



“WHO’S CROSSING?”

November 2023

STUDY OF THE DYNAMICS INDUCED BY THE REOPENING OF CÔTE D’IVOIRE’S BORDERS AFTER COVID 19 AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE NORTHERN BORDER AREAS OF CÔTE D’IVOIRE.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Dr Tingbo Germain Philippe Assale

ASSOCIATED RESEARCHERS:
Dr. Frederick Essoh Akpa
Mr Djedj Mel, MA
Mrs Bleu Mun Patricia, MA
Mrs Geneviève Konan, BA
Mr Ghislain Eza , MA

RESEARCH ASSISTANT:
Mrs Salimatou Karamoko, BA



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Resilience for Peace

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Cover Photo: Tricycle transport and bottles of petrol at the border town of Koguienou.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CCM:	Cellule civilo-militaire (civil-military unit)
CNFCI:	Commission Nationale des frontières de Côte d'Ivoire (National Borders Commission of Côte d'Ivoire)
CNS:	National Security Council
ECOWAS:	Economic Community of West African States
EAI:	Equal Access International
EMGA:	General Staff of the Armed Forces
GUM:	Guichet Unique Mobile
TMA:	Abidjan Military Tribunal
VEO:	Violent Extremist Organizations

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A Executive summary



Road marker, Tengrela

The goal of this study was to gather quantitative and qualitative data to better understand the risks and opportunities associated with re-opening of borders in the localities of Tengrela-Papara, Ouangolodougou and Doropo, in northern Côte d'Ivoire. Developing a baseline may improve communication mechanisms and strategies aimed at mitigating issues potentially exploitable by violent extremist organizations (VEOs).

The study focused on the dynamics induced by the closure and reopening of Ivorian land borders in northern localities. It used a combined qualitative and quantitative approach to analyze the opportunities and risks associated with border closures in relation to resilience against violent extremism (VE), and to analyze the dynamics induced by the reopening of borders.

The border closure impacted communities in several ways. The increase in the number of ways of bypassing official posts, with the risk of VEOs taking advantage of this to infiltrate the country, as well as the drop in production and consequent decrease in farmers' incomes due to the limited availability of agricultural inputs are just some of the challenges linked to the closure of the borders. During this period, communities experienced an increase in criminal activity, notably cattle and motorcycle theft. The first is of particular concern, given that cattle theft is linked to VE financing.¹

The closure of the borders forced some people, especially women and young tradesmen, to convert to agriculture, leading to additional pressure on farmland and natural resources. The border closure reduced the people's movement but did not stop it, leading to an exponential growth in racketeering.

Border closures also created new economic opportunities, such as the increasing use of moto taxis. During this period, conflict between non-nationals and local gold miners over natural resources decreased.

¹ Flore Bergeret Anicet Zran, Nord-Est de la côte d'Ivoire entre économie illicite et extrémisme violent, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, September 2023, p.17.

Certain dynamics engendered by the closure of the borders, notably the high cost of living, a slowdown in economic activities, racketeering, the closure of gold-mining sites and criminal activities, are still active. The opening of the borders has facilitated the movement of goods and people and led to a slow economic recovery. Respondents stated that the opening of borders has also resulted in the massive arrival of refugees. The arrival of these refugees has given rise to fears of conflict, especially over the management of natural resources (arable land, and gold mining).

Interviewees also highlighted local resilience mechanisms to mitigate some of the challenges posed by the reopening of borders in relation to violent extremism.

The study developed recommendations to strengthen these resilience initiatives in the border areas between Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso.

Map 1: map of regions and cities in northern Côte d'Ivoire. Names in bold refer to the locations where the research took place



1 Background

The border is a prism often associated with geopolitics and the state as a sovereign spatial complex. If we go beyond this perception and consider the border from a regional perspective, it influences the population and its distribution of economic structures and rural and urban organizations.

The border has *“become a recurrent theme in the news under the pressure of international tensions, migration, but also cross-border and transnational cooperation.”*² According to Astrid Von Busiris, the border *“is what limits and delimits spaces; it distinguishes groups, ethnic groups or communities; it also restricts conversations and regulates exchanges.”*³

However, with globalization, the border *“is increasingly asserting itself as a zone of contact, exchange, institutionalized cooperation and diversified mobility. It is as if spatial differentials were now valued not in terms of constraints and competition, but rather as complementarities and resources.”*⁴

Borders have become a power issue, which explains the particular importance attached to them by States, and justifies their closure in the light of events, as a means of protecting States. When the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, almost all the world's countries closed their borders to limit the spread of the virus.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the government closed land, sea, and air borders on March 22, 2020. However goods traffic was authorized, subject to health checks by the relevant authorities, as well as humanitarian and security corridors to meet specific pandemic management needs.

The closure of Côte d'Ivoire's borders had an impact on the daily lives of those living in border areas. Many practiced agriculture and trade on both sides of the border and frequented the health centers and educational establishments of neighboring countries. As a result, people affected by



Côte d'Ivoire - Mali border road, with the alignment of trucks along the tarmac

² Francis Moullé. "Un monde de frontière", In *Frontières* sous la direction de F. Moullé, Presse universitaire de Bordeaux, 2017, p. 13.

³ Astrid Von Beusekist. *Doors and walls: borders in democracy*. Albin Michel, February 2016, vol.224 pages, p.7, Paris.

⁴ Madeleine Boudoux d'Hautefeuille. *Entre marge et interface, recompositions territoriales à la frontière franco-brésilienne* (Guyane/Amapa), 2012 [Thesis for the doctorate in geography : Universités des Antilles et de la Guyane: 2012] p.13.

border closures developed ingenious ways of bypassing border posts and continuing their former activities. The subsequent proliferation of bypass routes seems to have been made possible by the porous nature of Côte d'Ivoire's borders, which are virtually unmarked, inherited from colonization. They do not always reflect socio-cultural and linguistic realities.

However, after three years of closure, the National Security Council, announced: *"In view of the favorable evolution of the global health situation and the recovery of economic activity, air and sea borders have been opened. [...] from midnight on Wednesday, February 15, 2023."*⁵

According to government, this decision to reopen the land borders comes after the secondary routes for clandestine crossings were brought under control by the security forces. This will enable *"travelers to be redirected to the official*

crossing points, so as to ensure better control of the migratory flow." This measure was taken against the backdrop of a security crisis that has left the socio-economic ecosystem of the northern border areas of Côte d'Ivoire vulnerable.

As part of the project Resilience for Peace (R4P) project, community resilience initiatives implemented by Equal Access International (EAI) in the northern border region of Côte d'Ivoire are supported by research to understand local dynamics. To prevent VEOs from exploit vulnerable contexts to expand their activities, the Resilience for Peace project commissioned this study to better understand the dynamics induced by the reopening of borders and their implications for communities.

The data and recommendations generated by this study will be used to implement activities to build community resilience to VE.



Travelers on the road in the Bounkani region

⁵ Ministry of State, Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Security and Civil Protection, Joint Communiqué, Abidjan March 20, 2020.



Study objectives


General objective


The overall goal of the study is to gather quantitative and qualitative data to refine understanding of the risks and opportunities associated with open borders in the localities of Tengrela-Papara, Ouangolodougou and Doropo. The aim is to better define communication mechanisms and strategies to mitigate events potentially exploitable by violent extremist organizations (VEO's).


Specific objectives


The study has the following specific objectives:


 Identify the dynamics induced by the closing of borders.


 Identify the risks and opportunities associated with the reopening of borders.

 Examine the quality of the relationship between authorities and populations in terms of securing borders.

 Analyze cross-border community relationships that can strengthen community resilience.


 Describe how communities perceive the opening of land borders.


 Identify the tensions surrounding natural resources generated by the opening of borders.


 Clarify the means of communication between communities and authorities on the effects of open borders.


Expected results of the study


The following results are expected:

 Data collection in relation to the indicator reference level.


 An analysis of the socio-economic dynamics generated by the closure of borders and their modes of expression.


 An analysis of the risks and opportunities linked to the opening of borders in northern Côte d'Ivoire.


 An evaluation of the quality of the relationship between the administrative and security authorities/populations about border security.

 Cross-border community relationships likely to strengthen community resilience are identified and analyzed.

 Catalog community perceptions of open land borders.

 Analysis of the tensions surrounding natural resources generated by the opening of borders.

 Identify the modes of communication between communities and authorities (with an emphasis on language to be used or avoided) and the best channels and times for communication.

 Develop concrete recommendations.

3 Study methodology: data collection

This study combined quantitative and qualitative methods. This combination made it possible not only to measure the perception that the various socio-demographic groups in the border localities of northern Côte d'Ivoire have of the dynamics linked to the opening of borders, but also to gather the opinions of key people on the study's problem set.

QUALITATIVE METHODS

The study used an Active Participatory Research Method whereby information sources were triangulated, wherever possible, through a combination of documentary analysis and data analysis collected in the localities. The following data collection tools were used:

- (i) semi-structured interviews,
- (ii) observations,
- (iii) and focus group discussions (FGDs).

Data was collected in strict compliance with ethical guidelines (respect for respondents, gender, equity, participation of adolescents, rights, and freedom of expression of young people and women in data collection, confidentiality, anonymity). The qualitative approach relied on three main sources of data collection, focus groups, individual interviews, and direct observation.

To reflect demographic, socio-economic diversity and balance, gender, age, social status, and community representativeness were variables considered when identifying participants.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

A document review was conducted to inform the development of questionnaires. Most past research focused on the various aspects of border security, insecurity, and the dynamics of border regions. The authors discussed the legal and geopolitical aspects of borders, the emotional and symbolic significance of borders, and the evolving nature of border practices. They also analyzed the impact of border closures and reopening on security, economic activity, and illicit practices. Paul de Geouffre de La Pradelle distinguishes between the "delimitation" (of a border), which is a line, and the "frontier," which for him is a zone of cooperation. He also differentiates between the "national" frontier, the subject of national public law, and the "international" frontier, the subject of public international law and private international law. He sees the border as a geopolitical object, as it is an institution established by political decisions.

Adamou Moussa Ibrahim sees the border as a subject of international law, whose "principal function is to mark the zone of intervention and competence of a State, and thus to delimit its sovereignty."

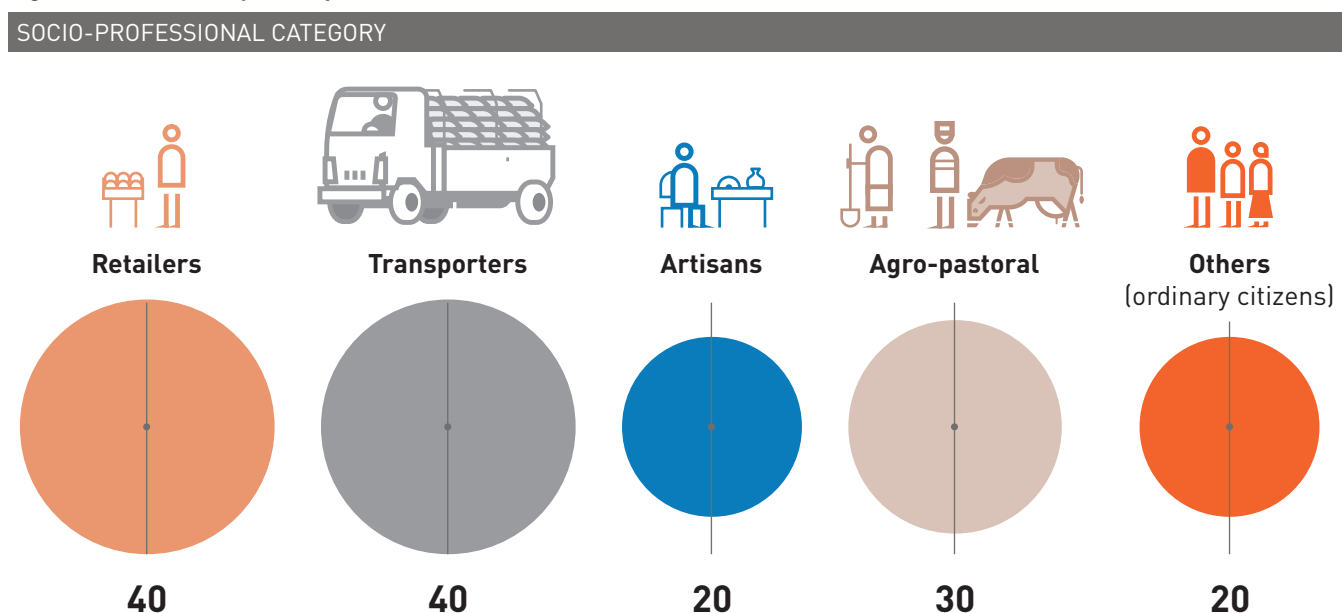
Astrid Von Destrück speaks of borders being sharing spaces, while François Moullé speaks of evolving border practices and border protection and cooperation mechanisms. A recent newspaper article spoke of the increase in racketeering



Travelers on a road in the Bounkani region



Figure 1: workforce by socio-professional stratum



around the closed border, where to cross the official border, all that was required, as the Ivorians like to say, was “to speak good French”, i.e. to put your hand in your pocket to have the border gates opened wide. In any case, racketeering and other forms of harassment had regained ground to the point where certain government officials, by means of biased reports, were encouraging the Ivorian authorities to keep the land borders closed, to continue lining their pockets.

