POLICY BRIEF NO. 1

MR FRANCIS TAZOACHA • JANUARY 2024

MITIGATING ARMED CONFLICT IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN

THROUGH STRENGTHENING REGIONAL COOPERATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

At present, the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) region faces a tortuous security situation. Across the worst-affected areas of northeastern Nigeria, Cameroon's Far North, western Chad, and southeastern Niger, a dangerous nexus between climate change and conflict has become evident[1]. In Cameroon in 2021, for example, climate-related water shortages due to low rainfall and high precipitation rates provoked tensions between fishing, farming, and livestock communities, with competition over scarce resources (water and pasture) leading to escalating violence[2]. All this has exacerbated food insecurity and poverty while reducing access to basic and social services[3].

More generally, climate variation hastens the loss of natural resources such as pastures and water sources, while catalysing natural disasters that have exacerbated conflicts not only in the LCB but across Africa more widely[4]. Armed conflicts caused by non-state armed groups or the proliferation of small arms and light weapons among 'civilians' are erupting in fragile regions where institutions and economies are weak, injustice and violence are widespread, and social unrest is spreading—for example, among the Logone Birni community in Cameroon's Far North region.Here, climate change has widely been recognized as a 'threat factor' due to its role in exacerbating traditional causes of conflict, particularly when it comes to intensifying competition for ever-scarcer natural resources[5]. Against this backdrop, this Policy Brief analyses how regional cooperation among the LCB member countries can mitigate community conflict triggered by the effects of climate change on natural resources.

CONTEXT

In his book, Environment, Scarcity, and Violence, Homer-Dixon argues that growing natural resource scarcity, especially from population-induced pressures, can act as a driver of conflict[6]. Anderson et al. further argue that climate change and associated variations in water regimes and pastures are likely be particularly damaging to natural ecosystems already under tremendous pressure from human resource exploitation[7]. These environmental scarcities have profound social consequences, including general discontent, tribal conflict, urban unrest and other civilian violence, especially in underdeveloped and developing countries[8].

[1] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 'Environmental fragility in the Sahel', Sep. 2022 - [2] Sanderson, C., 'A "dangerous link": climate-fuelled violence in the Lake Chad Basin', 1 Mar. 2023 - [3] Système d'Information sur la Sécurité Alimentaire et d'Alerte Précoce du TCHAD (SISAAP), World Food Programme and INSEED, 'Analyse de l'impact de la crise russo-ukrainienne sur la pauvreté et l'insécurité alimentaire au Tchad', 2022 - [4] Mwiturubani, D. and van Wyk, J., Climate Change and Natural Resources Conflicts in Africa (Institute of Security Studies: Pretoria, 2010) [5] Lamarche, A., 'Climate-fueled Violence and Displacement in the Lake Chad Basin: focus on Chad and Cameroon', Refugees International, 19 Jan. 2023 and Nett, K. and Rüttinger, L., Insurgency, Terrorism and Organised Crime in a Warming Climate: Analysing the Links Between Climate Change and Non-State Armed Groups (Adelpi: Berlin, 2016) - [6] Homer-Dixon, T. F., Environment, Scarcity, and Violence (Princeton University Press: 2001) - [7] Anderson, J. et al., Climate Change-induced Water Stress and Its Impact on Natural and Managed Ecosystems (European Parliament: Brussels, 2008) - [8] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 'Climate change, environmental degradation, conflict, and displacement in the Arab States region', May 2023

RECAP NETWORK
RESEARCH & ACTION FOR PEACE

In an African context, the negative impacts of climate change are already leading to resource and environmental scarcity[9]. Although no direct cause-and-effect link between climate change and conflict has been established, under certain circumstances the former may influence the drivers of the latter, thereby exacerbating security risks, including violent conflict[10]. In this regard, climate change represents a 'risk factor', 'fragility amplifier' or 'catalyst for conflict', which in Africa can translate into increased insecurity and armed violence[11]. For example, as a news report entitled 'Climate change fuels conflict in the Lake Chad Basin' demonstrates, the depletion of natural resources due to bad weather is exacerbating tensions between communities and leading to large numbers of people being displaced[12].

