

Border Community Conflicts and Their Implications for Trade Relations in West Africa (2015–2024)

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Abstract- This study examines border community conflicts and their implications for trade relations in West Africa between 2015 and 2024. Border communities occupy a strategic position in regional economic interaction, yet they have increasingly become hotspots of insecurity arising from weak border governance, porous boundaries, competition over scarce resources, and the activities of armed non-state actors. Anchored on Border Regimes Theory, State Fragility Theory, and Human Needs Theory, the study analyses how governance failures, restrictive or poorly coordinated border controls, and unmet socio-economic needs interact to sustain conflict and disrupt cross-border trade. A survey research design was adopted, drawing data from security agencies, border management institutions, regional organisations, and selected border communities across Nigeria and neighbouring West African states. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires and complemented with secondary sources, including official reports and academic literature. Descriptive statistical techniques were used for data analysis. The findings reveal that border community conflicts are strongly linked to weak state presence, inconsistent government policies, and competition over trade-related resources. Although cross-border trade shows some resilience and often continues despite tension, conflicts significantly disrupt trade by restricting movement, displacing residents, increasing insecurity, closing markets, and limiting access to essential goods and services. The study further finds that harassment, extortion, and violence against traders and residents undermine trust and cooperation among neighbouring communities, thereby weakening regional trade relations. The study concludes that border community conflicts and trade disruptions in West Africa are mutually reinforcing outcomes of fragile state capacity, ineffective border regimes, and persistent human insecurity. It recommends strengthening state governance in border areas, reforming border management practices, and prioritising the security and livelihoods of border communities to promote peaceful coexistence and sustainable regional trade integration.

Index Terms: Border Community Conflicts, Trade Relations, Border Security, State Fragility, West Africa

I. INTRODUCTION

Border community conflicts have emerged as a persistent feature of contemporary insecurity in West Africa, particularly within the context of evolving global and regional conflict dynamics. Recent scholarship observes that modern conflicts are no longer confined to conventional interstate wars but increasingly manifest as insurgency, banditry, terrorism, communal clashes, and organized criminal violence that operate across national boundaries (Krause, 2016; Social Science Research Council, 2018). Although large-scale interstate wars have declined, sub-national and cross-border conflicts continue to proliferate, especially in regions characterized by weak governance and limited state presence (Goodhand, 2018; Weigand, 2020). In West Africa, these dynamics are most visible in border communities, where insecurity has intensified since 2015 due to the rise of armed non-state actors, climate-induced resource competition, and fragile border management systems (Osimen et al., 2017; Tarfa, 2021)

The vulnerability of border communities in West Africa is deeply rooted in the colonial construction of boundaries that divided ethnic groups, disrupted pre-colonial trade networks, and imposed artificial territorial demarcations on historically interconnected societies. As Mancini, cited in Avis (2020), explains, territorial disputes often escalate into violent conflict when political and economic interests intersect with competition over scarce resources. Ojo (2019) further notes that porous borders, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient surveillance capacity have made border regions susceptible to transnational crimes and armed violence. Weak border governance, compounded by corruption among border officials, has facilitated the movement of insurgents, smugglers,

and bandits across Nigeria's borders with Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin, thereby deepening communal tensions and insecurity in border settlements (Blum, 2014; Ajaja, 2021; Onnoghen-Theophilus, 2022)

Despite these conflicts, border communities remain central to trade relations and economic interaction in West Africa, particularly within the framework of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Historically, cross-border trade has sustained livelihoods, reinforced social cohesion, and promoted economic interdependence among communities across Nigeria, Niger, Benin, and other neighbouring states (Usman & Sama'ila, 2019; Abubakar & Sha'aban, 2022). However, recurring border community conflicts between 2015 and 2024 have disrupted trade routes, reduced market activities, displaced traders, and undermined confidence in cross-border commerce. Asiwaju (2021) argues that the inability of political elites to effectively translate regional trade and security agreements into practical outcomes has further constrained economic cooperation. Consequently, border community conflicts have significantly weakened trade relations in West Africa, making it imperative to examine their nature, causes, and implications within the specified period in order to inform policies aimed at promoting peaceful coexistence and sustainable regional trade integration

