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Terrorism and mobility in Burkina Faso: obstacles to development and solutions for the future

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Abstract

This article examines the repercussions of growing insecurity, particularly linked to terrorism, on mobility and development in Burkina Faso. The aim is to examine the impact of this insecurity on internal travel and to highlight potential levers for strengthening the resilience of transport systems in the face of current security challenges. An analysis based on a literature review reveals that insecurity has profoundly disrupted mobility, hampering trade and restricting access to essential services, particularly in rural areas. However, community initiatives and the establishment of secure corridors have been put in place to mitigate these negative impacts. Although these efforts have led to a partial improvement in mobility and a limited recovery of the economy, it is imperative that the government, in partnership with the international community, step up its actions in terms of security and strengthen transport infrastructures. At the same time, support for resilience programmes targeting vulnerable populations must be a priority in order to provide a sustainable response to the challenges posed by this persistent insecurity.

Keywords: Security, mobility, terrorism, development, Burkina Faso

Introduction

Worldwide, the relationship between safety and mobility is widely recognised as central to sustainable development. The ability to move freely, whether for economic, social or educational reasons, is fundamental to the well-being of populations. Mobility also plays a key role in the integration of local economies into regional and international markets, an essential process for developing countries (Zoma, 2019) ^[8]. However, in regions plagued by security instability, mobility is often severely compromised, limiting access to the opportunities and services needed to support development.

In West Africa, several Sahel countries, including Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali, are facing insecurity linked to terrorist attacks, creating a turbulent area where the movement of people has become synonymous with risk. There is a close link between mobility and economic security in West Africa, where the majority of trade and travel is by land. Insecurity limits transport options, hampering intra-regional trade and increasing the vulnerability of populations who depend on these networks for access to markets and public services.

In Burkina Faso, this situation is exacerbated by the low resilience of transport infrastructure (Tomalka *et al.* 2019) ^[5], which was already underdeveloped before the escalation of terrorist violence. Roads and means of transport, which play a crucial role in development, have become prime targets for armed groups. As a result, connectivity between different regions of the country, as well as with neighbouring countries, is severely compromised, making it difficult to access areas affected by the violence.

In this West African country, the impact of insecurity on mobility is particularly worrying (Zoma *et al.* 2022) ^[9]. The current security crisis has not only reduced people's ability to move around, but has also undermined the very foundations of national development. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2022) ^[6] reports that the areas most affected by the violence, particularly in the north and east of the country, have become virtually inaccessible, both for the inhabitants and for humanitarian organisations.

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Given this critical situation, it is imperative to ask the following questions: How is insecurity affecting mobility and development in Burkina Faso? What strategies have national and international players adopted to mitigate these impacts and promote the resilience of transport systems? These questions are at the heart of this article, which proposes a literature review on the links between security, mobility and development in the context of Burkina Faso, with an analysis of local and international responses to these challenges.

The aim of this study is to provide an analysis of the impact of insecurity on mobility in Burkina Faso and to explore the various initiatives put in place to restore people's mobility in a context of growing insecurity. The aim is also to identify potential levers for strengthening the resilience of transport systems in the face of current security challenges.

This article is structured around three main themes. The first examines the direct impact of insecurity on mobility. The second looks at the economic consequences of this mobility. Finally, the third section analyses the initiatives and strategies implemented to improve safety and mobility, both by national authorities and by international organisations, with a view to restoring people's confidence in transport infrastructure.

Analysis of these areas will provide a better understanding of how safety and mobility interact to shape Burkina Faso's economic and social development, and how appropriate responses can be put in place to overcome these complex challenges.

1. Impact of insecurity on mobility

Insecurity in Burkina Faso, exacerbated by terrorist attacks, is having a profound effect on people's mobility. This issue deserves particular attention, as it affects not only internal travel but also the country's economic dynamic. Mobility, as a driver of development, is seriously compromised in a context of instability.

