



Life on the line: stability and livelihoods in Coastal West Africa

# Chapter 2: stability and livelihood challenges in the border regions between Wa, Ghana, and Batié, Burkina Faso

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## About XCEPT

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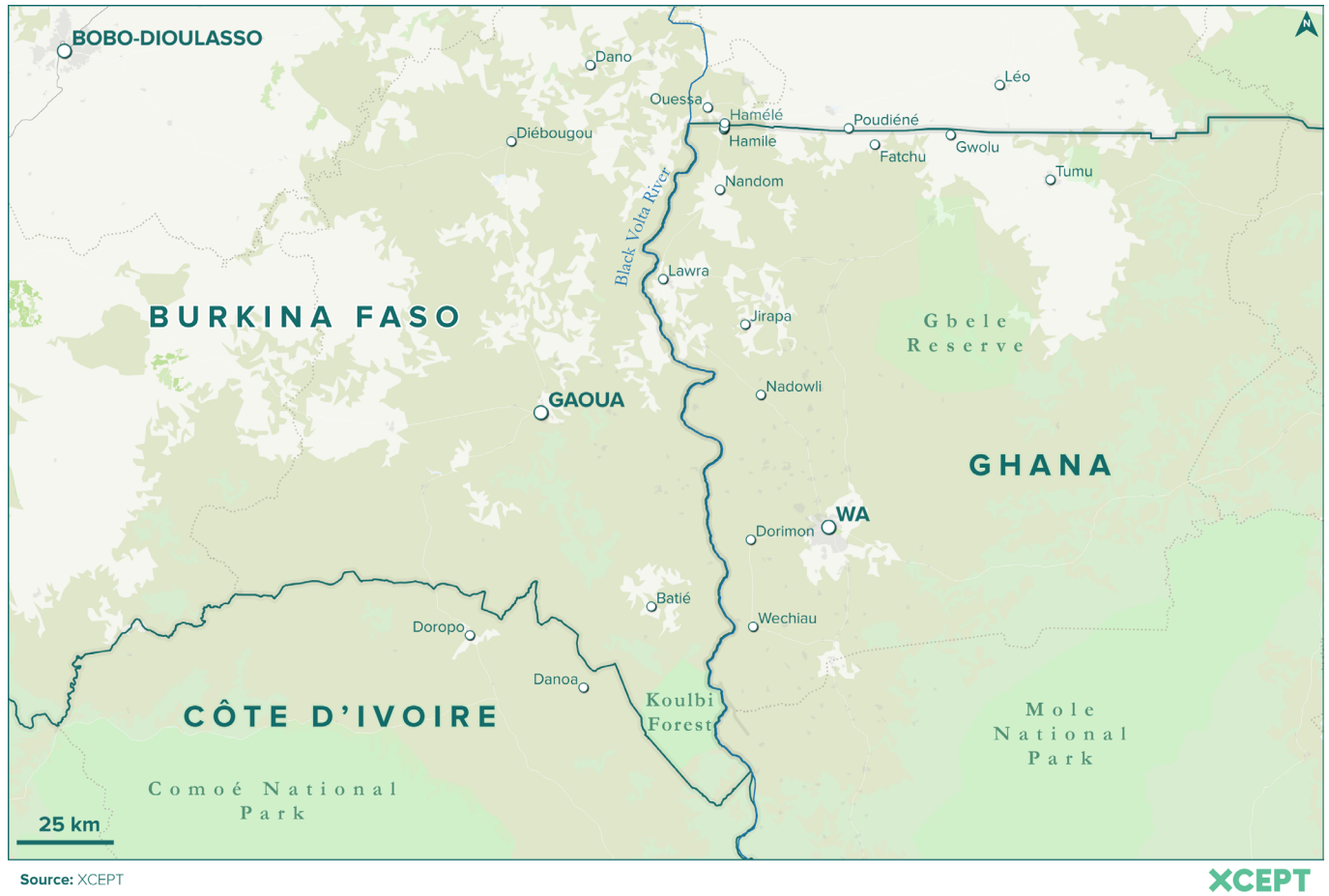
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**Figure 1.** Map of Wa border region










## Introduction

Trade centres, with all their social, economic, and political activity, are crucial to communities in the borderlands between Ghana and Burkina Faso. Residents of border towns use these trade centres on both sides of the border for trade, work, and to buy food and household goods. Other uses include meeting with cross-border relatives, attending cultural events, and attending public announcements by chiefs, politicians, and local government authorities.

This chapter focuses on trade and livelihoods in the Wa border region and considerations raised by cross-border threats to security and stability. The primary trade centres reviewed in this section include the market towns between Wa and Wechiau, in the Wa Municipal and Wa West districts of the Upper West Region of northern Ghana; and Batié, in the Nounbiél Province of the Sud-Ouest Region in southern Burkina Faso.

The border crossing between Wa, Ghana, and Batié, Burkina Faso, was chosen because of emerging violent extremism and serious organised crime (SOC) threats there, in addition to older criminal and illicit market networks.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GITOC). 'Observatory of illicit economies in West Africa,' Risk Bulletin 1 (Geneva: Global Initiative, September 2021), <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/WEA-Obs-RB1-GITOC.pdf> (accessed January 2024).

Traded Items	Direction of Trade	Dominant Demographic
 Vegetables (onions, tomatoes, peppers, tubers)	Burkina Faso → Ghana	Older women (short haul) Men (long haul)
 Cereals (millet, soy, maize, corn, rice, gari)	Burkina Faso ← → Ghana	Older women (short haul) Men (long haul)
 Nuts (cashews, groundnuts, shea)	Burkina Faso ← → Ghana	Men Women
 Livestock (cattle, goats, fowls, sheep)	Batié, Burkina Faso → Wechiau, Ghana	Older men
 Household items (ataya tea, cooking oil, plastic goods, bottles & bags, utensils, soap)	Burkina Faso ← → Ghana	Women
 Fabric, clothing, and sandals	Burkina Faso → Ghana	Men Women
 Fertiliser and pesticides	Ghana → Burkina Faso	Older men (in charge) Male youth (as workers)
 Fuel	Paga, Ghana → Pô, Burkina Faso	Older men (in charge) Male youth (as workers)
 Construction material (steel bars, plumbing material, cement, pillars, zinc)	Burkina Faso ← → Ghana	Men

**Table 1.** Trade flows in the Wa border region<sup>2</sup>

This crossing between Wa, Ghana, and Batié, Burkina Faso, sits within a tri-border space with a trade hub linked to Bouna and Doropo, Côte d'Ivoire. In this area, the borders are porous, and border security is limited. As a result, smuggling and contraband economies are well established and widespread.<sup>3</sup> Informal trade in regular commodities can sometimes take the same routes and even be conducted by the same people who engage in formal trade.<sup>4</sup> Cross-border trading patterns in this region are detailed in Table 1.

In northern Ghana, smuggling of arms, humans, fertiliser, cattle, motorbikes, and vehicles is particularly significant. Ghana is also a key hub for explosives and arms trafficking, particularly of components used in improvised explosive devices (IEDs). This includes fertiliser bought and sold in trade centres located in Wa, Hamile, and Navrongo in the Pô–Paga border region (see Chapter 3, the Hamile–Ouessa and Pô–Paga border regions between Ghana and Burkina Faso). This fertiliser is then traded throughout Burkina Faso and the broader Sahel.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This table was put together based on qualitative data collected in all three border regions. It combines evidence from 10 FGDs and 150 KIIs conducted in Burkina Faso and Ghana between November and December 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Various conversations with government officials in Ghana between 5–22 February highlighted this border's porosity and the fact that smuggling is widespread; and see also, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime Risk Bulletin (2021), 'Burkina Faso's Sud-Ouest Region risks becoming new zone of insecurity,' <https://riskbulletins.globalinitiative.net/wea-obs-002/04-burkina-fasos-sud-ouest-region-risks-becoming-new-zone-of-insecurity.html> (accessed January 2024).

<sup>4</sup> Aning, K. *Vulnerability Assessment on the Threats of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation in Northern Regions of Ghana*, United Nations Development Programme, 19 February 2023, [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-06/undp\\_ghana\\_violent\\_extremism\\_assessment\\_in\\_northern\\_regions\\_of\\_ghana.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-06/undp_ghana_violent_extremism_assessment_in_northern_regions_of_ghana.pdf), p. 36 (accessed January 2024).

<sup>5</sup> The Small Arms Survey, 'Out of Control: The Trafficking of Improvised Explosive Device Components and Commercial Explosives in West Africa,' November 2023, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-Report-2023-IED-West-Africa-EN.pdf> (accessed March 2024).

Beginning as early as 2018, when the onset of insecurity driven by violent extremist organisations (VEOs) from the Sahel expanded into southern Burkina Faso, several factors have impacted trade routes, local markets, and livelihoods in these borderlands. One of them is increasing insecurity, which has spread across Burkina Faso and threatens northern Ghana.

For example, since 2020, violent extremism has undercut the once-thriving cattle market in Wa, Ghana, leading to the redirection of the cattle trade; the route that formerly ran from Niger into Burkina Faso and Ghana now runs through Nigeria to Benin and Togo, before crossing through north-eastern Ghana, south of Bawku.<sup>6</sup> A second factor impacting trade and livelihoods is the deteriorating global and domestic economic situation. Growth slowed from 3.8 per cent in 2022 to 2.9 per cent in 2023, inflation worsened from 31.5 per cent in 2022 to 40.3 per cent in 2023, and by mid-2024, Ghana's currency (the cedi) had depreciated by 18 per cent against the US dollar from the start of the year, with the country suffering several economic downturns.<sup>7</sup> The African Development Bank attributes this downturn to a variety of domestic conditions, but notes that it reflects spillover effects from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on global financial and macroeconomic challenges.

Conflict has also impacted the economy in Burkina Faso, which relies heavily on agriculture, pastoralism, and extractives (mining). The security crisis has affected economic growth and political stability, disrupting farming and livestock-rearing outside major urban centres, and shuttering industrial gold mining, which accounts for 77 per cent of exports and 16 per cent of GDP.<sup>8</sup>

While some traders in the Sahel have benefited from higher purchasing power in Ghana,<sup>9</sup> it has become harder for Ghanaian traders to purchase goods. They have had to convert cash into the Sahelian currency – the West African CFA franc – when buying goods across borders and import back to Ghana.