II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Despite the strategic importance of border communities to regional stability and economic interaction, border community conflicts have remained persistent across West Africa between 2015 and 2024. These conflicts are largely rooted in colonial boundary legacies, porous borders, weak state presence, and competition over scarce resources, which have created fragile border spaces prone to violence and insecurity. In countries such as Nigeria and its neighbouring states, the activities of armed non-state actors and cross-border criminal networks have intensified insecurity in border communities, resulting in loss of lives, displacement, and disruption of social and economic life (Ojo, 2019; Osimen et al., 2017). Rather than functioning as zones of cooperation due to shared cultural and historical ties, many border communities have become marginalised and

neglected, thereby deepening tensions and increasing the likelihood of recurrent conflict (Asiwaju, 2015).

At the same time, these border community conflicts have significantly undermined trade relations in West Africa, yet their implications remain insufficiently examined in empirical literature. Cross-border trade has historically sustained livelihoods and promoted economic interdependence among border communities within the ECOWAS framework, but recurring conflicts have disrupted trade routes, reduced market activities, and weakened confidence in cross-border commerce. Although regional initiatives aimed at enhancing border cooperation and trade facilitation exist, insecurity and weak implementation continue to limit their effectiveness (Asiwaju, 2021). Consequently, there is a clear research gap in understanding how border community conflicts affect trade relations over time, making it necessary to systematically examine their nature, causes, and implications for trade relations in West Africa during the 2015–2024 period.

III. RESEARCH QUESTION

The study provides answers to the following questions:

1. What are the causes of border community conflicts in West Africa and their effects on trade relations?
2. What challenges do border community inhabitants face during conflicts, and what are the implications for trade relations in West Africa?

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study is guided by specific objectives aimed at understanding the dynamics of border community conflicts and their implications for trade relations in West Africa. In line with this, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the causes of border community conflicts and their effects on trade relations in West Africa.
2. Assess the challenges faced by border community inhabitants during conflicts and their implications for trade relations in West Africa.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Clarifications

Border

A border refers to a formally recognised line or zone that demarcates the territorial limits of state sovereignty and political authority. Caflisch (2006) defines borders as instruments through which states identify the spatial extent of their jurisdiction, while Diener and Hagen (2012) emphasise that borders function not only as physical demarcations but also as social and political constructs that differentiate spaces in terms of governance, identity, and economic regulation. Lee and North (2016) further argue that borders may be expressed through natural features such as rivers and mountains or through human-made markers, but their meanings are socially constructed and politically maintained. As such, borders serve as mechanisms for regulating movement, controlling resources, and asserting state authority.

Beyond their physical manifestation, borders play a critical role in shaping security, migration, and trade relations. Ramutsindela (2014) notes that borders help create order by delineating spheres of authority while simultaneously protecting those within from perceived external threats. However, in regions where borders are poorly defined or weakly governed, they may become sites of tension and conflict rather than stability. In Africa, colonial-era borders imposed without regard for pre-existing social and economic networks have contributed to persistent insecurity and contestation, particularly in borderlands where state presence remains limited (Asiwaju, 2015). Within the context of this study, borders are understood as dynamic spaces whose governance significantly influences peace, security, and cross-border trade relations in West Africa.

Border Communities

Border communities are settlements located in close proximity to international boundaries and are often characterised by intense social, cultural, and economic interactions across borders. Conteh (2005) describes border communities as spaces of constant movement and exchange, particularly during periods of conflict and insecurity. Due to their location, these communities are typically multicultural, with shared ethnic, linguistic, and religious ties that transcend

national boundaries. Hall (2005) observes that border communities often experience political and economic marginalisation, as they are frequently treated as sensitive security zones rather than centres of development by central governments.

