

Recognising the Local in Borderland Governance

With studies from the Central African Republic, Chad, South Sudan and Sudan



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Design and layout by Molly Taylor-South

Edited by Concordis International

Published by Concordis International

International Dispute Resolution Centre 1 Paternoster Lane London EC2M 7BQ

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References to this publication should be cited using the following format:

Concordis International (ed.) Recognising the Local in Borderland Governance (London: Concordis International, 2025).

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Laura Collins, Consultant Lead Researcher, who led the project's data collection and analysis, and wrote the original report that forms the basis of the final version. As an independent researcher, Laura has conducted extensive research throughout the Central African Republic on the dynamics of non-state armed violence against civilians and the interactions between religious organisations and armed groups.

This research would not have been possible without the assistance and input of many people. We are deeply thankful to the local research teams in each of the three borderlands who provided essential knowledge and expertise during the data collection phase of the study. Special thanks are reserved for all the community members across the three borderlands who gave of their time to participate in the study and who shared their knowledge.

Thanks go to Concordis programme staff, interns and consultants: Peter Marsden, Chris Milner, Nicola Ukiah, Marie Weiller, Timea Szarkova, Jonathan Tossell, Zoe David, Jessica Moody, Celestine Khasoha, Pascaline Magendo, Pari Mounra, Habib Salih Mohamadain, Stephen Mou, Acuil Atem, Kuol Montui, Amal Abdala, Helena Spleiss, Nina Rogers and Molly Taylor-South.

Particular thanks to Wafula Okumu for his contributions to the conception of this project.

Cover photo courtesy of Wildlife Conservation Society www.wcs.org.



Contents :

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Executive Summary | 5 |
| Chapter 1: Introduction | 6 |
| 1.1: Bridging a gap in the study of local cross-border governance | 6 |
| 1.2 Studying the role of local agreements in borderland governance | 6 |
| 1.3 Structure of the report | 8 |
| Chapter 2: Background and Context | 10 |
| 2.1 Traditional neglect of borderlands and borderland communities | 10 |
| 2.2 From state-centric to state hybridity | 11 |
| 2.3 Learning from local agreements within borders | 12 |
| Chapter 3 : Research Methods and Data Collection Processes | 14 |
| 3.1 Research approach | 14 |
| 3.2 Case study selection | 14 |
| 3.3 Data collection process | 14 |
| 3.4 Selection of focus group discussion and key informant interview participants | 17 |
| 3.5 Use of local researchers | 18 |
| 3.6 Challenges in data collection | 18 |
| Chapter 4 : The Sudan-South Sudan borderlands | 20 |
| 4.1 Key sources of inter-community conflict and tension in the Sudan-South Sudan borderlands | 20 |
| 4.2 How local authorities and communities are involved in negotiating and delivering on borderland governance agreements | 21 |
| 4.3. The intersection of local cross-border agreements with national and regional level border governance in Abyei | 25 |
| 4.4. Conclusion | 26 |
| Chapter 5 : The CAR – Chad Borderlands | 27 |
| 5.1 Key sources of inter-community conflict and tension in the CAR-Chad borderlands | 27 |
| 5.2. How local authorities and communities are involved in negotiating and delivering on borderland governance agreements | 28 |
| 5.3. The intersection of local cross-border agreements with national and regional level border governance | 33 |
| 5.4. Conclusion | 33 |
| Chapter 6 : The CAR-Sudan Borderlands | 35 |
| 6.1. Key sources of recent inter-community conflict and tensions in the CAR-Sudan borderlands | 35 |
| 6.2. How local authorities and communities are involved in negotiating and delivering on borderland governance agreements | 37 |
| 6.3. The intersection of local cross-border agreements with national and regional level border governance | 40 |
| 6.4. Conclusion | 40 |
| Conclusions, Implications and Policy Recommendations | 41 |
| Conclusions | 41 |
| Implications | 42 |
| Policy Recommendations | 44 |
| Bibliography | 47 |

Executive Summary

The report examines the role of local cross-border agreements in governing borderlands. It analyses how local authorities and communities are involved in negotiating and delivering on borderland governance agreements that seek to promote peace, security and stabilisation, particularly around the seasonal migration of livestock (transhumance). By examining the effect of local cross-border cooperation and the role of local actors in borderland governance, the report assesses the ways in which local cross-border agreements reflect local realities and prioritise the meaningful participation of diverse local actors. The report also considers how local borderland governance agreements interact with arrangements around national and regional borderland governance.

The report draws on data gathered between October 2023 and March 2024 in three borderland areas in Africa: those shared between the Central African Republic (CAR) and Chad, between CAR and Sudan, and between Sudan and South Sudan.

The report reinforces earlier findings that borderlands are not ungoverned spaces¹. Local communities manage cross-border relations around trade and livelihoods through local agreements. The report finds that local cross-border agreements around transhumance have transformed the livelihood practice from one that is poorly negotiated and largely unregulated at the local level into one that benefits transhumant and settled local borderland communities in the three borderlands.

The report concludes that local borderland governance is – and should be – a ongoing process.² Cross-border dynamics require continual management. Local borderland agreements are an integral feature and essential component of borderland governance. Existing agreements are effective beyond their own impact because they can be used to encourage and shape new agreements, setting a precedent from which to negotiate persistent issues and generating a framework for accountability.

The report identifies three factors that make local agreements more likely to be effective:

1. Agreements work better when local communities affected contribute to the negotiations and terms of the agreements. Local ownership is imperative to build trust and encourage implementation. Diverse actors play a crucial role in initiating, negotiating and delivering on borderland governance.
2. Agreements are more effective when supported by implementation and monitoring mechanisms.
3. Agreements are more likely to succeed when they focus on what needs to be solved, in particular on immediate community needs for security, trade and livelihoods. This may require setting aside broader sources of conflict that cannot be addressed at the local level.

The report concludes with eight recommendations for national and international policy makers to support local cross-border agreements and so contribute to effective borderland governance.



Image 1: Map showing geographical area of research

¹ Risse, Thomas. "Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood: Introduction and Overview," in *Governance Without a State? Policies and Politics in Areas of Limited Statehood*, ed. Thomas Risse (New York: Colombia University Press, 2011): 1-37; Risse, Thomas, Tanja Börzel, and Anke Draude, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Governance and Limited Statehood* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

² Kaldor, Mary, Marika Theros, & Rim Turkmani. "Local agreements - an Introduction to the Special Issue," *Peacebuilding*, 10, no. 2 (2022): 117-118.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1: Bridging a gap in the study of local cross-border governance

This report examines the role of local cross-border agreements in governing borderlands. It is based on research conducted in three borderland areas in Africa: the Central African Republic (CAR) and Chad, CAR and Sudan, Sudan and South Sudan.

Borderlands are adjacent areas of land on the territorial margins of individual states. A hallmark characteristic of borderlands is the critical life sustaining cross-border movement, activity and interaction of the diverse communities that live in these areas.³ Cross-border cooperation and interconnected livelihoods are central to how communities in borderlands navigate these spaces of limited state governance and economic and political marginalisation from traditional centres of power in state capitals. The agency of local communities in these spaces extends beyond passive survival. Borderland “communities can and do organise across international boundaries, create partnerships, negotiate and enter into arrangements to reduce transaction costs that the border imposes.”⁴

There are increasing calls among academics⁵ for analyses of conflict and governance at the regional level to centre borderlands as dynamic “political units” in their own right.⁶ There is also growing awareness among policymakers in African inter-governmental institutions of the need for greater incorporation of local communities in national and regional border management and agreements.⁷

Despite the recognition that borderlands and local borderland communities’ inclusion in governance are important, knowledge gaps remain in the study of local cross-border governance in border regions. There is a lack of in-depth understanding around how local communities work to manage cross-border relations around livelihoods and the free movement of people and livestock through local agreements, and how these agreements interact with national and regional border governance arrangements.⁸

This report represents a significant step forward in bridging this gap by analysing how local authorities and communities in the three borderlands are involved in negotiating and delivering on borderland governance agreements that seek to promote peace, security and stabilisation.

1.2 Studying the role of local agreements in borderland governance

This report leverages data gathered from local people⁹ in three African borderlands: Central African Republic (CAR) and Chad, CAR and Sudan, Sudan and South Sudan (henceforth “the three borderlands”), to analyse the nature, dynamics and processes of local engagement in borderland governance. In response to the initial research question: “What challenges affect security, economic cooperation and sustainable development in the three borderlands?” numerous political and developmental challenges in the borderlands and the livelihoods of the diverse borderland communities were identified. The political instability and conflict the three borderlands have experienced are – in part – rooted in the divisions created during colonialism.¹⁰ Contemporary inter-state competition and confrontation between CAR, Chad and Sudan, and between Sudan and South Sudan have also played a role in shaping cross-border

³ Hlovor, Ishmael Kwabla, “Inclusion of borderlanders in Border Management in Africa: Toward an emancipatory framework for the study and management of African borders,” *International Studies Perspectives* 21, no. 1 (2020): 37-53.

⁴ Hataley, Todd, and Christian Leuprecht, “Determinants of Cross-border Cooperation,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 33, no. 3 (2018): 324.

⁵ Scorgie, Lindsay, “Prominent Peripheries: The Role of Borderlands in Central Africa’s Regionalized Conflict,” *Critical African Studies* 5, no. 1 (2013): 33; Hataley, Todd, and Christian Leuprecht. Determinants of Cross- Border Cooperation, 324; Hlovor, Inclusion of Borderlanders, 37-53.

⁶ Scorgie, *Prominent Peripheries*, 33.

⁷ Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), “Policy Framework on the Nexus between Informal Cross-Border Trade & Cross-Border Security Governance,” Djibouti: IGAD, 2018: 7; African Union (AU), “Draft African Union Strategy for Enhancing Border Management in Africa,” Addis Ababa: AU, 2012: 2, 22; see also African Union (AU), “African Union Strategy for a Better Integrated Border Governance,” Addis Ababa: AU, 2020: 42.

⁸ Kaldor, Theros, and Turkmani. *Local Agreements - an introduction*, 107-121

⁹ Details regarding the local people from whom data was gathered are included in Chapter 3. For a comprehensive list, see section entitled: Selection of focus group discussion and key informant interview participants.

¹⁰ An in-depth review of the impact of history and, particularly, the legacy of colonialism on CAR, Sudan, South Sudan, and Chad is beyond the scope of this research report. For a discussion on the political instability and conflict rooted in the divisions created during colonisations in each of the four countries see, for example, Justin, Peter Hakim, and Lotje De Vries, “Governing Unclear Lines: Local Boundaries as a (Re) source of Conflict in South Sudan,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 34, no. 1 (2019): 31-46; Vaughan, Christopher, “Violence and regulation in the Darfur-Chad borderland c. 1909–56: Policing a Colonial Boundary,” *The Journal of African History* 54, no. 2 (2013): 177-198; Scorgie, *Prominent Peripheries*, 32-47.

instability and community level disputes across the three borderlands: the most obvious example is proxies for states using the borderlands of a competing state as a rear operating base to recruit and hide.¹¹ The three borderlands are each porous to people, goods and livestock, both through licit trade and seasonal livestock migrations (transhumance) and through the illicit movement of armed groups, small arms and contraband.¹²

The three borderlands also face particular issues that have shaped insecurity and cross-border tensions. In the Sudan-South Sudan borderlands, for example, political governance over the Abyei area is contested between Sudan and South Sudan. Abyei's unresolved status has resulted in an absence of formal state-based institutions and compounds local challenges around free movement and access to resources as land conflict is politicised between the two countries.¹³ In the two CAR borderlands, political marginalisation, successive rebellion and inter-state competition have contributed to the insecurity the diverse borderland communities experience.¹⁴

The empirical investigation asked what agreements are in place to address issues affecting cross-border relations, whether these agreements are formal or informal, and how effective they are. The research was also guided by questions about the actors in borderland governance: how often do different local actors meet to discuss issues affecting borderlands and who are the custodians and interpreters of local cross-border arrangements? By examining the effect of local cross-border cooperation and the role of local actors in borderland governance the report assesses the ways in which local cross-border agreements reflect local realities and prioritise the meaningful participation of diverse local actors. The report also considers how local borderland governance arrangements interact with arrangements around national and regional border governance. A supplementary objective of the report is to better understand the potential complementarity of local with national and regional border governance.

In asking about the effectiveness of local agreements, the research centres the perspectives of local people regarding how cross-border governance agreements work to address insecurity and to promote cooperative livelihoods, the free movement of people and livestock and non-violence. As such, the report's findings contribute to existing evidence on state-making at the margins.¹⁵ More specifically, the three borderland cases support existing knowledge that borderlands are not so-called "ungoverned" spaces.¹⁶ Rather, the report shows that myriad actors are involved in regulating these spaces, negotiating local cross-border agreements and delivering on their provisions. The report acknowledges where international NGOs have been involved in facilitating, mediating and supporting local agreements. The report also finds that the role of the state in local governance processes is varied and inconsistent.

¹¹ Carayannis, Tatiana, and Louisa Lombard, eds. *Making Sense of the Central African Republic* (London, UK: Zed Books Ltd, 2015): 38; Stephen W. Smith, "CAR's History: The Past of a Tense Present," in Carayannis, Tatiana, and Louisa Lombard, eds. *Making Sense*, 40. A comprehensive discussion of the inter-state dynamics between CAR and Chad, CAR and Sudan, and between Sudan and South Sudan is beyond the scope of this research report. For more information on the different inter-state dynamics that have affected the three borderlands examined in this report see, for example on Chad/CAR, Tubiana, Jérôme, and Marielle Debos, "Military International Abroad, Challenging Times Ahead," *United States Institute for Peace*, 2017: 1-44, available at: Carayannis, Tatiana, and Louisa Lombard, eds. *Making Sense*; affecting the CAR-Sudan borderlands see, for example, Smith, Stephen W, CAR's History, 17-52; Lombard, Louisa, "The Autonomous Zone Conundrum: Armed Conservation and Rebellion in North-Eastern CAR," in Carayannis, Tatiana, and Louisa Lombard, eds. *Making Sense*, 142-165; Tubiana, Jérôme, "The Chad-Sudan Proxy War and the 'Darfurization' of Chad: Myths and Reality," *Small Arms Survey*, Geneva: Graduate Institute of International Development Studies, 2008: 1-40, available at: <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/HSBA-WP-12-Chad-Sudan-Proxy-War.pdf>; affecting the Sudan-South Sudan borderlands see, for example, Craze, Joshua "Contested Borders: Continuing Tensions over the Sudan-South Sudan Border," *Small Arms Survey*, Geneva: Graduate Institute of International Development Studies, 2014:1-79, available at: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/186152/HSBA-WP34-Contested-Borders.pdf>; Christopher Vaughan, Mareike Schomerus, and Lotje de Vries, ed., *The Borderlands of South Sudan: Authority and Identity in Contemporary and Historical Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Carayannis, Tatiana, and Louisa Lombard, eds. *Making Sense*; affecting the CAR-Sudan borderlands see, for example, Smith, Stephen W, CAR's History, 17-52; Lombard, Louisa, *The Autonomous Zone*, 142-165; Tubiana, Jérôme, "The Chad-Sudan Proxy War and the 'Darfurization' of Chad: Myths and Reality," *Small Arms Survey*, 1-40, available at: <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/HSBA-WP-12-Chad-Sudan-Proxy-War.pdf>; affecting the Sudan-South Sudan borderlands see, for example, Craze, Joshua, 1-79, available at: <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/HSBA-WP34-Contested-Borders.pdf>; Christopher Vaughan, Mareike Schomerus, and Lotje de Vries, ed., *The Borderlands of South Sudan*.

¹² On CAR/Chad see, for example, Concordis International, "Promoting Peaceful and Safe Seasonal Migration in Northern Central African Republic," 2020: 2-97, available at: <https://concordis.international/reports/promoting-peaceful-and-safe-seasonal-migration-in-northern-centralafrican-republic>; Carayannis and Lombard, *Making Sense*. On CAR-Sudan see, for example, Carayannis and Lombard, *Making Sense*; on Sudan-South Sudan see, for example, Vaughan, Schomerus, and de Vries, *The Borderlands of South Sudan*.

¹³ Vaughan, Schomerus, and de Vries, *The Borderlands of South Sudan*; A013 FGD (local people – Noong, Abyei), March 2024; A011 (local people – Dokura, Abyei), March 2024; A011 (CSOs – 01), March 2024.

¹⁴ Carayannis and Lombard, *Making Sense*, 38; Smith, *CAR's History*, 40.

¹⁵ Höhne, Markus Virgil, and Dereje Feyissa, "Centering Borders and Borderlands: The Evidence from Africa," in *Violence on the Margins: States, Conflict, and Borderlands*, ed. Timothy Raeymaekers and Benedikt Korf (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 55-84; Christopher, Schomerus, and de Vries, *The Borderlands of South Sudan*

¹⁶ Risse, Thomas. Areas of Limited Statehood, 1-37; Risse, Börzel, and Draude, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Governance*.

The state is but one authority among many.

In highlighting how diverse local authorities and communities are involved in borderland governance processes, the report's findings underscore the importance of avoiding binaries whereby one set of actors is viewed as more legitimate than another. As the three borderland case studies highlight, customary and traditional authorities play a particularly prominent role in local cross-border governance agreements in place of rational-legal (state) authorities.

The report finds that local community issues both inform and are affected by cross-border governance agreements. Community-based issues are at the heart of local governance in all three borderlands. Many of the agreements focus more on the immediate needs of the community for security, non-violent dispute resolution and access to land for livelihoods than on broader issues of instability, insecurity and rights-based contestation over land. This finding draws parallels with works on local agreements emerging within a single state during internal armed conflict.¹⁷

The report identifies transhumance as a central issue that communities negotiate in the three borderlands, which were conceptualised as extending to an area of approximately 30-50 miles from the international borders on either side. The written and verbal cross border agreements identified during the empirical investigation in the three borderlands focus on addressing issues around transhumance. Despite the numerous and interconnected issues affecting stability in the three borderlands, from the management of natural resources to the presence of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) fleeing conflict, the focus on shaping the behaviours necessary to ensure a peaceful transhumance achieves prominence given that a common feature of all three borderlands is the extent to which they are affected by and dependent on the seasonal migration of livestock.¹⁸

Political dynamics in the three borderlands are influenced by national, regional and international factors. Local cross-border agreements and their provisions to address community needs may be undermined as these political dynamics shift. The report finds that borderland governance is also dynamic: an ongoing process of negotiation and renegotiation. Local borderland agreements are not an end point in that process but an essential component.¹⁹ The diverse actors operating in these areas can reference written agreements, build upon and revise them, and generate new pathways to reshape the micropolitics of cross-border relationships and functioning of borderlands around dialogue and non-violence.

1.3 Structure of the report

The report proceeds as follows: Chapter 2 provides background and context to the report by examining the evolution of how borderlands and borderland governance have been framed and approached. The chapter also refers to bi- and tri-lateral approaches to borderland governance, traditionally characterised by a lack of community involvement. Chapter 2 also draws from more recent works on borderlands, local agreements and peacebuilding that emphasise the importance of the local in governance and stabilisation efforts at the community-level.

Chapter 3 explains the research methods and data collection process used to guide the study of local borderland governance across the three borderland case studies. Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the challenges around gathering data in borderlands and an explanation of the ethical considerations prioritised during the data collection process. As this chapter explains, Concordis International – an international non-governmental organisation, henceforth referred to simply as Concordis – played a key role in developing the study and members of its local field offices in the CAR-Chad, CAR-Sudan, and Sudan-South Sudan borderlands were critical in collecting data.

Chapters 4-6 set out the three borderland case studies. Each chapter is divided into three sections. The first section describes key sources of inter-community conflict and tension in that borderland. The second section examines how local authorities and communities navigate the interconnected local and inter-state contestation to negotiate borderland governance agreements around essential livelihoods. The third section looks at how local cross-border

¹⁷ Pospisil, Jan, "Dissolving Conflict. Local Peace Agreements and Armed Conflict Transitions," *Peacebuilding* 10, no. 2 (2022): 1-16; Duursma, Allard, "Making Disorder More Manageable: The Short-term Effectiveness of Local Mediation in Darfur," *Journal of Peace Research* 58, no. 3 (2021): 554-567; Kaldor, Theros, and Turkmani. *Local agreements – an introduction*; Turkmani, Rim. 2022, "Local Agreements as a Process: The Example of Local Talks in Homs in Syria," *Peacebuilding* 10 (2): 156–171.

¹⁸ Although the report examines written and unwritten local cross-border agreements local borderland communities identified, which predominately address ways to mitigate and prevent sources of crossborder tensions arising directly and indirectly from transhumance, it should be noted that transhumance is not a standalone challenge, but rather one that intersects with others.

