



Informal Cross-Border Trade Networks within ECOWAS: Implications for Burundi's Regional Integration Efforts

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Abstract

Burundi is a small country in East Africa that has been striving to integrate into regional economic blocs such as ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States). However, its integration efforts are often hindered by informal cross-border trade networks which operate outside formal regulatory frameworks. The study employed a qualitative analysis approach, drawing insights from existing literature and interviews with local traders and government officials. Informal cross-border trade networks have significantly influenced Burundi's regional integration by causing disruptions to planned regulatory reforms aimed at fostering a more uniform economic environment across ECOWAS member states. For instance, these informal networks often bypass customs checks, leading to inconsistencies in tax revenues collected by the national and regional authorities. The findings underscore the need for concerted efforts towards formalising cross-border trade practices within Burundi's integration strategy with ECOWAS. This includes strengthening regulatory mechanisms and enhancing dialogue between government entities and informal traders. To facilitate effective regional integration, it is recommended that Burundi collaborates closely with ECOWAS to establish clear guidelines for cross-border trade operations. Additionally, promoting education and awareness programmes among local traders about the benefits of formalising their practices can help mitigate disruptions caused by informal networks.

Keywords: *African, Cross-border, Informality, Regionalism, Integration, Networks, Empiricism*

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