

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MICRO-REGIONALIZATION BETWEEN ETHIOPIA AND KENYA AT THE MOYALE MICRO- REGION AND ITS PAYBACKS

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to assess the characteristics of cross-border interactions among the people of Ethiopia and Kenya across the border in Moyale. It was conducted through the collection of secondary data and information. It is revealed that the Moyale micro-region is a favorable area for social and economic ties, as similar communal groups such as the Borana, Garri, Gabra, and Burji are living, which facilitates the movement of people, goods, and services that buttress micro-regionalization between Ethiopia and Kenya. It is found that cross-border market and trade activities are important for sustaining border communities' livelihoods. Most remarkably, people of the two communities living in Ethiopia and Kenya are further integrated in the socio-political aspects. Besides the instincts stimulated by inter-group marriages, people in Ethiopia cross the border to participate in the election of Members of Parliament and members to the county in Kenya, and the communities have even two ID cards –an Ethiopian and a Kenyan– though the Ethiopian law prohibits dual citizenship. They also usually cross the border to access health centers and schools on the other side. Both Ethiopian and Kenyan governments should design and enforce policies that encourage cross-border micro-regional socio-economic activities that would capitalize on comparative advantage for different local and national economies.

Keywords: Micro-Regionalization, Cross-Border Socio-Economic Interaction, Ethiopia, Kenya, Moyale, paybacks

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Formal Regional integration has been one of the top agendas of African leaders which is reflected in the 1980 Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa, 1980-2000, the Final Act of Lagos (1980), the 1991 Abuja Treaty, and the Constitutive Act of the African Union of 2000 as its building pillars for the envisioned United States of Africa. Because this process mainly involves the state and the conduct of political and policy affairs, it is known as formal integration (Söderbaum, 2011), institutional integration (Sohn, Reitel, & Walther, 2009), or policy-driven integration (Perkmann, 2007), and is referred to as regionalism.

However, the continent's economy is predominantly informal, and the informal cross-border trade (ICBT) constitutes a cornerstone of economic activity within the IGAD region, which contributed to IGAD's GDP at 24.1% in 2019 (Owiso & Kasera, 2025). Such regional integration comes from the intense interactions between traders, individuals, and firms across time and space, not necessarily from states (OECD/SWAC, 2017; Dobler, 2016), and which

lead to the emergence of functional regions. This kind of integration is known as functional or market-driven integration, which is referred to as regionalization.

A decade ago, Meagher (2010) argued that disillusionment with the state-led regionalism of the 1960s and 1970s shifted attention to informal cross-border trade during the 1980s as a force for regional integration 'from below'. Hence, the African continent has not missed out on the growth in the number of such micro-regions. These micro-regions appear on the continent in various appearances: they might be sub-national or cross-border; formal or informal; economic, political, administrative, cultural, and so forth (Söderbaum and Taylor, 2008; Grant, 2008).

Regionalization in Africa is a process that straddles both the formal and informal (which in all practical purposes merge) but also between the micro and macro levels (Söderbaum and Taylor, 2008). All such processes, however, impact upon social relations and the day-to-day lives of Africans, as well as having far-reaching implications for regionalization and the sense of community within the various micro-regions. Thus, Söderbaum and Taylor (ibid) contend that there is great heuristic value in studying micro-regions, in order to gain meaningful insights into regionalizing processes across the African continent, as well as good insights into how governance modalities work (or not) within Africa.

This paper examined the characteristics of micro-regionalization between Ethiopia and Kenya at the Moyale Micro-Region and its paybacks. There are several border-crossing points between Ethiopia and Kenya in Moyale. The most formal one is situated at the main road that connects Addis Ababa to Nairobi. Thousands of people, mostly residents of both Ethiopia Moyale and Kenya Moyale, cross the international border points every day for various reasons – social, economic, and political.

Moyale situated 777 km and 770 km south of Addis Ababa and north of Nairobi, respectively, is a hub economic and non-economic interaction between the people of Ethiopia and Kenya. Over the common border that the two countries share in Moyale, similar communal groups such as the Borana, Garri, Gabra and Burji are living. This helps develop social connections across borders, and facilitate the movement of people and goods, and services that buttress micro-regionalization between communities of the two countries. As Little (2006:177) noted almost two decades ago noted "the very existence of an international border creates economic opportunities that go well beyond cattle transactions, and distinguish cross-border trade from other types of livestock commerce." Indeed, besides livestock trade, there are a number of products such as cereal, pulses, vegetables, electronic products, utensils, and clothes which are traded across the Moyale border markets. The border trade in livestock, foodstuffs/grain, clothes, electronic products, and other goods between the two countries across the border is widely perceived to provide mutual benefits (Pavenello, 2010).