Poor economic conditions in Ghana have led to price hikes for basic commodities, especially for farm supplies, including fertiliser and seed, which has affected general agricultural yields for rural communities. In general, fewer farmers<sup>10</sup> and traders in Ghana and in Burkina Faso have been able to invest in their businesses or protect their livelihoods.<sup>11</sup>

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6 Three kills with cattle herders in Wechiau, Wa Municipal District, Upper West Region, Ghana, 29 November 2023. For more details, see Chapter 1 of this report and de Bruijne K and Courtright J, 'Cattle Wahala: the political economy of cattle rustling in coastal West Africa'. London: XCEPT, 2025. <https://www.xcept-research.org/publication/cattle-wahala-the-political-economy-of-cattle-rustling-in-coastal-west-africa/>.

7 African Development Bank (AfDB). *African Economic Outlook 2024*. [https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/2024/06/06/aeo\\_2024\\_-\\_country\\_notes.pdf](https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/2024/06/06/aeo_2024_-_country_notes.pdf) (accessed September 2024).

8 World Bank. (27 June 2024). *Burkina Faso Economic Update 2024 - Special chapter: Maintaining Reform Momentum on Social Assistance*. (27 June 2024). <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/burkinafaso/publication/burkina-faso-economic-update-2024-special-chapter-maintaining-reform-momentum-on-social-assistance> (accessed September 2024).

9 Ghana's economy reached a full macroeconomic crisis in 2022, and although inflation finally began to drop at the end of 2023, poverty levels are expected to increase to 34% by 2025, according to the World Bank; World Bank 2023, 'Ghana Overview: Development news, research, data,' <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ghana/overview> (accessed April 2024).

10 According to both field research and literature, farmers face the additional challenge of the impacts of climate change, which has affected predictability (including frequency, length/duration, and quantum) of rainfall, thereby affecting crop production in an area where agriculture is predominantly rain-fed. FGD with farmers and traders, Wechiau, Wa Municipality, Upper West Region, Ghana, 26 November 2023, and United States Department of Agriculture – Foreign Agricultural Service, *Ghana Climate Change Report*, 7 June 2023, [https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Ghana%20Climate%20Change%20Report%20\\_Accra\\_Ghana\\_GH2023-0008.pdf](https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Ghana%20Climate%20Change%20Report%20_Accra_Ghana_GH2023-0008.pdf) (accessed March 2024).

11 FGD, Dakola, Nahouri Province, Centre-Sud region, Burkina Faso, January 2024.

To address these insecurities, the local population is adopting new approaches to cross-border travel, particularly given increased security on the border, policing for illicit goods, and activities that could be linked to, or might finance, violent extremism and criminality.

The Ghanaian and Burkinabé governments continue to largely neglect the Wa border region, despite what academics and experts assess to be a thriving illicit supply chain running through these areas.<sup>12</sup> The difficult terrain and lack of formal border crossings have made it challenging for formal policing to be carried out.<sup>13</sup> As a result, livelihoods in this part of West Africa often become inextricably intertwined with the illicit supply chain.<sup>14</sup>

## Methodology

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This chapter is intended to be read in conjunction with the more extensive summary report and corresponding chapters. Research for this chapter was carried out in the border regions of Ghana and Burkina Faso by the Elva research team from October to December 2023. The research team included four of Elva's in-country consultants and enumerators, including two local researchers in Burkina Faso and Ghana. In Ghana, interviews were conducted in English and Dagaare, and French, Fulfulde, Gourounsi, and Lobi in Burkina Faso. The research for this chapter is part of a broader study of Coastal West Africa borderlands, conducted in collaboration with Clingendael, that included mixed-methods approaches, which entailed qualitative and quantitative methods, including a literature review and the use of remote methods through signals data and satellite imagery (see the annex of the summary report).

Twenty-two interviews with experts from within the security services, customs, intelligence, civil society, and implementing partners were conducted before and after the field data collection, remotely and in Ghana and Burkina Faso, from October 2023 to February 2024. These interviews were carried out in English and French, respectively.

The qualitative data collection for this chapter included 42 key informant interviews (KIIs) and two focus group discussions (FGDs). Researchers conducted 22 KIIs and 1 FGD in Wechiau (Wa West district), Ghana, and 20 KIIs and 1 FGD in Batié (Noumbié Province), Burkina Faso. The data was collected using purposive sampling methods.

## Wa border region

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### Socio-economic overview of border communities

The border areas between Upper West (Ghana), Sud-Ouest (Burkina Faso), and, to a lesser extent, northeast Côte d'Ivoire (see Figure 2) share significant cross-border trade dynamics through market

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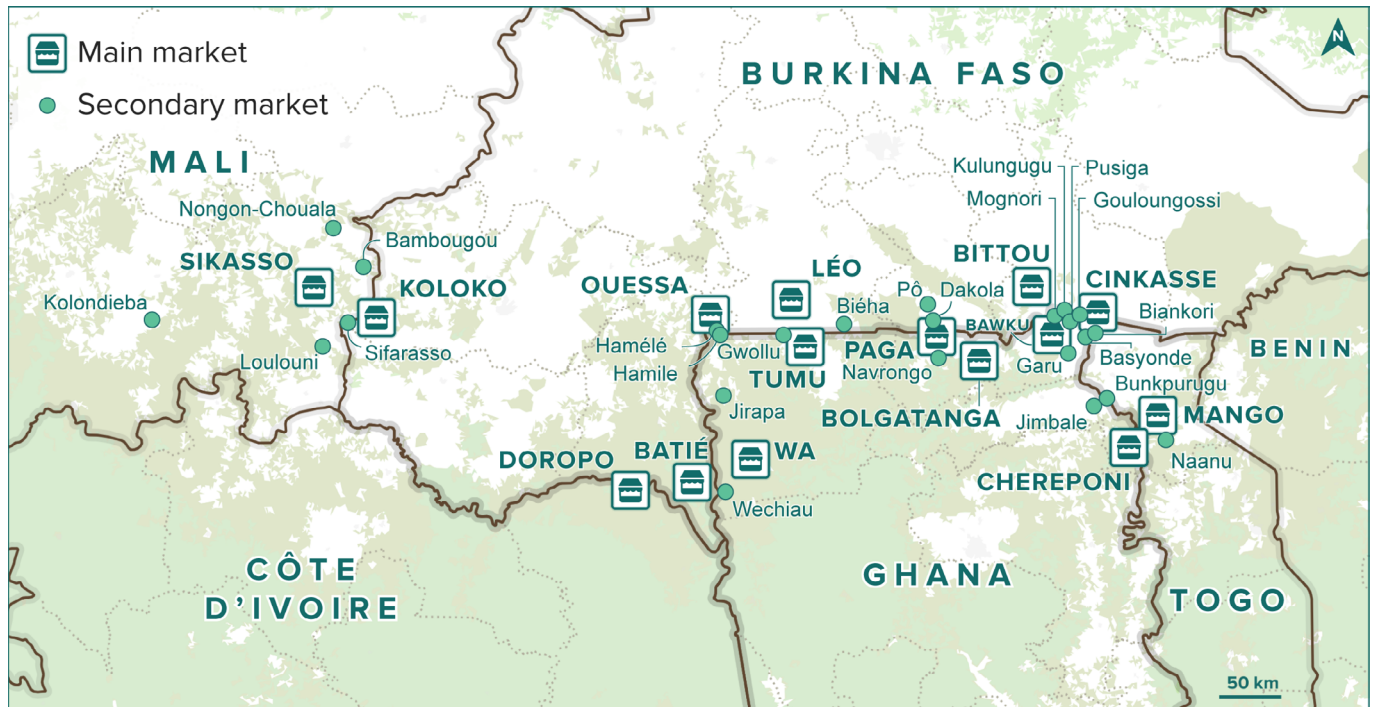
12 During validation meetings with the Ghanaian Boundary Commission in February 2025, the authors understood that Ghana has begun to engage with Burkinabé officials to address these cross-border insecurities. Interviews with the Ghanaian Boundary Commission, February 2025

13 Interview with security provider, Tamale, Ghana, February 2024.

14 Interview with government official, Accra, Ghana, February 2024.

towns located in Wa, Ghana, and Batié, Burkina Faso.<sup>15</sup> This border area boasts a pluralistic ethnic, linguistic, and religious population.

In the Wa Municipality, the population of 200,672 is predominantly Muslim (over 65 per cent), although a growing Catholic population (about 29 per cent) has been present since the early 20th century.<sup>16</sup> The ethnic-Wala people from Wa are culturally similar to other Gur-speaking people like the Senoufou and Mande groups in Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Mali, reinforcing the transnational connections these groups have with each other via common language, religions, and history.<sup>17</sup>



Source: XCEPT

XCEPT

**Figure 2.** Map showing locations under examination

Similarly, the Dagaaba people are another ethnic group spanning the borders of these three countries. Batié and the Sud-Ouest Region of Burkina Faso are mostly comprised of ethnic-Dagara, Birifor, Lobi, Gan, Djan, and Pougouli, a similar ethnic composition to the Bounkani department of neighbouring northeastern Côte d'Ivoire and Centre-Sud Region of Burkina Faso.<sup>18</sup> Over half the population in Sud-

- 15 Bounkani (Bouna Region, northeastern Côte d'Ivoire) is also a thriving trade centre that critically links sub-regional economic activity between Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire. It is also a notorious informal trade centre for the illicit supply chain, particularly in artisanal gold, due to its proximity to Comoé National Park, and the many gold mines that have been set up there in recent years. However, data collection did not include Côte d'Ivoire for this study. Global Initiative, 'Illicit economies in West Africa,' Risk Bulletin 1 (accessed January 2024).
- 16 Ghana Statistical Service. (October 2014), *Wa Municipality District Analytical Report*. [https://www2.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/2010\\_District\\_Report/Upper%20West/WA%20MUNICIPAL.pdf](https://www2.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/2010_District_Report/Upper%20West/WA%20MUNICIPAL.pdf).
- 17 Bodomo, A. (2020), *MABIA: Its Genesis, Geographical Spread, and some Salient Genetic Features*, 2020, Handbook of the Mabilia Languages of Africa (pp. 5–34), [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342715507\\_MABIA\\_Its\\_Genesis\\_Geographical\\_Spread\\_and\\_some\\_Salient\\_Genetic\\_Features](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342715507_MABIA_Its_Genesis_Geographical_Spread_and_some_Salient_Genetic_Features).
- 18 Institut national de la statistique et de la Démographie (INSD), 'Résultats Cinquième Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitation,' December 2022, <https://www.insd.bf/sites/default/files/2023-02/MONOGRAPHE%20DU%20SUD%20OUEST%205E%20RGP.pdf>.

