



# BORDERLAND POLICY BRIEFING SERIES

## Boko Haram and the Conflict Dynamics in the Chad Basin



UNDP Africa Borderlands Centre, Nairobi, December 2020

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### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020, the Lake Chad borderland region witnessed increased levels of violence linked to extremist organizations, perpetrated primarily by Boko Haram (*Jama'atul Ahl Sunnah Liddawati wal Jihad, JAS*) and its sub-factions. The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) estimates that since 2009, up to 40,000 people have been killed in the Boko Haram conflict,<sup>1</sup> 1.8 million are displaced, while about 230,000 live at the borderland as refugees. An estimated 7.1 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. These conflicts have been exacerbated by the challenges of climate change, cross-border migration, the COVID-19 pandemic, illicit flows of light weapons, demographic changes, persistent poverty, and poor governance. Recent findings indicate that the attacks and killings by Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have not been curbed by COVID-19 restrictions. For example, from March to June 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 lockdown, Boko Haram and ISWAP carried out 19 attacks around the Lake Chad borderland, killing four hundred and fifty-two (452) people, with the attack in March 2020 on Chadian soldiers recorded as one of the deadliest.<sup>2</sup> With the ease of lockdown measures

between July and August, Boko Haram and ISWAP carried out a further twenty-two (22) attacks, killing two hundred and thirty (230) people.

Civilians accounted for the majority of the victims in these attacks; in total, four hundred and seventy-four (474) civilians were killed, compared with two hundred and seventy-three (273) soldiers. A further thirty-one (31) soldiers were abducted. The atrocities of Boko Haram have been driven by the jihadi-salafi ideology of promoting “the purest” form of Islamic practices and reinforced by relative deprivation. However, the impact of the conflict on women, teenage girls, children, and those with disabilities remain unprecedented. Some endured abuse and intimidation by Boko Haram while others were assaulted by security personnel.

The response to this conflict has been defined by strategies largely national in scope. In providing a regional approach to tackling this challenge, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), in collaboration with the African Union Commission (AUC) and with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), developed the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery & Resilience (RSS).<sup>3</sup> The framework of this regional strategy has nine pillars that intersect security, development, and humanitarian issues. The crucial role of key stakeholders at local, national, and regional levels is also outlined. However, effective implementation remains a challenge. This research and policy brief presents findings on conflict dynamics

#### Lake Chad border region



in the Lake Chad borderland region, undertaken by the UNDP Africa Borderland Centre. The policy brief aims to fill emerging knowledge gaps, highlighting how responses to the conflict have been exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It also articulates key policy considerations relating to the conflict.

### Key Findings: January–October 2020

- There has been a decline in suicide bombings and a substantial increase in the killing and kidnapping of security personnel and aid workers around the Lake Chad borderland area.
- As Boko Haram continues to suffer losses from combat, health disasters such as the cholera pandemic in 2017<sup>4</sup> and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic have facilitated the recruitment of young people and vulnerable children, largely to replenish the ranks of its fighters.
- Although military responses continue to be guided by national security strategies, regional efforts by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) have suffered from lack of clarity over priorities, funding, procurement delays, and the reluctance to cede command by forces of the different countries.<sup>5</sup> There has also been weak collaboration on humanitarian action, research, policy design, and implementation.
- There is insufficient strategic religious response that engages, in a coordinated fashion, the religious leaders who espouse intolerant and extremist views that feed the Boko Haram/ISWAP narrative and its recruitment of young locals.
- There is a critical gap<sup>6</sup> in gender-sensitive, cross-border strategies that specifically attend to the challenges facing women, children, and those with disabilities. Despite the deployment of preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE) programs across the Lake Chad border communities to recognize the gender component, the vulnerability of women and children has not been sufficiently addressed.
- Agro-economic activities in Lake Chad's borderland employ more than 80% of the population, while human activity continues to contribute to deforestation and aggressive desertification that threatens livelihoods.<sup>7</sup> So far, seven (7) million persons risk hunger while fifty-thousand (50,000) people are reported to be exposed to famine.<sup>8</sup> Many of the most vulnerable have turned to crime and terrorist activities.<sup>9</sup>

### Key Policy Responses

- A strategic regional approach centered on religious re-orientation should be designed to engage with traditional and religious leaders, and communities in moderating their views to counter the extremist narratives of Boko Haram.
- For those implementing non-military approaches on disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration (DDRR) and transitional justice, platforms for capacity building and trainings should be provided, particularly in areas of articulating terrorism legislation, rehabilitation, and reintegration programs.
- Structural issues of poverty reduction, relative deprivation, and climate change should be prioritised to reduce the rate of Boko Haram recruitment.
- A transitional justice mechanism that does not exclude accountability but is also tailored to include community cultural and justice norms, such as the *sulhu* (reconciliation), should be adopted.
- Continuous sensitization on the COVID-19 pandemic in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and communities affected by the conflict should be sustained.
- A gender-sensitive regional response framework should be designed to address the specific impact of the conflict on women and teenage girls and boys.
- Community-led approaches and a framework for inclusion of the family<sup>10</sup> and the collaborative conflict mechanism,<sup>11</sup> where key and influential community stakeholders mediate the process, should be deployed.
- A cross-regional history and curriculum that includes climate change, security, peace, and inter-religious dialogue should be designed and taught to children in schools, IDP camps, and other affected communities.
- Alleged human rights abuses by the security forces should be independently investigated and addressed through strict and consistent application of accountability rules as well as the values of security professionalism.

