harmonisation, it might also result in more competitiveness, which can cause difficulties for lone traders, particularly women (Bhorat et al., 2016). In addition, although intended to ease commerce, customs and border laws can occasionally be complicated and present challenges for informal traders, particularly those who are not be familiar with regular trade procedures (UNDP, 2016).

7.4 The Women's' Expectation of Support

It is evident from the data gathered in this study that Basotho women traders have long been a vital part of the country's informal economy through their engagement in cross-border trade and entrepreneurship. Therefore, they expect assistance from the Lesotho government, which reflects their desires for social inclusion, economic empowerment, and acknowledgement of their contributions to the country's advancement. According to the participants' experiences, their engagement in informal cross-border trade results from the government's inability to absorb them in the formal employment sectors because of shrinking economic opportunities. However, the expectations of these women engaged in cross-border trading are for the government of Lesotho to help alleviate their challenges through public policy in the form of tax rebates and soft loan facilities, among others.

Firstly, the government must create an atmosphere of support for Basotho women traders' economic endeavours. This includes more accessible access to finance and financial services and streamlined governmental procedures and restrictions for trade. These women frequently struggle with issues such as lack of market information and access to cash, and therefore, they look to the government to promote financial inclusion and offer training programs that improve their business abilities. 'M'e Nthoi explained as follows:

I am not someone who can keep records. I do my business just like an ordinary Mosotho person and older adult. I plan everything from the head. But I am open to advice and training, especially with bookkeeping. If there is a training where I can be taught, I will attend ('m'e Nthoi, int.)

It is essential to foster the women traders' confidence in the government's dedication to their welfare by implementing supportive measures safeguarding them and respecting their rights as

informal traders, particularly at border crossings. Safety is of great importance to these women because of the kind of accidents that some have experienced.

Basotho women traders also seek the government's social support, such as measures that address gender-specific issues they face, like childcare services that let women balance their personal and professional obligations. The government can also implement policies that support gender equality and women's empowerment, including granting access to healthcare and education services in recognition of women's role in informal trade and their contributions to household earnings. These women's empowerment benefits their households and Lesotho's overall socio-economic progress.

Basotho women traders want their voices to be heard in the formulation of policies. They seek inclusion and engagement in decision-making processes to express their demands, worries, and suggestions for bettering the laws influencing their way of life. Involving them in policy debates will help Basotho women traders feel more empowered and ensure government programs are attentive to their needs. These women felt left out, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when they could not travel. Ponts'o shared her views as follows:

Unfortunately, the government has not done anything to meet us halfway during the pandemic, unlike street hawkers, who get to sell their goods under the essential service's protocol. As *bo 'mathoto*, we have been home since the first lockdown in March 2020 and now February 2021. We had that the street hawkers were assisted with M500 each. We do not know the qualifying criteria (Ponts'o, int.)

The government of Lesotho should provide complete assistance to Basotho women traders, including social empowerment, economic facilitation, and participatory governance. The government can maximise the potential of these women as major forces behind social and economic advancement in the country by fulfilling these complex expectations. Basotho women traders also have specific expectations of the government in terms of taxes. The expectation is to balance the taxation for revenue generation and the economic realities of informal entrepreneurship involved in their operations.

7.4.1 Tax-related expectations

Basotho women traders have specific expectations of the government in terms of taxes. They want the taxation for revenue generation to be balanced with the economic realities of informal entrepreneurship involved in their operations. First and foremost, these women want the Lesotho government to establish a fair and open tax system (Khoase, 2015). They recognise the importance of contributing to the nation's tax base but want an equitable and transparent tax system so they can understand how it operates. In addition to encouraging compliance, a clear and visible tax system builds confidence in the government's dedication to fair taxation policies. This openness should also apply to tax laws and practices so these traders can easily comply without difficulties.

7.5 Chapter Summary

Basotho women operate as informal cross-border traders in the economic corridor between Maseru and Gaborone. This chapter examined how the Lesotho government and non-state institutions respond to them. The objective was to comprehend how these responses improve and facilitate the operation of these women's businesses. Through the discussions, it became evident that there are non-state organisations in place and operating to address the needs of marginalised groups like women. Nonetheless, their involvement with Basotho women traders is unclear and requires further research. The same applies to the government of Lesotho: There is nothing tangible to show how it addresses the needs of these women. Therefore, I cannot conclude that there is nothing the government of Lesotho is doing for informal cross-border trade. This is a valuable segment of its economic sphere that partly holds the potential to alleviate poverty and contribute to economic growth and wellbeing in the short and medium term. As a result, the government's involvement through policy would significantly enhance its operations and that of Basotho women traders.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

This study aimed to understand the experiences and circumstances of Basotho women as informal cross-border traders, and the activity's contribution to their livelihoods and welfare in the Kingdom of Lesotho. Therefore, this chapter provides an overall summary of the study and maps out a way forward for further research about the contribution of informal cross-border trade to the households of many Basotho. The chapter addresses the study's primary objective, which were set out in Chapter 1 of this thesis. This study sought to explore and understand the motives and outcomes of Basotho women's cross-border trading to Botswana and assess whether it is a survival strategy or entrepreneurial, contributing to their economic and social empowerment. The study also explored informal cross-border trading and its impacts on this segment of women who are Basotho citizens and who buy goods from Botswana and sell them in Lesotho. It also investigated the Lesotho government's role and response to women's cross-border trading activities in the context of the growth of the activity and its role and significance in most Southern African countries.

The background of Basotho women was briefly described in Chapter 1 along with the evolving migration patterns and the pivotal role of informal cross-border trade in these women's lives. The study investigated informal cross-border trade as a new phenomenon under circular migration in Lesotho that started after the fall of the formal migrant system. The literature review revealed that policymakers have mostly overlooked these women traders and their circumstances, and the significance of this economic activity. Therefore, there should be specific policy recommendations targeted at cross-border informal traders to recognise it as an alternative economic activity. The recommendations provided in this chapter were derived specifically from the research findings and the gaps identified in the findings. Thus, Chapter 2 provided the frame from which we can understand cross-border trading, sought to identify gaps in literature, and provided a platform for this thesis.

