

# A Review on Devastating Conflict in the Shore of Lake Chad Africa

Umara Zulum<sup>1</sup>, Malini Prava Sethi<sup>2</sup>, Vineet Chandan<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> lecturer II faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Geography University of Maiduguri, Borno State Nigeria

<sup>2,3</sup> Assistant Professor Dept. of Geography School of Liberal Art, Noida International University, Uttar Pradesh India

Corresponding author: Umara Zulum

**Abstract - The prolonged conflict in the Lake Chad Basin has triggered millions of men and women from their daily livelihoods, making them mostly rely on humanitarian assistance to survive. Much concern has been given to the restoration agenda, with the focus on securitization. However, the humanitarian organization which is known as Oxfam made research in late 2017 showed that early recovery and livelihoods improvement are much needed and should be prioritized to promote resilience among crisis-affected resident, to decreased dependency on humanitarian assistance, and ultimately to promote sustainable peace.**

## INTRODUCTION

Lake Chad is the biggest transboundary lake which is located in the Sahel as well as in the West and the Central Africa subregions. It is shared border between Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Nigeria. It is estimated that a total of about 45 million people could benefit from its natural resources (fishing, livestock farming, agriculture, hunting and gathering). The Lake Chad system has been characterized by its strong cross-border dynamics rooted in history and strong cultural and language connections. A potential net exporter of food and a provider of seasonal jobs, the Lake Chad region previously also contributed to the food and job security of its residents including those in the two regional metropolises, Njamena and Maiduguri, as well as the regions of the lake's Sahelian hinterlands (Borno Adamawa and Yobe States in Nigeria; Diffa and Zinder in Niger, the Far North Province in Cameroon and the regions of Lac, Kanem, Hadjer Lamis, and Chari Baguirmi in Chad). If the lake area represents such a potential food production hub, it is because it offers a relatively secure source of water,

fodder, and fertile land. Moreover, those mostly family fishing and farming systems are labor intensive and generate significant indirect employment (processing, trade, crafts, and transport). Finally, the Conflict

After 10 years of prolonged conflict in north-east Nigeria, about 4.5 million people in the Lake Chad Basin need immediate livelihood support and are mostly dependent on humanitarian assistance for their day-to-day survival. They remain cut off from their traditional livelihoods in an area where agriculture activities such as fishing, livestock rearing, and regional trade were changes prior to the crisis in the lake region. The number of food-insecure people across the region is expected to increase to about 5.8 million by August 2018. The situation will keep overemphasis for the foreseeable future unless there is a concrete effort, which will drive by the governments of the conflict-affected countries, to lift communities out of a prolonged crisis and help them to resume their and livelihood activities. This cannot wait. A short-term humanitarian response, focused solely on keeping people alive, is not enough.

More than 2.2 million people remain displaced across north-east Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad, as a result of the conflict. At the pick of the conflict in 2014–15, non-state armed which is known as Boko Haram groups controlled about 20,000 square miles of land within north-east Nigeria alone (20% of Nigeria), where close to 1.8 million people lived. Military strategies to cut the armed groups off from their economic resources and declared 'state of emergencies' has had disastrous impacts on civilians' access to livelihoods. Despite the government regaining control of areas in recent years, almost one

million people are still living in out-of-reach areas and many communities remain displaced – or experience onward displacement – with little or no hope of returning to their homes due to threats from non-state armed actors and ongoing military operations in their villages of origin.

In Nigerian part, one in five internally displaced persons (IDPs) have stated their goal to integrate locally in the present area of their displacement; and many others, while expressing the will to leave, have asserted that the security situation is not yet good for going home. A major return back is not expected among Niger and Chad's displaced communities in the coming year. Ongoing insecurity, compounded by the lack of access to livelihoods, continues to expose displaced communities to protection threats such as killing, abduction, and sexual abuse, forcing them to resort to dangerous activities and negative coping mechanisms to survive. For women and girls, some of these negative coping mechanisms include early marriages (a direct consequence of lack of resources) or survival sex. Men and boys are also targeted and faced with abduction and killing as they go for firewood collection or to farm in insecure areas.

