

**A FRONT LINE WITH JIHADISM
DRAWN IN THE SAND OF THE SAHEL:
THE POPULATIONS OF NORTHERN BENIN
AND TOGO WAIT FOR A SOLUTION**

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Executive Summary

The progress made by jihadist groups in Benin and Togo is clear. However, it has largely gone unnoticed because of its slow and methodical nature. The territories affected by growing instability have increased. Until 2023, the danger was still concentrated in the territories directly bordering Burkina Faso for Togo, as well as Park W and Pendjari for Benin. In 2024, territories located further away have and will be increasingly affected.

Yet, the advance of jihadist groups has to some extent been slowed down by local particularities specific to the Savanes, Atacora and Alibori. As a result, these armed groups, all affiliated with Al-Qaeda, have opted for a long-term strategy. Armed groups with their camps in Burkina Faso harass security forces whose presence on the border represents a threat. They also infiltrate Beninese and Togolese territories through a mixture of local recruitment and violence against civilians.

The jihadist groups' slow progress should have afforded an opportunity to strengthen quality of life of the inhabitants in these areas at risk. Greater employment and revenue opportunities, as well as satisfactory public services, foster greater trust in the State. Following this principle, Togo implemented the Savanes Emergency Programme in 2023 (PURS); Benin has supported the development of its Communes neighboring the Sahel and Nigeria; and international partners have financed large-scale programmes, such as the World Bank's Gulf of Guinea Northern Regions Social Cohesion project (COSO), worth 450 million US Dollars. Still, the overall picture is bleak, with living the populations in northern Benin and Togo having experienced a dramatic deterioration in living conditions.

The social and economic situation of the populations of Savanes, Alibori and Atacora is distressing and must be taken very seriously. Social cohesion is on the decline. Conflicts between communities are intensifying due to a lack of available land as well as poverty, which has fuelled existing tensions. More specifically, tensions around the Beninese and Togolese Fulbe communities in these areas are becoming critical. Parallels are beginning to emerge between the situation of the Fulbe in coastal countries and those in the Sahel. This is problematic when considering the role that their deteriorated status has played in the worsening security situation in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Economically, income-generating activities disappear and are not replaced. The fall in purchasing power and a lack of agricultural production have led to increased hunger among populations. Additionally, local populations have had to welcome refugees and internally displaced persons. Hostility to their presence is growing among populations who have little, and are not necessarily willing to share with newcomers. As a result, arrival conditions for refugees can be particularly harsh.

Methodology

This work was based on two data collections. The first is a monitoring of the situation in northern Benin and Togo, with a particular focus on the rise of insecurity, which has been taking place for years. To be noted, part of this personal monitoring was rendered publicly accessible via ACLED between 2022 and 2024 as Mathias Khalfaoui was then part of the “Clingendael Consortium”. The second data collection was conducted specifically for this work. It entailed interviewing members of different populations in the Savanes prefectures of Togo and the communes of the Alibori and Atacora departments in Benin. A total of 274 interviews were carried out.

Introduction

Since the start of rising insecurity around the borders of the Gulf of Guinea countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin) in 2020, the idea that we have “learnt the lessons of the Sahel” has been oft-repeated. Both the international community and national authorities engage in such discourse. On the one hand, it highlights how support by international actors to the Sahel has led to failures and disappointing results, but that lessons were learnt that would bring about better assistance to the coastal countries. On the other hand, with this discourse, national authorities express that the failure to contain jihadism in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger will serve as learning tools for coastal countries in their own containment efforts.

Having said that, we can already question whether these lessons have really been learnt in several ways. On the part of the international community, problems that occurred in the Sahel are repeated in the Gulf of Guinea. One of the first major issues in the Sahel was to acquire a detailed understanding of local populations and contexts.¹ The international community's lack of detailed knowledge and its incapacity to incorporate these ethnic specificities, led to projects that did not always meet the needs of diverse local populations. This gave rise to frustration. More importantly, the lack of knowledge became even more problematic when faced with the rise of insecurity and its expansion to larger parts of the Sahel. It became essential to determine whether the location of projects, especially when expected to take years to be achieved, could be made impossible due to a deteriorated situation. Owing to a limited understanding of insecurity and its evolution, international partners have gradually left the most difficult areas, remobilising in areas located further south and more secure in the countries.² However, these patterns, which existed in the Sahel, are now occurring in coastal countries. The local context in the north of the coastal countries is relatively unknown to the international community. Insecurity has led to a rapid deployment of technical and financial partners to the north, where they are not used to working. The needs and local realities are still poorly identified. Likewise, insecurity is on the rise, and projects have difficulty assessing the areas that should be priorities: the areas most compromised by insecurity and those areas expected to become so. This is unfortunate because a clear distinction must be made between territories that require short-term assistance with more humanitarian support, and territories that need long-term assistance with development projects to strengthen the resilience of populations. Finally, this redeployment of technical and financial partners towards the north is also hamstrung by the perpetual problem of a lack of coordination between donors.

On the state side, successive coups since 2020 in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have given rise to significant diplomatic tensions, leading de facto to a division between Sahelian and coastal states. This increases fears that exchanges of information and feedback no longer take place. This could at least, in part, explain why erroneous interactions with certain communities also present in the Sahel are being repeated in coastal countries.

Our work aims to take stock of the situation in this context; a context in which insecurity and the emergent yet notorious spillover of jihadism from the Sahel to the coastal countries will continue over the long term. We will focus on the case of Benin and Togo which are targets of regular jihadist attacks, while the Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana have been spared to some extent. In particular, we will attempt to identify three important elements in Benin and Togo: the local context in the north of these two countries before they were affected by the rise of jihadism; the current security situation in these territories; and finally, the impact that this insecurity has had on the populations' way of life.

The Too-Little-known Local Context of Northern Benin and Togo

Climate change has introduced us to notion of the “Sahelisation” of the north of the Gulf of Guinea countries.³ Indeed, from a geographical perspective, we are witnessing an extension of the Sahel which means drier seasons, floods and unpredictable levels of precipitation. This disrupts the lifestyles of people, especially the way they traditionally engage in agriculture and pastoralism. However, we need to be aware of the fact that a sahelisation of the north of the coastal countries has long been taking place due to population movements. For several hundred years, populations from the Sahel have regularly moved and settled in coastal countries. The opposite is not true. These movements towards the south arose due to conflicts or famines in the Sahel. As a result, many Togolese and Beninese populations have special ties with the Sahel, since their community originates from there. Their socio-economic practices ignore borders and entail incessant movements to and from the Sahel. The insecurity experienced by Burkina Faso and Niger therefore considerably affects these Beninese and Togolese populations. What is more, these population movements are important to note because they generated conflicts in their host lands, some of which are still active to this day. Finally, the sahelisation of the north of the coastal countries due to population movement is unequal. The effective border of the Sahel within a country can be quite low, as in Togo, or quite limited, as with Benin. This has repercussions on the fate and vulnerability of populations in terms of insecurity and its impacts.

A. The Togolese Savanes Divided Between a Sahel and a Coastal Part

The Savanes region has a community presence which makes it strongly connected to the Sahel, but also ripe for community conflicts.

The upper part of the Savanes consists of a geography and populations that connect it to Burkina Faso, while the two southern prefectures, Oti and Oti-sud, do not have any special connection with the Sahel. These two prefectures thus symbolise the effective border of the Sahel within Togo.

1. A Piece of Burkina in Togo

Despite the Savanes region being relatively small in size, it has historically been the scene of numerous wars for its conquest. Consequently, its populations are a mixture of those originating from Burkina Faso, Togo, Ghana and even the Ivory Coast. From these conquests, many questions were raised about the distribution of land between communities without being properly answered, which generated tensions that linger to this day. Originally, in the 15th century, the Savanes were inhabited by only two notable indigenous groups⁴. These were the Mobas in the north, in areas known today as Cinkasse, Tandjouare, Tone as well as to a lesser extent Kpendjal. Further south were the Ngangams⁵.⁶

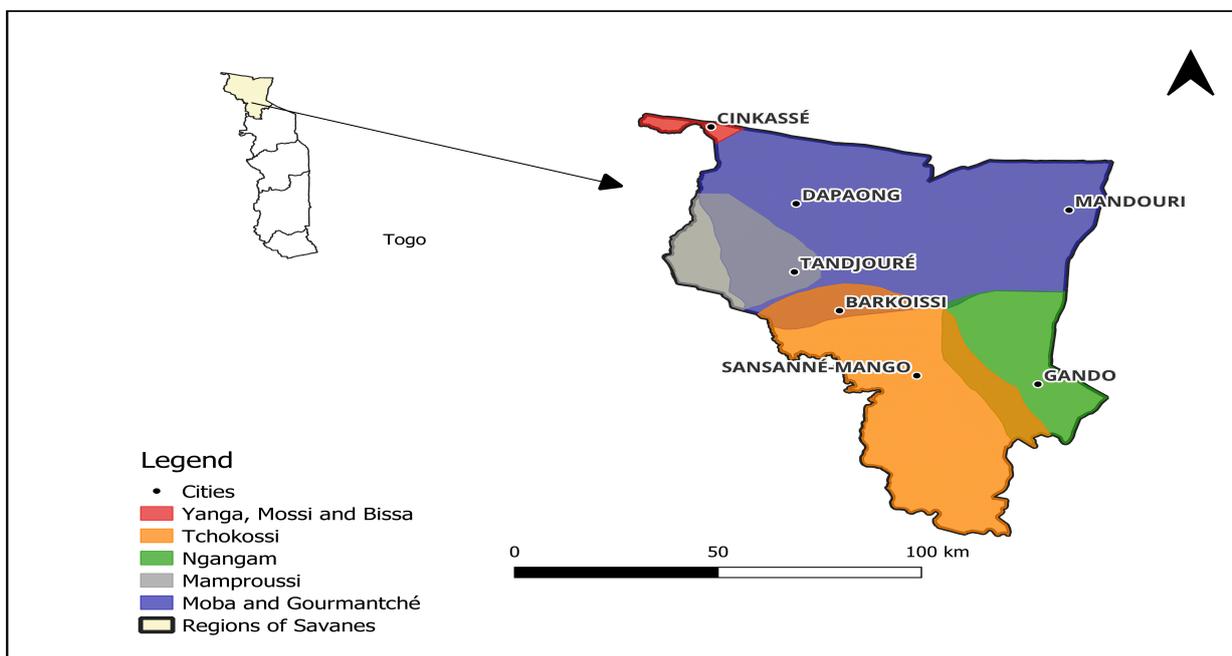
This division of territory between two populations soon fell apart due to a succession of invasions of more powerful armies seeking new lands in which to settle. The first came from what is now Burkina Faso. The Gourmantches, originally from the Fada N’Gourma region in Burkina Faso, conquered the Moba lands of the Savanes between the 16th and 17th centuries.⁷ However, Mobas did not disappear. Far from it, they adopted some of the ways of the Gourmantches, and the Gourmantches adopted some Moba habits and customs. Today, it is difficult to distinguish Mobas and Gourmantches in the Savanes⁸. At most, there are clans known to be Gourmantches and clans known to be Mobas. The land chiefs emanate from Gourmantche clans as a legacy of their conquest, while the religious leaders emanate from from Mobas. The Mobas are not the only ones to have undergone transformations linked to this invasion. A community called the Natchabés, present prior to the invasions mainly in Kpendjal, suffered the same phenomenon, with the notable difference that their lower demographics reduced and they thus have a reduced weight today.⁹ Finally, the Gourmantche invasion led to the arrival of other Sahelian populations towards the future Togo, notably the Yangas and the Mossis, who are particularly numerous in the prefecture of Cinkasse and somewhat in Dapaong.

In the 18th century, too, the Ngangam indigenous people suffered an invasion with the arrival of a community from the Ivory Coast, the Anufos.¹⁰ The Anufos are members of the enormous family of the Akan peoples, who are particularly influential in the Ivory Coast and Ghana. In Togo, the Anufos are generally better known as the Tchokossis, probably a name given by the Ngangam. The Tchokossis conquered large swathes of land, settling in the location of the current Oti prefecture. They notably renamed the main town in this area, which then had a Ngangam name, to Sansanné-Mango, which in Tchokossi means “Military Camp of Mango”¹¹. The Ngangam were driven to the East

towards what is now the South Oti prefecture. Its land is of lesser quality and, most notably, is away from the path of the caravans which already passed at the time between Mango and Cinkasse. The conquest of the Tchokossis did not stop south of the Savanes and continued with military victories over the Gourmantches and Mobas in the north. Ngangams, Gourmantches and Mobas were reduced to servitude and forced to pay large tributes to the Tchokossis.¹² Most of these communities often suffered raids at the hands of Tchokossi warriors and have not forgotten this era.¹³ In Togo, many places are named in relation to the Tchokossi raids and the passage of their slaves.¹⁴ The Fulbes, originally from Burkina Faso, seem to be the last to have arrived in the Savanes, around 1850.¹⁵

German colonisation in Togo at the end of the 19th century rebalanced the power relationship between communities in the Savanes.¹⁶ The Tchokossis were prevented from carrying out raids on neighbouring communities and thus gradually lost regional hegemony as well as the tributes they received. However, the legacy surrounding the Tchokossis conquests is still important to this day. The questions surrounding land ownership arising from these conquests were never resolved. An unstable status quo developed with Mobas and Ngangam populations feeling that land had been stolen from them and that they were entitled to get it back.

Map 1 : Community presence in Togo



2. After the Time of Conquests, the Era of Land Tensions

This contrasting history of successive invasions of indigenous populations resulted in a region of the Savanes that experiences strong community tensions owing to land disputes. The clashes which broke out in 1992 in the village of Barkoissi between Tchokossis and Mobas and in South Oti in 2019 between Tchokossis and Ngangam, have become the best-known examples of these tensions¹⁷. However, these are not isolated events.¹⁸ Conflicts over land exists in many villages. ¹⁹

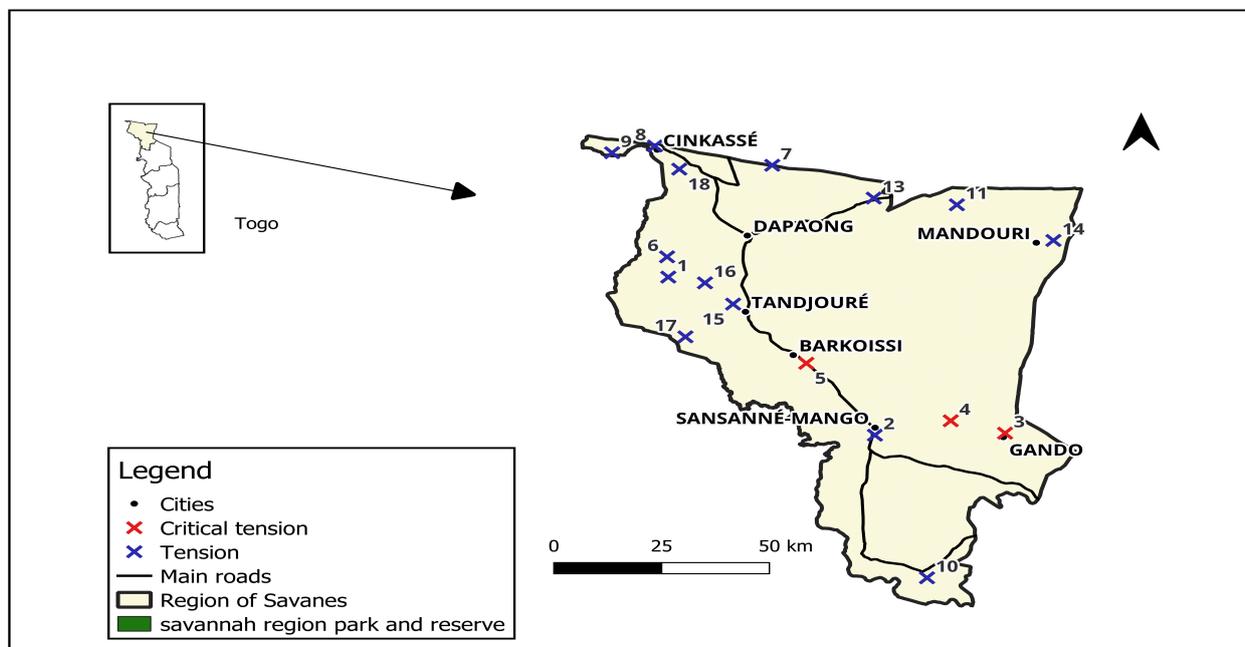
Prior to Togo gaining independence, in 1960, the loss of influence of the Tchokossi community over the rest of the Savanes encouraged the Moba/Gourmantche and Ngangam communities to hope to recover their lands. Confrontations took place. The conflict between the Tchokossis and other communities has even become politicised. In the 1950s, Togolese political parties emerged and pushed for an end to French colonisation. The Ngangam, Tchokossis and Mobas supported different parties. Thus, the electoral results often gave rise to community violence. For instance, in 1958, Ngangam were disappointed with the results of the elections and attacked the Tchokossi elite of Mango, forcing them to flee to Ghana.²⁰ They feared that the victory of a party considered pro-Tchokossi would result in further land losses. This politicisation of communities in the Savanes still takes place to this day and communities are deemed more or less close to the regime.

These community tensions therefore thwart the appointment of representatives in many localities. Depending on their ethnicity, these representatives are often only recognised and fully representative of part of their locality²¹.

The Mobas also have a long-standing conflict in Cinkasse with the Yangas concerning land chiefdom.²² The Mobas believe that they were the first to have arrived in Cinkasse and that the chiefdom owned by the Yangas is due to an usurpation dating from the Gourmantche invasions. Today, the conflict is dormant. The commune of Cinkasse 1 is primarily a Mossi, Yanga and Bissa (community from Ghana) land, while the commune of Cinkasse 2, closer to Dapaong, is rather Moba land with the village of Timbou as its capital.

Less known, but just as important, are the many intra-community tensions in the Savanes, which still touch on land issues. The border between Burkina Faso and Togo, as well as between Togo and Ghana, have many recurring conflicts, due to their poor demarcations. Between Burkina Faso and Togo, the main conflicts take place in the north of the Tone prefecture between Mobas. Each year, during agricultural periods the Mobas on both sides of the border clashed over the demarcation of their fields. The prefecture of Tandjouré is also crossed by numerous intra-community conflicts on both sides of the border. These are conflicts between Moba populations, but also Mamproussis. The Mamproussis of Togo, originally from Ghana, have been present on the Togolese part of the border for many centuries. Highly influenced by the Gourmantches and similar to the Mobas, they also have problems within their community regarding the delimitation of their land.

Map 2 : Areas of local conflicts and tensions in Togo



1. Lotogou (Tone, Savanes): Intra-Mamproussi conflict in Lotogou over land issues.
2. Sansanne-Mango (Oti, Savanes): Tensions between two Tchokossis clans.
3. Gando (Oti-sud, Savanes): Historical conflict between Tchokossi and Gamgam.
4. Mogou (Oti-sud, Savanes): Historical conflict between Tchokossi and Gamgam.
5. Barkoissi (Oti, Savanes): Historical conflict between Tchokossi and Moba
6. Tami (Tone, Savanes): Conflict between two Mobas clans over land.
7. Tchègle and Yemboate (Tone, Savane): Recurrent conflict between Mobas clans from Togo and Mobas from Burkina Faso over land on the border.
8. Cinkasse (Cinkassé, Savanes): The Yangas have the traditional chiefdom of Cinkassé, but they are contested by the Mobas and the Bissas. The tension persists.