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## 2. LAKE CHAD BASIN: CONTEXT OF THE CONFLICT

The Lake Chad borderland region<sup>12</sup> covers an area of 2,434,000 km<sup>2</sup>, an estimated 8% of the total African land-mass.<sup>13</sup> The region has a long history of violent conflict. In the 9th century, the Kanem-Borno Empire emerged as the imperial power, engaging in series of armed conflicts.<sup>14</sup> The rebellion of the Tuareg of Air in 1751 over the control of Bilma salt mines and the Komandugu Yobe river,<sup>15</sup> followed later by the revolt of the marginalized Fulani, established a deep culture of violence and extremism that ultimately remained up until the emergence of the El-Kanemi dynasty, the current governing elite in Borno. The territories of this region were later divided between France, Germany, and Britain. Following the period of decolonization in the 1960s, the borderland was divided between Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, with the biggest distribution of the land area in Chad (42%),<sup>16</sup> and the largest population in Nigeria.<sup>17</sup>

There are varied reasons for the continuous evolution of violent conflict in the Lake Chad borderland.

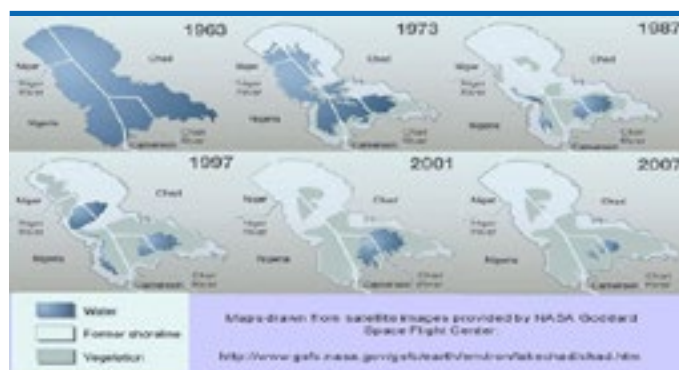
**The region is among the least industrialized in Africa, producing a vicious circle of poverty and relative deprivation.** The topography has vast and sparse forests, surrounded by unprotected borders and the high Mandara Mountains. Boko Haram takes advantage of this topography to set up camps in difficult to access regions, and disguise the movement of arms and foodstuffs. Light weapons are transported in sacks of beans and grains, using donkeys and camels, with the help of local businessmen.<sup>18</sup> Recent estimates show that out of the six-hundred-and-forty (640) million small arms circulating globally, one hundred (100) million are found in Africa, of which about thirty (30) million are in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>19</sup> and about eleven (11) million in Western Africa.<sup>20</sup> This is identified as one of the enclaves where drug traffickers, illegal traders, and terrorist groups have been involved in weapons trafficking.<sup>21</sup> The majority of these illicit weapons, about fifty-nine per cent, were previously alleged to be in the hands of civilians.<sup>22</sup>

**Weak cross-border institutions of law and order in the region** provide a beneficial environment for extremists, especially in terms of illegal trade. According to the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), there are over one thousand, four hundred and eighty-seven (1,487) illegal routes around the Lake Chad borderland to facilitate the movement of goods and services.<sup>23</sup>

**The use of Kanuri as a common language has benefited extremists in the expansion of their territory.** Kanuri, the borderland's dominant language, is spoken in Nigeria's Northeast, Niger's Diffa and Zinder provinces, and other parts of Cameroon and Chad. Leaders of Boko Haram and ISWAP use the Kanuri language as channels of communication and indoctrination. They translate their messages into Kanuri for a wider audience and reach.

**Conflict dynamics within the Lake Chad borderland have substantially changed**, with new actors and online forms of propaganda, supported by foreign elements that deploy sophisticated conflict strategies and digital tools. These changes are taking place within an increasingly volatile political, economic, and socio-cultural borderland region.

### Environmental change in the Lake Chad Basin<sup>24</sup>



**Climate change has led to a shortage of rainfall, the deterioration of rangeland, deforestation, and desertification.**<sup>25</sup> According to a recent scientific report, the Sahel and, by extension, the Lake Chad borderland region has experienced the most substantial and sustained decline in rainfall recorded anywhere in the world within the past 30–40 years.<sup>26</sup> This has led to the loss of both surface and ground water, the degradation of topsoil, and damage to on-land resources.<sup>27</sup> It has generated an excessive increase in evaporation, high temperatures, and dry winds.<sup>28</sup> This has also accelerated desertification, as the land mass increasingly becomes waterless, treeless, and barren.<sup>29</sup> The consequences include crop failure, livestock death, collapsed fisheries, and destroyed wetlands. To a large extent, this has not only affected agricultural activities, but has also increased unemployment, forced regional migration, and doubled the rate of crime as inhabitants turn to alternative livelihoods in poaching and terrorism. Regional governments with population settlements around this borderland offer no safety net to fishermen, farmers, pastoralists, and herders who can no longer live sustainably on the land. Boko Haram and

ISWAP consequently position themselves as alternative governments providing care and support to an abandoned borderland population.<sup>30</sup> They recruit using the Islamic ideological principles of welfare and caring for the poor, combining religion, money, and force.<sup>31</sup> They target the borderland's disaffected youths, unemployed graduates, and *almajiris* (Qur'anic students).