Some scholarly attention has been given to examples of formal regionalist projects in East and Horn Africa, such as the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and East African Economic Community (EAC) (McCarthy, 2010; Hansson, 1999; Abraham, 1999; Medhane, 2004; Nomvete, 1997; UNCTAD, 2009; ECA, 2009; ECA, 2010; Ndomo, 2009; Molla, 2002). However, there have been very few studies (Owiso & Kasera, 2025. Unruh, (2015; Söderbaum, 2004; Söderbaum and Taylor, 2008; Grant, 2008; Clapham, 2008; Bach, 2008; Bøås and Jennings, 2008) of regionalism at the micro-level. One of the least explored instances of regionalism at the micro-level in East and Horn Africa is that of the existing

informal cross-border micro-regions across Ethiopia-Kenya border. Thus, this study assessed the nature of cross-border socio-economic and political interaction and its benefits to the border communities using secondary sources.

2.0 CONCEPTUALIZING REGIONALISM, REGIONALIZATION, MICRO-REGION, AND MICRO-REGIONALISM/REGIONALIZATION

Regionalism: As Breslin and Hook (2002:3) state, the distinction between regionalism and regionalization made by Gamble and Payne in 1996 remains a good starting point for any analysis of regionalism. Regionalism is defined as “the conscious, deliberate and purposive attempts made by national states to create formal mechanisms for dealing with common transnational issues.” (Breslin and Hook (2002:3). Such regionalism may well be a response to economic factors and may even have been promoted by non-state actors, but the regional project is defined as one which is promoted by governments and proceeds through intergovernmental interaction. In this sense, it is ‘top-down’ in terms of governments implementing policies that impact on the economy and society.

Regionalization, on the other hand, refers to “processes which, rather than resulting from predetermined plans of national or subnational governments”, mainly emerge from the actions of non-state actors (Breslin and Hook, 2002). Nongovernmental organizations (NGO), local communities, and other actors can initiate these cross-national processes. In other words, regionalization can be summarized as being a process in which though rarely unaffected by state policies, the most important driving forces for economic regionalization come from markets, from private trade and investment flows, social cohesion, and from the policies and decisions of companies. For example, ‘Spontaneous’ micro regionalism, as the exemplary cases of the zone of the Sea of Japan and the ‘triangles of growth’ indicate, may develop without or beyond the formal will of institutionalized governmental arrangements (Smouts 1998: 35, cited in Breslin and Hook (2002:3). This particular form of regionalism is driven by economic forces, production and finance, that do not acknowledge formal borders. Under this understanding, micro-regionalization emphasizes the creation of transnational economic spaces which result from the deliberate or non-deliberate action of other actors, which ‘at least initially may foster a relocation of authority from the political to the economic realm’ and regionalization focuses on processes that are not necessarily driven by state actors. (Rosenau 1995: cited in Breslin and Hook, 2002; OECD/SWAC, 2017).

Micro-regionalism and Micro-Regionalization: According to Breslin and Hook (2002:8), “micro regionalism refers to those processes of growing regional interconnectedness that occur below the national level, and which cut across national borders”. It therefore represents a sub-national level regionalization process in political, economic, security, or social dimensions, though the economic one is the most prominent. These innovative forms of regionalism do not therefore require the inclusion of all the territory or population, communities, or resources of participating countries. Besides, sub-national actors usually play a central role in pursuing the causes of micro-regionalism, unlike regional and sub-regional schemes, which are regarded as higher-level cases of integration.

Micro-regionalism can either lay the basis for higher-level regionalization processes or itself result from larger initiatives. In the case of Europe, micro-regionalism was driven by the development of wider European integration (Grundy-Warr, 2002). Institutional

reconfigurations at the EU-level, and the advent of new communication technologies as well as the development of transportation facilities, have resulted in the growth of regional networks and trans-boundary exchanges based on mutual interest for economic development (Breslin and Hook, 2002). On the other hand, the reality in East Asia and the Asia Pacific sub-regions reveals a contrasting situation to that of Europe. The micro-regionalization process in these sub-regions is occurring through overlapping and interlinked processes in which micro-regionalization has served to promote a higher-level regionalization and, indeed, globalization (Soderbaum, 2004). As stated earlier, micro-regionalization mainly results from the actions of non-state actors such as local communities.

