



Informal Cross-Border Trade and Regional Integration in ECOWAS from an Ethiopian Perspective

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Abstract

This article examines informal cross-border trade dynamics within ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), with a particular focus on Ethiopia's role and perspective. The research employs a qualitative approach, drawing on interviews with key stakeholders including informal cross-border traders, government officials, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Ethiopia. Data analysis focuses on thematic content coding of interview transcripts and secondary data from ECOWAS records. Informal cross-border trade constitutes approximately 20% of total trade value within the region, with a significant proportion of this activity originating from Ethiopian traders who operate across borders to exploit price differentials. This sector faces regulatory challenges such as lack of documentation and enforcement issues. The findings suggest that while informal trade contributes positively to regional economies by filling gaps in formal supply chains, it also poses regulatory hurdles that hinder broader integration efforts. The study concludes with recommendations for improving the legal framework governing cross-border transactions. Recommendations include developing a comprehensive regulatory system that recognizes and legitimizes informal trade practices within ECOWAS borders, alongside enhancing enforcement mechanisms to ensure fair competition and compliance with regional standards.

Keywords: *Ethiopia, Cross-Border Trade, Regional Integration, Informal Economy, Development Studies, Economic Geography, Policy Analysis*

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