

Borders and Regional Security in Local Governments’ Cooperation in West Africa: Case Studies in Burkina Faso

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Abstract

This paper reflects on regional security issues in West Africa and especially in Burkina Faso, focusing in particular on international cooperation among local governments and border issues. When considering the recent political history of West African countries, such as Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, and Nigeria, domestic political disputes or conflicts tend to become the primary internationalized and regionalized issues across national borders. West Africa is recognized as a region where people have collectively moved and exchanged throughout history. Conflicts that occurred in Côte d’Ivoire and Mali in the twenty-first century directly affected the security and economic situations in neighboring countries. In Burkina Faso, facing a huge, popular insurgency, President Blaise Compaoré suddenly and unexpectedly stepped down after 27 years of his authoritarian regime. This unforeseen political turnover in addition to the destabilization of northern Mali alarmed the international community about the regional security in West Africa. In addition, Boko Haram has not only attacked cities and abducted people in Nigeria but also extended its aggressions across national borders into the territories of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The borders between sovereign states may not necessarily be barriers for extremist groups but occasionally convenient, permeable shields. On the contrary, for the national armies of African states, these borders remain strict and impermeable walls.

This paper also focuses on the decentralization process in Africa. Decentralization is one of the most crucial political and administrative reforms that African countries have implemented since democratization started at the beginning of the 1990s. Thus, the paper examines international cooperation and the politics of local governments of countries that are located on the borderlands, to better understand regional security and border issues in Africa. We cannot provide an efficient measure to resolve problems and conflicts related to borders and

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security without understanding the situation and the role of the local actors in the borderlands. However, it appears that the frameworks of border and security management have yet to sufficiently tackle this question.

First, the paper addresses border issues in Burkina Faso. Burkina Faso is a landlocked country that is located in the heart of West Africa. It borders Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger, and Togo, and has suffered from border-related problems with these neighboring countries. Border problems immediately translate to serious economic difficulties and security concerns for Burkina Faso. Second, the paper tries to decode security issues in West Africa while considering case studies in Burkina Faso to examine questions about borders and local governments' cooperation and relations with neighboring countries.

Like in Europe, peripheral - border regions are usually neglected and border populations' potential is not capitalized on, neither in socio-cultural nor economic terms. Cross-border cooperation aims at solving those problems of border populations including those of minorities. (West African Borders and Integration [WABI] 2007a, 30)

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to reflect on the border issues in Africa while studying about international cooperation among local governments and issues relating to regional security by examining case studies in West African countries, principally focusing on Burkina Faso. According to recent political history in West African countries, a domestic political dispute or conflict is likely to become a regionalized concern across national borders.

West Africa is known as the region where people have collectively moved and exchanged through long-distance trade and the immigration of peoples, such as Mandingo and Hausa merchants, Fulani people, and military troops, who have long enjoyed water transportation via the Niger River, dating back to the time of the ancient great empires.

Conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire and Mali in the twenty-first century have severely affected neighboring countries in terms of the economy, politics, and security. In Burkina Faso, President Blaise Compaoré was forced to step down unexpectedly in 2014, after 27 years of authoritarian rule, because of the huge, popular insurgency against his trial of constitutional change for his third presidential term¹. This

1. Compaoré changed the Constitution for the first time in 1997 to remove the limitation on the presidential term. However, this constitutional modification was met with huge protests and the assassination of Norbert Zongo. Zongo was a widely famous journalist who had investigated an arbitrary murder caused by François Compaoré, the president's younger brother. Compaoré had to accept the reinsertion of the presidential term limitation into the constitution (Article 37) in 2004. Article 37 limits the president to two terms (five years in each term), for a total of ten years. After this constitutional change, the presidential election was held under the new Constitution in 2005. Compaoré was re-elected. Compaoré tried again to remove Article 37 to eternalize his power before the end of his second term in 2015. Under such tense situations, in October 2014, National Assembly members tried to force the adoption of a proposition to organize a constitutional change. The seats in the National Assembly were massively dominated by the members of Compaoré's party (*Congrès pour la démocratie et le progrès* or CDP). On October 30, 2014, the day of the National Assembly vote, a massive protest took place against the constitutional violation. Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators joined in the protests in Ouagadougou and other big cities. Demonstrators started attacking and setting fire to state institutions, such as the National TV broadcaster's office and houses of members of parliament and dignitaries of the Compaoré

created a serious political vacuum in terms of regional security in West Africa. This unforeseen political turnover of Burkina Faso was a cause of great concern for the international community in terms of the regional security in West Africa, especially considering the volatile situation in northern Mali.

Unfortunately, this concern materialized in attacks on hotels and cafés by an armed group in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso's capital city, in January 2016. This terror attack was orchestrated by a group affiliated with Al Qaeda, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (Jeune Afrique 2016a, 2016b; BBC 2016; RFI Afrique 2016; Kindo 2016)². The group is similar to other armed jihadist groups, which are generally based in northern Mali and easily cross the borders of the Sahelian countries. This group crossed the border from Mali to Burkina Faso to carry out this terror attack. In addition, Boko Haram has not only attacked cities and abducted people in northern Nigeria but also crossed national borders to expand its aggression into Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Thus, Boko Haram is no longer a domestic security problem for Nigeria; it has become a regional and continental concern.