Region: A region has been understood as a subnational space between the ‘national’ and the ‘local’ (municipality), primarily within particular ‘states’. However, despite not a new existence, such micro-regions are becoming more and more cross-border in nature rather than contained within the boundaries of a particular nation-state (Söderbaum and Taylor, 2008:12; Söderbaum, 2004:4-5). In relation to this, the central features of cross-national regionalism in the Horn of Africa are not so very different from those of many other micro-regions in Africa (Clapham, 2008: 136). Such regions are referred to as micro-regions.

The Moyale Informal Cross-Border Micro-Regionalization: The Moyale micro-region is located in the southern part of Ethiopia where its border converges with that of northern part of Kenya within five to seven km away from the international border. The Moyale micro-region provides a socio-economic activities interface that cross state boundaries. However, it is not part of a formal regionalism project albeit it might be facilitated or retarded by the action of state.

Given its relatively small size - within fourteen km ranges, the Moyale region is best described as an implicit micro-region. The Moyale micro-region is implicit because it only roughly conforms to geographic proximity and socio-cultural affinity and economic interaction among the communal groups, such as the Boran, Gabra, Garri and Burji on both sides of the border rather than government creation. In other words, the Moyale region is not a micro-region in explicit terms of legislative recognition, as witnessed in semi- or quasi-autonomous entities that may exist within states or in bilateral cooperation of states.

Rather, the Moyale micro-region is home to important market operations and trade networks, however informal. There is relative freedom of movement of people and vehicles. Over the past several decades, informal livestock, cereals, and manufactured products flows have been an important means of exchange in the micro-region.

Hence, informal cross-border micro-regionalism (simply referred to as “micro-regionalization” hereafter) for this paper refers to free movement of people and vehicles across the border, inter-marriage and affiliation across the border between and among groups, cross-border trade and market operation between border communities living in two different countries – Ethiopia and Kenya. In other words, it refers to the socio-economic interactions between the communities living across the Ethiopia-Kenya border in Moyale. Hence, in this paper, informal cross-border micro-regionalism, micro-regionalism, and cross-border socio-economic interaction are interchangeably used.

3.0 CHARACTERISTICS OF MICRO-REGIONALIZATION BETWEEN ETHIOPIA AND KENYA IN MOYALE

Two factors mainly facilitate micro-regionalization in the Moyale Micro-region. The first is the presence of similar ethnic/clan groups, such as the Boran, Gabra, Garri, and Burji on both sides of the border. The second is geographical proximity between the Ethiopian Moyale and Kenyan Moyale, rendering transportation costs almost irrelevant, thereby allowing traders who are able to cross borders regularly to take advantage of differences in the supply, demand, and prices of various goods and services available on either side of the border. The carving up the border by colonial power and the Ethiopian Empire has, thus, created potential areas for integration between and among people living in different states across the border. As aptly explained by AEBR (2012: 9), African border areas are at the same time promising areas with a great potential to develop practical integration, due to already developed trade and social networks across borders, in some cases for centuries. Over the 860 km common border that Ethiopia and Kenya share, similar communal groups such as the Borana, Garri, Gabra, and Burji live. This helps develop social connections across borders, which facilitate the movement of people and goods and services that buttress cross-border socio-economic interaction or informal cross-border micro-regionalism (ICBMIR) among border communities between the two countries in Moyale. The fact that the vast majority of the people living in Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya are pastoralists who move with their livestock (IADC, 2009:8) enhances trade across the border. This section assesses the characteristics of micro-regionalization in terms of cross-border trade and markets, cross-border movement, and socio-political interactions between the two countries in the Moyale borderlands. Let us begin with cross-border trade and marketing.

