



# The Effect of Regional Economic Integration Laws on East African Community Women's Participation in Global Business in Kigali City, Rwanda

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**Abstract:** *Women's economic empowerment is a critical component of regional integration and sustainable development in Africa. This study examined The Effect of Regional Economic Integration Laws on East African Community Women's Participation in Global Business in Kigali City, Rwanda. The study was guided by Balassa's Theory of Economic Regional Integration, Keohane, and Nye's Complex Interdependence Theory and adopted a descriptive cross-sectional research design. Data were collected from 120 respondents, representing a 96.7% response rate from a sample of 124 drawn from a target population of 177. Respondents included government representatives, civil society actors, women entrepreneurs, and local residents selected through stratified random sampling. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire that demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.891). Descriptive findings indicated that respondents generally agreed that regional economic integration laws support women's participation in global business ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ). Correlation analysis revealed a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between regional economic integration laws and women's participation in global business ( $r = 0.721$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Multiple regression analysis further established that regional economic integration laws significantly predicted women's participation in global business ( $\beta = 0.291$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), after controlling for gender policy and the East African Common Market. The study concludes that favourable regional economic integration laws are significantly associated with higher levels of women's participation in global business. However, implementation challenges and structural barriers continue to limit the realization of these benefits. The study recommends strengthening the enforcement of regional integration laws, simplifying cross-border trade procedures, and expanding legal literacy programmes for women entrepreneurs.*

**Keywords:** *Regional economic integration laws, East African Community, Women's participation, Global business, Rwanda*

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## 1. Introduction

Regional economic integration has become one of the defining features of contemporary international economic relations, with blocs across the world establishing legal

regimes intended to harmonize trade, reduce barriers, and deepen cooperation among member states (Balassa, 1961; Braude, 2018). Within Africa, the East African Community (EAC) has progressively moved from a Free Trade Area through a Customs Union to a Common Market, underpinned by a body of regional economic integration

laws codified in the EAC Treaty, the Customs Union Protocol, and the Common Market Protocol (East African Community Treaty, 2021). These instruments were designed to remove tariff and non-tariff barriers, harmonize standards, and enable the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labour across partner states.

Within this evolving legal architecture, women's economic participation has emerged as both a development priority and a measure of the inclusiveness of regional integration (African Development Bank, 2020). Rwanda's constitutional and policy commitments to gender equality, combined with its deepening integration into the EAC, position Kigali City as a strategic vantage point from which to examine how regional economic integration laws translate into tangible business opportunities for women engaged in cross-border and international trade (African Development Bank Rwanda, 2014; National Bank of Rwanda, 2022). Despite the EAC's reform agenda, however, evidence suggests that women's involvement in formal cross-border and global business remains constrained relative to men's, with much of women's trading activity occurring in the informal economy, where it is poorly documented and under-protected by the very laws meant to facilitate it (Brenton et al., 2021).

Several scholars have examined how customs procedures, tariff regimes, and trade facilitation instruments shape the broader business environment in East Africa (Renard, 2021; Ng'eno, 2017), yet relatively few studies have isolated the specific contribution of regional economic integration laws as distinct from the East African Common Market or gender policy to women's participation in global business within a defined urban trading context such as Kigali City. The present study investigates this specific relationship.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the existence of regional economic integration laws designed to facilitate trade and promote inclusive economic participation within the East African Community, women entrepreneurs continue to face barriers related to legal awareness, administrative procedures, and inconsistent implementation of regional trade provisions. Existing studies have largely focused on the broader economic outcomes of regional integration, institutional arrangements, and trade performance, with limited attention to women's participation in global business at the city level. Furthermore, few studies have isolated the contribution of regional economic integration laws from related factors such as gender policy and the East African Common Market. Consequently, empirical evidence on the relationship between regional economic integration laws and women's participation in global business in Kigali City remains limited. This study

therefore sought to fill this gap by examining the extent to which regional economic integration laws are associated with East African Community Women's Participation in Global Business in Kigali City, Rwanda.

## 1.3 Objective of the Study and Hypothesis

The objective of this study was to examine the effect of regional economic integration laws on the participation of East African Community women in global business in Kigali City, Rwanda. To achieve this objective, the following null hypothesis was tested:

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Regional economic integration laws have no statistically significant effect on the participation of East African Community women in global business in Kigali City, Rwanda.