The food situation, far from improving, is expected to deteriorate from mid-2018, when climate-related stresses across the Sahel region are likely to compound the situation. According to a humanitarian needs forecast for the region, 62% of the Chadian population in the Lake region is expected to be food-insecure during the 2018 lean season: a 52% increase compared with 2017.4 In Nigeria, 3.7 million people could become food insecure if appropriate assistance is not delivered (compared with 2.6 million in January 2018). According to the 2018 Nigeria Humanitarian Response Plan,<sup>5</sup> 5.7 million people are in urgent need of early recovery and livelihood assistance in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states. However, the early recovery and livelihood sector was only 7.7% funded in 2017.<sup>6</sup>

While many humanitarian and development actors consider that conditions for early recovery are met in certain locations (the Lake region of Chad, most of Adamawa and Yobe state in Nigeria, the western part of Diffa region in Niger), the relative improvement in the security situation over the past two years has not translated into an improved access to livelihoods in most areas. Thanks to generous funding – 70% of the 2017 humanitarian response plan was funded in

Nigeria – and a massive humanitarian scale-up, famine was averted in the north-east of Nigeria. But a similar level of humanitarian assistance will be hard to maintain in 2018, and even if it can, this will not provide a long-term solution to the lack of access to food and livelihoods in this protracted crisis.

The continuing lack of safe livelihoods risks contributing to ongoing cycles of violence, fuelling grievances and further undermining the stretched coping capacities of impoverished communities. Massive investment in livelihoods opportunities is needed now, combining short- and long-term approaches, to prevent a deterioration of the situation. Action must be taken immediately: vulnerable women, men and children cannot wait until they are safe to go home for a more durable solution. A strong political vision is required from the governments of conflict-affected countries, which should take the lead in coordinating humanitarian and development interventions. Moreover, investment in livelihoods should be seen as an opportunity to empower women and youth and to reduce gender inequality, in order to promote long-term peace in the region.

#### The impact of the conflict

The ongoing conflict, including military strategies against armed groups, continues to have disastrous impacts on livelihoods across the region. Most conflict-affected communities lack any means of sustainable livelihoods. As of February 2018, 10.7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and are dependent on aid for survival. Hundreds of thousands of people are living in areas to which humanitarian actors do not have access, such as the islands of Lake Chad, or outside the government-controlled areas in north-east Nigeria.

Insecurity and military operations, as well as states of emergencies, have restricted the freedom of movement of communities and their ability to access their lands. Men and women living outside government-controlled areas and on the islands are often associated with armed groups, which means that civilians are often prevented from accessing their villages – and if they try, they risk being injured or killed. Those few who have returned to their homes, especially in Chad, have often lost most of their productive and financial assets during the conflict and do not have the means to start again. Even in relatively accessible areas, displaced

people's limited access to land prevents them from farming and feeding their families.

Millions of people fled their homes at the height of the conflict and are now entering their third year of displacement. Most are living in host communities – except in Borno state, where the number of people in camps is almost equal to the number of people living in host communities. They are among the poorest, living in makeshift shelters and with little or no access to basic services such as food, water, health and education. The coping strategies of host communities are overstretched, and tensions are flaring in some places over the use of resources such as water and land.

Fishing is severely constrained by the loss of productive assets and lack of access to the lake, which was central to many people's livelihoods; most communities living by the water supplemented their diet or diversified their income through fishing. In Diffa region, according to a modified Emergency Market Mapping Analysis (EMMA) done by Oxfam in November 2016, most fishing stopped completely (were previously, an average of 89%

of the total income of fishing families came from this source).<sup>7</sup> For those who continued to fish, production fell by 94%. On-going insecurity, restriction of movement and emergency restrictions on movement have also severely restricted the mobility of pastoralists, who used to travel within and across countries in search of water and pasture.