The uniqueness of this study was demonstrated by distinguishing it from existing studies. For instance, the idea of 'informality' in cross-border trade goes beyond the marginalised and

impoverished Basotho women, or rather, beyond the economic structures that have caused these women to venture into informal cross-border trade for survival. Pressures of deindustrialisation, jobless growth, rising unemployment, and expanding informality have intensified because of globalisation and rapid technological change, which require inclusive economies (Meagher, 2021). This has been proven by studies conducted all over the world that acknowledged the intensity and importance of informal cross-border trade to the many who engage in it (Mitra and Yemtsov, 2006, Ajakaiye et al, 2015, Meagher, 2019, 2020, 2021, Mujeri and Mujeri, 2021, Kappel, 2021). Sub-Saharan African nations are more dependent on informal cross-border trade (Meagher 1995, Ackello-Ogutu and Echessah, 1997, Lesser and Moisé-Leeman, 2009). Similarly, during this study, the relevance of informal cross-border trade and its impact on the lives of Basotho women informal cross-border traders was evident, as discussed in Chapter 5.

The methodology was described in Chapter 3. It presented distinct strategies for the fieldwork in Lesotho's Maseru and Mafeteng districts and the first-hand interactions with the women to understand how they experience informal cross-border trade. The study sought to understand how the women experienced informal cross-border trade, whether they perceive themselves as actors or those affected, the challenges they faced, and how they overcome them using their agency. As a researcher, the challenges I encountered while conducting this study were noted, and an attempt was made to demonstrate that these challenges did not compromise the study and its objectives, and therefore, the outcomes. This approach helped reveal Basotho women's experiences as informal cross-border traders and as actors. The challenges they face are primarily a result of their informality, but they often overcome them. The chapter also discussed the intricacies of ethical and political issues that go beyond the field site and affect writing and representation processes and highlighted the ethical issues associated with the practical constraints of applying ethnographic research during the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated containment measures.

Chapter 4 introduced the profiles of the Basotho women as informal cross-border traders to Botswana. Their social and economic surroundings were described. Their most common reason for engaging in informal cross-border trade is a means to a better livelihood. This suggests that informal businesses are often an alternative livelihood in weak economies, like Lesotho that depends on South Africa. While many Basotho women work in textile factories, access to textile

factories is limited or non-existent due to the global economic volatility. Those women who do work in textile factories are paid low wages by employers. Textile factories accommodate many Basotho women because they need little education or skills to start working there.

Despite the textile factories absorbing many Basotho women, some factories have been downsizing their workforces and others have completely shut down due to the downward trend in the global economy. As of October 2022, three textile factories had shut down because of decreased demand for their exports, partly due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore, thousands of Basotho women are without jobs, with the promise that work will resume in February 2023. The available alternative for most Basotho women is to venture into the informal sector to find a source of income. This is why some Basotho women have migrated to work as domestic or farm workers.

Chapter 4 presented Basotho women as informal cross-border traders, which is a completely different category of migrants than women who migrate to find work as domestic or farm workers. Basotho women informal cross-border traders are different from the disempowered Basotho women, who are discussed most often in the literature and are often exploited and who work as migrant domestic and farm workers (Johnston, 2007, Ulicki and Crush, 2007, Petrozziello and Robert, 2010, Griffin, 2011, Sexwale, 2012, Pitso, 2019, Makhata and Masango, 2021). In informal cross-border trade, women are independent, empowered, and use informal cross-border trade as a wealth accumulation strategy. They are a distinct category of women who cross borders for economic reasons, rather than to make ends meet. For this reason, they can be considered as another class of women, which was a fitting topic for this thesis.

Some Basotho women cross-border traders share the common characteristic of low levels of education with many other women, including those who migrate to look for employment in South Africa as domestic and farm workers. Thousands seem trapped in low-paying textile factories and the unemployed. However, Basotho women traders have broken the ranks, defied the odds, and established themselves as successful entrepreneurs and even employers, thus making them different from other initially similarly disadvantaged women. This study confirmed the observation by other studies that participants in the informal sector are generally poorly educated, but this is not the whole story. Generally, while the participants in informal cross-

border trade are uneducated, there are a few exceptions who have tertiary qualifications, and some even have secure jobs. I categorised them as part-time traders.

Chapter 5 highlighted the significance of informal cross-border trade in the lives of *bo 'mathoto* through its contribution to their household incomes and wealth creation. These women fit Muzvidziwa's (1998) expression of climbing out of poverty because some have moved from being poor and surpassed the survival stage of just providing for the basic needs. Some of these women even have employees or other established business income streams that benefit their households and communities. Therefore, the 'another class' thesis explains that informal cross-border trade is no longer just a survival strategy for some of these women but a means of wealth accumulation. Their realities constitute deconstructing the narrative of informal cross-border trade women as poor. The chapter presented some positive changes in these women's lives and households because of informal cross-border trade. The same women who struggled with start-up capital are now employers. Therefore, job creation is one of the significant positive outcomes of women informal cross-border trade. Evidence from the study indicated that most women who engage in informal activities carry the heavy responsibility of being the sole breadwinners for their families, and some of them are widows and single mothers.

Basotho women in informal cross-border trade attribute some of their excellent experiences with household economies to the support received from social networks. The women have developed these social networks as coping strategies within informal cross-border trade. The support they receive varies from finances, sharing information, and helping each other with orders. As a result, the significance of social networks, a crucial part of the survival and sustenance of these women in informal cross-border trade, was highlighted. The women operate in different types of social networks, and the most prominent are *stokvels (pitiki)*. In these prominent networks, women support each other financially. Most Basotho women informal cross-border traders acknowledged the networks as the pillar of their growth in informal cross-border trade. Their participation in these networks indicates their agency through which they can overcome their economic marginalisation. Their agency in engaging in informal cross-border trade has deconstructed the narrative of a typical Mosotho migrant woman as poor and looking for survival opportunities.

