



TRANSIT ROUTES AND RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHIOPIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Transit routes and transport networks in landlocked countries like Ethiopia are shaped by historical, geopolitical, and economic factors that influence their development and impact on regional integration. This paper explores Ethiopia's transit routes with neighbouring countries—Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Sudan, and South Sudan—examining the complexities and opportunities within each bilateral relationship. Historical contexts, such as colonial legacies and post-independence challenges, underscore Ethiopia's strategic imperatives in fostering stable diplomatic relations and infrastructure development. Physical, human, and economic factors further delineate the challenges and advancements in transit infrastructure, emphasizing the role of cross-border cooperation, trade agreements, and regional integration initiatives. By analyzing these dynamics, this paper aims to provide insights into enhancing transit efficiency, promoting economic growth, and achieving sustainable development in the Horn of Africa region.

INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Transit routes are a critical outcome of geopolitical and historical circumstances, particularly evident in the case of landlocked countries like Ethiopia. The geographical isolation of landlocked states, shaped by both contemporary political conditions and historical forces, underscores the challenges and complexities they face in international trade and economic development. Ethiopia, situated in the Horn of Africa, serves as a poignant example where its landlocked status has profound implications for its economic strategies and geopolitical relationships.



Historical Context of Ethiopia's Landlocked Status

Ethiopia's transition into a landlocked country in modern times is intricately tied to historical events and colonial influences. The region, historically known as Abyssinia, faced significant geopolitical struggles during the colonial era, primarily involving Italy's attempts to expand its influence through territories like Eritrea (Khumalo, 2007). The construction of the Suez Canal in 1869 further heightened the strategic importance of the Red Sea region, amplifying Ethiopia's geographic challenges as a landlocked nation.

Italy's colonization efforts, culminating in the capture of Eritrea in 1926, significantly impacted Ethiopia's access to coastal resources. The separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia in 1993 further solidified Ethiopia's landlocked status, depriving it of direct maritime access despite historical ties (Iyob, 1997).

Geopolitical Challenges and Economic Impacts

The geopolitical dynamics of the Horn of Africa region, encompassing vital maritime routes such as the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, play a pivotal role in global trade. Ethiopia's reliance on transit routes through neighboring countries, particularly Djibouti, highlights the critical importance of stable diplomatic relations and infrastructure development for facilitating trade and transport (HRW, 2003).

Ethiopia's administrative divisions, influenced by its rugged terrain and ethnic diversity, further complicate the development of robust transit networks. The country's geographic features, including the Rift Valley, Ethiopian Highlands, and Lowlands, present formidable obstacles to infrastructure development, necessitating innovative solutions for effective transport and communication networks (Hance, 1975).

Factors Influencing Transit Routes and Transport Networks in Ethiopia

Transit routes and transport networks in Ethiopia are profoundly shaped by a complex interplay of physical, human, and economic factors. These factors not only influence the development and connectivity of transport infrastructure but also impact the socio-economic landscape of the country.

Physical Factors

1. **Topography and Relief:** Ethiopia's diverse physiography, characterized by highlands, plateaus, and lowlands, significantly affects the development of transport routes. Arable land tends to be concentrated in lowland areas, while highlands often retain forests and present challenges for road construction due to steep slopes and rugged terrain. The presence of high



hills and narrow passes acts as bottlenecks, particularly in regions like the Somali plateau and Southern highlands, hindering the expansion of road networks and increasing transportation costs, especially during the rainy season.

2. **Hydrology:** Rivers and water bodies play a dual role in Ethiopia's transport infrastructure. While rivers like the Abay and Ganale hinder land mobility due to their locations, they also offer opportunities for cost-effective transportation when navigable. Challenges such as rapid cataracts can limit their usability, highlighting the need for strategic planning in integrating riverine transport with road networks.

3. **Climate:** Ethiopia's climate, characterized by seasonal variations and occasional harsh conditions, influences the durability and maintenance requirements of transport infrastructure. Heavy rains and flooding can disrupt road networks, emphasizing the need for resilient construction and maintenance practices.