The marginalisation of border communities has significant implications for both security and trade. Asiwaju (2015) argues that neglect by the state creates conditions of poverty, exclusion, and competition over scarce resources, which heighten the likelihood of conflict. At the same time, border communities play a crucial role in facilitating formal and informal cross-border trade, serving as hubs for markets, transportation, and regional economic interaction (Usman & Sama'ila, 2019). However, when insecurity escalates, these economic activities are disrupted, livelihoods are destroyed, and trust between neighbouring communities deteriorates. In this study, border communities are conceptualised as both victims and active agents within border conflict dynamics and trade relations in West Africa.

Conflicts

Conflict refers to a situation of opposition or confrontation arising from incompatible interests, values, or goals among individuals, groups, or states. Schaefer (2000) views conflict as an inherent aspect of social interaction, existing at various levels ranging from interpersonal to international relations. Similarly, Abdul (2014) and Shittu (2020) define conflict as opposition among social entities directed against one another, particularly when access to resources or power is contested. Conflict may manifest in both violent and non-violent forms, but when unmanaged, it often escalates into destructive outcomes.

In the context of development and trade, conflict has been widely recognised as a major impediment to economic growth and social stability. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) argue that conflict undermines productive activities, weakens institutions, and discourages investment, thereby retarding development. Rwigema (2020) similarly notes that the effects of conflict extend beyond periods of active violence, leaving long-term social and economic scars on affected communities. In border regions, conflicts are often intensified by weak governance, porous borders, and the presence of armed non-state actors,

leading to displacement, loss of livelihoods, and disruption of cross-border trade (Osimen et al., 2017). For this study, conflict is understood as a destabilising force that directly and indirectly shapes the security and trade dynamics of border communities in West Africa.

Trade Relations

Trade relations refer to the exchange of goods and services between states or communities, governed by formal agreements, informal practices, or a combination of both. Kagan (2019) conceptualises trade relations, particularly bilateral trade, as economic interactions that promote trade and investment through the reduction of tariffs and other trade barriers. In the context of West Africa, trade relations are shaped not only by state-level policies and regional frameworks such as ECOWAS but also by long-standing historical, cultural, and social ties among border communities. These relations often predate colonial boundaries and have continued through informal cross-border trade networks that sustain livelihoods and local economies (Usman & Sama'ila, 2019).

However, trade relations in border regions are highly sensitive to insecurity and conflict. Golub, as cited in Abubakar and Sha'aban (2022), notes that cross-border trade in West Africa has largely remained informal, facilitating the movement of manufactured goods from Nigeria to neighbouring states and agricultural products in return. Border community conflicts disrupt these exchanges by restricting movement, destroying market infrastructure, displacing traders, and increasing transaction costs. As a result, persistent insecurity weakens trust among trading partners and undermines regional economic integration efforts. Within the scope of this study, trade relations are understood as both formal and informal economic interactions whose sustainability depends largely on peace, security, and effective border governance.

Border Security

Border security refers to the measures adopted by states to regulate and control the movement of people, goods, and services across their territorial boundaries in order to safeguard sovereignty and national security. Rosenau (1990) argues that globalization has

weakened the traditional capacity of states to exercise absolute control over borders, as authority increasingly shifts toward regional institutions, transnational actors, and local communities. In Africa, this erosion of state control has exposed border regions to a range of security challenges, particularly where borders are porous and poorly monitored. Cohen (2001) further notes that increased cross-border economic interactions have diminished the traditional barrier function of borders, complicating security management.

In West Africa, weak border security has been identified as a major factor contributing to the rise of transnational crimes, insurgency, banditry, and smuggling. Andreas (2003) explains that the activities of clandestine transnational actors, including terrorists and traffickers, have transformed borders into both gateways for economic cooperation and channels for insecurity. The inability of states to effectively secure their borders has heightened vulnerability in border communities, leading to loss of lives, displacement, and disruption of trade activities (Osimen et al., 2017). Consequently, border security is conceptualised in this study as a critical determinant of peace and economic interaction, where ineffective control mechanisms exacerbate border community conflicts and negatively affect trade relations in West Africa.