1.1 Disruption to internal travel

Internal travel in Burkina Faso has been significantly disrupted by growing insecurity. According to a report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2022) ^[6], many previously well-travelled roads have become impassable due to terrorist threats, limiting people's access to essential resources. Isolated villages, particularly in the north and east of the country, are now landlocked, preventing residents from travelling safely to urban centres to access healthcare, education or markets.

This crisis situation has particularly harmful consequences for women and children. As Walther (2020) points out, women, who are often responsible for food supplies and children's education, find themselves trapped in localities where they no longer have access to essential services. Their ability to move freely is hampered, making them even more vulnerable. Children, for their part, are often forced to interrupt their schooling because of the closure of schools and the dangers associated with travel.

Disrupted internal displacement has also led to an increase in the number of displaced people. In the first quarter of 2023, the number of internally displaced people in the country exceeded 2 million, or around 10% of the total population (OCHA, 2024). These massive displacements generate tensions between the host populations and the

displaced, exacerbating community conflicts and social disintegration.

Transport networks, a key element in mobility, are also suffering from insecurity. Many transport companies, faced with the constant threat of attacks, have suspended their operations. This disruption to transport services has a direct impact on people's ability to travel for work or personal reasons, limiting the social and economic interactions necessary for community resilience.

To move from the impacts of insecurity on mobility to strategies for improvement, it is essential to understand how the effects of an unstable security situation affect the socio-economic dynamics of Burkina Faso. The obstacles to internal movement are closely linked to the economic repercussions, illustrating the vicious circle created by insecurity.

1.2 Economic repercussions

Disruptions to internal movements have major economic repercussions, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in Burkina Faso. Mobility is intrinsically linked to market access, income generation and economic growth. In a country where a large proportion of the population depends on agriculture and informal trade, the inability to move freely has dramatic consequences.

Farmers, in particular, suffer considerable losses. Siry & Traoré (2023) point out that the impossibility of getting to their fields or transporting their produce to market results in lower production and income. For example, farmers in regions affected by violence often find that their crops rot on the spot because they are unable to sell them. This creates a vicious circle in which the drop in income leads to a deterioration in living conditions, affecting food security.

The economic impact is not limited to farmers. Local trade, which is a pillar of the Burkinabe economy, is also seriously affected. Local markets are being disrupted by a drop in the number of customers and vendors. Traders, fearing for their safety, often choose to close their shops or reduce their opening hours, which reduces trade and increases the economic insecurity of the population.

The economic situation is also exacerbated by the brain drain and the migration of young people to safer areas or even abroad. This emigration further reduces local development opportunities. The essential skills and talents that could contribute to the country's economic revitalisation vanish, leaving communities in a state of stagnation and dependency.

The consequences of this insecurity for people's mobility and economic development cannot be underestimated. As well as providing emergency aid, humanitarian organisations are stressing the need to tackle these problems holistically, incorporating solutions that promote the rehabilitation of transport infrastructures and the strengthening of local capacities. This will require close collaboration between government, non-governmental organisations and the communities themselves to restore confidence and encourage a return to safe travel.

So, as this work examines the economic consequences of impeded mobility, it becomes crucial to recognise the role that restored mobility can play in the country's development. This dynamic leads to an exploration of how mobility, when facilitated, can act as a catalyst for socio-economic development, highlighting the vital role of transport.

2. Mobility as a vector for development

People's mobility plays an essential role in economic and social development, especially in a context as complex as Burkina Faso's, marked by insecurity linked to terrorist attacks. In this section, the article examines how transport is a lever for development, as well as concrete initiatives aimed at restoring and promoting people's mobility.

2.1 The role of transport in development

Transport is often seen as a catalyst for economic development. It facilitates access to markets, services and employment opportunities, while strengthening links between communities. In the context of Burkina Faso, where infrastructure is often fragile (Tomalka *et al.* 2019)^[5], transport is becoming a crucial issue for regional development. Efficient transport systems not only boost local economies, but also reduce inequalities in access to resources.