GROUP FACILITATIONS AROUND THE VARIOUS THEMES ADDRESSED BY THE STUDY

A total of 36 discussion groups were organized, 4 per locality (9 localities visited), including women’s groups. Each of these groups was made up of **8 to 15** people, representing the diversity of people (natives, migrants, herders, farmers, women’s groups, youth leaders, professional groups, etc.) living in the localities covered by the study.

In total **352 people** took part in the group discussions.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Individual interviews were conducted with key informants such as local authorities, representatives of the defense and security forces, traditional authorities, CSOs/NGOs, professional groups, and other stakeholders. The team spoke to a total of **99 people**.

QUANTITATIVE METHODS

For the collection of quantitative data, we chose a non-prob-

ability sampling procedure, by quotas, which consisted of selecting participants considered typical of the target population.

This procedure is intended to guarantee the external validity of the results. This sampling method made it possible to include certain characteristic components of the population to best explore the dynamics induced by the reopening of Côte d’Ivoire’s northern borders. The aim is to ensure maximum diversity of profiles.

Thus, the researchers opted to randomly interview **150 people** per locality (450 in total), distributed as shown in Chart 1:

QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION QUESTIONNAIRES

The quantitative data collection questionnaire consisted of **26 questions** administered using the Kobo tool. The 450 people interviewed were either directly involved in or affected by the border closing and reopening. They were identified with the help of the authorities or focal points in each locality.

Questionnaires summarizing the major themes and key questions to be addressed were drawn up with the aim of homogenizing the information to be collected for easier compilation and comparison of data across the three study sites.

LIMITS TO DATA COLLECTION

The data collection was confronted with several limitations, namely:

- The unavailability of some relevant key informants.
- Lack of traceability of border crossings via bypass roads.
- The reluctance of some key informants to share information due to internal protocols (need for hierarchical authorization before any information can be shared).
- A lack of diversity in some focus groups because some communities directly affected by the border closure reside in satellite villages and camps.
- Difficulties in finding people who could express themselves in French to administer the questionnaire, whereas the presence of translators would have influenced participants' responses.
- Translation into local languages created misunderstandings and lengthened the time scheduled for the focus groups.
- Reluctance of some community members to express themselves during focus group discussions.

Data collection was structured around 3 main axes:

- Border governance.
- Natural resource management.
- Communication and intercommunity relations around the reopening of borders.

TRAINING THE RESEARCH TEAM

Members of the research team participated in a one-day training session tailored to their survey experience. Most of them have taken part in at least two surveys, including the R4P perception survey.

The basic elements of interviewer and supervisor training included in-depth knowledge of the study and instruments, team structure and logistics, case management and respondent follow-up, ethics and consent, and best practices in interviewing. The training focused on ensuring a complete understanding of each question and its objectives, to guarantee the quality and consistency of any local-language translations to be carried out in the field.

Interactive elements to the training, including small-group exercises, as well as regular breaks and question-and-answer sessions were part of each module to assess participant understanding. Each interviewer and supervisor received a printed guide to use as a reference in the field.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The team's principal investigator, research assistant and IT specialist carried out quality checks on the data collected every other day throughout the data collection period. Verification checks were carried out on approximately 10% of respondents.

The cleaning and analysis of the survey data was carried out in STATA. The analysis of the survey data considered respondent characteristics such as gender, age, etc., as well as trends emerging from these characteristics. Cross-tabulations were created for each question. Graphs were created for key questions, or those where the pattern of responses between groups is of particular interest. Error ranges due to design effects were calculated where appropriate so that they could be presented in the report.



4 Study results

The results presented here are the sum of the results obtained through the 3 collection methods described above and are cumulative from the different interviewees. They provide a basis for perceptions of the risks and opportunities of border reopening in the Bounkani, Tchologo and Bagoué regions and will provide a means of measuring changes in these perceptions over time. These analyses bring together and faithfully

translate the data collected. For the individual interviews and focus groups, the notes were compiled to highlight the most frequent and relevant answers given by respondents.

The graphs represent responses globally and are supported by tables that show variations in responses by locality, to account for significant differences at each locality level.



Motorcycles parked in the town of Niamoué



5 The dynamics of closed borders

The dynamics induced by the closing of borders are myriad and manifest themselves in different ways. Some have been beneficial for the population, while others have been less so. We will structure these dynamics into by three main blocks: economic, social and securityeconomic, social, and security impact.

5.1 Border closure opportunities

Economic and social

GROWTH OF THE MOTO TAXI BUSINESS:

The border closure led to the reconversion of many youths as motorcycle transporters. In Doropo, the closure of the borders coincided with a crackdown on illegal gold mining, and many of those working in the gold sites reinvented themselves by taking advantage of the fact that large vehicles were unable to pass through the official posts. Using two- or three-wheeled vehicles, they transported people and goods between Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso using bypass routes. This activity not only provided employment to youth, but many civil servants and other members of the community invested in it, buying motorcycles, and employing young people to practice this "new" activity.

To better understand the motivations and opportunities that contribute to the appeal of this activity, we identified comments with pertinent information. A community leader in Doropo, believes that:

“ Bypass roads have existed for a long time, but they were used by individuals using their own motorcycles to get around. They took these routes because they were shorter, or they avoided checkpoints (FDS and health workers) or because their machines didn't have the required documents. For their part, smugglers and traffickers use them to evade customs when transporting their goods. But now that borders are closed, two- and three-wheelers were the main means of transport. Inhabitants with money found it a godsend to make more money. ”

The president of a women's association in Tengrela explains:

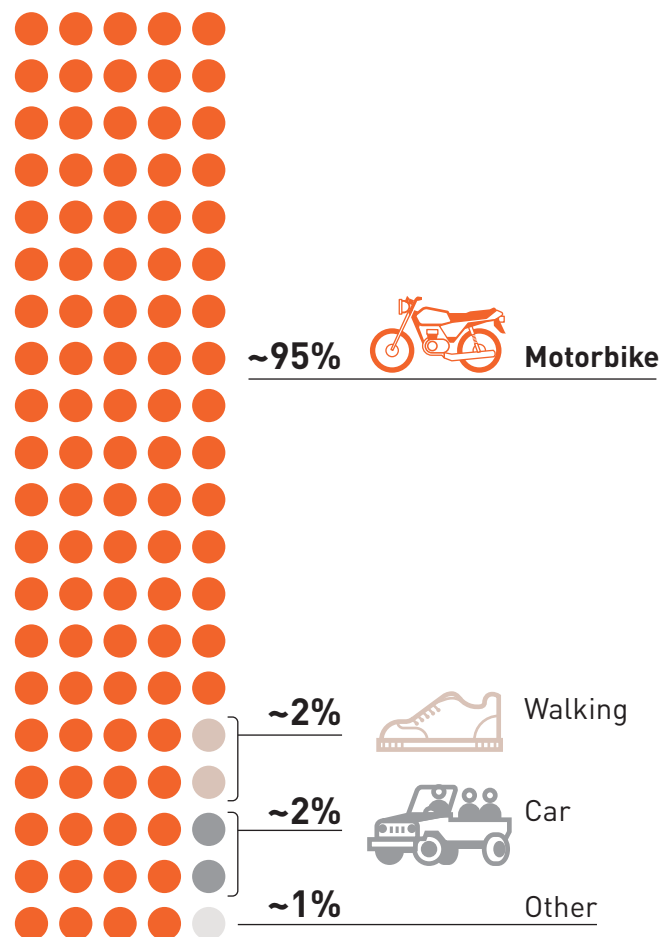
“ No transport company could cross the border. For example, buses from the Ivorian side couldn't go beyond Tengrela because of the border closure. Passengers

wishing to go to Mali used moto taxis from Tengrela to continue their journey. ”

This activity represented an economic opportunity not only for young people, but also for government employees, including the FDS, according to according to an economic operator:

“ The moto taxi business has enabled many people to achieve social fulfillment. I know people in my community who have built houses with the money generated by this activity. The journey from Tengrela to the first

Figure 2: proportion of means of transport used



Malian town on the bypass roads with the motorcycles cost at least FCFA 20,000 per passenger. And when you come across authorities, each passenger will pay 10,000f. If you're lucky, you'll pay 5000f. However, although the closure of the borders has had a considerable influence on the daily lives of Doropo's inhabitants, it has not had the same impact in certain localities, such as Papara.

”

According to a Papara entertainer:

“*The people of Papara didn't feel the closure of the borders too much, as the illegal gold miners came and went at any time. When gold mining was in full swing here, we couldn't stay in this office, everything was red from the dust of the motorcycles, despite the government's communiqué. Life was normal and here the youth are only interested in gold panning; those who drive the motorcycles are young Malians.*

”

MAINTAINING CROSS-BORDER INTERACTIONS AND TRANSACTIONS

The closure of borders had little influence on trade or social interaction between communities on both sides of the border. The border has no meaning for populations sharing the same social identity:

“*Here the border doesn't mean much, we're a family with our brothers on the other side. We take wives there, and they too come here to get married. On Fridays, we go to the mosque on the other side, and get medical treatment there. Some Malians live with us, but they go to work in their fields in Mali and come back.*

POGO COMMUNITY LEADER ”

A health worker in Tengrela agrees:

“*Côte d'Ivoire and Mali are two peoples who frequent each other and have similar cultures, so it was difficult to prevent people from crossing the border. People here prefer to go to Mali for treatment because they understand each other and share the same language.*”

In addition, inadequate border demarcation and the porosity of borders fuel the risk of destabilization and armed conflict as states are unable to control the border. Cross-border solidarities in cultural areas transcend the limits of the sub-region's states and encourage and give rise to uncontrolled movements of people and goods, both legal and illegal, and facilitate the development of terrorist gangs and serious crime.

The distance between Côte d'Ivoire's main cities and certain border towns such as Tengrela drives populations to prefer Bamako rather than Bouaké for certain services:

“*Trade continued even during the health crisis; you know why? The Malian capital is 337 km from Tengrela on asphalt, while Bouaké, the second largest city in Côte d'Ivoire, is over 500 km away, so it's natural that people go there, even if they know that the products they buy come from Côte d'Ivoire.*

MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY, TENGRELA ”

ECONOMIC RECONVERSION FOR WOMEN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Among the groups most affected by the border closures were women engaged in cross-border trade. Movement restrictions made it difficult for cross-border traders to continue their activities. As a result, they converted to market gardening. A female association leader declared:

“*Before the borders were closed, all the women you see were involved in cross-border trade. When the borders were closed and they could no longer carry out their activities, they turned to market gardening. I used to go as far as Mauritania, but today I'm a market gardener.*”

Security

In terms of security, the closure of borders has several dynamics, notably the observation of a certain flexibility and understanding on the part of the FDS when necessary, especially for health and educational reasons.

FLEXIBILITY FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL EMERGENCIES

Border controls were stricter during the border closure, but this did not prevent the defense and security forces from showing a degree of understanding in the face of health and social emergencies:

“*I've shown understanding towards sick people going to Mali for treatment. I let a man who was suffering from prostate disease go to Mali for treatment. If I didn't let him cross the border, he risked dying.*

We allowed them to go to funerals in Mali. Should we refuse or accept this request from the people with whom we work to secure our borders? After consultation with community leaders, we let them through to preserve good relations with the local population.

