



African
Union



COVID-19 AND RESILIENCE- BUILDING

in the Lake Chad Basin



Federal Foreign Office



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands



© 2021, United Nations Development Programme
Place de la Grande Armée, B.P. 727, N'Djamena, Tchad
Commission du Bassin du Lac Tchad

AUTHOR:
Olawale Ismael

EDITOR:
Chika Charles Aniekwe. PhD



COVID-19 AND RESILIENCE-BUILDING in the Lake Chad Basin

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	ii
1. Introduction	1
2. Multidimensional Crises in LCB	3
3. Update on COVID-19 in LCB.....	5
Table 1: National-level Data for LCB Countries.....	5
Figure 1: COVID-19 Cases and Deaths in LCB Territories	5
Table 2: COVID-19 Cases and Deaths in LCB Territories May-July 2020.....	6
4. COVID-19 and Impacts on Resilience Factors in LCB.....	7
(a) Social Protection.....	7
(b) Religion and Social Support Networks.....	8
(c) Livelihoods and Informal Economic Activities.....	9
(d) Humanitarian Assistance Services	11
5. Recommendations	13

Executive Summary

This Situational Brief is the second in a series of four rapid assessment briefs commissioned by the UNDP Regional Stabilization Facility for the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) region. It explores the impact of COVID-19 on resilience-building and socioeconomic recovery in the LCB area. It regards the COVID-19 pandemic as a new crisis, as well as one that adds another layer of complexity to the preexisting multidimensional crises in the LCB region. It uses the United Nations' definition of resilience as the ability of a system, community or society exposed to risks to resist, absorb, adapt to and recover positively from the effects of the risks efficiently and effectively. It looks at the impact of COVID-19 on four resilience factors, namely social protection programs; religion and social support networks; livelihoods and informal economic activities; and humanitarian assistance services.

Multidimensional crises in the Lake Chad Basin

Even before the onset of COVID-19, the LCB region had already been affected by multidimensional crises that had impaired the ability of communities to cope with shocks. Those multidimensional crises include structural violence and persistent development failures linked to limited government presence; a security crisis linked to banditry; conflicts over natural resources; organized criminal gangs and violent extremism (Boko Haram insurgency); and climate change and other environmental changes around the LCB region linked to climate change-induced variability in rainfall and temperature, and the size (water levels) of Lake Chad.

COVID-19 cases increased in LCB territories

As of 30 July 2020, LCB territories recorded 1,100 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 71 deaths; this marks a 247 percent increase over the preceding six weeks (21 May 2020). LCB territories in Cameroon had the highest rates of increase. The increases were exponential in Cameroon's Far North (7,050 percent upsurge) and North (1,000 percent rise), and in Nigeria's Adamawa (438 percent) and Borno (161 percent) states.

Ways COVID-19 impacts resilience-building in the LCB region

1. **Social Protection:** COVID-19 has led to the extension of old and new social protection programs to support conflict-affected households

and communities; these include cash transfers, the distribution of food supplies, deferral of utility bills, and monetary measures to protect jobs and support small businesses. However, the actual impacts of these measures remain unclear and, in some cases, criticisms and protests have trailed the social protection programs in Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria. There is limited evidence of whether and how the programs reach the most vulnerable and of the extent of their effectiveness in reducing poverty and supporting recovery.

2. **Religion and Social Support Networks:** Islam is the organizing principle of society and community life and provides community support to vulnerable persons and households in times of shocks across the LCB region. However, COVID-19 continues to impact the capacity of populations in the LCB to tap into community support mechanisms due to restrictions on public gatherings and congregational prayers (worship), public transportation, and new trading requirements. Community support networks were also weakened by a COVID-19 induced decline in remittances and donations to Baitul-Mal, Sadaqah and Zakat (Islamic charity) funds in local mosques. The onset of COVID-19 coincided with the Islamic holy month of Ramadan when congregational prayers, Tafsirs (religious sermons), the collection and distribution of charity goods and other group-based acts of worship were disrupted. All this weakened social cohesion, disrupted sociocultural practices, spiritual well-being and access to psychosocial support available through religious and community mechanisms.
3. **Livelihoods and Informal Economic Activities:** COVID-19 further worsens the practice of agriculture, and trade and associated services in livestock and fisheries in the LCB region. The pandemic disrupts pastoralism (seasonal movement) and regional livestock trade and markets, especially through Cameroon via Gamboru-Ngala to markets in Northeast Nigeria. Border closures and market restrictions, social distancing measures and reduced cross-border exchanges in LCB countries continue to affect livelihoods and informal economic activities. The coincidence of COVID-19 with coordinated military offensives by LCB countries in April-June 2020

disrupted the wet planting season (for grains) and youths' livelihoods (supply of farm labor), limited fishing activities, displaced riverine communities, and also disrupted the all-important smoked fisheries industry that supplies Maiduguri and other major cities across Northern Nigeria. This has more significant impacts on the livelihood opportunities of women and girls, as it restricts activities such as petty trading, sales by food and drink vendors, and the activities of load carriers, hawkers and those who beg for alms in markets and at border crossings.

4. **Humanitarian Assistance Services:** Humanitarian services – including the provision of shelter (camps), food, healthcare, education and livelihood support for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees across the LCB region – have been essential in helping the people cope with shocks. These services help to preserve lives in the immediate term and contribute to socioeconomic recovery over the long term. COVID-19 and its mitigation measures, including the closure of borders, restrictions on movements of goods and persons, and disruption of cross-border trade, have led to an increase in vulnerabilities of local communities and, by extension, the number of persons requiring humanitarian assistance. This is evidenced by recent overcrowding at IDP camps, border processing posts, humanitarian processing posts and refugee camps across LCB territories. Between March and July 2020, the number of displaced persons increased from 4.6 million to 4.9 million; and 12.8 million (including displaced persons needing assistance and those who have not displaced but need assistance) are estimated to need humanitarian assistance at the end of June 2020, compared with the 11 million who were expected as of January 2020. This increases the resource needs for humanitarian operations in the region with the United Nations mid-year coordinated appeals showing a 25 percent increase over 2019 levels. COVID-19 also restricts the availability, movement and access of humanitarian personnel as the mitigation measures impose additional logistical and safety measures on the delivery of humanitarian services in the region.