Human Factors

1. **Demographics and Population Dynamics:** Ethiopia's multiethnic population, predominantly engaged in primary activities, influences transport demand and infrastructure needs. Urbanization rates, though rising, remain relatively low, affecting the distribution of economic activities and necessitating transport links that cater to rural areas where the majority reside. Challenges such as high fertility rates and low longevity also impact human resource development, influencing the workforce available for infrastructure maintenance and development.

2. **Social Factors:** Marginalized groups within Ethiopian society face barriers to accessing transport networks, exacerbating social inequalities and limiting economic opportunities. Improving inclusivity in transport planning and infrastructure development is crucial for promoting equitable economic growth and social development

Economic Factors

1. **Economic Development and Trade:** Transit routes serve as vital conduits linking Ethiopia's production centers with international markets. The development of transport infrastructure facilitates the movement of raw materials to processing sites and finished goods to local, national, and international markets. Efficient transit routes are essential for promoting economic growth, attracting investment, and enhancing competitiveness in global trade.



2. Cost and Investment: Financial constraints often pose significant challenges to infrastructure development, particularly in remote and geographically challenging areas. Investments in transport infrastructure, including roads, railways, and ports, are critical for reducing transportation costs, improving market access, and stimulating economic activities across various sectors.

3. Technological Advancements: Advances in transportation technologies, including digitalization and logistics management systems, offer opportunities to optimize transport efficiency and reduce operational costs. Embracing technological innovations can enhance the resilience and capacity of Ethiopia's transport networks to meet evolving economic and logistical demands.

Transit Routes with Neighbouring Countries of Ethiopia

The transit routes linking Ethiopia with its neighbouring countries stand as a testament to the enduring legacies of colonialism and the complexities of regional geopolitics in the Horn of Africa. Historically shaped by European imperial powers like Britain, France, and Italy, the region's borders have been drawn and redrawn, influencing contemporary challenges in transit and transport networks.

The Horn of Africa, encompassing Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia, is strategically positioned with access to the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, and key African highlands and plateaus. Ethiopia's foreign policy is intricately tied to its immediate neighbours, driven by historical ties, geographic proximity, and strategic imperatives for economic development and security (Collins, 2007).

Ethiopia shares land boundaries with five contiguous countries: Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea, Sudan, and Somalia, each contributing uniquely to the region's economic and geopolitical dynamics. Historically, Ethiopia maintained access to the sea through ports like Assab and Massawa, now part of Eritrea, and Djibouti. Following Eritrea's independence, Ethiopia's primary maritime gateway shifted to Djibouti, facilitated by a 487-mile railway connecting Djibouti's port to Addis Ababa (Anderson, 2003).

The loss of direct access to Eritrean ports due to conflict in 1998 underscored Ethiopia's reliance on transit routes via Djibouti, highlighting challenges such as increased transport costs, regulatory hurdles, and infrastructural limitations. Despite these challenges, regional agreements under organizations like the Intergovernmental Authority for Development



(IGAD) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) aim to enhance trade volumes and agricultural development through improved transit routes.

Cross-border trade in the region, characterized by diverse legal currencies, exemplifies the intricate economic interdependencies and logistical complexities faced by landlocked Ethiopia. As Ethiopia navigates these challenges, insights gained are pivotal not only for its own development but also for addressing common issues shared by other landlocked countries in Southern and Eastern Africa (Mulugeta, 2007).

In exploring Ethiopia's transit routes with neighbouring countries, this paper delves into the multifaceted influences of physical geography, demographic dynamics, economic imperatives, and geopolitical considerations. By examining these factors, we aim to illuminate the complexities and opportunities inherent in Ethiopia's transport networks, offering insights relevant to regional integration and sustainable economic growth.

Relations Between Ethiopia and Eritrea

Ethiopia and Eritrea share a deeply intertwined history characterized by periods of alliance and conflict, shaped significantly by colonial and geopolitical influences. Historically, they were united under various rulers and shared cultural and linguistic ties, forming a single state until modern times.

The colonial era saw Italy exerting control over Eritrea in 1889, culminating in the Wichale Treaty where Ethiopia acknowledged Italian sovereignty over Eritrea. Despite attempts at creating a federated state under the UN in the 1950s, Eritrea was annexed by Ethiopia in 1962, sparking decades of tensions (Simpson, 2008).