¹⁹ In doing so, part of this report builds on Rim Turkmani's work that conceptualises local agreements in Syria (not in a cross-border setting) "as a process of talks that have value in their own right rather than as a discrete event reached on a particular date." For Turkmani, therefore, even talks that fail to produce an agreement are beneficial. See Turkmani, *Local Agreements as a Process*, 156–171.

agreements intersect with national and regional level border governance in the borderland. Each chapter concludes with a discussion of the key lessons learned.

The final chapter provides a brief comparative overview of the role of local cross-border agreements in governing the borderlands. Based on a comparative analysis of the qualitative data presented in the borderland case study chapters, this chapter outlines the report's key findings and their implications. The chapter concludes with a series of policy considerations around how to understand and better support local borderland governance.

Chapter 2: Background and Context

Hämäläinen and Truett describe borderlands as: “ambiguous and often-unstable realms where boundaries are also crossroads, peripheries are also central places, homelands are also passing-through places, and the end points of empire are also forks in the road.”²⁰

Borderlands are regarded by some scholars as places of contested power relations, where societies collide, interact and interconnect; as contested territories, where residents resist the domination of the centre, sometimes with violence; as sites of rebellion embedded in local grievance and narratives of neglect and marginalisation which armed actors use to challenge the state.²¹ The CAR-Chad and CAR-Sudan borderlands are pertinent examples,²² daily lives are often marked by insecurity, referred to by Vaughan, Schomerus, and de Vries as “violent form[s] of authority” imposed from both the centre and the margins.²³

Other scholars note that borderlands and life in these areas are also characterised by bridges of cooperation, points of ethnic linkages, threads of regional cooperation and places of cross-border informal commercial exchange, as borderland communities engage in varied and often overlapping livelihood-generating activities.²⁴ As Hlovor emphasises, borderlands “are confluences of interests and power. Even in the absence of the state, power and control are exercised by local actors.”²⁵ The research in this report builds on and adds to these debates by outlining the key sources of inter-community tension and conflict in the three borderlands and highlighting how local communities and different local authorities seek to navigate around them.

2.1 Traditional neglect of borderlands and borderland communities

The traditional neglect of borderlands and borderland communities in analysis of conflict and governance reflects liberal peace theory, founded on the idea that building strong, democratic and economically liberal states was the best way to ensure the prevention of a recurrence of conflict.²⁶ This approach to peacebuilding and governance led to a focus on state-centric policymaking, almost to the exclusion of those in more remote parts of the country.²⁷ A longstanding emphasis on state sovereignty and power precluded both acknowledgement and consideration of the power, resources and skills that exist in the borderlands.²⁸

A state-centric approach to security led to the securitisation of African borderland governance mechanisms.²⁹ Makinda and Okumu argue that African borderland governance has long been securitised, with borderlands co-opted by regimes to act as extensions of national security policy architecture, justifying a security-first approach to borderland governance ahead of prioritising the needs of borderland communities.³⁰ Similarly, Hlovor points out that: “by defining border security as national security, political actors reserve the privilege to take actions without prior

²⁰ Hämäläinen, Pekka, and Samuel Truett, “On borderlands,” *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (2011): 338-361.

²¹ Vaughan, Schomerus, and de Vries, *The Borderlands of South Sudan*.

²² Carayannis and Lombard, *Making Sense*.

²³ Vaughan, Schomerus, and de Vries, *The Borderlands of South Sudan*, 2.

²⁴ Hlovor, *Inclusion of Borderlanders*, 37-53. See also Clunan, Anne and Harold Trinkunas, “Conceptualizing Ungoverned Spaces: Territorial Statehood, Contested Authority, and Softened Sovereignty,” *Ungoverned spaces: Alternatives to State Authority in an Era of Softened Sovereignty*, ed. Anne Clunan and Harold Trinkunas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010): 17-33; Raleigh, Clionadh, and Caitriona Dowd, “Governance and Conflict in the Sahel’s ‘Ungoverned Space,’” *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2, no. 2 (2013): 1-17; Scorgie, *Prominent Peripheries*, 33; Hataley, Todd, and Christian Leuprecht, *Determinants of Cross-border Cooperation*, 324.

²⁵ Hlovor, *Inclusion of Borderlanders*, 50.

²⁶ Paris, Roland, *At War’s End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 5.

²⁷ Parham, Steven, “Controlling Borderlands? New Perspectives on State Peripheries in Southern Central Asia and Northern Afghanistan,” (Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2010): 31-32, available at: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125700/UPI_FIIA_26_Parham_web.pdf

²⁸ Hlovor, *Inclusion of Borderlanders*, 37-53. See also Clunan and Trinkunas, *Conceptualizing Ungoverned Spaces*, 17-33; Raleigh and Dowd, *Governance and Conflict*, 1-17; Scorgie, *Prominent Peripheries*; Hataley and Leuprecht, *Determinants of Cross-border Cooperation*, 324.

²⁹ Makinda, Samuel, and F. Wafula Okumu, “The African Union as a Human Security Arrangement,” in *Research Handbook on International Law and Human Security*, ed. Gerd Oberleitner (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022): 388-390. For a discussion regarding other regions see, for example, Parham, *Controlling Borderlands?* For a discussion around the militarisation of borders in North America, for example, see Jones, Reece, and Corey Johnson, “Border Militarisation and the Re-articulation of Sovereignty,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 41, no. 2 (2016): 187-200.

³⁰ Makinda and Okumu, *The African Union*, 388-390; Hlovor, *Inclusion of Borderlanders*, 37-53.

³¹ See Hlovor, *Inclusion of Borderlanders*, 37-53.

consultation with border residents.”³¹ Borderland policies and agreements developed and enacted through the prism of national security are also easier to implement where the state has a limited relationship with border communities, or in a context where it fears the potential strength of border communities vis-à-vis the state.

As Hlover argues, such perceptions of the national interest and policies, which guide state strategies, are insufficient for addressing the numerous security and other community-based challenges that borderland communities face.³² A focus on traditional security and military strength to secure borders, in addition to shows of force to address permeability, is often set against a local need for free movement across these borders for livelihoods.³³ Consequently, African borderland governance has been characterised historically by an absence of robust bilateral cooperation around the management of cross-border movement involving either local authorities or the borderlands communities affected.³⁴ Negotiations that led to the 2012 signing of a bilateral technical cooperation agreement between CAR and Chad on the movement of pastoralists and livestock, for example, failed to consult or involve borderland communities engaged in these livelihood activities or representatives from the technical agencies with the mandate to regulate the livestock sectors in CAR and Chad. Neither were informed of the negotiations and the provisions in the agreement. The weakness of the technical agencies to enforce their respective mandates owing to years of neglect by both governments meant that they would also have been unable to deliver on the governance agreement, so that both the process through which the agreement came to be and the agreement itself were fundamentally flawed.³⁵

2.2 From state-centric to state hybridity

The state-centred approach to policy making and delivering ‘security’ at borderlands stands in stark contrast to a growing awareness of the importance of local borderland communities.

Regional African policymakers have called in recent years for a greater inclusion of local communities in border management and in negotiating and delivering on borderland governance agreements. The Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) policy framework on the nexus between informal cross-border trade (ICBT) and cross-border security governance aims to mainstream ICBT concerns into economic development plans and governance strategies and include borderland communities in decisions affecting their lives.³⁶ The African Union (AU) 2012 “Strategy for Enhancing Border Management in Africa” had the “involvement of local communities” in borderland management as one of its three pillars³⁷ and the redrafted strategy, adopted in 2020, includes “fostering borderland development and community engagement” as its fifth pillar.³⁸ This approach requires governments at the national level to acknowledge and recognise local arrangements, formal or informal, that transcend boundaries, as well as their possible complementarity to national and regional level borderland governance. In some cases, this may require governments to reframe their inclusion of the local given emerging evidence to suggest that, even when political elites espouse these locally embedded processes, they do so “more in their form than in their spirit – while at the same time alienating actors who participate in these infrastructures.”³⁹

The awareness of the importance of local borderland spaces amongst policymakers mirrors the growing trend in academic circles on African borderlands to centre these areas in analyses on the dynamics of “state-making as a process.”⁴⁰ In doing so, this scholarship emphasises the agency of local authorities and communities “in imparting meaning to the border and helping to set the parameters of state engagement.”⁴¹ This overlaps with a move away from liberal peace theory towards an understanding that sustainable peacebuilding requires the involvement of local communities and their ownership of peace-oriented processes where conflict is felt, acknowledging that where peace

³² Ibid; Vaughan, Schomerus, and de Vries, *The Borderlands of South Sudan*, 2; Carayannis and Lombard, *Making Sense*.

³³ Hataley and Leuprecht, *Determinants of Cross-border Cooperation*, 317-328.

³⁴ International Crisis Group, “The Security Challenges of Pastoralism in Central Africa,” Africa Report N°215, Brussels: ICG, 2014, 1-33, available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/security-challenges-pastoralism-central-africa#:~:text=In%20the%20last%20few%20years,of%20cultivated%20areas%20and%20an> Vaughan, Schomerus, and de Vries, *The Borderlands of South Sudan*.

³⁵ International Crisis Group, *Security Challenges of Pastoralism*, 1-33.

³⁶ Intergovernmental Authority on Development, *Policy Framework*, 7.

³⁷ African Union (AU), “Draft African Union Strategy for Enhancing Border Management in Africa,” Addis Ababa: AU, 2012: 2, 22.

³⁸ See African Union (AU), “African Union Strategy for a Better Integrated Border Governance,” Addis Ababa: AU, 2020: 42.

³⁹ Niyonkuru, René Claude, and Régina Ndayiragije. “Whose Peace Agenda First? Unravelling the Tensions between National Peace Processes and Local Peacebuilding in Burundi,” in *Confronting Peace: Local Peacebuilding in the Wake of a National Peace Agreement*, ed. Susan Allen et al. (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2022): 251-277.

⁴⁰ Vaughan, Schomerus, and de Vries, *The Borderlands of South Sudan*, 2; Hataley and Leuprecht, *Determinants of Cross-border Cooperation*, 2

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Autesserre, Séverine, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 8.

agreements are formed locally, they are more likely to be held.⁴²

There has been a conceptual shift in peacebuilding and state-building literature from understandings dominated by narratives of fragile states with ungoverned margins to ones that acknowledge myriad actors engaged in governance processes.⁴³ This focus on “state hybridity” has led to empirical and theoretical investigations to better understand the constitutive parts of the local⁴⁴ and their role in shaping political order and governance. The hybridity framing reaffirms an understanding of borderland governance as efforts and initiatives undertaken by a variety of actors from local authorities (state and non-state), local communities and organisations, international government and non-governmental organisations. The local in borderlands and, by extension, local borderland governance agreements and arrangements “can take subnational or transnational forms,” underscoring the unique “translocal” character of borderland governance.⁴⁵

This report reflects the move towards “state hybridity”. It defines the ‘local’ in local border agreements as encompassing any “agreement that refers to a geographical area that is less than the entire national territory even though both actors and issues may be national, international, and regional as well as local.”⁴⁶ It refers to borderland governance as the efforts and initiatives undertaken by various actors operating locally to mitigate dispute from escalating and creating and deepening cross-border cooperation.⁴⁷ Borderland governance is underpinned by mutual arrangements, initiatives and policies that enhance security, cross-border interactions and the livelihoods of local communities. By acknowledging the ‘hybridity’ embedded in local cross-border governance, the report reinforces the notion that borderlands are not “ungoverned” spaces.⁴⁸ Rather, of the diverse actors operating in borderlands negotiating and delivering on cross-border governance agreements, the state is one among many.⁴⁹ Acknowledging this hybridity allows for a more nuanced understanding of questions of local agency and the dynamics of ownership surrounding local borderland agreements, including the processes through which local authorities and communities come to play a role in negotiating borderland governance agreements and, thereafter, delivering on them (or otherwise).

2.3 Learning from local agreements within borders

The report also draws from and builds on recent leading contributions that examine local agreements negotiated during internal armed conflict within the borders of a single state.⁵⁰ Local agreements in such settings have been shown to be more oriented toward conflict management than broader conflict transformation⁵¹ and “do not necessarily work towards a linear and sequenced resolution of a conflict,” “but towards dissolving it by undermining the conflict’s logics and conditions.”⁵² Allard Duursma’s examination of local mediation in Darfur emphasises the ability of these agreements to successfully “manage [not transform] disorder.”⁵³ Rim Turkmani’s analysis of local

⁴³ For a broader discussion on the local turn in peacebuilding and the “everyday” see, for example, Boege, Volker, M. Anne Brown, and Kevin P. Clements, “Hybrid Political Orders, Not Fragile States,” *Peace Review* 21, no. 1 (2009): 13–21; Nadarajah, Suthaharan and David Rampton, “The Limits of Hybridity and the Crisis of Liberal Peace,” *Review of International Studies* 41, no. 1 (2015): 49–72.

⁴⁴ Randazzo, Elisa. “The Paradoxes of the ‘everyday’: Scrutinising the Local Turn in Peace Building,” *Third World Quarterly*, 37, no. 8 (2016): 1351–1370; Forsyth, Miranda et al., “Hybridity in Peacebuilding and Development: A Critical Approach,” *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 2, no. 4 (2017): 407–421; Roberts,

D., “Post-conflict peacebuilding, liberal irrelevance and the locus of legitimacy,” *International Peacekeeping*, 18, no. 4 (2011): 410–424.

⁴⁵ Heathershaw, John, and Daniel Lambach, “Introduction: Post-Conflict Spaces and Approaches to Statebuilding,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 2, no. 3 (2008): 282; see also Scorgie, *Prominent Peripheries* for further use.

⁴⁶ Kaldor, Theros, and Turkmani, *Local Agreements-an Introduction*, 107–121.

⁴⁷ Vaughan, Schomerus, and de Vries, *The Borderlands of South Sudan*; Hämäläinen and Truett, *On Borderlands*, 338–361; Hataley and Leuprecht, *Determinants of Cross-border Cooperation*; Hlovor, *Inclusion of Borderlanders*.

⁴⁸ Risse, *Areas of Limited Statehood*; Risse, Börzel, and Draude, *Governance and Limited Statehood*.

⁴⁹ Ibid. This discussion is also prominent in the subfield of civil war studies that examines so-called “ungoverned spaces” within the territorial confines of states. See Metelits, Claire, *Inside insurgency: Violence, Civilians, and Revolutionary Group Behavior* (New York: NYU Press, 2009): 6; Mampilly, Zachariah Cherian, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Arjona, Ana, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, eds. *Rebel Governance in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Arjona, Ana, *Rebelocracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁵⁰ Pospisil, *Dissolving Conflict*, 1–16; Duursma, *Making Disorder More Manageable*, 554–567; Kaldor, Theros, and Turkmani, *Local Agreements-an Introduction*, 107–121; Turkmani, *Local Agreements as a Process*, 156–171.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Pospisil, *Dissolving Conflict*, 1.

⁵³ Duursma, *Making Disorder More Manageable*, 554–567.

⁵⁴ Turkmani, *Local Agreements as a Process*, 156–171.

agreements in a Syrian town goes a step further, arguing that even in cases where parties to a dialogue fail to reach an agreement, the surrounding dialogue processes can have significant positive implications for levels of violence.⁵⁴

Although local agreements negotiated in a single state during armed conflict rarely seek to foster positive peace by addressing the underlying institutions and structures that perpetuate violence, for Jan Pospisil they can nevertheless generate “tangible peace dividends” by negotiating provisions for local community-based needs related to freedom of movement, livelihoods and security.⁵⁵ In doing so, local agreements have the potential to move local “logics of conflict towards logics of ‘civiness,’”⁵⁶ enough to improve the everyday lives of borderland communities.

⁵⁵ Pospisil, *Dissolving Conflict*, 14; Lino, Martin Ochaya, “Local Peace Agreement in Abyei: Achievements, Challenges and Opportunities,” Conflict Research Programme, The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), 2020, 15.

⁵⁶ Pospisil, *Dissolving Conflict*, 3.

Chapter 3 : Research Methods and Data Collection Processes

3.1 Research approach

The study adopted an exploratory case study approach grounded in qualitative research methods. This was appropriate given the study's aim of gaining a deeper understanding of an emerging topic and the nature of the guiding research questions, which focused on the "what" and "how" of local cross-border governance.⁵⁷ The study asked:

- What challenges affect local borderland governance?
- What mechanisms are in place to address issues affecting cross-border relations?
- How do local agreements interact with national and regional level border governance?

The exploratory case study approach was also appropriate because it provided ways to gather in-depth insights about different outcomes linked to the social phenomenon being studied to generate a "thick description"⁵⁸ and because of its flexibility in adapting to changes during the research process and its capacity to engage stakeholders in identifying problems and potential solutions.

3.2 Case study selection

Three primary indicators guided the selection of the three borderland case studies:

- i. An awareness that agreements existed in each of the borderlands, whether written or verbal, negotiated with or without the presence, support or facilitation of national, regional or international government and non-governmental entities and irrespective of the issues the agreements addressed.
- ii. The presence of local teams able to support the logistics of field research and data collection.
- iii. The availability of existing data on the challenges affecting local border communities.

3.3 Data collection process

The data collection process used a mixed qualitative methods approach.

Collection took place across eleven local field sites, spread over the three borderlands in four countries: Chad, the Central African Republic (CAR), Sudan and South Sudan (see Image 1 below).

A questionnaire collected information about four key interconnected cross-border issues: security; the movement of people, goods, and animals, particularly linked to seasonal transhumance; local state and non-state cooperation; and the prevention, mitigation, and management of cross-border disputes. The questionnaire also requested information on the local arrangements, processes, mechanisms or agreements in place to address (1) the issues affecting borderland communities; (2) the involvement of local authorities and communities in discussions surrounding their development; and (3) whether local agreements affecting cross-border relations are reflected in bilateral and multilateral agreements on cross-border cooperation. The questionnaire was designed to generate insights into how local authorities and communities are involved in negotiating and delivering on borderland governance agreements, how this relates to existing regional borderland governance and how agreements developed to manage cross-border issues relate to existing regional borderland governance or could complement future approaches.

⁵⁷ Yin, Robert K, *Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2014).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Data Collection Field Sites

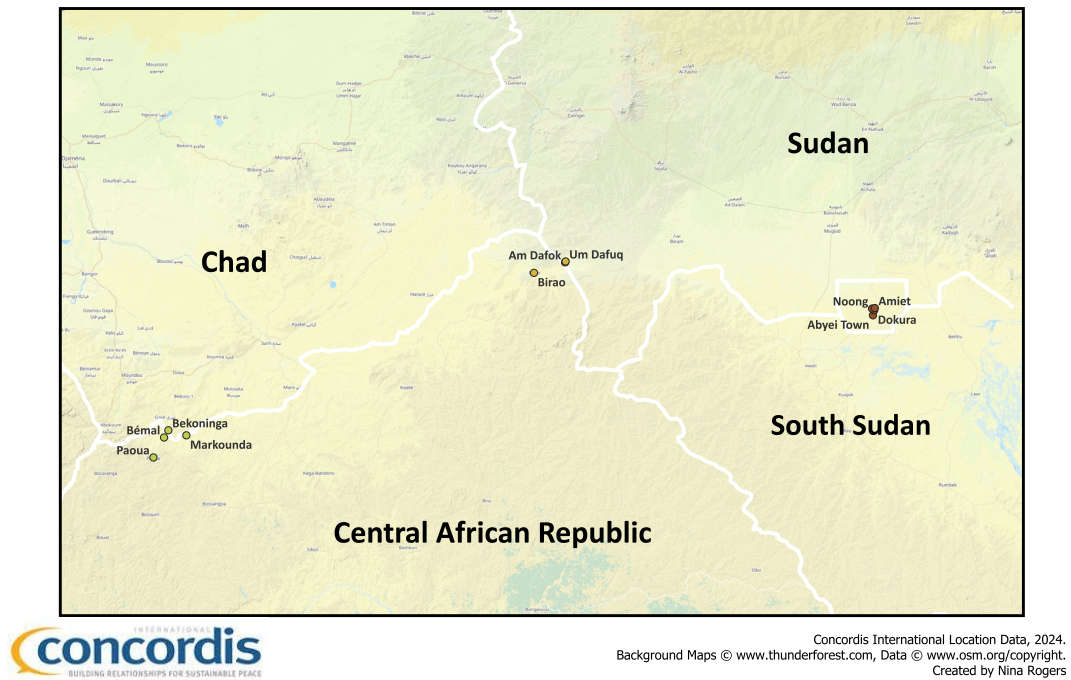


Image 2: Data collection field site

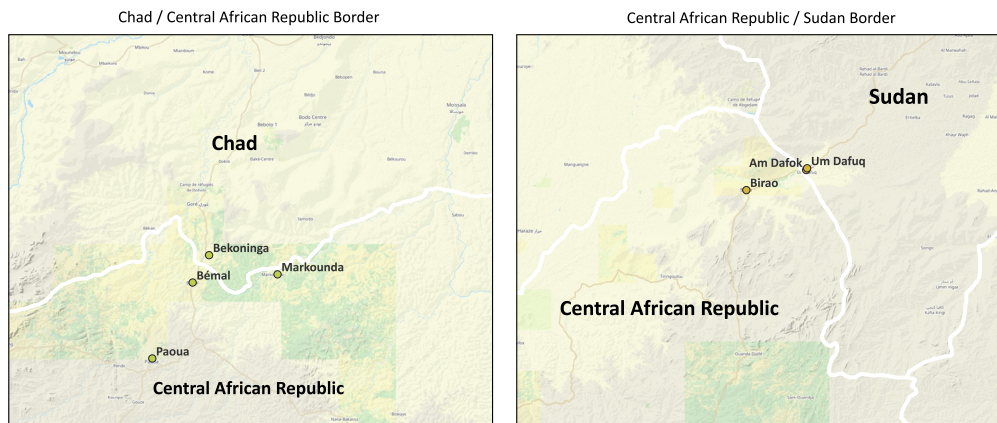
Using information from the questionnaire as the basis for interview questions and the focus group script, the research teams engaged in qualitative research and conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant semi-structured interviews (KIs). The number and locations of FGDs and KIs are set out in Figure 1 and the locations in the accompanying maps (Image 2 and Image 3) below.

| Primary field research October '23 to March '24 | Focus group discussions (no.) | Key informant interviews (no.) | Participants (no.) | Data collection locations |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| CAR-Chad | 5 | 3 | 63 | Paoua, Bémal, & Markounda (CAR) Bekoninga (Chad) |
| CAR-Sudan | 7 | 8 | 97 | Birao & Am Dafok (CAR) Um Dafok (Sudan)* |
| Sudan-South Sudan | 9 | 12 | 78 | Abyei town (central cattle corridor) Amiet & Dokura (central cattle corridor), Noong (western cattle corridor) |
| Total | 21 | 23 | 238 | |

*KII conducted virtually using an encrypted phone line

Figure 1: Number and locations of FGDs and KIs.