Additionally, studies have linked a 0.5°C increase in global warming to a 10–20 percent increase in the risk of deadly conflict[13]. As a threat multiplier, climate change exposes and aggravates pre-existing tensions, weak governance, historical and colonial injustices, and other socioeconomic factors[14]. Regarding land, climate change has and will continue to distort rainfall patterns, further reducing freshwater availability by about 20–30 percent in parts of Africa[15]. Rainfall deficits first recorded in 1972 have continued to worsen, despite occasional short-term flooding, resulting in systematic reductions in lake water[16]. The overall water balance of a lake basin is influenced by close interactions between precipitation, evaporation, lake inflow, and groundwater leakage beneath the lake body[17]. In the case of the LCB, resource scarcity has been precipitated both by these environmental factors and human activity such as upstream dam construction and forest burning. Elsewhere, conflicts over massive dam projects in Central Asia and the Nile River basin, tensions between farmers and herders in the Horn of Africa, and state fragility in Iraq and Iran (caused, at least in part, by water difficulties), highlight some of the many ways disputes around water can operate as a 'threat multiplier', igniting or intensifying conflict[18]. Growing water scarcity and an over-reliance on rain-fed agricultural activities, combined with the LCB region's political instability and propensity for drought, means the area is particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts such as rising temperatures and more variable rainfall[19].

More generally, the decline in agricultural productivity caused by climate change impacts is causing or exacerbating food insecurity and unsustainable food price increases across sub-Saharan Africa, with countries that have large or dense populations and weak institutions more adversely affected.

1 THE DRYING UP OF LAKE CHAD, 1964–2023

CLIMATE CHANGE, RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND CONFLICTS IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN

The LCB region continues to suffer persistent drought, severe desertification, and soil erosion, reducing the vegetation available for pastures and water. These changes are leading to altered grazing patterns, while the dramatic fall in the amount of water flowing from the Logone, Chari, and Komadougou-Yobe rivers into Lake Chad has prompted people in the area to scramble for the ever more meagre water resources available[20]. All this has led to violent conflict between farmers and herders. In Nigeria, for example, violence between farmers and herdsmen has become a major security problem, resulting in thousands being killed or displaced. In fact, in the first half of 2018, inter-communal and resource-based conflicts killed six times as many people as the Boko Haram insurgency in the country's LCB area[21].

The two main water supply systems in Lake Chad's catchment area are Chari-Logone and Komadougou-Yobe. These watersheds include rivers, streams, canals, lakes, and reservoirs, along with permanent and temporary ponds[22]. Changes in rainfall and temperature cause the lake to shrink, negatively impacting the ecosystem and livelihood activities related to fishing, livestock, and agriculture. The decline in water and grassland resources in the LCB region caused by unfavourable weather conditions wrought or exacerbated by climate change has inflamed tensions between communities, with about 3 million people displaced and another 11 million needing humanitarian assistance[23]. The link between climate change and conflict is evident in the inter-communal conflicts triggered by natural resource scarcity seen in various parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Despite this, little attention has yet been paid to the ways in which climate change has caused insecurity in the region. The LCB region in particular has over recent decades become a hotbed for contestation over natural resources, including land, water, and food[24]. Here, recent developments among the Logone Birni community in Cameroon's Far North provide just one example of violent conflict fuelled by climate change[25].

About 30 million people in Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Cameroon currently compete for what remains of the rapidly dwindling water resources provided by Lake Chad, which has lost some 90 percent of its surface water since 1960 (see Figure 1)[26]. This competition further drives displacement, hunger, and malnutrition, and is a key factor in the growing number of kidnappings, killings, and human rights violations seen in the region. Faced with the rise of armed groups in the region, UN Security Council Resolution 2349 of 2017 acknowledges 'the adverse effects of climate change and ecological changes among other factors on the stability of the Region, including through water scarcity, drought, desertification, land degradation, and food insecurity'[27].

In 2021, former Nigerian President Mohamadou Buhari asserted at the United Nations that Lake Chad, formerly a 'desert oasis', is now no more than a desert, with farmers and herdsmen fighting over what little water that is left. Buhari also asserted that the region's youth were joining terrorist groups due to a lack of jobs and difficult economic conditions[28]. Around half of northeastern Nigeria's population make their living from agriculture,