Robert Kaplan (2012) mentions the following:

Whereas borders indicate passport controls and fixed divisions of sovereignty, frontiers indicate a pre-modern world of vaguer, more informal, overlapping divisions. The Great Middle East is moving away from a world of borders and toward one of frontiers... Again, this is increasingly a geographer's world, where state borders erode and vaguer frontiers become more relevant. (352–3)

The border between two sovereign states is not necessarily a barrier for extremist groups; rather, it is occasionally a convenient, permeable membrane behind which they can defend themselves. On the contrary, the border is impenetrable for the “national” armies of African states without international coordination.

regime, including the National Assembly building itself. Despite interventions from security forces, these demonstrations could not be stopped. President Compaoré announced that he was abandoning the constitutional modification and announced his retirement at the end of his final term at the end of 2015. His speech was broadcast from a private TV station because the national TV station had been occupied by demonstrators. However, this speech failed to appease the demonstrators; instead, it made them accelerate their actions. Demonstrators began demanding President Compaoré's immediate resignation (Iwata 2016, 147–8).

2. After Mali (November 2015) and Burkina Faso, Grand-Bassam, a touristic town located 40 km from Abidjan, was attacked by the AQIM in March 2016.

In addition to border and security issues, this paper focuses on decentralization. Decentralization has been one of the most formidable challenges in terms of governance in African countries since the democratization process started in the 1990s. Therefore, there is a need to examine the international cooperation and politics of local governments in the borderlands since these state began tackling democratization, in order to understand regional security and border issues. We cannot expect to find an efficient solution to problems and conflicts related to borders without considering the role of local actors inhabiting the borderlands, because the life and interests of the local people are closely intertwined with questions regarding borders and security. However, the existing frameworks for border and security management might be insufficient for addressing this question. It is meaningful to focus on the local actors because the borders have changed in character become vaguer in terms of their orientation.

Figure 1: Borders of Burkina Faso



Source: *Central Intelligence Agency*

Burkina Faso is located in the center of West Africa and has a border spanning 3,611 km that it shares with Benin (386 km of border), Côte d'Ivoire (545 km), Ghana (602 km), Mali (1,325 km), Niger (622 km), and Togo (131 km). It has faced border disputes with these neighboring countries because of the ambiguous administrative borders drawn by the French colonial authority. Like other landlocked countries, Burkina Faso faces serious difficulties in terms of its economy and security.

Figure 2: Satirical cartoon criticizing the political intervention by President Compaoré



Source: *Journal du Jeudi*, No. 959, February 4–10, 2010.

However, the political leadership of Burkina Faso has not only suffered from border issues but also profited from them. During the regime of President Blaise Compaoré (1987–2014), he profited from the geographical location of Burkina Faso because of the political instability of other West African countries. For instance, the Compaoré Administration made profits from civil wars or conflicts in Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire while covertly supporting the illegal diamond and arms trades (BBC 2000; African Arguments 2012) while acting as the intermediary of peace talks in West Africa.

This paper is an attempt to decode the security issues in West Africa by examining questions about borders and the cross-border cooperation of local governments through case studies in Burkina Faso and neighboring countries.

2. Rethinking borders and security in Africa

2-1. Contemporary history

Since independence, national borders have been a serious national security concern for African countries. These are colonial borders that the sovereign states retained, and despite the claim that these borders were delimited or imposed by European colonizers, African countries have not been able to draw more authentic borders.

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) stipulated the principle of respect for existing borders in 1964, and its charter advocates respect for the sovereignty and

territory of African countries (Touval 1972, 42, 86). This principle of maintaining the status quo of national borders was succeeded to the African Union (AU), founded in 2002. Thus, African states have adopted this principle in attempting to deal with domestic and international disputes caused by border-related problems. Many African countries have suffered from conflicts with rebel groups fighting for separatist movements, such as Katanga (DR Congo), Cabinda (Angola), and Casamance (Senegal), or reunification movements for divided compatriots, such as the Great Somali movement (spreading over Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya) and Ewe unification movement (Ghana and Togo). Eritrea (in 1993) and South Sudan (in 2011) achieved independence after long and painful struggles. These two cases are the only cases of independence that separated existing African countries and creating new borders.

African states have recognized that a modification of state borders might open Pandora's box and destabilize each African state (Touval 1972, 83). In the early 1960s, the issue of the independence of Eritrea from Ethiopia divided African countries into two blocs: the Casablanca group and the Monrovia group. The OAU called on the African countries to respect the given borders that the newly born African countries had inherited from the former European colonizers. After the results of the January 2011 referendum, South Sudan achieved independence in July 2011. This newest case of independence was welcomed by the international community.

In general, armed conflicts have begun inside an African country and then occasionally crossed borders into neighboring countries. Despite severe border disputes, there have been few cases of war breaking out between national armies, because African armies have tended to intervene in internal affairs, rather than fight foreign armies. Therefore, the wars that took place between Burkina Faso (Upper Volta)³ and Mali in 1974 and 1985 owing to border disputes do not necessarily evince the general character of armed conflicts in the history of postcolonial Africa.

