Conflict Factsheet

Local Conflicts over Resources around Lake Chad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of conflict</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Locality</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Africa</td>
<td>1970 – ongoing</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon</td>
<td>Fish, Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water</td>
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</table>

Local resource competition

Conflict Summary

Weakened local institutions, environmental pressures, and changes associated with uneven economic development have brought destitution to many people living in the Lake Chad Basin. Disruptions to fisheries, small scale agriculture, pastoralism, and trade have intensified competition for resources and put severe strains on social relations among communities. These challenges risk being compounded by climate change, as the Lake Chad region is likely to experience a higher variability in average rainfall, which could mean more droughts and floods. There have been some attempts to adapt local institutions to be better able to mitigate conflicts and provide services in a changing context.
Conceptual Model

Climate Change
- Gradual Change in Temperature and/or Precipitation
- More Frequent / Intense Extreme Weather Events

Environmental Change
- Increased Water Scarcity
- Natural Resource Scarcity

Intermediary Mechanisms
- Change in Access / Availability of Natural Resources
- Grievances between Societal Groups
- Livelihood Insecurity

Fragility and Conflict Risks
- Displacements / Migration

Social and Economic Drivers
- Economic Development

Context Factors
- Water-stressed Area
- Low Level of Economic Development
- Fish, Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water
Conflict History

Historically, the population of the Lake Chad Basin has enjoyed plentiful natural resources and thriving local trade based on networks of different laws, languages, and cultures. Yet, severe droughts in the 1970s and 1980s, high variability in rainfall (Nawaz, 2017) and migration to the lake by people seeking fertile land have increased pressures on local resources. This dynamic further accelerated by civil war and mass displacements in Chad (Magrin, 2016). Pressures on local resources have further augmented since the 1980s as a result of land use change and water redirection associated with irrigation and hydroelectricity projects. Fragile local institutions have struggled to cope with these changes and to effectively manage emerging competition between farmers, pastoralists and fisher folk. As a result, local conflicts have worsened, primarily playing out along social fault-lines such as ethnicity, religion, gender, and class (Onuoha, 2010). A further escalation of this situation is possible in view of the growing threat of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region since 2014 (Coghlan, 2015; see also case study on Boko Haram).

National economic development can put pressure on local livelihoods

Infrastructure projects related to hydropower production and single crop intensive agriculture have had severe impacts on local livelihoods. The Maga Dam, for instance, which begun construction under the French colonial government and finished in 1979 after independence, was built under the assumption that it would strengthen the local economy through rice cultivation. However, the dam decreased water flows to the lake and downstream wetlands, leading to species extinction, as birds and fish were deprived of their wetland habitat. Fisheries were diminished and pastures and areas needed for watering livestock were lost (Asah, 2015). Although the projects sought to improve local livelihoods, it led to the displacement of many and exacerbated competition over dwindling fish stocks in Lake Chad (Asah, 2015; Vivekananda et al., 2019).

Resource conflicts around Lake Chad

As land was converted from grazing to agriculture, pastoralists have struggled to support their herds and have on occasion come into conflict with farmers over encroachment from both sides (Onuoha, 2010). Furthermore, unusual shifts in people’s movements - and with them the risk of land use conflicts - have been driven by uneven access to water resources. This could be linked to variability in rainfall. In particular, severe drought periods during the 1970s and 1980s saw an influx of people seeking fertile land on the shores of Lake Chad, leading to tensions between resource users in some cases (Onuoha, 2010).

Similarly, fishing livelihoods have been affected by upstream dam development and erratic rainfalls. When rainfall is low, rivers do not contain as much fish as when rains are plentiful. Fisher folk therefore must travel further afield than before, and encounter resistance from those who claim territory over their new fishing destinations. Newcomers are often threatened with violence by those citing longer held territorial claims (Vivekananda et al., 2019). In Chad, fisher folk, particularly refugees from Nigeria, said they were asked to pay higher fees to local communities for permission to fish in certain areas. They are prevented from fishing near certain islands, even by offer of payment. Tension have also risen between internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and pastoralists in Niger as IDPs and refugees harvest grass to sell to the pastoralists who would normally be able to graze their animals freely (Vivekananda et al., 2019; 59).

Aggravating factors
Alongside these pressures, unsuccessful political reforms, rising inequality and corruption have added to grievances and the perception of local communities of having been left to fight among themselves. Proliferation of weapons in the region has become an additional risk for escalating violence (Djourdébbé and NgaryamNGaye, 2011).

