



Informal Cross-Border Trade Networks in ECOWAS Regions of Ghana: A Qualitative Exploration

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Abstract

Informal cross-border trade networks play a significant role in regional integration within ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), particularly in Ghana's ecologically diverse and economically interconnected regions. A mixed-methods approach combining semi-structured interviews with focus groups was employed to gather insights from traders, government officials, and community leaders across multiple regions of Ghana. Data analysis involved thematic coding and content analysis. Semi-structured interviews revealed that informal cross-border trade networks in Ghana's ECOWAS regions facilitate the exchange of goods such as agricultural products, livestock, and manufactured items. The proportion of traders who operate across borders is estimated at around 30%, with a significant focus on regional staple food production. The study highlights the importance of strengthening regulatory frameworks to ensure fair trade practices while promoting sustainable development in these regions. Recommendations include improving infrastructure connectivity, enhancing market access for small-scale producers, and fostering inter-regional collaboration among ECOWAS member states. Develop a regional cross-border trade policy that addresses common challenges such as border clearance procedures, customs regulations, and dispute resolution mechanisms. Implement targeted training programmes for traders to improve their business practices and market knowledge.

Keywords: *Geographic, West African, Informal Economy, Cross-border, Regional Integration, Ethnography, Community Engagement*

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