

**DTM Sierra Leone**  
**Socio-Economic Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Travellers,**  
**Migrants and Cross-border Communities in Kailahun, Pujehun, and**  
**Falaba Districts**  
**16 — 25 December 2021**



**From  
the People of Japan**

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## Executive Summary

This study explored various cross border phenomena with the objective to understand how the emergence of COVID-19 impacted the cross-border chiefdom communities of Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba

A quantitative and qualitative methodological approach was employed to carry out this survey. Data collection was carried out in twelve chiefdoms across the three districts, and four chiefdoms per district. The survey targeted cross-border residents and migrants through focus group discussions, direct observation and key informants interviews focusing on local leaders, representative of migrants associations, and local business owners. The mixed methods employed in methodological approaches helped in carefully detailing the different types of consequences of covid-19 on the cross-border communities.

Like in many other countries affected by COVID-19, this study confirmed that most official points of entry (PoEs) were closed during the border closure proclamation approved by the government (March to July 2020). The regulations instituted by the government severely restricted movements and local by-laws in the various communities became an integral component to the COVID-19 mitigation strategies.

A key factor central to this study was the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19: the study noted that community inhabitants, including host communities and migrant residents, faced intense socioeconomic disruptions and for many, recovery from it has been slow and partial. Additionally, COVID-19 increased security and protection concerns around vulnerable inhabitants.

The study collected information on both official and unofficial points of entry, and confirmed that mobility inflows and outflows from Sierra Leone to Liberia and from Sierra Leone and Guinea following the re-opening of borders is high. While the occurrence of regular and orderly cross-border movements is vital for peace and stability in communities from the three countries, the presence of a weak border management system and functional infrastructure, as well as appropriate covid-19 management measures could remain challenging to border communities. As a way of mitigating these challenges, a couple of recommendations were highlighted. (1) Increase donor engagement: the three districts, Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba,

lack substantial socioeconomic livelihood supports. One way these locations could overcome the pains imposed by COVID-19 is for an increase donor concentration in these locations with socio-economic livelihood supports. This support needs to be tailored towards trade and agriculture in particular, as they are the major occupation for majority of the inhabitants. This would contribute in easing the extreme livelihood challenges imposed therein by COVID-19. (2) Increase funding for border infrastructure and management: As it is presently, there is a need for a support with new physical border infrastructure (border post) at points of entry in these districts. This would contribute towards cross-border security and substantial control of disease emanating from neighboring countries.

## Background

Sierra Leone shares 800km of borders with Guinea, as well as 300km of borders with Liberia. These borders witness large scale flows of people, goods and services on a daily basis. There are very close links between these three countries, be they historical, cultural, political or economic. Cross-border trade in goods, movements of students and business-people, family visits and labour migration of people to work in the mining and agricultural sectors are large contributors to the economies of all three countries.

The areas running along the borders are home to cross-border communities, single entities/communities which reside on both sides of the border, and who consider themselves homogeneous. As a result, members of cross-border communities in Sierra Leone regularly travel across international borders, to and from Guinea and Liberia, to work, trade, visit relatives, attend family and community gatherings, and access services and vice versa. Further illustrating this, data collected by IOM's DTM in December 2021 through focus group discussion and key informant interviews 90 per cent of participants stated there is a correlation between cross-border mobility and livelihood activities such as trade which provides income to support access to services such as schooling for children.

While movements across these borders are locally known and observed, little is documented about mobility across borders. This is particularly the case between Sierra Leone and Guinea, and between Sierra Leone and Liberia. More specifically, little widespread documented evidence of the extent and magnitude of cross-border flows, the profile of cross-border travellers, factors of mobility, and relations between cross-border communities and travellers

exist. In addition, and more importantly, little research has been carried out regarding the living conditions of cross-border communities and migrants living within these communities.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic had significant impacts on cross-border communities. Border closures, restrictions in mobility and the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis had significant social and economic consequences on these communities as well as in travellers moving between Guinea and Sierra Leone, and between Sierra Leone and Liberia. However, more information is needed to precisely assess these impacts. Thus, Japan Supplementary Budget (JSB) supported this exercise with the broad aim to strengthen health structures with these information for preparedness and early prevention of ailment around cross-border communities.

Furthermore, according to the focus group discussion and key informant interview conducted in this study, data related to public health risks and hygienic and safety measures is not easily available in these locations, especially in some remote across border communities. The lack of such information hinders the mitigation of outbreaks and potentiates the spread of infectious diseases at some PoEs. This remains a challenge to the COVID-19 pandemic's overall response efforts. There is a significant need to scale up capacity for COVID-19 and other disease prevention in border areas, and the availability of cogent data is needed to prompt appropriate decision making. Community event-based surveillance systems, "characterized as the collection, monitoring, assessment and interpretation of mainly unstructured and ad hoc information regarding health events or risk, which may represent an acute risk to human health"<sup>1</sup> is considered vital for the prevention of infectious disease outbreak and could also be further supported.

In light of this, the objective of the present study was to address information needs and the lack of available data on traveler flows and profiles, the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, living conditions, access to services and social relations in cross-border communities, as well as preparedness and response to COVID-19 at select Points of Entry (PoEs). These findings will inform the tailoring of programming and policymaking in cross-border communities, strengthening capacity for early prevention, detection, notification and response to COVID-

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<sup>1</sup> Kuehne, A., Keating, P., Polonsky, J., Haskew, C., Schenkel, K., de-Waroux, O.L.P., Ratnayake, R. (2019). Event-based surveillance at health facility and community level in low-income and middle countries. A systematic review. *BJM Global Health*

19 and other infectious disease outbreaks at the selected PoEs and surrounding areas. Additionally, the study mapped out trends and patterns of the socioeconomic challenges caused by COVID-19.

The remaining sections of this study are arranged as follows. The methodology section provides a detailed explanation of key definitions, geographical coverage and the process through which data were collected as well as the limitation of the study. Next, the document presents detailed analyses on mobility, with a particular focus on mobility characteristics, border mobility patterns, the operational status of Points of Entry and COVID-19. This is followed by a section on COVID-19 border management and coordination, in which the study highlights the pattern and structure through which coordination and management at the various points of entry were managed by the border management personnel. Moreover, the section on border infrastructure and disease surveillance highlights challenges faced at the PoEs and details the approaches taken to address the early detection of probable COVID-19 cases and prevention. Finally, the study presents the impact of COVID-19 on travelers, host communities and migrants and some of the security protection and social cohesion issues in these cross-border communities. The study ends by highlighting some of the needs and recommendations gathered from the field.