9. Gouloungoussi (Cinkassé, Savanes): Tensions between Yangas of Ghana and Yangas of Togo (from Cinkassé) over land issues.
10. Takpamba (Oti, Savanes): Historical conflict between Tchokossi and Gamgam.
11. Yamboldjouaré (Kpendjal, Savanes): There are many conflicts in this area due to villages that were emptied by the army to create a front line. The people who had to leave their land went a little further south and their search for land to cultivate created tensions with the inhabitants of the canton of Borgou.
12. Cinkassé (Cinkassé, Savanes): Tensions surrounding the arrival of refugees.
13. Papri (Kpendjal-Ouest, Savanes): Land conflict within Togolese Mobas clans.
14. Mandouri (Kpendal, Savanes): Many conflicts at the individual level are present around Mandouri and its surroundings.
15. Goundoga (Tandjouaré, Savanes): Numerous land conflicts in the canton.
16. Sissiak (Tandjouaré, Savanes): Numerous land conflicts in the canton.
17. Tamongue (Tandjouaré, Savanes): Conflict between Mobas clans on land.
18. Biankouri and Timbou (Cinkassé, Savanes): Conflict between the villages of Biankouri and Timbou over land boundaries.

B. The Diversity of Local Realities in Northern Benin

There are roughly three sets of communities in the departments of Alibori and Atacora. To the west, Atacora hosts a scattered block of small communities which have sometimes been grouped together with names such as Somba or Otamari.²³ However, these communities are unique and have little in common apart from having historically fled conflicts to take refuge in the mountain range that forms the border between Benin, Togo and Burkina Faso. The centre of Atacora and Alibori is mainly occupied by one community, that of the Baribas.²⁴ Finally, the north-east of the country is made up of Sahelian communities.

1. The Importance of the Bariba Empire in the Structuring of Communities

The organisation of Northern Benin largely arose from the conquests of a particular community, the Baribas. Originally this community was located between Nigeria and the current Beninese Borgou department, particularly around the town of Nikki.

In the beginning, the Bariba kingdom mainly consisted of farmers and was organised endogenously. However, from the 14th century, the Bariba kingdom was gradually conquered by warriors called the Wassangaris.²⁵ The latter were too few in number to convert the Baribas to their languages and cultures, and thus the Wassangaris have adopted the Bariba ways.²⁶ Today, the Wassangaris represent the upper social class among the Baribas and are no longer distinct. The conquest of the Wassangaris will precipitate major change in the Bariba kingdom, which is the opening to an exogenous system.²⁷ The kingdom became more of an empire, making numerous conquests which led the vanquished to be integrated into a feudal system where each community had a defined role. This is the case for the Boos, also called Bocos, located around the current commune of Segbana, and the same applies to the Mokolés located around the arrondissement of Guéné (Malanville) or the Fulbes who have lands in the Bariba empire, particularly at Kalalé but also Kandi, Kouandé and Nikki.²⁸ The Baribas also moved to arable land. Consequently, in Atacora, the communes of Kouandé, Kerou and Pehunco, as well as in Alibori in Banikoara and Kandi are under the domination of the Baribas who are still the land chiefs to this day.

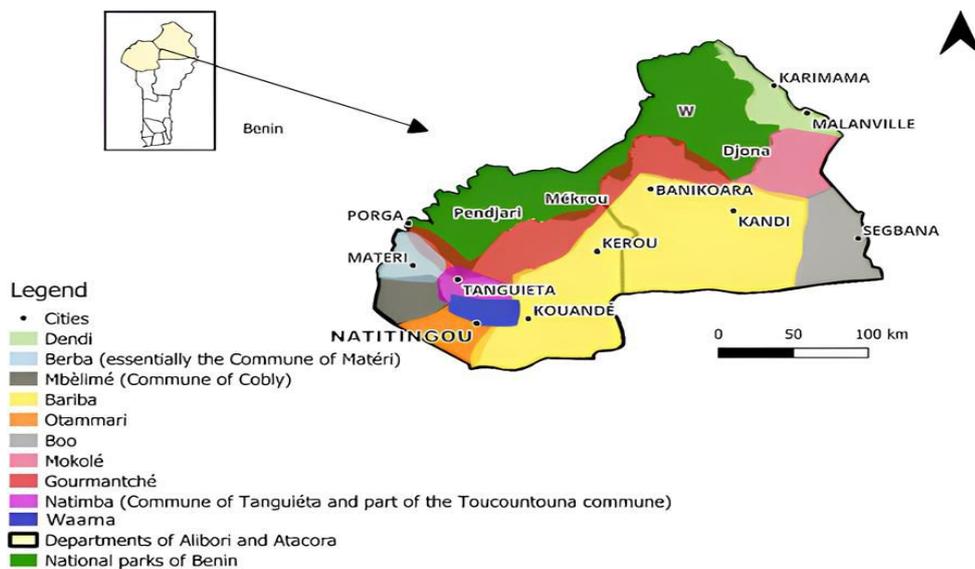
To the north of the Bariba empire, in the communes of Malanville and Karimama, mainly Dendis, Fulbes and some Haoussas are present. These lands remained relatively uninhabited for centuries and at most by communities that have now disappeared. This low demography was due to these lands having been wedged between Park W and its wild animals on one side, as well as the Niger River and its flood risks, on the other. The first arrivals of Dendis date back to the 16th century, but were limited.²⁹ This changed from the 18th and 19th centuries with violent wars in the sub-region, notably due to the Fulbe jihad.³⁰ In Dendi culture, the 19th century is called "the time of wars".³¹ The Niger side of the Niger River was the first to be affected and this unleashed floods of refugees who moved to the Beninese side of the Niger River.³² These refugees, Dendis and Fulbes, founded villages before also being caught

up in sub-regional military conquests.³³ For instance, the village of Karimama – the main city today in the commune of the same name – was destroyed for the first time in 1880.³⁴ It should be noted that the Dendis are originally from Mali and linked to the Songhai Empire (15th to 16th century). The Dendis are thus related to the family of Songhai peoples, which also makes them relatives of the Zarmas who are numerous in Niger. Thus, if the Dendis are undoubtedly perceived as being indigenous in Benin, they still have strong socio-economic links with the Sahel.

To the west of the Bariba empire, there are many communities in Atacora gathered in a small territory, that of the Atacora mountains. We can notably cite the Berbas³⁵, Waama³⁶, Otamari³⁷, Natemba³⁸ and the Mbèlimé³⁹. This is no coincidence. These communities mostly fled to the Atacora Mountains to find refuge⁴⁰. The largest movements took place in the 17th and 18th centuries⁴¹. The Bariba Empire to the east, the Gourmantche kingdom to the north, as well as the Tchokossis warriors to the West, pushed these populations to flee raids. They each lived in difficult conditions, which led them to developing strict food rationing⁴². Their land in Atacora is of average or even mediocre quality, particularly in the south towards Boukoubé.

The Gourmantche populations and the villages they founded all around the Pendjari and W parks must be added to this panorama of communities. The majority of them were Gourmantche from Fada N’Gourma looking for new lands. Although less important demographically in Benin, the Gourmantches retain at least a strong symbolic importance and they largely introduced the concept of chieftaincy in Atacora and Donga upon their arrival in the country⁴³. Similar to Togo for the Tchokossis, French colonisation proved to be disadvantageous for the Baribas. Its Empire lost part of its influence over the Fulbes, Boos Mokolés and other communities⁴⁴. They were able to have more control over the areas that had been originally granted to them by the Baribas.

Map 3 : Community presence in Benin



2. Modern Tensions Around the Land Legacy of the Bariba Empire

After securing independence in 1960, the Baribas quickly regained their place as the most influential community in the north of the country. This is easy to understand when considering the many advantages the community enjoys. The main town in the north, Parakou, is mostly Bariba, being close to its original lands. Then, the lands conquered in the past were retained, which means the Baribas are present in all the northern departments and in many communes. Its demographics make it by far the largest community in the north. Finally, the Baribas benefit from their ability to act as a bridge in trade between Benin and Nigeria. However, relations between the Baribas and the rest of the communities

are sometimes tense. There are a large number of land conflicts within the Bariba Empire between the different ethnic groups that formed part of it⁴⁵, as well as on its border with other communities. Relations are complicated by the Baribas supposed feeling of superiority towards communities, especially in Atacora, as well as the memory of their raids⁴⁶.

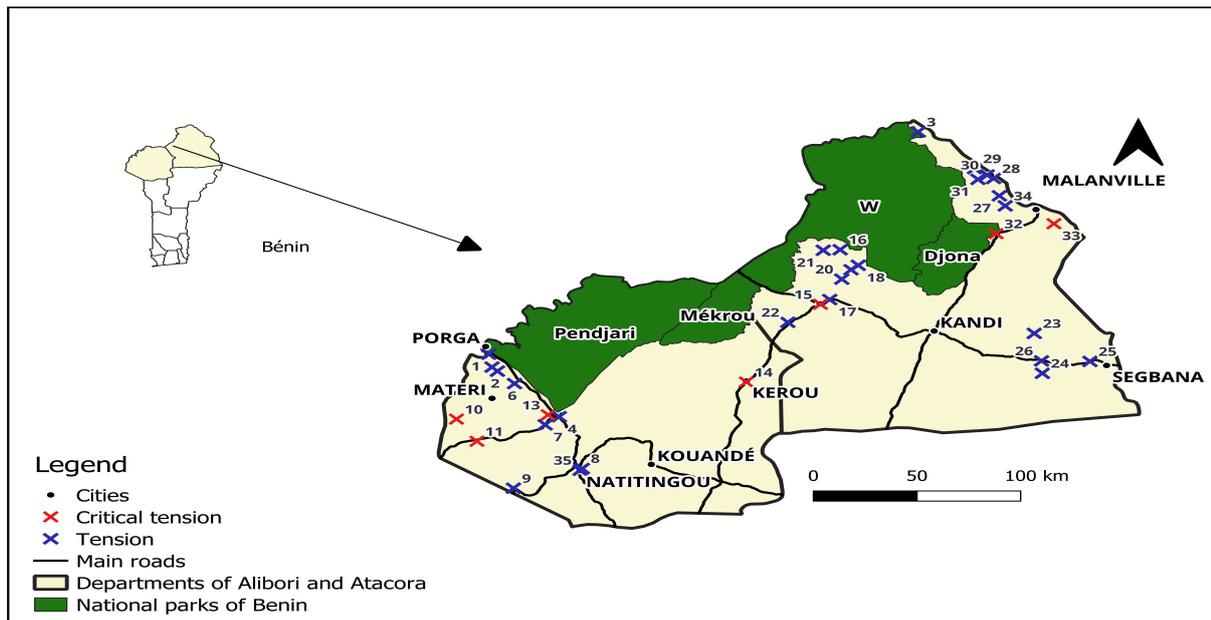
Beyond the Baribas, the Fulbes are the most visible ethnic group in the departments. However, we notice a division between the Fulbe clans originating from the Sahel who have less importance, compared to those who come from indigenous clans and who may be landowners. Important debates take place within the community regarding this situation, as the Sahel clans feel that they are entitled to have more. Many community conflicts exist with other ethnic groups, mainly due to farmer/herder tensions. The most noteworthy are occurring in the communes of Cobly, Banikoara, Toucountouna, Kerou and Malanville. Deadly clashes in those areas are commonplace.

Western Atacora is also host to many conflicts. The many communities that live together have witnessed a deterioration in their relationship over the years. In fact, the little land that exists and whose quality and demographics have been reduced by intensive agriculture, has rekindled even intra-community tensions. Many young people gradually have to migrate, particularly to Borgou, in order to work in the fields of the Baribas because there is nothing to do in Atacora⁴⁷.

The north of Alibori faces a fairly similar situation to the west of Atacora, with immense demographic pressure on communes like Malanville and Karimama, which have a very small surface area. In the same vein, this accentuates numerous small land conflicts in communes suffering from a clear delay in development.

The existence of these land conflicts is even a problem from a security point of view. In the Sahel, the appeal that jihadist groups can have for the local population is that they promise to settle land conflicts by substituting a corrupt justice with the real justice of God⁴⁸.

Map 4 : Local conflicts in Benin



1. Porga (Dassari, Materi, Atacora): Land conflict between two Berba clans from Porga.
2. Dayohoun (hamlet of Tétonga, Dassari, Matéri, Atacora): Conflict between a Berba clan and a Fulbe clan concerning repeated problems in the fields due to the passage of animals.
3. Loumbou-Loumbou and Tondigame (Monsey, Karimama, Alibori): Numerous conflicts between communities in these villages regarding the distribution of land.
4. Tanguiéta (Alibori): Numerous land conflicts between Natimba clans in Tanguieta.

5. Dayahoun and Ouriyori (Dassari, Materi, Atacora): Two villages in conflict over land issues.
6. Tihoun and Mognihoun (Dassari, Materi, Atacora): Two villages in conflict over land issues, this year led to the death of a farmer with a machete.
7. Taïacou and Biacou (Tanguiéta, Atacora): Conflicts between the Natimba clans of each village.
8. Natitingou (Natitingou, Atacora): Conflicts between two Wama clans in Natitingou.
9. Boukoumbé (Boukoumbé, Atacora): Numerous land conflicts in the commune due to its scarcity and lack of water, particularly between Otammari.
10. Petinga (Cobly, Atacora): Tensions surrounding the presence of numerous refugees settled on arable land.
11. Cobly (Atacora): The commune of Cobly was shaken in 2018 by attacks on Fulbe camps after the body of a farmer was found in his field. The relationship between herders and farmers is still tense today.
12. Boukoumbé (Boukoumbé, Atacora): Tensions surrounding the presence of numerous refugees.
13. Tanguiéta (Tanguiéta, Atacora): Tensions surrounding the presence of numerous refugees.
14. Kérou (Kérou, Atacora): Significant tensions between Fulbe and other communities, notably the Gourmantches.
15. Banikoara (Banikoara, Alibori): Significant tensions between Fulbe and other communities, notably the Gourmantches.
16. Kandérou (Founougo, Banikoara, Alibori): Tension regarding land distributions, a young man was killed this year for this reason.
17. Gomparou (Banikoara, Alibori): Many conflicts linked to land around Gomparou.
18. Bofounou (Founougo, Banikoara, Alibori): Conflicts between families over land, clashes take place every year.
19. Gama (Founougo, Banikoara, Alibori): Conflicts around Gama between Gourmantchés and Baribas as to who should be land chief.
20. Founougo (Founougo, Banikoara, Alibori): Recurrent conflict between Fulbes and Baribas over issues of transhumance corridors blocked by farmers' fields.
21. Sampéto (Founougo, Banikoara, Alibori): Numerous land conflicts around Sampéto, confrontations can be very violent.
22. Goumori (Banikoara, Alibori): Lots of violent conflict due to the land around Goumori. A young person was shot and killed at the end of 2023 for this reason.
23. Gbassè (Lougou, Segbana, Alibori): Numerous land conflicts around Lougou and particularly in Gbassè.
24. Tchakama and Gbarana (Sokotindji, Segbana, Alibori): Land conflicts between populations of the village of Tchakama and also on the Gbarana side.
25. Piami (Segbana, Alibori): Land conflict around Piami, it was particularly tense in 2023.
26. Gbessaka (Liboussou, Segbana, Alibori): Land conflict around Gbessaka, quite intense.
27. Birni-Lafia (Karimama, Alibori): Countless land conflicts in the district of Birni-Lafia. People consider that this started since 2005 and that it has never stopped or been resolved since.
28. Tondigamey (Karimama): Conflict between Dendis fishermen from Tondigamey and Dendis fishermen from Karimama over access to fishing zones.
29. Bogo-Bogo (Karimama, Alibori): Recurring land conflicts around Bogo-Bogo.
30. Karimama (Alibori): Recurring tensions between Gourmantches and Dendis.
31. Mamassi-Gourma (Bogo-Bogo, Karimama, Alibori): Land tensions in the village for several years, several clashes have resulted.
32. Guéné (Malanville, Alibori): Recurring deadly conflicts between Fulbe and Mokolés, community tensions are high.
33. Garou (Malanville, Alibori): Recurring deadly conflicts between Fulbe and Mokolés, community tensions are high.
34. Tomboutou (Malanville, Alibori): Important tensions exist between the farmers in the Commune of Tomboutou (Malanville) and the commune of Brini-Lafia (Karimama). The limit between both communes is unclear and farmer regularly fight, even to the point of killing each other.
35. Natitingou (Natitingou, Atacora): Conflict between the Wamas and Otamaris as to who is the land chief and most influential community in the city of Natitingou. The rivalry is highly politized and has been going on for a long time.

Relentless and Increasing Jihadist Pressure on Northern Benin and Togo

When, in 2019, the threat approached the border of the Gulf of Guinea countries⁴⁹, rather exaggerated speculations were made about what would happen next, notably the idea that jihadist groups would ultimately try to gain access to the sea⁵⁰. Today, the years have passed and we now have the necessary perspective to better understand the situation. Togo and Benin are facing two Katibats – jihadist fighting units – based in Burkina Faso. The first is called Katibat Sékou Mouslimou, mainly located in the provinces of Kompienga and Koulpélogo. It gained momentum throughout 2021. The second is called Katibat Abou Hanifa which is predominantly located in the province of Tapoa, and has acquired strength since early 2022 for the most part. Both Katibats are named after their leader and are affiliated to “Jamā’at nusrat al-islām wal-muslimīn” (JNIM), Al-Qaïda’s branch in the Sahel. It may have been hoped that the proximity of these Katibats would have led to tension between them. It is not the case. During their rise in power, these two Katibats mutually assisted one another. More so, in June 2022, a meeting was organised with the major JNIM jihadist leaders of the area to organise and divide the surrounding territory of Mouslimou, based in Kompienga, whose zone of influence is the Pendjari Parc, the Atacora department and Togo. Abou Hanifa, located at the frontier between Niger and Burkina Faso, has a zone of influence in the Tapoa province and the W Benin park. He is also probably responsible for the JNIM advance towards southern Niger. Finally, a chief was appointed by JNIM leadership, the now infamous Cheik Albaani, whose role is to organise the descent to Togo and Benin. Again, it could have been expected and hoped that Albaani’s arrival would create internal tensions, especially with the already existing local chiefs. There are a lack of details, but the attacks in both Togo and Benin are demonstrating great operational capacity, which does not seem to indicate that Albaani’s presence created conflict.⁵¹ For a better example of coordination, between July 20 and August 9, 2024, the two Katibats attacked three different military positions: a military camp in Kpinkankandi (Togo) on July 20, a Beninese army position in Park W on July 24 and a similar position near the village of Nouari, off the coast of the park on August 9⁵². These attacks enable them to push back the army, steal weapons and undermine the defence security system for future movements.