Ouest, Burkina Faso, practises animism, one-quarter identify as Christian, and the remaining quarter identify as Muslim.<sup>19</sup>

The socio-economic makeup of this tri-border region is fluid, characterised by significant cross-border trade and social dynamics that link the communities. As a result, violent extremism from southern Burkina Faso poses significant risks to stability in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.<sup>20</sup>

## Community dynamics in the Wa border region

This section describes the dynamics of the respective communities in Burkina Faso and Ghana, followed by a more detailed review of the cross-border relationships and trade flows between these borderland towns.

Wa is a rapidly developing trade centre in the Upper West Region of Ghana, with the potential to become an industrial and commercial hub for the sub-region due to a growing number of shops, banks, and industrial businesses – including textiles, wood, metal, leather, and processing trades.<sup>21</sup> The city is a transit hub for the Upper West Region: major roads link the north to Hamile and Tumu. The region itself is the fastest growing sub-region in Ghana: 49 per cent of the population in Wa Municipality is classified as 'youth'.<sup>22</sup> In addition, 66 per cent of the municipal population lives in the urban centre, compared to a relatively remote population in the rest of the Upper West Region (where only 16 per cent of the population is urban).<sup>23</sup>



Credits: © Maxar Technologies 2024 (left) and Pleiades © CNES 2024, Distribution Airbus DS

**Figure 3.** Trade activity on normal day (left) and a market day (right) in Batié, Burkina Faso. January 2024.

19 Ibid.

20 Assanvo, W. 'Côte d'Ivoire must cut ties between terrorists and illicit markets,' *Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Africa*, 18 September 2023, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/cote-divoire-must-cut-ties-between-terrorists-and-illicit-markets>.

21 Wa Municipal Assembly, Profile, <https://wamunicipalassembly.wordpress.com/profile/>.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

Despite its rapid development, Wa does not have enough infrastructure, jobs, and basic resources to support the quickly growing urban population and youth. As Wa evolves into a booming trade centre, with the development of an airport underway, the government has pivoted its attention to this northwest region, where illicit activity is flourishing. However, a growing number of security checkpoints have slowed trade. While illicit trade has been curtailed, livelihoods insecurity has increased. Profitability has been undercut by delays, less time in markets to earn, and fees incurred by paying regular checkpoint taxes and bribes to corrupt security officials. Meanwhile, violent extremism has scared local traders away from cross-border travel.<sup>24</sup>

The economy of the Wa Municipality in Ghana is 70 per cent agricultural, with slowly growing commercial (9 per cent) and industrial (3 per cent) sectors.<sup>25</sup> Although the economy is expanding, 90 per cent of the population lives beneath the poverty line; 30 per cent of farmers engage in subsistence farming, unable to produce sufficient yields for commercial sale (cash crops).

This underdevelopment limits industrial growth and capacity. Wa farmers lack modern infrastructure and rely heavily on rain-fed agriculture, which is increasingly unsustainable for income-generating activities (IGAs) due to climate change and desertification.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, in Wa West district, which includes the border crossing of Wechiau, 80 per cent of people rely on rain-fed subsistence farming.<sup>27</sup>

In Batié, Burkina Faso, across the border from Wa, the local economy is also mainly agricultural (see Figure 3 for views of market activity in Batié). However, increasing activity by VEOs and bandits has, in recent years, kept farmers from their fields and reduced farming outputs.<sup>28</sup>

“I trade in groundnut (peanut) products, so I take care of my family from that,” one female trader from Wechiau, said. “However, things have got very difficult, particularly from last year, due to the restrictions on movement as a result of the terrorists’ attacks. Most traders have gone out of business because of that”.<sup>29</sup>

Gold, quartz, and manganese mines are also multiplying in this sub-region, with Batié at the centre of the informal trade in these resources. The gold trade through Burkina Faso and Ghana is highly unregulated, contributing to the illicit trade and activity in this chapter’s borderlands. In 2021, Burkina Faso’s gold exports amounted to US\$7.71 billion, while Ghana’s totalled US\$5.29 billion, making the neighbouring countries two of the top five exporters globally. Although much of this production is industrial, artisanal and illicit gold mining contribute enormously to livelihoods in this region. The UN and other NGOs acknowledge that artisanal – and the subsequent illicit and unregulated – gold mining in West Africa is a significant revenue source for criminal activity and informal trade that does not contribute to the

24 Field research in Wechiau in Ghana, and Batié in Burkina Faso, highlights the effects of VEO-linked insecurity (even in the absence of actual VEO violence) – and government responses to it – as disruptors of livelihoods. FGD with farmers and traders, Wechiau, Wa West district, Upper West Region, Ghana, 26 November 2023; FGD with traders in Batié, Nounbié Province, Sud-Ouest Region, Burkina Faso, December 2023.

25 Wa Municipal Assembly, Profile.

26 Wa Municipal Assembly, ‘Composite budget for 2022-2025: Programme based budget estimates for 2022,’ <https://mofep.gov.gh/sites/default/files/composite-budget/2022/UW/WMA.pdf> (accessed April 2024).

27 In addition to agriculture, Wa Municipality residents increasingly participate in cereal flour production; Pito brewing (a popular local beverage produced from sorghum, and a large industry that employs women, although it is still underdeveloped); dairy production; edible oil extraction (e.g. shea butter, groundnut, and cotton seed oil is produced locally through traditional methods); and emerging fruit juice/jam extraction from mango, cashew, shea, and zumbringa. Wa Municipal Assembly, *Composite budget for 2022-2025*.

28 Field research in Nounbié Province highlighted how these growing fears have led to stagnating farming outputs in recent months. FGD with traders in Batié, Nounbié Province, Sud-Ouest Region, Burkina Faso, December 2023.

29 Interview with female trader, Wechiau, Wa, Ghana, 10 December 2023.

formal market.<sup>30</sup> Burkina Faso reportedly produces 34 tonnes of artisanal gold annually, but only exports about 300 kilogrammes.<sup>31</sup> In Ghana, where artisanal gold mining is referred to as ‘galamsey,’ the informal practice contributes to 35 per cent of the country’s gold production.<sup>32</sup>

Several international industrial mining companies, like the London-based Centamin, left Burkina Faso amid degrading stability in the south, and after subsequent coup d’états in 2022, which have limited formal livelihood prospects for local miners and affected Burkina Faso’s trade exports by stunting industrial production.<sup>33</sup> As of 2024, international industrial mining companies that are leaving the Sahel were eyeing gold opportunities in more stable areas like neighbouring Doropo, Côte d’Ivoire.<sup>34</sup>

## Effects of climate change

In West Africa, climate change is impacting rain variability, the intensity of extreme weather systems (in terms of excessive rainfall leading to flooding, in addition to longer and hotter heatwaves), and the shrinking of both forest cover and bodies of water, while exacerbating desertification.<sup>35</sup>

Climate change has intensified the vulnerability of subsistence farmers in West Africa, particularly in borderland, agrarian communities like those around Wa, Ghana, and Batié, Burkina Faso.

Almost all agro-pastoralists in the areas of research rely on seasonal agriculture and livestock rearing practices. The planting season occurs during the dry months (October to April). The growing season, during the rainy months (May to September), relies on rainfall capture, as there are few irrigation systems in these borderland communities.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, biodiversity loss in these borderlands has limited access to water points and arable lands for both farming and pastoralism. This compromises livelihoods and can lead to violent clashes over scarce resources.<sup>37</sup> Since climate change affects inputs for farming and herding (water, seed, grass, fertiliser), production is down, limiting supply in small markets in these remote towns.<sup>38</sup>

30 Hunter, M. et al. *Learnings from West Africa's regional experiences in the gold sector*. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. 2023. <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/800852-RR-ISS-OCWAR-T-Gold-ENG-03.pdf> (accessed September 2024).

31 Owen, W. *MINEXX exports first kilo of blockchain tracked gold from West Africa*. Global Mining Review. 2021. <https://www.globalminingreview.com/mining/17122021/minexx-exports-first-kilo-of-blockchain-tracked-gold-from-west-africa/> (accessed September 2024).

32 McDowall, R., & Patel, K. *Detecting Gold Mining in Ghana*. NASA Earth Observatory. 2021. <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/148376/detecting-gold-mining-in-ghana> (accessed September 2024).

33 Shanima, A. (2021), ‘UK gold miner Centamin seeks buyer for W. African project,’ Reuters. 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/centamin-results-idAFL4N2PC1A6/> (accessed January 2024).

34 McKay, D. *Centamin to lodge mining licence for Doropo following DFS*. Miningmx. 2024. <https://www.miningmx.com/news/gold/57614-centamin-to-lodge-mining-licence-for-doropo-following-dfs/> (accessed September 2024).

35 Tarif, K. ‘Climate Change and Violent Conflict in West Africa: Assessing the Evidence’. *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute* (SIPRI). 2022. [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/sipriinsight2203\\_ccr\\_west\\_africa\\_0.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/sipriinsight2203_ccr_west_africa_0.pdf) (accessed September 2024).

36 The only place where irrigation systems were used, according to KIs and FGDs, was around Paga. Elsewhere, all respondents said that they rely on rainfall and traditional agricultural seasonal patterns. Approximately 130 KIs in Burkina Faso and Ghana reported relying on rainfall.

37 Bernard, A. and Greenhalgh-Stammer, E. *Balancing Tradition and Conservation: Gender and Security Dimensions of Wildmeat Practices in Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire's Sudano-Sahel Zones*. Elva. 2024. <https://elva.org/wp-content/uploads/Gendered-Assesment-of-the-Wildmeat-trade-in-West-Africa-Elva-March-2024.pdf>.