## Methodology

### Definitions

A **Point of Entry (PoE)** is a place where people or goods are authorized by the competent authorities to cross the border, or a place officially designated by the legal framework of the country as an official entry to / exit. Each PoE is a specific border crossing point<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, there are also unofficial Points of Entry that are not recognized as official by the government but have served as crossing points. In the context of this study, we refer to crossing points between Sierra Leone and Guinea, and between Sierra Leone and Liberia. For this study, the data collection mainly focused on land and water crossing points within these locations<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> [WHO/Europe | International Health Regulations - Points of entry](#)

<sup>3</sup> International Organization for Migration (2019). Glossary on migration: international migration law.

**Cross-Border Communities** are defined as communities originating from and residing in locations on the Sierra Leone border who have never been forcibly displaced. Cross-border communities are spread across multiple countries, with members of cross-border communities often travelling across international borders for livelihood activities, and regularly moving freely to and from their locations situated across the border.

**Community-Event Based Surveillance (CEBS)** in this context is characterised as a process where communities participate in “detecting, reporting, responding and monitoring the health events in their communities”. This is a recognised public health data collection approach<sup>4</sup> and communities within cross border communities in Sierra Leone also form part of such vicinities.

The **Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)** is an IOM system designed to track and monitor displacement and population mobility, provide critical information to decision-makers and responders during crises, and contribute to the better understandings of population flows. DTM was first conceptualized in 2004 to monitor internal displacement in Iraq and has since been adopted for implementation in over 80 countries, including in contexts of conflict, disasters, complex emergencies and protracted crises.<sup>5</sup> Such data is crucial for prompt, appropriate, and informed decision making.

**Cross-border migrants:** Individuals originating from third countries residing amongst border communities for at least six months.

**Cross border travelers:** Individuals crossing points of entry, regardless of the purpose or length of their journey.

**Key Informants:** In the context of the Points of Entry assessment, these include border management authorities (Port health, Immigration and Police officers).

## Geographical Coverage

The geographical coverage of this study includes Kailahun district (Eastern Province), bordering Guinea and Liberia, Pujehun district (Southern Province), bordering Liberia, and

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<sup>4</sup> [Event-based Surveillance | Division of Global Health Protection | Global Health | CDC](#)

<sup>5</sup> <https://displacement.iom.int/content/methodological-framework-used-displacement-tracking-matrix-operations-quantifying>



- 1) PoE assessment: Assessments were conducted at each of the PoEs identified during the mapping exercise, involving interviews with key informants, including officials in the health, immigration, border management and police present at the PoEs. This included both official and unofficial crossing points. Two levels of assessments were conducted. Level one collected information on POE official status, GPS coordinates and operational status (whether it is open, partially open, or closed). Level two collected information on International Health Regulation (IHR) standards and Immigration and Border management (IBM).
  
- 2) Thematic study: Focus group discussions targeted a selected group of people residing in host communities as well as cross border migrants. In total, 180 people (40% female and 60% male) were interviewed through 12 focus group discussions (each one with 15 participants).
  - a. Focus group discussions (FGDs) with cross-border migrants were conducted in previously identified districts hosting this target population. The FGDs were divided into four thematic areas: mobility and COVID-19, knowledge and socioeconomic impact of COVID-19, protection, security and social cohesion, and living conditions and access to services. Focus group participants were selected to participate in the thematic areas based on their knowledge of the topic. There were twelve focus group discussion across three the districts.
  - b. Key informant interviews (KII) were used to complement the focus group discussions to obtain quantitative information and gain perspective on the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19. A total of twenty-four key informants interview (8 per district) were conducted with the select stakeholders that mainly provided data relating to the institutional challenges at the border crossing points and how COVID-19 impacted the socioeconomic livelihood of cross border localities. The key informants were selected based on their strategic roles within those communities and in line with assistance from port health officials who work and reside in those cross-border vicinities.

Data was collected from 18-29 December 2021. The data collection period for the focus group discussion was twelve days, with four days dedicated to each district (totalling 180 participants). For the focus group discussions, each group was comprised of fifteen

participants (representatives drawn from the different border community local stakeholder). For each focus group the gender balance was 60 per cent male and 40 per cent female.

In addition, the key informant interviews within the three districts also lasted for twelve consecutive days. Data collection for the key informant interviews was done through 18 enumerators (15 male and 3 female), that targeted 24 (twenty-four) stakeholders 10 per district.

Key informants that participated in the exercise were mainly representatives from key institutions like the health, police and immigration office of national security within those localities as well as community inhabitants (migrants and local business owners). Key informants and focus group participants gave informed consent. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants and they were informed of the safeguards in place to protect the data collected. Data collection was done using paper forms for focus group discussions and Kobo collect via mobile for the key informants.

## Limitations

The methodology utilized mixed methods (focus group and key informant) and a key limitation was the limited geographical coverage due to resource constraints. Furthermore, even in assessed districts, the study did not cover all cross-border communities in the districts. The findings of the study are therefore not representative of whole district. Additionally, the use of coding for the thematic analysis also introduces coding bias which may be considered another limitation.

## Mobility

### Characteristics of mobility: Trade

Mobility around these identified points of entry have different characteristics. The data collection revealed that movements are at their peak in the dry seasons, during which the road network is utilized by those who are largely involved in trade activities. All the participants (200 people) from the focus group discussion and key informant interviewees noted this. In the Falaba district bordering with Guinea, trade is carried out across borders. Within the seven days of the week, designated days are kept for traders to move with their

goods from Sierra Leone across the border to transact in the form of trade with neighbours, and vice versa.

In Falaba district, noted for cattle trading, herders usually move with herds of cattle from Guinea to a town named Gbindi, Dembelia Sinkunia Chiefdom, for sales on Mondays. On such market days, inhabitants of the surrounding communities would assemble at the identified market site to buy and exchange varieties of goods and products which then would be used for either domestic purposes or for further petty transaction at household and village level. This was reported by all the participants of the focus group discussions and key informant interview held in Falaba District. They also added that the Gbindi trade has been in existence for several decades and is considered integral for cross-border economic integration.