FDS, NIGOUNI BORDER ”

A local elected official, understanding the posture of the FDS due to the frequent interaction of border populations with health and education services, expressed himself in these terms:

“ *It’s no secret that our people go to neighboring towns for medical treatment, even as we speak,” he says, people are on their way to Kadiana for treatment, because for them it’s cheaper there, we speak to them in Malinké, and they’re well received.* ” Municipal authority ”

Also, according to a Papara health worker:

“ *The majority of our patients are people from neighboring countries, while the Papara population prefers to go to clinics in Mali for treatment. Just as the children who go to school here are mostly from neighboring countries. Take a tour of the school and you’ll see for yourself.* ”

Some communities have reservations about the quality of national hospital services compared with those in neighboring countries. These community criticisms are debatable, according to an FDS agent who said:

“ *For the local population, the welcome in Mali’s health centers is better than here, medicines are cheaper, staff take good care of patients, and communication is easy (in terms of language). Yet the health centers here are better equipped and the staff better trained. But these are their feelings, we can’t change that.* ”

Some Ivorian children from border villages who attended schools in Mali and Burkina Faso and vice versa did not interrupt their schooling during the border closure. The FDS facilitated their crossing of the borders during this period.

Ultimately, these gestures of empathy and indulgence from the FDS have helped their collaboration with the communities. According to a municipal authority in Tengrela:

“ *The FDS are informed by the population as soon as there are suspicious people or movements.* ”

REDUCED CONFLICTS BETWEEN NATIONALS AND NON-NATIONALS OVER NATURAL RESOURCES

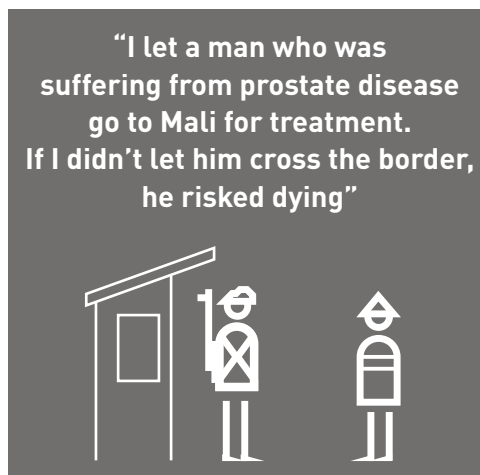
The closure of borders curbed competition for economic opportunities, which are limited, and eased the scramble for mineral resources. Non-nationals no longer had easy access to land due to the border closure.

This reduced the stranglehold of non-nationals on the illegal gold mining business (manpower, financing) and slowed down the pace of development.

The practice of collecting mining material in sacks and then processing it in Burkina Faso was no longer as easy as it had been in the past, even though in some localities such as Kalamon, this activity survived the closure of the borders. Subsequent crackdowns by the Ivorian authorities expelled non-national workers and led to the closure of several sites.

5.2 Risks and challenges of closing borders

Opinions differ on the negative effects of reopening borders, but 34% and 33% of those surveyed said that the reopening had affected youth activities and increased racketeering.



Economic and social

The closure of the borders led many traders to suspend their activities

“ *The closure of the borders has had an enormous impact on women, 90% of whom are traders. Before the closure, women used to make convoys every Friday to go to Mali to buy goods. It was a great despair for these women, they could no longer make ends meet, helping their husbands financially for some was almost impossible and the widows could no longer take*

care of the orphaned children they had.

PRESIDENT OF THE WOMEN TRADERS OF TENGRELA ”

DECLINE IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION (CORN, PEANUTS, COTTON, ETC.)

Agricultural produce could no longer be sold to the usual Malian buyers, as a young man from Tengrela noted:

“ *Before the borders were closed, Tengrela was first in pea-*



nut and maize production. Malians used to come here to stock up on peanuts and corn. In 2020, all our harvest was left in our hands, and inputs have become too expensive. I used to be a market gardener myself, but today I've become a launderer

”

The closure of borders has led to difficulties in supplying the market with agricultural, phytosanitary and food products:

“

We used to source our raw materials, groundnuts and néré, from Burkina. During the closure, supplies became more difficult and more expensive, especially because of the cost of transport to Côte d'Ivoire. Afterwards, the Burkinabe authorities decided to stop exporting to Côte d'Ivoire. We stopped producing peanut paste and sou-mara for months. And we lost several customers. Today, even with the reopening, the Burkinabe authorities refuse to export.”

PRESIDENT OF A WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION IN DOROPO

”

Rising prices for crop protection products made them unaffordable for many growers:

“

Before the borders were closed, bags of fertilizer cost 15,000 francs, but with the closure, fertilizer has risen to 30,000 francs. Foodstuffs that used to be easy to find are now lacking on the market

SÉNOUFO CHIEF

The lack of phytosanitary products and their high cost have had a serious impact on agricultural production in Tengrela. Even Tengrela is no longer counted among the peanut producers.

FARMER ”

Supplying the local market with consumer goods from Mali became more difficult:

“

If it was during closing time, it was impossible for us butchers not only to find meat, but if we did, the price was high. Buyers must come very early to hope to get meat.

BUTCHER IN TENGRELA ”

The lack of availability of beef led to overbidding by butchers and other vendors in mining localities:

“

All around of us, everything is a gold mine and it's in the same corner that we go to buy meat, the butchers who are in the corners where there's a gold mine tire us out. They buy more expensively than we do, and we're obliged to follow them by raising the price per kg. We want the population to eat the meat, but when we buy a kg at 1800 to resell at 2000, these miners come and offer 2000 to resell at 2200 because there's money there, and we're tired of it.

BUTCHER IN TENGRELA ”

The drop in traffic on the main roads led to a decline in economic activity:

“

Before the borders were closed, this road you see was very busy. Trade was good. But when they closed the borders, passengers didn't use the road anymore, they went through the bush. As a result, trade no longer worked.

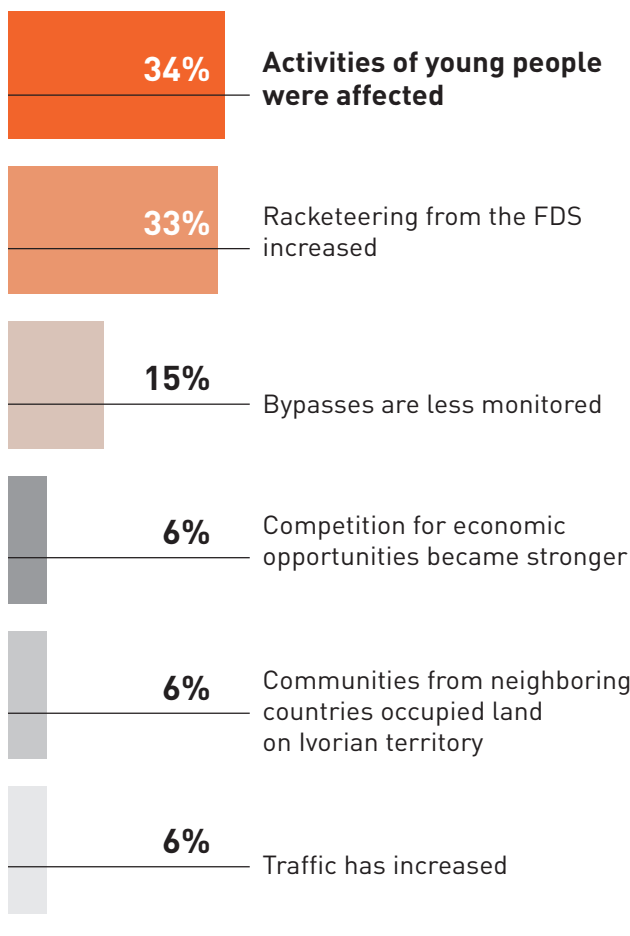
ELDER IN KOGUIENOU ”

As a result, people's living conditions have deteriorated, and family units are breaking up:

“

The high cost of living in the locality has pushed some of our sisters (women traders) to leave their homes and go to Kadiana (Mali) to make a second home with a goldsmith, because it's the goldsmiths who have the

Figure 3: effects of reopening borders



money. We've had financing from the First Lady, but we're tired of the 10% repayment because things don't work and some women have run away because they couldn't pay back the money" President of the Tengrela women merchants.

PRESIDENT OF THE TENGRELA WOMEN MERCHANTS ”

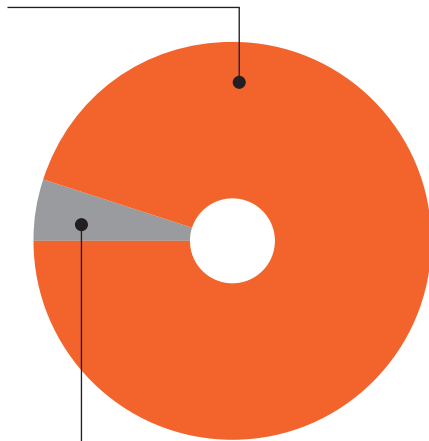
Security

PROLIFERATION AND AMPLIFICATION OF BYPASS ROADS

Roughly 95 percent of respondents surveyed said that they used bypass roads to cross borders during border closures.

Figure 4: proportion of channels used

95% Bypasses



5% Official routes

In addition to the existing bypass routes, the closure of the borders led to a proliferation of routes to try to escape FDS control or, failing that, to reduce road costs, since many of these routes were known to the FDS, which carried out checks on them from time to time. An FDS officer noted:

“ Every time a route was discovered, and roadblocks erected, people created new routes.

NOTE UN OFFICIER DES FDS ”

These roads were mainly used by two and three-wheelers. Arrangements were made between the FDS and travellers, generating an illicit economy. These “little arrangements” eased tensions and created strong affinities between the FDS and the local population:

“ Destroying or securing the bypass tracks helps taxi-mo-to drivers to create another track. They don't realize the danger. Young people create bypass tracks whenever they need it.

NIGOUNI BORDER POST ”

A woman familiar with the bypasses describes her daily life during the closure:

“ I sell dry fish and do business in Senegal, Mali, Mauritania and Gambia. When the borders are closed, I use bypass roads, and when the driver drops me off in the first village in Mali (Kadiana, 30 km away), we walk and go back. Often, it's during the night that we travel, so we can leave here at 4 a.m

TENGRELA SHOPKEEPER ”

This increase in the number of bypasses caused concern among the local population:

“ Motorcycle cab drivers have made foreigners discover all the bypasses. If someone wants to do harm in Tengrela, they'll go in and do what they want and then come out again without being bothered

MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY ”

Local people accuse motorcycle-taxis of encouraging the influx and outflow of strangers, including illegal gold-panners:

It's the moto taxis that bring in all the strange people we find on the illegal gold sites. They'll transport anyone into town if they hand over their money. The problem is that he is risking the whole population.

TENGRELA MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY

The non-existence of border checkpoints in certain localities such as Kalamon made them privileged crossings points:

“ Here in Kalamon, the border has never been closed. There are lots of tracks and no fixed checkpoints. We didn't feel the border was closed. On the contrary, many people preferred to cross here to go to Burkina or to return to Côte d'Ivoire. It's when you meet the FDS on patrol that there's a problem, but we “managed” with them. Even after the reopening, nothing has changed. People continue to pass through here.

KALAMON YOUTH LEADER ”

INCREASE IN MOTORCYCLE AND CATTLE THEFT

The increase in thefts of motorcycles and livestock was induced by the closure of borders. According to the president



of a merchant association, the closure of the borders had led to unemployment among some young people, and theft had become a means of survival for them. The bypass routes offered them an opportunity to cross the border incognito to sell their stolen goods:

“ Not a day goes by without someone saying they've had their motorcycle stolen here in Tengrela. It's like that every day.

MERCHANT, TENGRELA ”

An elected official added:

“ Without necessarily being linked to the closing of borders, the theft of livestock is recurring here, it's a well-organized crime that originated in Mali; back then, if you stole oxen and crossed the border, it was over.

DEPUTY MAYOR ”

INCREASED RACKET

The closure of the borders encouraged arrangements between the FDS and border crossers who often negotiated the crossing with cash. For a president of the moto taxi drivers:

“ The authorities aren't doing their job here, they're here for their own interests. They're here to get rich in the corridors, they're in the corridors for the racket, those who cross the border to go to or from Mali are obliged to “manage” them (bribe them). An officer asked me to “manage” it. Me an Ivoirian because I was accompanying my sister to Mali on a motorcycle. When I refused, he searched our luggage, even in the salt bags. I gave him the bags of salt and said that I don't pay anything in my own country, because I'm legal.

