Chapter 1

Cross-border co-operation in West Africa: Bridging the gap between research and policy

Chapter 1 starts by looking at West Africa's future, where rapid population growth is expected to continue over the next two generations. Settlement basins will continue to densify and expand, reaching across borders, and there will be more and larger cities. As a result, cross-border interaction will increase naturally regardless of the level of support from national and regional policy. The chapter will then look briefly at the cross-border dynamics developed by local actors which share a number of common factors, namely: bypassing institutional initiatives and dealing with the abuse of power, absence or shortcomings of those in charge of applying regulatory controls. It lastly addresses the potential of the paper's research and the advantage of actively narrowing the gap between bottom-up regionalisation dynamics and top-down regionalism, while considering the time-lags frequently experienced in improving public policy.

Key messages

- The need for cross-border co-operation will increase substantially as the strong forecast population growth for West Africa will encourage densification of regional and border settlements.
- Cross-border co-operation is subject to a multitude of physical, political and social factors from local to national levels and is therefore influenced by public policies relating to both regional integration and local development.
- Convergence of macroeconomic policies between West African nations could help to reduce the impact of external shocks and reduce contraband trade that benefits from customs and legislative differentials.

THE INEVITABLE DENSIFICATION OF REGIONAL AND BORDER SETTLEMENT

In 1998, the *West Africa Long-Term Perspective Study,* also known as WALTPS (Cour and Snrech, 1998), highlighted the links between demographic growth, urban growth and market economics. The "market attractiveness" indicator it used revealed the rapid expansion of spaces connected to urban markets, fuelled by population growth between 1960 and 2020 (Map 1.1). Based on the weight of and distance between the different markets, the costs linked to covering these distances and local farming conditions, the indicator used in the study confirmed the region's economic integration. Over time, disjointed market spaces connect to one another to form a cross-border continuum fed by and feeding into the growth of regional trade and social and economic networks. According to WALTPS, by 2020 half of agrifood trade will consist of regional produce. More recent research supports this view, showing that the agglomerations that drive cross-border socio-economic spaces are more numerous and populous (OECD/SWAC, 2013).

The West African population living in the countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS [Cabo Verde, Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo]), Cameroon, Mauritania and Chad will continue to see strong growth. The population is forecast to rise from 367 million in 2015 to 538 million in 2030; i.e. 170 million more people in 15 years. It is therefore more than likely that regional population distribution will continue to densify, including near borders. The aggregate population of Gaya (Niger) and Malanville (Benin), separated by 7 km, could grow from 95000 to 130000 between 2015 and 2030, for example. Katsina (Nigeria) could see its population grow from 330000 to 530000, while less than 100 km away on the other side of the border, the town of Maradi (Niger) could grow from 200000 to 300000 (Moriconi-Ebrard, Harre and Heinrigs, 2016). In the coming decades, an ever greater number of communities will inhabit borderlands that are ever more connected to the rest of the regional space by an ever denser settlement continuum.

TREND-BASED SCENARIOS AND POLICIES

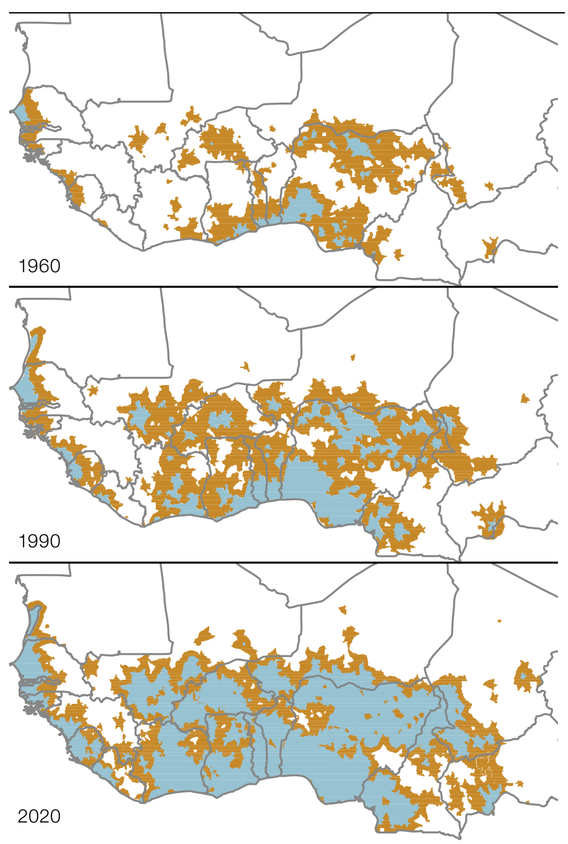
The importance of cross-border dynamics which are largely focused on, but not limited to, trade and the movement of people, should increase. Without changes in the political landscape, these dynamics will fall into three categories: "edge effects" of the border linked to contraband, re-export flows and transit (Chapter 3); potential cross-border complementarities (Chapter 5); and the local cross-border initiatives that manage to gain traction despite the lack of suitable legal frameworks (Chapter 6). These three kinds of dynamic are not mutually exclusive. In particular, the first two generally arise in tandem; the latter usually includes activities or investments relating to trade growth.

