



## Peace and security along the Ivorian-Liberian border: The local perspective



## Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the help and assistance of a great number of people. We thank the local population and border officials in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire who gave their time to be interviewed for this study. We offer our thanks to those members of the District Platforms for Dialogue who conducted the interviews. We are particularly grateful to our civil society partners in the region, including the West African Network for Peacebuilding – Côte d'Ivoire and the Institute for Research and Democratic Development in Liberia through whose immense work the research information was gathered. Special thanks also goes to Daniel Tucker for putting the partner reports together and for the final design of the report. We would also like to thank the European Union for funding this research through the “Capacities for Peace” project.

## Disclaimer

This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this are the sole responsibility of Conciliation Resources and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

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## Introduction

Since the Ivorian political crisis of 2010-2011, the Liberia-Côte d'Ivoire border region has experienced periodic cross-border attacks. These devastating attacks have destroyed lives, displaced families, shattered livelihoods and contributed to the breakdown of community norms and values. Many of the attacks have been attributed to supporters of former President Laurent Gbagbo who, having fled Côte d'Ivoire in the wake of the election crisis, are accused of using the Liberian border region to recruit militia members and launch attacks.

The first cross-border attacks were recorded in July 2011. Since then, there have continued to be outbreaks of violence across the border with a significant increase in the number of incidents recorded between February and August 2012. The most significant of which was the 8 June 2012 attack near Taï, which resulted in the deaths of seven Nigerian United Nations (UN) peacekeepers and 10 to 15 Ivorian civilians. In response to substantial attention from the international community, the Liberian and Ivorian governments heavily militarised the border area. Between August 2012 and early 2014 just two attacks were recorded (one in January 2013, followed by a second in March 2013). This period of relative calm led the UN missions in both countries to tentatively suggest that the border situation had improved.<sup>1</sup> However, deadly attacks in February, April and May 2014 have shattered this semblance of peace.

Whether in a time of regular attacks or relative calm, the local border communities remain fearful of more persistent underlying insecurities in the area. Friction between communities in the border region arising from a lack of sustainable livelihood opportunities, ineffective justice and insufficient security mechanisms to seek redress continue to widen divides. These have been further exacerbated in 2014 by the Ebola outbreak and the subsequent inadequacies of the national-level response.

Between April and June 2014, Conciliation Resources and its local partners - the Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD) in Liberia and the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Côte d'Ivoire -

conducted an assessment of factors behind the insecurities felt by communities living in the Ivorian-Liberian border region. This report presents and analyses the perspectives of those local border communities and government officials working in the region and outlines how they perceive and understand the violence, tensions and insecurities they experience. By providing relevant stakeholders with current and detailed information, this report can be used to improve the efficacy of current and future attempts to strengthen peace and security along the Ivorian-Liberian border.

## Contextual background

The UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia (UNMIL) is in the process of a three-year drawdown process, which was due to be completed by July 2015.<sup>2</sup> However, the final stages of this process have been suspended to enable better management of the Ebola outbreak.<sup>3</sup> In June 2014 the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) started the yearlong process of reducing its military component by 1,700 troops to 5,347 troops.<sup>4</sup> The intention of this restructuring is to hand over responsibility for the security of these communities and regions to the respective countries' government security institutions. However, there is a real concern that gaps in the handover process, and particularly in the capacity of local security officials to engage with communities to develop strategies responsive to local security needs, may create a conventional security apparatus vacuum within the border region.

The potentially destabilising impact of such a vacuum is likely to be exacerbated by the presidential elections in Côte d'Ivoire scheduled to take place in May 2015. Aside from the fact that these will be the first elections in the country since the 2010-2011 crisis, which saw high levels of political violence across the country, the traditional way in which national political rivalries have been played out along this fragile but porous border region, suggests that the area is likely to experience a spike in violence over the coming months.

