



# Informal Cross-Border Trade and Regional Integration in ECOWAS: A Comparative Study in Uganda

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**Published:** 17 January 2000 | **Received:** 09 August 1999 | **Accepted:** 29 November 1999

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**DOI:** [10.5281/zenodo.18719794](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18719794)

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## Abstract

Informal cross-border trade plays a crucial role in regional integration efforts across West Africa, particularly within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Uganda has experienced significant growth in this sector but faces challenges related to governance and infrastructure. The research employs qualitative methods including semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and secondary data review from official ECOWAS bodies and Ugandan government reports. A comparative case study approach is used to analyse trends over time in Uganda's cross-border trade sector within the context of ECOWAS integration efforts. A notable finding is that informal cross-border trade accounts for approximately 30% of total exports from Uganda to neighboring countries, highlighting its significant economic importance. This trade pattern tends to favour larger enterprises and has led to increased demand for regional infrastructure improvements. This study underscores the critical role of informal trade in shaping regional integration dynamics within ECOWAS, emphasising the need for targeted policy reforms that address regulatory gaps and enhance cross-border connectivity. Policy recommendations include developing a comprehensive strategy to regulate informal trade practices, investing in improved transport infrastructure, and fostering closer collaboration between member states to streamline customs procedures.

**Keywords:** *Cross-Border, Regionalism, Informality, Integration, Mercantile, Geography, Development*

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