



Informal Cross-Border Trade Networks within ECOWAS: A Qualitative Study in Namibia,

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Abstract

Informal cross-border trade networks play a significant role in regional economies, particularly within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This study focuses on Namibia's participation in these networks, considering its position as a landlocked country with limited direct access to ECOWAS markets. A qualitative study was employed, involving semi-structured interviews with 30 traders from various regions within Namibia who engage in cross-border trade with ECOWAS countries. Data collection also included document analysis of trade-related documents and observations at border crossings. The findings indicate that informal trade networks are crucial for the livelihoods of Namibian traders, accounting for an estimated 20-30% of total exports to ECOWAS countries. Key goods include livestock products, minerals, and manufactured items. The study also reveals significant gender disparities in trading roles. This research highlights the importance of informal cross-border trade networks within ECOWAS for Namibian economies, underscoring their role in regional integration processes despite regulatory challenges. Policy recommendations include enhancing border facilitation measures to reduce transaction costs and improving access to credit facilities for small-scale traders. Furthermore, strengthening intergovernmental cooperation is suggested to address cross-border issues effectively.

Keywords: *Geography, Africa, Spatial Analysis, Ethnographic Research, Trade Networks, Migration Studies, Historical Anthropology*

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