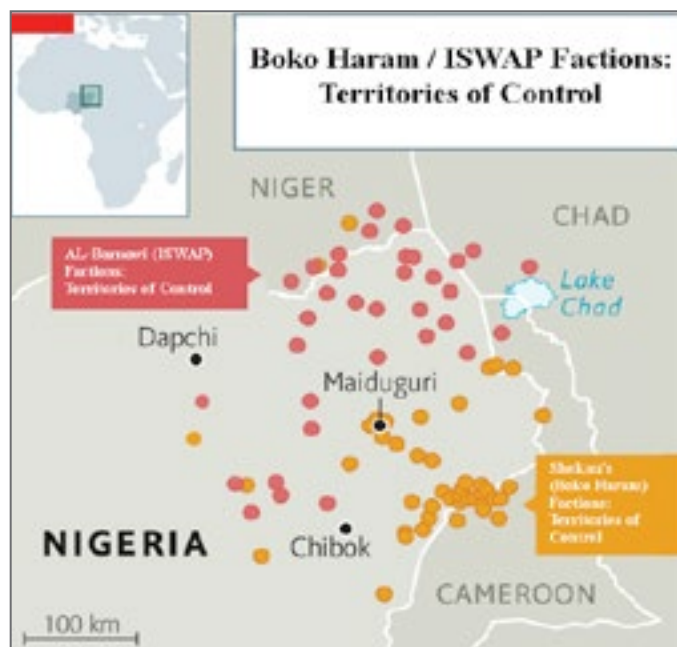
### 3. BOKO HARAM IN THE CHAD BASIN

**Background and recent history:** Although the history of Boko Haram remains contested,<sup>32</sup> Muhammad Yusuf – recruited by the more radical and extremist figure, Muhammad Ali,<sup>33</sup> – is considered the founding father of Boko Haram.<sup>34</sup> He is alleged to have worked closely with prominent Islamic scholars such as Shaikhs Mahmud Adam Ja'afar and Mohammed Abba Aji,<sup>35</sup> and he became the youth leader of the Izala Movement (a movement that forbids innovation in Islam).<sup>36</sup> However, Yusuf's extremist views led to his expulsion from the Indimi Mosque, a significant worshipping community in central Maiduguri, Nigeria.<sup>37</sup> When Ali was killed, Muhammad Yusuf became the de-facto leader of Boko Haram. He not only preached all over the Lake Chad region, but reorganized Boko Haram to launch an offensive against the Nigerian state. When Yusuf was killed in 2009, Abubakar Shekau assumed leadership of the group. He maintained the essential ingredients of the ultra-salafi radicalism espoused by Yusuf.<sup>38</sup> However, he also introduced the "global vision" for Boko Haram, as he openly identified with other global jihadist organizations by sending condolences "on behalf of the mujahideen in Nigeria and the Lake Chad," to the mujahideen in the Islamic State of Iraq, Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Yahya Al-Libi.<sup>39</sup>

**Cracks within Boko Haram and ISWAP:** The alleged autocratic leadership style of Shekau led to the emergence of different factions. The Yusufiya Islamic Movement (YIM), comprised of the original followers of Mohammed Yusuf, first emerged to challenge the dictatorship of Shekau. Later in 2012, *Jamaa'atu Ansarul Muslimeen fi Biladis Sudaan* (ANSARU, the Group of Partisans for Muslims in Black Africa) also broke away, accusing Shekau of killing Muslims.<sup>40</sup> After a pledge of loyalty to the Islamic State (IS) and the appointment of Shekau as Amir of West Africa in March 2015,<sup>41</sup> a new faction – Islamic State in the West Africa Province (ISWAP) – emerged in August 2016. Shekau was deposed and replaced with Abu Musab al-Barnawi. At this point, IS

increased its support for ISWAP as more Boko Haram fighters defected to ISWAP, allowing ISWAP to overrun at least 14 army bases around the borderland. An extensive shadow government was created by ISWAP close to the Lake, with firm control of the local economy.<sup>42</sup> The two major factions – Boko Haram and ISWAP – now maintain distinct areas of operations. Shekau's faction, JAS, operates in Southern Borno with the inclusion of the Sambisa Forest and the forests of the Kala Balge Local Government Area near the Cameroonian border. Al-Barnawi's ISWAP faction controls mostly the southern Diffa Region, Niger Republic, and around Lake Chad, including northern Borno and Yobe State, sometimes shifting towards northern Cameroon.