Consequently, the question of whether the jihadist threat is exogenous or endogenous for a country never makes much sense, and it makes even less sense with regard to Togo and Benin. In general, this question makes no sense because the exogenous and the endogenous combine. A jihadist cell is usually located near the targeted country and its actions in the new territory are carried out based on the local problems which enable recruitment. Local recruits then become informants, guides, fighters and recruiters themselves. Characterising the threat as exogenous often has more to do with political behaviour. It is about refusing the idea that nationals could have chosen the enemy’s side and when it becomes apparent that recruitment is taking place, political discourse often seeks to disqualify them as being foreigners in any case. As for Benin and Togo, the proximity of two powerful Katibats as the one in the Kompienga and the Tapoa renders the question pointless. JNIM simply managed to recruit individuals in Togo and Benin to serve as local relays in the Savanes, Atacora and Alibori. In these territories, there are no “local cells” and nor is there interest for the JNIM to create them. The Kompienga and Tapoa groups have sufficient mobility and relays to simply travel back and forth between their strongholds and areas of operations in the two coastal countries. The question would only be worth asking if the threat were to extend significantly into Togo or Benin.

A. Benin Under Harassing Fire

Insecurity in Benin can be understood according to the three military fronts facing the country. The first is on its border with Burkina Faso on the side of the Atacora department. The second is on its border with Niger on the Alibori department side. Finally, there is an unresolved question of the “threat from the east”, namely that of armed groups from Nigeria moving in the Alibori and Borgou departments.

1. Atacora: A Defensive Posture at the Burkinabe Frontier for both Benin and the Kompienga Armed Group

When jihadism came knocking on Benin’s door in 2019 and especially in 2020, the observers and experts underestimated the degree of threat and difficulty posed by JNIM in Atacora. Indeed, the threat from Burkina Faso has rapidly expanded in terms of territory that is likely to be attacked by armed groups, and greatly increased the task of the Beninese security forces.

Originally, the jihadist threat seemed to come from the immediate border between Benin and Burkina Faso. It seemed as though Benin would only have to focus on the commune of Materi, which borders Burkina Faso and part of the Pendjari Park. The first incidents at Benin’s frontier during 2021 seemed to confirm this. At the beginning of that year, armed

groups had started to exert pressure on the population of a village named Koualou and sporadic exchange of fires took place between the Forces Armées Béninoises (FABs) and jihadist in the Pendjari Park. The first attacks at Koualou and Porga at the end of 2021 continued to confirm that insecurity is to be expected directly from that border. However, from the second half of 2022, due to a clear desire to gain efficiency in its attacks in Benin, JNIM created two routes allowing it to bypass the Beninese defensive system at the border with Burkina Faso. In July 2022, for the first time we started noting jihadist movements going from Burkina Faso to Togo before heading to the village of Daloga, located on the border between Togo, Benin and Burkina Faso (see Table n°1).⁵³ In the same logic, it was in November 2022 that we also observed jihadists leaving the Kompienga, crossing the Pendjari park as high as possible, and going back down to the level of the commune of Kerou in the North-East of Atacora. In other words, a border between Burkina Faso and Benin that was generally quite small, had greatly expanded and was becoming more difficult to protect efficiently.

With this enlargement, the FAB faced another major problem. This is due to his troops' lack of combat experience. Benin has a limited military history. The troops sent to secure the parks were therefore initially destined to face difficulty due to fighters who had already fought in the Sahel. This resulted in disappointments and a certain loss of morale for his troops at first.

Despite the immense challenge, it should be noted that the response of the FABs was a success. The FABs gained proficiency, which translated into more successful armed confrontations against the jihadists, which gradually increased the confidence of its troops. More impressively, the FABs were in a position to not relinquish territory to the JNIM in Atacora. On the contrary, since the beginning of 2023, the FABs have a permanent presence in Koualou and they are adhering to their objective of holding on to the entire Pendjari Park. While it is still difficult to hermetically seal any place, the response provides satisfactory coverage of the department and its border with Burkina Faso.

Thus, if people believe that Atacora is seen as the most vulnerable area because the first jihadist attacks in Benin were made there, the reality is more complex. When we look at the details of events, the security of this department has been stable for a long time. Atacora even experienced prolonged periods of lulls. To gain a better understanding, it is important to distinguish between events that can happen in areas of friction such as the Pendjari Park, or the immediate border between Burkina Faso and Benin, notably Koualou and to a lesser degree the area around the village of Porga. The attacks that take place there are often unforeseen confrontations between reconnaissance teams from either side or, at worst, ambushes by armed groups who act in the logic of defending "their" territory⁵⁴. Real proof of jihadists' desire to "invade" Atacora would be actions carried out in Benin beyond the Pendjari Park. However, attacks in Atacora are limited. They are limited in terms of occurrences and geographically, since they are concentrated in only two communes, Materi and Kerou. We first believed that this limited number of attacks, particularly in Kerou, was due to jihadists' difficulty in evolving in environments unknown to them. For example, the first attack that was carried out in Kaobagou in November 2022 was a disaster for the jihadists. They attempted to attack Kaobagou's FAB position, but were unable to properly move toward their target, they fired first. Quickly overwhelmed by the response of the FABs, they retreated and thus suffered numerous losses. However, since then, the jihadists have undoubtedly become familiar with the area and this explanation is no longer valid. During the next attack in Kaobagou and Banikoara in May 2023⁵⁵, during which around 20 civilians were executed, the attackers clearly had great knowledge of the location. The operation had been carefully prepared, motorcycle movements had been made in the area during the previous months. The localities, houses and individuals had been identified and the retreat was quick and effective. However, following this attack which demonstrated a capacity to strike in the area, the JNIM remained relatively discreet in Kerou. The "attacks" that we subsequently recorded in Kerou are instances of jihadists firing from a certain distance on FAB positions before quickly retreating, without any real intention of inflicting significant damage.

This unwillingness to attack Atacora is not new, and was first observed as late as the end of 2022. At the time, a series of attacks in the commune of Materi had come to an abrupt stop. The attacks in the commune were mainly attributed to a Beninese recruit from the Kompienga group, who clearly had a very personal desire for revenge on his country. However, he died against a police station during a failed attack in Porga in October 2022. With his death, and while some Beninese recruits wanted to avenge the death of their local leader, the Burkinabè leaders of the Kompienga group firmly called them to order a stop to such clashes at that time.

Those attacks provided no gain for the jihadist groups. With the death of this Beninese fighter and the refusal of the armed group to continue, Atacora, outside Pendjari Park, has since experienced forms of peaceful life.

This restraint that the JNIM demonstrates in its advance towards Atacora is understandable. Atacora represents little strategic interest for the Kompienga group. Except for the Fulbes and the Gourmantches⁵⁶ who are minorities in this department, it is mainly Christian and animist land⁵⁷, which provides no particular resources nor access to strategic terrain.

Since 2023, the Kompienga group has mainly considered Atacora as a threat due to the proximity of the Benin army to their base in Burkina Faso. At this stage, its main interest is therefore to create a buffer zone with the FABs. Indeed, beyond the Accra Initiative and its Koudalgou operations, which had little impact in this area,⁵⁸ Benin has long considered joint operations with Burkina Faso and Togo at their shared border. Some materialised near Koualou in 2023. Undoubtedly, this must have been perceived as a serious threat to armed groups based as close as the village of Nadiagou and the Arly Park in Burkina Faso. Since March 2023, JNIM reacted by significantly increasing the planting of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). There were only a few cases of IEDS near the village of Nouari, since most are around Koualou and more globally the frontier between Benin and Burkina Faso, as well as in the Pendjari Park. This constitutes a defensive line for the Kompienga group.

The relative calm enjoyed by Atacora could disappear. Two sources of tension could lead the jihadist group resuming offensives on the Benin army. The first is due to the many areas of friction, particularly inside the Pendjari park. Indeed, Benin is faithful to its desire to hold its entire territory, and organises numerous patrols. Jihadist groups actually do the same on "their" side of the border and frequently in the Beninese park.

Table n° 1: A zone of infiltration and movement on the border between Togo and Benin

Recent events have shed light on the fragility of the border between Togo and Benin. However, the vulnerability of the area dates back a while. The first sign came in July 2022, when the armed groups of Kompienga went to the village of Daloga, which is a village located on the border between Togo and Benin and only a few kilometres from Burkina Faso. Threatened by jihadists, large sections of the population fled the next day in the direction of the arrondissement of Tantega. In January 2023, the rest of the population of Daloga was visited by armed men on motorcycles once again, who gave them an ultimatum: leave or die. The FABs and the Togolese Armed Forces (FATs) jointly managed the threat at the time by going to the village. In fact, the village is cross-border although drifting more on the Togolese part but essentially populated by Beninese or at least Beninese communities. At the time, the security forces noted the difficulty of protecting the hamlet. Specifically, the Togolese and Beninese border is difficult to access. There are only a few routes that allow security forces to get there. On the Togolese side, the river even blocks the road, and there are few crossing points. Consequently, the security forces had logically accepted the departure of the population of Daloga accompanying them inside the territory.

Nonetheless, there were then indications that it was not only Daloga which was targeted by the armed groups. In the following months of 2023, those villages located on the Togolese side of the border in particular began to indicate that suspicious motorcycle movements had taken place. Stranger still, the populations said that the movement did not come from north to south, but rather from Benin towards Togo. This information was not taken seriously at first as it seemed surprising, but it is now no longer in doubt. The jihadist groups were sending, presumably scouts, to identify the terrain and villages between Togo and Benin. Today, and we will come back to this, with the advances of armed groups in Togo, particularly in the cantons of Mandouri, Tambigou and Borgou, the axis of passage is no longer reduced to the immediate border between Benin and Togo, but has expanded within Togolese territory.

As a result, skirmishes regularly take place in the Pendjari Park. These skirmishes are often resolved in the same way: a brief exchange of distant fire on both sides, then a rapid withdrawal on both sides. However, near the Arly park, FABs on the other hand, expose themselves to deadly ambushes. The latest example being the attack on a Benin army patrol on the 4 June 2024, which resulted in the death of seven FABs.⁵⁹ Much has been reported about this, but it should not be seen as an offensive on Benin. The jihadists who carried it out did so above all in order to repel a patrol that was particularly close to the Burkinabè side due to their positions. There is a risk of increased clashes, which would heighten tension to the point of attacks outside the parks.⁶⁰

The second cause of tension between FABs and jihadists is due to cattle rustling in Atacora. Traditionally, cattle rustling in Atacora, as in all of Benin, is a relatively small-scale phenomenon.⁶¹ It is not comparable to the cattle rustling that takes place in the Sahel. However, the Kompienga Katibat partially funds itself through cattle rustling. Hence, instances of this have been on the rise in areas where they can access, Kpendjal in Togo and the commune of Materi in Benin.⁶² In 2022, a case of cattle theft in Materi highlighted this phenomenon for the first time. This caused a stir mainly because the stolen herd was the property of a former well-known minister. It was primarily a coup, and the subsequent theft of livestock carried out by armed groups remained an epiphenomenon. Nonetheless, since April 2023, cases of cattle theft by jihadists in the communes of Materi and occasionally in Kerou, have become a regular occurrence.⁶³ The Beninese army noticed this phenomenon and began to keep an eye on animal flows. Cross-border transhumance is prohibited in Benin in any case. In 2024, this vigilance led to several animal seizures that appeared to be stolen. However, these animals were the property of burkinabè jihadists. This has sparked considerable anger within the jihadi group and they have made threats to attack in retaliation. This is a phenomenon to keep an eye on because, as we explained above, Atacora has already experienced how even local anger among a few jihadists can act as a catalyst for attacks.

In any case, some areas need to be monitored; events in 2024 have shown the ability of groups to access the north of the commune of Kouande and Toucountouna. These are the areas at risk of witnessing an extension of the groups' zone of influence in Atacora.

2. Northern Alibori is a Corridor for Armed Groups

Northern Alibori (Karimama, Malanville and Kandi) is now the most destabilised territory in Benin. Far from the first attacks which affected Atacora, the neighbouring department of Alibori has now become the most affected by armed groups. Yet making sense of the insecurity that plagues the department proves to be challenging.

When attacks on those communes started during the second half of 2022, things moved at a speed and intensity that took everyone by surprise. As a reminder, in April 2022, the police station in Monsey, the northernmost arrondissement of the country, was attacked and a police officer lost his life⁶⁴. The attack was subsequently claimed by JNIM. This event was predictable in the sense that Monsey is the northernmost arrondissement of Benin, bordering Niger and relatively close to the border of Burkina Faso. However, in July 2022, the threat suddenly descended towards Kandi and Malanville with ambushes not far from Alfakoara. In September 2022, this becomes all the more surprising given that a Malanville customs post was attacked at the same time and the Islamic State claimed responsibility for some of the July attacks.⁶⁵ Subsequently, in October 2022, Karimama, capital of the commune of the same name, was visited by armed men. In addition, a customs post in Karimama and a police station in Birni-Lafia (a major village in the commune) were burned⁶⁶. Strangely, since this period, except for skirmishes in Park W, the situation has relaxed in Alibori. The department is under a constant pressure from the groups as opposed to regular and extraordinary attacks as was the case in 2022.

To begin, we should establish that JNIM is the only active jihadist group operating in Northern Benin. We will explain further later, but the Islamic State, via its branch "Islamic State – Sahel Province" (ISSP) is no longer present in Northern Benin. Most of the activities carried out by groups related to JNIM are discreet and aim above all at intimidating civilians, which generates an atmosphere of fear in the communes. Civilians are kidnapped, murdered and regularly threatened in the commune of Karimama, and to a lesser extent in Malanville. This is far removed from the myth that is sometimes put forward according to which jihadists attempt to curry favour with the population by concentrating their attacks on security forces and state officials. This ties in with a second myth that we must debunk, the idea that armed groups also try to win the support of the population by promising to give them access to Pendjari and W parks. This is disproved by the facts. Civilians are the first targets of jihadists, particularly in the parks. Many civilians, gatherers, poachers and herdsman who entered the parks were intimidated, shot at from a distance, beaten or executed. The park has also been filled with IEDs since December 2022, which further reduces the validity of this myth as it is civilians who regularly lose their lives. Parks are entry points for jihadist groups, and as such the presence of civilians could lead to the army being informed of their passages. Beyond these discreet but numerous acts of violence against civilians, we note important symbolic acts in Alibori, such as burning public buildings, schools, police stations, customs and a satellite antenna. This is common practice of the JNIM in the Sahel.

However, by far the most observed action in the communes of Karimama and Malanville is the movement of armed men. Movements of armed men on motorcycles are regular in these two communes. It should be noted that such movements are very limited in the commune of Kandi, even in the arrondissement of Angaradebou, which adjoins the park and the commune of Malanville. These motorcycle trips fulfill three objectives for armed groups. The first is supply. The armed groups located in Park W occasionally obtain supplies from the Beninese markets bordering the park. This is not the case or to a much lower extent in Atacora, which can be explained by the proximity of their main bases in Burkina Faso on that side. The second type of movement follows the same logic as exercising violence against civilian populations, since it aims to mark their presence with recurring visits to villages. This can lead, for example, to religious preaching, visits to the local market, or movements on motorcycles near a village. Finally, an important movement from a strategic point of view is that motorcycle travel can be used to reach the other side of the Niger River, to enter on the Dosso side or even to continue towards Nigeria.

This is where the commune of Karimama, as well as to a lesser degree the commune of Malanville, reveal their importance for JNIM. Benin constitutes an access point to the south of Niger, if not to Nigeria. Armed groups have demonstrated their capacity to cross the Niger river as would any smuggler in the area. For many years now, JNIM has been carrying out a slow but constant offensive, crowned with a certain success, on the Islamic State branches in the north of the coastal countries. At one time, the Islamic State used the Malanville area as a resting area for its soldiers.⁶⁷ Since then, JNIM has regained control of these lands which are obviously of only moderate importance for the Islamic State, as it has not fought to stay⁶⁸. It is possible that the haste and aggression of the JNIM movements in 2022 on Karimama were part of this attempt to gain influence on the area. Thus the movements of JNIM elements in Karimama in October 2022 were probably a means for them to mark their territory while the Islamic State had just claimed an attack a few months earlier in Benin in September 2022.⁶⁹

However, if, since 2023, insecurity has been concentrated in the commune of Karimama and the arrondissements of the commune of Malanville which adjoin the park, multiple attacks have since increased the risk of an extended threat. Indeed, the attack in March 2024 on a police station in Angaradebou, that of April 2024 on a customs post in the arrondissement of Garou commune of Malanville and the one in Money also at Malanville raise fears of an evolution in the situation⁷⁰. The arrondissements of Angaradebou, Garou and Malanville are where an extension of the threat would be natural for armed groups, since they are close to areas that are already a strong target. Beyond the strategic question, Karimama and Malanville are interesting targets for JNIM due to their geography and population. As previously explained, these are "Sahelised" localities. Their populations are Dendis-Songhai, Gourmantches, Haoussas and Fulbes. Due to its origin, the only population from the south of the country are the Mokolés of the arrondissement of Guéné who are related to the large family of Yorubas (southern ethnic group between Nigeria and Benin). The presence of the Dendis in northern Benin has long been undetected. However, this is a population that is deeply connected to the Dendis of Dossos and the Zermas of Tillabéri in Niger. A community conflict on the Niger side that would be exploited by armed groups could have a strong impact on northern Benin. Historically, as we have seen, any insecurity on one side of the riverbank is always felt on the other.

Finally, it should be noted that tensions between Benin and Niger lead to weak cooperation between the armed forces and local administrations.⁷¹ However, this makes it easier for armed groups to cross the Niger River. Niger's criticism of armed groups from Benin becomes ironic in light of this. On the one hand, these groups sometimes come from Niger on the border with Burkina Faso and at most cross the commune of Karimama in Benin to return to Niger towards the south of the Dosso region. Hence, Niger is equally responsible for the growing insecurity in the Dosso area, which could only be mitigated with serious cooperation with the Beninese side.

3. Beninese Banditry and Threat from Nigeria

Acts of banditry are on the rise and are becoming a regular occurrence in Alibori and Atacora. It is probably a coincidence, and there are no direct links, but the increase in banditry in Atacora and Alibori occurred around the same period, the second part of the year 2023. Beyond the very existence of these events, the trivialisation of the use of "weapons of war" by bandits raises an awareness of this danger. In other words, sophisticated weapons that are no longer limited to traditional rifles and machetes. As we will see, the proven presence of Nigerians among the bandits gave rise to the idea that these could be groups of bandits from Nigeria spilling over into Benin, or at least, that there is a vague link. It is not the case at this stage.

Table 2: On the importance of the attack of January 8, 2025

To answer the question straight away, the attack of January 8, 2025 at the triple point of Benin, border with Burkina Faso and Niger, having led to the death of 28 Beninese soldiers officially, is not a strategic turning point in the methods used by armed groups in their spillover from the Sahel to coastal countries⁷².

