Conflict Factsheet

Conflict and Armed Opposition Groups in the Lake Chad Basin

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Type of conflict</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
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<td>Sub</td>
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<th>Conflict Locality</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<td>Western Africa</td>
<td>2009 –ongoing</td>
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<th>Countries</th>
<th>Resources</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon</td>
<td>Fish, Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water, Resilience of the environment</td>
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Conflict Summary

The people living around Lake Chad are currently suffering from an intertwined humanitarian and security crisis. Clashes between military forces and Boko Haram over territory, attacks on civilians, and heavy handed counter-insurgency measures are worsening displacement, food insecurity and eroding of trust in political authorities. The government's approach, often centred on military operations, has often undermined local livelihoods adding to the pressures already faced by communities living in conflict areas. Combined social, economic and political developments underlie the current situation while pressures brought by climate change could compound its severity.
Conceptual Model

Climate Change
Gradual Change in Temperature and/or Precipitation

Environmental Change
Natural Resource Scarcity

Intermediary Mechanisms
Livelihood Insecurity

Fragility and Conflict Risks
Crime / Violence / Extremism

Social and Economic Drivers
Legal / Political Interference

Context Factors
Food Insecurity
Lack of Alternative Livelihoods
Trade restrictions

Elite Exploitation
Eroded Social Contract
Political Marginalization

Fish, Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water, Resilience of the environment
Conflict History

In late July 2009, Nigerian security forces raided a location in Bauchi, northern Nigeria, confiscating weapons and arresting nine people. Over the next few days, riots broke out in 4 cities in Nigeria’s northeast. Many government and police buildings were destroyed and around 700 people were killed in the uprising and military response. The location was later revealed to be an insurgent base and the riots were later dubbed the “uprising” (Adesoji, 2010). Since then, clashes involving state security forces and Jama’atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda’Awati Wal Jihad (People Committed to the Prophet’s Teachings for Propagation and Jihad), commonly known as “Boko Haram” have led to the deaths of over 35,000 people and the displacement of 2.4 million (Council of Foreign Relations, 2019).

The response of the Nigerian government (leading the fight against Boko Haram) in collaboration with the militaries of the other riparian states (Chad, Cameroon, and Niger) has been heavy handed. The combined militaries (Multinational Joint Task force or MNJTF) anti-terror measures have often hurt local communities directly or indirectly. Ironically, overly militarised responses could be driving recruitment into insurgent groups rather than preventing it, as Jihadists capitalise on grievances over state oppression, among others related to lack of public service provision (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2018; see also case study on violent extremism in the Sahel).

The rise of Boko Haram

Until the late 2000s, Boko Haram was largely confined to Borno State in northern Nigeria. It originated from an Islamic reading group in the 1990s which was critical of the government’s inability to bring prosperity to the north. Muhamamd Yusuf, the group’s leader blamed the western education of leaders for their failure, and in particular the hoarding of wealth which left the primarily Muslim north of the country chronically impoverished. In reaction to various national and global political factors such as wars in the Middle East and growing hostility towards the government, the group grew during the 2000s, engaging in electoral politics in 2003. In the years leading up to the uprising and subsequent ban of the group, Boko Haram’s aims of combining sharia and governance was supported by many local politicians including the current president Muhammadu Buhari (Harnischfeger 2014). After the 2009 uprising Boko Haram internationalised, and collaborated with other radical Islamic groups such as AQIM, al-Shabaab, and Malian groups. This was when it began to use extreme violence against civilians to pursue its political agenda (Watts, 2017).

The recent growth of Boko Haram is linked to various intertwined political, social, economic and ecological developments in Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria. In 2015, Nigeria’s current President Buhari was elected to replace Goodluck Jonathan on an anti-corruption platform in the wake of multiple embezzlement scandals (BBC, 2015, Kazeem, 2015) and a growing distrust of elites. Shortly after, the country experienced a recession related to a plunge in oil prices and a related fall in government revenue (Agri et al, 2016). Like other insurgencies such as the movement for the emancipation of the Niger delta (MEND) a major oil producing region, it gained large numbers of fighters through the recruitment of young men living in precarious social and economic conditions. However, local variances shaped the insurgencies differently (Watts, 2017) (see case study on oil production in the Niger Delta).