In the Kailahun (bordering both Liberia and Guinea) and Pujehun (bordering Liberia) districts, similar trade activities were reported during the focus group discussion, but noted these were mostly for products of agriculture such as rice, banana, vegetables, fruits and palm oil. Due to the focus on agricultural trade in these districts with fertile land, a high volume of mobility is recorded during harvesting season which is mostly in the dry seasons. During the rainy season agricultural efforts are concentrated on growing the crops. This was reported according to the data of the focus group participants and the data collected through key informants.

These observations noted by the focus group participants and key informants suggest that mobility relating to cross-border trade is normalized through patterns and cycles of established livelihoods activities and culture.

### **Cross-border mobility patterns of travellers**

Patterns of cross border movements between Sierra Leone and the two neighbouring countries, Guinea and Liberia, are distinct in terms of geographic coverage and point of entry type. Movements between Sierra Leone and Liberia, come from the east and south-eastern part of the Sierra Leone. Points of entry used for these types of movement are usually water crossings. Local boats are one of the most commonly reported means of transportation as particularly indicated by all the fifteen participants of the focus group discussion in Pujehun,

and also a small proportion of movements are made using vehicles and footpaths through limited ground crossing (reported by all 15 participants) .

Movement patterns between Sierra Leone and Guinea originate from the east and northern part of Sierra Leone, where the countries share a border. According to the data, all the 120 participants of the focus group discussion held within these locations (Falaba and Kailahun) in December 2021 asserted that, these locations are known for frequent and large scale mobility inflow and outflow. This is a result of close family ties across borders, livelihood activities and well-established patterns of trade relating to herding and agriculture

According to data collection from the focus group discussions, 90 percent of participants observed that cross border movements between Sierra Leone and Guinea and between Sierra Leone and Liberia are normalized and are not considered, especially by the inhabitants residing within these cross-border communities, as travel, but rather as a typical pattern that enhances their cross-border communal bond. As a deepening interconnectedness is realized through trade, family ties, and links around access to social amenities, most of these travellers considered themselves as a homogenous entity only limited by the geographical boundary.

Another characteristic of these cross-border flows is the search for services. Focus group participants (80 per cent participants) noted that movement across the border is because these travellers wanted to access services that are not present where they live. This is particularly notable in the case of medical services and goods for trade and for domestic use. According to the participants (70 per cent) of the focus group discussion held in Falaba and Kailahun, the introduction of free health care for lactating mothers, pregnant women and children under five, attracted travellers within the cross-border communities<sup>6</sup>.

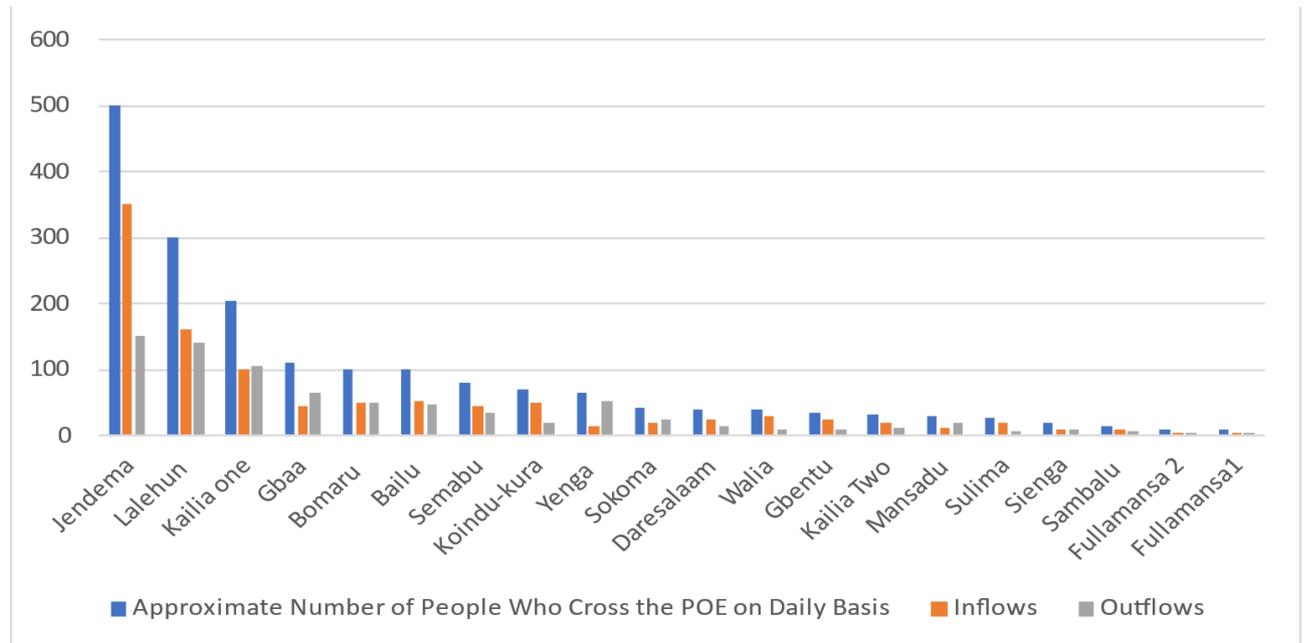
Data collected during both the key informant interviews and the focus group discussions revealed that, with the resumption of borders, cross-border flows have increased. This was observed at all the cross-border points in Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba, through both official and unofficial crossing points. Figure one below indicates the names of border crossing points and the daily movement flows, including the cumulative inflow and outflow at different crossing points with Sierra Leone. Of the three districts assessed, Pujehun hosted the PoEs

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.medindia.net/news/sierra-leone-free-health-care-programs-attracts-impooverished-neighbours-69663-1.htm>

with the highest daily flows, follow by Kailahun district, and then Falaba. The PoE with the highest flow in Pujehun district according to the data collected in Jendema and the lowest was recorded in Fullamansa in Falaba District. Further details are provided in annex 1.