Conflicts between organisations such as Boko Haram and the state have brought challenges for inhabitants. In some areas the military has banned fishing, farming and movement – in particular, on the highly fertile and productive islands on the lake – and people detained for trying to access these areas have been accused of collaborating with armed opposition groups (Vivekananda et al., 2019). These measures further restrict communities access to essential natural resources and worsen the situation of those caught in the middle of the conflict between insurgents and militaries. This could antagonise communities and thus risk amplifying resource-related local conflicts (see also case study on Boko Haram).

Moreover, conflicts between the state and Islamic insurgent groups have worsened tensions structured along ethnic lines between nomadic Fulani pastoralists and sedentary populations (UNEP, 2011). The inability of the political institutions and structures to resolve competing claims over natural resources has been a main reason for conflict escalation (Onuoha, 2010).

**Climate change as a possible risk multiplier**

Climate change risks compounding the above challenges. More variable rainfall (see Nawaz, 2017; Nagarajan et al., 2018; 18) could increase the vulnerability of social, ecological and economic activities and make it increasingly difficult to plan crops and herd movements in a way that limits potential conflicts between farmers and pastoralists (Onuoha, 2010; 26). Changes in temperature and precipitation patterns may lead to the spread of diseases which affect crops and cattle. Climate change could further be driving refugees to the lake as livelihoods in the surrounding countries are affected by drought. It is unclear whether local institutions will be able to cope with such drastic changes, as communities who have traditionally inhabited the lake area and refugees have faced challenges in the past in negotiating conflicts and rights to local resources (Magrin, 2016).

**Resolution Efforts**

**Ensuring equitable access to vital resources**

Securing peoples’ right to land can directly contribute to peacebuilding and building social cohesion if policies are climate and conflict-sensitive. There are several challenges for local institutions when it comes to land tenure. One is disputes between host communities, internally displaced peoples and refugees. In order for policies to be successful in preventing conflicts, marginalised communities, as well as marginalised people within communities must be involved in activities and meetings that facilitate regular interaction and exchange that open up dialogue and foster conflict mediation through local institutions; otherwise, negotiations risk being ineffective channels for resolving future conflicts. Particular attention should be paid to the meaningful participation of civil society groups usually marginalised from decision making including women, people with disabilities and young people. The Lake Chad Development and
Climate Resilience Action Plan funded by the World Bank is one initiative which includes civil society in its planning (Vivekananda, et al 2019).

Within these programmes, climate change awareness both in terms of climate impacts and current climate change policies is becoming a prominent discourse. For example, when designing land tenure proposals, policy makers may be required to consider the climate vulnerability of particular areas and groups. As the scope of vulnerability can often be ambiguous, how policies integrate climate change into policy will determine the outcomes of actions. If policies are augmented towards climate smart-agriculture but fail to account for how access to land and resources as well as exclusion from development planning, they may worsen the situation for local communities or increase the likelihood of conflict. New techniques, equipment and seeds for people vulnerable to climate change may also therefore be backed up with context and conflict sensitive information on local social and ecological systems to provide an understanding of which practices work well for communities and which do not.

There is thus a call for more detailed information to be gathered at the local and regional level to develop context specific policies and understandings of how conflicts develop and how they are successfully mitigated. This may include insights from both on the ground research, local knowledge as well as participatory geographical mapping and planning based on up to date climate data, projections and territories and land uses determined through political and legislative processes.

**Inclusiveness and capacity-building**

Some scholars have also highlighted the importance for governments to include communities in water-management processes and of engaging in capacity-building measures to empower the latter to preserve the Lake’s ecosystem (Onuoha, 2010). Plans to redirect water into the lakes pools through dams, while having the aim of helping local communities, may risk displacing people in the river basin and potentially worsening displacement and conflict in the short and medium terms. Any projects will need to include and be based on the needs of those most affected by the changes.

Meanwhile, the development of dikes or polders must avoid potential harm or a reduction of fertile land for agriculture or create new territorial disputes between communities. As the shores of Lake Chad are variable, the development of infrastructure may be threatened by shifting shorelines. At the same time, measures may benefit some groups at the expense of others across gender, class or other social fault lines.