1 'Thirty-fourth report of the Secretary General on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire', UN Security Council, S/2014/342 para. 60, 15 May 2014

2 'Resolution 2116(2013)', UN Security Council, S/RES/2116, 18 September 2013

3 'Resolution 2176(2014)', UN Security Council, S/RES/2176, 15 September 2014

4 'Resolution 2162(2014)', UN Security Council, S/RES/2162, 25 June 2014



*DPD members in Côte d'Ivoire conduct a survey gauging the border community's perspectives.*  
 © Conciliation Resources/ Janet Adama Mohammed

The Mano River Union (MRU), with the support of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union (EU) and the UN, has developed a sub-regional security strategy in the shape of a five-year plan (2014-2018), which, along with related project documents, clearly prioritises cross-border security as an integral mechanism for consolidating peace and stability in the sub-region. The spread of the Ebola epidemic across the region since April 2014 has further emphasised the need for better recognition of border security issues and the need for stronger governance structures and processes in these areas. Despite this, recent efforts encouraged by international emergency response agencies and governments, have only channelled support in response to the short term humanitarian needs of communities in these areas, rather than designing strategies to tackle the longer term gaps in governance. It is these gaps that have allowed the Ebola virus to spread so quickly throughout the area and have led to further violence amongst communities and between communities and health workers.

## Methodology and scope of the study

This research focuses upon the perspectives of communities and local actors along the Ivorian-Liberian border. It complements earlier research

conducted by Conciliation Resources and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex, which focused on policy responses to the Ivorian-Liberian cross-border tensions.<sup>5</sup>

The specific focus of the analysis on border communities around Danané and Toulépleu (in Côte d'Ivoire), and Loguato and Toe Town (in Liberia) is reflective of regions where there is a strong presence of MRU Joint Border Security and Confidence Building Units (JBSCBU). In addition, UNMIL, UNOCI and the Liberian and Ivorian security officials hold Operation MAYO meetings in these locations, aimed at providing a space for stakeholders to share current security issues with one another and undertake common mapping of the border on a twice-monthly basis. The hope is that this will allow for the development of a more cooperative and collaborative strategy between communities and security officials to manage or avoid tensions along the border.

Conciliation Resources and our partners IREDD in Liberia and WANEP in Côte d'Ivoire facilitated the training of representatives of community-based organisations, women and youth groups to form District Platforms for Dialogue (DPDs) in the four border communities. These are

<sup>5</sup> Allouche, J. and Mohammed, J. A. 'Cross-border Violence as an External Stress: Policy Responses to Cross-border Dynamics on the Border between Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia'. *IDS Evidence Report 77* (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2014)



networks of local community representatives who through engagement with local and national level policy makers, ensure that the security needs and concerns of local communities are effectively and transparently addressed by local and national government.

Upon completion of this training, members of the DPDs went to the surrounding communities and conducted a survey gauging peoples' perspectives of violence and instability in their communities and the capacity of local actors to respond. In total, over 200 people were interviewed across all four communities. The respondents included women, youth, commercial motorbike riders, mechanics and security and local government officials. Upon initial analysis of the survey, focus groups of between 20 and 40 people were organised to validate the emerging findings. This was then presented to national stakeholders in the respective capitals to verify the findings and share community concerns before the final report was produced.

## Findings from cross-border research along the Ivorian-Liberian border

The findings of the research are structured into two strands providing the perspectives first of government officials in the border regions (including security officials and local government officials) and second of the local communities who engaged with the process. The findings attempt to outline the differing explanations of the causes of instability in the region and highlight some of the key security and socio-economic issues affecting local people living in the border region.

One obstacle that the researchers found when undertaking this study with government officials was that many of them felt they were unable to discuss socio-economic issues in the border region in their professional capacity as state employees, as they saw these issues as being explicitly political in nature. Instead they focused on discussing the challenges, expectations and opportunities of their work. As a result, this report does not discuss socio-economic issues from the perspective of government officials. It is clear that when these individuals discussed socio-economic issues their role shifted from being that of a local government official to that



*A DPD training workshop with border officials in Toe Town, Liberia. © Conciliation Resources/Janet Adama Mohammed*

of a member of the local border population and their accounts are presented accordingly – alongside the accounts of other members of the local population.

## Perspectives of border region government officials

### Explanations for the violence

While Liberian and Ivorian officials acknowledge the role that both Monrovia and Abidjan must play in attempting to improve the situation, both sides have competing and often accusatory explanations of the primary cause of the tension along the border.

Liberian border officials emphasise that the tension is a result of a lack of political and economic inclusion in Côte d'Ivoire. An official from the Emergency Response Unit of the Liberian National Police, who wished to remain anonymous, stated that the new Ivorian government needed to 'take reconciliation and political inclusion seriously' if it is to consolidate and support the current political stability. He suggested that, whilst Liberia still has a number of pre-wartime issues to address, the Johnson-Sirleaf government had embraced political inclusion and more effectively united the country and prevented it from relapsing into violent conflict. He suggested that the Government of Côte d'Ivoire needs to adopt similar policies of political inclusion to mitigate tensions, which often appear in the border regions.

