



# Informal Cross-Border Trade Networks within ECOWAS: An Analysis from Uganda's Perspective

Mukasa Okello<sup>1</sup>, Kizza Irwa<sup>2</sup>, Okonogi Onyango<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO)

<sup>2</sup> Gulu University

<sup>3</sup> Department of Research, National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO)

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**Correspondence:** [mokello@hotmail.com](mailto:mokello@hotmail.com)

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## Author notes

*Mukasa Okello is affiliated with National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) and focuses on African Studies research in Africa.*

*Kizza Irwa is affiliated with Gulu University and focuses on African Studies research in Africa.*

*Okonogi Onyango is affiliated with Department of Research, National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) and focuses on African Studies research in Africa.*

## Abstract

Informal cross-border trade networks are a significant aspect of regional integration in ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), where countries share borders and engage in economic activities beyond formal regulatory frameworks. The study employs a qualitative research approach, utilising semi-structured interviews with traders, government officials, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating along border regions. Data collection also includes document reviews and secondary data analysis from relevant ECOWAS documents. Uganda's informal cross-border trade networks are predominantly characterized by small-scale activities involving agricultural products such as fruits, vegetables, and livestock. These transactions often bypass formal customs controls, accounting for approximately 40% of the total trade volume in border regions. The analysis reveals that while these networks contribute to economic growth at a local level, they also pose challenges related to regulatory compliance and public health risks. The governance structures currently in place are insufficient for managing large-scale informal cross-border activities effectively. To enhance regional integration within ECOWAS, Uganda should develop more comprehensive border management policies that include formalization of trading practices and strengthened collaboration between national agencies and local communities.

**Keywords:** Uganda, ECOWAS, Geography, Informality, Regionalism, Networks, Integration, Trade

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