**Figure 1:** Estimate of cross-border movements (inflow and outflow) in Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba on a daily basis by POE

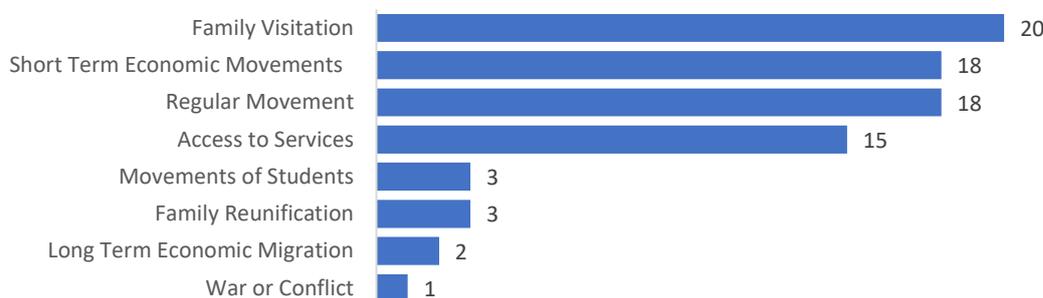


Daily flow data was collected through KI interviews at assessed points of entry and showed a greater number of entries (1,046) compared to exits (789).

Additionally, data from the interviews showed that women in Sierra Leone are largely associated with trade related mobility. 95 per cent of focus group participants reported that women’s involvement in small-scale trade provides short term income to care for households.

In addition to trade, various other factors were captured during the data collection that accounts for the level of movements - both inflow and outflow - within these cross-border communities. The below bar graph provides highlights on these patterns and trends.

**Figure 2:** Data on reasons for cross-border travels by number of respondents from the KI interviews (multiple answers possible)



### Points of Entry and COVID-19

Following the closure of border crossing points in Sierra Leone with the outbreak of the COVID-19 (from March to July 2020), only essential commodities were permitted to move across border points. Internally, restrictions including partial lockdown, bans on public gathering and the halting of inter-districts mobility were implemented in response to public health concerns.

Some of these movement restrictions generated distinctive challenges, particularly on the economic and social fronts. Both large and small-scale livelihoods enterprises were affected and, in many cases, halted. Additionally, community based social activity, such as gatherings in places of worship also ceased.

### Points of Entry and Operational Status

Points of entry through which travellers move from one location to the other attracted intense international attention relating to their management protocols in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as movements across and within countries through these points were significantly affected. From March, 2020 to July, 2020 all points of entry to Sierra Leone bordering with other countries were closed.

Data collected during the focus group discussions and key informant interviews indicated that Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba have a number of both official and unofficial PoEs. These official PoE include but are not limited to - Bailu, Yenga, Dawa, Bomaru, Jendema, Sulima, Bomaru, Daresalaam, Koindu-kura, Fullamansa, Walia, Gbentu. In addition, there are also several unofficial points of entry in these locations that are widely used.

All the key informants and focus group participants engaged during this study reported that the flow of travellers increased significantly through both the official and un-official crossing points following the lifting of the border closure ban and after the raining season starting in September 2020 specifically on market days (Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, Saturday), coming from Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia.

Data collected through the key informant interviews showed that following the lifting of the imposed mobility restrictions and the reopening of the borders in July 2020, the assessed points of entry returned to their previous operational status, and mobility patterns across these border communities resumed.

## **COVID-19, Border Management and Coordination**

With the reopening of borders, the mandatory observance of COVID-19 screening protocols was enforced at the assessed official crossing points, namely: the recording of travel history of travellers at crossing locations, obtaining the temperature and symptoms of travellers, wearing of mask for both incoming and outgoing travellers, and obligatory hand hygiene protocols. This can be attributed to the fact that PoEs with an official status host representatives from different government agencies including port health, security (police and military), immigration, customs and in some cases a local council representative.

Focus group discussion participants and key informants noticed that each point of entry has a border management and coordination convention jointly controlled by all represented border agencies (port health, security, immigration, customs, etc), with each agency designated to a specific assignment, ranging from ensuring health observance protocols for travellers, to security and safety for travellers, and information collection relating to the travellers' departure and their respective destinations in the country.

According to the focus group discussions and key informant interviews, the health protocols are mainly led by the port health officials at the respective PoEs, where passengers arriving at the border are interrogated by health officers for information collection and routine health checks. Cleared of any symptoms, travellers are then permitted to move to the next stage, immigration, for necessary travel protocols, while security agents ensure compliance from the travellers.

## Border Infrastructure, Public Health Measures and Equipment

Under the International Health Regulations of 2005 (IHR) considered as critical pillar for the operational status of PoEs, countries were advised to undertake specific measures at their “ground crossing, airports and ports to reduce the increase of health hazard from spreading to bordering countries.”<sup>7</sup> Such preventive protocols among others, should include standard operating procedures, such as public health emergency contingency plan; information education communication (IEC) materials; health declaration form; personal protective equipment; disinfection equipment; temporal detection; transfer system and coordination among the border management personnel.

Data collected through focus group discussion and key informant interviews in the selected border communities revealed that 70 per cent of respondents reported that health facilities were unavailable or in limited supply. This was the case in all points of entry in the assessed districts particularly in Bailu, Baidu, Bomaru, Dawa in the Kailahun district; Jendema, Sulima, Daresalam and Borbohum in the Pujehun district, and Fullamasa, Gbentu, Koindu-kura and Walia, in the Falaba district.

Data collected from the focus group discussion participants and key informant interviews show that observed that PoEs face challenges with some of the required quarantine facilities at the time this data was collected. According to data collected during the study, there were also prevailing challenges concerning the availability of adequate PPE and disinfection supplies, and a majority of the border personnel that participated in the focus group discussions stated that they had only received limited public health emergency training and would need more training to fully enhance their capacities for COVID-19 preparedness in instances of sudden increases of cases.

Infrastructure is key to the effective operation of these crossing points. POEs including Jendema, Baidu, Walia, Koindu-kura and Fulamasa, Gbentu, have limited physical infrastructures and equipment, while Bomaru, Yenga, Bomborhun and Daresalam lack the physical infrastructure to facilitate the effective management of mobility flows, despite being key crossing points. Personnel mostly work from a makeshift structure identified as a border

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/healthprotection/ghs/ihr/index.html>

post in these locations. This information was collected during the focus group discussion, key informant interviews and direct observation by the enumerators made at these locations.