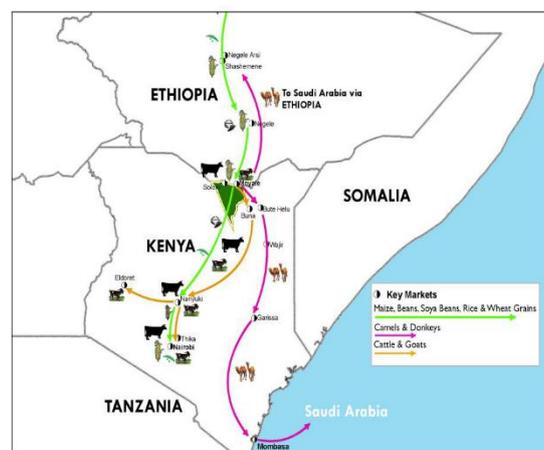
3.1 Cross-Border Trade and Marketing

Cross-border trade is one of the main aspects of informal micro-regionalism. Much of the trade activity, though not illegal, remains informal and operates outside government regulations (USAID, 2024). Informal cross-border trade has played a vital role in ensuring the food security of people surviving across the borders of societies (Gonfa and Malicha, 2024), and in most cases the value of informal cross-border trade exceeds the value of official trade (Brenton and Edjigu, 2021). Moyale is a busy market town on the border between Ethiopia and Kenya, serving both informal and formal cross-border trade in non-food and food commodities and livestock. However, according to some sources (Brenton and Edjigu, 2021; Gonfa and Malicha, 2024; Healy 2011; Little, 2006; Pavenello, 2010; Markakis, 2004; Mahmoud, 2008; FEWS NET/WFP/FAO, 2011) informal cross-border trade has been the dominant trade and has made a significant contribution to local livelihoods and even to national economies. For example, some of the animals traded in Moyale are sold in the primary markets in Borana zone or trucked directly to the central highland towns, such as Nazareth/Adama, Bishoftu/Debre Zeit and Addis Ababa.

The drivers of this trans-boundary trade seem to suggest that, because domestic demand for meat is met by livestock from the highlands, Moyale represents an essential outlet for Borana castrated bulls, without which market opportunities within Ethiopia would be very limited (Pavenello, 2010); and about 26% of Kenya's meat consumption comes from cross-border trade (Markakis, 2004). The trade through the Moyale trade route is substantial, and more than

70% of livestock trade in Moyale markets originates in Ethiopia (Brenton and Edjigu, 2021). The markets in Moyale can be categorized into two: those that involve the sale and purchase of non-livestock products, such as grains and manufactured goods, and those that sell and buy livestock products. There are several shops in the two towns that sell non-livestock products such as electronics, clothes, and cereals. However, the main livestock markets are found in the three Moyales: Moyale Somalia (Moyale Somali Regional State) and Moyale Oromiya (Moyale Oromia Regional State) on the Ethiopian side of the border, and Moyale Kenya on the Kenyan side.

Map 1: Main Sources and Destination of the Traded Commodities



Source: FEWS NET/WFP/FAO, 2011

Days and Hours of Operation: The markets in the two Moyales operate daily, particularly the non-food market, such as electronic products and used clothes. Sunday's trading activity is not, however, as active as other days. There are four important features of cross-border trading across the Ethiopia-Kenya border in Moyale. First, trade is dominated by informal trade. Second, food commodities and livestock products are trafficked from Ethiopia to Kenya whereas non-food commodities such as electronic products and used clothes are traded from Kenya to Ethiopia, which has created interdependence among the communities living between the two sides of the border. Third, cross-border trade is carried out mostly by local people, and often with the involvement of women in facilitating the passage of commodities across the border. Fourth, it is the major source of livelihood for the majority of the people.

It even contributes to national and regional economies. As other sources (Brenton and Edjigu, 2021; Gonfa and Malicha, 2024; FEWS NET/WFP/FAO, 2011; 2024) attest, informal cross-border trade has long operated in pastoral areas and makes a significant contribution to regional and national economies, as well as local livelihoods.

The products traded mainly from Ethiopia to Kenya include ox, cow, goat, sheep, camel, milk, dairy products, chickens and eggs, teff, maize, wheat, haricot beans, and vegetables. Whereas commodities trafficked from Kenya to Ethiopia include plastics, detergents, utensils, used clothes, shoes, building materials, and electronic products such as watches, mobile phone, TV, and similar devices (FEWS NET, 2018; Brenton and Edjigu, 2021). The Map above shows the

trade flow for these commodities. However, some agricultural products, such as potatoes, tomatoes, and other vegetables, are also traded in both directions. There are also cases where livestock is traded from Moyale Kenya, into Ethiopia. Since the start of Moyale Border operating as a One Stop Border Post (OSBP) in June 2021, which aimed to allow its small-scale traders to legally trade with Kenya through the Moyale border, has facilitated trade of goods whose value is of negligible amount, by simplifying the paperwork for informal and small-scale traders (Trade Mark Africa, 2021; Frontier Africa Reports, 2021). The increased volume of trade at the Moyale OSBP is reported to have led to an increase in the number of import documents to be processed at the border by 26 percent from Kenya to Ethiopia and of 57 percent from Ethiopia to Kenya (Frontier Africa Reports, 2021). However, the 'one-stop' has not yet materialized; it rather poses a continued threat to the security of the area amid contraband trade and human trafficking (Adhanom and Murray, 2022). Yet, hope remains for improved economic and social relations with cross-border trade and free movement of people.