”

This phenomenon of racketeering is also denounced in Papara:

“ When you're on a moto taxi, arriving at each roadblock, the driver pays, and the passenger pays. And for those who have no relatives in the village, it's very complicated. Often, passengers blocked by the FDS call us to plead with us to let them through. When we arrive, the FDS will say that the passenger spoke badly to them (said some insolent things), even if he's a bobo (deaf-mute) who doesn't speak, they'll say he spoke badly. They're here because of the money. For them, it's the money they make that interests them..

PAPARA RESIDENT ”



Tengrela Town Hall Crossroads



6 The perceived effects of open borders

Authorities announced the border reopening in early 2023 as the impact of the pandemic lessened. This was corroborated by 79% of interviewees.

6.1 Persistent dynamics

The opening up of borders has reduced or eliminated certain dynamics, while others persist.

Economic and social

PERSISTENT EXCESSIVE COST OF LIVING

In line with a national observation, border localities in the north of Côte d'Ivoire are also experiencing soaring prices for staple goods ⁶ and plant protection products. This rise in costs is partly due to an increase in the number of check-

points, which leads to additional costs linked to racketeering, and the rise in demand due to traders from Mali and Burkina Faso who come to buy supplies on local markets:

“ Today there is a rush to Tengrela, people come from all over to buy food, so prices cannot go down. The buses from Bamako come here directly without any problem. All the foodstuffs are here now.

The opening of borders has had no positive impact on the high cost of living; food prices are higher than before, but there is no longer any shortage of food on the market, and everything is available on a regular basis.

MERCHANT IN TENGRELA ”

THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN PERSISTS DESPITE THE REOPENING OF BORDERS

The closure of borders led to a drop in passenger traffic, which in turn led to a decline in customer numbers and a slowdown in business activity:

“ When they closed the borders, people stopped coming here. So, trade did not work. We lost our business. When they opened the border, we took out loans to get back into business. But it is still not working because people do not come through here like they used to. We are going to lose the money we borrowed again. We want to be allowed to open a market here. That way, people will come, and business will pick up again.

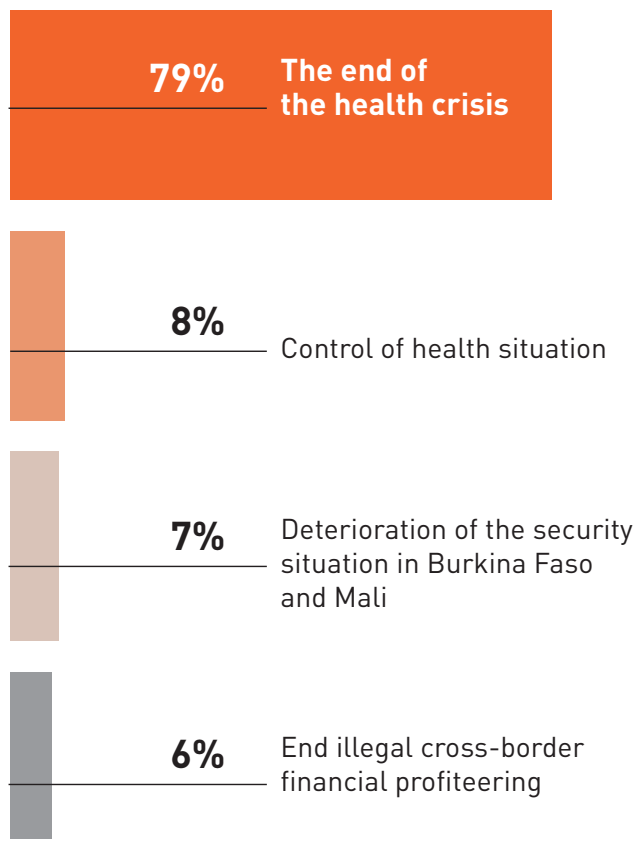
KOGUIENOU SHOPKEEPER ”

In some border localities, such as Doropo, the opening of borders, which has led to the slowdown of income-generating activities such as moto-taxis, combined with the security problems in neighboring countries pushed many people into unemployment.

“ The opening of the borders has put many young people out of work, as they used to earn a lot of money from motorcycle cabs. Insecurity in Burkina has also slowed down the beef trade. Former beef buyers are experiencing difficulties. There are fewer trucks arriving. As a result, mechanics' activities are declining. Cashew nuts are not well bought. Many young people have no activities and spend their time in the tea clubs. Some have tried to leave but have come back.

TRANSPORT MANAGER IN DOROPO ”

Figure 5: reasons for reopening borders



⁶ Local rice cost seven hundred francs a kilo in Ouangolodougou during the closure, but six hundred francs after the opening. It cost five hundred francs before the closure.



PERSISTENT DIFFICULTIES FOR WOMEN TRADERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Previously closed customs posts reopened. As a result, the number of checks has increased, customs procedures have become more cumbersome, and transport times have increased:

“ *This administrative burden reduces the frequency with which women traders travel to Mali, resulting in a loss of incomes. The time it takes for products to pass through customs checkpoints has risen from 2 to 7 or 8 days. To mitigate these difficulties, some of us opt for bypass routes.* ”
 PRESIDENT OF THE WOMEN TRADERS ”

rous nature makes it simple to cross using bypass routes and the closure led to an increase in the number of these routes. Bypassing checkpoints at the northern borders of Côte d'Ivoire, with Burkina Faso and Mali, is a major concern for the Ivorian authorities, especially as the opening of borders has not put an end to this dynamic. A leader of the Sénoufo community in Tengrela explains that the persistence of this phenomenon is partly due to the absence of access roads to certain border villages:

“ *Most villages are located far from the main roads. They can only be reached via tracks. Hence the ease with which moto taxis can create bypass tracks to access them.* ”

Security

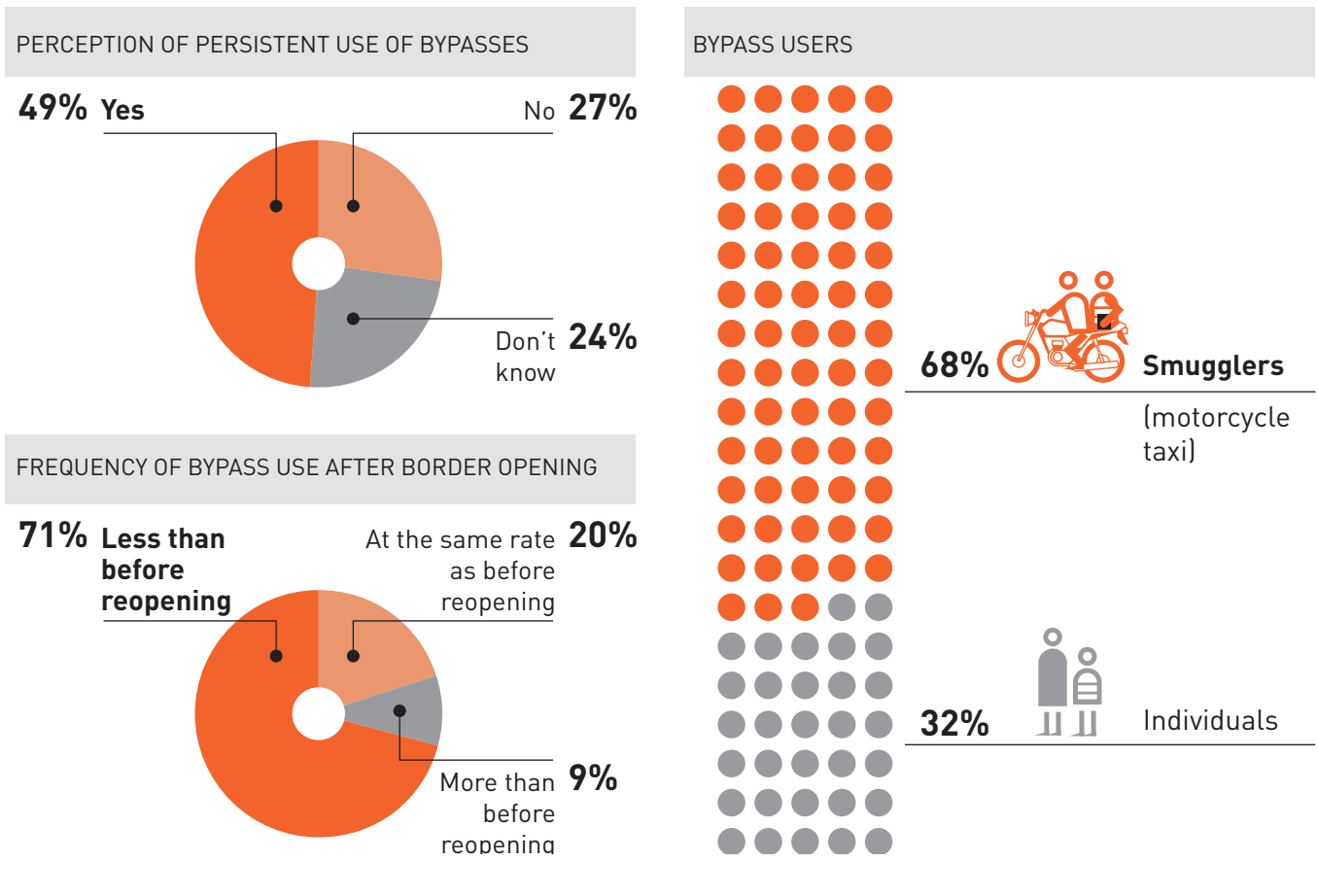
USE OF BYPASS ROADS AND MOTO TAXIS

The border closures between Côte d'Ivoire and neighboring countries have been impossible to enforce. The border's po-

To the question, “Do you know whether, since the opening of land borders, bypass routes are still used to reach different countries”? Half of those questioned answered in the affirmative.

A sizable proportion of the population (72%) think that the use of these trails is not as frequent as during the closure.

Figure 6: bypasses



However, the drivers surveyed estimated that the decision to use bypass roads is often taken by some passengers to avoid hassles and health checks on official roads:

“ Taking these bypass routes is often encouraged by passengers when they are in a hurry or if they want to avoid health workers, so they prefer to bribe a motorcycle cab driver to take the bypass route. Also given the rumors about the vaccinations required for the crossing (that vaccines would make you sterile), people prefer to use the bypass tracks
 NIGOUNI MOTORCYCLE CAB DRIVER ”

It should be noted that 42% of respondents believe that these routes are still used, despite the reopening of borders, to evade controls by the FDS.

According to some interviewees, there is a risk that moto taxis may carry members of VEOs or other Burkinabè fighters.

Motorcycle drivers interviewed in Doropo mentioned having transported youth fleeing Burkina to avoid being recruited into VDP. Some of these youth said they had recognized, among refugees now in Côte d'Ivoire, those who had taken up arms on behalf of the VDP but who had later fled because they were suspected of having provided information to jihadist groups.

From their point of view, closing or opening borders would have done nothing to prevent the entry of fighters or other extremists into Ivorian territory. They would have found refuge in border towns by motorcycle or on foot.

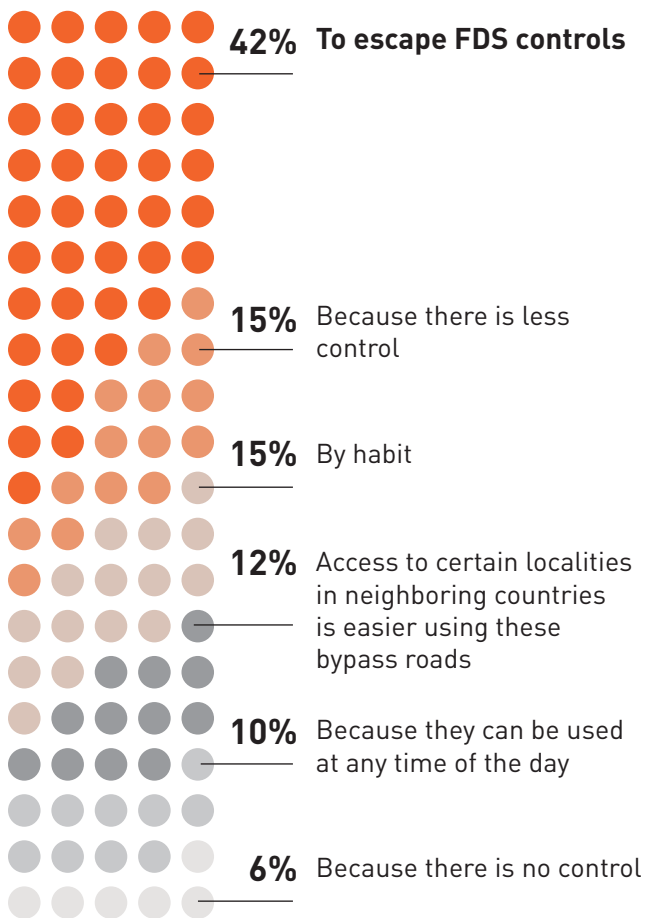
A member of the FDS, interviewed in Doropo, states that the regular presence of the VDP along the Burkinabe borders could create a new offer for these young people from Doropo who are in constant contact with these armed groups. These youth could be solicited by these groups to supply them or provide them with information.