Picture 1: A border post at Bomaru, one of Sierra Leone's main crossing point with Liberia ©IOM 2021 (Photo: EmmanuelVNKallon)

In general, the assessment found that all the assessed POEs across the three districts lack electricity with the exception of Bailu, Fullamansa and Jendema, and have inadequate water supply and sanitation. The points of entry, although remaining operational, lack computers for recording and storing data collected on cross-border movements that would ensure up to date and effective data management practice. Record keeping of incoming and outgoing travellers is done using ledgers, posing challenges to the accessibility and readily availability for use.

### Valued of Disease Surveillance at Cross Border Communities during Covid-19

One of the important means through which awareness of COVID-19 in these border communities has been increased is through disease surveillance. This is the practice of monitoring and observing with the objective to gather, analyse and distribute relevant information on disease occurrence and its spread<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/protocol/surveillance.pdf>

### **Awareness and Surveillance of COVID-19 at PoEs**

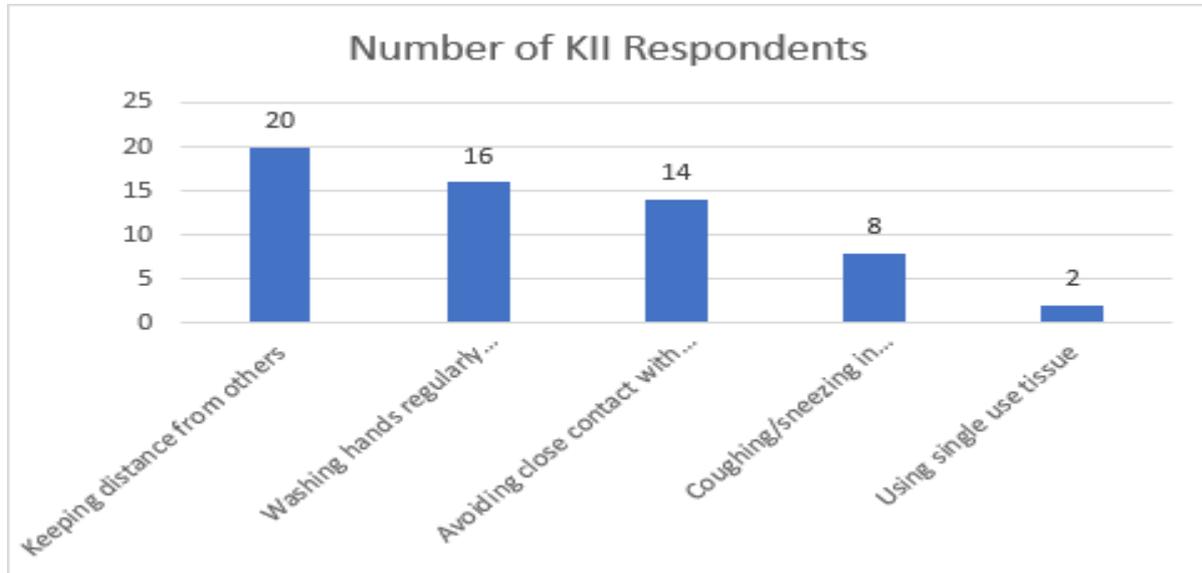
Data collected through the focus group discussions and key informant interviews revealed that border management actors had received some form of training on COVID-19 management. This helped to inform their disease surveillance approaches around points of entry and border locations. Also, within the border communities, participants specified that the community health authorities liaised strongly with the border personnel in gathering key information that informs timely intervention.

Additionally COVID-19 information education and communication materials relating to causes, symptoms and consequences of the disease were noted by all 20 of key informants interviewed and all participants of the focus groups which amount to 95 per cent of the assessed points of entry.

### **Awareness and Surveillance of COVID-19 at Border Communities**

Within the three assessed districts, the data revealed that the majority of inhabitants in border communities agreed that COVID-19 is spread through virus, however knowledge about the particular type of virus was lacking, 75 per cent of focus group discussion participants and 85 per cent of key informants reported this. Within the communities, knowledge of the virus has reportedly been increased through constant awareness raising in the form of sensitization by government authorities, as well as community or local stakeholders in town hall meetings, and through social media. During the focus group discussions held at the various cross-border communities, a question “what do you know about COVID-19 and measures taken for its prevention,” intended to gauge the awareness level on COVID-19. Data collected on this indicated that inhabitants have gradually become aware of the primary precautionary approaches relating to COVID-19 prevention, such as the practice of a regular handwashing, and social distancing. It was learned that some inhabitants have been able to know preventive measures and have been taking steps to sensitize immediate family and neighbours which are integral for community safety against the virus spread.

**Figure 3:** Number of key informant respondents that adhere to the COVID-19 measures



Travellers were also required to comply with regulations relating to community surveillance. According to the participants from the focus group discussion and key informants indicated that awareness of COVID-19 at the PoEs has have a direct relation with the surveillance system that has been deployed at community level and has helped in mitigating the spread of COVID-19 and other contagious ailments within their localities.

A key challenge noted by the inhabitants through focus group discussion about the pandemic is ability to differentiate the COVID-19 symptoms from other diseases. About 95 per cent stated symptoms are akin to symptoms of other ailments that have been in their communities for a long time.

