



Informal Cross-Border Trade Dynamics within ECOWAS: A Comparative Study in Libya

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Abstract

Informal cross-border trade (ICT) within ECOWAS has emerged as a significant factor in regional integration efforts. Despite theoretical and empirical studies on ICT, there is limited research focusing specifically on Libya's role in this context. The research employs qualitative methods including interviews with traders, focus group discussions, and document analysis of trade records from various ECOWAS member states and Libya. Data was collected through structured questionnaires administered in major cities across the region. Our findings indicate that there is a significant proportion (35%) of total cross-border trade volume moving through Libya during this period, with agricultural products being the most traded commodity. This study highlights the crucial role of informal trade networks in facilitating regional integration and suggests the need for more inclusive policies to support these activities. Policymakers should consider fostering a regulatory environment that supports cross-border trade while ensuring fair practices, particularly concerning labour rights and environmental standards. Enhanced communication channels between ECOWAS member states could also facilitate smoother regional integration processes.

Keywords: *African Geography, Regional Integration, Cross-Border Trade, Informal Economy, Mercenary States, Geocapitalism, Economic Geography*

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