Recommendations

The Regional Stabilization Facility

1. Develop guidance notes, planning templates, and other programmatic resources for

aligning resilience-building and COVID-19 mitigation strategies into the development and implementation of territorial plans by LCB territories.

2. Undertake and /or update multidimensional risk assessment (risk profiles of LCB territories) of COVID-19 for long-term socioeconomic recovery of populations and communities in LCB territories.
3. Collect reliable data on livelihood patterns and social protection interventions at regional, national and local levels, and assess the differential impacts on different categories of people, including women and girls, to support evidence-based decision-making and support to LCB authorities.
4. Enhance coordination among critical stakeholders – including government agencies, businesses, civil society groups and local and international humanitarian aid and development organizations – to mobilize resources, streamline priorities and minimize the impact of COVID-19 mitigation strategies on resilience (long-term recovery) in LCB region.

Other Stakeholders

The LCB Commission, governors of LCB territories, civil society groups, aid agencies, donor partners, private sector organizations and members of the P3 countries (the United Kingdom, France and the United States):

1. Promote the alignment of COVID-19 mitigation strategies and social protection measures with the Regional Stabilization Strategy resilience-building and long-term socioeconomic recovery objectives.
2. Promote greater transparency and accountability in the administration and distribution of and access to social-protection programs to ensure that they reach the most vulnerable population in LCB territories.
3. Work with local communities and religious bodies to promote community sensitization and adapt practices and activities to COVID-19 mitigation strategies and guidelines.
4. Promote greater coordination and synergy among humanitarian agencies, local communities, and COVID-19 response committees to streamline interventions, identify old and new priorities and ensure their activities support resilience-building and long-term socioeconomic recovery of LCB territories.
5. Promote information-sharing and cooperation among border agencies to facilitate COVID-19-compliant resumption of cross-border exchanges and movement of goods and services across the LCB region.



1. Introduction

This Situational Brief explores the impact of COVID-19 on resilience-building and socioeconomic recovery in the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) area. It is the second in a four-part series on the rapid assessment of COVID-19 and its impacts on critical aspects of the LCB Regional Stabilization Strategy (RSS).¹ The series traces and analyzes the evolution of COVID-19 and response strategies in the LCB territories of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria and provides initial rapid analysis and assessment of its implications for priority themes of the RSS and the mandate of the Regional Stabilization Facility (RSF). In view of the evolving nature of COVID-19, the Situational Briefs are based largely on open-source data and targeted interviews with stakeholders where possible.

The short-, medium- and long-term impacts of COVID-19 are yet to be fully understood. Nevertheless, the LCB region continues to experience a deteriorating security situation due to the Boko Haram/ISWAP insurgency² and counter-offensives by government troops under the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF). Emerging trends point to a ‘whole of the system’ and ‘societal’ impact of COVID-19 because its sudden and disruptive nature exposes old and new vulnerabilities in countries with preexisting economic, social, political, environmental, geographic and institutional challenges.³ The COVID-19 pandemic is a new crisis in itself. It adds another layer of complexity to the preexisting natural and human-induced hazards such as violent conflict, displacement, demographic pressures, climate and environmental changes and development deficits in the LCB region.

This Situational Brief uses the United Nations definition of resilience as the ability of system, community or society exposed to risks to resist, absorb, adapt to and recover positively from the effects of the risks efficiently and effectively.⁴ Resilience is the capacity to cope with individual and multidimensional shocks caused by both natural and human-induced events. It covers assets, resources, activities, practices and structures that serve as sources and forms of support for individuals, communities and societies when disruptions occur.⁵ This Situational Brief identifies and focuses on how COVID-19 impacts four resilience factors, namely *social protection, religion and social support networks, livelihoods and informal economic activities, and humanitarian assistance services*. While this is not an exhaustive list, these four factors represent the core resources and activities that enable people and communities to cope with disruptions and adjust to shocks across LCB territories.

Social protection speaks to government-led poverty alleviation programs, such as conditional cash transfers, distribution of food supplies, school feeding initiatives and other interventions that deliver financial and material support to persons in need. Religious and social support networks are non-governmental, community-based mechanisms and programs that provide financial, material, physical and psychosocial support to persons in need and help them to recover from shocks. Livelihoods and informal economic activities cover income-yielding activities and services available to populations in the LCB. Humanitarian services include the provision of relief materials, shelter, healthcare and psychosocial services by local

1 The key priorities of the RSS, as contained in the pillars of intervention, include political cooperation; security and human rights; DDR and reinsertion and reintegration of persons associated with Boko Haram terrorists; humanitarian assistance; socioeconomic recovery and environmental sustainability; education, learning and skills development; preventing violent extremism and building peace; and the empowerment and inclusion of women and youth. See African Union Commission/Lake Chad Basin Commission, ‘Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery & Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region’, August 2018, pp. 24-44. <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/regional-stabilisation-recovery-and-resilience-strategy-rss-.pdf>

2 ISWAP denotes Islamic State West African Province.

3 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), ‘2018 HLPF Thematic Review: Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies – Building resilience’, 2018, p.1, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/196362018backgroundnotesResilience.pdf>

4 United Nations, ‘UN Common Guidance on Helping Build Resilient Societies,’ (Final Advance Draft) September 2020 version, p. 18, https://www.sparkblue.org/system/files/2020-10/UN%20Resilience%20Guidance_Final_6%20Oct_no%20foreword.pdf

5 Virtual interview with the UNDP Africa Resilience Team (Resilience Project Manager, and Disaster Risk Reduction Regional Advisor for Africa), 11 June 2020.

and international aid agencies and non-governmental organizations to persons and communities affected (and often displaced) by shocks in the LCB region.