[9] Brown, O., Hammill, A. and McLeman, R., 'Climate change as the "new" security threat: implications for Africa', International Affairs, vol. 83, no. 6 (2007), pp. 1141–54 - [10] Sida, 'The relationship between climate change and violent conflict', Green Tool Box/Peace And Security Tool Box: Working Paper, 2018 - [11] Goodman, S. and Baudu, P., 'Climate change as a "threat multiplier": history, uses, and future of the concept', Briefer no. 38, Center for Climate Security, Council on Strategic Risks, 3 Jan. 2023 and Birkmann, J. et al., 'Poverty, livelihoods and sustainable development', eds.-O. Pörtner et al., Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, 2022), pp. 1171–274, [12] Kabukuru, W., 'Climate change fueling conflict in Lake Chad Basin', AP, 19 Jan. 2023 - [13] Birkmann et al. (note 11); and Lenton, T. M. et al., 'Quantifying the human cost of global warming', Nature Sustainability, vol. 6 (2023), pp. 1237–47 - [14] UNDP (note 8) - [15] Pham-Duc, B. et al., 'The Lake Chad hydrology under current climate change', Scientific Reports, vol. 10, no. 5428 (2020) - [16] Shiklomanov, I. et al., 'Chapter 4. Hydrology and water resources', Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2018 - [17] Pöschke, F. et al., 'How does the groundwater influence the water balance of a lowland lake? A field study from Lake Stechlin, north-eastern Germany', Limnologica, vol. 68 (Jan. 2018), pp. 17–25 - [18] Schmeier, S., et al., 'Water scarcity and conflict: not such a straightforward link', The Centre for Africa-Europe Relations, 31 Oct. 2019 - [19] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Climate Change and Food Security: Risks and Responses (FAO: 2015) and Holleman, C. et al., The Impact of Climate Variability and Extremes on Agriculture and Food Security: An Analysis of the Evidence and Case Studies, FAO Agricultural Development Economics Technical Study No. 4 (FAO: Rome, 2020) - [20] Nwilo, P. C. et al., 'Impacts of land cover change on desertification in northern Nigeria and implications on the Lake Chad Basin', Journal of Arid Environments, vol. 181 (Oct. 2020) - [21] Eberle, U., 'The climate factor in Nigeria's farmer-herder violence', International Crisis Group - [22] Olowoyeye, O. S. and Kanwar, R. S., 'Water and food sustainability in the riparian countries of Lake Chad in Africa', Sustainability, vol. 15, no. 13 (2022) - [23] Kabukuru (note 12) - [24] Lamarche (note 5)- [25] Skah, M. and Lyammouri, R., 'The climate change-security nexus: case study of the Lake Chad Basin', Policy Center for the New South, 2020 [26] Olowoyeye and Kanwar (note 22) - [27] Hussona, J., 'How is climate change driving conflict in Africa?', AOAV, 10 Mar. 2021 - [28] Jinadu, L. A., 'Resolving the herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Nigeria', Future Africa Forum, 17 Mar. 2021

FIGURE 1

Source: EcoHubMap (2023)

fishing, or animal husbandry. Due to increasing aridity, however, most of these livelihoods have disappeared, leaving young people vulnerable to recruitment into the Boko Haram insurgency[29]. Attacks by the group have become more frequent and brutal since 2020, with 110 rice farmers killed in a single attack in early December 2020[30]. The root causes of the increasing conflict seen in the country's north are climate-induced grassland degradation and herders being driven southward by the rapid growth of ethnic militias[31]. Meanwhile, confronted with the dramatic fall in water volumes, Musgum fishermen and farmers in northern Cameroon have constructed huge ditches to contain the Logone River's leftover waters, thereby enabling them to continue fishing and growing their crops[32].

However, these muddy trenches have resulted in the livestock of Choa Arab herdsmen getting stuck in ditches, often suffering broken legs. One such incident sparked clashes on 10 August 2021 that led to at least 45 people being killed and 74 injured (a further 15 disappeared and were presumed to have died crossing the Logone River into Chad)[33]. The mid-2021 hostilities sparked by climate-induced water shortages among fishing, farming, and livestock communities ultimately led to approximately 60 000 Cameroonians fleeing to seek refuge in neighbouring Chad[34].

2 REGIONAL COOPERATION FOR CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTION AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The four nations bordering Lake Chad—Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria—came together to establish the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) on 22 May 1964. The Lake Chad Basin countries, which are divided between the ECOWAS and ECCAS regions, are located in an area characterized by significant movement and permeable borders. At the same time, they face mounting environmental and security challenges[35]. Formed as a means of cross-border disputes, the LCBC is recognized by all the riparian governments and has been tasked with implementing an integrated, sustainable system of managing the LCB's water resources, while accounting for the consequences of climate change[36]. Towards this end, the LCBC aims to promote integration, peace, and security throughout the region, while monitoring, regulating, and harmonizing the management of the basin's natural resources.