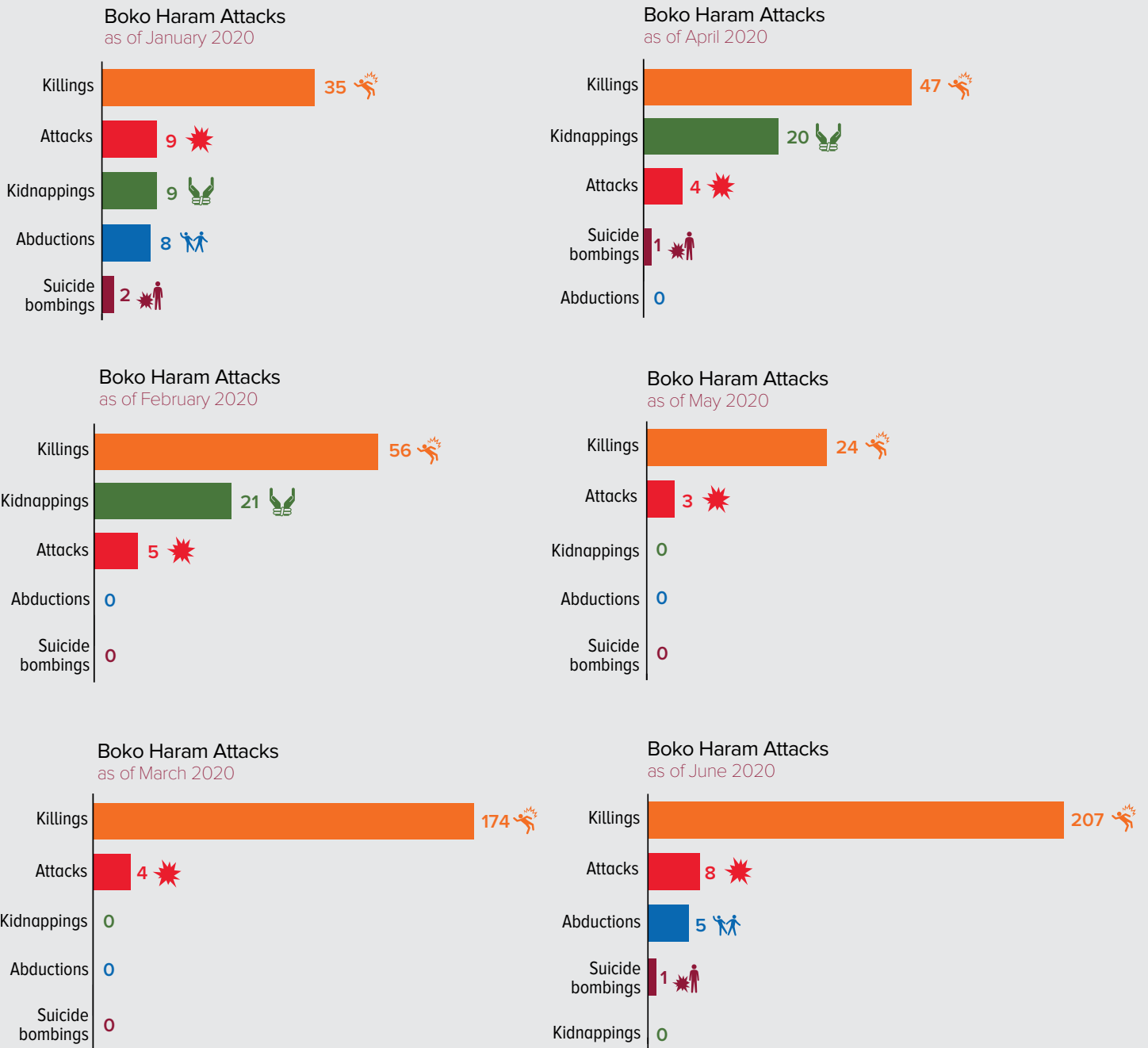
Map Showing Boko Haram/ISWAP Territories of Control



In March 2019, ISWAP suffered a major setback due to internal disputes and changes in leadership. IS replaced Abu Musab al-Barnawi with Abu Abdullah Ibn Umar al-Barnawi.<sup>43</sup> The removal of Abu Musab triggered an untidy flight of its top fighters led by Adam Bitri, a skillful and excellent commander of military units. He unsuccessfully sought collaboration with ANSARU but decided to set up a base in Abadam, close to the ISWAP seat of power. ISWAP now has three enemies to contend with: Adam Bitri, Shekau, and the Nigerian military. With the collapse of the caliphate in Iraq and Syria, IS may help reposition ISWAP, and this may remain a major security threat to the region.<sup>44</sup>

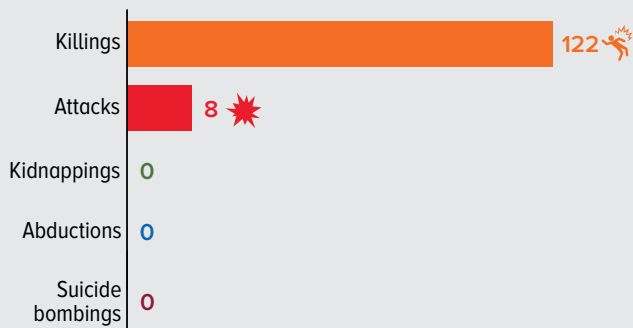
# BOKO HARAM ATROCITIES AT THE LAKE CHAD (JANUARY–AUGUST 2020): KEY DRIVERS

Cumulative Statistics of Attacks across the Lake Chad Border Countries – Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon (January – August 2020)

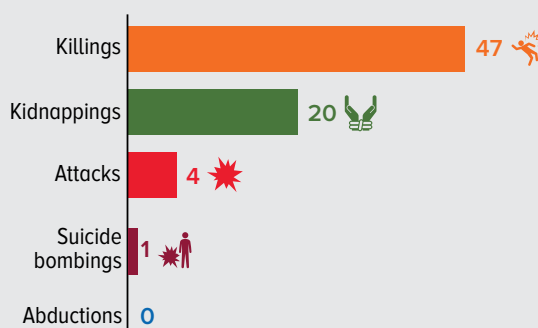


## Cumulative Statistics of Attacks across the Lake Chad Border Countries – Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon (January – August 2020)