Colonial borders were accepted as international and official borders among the African states upon independence. While the border issue might be "old," it has been repeatedly renewed for young African states. Borders have not only brought about territorial disputes but also political concern about struggles for survival during conflicts that have created massive numbers of refugees. Even in conflict-free (but not necessarily peaceful) times, the issues relating to borders are

3. Upper Volta (Haute-Volta) changed its name to Burkina Faso in 1984 under the revolutionary regime led by Captain Thomas Sankara.

always very sensitive ones of anti-government rebel forces' activities, smuggling in the borderlands, and regional integration.

Borders certainly existed among African states in the precolonial era. Throughout Africa's long history, many kingdoms and chieftaincies were established and perished. However, the governing bodies at that time did not necessarily delimit strict geographical borders. Traditionally, the rule in peripheral regions was more geographically vague. Even during the colonial period, massive movements of people and ethnic groups crossed the colonial borders repeatedly to escape despotic rule (Herbst 2000, 88).

The delimitation of colonial borders can be divided into two categories. The first category comprises the borders that were demarcated by an agreement among European countries. These were the international borders between European colonies. The second category consists of the borders drawn inside the colonies (Touval 1972, 4)—that is, the domestic borders. The colonial borders have not only divided ethnic groups and living areas but also have created new identities and aroused new interests in African people (Nugent 2002, 273).

On the one hand, globalization is recognized as a basic feature in the contemporary world. People, capital, and information have been crossing national borders on a large scale and instantly. On the other hand, borders have not faded under globalization; they continue to exert a huge influence over people's lives, especially in borderlands. Borders continue to create outsiders beyond their limits, and not only in a geographical sense. The borders have influenced and edified identities of communities and individuals and have constituted a base of political conflict. These aspects are displayed in the formation process of sovereign states. However, European countries drew artificial borders through few consultations with African authorities and African people.

2-2. Borders and security in Burkina Faso and neighboring countries

The final border beacon (*la borne* in French) of delimitation between Burkina Faso (Upper Volta until 1984) and Mali was eventually established in 2010. The inauguration ceremony commemorating the peaceful resolution of the border dispute was attended by representatives of both countries. After long and painstaking negotiations between Burkina Faso and Mali, with the support of the OAU (transformed into the African Union [AU] in 2002) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and accepting the judgment of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) 1986), the two countries finally concluded their border agreement. Thus, the border dispute between Burkina Faso and Mali was finally resolved 50

Borders and Regional Security in Local Governments' Cooperation in West Africa: Case Studies in Burkina Faso years after their independence (Jeune Afrique 2015a; RFI Afrique 2015; Jan 2015; Le monde 2015; ICJ 2013)⁴.

Figure 3: Resolution of the border dispute between Burkina Faso and Mali



Source: *Le Pays* (Burkina Faso), February 12, 2010.

During the first war between Burkina Faso and Mali in 1974, the name of a young soldier, future President Thomas Sankara, was diffused among the people of Upper Volta because he had bravely fought in Malian territory. This war brought Sankara much admiration from the Voltaic (Burkinabe) people. During this war,

Figure 4: Leaders of Burkina Faso



Source: Sankaranet website

4. In 2015, Burkina Faso and Niger accepted the proposition of the ICJ to modify their shared border and consequently resolve a dispute over 18 villages.

Sankara met his comrade Blaise Compaoré, President from 1987 to 2014. This war gave young officers an opportunity to join in a political game and finally establish the revolutionary regime (1983–87) in Burkina Faso by a military coup d'état led by Sankara and Compaoré. The meeting of young comrades continues to influence Burkinabe politics.

Although Upper Volta retained its colonial borders, like other African countries, its border-related situation was more complicated because it was established as a colonial administrative unit (*Circonscription administrative*) under *Afrique occidentale française* (French West Africa [AOF]) in 1919, then abolished once in 1932, but finally reestablished in 1947⁵. Upon the re-establishment of this colonial unit, some parts of the colonial administrative borders inside the AOF remained vague until independence. Upper Volta's border was buffeted by the shift of French colonial rule. This capricious re-establishment of the administrative unit in the French colony brought about more complicated and controversial border issues between Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) and neighboring countries after independence.

3. Local government cooperation in the decentralization process

3-1. Local governance in the era of globalization

Decentralization began in the mid-1990s in African countries, and it is appropriate to reconsider this process, as it has exposed its malfunction over the last two decades. Decentralization is the process of financial, human, and technical devolution from the central government to local governments to empower the latter. Although numerous studies have been done on decentralization in Africa, they have principally focused on administrative reform while neglecting political dynamism. Decentralization is the process of redefining the roles and responsibilities of the central and local governments. Therefore, decentralization is essentially political reform (Saito 2008, 284).

At the dawn of the decentralization process, Western donor countries expected that decentralization would lead to an improvement in local governance in African countries. However, the expectations for decentralization seemed to be inflated as a panacea-like reform without sufficient reflection on the historical, social, and

5. The colony of Upper Volta was divided into three parts and absorbed into the three French West African colonies of Côte d'Ivoire, French Soudan (currently Mali), and Niger from 1932 to 1947.

political realities in each country. In addition, the international community naively expected that decentralization would promote democratization at the local level and spread to national politics. These discourses seem to have been based more on ideological ideas than on the real experiences on the ground.