By comparison, Ivorian officials suggest that the instability in the border regions is primarily a product of the Liberian government and its associated security forces' lethargy in addressing the pro-Gbagbo militias taking refuge on the Liberian side of the border.

## Security issues

### *Shortage of personnel and equipment*

Both Ivorian and Liberian officials lamented a shortage of personnel, equipment and ancillary facilities as a great impediment to their duties in protecting the borders of their countries. Officials from some border posts reported being unable to undertake any border patrols at all due to lack of logistic support.

The officials state that they are also not able to maintain the little equipment they do have due to budgetary constraints. For example, it was observed that the only border patrol vehicle in Toe Town was broken down with no funds to repair it. Even when vehicles are running, the central government does not often provide funds for fuel and so the border officials are forced to take this burden on themselves.

The border officials also posit that the poor remuneration and housing facilities are insufficient to offset the enhanced personal vulnerability and the absence of requisite infrastructure.

### *Poor dissemination of legislation to the border regions*

The apparent marginalisation of security personnel in the border regions extended beyond the provision of resources and included the dissemination of government ideas and legislation.

The security officials do not feel that the decisions made in either capital city reach the border regions in sufficient time to facilitate effective or timely interventions. Indeed, a Liberian immigration official questioned how he was meant to work within, for example, the MRU protocol or Security Strategy if he has never seen it and does not know what it entails.

### *Travelling without proper documentation*

Similarly, the lack of education amongst the wider population with regards to required travel documentation across the border is a challenge to border controls. The security sector personnel estimate that 70 per cent of people crossing the borders do not have the correct travel documents. This challenge was reflected in the discussions with community members who rarely knew the difference between a passport, travel certificate, the ECOWAS Brown

Card<sup>6</sup> and stipulations for crossing with goods. This creates even more severe problems for refugees returning to Côte d'Ivoire because they faced being denied entry to Côte d'Ivoire on the grounds that they do not have identity cards. The Ivorian 'identity problem' means that it is very difficult to prove that an individual is from Côte d'Ivoire as opposed to being a Liberian who belongs to an ethnic group that spans across the border. The Ivorian authorities often require a specific identity card, though there are currently different versions and only a particular one may be acceptable.

The security personnel also bemoaned the fact that the population's lack of knowledge of the legislation or uncertainty as to what documentation was required opened them up to accusations of extortion and that the required fees are concocted by the individual even if this is not necessarily the case. It is therefore clear that the poor dissemination of government regulations to the border regions applies not just to the knowledge of security officials but also to the wider population.

## Perspectives of the local population in the border region

### Explanations for the violence

There was a general perception amongst the community on both sides of the border that much of the violence was in response to the actions of supporters of former President Laurent Gbagbo and any mercenary groups that they had recruited. There was some debate as to what the motivations were with some claiming that the violence is in expectation of Gbagbo's return to Côte d'Ivoire, while others suggested that the violence is punitive in nature against the Forces Republicaines de Côte d'Ivoire (FRCI) for their treatment of Gbagbo and the continued exclusion of his supporters from economic and political spheres.

There are widespread and often contradictory accusations that certain ethnic groups harbour and assist the militia groups. These inter-ethnic tensions and suspicions span the border and affect the security levels in both Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. Similarly, there remains a significant

<sup>6</sup> The Brown card is a vehicle insurance scheme that provides carriers with a common insurance policy covering liability in all ECOWAS member states

level of mistrust and tension with regards to the role of the FRCI and some Dozos (local hunters) in providing community security.

## Security issues

### *Fears of armed violence*

The communities on either side of the Ivorian-Liberian border identified that the scale of the armed violence had reduced since the end of the crisis, however they also noted that the situation remains fragile and there is fear that violence could restart at any moment. The communities in Côte d'Ivoire expressed a far greater fear of being victims of cross-border violence and they live in constant fear of attacks. As this research was on-going there was a cross-border attack on Grabo that killed at least 10 people. Despite the fact that Grabo is located between 450 km and 575 km along the border from our research locations the news of the attack served to heighten fears along the whole border region to the north west. The Ivorian communities surrounding Toulépleu and Danané shared that they live in a persistent state of fear especially at night, as rumours of attacks keep increasing. People from these communities stated that in the event of violence they are forced to evacuate their villages and hide in the forest until the attackers have moved on.