VI. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Border Community Conflicts in West Africa

Studies on border community conflicts in West Africa consistently highlight the role of weak governance, porous borders, and the activities of armed non-state actors in shaping insecurity in border regions. Osimen et al. (2017) examined borderless borders and internal security challenges in Nigeria and found that porous borders facilitate the movement of arms, insurgents, and criminal networks, thereby sustaining conflicts in border communities. Similarly, Tarfa (2021), in a case study of the Nigeria–Benin borderlands, revealed that domestic political interests, neglect of border communities, and unclear boundary demarcations contributed significantly to the persistence of border disputes and communal tensions. These studies demonstrate that border community conflicts are not isolated events but are structurally embedded within broader political and security failures.

Other empirical works further reinforce the link between border conflicts and weak state presence. OECD (2022), using spatial conflict data across North and West Africa, found that a high proportion of violent incidents occurred within close proximity to international borders, with civilians accounting for a significant share of victims. This finding underscores the vulnerability of border communities to conflict-related violence. In addition, Zachariah and Ngwu (2023) showed that trans-border insecurity in Nigeria's North-East and North-West zones has displaced populations, disrupted agricultural production, and undermined local economies. Collectively, these empirical studies establish that border community conflicts in West Africa are persistent, multidimensional, and deeply connected to governance and security deficits.

Border Community Conflicts and Trade Relations in West Africa

Empirical evidence also reveals that border community conflicts have profound implications for trade relations in West Africa. Walther (2015), using social network analysis of trade networks between Nigeria, Niger, and Benin, found that trust-based informal trade systems are critical to cross-border commerce, but these networks are highly vulnerable to disruption during periods of conflict. Similarly, Foyou et al. (2018) demonstrated that the Boko Haram insurgency along the Nigeria–Cameroon border significantly reduced cross-border trade and economic collaboration, as insecurity discouraged market participation and restricted movement of goods and traders.

Further studies show that state responses to border conflicts can also negatively affect trade relations. Ekanem (2021) examined Nigeria's border closure policy and found that although it was implemented as a security measure, it disrupted regional trade, strained relations with neighbouring ECOWAS states, and imposed economic hardship on border communities dependent on cross-border exchange. Kimengsi et al. (2018), in their study of the Bakassi Peninsula conflict, similarly observed that prolonged border disputes led to the collapse of traditional trade routes and declining incomes in affected communities. These empirical findings collectively indicate that border community conflicts and conflict-driven security measures

significantly weaken trade relations, reduce economic integration, and undermine the livelihoods of border populations in West Africa.

VII. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Border Regimes Theory

Border Regimes Theory conceives borders not as fixed territorial lines but as dynamic systems of governance made up of laws, institutions, technologies, and everyday practices that regulate mobility, security, and economic exchange. Proponents argue that borders operate through regimes that selectively permit or restrict the movement of people and goods, depending on political priorities and power relations rather than purely legal rules. Walters (2006) explains that border regimes function through a combination of surveillance, categorisation, and differentiated access, producing unequal outcomes for various actors such as traders, migrants, and border residents. Similarly, Bigo (2002) situates border regimes within a broader “security field,” where policing, military, and administrative actors jointly manage borders through risk profiling and control mechanisms. From this perspective, borders are continuously produced and reproduced through governance practices rather than existing as static territorial markers.

The theory further highlights how weak or exclusionary border regimes can generate conflict and disrupt economic relations, particularly in borderland regions. Andreas (2003) argues that restrictive or poorly coordinated border regimes often create incentives for smuggling, informal trade, and the activities of clandestine transnational actors, thereby undermining both security and legitimate commerce. In developing regions, scholars such as Houtum (2010) note that border regimes frequently marginalise border communities by prioritising state security over human security and local livelihoods. This imbalance can intensify grievances, foster resistance to state authority, and contribute to recurring border conflicts. Border Regimes Theory therefore provides a useful analytical lens for understanding how the design and operation of border governance systems can simultaneously shape patterns of conflict and trade relations, especially in regions where borders are porous, contested, and weakly governed.