The main products formally exported to Kenya include agricultural products such as haricot beans, coriander and very recently, cement and leather products. Whereas shoe polish (kiwi), stationery items, and detergents are some of the main imported goods from Kenya through Moyale. In general., commodities exchanges at the Moyale OSBP concern different type of products, mainly represented by agricultural goods for Ethiopia, such as beans, maize seed, tea, khat (known in Kenya as miraa), onions and tomatoes, while the main exports of Kenya to Ethiopia via Moyale are predominantly manufacturing and industrial products such as shoe polish creams, agriculture chemicals, ballpoint pens, printed papers and labels, and crown corks among others. Frontier Africa Reports, 2021). This indicates that in both informal and formal trade relations, food commodities and livestock are traded across the border in Moyale from Ethiopia into Kenya whereas non-food commodities/manufactured items are exported from Kenya into Ethiopia.

As stated earlier, the Moyale markets are of two types: the non-livestock market (agricultural products and manufactured goods) and the livestock market. The two markets have distinct characteristics. Non-livestock products appear to account for a considerable share of trading activities as measured by frequency rather than value. The market for these goods operates every day, including Sunday. However, unlike other non-livestock trade, the haricot bean and some industrial products such as cement, stationery items, and detergents are traded in large quantities. There are trucks carrying these products that cross the border. The Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture study (cited in ECA, 2010) estimated that 13,500 tons of haricot beans valued at \$8.8m were exported to Kenya through Moyale in 2007/08. During the Ethiopian budget year that concluded July 7, 2021, Ethiopia exported via the Moyale border goods for 11.5 million USD for about 9.5 million kilograms. In 2020, Ethiopia's total export to Kenya declined to 11.9 million USD, while in 2018 this trade reached more than double this figure (28.2 million USD). Similarly, the total export of Kenya to Ethiopia has almost halved from 78.7 million USD in 2019 to 47.3 million USD in 2020. Frontier Africa Reports, 2021)

The second type, that is, livestock trade, is much more significant than the small-scale non-livestock (except haricot beans, cement, and stationery) trade. As Healy remarks (2011), cross-border livestock trade is not petty trade confined to border communities but a multi-million-dollar economy based on long-distance cross-border trade and the export of livestock to markets beyond the two countries. Ethiopia has the largest livestock population in Africa, and

the great majority of livestock sold in Moyale Kenya originates from the Borana lowlands. Moyale livestock markets have the highest number of shoats and large herds supplied to the market per week, respectively (Njiru, Mtimet, Wanyoike, Kutu, Songolo, Dahir, and Jillo, 2017). Most of the traders and local officials stressed that cross-border trade in livestock between Ethiopia and Kenya via the Moyale markets is very significant in terms of value. It is estimated that cross-border trade accounts for 75% of the total livestock traded in Moyale (Pavanello, 2010:21). This is a substantial quantity. Some of the livestock in Moyale are exported via Adama/Nazareth to Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Pavanello, 2010; Healy, 2011). Some of the livestock are moved to Moyale Kenya, and then are trucked to Nairobi, where some of them are finally slaughtered in Nairobi, and others are exported to Saudi Arabia.

Overall, most of the commodities crossing the border from either side are mainly on transit to other markets, but are temporarily stored in Moyale (FEWS NET/WFP/FAO, 2011:1). Brokers play a key role in the market chain by facilitating the flow of these commodities across the border by linking sellers (Ethiopian wholesalers) to buyers (Kenyan Wholesalers), and vice versa. Some brokers also act as transporters and own Lorries, while others hire the Lorries and facilitate in transportation of the commodities from the source to the destination markets. All the transactions are undertaken in cash, with both the Ethiopian birr and Kenyan shilling being used. This researcher himself notices this. There are some moneychangers across the borders that facilitate exchange. The exchange rate determines the prices of most food and non-food commodities traded across the border (FEWS NET/WFP/FAO (2011:2). However, both currencies (Ethiopian Birr and Kenyan Shilling) are used in Ethiopia Moyale and Kenya Moyale markets to buy and sell goods. The functionality of both currencies (Ethiopian ETB and Kenyan Shilling) made trade easy, and there was no need to go to banks to find foreign exchange (Zakir, 2019). In Kenyan Moyale/Gambo, it is easy to find stores of goods immediately after crossing the border. There is no need to go far; Kenyan traders bring everything needed by Ethiopian traders close to the border (ibid).