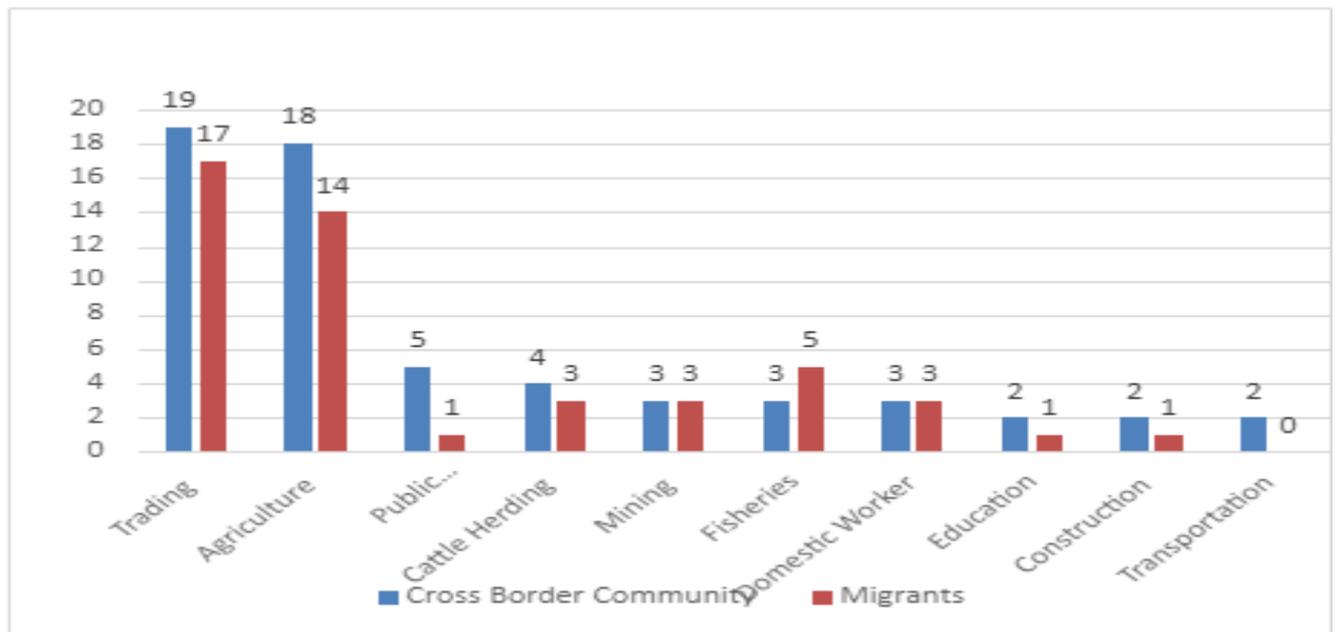
### COVID-19 Impacts on Travellers, Host Communities and Migrants Livelihood

The majority of the rural inhabitants in Sierra Leone at the border communities are farmers, with others engaged in small-scale trading, cattle management, fishing and mining , many also participates in cross border activities. All focus group participants (100%) in these cross-border communities in Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba overwhelmingly noted that agriculture and trading are the most frequent activities taken up by inhabitants. Agriculture in the form of subsistence farming, mainly in products such as rice, cassava, groundnut and potato, is

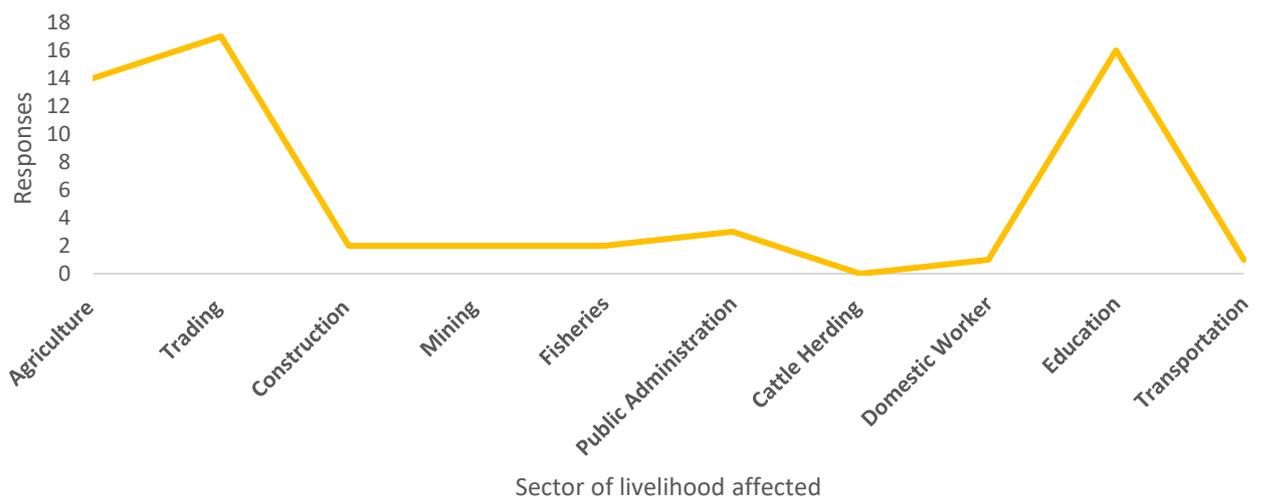
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among some livelihood activities through which families survive. In addition, sales of these agricultural products within and outside these cross-border communities with Sierra Leone is a common practice. Beyond agricultural products, families also trade other goods such as apparel, cosmetics, timber and animals.

**Figure 4:** Key Informants responses on the main livelihood activities of people in cross-border communities in Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba Districts.



**Figure 5:** Number of KI respondents indicating that the sectors of livelihood that have been affected (through lower yields) by the COVID-19 Pandemic



During the focus group discussion, participants revealed that COVID-19 created notable disruptions to livelihood activities. According to the data, one impact reported by the

participants was the low production of agricultural goods due to restrictions on movement and interaction. Another impact was the disruption of movement of people and trade (goods) from one location to another, especially during the period of border closure. About 95 per cent of participants narrated that, during the COVID-19 restrictions from April 2020 to July 2020 there were community members that were unable to trade.

Trade disruptions resulted in high food costs. Participants that amount to 97 per cent from the focus group discussions across the three districts, reported that this caused hardship for many households and that children were particularly affected, including their schooling.

Moreover, 95 per cent of participants from the focus group discussions reported that trade of all kinds follows a pattern of specific market days. Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays are among the most popular market days and attract significant cross border trade before COVID-19 and it is a common practice in these communities. During these days, inhabitants of Guinea and Liberia will cross over to Sierra Leone to trade goods of all forms, while Sierra Leonean inhabitants also cross over to Guinea and Liberia.