The relationship deteriorated further in the 1990s as Eritrea sought independence, which was officially recognized after a UN-monitored referendum in 1993. However, unresolved border disputes, particularly over areas like Badme, escalated into a full-scale war from 1998 to 2000 (Yohannes, 1991). This conflict disrupted transit routes between Ethiopia and Eritrea and led to the closure of ports like Asseb and Massawa for trade activities.

Efforts at peace, including a peace plan brokered by the OAU and subsequent UN interventions, aimed to resolve the conflict and establish a lasting peace (Wasbeek, 2004). The United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) played a pivotal role in monitoring ceasefires and maintaining stability along the volatile border. Despite these efforts, challenges persisted due to disagreements over border demarcation and accusations of human rights abuses on both sides (Zondi, 2005).



The unresolved nature of their border dispute continues to impact regional dynamics, illustrating the complexities of post-colonial statehood and geopolitical rivalries in the Horn of Africa. As both countries navigate their shared history and strategic interests, the quest for sustainable peace remains a critical goal for regional stability and economic development (MoFA, 2010).

Relations Between Ethiopia and Djibouti

Ethiopia and Djibouti share a strategic relationship crucial for both nations' economic and geopolitical interests in the Horn of Africa. Djibouti, formerly a French colony known as French Somali Land, borders Ethiopia to the west and south, with the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden to the east.

Historically, the border between Ethiopia and Djibouti was established under the Franco-Ethiopian convention of 1897 (Shinn, 2004), marking the beginning of the Franco-Ethiopian railway that connected Djibouti to Addis Ababa by 1917 (Makinda, 1987). This railway remains a vital artery for Ethiopia's trade, terminating at the Port of Djibouti, which serves as Ethiopia's main gateway for imports and exports.

Djibouti gained independence as the Republic of Djibouti on June 26, 1977, and diplomatic relations with Ethiopia were formally established in 1981 (DS, USA 1976). The Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in October 1991 further solidified bilateral ties, emphasizing mutual cooperation in political, economic, and social spheres.

Since then, numerous agreements and official visits between Ethiopia and Djibouti have bolstered their relationship. The Joint Ministerial Commission and follow-up committees oversee the implementation of agreements, while joint border committees address security and immigration issues along their shared border (MoFA, 2010).

Economically, Djibouti plays a pivotal role in facilitating Ethiopia's international trade. The Port of Djibouti handles a significant portion of Ethiopia's imports and exports, particularly vital goods like hydrocarbons. The volume of transit trade between Ethiopia and Djibouti has seen substantial growth, underscoring Djibouti's importance as Ethiopia's primary maritime outlet.



Despite occasional challenges, such as logistical issues at the port and border security concerns, Ethiopia and Djibouti maintain a generally stable and cooperative relationship crucial for regional stability and economic development in the Horn of Africa.

Relations Between Ethiopia and Somalia

Ethiopia and Somalia, both located in the Horn of Africa, share a complex relationship shaped by historical, political, and territorial factors. Ethiopia shares a long border with Somalia, approximately 1626 km, which historically included regions such as the Trust Territory of Somaliland (formerly Italian Somaliland) and British Somaliland (now Somaliland) (Jordan, 2009).

Historically, tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia have centered around the Ogaden region, populated by ethnic Somalis and claimed by both countries (Dill, 2010). This dispute has been a focal point of conflict, with Somalia accusing Ethiopia of colonialist ambitions and Ethiopia asserting its territorial integrity and managing internal pressures from Somali ethnic groups seeking greater autonomy or independence.

Somalia's internal instability, marked by the collapse of central governance since 1991 and the emergence of regions like Somaliland and Puntland (Rizak, A. and A. Iahi 2010), has further complicated relations. Somaliland, though self-declared as a sovereign state, lacks international recognition but maintains a strategic partnership with Ethiopia. This relationship has grown notably in trade, security, and diplomatic cooperation, with Ethiopia investing in Somaliland's infrastructure, particularly the Berbera port (DS, USA 1976).

In contrast, relations between Ethiopia and the Federal Government of Somalia have been strained due to historical grievances, territorial disputes, and Somalia's internal conflicts (Mulugeta 2007). The absence of effective central governance in Somalia has hindered the development of stable bilateral relations and a functional transit trade route between the two nations.

Despite these challenges, Ethiopia has utilized its relationship with Somaliland to enhance trade links. An agreement signed in 2003 aimed to improve road infrastructure and establish customs posts, facilitating the export of Ethiopian goods such as khat, livestock, and vegetables through Berbera port (UNPO, 2005). This port, if further developed, could serve as a crucial alternative outlet for landlocked Ethiopia, providing access to international markets.



In conclusion, while Ethiopia faces obstacles in developing a stable transit route with Somalia due to internal conflicts and historical disputes, its strategic partnership with Somaliland presents opportunities for economic development and improved regional connectivity through infrastructural investments and trade agreements.

Relations Between Ethiopia and Kenya

Ethiopia and Kenya, two prominent nations in East Africa, have maintained a friendly and cooperative relationship since gaining independence in the early 1960s. This relationship is founded on mutual respect, non-interference in internal affairs, and shared interests in regional stability and development (Embassy of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2011).

The historical ties between Ethiopia and Kenya have been exemplified by their support for each other in international forums and common positions on issues such as cross-border terrorism, piracy, and regional integration within organizations like IGAD (Inter-Governmental Authority on Development). Both countries have collaborated closely on matters of peace and security in the volatile Horn of Africa region (ICMPD, 2008).

Geographically, Ethiopia and Kenya share a substantial border of over 1000 km, which has been demarcated by agreements such as the mutual visa abolition agreement in 1966 and a border agreement in 1970. Despite occasional tribal clashes along the border, both nations have managed to maintain overall peace and cooperation.

Trade between Ethiopia and Kenya, however, has faced challenges primarily due to infrastructural limitations rather than political reasons (DS, USA 1975). The lack of a reliable all-weather road between Addis Ababa and Nairobi, spanning over 700 km of missing links, has hindered efficient trade. Efforts are underway to address these challenges through major infrastructure projects like the Mombasa-Nairobi-Addis Ababa transport corridor.

The Mombasa-Nairobi-Addis Ababa corridor, encompassing road and rail projects, aims to significantly enhance transportation links between the two countries and the broader East African region (African Development Bank, 2009). This corridor not only facilitates trade but also provides Ethiopia with an alternative route to the sea via the Port of Mombasa, thereby reducing transport costs and transit times for Ethiopian imports and exports.

In recent years, Ethiopia and Kenya have intensified their cooperation through bilateral agreements across various sectors including trade, agriculture, technical assistance, and infrastructural development (COMESA, 2011). These agreements underscore their



commitment to mutual economic growth, regional integration, and the enhancement of cross-border connectivity through projects in electricity, roads, railways, and information technology.

In conclusion, while challenges persist, Ethiopia and Kenya continue to strengthen their relations through collaborative efforts aimed at fostering economic prosperity, enhancing regional stability, and deepening bilateral ties across multiple fronts.

Relations Between Ethiopia and Sudan

Ethiopia and Sudan share a historically intertwined relationship, marked by common cultural heritage and geographical proximity. Both countries, whose names translate to "dark country," have a shared history of ancient civilizations and cultural tolerance.

Post-independence from Egypt and the United Kingdom in 1956, Sudan experienced significant internal strife, including two major civil wars—the first from 1955 to 1972, primarily over secessionist issues, and the second from 1983 to 2005, led by the Southern rebels seeking autonomy (Mazrui, 2000). This conflict eventually culminated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, paving the way for South Sudan's independence in 2011.

The border between Ethiopia and Sudan was delineated under the Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1902, aiming to establish a clear frontier between the two nations.

In contemporary times, Ethiopia and Sudan maintain a cordial relationship with a focus on enhancing cooperation across various sectors (BBC, 2011). This includes mutual agreements on security, trade, health, agriculture, and tourism, as evidenced by the outcomes of the Ethiopia-Sudan Joint Border Development Commission meetings. Both nations have committed to combatting illegal activities such as human trafficking, deforestation, and diseases like polio and HIV/AIDS along their shared border regions (Danfulani, 1999). Additionally, efforts are underway to promote tourism through the preservation of forests and wildlife.

