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Over decades, Africa has made significant strides in economic growth and human development. But, both COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine have changed that – pushing new boundaries on inequality as its yawning gap grows. Borderlands – home to 270 million Africans, are a major habitat demonstrating this disparity.

Established in 2021, the UNDP Africa Borderlands Centre pushes back against this trend – engineering, with local communities, targeted interventions responding to the specific needs of farmers, pastoralists, intellectuals, traders, historians, artisans, caregivers, women and youth living in Africa’s borderlands.

We are starting to see that: one, that attention produces a treasure trove of ideas that can put meat on the bones on the Leave No One Behind agenda; and two, that programmatic investments can make a real difference, if focused, first of all, on better understanding how people in borderlands see their own solutions, and then mobilizing partnerships for programmes of impact – bringing along leaders and policymakers, while putting those very borderland communities in the driver’s seat. We are learning that the people in borderlands can lead in protecting the environment, building inter-generational wealth and rebuilding social contracts – all of which have dividends in bolstering peace and security.

This inaugural Annual Report of the Africa Borderlands Centre captures UNDP’s vision for Africa’s borderlands. Since inauguration, the Centre has worked in 20 countries to advance socio-economic development and peacebuilding. In Kenya’s Turkana region, we delivered livelihood empowerment programmes to 32 groups of reformed warriors, women’s groups and youth groups. Along the Zambia-Zimbabwe border, we invested in innovative local solutions to support informal cross-border traders – targeting women and creating a new wave of promise for the African Continental Free Trade Area. And in the Liptako-Gourma region of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, our work created pathways to address the multi-dimensional impact of COVID-19, climate change and conflict.

UNDP and its partners believe that in improved circumstances, borderland communities will thrive and drive their country’s socio-economic prosperity. To get there requires paying close attention to inequality, especially in borderlands which, although portrayed as strongholds for insecurity and poverty, are in fact, pillars of promise given their land endowments, strategic geographic positioning and the enduring resilience of their communities.

This approach of tackling inequality is not only smart development practice, but also a vote for the aspirations of both Agendas 2030 and Agenda 2063 – giving the international development community new tools to stem conflict, the perils of climate change and forced displacement, and above, the tools to accelerate socio-economic transformation for sustainable development.

UNDP’s promise is to stay the course: nurturing the development intelligence we gain from engaging with borderland communities to unleash the talents and ideas within these rich cultures, as development assets. By disrupting traditional development models, the Africa Borderlands Centre aims to empower and advocate for these communities, bringing a forgotten voice to centre stage, and working from there to chart a path for the future of development.

I am proud to present the Africa Borderlands Centre’s ground-breaking work and look forward to working with all of you in sparking transformative and lasting change for these communities of immense promise.

Ahunna Eziakonwa
UN Assistant Secretary-General, UNDP
Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa
Executive Summary

Since its establishment in February 2021, the Africa Borderlands Centre (ABC) has demonstrated UNDP's unwavering commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while leaving no one behind. So much of the continent's development rests on unpacking the human and economic potential of Africa's borderland regions.

Opportunities abound, however, tapping into them requires a shift on two fronts. First, reversing the existing narrative that depicts African borderlands only as places of crisis, insecurity, humanitarian disaster, poor governance and areas prone to the impact of climate change.

Second, articulating development opportunities from the perspective of borderland communities and therefore, elevating their voices. While borderland communities may live at the periphery, their views and their ideas are not peripheral.

UNDP’s longstanding experience as a reliable development partner and SDG integrator positions the organization to fill the gaps that arise from knowledge, structural, policy and programme deficits. African borderlands can play a catalytic role in advancing and realizing the continent’s economic integration. The Centre was therefore created to shift the mindset of how borderland regions are perceived and to showcase them as unique and vibrant microcosms of development and growth.

In its first year, ABC initiated several unique and exciting programmes. For example, ABC’s 2021 Innovation Challenge revealed how local talents and innovations are best placed to solve local development challenges. As a result, four projects are currently contributing to financial inclusion for informal cross-border traders in the border regions of Sudan-South Sudan, Niger-Mali-Burkina Faso, Zambia-Zimbabwe and Benin-Ghana-Togo.

In the Sahel, the Centre designed and launched a cross-border programme, focused on promoting trade and peacebuilding in the Liptako-Gourma borderlands of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. The Centre also supported quick-impact programming, which contributed to improved livelihoods, peacebuilding and entrepreneurship at the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate-induced displacement in Sierra Leone, Niger and Namibia.

In 2021, ABC commenced production of the Encyclopaedia of Africa Borderlands, which aims to fill the vast data gaps in these regions to support research, policy and programming. The forthcoming Encyclopaedia will fill critical information gaps using borderlands experiences and key demographic, ethnographic, socioeconomic, infrastructural and other relevant data to inform our research, policy and programming.

Africa’s borderlands are vast and require a multi-stakeholder approach to addressing their unique and diverse needs. ABC’s work benefits from and is strengthened by invaluable partnerships with the African Union Commission, Regional Economic Communities, and a network of borderland communities among other stakeholders. Bringing together diverse partners and stakeholders is instrumental to elevating borderlands’ voices and addressing the multi-dimensional development challenges facing communities.