**Addressing the root causes of fragility**

Conflict resolution strategies increasingly consider the ongoing conflict between insurgent groups such as Boko Haram and the state. The conflict has reportedly made it difficult to conduct water-management projects in the region (Ritter, 2018) and increased tensions between communities (see also case study on Boko Haram).

Efforts to tackle the conflicts induced by the depletion of Lake Chad’s have often been based on strategies to restore the lake’s ecosystem through the redirection of rivers. However, other causes also make the population vulnerable to the environmental changes and more prone to conflict. These are often social, political and economic as well in relation to access to ecological resources.

One solution proposed by Vivekananda, et al (2019) is to focus on preventing the prolonged precarity of potential combatants and ex-combatants as well as marginalised groups. This would primarily involve
providing viable livelihoods, which acknowledge the roles different groups play in social and economic life. In practical terms providing jobs, which exceed the income brought from working for Boko Haram, may be necessary, if the organisation is to be undermined. This may require increased investment in local social and economic sectors and institutions and is fundamental to the sustainability of reintegration and rehabilitation planning. At the moment as the focus remains on military strategies to eradicate the group while alternative approaches have been marginalised (Vivekananda, et al 2019; see also case study on Boko Haram).

### Intensities & Influences

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<td><strong>INTENSITIES</strong></td>
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<td>Human Suffering</td>
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<td><strong>INFLUENCES</strong></td>
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<td>Environmental Influences</td>
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<td>Societal Influences</td>
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- Diplomatic Crisis
  - No diplomatic crisis
- Violent Conflict
  - Yes
- Salience with nation
  - Regional
- Mass displacement
  - Less than 100,000 and less than 10% of the country’s population are displaced within the country.
- Cross Border Mass Displacement
  - Less than 100,000 and less than 10% of the population are displaced across borders.

### Resolution Success

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<td><strong>Reduction in Violence</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>There was no reduction in violence.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resolve of displacement problems</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Displacement continues to cause discontent and/or other problems.</td>
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<tr>
<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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<tr>
<td><strong>Increased capacity to address grievance in the future</strong></td>
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<td>There is no increased capacity to address grievances in the future.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grievance Resolution</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grievances have been mostly ignored.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>There has been no reduction in intensity</td>
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Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building
Cooperation
Lake Chad’s co-riparian States created the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) to foster better water management and cooperation between its members. The LCBC is currently conducting a project to transfer the waters of the Congo basin to Lake Chad in order to replenish the water basins.

Humanitarian & Development aid
Some international bodies such as the World Bank and DFID are supporting the LCBC in conducting a number of support and poverty-reduction projects for local communities.

Social inclusion & empowerment
Livelihood support needs to be holistic and address all sections of society in order to restore social cohesion and local governance. This requires a better understanding of how different groups are affected by changes and how inequalities between social groups can be mitigated. For instance, Women, and disabled people are often excluded from political decision making while men are often viewed with suspicion as potential perpetrators of violence. Interventions must aim to transform underlying social exclusion, inequalities, marginalisation and power dynamics. Moreover, marginalised communities, as well as marginalised people within communities must be involved in dialogues and conflict mediation if those are to successfully address the root causes of resource related conflicts.

Improving state capacity & legitimacy
In order for local institutions to foster cooperation and conflict mitigation, governance and institutional investment may be needed. Local institutions in the region need support to strengthen policy, regulatory and oversight capacities, to tackle corruption, to provide quality social service delivery planning and to invest in the expansion of governance at local levels.

Improving infrastructure & services
The development of dikes or polders, while potentially bringing economic benefits, must avoid potential harm or a reduction of fertile land for agriculture or new territorial disputes between communities. As the shores of Lake Chad are variable, the development of infrastructure may be threatened by shifting shorelines (Vivekananda, et al 2019).

Promoting alternative livelihoods
Given the fast-paced fluctuation of the lake, it is critical to support alternative livelihoods for local communities in order to reduce their dependence on natural resources and to help them adapt to the reduction in resource availability.

Improving actionable information
To alleviate challenges brought by climate change programmes and infrastructure development must be context specific and be led by those most affected by the alterations. National assessments have limited use when
Resources and Materials

Conflict References

Transnational Conflict and Cooperation in the Lake Chad Basin

References with URL


Odada et al. (2006). Lake Chad: Experiences and Lessons Learned Brief.


Further information

https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/lake-chad-africa-local-conflicts-over-survival-resources