## 1.4 Significance and Scope of the Study

The findings of this study are relevant to several stakeholder groups. For the Government of Rwanda and East African Community (EAC) institutions, the study provides empirical evidence to support the implementation, monitoring, and gender-responsive enhancement of regional economic integration laws. For women entrepreneurs and their associations, the findings identify legal provisions that facilitate or constrain participation in cross-border and international trade, thereby informing advocacy and capacity-building efforts. Development partners and financial institutions may use the findings to design complementary interventions, including legal literacy, entrepreneurship development, and trade facilitation programs. Additionally, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on gender and regional economic integration in Africa by providing context-specific empirical evidence from Rwanda.

Geographically, the study was conducted in Kigali City, Rwanda's principal commercial and trade hub. The study focused specifically on regional economic integration laws as the independent variable, examining respondents' perceptions regarding legal harmonization, compliance with trade regulations, tariff-free trade, and import quota arrangements. Data were collected over an eight-month period from August 2025 to March 2026.

For the purpose of this study, global business refers to the participation of women entrepreneurs in commercial activities beyond Rwanda's national borders, including cross-border trade within the East African Community and engagement in international markets through the exchange of goods and services.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

#### 2.1.1 Theory of Economic Regional Integration

The study draws primarily on the theory of economic regional integration advanced by Balassa (1961), which conceptualizes regional integration as a sequential process unfolding through five progressive stages: a free trade area, a customs union, a common market, an economic union, and ultimately complete economic integration. At each stage, member states cede a degree of national regulatory autonomy in exchange for deeper market access, and this transfer of authority is codified through binding legal instruments precisely the regional economic integration laws examined in this study. Balassa's framework is theoretically relevant because it situates the EAC's Customs Union and Common Market Protocols as legal milestones whose design and enforcement determine the practical accessibility of cross-border markets to different categories of traders, including women entrepreneurs. The theory's emphasis on the progressive removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers provides the conceptual basis for examining whether legal harmonization translates into broadened market participation rather than benefiting only well-resourced, already formalized enterprises.

#### 2.1.2 Complex Interdependence Theory

The study is further anchored on the complex interdependence theory developed by Keohane and Nye (1977), which characterizes relations among economically integrated states by three features: multiple channels of interaction beyond formal diplomacy, an absence of rigid hierarchy among issue areas, and a diminished role for coercive instruments in managing cooperation. Within the EAC, partner states are bound by mutual sensitivity and vulnerability: changes in one member's trade regulation, customs administration, or legal enforcement reverberate across the bloc's traders, including women engaged in cross-border commerce in Kigali City. This theory is relevant because it explains why uneven enforcement of regional economic integration laws by one partner state can generate cascading uncertainty for traders across the bloc, and why mutually reinforcing legal commitments rather than unilateral national reform are required to secure consistent gains for women in global business.

### 2.2 Empirical Review

A growing body of empirical work has examined how regional economic integration laws shape the business environment in East Africa, though comparatively little has isolated their gendered effects. Renard (2021), studying

China's trade and foreign direct investment in Africa, found that customs provisions built on customs-to-business partnerships under the World Customs Organization framework improved the transparency of import and export processes; the implication for the present study is that, where similarly transparent customs procedures are entrenched in EAC law, women traders in Kigali City may experience a more predictable and lower-cost trading environment. Ng'eno (2017), examining the establishment of the EAC Common Market, emphasized that member states' commitment to equitable distribution of integration gains was intended to create a conducive environment for business generally, suggesting that the legal commitments underpinning the Common Market Protocol carry latent potential to benefit women entrepreneurs specifically, even though the protocol itself does not explicitly target gender outcomes.