Decentralization certainly increased resources and affected the power balance in the local politics (Iwata 2011). A few researchers have focused on the impact of decentralization on elections in Africa. One reason for this is that few African countries have repeatedly held local elections since the decentralization reform was initiated. Due to the lack of financial, human, and technical resources in the central government of a developing country, the local governments may not have expected the sufficient devolution of these resources. After local elections were held to complete the decentralization process, the newly elected representatives in the local governments faced demands for local development from the residents. Therefore, the local governments needed to establish direct and close relationships with foreign local governments in order to supplement the above-mentioned resources. Consequently, decentralization stimulated the international activities of local governments in Africa.

In addition, quite a few studies on decentralization in Africa have examined the security issue. The framework of the international cooperation of local governments, called *coopération décentralisée*, between France and French-speaking African countries, has been thoroughly promoted by the French government working with French local governments and other European donor countries, such as Germany and Italy⁶. *Coopération décentralisée* is the cooperative work of local governments with a foreign/domestic local partner to realize common interests (French Foreign Ministry 2007). Therefore, many local governments in Africa have concluded cooperation agreements with non-African local governments as well as those of neighboring African countries. As decentralization progressed, the cross-border local cooperation became more meaningful in terms of regional securi-

6. France is the aggressive promoter of local government cooperation in Africa (principally in francophone Africa). Local government cooperation is not only a cooperation tool but also a "value" for European countries that is based on their experience of reconciliation after World War II. Local government cooperation was launched between French and German local governments to establish a multilateral network of two nations for sustainable peace. Furthermore, local government cooperation was developed through the integration process of the European Union. Local government cooperation is literally the cooperation among local governments and is not limited to cultural exchange with the sister-city framework. Local government cooperation was stimulated and expanded through the decentralization process that enabled local governments to conduct more direct and international cooperation with foreign local governments in pursuit of fulfilling local interests.

ty and the socioeconomic development of borderlands.

3-2. Burkina Faso and neighboring countries

Burkina Faso is a strategically important country for France to promote the local government cooperation policy in Africa as well as regional security. France has appreciated Burkina Faso as a model of decentralization⁷ and local government cooperation⁸. As the satirical neologism “Françafrique”⁹ suggests, Africa has always been an indispensable resource for France to maintain its diplomatic status within the international community as a globally influential actor.

The Association of Municipalities of Burkina Faso (*Association des municipalités du Burkina Faso* [AMBF]) was founded as the main body to promote local government cooperation activities in Burkina Faso. It has been principally supported by France and Canada (more specifically, the Government of Quebec). The main French coordinator of the local government cooperation is *Cités unies France* (CUF). The Burkinabe government established the special institution, *Maison de coopération décentralisée* (MCD) in 2003, which would later be absorbed into AMBF.

The second international meeting of *Franco-Burkinabe coopération décentralisée* was held in Ouagadougou in December 2007 with 1,500 participants from Burkina Faso (including 359 mayors), France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Niger, Senegal, Mali, and Burundi. The event comprised two general meetings, three sections, and nine group discussions over the course of two days. The local government triangular cooperation among Burkinabe-French-German local governments¹⁰ was proposed by the German government.

7. Since the decentralization process started in 1995, 359 local units (49 urban, 302 rural, 8 particular *arrondissements* in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso), known as *communes*, and 13 regions were established in Burkina Faso. A *commune* is a basic unit of local administration equivalent to a city or town. The *arrondissement* is an administrative unit as the ward in the commune of special status and allowed similar status to a commune. Burkina Faso inherited the French system of local governance, like other French-speaking countries. The law related to local government (Code general des collectivités territoriales, 2004) stipulated the devolution from central to local government. The first full-scale local elections in Burkina Faso took place in 2006.

8. The history of local government cooperation in Burkina Faso started with the sister-city agreement between Ouagadougou and Loudun (France) in 1967. In the local government cooperation framework, more than 120 agreements of local government cooperation were concluded between the French and Burkinabe local governments until 2007.

9. “Françafrique” is the satirical neologism expressing complex feelings that are critical of the close and corrupt relationship between France and the former French colonies established through very personal connections among the leaders and elites. See Verschave François-Xavier (2000).

Figure 5: Session on local government triangular cooperation



Source: The National Congress of Local Governments in Burkina Faso (*Journée de la commune burkinabé*) organized by AMBF (December 4, 2007, Ouagadougou), photographed by the author.

The border dispute between Burkina Faso and Mali drove them to fight. Therefore, both countries recognized the importance of international local cooperation. The political instability in Mali after the coup d'état of 2012 certainly affected the political situation of Burkina Faso. The terrorist attack that occurred in January 2016 in Ouagadougou offers the most significant case of border security issues between the two countries, because these armed forces entered Burkinabe territory via Mali, thereby crossing the border to carry out this attack. Political instability allows the expansion of the activities of such jihadist groups. Before this serious incident, Samoroguan, a town located in the western region of Burkina Faso and 30 km from the border with Mali, had been attacked by an armed group in October 2015 (Jeune Afrique 2015b). The Burkinabe government had to acknowledge the importance of border security in its relations with Mali to maintain its sovereignty and national security.