The listed resilience factors cover the priorities and critical phases of the RSS (stabilization and transition to early recovery and resumption of the stalled development process) and straddle the development, security, climate change and environmental dimensions of the crises in the LCB region.⁶ They also embed the three output areas of the RSF, namely, improved community safety and security; the provision of functioning essential infrastructure and basic services; and the availability of livelihood opportunities. The choice of resilience factors also parallels those identified by the UNDP in other countries in West Africa (Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea) with similar experiences of a pandemic (Ebola) coupled with preexisting socioeconomic and environmental challenges.⁷

The rest of this Situational Brief has four sections. Section Two provides an overview of the multidimensional crises in the LCB region before COVID-19. Section Three profiles COVID-19 response strategies in the LCB states and territories. Section Four explores the emerging impacts of COVID-19 mitigation strategies on the four resilience factors highlighted above. Section Five provides recommendations for relevant stakeholders, including the RSF.

“

The choice of resilience factors also parallels those identified by the UNDP in other countries in West Africa (Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea) with similar experiences of a pandemic (Ebola) coupled with preexisting socioeconomic and environmental challenges.

6 African Union/LCB Commission (2018), Regional Strategy: for the Stabilization, Recovery & Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin, https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/rss-ab-vers-en_.pdf

7 In the context of Ebola in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, the UNDP identified resilience factors to include economic opportunities and livelihoods, health sector services, social protection, and institutional support and governance. See UNDP (2015) Getting beyond zero: Early recovery and resilience support framework: Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/crisis-prevention-and-recovery/getting-beyond-zero---early-recovery-and-resilience-support-fram.html>

2. Multidimensional Crises in LCB

The Lake Chad Basin was already a confluence of interconnected risks and crises before the onset of COVID-19. The multidimensional crises in the LCB region date back several decades and were made more acute by recent political, security and environmental challenges. Historically, the Lake Chad region was a major commercial hub in which the lake itself played a vital role in the practice of agriculture, pastoralism and cross-border trade in livestock, fisheries and other services. However, traditional patterns of communal living, employment, access to livelihoods and adaptive capacities (such as seasonal migration and occupational change) have weakened over the past decades due to violence, insecurity and environmental changes. Since 2009, the Lake Chad Basin has grown into one of the worst conflict-affected regions in the world and is the site of one of the worst humanitarian emergencies in the world. Of the estimated 17.4 million people living across the LCB territories as of March 2020, more than half of them – an estimated 9.8 million people – required humanitarian assistance.⁸

There are three major preexisting crises (and sources of shocks) across the LCB region; first is structural violence and persistent development failures linked to a limited government presence. The center-periphery problem, weak investment and infrastructure and inadequate access to social services are key markers of this. As noted in the ‘Situational Brief on Governance,’ the LCB countries perform poorly on crucial governance indicators, as well as socioeconomic indicators, including transparency and accountability, employment, literacy levels, access to health and other social services.

Second is a security crisis linked to banditry, heightened conflicts over natural resources (especially land and water resources), organized criminal gangs and violent extremism (Boko Haram insurgency). Due to the neglect by successive national governments, communities in the LCB region became poorly integrated with the rest of their respective countries. LCB territories have ‘outlier integration’ – border communities’ integration across national borders, rather than integration with the capital cities and economic development processes of their respective countries. This integration pattern has given rise to perceived and actual marginalization, grievances, the breakdown of the social contract between the LCB countries and their LCB territories.⁹ The Boko Haram insurgency is the most widespread and devastating of the security crises in the LCB region, and it continues to ravage the LCB region alongside the effects of COVID-19.¹⁰

Third is climate change and other environmental changes around the Lake Chad basin, which are linked to climate change-induced variability in rainfall and temperature and the size (water levels) of Lake Chad. For instance, temperatures in the Sahel, including the LCB region, are estimated to be rising 1.5 times faster than the global average over the past three decades. Extant studies pinpoint links between this and complex (unpredictable) patterns of rainfall in the region with climate change further exacerbating the environmental degradation and raising the risk of damage from floods and droughts.¹¹

Communal living and livelihoods are directly connected to the environment in the LCB region. However, ecological changes continue to accelerate the degradation of natural assets that support livelihood choices. Unpredictable rainfall patterns, changes in

8 United States Agency for International Development (USAID), ‘Lake Chad Basin – Complex Emergency: Fact Sheet No.2 Fiscal Year 2020’, March 31 2020. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/03.31.20percent20percent20USAID-DCHAprcent20Lakepercent20Chadpercent20Basinpercent20Complexpercent20Emergencypercent20Factpercent20Sheetpercent20percent20232.pdf>

9 Nagarajan, Chitra, et al., ‘2018: Climate-Fragility Profile: Lake Chad Basin’, adelphi research, Berlin, p. V.

10 In Chad’s Lac province, for example, Boko Haram attacks and insecurity have displaced nearly 170,000 people (one-third of the population in the area), and endangered livelihoods by hindering agricultural production and blocking cross-border trade. See Eizenga, Daniel, ‘Chad’s Escalating Fight against Boko Haram’, 20 April 2020, African Centre for Strategic Studies, www.africacenter.org/spotlight/chad-escalating-fight-against-boko-haram/

11 Vivekananda, Janani et al., (2019), ‘Shoring Up Stability: Addressing climate and fragility in the Lake Chad Region’, adelphi research, Berlin, 15 May 2019, p. 25 <https://shoring-up-stability.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Shoring-up-Stability.pdf>

temperature, and the dwindling size and water level of Lake Chad disrupt livelihoods and trigger shocks, competition for scarce resources, intercommunal (farmer-herder) conflicts, poverty, unemployment and food insecurity. These changes have triggered declines in fish production (60 percent), livestock population, and the degradation of pasture lands and threats to regional biodiversity.¹²

These shocks have produced interrelated disruptions and instability across LCB territories and countries, especially over the past decade. Since 2010, the Lake Chad Basin has become one of the most volatile regions and a ‘conflict trap’ – marked by violent clashes between state and non-state armed groups, poor governance and corruption, environmental mismanagement and humanitarian emergencies.¹³ The 2020 Global Report on Food Crises notes that decades of development deficits and inadequate state presence facilitated the rise of armed bandits and violent extremists groups in the region that displaced thousands of people, created a scarcity of resources and exacerbated frictions between host and displaced communities. It further led to the imposition of security measures that affect cross-border movements and trade. The scale of violence and insecurity continues to limit humanitarian access by and to vulnerable populations.¹⁴

“

These shocks have produced interrelated disruptions and instability across LCB territories and countries, especially over the past decade.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), ‘Global Report on Food Crises 2020’, April 2020, p. 41.

