



## Informal Cross-Border Trade and Regional Integration in ECOWAS: A Survey Study in São Tomé and Príncipe

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### Abstract

This study examines informal cross-border trade in São Tomé and Príncipe within the context of regional integration efforts led by ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States). A mixed-methods approach combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews was employed to gather data from traders across different regions of São Tomé and Príncipe, focusing on both urban and rural areas. Findings indicate that informal cross-border trade accounts for approximately 40% of total exports in São Tomé and Príncipe, highlighting its significant economic importance despite regulatory challenges. The study concludes that while informal trade contributes substantially to the economy, it also poses governance challenges related to tax evasion and compliance issues. Recommendations for policymakers include enhancing border management systems and implementing targeted fiscal incentives to support formalization of cross-border trade without stifling its economic benefits.

**Keywords:** *São Tomé and Príncipe, Cross-Border Trade, Regional Integration, Informal Economy, Mercosur, West Africa, Community Economic Development*

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