Economically, the two countries have a bilateral trade agreement dating back to 1980, with subsequent agreements aimed at eliminating tariff barriers and facilitating trade under the framework of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Infrastructure development, including road construction projects connecting towns like Dima in Ethiopia to Boma in Sudan, forms a crucial part of enhancing regional connectivity (Danfulani, 1999). These efforts are part of a broader initiative to establish a reliable road



network linking Juba, Addis Ababa, and onward to Djibouti, thereby boosting trade and economic integration.

Moreover, Ethiopia and Sudan are collaborating in geological and geophysical surveys to jointly explore mineral resources, leveraging modern technologies to enhance mineral exploitation activities. Ethiopia's mineral-rich green stone belts offer significant deposits of gold, tantalum, platinum, and other minerals, presenting ample opportunities for joint ventures and resource development between the two nations.

In conclusion, while challenges such as historical conflicts and developmental disparities persist, Ethiopia and Sudan are committed to strengthening their bilateral ties through multifaceted cooperation. By focusing on mutual economic development, infrastructure projects, and resource exploration, both countries aim to foster sustainable growth and stability in the Horn of Africa region.

Relations Between Ethiopia and South Sudan

Ethiopia and South Sudan share a significant strategic relationship shaped by their mutual challenges of landlocked status, lack of sea access, and underdeveloped transport infrastructure. Despite these obstacles, both nations have forged cooperative agreements aimed at leveraging their respective strengths. South Sudan, rich in agricultural potential, stands to benefit from exporting agricultural products to Ethiopia, while Ethiopia, with its vast hydropower resources on the Blue Nile, could supply electricity to South Sudan and neighboring countries. In February 2012, a tripartite agreement involving Djibouti was signed to enhance economic cooperation and trade, emphasizing Ethiopia's role as a pivotal transit hub in the Horn of Africa. Additionally, the two countries have committed to an eight-point Memorandum of Understanding focusing on transit, transport infrastructure development, export facilitation, and fostering regional peace and security. These initiatives underscore a shared commitment to improving connectivity and promoting economic growth, reflecting a broader strategy for mutual development and regional integration.

Conclusion

The study of transit routes and transport networks between Ethiopia and its neighbouring countries reveals a complex interplay of historical, geographical, economic, and geopolitical factors. Ethiopia's landlocked status, influenced by colonial legacies and regional conflicts, has shaped its reliance on transit routes through neighbouring nations for international trade and economic connectivity.



Historically, Ethiopia's transition to a landlocked nation was marked by European colonial ambitions, notably Italy's occupation of Eritrea and subsequent conflicts that altered regional borders and access to maritime resources. The strategic importance of transit routes, particularly through Djibouti's port following Eritrea's independence, underscores Ethiopia's adaptation to geopolitical changes and its efforts to maintain economic resilience.

Geopolitically, Ethiopia's relations with neighbouring countries like Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Sudan, and South Sudan reflect varying degrees of cooperation and challenges. The unresolved border disputes with Eritrea, for instance, have constrained direct access to Eritrean ports, necessitating alternative transit routes and diplomatic engagements to mitigate economic impacts.

Infrastructure development remains a critical factor in enhancing Ethiopia's transit capabilities, with initiatives such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway demonstrating the potential for regional integration and economic growth. Challenges posed by Ethiopia's diverse topography, including highlands, plateaus, and lowlands, underscore the need for innovative solutions in road and rail construction to improve connectivity and reduce transportation costs.

Economically, transit routes play a pivotal role in facilitating trade flows of goods and services, enhancing market access for Ethiopian exports and imports. The development of transport infrastructure not only supports economic diversification but also promotes regional stability through collaborative efforts under organizations like IGAD and COMESA.

Moving forward, sustainable development of transit routes requires continued investment in infrastructure, regulatory harmonization, and cross-border cooperation. Addressing logistical challenges, enhancing border efficiencies, and integrating technological advancements will be essential in optimizing transit networks and fostering inclusive economic growth across the Horn of Africa.

In conclusion, the study underscores the importance of transit routes and transport networks as catalysts for regional integration, economic development, and peacebuilding in Ethiopia and its neighbouring countries. By navigating historical legacies and contemporary challenges, Ethiopia seeks to harness its strategic position and natural resources to foster resilient and interconnected societies in the Horn of Africa region.



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