3. Update on COVID-19 in LCB

According to data from the Africa Centre for Disease Control, at the end of July 2020, the four LCB states had 61,560 confirmed cases and 1,404 COVID-19 deaths. When disaggregated, Nigeria had the highest number of confirmed cases, followed by Cameroon, Niger and Chad (see Table 1). Between May and July 2020, Nigeria and Cameroon had the highest percentage increases in the number of COVID cases with 81 percent and 37 percent rises, respectively. While national-level data provides useful context, it hides significant differences in the COVID-19 trend in the different LCB territories.

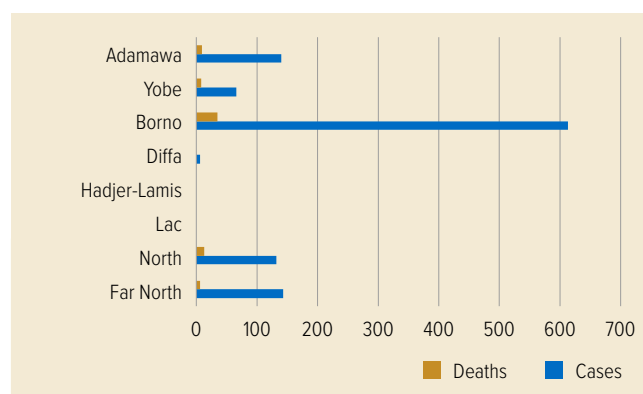
Across the LCB territories, there were 1,100 confirmed cases and 71 deaths as of the end of July 2020. Borno state in Nigeria and the Far North region of Cameroon had the greatest number of confirmed cases (see Figure 1). When analyzed for trends, available data points to continued rapid increases in COVID-19 cases in LCB territories in Cameroon and Nigeria and no new cases in LCB territories in Chad and Niger.

As indicated in Table 2, between 21 May and 30 July 2020, LCB territories in Cameroon had the highest rates of increase. For instance, confirmed cases rose by 7,050 percent in the Far North, and 1,000 percent in the North region of Cameroon. The LCB territories in Nigeria recorded more moderate levels of increase, rising 161 percent in Borno, 106 percent in Yobe, and 438 percent in Adamawa. At the time of this report, updated and disaggregated data for LCB territories in Chad and Niger were not publicly available, and this suggests poor data availability for the two countries.

TABLE 1:
National-level Data for LCB Countries through 31 July 2020¹⁵

	Confirmed Cases	Deaths	Recoveries
<i>Africa</i>			
<i>Lake Chad Basin</i>	61,560	1,404	
<i>Cameroon</i>	17,300	387	15,300
<i>Chad</i>	926	75	813
<i>Niger</i>	1,134	69	1,028
<i>Nigeria</i>	42,200	873	20,100

FIGURE 1:
COVID-19 Cases and Deaths in LCB Territories



¹⁵ Unless stated otherwise, COVID-19 data used in this report are from African Centre for Disease Control, <https://africacdc.org/covid-19/>

TABLE 2:
COVID-19 Cases and Deaths in LCB Territories May-July 2020

Country	Territory	COVID-19 as of 21 May 2020		COVID-19 as of 30 July 2020	
		Cases	Deaths	Cases	Deaths
Cameroon	Far North ¹⁶	2		143	6
	North	12	1	132	13
Chad	Lac	4		N/A ¹⁷	N/A
	Hadjer-Lamis	0		N/A	N/A
Niger	Diffa	6		6	0
Nigeria	Borno	235	24	613	35
	Yobe	32	1	66	8
	Adamawa	26	1	140	9

It is vital to emphasise that the individual and collective data for LCB territories may not reveal the full picture of COVID-19 cases in the LCB region. Nigeria appears to have a higher quality and greater transparency of and access to COVID-19-related data as compared to Cameroon, Niger and Chad. For instance, Chad stopped providing disaggregated data by region since the start of July 2020. Data from the government of Niger points to no new cases in Diffa, despite a modest increase for the country as a whole. And data for Cameroon is often not updated by the government.¹⁸

Across the LCB countries and territories, the initial mitigation strategies – including curfews, border closures, suspensions of markets and public gatherings, and national lockdowns that were introduced in the middle of March – were eased at

the start of May. As indicated in the First Situational Brief, the lockdowns were eased, in part, because the impacts of the disease itself as well as the mitigation strategies heightened social tensions and worsened socioeconomic difficulties, especially by limiting access to food, livelihoods and social services. In May 2020, governments in the LCB region introduced new guidelines that emphasized social distancing protocols, restrictions on public gatherings, new testing procedures, general hygiene initiatives, greater public health awareness and other measures.¹⁹ Governments and non-governmental organizations initiated socioeconomic protection measures, including the distribution of food, cash transfers and the suspension of payment for utilities. The impacts of COVID-19 itself along with the disease-mitigation strategies on resilience factors are explored in the next section.

¹⁶ The data for Far North and North regions in Cameroon were as of 22 July 2020. See: 'Cameroon: Rapport de situation COVID-19', No. 40, Période du 16 au 22/07/2020, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/cmr_covid19_sitrep40.pdf

¹⁷ This means data not available.

¹⁸ For data on Niger, see <https://coronavirus.ne/carte-interactive/>. For data on Chad, see <https://www.covid19-tchad.org/>. For data on Cameroon, see <http://covid19.minsante.cm/>.

