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Cohort 4: Climate-related security risks and sustaining peace

Addressing the climate change insecurity challenge in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin

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Introduction

The multifaceted crisis involving violence and insecurity and environmental conflicts in the Lake Chad Basin¹ has been attributed partly to the development deficit the region has endured over the years. In response, a military approach has been used, albeit with limited success, to quell the menace. The myriad initiatives in the wider Sahel region and the growing awareness that climate change is breeding insecurity or impacting it negatively has gained momentum of late. Yet, the crisis in the Sahel region, particularly in the Lake Chad Basin, requires deeper analysis to understand the root causes and drivers of the violent insurgencies such as Boko Haram and unpack the linkages between the insurgency and conflicts between herders and farmers, the regional dimensions and ways to address resultant complexity in the immediate, short/medium and long term.

In Nigeria, many initiatives have been undertaken to address the security and environmental challenges facing the northern part of the country, particularly encroaching desertification, that have affected livelihoods, specifically agriculture, fishing, and animal husbandry. The Boko Haram insurgency, now entering its second decade, has left immense devastation. The Recovery and Peace-Building Assessment (RPBA, 2016),

jointly undertaken by the World Bank, UN, and EU in partnership with the State and Federal Governments, identified climate change as a main structural driver of conflicts in Nigeria's north-east region. Climate change has led to desertification, drought, and the contraction of Lake Chad to less than 10 percent of its area in 1963. As a result of the prolonged droughts of early 1970s and 1980s, Lake Chad's waters declined to about 2,000km², although some studies allude to the fact that the lake waters have risen to about 14,000km², including groundwater. Its status is somewhat stable, with multiple "islands" of sand-filled lakebed.² The shrunken Lake Chad (see map on page 6) is at the core of the multiple problems that define today's regional crises engulfing that part of the greater Sahel region of Africa.

Literature abounds on the causes, drivers, and motivations of insurgency in Nigeria's north-eastern region. Successive Nigerian governments have grappled with effectively responding to and curbing the spread of the insurgency, which is plagued by a politically divisive discourse with varied conspiracy theories about its origin, sponsorship, and the government's ability to defeat the group. Over that time, the herders-farmers crisis, which has been a recurrent issue in Nigeria, has assumed alarming proportions. A conflict and fragility

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1 This area includes Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Libya, Sudan, Central African Republic and Cameroon (see map on page 3 below).

2 <https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/wrcr.20452>; <https://shoring-up-stability.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Shoring-up-Stability.pdf>.

assessment, undertaken as part of joint support to the Government of Nigeria’s recovery efforts, states, “The violence has left widespread devastation on a level unprecedented since the [Nigerian] civil war of 1967-1970, with an estimated 27,000 dead, more than 2.4 million people displaced internally or across international borders, and 2,000 missing persons (UNOCHA January 2016).”³

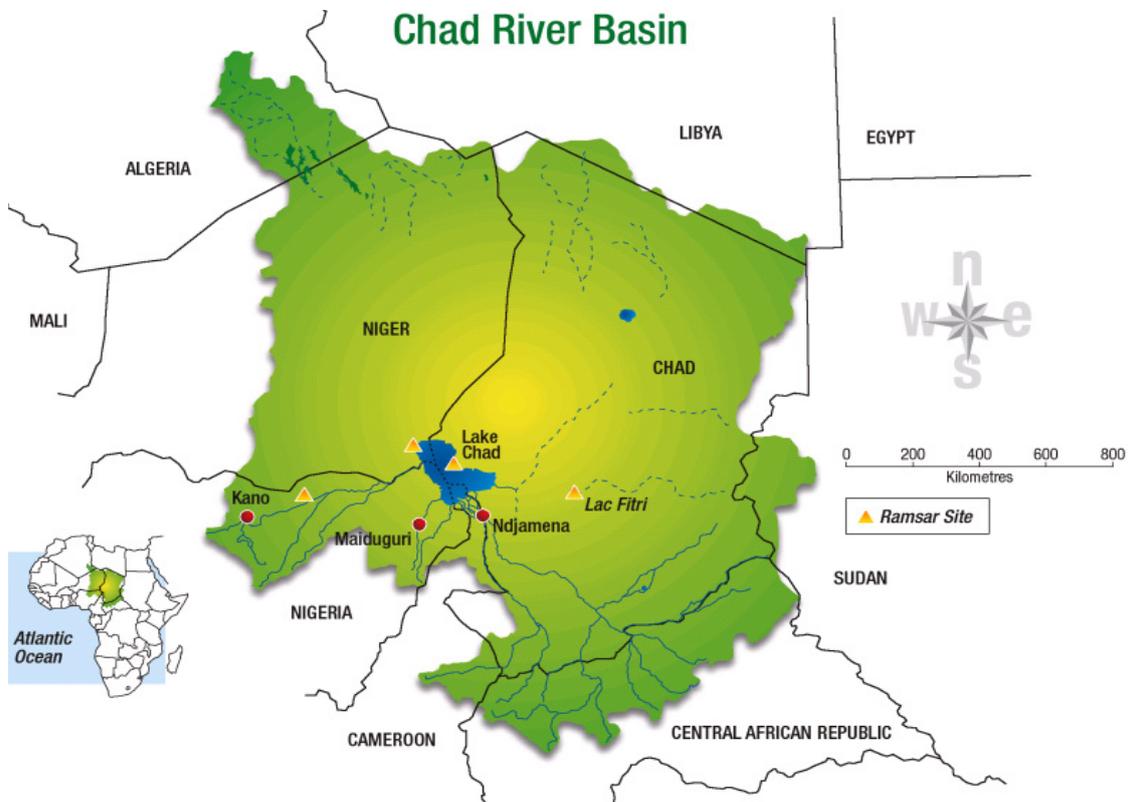
This paper makes a case for solid options concerning the revitalizing the Lake Chad and the lake ecosystem. The paper highlights the fact that climate change and the resultant shrinking of Lake Chad have been major factors responsible for violent conflicts affecting Nigeria and the entire Lake Chad Basin. Restoring the lake waters and associated tributary rivers is therefore an option for consideration to resolving the Lake Chad conflict system, although it is not the only solution. This paper further posits that while immediate and short-term security and livelihood support initiatives will stabilize the region, only a multi-pronged and long-term

economic development strategy that addresses the drivers and structural factors or roots of the crises can reverse the region’s fortunes.