Furthermore, the women emphasised how social networks enable their businesses to survive. The social networks have helped many Basotho women traders to thrive and strategise to respond to their socio-economic challenges. Through social networks, some women have benefitted through self-help interest-free loans from other women to restock, to top up for restocking, or to meet transport expenses when travelling. Some of the women have received entrepreneurial mentoring from business veterans, especially on maximising profits. Social networks help these women realise their dreams faster than they could have imagined, such as extending their houses, building houses, or even buying cars. The strategies explored by these women within social networks to make money revealed that they are not passive poor migrants but active entrepreneurs who influence the outcomes of their businesses and their impact on their families.

The findings in Chapter 6 illustrated the challenges Basotho women informal cross-border traders face and the strategies they employ to navigate through them. Their struggles were viewed through the lens of their informality. The challenges these women face are both economic and social. Economic barriers stem from the informality of their activities, and some social challenges were due to the patriarchal society these women come from where a woman's role is classified as homemaker and nurturer. Moving out of their home to look for a means of survival is seen as challenging the patriarchy. Many families have experienced considerable changes because of the feminisation of migration. This is because domestic work, reserved for reproductive and care functions in patriarchal societies like Lesotho, limited their movements and the economic activities they could venture into as men are believed to be the breadwinners.

However, the traditional caregiving roles in Lesotho have changed due to the circular migration of women, necessitating the adoption of new care practices. The study found that as alternative care arrangements are put in place in some households, it results in a mix of care chains (Murphy, 2014) and the circulation of care (Baldassar & Merla, 2013) results. Care chains develop when hired individuals who are considered 'outsiders' and are not linked to the family enter the private sphere of the family system, such as maids and livestock herders. Some women with younger children must hire helpers if they have no extended family members who can help take care of their children in their absence. The commoditisation of care and reproductive work results from this care shift within families (Fudge, 2012; Knight, 2012). Other females, from inside and outside the family, take on the duties often associated with the traditional roles of wife

and mother in exchange for payment. While some women receive support from their immediate family members, especially their spouses, others have separated from their spouses due to the unsuccessful renegotiation of gender roles.

Women's poverty and vulnerability are the result of their marginal social status. It is therefore impossible to discuss Basotho women as informal cross-border traders outside their social marginality, which entails vulnerability, exclusion, and informality. Chapter 6 discussed the limited access to start-up capital these women have because of stringent requirements by financial institutions for loans, which these women do not meet. The challenges continue as they go about their businesses, including difficulties with customs clearance processes and the amount of duty they are required to pay, which they feel is exorbitant. But the women also experience challenges with their clients in their everyday activities. Despite all the challenges, the women are not deterred from achieving their goals.

Their resilience was noted during the fieldwork as these women have survived multiple and multifaceted challenges and developed entrepreneurial skills that bring good returns from informal cross-border trade activities. They took the opportunity and are now benefiting from participating in the activity. For example, their income streams have diversified from informal cross-border trading activities. The Basotho women traders expressed their desire for the government to implement favourable policies to help them make their activities sustainable, especially those who aspire to venture into informal cross-border trade but are constrained by a lack of start-up capital. They stated that more women aspire to enter the informal cross-border trade business but have been prevented by a lack of start-up capital.

The current chapter discusses the conclusions and recommendations of the study based on the research objectives the study set to achieve. The chapter further summarises the themes derived from the study's empirical findings. The conclusions are that informal cross-border trade plays a big role in the betterment of livelihoods for many Basotho households. Therefore, the government should consider having policies in place to provide financial assistance to women engaging in this business, primarily upon first entry. But also, the government can avail more shelters to accommodate these women to carry out their businesses. Every Mosotho's right is to receive social services to live a better life that fulfil their basic needs.

8.2 The Adopted Approach

This is an ethnographic study of Basotho women engaged in informal cross-border trade between Lesotho and Botswana that emphasises their lived experiences. These women's experiences were explored following themes identified from their motives, social standing, and *modus operandi*. To assess the impact of informal cross-border trade on the lives of Basotho women, a thick descriptive analysis was used on the qualitative data that were gathered. The findings in this study are somewhat consistent with the narrative of the socio-economic impact of informal cross-border trade in the extant literature (Kayiya and Kadirov, 2020; Dzawanda, 2023). Studies by Peberdy, (2002), Ama et al, (2014), Yusuff, (2014) Manjokoto and Ranga, (2017) on informal cross-border trade from other parts of Africa showed a correlation between informal cross-border trade and women's economic empowerment. For instance, Chen et al. (2002) found that informal cross-border trade contributes significantly to the economies of many African countries as it is fundamental in alleviating household poverty and enhancing women's economic empowerment. This is similar to what the current study found, and the current study also found that the lives of most Basotho women involved in informal cross-border trade have been uplifted together with that of with their households.

Data were collected from 15 participants who are Basotho women engaging in informal cross-border trade to Botswana and work or live in two of Lesotho's lowland districts, namely Maseru and Mafeteng districts. The women who participated in the study had experience ranging from three to twenty-plus years in the informal cross-border trade business. Some work as full-time traders (self-employed), and others are part-time traders (employed by other institutions or organisations). The part-time traders' full-time jobs include textile factory worker, teacher, nurse, and government employee (civil servants). The participants were interviewed in person using an open-ended interview guide. Data were further collected using two focus group discussions, with each group including seven Basotho women who are informal cross-border traders. An interview guide was also used for the focus groups.

8.3 Addressed Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

- Who are Basotho women informal cross-border traders, and what is their social class and motives for engaging in informal cross-border trade?
- What is the significance of informal cross-border trade and its impact on the lives of Basotho women and their households?
- What social and economic challenges do Basotho women traders in Lesotho face and how do they navigate them?
- What are the government's and any non-state institutions' responses to this new migration trend that is different from the former migrant labour trends?

