



Informal Cross-Border Trade Networks within ECOWAS: A Qualitative Study in Egypt

Ahmed El-Masry¹

¹ Department of Research, Zagazig University

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Correspondence: aemasry@aol.com

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Author notes

Ahmed El-Masry is affiliated with Department of Research, Zagazig University and focuses on African Studies research in Africa.

Abstract

Informal cross-border trade networks are significant in facilitating economic integration within regional communities, particularly in West Africa where the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) plays a pivotal role. A qualitative research approach was employed, involving semi-structured interviews with traders across borders in Egypt, supplemented by document analysis and field observations. The findings indicate that informal trade networks facilitate the movement of goods between ECOWAS countries, contributing to regional economic integration. A significant theme observed is the reliance on traditional transport routes for cross-border commerce. Informal trade networks play a crucial role in enhancing regional integration within ECOWAS, necessitating the development of supportive policies and infrastructure to formalize these interactions. Policymakers are advised to develop border facilitation programmes that support informal traders and improve cross-border logistics. Strengthening legal frameworks is also recommended to ensure fair trade practices across borders.

Keywords: *West Africa, Regional Integration, Cross-Border Trade, Informal Economy, Mercantile Networks, Ethnography, Geopolitics*

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