The first scenario is the one that has received the most attention. It is not specific to Africa and even used to predominate in Europe. Before the inception and escalation of the European integration process, the economies of many border locations depended, and still depend, on the tax differentials for certain products created by national borders, on currency arbitrage or on contraband. In West Africa, it is highly probable that, even if the convergence of macroeconomic policies in different countries makes great strides in the next decades, trade in contraband will persist and will continue to sustain cross-border dynamics. However, this raises the question of how far these activities can constitute a vector for lasting integration. It is tempting to see the development of functional West African regions as a kind of informal, bottom-up integration that would offset the shortcomings of the top-down integration practised by states and intergovernmental organisations. Most transnational flows are extremely elastic in time and space, however, so their contribution to local development is very uncertain.

One example of this is the impact on Benin's economy of the economic and financial crisis

Map 1.1

Evolution of market attractiveness, 1960–2020



Note: The blue areas are closely connected to the markets, the yellow areas moderately connected and the white areas very poorly connected.

Source: Cour and Snrech 1998

that hit Nigeria in late 2015, and the sharp fall in global oil prices. The naïra's fall against the CFA franc encouraged the Beninese to buy more from Nigeria and reduced Nigerians' purchasing power in Benin. As a result, the oil companies based in Benin could not sell petrol, as they could not compete with the prices of their larger neighbour. The Cotonou market lost a large number of customers, as did re-export businesses (especially those selling automobiles) whose major buyers were Nigerians. Overall, economic activity declined, as did the state's tax revenues, to say nothing of inflation. On the Cotonou markets, prices for some foodstuffs doubled, as traders attempted to make up for declining volumes by raising prices.

If monetary and commercial divergences, especially between Nigeria and its neighbours, endure or worsen in the years and decades to come, these dynamics will continue and will increase in volume without losing their volatility. Conversely, if policy convergence increases, the relative share of contraband flows in cross-border trade could fall. For now, two factors make continuance of the status quo more likely:

- The convergence of budgetary and fiscal policy is making only very slow progress. In other words, the road to a single currency for ECOWAS remains long. As for the convergence of trade policy, it would be worth assessing the implementation of the common external tariff (since January 2015). The free-trade area (FTA) agreed in 1979 remains far from realisation (Box 1.2)
- Some countries through which regional flows transit, as well as a large number of powerful economic operators, have a vested interest in the maintenance of tax and regulatory disparities (Chapter 3).

The second scenario is based on the complementarities in the regional market, between production and consumption basins. Growth in population, especially in cities, and in the share of the population not producing foodstuffs automatically increases the size of the market, including transnational trade in local produce. This includes considerable volumes of maize produced in the Sudan-Sahel region and largely consumed in coastal conurbations, palm oil traded between the forests of Guinea and the rest of the region, onions exported from Niger to Abidjan, fish from the Niger River delta sold all the way to the Gulf of Guinea, and livestock from the Sahel supplying towns and cities along the coast.

These regional flows rely on and stimulate vibrant cross-border economies, such as Ouangolodougou, in northern Côte d'Ivoire, which had a population of 23 800 in 2010 according to *Africapolis* (Moriconi-Ebrard,

Box 1.1
The regional integration index (RII) for ECOWAS countries, Mauritania, Chad and Cameroon

This index was introduced in 2016 by the African Union (AU), African Development Bank (AfDB) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). It is based on the existence of shared laws and not on an evaluation of their application, which can be problematic in some fields, such as the free movement of people within ECOWAS which may be guaranteed, but in practice generates a range of constraints. This indicator can therefore be considered to be overvalued in the light of the situation on the ground. It does reveal, however, that inside ECOWAS, free movement is further advanced in law than in ECCAS. At the other end of the scale, the "trade integration" indicator, which is based on official intra-regional trade figures, is without any doubt underestimated because of the magnitude of unrecorded trade flows. The same is true of "productive integration", an indicator mainly based on the measurement of intra-community trade in intermediary goods. As for indicators concerning financial and macroeconomic integration and inclusion in regional infrastructure, the RII scores can be considered realistic since they are based on such tangible factors as currency convertibility, inflation rates and the existence of communication networks. Furthermore, the RII is currently the only tool for measuring trends and benchmarking integration in the region, though its results are best supported with qualitative observations.