On the Liberian side there are also some fears of violence, even though these communities are less prone to violence than their neighbours on the Côte d'Ivoire side of the border and attacks appear to be limited to areas very close to the border. For example, the communities in the Bhai region of the Toe Town bordering Pecan-barrage near Toulépleu, expressed far greater fear than the residents of communities surrounding Loguato. The Bhai community residents recalled on two different occasions heavy artillery fire on the other side of the border forcing them to evacuate to Toe Town in fear that the violence would spill over to their side of the border.

### *Security vacuum in anticipation of the restructuring of respective UN missions*

The majority of respondents cited the imminent restructuring of UNOCI and UNMIL as one of their most significant concerns with regards to security in the border region. The border communities have developed a dependency upon the respective UN missions in relation



*Janet Adama Mohammed, West Africa Programme Director, with Dozos in Côte d'Ivoire. © Conciliation Resources/ Janet Adama Mohammed*

to their security. The UN drawdown in Liberia and UN downsizing in Côte d'Ivoire will hand considerable additional security responsibility to the respective country officials and the local population does not have confidence in the ability of the national security force to protect them.

In an attempt to build up government-led security and justice services the Liberian government has pledged regional Justice and Security Hubs in each of the country's five sub-divisions. The aim of these Hubs is to decentralise and enhance the population's access to security and justice services and in the process counteract the cynicism, lack of confidence and sense of marginalisation felt by citizens outside Monrovia. At present only the Hub located in Gbarnga, Bong County has been opened and is intended to serve residents in Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties. Whilst community respondents from Loguato in Nimba County were aware of the Hub in Gbarnga, they questioned how helpful the Hub would be in the event of a serious security event. They noted that it was located some 150km away and were doubtful that it would be able to respond in time, especially in the wake of the well reported financial challenges faced by the institution.

This vacuum of formal security apparatus has been partially filled by the activities of Dozos, who, in the absence of state security personnel in the wake of the crisis took on the majority of civil order functions despite having neither the legitimacy nor qualifications to do so. The Dozos have themselves become a source of tension in the region as they have been accused of widespread intimidation of the local communities. The Government of Côte d'Ivoire came out with a policy statement requesting the Dozos to discontinue their services. The Dozos



are concerned that they have not been offered alternative job opportunities.

The fears regarding the capacity of the national security forces to protect civilians are further exacerbated in light of the widespread concern that violence will erupt in the lead up to and in the aftermath of the 2015 Côte d'Ivoire presidential election.

### *Civil-military distrust*

Community fears regarding the national security forces extend beyond doubting their ability to protect civilians to also questioning whether they even have the intention to do so. Many of the Ivorian communities alluded to their lack of trust of the new security forces, which are comprised of former Forces Nouvelles (FN) and Forces de Défense et de Sécurité (FDS) fighters. The Ivorian communities accuse some elements from both of these groups of indiscriminately killing civilians during the post-election violence in 2010 and 2011. As a result, the civilians find it difficult to understand how the very same people that previously terrorised and intimidated them are now responsible for protecting their lives. A recent collaborative report<sup>7</sup> between Conciliation Resources and IDS highlighted that this disconnect between security personnel and civilians is not limited to Côte d'Ivoire and is similarly a major concern on the Liberian side of the border as well.

Respondents suggested that this mistrust was beginning to be overcome in some locations. For example, in Danané, the respondents said that they were happy to work with the national authorities and security apparatus if it reduced the possibility of future attacks. However, this progress is clearly not uniform across the border with the police force in Toulépleu specifically stating that the lack of support from the local community was a significant challenge to their work. It is therefore clear that many communities in both Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire believe that their national security forces did not have the capacity or the will to protect civilians.

### *Harassment from security officials*

Beyond fears for their protection, another issue that communities on both sides of the border raised was the perceived constant

harassment and extortion of money by security and immigration personnel. Indeed, 80 per cent of the respondents from both countries accused some border security officials of being responsible for extortion. One such example of extortion by the security personnel is that people crossing the border are asked to pay 'mile-franc,'<sup>8</sup> even if their documentation is complete. A source of further resentment for the civilians in the border regions is that there is no statutory rate for goods to be transported across the border. Instead, the taxation rate for each item is seemingly left to the discretion of the immigration official.

