CRIME AND TERROR NEXUS

The Intersections Between Terror and Criminal Groups in the **Lake Chad Basin**

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Introduction

Overlaps between criminality and various forms of violence or terror are not new to the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) region. Yet, the rising frequency, scale, and regionalisation of the crime-terror nexus in the contemporary period in which Boko Haram[1] is complicit poses a pressing danger for states and communities. This has implications for countries of the LCB region that continue to endure the impact of the group's violence and those threatened by its potential spill over. In this paper, the 'crime-terror nexus' refers to the reciprocal relationship between organised crime and terrorism, whether purposive or circumstantial. It delves into how violent extremist groups such as Boko Haram exploit crime for instance as a source of funding or as part of activities that foster resilience and adaptation. The nexus also entails how alliances are formed involving factions of the group and other entrepreneurs of insecurity in ways that seek to benefit different entities.

This policy paper observes and analyses an extension and increasing connections of crime and terror in the LCB region. It argues that this trend requires dedicated analysis and joint strategic efforts by development, humanitarian and peace actors to avoid retrogression of efforts while ensuring an integration of measures towards recovery and long-term development in the region. The current challenges associated with the crime-terror linkage in the four riparian countries – Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria - are brought into focus. However, Nigeria is in the spotlight because the linkage between crime and terror is very manifest in the country and the acute challenges present an opportunity for deeper analysis. The paper is in five parts. The first part presents the historical antecedents of crime and terror in the LCB with a brief overview of the crime categories and terror groups in the region. The next is a discussion of the contemporary nature of crime-terror intersections in the region, highlighting the timeline for the crime-terror intersection, the enabling factors and circumstances, and the nature of 'benefits' for crime-terror entrepreneurs. The third part considers the multiple implications of the crime-terror linkages. The fourth part highlights the regional responses to the challenges. The final section draws attention to specific recommendations for key stakeholders at different levels.

Antecedents of Crime and Terror in the Lake Chad Basin: An Overview of Crime Categories

Despite what appears to be a heightened concern regarding crime and terror in the current period in the LCB region, there are two key points to bear in mind. First, crime and terror in the LCB are not recent phenomena and second, they have often underscored a transnational character. The current dynamics of crime and terror reflect vestiges of the past, with one of the longstanding features being contested state presence that has provided the space for criminal networks and terror groups to operate, particularly in the border communities of affected countries. Over the decades, criminal networks have exercised control over a range of activities and three notable ones include: smuggling, banditry and cattle rustling. These categories are not discrete and those implicated can be involved in more than one or two groupings at the same time. In fact, the opportunistic nature of criminal networks is such that they are known to profit from a combination of activities in order to thrive.

Smuggling and movement of licit and illicit items including vehicles, fuel, cigarettes, genuine and fake medicines, small arms and light weapons and ammunition, and drugs in the region have occurred in the past.[2] In Niger for instance, and for several years, cigarette smuggling was a lucrative business for a number of criminals, white collar workers and local traffickers. As early as 2006, it was observed that the value of exports of cigarettes from Niger in the 2000s was 40 times higher than the value of cattle exports.[3] As a whole, these smuggling activities purposefully circumvent or contend with national regulatory authorities in exchanges which constitute regional and international economies.[4] In other words, criminal networks involved in the aforementioned activities have over the years been connected to regional and international markets.[5]

In the late 1980s and early '90s banditry benefited from porous state borders and insufficient security presence.[6] Banditry in the LCB constituted a system of production that mobilised many categories of people, including ex-convicts, former rebels, the impoverished, and patrons with social status. More than a problem of law and order, this transborder criminality is one of the main facets of insecurity in the region. Analysts such as Issa Saïbou regarded the 1990s as the golden age of major road ambushes in countries such as Cameroon and especially in its Northern region. Bandits operated on all routes where they were certain to meet travellers. Some of these bandits operated in locations such as Maga and the Lake Chad, along the border between Cameroon and Chad, and from Fotokol to the Lake along the border with Nigeria.[7]

"**Beyond banditry and smuggling by criminal actors, armed groups in the LCB region had, in some instances, challenged governments with the aim of establishing sanctuaries in the region, prior to Boko Haram's emergence.**"

It would be recalled that the LCB region was previously the stage for the Movement for Democracy and Justice in Chad (MDJT), which targeted the Chadian government in the 1990s.[8]

In Niger, cross-border banditry is not new along the strip linking Maradi to Dogondoutchi. For decades, it fuelled organised criminal networks that transformed due to external dynamics such as those linked to the war in Libya. Since 2011, the Libyan war economy has revolved around trafficking, which has facilitated illicit flows (notably of drugs and fuel) from Nigeria through Niger. In more recent years, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) has relied on an elaborate network of contacts and routes cutting across West and North Africa (Libya-Algeria-Mali-Niger-Nigeria) to facilitate the movements of fighters.[9] The proliferation of weapons from the Gaddafi-era stockpiles has enabled armed actors operating throughout the Sahel –including in Chad and Niger– to acquire arms.[10] Bandits in this zone forged ties with the cross-border trafficking networks and recruited from various ethnic groups in the region.[11] Some of these ethnic groups are situated in countries with pre-colonial linkages that are nurtured by common languages, cultures, professional networks and religion. Their involvement transcends national boundaries and reflect to a large extent the cross-border undertones of crime and terror in the region.

In regard to cattle rustling in the LCB, multiple factors have accounted for this problem over the decades. These have been linked to inadequate security in remote rural communities, the proliferation of illegal small arms and light weapons, and the insatiable desire to accumulate cow herds as a means to wealth.[12] The growing phenomenon of cattle rustling is one of transformation from what is believed by some to have been a Fulani cultural practice of testing a person's personal bravery in warfare.[13] This transformation has seen the emergence of well-coordinated and well-funded banditry across the LCB region and particularly in northern Nigeria. Although the Fulani ethnic group are deeply involved in pastoralism, herding livestock is not an exclusive preserve of this group.[14]

Beyond this, farming and cattle rearing constitutes important economic activities in the LCB region and therefore the impact of rustling on affected communities takes a toll in terms of displacement and loss of herds, as well as the loss of human lives and livelihoods. In more recent years, cattle rustling has assumed even more violent proportions reflected in the involvement of Boko Haram that exploits it as a means to increase its financial strength. The phenomenon of cattle rustling can thus no longer be stereotypically restricted to pastoral communities but should also be understood in relation to non-pastoralists and insurgents engaged in criminality.[15]

Overview of Terror Groups

Prior to the upsurge in terror activities in recent years, the 1980s witnessed significant violence linked to what was known as the *Maitatsine* movement. Widespread riots caused by this movement particularly in Nigeria led to over 4,000 fatalities between 1980 and 1985. A tribunal of enquiry following the disturbances proved that a proportion of *Maitatsine* followers were not only Nigerians but citizens of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.[16] This demonstrated the regional character of the crisis at the time and one which hints at the contemporary expression of violent extremism affecting the LCB.