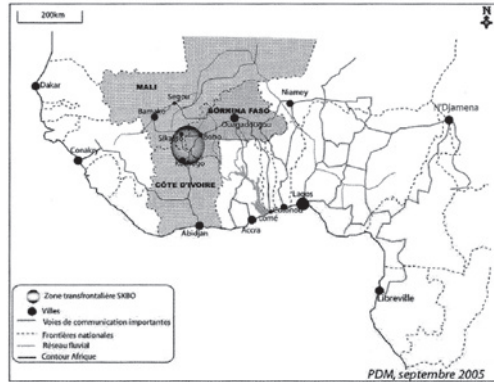
Similar to Burkina Faso, Mali is a landlocked country, surrounded by 7,243 km of land borders with seven neighboring countries. Due to the Ivorian crisis that occurred in the 2000s, Mali temporarily lost its free access to the port of Abidjan¹¹,

10. The trial of triangular cooperation was launched by Burkinabe, French, and German local governments. Burkina Faso is the pilot model country in terms of multilateral local partnerships in Africa. Subsequently, German, Italian, and Swiss local governments began working on a triangle framework.

11. As the Ivorian crisis intensified, Mali had to seek an alternative supply route, which was longer and costlier, such as from/to Dakar, Conakry, even Lome or Cotonou, passing Burkina Faso. During my fieldwork in Benin in 2006, I watched many Malian trucks and tank lorries travel. Mali had to pay additional costs for its economic activities.

one of the most important ports in West Africa, where 70% of goods are transported from/to Mali.

Figure 6: SKBo area



Source: Dahou et al. (2007, 16)

The northern territory had been practically the area outside the efficient control of the Malian central government even before AQIM and other jihadist forces expanded their influence in the Sahel region. Therefore, Mali needs a good neighbor policy to handle this emergency situation. Mali has stressed local government cooperation among the local governments of the borderland. The cooperation between Mopti (Mali)–Ouahigouya (Burkina) and Sikasso (Mali)–Korhogo (Côte d'Ivoire)–Bobo Dioulasso (Burkina), called SKBo, is an important example of the cross-border local government cooperation for Mali.

Figure 7: International meeting for local government cooperation in Mali



Source: Photographed by the author (December 2008, Bamako)

The Association of Municipalities of Mali (*Association des municipalités du Mali* [AMM]) is the main organizer of local government cooperation. The author attended the meeting for local government cooperation held in Bamako in December 2008, organized by AMM under the supervision of then President Amani Toumani Touré. Mali was the second largest base of local government cooperation for France after Burkina Faso.

3-3. Interests of France in local government cooperation in Africa

France has been keen to sustain its influence on its former African colonies, covering a wide range of interests including cultural, economic, educational, military, and political aspects. In addition, Burkina Faso is located at the center of French-speaking West Africa. When the terrorist attack occurred in Ouagadougou in January 2016, French troops were immediately dispatched to intervene against the armed group and to control the situation in cooperation with Burkinabe and U.S. troops (Jeune Afrique 2016c). France's stake in the decentralization and local government cooperation in Africa is not only related to socioeconomic activities; it is also important for international strategy and security. The following is the French government's definition of local government cooperation (*Coopération décentralisée*). The National Committee of the Local Government Cooperation (*Comité nationale de la Coopération décentralisée* [CNCD]) was set up in the French foreign ministry (*Ministères des affaires étrangères et européennes*; L. 1112-6, Article 134, 1992):

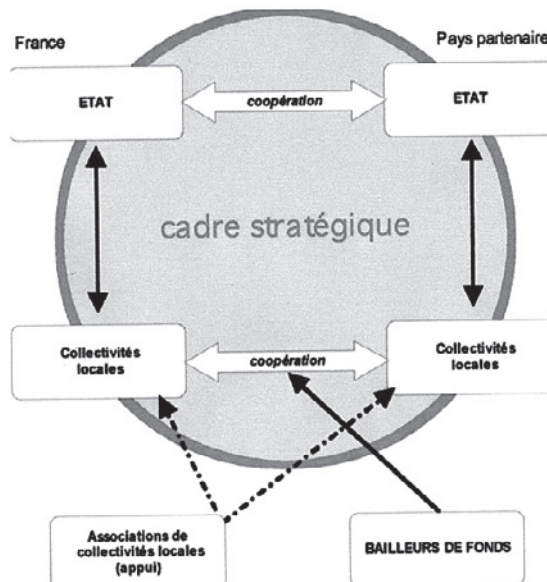
*Coopération décentralisée is the ensemble of actions for international cooperation with an agreement in the objectives of common interest between French and foreign local governments. Coopération décentralisée takes place in diverse forms such as sister-city, development program, and technical exchange. Coopération décentralisée is speculated in the largest framework of local government's foreign action by the circular of Prime Minister, announced on May 26, 1983*¹².

Local government cooperation is not only for the sake of local development but also a strategic tool for diversifying French diplomacy in Africa. The French

12. Le ministre de l'intérieur, Le ministre des affaires étrangères à Mesdames et Messieurs les préfets Mesdames et Messieurs les chefs de poste diplomatiques et consulaires, *La coopération décentralisée des collectivités territoriales françaises et de leurs groupements avec des collectivités territoriales étrangères et leurs groupements*, 20 avril 2001.

government needs to involve more French citizens in the development assistance in Africa and to increase the support for the French government's African policy. Local government cooperation is secondary diplomacy¹³ for the French government to maintain its influence in Africa, which allows France to keep its status as an influential actor in the international community.