38 An assessment based on responses by KIs in Wa, Ghana, and Batié, Burkina Faso, December 2023.

Located far from industrialised economies, such as Tamale in Ghana, or Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina Faso, borderland communities rarely benefit from the secondary and tertiary income-generating activities available in bigger cities. In the absence of a diversified trade economy, these communities instead rely heavily on subsistence activities and local cross-border trade and labour.<sup>39</sup>

In addition, Burkina Faso's 2021 grain and fertiliser export ban has further restricted borderland economies.<sup>40</sup> Less capable of accessing bigger, inland markets, people in these communities have been forced to rely more heavily on what they can produce themselves. In Wa and Batié, this dynamic has reinforced the importance of cross-border trade and mobility, with locals increasingly looking to markets in Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire to supplement small local trading centres, which can lack sufficient goods.<sup>41</sup>

Still, the slowing economy means that many agro-pastoralists struggle to source basic goods or to afford what is available even in local markets.<sup>42</sup> Borderland communities are generally quite resilient to endogenous shocks like being marginalised by government interventions, and exogenous shocks like climate change. They are used to existing in the periphery, far from urban economic and political centres, and without significant access to security, justice, big trade, and governance. However, they would benefit from new technologies and irrigation systems to help guard them from the immediate effects of climate change – like extreme weather systems, particularly as wet seasons are shorter and less predictable than in the past.<sup>43</sup>

“Most of us here are traders and farmers. Recently, it has been difficult for farmers because the lands are not fertile and fertiliser is difficult to get and expensive to buy,” a female trader from Wechiau, in Wa, Ghana, said. “This is because people hoard the fertiliser and smuggle to Burkina Faso, where it sells for a higher price. For traders, too, the insecurity is affecting our movement and killing the business”.<sup>44</sup>

## Cross-border movement of goods and people

This section reviews the trade dynamics, trends, and themes related to regular trade activities among communities located between Wa, Ghana, and Batié, Burkina Faso. It focuses on the Wa central district's three major market centres: Old Wa, Fadama, and New Wa. In the Noubié Province in Burkina Faso, the major trade hub is in Batié.

The Wa district supplies agrarian and industrial products to communities throughout the Upper West and Savannah regions in Ghana, and Sud-Ouest, Burkina Faso. The Piisi market is in a peri-urban community,

39 UNDP (2022), 'Promise, Peril and Resilience: Voices of Agropastoralists in Africa's Borderland Regions,' United Nations Development Programme. <https://www.undp.org/africa/publications/promise-peril-and-resilience-voices-agropastoralists-africas-borderland-regions> (accessed April 2024).

40 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (21 February 2024). FAO GIEWS Country Brief on Burkina Faso. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. <https://www.fao.org/giews/countrybrief/country.jsp?code=BFA&lang=es> (accessed September 2024).

41 General assessment of the analysis of data collected in Area 2 from 1–30 December, 2023.

42 UNDP (2022). 'Promise, Peril and Resilience: Voices of Agropastoralists in Africa's Borderland Regions'.

43 Ogunkola IO et al. 'Rural communities in Africa should not be forgotten in responses to COVID-19'. *International Journal of Health Planning and Management* 35 (6). 2020. p. 1,302–1,305. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32790138/>.

44 Interview with female trader, Wechiau, Wa, Ghana, December 2023.



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**Figure 4.** Informal border crossing between Burkina Faso and Ghana along the Black Volta River. January 2024.

and mainly supplies livestock, cereals, tubers, legumes, and vegetables.<sup>45</sup> The Wa West district boasts eight major trade centres: Dorimon, Dabo, Taanvare, Wechiau, Vieri, Ponyentanga, Nyoli, and Gurungu. These towns alternate market days to best service their communities and avoid conflicting with each other. These markets mostly supply agriculture as well as agricultural by-products, and household commodities that are primarily sold by women. The livestock trade is almost exclusively run by men.<sup>46</sup>

There is limited data about who uses these border crossings because there is no official crossing point between Batié in Burkina Faso, and Wa in Ghana. The Black Volta River forms a natural boundary, which becomes a seasonally dry riverbed from January to March (during the hottest part of the dry months), making it more easily passable (see Figure 4). As a result, informal trade drives the economies around these municipalities.<sup>47</sup> The primary informal routes used for regular trade in Area 2 pass along the Wa–Lawra Road (see Figure 5).

Residents in this area can cross the border between Burkina Faso and Ghana freely, as there are no formal crossing points, and virtually no security or customs patrols are present. However, no merchandise or goods for sale can legally move through these



**Figure 5.** Informal trade routes on the Wa–Lawra Road

45 Wa Municipal Assembly, 'Composite budget for 2022-2025,' p. 3.

46 Ibid., p. 6.

47 Aning, K. (2023), 'Threats of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation in Northern Ghana,' p. 39.

crossings because there is no customs checkpoint on either side of the border, and cross-river routes are 'unapproved' and change seasonally. Most respondents said that people who go to cross-border markets deliberately avoid security checkpoints, and instead navigate through the bush and off-road.<sup>48</sup> As one merchant from Wechiau explained: "We know where the roads are, but because they (Ghanaian security) will not let us pass on these roads with our goods for sale in markets, we must go off-road, across the river, to get to markets in Burkina Faso".<sup>49</sup> Respondents also said that newly established government checkpoints set up to patrol informal trade and armed-group activity have also impeded daily trade and travel on more 'passable' roads, leading people to choose informal crossing points.<sup>50</sup>

Traders face extra expenses at these checkpoints due to bribes they are forced to pay to corrupt security and customs officials. "We have a lot of problems with customs and the police," a male trader from Batié, Nounbiél Province, said. "Often, you can clear your equipment and the police stop you on the road [to say] that the paper is not compliant; you have to pay before leaving".<sup>51</sup> According to an agricultural trader from Batié: "Ghanaian police took my motorcycle once and told me I had to pay an authorisation fee. I spent the whole day in the office of the Ghanaian postmaster and had to pay 10,000 CFA francs (approximately £12.70) to be able to leave with my motorcycle."<sup>52</sup>

## Formal and informal trade flow across borders

The Wa–Batié border region does not have a formal or approved border crossing. In fact, the Wa commune sits between the only two official border crossings in northwest Ghana: Paga in the Upper East Region, and Hamile in the northwest corner of Ghana in the Upper West Region. Without a formalised cross-border movement of goods, the informal route across the Black Volta River has become highly trafficked by local traders, and a rich illicit local economy has emerged alongside it.

This economy is particularly strong through Wa, and the smaller commune of Wechiau. The Dorimon axis road is a major trafficking and trade route that feeds into the cross-border trade between Wa and Batié, across the river. This road links northeastern Côte d'Ivoire to trade in Wa, Ghana, connecting northward to Hamile. This is significant because the artisanal gold sourcing centres in Bouna and Doropo in Côte d'Ivoire (which service the Comoé National Park gold mines) have become supply hubs for the illicit gold markets in Batié, Burkina Faso.

Due to border restrictions imposed on the Ivorian border with Burkina Faso in response to insecurity in the Sahel, gold traffickers are now moving through Ghana along this route, before entering across the Black Volta River into the Batié Municipality. These traders sell gold in Batié, and purchase mining production materials – including chemicals, explosives, and fuel – from these markets, that they bring back to Côte d'Ivoire for mining.<sup>53</sup> There is significant smuggling in illicit items like arms, humans, stolen

48 All KIIs in the Wa border region who cited 'trader or merchant' as their profession (65%), indicated that they cross these borders for work (Batié, Nounbiél Province, Sud-Ouest Region, Burkina Faso, 19 December 2023, and Wechiau, Wa Municipal District, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023).

49 KII with trader, Wechiau, Wa Municipal District, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

50 FGDs with traders in both Batié and Wechiau confirmed that traders from both sides of the border are taking to informal routes to avoid security. Burkinabé are also increasingly now avoiding Ghanaian authorities by following the footsteps of their Ghanaian trading partners (FGDs conducted in Batié, Nounbiél Province, Sud-Ouest Region, Burkina Faso, 19 December 2023, and Wechiau, Wa Municipal District, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023).

51 KII with male trader, Batié, Nounbiél Province, Sud-Ouest Region, Burkina Faso, January 2024.

52 KII with agricultural trader, Batié, Nounbiél Province, Sud-Ouest Region, Burkina Faso, January 2024.

53 GITOC Risk Bulletin 1, 2021.

cattle, motorbikes, and vehicles. Respondents reported that some traders have sought to supplement their incomes by participating in this illegal activity, including in Batié, Burkina Faso, and Wa, Ghana.<sup>54</sup>

Moreover, informal trade in regular commodities<sup>55</sup> can sometimes take the same route, and be conducted by the same people, as illicit trafficked goods.<sup>56</sup> Ghana is also a key hub for explosives and arms trafficking, particularly in components that build improvised explosive devices (IEDs).<sup>57</sup> These components include fertiliser bought and sold in trade centres located in Wa, Hamile, and Navrongo, and traded throughout Burkina Faso and the broader Sahel.<sup>58</sup>

Smuggled medical products are also moved from the seaports on the Gulf of Guinea, particularly through Ghana's Tema port, to Sahel countries.<sup>59</sup> Wa is a trafficking centre for artisanal gold from nearby gold mines in Bole, Ghana, and in Côte d'Ivoire. Gold from the ungoverned trafficking hubs near gold mines in Dollar Power (in Ghana, north of Bole) is smuggled up through Wechiau on boats along the Black Volta River and into Burkina Faso by traffickers with ties to buyers in Gaoua and Bobo-Dioulasso.<sup>60</sup> Trafficking goods and persons, including sex workers,<sup>61</sup> is rampant around these trade centres.<sup>62</sup>

The trafficking of arms, ammunition, and other illicit goods has boomed since the onset of violent extremism in the Sahel in 2012 led to skyrocketing demand for cheap, locally sourced weapons. Likewise, as armed activity has spread outside the Sahel, regular civilians and other organised trade networks (both licit and illicit) are obtaining arms to protect themselves against armed groups and rogue bandits. Although the arms trade is criminalised in Ghana, artisanal arms cost US\$9 to produce and are sold for US\$90 to US\$150. Protected in Ghana by political and criminal elites, the booming trade is hard for authorities to curtail.<sup>63</sup>

## Gold rush in the tri-border region

The vast borderlands between the Wa Municipal District in Ghana and Nombiél Province in Burkina Faso are quite porous, despite new checkpoints and security deployments that have been set up since 2020.