Driving factors
Many scholars question the idea that religious or ideological factors are driving the conflict, regarding them more as opportunitistic strategies to mobilise support in the context of economic hardship and political problems (Connor, 2017). After independence in 1960, the Northeast of Nigeria near Lake Chad was associated with wealth owing to mineral deposits and rich agricultural soils. However, since the 1970s the country’s economy has been centred around oil (Omeje, 2006) effectively leaving other regions economically marginalised and politically forgotten. Over the past decades wealth has increasingly been centred in the Christian south, while the North has suffered economically (Wallis, 2014).

Poverty was worsened by the structural adjustment policies imposed in the 1980s and 1990s that reduced employment opportunities in the public sector (Watts, 2017) and recurring droughts especially in Chad and Niger. Freedom Onuoha (2014) draws a link between poverty and lack of education and the vulnerability of the communities to join groups such as Boko Haram. While others attribute the growth to crisis of youth living in precarious circumstances (Nagarajan, 2018) or a combination of factors which augmented challenges to the ideological legitimacy of governing institutions (Watts, 2016).

The insurgency has arguably benefited from a decline in the perceived authority of governments and state institutions in the region. Structural neglect of the border regions around Lake Chad and multiple political crises have eroded the credibility of institutions and made people more receptive to political and economic promises made by jihadist groups (Watts, 2017).

Moreover, increasing violence against civilians is an incentive for some people to seek the protection of armed militias. In particular, indiscriminate violence by state security forces could be responsible for the rising popularity of armed opposition groups. According to specialist Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, “blind repression” of the Nigerian army – who were blamed for slaughter and rape in the North – led many to join Boko Haram forces against the government (Malagardis, 2014). Meanwhile, state-sponsored local self-defence units were accused of human rights abuses and extreme violence against civilians (Nagarajan, 2018) and there have been limited efforts to reintegrate ex combatants back into communities, with a detrimental effect on social cohesion in the region (Vivekananda et al, 2019).

**State-imposed restrictions on trade and access to the lake**

Military responses to the crisis have further undermined local livelihoods which rely on access to natural resources such as water and land for grazing and farming. By imposing restrictions on trade and mobility around Lake Chad, security forces have impeded local people’s access and control over vital resources (see case study on local conflicts around Lake Chad). To aid the military effort, governments in the region closed their borders and prohibited access to certain places. This cut off important trade routes and banned local communities from essential fishing areas and pastures. The military and police forces have also restricted small scale agriculture and fishing to cut off armed opposition groups’ income and food supply; tall crops have been banned in some areas as they could offer hiding places for insurgents (Vivekananda et al, 2019).

**Reduced possibilities to cope with climate and environmental change**

Military efforts may also have had a negative effect on the ability of local communities to withstand the effects climate change and variability of precipitation patterns. While communities were previously able to shift livelihoods and migrate to adapt to variability, restrictions on access to natural resources related to the conflict around Lake Chad are making this more difficult.
The future effects of climate change on the region are uncertain. Around Lake Chad and across the Sahel, temperatures are projected to increase by 0.65 °C and 1.6 °C between 2016 and 2025 (Mahmood et al., 2019), although trends are likely to vary across countries and regions (see Karmalkar et al., 2012). Overall, precipitation is predicted to decrease in the basin in the coming years (Mahmood, 2019), while rainfalls are likely to become more variable and unpredictable (Nagarajan et al., 2018). This could have impacts on agriculture and health, as the possibility of floods or droughts would increase with more variability (Ly et al., 2013). On the other hand, there is a trend towards increasing rainfall in the Sahel, which may also affect available water in some areas around the Lake Chad Basin (Nagarajan et al., 2018).

People living around Lake Chad are used to adapting to changing climatic conditions. However, conflict has hindered adaptive capacity in various ways. For instance, moving to new grazing areas made available by the variability in rainfall as well as growing different crops and adapting fishing according to climatic variations were often curtailed in the fight against insurgent groups. The strong enforcement of borders and restriction of pastoralist mobility and trade as well as small scale agriculture around the lake has reduced the resilience of agro-pastoral and subsistence agriculture systems (Vivekananda et al., 2019).

At the same time, environmental changes may further deprive communities of their livelihoods and essential resources, and potentially lead the latter to join radicalised groups; although this link is more tenuous (Onuoha, 2014; Malagardis, 2014).

Resolution Efforts

Over-militarised counter-insurgency measures

Until now, the main strategy employed by Lake Chad governments in relation to the insurgents has been a military crackdown and attempts to thwart insurgents from gaining and strengthening a foothold in the Lake Chad Basin.

The militaries of the riparian states have employed the Multinational Joint Taskforce (MNJTF) to regain territory from Boko Haram. The force is under the auspices of the Lake Chad Basin Commission. Its mandate, from the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) led to the deployment of 10,000 fighters. The MJTF also employs, albeit indirectly, numerous local counter insurgency militias amounting to around 35,000 fighters from Chad Cameroon, Nigeria and Niger (Assanvo et al, 2016). These combined forces potentially outnumber the estimated 7,000-15,000 fighters of Boko Haram, however, it is possible the numbers of fighters in the insurgency is underestimated (Amnesty international, 2015).

While militarised approaches to the crisis have weakened the insurgency, in some areas they have lacked foresight and undermined local livelihoods. In Niger and Chad the military restricted fishing, grazing and farming rights for subsistence agriculture. This weakened public support for state institutions and military presence and allowed insurgents to exploit grievances of those affected by repressive actions and policies.

Moreover, militarised approaches have in many cases overshadowed attempts to address underlying political, social, economic and ecological concerns of people living in the basin. As a result, social cohesion between various groups has been weakened. Conflicts over land rights and restrictions on the use of
natural resources have increased tensions both between and within social groups, occasionally leading to conflict and violence based on ethnic, gender and class distinctions, as well as between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders (see case study on local conflicts around Lake Chad). Previous trade and social links have come under increased pressure due to human rights violations and restrictions on trade and mobility imposed by the military.

**Economic development and social cohesion**

Some have argued that a successful resolution of the crisis around Lake Chad may require a more holistic approach beyond achieving a military victory against armed opposition groups and may involve a political settlement or treaty between conflicting parties (Vivekananda et al, 2019).

Social cohesion is essential for building solidarity between social groups and rebuilding trust in institutions. This could include access to justice and securing access rights to land and other resources (ibid). The Lake Chad Basin Commission's Lake Chad Development and Climate Resilience Action Plan (2015) highlights a need to develop rural electrification and secure land rights for communities to foster rural development. However these could become targets for insurgent groups or worsen tensions if introduced inequitably.

**Promoting Dialogue**

While negotiations between security forces and the insurgency have been limited, there have been some indications that dialogue is possible between the groups. In 2015 for instance, Information minister Lai Mohammed said the government have been in negotiations with Boko Haram. President Buhari told the media in 2015 that he was willing to negotiate the return of kidnapped girls who were taken in 2014. However, he was only successful in negotiating the return of around half of them. Efforts to resolve the conflict through negotiation have so far proven unsuccessful due in part the fragmented nature of the insurgency and the fact that some factions are more open to dialogue than others (Campbell, 2018). The strategy has tended therefore towards and increased military effort.

**Enhancing local livelihoods**

Local livelihoods on the shores of Lake Chad (pastoralism, fishing, subsistence agriculture) all require mobility to adapt and improve resilience to climate change and variations in the Lake’s size as well as economic shocks to local markets and trade networks. Currently strategies to resolve the conflict often restrict mobility and access to markets; curbing, rather than supporting local adaptation strategies.

Where mobility is hindered, communities employ practices to make livelihoods more secure and resilient to ecological and economic shocks. For instance, harvesting Typha, known locally as bulrush or cattail may address a few of the challenges. A reed common to Lake Chad, security forces have claimed it offers shelter to insurgents. However, it is also a foodstuff, a biofuel and can be used in building. Hence promoting its use could aid local livelihood security. Similarly, Spirulina, a nutritious alga, widespread in Lake Chad, is collected and eaten by the local population. Promoting its production could provide an income, especially for women, who were the main beneficiaries of past projects centred on its promotion (Vivekananda et al, 2019).