Over the last decade, a number of groups in the LCB region have been linked to terrorism or violent extremism. Three are considered here and at different periods, their activities have been laced with organised crime and exploited as a means to achieving various ends. The first group is the *Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad* (JAS) previously led by long-time but late leader, Abubakar Shekau. The second is the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and the third is the *Jama'atu Ansaru Muslimina fi Biladis Sudan*, also known as Ansaru. The first two are more operational in various territories of the four LCB countries, while Ansaru is primarily active in Nigeria and specifically the country's northwest zone. All three groups have contributed to some of the deadliest insurgencies in recent decades and their activities have affected states, development partners, and communities in the region. Often, their activities hinder partner institutions that have relentlessly struggled to map a pathway towards sustained development activities without disruptions in the region.

Although Boko Haram's activities were already apparent in various forms since 2002,[17] The upsurge in insurgency by JAS against the State scaled in 2009 with sustained violence that started in Nigeria and progressively spread to neighbouring LCB countries. The first major sets of suicide attacks linked to violent extremism was perpetrated by JAS at the Nigeria Police Force Headquarters and the United Nations building in Nigeria's capital city Abuja in June and August 2011. The modus operandi espoused by JAS inspired several more suicide missions that exploited women and children. At its height in 2014, JAS was considered the deadliest terror group globally, responsible for over 6,000 fatalities that year alone.[18]

The idea of killing the 'infidel' is at the heart of JAS' ideological narrative and the group aims to replace the secular state with its own version of an Islamic caliphate. Christians and Muslims have not been spared in JAS' offensives and places of worship associated with both religions have been attacked in the respective countries.[19]

"Security forces have been targeted by JAS in order to get weapons to enhance its arsenal and humanitarian actors have also been hit in order to diminish their capacity to deliver critical assistance in communities."

Development actors have likewise suffered and JAS' objective in this regard is to present itself as a competing entity that can provide governance based on its version of Islam.

Boko Haram is by no means monolithic. The dynamics of moderates versus hardliners within the group has existed for many years. These internal tensions came to a head in 2012 when a faction of the group broke away to form Ansaru. At the time, the group claimed to be defending the interests of Islam while framing the nature of its attacks with an international focus. This focus was reflected in a 2013 attack it instigated against a convoy of Nigerian troops on their way to a peacekeeping mission in Mali.[20] In a sense, Ansaru represents al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's (AQIM) expansion into Nigeria through certain individuals who had trained with AQIM and formed Ansaru's 'militant wing'.[21]

According to Zenn and Weiss, the rise in violent extremism across the Sahel has facilitated a conducive environment for Ansaru to renew its presence. As this violence continues to push further south in both Burkina Faso and Niger, this has allowed Ansaru to strengthen connections with al-Qaeda's **Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin** (JNIM), translated as 'Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims'.[22] In the first week of January 2022, Ansaru reconfirmed its allegiance to al-Qaeda in an online statement. The group also affirmed its presence in northern Nigeria, near the borders of Niger and Benin.[23] This recent declaration signals the resurgence of a long-dormant group that is capable of complicating the counter-insurgency efforts of LCB states. If the threat posed by Ansaru worsens, it would dilute the attention of security forces, particularly those in Nigeria who are currently more focused on the northeast zone of the country. Such a situation would entail an investment of more resources as well as deeper cross-border cooperation with countries battling with the threat posed by AQIM and JNIM in the Sahel.

Beyond Ansaru, there is ISWAP which is the product of a schism that started within Boko Haram in 2015 and culminated in a split a year later. It would be recalled that in 2015 Boko Haram declared allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Shortly after, however, ideological disagreements and Shekau's seeming ruthlessness against his perceived opponents within the group positioned certain members of Boko Haram against each other. The outcome of this was an ISWAP faction parting ways in 2016 with a Shekau-led JAS faction. Although members of the former were endorsed by ISIS, internal tensions recurred within this faction and at some point, resulted in the elimination of pioneer members of the group.[24] Distancing itself from JAS, ISWAP claims to conduct its own 'jihad' by not attacking Muslims. Since mid-2018, the group was able to launch successive attacks on military targets with a major one in November 2018 that killed scores of soldiers of the Nigerian Army 157 Task Force Battalion in Metele, Borno state.[25] ISWAP's major 'accomplishment' came in May 2021 when it orchestrated the killing of Shekau.

With a weakened JAS and relatively low-profile Ansaru, Shekau's demise provided a context where ISWAP restructured into four provinces namely Sambisa Forest, Alagarno Forest (or Timbuktu), Tumbuma and the Lake Chad Islands, each with its own semi-autonomous leadership. All these are in Borno state, northeast Nigeria but tactically they provide operational bases for the extension of activities to other parts of Nigeria's northeast, as well as Cameroon, Chad and Niger. As part of ISWAP's consolidation, former Boko Haram fighters who left for Libya are believed to have returned to the LCB to re-join ISWAP.[26] However, ISWAP's expansion should not be understood as outright progress for the group. This is not exactly the case particularly when one observes the broader scheme of trends in the region where in-fighting and desertions by fighters are recurrent features of Boko Haram's factions.[27]

Something else to bear in mind is the presence of a sub-unit of JAS led by someone called Bakura Doro, situated in the Lake Chad Islands. Doro's fighters appear to have been insulated from the inter-factional clashes involving JAS and ISWAP following the death of Shekau.[28] The continued presence of Doro however poses a threat not only to ISWAP but more importantly to communities in close proximity to the lake.

Intersections of Crime and Terror in The Region: At What Point Did the Nexus Start Occurring?