These questions were addressed by the objective set out in section 1.4. The following section summarises the main themes that answered the study's questions derived from the empirical data.

8.4 Discussions

The study aimed to identify Basotho women involved in informal cross-border trade and to understand their social-economic and educational backgrounds. This was addressed in Chapter 4, which detailed the kind of women engaged in informal cross-border trade and how they operate.

The findings of the current study are consistent Carr and Chen's (2002) findings because the Basotho women who participated in this study all confirmed that their socio-economic circumstances and immediate families remarkably improved because of their involvement in informal cross-border trade, and therefore, their earnings and profit from informal cross-border trade have become the primary source of personal and family income. Again, this finding corroborates previous studies that showed that proceeds from informal cross-border trade in many African countries account for the earnings of close to 40% of the total population (Afrika & Ajumbo, 2012).

Southern Africa cross-border trade transactions amount to US\$ 20 billion annually, or about 30–40% of recorded formal trade between countries. However, this can pose a security and revenue concern because of the types of goods involved, immigration, smuggling, and tax evasion and because it is carried out through unofficial routes (Njiwa et al., 2013; Ogalo, 2010; Schneider, 2006). Although many studies have been done on the informal cross-border trade across Africa,

understanding these activities' nature, challenges, and economic and social implications on women is critical to women's economic emancipation and national policies at the borders.

Extant research about Basotho women migrants portrays them as poor, especially in research on domestic and farm workers (Griffin, 2011; Pedraza, 1991; Phillips & James, 2014; Pitso, 2019; Tayah, 2016; Vanyoro, 2019). This thesis departed from these observations of past research and its central argument is that Basotho women informal cross-border traders are a different class. What differentiates them from other informal cross-border traders is that they do not sell at the destination countries but rather buy goods and sell it back in Lesotho. They operate based on orders (principle of demand and supply), which means they do not leave Lesotho for Botswana and look from shop to shop for what to buy and do door-to-door selling in Lesotho. When they leave Lesotho, they know exactly what they will buy, how to sell it, and to whom to sell it.

This makes this study different as it looked at an emerging class of traders whose *modus operandi* is different from that of traditional traders, who are typically poor. It constitutes a deconstruction of the narrative on Basotho cross-border migrant women by presenting these women as a different class. They have made enough money to afford to hire special transport from Lesotho to Botswana and back. These activities are organised through social networks, which include neighbours, friends, family members, and other acquaintances from which they benefit from social capital, and this social capital can translate into financial capital. This is evidenced by some women entering into informal cross-border trade by invitation because of their participation in these networks.

Some *nouveau riche* have found informal cross-border trade as both a livelihood and a way of investment and wealth accumulation. These women are different from how the literature portrays women informal cross-border traders. It brings to the fore the idea of social marginality as a motivation for entrepreneurial behaviour. Through their agency, socially marginal groups can emerge from their marginal status to riches.

Basotho women engage in cross-border trade between Lesotho and Botswana for accumulation and asset building. Their motives differ based on the nature of their participation, mostly depending on whether they are in cross-border trading full-time or part-time and whether they depend on cross-border trading activities or have full-time occupations. Both categories interested me because they paint a picture of a Mosotho woman that is not seen in the literature

on Basotho women cross-border migrants. They represent a new class of Basotho women who are independent and accumulation-oriented and want to establish a better life for themselves and their families without being overly dependent on men, if they are married.

Part-time involvement in cross-border trading is crucial to highlight among the Botswana group because these women are not entirely dependent on this activity for a living; they have access to other sources of income, which makes them neither poor nor vulnerable. Part-time participation and access to alternative sources of income are also meaningful because these women have money to invest in cross-border trading activities and do not only rely on sales for survival. Cross-border trading involves long trips and sleepless nights and is strenuous to the body. Older women are more likely to avoid such activities, even if it is rewarding, because of health issues.

These women represent a different class of women from the stereotypical Basotho women, described by Gay (1980), who are left behind in rural areas by migrating men. Yet, they are also totally different from the people with low incomes and the exploited women working in the South African domestic sector and on Free State farms described by Johnston (2007) and Ulicki and Crush (2007). Johnston (2007) noted how the women are presented as cooperative, adaptable, and most importantly, as desperately poor, which are the attributes sought by the commercial farmers who exploit the women's desperation, obedience, and poverty to pay them starvation wages. The theme of desperation and vulnerability was pursued by Ulicki and Crush (2000), who showed that the women farmers workers were docile and accepted lower wages since most were undocumented. Undocumented women migrants are also the theme in studies by Griffin (2011) and Thebe (2017), who highlighted the desperation of these women who are willing to settle for anything.

Women with alternative sources of income are in a relatively better position than those without because they can invest part of their salaries into the business without waiting for clients to pay for the goods first. Access to alternative sources of income is also a significant source of security in cross-border buying and selling because it protects them against bad debts or clients paying late for goods bought on credit.

The married women traders must be explored further because it contrasts with popular belief and past studies on informal cross-border trade that found that widowhood and divorce are strongly linked to informal cross-border trade (Cheater and Gaidzanwa, 1996). According to Ntseane

(2004), Botswana women informal cross-border traders have similar backgrounds, such as dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy, a failed marriage, or coming from a dysfunctional home.

The unique situation of Basotho women may be attributed to what others have called migration shocks, characterised by retrenchments and reduction of employment in the South African mining sector (Mensah and Naidoo, 2011), and the high unemployment rates and low wages in the formal sector, which have pushed women to seek independent incomes. Though informal cross-border trade is said to be dominated by unemployed women attempting to scrape out a living, according to these women, they eventually make a fortune out of informal cross-border trade (Tekere et al., 2000). The Basotho women traders are not scraping together a living, and they have managed to establish financial independence and have moved away from dependence on men to liberate themselves, some from abusive relationships.

According to Njikam and Tchouassi (2011), in Central Africa, a significant proportion of women aged 30–39 and a lower proportion of women aged 40–49 are involved in informal cross-border trade. Kachere (2011) also found that most traders are between the ages of 26 and 45 years. The same age group were observed by Crush and Peberdy (1998) and Tekere et al. (2000), whose observations were that most informal cross-border trade are young and middle-aged.

8.5 Conclusion

The current study found that Basotho women informal cross-border traders are women who have strategies because they use orders to determine what they buy in Botswana. Although some women sell door to door, they do so in addition to their strategy of pre-orders. The study is important because it contributes a different dimension or perspective to what is known about cross-border migration and trading. It contradicts the narrative of Basotho women cross-border migration by positioning these women as a middle class, elite group who is not poor, and who has found a way of living, a way of accumulation, and a way of investment through cross-border trading. They are different from what the literature has led us to believe about cross-border traders and also different from what Lesotho cross-border migration literature, especially on women, has led us to believe. Basotho women informal cross-border traders have money to hire special transport, which requires money, especially when travelling frequently.

The dynamics of social networking within informal cross-border trade is another aspect that sets these women apart. These women are not just a random group of women; they are neighbours, friends, family, long-time partners, and colleagues at work. As much as there is an economic aspect to their relationships, there is also a social aspect that is vital in informal cross-border trade operations.

8.6 Policy Implications

Informal cross-border trade can be an essential strategy for women to generate income in an environment where there is a lot of unemployment. It can reduce poverty and increase economic growth and gender equality in Lesotho and other African countries. However, it is essential to note that informal cross-border trade is not a panacea for unemployment and economic development and that broader policy interventions, such as education, infrastructure, and social protection, are needed to support sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Informal cross-border trade has brought about some positive changes in the lives of the Basotho women engaged in this type of trade.

It is envisaged that the government of Lesotho will find the policy recommendations made by this helpful study and implement them. There is undoubtedly a need to facilitate and promote the growth and stability of the informal sector, particularly informal cross-border women traders. The following are five major policy implications that the government can consider:

Gender-inclusive trade policies: These play a pivotal role in advancing economic fairness and empowerment for the female workforce. These policies must be designed to both acknowledge and tackle the distinctive hurdles confronted by women in the realm of trade. Their primary objective is to cultivate an environment where women can enjoy parity in trade participation, resource accessibility, and the advantages arising from market opportunities. Typically, gender-inclusive trade policies encompass measures aimed at curtailing discriminatory practices, championing equitable compensation, and ensuring women's access to skill-building initiatives that cater specifically to their requirements. By nurturing a trade landscape that is more inclusive and just, these policies not only bolster women's economic independence but also make substantial contributions to overall economic expansion and sustainable development, ultimately benefiting society as a whole.

Facilitation of access to financial services: This can include credit and savings mechanisms for Basotho women actively involved in informal cross-border trade and will be a pivotal policy intervention with extensive advantages. Equipping these women with the necessary financial tools, will create a substantial opportunity to significantly elevate their economic prospects. The provision of credit will extend a pathway to empowerment, enabling them to amplify their existing enterprises, embark on fresh business ventures, and diversify their sources of income. This, in turn, will not only fortify their financial stability but also augment local economic growth in a meaningful way. Simultaneously, the establishment of savings mechanisms will create a conduit for setting aside funds earmarked for future investments, contingencies, or educational pursuits, thereby fortifying their overarching financial resilience. Moreover, these financial services can serve as vital instruments to help Basotho women manage and mitigate the financial risks intrinsic to cross-border trade, encompassing the vicissitudes of market dynamics and unanticipated financial exigencies. In summary, facilitating access to financial services will empower Basotho women, entrust them with agency over their economic destinies, and propel their deeper engagement in the informal cross-border trade arena, culminating in not just individual prosperity but also the advancement of broader economic development objectives.

Border formalisation and simplification represent essential policy initiatives that have the potential to substantially improve the prospects of informal traders, particularly Basotho women actively participating in cross-border trade. The core objective of streamlining customs and border procedures is to deconstruct trade impediments and foster a trade environment characterised by efficiency and accessibility. A highly effective approach involves the establishment of dedicated lanes or tailored procedures specifically designed to accommodate small-scale traders. These measures not only curtail waiting times but also reduce transaction costs, providing traders with the means to engage with the intricacies of cross-border bureaucracy more adeptly. These policies can serve as a catalyst not only for economic growth but also for inclusivity as they incentivise adherence to regulatory frameworks. Consequently, the adoption of such policies does not merely invigorate economic expansion but also ensures that even the most vulnerable participants within the informal trade sector can reap the benefits of streamlined cross-border processes.

The provision of skills development and training initiatives emerged as a fundamental aspect of policies aimed at empowering Basotho women actively participating in cross-border trade. These tailored programs must be carefully designed to address the distinct and diverse needs of female traders operating within this specific context. By offering comprehensive training in areas such as effective business management, financial literacy, and in-depth knowledge of trade regulations and standards, these policy measures will equip women with the essential expertise and capabilities necessary to proficiently navigate the intricate landscape of cross-border trade. Proficiency in business management fosters efficient business operations, facilitates informed decision-making, and enables adaptability in response to evolve market dynamics. Financial literacy, on the other hand, will empower these women to adeptly manage their finances, engage in prudent budgeting, and access vital financial services. Moreover, a robust understanding of trade regulations and standards will ensure compliance, mitigating the risks of legal complications and trade barriers. Collectively, these training and capacity-building programs will not only augment the competencies of Basotho women traders but also make substantial contributions to the growth and sustainability of their enterprises, ultimately advancing economic empowerment and fostering gender equality within the cross-border trade sector.

Implementing targeted social safety nets and support structures. During the early months of COVID-19 some women mentioned they felt trapped as informal cross-border trade is their main stream of income. But also that the government did not do have measures to come to their rescue. They felt forgotten unlike street vendors in Maseru town who were assisted with some money (M500) per head to get by. So social safety nets and support structures designed specifically for Basotho women engaged in cross-border trade is an imperative policy measure. These women, given the dynamic and often unpredictable nature of cross-border commerce, are exposed to economic shocks and disruptions.