¹⁹ For guidelines in Cameroon, for example, see <http://covid19.minsante.cm/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/point-de-presse-du-23-juillet-2020.pdf>

4. COVID-19 and Impacts on Resilience Factors in LCB

(a) Social Protection

There were several ongoing social-protection programs before the COVID-19 outbreak across the LCB region. These were mostly joint programs between government authorities in the LCB region and development and humanitarian aid agencies, and they targeted conflict-affected communities and households, including persons in IDP camps. The programs included those providing food and emergency shelter, conditional cash transfer schemes and youth empowerment and employment initiatives. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an expansion and increase of resources devoted to some of these programs such as cash transfers, food distribution, deferral of utility bills and the payment of salaries of public sector workers. Monetary policy bodies (central banks) also introduced measures to protect jobs and support businesses that contributed to better social protection, especially for the vulnerable populations.

Examples of social protection programs in response to COVID-19 include Cameroon's deferral of utility payments for three months for vulnerable households and accelerated value-added tax (VAT) reimbursements; expanded preparedness and response planning for health spending estimated at CFA 58.3 billion (US\$100 million).²⁰ Chad and Niger initiated similar measures in addition to the launch of a Youth Entrepreneurship Fund, and a new solidarity fund for the vulnerable population worth CFA 100 billion in Chad.²¹ Across Cameroon, Chad and Niger, the regional central bank (BEAC) introduced emergency monetary policies to support governments and businesses and protect economic growth. These include reduction of the

policy rate by 25 bps to 3.25 percent, reduction of the Marginal Lending Facility rate by 100 bps to 5 percent, increased liquidity provision for banks from CFA 240 to 500 billion, and support for banks to accept three-month payment deferrals by customers.²²

In Nigeria, the social register expanded from 2.6 million to 3.6 million beneficiaries since the outbreak of COVID-19. Palliatives such as cash and grains were provided to vulnerable households and IDP camps, and the government also continued the school feeding program for pupils, providing foodstuffs to the families that the pupils would otherwise have received at school; as well, the pump price of petroleum products was reduced during the initial period of the COVID-19 outbreak. The fuel price reduction was reversed in July 2020 to reflect the new price regime consistent with global increases in the price of crude. Nigeria also released contingency funds of about US\$2.7 million to the disease control agency and US\$18 million for the procurement of testing kits.²³

The Nigerian government also reviewed the national budget because of COVID-19 and the fall in oil prices. It introduced an economic stimulus package worth US\$1.4 billion to support the health sector and grant relief to taxpayers.²⁴ The Central Bank (CBN) reduced interest rates from 9 percent to 5 percent; added a one-year moratorium on CBN intervention facility; provided a US\$139 million credit facility and N100 billion support fund for the health sector; and launched a N2 trillion support fund for the manufacturing industry to protect jobs.²⁵

20 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'CAMEROON: COVID 19 Emergency: Situation Report No. 01', OCHA Cameroon/COVID 19 Task Force, 18 May 2020.

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20.05.20-ocha_cameroon_sitrep_covid-19_ndeg1.pdf

21 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 'Chad COVID-19 Situation Report – #03', 17 June 2020,

<https://reliefweb.int/report/chad/chad-covid-19-situation-report-03>

22 International Monetary Fund (IMF), 'Policy Responses to COVID-19: Cameroon', 2020.

<https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19#C>

23 Human Rights Watch (HRW) 'Nigeria: Protect Most Vulnerable in COVID-19 Response,' 14 April 2020,

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/14/nigeria-protect-most-vulnerable-covid-19-response>. See also CNN, 'Government, banks and wealthy individuals contribute billions to fight coronavirus in Nigeria', 27 March 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/27/africa/coronavirus-nigeria-fund/index.html>.

24 Premium Times, 'Nigeria: FEC Approves Revised 2020 Budget', 13 May 2020, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202005140102.html>

25 IMF, 'Policy Responses to COVID-19: Nigeria', 2020, <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19#N>

At the multilateral level, in May 2020, the World Bank approved a US\$346 million International Development Association (IDA) financing initiative to strengthen resilience and livelihoods of vulnerable groups across the LCB region. The IDA initiative has two elements: first is the Lake Chad Region Recovery and Development Project (PROLAC), worth US \$170 million, designed to support national and regional coordination and knowledge-sharing platforms and local capacity-building, contribute to restoring sustainable rural mobility and connectivity and strengthen the recovery of agricultural livelihoods in selected provinces of Cameroon, Chad and Niger.²⁶ The second project is the Multi-Sectoral Crisis Recovery Project for North Eastern Nigeria; it provides additional financing worth \$176 million targeted at assisting the government of Nigeria to improve access to essential services and livelihood opportunities for crisis-affected communities in the North Eastern States of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe.²⁷

Nonetheless, the actual impact of these social-protection measures remains unclear or mixed thus far. For instance, anecdotal events point to doubts and dissatisfaction with the government's COVID-19-related social-protection initiatives. In Cameroon, persons with disabilities protested against their neglect by the government during COVID-19 over issues of poor communication, the failure of social protection programs to meet their needs, and the impact of social distancing rules and other mitigation measures on their lives.²⁸ In Niger, there was a protest at the start of May 2020 over the socioeconomic hardships and restrictions on public gatherings (including congregational prayers) occasioned by COVID-19 mitigation measures.²⁹ In Nigeria, criticisms trail the government's social-protection programs during the

COVID-19 period over the lack of structure, perceived political consideration in their disbursement, poor data management and questionable transparency in the management of the program.³⁰

A June 2020 study on social-assistance programs concluded that although developing countries spend 1.5 percent of their GDP on social-assistance programs, there is limited evidence on how effective these programs are in reducing poverty and inequality. In many instances, social assistance fails to reach the lowest-income households across sub-Saharan Africa.³¹ A full evaluation of the social-protection measures will be required to determine their effectiveness in the context of COVID-19.