Understanding the interconnectedness and complexity of the issues at stake

The Lake Chad Basin has been an enclave for criminal groups and traffickers of all kinds from the time of the trans-Saharan trade. It is believed to host a large number of former fighters of the Chadian and Central African civil wars. With the emergence of the Boko Haram insurgency and other groups, such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Daesh or the Islamic State (IS) and multiple splinter or allied groups in the greater Sahel-Sahara, ranging from Mauritania, Mali, Algeria, Niger to Libya, the quest to dig deep into the root causes fuelling violent extremism and terrorism has become a recurrent imperative.

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Source: LCBC, “Roadmap of Restoring Lake Chad”

3 UN, EU, World Bank, “Conflict and Fragility Assessment for Northeast Nigeria”, 2016. Also see the USAID climate and fragility profile for Nigeria: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TKRT.pdf and the global study https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TBFH.pdf.

Reduced pasture and lack of demarcated grazing lands in countries around Lake Chad, blocked cattle routes and water sources for livestock, expanding agriculture and fisheries that have also increased food insecurity are among the myriad of issues/drivers that have aggravated the herders-farmers conflict. Competition over land and other natural resources, especially between agriculturalists and pastoralists, has been identified as the immediate trigger of the violent clashes. In their quest for pasture and water, herders from the Lake Chad Basin area and other West African Sahel countries have been pushed by climate consequences and insecurity to drift southwards into other parts of Nigeria. Although the practice of transhumance, the seasonal movement of cattle from the Sahel towards the fringes of the tropical forests, has existed for centuries, a 2018 study by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) revealed the changed dynamics, often characterized by violent confrontations, banditry attacks and cattle rustling.⁴ According to the International Crisis Group (ICG, 2018), clashes between farmers and herders have escalated in recent years, acquiring an ethnic and religious dimension that poses grave threats to the country's stability and unity. In 2018 alone, the total number of fatalities from the crisis—1,949—was three times the number of deaths attributed to Boko Haram.

The collapse of the Gaddafi regime in Libya aggravated the situation, as the whole region became awash with arms.⁵ Vast areas of ungoverned spaces with little or no government presence, particularly in peripheral areas in most of the countries in the Lake Chad Basin, provided fertile ground for insurgent and criminal groups to fester. Cattle rustling, armed banditry (particularly the coupeurs de route phenomenon in Chad, Niger and Cameroon), kidnap for ransom, organized crime and trafficking in prohibited goods, drugs (including tramadol and codeine) and persons, poaching of wildlife in national parks, and massive displacement have become familiar phenomena in the region.

Fishing, crop and cereal farming, animal husbandry and booming trade activities gave way to frustration and lack of employment opportunities, leaving the entire Lake Chad Basin subregion vulnerable in the context of a growing population, estimated at about 25-40 million. One of the direct links between the environmental calamity and conflict is that the thousands of small islands in the former lakebed have become hideouts for insurgents (Boko Haram and ISWAP, in particular) and criminal groups living with fishing communities.

The link between the insurgency and the herders-farmers conflict must be examined to better understand the complexity of the crises. The narrative of the Boko Haram and herders-farmers conflict has become a very toxic and politically sensitive issue. Conspiracy theories abound, with claims that both threats are a disguised religious agenda to “Islamize” Nigeria. Empirical evidence suggests that if undertaken successfully, the proposed re-watering of Lake Chad (see section on proposed replenishing the lake waters ahead) could further de-politicize the herders-farmers crisis if it is seen as responding to a consequence of climate change. Many reasons support the strong link between the Boko Haram insurgency and the herders-farmers conflict in the Lake Chad Basin countries, particularly in Nigeria.

First, the Boko Haram insurgency has forced pastoralists of the Lake Chad Basin (both Nigerian and from neighbouring countries of Niger, Chad and Cameroon) to drift southwards in search of safer areas for grazing, thus aggravating an already existing crisis. Second, Boko Haram and other insurgent factions use cattle to finance the movement; they attack herders and seize herds of cattle to sell or feed on in their hideouts. Third, according to claims and counterclaims, some insurgents may have infiltrated the herders and joined them to wage violent confrontations with farmers and bandits in an apparent coalition of convenience. The apparent “soft approach” that the Government of Nigeria has adopted in dealing with the armed herders has further fuelled the perception of a conspiracy to Islamize Nigeria, using the crisis as an alibi.

While one dimension of the herders-farmers crisis is related to the ownership of and access to land and water, there is no gainsaying that climate change, encroaching desert and the growing population have increased the pressures on land, especially with the widespread practice of non-sustainable farming systems (pastoralism and shifting cultivation). In the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, where the crisis peaked in 2018, a total of 191,922 people were internally displaced in the Guma, Logo, Nasarawa, Awe and Keana local government areas (LGAs), with a gender disaggregated data as follows: 41,936 adult males; 44,774 adult females; 53,053 male children; and 52,161 female children.⁶ The conventional wisdom in the predominantly Fulani-dominated parts of Nigeria holds that pastoralists and their cows will always go where there is water and pasture.⁷

4 UNOWAS, “Pastoralism and Security in West Africa and the Sahel: Towards Peaceful Coexistence,” Dakar, 2018.

5 https://www.unodc.org/documents/toc/Reports/TOCTAWestAfrica/West_Africa_TOC_FIREARMS.pdf

6 Data provided by Governor Samuel Ortom during his presentation to the Joint UNCT, Donors and Development Partners’ Meeting hosted by the UN in February 2018.