This event is a tragedy due to the particularly high number of Beninese soldiers killed, but concretely, it pursues the objectives of JNIM in Benin that we have already described previously. The attack on a border base once again aims for a triple objective: to reduce the threat of a Beninese battalion close to a katibat, to steal weapons, and to have greater freedom of movement which could ultimately lead to attacks in populated areas. This attack is a replica on the Beninese side, of that of the Togolese Kpinkankandi camp of July 20, 2024 to which we will return later. These two attacks were likely carried out by the same JNIM unit which has acquired extensive experience in attacks on military bases in eastern Burkina Faso.

It should be noted, however, that this attack in Benin reinforces the conclusion that collaboration between States in the region is the only solution that can lead to results. Movements of hundreds of fighters do not go unnoticed. Smooth communication between the armies of Niger, Burkina Faso and Benin could have led to another outcome.

Alibori, as with the jihadist acts, is more affected than Atacora by the phenomenon of banditry. However, it should be noted from the outset that contrary to what has been explained elsewhere, the places affected by acts of banditry and jihadists are now different. We must specify that they are now different, since in fact, the wave of banditry that began in October 2023 in Alibori, emerged in the communes of Karimama and Malanville. Thus, at that time, banditry and jihadism overlapped in their areas of action. Until December 2023, road cutters struck several times in these communes. Some shops were also robbed and there are cases of men being attacked in their homes by several armed men in order to steal their money. However, from January 2024, it became clear that banditry had shifted. The acts are now concentrated towards the commune of Kandi and have disappeared from Karimama, while decreasing drastically on the Malanville side. The same actions are noted: highway robbers, business robberies and attacks at the homes of people suspected of having money. This shift and this clear distinction between areas affected by jihadism in the north and banditry in the south is logical. The rise in banditry in the communes of Karimama and Malanville went hand in hand with an increase in operations by the Security Forces to seize weapons and collaborators. Without a doubt, the bandits must have been disgruntled by these operations and the decision to concentrate on a town where the FABs are less present, makes sense.

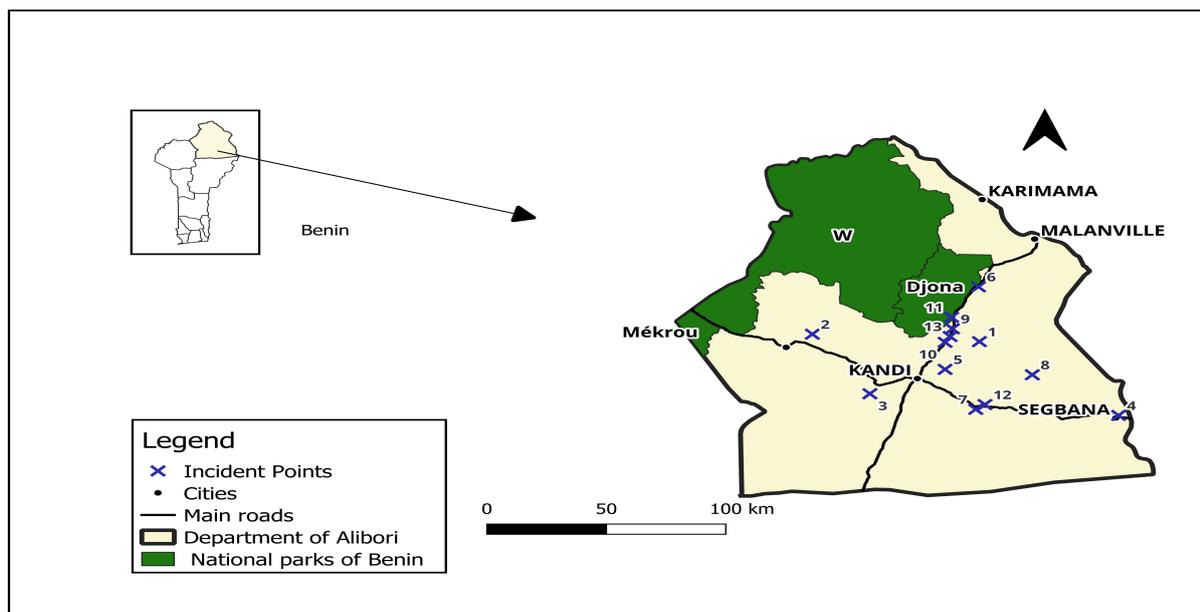
Now comes the question of knowing where this banditry comes from, and if they are linked to the “threat from the east”. For many years, the security risk posed by Nigeria for Benin has been known and feared. Although groups like Boko Haram may have seemed very distant at first, it is common knowledge that the group’s split led to a westward shift of some jihadist groups. Details on these groups are unfortunately still missing, particularly regarding their affiliations. In addition, western Nigeria has observed the spread of large groups of bandits as well as local militia with sophisticated weaponry. Studies have already shown the use that Benin could have for these diverse and varied armed groups in their actions in Nigeria.⁷³ Thus, the question of these Nigerian armed groups’ ability and willingness to spill over into Benin is a legitimate concern. However, for the moment, if the banditry in Alibori has Nigerian influence, it is in no way an overflow of a group of Nigerian bandits into Benin.

First of all, if the use of war weapons by bandits is a cause for concern, it should be noted that traditional rifles and machetes still make up the majority of arsenal of bandits in Benin. Furthermore, if Nigerians sometimes participate in bandit groups in Benin, this is nothing new and says little about the participation of experienced Nigerian groups. Beninese banditry has always been influenced by Nigerian banditry, the clearest To summarise, it would be difficult to consider that banditry in Alibori or even Borgou comes from the outside. It is not the work of Nigerian bandits crossing the borders of Benin. It is simply the manifestation of the economic complications experienced by the north of the country, which leads some of the youth to rely on illegal activities. They are focusing especially on the Kandi side in order to avoid the concentration of security forces in the communes of Malanville and Karimama.

In fact, everything indicates that bandits from Nigeria occasionally take refuge on the Beninese side of the border.⁷⁸

It would not make sense for them to carry out attacks as unprofitable as those observed in Benin, while they try to take refuge there. The same logic can be applied to jihadist groups that occasionally take refuge in Benin. Even if their presence has sometimes led to violence against civilians in order to ensure that they are not be signalled to the Security Forces. Furthermore, when we consider the type of actions carried out by Nigerian bandits in their country, violent and without discretion, it is a safe to say that if they were to extend their actions to Benin, this would leave no doubt as to their presence. The same goes for the banditry of Atacora. In this department, banditry is more difficult to rationalise because it is more scattered. Communes are affected differently. Particularly since 2022, the commune of Natitingou has experienced a problem of petty theft linked to the isolated actions of individuals seeking to meet their needs. Since 2024, the commune of Toucountouna has been crossed by a certain number of livestock thefts, a few animals per theft at most, which worry the residents.

Map 5 : Bandit areas in Alibori



1. Fouet (Angaradebou, Kandi, Alibori) - 15/01/24: Burglary of an alcohol shop in the village of Fouet, money and a motorcycle are stolen.
2. Yankpa (Konkey, Banikoara, Alibori) - 16/02/24: A man murdered in his home by bandits.
3. Niso-Gbéba (Sam, Kandi, Alibori) - 21/02/24: Armed men, some with sophisticated weapons, robbed traders in a market.
4. Segbana (Segbana, Alibori) - 23/03/24: Five armed men attacked a wealthy man to steal his money.
5. Lolo (Saah, Kandi, Alibori) - 26/03/24: A merchant leaving Lolo is robbed by bandits.
6. Bangoun (Guéné, Malanville, Alibori) - 08/04/24: Nine armed men entered a man's home with machetes and 12-gauge guns to steal his money.
7. Bensékou (Bensékou, Kandi, Alibori) - 23/04/24: Armed individuals came to the village to steal a couple motorbikes.
8. Niambara (Lougou, Segbana, Alibori) - 25/05/24: A couple men with automatic weapons stole two motorbikes from farmers.
9. Angaradebou (Angaradebou, Kandi, Alibori) - 17/06/24: A man was killed with a machete by a bandit who wanted his motorbike.
10. Thuy (Angaradebou, Kandi, Alibori) - 25/06/24: Four men with sophisticated weapons attempted to rob a person's home before the arrival of the police scared them away.
11. Angaradebou (Angaradebou, Kandi, Alibori) - 05/07/24: Men armed with machetes entered someone's home to steal their money.

12. Bensekou (Bensekou, Kandi, Alibori) – 12/07/24: A couple motorbikes were stolen by armed men.

13. Thya (Angaradebou, Kandi, Alibori) – 12/07/24: Armed man robbed a car and 700.000 CFA francs

Table n°3: Fulbe Kidnapping in Benin

From 2019, Benin was affected by a new type of banditry, namely kidnapping.⁷⁴ This kidnapping was of a particular type because it was carried out by Fulbes on members of their own community and often on members of their own family. This was mostly motivated by individuals in Fulbe families not obtaining a significant part of the inheritance, nor access to school, nor livestock. Hence, they would rely on kidnaping to obtain their share. This phenomenon has strongly affected the Borgou department, the Donga department and the Segbana commune in Alibori. These activities, which were at first carried out in Benin, have spread to Togo since 2020⁷⁵, Ghana since 2021⁷⁶ then Côte d'Ivoire since 2022⁷⁷.

This practice originated in Nigeria, and it was Nigerian bandits that first groomed individuals all over the Gulf of Guinea countries to carry out such kidnappings. Initially, these activities were discredited by the national authorities, and were perceived as specific to the Fulbe community, an internal matter. However, from the second half of 2020, the government took this threat very seriously. Indeed, several elements became worrying. Substantial sums of money were made through these kidnappings, weapons were circulated and worse, self-defence groups began to form to find the kidnappers. Since then, the actions of law enforcement have significantly reduced these activities. To this day, they only persist on the immediate border of Nigeria, notably Segbana and on the Togolese border near the commune of Boukoumbé. Those who perpetrate these kidnappings have a strong capacity for adaptation and there is no doubt that the reduction in kidnappings means that they are now engaging in other illegal activities, such as a return to banditry.

More broadly, the most central communes of the department, Toucountouna, Kouandé, Natitingou and even Kerou, are facing the rise in power of highway robbers, who most notably seek to seize motorcycles, an item that is easy to steal and then resell. Cobyly seems to be the most troubled commune. The commune has experienced cases of kidnapping for ransom as described above, as well as livestock theft and petty theft since at least 2023. Local populations are particularly worried and describe the phenomenon as being linked to the arrival of Fulbe from Burkina⁷⁹. Nonetheless, if some components come from the outside, local banditry is simply a manifestation of the local economic hardship.

B. Togo Under Threat of an extension of Burkinabe Unrest

When Togo was hit by jihadists for the first time on May 10, 2022 with the attack on an advanced post of the Togolese armed forces (FAT)⁸⁰, leaving eight soldiers dead, it seemed logical to think that the fate of Togo would be linked to that of Benin. In other words, Benin and Togo being under threat from the same group located in Kompienga, the two neighbouring countries would be targeted in a similar way. Practice has shown a completely different reality. As we explained, Atacora has experienced prolonged periods of peace, but it has never been the case in the neighbouring Savanes region of Togo. Togo has suffered from attacks and other events linked to jihadist groups on its territory without much an interruption since May 10, 2022. More so, jihadist groups are expanding their activities into Togo. It is no longer strictly the border with Burkina Faso which is under attack.

1. An Expansion of the Threat Despite a Strong Government Response

Despite the deteriorated situation, it is important to note that this is not due to a poor government response. On the contrary, since the spillover of insecurity from the Sahel to the Gulf of Guinea became a credible threat in the second half of the 2010s, Togo is undoubtedly the country that has provided the promptest and most effective response. As explained in previous works⁸¹, Togo secured its border with Burkina Faso back in September 2018 with military operation Koundjoaré. Furthermore, aware that it was becoming important to have an interministerial response to the threat as well as a stronger presence in remote areas, the "Interministerial Committee for Prevention and Combating Violent Extremism" (CIPLEV) was created in 2019. CIPLEV allows the government to take concerted actions, whether that be at national level or also at prefectural level under the control of prefect as well as agents at the local level. The last piece of the puzzle was introduced with the creation of the "Emergency Programme for the Savanes Region" (PURS) in 2022. This plan makes it possible to programme how the Savanes region can catch up in terms of development in order to strengthen the population's resilience⁸². Undoubtedly, this part came somewhat late, but in neighbouring countries like Ghana and Benin, it never saw the light of day.

However, as we mentioned, the situation has deteriorated. Attacks in Togo are constant. We have to go back to December 2022 to find a month when, to our knowledge, there was no attack. Since then, the year 2023 bore witness to jihadist group violence and aggressiveness in Togo at a level that was difficult to predict. Armed groups have increased attacks against positions of the Togolese armed forces (FAT). However, in many cases these attacks were particularly heavy and not simply harassment fire from a distant position as with Benin. The latest case with the attack and capture of the Kpinkankandi military camp by some one hundred jihadists on July 20 2024 is in no way an isolated or completely new event. This camp had already been targeted by attacks several times. As a symbol of their desire to gain influence, attacks on villages have increased. There are several cases of villages being stormed and civilians executed in full view. The use of IEDs has also become frequent since the second part of 2022. The latter have also been used in complex ambushes against security forces since November 2022. Their dissemination has also made the Kpendjal prefecture particularly dangerous in the event of travel.

More alarming, the expansion of the scope of action of jihadist armed groups is becoming clear. Most of the events linked to jihadists in Togo until 2024 were concentrated in three cantons: Pogno, Koundjoaré and Mandouri. In other words, JNIM was targeting territories adjoining Burkina Faso. Since May 2024, we have witnessed a sudden expansion of their areas of activity, with attacks and other intimidations against civilians in the canton of Borgou. Access to the canton of Borgou takes the threat to a new level. This canton does not directly border with Burkina Faso, it is large and from this canton it is possible for groups to have access to numerous territories. In other words, the threat becomes more difficult to contain. It is precisely this expansion to Borgou that allowed jihadist groups to act in the prefectures of Oti and South Oti. Moreover, due to its geographical isolation, South Oti could foresee a significant long-term expansion of the danger.

Thus, the nature, intensity and regularity of the attacks, show that Togo is more of a target for the JNIM than is Benin. A few elements could help explain why it is the case.

2. A Burkinabe Border Too Close to Togo: The Extension of the Community Conflict Between Gourmantches and Fulbes

Togo suffers first and foremost from a difficult geographical situation when dealing with the jihadist threat. The country's elongated shape has led to the development of localities which are concentrated either around the main road leading from Lomé to Cinkasse, or localities around the horizontal roads connecting to other coastal countries. Localities far from this vertical axis and these few horizontal roads have experienced a severe delay in development. The Savanes is no exception. The prefectures along the main axis, Oti, Tandjouaré, Tone and Cinkasse, have benefited from trade with the Sahel and northern Ghana. This left out two prefectures, Gando and Kpendjal (now divided into Kpendjal West and Kpendjal). These prefectures have suffered a severe delay in development. In the case of the city of Mandouri, capital of the prefecture of Kpendjal, the disconnection from the rest of the country has long been virtually literal. Indeed, the road, which was to connect it with Dapaong, the regional capital, was in a terrible condition. In Togo, the nickname given to Mandouri and its surroundings was for a long time the "seventh continent"⁸³. Many villages in Kpendjal are even more isolated, particularly those located near the Beninese border where the lack of a bridge over the Oti River makes crossing extremely difficult and has left its populations to their own devices. Kpendjal therefore suffers from an absence of basic social services. These shortcomings have led the population to have difficult relationships with public authorities, who are perceived as having abandoned them. For example, demonstrations were regularly held in 2021 in Mandouri, where the population demanded constant access to electricity (then cut off at certain times), that the Dapaong-Mandouri road be paved and finally better access to drinking water⁸⁴. These protests then degenerated into clashes with the local gendarmerie. Local leaders were arrested, which further weakened relations between the local population and the State. Since then, improvements have been noted, since most of these requirements have been met. The main road has been rebuilt, the electricity supply and access to drinking water have improved. However, this mainly meets the needs of Mandouri and many villages are still cut off from the country.

Thus, while the link between Kpendjal and the rest of the country is weak, this territory is at a reduced distance from the camps of the Kompienga armed group. These armed groups have a shorter distance to travel to reach Kpendjal than the Togolese forces based in Dapaong. This is why Togo planned the above-mentioned military operation Koundjoaré. Koundjoaré is a village in Kpendjal which is close to the border with Burkina Faso. It now hosts a military base to cover the prefecture and more globally the frontier with the Sahel. Unfortunately, a military

presence is nothing if it cannot move effectively. The very weak coverage of the Kpendjal with roads makes the ability of the security forces to cover the ground difficult. Even more so when we consider the risks of ambush and IEDs. Worse still, difficulties encountered by the army in covering such territory make its relations more complicated with a local population that would like ever-faster reactions.

This proximity with the Kompienga is a weakness for Togo for another reason. It is becoming clear that the community conflict, which has devoured eastern Burkina Faso between Gourmantches and Fulbes, is being exported to the Togolese Savanes. As explained previously, the Kompienga group is not what is sometimes called a "Fulbe Katibat". The group now comprises most of the surrounding communities. However, this jihadist group has perfectly exploited community conflicts linked to the Fulbe population in order to effectively recruit them, as has widely been seen elsewhere in the Sahel. This is particularly the case through the conflict between Fulbes and Gourmantches.

Historically, the relationship between Fulbes and Gourmantches is complex. Fulbes are land chiefs in the north of Burkina Faso in the current Sahel region. The Gourmantche kingdom borders this Sahel region, because it is located to its south in the Eastern region of Burkina Faso with Fada N'Gourma as its capital. The proximity between the two communities has created a strong historical background which is well-known locally. Thus, the 19th century was a particularly difficult period at the time of the Fulbe jihad when the Fulbe Empire of Sokoto attempted to conquer the Gourmantche kingdom. Fulbe people had already moved and at that time started living in Gourmantche land; for instance, they were the herdsmen of the Gourmantche aristocracy⁸⁵. This generated a Fulbe clan called Fulbe Gourmantche and trans-community marriages took place. The attempted conquest of the Sokoto Empire would have reversed the roles between the Gourmantche master and the Fulbe herdsmen. The victory of the Sokoto Empire was temporary and the Gourmantches regained control of their land to this day⁸⁶. Like the Malian Katibats who mobilised history⁸⁷, the jihadists of Katibat Mouslimou in Kompienga did the same to recruit members of the Fulbe community⁸⁸. Even more so, beyond history, more concrete tensions were created that emanated from conflicts between farmers, mainly Gourmantches, and herders, mainly Fulbe. This type of community tension exacerbates feelings of insecurity, which in turn, encourages individuals to join armed factions to find security for themselves and their family. Some joined jihadist groups, some joined the army auxiliary – Volontaires de la Patrie (VDPs). This choice is not done freely. Some areas turned towards VDPs, others turned more towards jihadist groups. Individuals in such areas do not have an individual choice, they have to go along with the local consensus to best protect themselves and their family. Hence, some Fulbes became VDPs and some Gourmantches joined jihadist groups. This is why we attempt to highlight that the Kompienga Katibat is not limited to recruiting among members of the Fulbe community. This is also a constant in the Katibats of the Sahel. If recruiting a category of the population first is a way to grow initially, we often observe more heterogeneous recruitments later on. Indeed, survival strategies incentivise populations living in a territory under strong jihadist influence to join such groups. This is why nobody should be surprised when we confirm that some members of every community, living near or around the Katibat Mouslimou, have been approached and recruited by armed groups with more or less success.