(b) Religion and Social Support Networks

Across LCB territories, Islam remains the dominant religion and the organizing principle of society and community life. Religious leaders often double as traditional title holders and oversee community and religious practices of Sadaqah and Zakat (Islamic charity).³² Religious institutions and /or community structures are essential sources of support and coping mechanism in times of shocks. Supports such as credit facilities, distribution of charity goods (food, water and clothing), psychosocial support, provision of safe shelter (hosting displaced persons, for example) and other measures are accessible through religious circles. Some Muslims also get soft loans (credit) from Islamic congregational contributions (*Baitul-Mal*) in some Mosques to enable the restart of old businesses and the creation of new ones.³³

However, the COVID-19 outbreak and associated mitigation measures, despite the relaxation of those measures, continues to hinder the ability of populations

26 World Bank, 'World Bank Provides \$346 Million to Strengthen Resilience and Livelihoods in the Lake Chad Region', 26 May 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/05/26/world-bank-provides-346-million-to-strengthen-resilience-and-livelihoods-in-the-lake-chad-region>

27 Ibid.

28 Kindzeka, Moki Edwin, 'Cameroon Disabled Protest Neglect as Coronavirus Spreads', 15 June 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/cameroon-disabled-protest-neglect-coronavirus-spreads>

29 Catholic News, 'Niger: Fears that COVID-19 riots could lead to church attacks', 01 May 2020, <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/39478>. See also, Garda World, 'Niger: Residents in Niamey protest COVID-19 measures April 17-19 /update 3', 22 April 2020, <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/334861/niger-residents-in-niamey-protest-covid-19-measures-april-17-19-update-3>

30 Olisah, Chike, 'FG's conditional cash transfer programme gets more beneficiaries despite criticism', Nairametrics, 11 April 2020. <https://nairametrics.com/2020/04/11/fgs-conditional-cash-transfer-programme-gets-more-beneficiaries-despite-criticism/>

31 Parekh, Nidhi and Oriana Bandiera, 'Do social assistance programmes reach the poor? Micro-evidence from 123 countries,' International Growth Centre, 7 July 2020, p.1, <https://www.theigc.org/reader/do-social-assistance-programmes-reach-the-poor-micro-evidence-from-123-countries/>

32 Telephone interview with a resident of Borno state, Nigeria, 20 July 2020.

33 Ibid.

in LCB to tap into community support mechanisms in several ways. First, the suspension and restrictions on public gatherings and congregational prayers (worship), respectively, meant the closure of mosques and other religious centers, with negative implications for the collection and distribution/access to charity goods and money. This weakens social cohesion as well as disrupts sociocultural practices, spiritual well-being and the psychosocial support available through religious and community mechanisms. The coincidence of the onset of COVID-19 during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan disrupted congregational prayers, charity donations, Tafsirs (religious sermons), and other group-based acts of worship and magnified the challenges.³⁴

Second, restrictions on transportation (e.g., vehicle occupancy), trading (including partial closures of markets), and social distancing measures have also hindered the distribution and access to community-based palliatives and other charitable goods. All this caused anxieties and strains in local communities as seen in the public protests by Muslims against COVID-19 mitigation measures in Niger in April 2020.³⁵ The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) also notes, “a lack of food/goods in refugee camps may increase tension among refugees and host communities. Perceptions that non-nationals bring the virus may escalate discrimination and social exclusion, particularly in areas hosting displaced populations.”³⁶

Third, COVID-19 would appear to have also weakened the voice and resilience of religion and community counter-narratives against Boko Haram (and their extremist narratives). Boko Haram has used COVID-19 and governmental mitigation strategies to reinforce its extremist narratives, claiming that the virus was a punishment from Allah and that the only cure for COVID-19 was a return to Allah (its brand of authentic Islam) and called for the return to congregational prayers. It also branded public health measures as veiled efforts to prevent Muslims from practicing their

faith, including congregational prayers and pilgrimages to Mecca.³⁷

Another area of impact on community support mechanisms in LCB countries and territories is the way in which COVID-19 affects remittances. Data specific to remittance flow to LCB territories is not available; however, national- and regional-level data could signpost possible implications. A recent analysis found, “before COVID-19, the remittance flow to developing nations was estimated to reach \$574 billion in 2020 and \$597 billion in 2021. With COVID-19, remittance flow to Africa has been adjusted downwards; it is estimated to drop by 23.1 percent to \$37 billion versus the pre-COVID-19 estimate of \$48 billion in 2019.”³⁸ The analysis concluded that any significant drop in remittances has a direct impact on the socioeconomic conditions of populations, especially those who rely on it to cushion the effect of acute poverty, in most African countries.

(c) Livelihoods and Informal Economic Activities

The dominant economic activities in the LCB were already impacted by the preexisting multidimensional crises in the region. The onset of COVID-19 further complicates them in at least four ways; first is the disruption of agriculture and trade, the core livelihood activities in the LCB region. On the one hand, COVID-19 continues to disrupt pastoralism and regional livestock trade and markets. The vast majority of persons and local communities in LCB territories are actively engaged in the value chain for livestock that involves the movement of animals from Chad (through Cameroon via Gamboru-Ngala) to markets in Northeast Nigeria for onward movement to major cities in Northern and Southern Nigeria. On the other hand, COVID-19 and the declaration of a state of emergency and coordinated military offensives by the government of Chad, Niger and Nigeria in April-June 2020 continues to limit fishing activities, displace riverine communities, and also disrupt the all-important supply

34 Ibid.

35 Garda World, ‘Niger: Residents in Niamey protest COVID-19 measures April 17-19 /update 3’, 22 April 2020. <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/334861/niger-residents-in-niamey-protest-covid-19-measures-april-17-19-update-3>

36 World Food Programme/Food Security Information Network, ‘2020 Global Report on Food Crises’, p. 5.

37 Bukarti, Audu, ‘How Is Boko Haram Responding to Covid-19?’, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 20 May 2020. <https://institute.global/policy/how-boko-haram-responding-covid-19>