In acknowledgement of their heightened vulnerability, these safety nets should encompass a spectrum of interventions, including access to healthcare services to address health-related needs. Additionally, they must include provisions for educational assistance to ensure that their families have access to quality education, irrespective of economic challenges. Moreover, the availability of insurance options will help mitigate the financial risks associated with trade disruptions, offering a financial safety net in times of unexpected crises. These comprehensive social safety

nets and supportive measures will not only bolster the resilience of women actively involved in cross-border trade but also underscore a commitment to promoting social and economic inclusivity, ultimately advancing their economic stability and overall wellbeing.

Further research, especially survey type research, on these women's activities, will aid policy response. Policy responses and decisions that are not evidence-based may not be beneficial and cater to the needs of informal cross-border trade businesspeople as they will be based on incomplete data or information. According to other research, informal cross-border trade contributes to national economies, but conventional trade policies and institutions tend to ignore them (Carr & Chen, 2002). Hence it is important to establish the following specific policy implications for Basotho women traders:

Simplifying customs and border processes for Basotho women: The women repeatedly stated that they lacked knowledge about what they pay, tax and duties, how much they should pay. Therefore the study recommends that government of Lesotho should create streamlined customs and border protocols explicitly tailored to accommodate small-scale traders that involve minimising administrative documentation, optimising inspection processes, and expediting the clearance procedures for women actively participating in cross-border trade.

Access to market information and training: some of the market information especially about financial institutions seemed to be something that the women did not have clear information about except for the hearsays. As a recommendation the government could set up educational initiatives and knowledge hubs dedicated to equipping Basotho women traders with essential market insights, trade regulations, and critical business acumen. These resources will empower them to make well-informed decisions and adeptly navigate the intricate landscape of cross-border trade with greater efficacy.

Establish cross-border trade associations and networks dedicated to Basotho women traders: These entities will serve as platforms that enable collective negotiation, the exchange of valuable information, and active advocacy for policy adjustments aimed at enhancing the welfare of women involved in trade.

A well-defined communication plan focused on the illiterate should share existing information on tax relief measures or exemptions and market possibilities in user-friendly formats with

women informal cross-border traders through training. Indeed, once the women understand such information, they can better choose which goods to buy and resell. In the long run, national development plans, budgets, and trade policies should be geared towards economic development that will eventually reduce dependence on informal cross-border trade by Basotho women.

8.7 Areas of Further Research

I struggled to find literature on informal cross-border trade in Lesotho, and therefore, nationwide research should be conducted to gather statistics on Basotho women involved in informal cross-border trade in Lesotho and its impact on their livelihoods. Secondly, research should be done on the opinions and views of the family members of those involved in informal cross-border trade regarding the benefits and impact they have seen in their lives. Similarly, research should be done on the views and opinions of drivers who provide hired transport to Basotho women informal cross-border traders during their trips to various destinations where they source goods because they also face challenges and to clarify their roles, especially at the borders 'customs duty' as it is unclear who is supposed to process the payments. The effects of informal cross-border on the partners of Basotho women traders in Lesotho is also an untouched research area.

Research is necessary on institutions that fund micro businesses in Lesotho since the literature on these institutions is unclear and limited. Similarly, research is necessary that covers both women and men involved in informal cross-border trade in Lesotho. A survey that covers both the highlands and lowlands will be useful as current the study only covered two districts in the lowlands. Likewise, there should be research on the role of government support for Basotho's involvement in informal cross-border trade, and a trade policy that meets the needs of Basotho involved in informal cross-border trade in Lesotho should be explored.

Lastly, I recommend research being conducted that not only focuses on informal cross-border trade but also on other informal sector small businesses that have become a source of livelihood for many households in Lesotho. This will assess the impact of the informal sector on the economy of Lesotho.

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APPENDICES



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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

1. Biodata
2. Motivation behind informal cross-border trade (informal cross-border trade) in Botswana
3. Duration in informal cross-border trade
4. Typical day-to-day workday
5. Brief description of informal cross-border trade as a survival strategy or as entrepreneurial behavior
6. The likes or dislikes of being an informal cross-border trader
7. First-time experience in Botswana
8. Description of the significance and dynamics of informal cross-border trade in your life and that of your household
9. The most challenging experience in informal cross-border trade, social or economic constraints encountered
10. Relation with other people in this trade
11. Shared culture amongst traders, beliefs, behaviors, code words, nicknames, and language
12. Source of start-up capital and profit savings
13. Government's role in your life as an informal cross-border trader
14. Honouring cross-border laws and customs duties

APPENDIX 2: BASOTHO WOMEN TRADERS' PROFILE

The following is the 15 participants' profiles in their own words and includes their education level, age, employment, marital status, and years in informal cross-border trade. More details about these women appear in the rest of the chapters.

- **Case 1:** My name is Ponts'o, and I am 36 years of age. I was born in Maseru at Mants'onyane. I am a married woman with two children aged 17 and 10 years. I dropped out of school while doing Form 2 (Form 2 is equivalent to Form 2 in Botswana and Grade 9 in South Africa) because I had failed and did not want to repeat a class. As time passed, I looked for a job at the shop in my village, where I met my husband and boyfriend. Eventually, I fell pregnant, and we agreed to get married. Unfortunately, I could not continue working at the shop after giving birth because I had moved to his home. We decided to move to the urban part of Maseru to look for jobs at the textile factories, where I got it as a machine operator while he got a job as a driver. With time, my husband changed jobs, still as a driver, and is currently a driver at the Ministry of Finance. I worked at the textile factory for 16 years, and by the time I left in 2016, I was now a line manager, no longer a machine operator. I was a line manager for four years when I quit. By this time, we had managed to buy a site and build the two-roomed house. I wanted more out of life and felt the money we brought was insufficient in realising our dreams. I joined an informal cross-border trader in 2017. I work full time in trade, and it has been four years now.
- **Case 2:** My name is mma Khotso, I was born in Mafeteng, Ha Ramokhele. I am a single mother and live in Mafeteng as a single mother. I am 49 years old, and I was never married. I have one daughter who is at tertiary (at university level) now. I left school early in Form 1 (grade 8 in South African education system and Form 1 in Botswana) because I fell pregnant and could no longer afford to pay school fees because my parents said they were diverting the funds to help raise my daughter. I dropped out of school at Form 2 in secondary school. I started informal cross-border trade around 1999. I was going to Botshabelo in Free State in South Africa, buying T-shirts and spices for resale. With time, I was no longer making enough money to meet my family's needs. So, in 2011, I started going to Johannesburg in South Africa. Things were okay but not good,