Last year, our committed staff, volunteers and partners embarked on a journey to bring policy coherence, unleash economic dynamism, promote cross-border collaboration and push for robust climate financing to support vulnerable and conflict-ridden communities.

In 2022, we look forward to continuing our work with governments, partners and borderlands communities to identify and meet development needs through unique and evidence-based solutions, such as our flagship work on how farmers and herders build resilience against multiple vulnerabilities in the borderlands, expanding our work on innovation with a focus on digital financial inclusion, designing new programmes, and building on partnerships to empower borderland communities.

Zeynu Ummer
Team Leader & Senior Technical Advisor
Africa Borderlands Centre, UNDP

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Why borderlands?
Borderlands, regions typically within 30km from international borders, are unique development spaces with often untapped opportunities. They are the territorial margins of nation-states – where border contact is a central feature of economic and political life.

Yet, the 270 million people living in Africa's borderlands are not only at risk of being left behind in the advancement towards the SDGs but also face the triple threat of conflict, COVID-19 and the impact of climate change.

Borderland communities are well-known for adapting to ever-changing, new and difficult circumstances by innovating with minimal resources. Economic development in these areas is limited, and informal cross-border trade (ICBT) creates a survival economy for many borderland inhabitants. They also often exhibit a high prevalence of extreme poverty and tend to be under-served in terms of essential services such as security, education and healthcare. This poverty is both a cause and effect of the violent conflict and insecurity afflicting many of Africa's borderlands.

Our Origin Story:
The Africa Borderlands Centre

“Working in collaboration with the African Union and Regional Economic Communities, the Centre will unlock the incredible creativity, innovation and economic potential of borderland regions.”

Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator

UNDP launched the Africa Borderlands Centre in February 2021 based on co-created ideas with the African Union Commission and Regional Economic Communities. The Centre offers specialized, expert knowledge and technical advice to better design, implement and adapt development programmes for border regions across Africa with a commitment to enhancing opportunities for people living in Africa’s borderlands and empowering them to be an integral part of all ABC development programming.
February 2021
The high-level launch event was organized in Turkana, Kenya, a region bordering South Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda to emphasize that working on borderlands requires going to borderlands and giving visibility to its issues and communities. The event was attended by over 500 in-person and virtual participants, including Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu, Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator, in the presence over 200 borderlands community stakeholders; senior Kenyan government officials; development partners; local and national media; and representatives from the UN and diplomatic communities.

Our Programme Approach
Evidence from the first 12 months since establishing the Africa Borderlands Centre demonstrates that borderlands are viable contributors to attaining the SDGs and sustaining national, regional and global economies. ABC has generated a model for socio-economic development in borderlands focused on six focus areas, three enablers and a four-pillar portfolio.
12 Months of Impact

» Our Footprint

Innovation

- Innovation Challenge
  Sudan, South Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe
  Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso
  Togo, Benin, Ghana

Programming

- Trade for Peace
  Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso

- Quick Impact
  Kenya, Uganda, Ghana
  Nigeria, Niger, Namibia
  Sierra Leone

- Scoping Mission
  Guinea, Mozambique
  Burundi

Research

- Research
  Sudan, South Sudan
  Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso

- Tanzania, Kenya
  Uganda, Ethiopia
  Ghana, Nigeria
  DRC, Chad

- Scoping Mission
  Guinea, Mozambique
2021 in Figures

01 » 🚀 270 million people living in borderlands
     1 in 5 Africans

02 » 🌍 Engaged with communities in 20 countries

03 » 💲 $5 million invested

04 » 💲 $6 million resources mobilized

05 » 📊 11 projects initiated

06 » 🧑‍🤝‍🧑 12 development partners engaged

07 » 🩸 Close partnership with the African Union and Regional Economic Communities

08 » ⌚️ Engagement with 20+ Partners globally
Africa's borderlands are a central feature of economic and political life. The livelihoods of borderland inhabitants are woven into the cross-border dynamics of trade and mobility. In response, the Africa Borderlands Centre was established to serve as a “thought leader”, delivering cutting-edge data, analysis and knowledge on critical borderlands policy and programming issues. In 2021, the Centre commissioned two research projects: a study on how farmers and pastoralists build resilience against multiple vulnerabilities and a series of Spotlight Briefs focused on issues affecting borderland communities.

1. Surviving Multiple Vulnerabilities
This research intends to offer an integrated livelihood model and development solution to security and socio-economic challenges facing borderland farmers and pastoralists in the West and Eastern Horn of Africa, drawing from the sources of resilience of the populace. The population is especially vulnerable to climatic events and heightened levels of risk, exacerbated by a lack of access to basic services such as clean water, adequate health facilities and electricity. This scarcity of resources frequently leads to conflicts among borderland communities over water and grazing land. These risks and shocks have led to the continual disruption of livelihoods and increased vulnerability in borderland regions, leaving residents at greater risk of poverty, stunted development, and depriving communities of their full human potential.

Launched in mid-2021, the research targets 1,000 borderland inhabitants through quantitative surveys, qualitative long-form interviews and featured case studies from eight African countries: Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria in West Africa and Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda in the Horn of Africa. The research will present findings and recommendations on economics and livelihoods, mobility, governance and services, conflict, environment and climate, with gender and youth as key cross-cutting themes.