The civilians noted that this combination of 'mile-franc' payments and uncertain rates of taxation makes crossing the border increasingly a nuisance for travellers and traders. One Ivorian resident said that the security personnel are 'impeding the movement of people, demanding money and creating invisible barriers.' The uncertainty regarding how much people will be charged personally and for their goods to cross the border exacerbates tensions and mistrust between citizens and border officials.

### *Dialogue between the government and population at the border community*

It is apparent that many of the meetings and committees that have been established by the UN and the MRU Secretariat to engage the local population fail to reach the more remote elements of the border population. The communities indicate that few of these initiatives are held outside of the regional capitals. They acknowledge that whilst this represents some progress from meetings solely being held in Monrovia or Abidjan, many of the regional capitals remain inaccessible to large swathes of the border populations. The communities expressed particular surprise that they were not asked to contribute to the Operation MAYO meetings to identify emerging threats. Some community people could have relevant insights to the sources of tensions and could also have relevant information to assist in resolving the tensions. However, due to the lack of opportunities for the civilian population to engage with local authorities and security personnel the opportunity is not used.

7 Allouche, Jeremy and Mohammed, Janet. 'Cross-border violence as an external stress: policy responses to cross-border dynamics on the border between Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia'. *IDS Evidence Report No. 77* (June 2014)

8 'Mile-franc' – 'one thousand franc' is term used in the border regions to refer to an official asking for payment to expedite the process, derived from *mille francs* (a thousand francs)



Motorbike taxis operate throughout the Ivorian-Libarian border region. © Conciliation Resources/ Aubrey Wade

## Socio-economic issues

### *Lack of economic opportunities*

Agriculture plays a key role in the economy of the border region, however it is incapable of providing an income to all and even those who do make a living from agriculture often receive a highly irregular income. As a result, personal economic insecurity remains a significant issue in the border regions. Indeed, 90 per cent of the community respondents identified the lack of job opportunities as a common feature in border communities. The border communities in Liberia identified working for the security forces and other local government positions represented the sole form of dependable income. The communities on both sides of the border made specific mention of the absence of vocational and technical training institutions in the vicinity of the border.

The poor road conditions restrict the use of cars and trucks with frequent breakdowns. By using motorcycles and tricycles the youth are managing businesses through motorbike taxis to meet transportation demand. The communities indicated that whilst the motorbike taxi business may have contributed to reducing insecurity as it occupied the youth in the border regions, residents also emphasised the fragility of this work. The motorbike taxi owners operate without legal documentation, and their bikes were mostly not registered. The bike riders indicated that there was a laborious and expensive system of registration. In order to avoid this they prefer

to pay monthly fees to respective institutions, including the Police, although these fees are a clear form of bribery, with no accountability showing where the money goes.

In addition to this, a large number of the respondents alluded to the lack of credit facilities in the border communities. Therefore, even if they have managed to establish a small business, they did not have access to the financial apparatus that would allow them to sustain it. Community members expressed frustration over the perceived neglect of their regions by the central governments stressing that whilst they generate revenue for the central government they believe that border communities rarely receive anything in return.

### *Impact of DDR process*

The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme in Liberia is completed but has not covered all the needed areas, whilst it remains on-going in Côte d'Ivoire.

Many communities who have been through DDR processes are often frustrated that the process has done little to offer them alternative forms of security protection or economic opportunities.

On both the Liberian and Ivorian sides there was an expectation that the DDR processes would include participation in development projects, whether it be farming, food processing or fishing. However, this has seemingly not occurred in either Liberia or Côte d'Ivoire.

A further concern is that, given the perceived security vacuum in the border region, the community respondents alluded to a general reluctance among the population to disarm. Community members said that they keep their weapons to protect themselves in the event of an attack because they do not have confidence in the ability of the conventional security forces to protect them.

In October 2013, the government officially called for Dozos to cease acting in this role and return to their traditional pursuits. However, the feeling in the border communities is that the Dozos were expecting to be rewarded by the government for the assistance they provided in fighting the former president Laurent Gbagbo and his fighters. Specifically, the Dozos expected that they would be integrated into the security forces and provided with economic opportunities. Consequently, the Dozos remain dissatisfied with their current situation and remain a significant source of tension in the border regions.

### *Ebola outbreak*

Many of the concerns on the Liberian side of the border were focused on the on-going outbreak of Ebola in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. In an attempt to prevent Ebola spreading across the border, the Government of Côte d'Ivoire closed its borders with neighbouring Liberia and Guinea in August 2014. On both sides of the border, agriculture (palm oil, rice, bananas and other food crops) represents the primary method of income generation for communities. People depend upon crossing the border to access the necessary markets to sell their produce. Consequently, the border closure has created concern on both sides of the border as access to both buy and sell at markets has been significantly reduced. Respondents emphasised that information regarding the outbreak and the border crossing closures had not been forthcoming and this silence was increasing the tension and sense of uncertainty in the region.

In regards to the Ivorian residents, they expressed relief that the border crossing had been closed amid fears that infected people may cross the border and spread Ebola into their own communities. Having said that they believed that the official border closing would not prevent people from crossing the border and remained fearful about the possible spread of Ebola.

## Analysis and recommendations

One key conclusion drawn from discussions with security officials and communities along the Liberian-Ivorian border is that although the overall security of the region has improved, there is still a persistent fear that violence could break out at very short notice and this is affecting DDR processes, as well as the governments' ability to ensure stability of the border regions. There is a sense that the current relative period of security is fragile in nature and that the tensions that existed prior to and during the violence that occurred after the 2010 election remain unaddressed. There are fears that violence will erupt in the lead up to the Ivorian presidential and national election in October 2015.

### *Security vacuum in the border regions*

One of the most alarming findings is the perception that there is a vacuum concerning effective security apparatus on both sides of the border. Officials and communities share this perception. Security officials believe that the lack of personnel and ancillary facilities are impeding their ability to conduct security patrols more than any other factor. For example, in Grand Gedeh, Liberia, just 24 officers remain from the Joint Task Force established in June 2012 to specifically address border violence.<sup>9</sup> This shortage in personnel is further hampered by weak logistical support, including a critical shortage in the number of functioning vehicles for patrols.

Local communities question not just the capacity of the security forces to protect them but also whether the security officials even have the will to do so. The post-violence national reconciliation programmes, whether the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia or Côte d'Ivoire's Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, have rarely reached the border regions. As a consequence, there remains a significant level of suspicion and resentment by people in the border communities with regards to the role of the reconciliation processes.

The concern over this apparent absence of effective security provision has been further exacerbated, as both UNOCI and UNMIL will have completed their considerable restructuring

<sup>9</sup> "Midterm report of the Panel of Experts on Liberia", UN Security Council, S/2013/316 para. 30, 31 May 2013



processes by the middle of 2015 and handed even more responsibility to the national authorities. At present the primary source of confidence for the local communities remains the UN forces operating in the area and, as such, the lessening of their responsibilities is a source of great worry to the local communities.

It is imperative that a more rigorous effort is made by central and local governments to manage the levels of mistrust that pervade the civilian-security relationships. Civilians in the border communities need to have faith that the security forces will protect them in the event of an outbreak of violence. Overcoming this lack of faith will have significant consequences for other insecurity indicators identified in this paper. For example, there would be an increased propensity for civilians to disarm if they did not feel they had to take their protection into their own hands. It is important that governments reassure the local populations of security. Relations between the security forces and local populations need to improve through joint consultations and identification of joint solutions.

Governments should work with the JBSCBUs of the MRU in their respective countries in their efforts to facilitate ways to build trust between local populations and the national security forces.

### *Poor communication and dissemination of information to the border region*

Key to overcoming the mistrust between the local government and the population in the border regions is effective dialogue and information sharing between the two. One of the greatest concerns for the local community is harassment and corruption from the local government officials, particularly when they are crossing the border. In contrast, the border officials argue that the lack of community awareness in regards to the requirements and correct taxation rates to cross the border expose them to accusations of extortion even if they are merely applying the correct laws. However at present, it is extremely difficult for the local border population to receive up-to-date information regarding the current requirements. To further complicate the issue, the government officials noted that often they themselves have not seen up to date legislation and often operate with older requirements with which they are more familiar.

This lack of effective dissemination of information, whether to government officials or the local

communities, is symptomatic of the wider social and political marginalisation of the border regions. It is noteworthy that both the government officials and the local border population both keenly recommended that there be regular visits and communication from officials at the national level. For example, security officials explicitly mentioned the lack of collaboration as a challenge to their work and the local communities expressed a sense of exacerbation that their intimate knowledge and experience of the insecurities is rarely taken into consideration.

There is a strong appetite for dialogue in the border regions but effective mechanisms for the government and local communities to engage and search for solutions are lacking. Furthermore, a lack of communication between national government actors and local populations creates room for the influence of rumours, which serve to further antagonise relations.