but I managed to take my daughter to school. In 2015, I heard about Botswana, and I started going to Botswana. As a single parent, I am trying to make ends meet. I remember I went to Botswana with R1 000 for the first time as my capital, as I did not have a lot of capital due to the expenses at home and for my daughter's education. I left the trade when things were not going well to work at a retail shop, only to come to the trade again. Otherwise, I could be far with life if I had stuck around. I have been full time in informal cross-border trade since I rejoined, and it has been 10 years, with six years of those going to Botswana.

- **Case 3:** I am mma Peete, a 30-year-old woman married with a three-month-old baby girl. I live at Khubetsoana in Maseru. I was born and raised in Nazareth and married in Berea district. I started informal cross-border in 2013 as a National University of Lesotho (NUL) student. By then, I was selling for my mother, an informal cross-border trader. I did so until 2016, when I graduated with my bachelor's degree. Since there was a lack of jobs and given the money, I was making on behalf of my mother, I decided to put away my certificate after graduation and engage in informal cross-border trade full time, and I do not regret my decision. My mother gave me M5 000 as my start-up capital. It has been eight years now.
- **Case 4:** I am Lineo, as people are used to addressing me by my maiden name. I was born and raised in Morija. I am married with three children aged 16, 10, and 3 years. I am 39 years of age. I only went as far as Form 1 in secondary school and could not go further. It was not about the issue of finances, but I think I lacked direction and was interested in partying, so I left school just like that. Along the way, I met my now husband and got married. Life is not easy; as you know, once one does not have qualifications from tertiary education, it is challenging to get a job. Often, the only option available is getting a job at the textile factories, where I have been for many years. I started engaging in informal cross-border trade in 2019 and do it part time, preparing to work full time soon.
- **Case 5:** My name is mma Sentle, and I am 34 years old. I have three children aged 16, 11, and 4 years. I am a married woman. Life happened, and I only went as far as Standard 7 (Standard, 7 in Botswana and grade 7 in South African education system) in primary school. I lost my mother when I was doing Standard 6 (grade 6 in South African

education system). Unfortunately, my father was not so supportive when it comes to education. So, when I did not get good grades in Standard 7, he did not find any need for me to re-sit for the examination. From then, I started doing piece jobs until I moved to Maseru to look for a job at the textile factory, and we decided to settle here with my husband. I come from Mokhotlong district and left when I was 17 years old. I have been working at the textile factories for 16 years to date. I am staying in a rented house at Ha Tsolo in Maseru but at least now we have a plot to build a house. I am making informal cross-border trade as a part time. I have four years in the business.

- **Case 6:** Mampoi is my name, and I am 40 years old with one child who is 10 years old. I was never married but stayed with the father of my child until my son was two years old, and then we parted ways. He supported me and the baby then, but our separation meant I had to fend myself and the child because his father moved to South Africa. With school, I went as far as Form 4 (also Form 4 in Botswana and grade 11 in South African education system), high school level. It was a pity I could not finish my high school certificate because I made choices that were not wise. I was born in Mafeteng, where I have bought a plot too. However, I live here in Maseru because I work at a textile factory. Between 2004 and 2011, I was in cross-border trade. I used to buy stock from Durban, but business was not going well. I stopped and resumed in 2019, now going to Botswana. My dream is to have my own home to raise my son in a safe and conducive environment, and I have realised that with the wages I get from the textile factories, it might just be a dream. I am a part-time trader.
- **Case 7:** I am mma Reitu, unmarried, and have no children. I am 30 and still staying with my parents in Ha Pita, Maseru. I did Form 5 (also Form 5 in Botswana and grade 12 in South African education system but did not qualify for tertiary education as my results were not good enough. My siblings are still in school, and I wish they could get tertiary education. Once I got my results and realised, they were not good enough, I started looking for a job at the textile factory, and the money is not enough. I learned about informal cross-border trade from my colleagues at the textile factories. I started going to Johannesburg in 2017, then changed to Botswana in 2018, and as it is, I do it part time.

- Case 8:** I am 'M'e Khalalelo, a 47-year-old widow and mother of two children aged 28 and 18. I studied up to Form 5 and did not proceed to tertiary. Life was a bit different from the way it is now. So, I got married shortly after completing Form 5. My home is Sehlabeng in Matsieng, 45 kilometres from the city centre of Maseru. After moving to Maseru in search of employment, my husband got lucky and found a job, and I was not working. Since I was home most of the time, people used to knock house to house selling. I kept thinking they were possibly making money until I asked one who used to pass by my house selling. When I thought of how much they made, I decided to take a step and start. So, I started engaging in informal cross-border trade in 2003. I started in Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town in South Africa. I now have 10 years since I started travelling to Botswana. I have always been full time in informal cross-border trade.
- Case 9:** 'M'e Nthoi is my name, and I am 58 years old. I am married but have no children. I went as far as Form 2 in school and could not go further. My home village is in Likhutlong Mohales Hoek, but now I am settled here in Maseru. I struggled a lot back then as I worked at a retail store and was not earning enough money. I started in Gauteng and Durban. I never looked back, and my life has never been the same since then. I have over 35 years of experience as an informal cross-border trader.
- Case 10:** My name is mma Thembi. I am 45 years old. I am married and a mother of three girls, aged 25, 22, and 18. Our home is at Ha Makhalanyane, Roma, 42 kilometres from Maseru city centre. I did not complete my high school certificate because I married after completing Form 4. My parents had wished for me to study until tertiary level. I did short training on hairdressing and became a hairdresser afterward. My husband was also in the informal sector, so money was insufficient, especially with our girls growing. We wanted to give them an educational opportunity. We could only afford good schools if we made more money. My parents had still not come to terms with the fact that I had not continued my studies. When they saw us struggling to make ends meet, my father sold a cow to get start capital for informal cross-border trade. I started in 2000 buying shoes from Cape Town, jeans and jerseys from Botshabelo in South Africa. Prices kept

increasing over the years, and I was no longer making a profit; I then shifted to Botswana. It is four years now since I started going to Botswana.