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54 FGDs conducted in Batié, Nombiél Province, Sud-Ouest Region, Burkina Faso, 19 December 2023, and Wechiau, Wa Municipal District, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

55 UNODC and TOCTA Sahel (2022), 'Trafficking in Medical Products in the Sahel'.

56 Aning, K. (2023), 'Threats of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation in Northern Ghana,' p. 36.

57 Abderrahmane, A., and Okai, S. (2023), 'Ghana's sophisticated artisanal firearms trade needs regulating,' 2023, Institute for Security Studies. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/ghanas-sophisticated-artisanal-firearms-trade-needs-regulating> (accessed January 2024).

58 Ghana's fertiliser subsidy has yet to positively impact small shareholder farmers, due to the widespread smuggling of fertiliser. Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana (2020), 'Smuggling, Hoarding, Major Challenges of Fertiliser Subsidy Program,' 2020, <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/smuggling-hoarding-major-challenges-of-fertiliser-subsidy-programme.html>. (accessed January 2024).

59 UNODC and TOCTA Sahel (2022), 'Trafficking in Medical Products in the Sahel'.

60 Remote Interview with Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime researchers, April 2024.

61 US Department of State, (2023), 'Trafficking in Persons Report: Ghana,' <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/ghana/> (accessed January 2024).

62 Sex workers are often present where there are extract mines, industrial centres, and infrastructure development because of the prevalence of male migrant labourers. In the absence of permanent settlements, and therefore families, women are trafficked in for sex work. GITOC West Africa Observatory, 'Illicit hub mapping,' <https://wea.globalinitiative.net/illlicit-hub-mapping/map>.

63 Abderrahmane, A. and Okai, S. (2023), 'Ghana's sophisticated artisanal firearms trade needs regulating'.

This exposes Ghana's border crossing between Wa and Batié (and Bouna, Côte d'Ivoire, to the south) to security threats from the Sahel.

Since 2014, a gold rush in nearby Comoé National Park in Côte d'Ivoire, and throughout northern Ghana, has expanded the trade, and led to increased criminality and insecurity that is associated with the presence of gold mines (e.g. sex work, trafficked labour, and organised crime linked to the gold trade value chain).<sup>64</sup> However, the lure of wealth associated with the trade means that those involved in the value chain are unlikely to abandon it.

In Ghana, over one million people work in illicit 'artisanal' gold mines, from which 35 per cent of the country's gold is extracted.<sup>65</sup> Burkinabé smuggle the gold from Ghana's Upper West Region into markets in Bobo-Dioulasso via Houde, Burkina Faso, from Wa, Ghana. A second trafficking route begins in Buko, Ghana, where traders discreetly move the gold to Bouna and Doropo (Côte d'Ivoire), and onwards to buyers in Gaoua, Burkina Faso.<sup>66</sup>

The Sud-Ouest Region of Burkina Faso also has a long history of artisanal gold mining, dating to before the colonial era in the 19th century. Gold mining in this corner of West Africa is well controlled by organised crime groups and cartels, which operate with considerable impunity due to the limited presence of law enforcement and security.<sup>67</sup> Over 46,000 people work in artisanal gold mining in this region of Burkina Faso, according to the Burkinabé government's National Institute of Statistics and Demography.<sup>68</sup>

In Burkina Faso in particular, but also in Ghana, agricultural communities rely on rainfall and the wet season and seek alternative livelihoods for the rest of the year. This has increasingly included participating in the gold trade (including related trades such as explosive materials, illicit food sales, and sex work).<sup>69</sup>

Some studies indicate that a rich informal gold trade creates more sustainable economic living conditions for the local community, which can then participate in income-generating activities that cater to the mining operations – such as cooking and selling food, and supplying lodging, fuel, and machine parts.

The gold trade has also bred a thriving organised criminal ecosystem in the borderland region.<sup>70</sup> Specifically, unregulated artisanal gold mining has allowed armed actors and illicit supply traders to move

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64 Hunter, M. (2022), 'Beyond blood,' p. 20. In 2019, Ghana became the largest producer of gold in Africa. However, the gold rush has led to a proliferation of illicit gold mining. This includes both artisanal mining, which is highly unregulated and draws illicit activity from across the sub-region, as well as illegal industrial gold mining, primarily led by Chinese companies that, in prioritising rapid industrial output, are destroying biodiversity en masse. See Meralis Plaza-Toledo. M. (2019), *The Mineral Industry of Ghana in 2019*; US Department of Interior - U.S. Geological Survey, 2019, <https://pubs.usgs.gov/myb/vol3/2019/myb3-2019-ghana.pdf>.

65 Toledo, M. 2019, *The Mineral Industry of Ghana in 2019*.

66 Sollazzo, R. and Nowak, M. (2020), 'Tri-border transit: Trafficking and smuggling in the Burkina Faso–Côte d'Ivoire–Mali Region'. *Small Arms Survey*, 2020, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/tri-border-transit-trafficking-and-smuggling-burkina-faso-cote-divoire-mali-region>.

67 GITOC Risk Bulletin 1, 2021.

68 Ibid.

69 Fritz, B. and Zanetti, J. (2020), "In my village, everyone uses the tractor": Gold mining, agriculture and social transformation in rural Burkina,' *The Extractive Industries and Society* 7(3), June 2020.

70 GITOC Risk Bulletin 1, 2021.

freely and thrive between Doropo in Côte d'Ivoire, to Batié in Burkina Faso<sup>71</sup> and Wa in Ghana, a regional hub for smuggling activities between Sud-Ouest in Burkina Faso and Doremu in Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>72</sup>

These roads link directly to the artisanal gold mines that proliferate near Dollar Power, the ungoverned gold mining town in the Bole district (Savannah Region, Ghana).<sup>73</sup> This is despite Ghana's attempt in late 2023 to clamp down on illicit and unregulated gold mining, in favour of industrial mining companies setting up business in the area and deploying security forces to the outskirts of the town.<sup>74</sup>

Gold extraction draws in smuggling activities and actors. For example, mercury and cyanide – both used to extract gold – are procured via trafficking networks from Upper West Region, Ghana. Cyanide sourced in Ghana is trafficked along routes through Bouna and Doropo in Côte d'Ivoire, into Kampti and Gaoua in Burkina Faso.<sup>75</sup>

The trade also pulls Burkinabé technicians into Ghana to manage cyanide processing technology. Burkinabé traffickers therefore have a prominent role in the trade. Additionally, government-subsidised fertiliser from northern Ghana is regularly trafficked into the Sud-Ouest Region, Burkina Faso, for creating explosives to set up mines – circumventing strict regulations by the Burkina Faso government on selling these materials.<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, labourers in the gold mines create a market for illicitly trafficked and smuggled items, including black-market pharmaceuticals and cannabis, which are primarily sourced from Ghana.<sup>77</sup>

## Livestock trade impeded by security concerns

In Wechiau (Ghana), where the cattle trade from Burkina Faso passes into southern Ghana, several key informants said they suspected that violent extremists were engaged in cattle sales via contacts within the Fulbe herder communities to raise money for their activities in the Sahel.<sup>78</sup> Wechiau was a major cattle-rearing village until 2020. However, several pastoralists said they had abandoned the trade in recent years due to the high incidence of cattle rustling involving a cartel of locals, Fulbe agents, and suspected jihadists.<sup>79</sup> One cattle trader said: “We have stopped herding our cattle because the armed men steal our cattle when we are camping at night. Travelling across the border has gotten more expensive too this year”.<sup>80</sup> Evidence of this is limited, although there are some isolated reports of arrested cattle rustlers with alleged connections to VEOs.<sup>81</sup> Nonetheless, security agencies in Wechiau described a ‘black market’ sale point along the Black Volta River, where transactions occur between cattle dealers

71 Berger, F. and Zran, A. (2023), ‘Between illicit economies and violent extremism’.

72 GITOC West Africa Observatory (2024), ‘Illicit hub mapping,’ <https://wea.globalinitiative.net/illicit-hub-mapping/map>.

73 Interview with former government official, Accra, Ghana, February 2024.

74 Burrows, E. and Bird, L. (2017), ‘Gold, Guns, and China: Ghana's fight to end galamsey,’ *Global Initiative*, 30 May 2017, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/gold-guns-and-china-ghanas-fight-to-end-galamsey/>.

75 GITOC Risk Bulletin 1, 2021.

76 Ibid.

77 Sollazzo, R. and Nowak, M. (2020).

78 KII with female trader and civil society leader in Wechiau, Ghana, December 2023; Cattle rustling and kidnapping for ransom fuels a booming illicit economy in this corner of the sub-region, which could also indicate the presence of more significant VEO and armed-group coordinated networks. GITOC West Africa Observatory, ‘Illicit hub mapping’.

79 11 KIIs with herders and traders, in Wechiau, Wa Municipal District, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

80 KII with a cattle trader, in Wechiau, Wa Municipality, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2024.

81 Ibid.

and VEO agents.<sup>82</sup> “There are several black-market sales points along the Black Volta”, a police officer said. “These are popular points for people to come to and sell their goods. It’s also where the armed men from Burkina Faso come to buy things like motorbikes, fuel, guns. We think they also sell stolen cattle here. The cattle thieves and the buyers know how to avoid being detected by security”.<sup>83</sup> These sale points are hard to verify, not least because they are reportedly very fluid; VEOs will deliberately change locations to evade being tracked and caught by security officials.