2. Spotlight Briefs
A series of Spotlight Briefs were produced to better understand specific thematic issues affecting borderland communities. The Mobility and Migration in the Karamoja Cluster brief looks at the dynamic pattern of population movement in the region straddling the borders of Uganda, South Sudan, Kenya and Ethiopia.

The brief on Boko Haram and the Conflict Dynamics in the Chad Basin examines the effects of violent extremism in the context of COVID-19, climate change and cross-border migration. The findings and recommendations from this brief informed country support on climate resilience projects during COVID-19.

The brief on Informal Cross-Border Trade (ICBT) along the DRC-Uganda Border highlights the critical role of ICBT in the community's livelihoods, socio-economic benefits and growth potential. The findings contributed to the design of the 2021 innovation grants in four border regions as well as the Trade for Peace project.

The brief on Social Protection on the Kenya-Tanzania Border confirmed that women form the majority of various informal social protection systems. This provides an opportunity to economically empower women as active participants and beneficiaries within economic ecosystems and facilitate their participation in the mainstream economy. This brief confirmed that social protection provides economic contingency to communities during shocks through support from community cooperatives.

2022 Outlook
The report on multiple vulnerabilities and sources of farmers and pastoralists, scheduled for release in 2022, will present findings and recommendations on economics and livelihoods, mobility, governance and services, conflict, environment and climate, with gender and youth as key cross-cutting themes. The findings will also offer an integrated livelihood model and development solution to existing security and socio-economic challenges, inspired by the history, practices and results recorded within the borderlands, as relayed by borderlands communities and their interlocutors.
Joseph Moit from Lorengippi village in Kenya’s Turkana County was a warrior and cattle rustler for 15 years. Education was not on the young herdsboy’s mind, who turned to life as a warrior, raiding neighbouring communities in Pokot on the Kenyan-Ugandan border and stealing livestock.

The conflict was a two-way street. The Pokot villages staged reprisal raids to avenge the attacks and recover their livestock, perpetuating the armed conflict. Much of the conflict was driven by water scarcity in Kenya, with pastoralists crossing over into Uganda during the dry season searching for water, rekindling hostilities. Both sides have suffered.

Over the years, many of Joseph’s friends were killed and injured, while many innocent villagers lost their livelihoods and were forced to rely on relief efforts for food. Fearing he would wind up dead like his friends and leave his 10 children behind, Joseph put down his weapons in 2019 and became an ambassador in the peace efforts supported by UNDP. Opening a small kiosk, he became a businessman.

But COVID-19 and climate change are challenging his and other already-vulnerable communities in Turkana, West Pokot and Marsabit, which suffer from climate-related shocks including drought, floods and locusts.

Like other small businesses relying on cross-border trade, pandemic restrictions prevented Joseph from restocking his kiosk in Uganda, forcing him to use his remaining stock to feed his family. Farmers and pastoralists struggle with dwindling natural resources, including water scarcity and land degradation. The twin impact of the pandemic and climate contributes to food insecurity, gender-based violence and mistrust between communities, threatening the fragile peace.

While long-term resilience and peace are critical, Turkana, West Pokot and Marsabit communities needed immediate help. So UNDP’s Africa Borderlands Centre launched a quick impact initiative aimed to achieve both short- and long-term objectives.

The initiative focused on strengthening social protection and livelihood interventions in the affected borderlands, particularly for women and youth, while advancing community peace dialogues. In addition, the initiative identified requirements for infrastructure interventions needed in the area to protect border communities from future climate-induced shocks.

Through the UNDP Kenya Country Office and implementing partner the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), the Africa Borderlands Centre delivered livelihood assistance to 12 groups of reformed warriors, women’s groups and youth groups in the Lorengippi/Lokrimama area of Turkana. The communities received farming equipment, cereals, harvesting gear, fuel, a milling machine, beekeeping equipment and beads.

The equipment delivered is meant to provide immediate relief to recover lost livelihoods and diversify sources of income for the future. Notably, the assistance is intended to serve not as a handout but as a start-up grant, with beneficiaries expected to not only recover but to build capital and save and invest for the future.

In West Pokot, 25 groups with diverse livelihood bases and needs were selected to benefit from the COVID-19 recovery grant. Depending on the economic activities of each group, the communities received goats, bulls, cereal milling machines, water pumps, and beehives.

This and other assistance, which includes rehabilitation of a primary school, will help the communities recover from economic losses and “build back better” from the pandemic – especially with the future of the most vulnerable groups in this climate-shock-affected area in mind.

The Africa Borderlands Centre is working to ensure its vision that borderland communities continue to yield hoes and not weapons, and grow their resilience beyond the borderlands to their countries and the entire region.
To analyze data needs and gaps in the borderland regions, ABC is designing the first Encyclopaedia of African Borderlands, which will collect detailed data, stories and ethnographic photography on borderlands across Africa, map existing borderlands data sources, define partnerships and collaborations on borderlands data, and determine the ‘best-fit’ platform for archiving the data. With a focus on borderlands regions in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and the Great Lakes, the data will be centrally archived onto a dedicated online portal as a one-stop shop for governments, researchers and organizations interested in accessing authoritative data on border communities.

The Centre has mapped 106 border pairs across the continent, identified borderland characteristic indicators, and mined, cleaned and consolidated existing and new data. In addition to the online portal, these efforts will also include the development of statistical fact sheets and a printed encyclopaedia book. The ABC Data Dashboard will be launched in late 2022.

Data

The lack of available data, and its dispersal across different sources, is a critical challenge to research and innovation in border regions.

According to ABC data mining exercises,

**Border Closures**
- spiked between 2019 and 2021,
- with more than 77% of border closures in the last decade occurring during this period.

**COVID-19**
- accounted for 54.7% and 91% of closures in 2019 and 2020 respectively.

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The focus areas are:

- **Economic:** key resources and economic potential/activities
- **Geographical:** 106 border pairs across the African continent
- **Resources:** natural resources, community-shared resources
- **Demographic:** population size
- **Infrastructural development:** status of investments in hospitals, schools and police stations

2022 Outlook
The Centre will launch the encyclopaedia portal and expand its scope by mining and adding data and information on Informal Cross-Border Trade. Additionally, it will seek to strengthen the data partnerships and ecosystem, and enhance analytical work through statistical modelling. To complement the research and analysis, the Centre will capture and document stories from borderlands areas to elevate voices and provide first-hand solution-oriented approaches to address current challenges.
Launch of Signature Products

- Encyclopaedia data portal
- Coffee book (fact sheets and illustrative maps)
- Borderlands SDG investor maps
- Thematic and geographic map of borderlands
- 8 data modelling blogs from research data
Lilian Masiye, a 27-year-old single mother of three, is an informal cross-border trader. She has a small-scale business selling duvets and kitchenware in Livingstone, Zambia’s tourism capital and a hub for visitors to Victoria Falls. The popular site, which also borders Zimbabwe, is visited by millions every year, bringing business to both sides of the border and informal cross-border traders like herself.

However, COVID-19 brought government restrictions and travel bans that sent tourism plummeting, and with it, Lilian's business. Costly COVID-19 certification fees needed to cross into neighbouring countries to source her goods added to Lilian's troubles.

Lilian needed a loan but like most informal cross-border traders, over 70 percent of whom are women, she could not get a loan. Even in good times, these women struggle with low business capital from critical household resources. Patriarchal practices perpetuate this loop - mainstream banks will not approve a loan without documented proof of property ownership and income, which most women do not have.

Lilian and other enterprising women pooled their meagre business funds to keep their businesses afloat during the pandemic, using intermediasies and runners to transport their goods. But she says these arrangements are risky and twice as expensive.

A change came around with the Africa Borderlands Centre’s (ABC) Innovation Challenge project, designed by the ABC and implemented by UNDP’s Accelerator Labs. The Accelerator Labs, or AccLabs for short, is a global UNDP initiative driven by the understanding of the need for grassroots business solutions that are locally relevant, informed and driven.

The challenge paired the AccLabs in Zambia and Zimbabwe to brainstorm innovative solutions that will help cross-border traders recover from the difficulties of COVID-19 and other impacts of climate change.

Two start-ups, one from each country, stepped up with solutions - the Zambian start-up VillageSavers, and Thumeza, a logistics start-up from Zimbabwe.

The first created an app to digitally help traders manage their savings through a Self-Helping Saving Groups (SHGs) initiative while providing digital and financial literacy training. The second created a digital transporter tracking system to facilitate and track the movement of goods across borders, responding to the COVID-19 restrictions and costs.

Lilian is among the 75 beneficiaries, primarily women and youth, who received digital and financial literacy training and basic entrepreneurial and group saving management practices. In addition, each beneficiary receives a smartphone to help keep track of transactions and savings, which will ultimately provide the needed documentation to satisfy traditional financing institutions for a loan.

The project has already paid off tremendously. Before VillageSavers, Lilian’s group could only save US$110 collectively. However, after learning to use the app, the group became savings-savvy and started growing their funds. By February 2022, they had saved over $3,500 collectively. In addition, they were able to secure loans at favourable rates, which they are repaying successfully.

Lilian is thrilled. “I have been able to pay school fees for my children, unlike before when the income from my business was uncertain,” she says happily, thumbing through a wad of banknotes at her makeshift duvet stall.

This project exemplifies the Africa Borderlands Centre’s mission to provide borderland communities with the tools to leverage and elevate their natural and longstanding creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation, and deliver the promise of their unique ingenuity and resilience to Africa as a whole.

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"I have been able to pay school fees for my children, unlike before when the income from my business was uncertain."
2021 Innovation Challenge

Often at the margins of formal planning, borderland communities have created their own informal opportunities. ABC’s inaugural 2021 Innovation Challenge, themed Improving Livelihoods for Informal Cross-Border Traders and Trading Communities, sought to curate, experiment and upscale local borderland innovations as the cornerstone of entrepreneurship culture in Informal Cross-Border Trade (ICBT).