The State Fragility Theory

State Fragility Theory explains conflict and underdevelopment as outcomes of a state's inability or unwillingness to perform core functions such as maintaining security, enforcing the rule of law, delivering basic services, and exercising effective territorial control. The theory is strongly associated with scholars such as Rotberg, who argues that fragile states are characterised by weak institutions, loss of legitimacy, and limited capacity to provide political goods to their citizens (Rotberg, 2003). In such contexts, authority is unevenly distributed, with peripheral regions like borderlands often experiencing the most severe governance deficits. Similarly, Zartman (1995) conceptualises state fragility as a condition where the state has collapsed or is collapsing, creating power vacuums that invite violence, criminality, and informal rule. These governance gaps make fragile states particularly vulnerable to internal conflict and transnational insecurity.

The theory further emphasises that fragility is most visible at the margins of the state, especially in border regions where state presence is weakest. Menkhaus (2015) argues that fragile states often exhibit "mediated" or absent governance in borderlands, allowing armed groups, smugglers, and insurgents to operate with minimal resistance. This condition not only fuels violent conflict but also disrupts economic activities such as trade, agriculture, and cross-border commerce. In fragile states, insecurity discourages investment, weakens market institutions, and erodes trust among economic actors, thereby undermining trade relations. State Fragility Theory is therefore highly relevant for analysing how weak governance and limited state capacity contribute to border community conflicts and the breakdown of trade relations, particularly in regions where borders are porous and institutions are ineffective.

Human Needs Theory

Human Needs Theory explains the emergence and persistence of conflict as a consequence of the denial or frustration of basic human needs that are essential for survival and dignity. The theory is most prominently associated with John Burton, who argues that conflicts become protracted when fundamental needs such as security, identity, recognition,

participation, and livelihood are unmet (Burton, 1990). Unlike interests, which are negotiable, human needs are non-negotiable, meaning that attempts to suppress or ignore them through coercion or force are likely to intensify rather than resolve conflict. From this perspective, violence is viewed not as irrational behaviour but as a response to structural conditions that systematically prevent individuals or groups from satisfying their essential needs.

The theory also draws support from Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which emphasises that individuals must satisfy basic physiological and safety needs before higher-level needs such as belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation can be realised (Maslow, 1954). In contexts where states fail to provide security, economic opportunities, and social inclusion, unmet needs often manifest in frustration, grievance, and collective violence. Human Needs Theory is therefore particularly useful for analysing conflicts in marginalised regions such as border communities, where poverty, neglect, and insecurity undermine livelihoods and social cohesion. By linking deprivation to conflict behaviour, the theory provides an explanatory framework for understanding how unmet human needs contribute to recurrent conflicts and, by extension, disrupt economic activities and trade relations.

Methodology

This study adopts a survey research design, chosen for its suitability in generating verifiable and systematic evidence on complex social and institutional phenomena such as border community conflicts and trade relations in West Africa. The design enables the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data from knowledgeable respondents drawn from key institutions involved in border management, security, diplomacy, and economic governance, as well as from selected border communities in Nigeria and neighbouring West African states. The population of the study comprises officials from institutions such as the National Boundary Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Multinational Joint Task Force, ECOWAS Secretariat, border security agencies, and local or traditional authorities in border communities across Borno, Katsina, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. From a total population of 40,154, a sample size of 380 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and

Morgan table, while stratified sampling was employed to ensure proportional representation of respondents with relevant technical knowledge and practical experience on border conflicts and trade relations

Data for the study were collected using both primary and secondary sources, allowing for triangulation and improved validity of findings. Primary data were obtained through structured, closed-ended questionnaires designed on a Likert scale and administered to selected respondents, alongside in-depth interviews with key stakeholders to capture qualitative insights. Secondary data were sourced from government reports, official border and security documents, ECOWAS protocols, African Union frameworks, treaties, academic literature, and relevant policy documents. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including tables and percentages, with the aid of SPSS (version 25), while qualitative data from interviews were analysed thematically through systematic coding aligned with the research objectives.