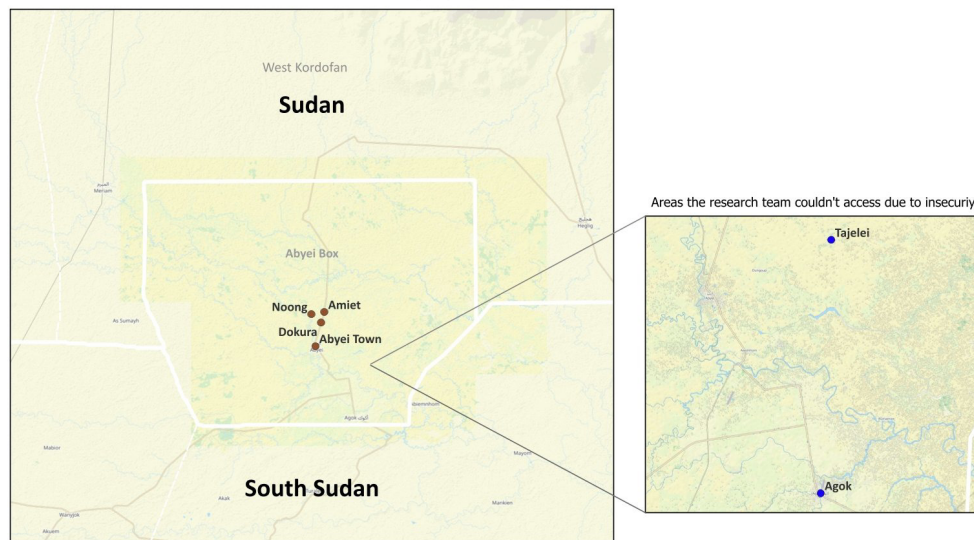
**Image 3: Data Collection Field Sites: CAR-Chad Borderlands;
CAR-Sudan Borderlands**



Concordis International Location Data, 2024.
Background Maps © www.thunderforest.com, Data © www.osm.org/copyright.
Created by Nina Rogers

Image 3: Data Collection Field Site: CAR-Chad Borderlands; CAR-Sudan Borderlands

**Data Collection Field Sites: Sudan-South Sudan
Borderlands**



Concordis International Location Data, 2024.
Background Maps © www.thunderforest.com, Data © www.osm.org/copyright.
Created by Nina Rogers

Image 4: Data Collection Field Site: Sudan-South Sudan Borderlands

The research teams in each borderland case study administered the questionnaire using purposive sampling, a non-probability/non-representative sampling technique widely used in small-scale qualitative research studies in conflict-affected contexts. The research teams likewise used purposive sampling to develop lists of prospective participants for KIIs and FGDs. Purposive sampling allowed for the identification and selection of individuals in all three borderland case studies who had in-depth knowledge of local cross-border security and governance, managing cross-border and inter-group disputes, and negotiating local formal and informal agreements to reduce tensions and promote cooperation and stability.

Informal conversations between Concordis staff and local community actors provided an important additional layer of context to better understand how and who initiated local cross-border dialogue processes. The lead researcher cross referenced insights gathered from the KIIs and FGDs with information provided by Concordis staff to validate and increase the reliability of the data. Where possible, the lead researcher also gathered and reviewed written versions of local cross-border agreements in each borderland.

All the FGDs and all but one of the KIIs were conducted in person by members of the core research teams. A member of the Concordis Darfur team conducted the virtual interview in Arabic, using an encrypted phone line. In addition to Arabic, which was also used to take notes in Abyei, the research teams conducted KIIs and FGDs in French and Sango (the lingua franca of CAR). The research teams in the borderlands of CAR-Sudan and Sudan-South Sudan translated and transcribed the Arabic language KII and FGD notes into English for the lead researcher. Notes from KIIs and FGDs held in Sango were translated and transcribed into French by the research team in the CAR-Chad borderlands. The transcripts in English and French formed the basis of the analysis conducted by the lead researcher.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview and focus group data collected in each borderland thematic to identify patterns and recurring ideas on the role of local cross-border agreements in borderland governance. The thematic analysis was conducted over multiple stages. First, to organise the data, the thematic analysis entailed applying broad coded themes to the primary data. Secondly, the initial codes were refined, with some similar and related themes merged. The meaning of each theme was then further refined through the development and inclusion of subthemes. Subthemes helped provide the descriptive content of the larger themes, which were analysed theoretically through: the lens of local, national and regional participation and collaboration in borderland governance; how a local cross-border agreement enhanced (or not) security, cross-border relations and the livelihoods of borderland communities; and how an agreement's provisions interacted with national and regional border arrangements.

3.4 Selection of focus group discussion and key informant interview participants

Across all three borderland case studies, the research teams carried out in-depth KIIs and FGDs with individuals involved in negotiating or supporting cross-border agreements, including local (state) military and political authorities, administrative officials (Abyei), informal authorities (customary chiefs and elders, traditional and religious leaders), community representatives and members of local, national or international civil society organisations, including youth and women's organisations. In both CAR borderlands, the members of local Committees of the Wise participated in FGDs. These committees are made up of elders elected locally by their respective communities. In the Sudan-South Sudan borderlands, representatives from Abyei's Joint Community Peace Committee (JCPC) participated in FGDs. The JCPC emerged from a 2016 peace agreement signed between leaders from the Ngok Dinka agro-pastoral community and the Misseriya Arab nomadic cattle herding tribes.⁵⁹

To ensure a diversity of testimonies within and across the key target research populations in each borderland case study and, by extension, increase data reliability, each of the research teams also invited wider community participation in the FGDs from among local people whose lives are influenced and – at times – regulated by local cross-border governance agreements but who were not directly involved in either their negotiation or renegotiation. These included local traders, including women who regularly cross the international borders to access markets to buy and sell goods, farmers, herders, butchers and other artisans. The research teams organised meetings by drawing first from Concordis' extensive network of contacts and linkages with these individuals and members of other key informant groups in the three borderlands. These relationships, established through ongoing programming in the borderlands, made it possible to identify, contact and invite an initial set of people to participate in the KIIs and FGDs. This strategy was combined with snowball sampling, whereby the research teams asked these participants to assist in identifying other potential participants who were then invited to participate in either a KII or FGD. This

⁵⁹ The Ngok Dinka – Misseriya Peace Accord on 25 February 2016, English/Arabic agreement, archival document, available from Concordis International.

additional sampling method was employed to include a wider set of attitudes and opinions on the role of various local agreements and arrangements in cross-border governance.

In the two CAR borderland case studies, the research teams also invited members of local Advisory Groups present on the CAR side of the border to participate in KIs and FGDs on the role of cross-border agreements in borderland governance. Established by Concordis, Advisory Groups are involved in promoting and facilitating negotiated solutions to conflicts between semi-nomadic communities, transhumant herders (from CAR and neighbouring Chad and Sudan) and members of settled populations, including farmers. They are also engaged in fostering greater interconnectedness and solidarity (social cohesion) among various local populations, organising events on transhumance with local stakeholders and acting as interlocutors between local actors and political authorities, focused on sharing recommendations from local meetings with these decision makers.

3.5 Use of local researchers

The lead researcher worked with country teams from Concordis operating along the northern border of CAR, in South Darfur (southwest Sudan) and Abyei (Sudan-South Sudan borderlands). The Concordis country teams are largely made up of local staff who have established links and trusted relationships with borderland communities, stemming from their locally led peacebuilding efforts, particularly around community dialogue and ensuring more peaceful cross-border transhumance. The existing trust between Concordis staff and local communities in all three borderlands allowed the research teams to recruit local actors to participate in the research. It also increased confidence that local actors would respond openly to questions about the challenges present in their locality and the involvement of their local authorities (state and non-state) in negotiating and, thereafter, delivering on borderland governance.

3.6 Challenges in data collection

Examining the effectiveness, influence and local ownership of cross-border agreements that seek to promote peaceful relations, security and stabilisation and local livelihoods in the three borderlands presented methodological, security and ethics-related challenges.

3.6.a Methodological challenges

Demarcating borderlands is challenging, particularly given the fluidity of issues facing borderlands and the inherent transboundary nature of these dynamics, which defy bounded conceptualisations. The research teams conceptualised the three borderlands as extending to an area of approximately 30-50 miles from the international borders separating the individual countries on either side. This approach provided sufficient geographical scope to understand the role and reach of cross-border mechanisms in borderland governance, while also being manageable for a small-scale research study requiring fieldwork.

The research team was also aware of potential research reliability challenges arising from the purposive sampling method. While care was taken to cross reference to validate and increase the reliability of the data, the team acknowledges that there may be individuals who were not selected for FGDs or KIs who would have expressed different opinions to those captured here.

3.6.b Security challenges

The potential for rapid shifts in the local security situation required flexibility, allowing the research teams to adjust data collection and fieldwork plans in response to the shifting security context in each of the borderlands.

Due to heightened insecurity across the Sudan-South Sudan and CAR-Sudan borderlands, some previously selected field sites in these areas were excluded from data collection. Security constraints in the Sudan-South Sudan borderlands emerged along the eastern (cattle) corridor in villages such as Tajelei and Agok, limiting the geographical

scope of fieldwork in these borderlands. In late 2023 and early 2024, villages such as Marial Achak and Rumamer in the eastern corridor experienced increased violence,⁶⁰ including abductions, cattle raiding and arms trafficking.⁶¹ The research team was unable to carry out fieldwork in these locations [see image 3 page 16 above]. Data collection in the CAR-Sudan borderlands was similarly constrained due to the escalating security situation in Sudan from April 2023. The two main factions of Sudan's military government, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a Sudanese paramilitary group, engaged in a violent power struggle which created violence across Sudan, including in the Darfur region that borders eastern CAR.⁶² The research team was unable to travel north along the major route connecting Birao to the border towns of Danai and Tissi,⁶³ located at the intersection of the CAR-Chad-Sudan borders. Data collection in the CAR-Chad borderlands encountered no security challenges.

3.6.c Ethical considerations

Throughout the study, the research teams followed a strict ethical protocol and 'do no harm' approach. To guarantee the confidentiality of FGD and KII participants, no names or personal data were collected from those who agreed to take part in this study: researchers recorded only the locations and dates of the KIIs and FGDs, alongside the social category of each participant (e.g. villager, civil society representative, religious authority). The lead researcher coded the KII data based on this information, assigning each KII transcript with a numerical code. The FGDs were similarly coded, with an added "FGD" abbreviation.

All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that they could withdraw from a KII or FGD at any time. The research teams obtained informed consent verbally. No statements made by participants during either the KIIs or the FGDs are directly attributed to them in this paper.

None of the KIIs or FGDs were recorded by any of the research teams. This is standard practice by Concordis to ensure that participants feel able to talk as openly and honestly as possible without fear of individual attribution and potential ensuing retaliation. Concordis has built a relationship of trust with the communities and individuals with whom they work and it is this level of trust that gave our researchers access to communities to conduct the fieldwork.

⁶⁰ Bark, Achol, and Clionadh Raleigh. "Violence Rises Across South Sudan's Disputed Abyei State | ACLED Insight." Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED). February 9, 2024. Available at <https://acleddata.com/2024/02/09/acled-brief-violence-rises-across-south-sudans-disputed-abyei-state/>; United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). "UNISFA condemns attacks on civilians and peacekeepers, calls for immediate end to violence in Abyei." UNISFA, Office of the Spokesperson, Press Statement. February 5, 2024. Available at <https://unisfa.unmissions.org/unisfa-condemns-attacks-civilians-and-peacekeepers-calls-immediate-end-violence-abyei>.

⁶¹ UN (United Nations) Human Rights Council. *Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan*, Fifty-fifth session 26 February–5 April 2024. A/HRC/55/26. New York, USA: 2024. Available at <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/033/78/pdf/g2403378.pdf> Conversation with local Sudan-South Sudan borderlands research team on the security situation

⁶² ACAPS, "ACAPS Briefing Note - Sudan: Conflict, 19 April 2023," April 19, 2023, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/acaps-briefing-note-sudan-conflict-19-april-2023>.

⁶³ Every effort was made to geocode these two locations, but it was not possible to find accurate enough coordinates. Consequently, the map indicating the field site locations in the CAR-Sudan borderlands only includes the localities that the research team were able to access and subsequently geolocate.

Chapter 4 : The Sudan-South Sudan borderlands

4.1 Key sources of inter-community conflict and tension in the Sudan-South Sudan borderlands

The Abyei Administrative Area (AAA) is situated in the borderlands of Sudan and South Sudan. The area is politically contested due to an unresolved dispute between the two countries over sovereign control of this borderland region. Abyei's unresolved political status has resulted in the area being underdeveloped and the absence of formal state-based institutions, including the police and judiciary.⁶⁴ Community leaders report that the lack of these formal institutions has contributed to insecurity in the area as local youth arm themselves to protect their land and communities.⁶⁵

4.1.a Historical inter-community tensions

Political and military competition and confrontation between Sudan and South Sudan over control of Abyei intersects with and fuels contestation in the borderlands between local authorities over land ownership and access.⁶⁶ This overlapping contestation⁶⁷ has significantly affected the cross-border relations, free movement and livelihoods of the diverse local communities in the area.

Violence and cycles of displacement in the disputed area have fuelled the perception among agro-pastoral Ngok Dinka that other ethnic groups want Ngok Dinka land for their livelihoods. As one villager from Dokura said: "both Misseriya and Twic [Dinka] want to take our land; it is rich with grass, trees, and good soil for agriculture and we have oil, too."⁶⁸ Another villager from Dokura echoed this sentiment, claiming, "Misseriya claims all Abyei area and Twic [Dinka] claims land south of River Kiir."⁶⁹ Such perceptions are linked to broader and more historic disputes around which ethnic groups have residency rights in Abyei, how residency is determined, and related contestation around land ownership. The pastoralist Misseriya in Abyei claim their right to move through the region with their livestock, not as transhumant cattle herders migrating from outside of Abyei with no right to residency, but rather as a people in Abyei moving through the area (emphasis added).⁷⁰

4.1.b Wider security concerns and localised sources of violence

More immediate sources of violence impact the livelihoods and everyday security of Abyei's diverse local communities. As one local official noted, "nobody would talk about satisfaction with security here in Abyei."⁷¹ Local authorities, community leaders, and villagers across Abyei all emphasised the constant presence of armed youth and local militia in the area and the effects of their criminal activities, including arbitrary taxation, cattle raiding and theft,⁷² Local villagers, officials and civil society representatives all referred to the smuggling and circulation of small arms and light weapons into Abyei from adjacent regions that has resulted in an escalation of confrontations over cattle, the burning of pastureland, and destructive cycles of reprisal and retribution targeting communities.⁷³

⁶⁴ To compensate for the lack of an official joint (Misseriya-Ngok Dinka) police force, the UN mission present in Abyei, UNISFA, set up a Community Protection Committee in Northern Abyei at the end of June 2022. For more information see United Nations Peacekeeping, "History made as UNISFA Establishes Community Protection Committee in Northern Abyei," June 30, 2022, available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/history-made-unisfa-establishes-community-protection-committee-northern-abyei>

⁶⁵ A001 FGD (Community Leaders – JCPC members), March 2024.

⁶⁶ Lino, *Local Peace Agreement in Abyei*, 1-17.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 6; Vaughan, Schomerus, and de Vries, *The Borderlands of South Sudan*, 2.

⁶⁸ A004 FGD (villager – Dokura, Abyei), March 2024. Separate quote highlighted in a FGD summary. Informal translation into English by the research team.

⁶⁹ A004 (villagers – Dokura, Abyei), March 2024. Separate quote highlighted in a FGD summary. Informal translation into English by the research team.

⁷⁰ 003 Discussion with local Abyei researcher, April 2024.

⁷¹ A002 (local official – Abyei), 11 February 2024.

⁷² A001 FGD (local officials – Abyei), March 2024; A001 FGD (local non-state/civil society representatives – Abyei); A001 FGD (villagers – Noong village, Abyei), March 2024; A002 FGD (villagers – Dokura village, Abyei), March 2024; A002 (villagers – Amiet village, Abyei), March 2024.

⁷³ Ibid.

4.2 How local authorities and communities are involved in negotiating and delivering on borderland governance agreements

4.2.a Local borderland agreements to manage immediate community needs

Negotiations between the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka since 2016 have focused on access to and use of land and free movement through Abyei, from the perspective of immediate community-based needs for security and livelihoods. Local borderland negotiations sought not to resolve the state level Abyei conflict and land ownership disputes, but rather to facilitate and govern essential access and movement through Abyei's pasturelands, divided into three central routes or "cattle corridors."⁷⁴

Consequently, the two formal local borderland agreements of 2016 and 2023 focused on the management of immediate and tangible community-based needs for free movement and other essential conditions for livelihoods, mirroring other local agreements in settings characterised by chronic insecurity.⁷⁵ Prioritising dialogue and negotiations around pressing and interconnected security and livelihood needs of local communities, in highly contested, seemingly intractable inter-state conflict settings, can yield essential improvements in the everyday lives of communities.⁷⁶ Such improvements may be more challenging to achieve at the national or regional level.

Local high-level⁷⁷ customary authorities from within the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities in Abyei were the catalysts for dialogue and negotiations to support the livelihood needs of their communities. The visibly active and prominent role these local customary authorities played in negotiating and delivering on local borderland agreements underscores the importance of engaging appropriate local actors in questions of governance.

In 2016, these Ngok Dinka and Misseriya customary leaders initiated a joint dialogue in the town of Noong in response to an increase in threats to their communities' respective livelihoods.⁷⁸ The economic and livelihood implications on Ngok Dinka communities of the compounded effects of the multi-party civil war in South Sudan; increased resource scarcity; heightened food insecurity in Abyei due to disrupted trading routes and the closure of official border crossings by the Sudanese government in Khartoum⁷⁹ were acute, as were the effects of the drought throughout the Sudan-South Sudan borderlands in 2015 on Misseriya pastoralist communities.⁸⁰ Without access to the essential grazing areas and water points in the Abyei area for their livestock, the drought threatened the Misseriya's livelihood socio-economically and culturally.⁸¹

The joint dialogue process led to the March 2016 Noong accord.⁸² For local people in Abyei, the 2016 Noong accord remains the most consequential agreement for the way in which it "first broke the hot border relations" and bridged a "separation between them [the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya] that had lasted for almost four years,"⁸³ following the killing of Ngok Dinka Paramount Chief, Kuol Deng Kuoby, by Misseriya militia in 2013.

In 2023, following a similar pattern of periodic insecurity and increased violence during the grazing periods, the 2016 Noong agreement was revised in Todach.⁸⁴ A local villager in Noong described the content as being similar to that of the earlier dialogue: "[it] was about the movement of Misseriya cattle [to graze on Ngok Dinka land] and free movement of Ngok people who depend on the bush for living."⁸⁵ The 2023 Todach agreement included written

⁷⁴ The term "cattle corridors" was used throughout the focus group discussions conducted with local people in Abyei.