The challenge called for ideas capable of providing durable solutions to barriers against ICBT, with a focus on home-grown solutions, particularly those with the potential to expand opportunities for women and youth. In collaboration with UNDP Accelerator Labs (AccLabs), 10 UNDP Country Offices responded to the call and submitted 17 proposals. The Grant Award Committee selected four groups of Country Offices as winners of the challenge: Zambia-Zimbabwe, Ghana-Benin-Togo, Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger, and South Sudan-Sudan.

By the end of 2021, all community immersion missions between the ABC innovation team and participating AccLabs had been completed; with the areas of focus for innovation further sharpened and metrics of success determined for each of innovation project.

ABC and AccLab staff participated in a five-day community immersion, acclimating to the settings where the innovations are or will be implemented. The immersion programme allowed the paired offices to gain first-hand experiences of the potential for innovation in the selected community, test assumptions underlying the innovative design, and improve the development impact quality within communities or ‘social laboratories’ to experiment with innovative ideas.

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2022 Outlook

A major lesson learned in the Centre’s implementation is that community credit unions are vital stakeholders in accelerating financial inclusion and sustainable development. In addition to sustaining micro industries, they also play a critical role in social protection, inclusive wealth management, and peaceful management of shared resources across national borders. Yet, they are leaving behind the poorest and the most vulnerable, which is a risk factor to the realization of the SDGs.

By ensuring that community credit unions digitally and financially include the most vulnerable persons in the borderlands in their business models, we can provide a pathway for an inclusive approach to wealth creation and management that allows people to realize the promise of The Africa We Want articulated in the African Union’s Agenda 2063. In 2022, the Africa Borderlands Centre will launch a digital financial inclusion initiative, beginning with four community credit unions located in Africa’s borderlands.

Africa’s borderlands and their communities are a unique source of ingenuity, places of untapped opportunity and remarkable resilience.

Community immersion: understanding lived experiences to inform the co-creation of innovation

Immersion is a participatory method used by policymakers and development workers that considers cultural values and the plurality of knowledge systems in society. This method allows exploration into insiders’ perspectives to understand the context of the communities in which they work. Immersion field visits, where teams embed with a local community for a five-day learning stay, are a core tenet of the co-creation phase of the Innovation Challenge.

One such community immersion took place along the South Sudan-Sudan border. The Innovation Challenge teams met with local communities to better understand the context and lived experiences on the ground. This is a critical phase for forming a deep connection with the border communities and ensuring community ownership of the proposed innovation.

In this case, the community immersion field visits aimed to explore the assumptions underlying the initial innovation concept regarding local grassroots saving cooperatives known as sanduks, which offer a communal means of saving and borrowing. Hearing directly from the community, traders and other stakeholders helped teams acquire a deeper, authentic understanding of the function of this mechanism and how it serves the community. This informed and inspired the teams on how sanduks may be digitized, scaled and leveraged within the Innovation Challenge as a tool for enabling informal cross-border trade and strengthening the entire community.
The communities of Liptako-Gourma, the border region between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, have been practising agriculture and pastoralism for centuries, trading produce, livestock and products with neighbouring communities and providing services to the many who traverse the routes connecting the three countries.

However, this Sahel area has been troubled in recent years, facing violent conflict, climate change and COVID-19. War and violence have led to border closures and displaced many, taxing the already-strained natural and financial resources, challenging farming and animal husbandry, increasing quarrels over resources, and deepening poverty and food insecurity.

In the absence of a peaceful border allowing trade, the town of Koro in Mali has lost its primary market and lifeline to Thiou in Burkina Faso.

Fatoumata Togo owns a small restaurant in the once busy trade hub. But Koro has changed because of the war, she says. People don’t come anymore, and many of the meals prepared remain unsold. “We are suffering from this situation,” she says, hoping for support in getting her restaurant going again.

Fellow-townsman Yaya Droukala echoes this. Years of conflict have disrupted farming, sending them to cultivate distant, unsafe fields. They could cross over to Burkina Faso to sell surplus harvest from a good season in better times. But since the crisis, the border has been closed, and both sides have lost. Koro farmers and breeders can’t sell their produce or animals, and Burkinabes can’t buy food in Mali. “It is the conflict causing these miseries,” Yaya says.

In 2021, with substantial support from the Government of Japan, the Africa Borderlands Centre launched the “Trade for Peace” initiative to build resilience and facilitate socio-economic recovery from COVID-19 and conflict in the borderland communities of Liptako-Gourma.

Identifying food insecurity as a root cause driving conflict, the project’s two-fold aim is to support the region’s agricultural and livestock farmers and strengthen peacebuilding and dialogue. A particular focus is helping women and youth. Together, the initiative aims to enhance food security, improve livelihoods and increase income opportunities.

The 12-month project is already showing strong results. In Burkina Faso, 160 beneficiaries received goats and hens, along with feed, and another 240 people have received training on cattle and poultry farming, primarily women, youth and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

In Kaya, host to some 400,000 IDPs, a women’s group has started growing vegetables with the support of seeds, fertilizers and equipment provided by UNDP.
The potential of Africa’s borderland communities remains vastly unexploited. With an estimated 270 million inhabitants, transforming lives in borderland communities has the potential to accelerate Africa’s development trajectory. Increased programming and investments in borderland communities will be central to achieving the goals of Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030 and ensuring that no one is left behind. In 2021, the Centre supported borderland communities with socio-economic and peacebuilding interventions in six countries.