## Factors impacting cross-border livelihoods

### VEO and armed-group activity

JNIM, the umbrella coalition of Al-Qaeda-aligned groups in the Sahel, has a discrete but significant presence in Ghana, where VEOs have uninterrupted access to trafficking networks and the illicit supply chain, according to experts, although details of these dynamics are not well documented.<sup>84</sup>

Fears of VEO activities have stopped people from travelling across borders or participating in their regular livelihoods. The research did not yield evidence that JNIM is active in this border region. It is possible that the ‘bad actors’ that people report seeing are bandits, organised criminals, and traffickers involved in the nearby gold trade, as well as regular people who act as ‘faciliators’ for JNIM by buying goods, but not fighting, for it.<sup>85</sup>

Since 2018 (but in some cases as early as 2016), JNIM has successfully expanded into Coastal West Africa from eastern Burkina Faso and northern Mali. It has done so by first penetrating the forests in Burkina Faso’s southern border regions and expanding south from there towards the coastal countries by exploiting elements of the illicit supply chain that run through the same border spaces and market towns studied here. In the Wa border region, a rich illicit supply chain has provided resources for the local population and non-state armed groups – such as VEOs linked to JNIM – and bandits.<sup>86</sup>

In March 2016, gunmen killed 19 people in the popular coastal resort town of Grand Bassam, 40 kilometres east of Abidjan, in an attack for which Al-Qaeda’s North African affiliate, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Al-Mourabitun, claimed responsibility. In June 2020, Côte d’Ivoire experienced its first VEO attacks on the border since the Grand Bassam shootings, when JNIM ambushed the Kafolo

82 Interview with government officials in Wechiau, Wa Municipality, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

83 KII with officer, Wechiau, Wa Municipality, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

84 Several interviews with active and former Ghanaian government officials were conducted in Accra and northern Ghana in February 2024. In every conversation, Ghanaian officials acknowledged that JNIM is active in Ghana, though their activities have not yet turned violent. The KIIs also said that VEOs are moving around their communities, although it was unclear if these are active violent extremists or just JNIM facilitators, collecting intelligence and conducting supply runs into Ghana for JNIM cells in Burkina Faso.

85 An absence of data on JNIM activity in the Wa border region, according to ACLED, does not necessarily mean that they are not present. Rather, it suggests that they are not carrying out violent events in these areas, and not clashing with the community or security forces; ACLED, *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Database*, <https://acleddata.com/>.

86 Bernard, A. (2021), ‘Tracking Violent Extremism Spillover from the Sahel to Coastal West Africa,’ Analytical Report funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021.

and G'béya security bases in the north of the country. The attack followed a joint Ivorian- Burkinabé counterterrorism operation in May 2020 that had dismantled a rear base (or logistics hub)<sup>87</sup> housing a regional branch of JNIM, known as Katibat Alidouougou.<sup>88</sup>

Whilst JNIM's activities had not been violent in Côte d'Ivoire prior to the 2020 attack, evidence suggests it had been present on the Ivorian border with Mali following the Grand Bassam attack.<sup>89</sup>

By 2021, JNIM had advanced into the Cascades Region of Burkina Faso (see Chapter 4 on Sikasso border region), anchoring a western front for the group, presumably to position it for eventual penetration into Coastal West Africa.<sup>90</sup> VEO presence in southwest Burkina Faso (Hauts-Bassins and Cascadese regions) has continued to grow since 2021.<sup>91</sup> Experts have said that areas south of the Wa border region in Ghana, including Chache and Bole,<sup>92</sup> boast significant activity by armed groups with reported ties to VEOs.<sup>93</sup>

Since 2021, after Côte d'Ivoire pushed the Katiba Alidouougou cell from its northern communities, remnants of these JNIM cells have established sleeper cells in border areas around Sud-Ouest Burkina Faso.<sup>94</sup>

In Ghana, the activities of suspected JNIM actors have been documented by the security providers and local community highlighting the group's presence. Although there have been no reports of violent events by JNIM, there are growing numbers of reports about how the group is moving through Ghana's border spaces. The government's 'See Something, Say Something' campaign and early-warning system, managed by the Ministry of National Security, has led to some reports of suspicious activity being responded to. A security officer from Wechiau described how the early-warning system functions:

"About two months ago, we picked [up] intelligence from someone making a suspicious call we suspected was to an armed group. So, we went on foot... at night to catch him, but... the person quickly called the suspect and told him that the security was around so they should use a different route." The security officer said they managed to catch the informant, but he had since refused to disclose the group he was informing for. "We have reasonable suspicion that it was a group of terrorists who had crossed into [Ghana], and that he was aiding their return to Burkina Faso. There is evidence they're hiding in forests in Ghana, because we have pursued some jointly with colleagues from Burkina Faso in the Ghanaian forests. Their presence on our side is in no doubt at all."<sup>95</sup>

87 A rear base is often the furthest position a group maintains as a safe space for combatants to flee to during combat operations, or seek rest and rehabilitation in during periods of calm. Due to their distance from the battlefield, rear bases are critical support elements for armed groups, and often host all logistics and management elements. US Department of the Army (2023), 'FM 3-90, Tactics' (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, May 2023), [https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR\\_pubs/DR\\_a/ARN38160-FM\\_3-90-000-WEB-1.pdf](https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN38160-FM_3-90-000-WEB-1.pdf).

88 International Crisis Group (ICG) (2023), 'Keeping Jihadists Out of Northern Côte d'Ivoire,' Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°192 (Abidjan/Brussels: ICG, 11 August 2023), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/cote-divoire/b192-keeping-jihadists-out-northern-cote-divoire>.

89 Bernard, A. (2021), 'Tracking Violent Extremism Spillover'.

90 ICG (2023), 'Keeping Jihadists Out of Northern Côte d'Ivoire'.

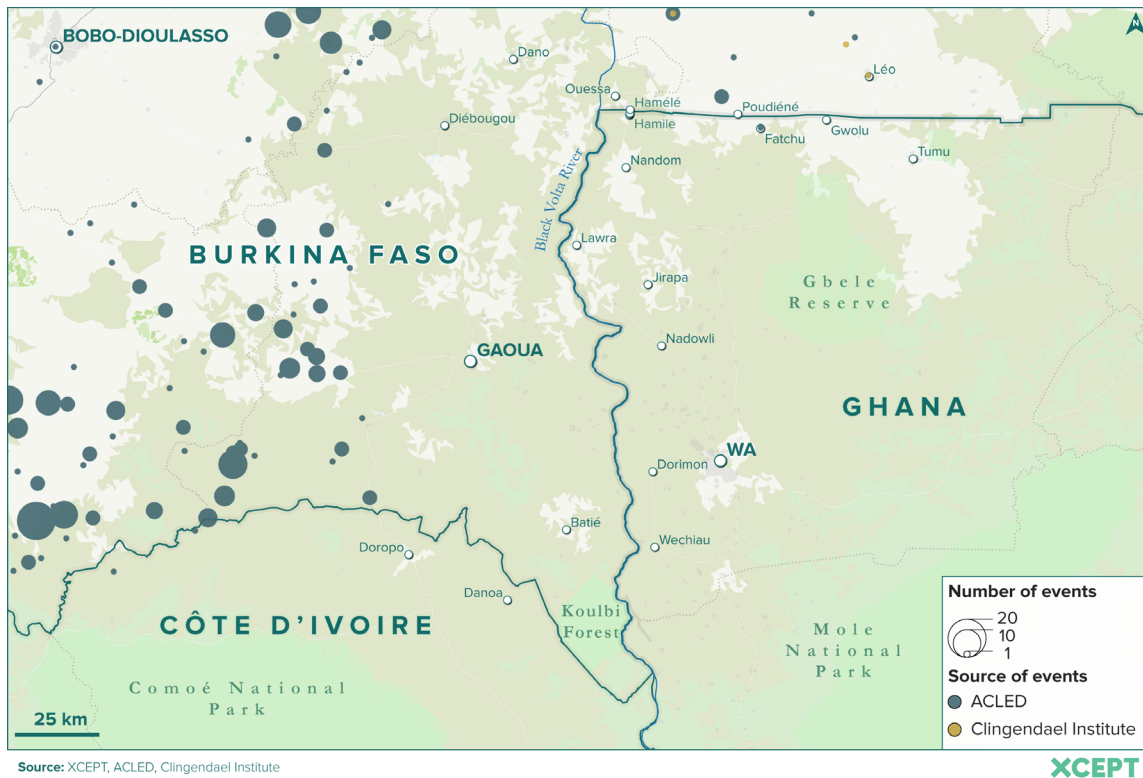
91 ACLED, Database.

92 KAS and Promediation (2024), 'The jihadist threat in northern Ghana and Togo,' p. 18; interview with security analysts in Accra, Ghana, February 2024.

93 Expert interviews with government official, Accra, Ghana, 8 February 2024, and retired security provider, Accra, Ghana February 2024.

94 GITOC Risk Bulletin 1, 2021.

95 KII with security officer, Wechiau, Wa West district, Ghana, December 2023.



**Figure 6.** Map showing VEO activity in the Wa border region (2022-2024)

There are concerns of possible collaboration between VEOs and other armed actors across the region due to their mutual reliance on the illicit supply chain.<sup>96</sup> Academic reports and field research lack sufficient information on JNIM or other armed actors in the Wa border region, and there is no clear evidence of VEO activity around Batié. However, reporting databases like ACLED document VEO activity in nearby areas like the Cascades Region in Burkina Faso (see Figure 6),<sup>97</sup> prompting Ghanaians in Wechiau to avoid travelling there.<sup>98</sup> Locals in Batié said they believe that JNIM might try to exploit informal trade in the Wa border region by radicalising local vulnerable groups, such as marginalised youth and underemployed people.<sup>99</sup> Wechiau is the closest town to the attacks, which are edging closer to Ghana; at time of research, gunshots could be heard there. “There have been casualties who are Ghanaian from this district. We receive reports and late-night calls from locals about suspicious people,” a security provider from Wa said.<sup>100</sup>

In addition to serious organised crime linked to the illicit supply chain, intercommunal conflict in this tri-border region has increased since 2016. This has been exacerbated by economic hardship resulting from an economic embargo spanning two decades that was imposed on the northern region of Côte d'Ivoire

96 KAS and Promediation (2022), ‘The jihadist threat in northern Ghana and Togo,’ p. 16.

97 Ibid.

98 No KIs in Batié reported sightings or interactions with VEOs. However, almost all KIs in Wa and Wechiau reported growing fears of travelling to the Noubié Province, Burkina Faso, for work, due to their perception of VEO activity or presence there. Overall, there is limited evidence of JNIM activity in the Wa border region.

99 The focus group in Batié discussed concerns about how the rampant informal trade and criminality that exists in these spaces could quickly spiral into violent extremism and become pull factors for at-risk youth, in particular. Several KIs in Wa blamed underemployed youth who participate in gold mining as the source of VEO insecurity. FGD in Batié, Noubié Province, Sud-Ouest Region, Burkina Faso, December 2023.