⁷⁵ Pospisil, *Dissolving Conflict*, 1-16; See also Duursma, *Making Disorder More Manageable*, 554-567; Kaldor, Mary, Theros, and Turkmani, *Local agreements-an Introduction*, 107-121; Turkmani, *Local Agreements as a Process*, 156-171.

⁷⁶ See Pospisil, *Dissolving Conflict*, 1-16.

⁷⁷ A purposeful distinction here is made between local customary authorities. Local (high-level) customary authority in this case refers to a paramount chief present in Abyei. Local customary authority refers to a chief in Abyei of a lower politically influential status who has not been given the paramount chief title.

⁷⁸ "Sudan El Niño Mitigation and Preparedness Plan," 22 February 2016, 1-18, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-el-ni-o-mitigation-and-preparedness-plan>

⁷⁹ Craze, *Contested Borders*, 10.

⁸⁰ Sudan El Niño, 1-18.

⁸¹ Lino, *Local Peace Agreement in Abyei*, 7.

⁸² A013 FGD (villagers – Noong village, Abyei), March 2024; March 2016 Noong Agreement, agreement from a meeting held in Noong on 24 March between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya, Arabic archival document, available from Concordis International.

⁸³ A013 FGD, (local non-state authorities), March 2024. Citation highlighted in FGD summary

⁸⁴ "Seasonal Pre-Migration Conference 12-15 December 2023 – Noong: The Conference's Resolution," English/Arabic archival document, available from Concordis International.

⁸⁵ A013 FGD (villagers – Noong village, Abyei), March 2024. Quote highlighted in a focus group summary discussion.

commitments from both Misseriya and Ngok Dinka representatives to permit “free movement and transportation within [the] Abyei border without any form of restriction.”⁸⁶ The agreement also included provisions for Abyei’s demilitarisation under the purview of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), present at the dialogue.⁸⁷

In addition to the clear contributions made by the local paramount chiefs from both communities, the involvement of external actors may be considered an important tool for the brokering of local borderland agreements. In 2023, external actors involved included Concordis, UN agencies and representatives from UNISFA, all of whom co-organised the dialogue with Ngok Dinka and Misseriya representatives.⁸⁸ Concordis had also played a crucial facilitating role in 2016, bringing together over seven hundred Ngok Dinka and Misseriya representatives who were part of the multi-day negotiations. It is likely that the convening of significant, broad-based representation from both communities was made possible because of this external involvement, which encouraged dialogue beyond the local elites.

4.2.a.i Importance of the 2016 Noong Accord

The importance of the 2016 Noong accord was not limited to the collectively agreed upon provisions or the acknowledgement by Misseriya and Ngok Dinka community representatives of their joint governance responsibilities. Rather, as civil society leaders in Abyei noted, the Noong accord generated “essential outcomes” that – at the time – “contributed fundamentally to reducing tensions.”⁸⁹ Among the outcomes were “locally initiated” informal governance arrangements and a series of additional joint dialogues among various segments of the two communities.⁹⁰

The 2016 Noong agreement was a beginning that established crucial joint implementation mechanisms previously absent and set a precedent for essential and continual dialogue to support livelihoods, freedom of movement and increased security. To that end, the parties agreed and successfully organised meetings around the seasonal pastoralist migration in the Abyei area.⁹¹ The Ngok Dinka and Misseriya representatives present agreed to hold these meetings prior to the start of each seasonal migration southward through Abyei and before the departure of pastoralists northward with the onset of the rainy season. They also agreed to establish the 20-member Joint Community Peace Committee (JCPC) made up of an equal number of customary leaders from both communities, which was functional by May 2016.⁹² The JCPC’s overarching mandate was to resolve conflict and manage disputes between Ngok Dinka and Misseriya to address and mitigate the effects of criminality and impunity linked to cattle raiding, the burning of pasture, abduction and revenge killings.⁹³

4.2.b Interconnected mechanisms for joint local governance

The JCPC became the linchpin of joint local governance in Abyei.⁹⁴ It oversaw the management and organisation of the main cattle corridor routes including cattle conferences around the seasonal pastoralist migration.⁹⁵ It functioned as an arbiter for petty disputes and security incidents from theft and cattle raiding to killings by members of Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities.⁹⁶ JCPC members managed the return of stolen property or determined an equivalent monetary sum to be paid to victims, and oversaw the payment of blood money compensation to families in the event of killings (Diya).⁹⁷ As a traditional conflict management mechanism with the assent of both communities, the JCPC sought through these forms of compensation to prevent disputes from escalating and foster mutual confidence between the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka as envisioned by the Noong agreement.⁹⁸

⁸⁶ “Seasonal Pre-Migration Conference 12-15 December 2023 – Noong: The Conference’s Resolution,” English/Arabic archival document, available from Concordis International.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ A007 FGD (local CSOs - 01), March 2024. Citation highlighted in a FGD summary

⁹⁰ A013 FGD (local CSOs - 01), March 2024. Citation highlighted in a FGD summary.

⁹¹ March 2016 Noong Agreement, Agreement from a meeting held in Noong on 24 March between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya, Arabic archival document, available from Concordis.

⁹² A007 FGD (local CSOs - Abyei), March 2024.

⁹³ March 2016 Noong Agreement, agreement from a meeting held in Noong on 24 March between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya, Arabic archival document, available from Concordis; A003 FDG (local officials - Abyei), March 2024; A013 FGD, (local non-state authorities - Abyei), March 2024; A003 FDG (local people – Noong village, Abyei), 2024; A003 FDG (local people – Dokura village, Abyei), March 2024. See also Lino, *Local Peace Agreement in Abyei*, 1-17.

⁹⁴ A013 FGD (local CSOs - 01), March 2024

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ A005 FGD (local CSOs 01), March 2024.

⁹⁸ Ibid

The significance of the JCPC has also been demonstrated by periods when it has functioned less well. Following the January 2020 massacre, allegedly perpetrated by Misseriya youth on the predominantly Ngok Dinka village of Kolom, the Chief Administrator of Abyei, Kuol Deim Kuol, suspended ten members of the JCPC for having failed to prevent the attack.⁹⁹ Throughout 2020 and 2021, armed attacks and retaliatory violence were left largely unaddressed due to the weakened JCPC. With no new or renewed resolutions reached around governing the corridors or a fully functioning JCPC, the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 grazing periods were marked by violence.¹⁰⁰ This highlights the important precedent the 2016 accord established for an active joint public authority overseeing local governance, disseminating conference deliberation outcomes and resolutions, and recurring dialogue.

During the March 2023 dialogue a major reason cited among participants for the intermittent implementation of the 2016 accord's provisions in recent years was the suspension of the JCPC members.¹⁰¹ The central provision of the March 2023 agreement was the reactivation of the JCPC in its entirety as the principle public authority overseeing local governance. The JCPC has since been reinstated, following South Sudan's appointment of Chol Deng Alak to the position of Abyei Chief Administrator.¹⁰² The parties further agreed to the JCPC reengaging weekly to ensure ongoing and joint communication on dispute resolution to end cycles of violence and rebuild trust and revived the JCPC's leadership over joint community wide peace conferences to be held every three months and to manage the seasonal pastoralist migration.¹⁰³

An essential component of the borderland governance process in Abyei, the peace and pre-seasonal joint Misseriya-Ngok Dinka conferences functioned as a space for further dialogue and an accountability mechanism. Through conferences held from 2016, Misseriya and Ngok Dinka representatives present acknowledged the successful effects of the Noong agreement in addressing immediate community-based needs and discussed implementation gaps, with space to examine, refine and add to existing provisions.¹⁰⁴ In addition to the conferences providing a space to examine the Noong accord's implementation, they presented an opportunity to readdress issues that had been part of the March 2016 dialogue, but for which there were no provisions in the final Noong agreement. For example, during the June 2016 conference, the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya delegates agreed to form a joint community court (JCC) and establish a prison cell in Amiet market.¹⁰⁵ The formation of the court was particularly noteworthy given that the international ambiguity over Abyei's status had resulted in no formal judicial system in the area, limiting women's access in particular to justice and related services following incidents of sexual based violence.¹⁰⁶ During the December 2016 pre-migration conference, Misseriya and Ngok Dinka representatives agreed that the prison cell established in the market had reduced criminal activity.¹⁰⁷

Perhaps most crucially, the ongoing dialogue through the cattle conferences gave Misseriya and Ngok Dinka community representatives a space to examine setbacks, jointly recommit to provisions and agree on steps to prevent a deterioration in their functioning – albeit fragile – relations. In doing so, the conferences played a role in holding the different communities and their leaders to account: placing the focus on the responsibility of each side to ensure the implementation rather than on cycles of blame for specific violations, which would have had the potential of escalating into violence. At the June conference, for example, representatives committed to finalising payment of compensation and return of stolen property more quickly to “promote mutual trust” and “salvage the peace agreement.”¹⁰⁸

⁹⁹ A001 Discussion with Concordis staff/Abyei team, April 2024.

¹⁰⁰ Craze, Joshua, “Attacked from Both Sides: Abyei’s Existential Dilemma,” *Small Arms Survey*, South Sudan HSBA Situation Update Abyei, July 2023, available at: <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/attacked-both-sides-abyeis-existential-dilemma>.

¹⁰¹ This was confirmed in a discussion with a Concordis staff member. 001 Discussion with local Concordis staff member in Abyei, April 2024.

¹⁰² 002 Discussion with local Concordis staff member in Abyei, April 2024; A005 (local people – Amiet village, Abyei), March 2024.

¹⁰³ Seasonal Pre-Migration Conference 12-15 December 2023 – Noong: The Conference’s Resolution,” English/Arabic archival document, available from Concordis International.

¹⁰⁴ Resolution of the Joint Peace Conference, 11-12 June 2016, Noong (Abyei), English/Arabic resolution document, available from Concordis International; The Resolution of Pre-Migration Conference, 28-30 November 2016, Amiet, EMR, English/Arabic archival document, available from Concordis International.

¹⁰⁵ Resolution of the Joint Peace Conference, 11-12 June 2016, Noong (Abyei), English/Arabic resolution document, available from Concordis International.

¹⁰⁶ Concordis worked to support the JCC traditional judges to incorporate relevant Sharia and Dinka legal doctrines to better deal with complex cases of sexual and gender-based violence. 001 Discussion with local Concordis staff member in Abyei, April 2024.

¹⁰⁷ The Resolution of Pre-Migration Conference Central Route, 5-7 December 2016, Amiet, archive document, available from Concordis International.

¹⁰⁸ Resolution of the Joint Peace Conference, 11-12 June 2016, Noong (Abyei), English/Arabic resolution document, available from Concordis International.

4.2.c The role of youth in brokering governance arrangements

The AAA has a strong history of youth associations and youth-led civil society, but this has rarely translated into meaningful representation at the local decision-making level.¹⁰⁹ The emerging clashes between the Ngok and Twic Dinka in 2022 over land claims at Abyei's southern border with Warrap state increased instability in the Sudan-South Sudan borderlands, encouraging recent youth engagement.¹¹⁰ Ngok and Misseriya realised the need to coordinate to meet mutual interests to manage cross-border relations positively and mitigate a potential escalation of violence.¹¹¹ The more recent and active engagement of Ngok Dinka and Misseriya youth in delivering on borderland governance agreements in Abyei is pertinent for the way in which their concurrent activities engage members of the wider local community. In conjunction with the JCPC, Ngok Dinka and Misseriya youth have initiated informal meetings in villages along the main cattle corridors and in Misseriya cattle camps as a means through which to build trust and reduce disputes.¹¹² These youth-facilitated meetings are held frequently. "Every two weeks ... and [they] move from one location [to the next] within the box [Abyei]," ¹¹³ "in coordination with the JCPC, corridor leaders, and local authorities."¹¹⁴

Drawing from their experience of attending the meetings, local villagers from Dokura and Amiet noted that the discussions centre on supporting the free movement of people and livestock along the corridors, sharing security-related information ¹¹⁵ and discussing market disputes. As such, youth-focused engagement prioritises the tangible, rather than politically sensitive issues of land ownership, settlement and Abyei's status. The engagement of Ngok Dinka and Misseriya youth also play a significant role in addressing crime along the migration routes, as villagers from Amiet highlighted.¹¹⁶ Many of the youth now engaged in borderland governance issues were formerly involved in crimes from cattle raiding to theft, positioning them well to deter others and to identify and trace the perpetrators of similar crimes that contribute to inter-community conflict and tensions.¹¹⁷ Civil society representatives noted that the youth-initiated meetings have been instrumental in increasing accountability for such crimes, which has served to strengthen the JCPC's ability to fulfil its mandate to oversee the payment of blood money compensation and the return of looted properties.¹¹⁸ Just as the role of customary authorities in the governance of Abyei underscores the importance of contributions from local actors beyond formal state-based authorities, so recent youth engagement highlights the potential contribution of local actors who were previously involved in crime in the community.

By reinforcing during their discussions the commitments made in previous local agreements,¹¹⁹ youth meetings function as a community wide information dissemination system and a highly localised monitoring mechanism in the local borderland governance process. This is pertinent as villagers who do not hold community leadership positions are not always informed of borderland governance resolutions by their customary authorities.¹²⁰ In speaking about a joint youth meeting held in Noong in February 2024, villagers noted that several of them joined the meeting following an invitation from local youth. They attended alongside JCPC representatives, pastoralists and traditional leaders to discuss the free movement of people and livestock in their area.¹²¹

4.2.d Local borderland governance as a process

Events surrounding the 2016 and 2023 agreements indicate that local borderland governance is an ongoing process. The 2016 Noong agreement was a beginning, establishing crucial joint implementation mechanisms and setting a precedent for dialogue to support livelihoods, freedom of movement and increased security. The revival of the 2016 accord in 2023 shows that local borderland agreements can function as an essential reference point for ongoing borderland governance processes from which diverse actors operating locally can build and revise, generating new pathways to shape cross-border relationships and the functioning of borderlands away from destructive conflict. This is significant given that borderlands are characterised by complex security and governance environments that can

¹⁰⁹ Concordis narrative application Sudan Abyei South Sudan 25 November 2024, accessed from Concordis.

¹¹⁰ A005 (CSOs – 002), March 2024

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² A003 Discussion with local researcher, April 2024.

¹¹³ A005 (CSOs – 002), March 2024. Citation highlighted in a FGD summary.

¹¹⁴ A011 (CSOs – 01), March 2024. Citation highlighted in a FGD summary.

¹¹⁵ A011 (local people – Dokura village, Abyei), March 2024.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ 003 Discussion with local researcher in Abyei, April 2024.

¹¹⁸ A011 (local people – Dokura village, Abyei), March 2024; A005 (CSOs – 01), March 2024; A005 (CSOs 002), March 2024

¹¹⁹ A012 (non-state authorities, Abyei), March 2024; A011 (local people – Dokura village, Abyei), March 2024.

¹²⁰ A008 (local people – Noong village, Abyei), March 2024; A017 (local people – Noong village, Abyei), March 2024.

¹²¹ A10 (local people – Noong village, Abyei), March 2024

render the already negotiated contents of local agreements unsuitable due to shifting dynamics.¹²²

Reaching agreement in Abyei requires a local architecture comprised – at times – of both international and local parties engaged in a dialogue process that advances immediate community-based needs and security. Prioritising the pressing needs of local communities at the time of an agreement's signing may render the agreement less responsive to shifting local dynamics, necessitating renegotiation and perhaps a new agreement with additional parties to address emerging contestations among and between local actors. Yet local borderland agreements, however fragile and imperfect, are seen by local communities as an important part of the borderland governance process. As youth leaders in Abyei noted, Ngok Dinka and Misseriya realise the need to coordinate to meet mutual interests to manage cross-border relations positively and mitigate a potential escalation of violence.¹²³ Due to a series of combined actions, local people in Noong, among other local stakeholders in Abyei, attribute today's "relative peace" in their village to the 2023 agreement.¹²⁴

4.3. The intersection of local cross-border agreements with national and regional level border governance in Abyei

The interplay between international, regional and local dynamics can strain locally negotiated agreements and their associated implementation mechanisms, requiring sustained support from various international actors and, at times, renewed dialogue and a revised agreement.

Political deliberations at the UN prior to the March 2019 Abyei pre-migration conference co-organised by UNISFA, FAO and IOM, for example, mired the three-day dialogue process in historic disputes between the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka over land rights.¹²⁵ Following deliberations to discuss extending UNISFA's mandate, UNSC resolution 2445 granting the extension referred to the administrative seat of the Misseriya in Muglad (Sudan) and the Juba appointed administration in Abyei – a position held by a Ngok Dinka representative.¹²⁶ The Misseriya and the government in Khartoum viewed this distinction (and recognition) as a denial of their respective rights to be involved in decisions over Abyei's status.¹²⁷ Amid the heightened tensions, the Misseriya present at the 2019 migration conference argued against what they perceived to be their framing at the conference as migrants, migrating from outside of Abyei as transhumant pastoralists. Although the conference ultimately proceeded and a resolution document was produced, the title of the conference was changed to the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka pre-movement conference in the outcome document.¹²⁸

The 2016 and 2023 local formal borderland governance agreements subtly intersect with the historic, internationally negotiated agreements that sought to manage the inter-state dispute over Abyei between Sudan and South Sudan. Both local agreements acknowledge and actively promote the Misseriya's right to access grazing pastures in Abyei, which are essential for their livelihoods, and their right to move through the disputed area as enshrined in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).¹²⁹ In addition, both local agreements broadly intersect with and promote the 2011 Addis Agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement on Temporary Arrangement for the Administration and Security of the Abyei Area, as illustrated by their respective efforts to promote a demilitarised Abyei through UNISFA specific provisions.¹³⁰ In doing so, both local agreements sought to mitigate the everyday insecurity associated with the presence of local militias and the circulation of small arms and light weapons.

Despite the overlap, neither local accord intersects with international agreements in terms of references made to defining the Abyei area and demarcating its borders or defining Abyei's residents. Some local civil society

¹²² Pospisil, *Dissolving Conflict*, 1-16.

¹²³ A005 (CSOs – 002), March 2024.

¹²⁴ A003 FGD (local people – Noong village, Abyei), March 2024. Citation highlighted in FGD summary; Local officials reiterated a similar sentiment about the effectiveness of the 2023 agreement to revisit and revise the 2016 accord. A003 FGD (local government officials, Abyei), March 2024.

¹²⁵ Lino, *Local Peace Agreement in Abyei*, 14; United Nations, Resolution 2445 (2018), adopted by the Security Council at its 8400th meeting, available at https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2445.pdf

¹²⁷ Lino, *Local Peace Agreement in Abyei*, 14. As Martin Ochaya Lino also notes, in addition to the UN deliberations around the mandate extension heightening tensions, comments made by the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, in the months preceding the mandate extension, further contributed. The UNSG stressed the need for a referendum on Abyei in line with the proposed administrative arrangements to resolve Abyei's status put forth by the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP), which the Misseriya had rejected at the time. See Lino, *Local Peace Agreement in Abyei*, 14.

¹²⁸ UNISFA, "Misseriya and Ngok Dinka pre-movement conference ends in Abyei Town," Press Release, 28 March, 2019, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/misseriya-and-ngok-dinka-pre-movement-conference-ends-abyei-town>

¹²⁹ CPA, P. 68, article 6.1 (a)), available at: <https://sudanarchive.net/?a=d&d=LD20050109-01>

¹³⁰ "Agreement between The Government of the Republic of Sudan and The Sudan People's Liberation Movement on Temporary Arrangements for the Administration and Security of the Abyei Area," 20 June 2011, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/agreement-between-government-republic-sudan-and-sudanpeoples-liberation-movement>.

representatives and local officials in Abyei discussed the importance of the 2009 Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling that determined Abyei's borders much more narrowly in line with the CPA,¹³¹ which, for these local actors, is the only international arrangement to resolve the border dispute.¹³² Crucially, however, the effectiveness of the 2016 Noong accord, in particular, and the more recent 2023 agreement, lay in how they largely sidelined the contentious elements of international agreements over Abyei's unresolved status and focused on the pressing needs of both Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities. As the case of borderland governance in Abyei suggests, in settings where political governance is contested at the inter-state level, progress locally may be more likely to be achieved when issues are framed through the lens of community-based needs rather than attached to broader political issues.

4.4. Conclusion

The case study highlights how locally written cross-border agreements around transhumance, access to land for grazing and free movement are a powerful asset of local governance in an area of contested sovereignty at the inter-state level.

The negotiations and resulting 2016 and 2023 local borderland governance agreements in Abyei focused not on reaching agreement on a framework for sustainable peace, but rather on the management of more immediate and tangible community-based needs to increase everyday security for livelihoods. The dialogue process surrounding the 2016 Noong accord, and the agreement itself, were effective due to the way in which they were largely insulated from broader issues related to the inter-state dispute between Sudan and South Sudan over Abyei's status. The diverse locally embedded mechanisms developed to deliver on the provisions contained in the agreement and to monitor its implementation, the corridor committees and pre-migration conferences, the JCPC and the Amiet Peace Market, were all the more necessary as a result. As such, even if the dialogue focused on shared needs around livelihoods and security, the locally crafted and embedded arrangements effectively established a local cross-border architecture that both acknowledged and responded to the complexity of borderland governance in Abyei.