In a country where agriculture accounts for a significant proportion of the economy, transport plays a central role. Farmers need safe and reliable means of getting their produce to market. Safe roads and available transport services are essential to ensure that crops reach consumers. When farmers can transport their produce without fear, they have more incentive to invest in their crops, which can improve productivity and enhance food security.

However, insecurity due to terrorist attacks complicates this dynamic. The fear of being attacked on the roads dissuades many economic players from using existing infrastructures, resulting in considerable financial losses. Against this backdrop, investment in transport security is needed to restore the confidence of economic players and encourage trade.

Mobility is not just about trade; it is also essential for access to basic services such as education and health. Young people, in particular, need to be able to travel safely to access educational institutions. Disruption to access to education can have long-term consequences for the country's human capital. Investment in transport infrastructure and safe travel could help improve access to education, which is crucial to Burkina Faso's sustainable development.

2.2 Case studies of mobility initiatives

Faced with the challenges of mobility in a context of insecurity, a number of local and community initiatives have emerged to try to mitigate the effects of the crisis. These initiatives testify to the resilience of the population and their ability to adapt to difficult circumstances.

A significant example is the community transport project set up in certain regions of the country. The aim of this project, which is based on cooperation between residents and local authorities, is to create safe and accessible transport systems. These initiatives not only facilitate travel, but also strengthen social cohesion. Community members get involved in organising transport, which helps to create a sense of belonging and solidarity.

These community transport systems are often based on vehicles such as motorbikes or tricycles, which are adapted to the sometimes difficult roads. They offer an alternative to formal public transport, which may be limited or non-existent in some areas. In addition, these initiatives reduce transport costs for users, which is particularly important in a difficult economic climate.

Another interesting initiative is the 'security corridors' set up to protect strategic roads (Fews Net, 2024). These corridors are designed to ensure the safety of road users by reinforcing the presence of the security forces and involving local communities in monitoring security along the roads. On several occasions in Burkina Faso, communities have worked with the police to report potential threats, which has improved travel safety.

In addition, some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have also developed awareness-raising programmes to encourage people to use the means of transport available. These programmes highlight the importance of mobility for development and seek to restore users' confidence in the existing infrastructure. For example, targeted communication campaigns on social networks and in communities have been implemented to inform people about safe routes and best safety practices.

In short, the combination of community transport, safety corridors and awareness-raising programmes represents an integrated approach to meeting the challenges of mobility in a context of insecurity. These initiatives, while facing significant challenges, show that community resilience can be a driver of development and positive change, even in the most difficult situations.

Therefore, in looking at existing initiatives, we see concrete examples of transport systems and community projects that illustrate how people are working to overcome these challenges. This analysis of initiatives leads us to reflect on the strategies to be implemented to improve mobility in this context of insecurity, guiding us towards an exploration of the public policies needed to support these efforts.

3. Strategies for improving mobility

The insecurity caused by terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso is having a disastrous impact on people's mobility and, by extension, on the country's economic and social development. Faced with these challenges, it is imperative to develop strategies that encourage people's mobility while ensuring their safety.

3.1 National public policies

National public policies play a crucial role in managing mobility and responding to insecurity. In Burkina Faso, the need to adapt these policies to the current situation is more pressing than ever. An integrated approach that takes account of security, economic development and mobility is essential if we are to meet today's challenges.

A first step is to invest in transport infrastructure. Renovating and building roads, bridges and other transport infrastructure must be a priority to facilitate travel. Safe, well-maintained roads are essential to encourage trade and ensure access to basic services, including health and education. Efforts must also be made to make these infrastructures accessible to vulnerable populations, including women and people with disabilities.

Alongside these investments, it is necessary to improve road safety. The introduction of security features such as checkpoints and regular patrols can help to reduce feelings of insecurity (Zoma & al, 2022)^[9]. It is important to involve local communities more in safety monitoring, which can not only increase travel safety but also strengthen the link between authorities and citizens.

Public policies should also promote alternative modes of transport, such as community transport, which can offer flexible solutions tailored to people's needs. These systems

make it possible to strengthen local capacities while meeting the demand for mobility in areas where formal transport services are inadequate.