Despite the reopening of borders, illicit border crossing continues. This is attributable to both regular crossers and motorcycle cab operators, even if the business does not generate as much revenue as it did when the borders were closed:

“ At the moment, when people are in a hurry, they get on a motorcycle to leave quickly. They themselves are the reason this activity cannot end. It is true that it has decreased. It does not make as much money as it used to because there are cars on the line. Cars coming from elsewhere can leave directly, and there is even a bus that loads here to go as far as Bamako and beyond. But people get away with it. Some people drive motorcycle cabs into town during the day. In the evenings, when the buses arrive, they are at the station to offer their services to arriving passengers.”

TENGRELA RESIDENT ”

Figure 7: persistent use of bypasses



HOW MUCH IS IN IT?

The statement from Bako (2003, p.17) highlights a critical issue regarding the relationship between security forces and the exercise of their legal authority. By stating that security forces possess the power to ensure people's actions comply with the law, a power that has been legally granted to them, Bako draws attention to a potentially problematic aspect of this authority. Specifically, he points out that this power can be strategically utilized for the potential extraction of funds. This implies a concern about the misuse of legal authority for personal or institutional financial gain, rather than solely for maintaining public order and enforcing the law ⁷. A moto taxi driver from Nigouni mentions racketeering as the main reason he and his colleagues use the bypass roads:

⁷ Arifarin Nassirou, BAKO (2003). Everyday corruption in Benin Parakou. LASDEL-IRD, report N° 17.



“ Today, even if you have all your papers in order, the FDS is going to ask you to manage it. That is why we always take the bypass to avoid the controls. Sometimes, to travel 15 or 20 km, you will come across 4 or 5 roadblocks, and you will have to pay 2,000 at each one, so we take the risk of using the bypass with the agreement of our passengers.

MOTO TAXI DRIVER, NIGOUNI (TENGRELA)

The FDS no longer monitor the population, it is us who monitor them, they came to the north for self-interest. When they know they have been posted here, it is total joy because they know they are going to racketeer the drivers. They no longer check passengers, but demand money from anyone who wants to cross the border.

MOTOCYCLE CAB DRIVER IN TENGRELA ”

According to a customs authority, cross-border traders are rarely up to date administratively with their documents. This

situation exposes them to financial penalties, which leads to negotiate arrangements with the FDS:

“ Ignorance and the desire to save time in these commercial operations lead women to prefer arrangements with the FDS to bypass the rules.

OUANGOLODOUGOU TRADER ”

This tendency of the FDS to prefer arrangements with traders and other travelers exposes the country to security risks, according to a Papara community leader:

“ As long as you have the money to bribe the FDS, you can cross Côte d'Ivoire's borders and bring in whatever you want, even prohibited products and dangerous people like jihadists, without being bothered too much. It is God himself who saves us!

PAPARA COMMUNITY LEADER ”

Figure 8: obstacles to the movement of people and goods

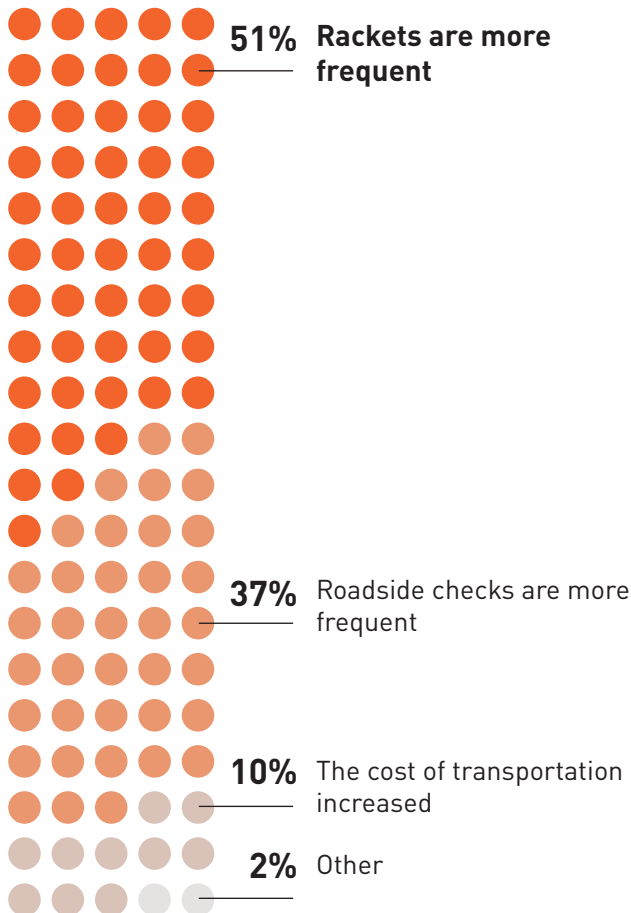
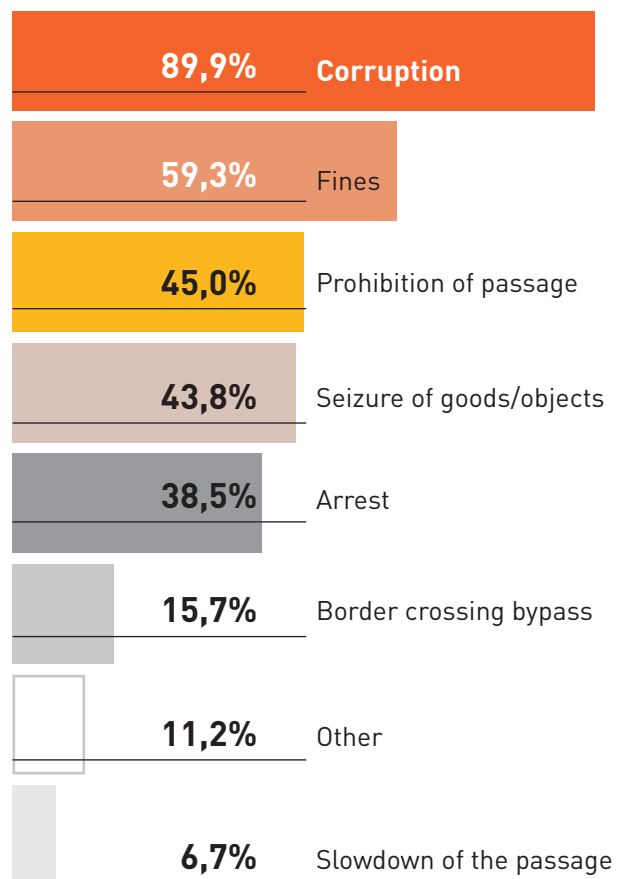


Figure 9: reasons for differences (%)





Strategic crossroads of the borders of Guinea and Mali in Minignan

A cross-border transporter in Doropo-Burkina, asserts that:

“ If someone wants to come and do harm, they can pass through quietly if they pay. The FDS at the border post have frustrating words. They use coarse, coded language equating foreign passengers with goods and things. They say “how many in it” to indicate the number of foreigners we are carrying, and therefore the amount we should collect in advance for them. During identity checks, it is just the money in which they are interested. ”

The majority of those questioned (51%) identified racketeering at roadside checkpoints as obstacles to the movement of people and goods.

This situation creates tensions with the local population. According to most of those surveyed, the main causes of conflict between the community and security agents are demands for payment on passage (89.9%), fines (59.3%), seizure of goods and objects (43.8%), and prohibition of passage (45%).

CLOSURE OF GOLD MINING SITES AND UPSURGE IN CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Gold mining was a source of employment for many youths from Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea. With the closure of gold sites in Tengrela and the reopening of the borders, some of the unemployed have turned to cattle and motorcycle theft, as well as other criminal activities such as robbery.

The reopening of borders is not all unwelcome news. The government decision is also a source of business opportunities for the local population. When the borders were closed, women traders used to expose themselves at night to security risks to supply the market. But now that the borders have been reopened, they no longer need to go out at 4 a.m. and take motorcycle cabs to get to Kadiana via the bypass roads. They no longer run the risk of being raped or robbed by armed groups hiding along the road.

6.2 Perceived opportunities linked to the opening of borders

The closure of the borders represented a multifaceted source of constraints for local populations. This measure had an impact on economic activities and the reopening of the border has given rise to a feeling of new-found freedom, and relief for border communities.

“ The opening of the borders is more advantageous for the population than for the FDS and the administrative authorities, it has allowed the town to be more animated than before, there are more than six new companies in town. There is also less motorcycle cab traffic ”

TENGRELA RESIDENT ”

This opinion is corroborated by quantitative data as 87% of respondents have a positive perception of the reopening of borders.



Figure 10: perception of the reopening of borders

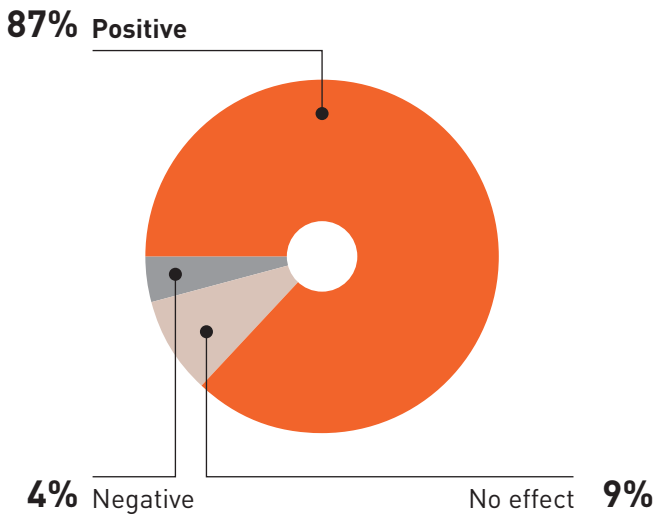


Figure 12: travel difficulties between border towns and neighboring countries

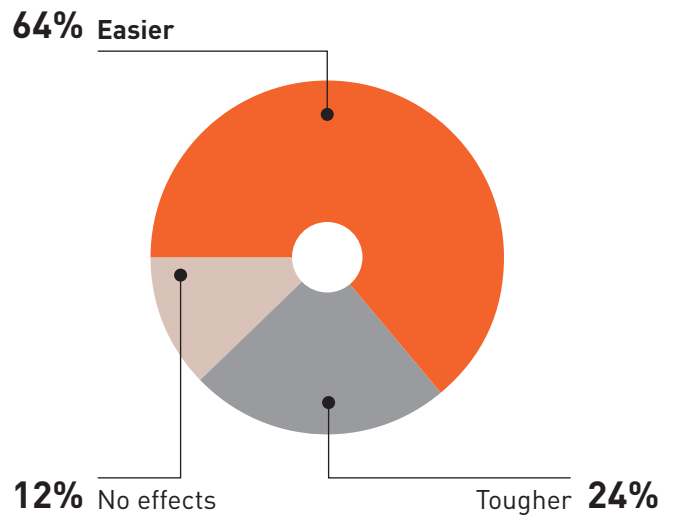
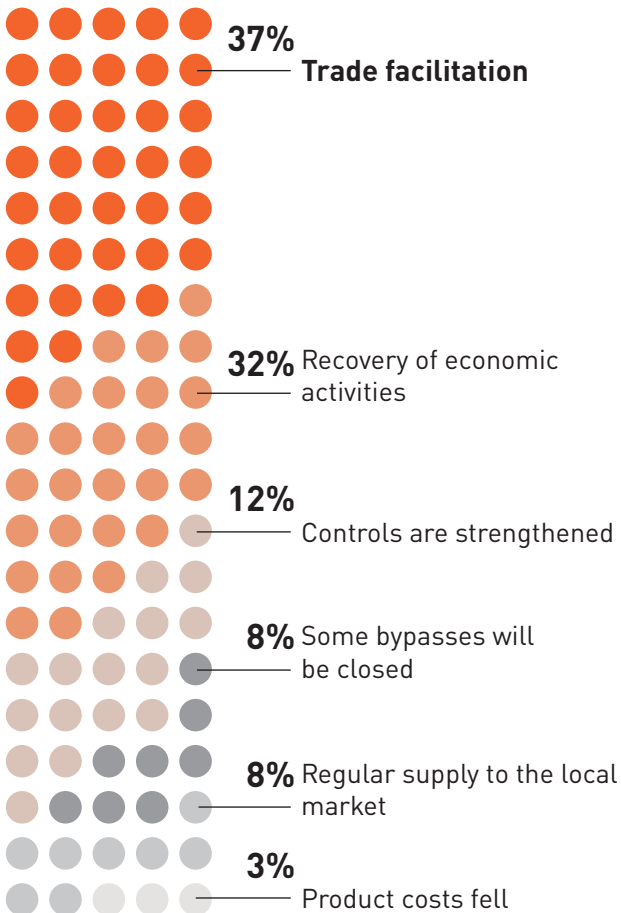


Figure 11: positive effects of reopening borders



On the question “What are the positive effects of this reopening,” opinions diverge but highlight the facilitation of trade (37%) and the resumption of economic activity (32%).