38 Adeoti, Dipeolu, ‘Beyond Remittances: Covid-19 And The ‘Future’ Of African Diaspora – Homeland Relations’, ALC Op-Ed Series, Vol.3, Issue 3, 18 June 2020. <https://www.africanleadershipcentre.org/index.php/COVID-19-research/644-beyond-remittances-COVID-19-and-the-future-of-african-diaspora-homeland-relations>

of smoked fish to Maiduguri and other major cities across Northern Nigeria.³⁹

Second, border closures and restrictions, market restrictions, social distancing measures and reduced cross-border exchanges in LCB countries affect livelihoods and informal economic activities. COVID-19 directly impacts the cross-border movement of persons, goods and services, which is a historical feature of the LCB. Also, the closure of crucial border posts, especially the strategic Gamboru-Ngala crossing that connects and facilitates socioeconomic exchanges among Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria, affects livelihoods and the seasonal movement of labor and livestock. This has more significant impacts on the landlocked LCB territories in Niger and Chad.

Third, COVID-19 also restricts trading activities (and livelihood opportunities) because key regional livestock markets in Borno state (Maiduguri, Gamboru-Ngala, Konduga, Jere, Dushman, Shuwari and Ngom) and those in Yobe state (Kukareta, Gaidam and Potiskum) have either shut down or are operating at a reduced capacity.⁴⁰ This more significantly impacts the livelihood opportunities of women and girls, as it restricts activities such as petty trading, sales by food and drink vendors, and the activities of load carriers, hawkers and those who beg for alms in markets and at border crossings. Trading restrictions naturally lead to increased costs for traders, especially women and girls, as they resort to unofficial routes and more dangerous ways of practicing their trades.⁴¹ The COVID-19 containment measures adversely affect transhumance flow across borders in the wet season (from May until September) because herders have limited access to grain supplies and markets to sell stocks.⁴² This affects the entire value chain including breeders, transporters, animal feed suppliers, veterinary service providers, butchers, hide and skin dealers, and beef and milk sellers with implications for the socioeconomic vulnerability of the population in LCB territories.

Fourth, COVID-19 and security-related restrictions also impact farming (planting season), especially the production of grains. For instance, the onset of COVID-19 coincided with the wet season (early March-to June planting season), and the movement restrictions translated into a reduced cultivation of farmlands and the loss of jobs and incomes for youth who could not sell their labor on a farm.⁴³ This could impact food availability and supply across the LCB region later in the year. The FAO notes that while harvests have been good and the outlook for staple crops is promising, COVID-19 restrictions will disrupt the transport and processing of food and other critical goods, increasing delivery times and reducing the availability of even the most basic food items. Moreover, disruptions in the value chain for livestock and markets generally will likely trigger declines in crop and livestock production and sales (food crises), as well as a reduction in the purchasing power of LCB communities.⁴⁴ The FAO concludes, “people in food crises often have higher rates of underlying health conditions, including non-communicable diseases and malnutrition (acute, chronic and micronutrient deficiencies), which weaken the immune system and increase the risk of people developing severe COVID-19 symptoms.”⁴⁵

A May 2020 study also underlines the overall impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods for those living in developing countries, including LCB countries. It notes that national lockdowns, workplace closures and other mitigation strategies immediately push an additional 9.1 percent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa into extreme poverty; about 3 percent of household (especially daily laborers) will suffer an income drop of 50 percent on average; an estimated 168 million persons (19.3 percent of the population), especially those in the informal sector, will no longer be able to afford their pre-COVID-19 level of food consumption at the end of an eight-week lockdown; up to 31.8 million people (3.6 percent of the population), including 3.9 million children under five years of age, are in danger of becoming severely food-deprived at the end of an eight-week

39 Ibid.

40 Phone interview with a resident of Maiduguri, 18 May 2020.

41 International Organization for Migration (IOM), ‘Background Brief on the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin Amid COVID-19 Crisis’, April 2020.

42 Ibid.

43 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), ‘CAMEROON: COVID 19 Emergency: Situation Report No. 1’, 18 May 2020. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20.05.20-ocha_cameroon_sitrep_covid-19_ndeg1.pdf

44 WFP/FSIN ‘2020 Global Report on Food Crises’, p. 4.

45 Ibid.

lockdown; citizens will see the depletion of 30 percent of their savings, which may remove all resilience capacity to future shocks; and the poor performance of pre-COVID-19 social-protection programs in developing countries suggest that simply expanding existing programs will do very little to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown measures.⁴⁶

(d) Humanitarian Assistance Services

Since the intensification of the multidimensional crises in the LCB region over the past decade, humanitarian assistance has been an essential resource for displaced populations and communities in LCB territories. Humanitarian services provide shelter (mostly through camps), food, healthcare, education and livelihood support (cash transfers) for IDPs and refugees.⁴⁷ These services help to preserve lives in the immediate term and also contribute to socioeconomic recovery over the long term. The onset of COVID-19 presents a new shock and worsens the preexisting crises in the LCB region. COVID-19 and its mitigation measures, including the closure of borders, restrictions on movements of goods and persons, and disruption of cross-border trade, has increased the vulnerabilities of local communities and, by extension, the number of persons requiring humanitarian assistance. This is evidenced by recent overcrowding at IDP camps, border processing posts, humanitarian processing posts and refugee camps across LCB territories.⁴⁸ Since March 2020, this has been exacerbated by military offensives by MNJTF forces.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the number of displaced persons, including IDPs, refugees, IDP returnees and third-country nationals in the LCB region increased steadily since COVID-19, from 4.6 million in March 2020 to 4.9 million in July 2020.⁴⁹