### *Inter-communal tensions*

Tensions between different sectors of society remain deeply entrenched. There are widespread and often contradictory accusations that certain ethnic groups harbour and assist militant groups. This causes inter-ethnic tensions and suspicions that span the border and could ultimately affect the security levels in both Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. Some of these tensions are also linked to land disputes.

### *Incomplete DDR*

A critical issue that remains is the incomplete and ineffectual demobilisation and reintegration processes occurring on both sides of the border. On the Côte d'Ivoire side, there are many problems with respect to the DDR programmes. There has been widespread concern that despite the government emphasising that all former combatants would be included in the programme only pro-government combatants have been enrolled. Some people observed that combatants who fought in support of Gbagbo have been alienated from the DDR process.

The poor reintegration of former combatants is particularly notable in Liberia where ex-combatants were not absorbed into the security forces post-war. Instead, the government chose to entirely reform the armed forces in an attempt to move away from its association with the civil war. This constitutes a relatively large group of former combatants who remain

alienated, neglected, disempowered and mentally immobilised. By failing to successfully demobilise and reintegrate ex-combatants into society, there is a huge risk that they will be remobilised because they see no other option.

Both countries need to share reflections of their DDR processes in relation to the tensions and identify common strategies as part of the MRU regional efforts for improved border security and peace.

### *Informal and unsustainable livelihood opportunities*

Inextricably linked to the poor reintegration of former combatants but also of significant concern to all border region communities is the limited and informal nature of employment available to border communities. It is clear that the primary sources of income are commercial motorbike riding and farming, both of which provide a highly uncertain and inconsistent wage. Indeed, the Ebola outbreak and subsequent closing of the Ivorian-Liberian border has served to place enormous pressure on the local communities as farmers have been unable to take their produce to market and there remains little need for commercial motorbike riders to provide transportation across the border. As a result, at a time when the Ebola outbreak is causing food and household products to become increasingly expensive, communities in the border regions are facing even greater insecurity as their incomes become smaller and even less certain.

### *Food security*

The reduced spending power and ability to reach markets that Ebola has caused has served to exacerbate the regions pre-existing food security concerns. This border region straddling the Cavalla River is rich in natural resources including gold, diamonds and timber. With numerous water points across the region and direct access to the ocean, the soil is fertile and fish thrive in its rivers and lakes. Despite its natural wealth and fertile lands, food security remains a major concern within the region. Evidence collected by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2012 shows how food and social insecurity are tied to issues of land conflict and weak social cohesion, which persist throughout the region.

In early May 2012, representatives from NGOs including the Norwegian Refugee Council,

Danish Refugee Council, and the UN agencies within Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia – namely the FAO and World Food Programme (WFP) – met in Monrovia to discuss new approaches to food security interventions along the Ivorian-Liberian border. In this meeting, eight cross-border actions outlining a new approach to food security along the Ivorian-Liberian border were agreed upon. In March 2013, an action plan was drawn up for cross-border food security and nutrition for Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire for 2013-16. As the food security programme has commenced, it is anticipated that it will not only address some of the issues around unemployment, but also be implemented in a conflict sensitive manner responding to some of the underlying drivers to the tensions in the border region.

### *Joint government and regional efforts*

The need for a collaborative strategy between the Ivorian and Liberian governments to address the instability along the Ivorian-Liberian border has long been emphasised. The UN missions in both countries have helped to facilitate a number of high-level meetings between the governments in the years following the 2010-2011 election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire. Meanwhile, the EU-supported MRU Security Strategy prioritising cross-border threats to peace and stability is a further positive development in this area. Nevertheless, the research findings suggest that neither the wider community nor the security personnel in the border region shared any life changing experiences as a result of these efforts. The little knowledge of collaborative meetings that people are aware of in the border region is often with regards to the Operation MAYO meetings that have been established to share information and identify emerging threats. However, this knowledge is largely limited to the government officials and more recently the number of Operation MAYO meetings has been declining.

## Conclusion and key messages

This report has highlighted government officials' and local communities' perspectives with regard to the insecurity in the Ivorian-Liberian border region. It has shown that there remains a significant fear that violence is sporadic and exacerbated by a security vacuum in very remote border communities. Communication

and collaboration between different sectors of society remains limited with entrenched notions of difference and mistrust among the people and with security officials. This report has also highlighted some of the most prominent challenges to living in the border region, most notably the lack of sustainable livelihood opportunities and food insecurity. The on-going Ebola outbreak and subsequent closure of the border has served to further exacerbate these tensions and placed considerable strain on the security needs of border populations.