It is problematic to pin a date to the marriage between crime and terror in the LCB region. This is due to the longstanding and fluid nature of both phenomena but also because crime and terror are not mutually exclusive in the way they manifest themselves and in terms of their impact on communities. Criminal acts breed terror and acts of terror exude a criminal character. In fact, reflecting this linkage in January 2022 was the Nigerian government's publication of a gazette that declared bandit groups operating in the country's northwest zone, as terrorists. This was in reaction to a ruling of the Abuja Federal High Court, ordering the government to declare the activities of specific bandit groups – Yan Bindiga and Yan Ta'adda, as acts of terrorism.[29]

Beyond these, what may be analytically helpful is to illustrate notable periods when insecurity actors such as Boko Haram assumed bolder expressions with their use of criminal acts in the region. Bank robberies, prison breaks, abductions, and cattle rustling have typified the activities of Boko Haram since 2010. Although attributable to city criminals, Abu Qaqa, Boko Haram's spokesperson in 2011 claimed responsibility for attacking banks in Nigerian states such as Borno and Bauchi.[30] Funds obtained through robberies have consequently been used to purchase weapons, including materials used for producing non-metallic bombs that defy metal detectors.[31] There have been episodes involving highway robberies, looting of homes and shops with the aim of obtaining essential supplies needed to sustain the group's reign of terror.

"As the years progressed, crime and terror patterns have become more organised involving instances of attacks and raids on communities by terrorists using convoys of pick-up trucks and motorcycles."

A report from 2015 provided a detailed account of how Boko Haram fighters took control of towns and villages during the period.[32]

Numerous prison breaks masterminded by Boko Haram have occurred particularly in Nigeria with states such as Bauchi affected in September 2010, Adamawa in April 2011, Kogi in February 2012, Yobe in March 2012 and Borno in March 2013. Motives behind these prison attacks were purely driven by the motivation to free comrades from detention centres.

In addition to the hundreds of abductions in several LCB communities, particular cases have made the news headlines including the kidnap of the Moulin-Fournier family in northern Cameroon in 2013. Members of this family, including four children, were later released.[33] The following year, there was the mass abduction in the Nigerian town of Chibok which made global headlines. Similar mass abduction accounts include the kidnap by ISWAP of over 100 schoolgirls from the Nigerian town of Dapchi in February 2018. The abduction (and execution) of a British and Italian construction worker in 2012 by Ansaru.[34]

As a crime category, cattle rustling proceeds have been used to financially and materially support the operations of Boko Haram. The material proceeds of the group's rustling activities are threefold: money, milk and meat. The money is generated through direct and indirect sale of both mature and infant cattle. The milk and meat are sourced from cattle that are harboured within the domains of Boko Haram's occupied territories. While the money is used to provide for the logistical and material needs of group members, milk and meat constitute an essential component of the group's dietary requirements.[35]

The intersections between crime and terror extend beyond the aforementioned acts and have evolved into a context where Boko Haram militants source arms through the seizure of weapons from military bases or outposts during attacks, often displaying them in propaganda videos.[36] Other forms of seizures have occurred but in this case on the part of the Cameroonian authorities confiscating shipments of Tramadol in June and August 2017 near areas where militants had been active along the Nigerian border.[37] Militants have indeed been associated with the abuse of Tramadol, an opioid pain medication.

Enabling Factors for Intersections

There are deeper and persistent socio-economic, and ideological factors, that influence the crime-terror overlaps. These factors apply to all four countries to varying extents. However, in comparison with its neighbours, Nigeria deserves special attention due to the sheer frequency of crime-terror incidents occurring in the country's three northern zones – northwest, northcentral and northeast. The rate of abductions in Nigeria – of which the northern region is most affected – during the first six months of 2021 exceeded the number for the whole of 2020. From January to June 2021, at least 2,944 individuals were reported kidnapped compared to 2,860 in 2020, 1,386 in 2019 and 987 in 2018.[38] In 2022, the first quarter has so far reflected an estimated abduction figure of 1,484 with the northern region representing 91.2% of victims (1,354) compared to the southern region having 8.8% (130).

> **"In terms of the five most affected states in the northern region, these include a mix of states in the northcentral and northwest zones: Kaduna, Katsina, Kogi, Niger and Zamfara states."**

These states are observable in figure 1. In terms of specific periods, the month of January suffered the highest rate of abductees – 623 while February and March had 342 and 519 respectively.[39]

The risk factors for criminality and violent extremism that beset Nigeria's northeast zone also exist in the northcentral and northwest to a degree sufficient enough for banditry, abductions and other forms of criminality to flourish.

> **"Poverty, deprivation, unemployment and the various governance gaps across different sectors render communities vulnerable to recruitment by insecurity actors."**

Some individuals join groups such as Boko Haram because of recruitment narratives of exclusion and victimisation caused by states, as well as lack of opportunities coupled with promises of a better life.[40] These factors are compelling and are not novel in Nigeria's northern region. Their longstanding nature arguably laid the foundation for the present-day trends of crime and terror, and therefore it is essential that one revisits the past.

In 2012, Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics drew critical attention to the country's northwest where places such as Sokoto reflected 81.2% and 86.4% under the matrices of absolute and relative poverty respectively.[41] Sokoto and its neighbours in the present-day period bear witness to banditry and other rising forms of criminality. The highlighted poverty figures ranked as the highest not only within Nigeria's northwest zone but also in comparison with other states in the wider northern region and indeed the entire country. Therefore, these figures are not inconsequential for understanding the more recent period where crime and terror trends are intensifying. These figures characterise socio-economic environments where criminal and terror groups focus on the same pool of people who face similar risk factors that dispose them towards recruitment. Such a situation was examined in broader detail in a 2016 study by the London-based International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR). Although focusing on the European context, the ICSR study explained how the creation of synergies and overlaps between crime and violent extremism contexts underscore the 'new crime-terror nexus'.[42]

Figure 1: Nigeria's northwest, northcentral and northeast states caught in the crime-terror web.

The Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) more explicitly spotlighted additional aspects of socioeconomic deprivation. As at 2013, the highest percentage of men with no education (about 53-56%) in the country was in the northwest with Katsina, Kebbi and Sokoto states most affected.[43] In the domain of healthcare, immunisation coverage is one of the indicators used to monitor progress towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 4—the reduction of child morbidity and mortality. Still during this period, among the Nigerian states, full vaccination against certain preventable diseases was lowest in the northwest.[44] Regarding women's participation in decision-making, even within the household (household purchases, visits to her family or relatives, her healthcare), women in Kebbi, Kano, Zamfara, and Sokoto were least likely to participate in all three decision areas.[45]

Besides 'push factors', the other side of the coin that relates to factors such as ideology that pull individuals towards violent extremism has long been at play in the northern region. Since the early years of Boko Haram, the group's first leader Mohammed Yusuf visited a number of states across the three northern zones in an attempt to proselytise and recruit followers.[46] Even after Yusuf's death, several attacks were masterminded by cells and sympathisers of Boko Haram across these zones. In more recent years and just before the death of Abubakar Shekau, JAS, succeeded in strengthening the bond between members in the northeast and other criminal characters in the northcentral and northwest. In mid-2020, Shekau was reported to be pulling a massive stealth strategy in an organisational makeover driven by an expansionist agenda.[47]

The late leader of the group appeared to be welcoming former 'apostates', engaging in factional reconciliations and admitting of modest ideological shifts while proposing a balanced role for clerics and combatants in his group. In June 2020, JAS released a video wooing armed groups in the northcentral and northwest. The video displayed four speakers addressing viewers in English, Hausa, Fulfulde and French, appealing to people in Zamfara and Niger states to strive harder in their cause for Allah.[48] The use of several languages was aimed at swaying a wide scope of militia groups in the northwest but also connecting with audiences who speak particular languages across the Sahel.

Boko Haram's interest in these zones, especially the northwest, can again be traced to a 2014 internal 'Message to Fulanis' video.[49] In it, Shekau is seen expressing 'gratitude' to fighters in Katsina state and other unspecified locations. About six years later, in what appeared to be further confirmation of Shekau's interest in the aforementioned zones, Boko Haram fighters sent greetings to their colleagues in Zamfara and Niger states in a video released by the group.[50] Three weeks later, the greetings were reciprocated by fighters in Niger state.

Niger state holds significance for bandits as well as Boko Haram and helps to illustrate an additional enabling factor linked to geographical space. The concept and reality of geographical space is recognised as an important element of both criminal and violent extremist networks. Space provides the physical framework in which crime and violent extremist attacks are conducted. It also shapes the strategies of covert organisations by acting as a facilitating or sometimes constraining factor in their fight against government forces or civilian populations.[51] Niger is Nigeria's largest state in terms of land mass, and it shares borders with two states exploited by criminal groups for insecurity in the country – Kaduna and Zamfara. Niger also shares borders with Kogi state in the northcentral, which has been noted for housing Boko Haram sleeper cells.[52] It therefore provides a potential base and site for training camps.

From a regional perspective, Niger state shares borders with Benin Republic and this is noteworthy because of the broader implications of a crisis spillover if the crime and terror intersection deepen. There are already risk factors in Benin where the rising spate of kidnapping for ransom is stoking fears regarding alliances between kidnappers and violent extremists.[53] Concerns over Niger state in Nigeria intensified in April 2021 following a string of attacks on communities in Shiroro and Munya with the state governor pointing out that the attackers included bandits and Boko Haram members. This episode of attacks was reminiscent of Boko Haram operations in the northeast. Attackers were seen riding motorbikes, wearing military and mobile police uniforms, and carrying a combination of AK-47s, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and machine guns. They stole cattle, abducted women, burned buildings in the area and destroyed food items which they could not cart away.[54]

The northwest of Nigeria is strategically and economically appealing for Boko Haram. This zone suits Boko Haram's operations and tactics, and its ability to hide. The Kamuku Forest, which is bigger than Sambisa, spans several states within Nigeria. The Ruma/Kukar Jangarai forest extending from Katsina to Zamfara and the Kwiambana forest in Zamfara are already suspected hideouts for bandits. This terrain offers shelter for criminal groups and access to resources.[55] In addition, illegal gold mines[56] in Zamfara and Niger states is an attraction for the group. Although Boko Haram has previously carried out attacks in these states without fully establishing itself there, the current trends provide the group with the opportunity to

build the kinds of local alliances needed to establish its operation in these states. In January 2021, the governor of Nasarawa state claimed that Boko Haram members had regrouped at the border connecting his state and Benue in the northcentral zone.[57] Four local government areas in Nasarawa were identified as locations where members were allegedly regrouping and they share borders with the federal capital territory (Abuja), Kaduna, Plateau, Benue and Taraba states.

In addition to the projection of (geographical) influence, another reason why Boko Haram has been keen to expand its presence beyond the northeast relates to the need to create a diversion. Instigating security threats elsewhere removes or reduces the counter-insurgency pressure by security forces in the northeast, particularly Sambisa Forest. Yet, reasons for the late Shekau's forays into the northwest and northcentral zones were not limited to a diversionary strategy or simply a desire to create an Islamic state that extends beyond the northeast. The search for financial gains from ransom payments and other activities like illegal gold mining were also objectives.[58]

> **"Lacking government protection, communities in the concerned states are left with limited choices but to take charge of their own security and this could lead to more violence, loss of lives and livelihoods, and increase the proliferation of arms."**