Secondly, COVID-19 impacts humanitarian assistance in the LCB as it increases the amount of resources (monetary and materials) needed for humanitarian operations. The mid-year assessment showed that COVID-19 had impacted the total United Nations-coordinated appeal requirements for 2020, as it reached US \$37.7 billion (25 percent higher than 2019 levels). An additional US \$578 million has been committed to United Nations-coordinated appeals so far this year compared to the same point in 2019.⁵⁰ Also, the analysis by Development Initiatives also suggests that COVID-19 has increased the global need for humanitarian assistance, compounding existing crises and creating new ones, and that all resource flow for aid and humanitarian activities are set to fall in countries targeted by the United Nations' COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP). It is also projected that revenues for countries experiencing crises could decline by 7 percent in 2020. This would have implications for money devoted to humanitarian needs by national governments. The COVID-19 linked global economic decline is estimated to reduce Official Development Assistance (ODA) from US \$153 billion in 2019 to US \$134 billion by 2021 as well as limit the ability of the ODA to scale up effort in response to new emergencies.⁵¹

Thirdly, COVID-19 also impacts humanitarian operations through the effect of the disease on personnel and operational environments in the LCB. A record number of humanitarian personnel have been infected by the coronavirus, and the mitigation measures impose additional strains on operational plans and access to persons in need. In April 2020, an aid worker contracted and died from COVID-19 in Borno state. More than 11 medical and aid workers had contracted COVID-19 in Borno as of May 2020, and scores of

46 Teachout, Matthieu and Céline Zipfel, 'The economic impact of COVID-19 lockdowns in sub-Saharan Africa', Policy Brief, International Growth Centre, May 2020, pp.1-10. <https://www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Teachout-and-Zipfel-2020-policy-brief-.pdf>

47 There are also instances of humanitarian agencies providing support to communities in remote areas.

48 International Organization for Migration (IOM), 'IOM warns of 'possible dire consequences' of COVID-19 in Nigeria's IDP camp', 28 April 2020. <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/24393/iom-warns-of-possible-dire-consequences-of-covid-19-in-nigeria-s-idp-camp>

49 For monthly IOM assessment reports (dashboard), see <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/regional-displacement-tracking-matrix-dtm-lake-chad-basin-crisis-monthly-dashboard-22>

50 Development Initiatives, 'Crisis financing to the Covid-19 pandemic response', Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2020, pp.61-63, <file:///C:/Users/k1469895/Downloads/Global-Humanitarian-Assistance-Report-2020.pdf>

51 Ibid.

medical personnel have also contracted and died from COVID-19 in Cameroon.⁵² The FAO also notes that COVID-19 compounded the food crises in the LCB region due to its effect on the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the diversion of resources to support other COVID-19 efforts. Movement restrictions are likely to affect the mobility of supplies and staff, including the ability to conduct fieldwork, and consequently increase the costs of delivering humanitarian assistance.⁵³

Overall, COVID-19 affects the ability of vulnerable populations to withstand shocks in the short-term and recover over the long-term in the LCB region. Clearly, COVID-19 and its mitigation strategies make resilience-building more difficult in LCB territories. The critical implications for resilience in the region include the following:

- a) a growing number of the most vulnerable people
- b) an increased need for humanitarian assistance in the region
- c) a weakened degree of social cohesion and a diminished level of community-based assets
- d) a need to divert resources and services to support short-term needs
- e) reduced access to social services critical to socioeconomic recovery (health, education and livelihoods)
- f) a risk of populations resorting to less sustainable (and environmentally insensitive) socioeconomic activities
- g) a worsening of the multidimensional crises in the LCB region.

“

Overall, COVID-19 affects the ability of vulnerable populations to withstand shocks in the short-term and recover over the long-term in the LCB region.

52 Kallon, Edward, 'Coronavirus – Nigeria: Statement on the death of an aid worker from COVID-19', APO Group via Africanews, 20 April 2020, <https://www.africanews.com/2020/04/20/coronavirus-nigeria-statement-on-the-death-of-an-aid-worker-from-covid-19/>. See also, The Cable, 'Our people don't believe COVID-19 is real, says Borno deputy gov', 03 May 2020, <https://www.thecable.ng/our-people-dont-believe-covid-19-is-real-says-borno-deputy-gov>

53 WFP/FSIN '2020 Global Report on Food Crises', p. 5.

5. Recommendations

The Regional Stabilization Facility

1. Develop guidance notes, planning templates, and other programmatic resources for aligning resilience-building and COVID-19 mitigation strategies into the development and implementation of territorial plans by LCB territories.
2. Undertake and /or update multidimensional risk assessment (risk profiles of LCB territories) of COVID-19 for long-term socioeconomic recovery of populations and communities in LCB territories.
3. Collect reliable data on livelihood patterns and social protection interventions at regional, national and local levels, and assess the differential impacts on different categories of people, including women and girls, to support evidence-based decision-making and provide support to LCB authorities.
4. Enhance coordination of critical stakeholders, including government, business, civil society groups, and local and international humanitarian aid and development organizations to mobilize resources, streamline priorities and minimize the impact of COVID-19 mitigation strategies on resilience (long-term recovery) in the LCB region.
5. Promote the alignment of COVID-19 mitigation strategies and social protection measures with the RSS resilience-building and long-term socioeconomic recovery objectives.
6. Promote greater transparency and accountability in the administration and distribution (and access) of social protection programs to ensure that they reach the most vulnerable population in LCB territories.
7. Work with local communities and religious bodies to promote community sensitization and adapt practices and activities to COVID-19 mitigation strategies and guidelines.
8. Promote greater coordination and synergy among humanitarian agencies, local communities and COVID-19 response committees to streamline interventions, identify old and new priorities and ensure their activities support resilience-building and long-term socioeconomic recovery of LCB territories.
9. Promote information-sharing and cooperation among border agencies to facilitate COVID-19 compliant resumption of cross-border exchanges and the movement of goods and services across the LCB region.

Other Stakeholders

For stakeholders such as the LCB Commission, governors of LCB territories, civil society groups, aid agencies, donor partners, private sector organizations, and members of the P3 countries working on the Lake Chad Basin area:



Lake Chad Basin

Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience (RSS)-Secretariat
Place de la Grande Armée, B.P. 727, N'Djamena, Tchad

Commission du Bassin du Lac Tchad



Federal Foreign Office



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands