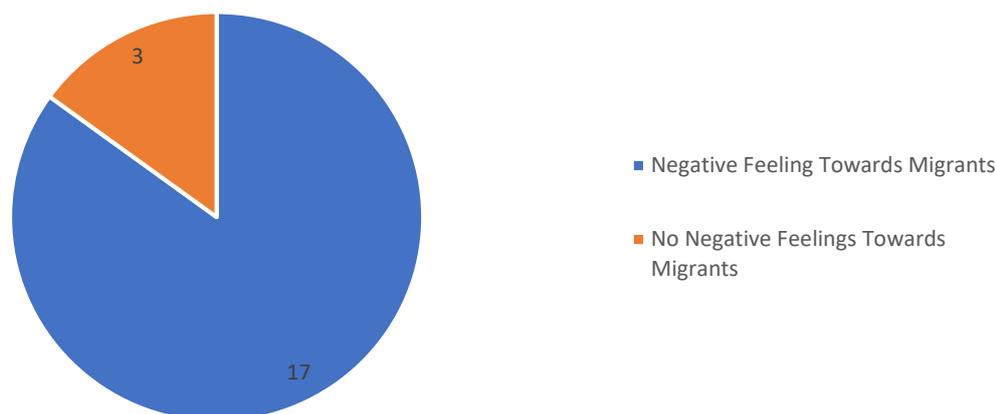
Trade in clothing is commonly practiced in the assessed areas and presents an example of cross-border interconnectedness between communities. Inhabitants of these communities rely on cross-border traders to supply clothing for festive periods. In turn, traders rely on these transactions to meet their personal and livelihood needs. According to 98 per cent of focus group participants and informant interviews, COVID-19 disrupted livelihood and interconnectedness patterns, and has subjected them to economic hardship with a challenging path to recovery.

Another livelihood area affected by COVID-19 mobility restrictions was cattle herding. Participants that amount to 60 percent reported that this affected Falaba district in particular as this was a key livelihood activity for that district. Focus group discussions revealed that in the dry season herders take cattle to locations ideal for grazing and sell the cattle on to local communities. This practice brings meat products and milk to local markets. This activity and market supply was disrupted due to mobility measures and was reported by focus group participants to have had an economic impact.

In addition to trade and farming, 70 percent of the focus group participants reported that access to social services was also impacted by COVID-19. This included access to education

and health care systems within cross-border communities. Participants (17 out of 20 the key informants) reported that COVID-19 affected trust for travelers and migrants due to concerns of the disease spread (please see figure 6).

**Figure 6:** Respondents of Key Informants interview on Negative feelings towards Migrants regarding COVID-19 crisis



It was also noted that activities such as mining and fishing ceased and unemployment became an economic challenge for those affected. Migrants were reportedly amongst those affected. Focus group participants (60 per cent) and key informant of (35 per-cent) noted that recovery is still on going and that this has impacted the ability to send children to school.

## Security Protection and Social Cohesion

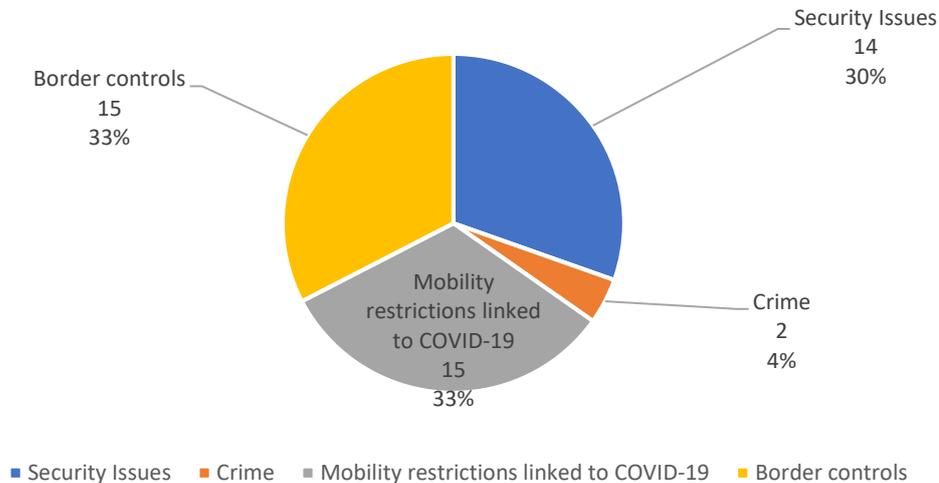
Security, protection and cohesion within communities particularly situated along crossing points with neighboring countries have always attracted keen attention by the local community stakeholders, inhabitants and government. The safety of these locations, the free movements of the inhabitants and general travelers, as well as their ability to live peacefully are integral to the functioning of crossing points.

With regards to social cohesion, data collected from participants (Focus group participants and key informants) from within these border communities in Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba 79 per cent of the participants showed that there has been a general calmness within their communities. Relationships between host communities, travelers and migrants were reported as stable as long as community by-laws were followed, and there is a relative cohesion among inhabitants, and migrants and host communities have lived in peace for

several years. One key factor contributing to this is that almost all travelers within these communities speak same language and many are associated with same families and relatives across border communities. Additionally, local by-laws exist within the communities that have worked towards cementing stability. Local authorities ensure that such regulations that maintain peace are abided by all, irrespective of origins. For instance, it was mandatory to present yourself to local authority on arrival in new communities, and such as abided or such traveler is requested to return from place of origin.

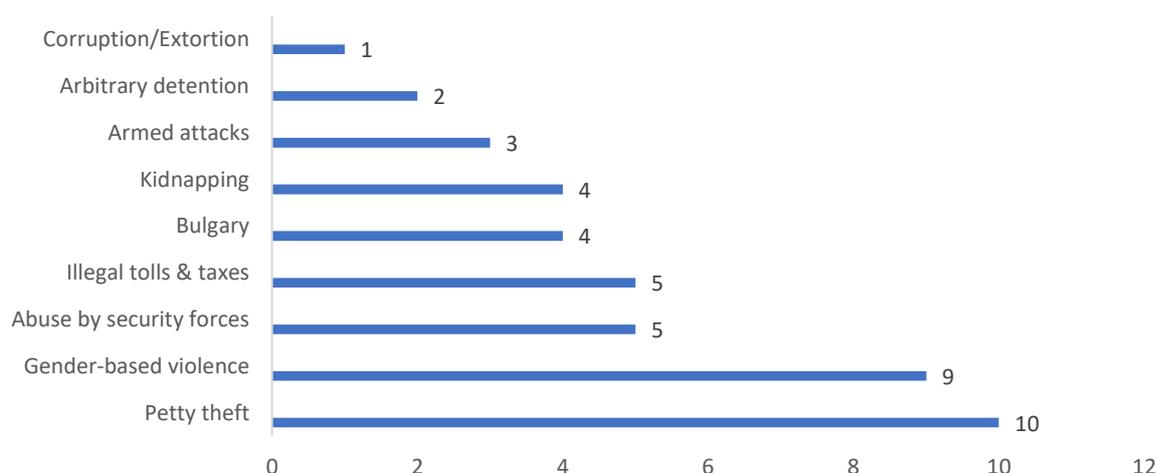
Regarding the community’s feeling of security during the COVID-19 period, criminal enterprises often became a widespread pattern in certain societies because of the many disruptions to inhabitants’ economic means of survival. Indeed, 75 per cent of focus group participants noted that robberies and thefts were sometimes reported but handled by local leaders. Another security concern faced within these borders was the restriction of movements. This limited the access to livelihoods and sometimes resulted in tensions between border security and travellers.