Figure 8: Strategic framework for International Cooperation in French government



Source: *Coopération décentralisée et développement urbain* (2007, 56)

Figure 8 above depicts the scheme of the French local government cooperation. It is a mixed cooperation between states (*Etat*) and local governments (*Collectivités locales*). *Cités unies France* is the coordinator organization for the local government cooperation between the French and foreign local governments (Foreign Ministry of France 2012a)¹⁴. The French Foreign Ministry provides financial support to the

13. France and Germany initiated local government cooperation after the end of World War II to avoid another tragic war. Both countries were confident that local government cooperation would establish strong friendships between the two nations and assure a diversified communication channel that would keep the peace. This local government cooperation has developed for Europe not only in terms of friendships but also in terms of achieving the national and regional security goals.

14. In total, 3,800 French local governments have participated in the local government cooperation, representing 8,000 projects.

French local governments cooperating with the local governments in Africa. In total, the French Foreign Ministry funds 50% of the total amount for a project undertaken by a French local government (Foreign Ministry of France 2012b). This is called “co-finance” (*co-financement*)

4. Border issues and regional security in local government cooperation

4-1. Decentralization and cross-border cooperation

This part focuses on local involvement in socioeconomic development and security issues in the borderlands.

In Africa, a country's sovereignty stops at the border. That means: sovereign rights of two States meet at the border, but no State has the power to act across the border. Therefore, cross-border structures are needed, ideally at the regional/local level acting as drivers of co-operation. (WABI 2007a, 31)

Border control and regional security can be carried out only through international and regional cooperation among neighboring states. There are residents living on both sides of the border, who frequently cross the border to undertake their daily activities. The cross-border cooperation is not only expected to establish and develop the socioeconomic relations in the neighboring communities but also to ensure national and regional security. After African countries began implementing the decentralization reform, the local governments were expected to play a key role in the economic development and improvement of life of the local residents through the devolution process from the central government to the local governments (OECD-SWAC 2010, 27). Thus, the African local governments eagerly sought foreign partners. International cooperation between local governments was stimulated, therefore, in the decentralization process. It has been indispensable for advancing international cooperation among local governments in the borderlands, especially with neighboring communities across their borders, in order to carry out economic development and strengthen the security of the borderlands.

People living in a borderland are linked socioeconomically and culturally (OECD-SWAC 2010, 8). The concept of a cross-border region was proposed by Malian President Alpha Oumar Konare in 2002, and cross-border cooperation has expanded throughout West Africa. Consequently, local governments have concluded sister-city and other agreements¹⁵. Civil society associations encourage that the

local people resolve conflict through a mediation process. Some other functions of these agreements are that health centers coordinate the use of their resources, schools accept young students living on the other side of their border, livestock breeders employ transhumance corridors, and traders have established border markets (FIAO Report 2005, 7).

At the workshop on border cooperation held in Ouagadougou in July 2003, WABI (or *Frontières et intégrations en Afrique de l'Ouest* in French) was established. WABI was supported by the National Division of Borders of Mali (a state organization), ENDA-Diapol (an NGO), and OECD-SWAC (an international organization)¹⁶ for funding (FIAO Report 2005, 2).

4-2. Cross-border local cooperation

The SKBo region is recognized as the most hopeful and attractive case of cross-border triangular cooperation in West Africa. Each country in this triad has peripheral areas (Dahou et al 2007, 15) including the cities of Sikasso (Mali), Korhogo (Côte d'Ivoire), and Bobo Dioulasso (Burkina Faso). SKBo contains 3.5 million inhabitants and covers an area of 115,000 km².

The common history of this border area has been built through the great kingdoms of the past (Kong, Kéné Dougou, and Gwiriko) and the colonial period. The kingdom had Kéné Dougou as capital Sikasso and includes most of the SKBo between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. (Yatta 2011, 2)

The intertwining historical, geographical, and commercial aspects of this border region make it a dynamic area (Dahou 2007, 16). The SKBo region has been a

15. Organizations for local cooperation work together, such as the Mali Association of Municipalities (AMM), the Burkina Faso Association of Municipalities (AMBF), the Municipal Development Partnership (PDM), the International Association of Francophone Mayors (AIMF), *Cités unies France* (CUF), the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), and the Cross-border Operational Mission (MOT) (OECD Sahel and West Africa Club 2010, 19).

16. According to OECD-SWAC (2010), "The decentralisation process is an ongoing one which is subject to supervision on the part of support programmes with the backing of the technical and financial partners. The aim is that the territorial authorities should become more capable of exercising their responsibilities. Authorities in border areas are faced with special challenges in meeting the needs of their populations: identifying a common vision for the development of a particular cross-border area; and the development of consistent and co-ordinated policies on both sides of the border (in fields such as culture, education, health, transport, economic development and land-use planning), as well as of services, infrastructure and cross-border public amenities (to avoid any duplication). In this respect, the cross-border issue has to be part and parcel of the decentralisation process" (9-10).

space of close political, economic, and religious ties, creating a hub of trade, information, and finance (Dahou 2007, 40). This area is at the heart of the production of cotton, cereals, fruits, vegetables, and animal husbandry. The port of Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire includes indispensable infrastructure for the economies of Burkina Faso and Mali because they are landlocked countries (PDM 2006, 8; Yatta 2011, 1).