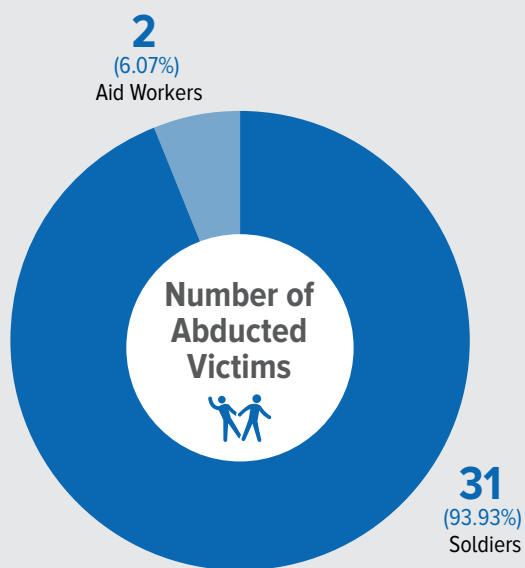
**Boko Haram Attacks**  
as of July 2020



**Boko Haram Attacks**  
as of August 2020



**Abductions**  
January – August 2020



**Killings**  
January – August 2020



**Despite claims of Boko Haram's technical defeat,<sup>45</sup> a close analysis of the group's recent activity between January and August 2020 reveals the continued and potent threat it poses.** The cumulative statistics of Boko Haram atrocities presented above indicates that between January and August 2020, fifty-five (55) attacks have taken place, with over 34 abductions, twenty-nine (29) kidnappings, and four (4) suicide bombings. In all these, seven hundred and sixty-three (763) people are reported to have been killed, including two hundred and seventy-three (273) soldiers. Soldiers also constituted over ninety-one per cent of those abducted, indicating increasing attacks against security formations.<sup>46</sup> The drivers of these atrocities are outlined below.

**Borderland religious ideology.** The Chad Basin region has a long history of heightened religious enthusiasm. Itinerant religious scholars crisscross the borderland to propagate Islam, at times deploying extremist interpretations. The leaders of Boko Haram, who belong to this tradition of scholars, subscribe to the salafi-jihadi ideology, insisting that legitimate political authority must be exercised with literal and total submission to the Qur'an and the *sunna* (practices) of the Prophet.<sup>47</sup> ISWAP deploys this narrative in a bid to reinvent Islam and recapture its past glory.<sup>48</sup> ANSARU, on the other hand, has taken on the salafi-jihadi ideology, intertwined it with Usman Dan Fodio's concept of *tajdid* (reformation), promising the defense of Islam from the infiltration of Christianity in northern Nigeria. Dan Fodio was an 18th and early 19th century Fulani religious teacher and revolutionary jihadist whose legacy lives on around the Lake Chad borderland region. On the contrary, Shekau and his loyalists remain committed to an extremist interpretation of the salafi-jihadi ideology that promotes pure Islamic environment. For example, in August 2020, about four hundred and ten (410) members of the Darul Salam terror group were arrested by troops of Operation Whirl Stroke in Utu, Toto Local Council, Nasarawa State.<sup>49</sup> Security reports suggest that this group works closely with the Shekau faction in providing new recruits for Boko Haram's expansionist agenda in northern Nigeria.<sup>50</sup> However, since not all Muslims subscribe to this extremist ideology, Boko Haram reframes the history of the Lake Chad borderland as a contestation between Islam and colonial legacies of the West. For Shekau, Islam inspired the rise of the Kanem-Borno empire<sup>51</sup> but the empire's territories were invaded and partitioned between France, Britain, and Germany during the colonial period.<sup>52</sup>

The new states that emerged during decolonisation (Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger) became enmeshed in corruption; with a new set of political elites

whose control of state resources increased the layers of bureaucracy that ordinary people confront daily. The reframing of the history created a sense of indignation among ordinary Muslims, currently deployed by Shekau to justify the overthrow of democratic institutions established on the ruins of the borderland empire.<sup>53</sup> In July 2019, Shekau's faction of Boko Haram released a video of fighters in Niger state sending greetings to Shekau, the brothers in Zamfara; fighters in Sambisa forests and the Lake Chad fighters under the leadership of al-Bakura.<sup>54</sup> These greetings were actually preceded in June 2019 by other video salutations in which English, French, Fulani and Hausa speaking fighters greeted fellow fighters in Zamfara state.<sup>55</sup> Six months later, a massive attack took place in Bohoma, Chad, which killed nearly 100 Chadian soldiers. Shekau immediately claimed responsibility for this attack.<sup>56</sup> These video demonstrations by Shekau are meant to keep alive the quest for control of the Lake Chad borderland.

**Violence and emerging technologies.** To carry out some of these atrocities, Boko Haram exploits the digital space for mobilization and propaganda. Previously, Boko Haram used fake SIM Cards<sup>57</sup> to make calls to demand funds, claim responsibility, threaten, or intimidate perceived enemies.<sup>58</sup> Between 2010 and 2020, Boko Haram and ISWAP are alleged to have released more than 100 videos on YouTube,<sup>59</sup> including beheadings, executions, and the stoning to death of those deemed in violation of Sharia.<sup>60</sup> They also post images of its fighters carrying out attacks and/or in training, often acquiring suicide skills.<sup>61</sup> Using the digital space, they have become less hierarchical, more networked and connected to members of the public.<sup>62</sup> Currently, ANSARU uses online accounts like Telegram and Facebook to post verses from the Qur'an and generic praise of al-Qaeda leaders such as Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahir. Boko Haram on the other hand uses social media platforms such as Telegram (an account that uses the name *Khairul Huda* seems to have been taken down), YouTube, and Facebook<sup>63</sup> to praise Shekau and taunt the supporters of ISWAP. ISWAP uses Telegram, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook accounts. Since November 2019, ISWAP has released a selection of its old videos on Amazon, Google Play, Vimeo, Dropbox, Flickr, and other platforms for the first time. A thirty-four-page manual on securing communications, developed by IS and quoted in the European Foundation for South Asian Studies report, highlights ISWAP's deployment of applications such as Twitter, Justpaste.it, Telegram, iMessage, and FaceTime. The group has also been relying on other communication applications that are considered to have better end-to-end encryption such as Signal, and the German