In Kaduna and Zamfara states, community vigilante groups have conducted reprisal attacks against armed groups. Youths in Katsina state are also teaming up to protect their communities.[59] These efforts are however insufficient in the face of escalating threats as witnessed in July 2021 when bandits shot down a Nigerian Airforce fighter jet while it returned from an air interdiction mission between the boundaries of Zamfara and Kaduna states.[60] Among other dimensions, the development signalled the growing capabilities of these insecurity actors but also raises questions regarding how the capacity of bandits benefits from support beyond local circles. Understanding how 'bandits' have developed the capacity to shoot down a fighter jet has implications for the character and scale of responses from the government.
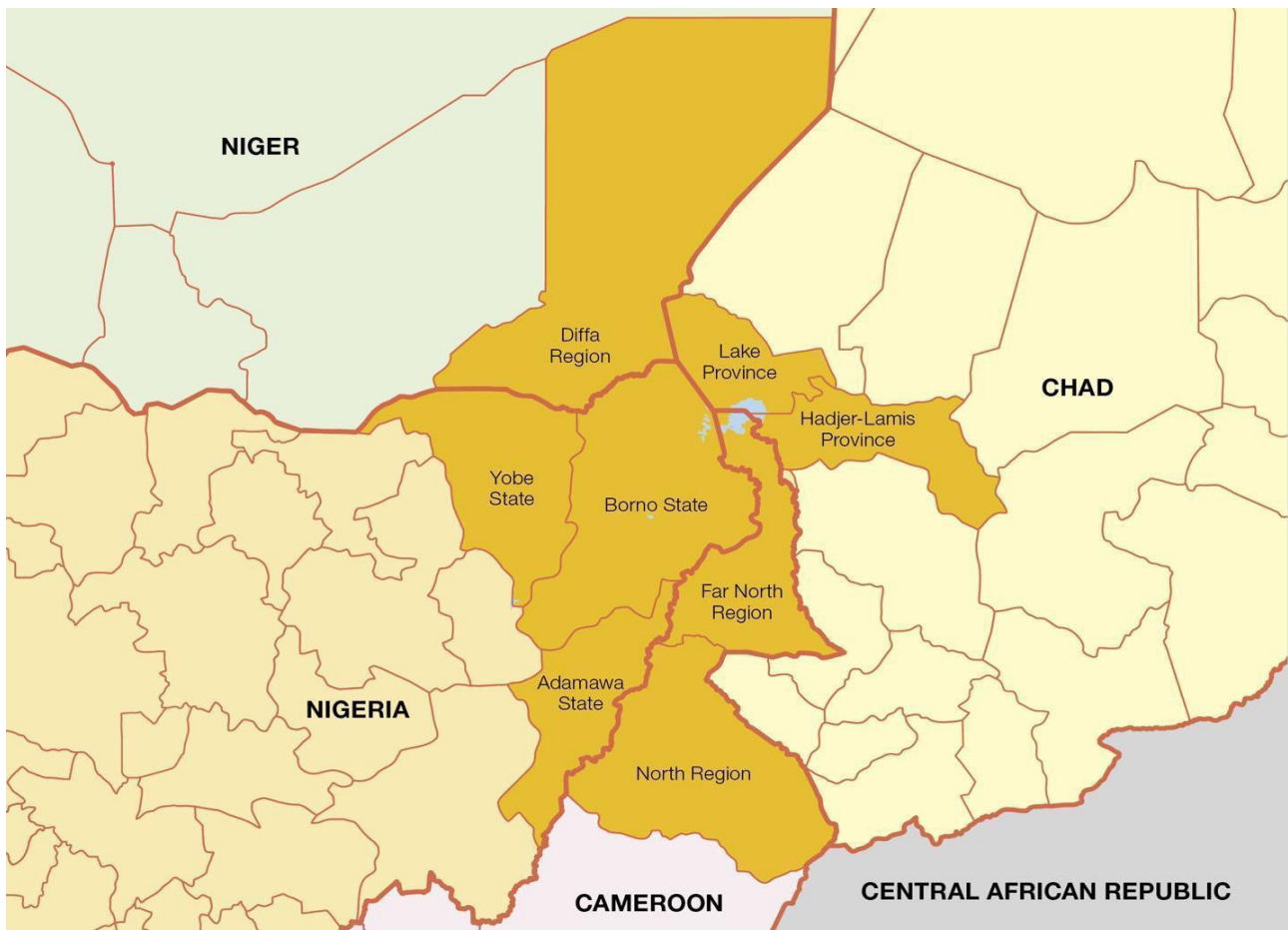
Figure 2: The eight affected states, regions and provinces in the Lake Chad Basin countries.

A Regional Challenge Beyond Nigeria

The restive nature of insecurity in the four riparian states has clearly offered groups like Boko Haram access to tap into what has been described as a 'bad neighbourhood' effect.[61] What unfolds in one country results in a preponderance of impact in neighbouring countries. This spillover tendency cannot be overlooked when discussing the overlaps of crime and terror.

In the wake of the 2014 mass abduction in Chibok, fear spread across the border to Cameroon leading to the closure of several schools. Despite the call by state authorities for the reopening of the educational institutions, many students and teachers refused to return for a while. For instance, the Achigachia school in the Far North had 3,000 students in 2014 but that number later dropped to 400.[62]

"**The spillover impact of abductions stemming from the mix of crime and terror has further ramifications for not just livelihoods or human security, but also the level of access to education and its quality over time.**"

In Cameroon, the Far North region has witnessed acts of banditry associated with road ambushes and numerous abductions of community members including children. Recently, the Northern region of Cameroon also witnessed kidnappings for ransom in areas such as Ngong, Bibemi and Gashiga in the Bénoué department. In addition to the human cost, places such as Modzogo again in the Far North have experienced mass looting of property by Boko Haram. Food, mobile telephones, clothes, motorbikes and other items essential for the livelihoods of communities are among the items usually looted.[63]

Against a background of state neglect, socio-economic vulnerabilities and acute poverty, conditions have been created for Boko Haram to exploit for recruiting thousands of youths caught in the crime-terror web.[64] Boko Haram reportedly established the core of its logistics network in the Far North between 2010 and 2014, relying particularly on former smugglers and traffickers, traders, truckers and family members who were offered large sums of money to act as logisticians or suppliers. Kousseri, the capital of the Logone and Chari department, was the main logistics hub. Logisticians there arranged arms caches, currency exchange, the production of fake identity documents and printing of propaganda material. Mayo Sava, close to Boko Haram strongholds in Borno, was the main area for recruitment between 2012 and 2014. Fuel and food were delivered in Mayo Tsanaga and Diamaré. Boko Haram also used the Mandara Mountains as a safe haven, as well as for a food and fuel supply corridor.[65]

Chad has witnessed a growth in the activity of highway robbers *(zarginas)*. Due to repeated conflicts in the country, notably the rebellion of the Movement for Democracy and Justice, many fighters were dispersed, and some found their way into banditry while others are believed to have joined groups such as Boko Haram. The group manages to associate with or even incorporate some trafficking or bandit groups in order to obtain supplies or sell off seized materials.[66]

Kidnappings by Boko Haram in Chad's Lac Province continued during the period from April to May 2021, with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) recording at least 27 abductions at the time.[67] The militarisation of the Lac Province following the presence of Boko Haram has exerted influence on other forms of banditry and criminality that characterised this area in the past.

Research by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) shows that outside the areas directly affected by Boko Haram, the regions of southwestern Chad, both Mayo Kebbi provinces bordering Cameroon, are experiencing an upsurge in abductions for ransom, especially affecting herders. This phenomenon worsened since the recent crisis in Central Africa, which left many herder families without herds and resources, thus pushing them towards banditry. Even in instances where the linkages are blurred, it is crucial that these challenges are addressed, taking into account their scale and cross-border character. The perpetrators of

these abductions and their accomplices easily move between the Mayo-Kebbi West region in Chad and the North and Far North regions of Cameroon, taking advantage of border porosity.