7 This was also affirmed recently made by President Buhari during a visit of a UN delegation to the Presidential Villa.

The ‘politicization’ of the issue (making it a recurrent issue of discord between the ruling party and the opposition and allegations of deliberate conspiracies for political gains) has become so entrenched that the search for a lasting solution has remained a challenge. Notwithstanding, in January 2019, the National Economic Council (NEC) unanimously endorsed the 2018-2027 National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), a national strategy designed to address multiple dimensions of the escalating crisis, including enabling the peaceful transformation of Nigeria’s livestock ecosystem. Previous attempts to address the crisis, notably through establishment of cattle colonies and the rural grazing area (RUGA) measures failed due to resistance from States in the southern part of the country. The UN took part in the joint international effort, which supported the development of the strategy, based on a holistic five-pillar approach: conflict resolution and peacebuilding; justice and rule of law; humanitarian relief and early recovery; investments in human capital; and crosscutting issues. The UN secured funding from the Human Security Trust Fund and the Peacebuilding Fund to begin to address the root causes of the herders-farmers’ crisis, taking an inter-agency approach.

In June 2015, Mercy Corps, an international NGO, conducted a study to quantify the economic costs of the farmer-pastoralist conflict in Nigeria, looking at the “potential economic benefits of sustained peace, emphasizing the important role that peacebuilding and security initiatives can play in improving household, community, and state welfare... and effects of farmer-pastoralist conflict in Nigeria’s Middle Belt on state, sector, and national economies.”⁸ The study found that: (i) “Nigeria stands to gain up to US \$13.7 billion annually in total macroeconomic progress in a scenario of peace between farmers and pastoralists in Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, and Plateau [States] alone; (ii) States affected by farmer-pastoralist conflicts lost an average of 47% of taxes (Internally Generated Revenue, or IGR) due to these conflicts; and (iii) The average household affected by farmer-pastoralist conflict would experience at least a 64% increase in income, and potentially 210% or higher increase in income, if these conflicts were reduced to near zero.”⁹

This economic dimension is critical in orchestrating a shift in the approach to resolving the crisis in the middle and long term. The military response of the Nigerian government has been very challenging, characterized

by allegations of poorly equipped troops, poor leadership, indiscipline and claims of corruption in military procurement. The asymmetrical warfare imposed by the insurgents on an army trained in conventional warfare, coupled with accusations of serious and continuing human rights abuses and possible war crimes on the part of both the Nigerian military and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), are supported by documented evidence.¹⁰ The responses of government agencies and partners to the crisis have been marred by lack of coordination, coherence and clarity of roles and responsibilities among the many actors involved (until a Ministry of Humanitarian and Social Affairs was created).¹¹

Experts believe that the military option offers only a 10 percent chance of ending the insurgency in the north-east of Nigeria. This means that military intervention alone cannot defeat Boko Haram and the rest of the splinter groups. What, then, will constitute the remaining 90 percent? Evidently, it will involve a combination of political, governance and socio-economic measures. Ineffective governance, especially at local level, and lack of institutional reforms and confidence in government services and deep perception of unfairness in the treatment of all communities and ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic context like Nigeria remains a major grievance. Communities are already expressing fatigue with the effects of the insurgency, and they can play a critical role if well mobilized. Long years of economic neglect of the region by successive governments have led to poor economic indices in the north-east, pointing to a deep development deficit.

In addition, the following should be considered in the search of a durable solutions in the Lake Chad Basin, should be considered in the quest for a holistic solution. First, there is the need to pursue the counterterrorism and counter-insurgency effort of the Nigeria armed forces and the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF). This however need to be complemented with a political process and possible dialogue in the search of a durable solution, making the process as inclusive and transparent as possible to ensure a buy-in from the victims (communities and individuals). This effort should include enhanced dialogue and negotiation, DDR, conflict resolution and reconciliation, securing voluntary return and reintegration of IDPs, with adequate guarantees of the safety of the returnees. Second, lifesaving assistance anchored on a resilience-based approach

8 <https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/economic-costs-conflict-nigeria>.

9 Ibid.

10 <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2014/12/boko-haram-asymmetrical-warfare/> ; <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2016/005-the-nature-of-nigeria-s-boko-haram-war-2010-2015-a-strategic-analysis.pdf>; https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328689794_The_Asymmetric_Nature_of_Boko_Haram_Insurgency_and_Its_Implications_on_Human_Rights_and_International_Humanitarian_Law

11 The UN in Nigeria through the Resident Coordinator has been consistent on the three pronged approach in the search of a durable solutions in the Lake Chad Basin, with the emphasis that the humanitarian, development and peace nexus remains an overarching strategic framework for peace.

to assist the affected population cope with the impact of the crisis and engage in transformative change should continue to be mobilized.¹²