CryptoPhone and BlackPhone. Additionally, apps such as FireChat, Tin Can, and The Serval Project were seen as suitable communication services particularly in the absence of internet, since users could gain access to them through Bluetooth. Mapps and Avast SecureLine were other suggested applications owing to their quality to mask the user's location and IP address.<sup>64</sup> This appears to have improved the communications strategy of ISWAP. For instance, between December 2019 and August 2020, ISWAP had posted its hostage video showing the beheading of eleven (11) Christians,<sup>65</sup> aid workers, and soldiers around the Lake Chad borderland.<sup>66</sup>

### **Recruitment and the availability of human resources.**

The attacks of Boko Haram are further sustained by its continuous radicalization and recruitment around the Lake Chad borderland, targeting young people, especially teenage boys and girls, affected by poverty and relative deprivation. Estimates indicate that in February 2019, ISWAP had between three thousand, five hundred and five thousand (3,500–5,000) fighters and JAS had between one thousand five hundred and two thousand (1,500–2,000).<sup>67</sup> Global Initiative, a Nigerian research organization, recently produced a much higher figure for ISWAP's numbers – between eighteen and twenty thousand (18,000–20,000) fighters – apparently based on an unpublished examination of ISWAP's combat groups built from contacts with both the Nigerian military and ISWAP sources.<sup>68</sup> Boko Haram and ISWAP allegedly recruit from *almajiri*,<sup>69</sup> Qur'anic pupils who litter the borderland, living in IDP camps and roaming the streets, begging for alms.<sup>70</sup> Climate-change refugees and immigrants living in the region<sup>71</sup> are also believed to have been recruited.

For the past three decades, there has been steady cross-border migration due to drought, war, and violent conflict.<sup>72</sup> It is estimated that there are about 150,000 illegal immigrant residents in Borno State, Nigeria, mostly from Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and the Sudan.<sup>73</sup> They became the unskilled, semi-skilled, and even unqualified migrant labor force, employed at construction sites, markets, and other institutions.<sup>74</sup> According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), since 2017, about three million, five hundred and ninety thousand people have been displaced and have become either refugees, asylum seekers, or illegal migrants; one and half million of these are children.<sup>75</sup> Beyond this, Boko Haram also recruits from victims of military offensives. Since 2009, military forces have executed more than one thousand, two hundred (1,200) people, arbitrarily arrested at least twenty thousand (20,000) people<sup>76</sup> – mostly young men and boys – while thousands

of other people have become victims of enforced disappearance. Boko Haram constantly takes advantage of this to radicalize and recruit. Similarly, ISWAP exploits the images of children dressed in military fatigues and holding assault rifles for recruitment. This is further cemented with outright abductions and kidnappings from IDP camps and markets: orphans are often targeted, promising them an opportunity to avenge the deaths of lost ones.<sup>77</sup> A recent report by Extremist Watch shows that between January 2017 and December 2019, Boko Haram used a total of three thousand, six hundred and one (3,601) boys and girls as soldiers and suicide bombers. These children were also used in direct combat and other support roles, including as sexual slaves.<sup>78</sup>

**Borderland economy and trade.** ISWAP's recruitment and activities around the Lake Chad borderland are boosted by its increasing dominance of the Lake Chad borderland economy. While IS financial support was crucial to the survival of ISWAP in 2016 and 2017, by 2018 that support had sharply dropped to just 3.41 per cent of its previous rate, and ISWAP had to look elsewhere for funding.<sup>79</sup> According to the 2019 report of the Global Initiative for Civil Stabilisation, ISWAP has, from 2018, earned as much as USD 35.2 million collected in a combination of Naira, US Dollars, and West African CFA Francs from taxes, fees charged to local traders, smugglers, and transporters. ISWAP's success is linked to its increasing involvement and control in the trade and production of dried fish, dried pepper, and rice. The fish trade is said to have brought ISWAP about 30 per cent of its income, dried pepper and rice provided 10 per cent and 11.39 per cent respectively, while taxes are said to have provided around 45 per cent of income.<sup>80</sup> ISWAP has attained this influence because it provides the security needed for this free market economy at the local level – the security that the Lake Chad border governments have been unable to provide. This financial dominance of the local economy by the insurgents gives them a high degree of control over the livelihoods of communities, allows them to dictate the movement of goods, services, and people, and also allows them to decide how communities could be structured and governed. Importantly, this process facilitates the cultivation and sale of drugs and the illicit movement of arms, making ISWAP deadlier and more dangerous to the region.