To the question, “How would you describe travel between your locality and neighboring countries since the reopening of land borders?” 64% of respondents said that travel had become easier since the borders were reopened.

PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF THE REOPENING OF BORDERS ON CROSS-BORDER MOBILITY

The reopening of borders has helped to renew ties between the different communities living on either side of the border.

“ The closure of the borders cost us dearly. When there were happy or unhappy events, we were obliged to send just a few people to represent us because the journey was difficult and expensive. Today, with the borders reopened, anyone who wants to go and take part in events or see family can go more easily. ”
DOROPO BURKINABÈ COMMUNITY LEADER

UPTURNS IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

The opening of borders has enabled business to resume. The security crisis in Burkina and the measures taken by the country’s authorities to limit the export of certain goods to neighboring countries have encouraged Ivorian traders to trade locally.



“ There was a woman who would sell us peanuts from Burkina. When we placed our order, the truck was stopped at the border. The Burkinabe authorities told her that certain products could no longer leave the country because of the crisis. Since that day, everything has been blocked. Our order is still there. We cannot buy any more products there [...]. We now buy from Korhogo. ”

DOROPO SHOPKEEPER ”

Burkinabè women still manage to enter Ivorian markets, buying large quantities of products to supply the Burkinabè market:

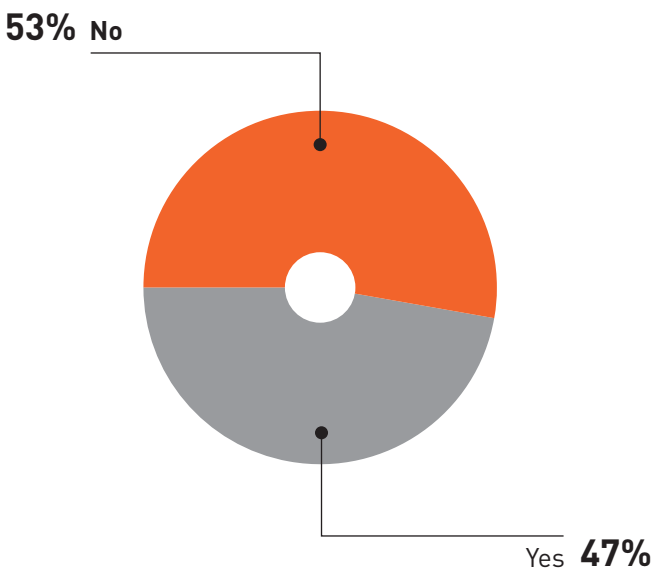
“ There are women who know the market days, from here to Adzopé. On market days, they invade the markets early. They buy all your products and take it to Burkina. Ouan-golodougou municipal authority.” ”

According to one of Doropo’s municipal authorities, this situation is a cause for concern and could affect Côte d’Ivoire’s food security. In the past, a sizable proportion of food products came from Burkina. But the protectionist measures adopted by the Burkinabè authorities have reversed this trend. This has affected supplies to the local market, as demand has outpaced supply.

LOCAL SECURITY ENHANCED

Now that cross-border transport has resumed, most passengers are using the official routes. This enables authorities to control the ebb and flow of traffic and reinforce security arrangements.

Figure 13: perception of immigration in relation to the reopening of borders



“ We’ve been a little relieved since the borders reopened. Even if some people continue to use circuitous routes, the vast majority go through official channels. At least the uniformed forces can check their identity. ”

FDS OFFICIAL ”

EASIER TRAVEL FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

Respondents noted that the reopening of borders led to a massive influx of refugees into northern Côte d’Ivoire.

6.3. Perceived risks associated with open borders

TENSIONS OVER NATURAL RESOURCES GENERATED BY THE REOPENING OF BORDERS

In the localities covered by the study, there are latent tensions over natural resources, some of which have been heightened by the reopening of borders.

RESOURCES FOR AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Agropastoralism is one of the economic activities practiced by the communities surrounding the Comoé National Park. During periods of drought, herders are faced with the challenge of finding water and grazing areas for their animals. Many Burkinabè herders, fleeing violence, have found refuge with their cattle in the Bounkani region, thanks to the opening of the borders. In fact, the massive influx of oxen onto Ivorian soil has been highlighted by many interlocutors as a major risk of conflict:

“ The only thing we are worried about is cohabitation with the herders. The Fulani are the most numerous among the refugees. There are a lot of children and women among them. I think the likelihood of conflict between the female Fulani and the Indigenous community is low, as the Fulani do not farm. But the concern lies with the herders, especially those who have gone down to Niamoué and Bouko. ”

DOROPO FARMER ”

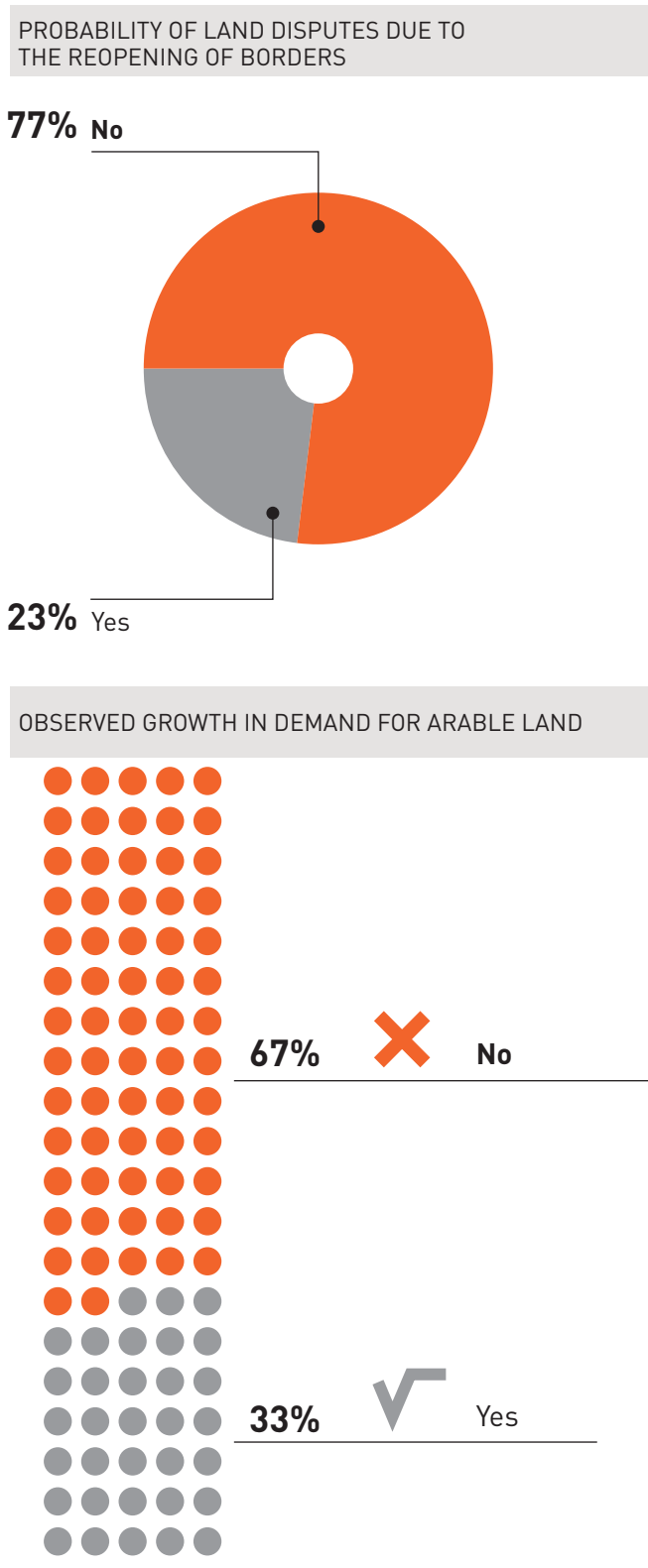
Some believe that the arrival of these herds on Ivorian territory is an advantage for the beef industry, which faced enormous difficulties during the period when borders were closed and as the security situation in Burkina deteriorated. In Koguéniou, for example, the Lobi, for whom agriculture is the main economic activity, consider the arrival of the Burkinabè herders as a labor opportunity to look after their cattle herds:

“ Here, people send their children to school a lot, so there is nobody left to tend the fields and look after the cattle. It is the Peuhl who have arrived who look after the cattle. ”

PEULH COMMUNITY LEADER ”



Figure 14: demand for arable land



Respondents believe that the reopening of borders could lead to land disputes in their localities.

This is because, among other things, there is an increased demand for arable land, which is due to the arrival of refugees in border localities, especially in Doropo and Ouan-golodougou.

GOLD MINING, RECURRING LAND CONFLICTS AND THE RISK OF EXTREMIST GROUPS PENETRATING THE REGION
 The scramble for land in the Papara sub-prefecture by gold miners from the sub-region, which had slowed due to the closure of borders, has resumed. Intra-community conflicts over land have become recurrent.

“ Land issues linked to land delimitation are at the heart of the conflicts, and even when there are court cases, young people continue to look for sites for gold mining. Community chiefs and land chiefs are involved in gold mining because of vested interests.... For this reason, bad faith is the most shared thing here today with both the old and the young.

PAPARA RESIDENT ”

Inhabitants claim that the Papara sub-prefecture is exposed to food and environmental insecurity due to gold mining, which lead to the destruction of arable land.

Every cashew field you see is filled with holes. Everyone is quietly looking for gold in their own fields because it is when you make a sound that the soldiers come to chase you away. No land has been spared today; before, people used to look for gold in the streams.

PAPARA RESIDENT

The massive arrival of unknown persons in the country's vil-lages and hamlets is a source of security concern for com-munities and authorities alike.

“ The town is exposed to all sorts of dangers, illegal gold mining is a source of insecurity because of foreigners entering the locality without being checked and the re-opening will make the situation worse.