100 Interview with a government official in Wa, Wa Municipality, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

by the Ivorian government during two civil wars in 2002 and 2011, and the roving presence of VEOs and armed groups.<sup>101</sup> Meanwhile, longstanding intercommunal conflict between ethnic Lobi and Fulani in Bouna, which led to the displacement of over 2,500 ethnic-Fulani into Burkina Faso in 2016, has added to intercommunal tensions in these borderlands.<sup>102</sup> These displaced groups add to existing strains on local economies in this tri-border area, which already suffers from underdevelopment and rampant poverty.

In the Wa–Batié crossing, security providers patrol for armed activity, adding to a tense environment in which customs and law enforcement reportedly participate in extortion and racketeering.<sup>103</sup> In Burkina Faso, respondents said that the Burkinabé auxiliary force, known as Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (or *Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie*, VDP),<sup>104</sup> arbitrarily arrest people, rummage through their belongings, and steal money.<sup>105</sup> This systemic corruption and limited security presence has allowed armed activity to flourish – whether related to chieftaincy conflict, organised crime, or violent extremism.<sup>106</sup>

## Impact of non-state actors on local trade

VEOs have impacted regular trade in Burkina Faso. For example, many livestock and vegetable traders from Ghana used to travel frequently to remote communities outside Batié to buy produce and livestock in bulk. However, since JNIM expanded into southern Burkina Faso in 2019–2020,<sup>107</sup> they prefer to purchase produce in markets – instead of wholesale from suppliers – and to travel when security officers are on the road. This means they often miss peak trading hours, as they prefer to travel back to Ghana before nightfall.<sup>108</sup> Ghanaian traders reported that they have lost on average four to six trade hours daily. These lost hours fall during peak business hours because most customers and sellers in Burkina Faso are farmers, who trade either before or after their farming activities. As Ghanaian traffic into Burkina Faso has slowed, Burkinabé traders have increased their own travel into Ghana to buy and sell their goods.<sup>109</sup>

Despite their critical role in regular commercial trade, women typically do not travel far in West Africa.<sup>110</sup> They often buy and sell goods in markets close to home to limit time outside the household, which in turn

101 Bernard, A. (2021), 'Tracking Violent Extremism Spillover'.

102 Ibid.

103 Participants in focus groups in both FGDs in Wa, Wa Municipality, Ghana, and Batié, Nounbié Province, Burkina Faso, spoke about widespread corruption tactics deployed by security providers at the border.

104 The VDP is an armed self-defence 'vigilante' group that the Burkinabé government established in 2020 to support the security forces in fighting VEOs. The VDP is controversial due to the limited training it receives and the low bar set for entry. It has been accused of carrying out human rights violations and war crimes during indiscriminate targeting of civilians under the guise of 'counterterrorism' missions. International Crisis Group (ICG) (2023), 'Burkina Faso: Arming Civilians at the Cost of Social Cohesion?', Africa Report N°313 (Brussels: ICG, 15 December 2023), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/burkina-faso/313-armer-les-civils-au-prix-de-la-cohesion-sociale>. accessed January 2024.

105 Four KIIs with merchants and traders from Batié reported similar incidents of VDP at or near crossings tearing their belongings from their bags, throwing them the floor, and seizing their valuables and money.

106 Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) and Promediation (2022), 'The jihadist threat in northern Ghana and Togo: Stocktaking and prospects for containing the expansion,' Regional Programme: Political Dialogue in West Africa (Abidjan: KAS, 7 April 2022), <https://www.kas.de/en/web/westafrika/publikationen/einzeltitel/-/content/the-jihadist-threat-in-northern-ghana-and-togo-2>, p. 16.

107 Twenty-two KIIs in Wechiau, Wa Municipality, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

108 FGD with traders and merchants in Wechiau, Wa Municipality, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

109 Because of the currency depreciation in Ghana, Burkinabé also benefit from higher purchasing power when buying goods inside Ghana. Three KIIs in Batié, Nounbié Province, Sud-Ouest Region, Burkina Faso, 19 December 2023.

110 Walther, O.J. and Hoffmann, L.H. 'Gendered Dynamics of Cross-border Trade in West Africa,' published online, 20 April 2021, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3830755>.

affects their ability to earn more money.<sup>111</sup> Men are generally primarily involved in the livestock, fertiliser, and fuel trades, or other longer-haul trades in commodities and agriculture.<sup>112</sup> However, as violence caused by non-state actors and extremists grows in Burkina Faso, interviewees in Batié said that men are increasingly engaging in short-haul trade in foodstuffs typically done by women.<sup>113</sup> Male interviewees in Wechiau said the dangers that VEOs pose to the cross-border cattle trade has also led them to actively seek high-volume, long-distance trades in other commodities, such as cereals and vegetables, which are sold in southern Ghana.<sup>114</sup>

Shifting trade routes due to VEO violence in the Sahel particularly affect women traders.<sup>115</sup> Several women in Wechiau said their trades – including providing fuel, travel-related and trade services, and preparing roadside food to Ivorians passing through Burkina Faso to Ghana – are drying up as travellers opt for safer, but longer, passages. Additionally, because of insecurity in Burkina Faso, many Ivorians are now taking the longer route, crossing into Ghana further south and bypassing the food stalls on the border, negatively impacting the ability of women traders to earn money.<sup>116</sup> One female trader in Wechiau said there used to be many traders from Côte d'Ivoire who would come to market there via Burkina Faso. “We would pick them up at the Black Volta River crossing in Ghana,” she said. “But because of VEO attacks at the border between Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, in the past two years, they have stopped coming through Burkina Faso. Instead, they come in straight through Bole in the Savannah Region, so we have lost customers.”

The growing sense of insecurity has also led men to reduce the risk that women face by taking over their traditional roles in travelling to the Burkinabé vegetable farms in rural communes outside Batié.

## State security force responses

In late 2019, Ghana reorganised its northern borders, splitting the northern region into the Northern, Savannah and North East regions to diversify governance authorities and increase the ability of municipalities to deploy resources to secure, develop, and govern remote areas.<sup>117</sup> In theory, splitting the vast and rural Northern region up into three separate regions was intended to help restore governance to rural parts of the north that had otherwise lacked these resources due to limited administration. However,

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111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.

113 Nineteen Kills in the Wa border region (Wechiau, Wa Municipal District, Upper West Region, Ghana, 2-3 December 2023 and Batié, Nounbié Province, Sud-Ouest Region, Burkina Faso, December 2023).

114 Seven Kills in Wechiau, Wa Municipal District, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

115 OECD and Sahel and West Africa Club 2019, ‘Women and Trade Networks in West Africa’ (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1787/7d67b61d-en>.

116 Two Kills with female traders in Wechiau, Wa Municipality, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

117 The Northern Region was the largest administrative region in Ghana but has continued to suffer from extreme levels of underdevelopment. In 2017, the Ghanaian government established the Ministry of Regional Reorganization and Development to redraw the region into the North East, Savannah, and the Northern Region. This redesign was intended to help municipal and regional authorities access more development resources. So far, the success of this redivision is debatable, and some experts reported that the failures of this system are tied to corruption among political elites who hold regional leadership positions. Interviews with Tamale municipal authorities and researchers in Bolgatanga, February 2024. The literature also points to the sectarian challenges that Ghana has always faced, which have been exacerbated by these administrative divisions that separate some groups and push other groups together under the redesign. See Bolaji, M.H.A. and Gariba, M.A. (2020), ‘The Scramble for the Partition of the Northern Region of Ghana: Conflict and the Quest for the Coterminality of Cultural and Political Boundaries,’ *African Sociological Review / Revue Africaine de Sociologie*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2020, pp. 75–104. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26918066>.

resource constraints have hampered the initiative, including limitations on adequate security deployments to the north. For example, in 2020, the Ministry of National Security established new battalions under Operation Conquered Fist, an initiative that focuses on the Upper East and Upper West regions. Very few units are deployed in the Northern, Savannah, and North East regions, despite their borders with Togo, Burkina Faso, and Mole National Park.<sup>118</sup>

Ghana has made significant intelligence efforts to determine sources of insecurity and vulnerability in northern communities as part of this operation.<sup>119</sup> In 2021, for example, the Ghana Immigration Service arrested 38 Burkinabé migrants in the Nadowli–Kaleo areas (north of Wa Municipality) over perceived threats from VEOs in the Sahel spilling into Ghana.<sup>120</sup> However, by elevating risks of homegrown radicalisation and reducing local willingness to cooperate with the state against VEOs, Ghana's increasing profiling and targeting of Sahelians – particularly ethnic-Fulbe – could limit the government's ability to realistically respond to insurgent threats from VEOs. This has been the case in new areas of JNIM operations, including in Benin.<sup>121</sup>

Expert informants reported that Ghana has a robust intelligence agency that has successfully stopped efforts by armed groups to carry out violent extremist attacks and activities inside the country's boundaries. The central organisation collecting intelligence on security issues in Ghana – the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB) – relies heavily, in the north, on information that comes through the Ministry of National Security's early-warning system, as part of the government's 'See Something, Say Something' campaign, which encourages civilians to report suspicious behaviour.<sup>122</sup>

However, experts have recognised that although the system works well, given that Ghana has not yet experienced violence from VEOs from the Sahel, there are still not enough intelligence networks in place in the north.<sup>123</sup> This limited strategy casts doubt on authorities' capacity to tackle violent extremism, given that JNIM movements and suspected activity in Ghana remain highly covert, operating through complex illicit networks that require proactive tracking and coordinated intelligence.

## Impact of security responses on local trade

The sense of insecurity, together with the surge in security responses, has significantly impacted regular cross-border movement, activity, and trade. "There is more security in the area, but we deplore the multiple checkpoints imposed on us from them", a male transported from Batié, Burkina Faso, said. Journeys between border towns on the northern border between Ghana and Burkina Faso can involve passing up to six security checkpoints, with each one demanding a bribe costing £0.30–2.50. The repeated payments – often delivered multiple times in one journey – erode the small profit that people are able to make.<sup>124</sup>

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118 Interviews with government officials in northern Ghana, February 2024.

119 Ibid.

120 KAS and Promediation (2022), 'The jihadist threat in northern Ghana and Togo'.

121 Courtright, J. (2023), 'In Ghana, accusations of rising jihadism may be making a local conflict worse,' *Institute of Current World Affairs*, 30 January 2023, <https://www.icwa.org/ghana-chieftancy-battle/>; de Bruijne, K. (2023), 'Despite military progress, it's not going well in Northern Benin,' CRU Policy Brief, Clingendael Institute, <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/despite-military-progress-its-not-going-well-northern-benin>.