Finally, it is crucial that these policies are developed in consultation with local communities. Local people must be involved in the decision-making process to ensure that the solutions put in place really meet their needs. This requires strong political will and a long-term commitment to transparency and accountability.

The discussion on public policies encourages us to consider collaboration between various players, including the international organisations that provide resources and technical support. Their contributions are essential to the implementation of appropriate and safe transport systems.

3.2 Role of international organisations

International organisations play an indispensable role in improving mobility in Burkina Faso. Their expertise and resources can complement national efforts and help implement innovative solutions. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021), stresses that international assistance is essential, particularly in fragile contexts where government capacity may be limited.

One of the main contributions of international organisations is the funding of infrastructure projects. Many agencies, such as the World Bank and the European Union, have invested in programmes to improve transport infrastructure in Burkina Faso. These projects modernise roads, improve access to rural areas and facilitate trade. Such investments can also have a positive impact on safety by making roads safer and integrating safety measures into infrastructure projects.

In addition, international organisations play a key role in implementing training and awareness-raising programmes. These programmes aim to build the capacity of local players and raise awareness of the importance of mobility. Training in risk management and security can help prepare communities to deal with potential threats, while improving the resilience of transport systems.

In addition, regional cooperation is another area where international organizations can have a significant impact. By supporting cross-border initiatives, they can help establish security corridors that promote the free movement of people and goods while ensuring security. These initiatives can also strengthen regional stability, which is essential for a country like Burkina Faso, which faces security threats from neighboring countries.

Finally, it is imperative not to neglect the role of citizens. Their active involvement in promoting mobility is a determining factor for the success of the initiatives put in place, as they are often on the front lines facing security and mobility challenges. This collaboration between the State, international organizations and citizens is essential to build a future where the mobility of people is both secure and conducive to development.

3.3 Role of citizens

The role of citizens in improving mobility cannot be underestimated. Local communities are often the first to face challenges related to insecurity and mobility, and their engagement is essential to find sustainable solutions. Citizen

participation in the planning and implementation of transport initiatives is therefore necessary.

Citizens can play an active role by participating in local security committees, where they can discuss mobility concerns and propose solutions. This participatory approach fosters a sense of belonging and responsibility, thus strengthening social cohesion. In addition, local committees can serve as a link between authorities and populations, allowing for constructive dialogue and a better understanding of community needs.

Education and awareness-raising are also crucial to encourage responsible and safe use of transport infrastructure. Citizens can organize awareness-raising campaigns to inform their peers about best practices in terms of security and the importance of mobility for local development. These community initiatives can have a significant impact on the perception of security and encourage residents to use available transport services.

In addition, citizens can contribute to the establishment of alternative transport systems. For example, in some regions, youth groups have formed transport cooperatives to provide motorcycle or tricycle services. These initiatives not only meet mobility needs, but also create local jobs and strengthen the community economy. These community transport initiatives strengthen the resilience of populations in the face of crises.

Therefore, strategies to improve mobility in Burkina Faso must be holistic and integrated. National public policies, support from international organizations, and citizen engagement are all essential elements to restore people's mobility in a context of insecurity. By combining these efforts, it is possible to create a safer and more accessible environment, thus promoting the country's economic and social development.

Conclusion

Growing insecurity, linked to terrorist attacks, represents a major threat to the socio-economic stability of Burkina Faso. Mobility, a key pillar of development, is particularly affected by this pervasive insecurity. Internal displacement, once routine, is now perceived as perilous, creating geographical isolation in several regions of the country. This phenomenon first impacted the daily lives of populations, particularly in rural and border areas, before spreading to large cities, reducing the ability of citizens to access essential services such as education, health and markets. The disruption of internal displacement in Burkina Faso has also accentuated the humanitarian crisis, exacerbating the situation of already vulnerable populations. Thousands of Burkinabè have been forced to flee their homes to escape violence, thus swelling the number of internally displaced persons. This forced population movement has strained the resources of host communities, already limited, and reinforced social conflicts. In addition, this situation of isolation has accentuated economic disparities between the different regions of the country, further widening the gap between relatively secure areas and those affected by insecurity.