VIII. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	345	95.3
	Female	17	4.7
	Total	362	100.0
Age	18-25 Years	96	26.5
	26-35 Years	140	38.7
	36-45 Years	106	29.3
	46-54 Years	16	4.4
	55+ Years	4	1.1
	Total	362	100.0
Educational Level	Primary	44	26.2
	Secondary	65	36.7
	Tertiary	219	37.1
	Total	362	100.0

Distribution by Rank	Brigadier General and Above	5	1.4
	Major to Colonel	49	13.4
	Second Lieutenant to Captain	82	22.7
	Master Warrant Officer to Army	18	5
	Sergeant to Warrant Officer	42	11.6
	Private to Corporal	166	45.9
	Total	362	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study. The gender distribution shows that the respondents were predominantly male, accounting for 95.3 per cent, while females constituted only 4.7 per cent of the total respondents. This distribution reflects the male-dominated nature of the security sector from which the respondents were drawn. In terms of age, the majority of respondents fell within the economically active age groups. Respondents aged 26–35 years formed the largest category at 38.7 per cent, followed by those aged 36–45 years at 29.3 per cent, and those aged 18–25 years at 26.5 per cent. Older age groups were minimally represented, with respondents aged 46–54 years accounting for 4.4 per cent and those aged 55 years and above representing only 1.1 per cent.

With respect to educational attainment, respondents were fairly evenly distributed across secondary and tertiary levels of education, accounting for 36.7 per cent and 37.1 per cent respectively, while those with primary education constituted 26.2 per cent. This suggests that the majority of respondents possessed at least a secondary level of education, enabling them to provide informed responses to the study questions. The distribution by rank indicates that junior personnel formed the bulk of the respondents, with private to corporal ranks accounting for 45.9 per cent and second

lieutenant to captain accounting for 22.7 per cent. Senior officers were less represented, as brigadier general and above accounted for only 1.4 per cent, while majors to colonels made up 13.4 per cent. The demographic profile suggests that the respondents were largely drawn from active service personnel across various ranks.

Research Question One: What are the Causes of Border Community Conflicts in West Africa and their effects on Trade Relations?

Table 2: Causes of Border Community Conflicts in West Africa and their effects on Trade Relations

S/N.	Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
1	Conflicts in Border Communities Are Primarily Driven by Competition over Trade-Related Resources	57 (15.8%)	120 (33.1%)	41 (11.2%)	91 (25.1%)	53 (14.8%)	362 (100%)
2	Trade Activities between Border Communities in West African Region Generally Continue Despite Conflict or Tension	172 (47.5%)	136 (37.6%)	29 (8.0%)	14 (3.9%)	11 (3.0%)	362 (100%)
3	Traditional Authorities and Local Institutions Play a Significant Role in Resolving Border Conflicts and Facilitating Trade	91 (25.1%)	186 (51.4%)	42 (11.6%)	30 (8.3%)	13 (3.6%)	362 (100%)
4	Cross-border Trade has Contributed Positively to Peaceful Coexistence and Cooperation among Neighboring Border Communities	91 (25.0%)	155 (42.7%)	24 (6.5%)	59 (16.4%)	33 (9.4%)	362 (100%)
5	Government Policies and Enforcement Practices have Significantly Influenced the Frequency and Intensity of Border-Related Conflicts	119 (32.8%)	165 (45.7%)	39 (10.9%)	22 (6.0%)	17 (4.6%)	362 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 presents respondents' views on the causes of border community conflicts in West Africa and their effects on trade relations. On whether conflicts in border communities are primarily driven by competition over trade-related resources, about 48.9 per cent of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed, while 39.9 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed. This suggests a divided opinion, indicating that although competition over trade-related resources is considered an important factor, other underlying causes may also contribute to border conflicts in the region. In contrast, a strong majority of respondents believed that trade activities generally continue despite conflict or tension, as 47.5 per cent strongly agreed and 37.6 per cent agreed, while only 6.9 per cent expressed disagreement. This implies that cross-