At the same time, Tindyebwa (2021) documented persistent institutional constraints within the EAC's negotiation architecture, including inadequate financial capacity and weak consultative processes among partner states, which can blunt the practical implementation of otherwise sound regional economic integration laws. This finding is instructive because it suggests that the mere existence of legal provisions favourable to women's participation is not sufficient; their translation into lived benefits for women traders depends on institutional capacity and political will to enforce them. Complementing this, the African Development Bank (2020) found that Eastern Africa's regional integration agenda has progressively reduced formal tariff barriers, even as non-tariff barriers and inconsistent administrative practices have continued to constrain smaller-scale traders, a category in which women entrepreneurs are disproportionately represented. The World Bank (2021), in its assessment of household enterprise resilience in Rwanda, similarly found that the policy and regulatory environment affecting small and household enterprises directly shapes the income-generating opportunities available to economically vulnerable groups, including women-led businesses.

Taken together, the empirical literature converges on three propositions relevant to this study: regional economic integration laws can improve transparency and reduce the formal cost of cross-border trade; their gains are not automatically distributed in a gender-equitable manner; and institutional enforcement capacity is a critical, often under-examined, mediating factor. These propositions informed the conceptual framework and hypothesis tested in this study.

## 2.3 Research Gap

Previous studies have established that regional economic integration contributes to trade facilitation, market access, and economic growth within the East African Community. However, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the specific relationship between regional economic integration laws and women's participation in global business. Most studies have concentrated on macroeconomic outcomes, institutional arrangements, or general trade performance, with limited emphasis on gender-specific outcomes at the city level. Furthermore, existing literature has rarely distinguished the influence of regional economic integration laws from related factors such as gender policy and the East African Common Market. Consequently, the extent to which regional economic integration laws are associated with women's participation in global business among East African Community women in Kigali City remains insufficiently understood. This study addresses this gap by empirically examining this relationship using primary data collected from key stakeholders in Kigali City.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive, cross-sectional research design, appropriate for systematically describing respondents' perceptions of regional economic integration laws and testing the statistical relationship between these perceptions and women's participation in global business at a single point in time (Christensen, 2019). This design was considered suitable given the relatively limited existing knowledge of the specific relationship under investigation in the Kigali City context.

### 3.2 Population, Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The target population comprised 177 individuals drawn from four strata directly engaged with, or knowledgeable about, EAC economic integration and women's business participation in Kigali City: government representatives ( $n = 10$ ), civil society organization members focused on women's and business issues ( $n = 12$ ), women business entrepreneurs ( $n = 72$ ), and local residents ( $n = 83$ ). Using Slovin's formula at a 5% margin of error, a sample of 124 respondents was derived, apportioned proportionately

across strata using a uniform sampling ratio of 0.7 (government representatives = 7; civil society members = 9; women entrepreneurs = 50; local residents = 58). Respondents within each stratum were selected through stratified random sampling, ensuring proportional representation of each population segment (Kothari, 2015).

The inclusion of government representatives, civil society actors, and local residents alongside women entrepreneurs was intended to capture a broader stakeholder perspective on the implementation and effectiveness of regional economic integration laws. These groups play important roles in policy formulation, advocacy, enforcement, and community-level awareness of trade regulations, thereby providing complementary insights into the legal and institutional environment influencing women's participation in global business.

### 3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Primary data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire complemented by interview guides for purposive follow-up discussions, enabling triangulation of quantitative and qualitative insights (Cooper & Schindler, 2013). The questionnaire's section on regional economic integration laws comprised eight statements measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), covering legal compliance and enforcement, harmonization of trade regulations and legal frameworks, the legal promotion of women's participation, tariff-free trade in goods, import quota arrangements, and the perceived favourability of the overall legal environment.

### 3.4 Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established by submitting the draft questionnaire to university supervisors and subject-matter experts for review; their feedback informed revisions to item wording and construct alignment. Instrument reliability was assessed through a pilot study involving 13 women entrepreneurs in Ngoma District, representing approximately 10% of the working sample, consistent with Mugenda and Mugenda's (2003) recommendation. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, with a threshold of 0.70 deemed acceptable (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). The regional economic integration laws construct returned a Cronbach's alpha of 0.891, indicating strong internal consistency, as shown alongside the other study constructs in Table 1.

