



Informal Cross-Border Trade and Regional Integration in ECOWAS from an African Perspective in Central 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). Central Africa's economic landscape is characterized by underdeveloped infrastructure and limited formal trade networks, necessitating alternative channels for goods movement. The analysis employs qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews with traders and policymakers, as well as a review of existing literature on cross-border trade in Central Africa and ECOWAS. Data triangulation was used to validate findings. Informal trade in the region accounts for approximately 30% of total trade volumes, predominantly involving small-scale farmers and artisanal producers. This informal sector operates with minimal regulatory oversight, posing challenges for broader integration efforts. The study underscores the importance of integrating informal cross-border trade into regional integration strategies to foster sustainable development in Central Africa's ECOWAS region. Policymakers should prioritise developing a comprehensive legal framework that recognizes and regulates informal cross-border trade, ensuring equitable participation for all stakeholders. Enhanced cooperation between neighboring countries is also recommended to streamline border processes.

Keywords: *Sub-Saharan, Cross-border, Informality, Regionalism, Mercantilism, Decentralization, Integrationist*

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