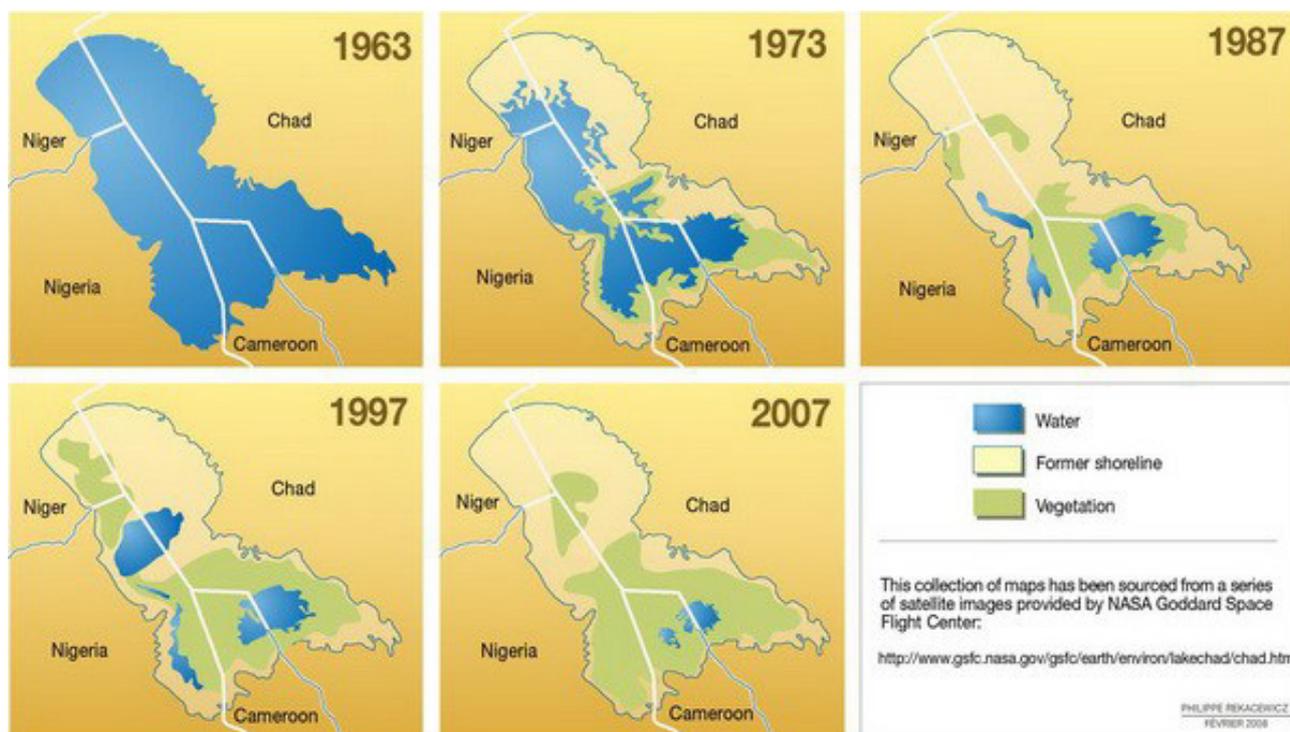
The ongoing crisis in the Lake Chad Basin is not just a security matter as its implications are profound throughout the subregion.¹³ It is linked to geostrategic issues affecting the entire Sahel-Sahara region and the long-standing, competing economic interests of the superpowers and multi-lateral interest groups. Multi-billion dollar investments have already been made in the region, such as the Chad-Cameroon pipeline project (funded by the World Bank), which transports crude oil from the petroleum fields in southern Chad to Cameroon's Kribi seaport and the uranium fields in Niger operated by the French company, Areva. In addition, other interests, such as the French military bases in N'Djamena and the former American base in Maroua in Cameroon from where reconnaissance planes and drones were launched to monitor Boko Haram activities, buttress the region's strategic importance. China's growing interest in the area includes plans to link a railroad from Ngaoundere, Cameroon to N'djamena and, eventually, align Port Said in Sudan to Cameroon's Douala seaport.

As an important part of this paper, filling the Lake Chad Basin to boost the water level and restore a vibrant ecological system can go a long way in resolving the protracted crisis in the region. This will not only enhance agricultural production through large scale irrigation farming as well as inland fishing activities but will also increase the region's attractiveness to investments and various forms of livelihood and infrastructural development.

Replenishing Lake Chad: A possible solution

The diagram below shows the level of depletion of the Lake Chad waters between 1963 and 2007. The Lake Chad example remains a classic case of the consequence of the climate change, with immense ecological and environmental ramifications in the entire sub-region. This climate related challenges have multiplier effects, especially in aggravating insecurity and conflict. An understanding of the role of the diminished lake waters in the escalating security and humanitarian crises in the Lake Chad region is critical to better understand the issues at stake.

The Lake Chad Basin: 1963-2007



12 Ibid.

13 The 2019 LCB climate and fragility study (<https://www.adelphi.de/en/publication/shoring-stability>) was one of the first to systematically examine the intersection among climate, security and mediating factors.

The Boko Haram insurgency that has lasted for more than 11 years, has defied all efforts at resolution and triggered a debate over its root causes to better diagnose and proffer innovative responses. While drivers such as bad governance, manipulation and instrumentalization of religion and ethnicity, and political and criminal elements have been flagged, the roots of the crisis must be identified and the complex and dynamic connections among the causal factors must be established in order to proffer sustainable solutions. This was the context in which the Government of Nigeria, through the Federal Ministry for Water Resources, along with the Lake Chad Basin Commission, co-hosted, in February 2018, the International Conference on Lake Chad in Abuja, with support from UNESCO. The conference, whose theme was “Saving the Lake Chad to revitalize the Basin’s ecosystem for sustainable livelihood, security and development,” presented options to address the lake’s diminishing water levels. They have contributed to the region’s reduced economic viability, paving the way for violent conflicts and an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The conference convened Heads of State and Government from Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Central African Republic (CAR), Cameroon and Gabon, representatives from Libya and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and experts and researchers to discuss options for restoring the waters in Lake Chad to provide a longer-term solution to the Basin’s challenges.