The regional challenges that highlight crime-terror intersections get clearer when one considers Niger as well. Boko Haram's factions and other 'unidentified' criminals have engaged in abductions, lootings and extortion of communities along the borderlands. A prominent attack occurred in December 2020 in the Diffa region that affected Jaskoru, Nga'am, Toumour, Kudo Kauwa, Bosso villages, where Nigerien host communities and Nigerian refugees live. The attack was inspired by fighters affiliated to JAS under the command of Bakura Doro.[68] Villagers were mandated to pay taxes for farming but while in the process of gathering funds, they were attacked, with at least 28 people killed and villages razed.[69] Some villages that were able to pay funds were not attacked. Some of those spared included Ngam-gra, Kudo-Bula'anai, and Bula Yiye villages.

Nearly the entire southern border of Niger connects with the northern frontier of Nigeria. While the southeast of Niger interacts with the northeast of Nigeria in the context of the Boko Haram crisis, there are similar crime-terror trends that extend all the way to the southcentral and southwest of Niger. Looting, abductions and extortion of communities by Boko Haram in the Diffa region have been the norm for years. The Diffa region's borders are crisscrossed by militant groups and traffickers who sometimes compete for money and influence.

"The threat of gender-based violence and killings has prompted tens of thousands to flee from their homes.[70] "

There are instances where Nigerien citizens are abducted and taken across the border to Nigeria. In January 2021, nine abductees from Maradi (southcentral Niger) were rescued in Katsina state, northwest Nigeria.[71]

Figure 3: Particular locations affected by crime-terror incidents in the Lake Chad Basin region.

'Benefits' of Crime-Terror Collaborations: Alliances of Convenience

Alliances between groups involved in crime and terror vary and can entail one-off, short-term and long-term relationships. These alliances are borne out of a variety of reasons such as seeking expert knowledge linked to money-laundering or bomb-making, or operational support such as access to smuggling routes.[72] In the current context of the LCB, what is discernible are short-term alliances of convenience that are evident when one considers the interaction between bandits and the JAS faction of Boko Haram.

A set of former Boko Haram members led by an individual known as Adam Bitri – a pioneer member of the group and close friend of late founder Mohammed Yusuf, as well as the late Shekau – was crucial in the alliance between bandits and JAS.[73] In 2019 Bitri fled from government-provided accommodation in Kaduna state in Nigeria's northwest zone while waiting to enrol in a deradicalisation programme.[74] He teamed up with kidnappers in Zaria and Birnin Gwari in Kaduna state, and re-established a link with JAS.

Another important player in the alliance is known as 'Sadiku', a JAS commander. He was already familiar with the different geographical zones because he shuttled between Nigeria's northeast and northwest. Following the death of Bitri, Shekau sent a delegation headed by Sadiku to ensure that his death would not jeopardise the burgeoning relationship with some of the bandit groups loyal to him. The delegation, which was to be permanently based in the northwest and northcentral, facilitated a treaty between those groups loyal to Shekau and those that were not. The treaty prohibited each side from attacking the other or giving information about the other to security forces.[75]

This complex relationship between characters in the northeast and other zones became clearer following a mass abduction in Kankara, Katsina state in December 2020. An abduction of over 300 schoolboys was carried out by bandits but with the logistical support and technical know-how of Boko Haram and more specifically the JAS faction. The operation was coordinated by a former Boko Haram member who was previously part of the delegation sent by JAS to improve the relationship between the group and bandits. Known by the alias 'Muazu', the ex-Boko Haram member is believed to have been based in Kaduna and facilitated the coordination of banditry activities. He was also responsible for the transportation of the abducted boys from Katsina to another Nigerian state called Zamfara.[76] It appeared that JAS intended to exploit the abduction to secure the release of some of its fighters held by the military while also taking a share of the ransom and leaving the rest to the bandits.

Sadiku and Muazu, two key figures in the Boko Haram-bandit nexus, supplied weapons and advice. They also made available scores of their group members to support the kidnap operation. Prior to the release of the schoolboys, a video reflecting the voice of Shekau circulated, with a claim that Boko Haram was implicated in the operation.[77] The temporary alliance reflected through the Kankara abduction demonstrates not only the crime-terror linkages across geographical zones but also the degree to which influence can be exchanged between entrepreneurs of violence, enabling different parties to benefit from mutually-assured opportunities.

The motives of these different actors vary over time and are mixed. In other words, they are opportunistic in nature. There are instances when objectives are aligned with ideological motives. Some assassinations are conducted in the name of ideology that exploits religion. Yet, this does not preclude other motivations linked to fundraising to sustain operations. As the Nigerian context also suggests, targets of abductions and attacks include members of security forces, political actors, religious groups, farmers and pastoralists, health and aid workers, and students. The figure below is a reminder of what transpired from 2018 to mid-2021. It provides a nuanced illustration of abduction trends reflecting the mix of perpetrators, targets, locations, and frequency of incidents over a three-and-a-half-year period.
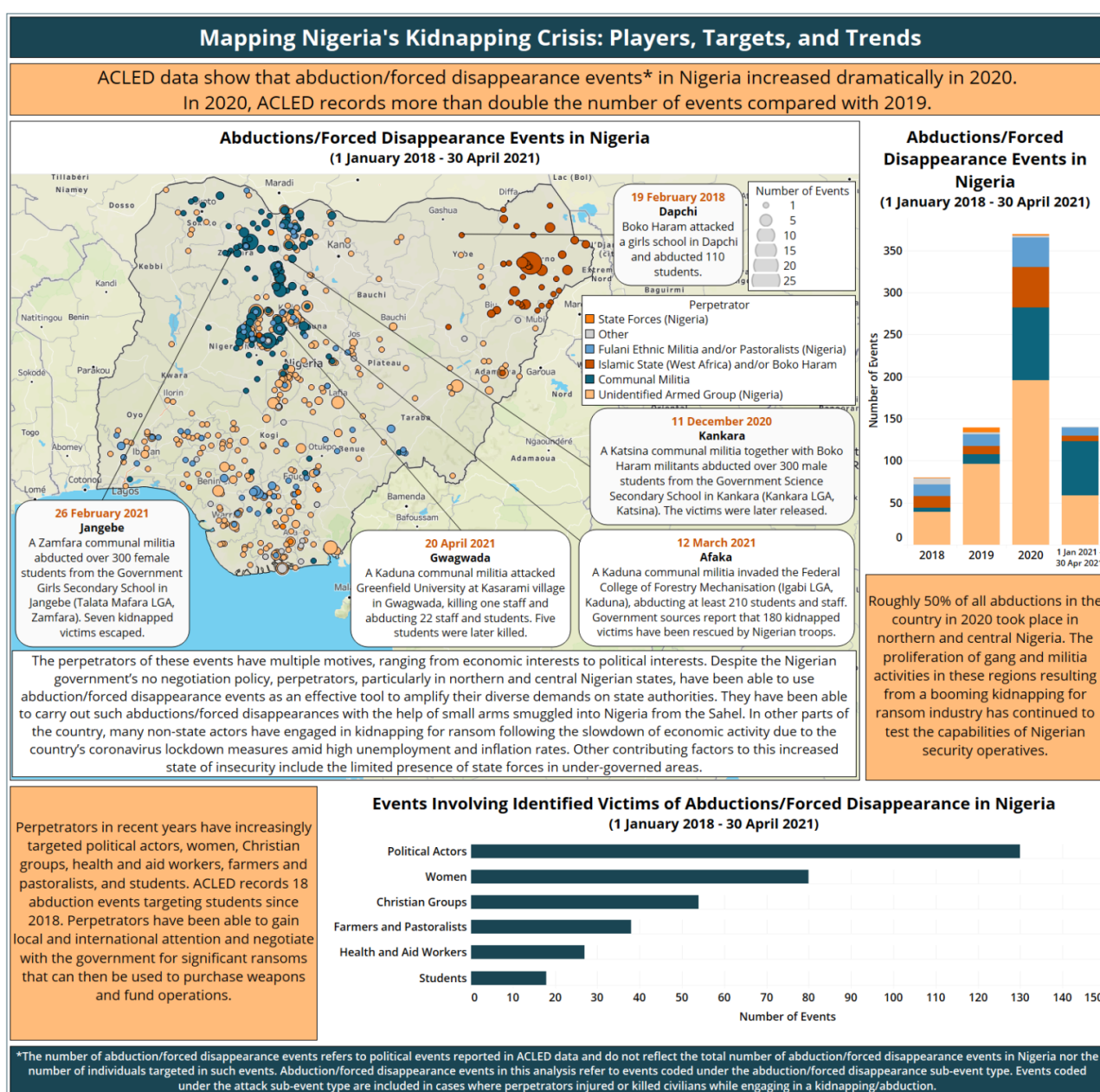

Figure 4: Mapping Nigeria's Kidnapping Crisis: Players, Targets, and Trends[78]

Ansaru should not be overlooked when discussing alliances. The group also appears to be involved in an opportunistic alliance with bandits in Nigeria's northwest. While aiming to raise its profile after a long period of silence in the region, the group has provided weapons and other forms of support to armed gangs perpetrating attacks.[79] This claim has been corroborated by other accounts pointing to police special units raiding a camp that was used by bandits and Ansaru in Kuduru forest of Kaduna state, Nigeria.[80] Since these are still early days with observing Ansaru's resurgence, there is much to be determined regarding the deeper outlines of the Ansaru-bandit alliance. Analysts such as Heni Nsaibia characterised such a relationship between terror and crime through the prism of jihadism and banditry, in what could be understood as 'jihadisation of banditry'.[81] For instance, in related contexts in other parts of the Sahel, groups such as JNIM and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) have proven effective in transforming a range of armed actors – bandits, rebels, smugglers, and poachers – into allied groups and auxiliaries, establishing unity of purpose to subvert state control and facilitate illicit activities.

Implications of trends

Complexification of threats

First, a deepening of the alliance between bandits and factions of Boko Haram would result in more complex challenges for the already overstretched security forces in the four LCB countries. This means a diversion of scarce resources – financial, logistics and personnel – that would need to be spread across a wider geographical area in countries.

> **"The tendencies are that the merger between terror groups and crime groups that are gradually creeping into the north-western zone of Nigeria could potentially lead to the fusion of the conflict space between the Lake Chad Basin and the Liptako-Gourma."**

This can result in a wide conflict zone that creates a more complex security and cross-border situation. In the case of Nigeria where the link between crime and terror has been established, there are fears that the pattern could continue to shift towards other zones such as the northcentral and down to the southern region with a possibility of this ushering in a new form of resource mobilisation and sustenance for terror and crime groups. This also raises concern about the security capacity of Nigeria to engage crime and terror on all fronts especially given the fear raised by the Nigerian Senate regarding the Army being overwhelmed by security challenges across the country.[82]

Antecedents of the spread of Boko Haram from a Nigerian to a regional challenge implies that the interaction between crime and terror in Nigeria could potentially lead to a spread to its neighbour facing the same terror challenge. What is more worrisome is that the security capacities in the region could become overstretched and overburdened.

Duration of insecurity and instability

Second, the strengthening of alliances with criminal actors such as armed bandits and abduction racketeers could expand Boko Haram's sources of funds thereby strengthening their scope of resources including the ability to recruit and sustain members. Such a scenario could extend the duration of what is already a regional problem and expand the influence of crime-terror groups including, access to information, training and logistical skill set.

Exacerbation of vulnerabilities

Third, the expansion of Boko Haram's factions into additional zones or regions in the four LCB countries through their link and synergetic relations with criminal groups would significantly disrupt the currently weak local economies. The Boko Haram crisis has already upset

agricultural activities including fishing, farming and animal husbandry, which are the mainstay of the regional economy. Although agriculture has seen the largest reduction in employment contribution for both women and men, women's employment in agriculture decreased more dramatically, from 51 per cent of the female labour force in 2007 to 45 per cent in 2016.[83] This trend can worsen if insecurity actors such as terror and criminal groups continue to expand its influence in the region. Regional human mobility, regional trade and transport networks have already suffered setbacks that have induced a rise in the cost of trading, higher prices of agricultural and other goods, and a loss of income and sustenance for communities. The strengthening of the link between terror and criminal groups especially through Nigeria's northwest, which is the country's granary, and the northeast axis could spell economic doom for communities in the region. With farming activities already greatly affected by the Boko Haram crisis in the northeast, Nigeria and indeed the region cannot afford further losses in a key agricultural zone in the northwest. Farmers in Zamfara and Katsina states are already staying away from their lands for fear of attacks, and the situation may worsen if the emerging and quickly evolving crime-terror partnership is not halted.

Diffusion of risks

Finally, as Boko Haram's factions aim to consolidate their influence across other zones and regions, this will enhance the factions' ability to move across state and national borders, beyond the current geographic scope of the LCB. The southern border of Niger Republic connects with Nigeria's northern frontier where there are already troubled states such as Zamfara, Katsina and Sokoto states. There is also Niger state in Nigeria that shares borders with the Republic of Benin. This gives a glimpse of the regional outlines of potential impact if crime-terror trends escalate. Concerns regarding this may increase especially in the current post-Shekau period, characterised by the strategic expansion plan by ISWAP across the region and with the support of the Islamic State. In addition, the medium to long-term period could witness an extension of humanitarian zones, beyond its current space.

Responses to Crime-Terror Threats in the Lake Chad Basin

The implications of the trends are clear, and the longevity and depth of the challenges explained so far have elicited responses at local, national and regional levels. Responses to the emerging and quickly evolving crime-terror interaction by different actors in the region are outlined.

Dating back to 1964, the four LCB countries set up the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). Reflected in its mandate are the management of the Lake Chad and its shared water resources but also the promotion of regional integration, peace, security, and development. With the deepening of cross-border insecurity over the years and the worsening of the Boko Haram crisis, the Commission gradually developed its capacity beyond a focus on environmental management and conservation issues into the terrains of security and development.

There was the emergence of the Multinational Joint Security Force (MNJSF) which later became the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). The decision to create the task force to combat organised crime and banditry in the region had first been taken in 1994 and it became effective in 1998. However, at the time, Cameroon was not a part of this mechanism, given its strained relations with Nigeria over border disputes in the Bakassi Peninsula.[84] When the MNJTF was relaunched in 2015, the Republic of Benin joined as a member at a time when the threat posed by Boko Haram intensified. This endorsement of the revamped task force came in 2014 through a communiqué of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU) at its 469th meeting.[85]

In 2018, the LCBC reached an important threshold with its efforts against violent extremism. With the support of the AU, it adopted the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin.[86] This Regional Strategy was developed to ensure a comprehensive approach to addressing the situation in the Lake Chad Basin region through nine (9) interlinked pillars calibrated around humanitarian, development, and peace axes.

"**The implementation of the Strategy has led interventions that directly address causes of insecurity in the region."**

For example, the UNDP stabilisation facility has contributed to the gradual rebuilding of the weak social contract, re-establishment of security, rehabilitation of essential infrastructures and provisioning of livelihood supports to affected communities while strengthening capacities of sub-national and regional entities.

Recommendations

Security

i.   **Immediate Recruitment of Additional Military and other Security Personnel:** One of the implications identified in this paper as a result of the crime-terror trends is the diffusion of insecurity within and across national borders. In Nigeria alone, an emboldened merger of criminal and terror groups that places strain on security personnel calls for immediate recruitment of additional military capacity. Yet, recruitment in itself is not a silver bullet. Military and law enforcement personnel who will be embedded within communities should receive training on engagement in non-criminal spaces where interaction with community members is constant. Such training is key particularly in light of past allegations and cases of human rights violations.

ii. **Strengthening of Intelligence Gathering, Sharing and Action:** The conflict in the Lake Chad Basin since the past decade has assumed a regional dimension in a manner that has given the terror groups and criminal elements seeming advantage over communities and countries at large. Their geospatial knowledge of the region and their ability to traverse the Lake Chad Basin space without regard to sovereign limitations demands new ways of miliary coordination by the countries of the region. The LCB countries should as a matter of urgency consider establishing a special unit gathering and sharing intelligence, which could serve as a trigger for preemptive action against the criminal and terror groups.

Governance

iii. **Rebuilding Social Contract and Restoring Trust:** At the root of the problem in the LCB region is the failed social contract between governments and citizens. Insecurity has further severed trust and in recent times led to a crisis escalation. The government of the four affected countries should urgently focus on rebuilding the social contract and restoring trust through community dialogue and other forms of community engagements designed to win heart and minds especially for the growing young population in the region.

iv. **Economic and Infrastructural Investment:** The breach in trust and social contract which created the fertile ground for terror and criminal groups to breed was necessitated by the lack of economic and infrastructural investments in the region. The governments and private sector should urgently prioritise investment in infrastructure and the economy of the region. The UNDP stabilisation facility which supports the Lake Chad Basin Regional Strategy for Stabilisation Recovery and Resilience has provided a model for investing in conflict zones which the government of the region could follow.

v.   **Strengthening Rule of Law:** The LCB governments should urgently invest in the rule of law in affected communities, including investment in community policing and judicial services to improve accountability and criminal prosecution. Such an investment will complement other efforts to rebuild trust through the prioritisation of economic and basic infrastructure.

Cross-Border Interventions

vi.   **Investment in Cross border interventions:**   The transnational character of crime and terror requires transnational solutions. Most of the affected communities are those at the fringes without economic opportunities and basic infrastructure. These communities are also far away from cities and government capitals. Therefore, governments and the private sector should deliberately invest in communities in the border zones while improving security to facilitate cross border human mobility and trade. The recent investment through the UNDP Regional Stabilisation Facility at the border communities of Banki in Borno State, Nigeria and Amchide in the Far North region of Cameroon, which has boosted cross border trade and human mobility between Nigeria and Cameroon provides evidence for the argument for investment in cross border interventions.

Civil Engagement and Counter Narratives

vii.   **Counter Messaging and Narratives:** The efforts of civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the region should be targeted towards promoting regional peace, countering the narratives of violent extremists and criminal groups, as well as encouraging social cohesion in communities. The United Nations should prioritise cross border peacebuilding initiatives to adapt to the regional and transnational nature of the conflict and to ensure that lessons are shared and replicated where possible across countries. The global community should support LCB community radio initiatives that prioritise the dissemination and spread of counter narratives targeted at winning hearts and minds.

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CRIME AND TERROR NEXUS
TERROR NEXUS
The Intersections Between Terror and Criminal Groups in the **Lake Chad Basin**