These findings should inform current and future strategies to strengthen peace and security in the region. With this in mind, Conciliation Resources and our partners present the following strategic messages as a contribution to improving cross-border peace and security in the MRU region.

### *Ownership and commitment to regional efforts*

Cross-border security is important for the stability and development of the countries in the MRU. Local, national and regional efforts need to be coordinated to ensure maximum impact. At the moment, several JBSCBUs are not functioning effectively because of lack of national recognition and ownership. In addition, these institutions are unable to address local cross-border needs. To enable this, the MRU Policy documents such as the Security Strategy and protocols should be disseminated and promoted at local and national levels to raise awareness in each country and enable citizens and governments to identify and commit to their roles.

### *Strengthening cross-border initiatives*

Cross-border initiatives both local and national are important as they enable joint efforts at addressing common border challenges. However, the current approach could be strengthened to address specific issues or else they become the usual “talk-shops”. Periodic joint border security and peace analysis is encouraged so that actors can map and monitor the impact of work in resolving specific border tensions and improving governance and development for the border regions in each country.

### *Information and communication*

Improvement of communication and information between national and border communities is

critical to managing cross-border tensions. This should be a two-way process so that policy responses reflect local concerns and realities with regards to border community security risks.

### *Border community participation*

Often, cross-border security meetings are conducted without the participation of local actors and yet these are the people who bear the brunt of such security decisions. It is important to strengthen local capacities and enable local communities to contribute to policy decisions in relation to local security and development.

### *Strengthening border officials*

Border officials have identified several challenges including a lack of information and logistics. In addition to responding to these needs, government ministries responsible for border management, such as the Police, Customs and other agencies, should provide their staff with regular training to update their skills in accordance with regional and international border management standards and regulations. International actors such as the UN and the EU should support governments to provide this updated training for border security personnel as well as local government officials. This should be backed by systems for transparent and accountable governance; including the practice of the rule of law and human rights in both Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia.

### *Collaboration with civil society*

For effective peace and security, national and regional institutions for cross-border security should continue to collaborate with national and local civil society organisations.

### *Dialogue in emergencies*

Undoubtedly, the management of the Ebola crisis has created its own tensions, which have sometimes resulted in violence and appear to threaten the security and stability of the region. It is important that stakeholders working in the border regions continue to provide encouragement, information and support to the affected local populations, raising their levels of awareness of the effect of the Ebola virus and helping to demystify the strong perceptions about the epidemic. In addition, it is important for national governments, and regional and international actors to support dialogue initiatives to resolve tensions as they emerge.



# Glossary

<b>DDR</b>	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
<b>DPD</b>	District Platform for Dialogue
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agricultural Organization
<b>FDS</b>	Defense and Security Forces (Forces de Défense et de Sécurité)
<b>FN</b>	New Forces (Forces Nouvelles)
<b>FRCI</b>	Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (Forces Republicaines de Côte d'Ivoire)
<b>IDS</b>	Institute of Development Studies
<b>IREDD</b>	Institute for Research and Democratic Development
<b>JBSCBU</b>	Joint Border Security and Confidence Building Units
<b>MRU</b>	Mano River Union
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNMIL</b>	United Nations Mission in Liberia
<b>UNOCI</b>	United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire
<b>WANEP</b>	West African Network for Peacebuilding
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme

## About this project

**Capacities for Peace** is a global project undertaken by Saferworld and Conciliation Resources funded by the EU under the Instrument for Stability. The project involves working with local actors to enhance the effectiveness of local analysis, early warning and early action in 32 countries around the world. This report was produced as part of the **Capacities for Peace** project.

For more information about this project, please visit:  
[www.c-r.org/featured-work/capacities-peace](http://www.c-r.org/featured-work/capacities-peace)

**Conciliation Resources** is an independent organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence and build peace. We provide advice, support and practical resources to help divided communities resolve their differences peacefully. In addition, we take what we learn to government decision-makers and others working to end conflict, to improve peacebuilding policies and practice worldwide.

For more information about Conciliation Resources' support for cross-border peacebuilding efforts in the West Africa region, please contact: Janet Adama Mohammed, West Africa Programme Director, [jmohammed@c-r.org](mailto:jmohammed@c-r.org) or visit: [www.c-r.org/west-africa](http://www.c-r.org/west-africa)

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