Harre and Heinrigs, 2016). Linked to the markets of Sikasso in Mali and Niagoloko in Burkina Faso, it is a centre for trade in local produce and products imported from the global market. Similar situations are seen in the border markets dotted along some particularly dynamic stretches of West African borders (OECD/SWAC, 2014), such as Diaobé in Senegal, Sinkansé in Burkina Faso and Malanville in Benin.

The problem is not so much that policies prevent trade growth. Quite the reverse: the countries of West Africa have officially abolished customs duties and barriers to trade in produce from fishing, farming of land and livestock, and handicrafts. ECOWAS is in fact exemplary in this field (Box 1.1). The problem lies in the failure to apply policies for the free movement of goods and people. To quote the United

Table 1.1

Regional integration index by country

High performing country [a]
Average performing country [b]
Poor performing country [c]

	Overall index	Trade integration	Regional infrastructure	Productive integration	Free movement of people	Financial and macroeconomic integration
Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)						
Côte d'Ivoire	0.675	0.986	0.370	0.280	0.800	0.941
Togo	0.671	0.466	0.646	0.494	0.800	0.947
Senegal	0.628	0.648	0.338	0.383	0.800	0.968
Benin	0.548	0.358	0.383	0.279	0.800	0.920
Niger	0.556	0.447	0.352	0.182	0.800	1.000
Ghana	0.546	0.604	0.603	0.470	0.800	0.253
Burkina Faso	0.537	0.425	0.404	0.083	0.800	0.971
Mali	0.525	0.485	0.271	0.119	0.800	0.950
Nigeria	0.501	1.000	0.385	0.168	0.800	0.153
Guinea-Bissau	0.500	0.413	0.339	0.000	0.800	0.950
Gambia	0.447	0.005	0.550	0.517	0.800	0.362
Sierra Leone	0.404	0.519	0.315	0.353	0.800	0.033
Liberia	0.357	0.000	0.331	0.376	0.800	0.277
Guinea	0.301	0.110	0.430	0.167	0.800	0.000
Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)						
Cameroon	0.664	0.980	0.482	0.439	0.450	0.966
Chad	0.512	0.747	0.196	0.190	0.450	0.978
Arab Maghreb Union (AMU)						
Mauritania	0.310	0.000	0.434	0.312	0.667	0.138

The maximum score is 1.000.
a) The score is higher than the average for Regional Economic Communities (REC) countries; b) The score is within the average for REC countries; c) The score is lower than the average for REC countries

Source: African Union/African Development Bank Group/United Nations 2016

Nations and UNECA (United Nations/UNECA/ECOWAS, 2015):

> Certain countries require certificates of origin for agricultural products, which is inconsistent with ECOWAS texts. Beninese exporters have to request a special authorisation from Abuja, as Nigeria is uncertain about products imported from Benin.
>
> […]
>
> Groundnuts produced in Senegal are not accepted in Guinea and bananas from Guinea do not officially enter Senegal.

These difficulties, which are particularly evident when two countries do not belong to the same monetary zone, explain why a major proportion of regional trade in products that are legally exempt from tax and point-of-origin inspections in fact amounts to a form of contraband. The solution is not getting around current policy, but adapting as well as possible to the abusive practices of government representatives or the latters' failure to abide by their community commitments.

Will these practices last? In order to obtain a negative answer, all states concerned would have to be persuaded that they had more to gain, including financially, by eliminating customs barriers, than they stand to lose. But the facts testify to certain scepticism, especially since the compensation mechanism set up in the FTA has not worked well (Box 1.2). Whatever the case, they act as a barrier to the development of formal cross-border co-operation. Well-equipped markets and border storage facilities are certainly useful investments that are appreciated by market actors; they are also the sites of the controls, levies and predation that these same actors are keen to avoid.