The crisis that occurred in Côte d'Ivoire at the beginning of the twenty-first century severely damaged the socioeconomic activities in the SKBo region. The port of Abidjan was largely inaccessible to inland countries for almost five years. Before the civil war broke out in Côte d'Ivoire in September 2002, more than 60% of imports and exports from/to Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, transited through Abidjan, representing about 7% of the total traffic handled by the Abidjan port. The Ivorian crisis drastically reduced the activities of the port of Abidjan by 43.4% (Panapress 2003). Burkina Faso and Mali had to shift from Abidjan to other big ports, such as Conakry (Guinea), Cotonou (Benin), Dakar (Senegal), Lomé (Togo), Nouakchott (Mauritania), Takoradi, and Tema (Ghana) to sustain their economies. Due to the Ivorian crisis, many immigrants came into the SKBo area (Dahou 2007, 27). Therefore, the Ivorian crisis shed light on the importance of borderland regions (Dahou 2007, 15).

This crisis divided Côte d'Ivoire into the North and the South (the main part of the Ivorian economy). This division not only seriously damaged the economy in Côte d'Ivoire but also the economies of the inland countries depending considerably on transport via the port of Abidjan, such as Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. During the Ivorian crisis, the northern region was practically ruled by the rebel group (at that time), *La force nouvelle*, led by Guillaume Soro, the current president of the National Assembly, under a militarized structure. In the northern area, the borders with neighboring countries became more important owing to this area's economic isolation from the South.

However, the civil war ironically stimulated regional trade from/to northern Côte d'Ivoire often across the borders with Burkina Faso and Mali from/to Benin, Ghana, Guinea, Togo, and Nigeria in order to sustain the economic activities. A network of Malinke Muslims contributed to the socioeconomic activities in the isolated northern territory of Côte d'Ivoire. The Ivorian crisis made the SKBo region a newly activated economic zone fostering cultural solidarity in terms of the creation of a regional network. While the separation from the southern region and economic capital of Abidjan was maintained, the northern region became an epicenter of illegal trade, exporting agricultural (e.g. cocoa, cashew, cotton) and mining products (e.g. diamond) through the ports of Lome and Accra via Burkina Faso and

Mali (Nassa 2008, 9–10).

During the Ivoirian crisis, people were reminded of the importance of solidarity in the SKBo region. The *Kurumba* (“stepladder” in Bambara) network of radio stations was created in the SKBo region. It comprised five community radio stations including Radio Munyu in Banfora, Kéné Dougou in Sikasso, Yeelen and Folona in Kadiolo, and Danaya in Zegoua (WABI 2006, 31). This involved the communities in the SKBo area in direct exchange and communication. Further, the youth in the borderlands (Mali, Burkina Faso, and Côte d’Ivoire) undertook cross-border cooperation activities (WABI 2007b, 25).

Apart from the SKBo area, Burkina Faso has other potential triangle border areas. For example, IIRSAhel, shared with Niger and Mali, has been expected to promote cross-border cooperation, and the Liptako-Gourma region has broadened the borderlands between Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, covering an area of 370,000 km². The IIRSAhel project is a program supporting agricultural development (UNCDF 2012, 13).

In particular, the borderlands in the northern regions neighboring Mali have increased the crucial meaning of security for Burkina Faso. Burkina Faso fought wars with Mali twice, in the 1970s and the 1980s. Thus, its relations with Mali have been Burkina Faso’s biggest security concern since its independence. In recent years, Burkina Faso has faced security threats from the rebel groups that have repeatedly attempted to cross the border from the Malian territory while Mali has been suffering from the political vacuum and instability resulting from the coup d’état that occurred in 2012. In terms of this security concern, cross-border local cooperation is more important for Burkina Faso. Therefore, it has been actively involved in local cooperation and especially cross-border local cooperation.

There is an example of significant cross-border local cooperation between the local governments of Mopti (Mali) and Ouahigouya (Burkina Faso). The Dogon and Mossi communities were close neighbors throughout long pre-colonial history. In addition, this region was ruled by the same administrative unit of French Soudan (currently Mali) from 1932 to 1947. Therefore, this area has kept close and strong ties. In the local government cooperation (or *la coopération décentralisée*) framework, these two local governments have been keen to develop diverse cooperation through sister-city framework and sectors such as health, agriculture, livestock, and security (FIAO Report 2005, 12).

In 2004, the ECOWAS Cross-border Initiatives Programme (CIP) was initiated to resolve border disputes among West African countries. While border areas show potential for development, these areas are fertile grounds for conflicts, insecurity,

drug and human trafficking, and arms sales. The movement of people and the trade of all kinds of products take place on both sides of the border. Therefore, cross-border cooperation is quite important for promoting socioeconomic activities in the borderlands while successfully avoiding problems. However, political instability makes it difficult to maintain cross-border cooperation. The Malian political crisis after the coup d'état made the cross-border cooperation in Mali increasingly difficult, as many sites became inaccessible due to attacks and occupations by rebel forces (UNCDF 2012, 10).