Building on its investments in research, data and innovation, the Africa Borderlands Centre provides technical and advisory services and catalytic funding to support the development of borderlands and cross-border programmes across Africa. The Centre’s aim is to use these investments to showcase a proof of concept, achieve immediate community impact and identify lessons for impactful interventions that can be scaled and sustained.

Evidence from the first 12 months since establishing the Africa Borderlands Centre demonstrates that borderlands are viable contributors to attaining the SDGs and sustaining national, regional and global economies. ABC has generated a model for socio-economic development in the borderlands focused on a four-pillar portfolio to inform ABC’s programming support moving forward.

ABC’s catalytic programming approach builds on the Centre’s investments in research, data and innovation, co-created with borderland communities and key national and regional partners.
Facilitating cross-border trade in the Liptako-Gourma Region

The borderlands of the Sahel face the triple threat of conflict, climate change impact and the COVID-19 pandemic, with communities in the Liptako-Gourma region (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso) particularly affected by border closures, drought and violent extremism. In response, the Africa Borderlands Centre and the UNDP Sub-Regional Hub for West and Central Africa, with funding from the Government of Japan, developed a programme to promote socio-economic development and peacebuilding in the Liptako-Gourma borderlands, through strengthening cross-border trade and community dialogues.

Quick impact initiatives

The Africa Borderlands Centre designed a quick impact initiative to support socio-economic and livelihoods recovery in Africa's borderlands and protect the most vulnerable from the impact of COVID-19 and climate change-induced shocks. Implemented in Kenya, Sierra Leone, Niger and Namibia, the initiative provided targeted quick impact funds that aimed to measurably enhance social protection and livelihoods of borderland communities, as well as lay the foundation for ‘building back better’ through investments in critical infrastructure.

The initiative supported more than 1,000 women and youth with key livelihood activities, supported capacity building of local authorities, provided water infrastructure and peacebuilding mechanisms that directly benefited borderland communities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Programming guidance and portfolio approach

There is significant demand among UNDP Country Offices (COs) and partners to receive better guidance on how to effectively and sustainably programme in borderland communities. Transaction costs for borderlands programming and cross-border programming are high, with an elevated level of complexity.

More guidance, tools, resources and support are critical to increasing the portfolio of programmes in borderland communities. In line with its knowledge creation and programming support mandate, the Africa Borderlands Centre worked on collecting experiences, best practices, lessons learned, tools and templates and structuring them into guidelines for borderlands and cross-border programming to support UNDP COs, UN agencies and development actors in improving the quality and impact of projects and programmes in support of borderland communities in Africa.

Lessons from SECCCI delivery

2021 saw the end of the project “Support for Effective Cooperation and Coordination of Cross-Border Initiatives in Southwest Ethiopia - Northwest Kenya, Marsabit - Borana and Dawa, and Kenya - Somalia - Ethiopia” (SECCCI), co-funded by the European Union (EU) and the UNDP Regional Programme for Africa and jointly implemented by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The SECCCI project provided technical support to national and local governments of Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia with the overall objective of addressing the drivers of conflict, instability, irregular migration and displacement through improved cross-border cooperation and coordination. The implementation of the project laid the foundation for the partnership between UNDP and IGAD, and allowed the collection and consolidation of expertise and lessons for improved borderlands and cross-border programming. The above mentioned borderlands programming guidelines are strongly linked to the SECCCI experience.

Promoting socio-economic development and peacebuilding in Africa’s borderlands

With funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Africa Borderlands Centre designed a programme with a specific emphasis on engaging and empowering women and youth. It combines interventions that build the capacity of borderland civil society organizations (CSOs) and innovative pilot approaches to unleash borderlands’ economic potential and provide immediate livelihood improvements to communities.

The pilot initiative will showcase the approach and potential of a joint African Union-UNDP borderlands engagement following in-depth consultations between the Government of Sweden, the African Union Commission, the Life and Peace Institute (LPI), and UNDP. The geographic focus of the interventions for livelihoods and peacebuilding interventions covers Eastern Africa (CSO engagement), Karamoja (Kenya, Uganda) and Mali.

2022 Outlook

In 2022, the Africa Borderlands Centre will continue implementation of the Trade for Peace project in the Liptako-Gourma region and undertake the development of a second phase in the wider Sahel region. As a contribution to thought leadership, the Centre will develop and release a guidance note for borderlands and cross-border programming. Finally, new projects will be launched and implemented in the border regions of Burundi-Tanzania, Gambia-Senegal, Chad-Cameroon,
YouthConnekt Africa: Entrepreneurship as a powerful vehicle for youth empowerment

Borderlands youth are well-known for adapting to new and difficult circumstances, often innovating with very limited resources while facing discrimination and social exclusion. Youth alienation in the borderlands is particularly acute, with many young people experiencing poverty throughout their early lives.

This gap is closing through initiatives such as YouthConnekt, a UNDP-supported platform designed to connect young people for socio-economic transformation. It seeks to strengthen Africa’s youth resources and knowledge sharing and improve national ownership of socio-economic transformation agendas.