- **Case 11:** My is mma Mochesane. I am a 45-year-old mother of two girls, aged 18 and 13. I am divorced and from Thaba Khupa in Mafeteng. I studied up to Form 5 and did not continue to tertiary school. When I divorced, I moved to Maseru away from my ex-husband and his family in Mafeteng. I was born and raised in Roma on the outskirts of Maseru. In 2006, I started going to Johannesburg, and it was never a fruitful business because of my marriage. My ex-husband did not like seeing me bring in more money than him, and he started emotionally abusing me. He would even take the money for stock and drink it. He used to say that is some lousy behaviour in informal cross-border trade. After five years in informal cross-border trade, I stopped because of him. I left the marriage after 12 years in 2014, and 2015 I was back in trade. I started stocking from Botswana in June 2016 till day. I have also been a full-time trader. Right now, I am building at Ha Thetsane.
- **Case 12:** I am called 'm'e Liteboho from Ha Mazenod, Maseru. I am 44 years of age and married with three children. My eldest son is 22, the second-born girl is 18 years, and the last-born son is 12. I studied up to Form 3 (also Form 3 in Botswana and grade 10 in South African education system) and dropped out of school at this stage because I had not done well with end-of-year examinations. I had no wisdom to repeat, so that was the end of school. The results were to determine my progression into Form 4. But I have about five years in the business and was pushed into it by lack of employment, especially for people without a tertiary degree like me. I am in it for full time. I enjoy buying stock in Botswana because it gets bought fast. I am grateful for this opportunity and my veteran mentor mma Khala.
- **Case 13:** Mma Boitumelo is my name. I am a married woman with three children: 31, a girl; 29, a boy; and 14 years, a girl. I did not go beyond Standard 7 at the primary level, and life has been challenging due to a lack of education. I live here at Tsoapo-le-bolila, Maseru. I used to work at the textile factories, but the wages were too low and longer catering to family needs. I have about three years in the business now.

- **Case 14:** Lack of job opportunities is a significant challenge. My name is ‘Matempi, and I am 45 years old. I was never married but have two sons, aged 19 and 15. I went as far as Standard 5 (also standard 5 in Botswana and grade 5 in South African education system) in the primary level and dropped out. Not because there were no means to pay for my fees but because I struggled in class as a slow learner. I felt the teachers were not patient to accommodate me.
- **Case 15:** I am ‘M’e Mampho, and I am 49. I have six children. I am a married woman. I studied up to Standard 7 at primary school. My husband was self-employed when we married, but as a woman, I felt I needed to do something as I was not employed then. I started informal cross-border trade in 1989. I used to go to Botshabelo in South Africa and Ladybrand, buying meat packages for resale in my community and surroundings. I have 30-plus years of experience in informal cross-border trade. We live in Mahlabatheng Maseru.

APPENDIX 3: ETHICS APPROVAL



Faculty of Humanities

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomotheo

Humanities 100
Since 1918

09 November 2020

Dear Mrs KA Maphosa

Project Title:	A different class? Basotho women informal cross border Traders to Botswana.
Researcher:	Mrs KA Maphosa
Supervisor(s):	Prof V Thebe
Department:	Anthropology and Archaeology
Reference number:	20691701 (HUM036/0820)
Degree:	Doctoral

I have pleasure in informing you that the above application was **approved** by the Research Ethics Committee on 09 November 2020. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pikirayi'.

Prof Innocent Pikirayi
Deputy Dean: Postgraduate Studies and Research Ethics
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail: PGHumanities@up.ac.za

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomotheo

Research Ethics Committee Members: Prof I Pikirayi (Deputy Dean); Prof KL Hama; Mr A Siza; Dr A-M de Beer; Dr A dos Santos; Ms KT Govender; Andrew; Dr P Cuthbert; Dr E Johnson; Prof D Mokoena; Mr A Mohamed; Dr I Naamé; Dr C Ruiters; Prof D Rayburn; Prof M Soer; Prof E Tlajau; Prof V Thebe; Ms B Tsohe; Ms D Mokhelepe

APPENDIX 4: CONSENT FORM



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CONSENT FORM

I have read the information presented in the letter about Basotho women's informal cross-border traders and have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study and received satisfactory answers.

I know the researcher will take written notes and record my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in publications from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous. The researcher explained that I may withdraw my consent without penalty. I willingly agree to participate in this study with full knowledge of those mentioned above.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Researcher's Name: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Contact Details

Researcher: Keneuoe Maphosa, University of Pretoria, Department of Archaeology, Anthropology, and Development Studies, Lynnwood Rd, Hatfield, Pretoria, 0002, South Africa, kmaphosa2022@gmail.com, +27 (0)76 262 4557

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APPENDIX 5: LETTER FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR



KARIEN HURTER
Copy Editor and Proofreader
Email: karien.hurter@gmail.com
Tel: 071 104 9484

3 October 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to confirm that *A Different Class? Basotho Women Informal Cross-border Traders to Botswana* by Keneuoe Alice Thibello was edited by a professional language practitioner. It requires further work by the author in response to my suggested edits. I cannot be held responsible for what the author does from this point onward.

Regards,

Karien Hurter