The mechanisms, along with critical support from international actors, including Concordis International, the UN, and others, proved crucial for the 2016 Noong accord's early successes and holding the diverse parties to the agreement to account. The interplay between international, national and local dynamics involving the negotiating parties, however, increasingly rendered the 2016 accord and its associated local cross-border mechanisms less effective. Against the backdrop of shifting local dynamics and escalating tensions, local and international actors were able to use the existing Noong agreement to reopen the dialogue and negotiation process to address some of the emerging contestations among and between local actors, while choosing to leave others, such as the ongoing conflict between Ngok and Twic Dinka communities, unaddressed.

What the revival of the 2016 accord in 2023 indicates is that local agreements can serve as essential entry points from which diverse actors operating locally in borderlands can make reference, build and revise, generating new pathways to shape the micropolitics of cross-border relationships and functioning of borderlands away from destructive conflict. This is essential given that borderlands are marked by complex security and governance environments that can render the already negotiated contents of local cross-border agreements unsuitable due to shifting local dynamics. The case study demonstrates that local borderland governance is an ongoing process. The 2016 local agreement was not an end point but a beginning that fostered joint implementation mechanisms and set a precedent for dialogue and for other actors, including youth, to play key roles in borderland governance. The ability of Abyei's locally embedded governance mechanisms such as the JCPC to disrupt violent contestation and contribute to dialogue – albeit with limitations – is significant.

¹³¹ Craze, Joshua, "Creating Facts on the Ground: Conflict Dynamics in Abyei," Small Arms Survey, Geneva: Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, 2011: 16, available at: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/131135/HSBA-SWP-26-Conflict-Dynamics-in-Abyei.pdf>

¹³² A015 (local officials - Abyei), March 2024; A015 (local CSOs/community leaders - Abyei), March 2024.

Chapter 5 : The CAR – Chad Borderlands

5.1 Key sources of inter-community conflict and tension in the CAR-Chad borderlands

Inter-community conflict and tension in the CAR-Chad borderlands coalesces around transhumance.¹³³ Armed political violence and economic banditry disrupts the livelihoods of pastoralists who need to move their livestock across borders in search of pasture and of settled communities who rely on cross-border trade around transhumance. Poorly regulated and negotiated transhumance fuels conflict and tension between pastoralist and settled communities as the practice cuts across issues of land access and the livelihoods of others. The ways in which local cross-border dynamics have been affected by the relationship between borderland insecurity and transhumance are four-fold:

1. Transhumance has become increasingly militarised. Chadian cattle-herders now carry arms for the seasonal livestock migration to protect against cattle raids by armed groups operating throughout the borderlands since the early 2000s known locally as *zaraguina* or *les coupeurs de route* (highwaymen).¹³⁴ Cattle herders hired to drive the livestock of Chadian elites during the seasonal migration are armed to protect the wealth associated with the herds they bring against violence and insecurity in the CAR-Chad borderlands.¹³⁵ This recent militarisation reduces the likelihood of communities resolving conflict over transhumance through dialogue. A local women spoke of her experience of catching a transhumant herder's oxen destroying her millet field. She had wanted to complain to the herder, but he brandished his weapon, thus, not having the same strength, she kept quiet and went home.¹³⁶

2. Illicit taxation creates tension. Illicit taxation on the movement of livestock is another source of tension. The armed group known as *Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation* (3R) operating in the CAR-Chad borderlands secured a monopoly over this system of illegal taxation.¹³⁷ In response – and to protect themselves – some pastoralists both knowingly and unknowingly violated historic verbal agreements and joint responsibilities among farming and herding communities governing the seasonal livestock migration.¹³⁸ They failed to make their arrival known in each locality through which they passed during the migration and found alternative routes to the historic cattle corridors. In doing so, they often moved through farming land with their cattle, destroying crops in the process.¹³⁹ Members of settled (farming) communities also breached historic verbal commitments governing transhumance and exacerbated tensions over access to and use of land. They used lulls in pastoralist activities along official transhumance corridors and grazing areas to cultivate these more fertile pastures.¹⁴⁰

Other pastoralists paid the 3R-imposed levy on cattle, which afforded them both unchecked grazing rights and protection when conflicts arose between them and other segments of the population in border towns such as Paoua.¹⁴¹ This contributed to the localised politicisation of transhumance in the CAR-Chad borderlands. The proximity between 3R and some pastoralists increased tensions and mistrust between pastoralists, on the one hand, and settled and agro-pastoralist communities, on the other.¹⁴² More specifically, it fuelled the violent resolution of disputes and created a perception among some in settled communities that pastoralists were affiliated with 3R and – at times – complicit in their predation.¹⁴³ Chadian community leaders noted that local defence and security officials on the CAR

¹³³ Throughout this chapter the terms “pastoralism,” “transhumance,” and “the seasonal livestock migration” are used interchangeably. The terms “cattle-herder,” “transhumant herder,” and “pastoralist” are all used to denote people engaged in the cross-border seasonal livestock migration and are used interchangeably. All of these individuals differ from agro-pastoralists who are settled pastoralists and graze their livestock near their home base. For more details, see Concordis International, *Promoting Safe Seasonal Migration*, 21-22.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* This specific story was highlighted in a FGD summary for the FGD held with local people in Markoundia in February 2024.

¹³⁷ UN (United Nations) Security Council Committee. *Midterm report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic extended pursuant to Security Council resolution 2262* (2016). S/2016/694, (New York 2016):

18, available at <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2016/694>

¹³⁸ Concordis International, *Promoting Safe Seasonal Migration*, 2-97; International Peace Information Service (IPIS), “The Politics of Pillage: The Political Economy of Roadblocks in the Central African Republic,”

(Antwerp, Belgium: IPIS, 2017): 38-46, available at <https://ipisresearch.be/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/1711-CAR-roadblocks-English.pdf>

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Concordis International, *Promoting Safe Seasonal Migration*, 21-22.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2-97.

¹⁴² C/CH 001 Discussion with Concordis staff member – Paoua, October 2023.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

side of the border had been known to arrest and detain pastoralists arbitrarily due to a presumed affiliation with 3R.¹⁴⁴ A local political leader in Paoua emphasised that incidents of cattle theft by individuals or groups of individuals on the CAR side of the border that targeted transhumant herders had fuelled insecurity and “panic among [the wider] local populations who fear[ed] reprisals from 3R.”¹⁴⁵

3. Borderland insecurity reduces reach of public bodies. A third consequence of insecurity and political violence in the CAR-Chad borderlands has been the weakened capacity of public bodies in place to monitor transhumance and adherence to historic verbal agreements and official taxation. Local people in the border town of Markounda on the CAR side of the border whose main livelihood is farming report that the Fédération Nationale des Eleveurs Centrafricains (“National Federation of Central African Livestock Herders” (FNEC)) has been limited in its ability to raise awareness among Chadian cattle herders at official border crossings and pastoralist encampments about the location of and respect for official transhumance corridors to reduce disputes between communities.¹⁴⁶

4. Strained relations exist between and with security forces. Fourthly, there has been a lack of trust between Chadian and Central African security and defence forces stationed along the border and between local borderland communities and these agents of the state.¹⁴⁷ Political violence in the CAR-Chad borderlands has strained bi-lateral diplomatic relations between CAR and Chad. Political violence, insecurity and transhumance in the borderlands intersect, shaping the historic and recent conduct of local security and defence officials present, and their actions in turn have contributed to insecurity. As well-documented by Human Rights Watch, Chadian troops have conducted unilateral raids against the bases of armed groups using the other side of the CAR border as a rear operating base to recruit, forge alliances and retreat.¹⁴⁸ These offensives, ostensibly conducted to reduce insecurity, were coupled with looting and civilian abuses, disproportionately targeting civilians presumed to be rebel sympathisers.¹⁴⁹

In May 2021 France 24 reported that CAR troops, tracking 3R rebel elements across the border into Chad, fired on their Chadian counterparts stationed at a border outpost in Sourou on the CAR-Chad border east of Paoua, killing several.¹⁵⁰ The incident strained local relations between Chadian and Central African security and defence forces on either side of the border, reviving historic tensions and mistrust between them which have long characterised their cross-border engagement because of past unilateral raids by both sides in the pursuit of rebels and cattle rustlers.¹⁵¹

5.2. How local authorities and communities are involved in negotiating and delivering on borderland governance agreements

5.2.a Local will to negotiate agreements to address conflict around transhumance

Local communities worked collaboratively to address conflict and tension around transhumance in the CAR-Chad borderlands. Between 2019 and 2022, communities signed three formal local cross-border agreements to address aspects of the insecurity in the CAR-Chad borderlands and their impact on the seasonal livestock migration. The agreements were signed after local community dialogues in: Paoua, CAR (2019); Bekoninga, Chad (September 2022); and Markounda, CAR (November 2022).

The local Advisory Group – a decentralised network of community members beyond local elites¹⁵² – and local political authorities on both side of the CAR-Chad border played key roles in the negotiations. Their actions contributed to local, multi-levelled, cross-border community participation in negotiating borderland agreements from 2019.

¹⁴⁴ C/CH 002a FGD (non-state authorities/community leaders – Bekoninga (Chad)), October 2023.

¹⁴⁵ C/CH001 KII (local politico-administrative authority – Paoua (CAR)), October 2023.

¹⁴⁶ C/CH004 (local people – Markounda (CAR)), February 2024.

¹⁴⁷ Carayannis and Lombard, *Making Sense*.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid; Yusuf, Mohammed, “CAR, Chad Conduct Separate Military Operations amid Border Security Concerns,” *Voice of America* (VOA), October 6, 2023, available at <https://www.voanews.com/a/car-chadconduct-separate-military-operations-amid-border-security-concerns/7299958.html>.

¹⁴⁹ Bouckaert, Peter, and Olivier Bercault, “State of Anarchy: Rebellion and Abuses against Civilians,” New York, USA: Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2007, available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/09/14/state-anarchy/rebellion-and-abuses-against-civilians>

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid; Concordis International, “Creating Peace Together in the Borderlands,” October 2020, 1-20, available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/62de86f9fcacba6469947f2e/t/62fa6ef3d9a32214bb86ed53/1660579597236/Creating+peace+together+in+the+borderlands>

¹⁵² Despite Concordis creating each Advisory Group and retaining links with the groups through mediation and conflict resolution training and coaching, they are largely autonomous structures, answerable to the broader community rather than to Concordis. A local Advisory Group does not depend on Concordis for funding or the presence of Concordis in a given locality to function. Consequently, Advisory Groups retain a high degree of autonomy. Furthermore, unlike historic peace committees whose memberships were largely concentrated in regional capitals, each Advisory Group Concordis has established is made up of an ethnically diverse group of local people located across the area it represents, including in remote villages and along key transhumance corridors, including nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists and members of agro-pastoralist and farming communities.

A local Advisory Group member spoke of the action plan the Advisory Group developed in 2019 specifically to address localised conflicts and disputes arising from the shifting patterns of transhumance in the CAR-Chad borderlands discussed above.¹⁵³ Calls for cross-border dialogue with local Chadian authorities, community leaders and members of the transhumant and farming communities were central to their 2019 strategy for a peaceful seasonal pastoralist migration.¹⁵⁴ Cross-border relationships between CAR and Chad communities were established. Preliminary discussions were organised with the authorities from the three adjacent administrative departments across the regions of Logone Oriental and Mandoul in Chad, which border the Ouham Pendé region¹⁵⁵ in northern CAR. These discussions focused on the possibility of fostering cross-border dialogue to improve management of the seasonal livestock migration.¹⁵⁶

The catalyst for cross-border cooperation around transhumance before the 2022-2023 seasonal livestock migration southward from Chad also emerged from within local communities in the CAR-Chad borderlands. The newly elected prefect of the Nya Pendé border area in Chad and his Central African counterpart, the prefect of Lim Pendé, held their first cross-border meeting in 2022 during which they discussed opening the border and transhumance.¹⁵⁷ The actions of local authorities demonstrated local political will for cross-border governance and political autonomy to address insecurity and the management of transhumance in their localities and a recognition of the important role they had to play in borderland governance.

Participants in the 2019 Paoua dialogue included Chadian mayors who joined their Central African counterparts from the adjacent region across the border in CAR.¹⁵⁸ Local political leaders, customary authorities and youth leaders attended. Members of farming, nomadic and semi-nomadic communities were present, together with representatives from the National Federation of Central African Livestock Herders (FNEC). At Bekoninga in 2022, local political and administrative leaders from CAR and Chad again gathered alongside other local state authorities, including mayors from Lim Pendé (CAR) and Nya Pendé (Chad). These leaders were joined by representatives from the FNEC and the Central African Agency for Agricultural Development (ACDA) who attended alongside civil society representatives, women and youth leaders, farmers from the Central African prefecture of Lim Pendé, and members of the nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralist communities.¹⁵⁹ A similar group assembled in Markounda two months later: the local prefects were joined by Chadian and Central African mayors from these localities, representatives from agencies governing the livestock and agricultural sectors in CAR, farmers and farmers' representatives, nomadic and semi-nomadic herders, and civil society actors, including youth and women's leaders and mediators affiliated with the local Advisory Group.¹⁶⁰ Myriad voices present engaged in conversations around the overlapping sources of inter-community conflict and tension in the CAR-Chad borderlands, along with the need to prevent and manage conflicts related to transhumance to support livelihoods and more cooperative cross-border relations.

5.2.a.i Inclusion of local security forces in borderland governance negotiations

Unlike the 2019 Paoua dialogue, the 2022 Bekoninga dialogue included local state security and defence officials from Chad and CAR. The need to include the security sector in negotiating borderland governance was emphasised during the dialogue by the local prefects from Nya Pendé and Lim Pendé, who underscored the importance of cross-border security between their localities and the need to secure the transhumance corridors to reduce cattle raiding and the destruction of fields.¹⁶¹

The inclusion of local state security and defence officials proved crucial. This was the first time they had engaged in sustained dialogue on cross-border cooperation and their ability to convene served as a "confidence building

¹⁵³ C/CH002 KII (local Advisory Group member – Bémal (CAR), October 2023.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.; Advisory Group Action Plan, 2019, available from Concordis International.

¹⁵⁵ This region has since been divided administratively into two separate prefectures (regions) known as Ouham Pendé and Lim Pendé.

¹⁵⁶ C/CH 002 Remote Discussion – Concordis staff member – Bangui, April 2024.

¹⁵⁷ Acte d'engagement – prevention et de gestion des conflits pour une transhumance transfrontalière apaisée et bénéfique à tous. French/ archival document, available from Concordis International. This information was also confirmed by a Concordis staff member: C/CH 002 Remote Discussion – Concordis staff member – Bangui, April 2024.

¹⁵⁸ Acte d'engagement: prévention and de gestion des conflits pour une transhumance apaisée. December 06, 2019. Paoua, CAR, French/ archival document, available from Concordis International.

¹⁵⁹ C/CH001 FGD (local people – Bémal (CAR)), October 2023; Acte d'engagement Bekoninga, September 2022.

¹⁶⁰ Acte d'engagement: prévention and de gestion des conflits pour une transhumance apaisée. November 28, 2022; C/CH004 FGD (local people – Markounda (CAR)), February 2024.

¹⁶¹ C/CH 002a FGD (non-state authorities), October 2023.

¹⁶² C/CH 002 Online Discussion with CAR staff member, Bangui, April 2024.

exercise.”¹⁶² The importance of including local security and defence forces in this way was reinforced with their inclusion in the parallel 2022 cross-border dialogue process Concordis facilitated in Markounda on the CAR side of the border.

5.2.a.ii International support to negotiate local border governance agreements

Concordis was instrumental in supporting and facilitating the dialogues that led to all three local borderland governance agreements. Before the 2019 Paoua dialogue, Concordis began establishing cross-border relationships in consultation with local Advisory Group members, organising the preliminary discussions between authorities from adjacent administrative departments in Chad and CAR. The success of these initial conversations led to the joint dialogue in Paoua which Concordis convened. Concordis then supported and facilitated the dialogue process that led to the 2019 written agreement, including providing space for the local actors present, including farmers and herders, to engage directly in dialogue to address the sources of tensions between them.¹⁶³

In 2022 Concordis facilitated cross-border discussions initiated by the prefect from Nya Pendé in Chad with the prefect from the adjacent Central African region of Ouham.¹⁶⁴ More specifically, the newly elected Nya Pendé prefect led a joint local Chad-CAR delegation in discussions with Concordis on the need for a cross-border dialogue following his first meeting with the Lim-Pendé prefect.¹⁶⁵ Concordis supported and facilitated the 2022 dialogue in Bekoninga, including providing space for the local security and defence officials to negotiate and develop joint commitments around how to respond to criminality arising from or linked to transhumance and mitigate the historic and contemporary sources of confrontations between them. The inclusive dialogue approach adopted in Paoua, Bekoninga and Markounda was significant for the way in which it resulted in provisions in each agreement that more accurately reflected and responded to the local challenges farmers, cattle herders and others had raised, which were impeding their immediate livelihood needs. Each of the written cross-border agreements that emerged enshrined a series of jointly developed, agreed upon provisions that were local actor specific.¹⁶⁶

5.2.b Approaches and obstacles to delivering local borderland governance agreements

There is considerable evidence of the ways in which the three local governance agreements reached in the CAR-Chad borderlands worked. Parties to the agreements met their commitments to change behaviour to address issues identified in dialogue leading to the agreements. Chadian community leaders in Bekoninga and surrounding areas perceived that instances of non-violent dispute resolution increased following the 2019 Paoua agreement, replacing violence and intimidation.¹⁶⁷ A local political representative from CAR, speaking a year after the 2022 Bekoninga agreement, stated that: “cases of cattle theft [on the CAR side of the border around Paoua] are no longer as recurrent as they used to be. Violent conflicts between herders and farmers have decreased.”¹⁶⁸ Local security and defence forces on either side of the CAR-Chad border equally attributed a reduction in cattle raiding and violent clashes between herders and farmers along the Goré-Paoua transhumance corridor to the Bekoninga agreement.¹⁶⁹ Villagers in Markounda emphasised that the 2022 Markounda agreement had resulted in small improvements, specifically regarding relations between settled communities and transhumant herders along the Goré-Markounda corridor. Villagers from Markounda’s farming communities perceived an increased willingness among unarmed pastoralists to adhere to official grazing land and transhumance routes in line with the Markounda agreement.¹⁷⁰ They likewise indicated that pastoralists are more willing to compensate farmers for the trampling of fields.¹⁷¹

The agreements achieved particular success regarding taxation around transhumance. Provisions to standardise community level cross border taxation on transhumance to incentivise herders to keep to official cross-border entry points and corridors worked: an official tax was set and both Chadian community leaders and Concordis staff noted

¹⁶³ Ibid.; Acte d’engagement: prévention and de gestion des conflits pour une transhumance apaisée. December 06, 2019. Paoua, the CAR, French/ archival document, available from Concordis International.

¹⁶⁴ C/CH 002 Remote Discussion – Concordis staff member – Bangui, April 2024.

¹⁶⁵ C/CH 002 Online Discussion with CAR staff member, Bangui, April 2024.

¹⁶⁶ Acte d’engagement: prévention and de gestion des conflit pour une transhumance apaisée. December 06, 2019, French/ archival document, available from Concordis International; Markounda Agreement – November 2022, French/ archival document, available from Concordis International; Bekoninga Agreement – September 2022, French/ archival document, available from Concordis International.

¹⁶⁷ C/CH 002a FGD (non-state authorities/community leaders - Bekoninga (Chad)), October 2023.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ October 2023; C/CH 002 FGD (security and defence authorities – Bekoninga (Chad)), October 2023.

¹⁷⁰ C/CH004 (local people – Markounda (CAR)), February 2024.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² C/CH 002a FGD (non-state authorities/community leaders - Bekoninga (Chad)), October 2023; C/CH 001 Discussion with Concordis staff member – Paoua (CAR), October 2023; C/CH 002 Remote Discussion – Concordis staff member – Bangui, April 2024.

that cattle herders were more inclined to pay the official cattle tax in the period following the agreements.¹⁷²

Commitments for joint security and defence cooperation and coordination between local Chadian and Central African forces also worked well. These included the affirmation in the 2022 Bekoninga and Markounda agreements that security and defence officials from Chad and CAR had a “shared right to pursue” criminals across the border “under orders from politico-administrative authorities” in their respective localities.¹⁷³ Authorities also agreed to share contact details to reopen bilateral communication channels and exchange information on transhumance-related criminality to prevent local disputes from escalating to armed confrontations between security forces. They also committed to quarterly meetings, as well as meeting on an ad hoc basis in emergencies, to deliver on their commitments made.¹⁷⁴ These commitments have had an observable impact in terms of enhanced cross-border cooperation and communication between Goré and Paoua. Security and defence authorities spoke of a “close collaboration” between themselves and local political authorities on both sides of the border and villagers in the border town of Bémal on the CAR side of the border supported this, noting that the Bekoninga agreement had resulted in “good collaboration” between local Chadian and Central African state officials and between security and defence officials, marked by the fact that the CAR security forces resupplied from both Bekoninga and Goré.¹⁷⁵

5.2.b.i Approaches that worked to deliver agreements

Each of the agreements worked by addressing systemic issues underpinning local intercommunity conflict and tension. Examples included standardising cross-border community-level taxation around transhumance and putting in place provisions for non-violent resolution of disputes over issues including crop destruction, unchecked movement of livestock and cattle theft. Multi-levelled cross-border community participation supported this, ensuring systemic issues were explored, understood by all parties to the dialogue and addressed in the agreements.