Cross-border trade has resulted in small price gaps for traded commodities across borders, and works both ways, creating unexploited incentives for both export and import activity across the border. This suggests that there is somehow price convergence and integration of adjoining local markets. The existence of small price gaps means benefits in economic efficiency and in the welfare of local communities. The reason for small price gap might be related to the geographical proximity between the two Moyales and limited restriction on the movement of people across the border. Moreover, traders devise various strategies to tap economies of scale by consolidating deliveries, i.e., mobilizing entire families to carry out trading operations as well as because of porous border. The price gap, however, becomes larger when goods are transported away from the Moyale region either to Addis Ababa, Yabelo, Dilla, Mersabat, Isolo or Nairobi due to restrictions imposed on certain goods and in association with transport cost.

The existence of ethnic/clan commonalities across national boundaries ensures social harmony. There are also several laborers, mainly Ethiopians, who are crossing the border to work in Gambo –Moyale, Kenya. The exact number of people working in Moyale Kenya, is not known, as there is no official record. The ties of kinship and community, indeed, provide the foundations for micro-regionalization in terms of enhancing movements of people, cross-border trade, and market operation. As Healy (2011) a decade ago aptly noted, ethnic

overlapping in borderlands provides opportunities of various kinds of cooperation and integration. Social connections across borders facilitate the movement of people, goods, and money that are necessary to underpin regional economic integration. This description fits the situation across the Ethiopia-Kenya border in Moyale. Such networks strengthen trade and can build the foundations for business and commerce.

In general, cross-border trade between Ethiopia and Kenya is a microcosm of the commodity composition of total trade. In some cases, it encompasses a large spectrum of industrial products ranging from cement and detergents, and toilet paper. Trade between the two countries involved both locally produced (such as livestock, teff, shoes polish) and imported (used clothes, electronic products) i.e., involve re-exports.

A decade ago, Ethiopia took unilateral action to liberalize small-scale border trade across Djibouti, Kenya and Somalia by specifying the value (upper limit) and type of goods that can be traded, as well as the frequency of crossings and the distance from border posts up to which trade is authorized (Zakir, 2019). Thus, traders are allowed to trade within 200 kilometers distance from the Kenyan border and can make 2 trips a month or 24 trips a year with the value of goods (other than livestock) traded with Kenya is fixed at Birr 5,000 per week, while the value of livestock is fixed at Birr 30,000 (ECA, 2010: 147-148). This initiative was intended to improve the supply of basic goods at a time when there was a general shortage of basic goods in the area (Zakir, 2019). The sample of ID issued to traders across Ethiopia Kenya border. However, such cross-border trade was not effective in Moyale. Those few traders who were registered at a time had returned their licenses in 1999 as they were unable to compete in business after the payment of official dues with other informal traders. Recently, the Government of Ethiopia has been finalizing a protocol that will allow small-scale traders to apply the Simplified Trade Regime (STR) equivalent at Moyale, at the border with Kenya, which started to operate as a One Stop Border Post (OSBP), in an attempt to convert part of the informal trade occurring at this border into formal trade. The Protocol will contain a common list of goods to which the simplifications will apply, with the relevant volumes that can be traded across the Moyale OSBP, which registered a progressive growth of trade in the last year, although at the bilateral level, the total trade between the two countries has declined in the last 3 years (Frontier Africa Reports, 2021).

Overall, Moyale is one of the main livestock trading hubs across the border between Kenya and Ethiopia. Like other parts of Africa, the vast majority of cross-border trade across the Moyale region is informal. A large part of intra-Africa trade is informal cross-border trade (ICBT) which is approximately to be 43 percent of official gross domestic product (GDP) (ECA, 2013:1), and it is estimated that cross-border trade supports about 17 million people including pastoralists, agro-pastoralists, small and medium local traders, cross-border traders, brokers, butchers, trekkers and others in the Horn of Africa (Brenton and Edjigu, 2021). It offers, by far, the most efficient financial and commercial infrastructure that is presently available for regional trade. Given the appropriate policy framework, contribute to the rapid and massive expansion of markets for local industrial and agricultural goods.

3.2 Cross-Border Social Relations

Communities living in Moyale, though separated by the international border, share a special relationship. There are strong links between the people of Moyale of Ethiopia, and those in

Moyale Kenyan commune. The Ethiopia and Kenya Moyale areas are home to the same ethnic groups living in similar ecologies, sharing similar livelihood systems and trans-boundary mobility patterns across the border, where the communities have strong socio-cultural ties and economic interdependence (USAD, 2022). Crossing from Ethiopia to nearby towns in Kenya is a daily activity as many have family members on the other side of the border (Adhanom and Murray, 2022). According to Adhanom and Murray (2022), nearly one-third (31%) of young adults who took part in the survey, have family or friends living abroad, many of whom are in Kenya (67%) They have marriage relations with the other side, for some, their spouses live on the other side of the border. This implies that communities in Ethiopia have relatives in Kenya, and vice versa. Beyond these family ties, these people often visit and use pastures on both sides of the border.