On the economic front, the reduction in mobility has had catastrophic effects. Trade, once supported by increasingly fragile transport infrastructure, has drastically declined. Farmers, who depend on transport to get their products to markets, are facing significant losses, contributing to the deterioration of living conditions in regions affected by

violence. Informal trade, the driving force of the local economy, has also been hampered, leaving traders in a precarious situation and slowing the country's economic growth. Thus, hampered mobility worsens an already fragile economic situation, in a context where the struggle for survival is becoming a priority for many Burkinabè.

Furthermore, the brain drain and the migration of young people to safer regions or abroad pose another crucial challenge for Burkina Faso. This loss of human capital weakens the country's ability to recover economically and socially. In the absence of sustainable solutions, talented and qualified young people prefer to leave their country, leaving behind impoverished communities with no real prospects for development. This phenomenon increases the country's dependence on international aid, thus reducing its sovereignty and its capacity to manage internal challenges autonomously.

However, in the midst of this chaotic situation, local and community initiatives aimed at improving mobility in a context of insecurity have emerged. These initiatives, although limited, demonstrate the resilience and solidarity of the Burkinabè. Community transport systems have been set up, offering an alternative to formal transport services. These projects have not only helped restore some mobility, but have also strengthened social ties between community members, thus contributing to social cohesion.

At the same time, the authorities' efforts to create security corridors on certain strategic roads have shown encouraging, albeit temporary, results. These corridors, with the support of local communities and security forces, have facilitated the passage of travelers and traders, thus contributing to a partial restart of economic activities in certain areas of the country. These initiatives show that, even in crisis situations, innovative solutions adapted to the local context can be implemented to improve mobility.

However, the implementation of longer-term strategies remains essential to break this cycle of violence and stagnation. An integrated approach that takes into account both security and economic development is imperative. The Burkinabe government must intensify its efforts to restore security throughout the territory, working with international partners who share its development vision and local communities. Protecting transport infrastructure must become a priority to ensure the continuity of trade and access to essential services for populations.

At the same time, it is essential to strengthen the capacities of local populations to resist the effects of insecurity. Training citizens in techniques for monitoring and reporting potential threats, as well as promoting a sense of collective responsibility, can play a crucial role in improving security. Community development programs, focused on resilience, should be put in place to support vulnerable populations, particularly women and children, whose mobility is seriously compromised by insecurity.

Similarly, a redesign of public policies on transport and security is necessary to adapt to the reality on the ground. Strengthening transport infrastructure, including roads, bridges and secure means of transport, should be considered a key lever for development. These efforts should be accompanied by measures to ensure safe travel, such as the installation of checkpoints and regular patrols in areas most affected by terrorist attacks. The private sector also has an important role to play in this dynamic. By supporting local transport initiatives and investing in infrastructure projects, businesses can not only contribute to the recovery of the

Burkinabe economy, but also strengthen their own resilience to crises. The creation of public-private partnerships could offer new perspectives to restore mobility and encourage the development of isolated areas.

Furthermore, the international community has a crucial role to play in stabilizing the situation in Burkina Faso. Increased financial and logistical support is needed to strengthen security and restore mobility. International organizations, whether United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations or financial institutions, must intensify their collaboration with the Burkinabe government to address the immediate needs of the affected populations, while developing long-term strategies to promote security and development. In short, mobility, a real vector of development, is today seriously hampered in Burkina Faso due to widespread insecurity. However, solutions exist, and local initiatives, government efforts and international support can help overcome this crisis. It is imperative to restore security across the territory and restore mobility to allow populations to move freely, access essential services and participate in the country's economic recovery. Burkina Faso, with the resilience of its populations, can hope to overcome the challenges it faces, provided that concrete and sustained actions are implemented to strengthen security and restore mobility. This dynamic is essential to initiate a process of sustainable and inclusive development, where mobility, once restored, will once again become a driver of prosperity for all.

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