A primary tenet of the plan for the LCB is that Lake Chad must become a hub for regional agricultural development. In this respect, the planning of specific actions that will enable local communities to become more climate resilient, while fostering regional growth, is essential. Thus, the plan focuses on alleviating severe poverty in the area, ensuring the livelihoods of those residing around the lake, and enhancing the lake's contribution to regional food security[37].

The emergence of Boko Haram brought the LCBC into the spotlight, as the states affected required a political platform to coordinate their military endeavours and foster cross-border collaboration in combating terrorism. Thus, the LCBC served as a regional gateway, establishing the necessary legal structure to facilitate cooperation and allocate funds for the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) involving Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Chad, and Benin[38]. Although Benin's lack of direct connection to the basin means it is not a member of the LCBC, the country has actively engaged in the commission's collaborative endeavours to combat Boko Haram. There have been instances of Beninese citizens being recruited by the extremist group, regardless of the fact that the country's border lies some 700km away from the region where Boko Haram operates[39]. Furthermore, there have been concerns regarding a shift towards more conservative ideologies within Muslim communities in the northern part of the country. Initially, it was anticipated that Benin would provide approximately 800 troops to the MNJTF. In April 2016, however, this number was reduced to 150. The primary objective of these troops appears to be safeguarding the security of MNJTF headquarters and providing escort services for humanitarian convoys and dignitaries[40].

The LCBC has been assigned responsibility by its member states for arranging the procedures and mechanisms necessary to improve cross-border collaboration on security and stabilization, early recovery, and sustainable development. On top of this, in order to support the efforts of the LCBC member states and Benin to 'create a safe and secure environment and contribute to stabilizing the situation in the areas affected' by Boko Haram activities, the African Union (AU)'s Peace and Security Council approved the deployment of the (MNJTF) in March 2015[41].

The second phase of the MNJTF's mandate, as highlighted in the Strategic Concept of Operations of the Force, is to 'facilitate the implementation of overall stabilization programmes by the LCBC Member States and Benin in the affected areas, including the full restoration of state authority and the return of IDPs and refugees'[42]. In August 2018, the LCBC member states, with the assistance of the AU and United Nations Development Programme, developed the Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Recovery, and Resilience. Thus, military responses to security, humanitarian, and conflict issues in the LCB have, over the past two years, given way to more comprehensive initiatives involving a variety of political, development, humanitarian, and peace actors[43]. The conflict risks faced in the LCB region have been heightened by an absence of water and environmental management policies, poor practices at a national and regional level, and a lack of understanding of aquatic ecosystems and water resources, which together have left the population scrabbling for scarce resources[44]. Moreover, there is no efficient system for monitoring water quantity or quality, nor any facilities enabling early warning and preservation measures[45]. Inadequate coordination resulting from limited stakeholder participation, and deficient integrated water management cooperation within and between countries has been a major factor contributing to the escalation of disputes in the basin[46]. In this respect, the environmental legislative framework and enforcement of laws concerning shared resources require updating and harmonization on a regional basis.

[29] - [30] Hussona (note 27) - [31] International Crisis Group, 'Stopping Nigeria's spiraling farmer-herder violence', Africa Report no. 262, 26 July 2018 - [32] Ngargoune, A., 'Climate change fuels clashes in Cameroon that force thousands to flee', UNHCR, 9 Sep. 2021 - [33] Ngargoune (note 32) - [34] Lamarche (note 5) - [35] clingendael - [36] African Union, 'Strategic Summary Territorial Action Plan: Regional Strategy For Stabilization, Recovery & Resilience', 2022 - [37] World Bank, 'Investing in resilience and development in Lake Chad', 11 Feb. 2016 - [38] ecdpm.org - Political-Economy-Dynamics-Regional-Organisations-Africa - [39] clingendael - [40] clingendael - [41] Lake Chad Basin Commission, 'Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Lake Chad region', RD-SRR Factsheet, Jun. 2022 - [42-43] Lake Chad Basin Commission (note 37) - [44] Tzanakakis, V. A. et al., 'Challenges and opportunities for sustainable management of water resources on the island of Crete, Greece', Water, vol. 12, no. 6 (2020) - [45] Lake Chad Basin Commission, 'Integrated river basin management: challenges of the Lake Chad Basin, Vision 2025' - [46] Lake Chad Basin Commission (note 41)