border trade in West Africa is relatively resilient and often persists even in the face of insecurity or tension. Furthermore, respondents largely acknowledged the role of traditional authorities and local institutions in managing border conflicts and supporting trade relations. About 76.5 per cent of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that these institutions play a significant role in conflict resolution and trade facilitation, indicating strong confidence in local mechanisms of peacebuilding. Similarly, a majority of respondents recognised the positive contribution of cross-border trade to peaceful coexistence and cooperation, with 67.7 per cent expressing agreement, although 25.8 per cent disagreed, suggesting that the peace-building effects of trade are not uniformly experienced across all border areas. In addition, government policies and enforcement practices were

widely perceived to influence the frequency and intensity of border-related conflicts, as 78.5 per cent of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. In sum, the table suggests that while competition over resources contributes to border conflicts, effective local institutions, resilient trade networks, and appropriate government policies play

critical roles in shaping conflict dynamics and trade relations in West African border communities.

Research Question Two: What Challenges do Border Community Inhabitants face during conflicts, and what are the implications for Trade Relations in West Africa?

Table 3: Challenges of Border Community Inhabitants face during conflicts, and what are the implications for Trade Relations in West Africa

S/N.	Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
6	Border Conflicts Often Result in Displacement or Restricted Movement for Residents, Affecting Their Ability to Engage in Trade	95 (26.2%)	164 (45.4%)	29 (7.9%)	50 (13.9%)	24 (6.6%)	362 (100%)
7	Insecurity and Violence during Border Conflicts Prevent Traders from Safely Transporting Goods across the Border	94 (26.1%)	162 (44.8%)	23 (6.3%)	49 (13.6%)	34 (9.2%)	362 (100%)
8	Residents of Border Communities Face Harassment or Extortion from Armed Groups and Security Personnel during Periods of Conflict	53 (14.7%)	170 (47.1%)	29 (8.0%)	73 (20.1%)	37 (10.1%)	362 (100%)
9	Border Community Conflict Leads to the Closure of Markets and Border Checkpoints, Significantly Disrupting Local and Cross-Border Trade Activities	145 (39.9%)	179 (49.4%)	20 (5.4%)	6 (1.6%)	12 (3.7%)	362 (100%)
10	Access to Essential Goods and Services Becomes Limited for Border Community Inhabitants during Conflict, Weakening Trade Relations in West Africa	81 (22.4%)	174 (48.1%)	59 (16.4%)	27 (7.4%)	21 (5.2%)	362 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 highlights respondents' views on the challenges faced by border community inhabitants during conflicts and the implications of these challenges for trade relations in West Africa. A clear majority of respondents agreed that border conflicts often result in displacement or restricted movement, thereby limiting residents' ability to engage in trade, as about 71.6 per cent either strongly agreed or agreed, while only 20.5 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Similarly, insecurity and violence were widely perceived as major obstacles to trade, with approximately 70.9 per cent of respondents indicating that such conditions prevent traders from safely transporting goods across borders. These findings

suggest that mobility constraints and insecurity significantly undermine cross-border commercial activities during periods of conflict.