**Boko Haram expansionist agenda beyond the borderland.** Although links between extremist violence in the Lake Chad borderland and other parts of northern Nigeria are not always clear-cut, an early 2019 report by International Crisis Group indicates that Abubakar Shekau, the leader of Boko Haram, is coordinating an



expansionist agenda, building alliances, and extending his authority to northwest and north central Nigeria.<sup>81</sup> Shekau engages in factional reconciliation, and has become more lenient towards his followers<sup>82</sup> while willing to delegate authority to his deputies in southern Borno and northern Cameroon. Since January 2020, Shekau is alleged to have created cells in Niger, Zamfara, Taraba, Kogi, Katsina, and Sokoto states. Shekau is accused of courting Sa'alaba and Bakura, two prominent fighters who were reluctant to commit to any side during the feud between the Abu Musab and the late Mamman Nur (both Sa'alaba and Bakura are said to have a combined force of over three hundred (300) fighters). Shekau has stationed this group in Niger, operating close to the border with Nigeria, with about one thousand (1,000) fighters, the largest outside the Sambisa general area.<sup>83</sup> The collapse of oil prices and sudden rise in the market price of gold since January 2020<sup>84</sup> has made Nigeria to consider the production of gold.<sup>85</sup> However, the situation has also significantly attracted different groups into gold mining and terrorist and criminal activities across northwestern Nigeria.<sup>86</sup>

One such group is ANSARU,<sup>87</sup> which is alleged to be building new relationships and sending recruits to Libya for training.<sup>88</sup> It is also said to be deploying clerics to undermine democracy and constitutional government<sup>89</sup> while selling AK-47 rifles supplied by al-Qaeda lower than current market rates.<sup>90</sup> ISWAP, however, is reported to have forged links with communities that share border with Niger, strengthening the capacity of radical groups in Magaba, Dankwo, and Derin-Deji in the Zuru area of Kebbi state, Nigeria,<sup>91</sup> offering them welfare packages.<sup>92</sup> The contestation over the northwest by these groups and other criminal elements has triggered a major humanitarian challenge with estimates showing that, as at May 2020, more than 210,354 persons have been displaced.<sup>93</sup> The first major concern is that there is now a terrorist operational link being established between northeast, north central, and northwest Nigeria, close to the border with Niger. It is highly likely that another operational link could be created through Niger Republic via the Dosso and Tillabery regions, unto Mali and Burkina Faso, which are themselves struggling to contain al-Qaeda and IS affiliates. IS has already branded a group operating in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso as ISWAP.<sup>94</sup> The formal unification of ISWAP in Lake Chad with IS factions in the Sahel under a single banner therefore has the potential to unify terrorist groups beyond Lake Chad to the whole of West Africa. The potential threat for the entire region remains incalculable.

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## 5. GENDER AND VIOLENT CONFLICT IN THE LAKE CHAD BORDERLAND

**The Conflict around the Lake Chad borderland area has substantially affected the lives of women, girls, men, and boys, often in different ways.** The gender aspect of the conflict should be understood in the context of Lake Chad's borderland patriarchal societal structure and its widespread adherence to Islamic tenets. Colonialism and independence did little to alter this, and Boko Haram and its factions reinforce many pre-existing roles.<sup>95</sup> Evidence suggests that many men and women joined voluntarily to escape difficult social conditions, while others were abducted and enslaved. Some endured abuse while with the group, while others found a sense of belonging. Men have disproportionately been killed. Women remain the overwhelming majority among the estimated 1.8 million IDPs.

**Women and girls have suffered in the hands of the security services in the borderland region.** In 2016 alone, security forces freed more than 12,000 people back from Boko Haram areas – about 80% were women and children. They were assessed and transferred to 20 garrison towns and IDP camps set up by the military.<sup>96</sup> Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have documented the dire conditions of detention for these women and girls, including sexual abuse by soldiers.<sup>97</sup> The patterns of this abuse appear to have evolved. Security personnel are alleged to have moved from rape to demanding “survival sex” from women and girls, trading sex in exchange for small favors that can make a big difference in the women's lives.<sup>98</sup> With ISWAP's current expansion since January 2018, the more than 800,000 people under ISWAP and Boko Haram controlled territories<sup>99</sup> continue to suffer abuse and sexual violence.

**Women should not be seen only as victims of violence but also as participants in it.**<sup>100</sup> Boko Haram and ISWAP have abducted women and girls around the borderland for both political and pragmatic ends. Once recruited, they have been deployed as spies, messengers, recruiters, and smugglers.<sup>101</sup> Increasingly, Boko Haram and its factions have used female suicide bombers around the Lake Chad region. Boko Haram deployed its first female suicide bomber in Gombe State in June 2014, and as of February 2018, a recorded four hundred and sixty-nine (469) female “suicide bombers” have been deployed; they have killed more than 1,200 people across the Lake Chad border region.<sup>102</sup> Between January and

August 2020, Boko Haram is alleged to have deployed about three suicide bombers in Bama, Nigeria, Amchie, far north Cameroon, and Kaiga-Kindjiria, Chad. Although there is no evidence to suggest they were female suicide bombers, it has been documented that Boko Haram is known to deploy more female suicide bombers than any other terrorist groups. A recent report by Mia Bloom and Hilary Matfess, *Women as Symbols and Swords in Boko Haram's Terror*, discusses in detail the vulnerability of women and young girls in IDP camps.<sup>103</sup>

**Responses to the conflict have involved and affected women in unique ways.** Hundreds of women help security forces to frisk other women at checkpoints, gather information and identify suspects, and also sometimes to fight Boko Haram. Others work in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or care privately for war victims. In terms of reintegration, women and girls are often regarded as former wives, slaves, or fighters, and are barred from reintroduction into their communities due to stigma, and because the lines between militant, sympathizer, and forced accomplice are blurred. Regrettably, the Borno State Maiduguri Safe House Initiative and Bulumkutu Transit Centre, which intended to rehabilitate returnee women and children around the Lake Chad border region, were closed in 2018.