The agreements empowered or sought to strengthen existing local structures to implement the agreements.¹⁶⁹ The local Advisory Group, for example, was given additional mediation responsibilities to facilitate the implementation of provisions around non-violent dispute resolution.¹⁷⁷ Advisory Group members also reported behaviour of security actors to army commanders, enabling the commanders to take action against the perpetrators.¹⁷⁸ Different segments of borderland communities were given specific responsibilities for delivering on the agreement. The positive effect of including local state security actors in the 2022 dialogues and providing space for them to agree joint commitments supports the approach of including previous or potential spoilers – local community stakeholders whose actions or inactions have previously compounded tension and insecurity in the borderlands. The inclusion of local state security actors was also an example of the importance of giving different segments of borderland communities specific responsibilities for delivering on commitments in the agreements.

5.2.b.ii Obstacles to delivering the agreements

The diversity and complexity of the local actors involved in the agreements and their evolving interests require continual management. One obstacle to delivery of the agreements noted stemmed from the variability with which the same types of actors delivered upon commitments across localities. Local stakeholders delivered inconsistently on jointly agreed upon provisions in the agreements. Evidence suggests, for example, that fluctuating local political will contributed to the irregular delivery by local state and security officials on their commitments in the 2022 Markounda agreement,¹⁷⁹ which impacted the monitoring committee’s ability to ensure its implementation across localities

¹⁷³ October 2023; C/CH 002 FGD (security and defence authorities – Bekoninga (Chad)), October 2023; Bekoninga Agreement – September 2022, French/ archival document, available from Concordis International.

¹⁷⁴ October 2023; C/CH 002 FGD (security and defence authorities – Bekoninga (Chad)), October 2023; Bekoninga Agreement – September 2022, French/ archival document, available from Concordis International; 002a FGD (non-state authorities/community leaders - Bekoninga (Chad)), October 2023.

¹⁷⁵ C/CH 001 FGC (local people – Bémal (CAR)), October 2023.

¹⁷⁶ Acte d’engagement: prévention and de gestion des conflit pour une transhumance apaisée. December 06, 2019, French/ archival document, available from Concordis International; Bekoninga Agreement – September 2022, French/ archival document, available from Concordis International.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ C/CH 001 FGC (local people – Bémal (CAR)), October 2023.

¹⁷⁹ C/CH004 (local people – Markounda (CAR)), February 2024; C/CH 002 FGD (security and defence authorities – Bekoninga (Chad)), October 2023.

¹⁸⁰ As a reminder, Markounda and the sub-prefecture of Markounda are located in the Central African region of Ouham, which is adjacent to the Lim Pendé region.

¹⁸¹ C/CH004 (local people – Markounda (CAR)), February 2024

¹⁸² Ibid.

connected by the Goré-Markounda¹⁸⁰ transhumance corridor.¹⁸¹ Villagers in Markounda noted that support from local authorities for the non-escalation of disputes related to unchecked cattle trampling their fields is lacking.¹⁸² The local villagers went on to speak of the authorities being susceptible to bribes, perceiving them to be less willing to intervene in transhumance-related disputes equitably.

Delivery of commitments under the agreements was also impacted by perceptions of pastoralists held by some local political and security officials. Perceptions of pastoral complicity with armed group 3R persisted despite, for example, commitments in the Markounda agreement to avoid the identity-based targeting and arbitrary detention of pastoralists.¹⁸³ As evidence, local community representatives from Chad cited the lack of agreement among local political and security and defence officials in CAR to allow pastoralists to enter Markounda town to resupply during the seasonal livestock migration,¹⁸⁴ despite the negative consequences of this decision for trade between pastoralists and settled communities and the local economy more generally.¹⁸⁵

Some local people spoke of security and defence forces from CAR as undermining the Bekoninga agreement by targeting pastoralists for extortion at checkpoints and in their encampments: an issue pastoralists had raised in the Bekoninga dialogue as a reason for them not keeping to official ports of entry and transhumance corridors.¹⁸⁶ Local people in Bémal also stated that cattle herders who are minors were, at times, subjected to “harassment” as well as prohibitive and arbitrary fines imposed by local police and security forces at checkpoints in CAR.¹⁸⁷ As principal guarantors of the Markounda agreement, this inconsistent behaviour of local state and security officials in turn frustrated the implementation of the agreement.

Shifting conflict dynamics at the national level also created obstacles to delivery. The shifting politico-military landscape in CAR during the 2020 electoral period created increased and widespread insecurity which hampered local authorities’ ability to deliver on the provisions in the Paoua agreement.¹⁸⁸ Armed groups operating in the CAR-Chad borderlands and elsewhere leveraged the electoral period to establish new alliances, consolidate and expand their territory. This culminated at the end of 2020 with the emergence of a new armed coalition known as the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) composed of some of CAR’s most dominant and enduring armed groups.¹⁸⁹

5.2.c Local borderland governance as an ongoing process

The three borderland governance agreements reached in the CAR-Chad borderlands between 2019 and 2022 demonstrate that borderland governance is an ongoing process. Each specific agreement is not an end point in that process, but a key component.

The value of the 2019 Paoua agreement and the dialogue surrounding it lay not only in the direct impact of the agreement but also in how the process acted as a framework for the agreements that followed in 2022. The agreement served as an important precedent for local political leaders from Chad and CAR. It highlighted what had already proved possible at the community level to achieve better cross-border cooperation around transhumance. Both leaders referred to the Paoua agreement during their initial engagement with Concordis around facilitating a larger cross-border dialogue.¹⁹⁰ Beginning with the Bekoninga dialogue, local representatives revived the 2019 Paoua agreement, using it to frame their discussions.¹⁹¹ They reviewed previous commitments, emphasising those that were still most valuable and applicable, such as the licit cattle tax, non-violent dispute resolution and monitoring by local Advisory Group members, while revising other provisions and adding new commitments.¹⁹² Negotiations surrounding

¹⁸³ Markounda Agreement – November 2022, French/ archival document, available from Concordis International.

¹⁸⁴ C/CH002 (community leaders / non-state authorities – Bekoninga (Chad)), October 2023.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ October 2023; C/CH 002 FGD (security and defence authorities – Bekoninga (Chad)), October 2023; Bekoninga Agreement – September 2022, French/ archival document, available from Concordis International.

¹⁸⁷ C/CH 001 FGC (local people – Bémal (CAR)), October 2023.

¹⁸⁸ C/CH 002 Remote Discussion – Concordis staff member – Bangui, April 2024.

¹⁸⁹ UN (United Nations) Security Council Committee, *Final report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic Extended Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2536* (2020). S/2021/569, New York, USA: 2021, available at <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n21/126/24/pdf/n2112624.pdf>; UN (United Nations), “CAR: UN Chief Condemns Escalating Violence During Election Campaign,” *UN News*, December 20, 2020, available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1080482>

¹⁹⁰ C/CH 002 Online Discussion with CAR staff member, Bangui, April 2024.

¹⁹¹ C/CH 002 Remote Discussion – Concordis staff member – Bangui, April 2024.

¹⁹² Bekoninga Agreement – September 2022, French/ archival document, available from Concordis International; C/CH 002a FGD (non-state authorities/community leaders - Bekoninga (Chad)), October 2023; October 2023; C/CH 002 FGD (security and defence authorities – Bekoninga (Chad)), October 2023.

each agreement and the content of the agreements themselves have also set an important precedent, forming a foundation from which local actors can reopen dialogue around the local governance of transhumance, revisit existing commitments and add others.

Local cross-border agreements are important for how they have contributed and can contribute to addressing challenges and setting a precedent from which to renegotiate persistent issues and their implications for livelihoods, security and trade in borderlands.

5.3. The intersection of local cross-border agreements with national and regional level border governance

The local, community-needs based commitments enshrined in the Paoua and Bekoninga agreements were juxtaposed with references to regional commitments made by political elites from Chad and CAR in 2013. The transhumant and settled community representatives present at the dialogues surrounding the Paoua and Bekoninga agreements jointly developed an explicit recommendation for the governments of CAR and Chad to strengthen their commitment to the implementation of the 2013 N'Djamena (regional) Declaration.¹⁹³ Signed by both governments in 2013, this included commitments to better govern the seasonal migration of livestock, one of which was the need for the two governments to guarantee the security of pastoralists in borderlands throughout the duration of the seasonal livestock migration.¹⁹⁴

The intersection of the Paoua agreement with the N'Djamena Declaration lay in how the 2019 agreement sought to prevent locally embedded sources of contestation such as cattle raiding, theft and the destruction of fields from escalating into violence through non-violent dispute resolution between settled and transhumant communities. The Bekoninga agreement, with its inclusion of local security and defence officials and commitments to joint security arrangements, supported more directly the elements of the N'Djamena Declaration related to the security of pastoralists. The inconsistencies around how local security and defence officials have delivered on commitments regarding their conduct toward pastoralists speaks to the challenges of effective and consistent governance around transhumance throughout a borderland irrespective of the level at which commitments are made.

The Paoua, Bekoninga and Markounda agreements intersect most directly with the N'Djamena Declaration's call for "jointly agreed and transparent taxation of livestock"¹⁹⁵ through their revival of official taxation provisions. Provisions for local taxation included across the three agreements reinforced the importance of authorities such as the National Federation of Central African Livestock Herders (FNEC) in regulating the livestock sector and supported a localised form of accountable state-making often absent in the CAR-Chad borderlands.¹⁹⁶

The local cross-border agreements in the CAR-Chad borderlands have gone beyond a focus on community-based needs around security and livelihoods, in doing so reinforcing commitments in regional arrangements to promote safer, more peaceful and regulated transhumance. The CAR-Chad case study is evidence that local cross-border governance agreements in borderlands can intersect with borderland arrangements negotiated at higher levels.

5.4. Conclusion

The local cross-border formal written agreements that emerged in Paoua, Bekoninga and Markounda between 2019 and 2022 were locally initiated and negotiated in response to the pressing community-based needs of borderland communities. Initiated by diverse local catalysts requesting processes for more cooperative cross-border relations and livelihoods and reached through local multi-levelled cross-border community dialogue facilitated with international support, an achievement of the three agreements was their locally responsive provisions from which to deliver a safer, more peaceful and economically prosperous transhumance. The agreements produced essential community-based dividends for farming and pastoralist communities around non-violent resolution of conflict in which members of the pre-existing local Advisory Group play a key mediating role. All three formal agreements in the CAR-Chad borderlands have revived official taxation around transhumance and support for livestock federations, demonstrating that – at

¹⁹³ Bekoninga Agreement – September 2022, French/ archival document, available from Concordis International; Acte d'engagement: prévention and de gestion des conflits pour une transhumance apaisée, December 06, 2019, Paoua, CAR, French/ archival document, available from Concordis International.

¹⁹⁴ Tchadienne Plateforme Regional, "Declaration de N'Djamena sur la contribution de l'élevage pastoral à la sécurité et au développement des espaces Saharo-Sahéliens," Colloque Régional-Conférence Ministérielle, 2013, available at: <https://www.inter-reseaux.org/en/ressource/declaration-de-ndjamena-sur-lelevage-pastoral-la-securite-et-le-developpement-des-espaces-saharo-saheliens/>

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 4.

¹⁹⁶ Smith, *CAR's History*, 17-52.

times – local cross-border agreements can go beyond a focus on immediate community needs.

State actors are present and active in local borderland governance in the CAR-Chad borderlands. Local authorities here have acknowledged their interconnected and cross-border responsibilities in negotiating and delivering on borderland governance around transhumance. Building on the Paoua agreement, the Bekoninga and Markounda agreements crucially provided space for local border security and defence officials to engage in dialogue and develop joint commitments that have been implemented to varying extents. Through the sustained political will of political and security officials between Goré (Nya Pendé, Chad) and Paoua (Lim-Pendé, CAR) for cooperative cross-border relations and livelihoods, the local state authorities have contributed to reducing instability. As has the simple act of the state actors exchanging phone numbers to share information rapidly and diffuse tensions.

The processes surrounding the agreements underscore the value of involving a diversity of actors in negotiating and delivering on borderland agreements, but also the variability at which the same type of actor delivers on similarly agreed upon commitments across localities. Emerging conflict fault lines and predation by actors involved in local cross-border agreements have – at times – undermined their delivery. Local state officials in the CAR-Chad borderlands have not only facilitated, but also contributed to frustrating, the delivery of agreements, which suggests the need for strategies to renegotiate and engender responsible and sustained local state engagement.

The dynamics here speak to both the complexity of the local actors involved and cross-border dynamics, which require continual management. The local agreements in the CAR-Chad borderlands were negotiated amid a shifting politico-military environment marked by shifting dynamics around violence, which often characterise borderlands. The precedent set by the agreements underscores the centrality of local cross-border dialogue in any strategy for more peaceful transhumance and provides an essential mechanism from which to renegotiate existing commitments or add additional provisions. Borderland governance is an ongoing process; a process that is not necessarily linear.

Chapter 6 : The CAR-Sudan Borderlands

6.1. Key sources of recent inter-community conflict and tensions in the CAR-Sudan borderlands

Sources of recent inter-community conflict and tensions in the CAR-Sudan borderlands are examined against a background of broader political violence in both countries.¹⁹⁷

Key trade routes operate through the border town of Am Dafok in the prefecture of Vakaga in northeastern CAR. These routes support a mix of licit and illicit livelihoods:¹⁹⁸ the legal seasonal migration of livestock (transhumance), breeding and sale of cattle, hunting, farming and agro-pastoralism co-exist with trafficking arms, livestock and other illicit items, cattle raiding, poaching and other forms of economic predation. This creates a corresponding mix of operators: multi-ethnic cattle and camel herders who move their livestock across the Sudan-CAR border in search of pasture;¹⁹⁹ settled farmers; semi-nomadic agro-pastoralists; cross-border politico-military entrepreneurs; heavily armed poachers and criminal gangs known locally as zaraguinas or les coupeurs de route (highwaymen) who extort herders and steal cattle.²⁰⁰

The mix of livelihoods and operators generates inter-community conflict and tension. Community tension over contested access to land for grazing, cattle rearing or farming occurs alongside violent conflict over cattle theft or crop destruction. A Sudanese Arab transhumant herder spoke of having lost: “dozens of cattle, stolen by armed bandits.”²⁰¹ There are no senior state politico-administrative authorities or official security and defence forces in Am Dafok. Sudanese herders at a pastoralist encampment outside the town said that insecurity has been particularly pervasive since 2021 and this is driving more and more herders from the Sudanese Arab communities away from livestock to agriculture.²⁰² Unregulated and poorly negotiated transhumance has contributed to inter-community conflicts and rising tensions. Sudanese Arab transhumant herders raised the issue of what they referred to as “les champs pièges” (“trap fields”), created by some within farming communities on fertile land along transhumance routes, around pastoralist encampments and near watering points for cattle.²⁰³ Muslim religious leaders from Am Dafok’s diverse farming communities noted that Arab herders from South Darfur set up camps near farmers’ fields, causing fields and crops to be trampled and destroyed.²⁰⁴ Increasing tension over land use and access has led to violence. The Sudanese Arab transhumant herders claimed members of the local ethnic Sara (settled) community attacked their cattle and set alight already scarce grazing pastures, threatening the herders’ livelihood.²⁰⁵

Insecurity and predation in the CAR-Sudan borderlands has also been linked to an increased presence of often

¹⁹⁷ Lombard, Louisa. *The Autonomous Zone*, 142-165; Smith, Stephen W. *CAR's History*, 40.

¹⁹⁸ Lombard, *The Autonomous Zone*, 142-165; Smith, *CAR's History*, 40.

¹⁹⁹ For more information on the multi-ethnic pastoralist communities engaged in the seasonal livestock migration from Sudan into the CAR, see International Peace Information Service (IPIS), “Central African Republic: A Conflict Mapping,” (Antwerp, Belgium: IPIS, 2018): 74, available at <https://ipisresearch.be/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/1809-CAR-conflict-mapping-web.pdf>.

²⁰⁰ Wayns, Yannick, et al., “Mapping Conflict Motives: The Central African Republic,” (Antwerp: International Peace Information Service (IPIS), 2014): 1-88, available at <https://ipisresearch.be/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/IPIS-CAR-Conflict-Mapping-November-2014.pdf>; Huchon, Jean, et al., “Transhumant Pastoralism and Protected Areas in Central Africa: From Conflict to Peaceful Coexistence, EU Science Hub, 2020: 237; UN Security Council Committee, Final Report, 33-34.

²⁰¹ 007- Vakaga FGD (Sudanese transhumant herders –pastoralist camp near Am Dafok), February 2024.

²⁰² Although the transhumant herders indicated 2021 as the year that they perceived insecurity to increase, secondary sources cite from 2019. See, for example, Final report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic extended pursuant to Security Council resolution 2339 (2017). S/2017/1023. New York, USA: 2017: 33-34. Available at <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2017/1023>. Violence increased in the Vakaga region as the group that formally controlled the region, known as the FPRC, was challenged by other armed groups following the signing of the peace agreement between the Central African government and 14 recognised armed groups operating in CAR. These groups fought over control of strategic trafficking routes in Vakaga (CAR).

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Vakaga FGD (religious leaders (imams) – Am Dafok (CAR)) February 2024.

²⁰⁵ 007- Vakaga FGD (Sudanese transhumant herders –pastoralist camp near Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024. 203

²⁰⁶ C/S: 006_Vakaga FGD (local women – Am Dafok), February 2024; C/S: 001_Vakaga FGD (religious leaders (imams) – Am Dafok (CAR)) February 2024; C/S: 001Vakaga KII (local community leader/customary authority - Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024. Historically, Arab and non-Arab Fellata pastoralists from Sudan have carried weapons to hunt during the seasonal livestock migration. However, these weapons were predominantly non-automatic (bladed) weapons. See, Lombard, *The Autonomous Zone*, 151, 155.

heavily armed transhumant herders²⁰⁶ and the use of alternate, unofficial routes as transhumant herders seek to avoid extortion or having their cattle raided during the seasonal livestock migration.²⁰⁷ Local women from Am Dafok's farming community perceive that armed pastoralists enjoy impunity, which further strains relations between pastoralists and settled communities. As one of the women noted, the presence of armed pastoralists: "mocks a community lacking state authorities."²⁰⁸

Real and perceived linkages that some within both pastoralist and settled communities have with predatory actors and illicit livelihoods in the CAR-Sudan borderlands have created a lack of trust among communities, fuelling inter-community tensions and conflict. Muslim religious leaders from Am Dafok's farming communities claimed Sudanese transhumant herders also engage in poaching,²⁰⁹ as well as deforestation,²¹⁰ linked to the destruction of local shea trees they cut down to feed their livestock, which impacts farming land. ²¹¹ A local official in Birao claimed armed Sudanese pastoralists from South Darfur had "transformed into 'highwaymen' (zaraguinas)," citing a recent incident during which a local semi-nomadic agro-pastoralist on the CAR side of the border around Birao had been targeted and 36 of his cattle stolen. ²¹² The local official went on to concede, however, that the perpetrators were "unidentified armed bandits."²¹³

The recurring belief among some within agro-pastoralist communities between Am Dafok and Birao that Sudanese Arab pastoralists perpetrate cattle raids overlaps with broader local perceptions that Sudanese transhumant herders are complicit in the armed trafficking of livestock in the CAR-Sudan borderlands.²¹⁴ Some among the more settled communities on the CAR side of the border have accused Sudanese transhumant herders of working in collaboration with the FPRC, an armed group that controlled the Vakaga region between 2014 and 2019, and Sudanese elites in the adjacent South Darfur region to profit from cattle rustling. ²¹⁵

The presence of arms has an impact. Disputes are settled violently at times, sparking destructive escalatory cycles of retribution. Local people in Am Dafok spoke of an incident in late November 2023 when an armed confrontation between two local farmers from Am Dafok and pastoralists from neighbouring Sudan over the herders' cattle in the farmers' fields led to violent reprisals. Over a two-day period, farming land and 86 homes were set alight, razing over 2,500 hectares: one person was killed, six others were wounded, and essential farming tools were taken.²¹⁶

Tribal land ownership rights governed throughout Darfur by the Hawakeer system, ²¹⁷ which pre-dates colonialism in Sudan, intersect with and exacerbate longstanding conflicts over land access on the Sudanese side of the border. ²¹⁸ Fewer land rights allocated to certain pastoralist communities under this system have contributed to local grievance.²¹⁹ The re-demarcation of land boundaries under Sudan's former President Bashir, which effectively transferred segments of land once belonging to one tribal group to another for settlement, use and access for livelihoods, both perpetuated and escalated recurrent cross border livelihood-related disputes between communities.²²⁰ Clashes between settled Taaisha agro pastoralists and nomadic non-Arab Fellata communities, for

²⁰⁷ 006_Vakaga FGD (local women – Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024; 001_Vakaga FGD (Am Dafok –religious leaders (imams) (CAR)) February 2024; 001Vakaga KII (local community leader/customary authority - Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024.

²⁰⁸ 006_Vakaga FGD (local women – Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024. Informal translation of a quote that was part of the FGD summary for the FGD with local women in Am Dafok.

²⁰⁹ 001_Vakaga FGD (Am Dafok – religious leaders (imams) (CAR)) February 2024.

²¹⁰ Ibid

²¹¹ IPIS, A Conflict Mapping, 74.

²¹² 004 Vakaga KII (local official - Birao Centre (CAR)), February 2024.

²¹³ Ibid

²¹⁴ IPIS, A Conflict Mapping, 74.

²¹⁵ Ibid; UN Security Council Committee, Final Report, 33-34.

²¹⁶ 001Vakaga KII (local community leader - Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024, informal translation from the original French. This event was also discussed by other interlocutors in the CAR/Sudan borderlands: 001 Vakaga FGD (local religious leaders – Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024.

²¹⁷ C/S 001 KII (local authority – Um Dafok (Sudan)), March 2024; see also: Dawalbit, Mohamed, "Narratives that Drive Conflict – Unpacking the Term 'Settler' and What it Means in Darfur," *The Conflict Sensitivity Facility*, February 6, 2024, available at <https://csf-sudan.org/settler-in-darfur/>.

²¹⁸ C/S 001 KII (local authority – Um Dafok (Sudan)), March 2024

²¹⁹ 001 Remote Discussion – Concordis Staff – Darfur Team, April 2024; Dawalbit, *Narratives that Drive Conflict*.

²²⁰ 002 Remote Discussion – Concordis Staff – Darfur Team, April 2024. The Concordis staff member provided more historical details that helped to contextualise the responses of Sudanese herders and a local authority from South Darfur.

²²¹ 007_Vakaga FGD (Sudanese transhumant herders –pastoralist camp near Am Dafok (CAR)); 001 KII (local authority – Um Dafok (Sudan)), March 2024; 001 Remote Discussion – Concordis Staff – Darfur Team, April 2024

example, typically occur when the Fellata return from CAR to Sudan at the start of each rainy season.²²¹

6.2. How local authorities and communities are involved in negotiating and delivering on borderland governance agreements

6.2.a Governance in the absence of state actors

The CAR-Sudan borderlands have lacked a longstanding presence of state and international governmental and non-governmental actors. Consequently, local customary and religious elites have played a central role in borderland governance. Agreements to manage cross-border relations and livelihoods are predominantly unwritten, highly informal and localised: local communities only identified one contemporary formal (written) cross-border agreement, which was facilitated with international support in 2019 to reduce insecurity and promote a safer and more peaceful transhumance. Members of pastoral and settled communities revealed the existence of community mechanisms aimed at mitigating tensions and increasing trust between and among pastoralist and farming communities. These include local committees and councils which operate at different levels of governance depending on the socio-political status of their members and the roles they play in cross-border governance processes and dispute resolution. The main aim of the informal unwritten cross-border local agreements that have emerged from these different structures is to mitigate an immediate escalation or recurrence of violence related to poorly negotiated transhumance. In doing so, these agreements primarily seek to “manage [local] disorder” in the CAR-Sudan borderlands rather than transform the underlying dynamics of violence.²²²

The formal 2019 Vakaga agreement to promote a safer, more peaceful, mutually beneficial transhumance in the CAR-Sudan borderlands was signed in Birao on the CAR side of the border. It emerged from an extensive cross-border mediation process facilitated by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) in September 2018. This involved Central African farmers, local pastoralists and agro-pastoralists from Vakaga and Sudanese transhumant herders from neighbouring South Darfur.²²³ These representatives of farming and cross-border transhumance communities were joined by local state and customary authorities from Vakaga and South Darfur and other community leaders.²²⁴ From Vakaga, this included the prefect and the Sultan of Birao who also functions as the mayor. Both served as witnesses to the agreement alongside representatives for the Sudanese, including the Council General for Sudan in Birao and the mayor of the town of Um Dafok on the Sudanese side of the border.²²⁵ The broad community participation in Birao enabled the development of local actor specific provisions for both farming and pastoralist communities in the CAR-Sudan borderlands: these anchored larger joint commitments that responded to some of the agreed upon sources of tension between their communities.²²⁶ Representatives from the farming, pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities agreed not to call on the members of armed groups or community-based armed militias to settle disputes between them.²²⁷ All sides agreed to denounce violence perpetrated by members of their respective communities against other communities, including not supporting cattle raiding against any community.²²⁸

High level local customary authorities have played a visible role in recent history in negotiating agreements to address the effects of violent clashes and reprisal attacks between Sudanese Arab pastoralists and more settled communities on the CAR side of the border. In March 2003 the extent of cattle looted and homes and fields destroyed in an incident prompted local politico-administrative leaders present and traditional and religious authorities to initiate a joint cross-border meeting.²²⁹ Those representing Sudan included the Consul for Sudan, a Khartoum political appointee based in Vakaga, alongside Omdas (traditional leaders) from South Darfur. Various high-level local state officials were present

²²² Duursma, *Making Disorder More Manageable*, 554-567; Pospisil, *Dissolving Conflict*, 1-16.

²²³ Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), *Médiations locales en République centrafricaine: Retour sur trois processus de médiation conduits par le Centre pour le dialogue humanitaire en 2018 & 2019*, Geneva, Switzerland: HD, 2020, available at <https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/RCA-mediations-locales.pdf>

²²⁴ 001_Vakaga FGD (religious leaders – Am Dafok (CAR)) February 2024.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), *Conflict Prevention Agreement Between Farmers from Vakaga in the Central African Republic and Herders from South Darfur* (Vakaga Agreement), 11 June 2019, Birao, Central African Republic, available at: https://www.peaceagreements.org/media/documents/ag2291_5ef20bb952c45.pdf

²²⁷ 001_Vakaga FGD (religious leaders – Am Dafok (CAR)) February 2024.

²²⁸ Ibid. For a written review of the agreement's provisions, see the agreement which is available at, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, *Conflict prevention agreement between farmers from Vakaga in the Central African Republic and herders from South Darfur* (Vakaga Agreement), 11 June 2019, Birao, Central African Republic, available at: https://www.peaceagreements.org/media/documents/ag2291_5ef20bb952c45.pdf

²²⁹ 001 Vakaga KII (local village leader – Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024.

²³⁰ Ibid. This information regarding the specific attendees was supplemented with the help of an additional conversation with a Concordis staff member both from and located in Birao, Vakaga. 001 Concordis staff member – remote discussion – March 2024.

from CAR, including the prefect for Vakaga, together with traditional authorities.²³⁰ Although the process was intended to lead to inter-community dialogue and reconciliation following the violence, it largely focused on both sides first taking stock of the damages and loss of life before negotiating a compensation amount owed and signing a joint cross-border agreement to that effect.²³¹

In 2017 a joint cross border meeting held between local populations in Am Dafok and diverse multi-ethnic transhumant herders arriving from Sudan as part of the seasonal livestock migration agreed to establish a local cross-border agro-pastoral committee which would be convened in the event of inter-community disputes to adjudicate between the different communities.²³² In establishing the committee, customary authorities were recognising the central role they play in borderland governance. A local customary leader from Am Dafok's farming community recalled how the committee functioned: "every time there is a dispute between pastoralists and farmers, there is a settlement or an agreement signed between the parties."²³³ The committee no longer functions formally: as an example of how shifting political dynamics in adjacent countries affect borderlands and the framework through which local authorities engage in borderland governance process, some of the Sudanese committee members had to leave South Darfur with the outbreak of war in Sudan in 2023. The committee's way of managing cross-border disputes endures: local women from Am Dafok's farming communities confirmed that high-level local customary authorities continue to lead the settlement of disputes by way of arbitration in the CAR-Sudan borderlands.²³⁴ In response to violence and deadly reprisals in November 2023, for example, customary and religious authorities from CAR and Omdas from Um Dafok gathered, reviewed the harm caused and determined that compensation would be paid to a family who lost their relative during the retaliatory violence.

Members of pastoralist and farming communities in Am Dafok highlighted small scale dialogue processes that were more inclusive than the arbitration committee. A locally embedded community conflict management council in Am Dafok was made up of 'wise people' chosen specifically from among the diverse pastoralist and settled communities, including two members from the Vakaga Advisory Group established in 2019.²³⁵ The council has a mandate to manage conflicts and prevent escalation between Sudanese transhumant herders and Am Dafok's farming and agro-pastoralist communities. It "meets systematically [during the seasonal livestock migration] to take stock of the situation and prevent potential conflicts," not only in the event of disputes. In addition to taking a broader community approach to dispute resolution, it also prioritises highly localised mediation and dialogue between the conflicting parties to reach a negotiated settlement.²³⁶ Local villagers in Am-Sissiya and Arab transhumant herders from Sudan emphasised that, in the event of disputes arising between them around access to land for livelihoods, the council engages in a dialogue process to reduce tensions and prevent escalation spreading throughout their respective communities, and then through further dialogue principally involving the conflicting parties a negotiated settlement is reached.²³⁷ Outcomes of meetings are shared with the different populations in Am Dafok through smaller group meetings, led by youth leaders for example, or more widely via megaphone.²³⁸ The council's cross-border governance efforts are also significant for the ways in which they not only seek to respond to transhumance-related disputes, through repeat community-based engagement, but also seek to prevent disputes emerging and escalating. Council representatives meet often as part of the council's mandate to condemn those who engage in cattle raiding and looting of property:²³⁹ the council's joint denouncements aim to reduce accusations of complicity levelled at one community or the other and act as a confidence building measure among and between pastoralist and farming communities in and around Am Dafok.

The system of governance in the CAR-Sudan borderlands demonstrates the complexity of local borderland spaces, with authority vested not only in the traditional local elites but also in those chosen by local communities to facilitate mediation and negotiated settlements. The preliminary significance of agreements reached – whatever the governance mechanism used – is to mitigate further escalation and the recurrence of violence in an environment

²³¹ Ibid. 224 006_Vakaga_KII (youth leader – Am Dafok (CAR)); 001_Vakaga_KII (village leader/customary authority – Am Dafok (CAR)).

²³² 006_Vakaga_KII (youth leader – Am Dafok (CAR)); 001_Vakaga_KII (village leader/customary authority – Am Dafok (CAR)).

²³³ 001_Vakaga_KII (village leader – Am Dafok (CAR)).

²³⁴ 006_Vakaga FGD (local women – Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024.

²³⁵ 007_Vakaga FGD (Sudanese transhumant herders – pastoralist encampment near Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024; 004 Vakaga FGD (local villagers – Am-Sissiya (village 5km outside of Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024.

²³⁶ 007 Vakaga FGD (Sudanese transhumant herders – pastoralist encampment near Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024; 004 FGD (local villagers – Am-Sissiya (village 5km outside of Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ 001_Vakaga KII (local village leader – Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024; 006_Vakaga_KII (youth leader – Am Dafok (CAR)).

²³⁹ 004 Vakaga FGD (local villagers – Am-Sissiya (village 5km outside of Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024.

marked by chronic insecurity. The informal local cross-border governance largely manifests through a process of relational proximity and repeat engagement, but locally imposed arbitration is mostly ad hoc. The system lacks formal, written agreements, to which participants and others can refer and on which they can revise and build.

6.2.b Effectiveness of local governance in the CAR-Sudan borderlands

Local governance in the CAR-Sudan borderlands has had mixed success in addressing inter-community conflict and tensions.

The formal written agreement showed some positive results soon after it was signed in Vakaga in 2019. The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) reported that, for the 2019 seasonal livestock migration, herders from South Darfur broadly adhered to official transhumance routes and agro-pastoralist areas were observed. There were also no reported incidents of cattle theft one month into the seasonal migration.²⁴⁰ Parties to the agreement met their commitment to create a Joint Commission comprising farmers and herders from Vakaga and South Darfur to deliver on the agreement and monitor its implementation throughout the CAR-Sudan borderlands.²⁴¹ The commission's mandate focused on engaging in and promoting non-violent dispute resolution and respect for the Vakaga agreement's provisions: as such it was an essential component of the agreement's implementation process, but the signatories only committed to convene once in the 12 months after the official signing, which was insufficient to ensure the agreement was adhered to or that it could withstand and adapt to shifting local dynamics in the borderlands. Armed violence increased on the CAR side of the border after the signing as armed groups fought for control of strategic trafficking routes in the Vakaga region.²⁴²

The Vakaga agreement could not address all the issues voiced by participants in the mediation. Some of the wider detrimental effects of cross-border violence on security, livelihoods and the local economy that were discussed were left unaddressed by the final agreement's provisions. Some issues that were addressed at the time resurfaced: speaking some five years after the signing of the agreement, Muslim religious leaders noted that Arab herders from South Darfur continue to establish their encampments near farmers' fields, which leads to the trampling of fields.²⁴³

The emergence of tensions during the mediation process leading to the Vakaga agreement that could not be addressed within that process underscores the significance of agreements not being part of an isolated process. Rather, borderland governance should be seen as an ongoing process of often continual negotiation and renegotiation. The issues facing borderland communities require recurring space for dialogue and negotiation for which international organisations can provide convening support as in the case of HD's efforts in 2019.

Community mechanisms using arbitration also had some immediate success. Local women from Am Dafok's settled communities agreed that the arbitration processes led by high-level local customary authorities: "often calm tensions between the two border communities" before they escalate or escalate further.²⁴⁴ This immediate de-escalatory and stabilising effect allows people to resume essential cross-border livelihood activities.²⁴⁵ Yet respect for arbitrated settlements and associated local cross-border agreements to mitigate transhumance-related violence is inconsistent.²⁴⁶ Women farmers say that Sudanese transhumant herders who previously agreed to compensate farmers for trampled fields and destroyed crops have reneged on the agreement.²⁴⁷ The lack of formalised post-settlement monitoring mechanisms anchoring the arbitrated settlements seemingly frustrates parties' delivery on informal arbitrated agreements.²⁴⁸ The limited scope of arbitrated settlements is also cause for complaint: a member of the local auxiliary force stated that after the November 2023 unrest, despite the significant destruction of farming land and essential equipment, it was: "only the relatives of the person killed in the reprisal who were compensated."²⁴⁹

Although the reach of the community conflict management council was limited to the surrounding area, it achieved

²⁴⁰ Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), *Médiations locales en République Centrafricaine: Retour sur trois processus de médiation conduits par le Centre pour le dialogue humanitaire en 2018 & 2019*, Geneva, Switzerland: HD, 2020, available at <https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/RCA-mediations-locales.pdf>

²⁴¹ Humanitarian Dialogue, *Vakaga Agreement*.

²⁴² UN Security Council Committee, *Final Report*, 33-34.

²⁴³ 001_Vakaga FGD (religious leaders – Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024.

²⁴⁴ 006_Vakaga FGD (local women – Am Dafok CAR)), February 2024.

²⁴⁵ 001 Vakaga KII (local village leader – Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024.

²⁴⁶ 006_Vakaga_KII (youth leader – Am Dafok (CAR)); C/S: 001_Vakaga_KII (community leader/farmer/customary authority – Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024; C/S:006 Vakaga FGD (local women – Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024.

²⁴⁷ 006 Vakaga FGD (local women – Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024.

²⁴⁸ 001 Vakaga KII (local village leader – Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024.

²⁴⁹ 003 Vakaga KII (member of local auxiliary force – Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024. Informal translation from the original French interview.

success in addressing the sources of inter-community conflict and tensions by building trust through highly localised and inclusive dialogue. It was the intercommunal confidence building efforts the council in Am Dafok facilitated that proved most significant. For Sudanese transhumant herders and local villagers in Am-Sissiya, the council is more effective than other local informal mechanisms to manage cross-border disputes for the way in which it enables members of the two local communities to manage and prevent conflicts among themselves, through mediation and dialogue and by directly negotiating the settlement.²⁵⁰ That the Sudanese transhumant herders judged settlements embedded in dialogue processes to be more effective ²⁵¹ underscores the importance of local involvement in negotiating cross-border agreements, however informal, and the need for grassroots local engagement, more specifically, for the purposes of trust building. It would also appear that trust built through highly localised and inclusive dialogue can operate as the implementation mechanism which ensures compliance.

6.3. The intersection of local cross-border agreements with national and regional level border governance

Neither the formal nor informal cross-border agreements in the CAR-Sudan borderlands make explicit reference to national or regional border governance arrangements such as the N'Djamena (regional) Declaration signed by the CAR and Sudanese governments in 2013. All the agreements in the CAR-Sudan borderland intersect with the N'Djamena Declaration in a more subtle way, speaking to its commitments to better govern the seasonal migration of livestock, one of which was the need to guarantee the security of pastoralists in borderlands throughout the duration of the seasonal livestock migration, with their focus on non-violent dispute resolution to mitigate conflict over land access and use, cattle theft and the trampling of fields from escalating throughout local communities.²⁵² The 2019 Vakaga agreement, more specifically, emerged against the backdrop of the 2019 national peace process in CAR. The local mediation and dialogue that led to the Vakaga agreement was intended to play its part in national “stabilisation efforts” at the time, in recognition of how local cross-border conflicts between the diverse pastoralist and farming communities had reinforced and fuelled broader conflict dynamics in CAR, as armed groups and less structured criminal gangs in the borderlands sought to profit from the movement and trade in livestock.²⁵³

6.4. Conclusion

Local (informal) cross-borderland governance agreements in the CAR-Sudan borderlands are the outcome of locally initiated processes from within communities. The local structures involved in managing transhumance in the CAR-Sudan borderlands govern at different levels, influenced by the diverse societal influence of their members. Through separate arbitration and dialogue processes, these local structures have facilitated informal, unwritten cross-border agreements that largely seek to prevent the immediate escalation of violence related to poorly negotiated transhumance.

In comparison with local arbitration processes imposed with limited involvement from the injured parties, local people in the CAR-Sudan borderlands see agreements reached through dialogue as more effective at resolving disputes and preventing escalation. Despite a lack of formal implementation and accountability measures, engaging in highly localised dialogue, where the conflicting parties can directly negotiate a settlement to resolve their dispute, helps to foster trust and adherence to that negotiated settlement. The CAR -Sudan case highlights that local cross-border governance can function even when informal, seemingly ad hoc in nature and lacking a broad diversity of actors, through a process of relational proximity with its focus on highly localised, recurrent cross-party dialogue.

Evidence in this case that borderland governance is an ongoing process comes from an absence rather than a presence. The lack of formal, written agreements has removed the opportunity to refer to, revise and build on what exists; the one formal, written agreement that exists has suffered from the failure of its implementation and monitoring mechanism to facilitate ongoing dialogue around commitments agreed and further discussions on issues raised but not addressed during the mediation; ad hoc governance is functioning but the process of relational proximity and repeat engagement may not prove resilient to severe shocks, such as war in Sudan or the effects of climate change. There may be a need to support more proactive and intentional fora through which these local borderland communities can engage in dialogue.

²⁵⁰ 007 Vakaga FGD (Sudanese transhumant herders – pastoralist encampment near Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024; 004 FGD (local villagers – Am-Sissiya village 5km outside of Am Dafok (CAR)), February 2024.

²⁵¹ 007 Vakaga FGD (Sudanese transhumant herders – pastoralist encampment near Am Dafok (CAR)),

²⁵² Tchadienne Plateforme Regional, “Declaration de N'Djamena sur la contribution de l'élevage pastoral à la sécurité et au développement des espaces Saharo-Sahéliens,” Colloque Régional-Conférence Ministérielle, 2013, available at : <https://www.inter-reseaux.org/ressource/declaration-de-ndjamena-sur-lelevage-pastoral-la-securite-et-le-developpement-des-espaces-saharo-saheliens/>

²⁵³ Humanitarian Dialogue, *Vakaga Agreement*.