Overall, a lack of collaboration among sectors within and between countries has led to ineffective coordination, limited stakeholder involvement, and inadequate institutions for integrated water resource management. As a consequence of this absence of proactive measures, donors have done little to encourage or support a cohesive, enduring programme focused on sustainable development in the LCB region[47] [48]. Without such outside assistance, the LCBC member states must seek other means of raising the funds necessary to implement an expensive environmental monitoring system. In reality, however, the dearth of commitment from member states has hindered the effective, sustained management of water resources in the region. The regional agreements and their harmonization, as well as the updating of the legal framework and means of applying the laws, have been neglected. This has resulted in a failure to protect the basin's water resources and ecosystem as common resources. In turn, the vision for a Lake Chad Region characterized by integrated sustainable management policies remains unrealized due to the absence of integration processes at the local, national, and regional levels[49]. At the same time, a burgeoning population is placing ever greater strains on the region's ecosystems, water supplies, and biodiversity. Each of the LCB countries will therefore have to draw up national action plans to monitor armed conflict and strengthen regional cooperation on climate change and natural resource management. Currently, the authorities in Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria simply do not have the conflict resolution and peacebuilding mechanisms needed to effectively resolve the climate-related armed conflicts plaguing the region.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The pressures brought about by climate change in Africa and the LCB in particular over recent years are unprecedented. Irregular rainfall patterns and changeable weather are, coupled with poor planning and bad policies, making land use difficult. As such, competition and negotiation around land use continue to intensify, compounded by national and interstate conflicts in the region[50]. The negative impacts of climatic changes have thrown up new challenges to regional cooperation and individual member countries, threatening the security of the region's residents and impeding workable policy resolutions to the LCB's various conflicts[51]. Not only do these environmental changes further impoverish those who rely on the region's natural resources for their sustenance and livelihoods, but they are also leading to the radicalization of those—especially youths—who have lost out. Concerted efforts must therefore be made to sustainably mitigate these climate-related impacts, starting by addressing the root causes of conflict in the area, which will require genuine commitment on the part of both local communities and the governments of the LCBC member countries.

In light of the above, the following recommendations should be taken into consideration:

- The LCBC should create specialized teams to lead discussions and develop collaborative initiatives and projects that acknowledge the role of NGOs in (i) enhancing awareness at a local, national, and global scale, and establishing connections between them; (ii) encouraging community involvement and the utilization of local knowledge; and (iii) promoting collaboration and cooperation among various organizations while encouraging public and private sector participation.
- The LCBC and its member states and stakeholders, especially the United Nations Development Programme, should revitalise implementation of the LCB Regional Strategy.
- The LCBC member states should, as a matter of urgency, put in place conflict-resolution mechanisms, harnessing community dialogues and mediation initiatives aimed at resolving conflicts triggered or aggravated by global warming while mitigating inter-community and resource-based armed conflict.
- The LCBC member states, together with other stakeholders, should prioritize the preparation and implementation of national action plans. Civil society possesses the potential to contribute significantly to conflict resolution, including via mediation, despite frequently being excluded from official government-led peace processes. Consequently, the LCBC and its member states have pledged to actively involve civil society in community mediation and dialogues.
- The LCBC should set up conflict early warning and response platforms to monitor prospective hostilities arising from climate change-related resource scarcity, particularly concerning water and pastures.
- The LCB countries, stakeholders, stabilization and peace actors, as well as international donors, should focus on setting out a common purpose and agreeing on policy areas of focus for sustainable development in the region.

[47] faolex - [48] Lake Chad Basin Commission (note 41) - [49] info.undp - [50] FAO (note 19) - [51] Vivekananda, J. et al., Shoring Up Stability: Addressing Climate and Fragility Risks in the Lake Chad Region (adelphi: Berlin, 2019).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Francis Tazoacha - Peace and Security Analyst
Director of Peace and Security Division
Nkafu Policy Institute

LEGAL NOTICES

Research and Action for Peace network (REcAP network)

Trinity Avenue, O Mile 7 Road, Achimota-Accra
P. O. Box CT4434, Cantonments, Accra-Ghana
Link Rd, Dhaka

Tel: +233 302 411 638
Mail: recapsecretariat@wanep.org
www.site.recapnetwork.org

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author and the Research and Action for Peace network and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Funded by the European Union

REcAP NETWORK

The REcAP network is an interactive platform for regional cooperation bringing together organisations and experts specialised in peacebuilding, the prevention of conflicts and violent extremism in West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin.

The REcAP Network project has been designed to respond to capacity gaps and limitations to collaboration between peacebuilding experts, policy makers and practitioners and to improve the impact, progress, and sustainability of peacebuilding research, policy and practice.

www.site.recapnetwork.org

REcAP NETWORK
RESEARCH & ACTION FOR PEACE