In this context, the Savanes were predisposed to being destabilised by these community tensions and therefore by the risk of an extension of jihadism. As explained previously, the prefectures of Cinkasse, Tone, Kpendjal-West and Kpendjal are linked to Burkina Faso due to populations affiliated with the Gourmantche chiefdom system. Beyond the incessant movements that traditionally take place between the two countries' populations, there are countless blood ties on both sides of the border. More so, community tensions have the unpleasant tendency of being easily exported across state borders. The calls for murder and the abuses committed in Eastern Burkina Faso are known to the same populations in the Togolese Savanes. An anti-Fulbe discourse was thus slowly but surely cultivated by the Gourmantche and Moba populations in the Savanes. The people interviewed for this work were very clear. Togolese Mobas and Gourmantches spoke to us in very harsh terms about the terrible relations they have with the Fulbe population: "The Fulbes today are barbarians, thieves, jihadists, traffickers. [...] The situation with them is not good and it risks degenerating one day. We risk witnessing a genocide⁸⁹." We must add that it is clear from our interviews that if relations are bad with the Fulbe community in general, the communities living on the border with Burkina Faso are unsurprisingly much more radical than on average⁹⁰.

Interestingly, many people interviewed also spontaneously underlined that they were aware that improving relations between the Fulbe community and their Gourmantche community is vital to secure their region against attacks: “it is our salvation, even if it is difficult, there has to be a way to bring us closer to the Fulbe again⁹¹.”

At this stage, just as in Burkina Faso, the Komienga group is exploiting these divisions in the Togolese Savanes. Recruitment took place, both among Fulbes who felt stigmatised and among Gourmantches for more economic reasons. Many are also forced to comply with the groups when living in heavily insecure areas.

This is why Togo’s challenge in the Savanes is not only immense, but different from what Benin may experience. The upper half of the Savanes are Sahelian lands, where the conflicts in Burkina Faso spill over unchecked, particularly on pockets of Togolese territory like Kpendjal, which are largely underdeveloped. All this takes place while a major jihadist group is on the other side of the border.

To conclude this part on insecurity in Togo and Benin, the overall lesson is that it is clear that the armed groups have initiated a slow process for the spillover from the Sahel to both coastal countries. Jihadist groups are trying to destabilise the Savanes, Alibori and Atacora with a combination of sporadic attacks and an infiltration attempt; the success of which varies depending on the area. This situation poses two major difficulties. The first difficulty is that the slow nature of the infiltration process is interrupted by brutal attacks, which suddenly extend beyond the territories usually targeted. This makes it difficult to plan long-term actions to support the population. Secondly, and more urgently, if the number of those killed by jihadism and the territories attacked continue to be limited, we witness a profound social and economic destabilisation of its populations. This leads to an increase in banditry, as we explained earlier. Once the vicious circle is set in place, as already seen in the Sahel, where jihadism exacerbates the population’s living conditions and which in turn strengthen jihadist groups, it will become extremely difficult to stop.

1. 20/07/24 – Kpinkankandi (Mandouri Canton, Kpendjal): The Advanced Operational Post of Kpinkankandi is taken over by a hundred of JNIM fighters. At least 12 Togolese soldiers lost their life.
2. 23/07/24 – Bouldjoaré (Borgou Canton, Kpendjal): Jihadists came to the village of Bouldjoaré and executed two civilians.
3. 11/07/2024 – Namartinga (Borgou Canton, Kpendjal): Jihadist groups came to threaten the population, ordering them to leave. IEDs were later found in the vicinity.
4. 27/06/2024 – Boulandi (Mogou, Oti Sud): IED spotted and defused.
5. 25/06/2024 – Mogou Canton (Oti Sud): Ambush leading to the death of several civilians.
6. 18/06/2024 – Bonzougou (Mango, Oti): IED exploded on civilians passing by. Four civilians killed and two heavily injured.
7. 21/06/2024 – Kpétindjoaga (Borgou, Kpendjal): Ambush on a military patrol, at least two soldiers died.
8. 18/07/2024 – Yiégou (Borgou, Kpendjal): Two civilians executed by jihadists.
9. 09/08/2024 – Nouari (Matéri, Atacora): Military position attacked by jihadists, 2 soldiers killed.
10. 24/07/2024 – Park W: Military position in the park attacked and overwhelmed, 12 soldiers and rangers killed.
11. 19/07/2024 – 22/07/2024 – Toucountouna (Atacora): Assassination of a man and movements of armed men in this area.
12. 04/06/2024 –Pondjari Park: Ambush on a FAB’s patrol, six soldiers were killed.
13. 23/05/2024 – Kaobagou (Kerou, Atacora): Shoot fired from a distance on a military FAB position.
14. 20/05/2024 – Dangazori (Karimama, Alibori): A school was burned by a group of jihadists.
15. 16/04/2024 – Monkassa (Malanville, Alibori): Customs office attacked by jihadists from JNIM, three people killed including a soldier.
16. 21/03/2024 – Angaradebou (Kandi, Alibori): The Angaradebou police station is attacked and burned.
17. 04/2024 – Guilmaro (Kouande, Atacora): Multiple movement of armed motorbikes.
18. 09/11/2024 – Gbamonte (Papri, Kpendjal-Ouest): Attack on the Gbamonte “Forward Operational Post”
19. 20/11/2024 – Bangou (Malanville, Alibori): Ambush on a FAB convoy.
20. 25/11/2024 – Kantoro (Malanville, Alibori): Construction equipment for the road burned in the night

- 21. 02/12/2024 – Money (Malanville, Alibori): Attack on a FAB Position at Money
- 22. 08/12/2024 – Pendjari Park: Ambush on a FAB patrol.
- 23. 14/12/2024 – Firou (Kérou, Atacora): Police station attacked.
- 24. 08/01/2025 – Park W: Attack on a FAB position leading to a record number of soldiers casualties.

Map 6 : Insecurity in northern Togo and Northern Benin

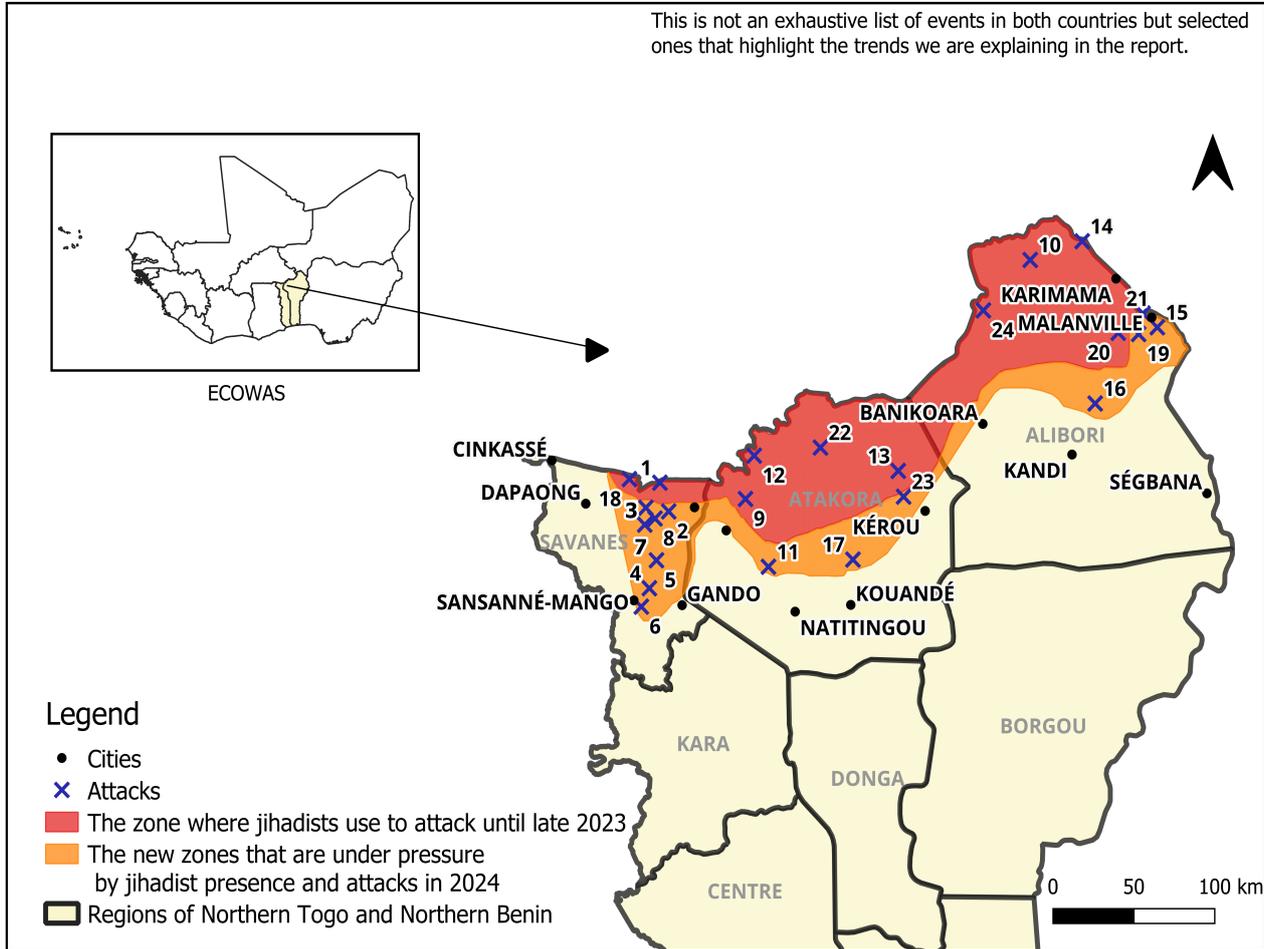


Table n°4: The Limited Risk of an Expansion of the Gourmantche and Fulbe Conflict in Benin

If this danger is significant in Togo, it is less so in Benin. Indeed, in Benin, on the Atacora side and all around the Pendjari and W parks, there are Gourmantche and Fulbe populations. Nevertheless, unlike the Savanes region, these Gourmantche communities are of much less importance. The Gourmantches are de facto less exported to Benin, their number is smaller. In addition, there are culturally Gourmantche-influenced populations in northern Benin. However, far from the case of the Mobas who have become impossible to differentiate from Gourmantches, the Beninese populations, notably Natemba, Waama and Berba, have retained not only their singularity, but also have a more complex relationship with their neighbour in Burkina Faso. Indeed, as explained previously, the Mobas experienced an invasion followed by a successful coexistence with the Gourmantches, like the Wassangaris with the Baribas. Conversely, most of the communities from Burkina Faso who migrated to Atacora did so because they were chased away by the Gourmantche masters. This is particularly the case of the Berba and Natemba who preserve the legends of their exodus to Atacora.⁹² The Natembas notably have traditions that feature their flight to the mountains. It is, for instance, a rite of passage for younger generations. These communities who once in Atacora lived with the fear of Gourmantche raids. It is therefore not surprising to see these communities cultivate their uniqueness. The extension of

tensions between Gourmantche and Fulbe from Burkina Faso would therefore occur less naturally in western Atacora.

There is, however, an area where there are already risks of tensions between Gourmantches and Fulbes in Benin; these are the communes of Kerou and Banikoara. In these two communes, the biggest community are the Baribas. Thus in Kerou, where the Baribas represent more than 50 percent of the population, the Fulbes and the Gourmantches make up around 20 percent⁹³. These proportions are similar in Banikoara. Like the Savanes, jihadist attacks have instigated troubled relations between Fulbes and Gourmantches in these communes. Indeed, during the May 2023 attacks against civilians in Kaobagou and the surrounding area of Banikoara, the victims were mainly from the Gourmantche community. Since then, the Fulbe community, accused of being in collaboration and settling scores thanks to the jihadists, have had to pack up. The Fulbe from the affected arrondissements of Kaobagou in Kerou, Firou in Banikoara, but also in the arrondissement of Guilmaro in the commune of Kouandé, have mostly left. They went to Tanguieta, Kerou centre, Kouandé, Banikoara centre or Kandi. They feel like they are being driven out with the consent of the administrative and military authorities. A Fulbe from Kerou summarises the situation "In 2023, our Gourmantche brothers suffered barbaric attacks. After that, it was no longer the same. People said the barbarians were Fulbe. The Gourmantche people were angry with us. The military began to exert too much control over our community. We witnessed arrests that we did not understand. We have to tell the truth; we were thrown out. We took our things and left."⁹⁴

It should be noted that the departures of Fulbes from villages are all the more problematic, as they tend to reinforce the belief held by other communities that they had something to hide in the first place⁹⁵.

Without Economy or Social Life, Populations Awaiting a Miracle

The great unknown concerning the security deterioration in the north of the coastal countries is the situation facing its populations. Their territory quickly experienced the descent of armed groups from the Sahel and the rise of security forces to secure the borders. Consequently, stuck on this front line, the balance and everyday lives of the populations living in this area are called into question. Beyond their physical security, there is also the issue of adaptations made by these populations in the short term and whether these are viable over the long term because insecurity in these territories is intended to last. Economically, the populations are undergoing a deep crisis. The prices of goods are exploding due to the difficulty in producing locally and importing goods that the villages now lack. As for income-generating activities, they are in jeopardy. A large number of them have simply disappeared, while others have become less profitable and often risky. The main explanation for this is that individuals now have great difficulty in moving around. It is difficult to move inside one's prefecture or department, let alone going to a neighbouring country. More strikingly, we are witnessing a switch, with a population favouring survival strategies. Indeed, the difficulty in generating wealth through trade, coupled with the difficulty in now producing food through agriculture, leads to a growing food insecurity in those territories.⁹⁶ There is no doubt that this will be more deadly than the attacks of jihadist groups. Socially, cohesion is clearly in decline. In the areas most affected by insecurity such as the Kpendjal prefecture in Togo or the commune of Karimama in Benin, people are withdrawing into silence. Generalised distrust prevents the population from expressing what they experience at risk of being targeted⁹⁷. In this context, the reception of refugees and the deterioration of relations with the Fulbe community must be addressed. Today, these are particularly fragile points in the social cohesion, which must be strengthened as quickly as possible.

Asked about the viability of their situation, the vast majority of the populations explained to us that they did not really have any alternative or replacement strategy other than "waiting and praying"⁹⁸. There is a risk, however, that the situation may not evolve quickly.

I. Destruction of the Local Economy and Risk of Famine in the North

The Savanes region in Togo and those of Alibori as well as Atacora in Benin have long been the least developed and most impoverished regions of their respective countries. The numbers show clearly show this. Alibori and Atacora are thus the departments with the worst infrastructure and the lowest level of urbanisation in Benin⁹⁹. They also have the worst public services, as well as the highest rate of extreme poverty in the country.¹⁰⁰ The same goes for the Togolese Savanes: a region with the highest poverty index rate in the country^{101,102}, lowest purchasing power in the country,¹⁰³ lowest region in net enrollment rate at school...¹⁰⁴

Added to these long-standing economic difficulties are the restrictions that inevitably face a region where a military operation is dispatched to fight against forms of insurgencies. This should now be noted. It is clear that enrichment strategies for the populations, which were beginning to bear fruit, are now abandoned by them in order to primarily focus on their survival. Hunger is spreading in the north of Togo and Benin.

1. Agriculture: Less Land, More Conflicts

Land and agriculture go hand in hand in northern Benin and Togo.¹⁰⁵ Agriculture is by far the leading economic activity in terms of wealth produced and capacity to provide employment.¹⁰⁶ More importance could have been placed on activities such as pastoralism and mineral exploitation. However, pastoralism is a traditionally limited activity in coastal countries, as common practice relies on the arrival of animals from the Sahel and the minerals are still little exploited. As a result, agriculture weighs heavily on the lives of individuals and has considerable political importance. At individual level, farmers try to find a balance between producing agriculture that feeds them, this is subsistence agriculture, and also products that can be resold, this is cash-crop agriculture. A well-known cash-crop agriculture for instance in Benin is its now famous cotton production, which is trivially nicknamed “white gold”¹⁰⁷. Access to land is a wealth that has created a significant market around it. Owning land is not the only way to exploit it: some are hired to do it, others rent it. As a result, wealth represented by this access to land generates countless conflicts, which can inevitably lead to fatal clashes. In order to best regulate this practice and avoid the worst, many local agreements exist around the access to land in any given area. However, with the advent of insecurity, much has been called into question.

The factor that most affects the livelihoods of most individuals in northern Benin and Togo is the loss of available land. Insecurity has quite simply made large parts of the territory inaccessible and/or too dangerous for farmers.

The first lands that both the Beninese and Togolese had to abandon were in Burkina Faso and Niger. This information went relatively unnoticed, but many farmers in the Savanes, Alibori and Atacora have experienced ruin in recent years. They are on the front line of people counted as Internally Displaced People (IDPs). Many of them owned land located on the border between their countries and Burkina Faso or Niger, allowing them to often travel back and forth between their village and their fields. From 2021, with the rise of insecurity and controls, this way of life has become impossible: “We did not want to abandon our land, but when we crossed the border, we were afraid and the worst thing was that we became suspects when returning to the village. We were being controlled. I know people who have been arrested. We had to stop”¹⁰⁸. Even today, there are many cases of civilians who, unlike the person interviewed, cannot accept abandoning their fields in Burkina Faso and Niger; this often leads to deadly incidents. They may be executed by jihadist groups, or killed by security forces on high alert and who may be surprised to encounter civilians in war zones. Subsequently, land on Beninese and Togolese territory also had to be abandoned.

On the Beninese side, this mainly concerns land located around the Pendjari and W parks. These parks used to offer quality land for farmers. Historically, this has led to significant forms of deforestation in the parks¹⁰⁹. Since 2017, with a stricter national policy for the preservation of parks and the arrival of a South African NGO, African Parks, to ensure this, farmers gradually accepted their limited exploitation of lands bordering the Pendjari and the W. From December 2022, jihadist groups began tightening their grip around Beninese parks. Evictions of villages increased as well as the intimidation of civilians going to or near parks. Poachers, herdsmen, fishermen, gatherers and farmers in the parks began to be beaten and threatened with death on a regular basis. From January 2023, executions took place in the parks. The message from the jihadists for the rest of the populations was clear. The bodies were often left exposed. For the communes of Materi, Kouandé, Kerou, Banikoara and Karimama, large swathes of their territory have become simply inaccessible.

On the Togolese side, the prefectures of Kpendjal and Kpendjal-West are known as “the breadbasket of the Savanes”¹¹⁰. Originally, Kpendjal was considered lower-quality land, which meant populations had a limited interest in it. This partially explains its lower demographic presence. However, the populations of the Savanes, particularly Mobas, had growing food needs owing to an increase in population. This led them to develop an expertise in agricultural production on these lower quality lands.¹¹¹ The populations had notably developed knowledge of off-season agriculture near the river, which had markedly improved their food security.¹¹² Since then, access to these lands has become complex and too dangerous. Similar to what happened in Benin, as of early 2022, Togolese farmers began to be intimidated and killed while in their fields. Since then, with the exception of the most daring, the lands

near the Burkinabe and Beninese borders have been abandoned. Specifically, the “breadbasket of the Savanes” is no more.