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In its final communiqué, the conference concluded that there is no solution to the shrinking of Lake Chad that does not entail transferring water from another source. It also highlighted that the Transaqua Project is the preferred option. It involves an inter-basin water transfer from the Congo Basin, connecting the River Congo to the Chari River that flows into Lake Chad. The conference also requested that the African Union consider

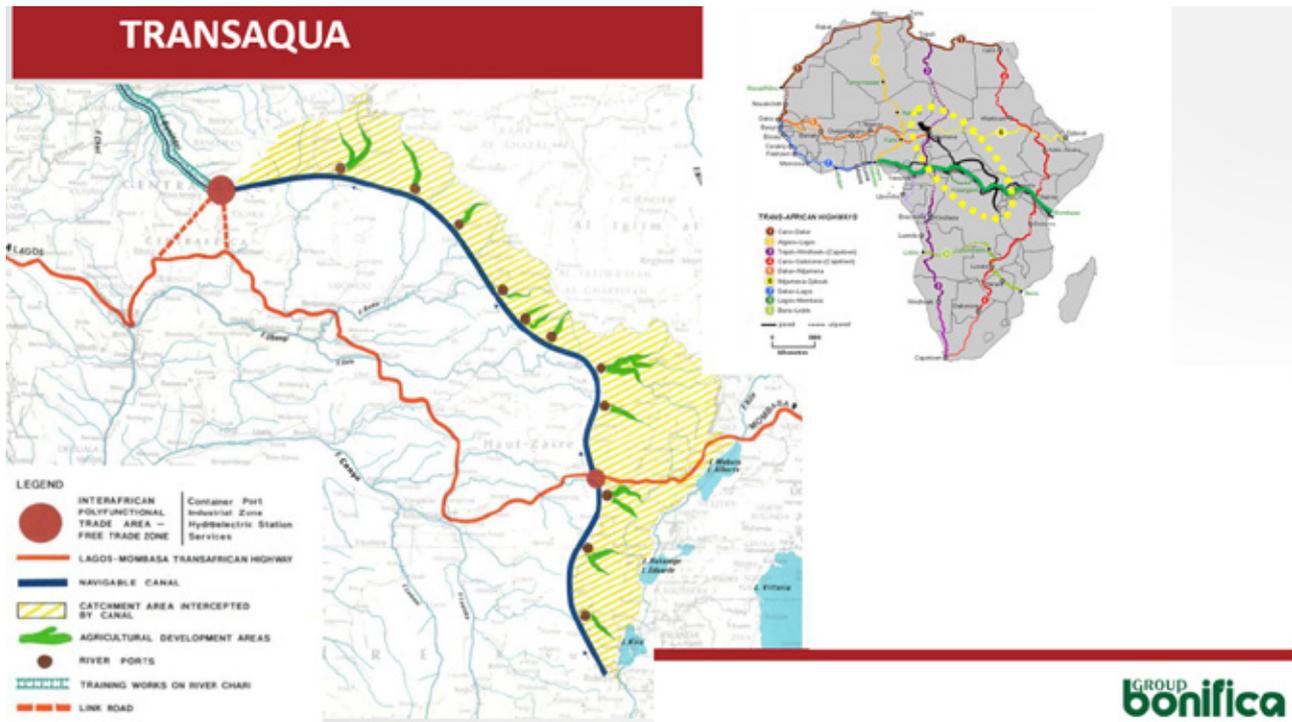
this a Pan-African initiative to restore peace to the Lake Chad Basin, with wide-ranging impacts to promote navigation, industrial and economic development in the entire Congo Basin. The conference called on the African Development Bank to facilitate the creation of a Lake Chad Fund of US\$50 billion. African leaders also called for strengthening the capacity of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) to handle the complex environmental and engineering challenges facing the project, developing a database of genetic resources and biodiversity within the Lake Chad Basin, and conducting studies to establish the hydraulic conductivity of the Nubian sandstone aquifer with the basin.¹⁴

The components of the re-filling plan include: the water transfer project from the Ubangi River in CAR to Lake Chad; sensitization on the sustainable use of natural resources and preservation of the Lake Chad Basin ecosystem; strengthening stakeholder participation and implementation of the Lake Chad Basin Water Charter; and implementing the National Action Plan (NAP) for the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) of the Lake Chad Basin member countries. Implementation of the NAP is underway in Nigeria, where the Basin’s riparian states have taken up the challenge to address the current issues by setting up a trust fund to implement the activities in the Catchment Management Plan of the Komadugu-Yobe Basin (KYB). Moreover, the LCBC and its six member countries (Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Libya, Niger and Nigeria), with support from the World Bank Group and in coordination with the *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD), have prepared the Lake Chad Development and Climate Resilience Action Plan (LCDAP) for the period 2016-2025. Under the plan, in addition to restoring peace and security, the Lake Chad Basin would be transformed into a regional rural development hub.¹⁵

14 Communiqué of the International Conference on Lake Chad held at the Transcorp Hilton Hotel, Abuja, 25-28 February, 2018; LCBC.

