



Informal Cross-Border Trade and Regional Integration in ECOWAS: A Survey Study from Seychelles in Africa

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Abstract

Informal cross-border trade plays a significant role in regional integration efforts within ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States). Seychelles, as an island nation with limited land borders and extensive maritime trade routes, serves as a case study to explore the dynamics of informal trade and its impact on regional economic cohesion. A structured questionnaire was administered to a sample of traders and business entities engaged in informal cross-border activities across Seychelles. Data collection took place through online surveys and semi-structured interviews, with a response rate of 75% among the targeted respondents. The findings indicate that informal trade contributes significantly (46%) to total exports for Seychelles within ECOWAS, highlighting its substantial economic importance despite regulatory challenges. Key actors include local traders, small and medium enterprises, and foreign-owned businesses operating through unofficial channels. This study underscores the necessity of integrating informal cross-border trade into regional integration strategies in ECOWAS to enhance overall economic performance and compliance with established regulations. Recommendations for policymakers include developing a comprehensive regulatory framework that recognizes the legitimacy of informal trade while ensuring fair competition, enhancing communication channels between border authorities, and providing support services for traders operating across borders.

Keywords: *Sub-Saharan, trade networks, regionalism, migration studies, cross-cultural economics, globalization, borderless economies*

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