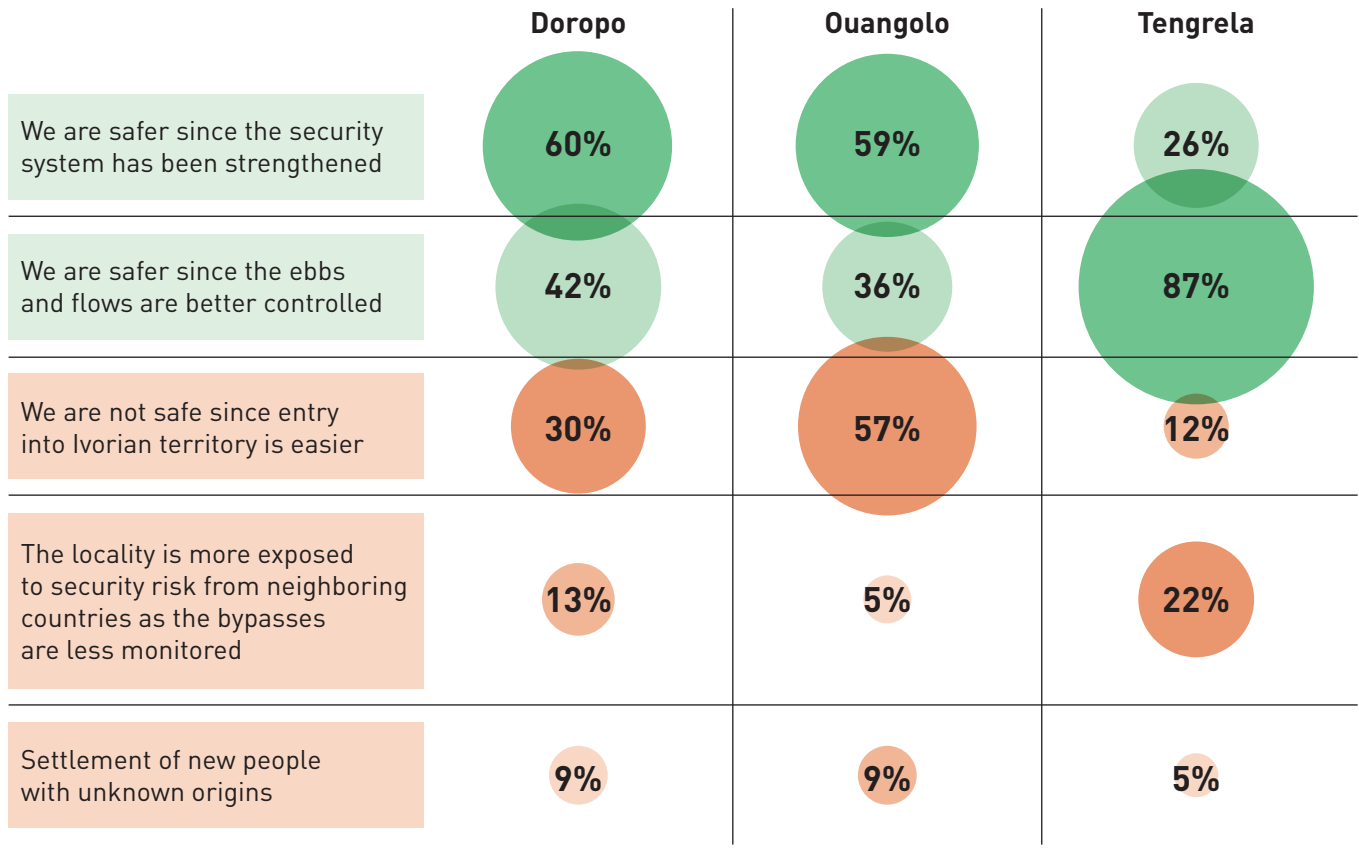
TENGRELA MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY ”

A resident of Papara agrees:

“ There are even people who have been in contact with armed groups in Mali, who have fled, telling themselves they risk death by staying.

PAPARA RESIDENT ”

Figure 15: perceived sense of security in localities



The Papara population’s perception of the risks associated with gold mining is mixed.

“ *The inhabitants of certain villages make sacrifices to have gold under their land. Villages with seven huts have schools, health centers and mosques thanks to gold mining.*

PAPARA YOUTH ”

Security risks

SENSE OF FEAR AMONG CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE POPULATION

Populations’ sense of security following the reopening of the borders is mixed.

“ *The communities here felt in danger when the borders were opened, because anyone can now enter or leave the country. With the crisis in Mali, there has been an influx of refugees into Côte d’Ivoire. People are even returning.*

PAPARA YOUTH ”

In general, the people questioned had a good perception of the opening of borders. In the department of Tengrela, which is accustomed to rumors of infiltration by VEOs, most people feel safe, because they feel that the opening of borders means they can better control the ebb and flow of people. The department of Doropo, which has seen attacks by extremist groups (attacks on Gôgô and on Boukô), consider that the reinforcement of the FDS in their locality is reassuring.

Ouangolodougou, which straddles the borders of Mali and Burkina, two countries heavily affected by VE, and borders the Bounkani region, a region that has experienced VE attacks, also finds the strengthening of the FDS presence reassuring. The further away we get from localities that have experienced VE attacks, the more people are concerned about the fear of infiltration.

INCREASE IN THE PHENOMENON OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR INFLUX INTO THE LOCALITY:

Since the opening of the borders, the people interviewed say they have noticed an unusual presence of unaccompanied children.





Crossroads former regional council of Minignan leading to the different border tracks

“ With the opening of borders, unaccompanied children and teenagers aged 12 to 22 abound, especially at the Nigouni border. Some have become apprentices on large trucks, while others roam the streets.

DOROPO RESIDENT ”

An opinion shared by communities and local authorities maintains that the attacks that took place in Kafolo, Doropo and other northern border towns were always preceded by the arrival of unaccompanied children. According to a member of the FDS in Doropo, these children, allegedly enrolled in uncontrolled religious schools, can be an indicator of VE groups.

STRAINED RELATIONS BETWEEN PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND THE LOCAL POPULATION

Resentment towards state representatives oscillates between a profound loss of confidence and a feeling of poor management of public affairs, as communities have a perception of public services as out of step with their expectations. Opinions differ, however, depending on whether you are a young person, a transport operator, a shopkeeper, an

ordinary citizen, a social elder or a government official.

In general, health workers and the FDS are among the most decried, and this comment from a community member is a perfect illustration:

“ The hospital in Tengrela has become a nightmare. The quality of patient care leaves much to be desired.

TENGRELA RESIDENT ”

The same observation was made in all the border towns surveyed. The population prefers to cross the border to seek treatment in neighboring countries, despite the risks of insecurity.

“ If you see that people are leaving the hospital here to get treatment in a clinic in Mali, it is because the people here are not doing their job. The midwives here are little girls aged 21 to 23 who have never had children, so they mistreat our wives, sisters and daughters who are about to give birth. There are stillbirths every time.

TENGRELA RESIDENT ”

About the FDS, one resident noted:

“ *It is because the jihadists do not want to be in Côte d'Ivoire, otherwise they would be here. There are no controls at the border, a jihadist can arrive, the FDS will just want him to 'manage' it. If he gives for example 10,000f, they will let him through without a problem, without searching him even though he is a jihadist.* ”

TENGRELA RESIDENT ”

Before the borders closed, 50% of respondents said that they or someone close to them had paid less than 2000 F CFA when crossing the border.

During the closure, 59% said they had spent more than 5000 f CFA for the same reasons. Arrangements with the FDS and other government agents were negotiated at a slightly higher price.

Since the opening of borders, the sums requested from border control posts have decreased but have not returned to pre-closure levels.

According to respondents, the FDS (68%) and health agents (16%) are the main recipients of the additional fees charged to travelers. Health workers use the vaccination requirement to extort money even from those who have already been vaccinated. At the border posts of Laleraba and Pogo (Ouangolodougou), some of the people interviewed said that health agents demanded 1,000f from those who had their vaccination booklet up to date, and 8,000f from those who did not. To verify this information, a member of the research team, simulating a border crossing at Laleraba, was demanded to pay the sum of 1000 F CFA by health agents, despite being up to date on their vaccines.

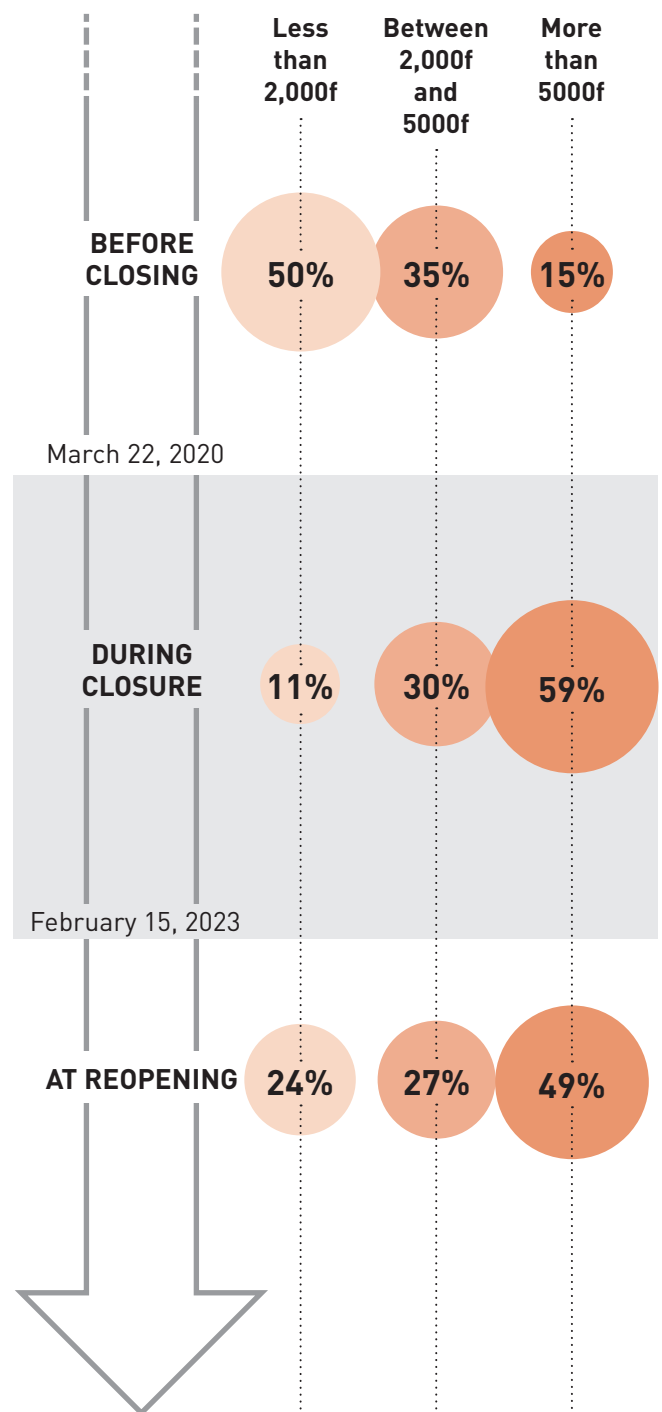
As far as the FDS are concerned, the increase in movements after the opening of the borders has raised tensions with the local population. Collaboration, which seemed to have improved during the shutdown period, has deteriorated. Residents say the FDS are to blame:

“ *The behavior of the police, especially the gendarmes, discourages us. It is as if they have come to settle an old score with us.* ”

WOMAN FROM LALERABA ”

The communities blame them for the plethora of checkpoints. In Kalamon, communities feel that the survival of extortion practices, the humiliation of travelers at checkpoints and the frustrations they engender risk creating a breeding ground for the acceptance of offers from extremist groups.

Figure 16: proportion of amounts paid at border crossings





Residential District, Water Tower crossroad in Minignan

Figure 17: destination of additional costs paid by travelers to neighboring countries

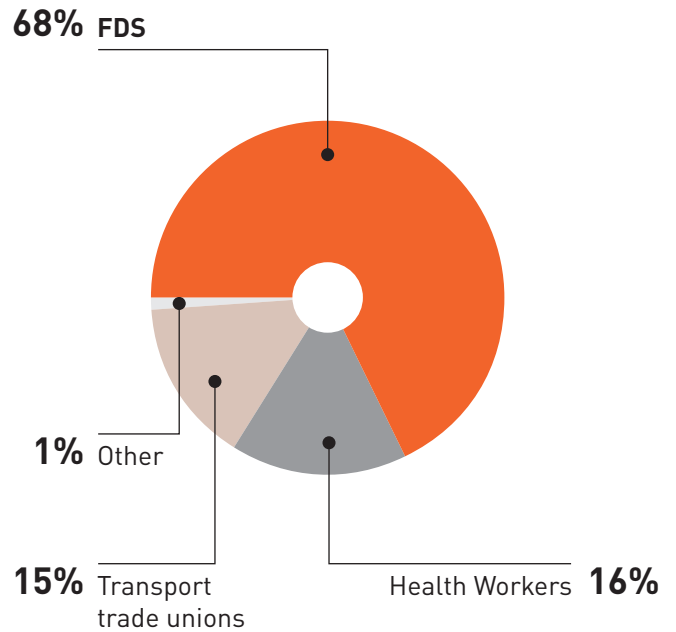


Diagramme 18 : difficulties/risks identified after border opening



SAFETY:

- **Rising insecurity** (cattle and motorcycle theft, aggression, etc.) linked to youth unemployment.
- **Risk of EV incursion** due to bypass tracks.
- **Public frustration** at the inferior quality of public services (health, security).



SOCIAL:

- **Mutual mistrust** between communities/ Risk of negative impact on social cohesion.