YouthConnekt regularly convenes heads of state, ministers, development agencies, the private sector, civil society organizations and young entrepreneurs to seek policies, programmes and partnerships to accelerate youth empowerment at the continent level.

The Africa Borderlands Centre sponsored borderlands youth from 9 African countries (Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Sudan, Kenya, Togo, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali) to participate and showcase their innovations at two YouthConnekt activities in Accra and Dakar, themed “Africa Beyond Aid: Positioning the Youth for the Post-COVID Economy and AfCFTA Opportunities” and “Connecting Sahelian Youth for Peace and Prosperity” respectively. The two YouthConnekt events featured intergenerational dialogues, exchanges with high-level government stakeholders, workshops, breakout sessions, project pitching, learning visits, and cultural events.

As Africa’s greatest resource, young people represent an abundant resource for future transformation. Experience from borderland communities has shown that harnessing the skills and creative innovation of young people is vital to strengthening inclusive youth participation in borderlands development.

Working across 23 African countries, YouthConnekt has five goals: to create 10 million jobs, empower 25 million youth with skills, nurture 1 million young leaders, connect 100 million youth, and close the gender gap.
Advocacy and Partnerships

“Through our AU Border Programme, we are joining forces with the UNDP Africa Borderlands Centre to support the Member States and communities and promote socio-economic development in Africa’s borderlands.”

Ambassador Fred Ngoga Gateretse, Focal Person on International Partnerships and AU Border Programme, Office of the Commissioner, African Union

Strong partnerships are essential to unlock the potential of Africa’s borderlands. In response to the growing interest and focus on borderland communities, the UNDP Africa Borderlands Centre invests in technical and financial collaboration in partnership with the international community, the African Union, Regional Economic Communities and other critical stakeholders.

Partner with the African Union and Regional Economic Communities

The Africa Borderlands Centre was co-created with the African Union Commission. As such, the Centre works closely with the team at the AU Border Programme in co-creating research and policy and coordinating on partnerships and programmes. The AU has been engaged throughout all key events and activities in 2021, including through the Steering Committee and Technical Committee.

In the Horn, the Centre worked closely with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). A joint workshop organized in June 2021 identified key points for joint programmes and advocacy in support of borderland communities. In the Sahel, the Centre worked most closely with the Liptako-Gourma Authority, a central partner in the design and implementation of the Trade for Peace project in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso.

Development Dialogues

The Africa Borderlands Centre facilitated a session in the UNDP Development Dialogues, a series of 38 events held between March and July 2021. The session facilitated by the Centre highlighted bottom-up solutions to development challenges in marginal spaces.

Civil society and academia

A central approach at ABC is co-creation with borderland communities. In 2021, the Centre directly engaged with borderland communities in 20 countries across Africa, listening to their ideas, solutions and needs from a first-hand perspective.

For cohesive programming, the Centre collaborates with local, national and regional CSOs to capture the voices of communities and co-develop and co-implement projects and research, thus fulfilling the needs and demands of these communities. Core partners in 2021 have been the Life and Peace Institute (LPI), the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), the African Borderlands Research Network (ABORNE) and Infotрак.

Development partners

The Africa Borderlands Centre has embraced UNDP’s strategy to engage development partners as funders and active participants, helping to co-create the Centre’s activities and lay a foundation for further collaboration and funding. In 2021, the Centre conducted strategic engagements with the Governments of Japan, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union, and the IKEA Foundation.

Collaboration with the UN system

The prevention of violent conflict, peacebuilding and sustaining peace is central to the work of the United Nations as derived from its Charter. Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, has proposed the development of a new agenda for peace, with more investment in prevention and peacebuilding. The Africa Borderlands Centre was referenced as a positive example of UN collaboration in the latest Secretary-General’s report on Sustaining Peace (A/76/668–S/2022/66, Para 5).

The Centre is also an active member of the UN Working Group on Borderlands, established by the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). The Centre has briefed the Special Envoy for the Sahel, Horn of Africa and Great Lakes and is working in close partnership with UN Country Teams and Resident Coordinator Offices in the 20 countries where ABC initiatives are operating. The Centre is also working closely with the World Bank, including through regular exchange on research and policy and by jointly co-chairing the ACMI workstream on borderlands.

Public-Private Partnerships

The ABC started the process of collaboration with Equity Bank (East Africa) Group. The co-designed initiative aims to promote Cross-Border Trade (CBT) by facilitating access to finance for smallholder commodity producers and businesses in Africa’s borderlands. The programme prioritizes women and youth-led entrepreneurs, enables businesses to access credit facilities, logistical support and digitization for increased profitability, and supports policy and legal framework reforms at the national level to improve cross-border trade.