15 LCBC, “Roadmap of Restoring Lake Chad,” working document.

Diagram of the inter-basin water transfer



Source: LCBC (credit)The Bonfica Group

While ongoing efforts by the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to defeat the Boko Haram insurgency have made significant strides in containing the violence, it is now understood that a political solution to the crisis is needed, along with sustainable economic intervention. UN Security Council Resolution 2349 (2017) on Boko Haram and Lake Chad, adopted on 31 March 2017 at the Council's 7,911th meeting, following the 2-7 March 2017 visit to the Lake Chad Basin Region, offers an opportunity. Paragraph 22 of the resolution called "upon the Governments in the Region to take further measures to address social, political, economic and gender inequalities, and environmental challenges, and to develop strategies to counter the violent extremist narrative." Paragraph 28 calls on the United Nations and its partners to "address comprehensively the security, political, and developmental challenges and the underlying root causes and drivers of instability and conflicts in the Sahel region."¹⁶

In June 2017, the Chinese construction giant, PowerChina and the Italian firm, Bonfica Spa, signed an

agreement in Hangzhou, China, to operationalize the Transaqua project. PowerChina committed to fund feasibility studies at a cost of \$1.8 million, while LCBC will provide all necessary information and assistance. This feasibility study is expected to also include an environmental assessment addressing the concerns and worries of sceptical partners. The 2,400 km-long canal from southern DRC is expected to intercept the right bank tributaries of the River Congo through dams and reservoirs and carry up to 100 billion cubic meters of water per year, by gravity, into Lake Chad. In addition, it will also produce about 15,000-25,000 kilowatts of hydroelectricity and provide abundant water for irrigation farming in the entire basin, in a region with huge agricultural potentials. The canal will also constitute a major transportation network for Central Africa. This feat nearly replicates what the Chinese did in their own country by transferring water from southern China to the northern region through a 2,500km canal. This constitutes only phase one of the Chinese water transfer plan.¹⁷

¹⁶ United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2349 (2017), which followed a visit to the region by members of the Security Council chaired by the United Kingdom. The resolution also acknowledged "the important contribution of civil society, particularly women's and youth organizations, to conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding and humanitarian efforts in the region, and encourages greater dialogue between respective Governments and civil society."

¹⁷ <https://www.pambazuka.org/human-security/saving-lake-chad-pan-african-project>. The late Chairman Mao Zedong first proposed the South-to-North Water Diversion Project in 1952. It was developed as an ambitious scheme to ease the growing water shortages in the cities of Beijing and Tianjin and the northern provinces of Hebei, Henan and Shandong. On 23rd August 2002, 50 years later, and after extensive research, planning and discussion, the project was approved by the State Council. Work began on the eastern route of the project in December, with construction commencing on the central route a year later. The complete project was expected to cost \$62 billion but by 2014, more than \$79 billion had been spent, making it one of the most expensive engineering projects in history.

Nigerian engineers have been offering alternatives to the politically sensitive refilling from the River Congo, including the option of harvesting water from the Rivers Niger and Benue (which usually causes floods downstream, especially in the peak of the rainy season) and other tributaries and channelling it into Lake Chad over a long period.¹⁸ The proponents of this alternative and “domesticated solution” have advanced other benefits the country will derive by adopting this solution, including: the entire stretch of the River Benue within Nigeria will become navigable; a good segment of River Niger will become navigable within Nigeria; and the Hadejia-Jema’are-Komadugu-Yobe River will become navigable. Furthermore, the widened and deepened Hadejia-Jema’are-Komadugu-Yobe River can also be used to transform the Nguru wetlands for year-round agriculture (crop and animal farming) irrigation projects.¹⁹

The proponents of the alternative option of using River Niger via the Hadejia–Jema’are–Komadugu–Yobe River, which currently contributes about 3 percent of the flow into the lake, believe that this will bring abundant benefits to the country, including transforming the Sambisa Forest into a vast agricultural irrigation field. At present, it serves as a hideout for Boko Haram and other criminals. Proponents insist that this is an opportunity for the government to “kill two birds with one stone;” that is, simultaneously ending seasonal flooding of the Niger and Benue downstream and refilling Lake Chad. In terms of cost, they argue that the estimated capital expenditure (CAPEX) for the optional “domesticated solution” is about \$1.5 billion–\$2.5 billion, less than 5 percent of the \$50 billion the member states of the LCBC seek to build a 2,500-kilometre navigable channel between River Congo and Lake Chad. They also point out that the River Niger originates in and flows through the LCBC countries. Thus, it poses less likelihood of future political risk. Moreover, existing dams within Nigeria (and regions such as Lagdo in Cameroon) can be integrated into the River Niger option.²⁰

However, Abdullahi Sanusi Imran, Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, has stated that

the Transaqua idea “is much more appropriate for the situation of the Lake Chad than all other alternative solutions.”²¹ According to proponents, the inter-Africa Transaqua project has the potential to promote regional integration, peace and stability by creating massive employment. Operationalizing the project may reposition the DRC by adding economic and political value to the millions of cubic metres of water that the River Congo discharges (an average 50,000 cubic metres of water/second) into the Atlantic Ocean, if channelled into Lake Chad as freshwater.²² This may also galvanize support for other megaprojects such as the Inga Dam, which has remained on the drawing board due to lack of financing. Proponents of this option claim that the project can catalyse economic and environmental investment. Nigeria’s drive to provide leadership to the project is crucial, although the marketing strategy has not been as robust as expected, despite President Buhari’s efforts during his diplomatic outings, including his visit to Germany in early 2017. Sceptics believe that should Buhari’s influence wane, the project may lose momentum, especially with Nigeria’s growing economic, security and political challenges. Although it is a regional initiative, the project needs a promoter and champion and sustained political will.²³ As recommended in the Lake Chad Basin Summit communiqué, the African Union was expected to take leadership in mobilizing support.

Although Transaqua has offered this viable solution to the lake’s problems since the 1970s, Western nations and institutions have shown little interest in funding the project. This reluctance is attributed to financial and perhaps, ideological reasons,²⁴ as well as to their economic and strategic interests in the region. A focus on investments in megaprojects with promising economic turnover may thus be a remedial option, while seeking to align these with African interests, which were articulated in the Lagos Plan of Action (1980) and subsequent plans for Africa’s development, including the current Agenda 2063.