Conclusions, Implications and Policy Recommendations

Conclusions

The report finds that borderlands are both places of conflict and tension and places of opportunity. Challenges affecting security, economic cooperation and livelihoods in the CAR-Chad, CAR-Sudan and Sudan-South Sudan borderlands range from the illegal activities of armed groups to political contestation over territorial sovereignty. Conflict and tension around the seasonal livestock migration (transhumance) is a central challenge in all three borderlands. Poorly regulated and negotiated transhumance shapes local cross-border dynamics, fuelling tensions and driving conflict, and is in turn reshaped by broader conflict dynamics at the national and regional levels as these cut across issues of land access and the free movement of people and livestock. At the same time, opportunities for cross-border trade and the livelihoods associated with them, both licit and illicit, are offered in these places where diverse groups of people congregate, bringing goods and livestock or providing services to those who do. All present – whether passing through or settled – seek the conditions that will make their livelihood possible and the security that will keep at least their own group safe.

Existing literature reveals that border management policies at the national level to create the conditions for a peaceful and safe transhumance often neglect the interests of local borderland communities. Negotiations on the movement of pastoralists and livestock fail to consult or involve borderland communities engaged in these livelihood activities or local representatives from the technical agencies with the mandate to regulate the livestock sectors.

In the absence of effective border management policies at the national level, the report reinforces the finding that borderlands are not ungoverned spaces.²⁵⁴ Local communities manage cross-border relations around trade and livelihoods through local agreements. Local actors govern, manage and engage in and with transhumance through local cross-border agreements for their mutual benefit, underscoring the centrality of local communities in borderland governance in the three borderlands. The report has shown the importance of diverse local leaders and groups acting as local catalysts for cross-border dialogue processes around the governing of transhumance. State actors are present and active in local borderland governance in some borderlands: local authorities recognise the role they play in borderland governance and demonstrate the political will to do so. Customary and traditional authorities assume responsibility for and play a prominent role in local cross-border governance agreements. The report recognises the complexity of local borderland spaces, where authority may be vested not only in traditional local elites but also in those chosen by local communities to facilitate mediation and negotiated settlements. Multi-levelled cross border community participation works, including governing by local structures at different levels. Despite the challenges of effective and consistent governance around transhumance throughout a borderland, the local cross-border agreements around transhumance discussed in this report and their associated mechanisms have made a difference in transforming the livelihood practice from one that is poorly negotiated and largely unregulated locally into one that benefits transhumant and settled local borderland communities in the CAR-Chad, CAR-Sudan and Sudan-South Sudan borderlands.

In considering how local borderland governance agreements interact with national and regional border governance, the report finds that local cross-border agreements can and do intersect with borderland arrangements negotiated at higher levels. One or more of four approaches are used. Local agreements acknowledge what exists at the national or regional level (CAR-Chad, CAR-Sudan, Abyei); sideline contentious elements (Abyei's unresolved status); use what is supportive of the local direction (CAR-Chad references in local agreements to the N'Djamena Declaration) or act in the same spirit without specific reference (CAR-Sudan agreements intended to move towards a peaceful transhumance).

The report finds that local borderland governance is – and should be – an ongoing process. Local cross border agreements are affected by national, regional and international dynamics. All three borderland case studies emphasise that shifts in these dynamics can strain existing local cross-border agreements aimed at enhancing security, cross-border interactions and the livelihoods of borderland communities. Shifting conflict dynamics at the national level can create obstacles to delivery, as with the shifting national politico-military landscape in CAR that

²⁵⁴ Risse, Thomas. *Areas of Limited Statehood*, 1-37. New York: Colombia University Press, 2011; Risse, Thomas, Tanja Börzel, and Anke Draude, *The Oxford Handbook of Governance*.

impacted the implementation of the local 2019 Paoua agreement. Changing dynamics can render local agreements less effective at dealing with the issues they previously sought to address, or less relevant as new conflicts emerge. In the CAR-Sudan case study, for example, the outbreak of war in Sudan in 2023 affected the functioning of the cross-border agro-pastoral committee. Cross border dynamics require continual management: borderland governance should be seen as a process of often continual negotiation and renegotiation with space provided for this. More positively, local borderland agreements are – and are seen by local communities to be – an essential component of the process of borderland governance. Existing agreements can be used to encourage and shape new agreements, setting a precedent from which to negotiate persistent issues. In the Sudan-South Sudan case study, the 2016 Noong agreement was used as a reference and catalyst at every stage of the process leading to the 2023 agreement, functioning as an essential reference point from which revisions and new pathways could emerge. In the CAR-Chad case study the 2019 Paoua process acted as a framework for the agreements that followed and the 2022 agreements built on the 2019 agreement.

Local cross-border agreements are an integral feature of these borderlands. They govern cross-border relations around trade and livelihoods, in particular those linked to transhumance, aiming to prevent the escalation of violence and resolve conflict. Local community issues both inform and are affected by cross-border governance agreements. The report finds that local communities create and use these highly localised agreements to sustain their local economies, create the conditions necessary for their livelihoods and improve the environment in which they live. Some agreements have proved effective at responding to the pressing needs of borderland communities for more immediate security and stability. Some have proved resilient to political and conflict-related shocks in the borderlands.

The report finds evidence of three factors that make local agreements more likely to be effective:

- 1. Agreements work better when those affected contribute to negotiations and agreements.** The CAR-Chad case study found that an inclusive dialogue approach resulted in provisions in each agreement that more accurately reflected and responded to local challenges raised. On the CAR-Sudan border, communities reported that dialogue mechanisms are more effective than arbitration because through dialogue participants can manage what is agreed themselves, including the scope of a settlement. Engaging in highly localised dialogue, where the parties can negotiate a settlement directly, helps to foster trust and adherence to that negotiated settlement. The case for engaging relevant local actors, including where appropriate spoilers or potential spoilers, is made in the CAR-Chad case study (inclusion of security and defence actors negotiating and developing joint commitments proved crucial) and in both the Sudan-South Sudan and the CAR-Sudan case study (role of youth in governance).
- 2. Agreements are more effective when supported by implementation and monitoring mechanisms.** These may take different forms: the use of existing mechanisms (e.g. local Advisory Group given implementation responsibilities in CAR-Chad), creating new mechanisms (e.g. the Joint Community Peace Committee in Abyei) or building trust in the absence of formal mechanisms (e.g. the Community Conflict Management Council in CAR-Sudan). Implementation and enforcement may also be more effective where the agreements enshrine a series of jointly developed, agreed upon provisions that are local actor specific, as in the CAR-Chad agreements. There may also be a role for external actors – beyond supporting and facilitating dialogues, acting as an important tool for brokering local borderland agreements and ensuring broad-based representation – in assisting local communities when invited with the implementation and enforcement of agreements.
- 3. Agreements are more likely to succeed when they focus on what needs to be solved.** Agreements in each of the case studies succeeded by focusing on the immediate community needs for security, trade and livelihoods. In the CAR-Sudan case study, the main aim of the informal, unwritten local agreements that have emerged is to mitigate an immediate escalation or recurrence of violence related to poorly negotiated transhumance. Where the political situation made this possible, agreements were able to go beyond this narrow focus to address broader sources of conflict and systemic issues (e.g. taxation in CAR-Chad), where necessary agreements kept away from what could not be solved (e.g. state level conflict in Abyei). There is value, however, in acknowledging when issues raised cannot be addressed during the current process (CAR-Sudan learning from issues raised in dialogue and not addressed in the Vakaga 2019 agreement).

Implications

Three main implications from the findings in the report were identified.

First, local ownership of the negotiation of cross-border agreements is imperative.

This can be achieved by inclusive consultations and dialogue preceding and during negotiations around borderland

governance. The involvement of external actors may make the brokering of an agreement easier and can encourage broad based representation beyond the local elites, but the role of these actors must support local ownership.

Even in the CAR-Sudan borderlands, where informal cross-border agreements lacking international support are more frequent, local people emphasised their need to be directly and actively involved in dialogue processes to reduce cross-border tensions, in addition to stating a preference for dialogue over arbitration.

The implementation mechanisms in Abyei, including the 20-member Joint Community Peace Committee (JCPC), were particularly striking for how they managed cross-border relations positively over a sustained period. The monitoring committees and local Advisory Groups in the CAR-Chad borderlands were also noteworthy. These mechanisms were not externally imposed but rather mutually designed and agreed upon structures that were locally embedded, which counted among the most important reasons for their sustainability and trust within the wider local community.

Irrespective of the shape these monitoring mechanisms take, local agreements with these components have been effective because they provide a means through which local communities and international actors can provide ongoing and sustained support. This type of support is crucial, particularly as local political or conflict dynamics shift, possibly requiring additional opportunities for cross-border communities to come together, engage in dialogue and revisit the progress regarding the implementation of an agreement's provisions. International actors can also provide crucial logistical support for such encounters.

In borderland contexts where international organisations are less present and local mechanisms governing cross-border relations, livelihoods and disputes are predominantly unwritten, more informal and seemingly ad hoc, these arrangements function through a process of relational proximity. In the CAR-Sudan borderlands, for example, repetitive interactions, relationship building and highly localised dialogue have proved to be more effective in diffusing tensions and sustaining cross-border relations than arrangements centred on arbitration. In addition to focusing on the power of dialogue over arbitration, local people highlighted the effectiveness of directly choosing who facilitated the dialogue between themselves and the other party to the conflict.

Second, local cross-border agreements are effective because they can set a precedent and generate a framework for accountability.

The local cross-border agreements discussed in this report provide an effective foundation, which diverse local communities can reference, build upon and revise, or use to generate new pathways to shape cross-border relationships and the functioning of borderlands toward non-violent dispute resolution and cooperative livelihoods. For example, in the CAR-Chad borderlands, the Bekoninga Agreement signed in 2022 not only built upon the 2019 Paoua agreement, but also went further in terms of the local actors involved in the dialogue and negotiating the agreement. Specifically, local security and defence forces stationed on either side of the CAR-Chad border were included during the Bekoninga Agreement dialogue process. Their inclusion and mutually agreed upon joint commitments, around cross-border security, communication and their subsequent conduct toward transhumant herders, ultimately strengthened the role of these forces in delivering on borderland governance.

In the case of Abyei where youth are an emerging local stakeholder in borderland governance, they are using existing local cross-border agreements to support their efforts to prevent disputes arising from cattle theft and other criminality. For example, local youth refer to the commitments made in previous local agreements in their engagement with local communities along the cattle corridors prior to the seasonal migration. Faced with rising tensions over Abyei's contested status in the context of the external shock of the war in Sudan, youth from both sides were able to reference previous agreements and their provisions in discussions around access to grazing pastures and water points with local people living along the cattle corridors prior to the seasonal migration.

The diverse ways in which local people use and engage with local agreements after they have been signed further underscore their importance as an integral component in the broader borderland governance process. They serve as a reminder that dialogue is possible even in highly contested environments.

Third, diverse actors from local borderland communities play a crucial and leading role in initiating, negotiating and delivering on borderland governance.

The presence and authority of local political authorities, state security and defence forces, and customary and religious authorities varies across three borderlands. However, as this research has shown, the local cross-border agreements examined broadly underscore the interconnected local and cross-border responsibilities diverse local authorities have in negotiating borderland governance agreements around transhumance and then delivering on these agreements alongside their respective counterparts across the border.

The number and variety of actors also speaks to the complex role local cross-border governance agreements play in relation to state-building efforts, notably in Abyei and the CAR-Sudan borderlands. Customary and traditional authorities play a particularly prominent role in local cross-border governance in comparison to rational-legal (state) authorities in both these borderlands. The role of customary and traditional authorities in local borderland governance underscores the importance of policymakers and other relevant external actors avoiding binaries whereby one set of actors is viewed as more legitimate than another in borderland governance. The state is but one authority among many. Yet, irrespective of the borderland context and the actors present, this report finds that cross-border dialogue is central to any strategy for more peaceful, inclusive and accountable transhumance and cross-border relations in the CAR-Chad, CAR-Sudan and Sudan-South Sudan borderlands.

Policy Recommendations

To support local cross-border agreements, policymakers should focus on eight interconnected recommendations

1. Pursue a holistic approach to borderland governance focused on developing locally sensitive policies and programming and enhancing connections between local, national and regional governance arrangements.

Policy makers at the national, regional and international levels need to be more aware of the effects their policies and programming have on dynamics at the community level, and vice versa.

Those making policy related to borderland arrangements, whether national governments of neighbouring countries negotiating bilateral treaties or international organisations, must take steps to better understand local borderland contexts. Specifically, this must include a clear understanding of the mechanisms and effectiveness of existing systems of local governance, recognising that how local cross-border communities work together collaboratively to resolve conflicts, mitigate tensions and promote livelihoods may not present in conventional ways. Such understanding must include both the more formal, written local cross-border agreements and the informal, highly localised unwritten agreements that exist.

Working collaboratively through consultations and ongoing engagement with the diverse stakeholders that make up borderland communities is required to ensure efforts at one level do not jeopardise efforts at another.

2. Recognise the importance of local agreements and the role they play in enhancing the lives and livelihoods of borderland communities, particularly around transhumance and related issues such as free movement, access to land and other resources, and dispute resolution.

Written and unwritten – formal or informal - local cross-border agreements are a key element of local borderland governance. These agreements can make a tangible difference to the lives of borderland communities. The practice of transhumance, for example, is often poorly regulated and takes place in areas where there is limited state-led governance. Local agreements in the CAR-Chad, CAR-Sudan and Sudan-South Sudan borderlands have made a difference in moving the process of transhumance from being largely unregulated and unnegotiated to more governed and regulated at the community level. This enables transhumance to generate wealth and livelihoods for all concerned, as well as security, taxation and improved state presence in the borderlands where local state authorities are present. Policy makers and international organisations need to support existing agreements where they are proving effective and allow space for the creation of new local agreements where these are likely to be effective. Often, the agreements themselves are specific about the support sought. These include requests: in Abyei, for security patrols from UN peacekeepers and for national-level politicians to refrain from inflammatory political rhetoric; along the CAR-Chad border for waterpoints, the marking of transhumance routes and training in conflict resolution and non-violent communication.

3. Promote local knowledge and ensure local ownership over community-level borderland governance processes.

International actors can provide essential logistical and facilitation support around the negotiation of local cross-border agreements, but local ownership is vital. Community-level cross-border agreements are more sustainable when they reflect locally identified challenges and are accompanied by locally embedded mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and continued cross-border dialogue and engagement. Local people in the CAR-Sudan borderlands perceived unwritten, informal agreements to be effective at reducing transhumance-related tensions in the immediate term. However, without visible monitoring mechanisms the sustainability of these ad hoc agreements is less easily identified. International actors must balance ensuring local ownership and accountability while providing the necessary support and conditions for constructive dialogue and reaching an agreement. Finding this balance includes judging when to stay to assist with a smooth implementation, help reconvene community-level actors as their interests and local dynamics shift, and when to leave to avoid undermining local ownership. Concordis Advisory

Group members have been effective in making this judgement as they include people trusted by a wide and inclusive spectrum of the region's different communities.

4. Prioritise cross-border solutions that address locally identified community needs.

Local cross-border agreements are often negotiated in areas that are highly contested such as in Abyei where political governance is contested between Sudan and South Sudan. Local agreements in Abyei have succeeded by sidelining (not resolving) the seemingly intractable and protracted conflict over Abyei's political status and focusing instead on the immediate needs of the communities concerned. In doing so, local cross-border agreements and their implementation mechanisms can achieve an improvement in the quality of lives and livelihoods that may be more complicated to achieve at the national or regional level. This in turn builds local ownership and gives a clear incentive for people to comply with the agreements. Policymakers should be open to and promote the option of local solutions where a broader one appears less likely in the short to medium term and work to create the conditions for such solutions – or at the very least take care to step away or pull back from acting in a way that makes a local solution more difficult. Long term work with trusted local intermediaries, such as Concordis Advisory Groups, can be highly effective in finding solutions that achieve this balance.

5. Creatively support local borderland communities through a diverse range of forums that encourage more proactive, intentional and inclusive dialogue as a vital component of borderland governance.

Irrespective of whether the dialogue around borderland governance is considered and deliberate or more reactive, as in the CAR-Sudan borderlands, dialogue is an important and recurring feature around local cross border agreement to address tensions, build trust and foster cooperative and prosperous livelihoods. Effective dialogues can take a multitude of forms. Meetings of traditional leaders or other community members can take place more informally and without external assistance, as has happened on the Sudan-CAR border. It is recommended that they continue to meet in this way. The Joint Community Peace Committee (JCPC) in Abyei is effective in that peacemakers from all sides of the conflict sit together regularly to address issues arising. Cross-border peace conferences on the CAR- Chad border were effective in part because they included senior officials with the power to direct security services and extract tax revenue.

Policymakers should endeavour to support dialogue, including facilitating the space for dialogue (physical and time), removing barriers to dialogue (physical and economic) and providing infrastructure (frameworks and facilitation) where needed.

Policymakers also have a role to play in encouraging more proactive, intentional and inclusive dialogue by: engaging local communities to collaborate more effectively through support for entities or actors whose role makes them more likely to promote dialogue; sharing information about ways in which other borderland communities have reached agreements; or raising the possibility of including key actors (such as security and defence officials if present) who have previously been left out of dialogue around borderland governance.

6. Recognise the diversity of local actors involved in initiating, negotiating and delivering on cross-border agreements governing transhumance and related issues such as free movement and access to land.

In the CAR-Chad, CAR-Sudan, and Sudan-South Sudan borderlands, the role of state actors in local governance processes is both varied and inconsistent. High-level local customary and traditional authorities have played a particularly prominent, catalytic role in cross-border governance processes, but their effectiveness has also varied. On the CAR-Chad border, military actors from both sides of the border were able to establish their own joint security protocols, quite separately from the agreement reached between prefects. Effective and locally owned cross border governance needs to be highly interconnected, with myriad stakeholders being actively involved and engaged. Policymakers must therefore avoid promoting one set of local actors, such as state authorities or even armed groups, as more legitimate than others in borderland governance.

Policymakers should seek creative ways to secure active participation of different groups in the practical implementation of cross border agreements. In Abyei, for example, this could include building on the informal meetings initiated by Ngok Dinka and Misseriya youth in conjunction with the JCPC.

7. Leverage existing cross-border agreements to promote future dialogue and agreements.

The existence of a local cross-border agreement, even one that is no longer in use or was never fully implemented, has been shown to have a positive effect on progress towards future dialogue and agreements. Potential parties to the future agreement view the existing agreement as evidence that reaching consensus on pressing community needs for

immediate security and stability, livelihoods and functioning local economies is possible. Existing local agreements in one borderland area can act as a starting point for further dialogue or be used to initiate a new agreement drawing on specific elements from another. Policymakers can leverage this by drawing attention to current and lapsed agreements and by being assumptive about these as catalysts for future agreements.

8. Utilise and promote local cross-border peace agreements as a part of positive borderland governance processes.

Local cross-border agreements are not end points in the process of managing borderlands and governing space and access to land. Rather, they must be viewed as an important element of a broader infrastructure made up of dialogue, implementation and monitoring mechanisms. Policymakers need to make space for and acknowledge the importance of each stage of the process. They can do this through: extensive intracommunity dialogue, discussions and negotiations to ensure inclusivity and buy-in before cross-border dialogue or community-level conferences prior to the seasonal migration; an action plan with extensive local follow-up after the conference; further dialogue as necessary to establish and implement the mechanisms necessary to ensure accountability and address issues arising.

Policymakers should also take a long view of cross border dynamics and recognise that, even if an agreement breaks down, there may still be a positive process to salvage. An initial agreement can be referred to as evidence of common ground and an ability to reach agreement, those who were willing to meet before can be encouraged to do so again, those who were not involved can be invited and included. Policymakers have a role to play in promoting individual peace agreements as part of positive borderland governance processes and in countering rhetoric that a broken agreement cannot be revisited and revised to restore cooperative livelihoods and cross-border interactions away from destructive conflict.

Finally, recognising that peacebuilding in the borderlands is an ongoing process not an event, policy makers should avoid the temptation for 'quick fixes', one-off interventions and short-term engagements. They should instead invest in long-term, relational and locally rooted work, that generates accountable governance and conflict transformation through repeated transactions to mutual economic benefit.

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About Concordis

We are peacebuilders.

We support those who live where conflict is fought and felt.

We work hand in hand with communities, helping them find workable solutions that address the root causes of conflict and contribute to lasting peace and economic development.

We are committed to finding sustainable solutions that benefit all those involved: women and youth, as well as men; local administrative authorities, community leaders, and civil society; those who choose to take up arms and those who don't.

We engage for the long term to build trusting relationships, leaving a legacy that enables future conflict to be managed peacefully within the community.

We work to our values of humility, impartiality and inclusivity.

About XCEPT

The Cross-Border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) research programme brings together world-leading experts and local researchers to examine conflict-affected borderlands, how conflicts connect across borders, and the drivers of violent and peaceful behaviour. Funded by UK International Development, XCEPT offers actionable research to inform policies and programmes that support peace. The views expressed in this material do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

<https://www.xcept-research.org>

Contacts

<https://concordis.international>