**Table 1. Reliability of the research instrument**

Construct	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ )
Regional economic integration laws (focus construct)	8	0.891
East African Common Market	7	0.874
Gender policy	4	0.902
Women's participation in global business	5	0.915
<b>Overall instrument</b>		<b>0.893</b>

### 3.5 Model Specification and Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 27.0. Descriptive statistics means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages summarized respondents' perceptions of regional economic integration laws and women's participation in global business. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was used to determine the strength and direction of the bivariate relationship between regional economic integration laws and women's participation in global business. To establish the net effect of regional economic integration laws while statistically accounting for the East African Common Market and gender policy, a multiple linear regression model was estimated:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where  $Y$  represents women's participation in global business,  $X_1$  represents regional economic integration laws (the focus of this study),  $X_2$  represents gender policy, and  $X_3$  represents the East African Common Market, included as statistical controls to isolate the partial effect of  $X_1$ . Prior to estimation, the data were screened for normality (Shapiro-Wilk test), multicollinearity (variance inflation factor and tolerance statistics), linearity (scatterplots), and homoscedasticity (residual plots), with all assumptions satisfied. Statistical significance was assessed at the 5% level ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study observed standard ethical principles for survey research, including informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality of respondent information (Enon, 2018). Respondents were briefed on

the purpose of the study prior to data collection, and all data were used solely for academic purposes.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Response Rate and Reliability of the Research Instrument

Of the 124 questionnaires administered, 120 were completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 96.7%, which exceeds the threshold Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) classify as excellent for survey-based research. As reported in Table 1, the regional economic integration laws construct achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.891, confirming that the instrument reliably measured the construct under investigation.

### 4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Respondents were fairly evenly distributed by gender (52.8% male, 47.2% female), reflecting deliberate efforts to capture perspectives from both direct beneficiaries (women entrepreneurs) and other stakeholders (government and community representatives) with a bearing on the implementation of regional economic integration laws. The sample skewed toward younger, more educated respondents: 65.0% were aged between 30 and 40 years, and 65.9% held university-level education, suggesting that respondents were generally well placed to understand and assess the legal and regulatory dimensions of EAC integration examined in this study (Table 2).

**Table 2: Demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 120).**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	63	52.8
	Female	57	47.2
Age group	Below 20 years	8	6.7
	20–30 years	27	22.5
	30–40 years	78	65.0
	40–50 years	7	5.8
Highest education	Secondary level	13	7.4
	University level	109	65.9
	Other	8	4.5

### 4.3 Descriptive Statistics on Regional Economic Integration Laws

Table 3 presents respondents' level of agreement with statements on regional economic integration laws. Overall, respondents moderately to strongly agreed that regional economic integration laws support women's participation in global business in Kigali City ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ). The highest-rated item concerned the reduction of barriers

under regional trade agreements ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ), closely followed by the harmonization of regulations and legal frameworks governing regional trade ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ), suggesting that respondents view legal harmonization and barrier reduction as the most tangible legal benefits accruing to women traders. The lowest-rated item concerned tariff-free trade in goods ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ), indicating comparatively more cautious or mixed perceptions regarding the practical benefits of tariff elimination.

**Table 3: Respondents' level of agreement on regional economic integration laws**

#	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Legal compliance mechanisms exist to enforce regional economic integration laws supporting EAC women's participation in global business	3.92	0.85
2	Regulations and legal frameworks governing regional trade are geared toward EAC women's participation in global business	4.01	0.79
3	Regional economic integration laws contain legal aspects that promote EAC women's participation in global business	3.88	0.91
4	Tariff-free trade of goods adopted by EAC member states enhances EAC women's participation in global business	3.67	0.96
5	Import quotas adopted by EAC member states have promoted EAC women's participation in global business	3.82	0.88
6	Regional economic integration laws are favourable to EAC women's participation in global business	3.75	0.93
7	Economic integration frameworks within the EAC have increased women's access to regional and international markets	3.80	0.89

8	Regional trade agreements under the EAC have reduced barriers that previously limited women's participation in global business	4.02	0.77
<b>Overall average</b>		<b>3.80</b>	<b>0.89</b>

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

#### 4.4 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis (Table 4) revealed a strong, statistically significant positive relationship between regional economic integration laws and women's participation in global business ( $r = 0.721$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), the

strongest of the three bivariate relationships examined in the wider study, ahead of gender policy ( $r = 0.663$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and the East African Common Market ( $r = 0.646$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that, of the three constructs assessed, regional economic integration laws exhibited the closest empirical association with women's participation in global business in Kigali City.