In addition, respondents largely acknowledged that border community inhabitants face harassment and extortion from armed groups and, in some cases, security personnel during conflicts, with about 61.8 per cent expressing agreement, although a notable proportion, 30.2 per cent, disagreed or strongly disagreed. Market disruption was identified as a particularly severe consequence of border conflicts, as an overwhelming 89.3 per cent of respondents agreed that conflicts lead to the closure of markets and border checkpoints, thereby significantly disrupting local and

cross-border trade activities. Furthermore, about 70.5 per cent of respondents agreed that access to essential goods and services becomes limited during conflicts, weakening trade relations across West Africa. Overall, the results indicate that border conflicts create substantial socio-economic hardships for border community inhabitants and severely disrupt trade relations by restricting movement, increasing insecurity, closing markets, and limiting access to essential goods and services.

IX. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate that border community conflicts in West Africa are closely linked to governance weaknesses, resource competition, and the fragility of state control in peripheral border areas. Respondents' views that competition over trade-related resources and government policies significantly influence the frequency and intensity of border conflicts reflect the core assumptions of State Fragility Theory. This theory posits that weak state capacity, limited presence of government institutions, and ineffective policy enforcement create environments where conflicts thrive. The strong agreement that government policies and enforcement practices shape conflict dynamics suggests that inadequate border governance, poor coordination among state agencies, and inconsistent security responses contribute to instability. In such fragile contexts, the state is often unable to provide security, regulate trade effectively, or manage disputes, thereby allowing conflicts to persist and directly undermine trade relations in border communities.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the relevance of Border Regimes Theory, which focuses on how borders are governed, regulated, and experienced by local populations. The perception that trade activities often continue despite conflict indicates the resilience of informal and semi-formal cross-border trade networks, which operate alongside or outside official border regimes. However, the high level of agreement that conflicts lead to market closures, restricted movement, and disrupted transport routes reveals the vulnerability of these trade systems to coercive border practices during periods of tension. Border regimes characterised by heavy militarisation, restrictive

controls, and inconsistent enforcement tend to exacerbate insecurity rather than facilitate trade. The significant role attributed to traditional authorities and local institutions in conflict resolution further highlights the limitations of formal border regimes and the importance of local governance structures in sustaining trade and cooperation across borders.

The challenges faced by border community inhabitants during conflicts, as presented in Table 3, also strongly align with Human Needs Theory, which emphasises that conflicts arise when fundamental human needs such as security, livelihood, mobility, and access to essential goods and services are threatened. The widespread agreement that insecurity, displacement, harassment, and restricted access to goods weaken trade relations illustrates how unmet human needs directly fuel instability and economic disruption. When residents are unable to move freely, trade safely, or access basic necessities, economic survival strategies are undermined, deepening grievances and perpetuating conflict. These conditions not only disrupt trade flows but also erode trust and cooperation among neighbouring communities. Taken together, the findings suggest that border conflicts in West Africa are sustained by fragile state structures, restrictive and poorly managed border regimes, and the failure to meet the basic human and economic needs of border populations, all of which have profound implications for trade relations in the region.

X. CONCLUSION

Border community conflicts in West Africa are deeply rooted in weak governance structures, ineffective border management, and the persistent inability of states to address the fundamental needs of border populations. The findings underscore that when state authority is fragile, border regimes are poorly coordinated, and human security is compromised, conflicts become recurrent and trade relations are severely disrupted. Although cross-border trade demonstrates a degree of resilience, its sustainability is undermined by insecurity, restrictive movement, market closures, and the marginalisation of local communities. The interaction of fragile state capacity, coercive or inconsistent border controls, and unmet human needs creates a cycle in which conflict and economic disruption reinforce one another. Achieving

lasting peace and stable trade relations in West African border communities therefore requires an integrated approach that strengthens state institutions, reforms border governance frameworks, and prioritises the security, livelihoods, and welfare of border inhabitants as central components of regional cooperation and development.

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the findings of the study, the study recommends that:

- i. Governments in West Africa should strengthen state presence and governance capacity in border communities through coordinated security, administrative, and development interventions.
- ii. Governments and regional bodies should promote inclusive border regimes that facilitate safe movement, protect traders from harassment and extortion, and ensure access to essential goods and services during periods of tension.

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