18 Prominent Nigerians: Engr. Mustafa Bello, FNSE, Engr. B.O.E Adebosin, MICE, and Engr. Ibrahim Olomoda (FNSE info@mbfsed.com) presented the alternative solution.

19 <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/using-river-niger-to-recharge-lake-chad.html>

20 Ibid.

21 These alternatives were presented in the National Audit Report of Nigeria as part of the Joint Environmental Audit report on the drying up of Lake Chad. The report was prepared by the Supreme Audit Institutions of each of the states for the African Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions. Dissenting positions can create unnecessary friction between government agencies and make it difficult to coordinate actions.

22 <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/06/atlantic-kinshasa-journey-river-congo-170614093548128.html>.

23 It was reported that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had agreed to partner with the Nigerian government to raise the \$50 billion needed to finance the project, as disclosed by the African Development Bank President, Akinwumi Adesina, a former Nigerian Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, during a visit to the Presidential Villa in Nigeria in 2019 (see <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/un-secretary-general-african-development-bank-president-agree-to-strengthen-ties-and-push-development-agenda-in-africa-19244>). However, there are indications that this has not yet been concluded.

24 Executive Intelligence Review (EIR) Strategic Alert, No. 32 of August 2017.

Beyond the refilling of Lake Chad

Proponents see refilling Lake Chad, ambitious as it may appear, as a likely game changer and long-term solution to the acute environmental problem that has undermined the fortunes of the region for many reasons. Accompanying measures to deal with related factors, such as population growth and overexploitation of groundwater. Sustainable consumption and production should be factored into the proposed responses. This will also involve institutionalizing water efficiency, planting drought-resilient crops, using grey water, tackling pollution, desilting and controlling invasive plant species, such as water hyacinth and typha, which increase water loss and decrease access to the lake.²⁵

Nonetheless, the proposed solution has several benefits. First, restoring the waters to a significant level implies restoring the economic boom from the inland fishing industry, pastoralism, and irrigation farming, and regional trade. This would contribute to the gradual reversal of the multiple negative impacts of the reduced waters, improving the environmental, economic and sociocultural fortunes of a revitalized Lake Chad. Second, a revived Lake Chad would enhance implementation of the SDGs, as articulated in the principle of “leaving no one” and no region behind and based on the 5Ps: planet, people, prosperity, peace and partnerships. Emphasis must be made on the need to ensure the gender empowerment as the role of the women peasant farmers in the region is critical in reversing tides of poverty and accelerating wealth creation. No vision of an agricultural transformation or revolution can succeed without deliberately targeting the women farmers.

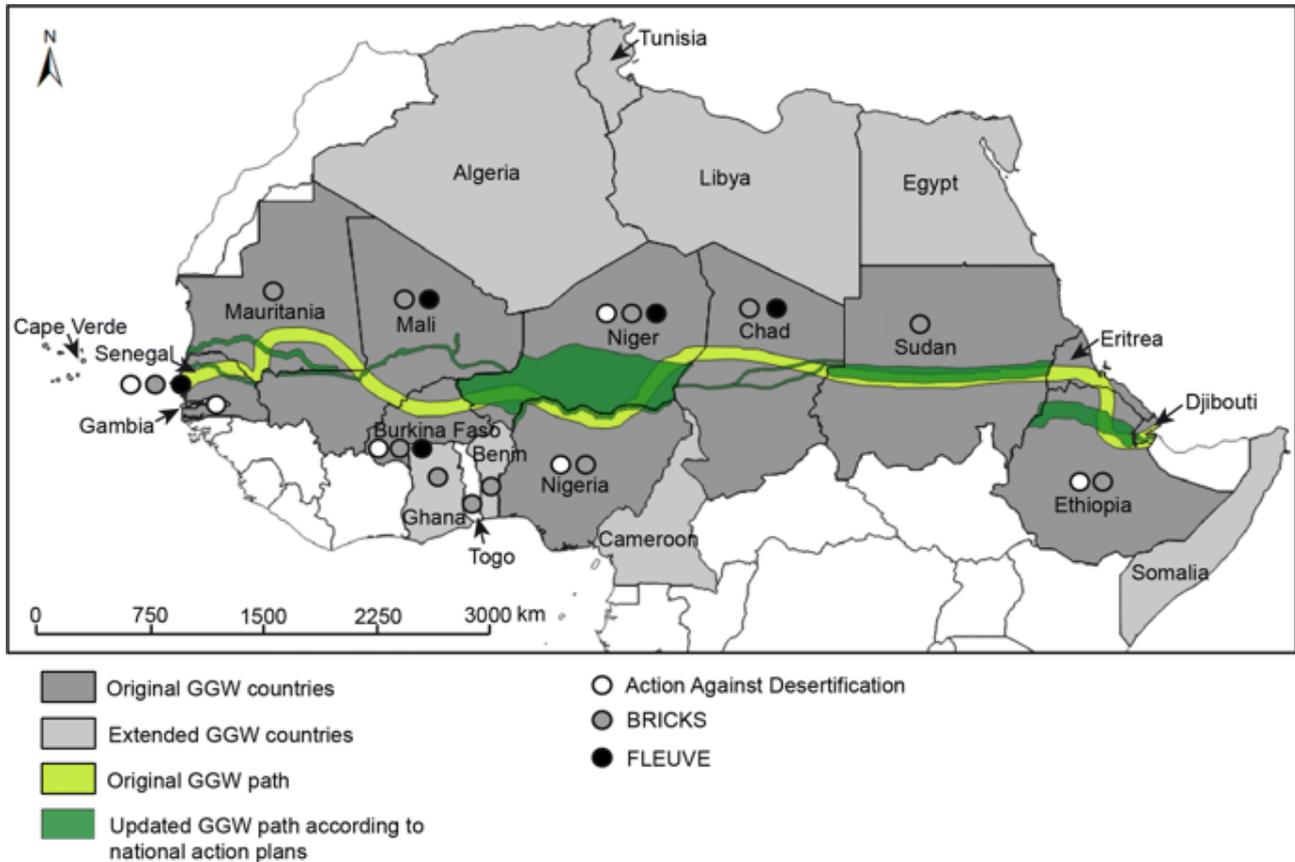
In addition to national efforts, further engagement around “water diplomacy” is needed with DRC, Republic of the Congo, CAR and Cameroon. Concerned communities should also be involved in carrying out the required environmental impact assessment. Similarly, Nigeria, the LCBC and the parties concerned can change the narrative of the Lake Chad Basin through consistent diplomatic moves to assuage the concerns and geostrategic interests of major powers with strong historical and economic claims in the region, particularly France. Drawing inspiration from the Grand Ethiopia Renaissance dam project, the private sector and citizens of the Lake Chad Basin countries, at home and in the diaspora, could be mobilized to invest their human and financial resources in the search for a solution to the Lake Chad crisis. In this regard, other alternative options should be considered in the quest for a durable solution to the refilling debate.