**Climate Change adaptation**

While migration and movement is the most common way for local communities to deal with changes in temperature and precipitation, sometimes migration routes may be blocked by border guards. Meanwhile, previously reliable and fertile destinations may be hit by droughts or other problems. Strengthening local knowledge about potential changes could help communities prepare and address
climatic variability. Improving awareness and readiness, e.g. through the dissemination of better climate and hydrological information, may help farmers, pastoralists and fisher folk adapt to economic and ecological shocks, while facilitating forward-looking policies, which engage local communities who have previously been marginalised. Further, pastoralist mobility and resilience rely on open migration routes, thus strong border regimes may impede on the adaptability of livelihoods and reduce the social cohesion of cross-border social networks.

Finally, Polders are an effective way to control floods and create productive land for food production, well suited to the shore areas around Lake Chad. Polders, land reclaimed from a body of water by building dikes and drainage canals, require some initial infrastructure investment for drainage and irrigation. They have been successfully used in the region, especially around Bol, in Chad, since the 1960s, to grow crops (Vivekananda et al, 2019).

**Towards a holistic approach to the crisis**

Furthermore, a better understanding of peace and conflict between land users and their engagement (see case study on local conflicts around Lake Chad) in development policies is needed to explain the rise of insurgent groups, as well as the effects of environmental and economic and social changes on insecurity. This would include gathering more information on security, the environment, the economy and society in the region.

There is also entrenched gender based violence and inequality which has worsened over the past decade in relation to the conflicts (Vivekananda et al, 2019). This implies social and economic policies should take issues of gender into account (it is thought Boko Haram gained support from young men who felt excluded from institutions of marriage) (ibid). Solutions may also involve long-term planning based on detailed social and ecological data to provide information on the relationships between policies, social relations, climate change and conflict. Improving available information could also include greater participation of a wide variety of groups in the gathering of relevant information for social policies if research is designed according to the concerns of affected groups.
### Intensities & Influences

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<th>Intensities</th>
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<td>International / Geopolitical Intensity</td>
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### Resolution Success

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<td><strong>Resolve of displacement problems</strong></td>
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<td>Displacement continues to cause discontent and/or other problems.</td>
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<td><strong>Reduction in geographical scope</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>There has been no reduction in geographical scope.</td>
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<td><strong>Grievance Resolution</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grievances have been mostly ignored.</td>
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Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building
Peacekeeping
Whereas governments in the region need to end the instability in the interest of communities, the means for doing so need to be compatible with the goal of sustainable livelihoods for, and better relations between communities in the region as well as the state legitimacy that will grow from enabling these. For this is will be necessary to critically review and adapt the tactics used to combat armed opposition groups.

Dialogue
There have been suggestions to open dialogue but they have been overshadowed by a heavy handed military effort

Social inclusion & empowerment
Livelihoods relate to more than just the provision of jobs, support needs to be holistic and address all sections of society and inequalities between social groups and along the lines of gender, class and ethnicity in order to restore social cohesion and local governance. Gender inequality is a central dynamic in the conflict, and violations of human rights in the context of abuse by militaries are frequent. Facilitating access to land and other productive assets, particularly for women who face difficulties in owning land, should be an important element of preventing the power imbalances which lead to gender based violence. More investment in support for survivors of abuse is also needed.

Promoting peaceful relations
Social cohesion is essential for building solidarity between social groups and rebuilding trust in institutions. This could include access to justice and securing access rights to land and other resources. Social cohesion could further be promoted by providing access to mechanisms for justice and dialogue between generations, social groups and between conflicts parties. Securing peoples’ right to land may also directly contribute to peacebuilding and enhanced social cohesion.

Improving state capacity & legitimacy
Local institutions require support to develop appropriate policies and environmental and social planning at the local or municipal level. This suggests Investment in governance and institutional development is needed.

Improving infrastructure & services
Critical to community resilience to crises, and in underlying fractured relations between the state and citizens is access to basic services such as sanitation, health and education.

Promoting alternative livelihoods
Local practices could aid both climate change adaptation and stability in the region. For instance, harvesting Typha, known locally as bulrush may improve local livelihood security. Similarly, Spirulina, a nutritious alga, widespread in Lake Chad, is collected and eaten by the local population. Promoting its production could provide an income, especially for women, who were the main beneficiaries of past projects centred on its promotion.

Improving actionable information
Improving awareness and readiness, e.g. through the dissemination of better climate and hydrological information, can help farmers, pastoralists and fisher folk adapt to economic and ecological shocks, while facilitating forward-looking policies.
Resources and Materials

References with URL

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Further information