The closure of markets, the destruction of infrastructure (roads, electrical power stations) and the loss of financial and productive assets have severely reduced production and contributed to an increase in prices of staple commodities; affecting the purchasing power of households and increasing food insecurity. In north-east Nigeria, staple food prices in December 2017 were approximatively 60% higher than at the same time the previous year and up to 120% above the five-year average.

Cross-border trade has been severely affected due to insecurity and military measures, such as curfews, limiting the flow of goods and people; new and longer routes, more costly and dangerous, are being used for trade. The booming markets of north-east Nigeria, which used to connect traders from Niger, Chad and Cameroon, have closed or have deteriorated as a result of restrained movements of goods and people. Other markets are functioning outside of states' control.

Increasingly aware of the impact of security restrictions on communities' well-being, the Nigerien authorities lifted the ban on red pepper production in October 2017 and reopened most markets in Diffa region in early February 2018. While this is a positive move for improving and restoring the livelihoods of communities, this effort could be limited by the ongoing insecurity and restrictions on accessing the production areas. More generally, there is a need to monitor the impact of the lifting of the red pepper production ban on community's livelihoods. In Chad, very limited parts of the lake are now available for fishing (mainly from the shore). Apart from these efforts, most of the security restrictions remain in the three countries.

The restricted access to livelihoods has had more impact on women, who already faced limited access to markets in rural areas,<sup>9</sup> and limited participation in trading activities, exacerbated by a limited access to capital and credit to finance their trade.<sup>10</sup> Existing long-term gender disparities in the region, such as limited access to education for girls, limited participation in civic life and little or no representation in traditional (and official) power structures and decision making bodies have been exacerbated by the conflict.

The conflict has also contributed to a shift in gender dynamics in the region, which has had both positive and negative effects on women. While men have often played the traditional role of the provider, they have been particularly targeted by all aspects of the conflict, through killings, abductions or illegal detentions. Without men, women have often become the main (or only) breadwinner in the household. In north-east Nigeria, on average, 30% of households are now headed by women (more than 50% in some locations).<sup>11</sup> However, this shift has also put a heavier burden on women, already in charge of domestic chores and children's care, and often without enough education to conduct business activities. This role shift can also fuel frustration among men, who feel disempowered, and can result in an increase in domestic violence.

#### Agriculture

The conflict has had a significant impact on agriculture in the Lake Chad Basin, the main source of livelihood for most of the area's rural households. Communities have repeatedly been targeted by

insurgents, with the aim of acquiring resources and forcing vulnerable populations from their homes. The perception of insecurity and the threat of being kidnapped have prevented farmers from fully engaging in agricultural activities. Over the past few years, the involvement of Boko Haram in looting harvests and cattle, and disrupting the region's fish trade, has been widely reported. In Nigeria's northeastern States of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe, insecurity and restriction of movement due to the presence of the armed group have severely constrained agricultural activities. This has exacerbated the challenges producers already faced (e.g., erratic rainfall and lack of basic social services). The destruction of infrastructure and the disruption of existing limited services have also contributed to decreases in agricultural production throughout the affected areas. In Chad, at the end of the 2015/16 agricultural season, cereal production was estimated to be 11 percent lower than the previous year, with a per capita availability of 155 kg, lower than the FAO minimum standard of 159 kg<sup>17</sup>. In Cameroon, rainfed cereal production was lower in 2016 compared with previous years, with an estimated 3 percent decrease in the east, a 5 percent decrease in the north, an 18 percent decrease in Adamawa and a 25 percent decrease in the Far North region. Insecurity has been a hurdle for agropastoral activities, with a 15 percent decrease in areas planted with cereal crops.<sup>18</sup> Also in northeastern Nigeria, the production of cash and staple food crops is well below average, mainly because of low rainfall and insecurity preventing farmers from accessing their fields. Population displacements as a result of the conflict have increased pressure on host communities and on already limited natural resources (e.g. water and land), reducing food and water availability, while heightening the risk of social tensions. Arable land has been used for shelter for IDPs, further fragmenting farmlands, while the production of maize and sorghum, important staple crops in the region, has been restricted to avoid creating hideouts for the insurgents. The use of fertilizers for agriculture has been restricted in most conflict-affected states, as they can be used to produce IEDs. The suspected presence of IEDs and UXOs on agricultural land is also limiting farming activities. The security situation has affected the seed system. An October 2016 FAO assessment in Nigeria's States of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa

showed that most farmers had a fairly resilient informal seed system in the past, with strong social networks and multiple crops grown by every household. Since the insurgency, informal and formal seed systems have been disrupted. Certified seeds from formal sources are reportedly too expensive for many, especially poor farming households and IDPs, to buy, with bad roads and insecurity increasing transportation costs, translating into higher prices. Before the crisis, the affected areas already faced a high risk of disease outbreaks, including transboundary animal disease, cyclical drought and other natural disasters. These factors, combined with the current overuse of natural resources and high concentration of people and animals in limited spaces, are testing the ability of humanitarian and government actors to respond. As such, there is a risk of the crisis spreading throughout the Sahel region and into northern parts of the Central African Republic. In Nigeria's Borno State, a December 2016 FAO assessment shows that fishers have recently begun moving back to Monguno. In Cameroon, the rehabilitation of the Maga Dam<sup>21</sup> is expected to improve fishing activities in the area. In Chad, many of the displaced in the Bol and Bagasola areas have started returning to their villages of origin, at least those that are safe to access. However, houses were destroyed and most of the canoes, nets and other fishing equipment were swept away. Returning fishers need basic support to enable them to resume their livelihood activities.

#### Livestock

Another pillar of the Lake Chad economic system is the livestock sector. In the conflict-affected areas, livestock have been deliberately killed or looted by the insurgents or abandoned by herders fleeing violence. The early start of the pastoral lean season – with water points and pastures drying out – has further deteriorated livestock body conditions. The situation has been aggravated by the border closures and inaccessibility of some areas due to security constraints. Transhumance flows, including across borders – a common coping strategy in the face of fodder shortages – are impeded. The resulting concentration of animals is straining already limited water and pasture resources, which could threaten animal health as well as heighten tensions between herders and farmers, further destabilizing the region.

The current border closures and disruption of livestock markets are affecting food security, nutrition and livelihoods in the four Lake Chad Basin countries, whose economies are strongly integrated and interdependent. The crisis is having an impact on livestock traders, processors and animal health workers. Milk collectors, mainly women and youth, can hardly supply markets as many herders have lost their animals. To continue their businesses, they are reconstituting powdered milk, often under poor hygienic and sanitary conditions. While the technical capacity in terms of both quantity and quality is available at all levels, the lack of financial and material resources is a major constraint to increasing livestock production and restarting the regulatory work and provision of services. In addition to meeting the livestock sector's immediate needs, special attention should be paid to existing tensions between pastoralists and farmers. Clashes between the two groups are reported daily. This mistrust is leading to a strong perception among farmers that pastoralists are to blame for the problems. This will need to be taken into account at the global level and in the aid interventions targeting these groups.

#### Fisheries

Until the Boko Haram crisis, fisheries provided nutritious food, employment and income to many families in the region. The overall fisheries production in Lake Chad in 2014 was reportedly between 80 000 and 100 000 tonnes/year, with an estimated value of between USD 54 million and USD 220 million.<sup>19</sup> Currently, fishers face many challenges. In addition to climate variability, which is shrinking the lake, the Nigerian armed forces placed an embargo on fishing activities in order to reduce the risk of insurgents using the lake to generate revenue (e.g., by stealing fisheries products). The presence of the insurgents and the embargo have disrupted fishing activities throughout the region as well as sales through local and export markets, depriving communities of their main livelihood and forcing thousands of families to flee to safer ground, abandoning their boats and fishing gear. Fishers in the Niger's Diffa region, who were making USD 1 515 a year before the crisis by selling smoked and dried fish, are now making USD 420 a year – a 72 percent drop in their yearly revenue.

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