Family relations and marriage ties create and perpetuate different forms of social participation on both sides of the border, such as the sharing of customs, the celebration of traditional festivals, and participation in social events (marriages, funerals, etc.). The customary Chief of these communal groups, whether living in Ethiopia or Kenya, claims to have authority over the group, and their decision is widely accepted by the people on both sides. Cross-border social relations can go beyond the family framework, extending to the community during traditional festivals or even public events, in which case these relationships extend to the village, commune, locality (at the circle level) or even the region. There are cases where commune groups participated in a football match and beauty contest organized by the governments of both countries, NGOs, and IGAD.

Moreover, the education and health sectors illustrate the organization of a cross-border life, initiated at the urging of the people: Kenya Moyale regularly admits Ethiopian children. Migration to Kenya for education and employment is common and perceived as positive. Many send their children to nearby Kenyan towns for schooling (Adhanom and Murray, 2022). These schools can be avenues for nurturing a peace-loving, risk-conscious, conservationist and resilient generation. (USAID, 2024). However, there are no harmonized policies between the two educational systems. There are also health centers in both sides of the border. Some patients prefer to go to the Kenya Moyale health centers. Some people from Kenya even prefer to go far to Hawassa referral hospital in Ethiopia.

Cross-border social networks are also used for political mobilization to enlarge one's constituency, particularly during elections. Voting politics in this setting have a strong cross-border dimension. Political power on both sides of the Ethio-Kenyan border is contested between various ethnic groups that partly also inhabit the two states. Alliance formation across borders, particularly between the same communal groups such as Borana, Garri, Gabra and Burji of Ethiopia and Kenya, has become common. During election, alliance among ethnic groups across the border are formed. For example, the alliance among the Gabra, Rendille, and Burji (ReGaBu), as well as Gabra and Burji (GaBu), locked out the majority Borana from elective posts. People in the Ethiopian side cross the border to participate in the election of MPs in Kenya and members of the county. Some of the communities have even two national identity/ID cards for easy movement across the border—an Ethiopian and a Kenyan- even though the Ethiopian law prohibits dual citizenship (Adhanom and Murray, 2022). This enables them to vote in local elections in Kenya.

The Kenyan district of Moyale is largely inhabited by the Boran, but there are also sizeable Garri, Gabra and Burji minorities (Adhanom and Murray, 2022). The candidates campaigned on different political platforms, appealing to common religious identity (Usually by the Gabra, Burji and Garri candidates) or playing the ethnic card (usually by the Borana). Some sources (Adugna 2006; Feyissa, and Hoehne, 2008) confirmed this. Invoking the Oromo nationalism of the Borana on both sides of the border by the candidates attracted the attention of the Ethiopian government that feared a possible connection with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) guerrillas (ibid).

3.3 Movement of People and Vehicles

The majority of the border communities usually move without recognizing the international border, mainly due to the affinity between the communities living across the border, the livelihood nature of the communities (the majority being pastoralists), and geographical proximity. Besides the ethnic ties between communities on either side of the border, the movement of people across the Ethiopia-Kenya border is facilitated by bilateral agreements, such as waiving visa requirements, and the establishment of a one-stop border post (OSBP) and infrastructure projects. The completion of the 2021 border further facilitates the movement of people and vehicles across the border (Adhanom and Murray, 2022). Border guards usually do not require an ID card unless they suspect the person crossing the border is a stranger. The free movement of people underpins micro-regionalization processes such as cross-border trade and marketing, which constitute key livelihood and coping strategies for borderland communities.

People cross the border every day. Movement along the Moyale Corridor has increased dramatically; previously, only 30-40 cars travelled along the road on any given day, there are more than 100 a day due to the completion of the highway between Moyale at the border and Isiolo (USAID, 2018). People cross the international border in Moyale for various reasons. People in Moyale move across the border whether to trade (Buying and/or selling), to look for water and pasture livestock, to visit family/relatives/friends, to attend special gathering, to access better social services such as health, education, sport/recreation, to take part in religious events, to manage resources jointly /joint grazing livestock and/or to voting (political participation). To use the words of Pavanello (2009: 22), cross-border movement represents a key livelihood strategy for border communities.