The third scenario concerns initiatives for structured cross-border co-operation – which remain far too few – that involve local authorities or associations on either side of a border. Recent examples include the Civic Governance Programme for territories in the Senegal River basin, which has been rolled out in five regions across three countries (Mauritania, Mali and Senegal). The programme is sponsored by the Group for Rural Development Research and Projects (GRDR) and addresses local governance challenges in each of the three border zones; local economic development and genuine cross-border issues, including conflict prevention, cross-border markets and the management of shared resources. The Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in the Sahel (IIRSAHEL) within the framework of the Local Cross-Border Initiative Programme (LOBI) of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) is another example. It involves nine local border authorities in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali. With support from UEMOA, Luxembourg's development co-operation, and the UN's Capital Development Fund, this cross-border zone is building shared infrastructure such as abattoirs, livestock trails and vaccination centres.

Box 1.2

ECOWAS free-trade area

The creation of the FTA within ECOWAS began in 1979 with the adoption of the principle of the complete removal of tariffs on local products, traditional artworks and finished goods. At the same time as the FTA, a mechanism was created to compensate member states for revenues lost as a result of the elimination of tariffs on intra-community trade. The term of the compensatory financial arrangements was set at four years, beginning on 1 January 2004. The amounts to be compensated depended on the customs revenues lost by the member state on imported industrial products of approved origin. They are calculated as follows: 100% of losses incurred in 2004; 80% of losses incurred in 2005; 60% of losses incurred in 2006; 30% of losses incurred in 2007; and 0% of depreciation as of 1 January 2008. The mechanism did not operate flawlessly; however, since the budget that was to fund the compensation depended on payment of member states' contributions.

Source: United Nations/UNECA/ECOWAS 2015

These initiatives mobilise a wide range of people, including civil servants co-operating in the common interest. The problem lies in the shortcomings of the legal frameworks: how to create a cross-border entity to manage a shared project; how to manage that shared project under three different jurisdictions; and how to promote co-operation between local authorities from different countries. One of the most frequent responses is to base a border initiative on one side of the border only. This is often the case for projects to build or renovate livestock markets, designed with a local border authority in order to attract more livestock. It is a solution that can be applied in several fields, including education, where border schools are likely to attract pupils from the other side of the border.

These initiatives generally arise out of assessments of cross-border potential and, often, out of informal discussions with actors from a neighbouring country. Some are sponsored by regional organisations (UEMOA, Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel [CILSS]) looking for effective ways to boost regional co-operation at grassroots level while bypassing the complexities of an institutional cross-border set-up. There are several examples of successful "cross-border agreements" which can be seen as pilot projects that could inspire similar schemes. The province of Kossi in Burkina Faso, for example, and the district of Tomina in Mali have signed an agreement concerning the local management of natural resources, with the approval of their respective governments. This kind of innovative experimentation should become more widespread, as cross-border co-operation is gaining traction in political discourse.

The groundwork for this to happen exists in the form of the African Union Convention on Cross-Border Co-operation, known as the Niamey Convention, adopted in June 2014. By mid-2016, it had been signed by nine countries, seven of which are covered in this study (Benin, Chad, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Niger, Sierra Leone, Togo); Niger alone has ratified it. It will come into force after ratification by 15 countries, paving the way for the introduction of a range of operational instruments.

However, once a positive legal and regulatory environment has been created there must be sufficient decentralisation to allow people to design and deploy local cross-border co-operation initiatives. In fact, the role of local government in regional construction is being given increasing prominence. In West Africa, the most striking example of this recognition was the creation in 2011 of the Council of Local Governments (*Conseil des Collectivités Territoriales* [CCT]) by an Additional Act to the UEMOA treaty. The decision proceeded from two observations: first, out of a little over 2 000 local authorities in UEMOA countries, almost half govern border regions. Second, all countries in the Union are, to varying degrees, involved in some form of decentralisation process (Chapter 8). This is also true of the other ECOWAS countries, Mauritania, Cameroon and Chad. From this point of view, the situation is very mixed.

While most countries now have constitutional and legislative frameworks that are, on the whole, favourable to decentralisation, and local democracy seems to be relatively well established in a large number of these countries, there remain two structural weaknesses to overcome: the low level of financial resources, and the weak institutional capacity of local authorities. It is worth mentioning two specific examples. First, that of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, whose 36 states seem to be far better provided for in terms of financial resources than the local authorities in other countries of the region. It might, indeed, be appropriate not to use Nigeria's federal states as an example, but their constituent Local Government Areas instead, which have more characteristics in common with the local authorities of other countries. The second example concerns Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Liberia and Togo, where the transfer of state resources from central government to local authorities, direct resources and the performance of municipalities are particularly low by the standards of the region. The first three countries also score very low on the regional integration index (Box 1.1), which gives them a double handicap in terms of cross-border co-operation.