**Figure 7:** Barriers that impeded free movement of in border communities during COVID-19



Another issue put forward as a security threat that often resulted in the vulnerability of many inhabitants was the uncontrolled price system of transportation cost. Participants noted that drivers of vehicles and motorcycles often used to impose high price tags on passengers traveling from one location to the other in rural locations. They considered this high cost of transportation to have limited some form of their movements. In addition, the figure below indicates general security issues.

**Figure 8:** Main security issues during the cross-border travels.



## Needs and Recommendations

### Needs

With the emergence of the COVID-19 in 2020 in Sierra Leone, several priority needs have emerged. In the context of Sierra Leone, this not only reflects the needs of rural community inhabitants, but urban settings as well. For instance, with the outbreak of the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone in 2014, the dire situation of medical infrastructures was exposed in both urban hospitals, clinics and rural health centers<sup>9</sup>. During this study, the data collected from these border communities in Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba confirms that these needs connected to their geographical locations have not yet been addressed.

Among the expressed needs, priority should be given to the provision of border infrastructures in community points of entry, particularly official crossing points. The availability of such facilities in the communities would enhance community security and ease the fear of border community threats. Health care facilities and sanitation are also key challenges faced in many settlements. An increase in the number of health care facilities, would allow the populations to reduce the distances they usually have to cover to access health care.

<sup>9</sup> <https://bmchealthservres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12913-018-3072-3>

Additional means of transportation was another need participants put forward. They reported that because of the poor transportation system, some urban centers in Sierra Leone are difficult to access from extreme remote rural communities. Without a stronger transport system the cross-border population is limited in their ability to market their agricultural products, which caused many to move trade to Guinea. Participants said that the lack of accessible road networks also worsened their access to livelihoods. Interestingly, the fact that along border locations communities have to make transaction in both Sierra Leonean and Guinea's currencies appeared to not limit trade and remained a normalized and acceptable pattern within those locations.

Participants of all the three districts (Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba) also advocated to be assisted with micro-finance. They stated micro-credit finance assistance would help restart their lost businesses, which collapsed due to COVID-19. With the micro-finance assistance, participants argued they could reduce domestic tensions at home and within communities. Micro-finance support could also bolster agriculture yields, and allow communities to use part of their crops for household use while selling the surplus.

In the Pujehun district, fishing is a main occupation of its inhabitants. Thus, it was recommended that they would need an improved fishing infrastructure, e.g. storage, that would allow them to process and preserve the harvested fish.

## Recommendations

**Increase donor engagement:** the three districts, Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba, lack substantial socioeconomic livelihood supports. One way these locations could overcome the pains imposed by COVID-19 is for an increase donor concentration in these locations with socioeconomic livelihood supports. This support needs to be tailored towards trade and agriculture in particular, as they are the major occupation for majority of the inhabitants. This would contribute in easing the extreme livelihood challenges imposed therein by COVID-19.

**Increase funding for border infrastructure and management:** As it is presently, there is a need for a support with new physical border infrastructure (border post) at points of entry in these districts. This would contribute towards cross border security and substantial control of disease emanating from neighboring countries.

Road networks: Some border crossing points take hours for populations to access because of the bad networks. If they are fixed trade patterns and access to health care could be improved.

## Conclusion

This study explored various cross border phenomenon with the objective to understand how with the emergence of COVID-19 these locations became impacted in one way or the other, and more importantly, if any lesson could be learned from these communities. For the purposes of limiting the focus of the study, the survey focused only on the cross-border communities of Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba.

Like in many other countries affected by COVID-19, this study proved that generally, across border points, most official PoEs were closed. Regulations instituted by the government were put in place to restrict movements, as confirmed by the data in this study. Complementing those regulations, local by-laws in the various communities were invoked and became an integral component to the COVID-19 mitigation strategies. A key factor that is central to this study was the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19.

The study noted that community inhabitants, including both host communities and migrant residents, faced intense socioeconomic disruptions and for many, recovery from it has been slow and partial. Additionally, COVID-19 increased security and protection issues especially for vulnerable inhabitants, and also increased vulnerabilities within these rural settings (Kailahun, Pujehun and Falaba as noted by participants)

The study from these three districts revealed that there is a presence of many unofficial points of entry, and also that mobility inflows and outflows from Sierra Leone to Liberia and from Sierra Leone and Guinea have gradually increased. While regular and orderly cross-border movements are vital for peace and stability in communities from the three countries, a weak border management system lacking appropriate and functional infrastructures and appropriate COVID-19 management measures could remain challenging in these border communities.

## Annex 1: Number of movements recorded daily at PoEs

District	POE	Approximate Number of People Who Cross the POE on Daily Basis	Inflows	Outflows
Pujehun district	Jendema	500	350	150
Kailahun	Lalehun	300	160	140
Pujehun district	Kailia one	205	100	105
Pujehun district	Gbaa	110	45	65
Kailahun	Bomaru	100	50	50
Kailahun	Bailu	100	52	48
Kailahun	Semabu	80	45	35
Falaba District	Koindu-kura	70	50	20
Kailahun	Yenga	65	14	51
Kailahun	Sokoma	43	20	23
Pujehun district	Daresalaam	40	25	15
Falaba District	Walia	40	30	10
Falaba	Gbentu	35	25	10
Pujehun	Kailia Two	32	20	12
Falaba District	Mansadu	30	12	18
Pujehun	Sulima	26	19	7
Kailahun	Sienga	20	10	10
Kailahun	Sambalu	15	9	6
Falaba	Fullamansa 2	9	5	4
Falaba	Fullamansa1	9	5	4

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