The Great Green Wall

Most importantly, the revival of Lake Chad would boost and/or propel the revival of other infrastructure projects that have been put on hold, such as the Trans-African Highway and the rail route network from Dakar to Djibouti, designed over the years following feasibility studies by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and, subsequently, the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). This major route infrastructure will open up the Sahel belt, which has been ravaged by multiple threats due to the hard-to-reach enclaves, and help transform challenges into opportunities, given the region’s huge agriculture, mining and renewable energy (solar) potential. The infrastructure plan will both transform the region and complement the Green Belt project (see map below), which is geographically aligned with it. Innovative gender sensitive ideas should build on harnessing women cultivators and youth initiatives in promoting the development of nurseries, planting of trees, and protection from animals and wildfire destruction. These projects would also help to reinvigorate intra-African trade, especially with the coming of age of the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA). They would also serve as an impetus to the Lake Chad Basin Commission, one of the oldest regional structures in the African continent. ACFTA provides an opportunity to build support for megaprojects, such as the refilling of Lake Chad, and enabling projects, such as the Green Belt Project (in which Nigeria is a key actor) and the trans-Sahel route networks. This will revive the historical trade that defined the area in pre-colonial days.

A durable solution to the Lake Chad Basin crises lies in harnessing these existing and mutually enhancing initiatives that articulate the economic opportunities and benefits. These megaprojects, if courageously embraced, would fundamentally change the Lake Chad Basin narrative. Focusing on the Great Green Wall may be the most convincing, practical and best way to draw attention to the Lake Chad crisis and elicit necessary support action. The Great Green Wall is expected to restore the region’s flora and fauna, with attendant reversal of effects of climate change and reducing vulnerabilities from land degradation and desertification.

Map of the Sahel Great Green Wall and Trans-African route network



Source: <http://www.grandemurailleverte.org/>.

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Conclusion

Lake Chad remains a classic example of the consequences of climate change over the years. Although some studies claim that Lake Chad water is locked underground, with about 80 percent as groundwater resources, the Lake Basin complex crises remain a global climate issue that requires a global response in support of local, national and regional initiatives. It is one of the regional issues that requires the much-needed “Marshall Plan for Africa”. The socio-economic benefits of a mega-initiative, particularly the refilling project driven by the Lake Chad Basin Commission and supported by Nigeria, are enormous. However, the project needs massive grassroots sensitization campaigns and mobilization to ensure its benefits the more than 40 million people in the region. From refilling the lake to planting the Great Green Wall, these efforts would empower an enormous number of men and women farmers, pastoralists and the youth. In addition to the jobs that would be created in the construction and post-construction phases, such a massive project would drastically reduce the wave of migrants from the region and serve as an ‘antidote’ to the violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin and beyond. A paradigm shift and reversal

of fortunes are needed in a region that is home to most of the migrants stranded in Libya and the rest of the Sahel-Sahara, seeking to make their way to Europe and the Middle East, in search of greener pastures.

Ongoing microclimate initiatives, such as the afforestation of Nigeria’s northern region, will restore an ecosystem that can transform the local climate and vegetation over the medium and long term. Many reports on the Sahel crisis and the multiple initiatives, which have themselves become a problem, all point to the fact that a military solution alone cannot address the crisis in the region. It is critical to adopt a structural conflict prevention approach, currently encouraged by the African Union, and the United Nations, to address the structural vulnerabilities identified and the root causes of conflicts in the Lake Chad Basin, with all their ramifications. It is also a less political approach that governments/member states may likely be willing to accept more easily. The Sahel Green Belt Initiative, the Trans-African Highway and rail lines can work hand-in-hand with the re-watering of Lake Chad, whether from the Congo Basin or from the Rivers Niger and Benue and their tributaries.

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www.undp.org/oslocentre

Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention

Since 2004, the United Nations Development Programme and the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) have partnered to strengthen support to the UN's work in building national capacities for conflict prevention. Often times, such support is extended through the deployment of Peace and Development Advisors (or PDAs), a growing cadre of UN staff who support Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams adapt and respond to complex political situations and to develop and implement strategic conflict prevention initiatives and programmes.

<https://peaceinfrastructures.org/>

Folke Bernadotte Academy

The Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) is the Swedish government agency for peace, security and development. As part of Sweden's international development aid, FBA promotes peace in conflict-affected countries by offering training, advice and conducts research in order to strengthen peacebuilding and statebuilding; as well as grant funds to civil society organizations working with peace and security. The agency is named after Count Folke Bernadotte, UN's first peace mediator.

<https://fba.se/en/>