ECONOMICS:

- **Slowdown** or even cessation of certain economic activities (e.g. restaurants, coffee kiosks, scrubland, fishing, cross-border trade, etc.).
- **Risk of impoverishment** of border populations.
- **Unemployment** may encourage uncivil behavior.
- **Market supply problem** (lack of food for local populations) / Cross-border communities unable to access markets on either side of the border, leading to higher food prices (risk of food crisis).



BORDER MANAGEMENT:

- **Porous borders** and multiple unofficial crossings.
- **Lack of mobility** to facilitate patrols.
- **Insufficient human resources** to monitor the many bypass roads.
- **No night-time monitoring tools.**
- **Acts of disobedience** for reasons of survival (disappearance of means of subsistence).

7 Local and cross-border resilience mechanisms

Local populations have put in place mechanisms to mitigate the challenges posed by open borders to community resilience to VE, including strengthening cross-border community relations and community outreach activities. The presence of the FDS is also perceived as reassuring by the population.

7.1. Cross-border community relations likely to strengthen community resilience

Weddings and cultural activities between members of cross-border communities are, according to one community leader, a guarantee of social cohesion.

“ We were born and found our parents married with the women of Mali, so we take part in wedding and funeral ceremonies We even do dozoya initiations together and track down thieves together. They inform us of any suspicious activities they notice on their side. Thanks to these intercultural relations, we are sometimes better informed than the FDS.

NIGOUNI RESIDENT ”

Peaceful resolution of inter-community and cross-border conflicts through traditional mechanisms strengthens ties.

“ All conflicts are settled through negotiation. Village and community chiefs play an excellent mediation role at grassroots level” Ouangolodougou prefectural authority.

OUANGOLODOUGOU PREFECTURAL AUTHORITY

On both sides of the border, people are aware of the need to take action against violent extremism, especially as it involves the same families.

VILLAGE CHIEF OF POGO ”

Communities are also working together to find stolen cattle:

“ When there is a loss of livestock here or in Kadiana, the dozos and young people of the two localities share information to search for the missing animals, even for the situation in Mali, people share information so that the terrorists don't arrive in Côte d'Ivoire in order to secure their families here.

DEPUTY MAYOR ”

7.2. Community outreach activities

Rapprochement activities such as soccer matches and marches were organized in several of the localities visited to break down the mistrust between the FDS and the communities. According to a community leader in Foulabougou in Tengrela, a march was organized between the FDS and the Fulani community. This initiative helped to reduce tensions with the FDS.

“ We have a good relationship with the community leaders here. When we arrived here in 2018, we approached them to explain our missions. We even organize soccer matches with the youth of here and Burkina to facilitate cohesion.

KOGUIENOU IMMIGRATION POLICE ”

The prefectural authorities, for their part, convey awareness-raising messages on the need for collaboration between the FDS and the communities. These messages were appreciated by many of the people interviewed during the study.

The involvement of multiple actors, including village chiefs, land chiefs, dozos, youth presidents and women's leaders in conflict management, consolidates social cohesion and consequently community resilience against VE.

Diagramme 19 : cross-border activities strengthening community resilience



“ In the case of crop damage, village chiefs and land chiefs settle it amicably, while in the case of livestock theft, traditional hunters or dozos are called in first, to carry out searches to find the cattle and the thief... When cases go to court, it is because they are complex, otherwise the various community leaders settle out of court. ”
 TENGRELA COMMUNITY LEADER ”

7.3. The presence of the Defense and Security Forces

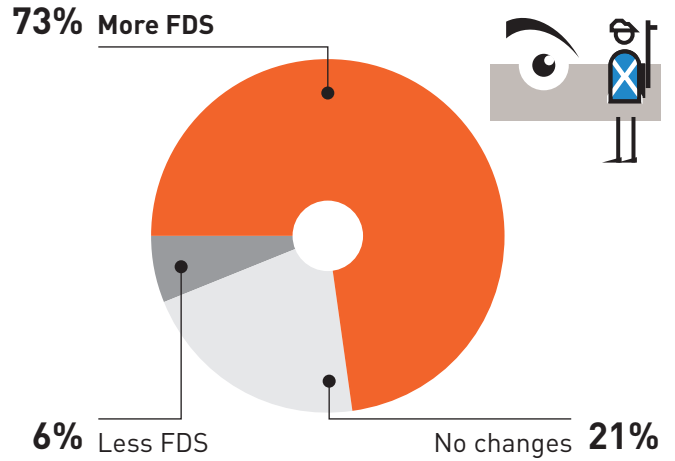
The populations surveyed have noted an increased presence of the FDS since the reopening (73%).

A large majority (73% vs. 27%) of those questioned maintain that the strong presence of the FDS is reassuring and dissuasive.

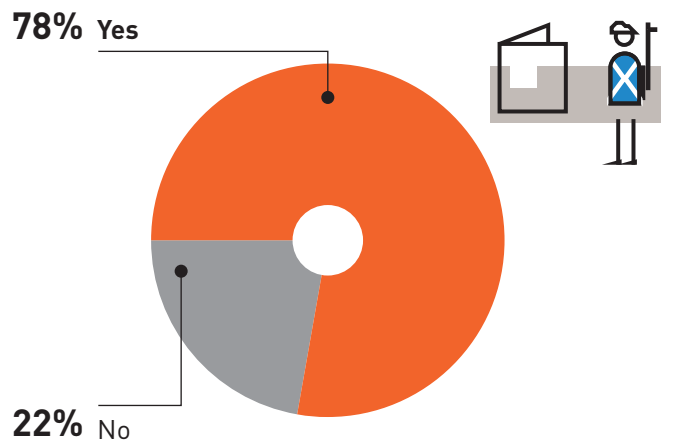
It reinforces the feeling of security (78% versus 22%).

Figure 20: presence of the FDS in the localities

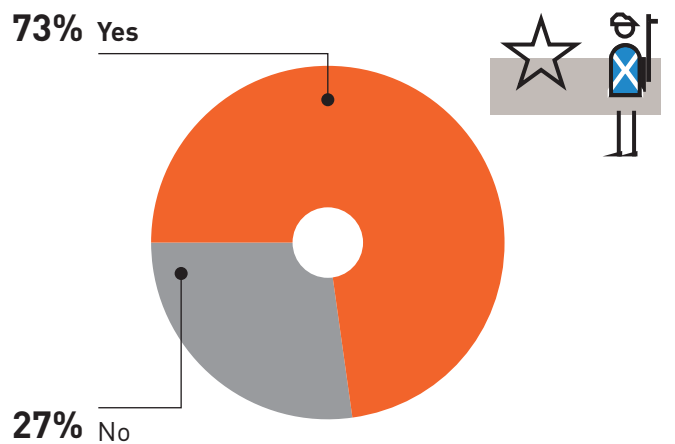
PERCEIVED PRESENCE OF THE FDS



EFFECTS OF THE FDS PRESENCE



PERCEIVED QUALITY OF THE FDS PRESENCE



8 Conclusion

In conclusion, the closure of borders triggered various challenges while also unveiling new opportunities. It led to the emergence of alternative routes circumventing official checkpoints, raising concerns about extremist infiltration. The agriculture sector experienced a downturn, with farmers facing reduced incomes due to scarce agricultural supplies, while criminal activities, particularly cattle and motorcycle theft, surged. The border restrictions compelled people, particularly women and young traders, to pivot towards farming, exacerbating land disputes and increasing pressure on available farmland.

Despite these challenges, the border closure facilitated the rise of new economic activities, such as moto taxis, and enhanced interactions among cross-border communities. This period also saw a decrease in resource-related conflicts between locals and non-nationals over artisanal gold mines. However, the reopening of borders, while easing the flow of goods and people and supporting economic recuperation, introduced complications like the influx of refugees, sparking concerns over resource management conflicts.

The respondents noted that local resilience mechanisms are in place to address the challenges posed by border reopening, particularly in mitigating VE. These include fostering cross-border community relationships and organizing recreational activities to unite communities. This study emphasizes the need for reinforcing these resilience efforts in the border regions of Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso, highlighting both the persistent and emerging challenges and opportunities in the wake of the border closure and reopening.



9 Recommendations



Women and child crossing a road

I. Community involvement

- Opening of an EAI branch in Ouangolodougou, which has many vulnerabilities.
- Conduct awareness-raising and training initiatives to help people develop safety reflexes.
- Facilitate access for young people and women in border localities to government job creation initiatives (FAFCI, Emploi-jeunes, etc.) (CNS and CNFCI).
- Support the professional retraining of young people working as smugglers (Ministry of Youth).

II. Communication

- Develop a partnership with community radio stations to run information and awareness-raising campaigns for communities on social cohesion and the prevention of cattle theft.
- Revitalize existing committees by motivating participants, especially opinion leaders, young people, and women.

III. Security

- Strengthen the CCMs in the Ouangolodougou, Tengrela and Doropo departments to build confidence in the defense and security forces (CNS, EAI).
- Support CCMs in organizing socio-security dialogues (CNS and EAI).
- Continue the organization of Guichets Unique Mobiles to enable two- and three-wheeled vehicles to obtain identity papers, to minimize their use by extremist movements. (EAI and partners involved)
- Support administrative and traditional authorities in strengthening cross-border cooperation initiatives on security and social cohesion with their counterparts in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea (CNS, CNFCI and EAI).
- Help evaluate and strengthen the anti-racketeering unit.
- Support the popularization of means of reporting racketeering (toll-free number 0101013645, 0101 01 36 88, 0708 86 30 31, 05 33 54 35; anonymous mail, etc.).
- Support the High Authority for Good Governance in setting up focal points in border localities responsible for

registering and handling complaints from the public about corruption and racketeering.

- Support the Joint General Staff in promoting a charter of good conduct and courtesy for defense and security forces to improve their relations with communities and obtain their cooperation in preventing violent extremism (CNS, CNFCI and EAI).
- Support the military court in conducting unannounced raids in border localities border localities (CNS, CNFCI and EAI).
- Introduce a mechanism of reward mechanism for quotas deployed on border who, at the end of their mission, have not been the subject of any complaints against (CNS, CNFCI).
- Strengthen existing early warning systems in border localities to enable them to inform the authorities of any security threat.
- Organize a presentation of the results of the Study to the NSC, the major commands of the FDS, the TMA and the border troops (EAI, NSC and General Staff). The General Ministry of Health, High Authority for Good Governance).
- Set up a village registration mechanism for people using the bypass routes to enter Côte d'Ivoire (CNFCI, CNS and EMGA).
- Advocacy to CNFCI on the need to speed up the border materialization process (EAI).

IV. Natural resource management

- Help young people organize themselves into cooperatives and draw up the documents required to become artisanal gold miners.
- Help young people organized into cooperatives to attend the Papara gold panning training school to acquire the skills they need to compete for more opportunities.
- Train young people to rehabilitate areas used by small-scale gold miners, so that communities can continue to have access to arable land.
- Declassify certain areas around Comoé National Park to make them habitable. Human presence is a factor in guarding the park against jihadist incursions (Government).
- Support peaceful interactions between host communities and migrants/transhumants through planned management of natural resources, supported by popularization of regulatory frameworks among all local actors (EAI).
- Initiate periodic meetings between farmers and herders, especially before the dry season, to establish rules for preventing/reducing damage (EAI, CNFCI).
- Set up formal arrangements based on the legal framework for land tenure, to materialize and enforce oral/tacit agreements between land chiefs and farmers, involving prefectural authorities as witnesses to these agreements (CCM, prefectural authorities and with the support of EAI).
- Strengthen/establish a framework for bilateral coordination between countries on transhumance, by initiating periodic

meetings between border authorities and local authorities in the three countries. (CNFCI).

- Set up coordination strategies for transhumance-related problems at the borders between the three countries and disseminate these strategies at the local level (sub-prefectures) (CNFCI).
- Set up tools to collect data on disputes/conflicts/violence linked to NRs to have a reference list (CCM).
- Set up a registration system for transhumants, herders and livestock owners at local/village and sub-prefecture level to better control flows (EAI and CNFCI).

V. Women

- Helping women set up village loan associations to help them bounce back or finance themselves after the bankruptcy caused by the closing of borders (EAI).
- Support women who have converted to market gardening to find secure plots of land and put them in touch with technical structures so that they can receive better support for healthier and improved production (EAI).



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Crossroads of the Katana hotel road to Mahandiana Sokourani (Kouto)





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