Those who owned this land describe having lost everything.¹¹³ More so, if the danger is greater at the frontiers or closer to the parks, it also exists everywhere to a certain extent. Most farmers have tried to devise techniques to mitigate risks. When soldiers are not available to accompany the farmers in the field, they travel in groups and some of them are responsible for watching while the others work. Farmers have also gained knowledge about the areas that are most likely to have IEDs, which pose a major danger.

This situation results in a dramatic decrease in output for the fields that continue to exist. Farmers can no longer spend as much time as necessary in their fields. They all describe how their production has dropped significantly. “Our fields are full of weeds now, we no longer care for them as we did before”¹¹⁴. It is not just insecurity that reduces farmers’ working hours, it is also the curfews. In northern Benin, for example, since March 10, 2023, travel has been prohibited between 7 p.m. and 6 a.m.¹¹⁵ Those are hours during which you cannot work and it greatly affects farmers whose land is far away from their homes owing to the added travel time. Farmers bordering neighbouring countries also describe how certain villages lack labour because they had employed foreigners from the other side of the border in the past, but who can no longer come. “I had the workforce that came from other localities even from Niger. But since insecurity has set in, I no longer have enough workers for my fields”¹¹⁶. Many farmers also explained that they could no longer engage in cash crop farming. This cash crop agriculture primarily refers to the production of cotton, soya and sesame. Many farmers have gradually switched to cash crop farming with the help of the State and international programmes. The most profitable model was to reserve a small part of one’s land for subsistence agriculture, mainly corn or sorghum for one’s own consumption, and to make a profit on the rest in order to derive a net economic benefit. The limitation of land and insecurity have made this more difficult. The main need is to provide for families who sometimes had to welcome refugees. “Before we also grew commercial crops like cotton; sesame and others but in this situation, we exploit the little land that remains to us to feed ourselves. It is not even enough”¹¹⁷. Worse still, cash crop orientated farmers have angrily discovered that the disorganisation of the markets no longer allows them to effectively resell their production, which loses value in the process.¹¹⁸ Multiple problems arise with their resale. In many remote villages, resale was carried out via bulk buyers who passed from village to village. In light of the insecurity, these buyers no longer travel to certain areas, leaving farmers to manage by themselves.¹¹⁹ Others explain that their products used to be sold to residents of neighbouring countries, particularly in Togo for Atacora products, and that this is no longer possible.¹²⁰ Finally, soy producers voice their disappointment at having to resell their product to the State as required by the new regulations since April 2024.¹²¹ Purchase prices are low and do not make soy production attractive. More generally, rent-oriented farmers explain that they are forced to resell their product at discounted prices and that they would have been better off growing food products.¹²² These are ultimately more useful and easier to resell.

The lack of available land and the difficulties in farming are now fuelling the countless land conflicts that agitate the Savanes, Alibori and Atacora. The interview of a traditional chief sums up the situation perfectly: “there is less land, so it’s gaining value and people are more desperate, so we have more conflicts. Now we are called everywhere [to mediate]”.¹²³ This goes beyond agriculture. For example, fishermen told us about old conflicts which are likely to resurface for the same reasons.¹²⁴ Distributions of fishing spots have become obsolete because some are no longer accessible, increasing the risk of conflicts between villages.

In this context, where food insecurity is becoming a glaring issue,¹²⁵ it is important to carefully monitor the quality of agricultural harvests. A bad harvest could portend terrible consequences for many families. In 2021, the agricultural season in northern Benin and Togo was of poor quality, pushing food product prices to increase sharply.¹²⁶ The Savanes, Alibori and Atacora would scarcely be able to sustain another season like this.

2. Trading: No Movement, No Business

The Savanes, Alibori and Atacora have historically, each in their own way, benefited from being a junction point between the Sahel and the coastal countries thanks to trading. In the Savanes, this even took place long before the existence of modern African states; towns like Mango and Cinkasse were already essential trading points for communities in the sub-region.¹²⁷ In Benin, Atacora once took advantage of its routes with Burkina Faso and Togo, just like Alibori via the border town of Malanville to trade with Niger as well as Nigeria via the arrondissement of Madecali (commune of Malanville) or the commune of Segbana.

However, with insecurity, movements are reduced and this is contrary to the concept of cross-border trade. In the words of an interviewed Savanes trader: "everything is at a standstill. Nothing is moving."¹²⁸ On the one hand, this shutdown can be explained by the many routes that were sources of significant income having simply been closed. On the Beninese side, the two routes to Burkina Faso no longer exist. The first left from Tanguieta in Atacora and went up through Porga and Koualou. The second linked Benin and Burkina Faso via the RN7 axis in the commune of Banikoara, and was closed in May 2023 by the Beninese authorities. For Benin the connection with Niger has also been severed due to diplomatic tensions between the two countries. The closure of these roads represents a major upheaval for the residents on this border. For example, the Gourmantche communities of Banikoara have always been known for their countless trips between the two countries. The goal was to take Beninese products that they sold to Burkina Faso and buy products there that they resold in shops in Banikoara. This whole industry has come to a standstill. On the Togolese side, the roads have become just as dangerous to use. The rise in power of the Kompienga group condemns movements on the Pogno-Kompienga axis. On the Cinkasse side, periods of insecurity prevent people from going to Burkina Faso. Throughout 2023 and early 2024, they were periods during which the jihadist multiplied their attacks on the trucks leaving Cinkassé to Bittou in Burkina Faso. Based around the forests of Sawenga in Burkina Faso, the jihadist would go back-and-forth to Bittou to attacks convoys. Since then, in 2024, the Burkina Faso army has cleared the area around Sawenga and has a military position there. Hence, movements between Cinkasse and Burkina Faso are possible once again. However, people live in fear that this could be rendered impossible in the future. More importantly, bandits are a growing problem in this area, they are active both on the Cinkasse-Bittou road and the Cinkasse-Dapaong road.¹²⁹

Secondary roads are developing for the most reckless and desperate. The inhabitants of Kerou and Banikoara therefore pass through Togo near Coby or Boukoubé to reach Burkina Faso via Cinkasse. In Alibori, those who want to reach Niger at all costs go through Nigeria via Segbana or cross the river as best they can. These bypasses are quite dangerous. There have been several cases of canoes capsizing on the Niger River or being fired upon by security forces to force them to turn back. Jihadists can take the same path, which makes these movements particularly suspicious and results in traders becoming targets. The passage to Nigeria is also dangerous, and several traders have told us about their fear which prevents them from attempting it.¹³⁰ Beyond the danger, these detours lead to a significant increase in transport costs and therefore in the price of the product. "Before I did Banikoara to Fada in one day, the round trip if I left early. Now if I want to go there, I have to do Togo first. It takes me three days at least. It's really expensive. I'm not even talking about the danger."¹³¹

Beyond the insecurity which reduces exchange, two phenomena make them too expensive to be put into practice. The first is the presence of security forces. Many traders are annoyed about the consequences of their presence. The countless roadblocks and controls accompanying them cause a number of "administrative issues".¹³² Besides the petty corruption that you sometimes have to rely on, controls require you to be up to date with your papers, which was not necessary in the past. "They talk to us about papers now, we've never had that before, we don't even really know how to get them."¹³³

The second major event is the ban on the sale of adulterated petrol in northern Togo and Benin. It is a double penalty for those areas concerned. Originally, petrol trafficking, mainly coming from Nigeria, was a profitable business and also a way of ensuring residents could travel at a lower price. On the Beninese side, the Tanguieta-Koualou axis provided petrol for localities in the department, as well as Burkina Faso and Togo. On the Togolese side, petrol came in from Koualou and more so from the commune of Coby. From Coby, petrol would be sold in all the Savanes. It must be understood that entire localities had no other choice but to use

adulterated petrol. For example, for a long time, Mandouri did not have a petrol pump. Even the local police used adulterated petrol. There was no alternative. For Togo, petrol trafficking was a source of work, particularly for young people. People from the eastern part of the Savanes went to work in Benin and took part in distributing petrol in the Savanes. Likewise, in the prefecture of Tandjouré, young people sold Beninese petrol all the way to Ghana.

Unfortunately, it became clear that this petrol trafficking was becoming a problem. On the one hand, petrol was also being used by the Kompienga jihadists. Individuals had even become full-time petrol carriers for jihadists. In addition, petrol trafficking is a source of income for jihadists with money flowing into Burkina Faso at the same time as adulterated petrol. The Beninese and Togolese governments gradually put an end to this trafficking from the second half of 2022. The decision was the right one, as it was possible to observe that the jihadist groups of Kompienga and Tapoa experienced supply problems from January 2023. However, the end of petrol has increased youth unemployment and now made petrol largely available at the pump. Which is more expensive. At the same time, carriers, taxis and traders have observed a dramatic increase in their costs. For instance, the zemidjans – motorcycle taxis – which are abundant in the big cities are also at a standstill: “Petrol is expensive, some places are dangerous, and people no longer want to move. We don’t gain anything anymore.”¹³⁴ More so, the decision to forbid the petrol traffic was misunderstood by individuals who benefited from it and still hold a grudge to this day: “I hate the police because they are the ones who spoiled our meals by arresting our bosses”.¹³⁵ Certain areas have more or less accepted to stop selling petrol, but others do not, such as the commune of Banikoara, which creates tense relations between the population and the security forces.

It should be noted that beyond petrol trafficking, a whole range of trafficking activities have also closed their doors, leading to a reduction in income-generating activities. During our previous work,¹³⁶ we highlighted that a certain number of Togolese villages in the Savanes were specialised in trafficking, whether in arms, drugs or medicine. Unsurprisingly, the increase in the presence of security forces has significantly disrupted this type of activity in the area. However, as one person interviewed explains, this trafficking did not disappear, they simply decided to move away from the front line by going further south in the countries concerned: “I was a carrier for people here. I went a lot to Burkina. But when the situation became complicated, the El Hadj who financed everything decided to take a few young people with them and go further south to Togo. Now there is nothing more to do here.”¹³⁷ Like Benin, idle youth are turning to banditry. This is becoming a serious problem in the Savanes. They are increasing ambushes on certain roads, robbing establishments and racketeering against traders.¹³⁸

Local markets are withering away in most border towns. Traders explain that they can no longer travel to the many different markets and only go to those closest to them. This reduces their customer base and their profit. Also, in communities particularly affected by insecurity like Karimama, many husbands explained to us that they now forbid their children and wives from going to the markets, even in their own locality: “Before my wife and my children went to the market to sell a little. Now I told them not to go there anymore. It’s too dangerous, even if we lose money, they have to stay here.”¹³⁹ Women’s income-generating activities are also affected due to the curfew. The latter heavily penalises bars and eating places. However, these are activities in which many women had specialised. Women told us, for example, about the loss of income that the curfew represents for them, as they were used to staying up late to sell food to traders and farmers returning home in the evening.¹⁴⁰

Supply chains are also greatly destabilised. Similar to the traders we mentioned above, going from village to village to buy agricultural products in large quantities, there were people touring the villages to sell what they needed. Now, these itinerant traders avoid many villages due to insecurity, which isolates them considerably. The disappearance of these “large resellers” affects the products that circulate at the level of the smallest markets by “small resellers”.¹⁴¹ Many village residents explained that they were having difficulty obtaining such essential goods like fertilisers or medicine.¹⁴²

More broadly, traders explain that they are suffering from the economic crisis which is currently pushing people to save as much as possible and spend only on the essentials. The traders all told us about the disappearance of their customers: “people no longer have money here. Money no longer moves. So people don’t spend anything anymore.”¹⁴³ Many traders have told us of their desire to move further south, even if they are aware that this would further weaken the northern territories: “I will leave at some point. There is nothing left here. The people are poor.

There is too much control so people are afraid to go to the market like before. Young people don't come because they don't want to be stopped and questioned. [...] We have to increase prices because otherwise we go into debt, but with the new prices people want even less. [...] People don't want us to leave you know? They don't want to. But what am I supposed to do?".¹⁴⁴

Figure: Corn price and a few other items on the major markets of the Savanes, Alibori and Atacora.¹⁴⁵

Market	Corn (2,5kg)			Meat (kg)			Rice (25kg)		
	2021	2022	2024	2021	2022	2024	2021		2024
Mango	350		750	800/1000		1500			
Malanville		375	875		1000	2000			
Natitingou		500	800						
Mandouri		350	725						
Cinkasse	350		675				14500		19000

3. Pastoralism: Without Transhumance or Sedentarisation, No Affordable Meat

In the north of Togo, pastoralism is dying, while in the north of Benin it is running out of steam. Savanes, Alibori and Atacora used to be essential for the arrival of animals embarking on transhumance from the Sahel to the coastal countries. As a result, a number of markets were built to allow for the arrival of animals and sell them. With the ban on cross-border transhumance in Benin in December 2019 and Togo in January 2021, these markets were destined to struggle. From now on, many Sahelian herders have brought their animals further south inside the coastal countries, particularly in their middle belt with the idea of not going back to the Sahel because of the insecurity.¹⁴⁶ A herder explains: "Before, markets in the north were selling cattle to the south of the country. Now it is reversed. We have to buy cattle coming from the south".¹⁴⁷ Hence, many markets such as the ones of Cinkasse and Gando in the Savanes or Tanguieta in Benin are struggling. A butcher explains: "before insecurity, I would kill 15 to 20 goats a day. Now, people are saving money, so I kill three to four a day".¹⁴⁸ Other markets were closed. In Togo, for security purposes the authorities shut down the market of Koundjoaré at the end of 2022 and the Borgou market in March 2023. In Benin, the Karimama market collapsed due to insecurity during 2023. As a consequence, the price of animals and meat is getting out of hand.¹⁴⁹

In principle, the Togolese and Beninese livestock markets should now have been busy thanks to sedentarisation. Sedentary herding or ranching is a breeding method based on animals living in an enclosed plot of land. Thus, in both countries, a reserve of cattle and other small ruminants (sheep and goats) should have emerged thanks to the creation of livestock parks. In June 2021, a "Haut Commissariat à la Sédentarisation" was created in Benin to implement this project. Funds have even been found to implement this sedentarisation with the World Bank's COSO programme launched in 2022. However, beyond some land clearing, ranching did not begin two years later. At most, there is still one piece of land in the north that has been reserved in the commune of Gogounou spanning 2000 hectares which is still being used. Without either the complete takeover of transhumance or sedentarisation, especially with a model that considers the two approaches to be in opposition, meat prices are doomed to increase in the northern territories.

Nevertheless, contrary to what has been presented elsewhere, it should be mentioned that the Fulbe population of Benin and Togo are not hostile to sedentarisation. Most are actually supportive. When Benin made the decision to ban cross-border transhumance in 2019, one could have reasonably expected to see the Beninese Fulbe community to be opposed. They were not. The decision was supported for several reasons.¹⁵⁰ The first reason concerns the land. Many Beninese Fulbe who did not own land, saw sedentarisation as an excellent process that would allow them to gain some. Also, part of the Fulbe community, especially its intellectual elite, perceived sedentarisation as a modern feature allowing the better anchoring of the Beninese Fulbe, which could ultimately be accompanied by greater political weight at national level. As a result, the Beninese Fulbe communities, but also the Togolese, have shown little support for the lobbying attempts undertaken by the Fulbe of the Sahel, desperate to see welcoming lands that are closed to them.¹⁵¹ Even today, many Beninese and Togolese Fulbes have told us about their support in theory for settling down for the reasons mentioned above.¹⁵² However, it is clear that settlement projects in Benin and Togo are taking time to get started and the populations are growing impatient. A trader from a Beninese livestock market sums up: "we don't know what is happening, in the meantime it's difficult here, herders no longer come to the markets because they are afraid of controls or that they will be accused of being transhumants".¹⁵³

II. Fear of the Fulbes and Fear of the Refugees, the Populations on Edge

Social cohesion in northern Togo and Benin is affected. It could not be otherwise. With increasing physical, food and economic insecurity, populations instinct for survival kicks in, in which they favour the well-being of their individual and ethnic group. The situation in the Sahel teaches us that we must be concerned when the deterioration of this social cohesion is such that it leads to minorities being stigmatised. Minorities which are often already vulnerable. We will focus on the fate of the Fulbes and refugees in both countries.

1. Katibats Recruiting from all Communities but the Fulbes the Most

When it comes to economic issues, the Fulbe community of Togo and Benin is not unique. All communities are affected by the economic crisis. However, we must be clear regarding security issues and recruitment by jihadist groups. Social cohesion around the Beninese and Togolese Fulbe communities is a crucial element for the security of these two countries. Jihadist groups are taking advantage by using recruitment techniques that have proven to be effective in the Sahel and that are merely repeated in Benin and Togo. In addition to these Togolese and Beninese Fulbe recruits, we must highlight the importance of having a better management as well as better reception of Sahelian Fulbe refugees in coastal countries.

a) The Fate of the Fulbe Populations of Benin and Togo

The relationship between the Fulbe community and the other inhabitants of Alibori, Atacora and Savanes is deteriorating at a worrying speed. In areas where the presence and actions of jihadist groups are recurrent, there is a strong feeling of distrust which deeply undermines social relations.¹⁵⁴ Due to the fact that attacks have undoubtedly been carried out in certain localities by Fulbe jihadists, the entire community is seen as being suspicious.

However, jihadists are merely exploiting local conflicts to achieve their ends, which is to recruit individuals whoever they may be. The first two cases that we were able to document of Beninese Fulbe recruited by the Kompienga group, came from two local conflicts, the Coby conflict in 2018 and that of Toucountouna in 2021. These two communes are in the department of Atacora.