122 Interviews with two senior government officials in northern Ghana, February 2024.

123 Ibid.

124 This was an aggregated average based on the prices that all 42 KIIs cited during interviews in both Wechiau, Ghana, and Batié, Burkina Faso, in Area 2.

In some cases, as in Wechiau, police demand that traders pay for their fuel in return for a secure convoy to escort them between towns and protect them from armed groups, VEOs, and bandits.<sup>125</sup> Corruption is reportedly most prevalent in Ghana among the Customs, Excise and Preventative Services (CEPS) and local police.<sup>126</sup> A number of interviewees in Wa said that these security services are not transparent or consistent in how they enforce fee collections: several said they spend more money paying bribes to CEPS officials at various border checkpoints than they do selling their goods in markets.<sup>127</sup> Women travelling to Batié to sell their products in markets said they felt particularly discouraged from making the journey regularly due to corrupt security providers and customs agents.<sup>128</sup> “They mostly don’t charge fees. But there are some officers who extort money illegally, especially when you forget your Ghana card or when they meet you alone on the smaller routes”, a female trader from Wechiau said.<sup>129</sup> Interviewees shared similar accounts in Burkina Faso. However, because security forces are less prevalent in the Nounbiél Province than they are in Ghana, there are fewer opportunities for extortion.<sup>130</sup>

The presence of security does not eliminate the danger that armed activity poses to local livelihoods. KIIs in Batié said that banditry and highway robbery was increasing in the Sud-Ouest Region, although they reported that Batié has been better policed by security forces since 2023 than the neighbouring Boussoukoulou or Kpouéré departments that border Côte d’Ivoire.<sup>131</sup> Despite their frustration with corruption, key informants and focus group participants still expressed gratitude for any security providers being present at all.<sup>132</sup> “They reassure us”, one female trader from Wechiau said.<sup>133</sup>

Border security operations and trade restrictions have especially impacted women,<sup>134</sup> who are the primary buyers and sellers of cereals, vegetables, and other ‘store-bought’ items in the Wa–Batié borderland crossing.<sup>135</sup> Women said the numerous checkpoints and delays they were subjected to often caused their perishable goods to spoil in the sun, significantly reducing their value.<sup>136</sup> As a result, they said they often gave bribes to security officers to pass at informal crossings or to expedite passage at regular checkpoints to ensure they reach markets in time.<sup>137</sup>

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125 Five KIIs in Wechiau, Wa Municipal District, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

126 Respondents reported that the police would explain that these fees go to escort services, whether they asked to be escorted or not. Two KIIs in Wechiau, Wa Municipal District, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

127 Ten KIIs in Wechiau and Wa, Ghana, reported that their livelihoods are now at risk because they are not able to financially keep up with the fees they are charged at border crossings.

128 Four female KIIs in Wechiau, Wa Municipality, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

129 KII with female trader, Wechiau, Wa Municipality, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

130 FGD in Batié, Nounbiél Province, Sud-Ouest Region, Burkina Faso, January 2024. This is because Burkinabé authorities have prioritised security forces being present in areas that are currently under siege by VEOs, and have instead deployed VDP to the Sud-Ouest, where they operate in fewer numbers.

131 Three KIIs with traders in Batié, Nounbiél Province, Sud-Ouest Region, Burkina Faso, December 2023.

132 FGD with traders, Wechiau, Wa Municipality, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

133 KII with female trader, Wechiau, Wa Municipality, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

134 OECD and Sahel and West Africa Club 2019, ‘Women and Trade Networks in West Africa’.

135 Ibid; FGD in Wa, Wechiau, Wa Municipal District, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

136 KII with female trader in Wechiau, Wa Municipality, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

137 FGD with traders in Wechiau, Wa Municipality, Upper West Region, Ghana, December 2023.

# Considerations for policy and programming in the Wa, Hamile, and Paga border regions

The multi-faceted supply chain of illicit goods moving through the tri-border space between Batié, (Burkina Faso), Wa (Ghana), and Bouna (Côte d'Ivoire) operates largely unimpeded by security forces of governmental authorities. The prevalence of serious organised crime in this corner of West Africa presents real risks of instability for the broader sub-region. Because illicit supply chains and informal trade-related activities are so complex and deeply embedded in the socio-economic dynamics of the tri-border region, they are not easily disrupted by anti-trafficking initiatives that aim to target the financing of VEOs. Such VEO activities, including gold trafficking, generate livelihoods and income for locals. Government initiatives that do not recognise this reality could trigger reactions from the civilian population that works in gold mining, and from the armed groups and criminal organisations that benefit from these illicit activities, potentially allowing the latter to exploit resulting vulnerabilities among locals.<sup>138</sup>

Ghana has yet to experience the same level of violent VEO insurgency as neighbouring Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, and Burkina Faso. As a result, the country's authorities believe that the insurgency is being contained through patrolling, intelligence, and containment.<sup>139</sup> However, experts interviewed for this research assess that violent extremist groups are quickly expanding into Ghana, conducting operations from small border towns.<sup>140</sup> There are several lessons that can be learned from experiences of the Sahel and Coastal West Africa that can be applied to Ghana's emergent threat.

In 2021, JNIM attacked military installations in northern Côte d'Ivoire in Kafolo and Gbeye. The Ivorian government quickly mobilised a whole-of-government, civilian-inclusive, counterterrorism response on its northern borders.<sup>141</sup> It established a military zone in the north in 2020 that deployed air assets, logistics, and significant human resources and equipment to patrol the northern border for movement from armed groups from Burkina Faso and inside various park spaces – including Comoé National Park. This initiative included, in 2021, the establishment of the Centre de Renseignement Opérationnel Antiterroriste to bolster intelligence capabilities, and the Counterterrorism Academy (known as the AILCT), to reinforce trainings and capacity-building of Ivorian and other West African security partners.

In conjunction with these military operations, Côte d'Ivoire, in 2022, established PS Gouv 2 – the government's second social programme – to address fragility issues in northern border towns by deploying economic, social, and infrastructural development programmes to these communities, and channeling foreign aid in this direction.<sup>142</sup> While not an innovative strategy, its implementation has been novel in its success, as the government has deployed a coordinated development and security framework

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138 Sollazzo, R, and Nowak, M. (2020).

139 Three expert interviews with ministerial officials in the Ministry of National Security, February 2024.

140 Interviews with government officials in Tamale, Gwollu and Paga, Ghana, February 2024.

141 Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Promediation (2022), 'The jihadist threat in northern Ghana and Togo.' <https://www.kas.de/en/web/westafrika/publikationen/einzeltitel/-/content/the-jihadist-threat-in-northern-ghana-and-togo-2..>

142 Assanvo, W. (25 July 2023). *Has Côte d'Ivoire found the solution to violent extremism?* ISS Africa. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/has-cote-divoire-found-the-solution-to-violent-extremism> (accessed September 2024).

to address insecurity in the north, with sufficient resources so far, that appears to be successful in reducing JNIM threats. Its approach provides a useful model for Ghana to follow.<sup>143</sup>

Most experts see a limited, but growing, pattern of insurgent activity around the gold mines of the tri-border area between Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire, which is capitalising on illicit trade networks. Still, the government's quick response does appear to have had some impact: since the 2021 attack, northern Côte d'Ivoire has not experienced the same level of violence from VEOs; in 2022, only three attacks were recorded in the country's northeast, near Bouna, the trade centre close to the Ghanaian and Burkinabé borders. There were no significant attacks in 2023 or in 2024, at time of writing.<sup>144</sup>

Meanwhile, Benin has relied more heavily on a security-forward approach in responding to a similar insurgency from JNIM. This involves the government reclaiming territory in the northern Atakora and Alibori departments, bordering the Sahel and the Park W-Arly-Pendjari complex, and temporarily clearing areas of JNIM through military operations. Nonetheless, VEOs have moved into new areas, south of the borderlands, closer to the middle of the country and eastern border with Nigeria, and continue to violently expand.<sup>145</sup>

In Burkina Faso, the government has limited presence in the Nounbiél Province and has prioritised tackling insecurity elsewhere in the country. Although moderately stable compared to other parts of the country, key indicators of future instability can be identified in southwestern Burkina Faso: a rich trafficking economy, armed actors, and displaced persons. Policymakers and stakeholders must ensure the area receives more attention to prevent it from collapsing under the weight of instability caused by VEOs – as has happened in parts of the country's east and north.

Disrupting these supply chains and pushing communities to seek alternative livelihoods is not a sustainable solution in this region. There are several alternative approaches that are likely to be more effective and less disruptive to residents:

#### **In the short term:**

- Governments should improve local security and governance to reduce reliance on private militias in and around gold mines. They should prioritise allocation of financial resources for training law enforcement and security in how to question and police civilians, without abusing their positions and breeding resentment that VEOs leverage to recruit.
- Government authorities (including local officials such as mayors, law enforcement, and military) should conduct outreach initiatives to strengthen government–civilian relations. This will enable government authorities to more sustainably disrupt illicit flows in the region.

#### **In the long term:**

- Governments should clamp down on corruption by:
  - Deploying more officers in northern Ghana to alleviate stress on individual security personnel, who are often overworked, undercompensated, and alone in remote locations without oversight.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Berger, F. and Zran, A. (2023), 'Between illicit economies and violent extremism'.

<sup>145</sup> de Bruijne, K. (2023), 'Despite military progress, it's not going well in Northern Benin'.

- Establishing a reporting mechanism in Ghana for civilians to anonymously report corruption to local administrative officials. This would provide a means for local authorities to curtail the patronage that senior officials afford officers.
- Hiring locally to improve trust between locals and security providers and promote local job creation.
- Governments should formalise market economies around gold extraction and other trades to undercut the economy that currently contributes little to national GDPs but finances criminal networks. This includes affording more rights to industrial mines and encouraging foreign mining companies to hire local miners.
- International stakeholders should include subregional government authorities, as well as national governments, in their programming to ensure countertrafficking initiatives are properly implemented at the ground level.

Please see the summary report or further policy considerations and recommendations.

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