4.0 BENEFITS OF MICRO-REGIONALIZATION

The border trade in livestock, food, and other goods is widely perceived to provide mutual benefits (Pavenello, 2010). Cross-border socio-economic interactions, specifically cross-border trade, is the main economic activity and a critical source of livelihood for the communities in the Moyale region. Cross-border trade is the lifeblood for most of the people in Moyale, especially for women (Brenton & Edjigu, 2021), who may not have the time or support necessary to enter into formal employment channels (Boute et al, 2018). As mentioned earlier, women are more actively involved in border-trading activities. Informal cross-border trade is the main source of job creation in Africa, accounting for between 20 per cent and 75 per cent of total employment in most countries, except South Africa, where the figure is estimated at 12 per cent of the active population (ECA, 2010: 143). Cross-border trading is also the most important source of employment and income generation, particularly in Moyale town.

Thousands of people work directly in cross-border trade activities. Cross-border trade not only benefits traders' lives as a source of income, but also strengthens local production and fosters service provision (such as storage facilities and transportation). Hence, demand and supply of goods and services generate income and employment for people working in activities associated with trade. Some traders also generate an additional one- to two-person employment. There are hundreds of taxi drivers offering their services because of cross-border activities. Moreover, bars and restaurants in both Moyales as well as stores all over the two towns appear to be thriving due to cross-border economic activities.

In a nutshell, cross-border trade increases and broadens available market supply and demand for livestock and food crops in the region, and so pastoralists in the borderlands benefit from the increase in demand for their animals and commodities (Brenton & Edjigu, 2021). As Healy (2011) rightly summarizes, "livestock trading is a form of integrated economic activity that reinforces social and economic ties across borders, part of the social glue that holds the Horn of Africa together." The rangelands and their associated livestock market chains are major regional assets, essential for the survival of pastoral communities and for sustaining the livestock economy. Kenya imports between a quarter and a third of its domestic beef requirements through unofficial cross-border trade from neighboring countries (Pavanello, 2010: 21). In addition to livestock trade, non-livestock trading across the border reinforces social and economic ties across the border. Most remarkably, people of the two communities living in Ethiopia and Kenya are further integrated in the socio-political aspects. For example, in addition to access to health centers and attending schools, people in the Ethiopian side, having two IDs (Ethiopian and Kenyan), cross the border to Kenya to take part in the election. For example, access to have access to schools serves as an avenue for nurturing a peace-loving, risk-conscious, and resilient generation. (USAID, 2024). While proximity to the border can clearly provide important benefits to adjacent communities, it is also apparent that communities are able to enjoy these benefits mostly during periods of peace.

Besides, cross-border trade at the Moyale border between Ethiopia and Kenya presents paybacks such as reduced costs, faster movement of goods, increased economic integration, and job creation. The establishment of a one-stop border post (OSBP) and infrastructure projects like the Nairobi-Moyale-Addis Ababa highway have significantly cut travel times and shipping costs. A fully functional OSBP is expected to reduce the border crossing time by at least 30 percent, to enable faster movement of cargo and people (Trade Mark Africa, 2021). Overall, the development of the Moyale Corridor could be a significant factor in "enhanced market opportunity and food security, enabling the region to gain from a diversified economy of agricultural products and providing greater flexibility for producers and improved nutrition for consumers" (USAID, 2018). Socio-cultural interlinkages also have beneficial roles to play, including serving as a bridge for inter-state cooperation and regional integration (USAID, 2022), which could enhance the current efforts to realize regional integration. Cross-border interaction fosters stronger bilateral trade relations between Ethiopia and Kenya and promotes economic integration.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The Moyale micro-region is a favorable area for social and economic ties, as similar communal groups such as the Borana, Garri, Gabra, and Burji are living which facilitates the movement

of people, goods, and services that buttress micro-regionalization between the two countries. Cross-border market and trade activities are important for sustaining pastoralist livelihoods in the borderlands. In particular, the livestock sector plays a vibrant role in the regional economy where the export of cattle, sheep, and goats from the region to the Middle East is the source of income. Besides, as a hub of interaction between the two countries, Moyale is the source of income for both the governments of Ethiopia and Kenya. By recognizing the importance of cross-border interaction, both Ethiopian and Kenyan governments should design and enforce policies that encourage cross-border micro-regional socio-economic activities that would capitalize on comparative advantage for different local and national economies. To use the words of Owiso & Kasera, (2025, p10), "Policies must not only exist but must also be carefully designed and implemented to protect livelihoods while gradually steering practices toward formalized trade and resilient borderland economies."

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