In 2018, following the unexplained death of a farmer from Coby in his field, presumably by a transhumant herder, the inhabitants of his village attacked the surrounding Fulbe camps in retaliation. Many huts were burned, animals massacred, thousands of Fulbes had fled and the human toll remains uncertain, but it is estimated at around ten people killed.¹⁵⁵ A certain number of displaced people have settled further north on the border with Togo and Burkina Faso. It is now known that certain young people who cultivated clear resentment since this episode have joined jihadist groups in Burkina Faso. The same goes for the April 2021 event in Toucountouna, where in the village of Tchakalalou, indigenous communities attacked a Fulbe camp, they also burned huts and killed animals. A Fulbe chief whom we questioned about the event a few months after it happened, answered us honestly: "Yes, young people from Tchakalalou have joined Burkina. We tried to hold them back, but we didn't succeed. We must understand that they had nothing left and that they had the feeling of having been abandoned."¹⁵⁶ These are the usual methods of armed groups to prey on fragile individuals full of frustrations.¹⁵⁷

It is also vital to maintain a degree of trust between the security forces and the Fulbe community. This can be a challenge, as Fulbes are for instance widely known as fearing security forces. In Togo, for example, the first attack on the Kpinkankandi military camp on May 10, 2022 apparently marked a turning point. The attackers could be identified at least in part as Fulbes. From then on, relations between the security force and the Fulbe community in Togo became tense. Numerous arrests took place during the following days in Fulbe camps. Since then, the killing by jihadists, some being Fulbes, of around 30 civilians in Kpendjal in February 2023, as well as the attack last July on the Kpinkankandi military camp where the jihadist group staged its victory with a Fulbe speaking cameraman, does nothing to help the situation. However, it is important not to fall into the trap. Jihadist groups are trying to exacerbate these community tensions. The abuses on Fulbes that do occur in Benin and Togo work to the advantage of the jihadist groups. The abuses of law enforcement must be taken seriously. Togo reacted perfectly, for example, when an accident took place on July 9, 2022 with a military drone killing seven Fulbe children on the evening of the start of Tabaski (the name for Eid al-Adha in West Africa). The investigation and explanations made it possible to avoid propaganda that would have been easy for jihadist groups to use.¹⁵⁸

This type of action should be carried out more regularly. For example, in Benin, since June 2024, there have been several episodes of cattle killings in the park by APN rangers, probably in a mixed team with FABs. There have already been more than 150 animals slaughtered in the woods.¹⁵⁹ This type of unlawful abuse has serious consequences for the security of a country and provides no gain.

A Fulbe from Kpendjal in the Savanes concludes: "Here, the radicalisation of some Fulbes is the result of accumulated injustices. They were indoctrinated because they were sold illusions of independence in the face of all these injustices suffered. The Fulbe community is not accepted. We are always told we are strangers. We live in difficult conditions. We have no development project for our community. We are arrested. We are insulted as being jihadists. It is not possible to be surprised that some really turn into jihadists with all of that. It is not possible".¹⁶⁰

b) A Ban on Cross-Border Transhumance Creating Fertile Ground for Violent Extremism off the Borders of Coastal Countries

It is often argued that the ban on transhumance in Benin was motivated by security considerations. This is not completely accurate. Transhumance in Benin has been in the current presidential project since 2016. It was conceived as being opposed to modernity and too deadly with around 50 deaths every year due to farmer-herder conflicts.¹⁶¹ This led to a ban on transhumance for the 2020 season. However, it subsequently became clear that infiltration by members of armed jihadist groups had taken place during the transhumance period.¹⁶² This reinforced the desire to ban it and Togo's decision in 2021 surely seems to be mainly for this reason, linked to the rise in insecurity at its borders at the time. Nonetheless, from a security standpoint, there can now be no doubt that this ban on transhumance is counterproductive for coastal countries.

When the ban on transhumance became a reality in Benin and then in Togo, the question was raised of the destabilisation that this decision would cause in the Sahelian states. This ban jeopardised a prosperous sector of activity in these countries, particularly Niger. It did not take long before we heard the first stories of livestock dying on the border with the coastal countries where they were stuck.¹⁶³ It was then speculated whether cattle owners or herds-men might join the groups, having lost their wealth. However, today, it is possible to clearly assert that the ban on transhumance, which is not limited to that of Togo and Benin, is used by jihadist groups in the south of the Sahel, to recruit in large numbers.

Anyone following the issue of refugee arrivals in Benin and Togo notes a factual situation, which is that the refugees are rarely Fulbes. The bulk of refugees come from other communities. The reason is not that the Fulbes do not flee areas of instability. Many Fulbe fled the eastern part of Burkina Faso due to the untenable level of insecurity caused by the jihadists. The reality is simply that like any other refugee, the Fulbe flee with their most precious possessions, often livestock. However, entering Togo and Benin with these livestock, while there is a ban on transhumance, is too dangerous.

This situation is not limited to Togo and Benin, and the same goes for Ghana and Ivory Coast. In early 2023, the Ivory Coast was confronted with a considerable flow of refugees, particularly from Burkina Faso and its south-western regions where the security situation had deteriorated considerably. Populations with a large contingent of Fulbe had fled in the direction of Bounkani and Tchologo in Côte d'Ivoire. As the Fulbe refugees did so with their cattle, the Ivorian authorities were overwhelmed by the arrival of such a large number of livestock. Consequently, on May 25, 2023, the Ivorian National Security Council (CNS) banned the entry into their territory of livestock belonging to Burkinabè refugees in order to "preserve social cohesion". Ghana has followed a similar trajectory. With the ban on transhumance in Benin and Togo, as well as the difficulty for herders to return to the Ivory Coast even before the decision of the CNS, Ghana had become the main entry point for Sahelian transhumance, as well as Fulbe refugees. Ghana does not have the necessary infrastructures to accommodate transhumance, but at least there seemed to be a political willingness. However, the forced expulsions of Burkinabè refugees, particularly Fulbe from May/June 2023, have changed the situation.¹⁶⁴ The bond of trust was broken and Fulbe refugees reduced their departure to Ghana, fearing they could be deported again. In both Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, Fulbes are entering with their cattle discretely.¹⁶⁵ As a result, there is not a single Gulf of Guinea country where Fulbe refugees, especially when they own livestock, often the only wealth they have left, can easily go.

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This is catastrophic, because the need for access to Benin and Togo has never been greater for herders in eastern Burkina Faso. Specifically, insecurity makes the movements of cattle, even by trucks, between the East of Burkina Faso and the rest of the country, particularly dangerous. The herds located east of national road 18 are stuck. Some Burkinabe and Nigerien herders sensed the risk and had already crossed the country in recent years. Those who did not or could not travel, are now in a situation of great vulnerability and danger. that the coastal countries could still constitute at the time. For instance, as we explained earlier, the Katibat Mouslimou finances itself through cattle rustling in this area.

A Fulbe leader from Fada N'Gourma, having himself fled the province to take refuge like many others in Ouagadougou, explains it perfectly: "It's a big problem. We are fleeing like everyone else but those who have animals are in an impossible situation. They have nowhere to go. Some try to take refuge discreetly in Togo and Benin but they know that they can be arrested and we have many stories of animals killed by the [security forces]. Others choose to stay in the bush to hide but they are at the mercy of the jihadists. If they don't cooperate with them, they will often have their livestock stolen. Personally, I have completely lost hope."¹⁶⁶ To paraphrase, the ban on transhumance for Benin and Togo is transformed into a policy of refusing Fulbe refugees from the Sahel. The latter find themselves living in the bush and being targets for recruitment by the armed groups. Thus, these policies pursued by coastal countries actually strengthen the jihadist Katibats, which are responsible for the attacks and incursions towards the Gulf of Guinea.

This point is important to understand because some reports have quite problematically described that there is a sort of community of interest between Fulbe herders and jihadists because, like them, they are "often [Fulbe], Muslim and bushland dwellers".¹⁶⁷ This description is far from reality. Beyond the fact that it is erroneous and counterproductive to characterise the jihadists in this area as "often [Fulbe]", the relationship between herders and jihadists in this area is much more complex than that and does not resemble a good relationship at all. Pastoralists in this area are desperate and live in fear of losing their last valuable asset, which leads them to adopt survival strategies with jihadist groups who are predators with a "with us or against us" mentality. It is problematic to make the generalisation that there are herders who can support armed groups through personal ideology.

Even when we go back to the infiltrations that took place through transhumance in the second half of the 2010s to which we referred above, this must be understood in a context which is no longer relevant today. At the time, the borders were not monitored like today, these infiltrations took place via the natural movement of goods and people. It would not be the same with the deployment of military operations of Koundjoaré

in Togo and Mirador in Benin. The very notion of infiltration can be debated. If in certain cases, these movements of men affiliated with armed groups could be made with a strategy of identifying the terrain, and in many cases it was a question of benefiting from the rest zones that the coastal countries could still constitute at the time. However, in any case the reversal of the balance from a position of allowing passage to a total ban on passage is working against the coastal countries. Armed groups located off their border readily take advantage of this.

This situation is all the more counterproductive as it generates rumours among the populations of northern Benin and Togo.¹⁶⁸ The absence of Fulbe refugees reinforces the idea that the Fulbe did not need to flee and that they were all in collaboration with the jihadists in Burkina Faso. Finally, another problem, a substantial number of Fulbe refugees who prefer not to report for fear of having problems, cannot benefit from the assistance provided to other refugees.

2. The Limited Capacity and Will of Local Populations to Accept Refugees

There is general uncertainty about the number of Sahelian refugees and IDPs in Togo and Benin. In Togo, the official figures for 2023 were 47,597 displaced persons including 9,690 IDPs and 37,917 refugees.¹⁶⁹ In Benin, the figure for refugees is 17,029 individuals.¹⁷⁰ This last number does not account for IDPs, who have not yet been registered. Nonetheless, these figures, particularly in Benin, seem too low. As with the uncounted Fulbe entries, not all refugees are registered. Recently, the discussion about the arrival of 10,000 Burkinabè refugees at Banikoara in a few days,¹⁷¹ information which proved false,¹⁷² had the benefit of reviving the question of the importance of better estimations.

In any case, the burden of refugees is already being felt in their host countries. Thus, the question of reception capacity and the willingness to welcome populations from the Savanes,

Alibori and Atacora is key. Tensions between natives and refugees must be avoided at all costs.

The best form of reception is that which is organised naturally. In other words, these are the host families. These are indigenous families who shelter refugees generally from the same community under their roof. The Beninese and Togolese states are in favour of this approach. However, this situation concentrates migratory pressure on Togo rather than Benin. In fact, most of the refugees come from the Kompienga, which means they are mostly Gourmantche and Moba people. The latter tend to join Togo and prefectures like Cinkasse, Tandjouaré, Tône and Kpendjal, which are Gourmantche lands. Failing to go to Ghana, the Yangas and Mossis also do the same with a particular concentration in their host families in Cinkasse and Dapaong.

Benin is a more complicated reception point. On the one hand, the border on the Atacora side with Burkina Faso is largely controlled by security forces who do not let anyone pass and the frontier is largely mined with IEDs. Then, host families are few in number. As previously explained, Gourmantche lands are quite small in northern Benin. These are mainly villages which surround the two parks, notably in the communes of Kerou and Banikoara where the Gourmantches are sufficiently present. However, to access these villages, refugees must cross the parks which are extremely dangerous.

On the border with Niger, it is likely that the influx of refugees will increase in the years to come. Nevertheless, at this stage, Karimama still welcomes few.¹⁷³ The area is dangerous in any case and limited in available land; the refugees would not stay there and would go further south. The commune of Malanville could serve as a reception area, in particular because of the Dendi community. In any case, the border is currently closed and the Niger region of Dosso is not yet destabilised enough to push for mass departures. Today, arrivals are still happening in small numbers at a time. Looking at the history of Karimama and Malanville, the numbers will be set to increase drastically in the coming years.

The arrival of refugees and IDPs took place gradually. Benin discovered the phenomenon with a first wave of arrival in June 2021, while armed groups increased their pressure on villages around Nadiagou in Burkina, then there was a second wave from November 2021.¹⁷⁴ The first case of IDPs followed in December 2021, with Beninese populations from Koualou fleeing to Porga, too. In the process, the first ultimatums were issued by armed groups in Togolese and Beninese territories. Indeed, in their desire to control spaces and create no-go zones that allow them both to move easily and to avoid proximity with a population that could inform the army, the jihadists emptied villages. They were urged to leave within 48 or 72 hours. In February 2022, the Togolese border villages of Lalabiga and Tiwoli were visited by armed men threatening residents with death if they did not leave. Since then, cases of ultimatums have multiplied, as have the subsequent evictions of populations. This has generated a significant number of IDPs who are added to the continuous flow of Burkinabè refugees coming from Kompienga.

The capacity of the local Beninese and Togolese populations to welcome IDPs and refugees is critical. Especially if we consider that refugees come with the intention not to leave any time soon and that their arrival adds pressure on local populations. Signs of tensions against refugees soon became apparent in Togo. In 2022, waves of refugees have been greeted with great suspicion by the local population.¹⁷⁵ This arrival was seen as a risk of being infiltrated by jihadists. Arriving in the villages of Pogno and Koundjouaré, these first refugees quickly took the road towards Dapaong in order to avoid the numerous checks by the Togolese security forces at the border. In May 2023, the village of Pogno, which welcomes many refugees due to its presence on an axis that connects Kompienga and the Togolese Savanes, witnessed the first wave of anger among its inhabitants. Its population's anger was at that point not directed against the refugees, but rather against the local authorities. The local population criticised that aid was only for refugees and not enough for residents, particularly host families. They obtained an expansion of the distribution of aid which eased the situation.

Today, there are clear areas where a willingness to welcome is weak or even hostile. Schematically, as explained above, reception works when refugees go to families who are from the same community. This means that in the prefectures of Tone, Kpendjal-West, Kpendjal and Tandjouaré in Togo, the reception of refugees, the majority of whom are Gourmantche, is going well.¹⁷⁶ On the other hand, in the prefectures of Cinkasse or Oti, refugees are frowned upon by the Yanga, Mossi and Tchokossi populations. In Cinkasse, harsh words were used during our interviews with regard to the refugees: jihadists, rapists, traitors, killers and bandits.¹⁷⁷ Worse, many residents

of Cinkasse explain that they are angry when they see refugees receiving so much support: “everything goes to the refugees. We must tell our leaders that there are indigenous people who have even less than refugees. We also need help.”¹⁷⁸ The same is true in Mango, where residents take a dim view of refugees “we don’t know who they are and what they did”.¹⁷⁹ This is all the more true as the refugees are mostly Mobas or Gourmantches, and this impacts the fragile balance between Tchokossis and Mobas regarding land, which as we explained, is a sensitive subject.

This can be surprising, because a city such as Cinkasse has experienced the arrival of refugees in the past. Indeed, the countless community conflicts on the Ghanaian side of the border have often led to the departure of populations towards Togo. Asked about this, a traditional leader responds that when it comes to their perception of the situation: “It’s completely different. It’s not the same thing. The refugees who came at the time from Ghana came because there was a conflict between two communities. By coming here, they kept their problem in Ghana. In Burkina they have jihadism. They have jihadism. We don’t know who are the refugees that are coming. They bring their problem to us. Togo is now under attack.”¹⁸⁰

A possible explanation for this distrust of refugees is due to a general attitude observed among a certain number of Beninese and Togolese communities. Indeed, with the rise of insecurity in their region, communities have demonstrated a tendency to fall back on their own community. This is even clearer among smaller communities that are aware of having reduced political weight in their country and who can therefore expect less from the State. Communities are thus conducting internal discussions at the level of traditional chiefdoms about how to approach the situation and some clearly told us about their fear regarding any stranger to their own community: “We have a lot of discussions within our community about the reasons for this insecurity. Our elders told us to be wary of others, of all people who are strangers to us”¹⁸¹

In Benin the situation regarding refugees is similar. In Alibori, populations including Natemba, Waama and Berba who lived in Togo and Burkina Faso returned to their parents in Materi, Tanguieta and Natitingou. In Banikoara and Kerou, populations of Gourmantche leaving eastern Burkina Faso find refuge. There are also tensions in other localities. For example, there is an influx of refugees settling near the village of Petinga in the commune of Cobly, also near the commune of Boukoubé and around Tanguieta. Those three areas bring them into contact with Beberbè, Otammari and Wama populations who have more difficulty welcoming complete strangers and who take agricultural land to settle.¹⁸²

Whatever the case, in Benin or Togo, it is important to be vigilant about the fate of refugees, particularly regarding the forms of exploitation to which they could be subjected. This is already happening. Large sums of money can be extorted from them in order to simply rent a place, and many of them are crowded.¹⁸³ We also have reports of refugee men being sent to take care of the most dangerous agricultural lands, the most likely to be crossed by jihadists or with IEDs, while the natives no longer go there.¹⁸⁴ As for women, who form the majority of refugees, many of them have to rely on prostitution to make a living.¹⁸⁵ A refugee summarises the situation: “we are grateful for the help from the State and the World Food Programme, but our living conditions here are inhumane. We are trapped”.¹⁸⁶

Conclusion

Insecurity in Benin and Togo continues. Jihadist groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda have a clear interest in these two countries, but their strategy is being implemented slowly, notably through attempts to infiltrate the populations. The local particularities of populations tend to act either as a barrier or an entry point for armed groups. However, although the rise of jihadism is slow, it has profoundly disrupted people's lifestyles. This is cause for great concern.

A major crisis is beginning in northern Benin and Togo. People live in fear. Social cohesion is deteriorating. Furthermore, economic activities disappear while prices rise. Added to this is the large-scale arrival of refugees whose legitimate demands put strain on the situation.

The difficulty here is that those territories are already historically the most disadvantaged of Benin and Togo. In this sense, assistance by the international community could prove decisive. Unfortunately, clear difficulties exist. The populations in Kpendjal and Materi spoke to us extensively about the withdrawal of NGOs, which helped them in the past, due to growing insecurity. Some territories receive minimal aid even though they are the most destabilised, such as Karimama, Banikoara and even Malanville in Benin.^{187 188} Finally, we only have limited knowledge of the relevant populations. This prevents us from responding well to their expectations and identifying problems or conflicts in advance. It is to be hoped that international partners will engage in more in-depth planning for their support. It is especially vital to identify areas where urgency dictates that support should be mainly humanitarian, particularly for refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as areas where insecurity is unlikely to interrupt projects in the long term.¹⁸⁹ The populations themselves have already integrated this logic. The most destabilised areas hosting refugees, for example, spoke to us extensively about how helpful aid from the World Food Programme or emergency government programmes has been. Populations from the more preserved areas have requested help for more substantial long-term development projects.

Finally, from a purely security point of view, it is difficult to imagine an improvement in the situation without better coordination between Coastal and Sahelian countries. This seems difficult to achieve in the current diplomatic climate. Ideally, concerted operations, perhaps under the aegis of the Accra Initiative, between Togo, Benin, Niger and Burkina Faso should take place against the Kompienga and Tapoa groups. In addition, the lack of information exchange between Sahelian and coastal countries creates blind spots in military operations on both sides of the border, which are increasingly obvious. It is also to be hoped that consultations regarding the movements of refugees can take place. Otherwise, the worrying rise in power of the Katibats in southern Burkina Faso and Niger, which are clearly exploiting the lack of communication between countries and the gaps between their borders, risks being difficult, if not impossible to stop.

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- 19 "We Tchokossis have a problem with everybody, the Fulbes, the Mobas, the Ngangam", Interview, Tchokossi farmer, Mango ; "The Tchokossis stole our lands in Oti", Interview, Ngangam Farmer, Gando ; "The Tchokossis are a problem for everybody, for us Mobas but also the Ngangam and the Fulbes. They know that they should not have houses too far on our lands", Interview, Moba Farmer, Barkoissi.
- 20 Op. Cit. De Haan, Léo. (1999).
- 21 Field mission in Northern Togo – 2021.
- 22 For a community, being a land chief means dominating the area and managing the land. This results in a strong symbolic importance but also considerable financial advantages, particularly when it comes to a commercial city such as Cinkasse.
- 23 Constitutional Court of Benin, DCC 17-259, 12 December 2017.
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- 29 de Haan, Léo. (1997). Agriculteurs et éleveurs au Nord-Bénin : écologie et genre de vie. Khartala.