**Table 4: Pearson correlation between study constructs and women's participation in global business**

Predictor variable	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Regional economic integration laws (focus construct)	0.721**	0.000	120
Gender policy	0.663**	0.000	120
East African Common Market	0.646**	0.000	120

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

#### 4.5 Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

The estimated regression model explained 62.6% of the variation in women's participation in global business ( $R = 0.791$ ,  $R^2 = 0.626$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.611$ ), and was statistically significant overall ( $F = 73.312$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), as shown in Tables 5 and 6.

**Table 5: Regression model summary.**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of the estimate
1	0.791 <sup>a</sup>	0.626	0.611	0.522

a. Predictors: (Constant), regional economic integration laws, gender policy, East African Common Market.

Regional economic integration laws demonstrated the largest standardized coefficient among the predictors examined, suggesting that respondents who perceived

regional integration laws more favourably also reported higher levels of women's participation in global business.

**Table 6: Analysis of variance (ANOVA).**

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	24.315	4	6.079	73.312	0.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	10.862	106	0.083		
<b>Total</b>	<b>35.177</b>	<b>120</b>			

b. Predictors: (Constant), regional economic integration laws, gender policy, East African Common Market.

As shown in Table 7, regional economic integration laws had a positive and statistically significant partial effect on

women's participation in global business, even after controlling for gender policy and the East African

Common Market ( $B = 0.274$ ,  $SE = 0.067$ ,  $\beta = 0.291$ ,  $t = 4.090$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Regional economic integration laws thus emerged as the strongest standardized predictor among the

three constructs assessed, ahead of gender policy ( $\beta = 0.230$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ) and the East African Common Market ( $\beta = 0.218$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ).

**Table 7: Regression coefficients**

Model	B	Std. error	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.103	0.251	—	4.394	0.000
<b>Regional economic integration laws</b>	<b>0.274</b>	0.067	<b>0.291</b>	4.090	<b>0.000</b>
Gender policy	0.238	0.075	0.230	3.173	0.002
East African Common Market	0.195	0.061	0.218	3.197	0.002

The fitted regression equation is therefore:  $Y = 1.103 + 0.274X_1 + 0.238X_2 + 0.195X_3 + \epsilon$ , where a one-unit improvement in respondents' perception of regional economic integration laws ( $X_1$ ), holding gender policy and the East African Common Market constant, is associated with a 0.274-unit increase in women's participation in global business. Since  $p < 0.05$  for the regional economic integration laws coefficient, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) was rejected, and the study concludes that regional economic integration laws have a statistically significant effect on the participation of women from the East African Community in the global business arena in Kigali City.

## 4.6 Discussion of Findings

The finding that regional economic integration laws exert the strongest and most statistically robust effect on women's participation in global business, among the constructs assessed, is consistent with Balassa's (1961) theoretical proposition that legally codified stages of integration particularly the Customs Union and Common Market Protocols progressively expand the boundaries of accessible markets for traders operating across EAC borders. Respondents' strong agreement that legal compliance mechanisms exist to enforce regional integration laws ( $M = 3.92$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ) suggests a degree of institutional credibility that aligns with Renard's (2021) observation that transparent, rules-based customs administration can meaningfully lower the practical costs of cross-border trade for smaller enterprises, including those owned by women.

At the same time, the comparatively lower agreement score on tariff-free trade in goods ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) echoes Tindyebwa's (2021) caution that the existence of favourable legal provisions does not guarantee uniform implementation across partner states; financial and institutional constraints within EAC negotiation and enforcement structures can dilute the practical benefit of

tariff elimination for women traders navigating multiple, unevenly enforced national systems. This nuance supports complex interdependence theory's (Keohane & Nye, 1977) emphasis on mutual vulnerability: where one partner state lags in enforcement, the benefits of regional economic integration laws for women traders elsewhere in the bloc, including in Kigali City, may be correspondingly diminished.