Between Benin and Niger, there are historically established ties between the borderland cities of Malanville (Benin) and Gaya (Niger), located on either side of the Niger River. These two cities have constructed a community on the basis of shared languages and traditions. However, under French colonialism, the Niger River became a demarcation between the colonial administrative unit of Dahomey (currently Benin) and Niger under the French colonial structure (AOF). The community on the Nigerien side was called Gaya and that on the Beninese side was called Malanville, derived from the name of a French military general. The cross-border cooperation framework has great expectations for this historically fostered borderland (WABI 2004, 27).

The market of Malanville has been growing, attracting new populations and creating new jobs, owing to the price advantage it offers as compared to the bordering countries. Malanville benefits from its strategic location between the coastal and the Sahelian countries. This is the gate from/to the Sahel region that benefits from transportation via the Niger River. This area also shares a border with Nigeria. Thus, the Malanville–Gaya cross-border dynamism might provide great potential on the Nigerian side. This network is expected to involve the Nigerian city of Kamba especially with respect to the development of the grain market (WABI 2004, 28–9, 31).

5. Conclusion

This paper reflected on the border and regional security issues of Burkina Faso and its neighboring West African countries from the perspective of cross-border local cooperation. In the historical context, the issue of borders has been a serious national and regional security concern for African countries since their independence. African countries have faced many cases of border disputes and political destabilization due to such border-related problems.

However, the border-related security concerns have changed in character in

recent years and become increasingly complicated. It has become easier for jihadist and rebel groups to cross national borders and globalize their activities. In Nigeria, Boko Haram announced its affiliation with the Islamic State, and in other parts of Africa, some rebel groups are affiliated with AQIM. On the one hand, a border might be a convenient membrane that allows rebel groups to defend themselves; on the other hand, a border still represents a strong sovereign wall for the national armies of African countries.

In order to promote cross-border cooperation, it is indispensable to ensure the active involvement of local governments and people inhabiting the borderlands. The decentralization process in Africa has more or less brought about the liberty of activities and the responsibility of governance for local leaders, although the devolution from the central government to the local governments is still incomplete. Decentralization may not only be expected to encourage cross-border cooperation for economic development and the improvement of the lives of local residents but also to promote national and regional security. Poverty might provide a good recruitment opportunity for jihadist groups. In the context of the recent terror attacks in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali, jihadist groups had reportedly recruited local people who perceived maltreatment on the part of the central government and were, thus, resentful. The residents of borderlands or marginalized areas might be more likely to share such resentment. In that sense, cross-border local cooperation is essential for developing the local people's lives and ensuring that they are not tempted to join in jihadist activities.

However, this paper does not conclude that decentralization is a panacea-like measure for resolving any kinds of problems in the local communities and for promoting local development, poverty reduction, cross-border cooperation, local democracy, and security in borderlands. On the contrary, we need to consider that decentralization might create problems and disputes in the local politics and governance. Therefore, we cannot expect too much from decentralization; rather, we should consider it as an important institutional option for achieving the above-mentioned objectives, because the central governments and Heads of State in African countries are likely to neglect the borderlands unless the leaders come from these regions or they are resource-rich regions. Therefore, we need to highlight that decentralization is an unignorable optional measure that might contribute to the promotion of cross-border cooperation and borderland security.

The cross-border cooperation among local governments is expected to strengthen border security while uncovering the activities of rebel forces, illegal transactions or the smuggling of arms, drugs, minerals, and agricultural products, and human

trafficking across borders. However, African countries have always faced limitations in their capacity for border control due to insufficient financial, human, and technical resources.

This paper focused on Burkina Faso because this country once had a reputation as a model of decentralization and was the aggressive sponsor of local governments' international cooperation. Indeed, the Burkinabe government played host to two international meetings for local cooperation (*Assises de la coopération décentralisée*). The Malian government organized a similar international meeting in Bamako. Both Burkina Faso and Mali have a common interest in developing local cooperation in order to ensure national security as well as local development, especially through the cross-border local cooperation framework. However, political instability in the two countries caused serious damage to the cross-border local cooperation, especially after the coup d'état in Mali in 2012 and the popular insurgency in Burkina Faso in 2014.

In Mali, the northern region has not been under the effective control of the central government, despite broad deployments of an international peacekeeping operation with France, the United States, and the United Nations after the coup d'état created a significant political power vacuum. In Burkina Faso, after President Compaoré was practically ousted by the insurgency of 2014, the councils of the local governments (*communes*), composed of elected mayors and councilors, were dissolved by the transitional government (Zoure 2014) to eradicate the influence of the former regime as well as the National Assembly, because the representatives of the local governments (the council of commune) were dominated by the Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP, *Congrès pour la démocratie et le progrès*), the dominant party during the Compaoré regime. The transitional government temporarily sent governors to govern local bodies until the installation of new local representatives after the municipal elections (held in May 2016).

Since the transitional government dissolved the local governments in November 2014, international cooperation among the local governments has been practically suspended in Burkina Faso without any true local leadership or initiative. The cross-border local cooperation between Burkina Faso and neighboring countries also became inactive. Therefore, it is necessary to normalize the institution of local governance in order to restart the cross-border local cooperation.

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