30 The 18th and 19th centuries were periods of conquest for the Fulbe community and generated Fulbe empires which continued to be famous such as the Macina Empire (Mali), the Toucouleur Empire (Senegal) or the Sokoto Empire (Nigeria).

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34 Op. Cit. Haour, Anne.

35 The Berba community is often mistakenly called "Biali". Biali is the language spoken by the Berba people.

36 Caution is needed: the Waama people is named after its most powerful clan. Hence when talking about the Waama people, reference is usually made to the Waama people, but sometimes they are talking about the Waama clan, which is one of many.

37 Otamari is the singular and when talking about multiple individuals, one should say Batammariba or Bétammaribé. However, in order to make it easy and clear, we will refer to the Otamari even when plural throughout our work. Otamari are also known as the Ditamari. Sometimes Otamari and Ditamari are even considered to be two different groups. However, they are essentially the same people.

38 Similar to the Berbas, the Natemba people are often called Nateni. Nateni is the language spoken by the Natemba people.

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49 That year, a customs post was attacked on the border between Togo and Burkina Faso. Furthermore, two tourists were kidnapped and their guide was beheaded in Benin. See RFI. (17 February 2019). *"Togo: émouvant hommage au prêtre salésien tué au Burkina"*; LeMonde. (9 May 2019). *"Français disparus au Bénin : selon des sources sécuritaires, 'la thèse d'un enlèvement se précise'"*.

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51 More so, we have had echoes on multiple occasions in the area of JNIM fighters referring to Cheick Albaani as being their leader, which would entail that Albaani is recognised and respected as such.

52 AfricaNews. (29 July 2024). *"Bénin : au moins 12 morts dans une attaque au parc W"*.

53 Interviews made by the author of the present study with the local population in July 2022. Those interviews fed a Clingendael report. See, de Bruijne, Kars. (2022). *"Conflict in the Penta-Border Area : Benin's Northern Jihad from the perspective of its neighbours"*, Clingendael.

54 We will come back to this, however, the example of the tragic attack in which a FAB patrol lost their life in the park on June 4, 2024, is not an indicator of a JNIM offensive towards Benin.

55 Lepidi, Pierre. (4 May 2023). *"Le nord du Bénin touché par deux nouvelles attaques meurtrières en deux jours"*, LeMonde.

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61 It is usually minimal. It would be at most a few oxen at a time.

62 "A lot of Fulbe families have seen their cattle get stolen by the jihadists", interview, Fulbe Herder, Kpendjal, Togo.

63 At first, these were considered to probably be bandits with links to jihadists in order to flee to Burkina Faso with the stolen livestock. Now there is no longer any doubt that these thefts are the direct work of jihadists.

64 France 24. (26 April 2022). "Attaque au Nord du Bénin, un policier tué dans un commissariat".

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74 Interviews, Nigerian researchers, Lagos, Nigeria ; interviews, herders, traders and farmers, Kalale, Nikki, Parakou, Benin. This is corroborated by another report, Op. Cit. De Bruijne and Gehrling, 2024..

75 Field mission in Northern Benin – 2020.

76 Field mission in Northern Togo – 2021.

77 Field mission in Northern Ghana – 2021.

78 Field mission in Northern Cote d'Ivoire – 2021.

79 Interview, Inhabitants of Cibly, Atacora, Benin.

80 The first event which is usually mentioned as being the first jihadist attack in Togo dates back to November 2021. However, in order to correctly analyse the situation, it is appropriate to leave this event aside for two reasons. The first is that the "attack" of November 2021 took place in the Togolese village of Sanloaga, on the border with Burkina Faso. Nonetheless, it turns out that the visit to this village in November 2021 was a mistake by a group of jihadists on motorcycles who were going to multiple Burkinabè villages in the area and probably did not understand that they had crossed the border. Also, the same village of Sanloaga had already been visited the previous year in November 2020 in similar conditions. Hence, if we are to use the November 2021 as a first event, we should actually use the November 2020 incident, which would make even less sense.

81 Khalfaoui, Mathias. (2021). "The jihadist threat in northern Ghana and Togo Stocktaking and prospects for containing the expansion". Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung ; Khalfaoui, Mathias. (2023). "L'inexorable avancée du djihadisme en Afrique : le golfe de Guinée mis au défi". Fondation Jean Jaurès.

83 Khalfaoui, Mathias and Sahel Security Analysis. (2023). "Danger at Senegal's Gates: The Jihadist Expansion towards Southwestern Mali". Hudson Institute.

82 It should be noted that the PURS is currently experiencing a surprising evolution. In November 2023, it moved from the “Emergency Programme for the Savanes” to the “Emergency Programme to Strengthen Community Resilience and Security” while keeping the acronym PURS. This new PURS targets the entire Togolese territory and no longer just the Savanes while covering “specifically areas affected or threatened by acts of terrorism and violent extremism” according to the official website of the Togolese Republic. Concretely, the PURS seems to be extending its actions to the Kara and Central regions, which could dilute its capacity to strengthen the real fault lines, the Savanes.

83 Op. Cit. Khalfaoui, Mathias. (2021).

84 Op. Cit. Khalfaoui, Mathias. (2021).

85 This is typically why the attempt in some reports to understand where jihadists are coming from based on the potential Fulbe clans, which some might be part of, is a problematic and misleading method. Fulbes from Northern Burkina Faso clans are very present in the Kompienga and have been present for centuries.

86 Kaboré, Alexis. (2010). *Brousse des uns, aire protégée des autres Histoire du peuplement, perceptions de la nature et politique des aires protégées dans le Gourma burkinabè : l'exemple de la Réserve partielle de faune de Pama*. Thèse, Institut de Hautes Etudes Internationales et du Développement ; Santoir, Christian. (1998). “Le long chemin des Gurmaabe la dérive migratoire des Peuls du Gourma burkinabé”. Institut de Recherche pour le Développement.

87 Interviews, inhabitants of Centre-Est, Burkina Faso.

88 This is not an isolated Interview. Here are some more coming all from interviews with Moba and Gourmantche farmers in the Savanes: “Since the advent of jihadism, we are suspicious of them” ; “Nobody trusts the Fulbe here” ; “everybody is scared of the Fulbes” ; “Today the Fulbes are considered by most ethnic groups in the Savanes region as the cause of the ills we experience” ; “The Fulbes will pay someday” ; “If the army was not present to protect the Fulbes, we would take care of them” ; “A genocide could happen one day”...

89 The Mobas and Gourmantche clans further south in the Savanes told us of the fear they had of the Fulbes, but the calls for murdering Fulbes are more subtle and limited compared to the ones at the border. We also noted some recurring and clearly unsubstantiated rumours about the Fulbes. We for instance were repeatedly told that some rich “barons” in Togo would be protecting all Fulbes, which would supposedly explain why the army do not dare to arrest Fulbes despite being jihadists.

90 Interview, Moba Farmer, Mandouri.

91 This is all the more revealing in the case of the Berbas. Their name refers to being grains of sand that are too elusive to be captured by raids. Interview Berbas, Matéri, Benin.

92 Commune de Kerou (2015). “Plan Communal de Conservation de la Biodiversité du Système des Aires Protégées Système des Aires Protégées des Aires Protégées : Commune de Kerou 2015-2019” ; Diogo, Rodrigue and Tama, Bignon. (2019). “Production maraîchère à Banikoara au Nord Bénin : Acteurs et pratiques pour la durabilité du système de production”. *Annales de l'Université de Parakou*. Vol. 9, N°1.

93 Interview, Fulbe, Kouandé.

94 When Togo created a buffer zone with Burkina Faso, few villages were emptied by the army. While most remained empty, some, including those north of the Tone Prefecture, have been repopulated. However, members of the Fulbe community have not returned. This generated fear and anger locally. “If they haven't come back, where are they? We are wary.” Interview, Farmer from Tone, Savanes, Togo.

95 “Hunger is killing us”, Interview, Banikoara Farmer, Alibori, Benin.

96 This is why we would advise any organisation attempting to understand the needs of populations living in Kari-mama, Malanville, Banikoara, Kérou, Tanguiéta in Benin and Kpendjal, Tone and Cinkasse in Togo to be extremely cautious when engaging with the local population. If done without the help of individuals from those communities and with a good methodology, it is impossible to get to the bottom of what is happening. The answer you might get, could often be counterproductive and misleading.

97 Countless interviews mentioned praying and waiting as their sole solution. This precise quote comes from an interview in Materi (Atacora, Benin) with a farmer.

98 UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. (2022). “Rapport sur le développement durable pour le Bénin 2022” ; Dramani, Latif and others. (2022). “Réseaux et territoires au Bénin : Accroître davantage l'investissement dans les infrastructures pour une meilleure attractivité”. GREG and INSTAD.

99 Op. Cit. UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. (2022).

100 INSEED. (2020). *Enquete Harmonisee sur les Conditions de Vie des Ménages (EHCVM) 2018-2019 - Rapport Final*.

101 The region has a population almost exclusively focused on agricultural activities (75 percent of Savanes, highest rate of all regions of Togo, while the national average is 42 percent) while it is the activity that generates the lowest amount of income on average behind activities such as crafts, construction or trade. See Karlen, Raphaela and Rother, Friederike. (2023). *Diagnostic Emploi Togo*. World Bank.

102 Op. Cit. INSEED. (2020). 106 Interview, Farmers of the Savanes, Togo.

- 103 Ministère des Enseignements Primaire et Secondaire. (2020). Tableau de bord de l'éducation au Togo 2019-2020.
- 104 This has applied even more since the 1980s. During this period, the introduction of intensive agriculture increased the individual capacity of farmers to exploit more land. This led to increasingly extensive searches for land. It is since this time that farmer/herder conflicts have increased, because the land available for the passage of animals has been greatly reduced. See Op. Cit. de Haan, Léo. (1997).
- 105 Secretariat General du Ministère - Direction de la statistique agricole. (2021). Recensement national de l'agriculture - volume 2 recensement national de l'agriculture principaux résultats du module de base ; World Bank Group. (2021). Climate risk country profile: Togo.
- 106 VOA. (23 February 2018). "Le coton, l'or blanc du Bénin".
- 107 Interview, Farmer, Savanes, Togo.
- 108 For example, the village of Guéné is in the park W according to the official boundaries dating from 1954.
- 109 In french "grenier des Savanes".
- 110 Interview, Farmers of the Savanes, Togo.
- 111 Interview, Farmers of the Savanes, Togo.
- 112 Interview, Farmer of Banikoara, Bénin.
- 113 In practice, the security forces grant some flexibility depending on the areas. The curfew is effective around 8 p.m. or 10 p.m.
- 114 Interview, Farmer from Tanguieta, Benin.
- 115 Interview, Farmer from the Savanes, Togo.
- 116 Interview, Farmer from Kerou, Benin.
- 117 Interview, Trader from Karimama, Benin.
- 118 Interview, Farmer from Natitingou, Benin.
- 119 Interview, Kerou Farmer, Benin.
- 120 Interview, Kerou Farmer, Benin.
- 121 Interview, Traditional leader from Materi, Benin.
- 122 Interview, Fisherman Karimama, Benin.
- 123 "The harvests are not even enough for our food", interview, Karimama Farmer, Benin.
- 124 Interview, Pogno Farmer, Togo.
- 125 Norris, Edward Graham. (1984). "le Commerce Haoussa de la Cola au travers du Togo (1899-1912)", J'aideuma, n°30, pp.161-183.
- 126 Interview, Trader from Cinkasse, Togo.
- 127 "It has been a month, since April, that we do not have problems with jihadits like before. The army solved the situation. But bandits are present. It is not as big a problem as jihadists, but it is still a problem". Interview, Bittou trader, Burkina Faso; "If you want to go from Cinkasse to Dapaong now, you never go at night, after 6 p.m., you should not even think about going. You will have problems", Interview, Cinkasse Trader, Savanes, Togo.
- 128 Interview, Trader, Karimama, Benin.
- 129 Interview, Trader from Banikoara, Benin.
- 130 In french: "tracasserie administrative".
- 131 Interview, Trader from Cinkasse, Togo.
- 132 Interview, Taxi-moto Driver, Natitingou, Benin.
- 133 Interview, Carrier, Materi, Benin.
- 134 Op. Cit. Khalifaoui Mathias.
- 135 Interview, Driver, Materi, Benin.
- 136 Interview, inhabitants of the Savanes, Togo.
- 137 Interview, Trader, Karimama, Benin.
- 138 Interview, Seller, Banikoara, Benin.
- 139 Interview, Trader, Natitingou, Benin.
- 140 Interview, Farmer, Malanville, Benin.
- 141 Interview, Craftsman, Dapaong, Togo.
- 142 Interview, Trader, Dapaong, Togo.
- 143 Data collected in the markets.
- 144 Interview, Herder, Kandi, Benin.
- 145 Interview, Togolese Herder, Mango, Savane.
- 146 Interview, Butcher, Tanguieta, Benin.

147 “The same animal I would sell for 15000 four years ago, I have to sell it for 50000 today. And the truth, the animal at 15000 you could invite ten people to eat and everybody would be happy. Today, you pay 50000 but you will not have enough meat for ten people”. Interview, Butcher, Materi, Benin.

148 Multiple interviews carried out in 2020 in Benin and Togo with herders from all-over the countries.

149 This was particularly evident at the time of the negotiations, in which we personally participated, between Niger and Benin in 2020 to obtain a renewal of the exception which had been given to Niger to carry out limited transhumance in Benin. “They abandoned us”, was the reaction of a Niger herder at the end of the failed negotiations in the process about the Beninese Fulbes.

150 Interviews carried out with herders in northern Benin and Togo, 2024.

151 Interview, herder, Tanguieta, Benin.

152 We were told about multiple examples of very concrete distrust towards the Fulbe community on a day-to-day level: “Before, when we had to plow our land, we would ask to borrow a bull from a Fulbe. Now it would be unimaginable to do that. We would never ask for anything”. Interview, Dendi farmer, Karimama, Benin.

153 L’Événement Précis. (14 October 2019). “Enquête/Conflits communautaires à Coby : Quand la terre divise”.

154 Interview, Fulbe Chief, Natitingou, 2021.

155 One report mentioned that “Peulh pastoralist” would be more targeted by jihadist groups for recruitment in Benin, as opposed to sedentary Fulbe. Our work and experience do not verify this. Jihadist groups in Benin and Togo primarily attempt to recruit the Fulbes based on their frustration and feeling of being stigmatised. The term “Peulh pastoralist” probably refers to that of “Red Fulbe”. The Red Fulbe are the Fulbes who take care of animals. In practice, it is possible that the Red Fulbes of Benin and Togo are de facto more targeted by jihadist groups due to their lack of access to education and the fragility of their living system, but all Fulbes are equally targeted. However, on the other hand, as we will see later, the Red Fulbe of southern Burkina Faso are indeed targeted by jihadist groups. To read the report see Bernard, Aneliese and Mossi, Aziz. (2023). “An Assessment of the Experiences and Vulnerabilities of Pastoralists and At-Risk Groups in the Atakora Department of Benin”. Elva.

156 Ouest-France. (15 July 2022). “Togo. L’armée tue sept civils par erreur”.

157 If we take a conservative figure of 150,000 CFA francs per head of livestock, this represents more or less 34,000 euros of livestock killed.

158 Interview, Fulbe, Kpendjal.

159 Interview, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fishing, 2020.

160 Field mission north Benin – 2020; Field mission north Togo – 2021.

161 Interview, Burkinabe Herder, 2021.

162 Courtright, James. (18 April 2024). “Ghana accused of expelling Fulani asylum seekers from Burkina Faso”. The New Humanitarian.

163 “The decision of the CNS is still valid I think. So what we see are herders coming to Cote d’Ivoire, but not as much as before. Also, when they come, they don’t want to be seen.”, interview, herder from Bouna, Côte d’Ivoire; “We have lost trust in Ghana after what happened. People fear if they come, they will be sent back. So people are helped by friends and family to get their cattle in”, interview, herder from Tamale, Ghana.

164 Interview, Fulbe Burkinabe Chief, 2024.

165 Complete citation “Militants have cultivated close ties with nomadic herders, who like them are often Peul, Muslim and bushland dwellers. Despite mutual distrust at first – jihadists worried that pastoralists might have government informants in their ranks, while pastoralists balked at paying Islamic alms (or zakat) – the two groups now collaborate in ways that benefit both. Jihadists give pastoralists free access to the park’s abundant grasslands, while the latter’s presence inside the park deters military action, given the high risk of civilian casualties. Pastoralists often run errands in rural markets to get insurgents their daily supplies. Militants regularly preach their version of Islam in herders’ camps, seeking recruits”. International Crisis Group. (2023). Containing Militancy in West Africa’s Park W. Africa Report N°310.

166 Interviews, People from the Savanes, Togo.

167 PURS official figures in March 2024.

168 UNHCR. (30 June 2024). Benin: Monthly Statistics.

169 DW. (24 July 2024). “Des civils burkinabè affluent vers le Bénin”.

170 Multiple residents of Banikoara denied the information. The Burkinabè refugees who are beginning the registration process had already been there for some time. They did not arrive over 24 hours.

171 Interviews with individuals from Karimama.

172 Back then, multiple organisations used July 2021 as the month when refugees started coming, but it did so a month earlier in June 2021. See UNICEF. (17 July 2021). L’UNICEF soutient les familles déplacées du Burkina au Nord-ouest du Bénin suite à la détérioration de la situation sécuritaire dans leur région. Communiqué de Presse.

173 Interview, Individuals from the Savanes, 2022.

174 There are exceptions. For instance, in areas such as the north of Tone where Togolese Mobas and Burkinabe Mobas have fought over land as we explained earlier, the reception has not been as welcoming for years.

176 Interview, People from Cinkasse.

177 Interview, People from Cinkasse.

178 Interview, People from Mango.

179 Interview, Traditional Leader from Cinkasse, Togo.

180 Interview, Individual from the Savanes, Togo.

181 Interview, People from Petinga, Benin; Interview, People from Boukoumbé, Benin; Interview, Wama People, Tanguieta, Benin.

182 Interview, People from Pogno, Togo.

183 Interview, People from the Savanes and Atacora.

184 Interview, People from Dapong, Togo.

185 Interview, Refugee, Mandouri, Togo.

186 Our work did not aim at carrying out surveys, but it is interesting to note that the question of satisfaction with international aid was asked to 68 individuals in Atacora and 49 individuals in Alibori. 36.7 percent (25 out of 68) of those questioned said they were satisfied in Atacora compared to four percent in Alibori (two out of 49). The populations of Banikoara, Karimama and Malanville spoke to us extensively about their bewilderment at receiving little to no aid from the international community, even though their situation is critical.

187 For example, intervention in Banikoara and Karimama could be decided against, in particular because of the insecurity that could compromise any operation. However, it is to be hoped that the neighbouring communes of Malanville and Kandi, which would see the pressure shifted to them, would be supported accordingly.

188 Many long-term projects in Togolese Kpendjal or in Materi in Benin have been compromised in the past four years. It was possible to predict this at the time of their design.

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