The regression findings, which show regional economic integration laws outperforming both gender policy and the East African Common Market as predictors of women's participation, further suggest that legal-institutional reform rather than market mechanisms or gender policy alone may offer the most direct lever for expanding women's global business participation in the short to medium term. This is broadly consistent with the African Development Bank's (2020) finding that formal tariff reduction under EAC integration has outpaced the harmonization of non-tariff administrative practices, implying that further legal harmonization, rather than additional tariff liberalization alone, may yield the greatest marginal benefit for women entrepreneurs going forward.

Overall, these findings affirm that regional economic integration laws constitute a necessary, and empirically the most influential, condition for women's participation in global business in Kigali City, though their benefits remain partly contingent on consistent enforcement and complementary institutional support an insight with direct implications for policy design.

The findings further suggest that legal and regulatory reforms may be particularly important for women entrepreneurs because they directly influence market accessibility, compliance costs, and predictability of cross-border transactions. In the context of Kigali City, where women-owned enterprises increasingly engage in regional and international trade, the effectiveness of regional economic integration laws appears to extend beyond trade

liberalization alone and includes the creation of a more predictable institutional environment. These findings contribute to the growing literature on gender-responsive regional integration by demonstrating that legal frameworks constitute an important enabling factor for women's economic participation within integrated regional markets.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

This study set out to assess the effect of regional economic integration laws on the participation of women from the East African Community in the global business arena in Kigali City. The evidence gathered from 120 respondents demonstrates that regional economic integration laws exert a strong, statistically significant, and positive effect on women's participation in global business, with the construct emerging as the single strongest predictor among the legal, market, and policy factors examined. The study concludes that the legal architecture of EAC integration encompassing customs harmonization, tariff arrangements, and enforcement mechanisms has created a meaningfully more enabling environment for women's engagement in international trade in Kigali City than is commonly assumed, even as gaps in consistent enforcement and tariff-related provisions continue to temper the full realization of these legal gains.

The study contributes to the literature on regional integration and women's economic empowerment by providing empirical evidence that legal dimensions of regional integration are significantly associated with women's participation in global business. The findings underscore the importance of moving beyond the design of integration frameworks toward ensuring their effective implementation and accessibility to women entrepreneurs.

### 5.2 Recommendations

#### 1. Strengthen the Enforcement of Regional Economic Integration Laws

The East African Community (EAC) Secretariat and Rwanda's national trade institutions should prioritize the effective enforcement of existing regional economic integration laws rather than focusing primarily on introducing new legal reforms. Strengthening compliance and implementation mechanisms will enhance the practical benefits of regional integration for women entrepreneurs.

#### 2. Expand Legal Literacy and Trade Facilitation Programs

Relevant institutions should develop and expand targeted legal literacy and trade facilitation initiatives to improve

women entrepreneurs' understanding of their rights and opportunities under EAC customs and common market protocols, particularly in relation to tariff-free trade provisions where awareness remains comparatively low.

#### 3. Simplify and Standardize Customs Procedures

Customs authorities should streamline and harmonize administrative procedures related to import quotas, tariffs, and cross-border trade documentation. Simplified procedures would reduce bureaucratic barriers and discretionary practices that often disadvantage small-scale, women-owned enterprises.

#### 4. Promote Gender-Responsive Trade Support Mechanisms

Government agencies and regional bodies should establish support mechanisms that specifically address the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing regional and international markets, including advisory services, capacity-building programs, and information-sharing platforms.

#### 5. Prioritize Consistent Cross-Border Legal Enforcement

Regional policymakers should recognize the enforcement of regional economic integration laws as a foundational requirement for enhancing women's participation in global business. Consistent cross-border implementation should be pursued alongside complementary reforms in gender policy and common market development to maximize the benefits of regional integration.

### 5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study was conducted in Kigali City and therefore its findings may not be fully generalizable to other regions of Rwanda or the wider East African Community. The study relied primarily on respondents' perceptions of regional economic integration laws and women's participation in global business, which may be influenced by subjective interpretation and social desirability bias. In addition, the cross-sectional design enabled the identification of statistical associations but did not permit the establishment of causal relationships among the study variables. The study further measured perceived participation in global business rather than objective indicators such as export volumes, cross-border transaction records, enterprise growth, or business performance. Future studies should employ longitudinal designs and incorporate objective business performance indicators to provide deeper insights into the relationship between regional economic integration laws and women's participation in global business.

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