RECONCILING THE GRASS ROOTS WITH THE CORRIDORS OF POWER

Cross-border co-operation stands at the crossroads between regional integration and local development; it can be expressed at different levels and it is determined by a multitude of physical, political and social factors. It is therefore affected by a large number of public policies (Chapter 2). The socio-economic integration dynamics discussed above share the same lack of congruence with some of these policies, whether that takes the form of circumventing them, accommodating the parties responsible for applying them, or making up for their absence or shortcomings. Invariably, bottom-up dynamics adapt and will continue to adapt to the changing conditions in the international environment and to the different policies implemented from the top down.

There is the issue, however, of improving these policies and implementing them faster, and this responsibility lies with national governments and regional organisations. There is much to be done and processes are time-consuming in a field in which transnational and cross-border dynamics are rapidly gaining in intensity, buoyed by fast population growth. How, under these circumstances, can processes at grassroots level be reconciled with the institutional practices decreed from the top in order to inform and shape public policy? How could public policy adapt in turn to these dynamics in order to establish an environment more conducive to cross-border co-operation that builds a lasting platform for regional integration? The research findings presented here could provide the beginnings of answers to these questions.

First, the findings bolster the policy argument for cross-border co-operation by showing, through innovative arguments, that the concrete potential for co-operation is significant, but varies widely between regions (Chapter 5). The first condition necessary for the viability of a policy lies in the unanimous conviction that it will bring added value to a majority of stakeholders. This does not yet seem to be the case with regard to regional integration, although it is right to recognise and applaud the progress made in that field. More time should therefore be invested at this stage to demonstrate the usefulness and positive impacts of cross-border co-operation.

It is worth discussing the potential for cross-border co-operation as summarised in Map 5.19 with the sole representative body of local politicians in the regional integration process, namely the UEMOA Council of Local Governments. It would also be worth comparing it with projects supported by the CCT/UEMOA, the ECOWAS Cross-Border Co-operation Programme (CBCP) and the African Union Border Programme. These debates could generate additional policy stimulus for the promotion of borders in West and Central Africa.

Second, this report will help to spotlight local specificities, which are often clearly perceived by those in the field, but which are hard to measure and therefore tend not to be taken into account by policy makers. Practitioners could use the analysis of social networks (Chapter 4) to refine the design, implementation and assessment of cross-border and border initiatives, as well as the "population potential" of border markets (Chapter 5). These tools could also make a useful contribution to refining regional and national policies for the promotion of cross-border co-operation.

By examining social actors through their connections, the relational approach adopted in the report shines a realistic light on flows of capital, information and resources, which transcend social categories and groups such as communities, villages, political parties and social classes. Although the fundamental concepts developed by the analysis of social networks such as centrality, embeddedness and brokerage are increasingly used to describe and model economic, political and social structures, they remain rare in the field of development.

The analysis of social networks is a useful adjunct to other approaches, helping to represent both the complexity of the social connections that tie policies together and the spatialisation of political networks, particularly beyond national borders. It illustrates the nature of the links, the prominence of some actors and the architecture of a network, which has a direct impact on individual behaviour. Decentralised structures, for example, are particularly well placed to deal with the uncertainties which policies are exposed to on a daily basis.

Beyond the academic field, network analysis also acts as a driver of empowerment for local communities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as an operationalisation tool for international organisations and governments. One of the most visible applications of this approach to cross-border co-operation is that it allows the structural position of policies and organisations to be identified, mapped and analysed with considerable precision. The ability to capture both the components and the links in a social group helps to reveal actors that are particularly well connected, and those that are not. Those that are well connected are thoroughly incorporated into their groups and enjoy diverse external contacts. Conversely, those that are relatively unincorporated, with homogenous external contacts and only very little social capital of any potential benefit, can find themselves marginalised within cross-border political networks.

The results of the work confirm that social network analysis provides a promising methodology for understanding the complexity of social ties that bring together actors working on regional integration, complementing more qualitative forms of analysis. Finally, it also reminds readers that border regions can contribute substantially to the process of regional integration, provided that regional policies are adapted to encourage investment in the most pertinent issues for those areas.

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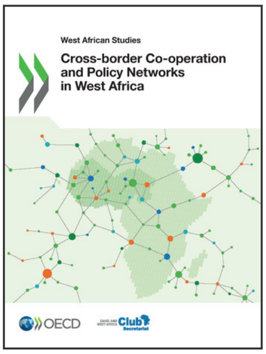

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