Co-leading the borderlands discussion of the Africa Climate Mobility Initiative (ACMI)

Ahead of the upcoming COP27 in Egypt, the Africa Borderlands Centre has been co-leading, with the World Bank, a consultative process on borderlands for a research project on climate mobility in Africa. Over 50 development practitioners across Africa were convened to apply a borderlands lens to the research and modelling undertaken to discuss scenarios in which climate change could interact with human mobility in Africa’s borderlands and how policy and programme responses should respond. The consultative process is feeding directly into a comprehensive report on climate mobility in the continent, titled “Shaping the Future of Mobility in Africa: Addressing Climate-Forced Displacement & Migration.”
UNDP-IGAD partnership: promoting resilience and borderlands development in the Horn of Africa

A joint IGAD-UNDP workshop held in June 2021 in Nairobi, Kenya, brought together 65 participants from 8 UNDP country offices in the Horn of Africa and representatives of all key partners engaged in resilience and borderlands development work in the Horn, including the African Union, the Office of the Special Envoy for the Horn, the World Bank, GIZ, Sweden, European Union, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and the Life and Peace Institute.

The workshop focused on taking stock of the progress achieved in implementing regional and cross-border projects in the Horn and reflecting on lessons learned from the joint initiative, particularly the cross-border project SECCCI, which served as the foundation for establishing ABC, and the two organizations’ broader work on resilience in the region.

Participants discussed crisis and drought management and agriculture and natural resources management, touching on some of the key issues unique to the Horn of Africa - a fragile area home to 14.3 million refugees, asylum seekers, returnees and IDPs, and 70% of IGAD territories being defined as arid and semi-arid regions.

Following the workshop, a Joint Technical Working Group was created, and regular meetings convened. This led to the co-design of joint programmes, as well as joint advocacy efforts.

In its inception year, the Africa Borderlands Centre embarked on a challenging journey, building from the SECCCI experience and learning immensely in the process. The main lessons are outlined below:

- **Co-implementation and partnerships are critical to ownership:** Borderland communities, including women and youth, and key partners co-created all ABC workstreams in 2021. The Centre also ensured ‘co-implementation’ by making these stakeholders central features of project governance mechanisms and local consultations, to decide on activities to be implemented and share their experiences of programme results.

- **Social innovations can have a better impact with the deployment of technology:** Social innovations have been critical to survival. However, their socio-economic potential has been restricted by inadequate access to technology. Through ABC’s interventions on digitization, age-long innovations in informal cross-border trade (ICBT) are reaching more people, creating new job opportunities, and pulling the private sector into marginal spaces. As many remote borderlands are poorly integrated in more extensive spaces. As many remote borderlands are poorly integrated in more extensive.

- **Socio-economic accelerators:** Intense community immersion exercises and field observations by ABC staff revealed that farming, pastoralism and ICBT are considered the three topmost livelihood catalysts of development.

Stakeholders in 20 borderlands communities across Africa demanded partnership (not only assistance) with development practitioners and the private sector to maximize their competitiveness in these areas.

- **Inclusive development is built on the foundation of sustainable peace:** Borderland communities highlighted a deliberate cross-border approach to managing shared resources across national borders in an inclusive manner. They advocated for the cross-border interventions built around community ownership, government leadership, gender sensitivity, diversity management and accelerated cross-border cooperation and coordination institutions. For example, the development-focused approach of the ABC in the Sahel is focused on consolidating the gains of stabilization initiatives.

- **Diving deep and narrow for impact:** The needs in borderlands regions are enormous, and expectations for development assistance are equally significant. Based on lessons learned from interactions with borderland communities, ABC developed a 4-pillar portfolio for its programming workstream focused on: (1) Strengthening agriculture and livestock production and productivity, and enhancing associated value and supply chains; (2) Access to finance, supporting entrepreneurship, and strengthening the capacities of Micro and Small Enterprises; (3) Investing in climate-resilient small infrastructure to enhance production and trade; and (4) Strengthening vertical and horizontal social cohesion.
Governance structure
The governance structure of the Africa Borderlands Centre consists of the project staff, with support from a Project Board and Technical Committee. The Project Board provides the overall decision-making functions in line with UNDP’s policies and procedures, and makes its decisions based on recommendations made from the ABC Project Management Unit and the Project Technical Committee.

The Project Technical Committee is responsible for ensuring coherent implementation of the Africa Borderlands Centre’s programmatic framework; generating programmatic ideas and perspectives; and providing substantive support to strengthening partnership and resource mobilization.

Members of the technical committee represent the private sector, civil society, non-profit organizations, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the World Bank, the Border Institute, and UNDP.

The inaugural ABC Board Meeting, held in June 2021, was chaired by Ahunna Eziakonwa, Assistant Secretary General and Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa. Board members approved the 2021 annual workplan, provided guidance on the implementation of the Trade for Peace project in the Liptako-Gourma borderlands, and provided strategic guidance to the ABC Project Management Unit.
Budget, Fundraising and Expenditure Overview 2021

Overall budget 5 years
$30,000,000

Annual budget
$6,000,000

Funding Received and Expenditure in 2021

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Multi year budget ending May 2022

Countries:
- BFA-MLI-NER: B.Faso-Mali-Niger
- GHA-TGO-BEN: Ghana-Togo-Benin
- SUDAN-S.SUDAN: Sudan-South Sudan
- ZAMBIA-ZIMBABWE: Zambia-Zimbabwe

2022 Implementation

ACLABS pairs/trios
- SLE, NAM & KEN (Delivered in 3 months, Sept - Dec, 2021)