## 6. COVID-19 AND TERRORISM IN THE LAKE CHAD BORDERLAND

COVID-19 has had a direct influence on both violent extremism and responses to it around the Lake Chad borderland.<sup>104</sup> The UNDP Regional Stabilization Programme for the Lake Chad Basin reports that as of June 27, 2020, the Lake Chad borderland countries had a combined total of thirty-seven thousand, eight hundred and sixty-five (37,865) confirmed cases as tabulated below. However, evidence from national-level data shows a drastic increase in confirmed cases in Cameroon and Nigeria compared to Niger and Chad. Between May 7 and June 27, 2020, confirmed cases jumped from three thousand, five hundred and twenty-nine (3,529) to twelve thousand (12,600) (257 per cent) in Cameroon and increased from increased from six thousand, one hundred and seventy-five (6,175) to twenty-three thousand (23,300) (277 per cent) in Nigeria. Over the same period, confirmed cases in Niger increased from 909 to 1,100 (21 per cent), and from 519 to 865 (67 per cent) in Chad.<sup>105</sup>

**Table 1 Number of COVID-19 incidences**

Country	Confirmed Cases	Deaths	Recoveries
Lake Chad Borderland	37,865	1,008	20,102
Cameroon	12,600	313	10,100
Chad	866	74	785
Niger	1,100	57	924
Nigeria	23,600	554	8,300

COVID-19 in the Lake Chad borderland is still evolving and with very limited testing, it is difficult to ascertain the outcome. Since March 2020, national governments of the Lake Chad borderland implemented containment measures, including the closure of markets, borders, the imposition of curfew to restrict inter-state/province movements, and the stoppage of religious activities and other social congregations. Testing procedures and public hygiene initiatives – including hand washing, use of hand sanitizers, and public health awareness and education – were also implemented. This affected local businesses and increased poverty levels. In Nigeria, the Presidential Task Force was set up to coordinate all COVID-19 responses. Air and land borders were closed, particularly the border with Niger, Cameroon, and Chad. Maiduguri Monday Market was also closed. On March 17, the Cameroonian authorities placed the country on maximum alert and activated a contingency plan, closing Cameroon's land, air, and sea borders. These measures were reinforced by new ones, including the compulsory wearing of masks in public spaces.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, Chad postponed its legislative elections scheduled for March 2020 to December 13, 2020. In Niger, the electoral commission suspended voter registration exercises due to the requirement for social distancing, raising fears COVID-19 could affect the planned presidential and legislative elections in December 2020.

To cushion the impact of lockdowns in the Lake Chad border countries, a variety of economic palliatives, including food packages and household supplies, were initiated.<sup>108</sup> However, some aspects of the response to COVID-19 around the borderland have made recent recruitment by Boko Haram faster and easier. Again, the governments' pandemic response has slightly shifted attention from caring for victims in IDP camps to testing and creating awareness to avoid mass infections. The reopening of land borders and the resumption of air travel in every country is likely to increase the spread of the virus. As a result, enormous resources have been deployed in monitoring and testing of refugees and

victims of conflict around the border regions.<sup>109</sup> In support of this, the World Bank announced in May 2020, an intervention fund of USD 346 million to strengthen resilience and livelihood in the Lake Chad borderland area.<sup>110</sup>

**Boko Haram and ISWAP have tried to increase their public appeal by filling the governance deficit caused by the outbreak through service provisions.** Using funds generated from taxes and the control of the borderland economy, ISWAP is said to be offering humanitarian help and support for refugees and IDPs.<sup>111</sup> Since the COVID-19 outbreak, a large number of charities have arisen to assist families in need. There are fears that Boko Haram and ISWAP could pose as charity and humanitarian relief organizations to raise funds for conducting the war rather than helping the poor. However, the pandemic has also adversely affected the terrorists around the Lake Chad border region. They have lost media focus, now shifted to the pandemic rather than their activities. The imposition of lockdowns and travel restrictions have also disrupted Boko Haram and ISWAP's operational planning, mobility, networking, and finance-related activities around the Lake Chad borderland.

**Terrorist groups in the region have exploited propaganda opportunities afforded by the pandemic.**<sup>112</sup> ISWAP, with the propaganda machine of the IS, has framed COVID-19 as reflecting the decline of the West and as a divine punishment for their moral decadence.<sup>113</sup> During the pandemic lockdown, worldwide internet data usage surged from 50 per cent to 70 per cent. Globally, over 1.5 billion students in 191 countries are no longer in full-time education and spend more time online, particularly on gaming platforms. Among these, around 400 million who are directly affected by conflict or violence are most vulnerable. This online exposure offers terrorists a chance to radicalise and recruit, specifically among those under the age of 30.<sup>114</sup> The recent rise in teenage recruitment as child soldiers by ISWAP and Boko Haram is also linked to this.

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## 7. LAKE CHAD BORDERLAND RESPONSES TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

**Early military responses.** Early responses to the conflict around the Lake Chad borderland indicate that military offensive was the first option rather than the last resort. In

June 2011, the Nigerian government established a Joint Task Force. This evolved to become the largest military deployment since Nigeria's civil war with 10,000 troops, under the name Operation Zaman Lafiya. Cameroon, meanwhile, created the fourth Joint Military Region (RMIA4) in Maroua in August 2014. In the early days of the conflict, the involvement of Chad and Niger was minimal. Chad in particular held back because it was more worried about the consequences of the Libya conflict.<sup>115</sup> The Multinational Joint Task Force, whose original mandate was to address cross-border issues, was reformed in April 2012 and its mandate extended to help fight Boko Haram.<sup>116</sup> With the election of President Buhari in Nigeria in 2015, the prospects of regional collaboration improved. A regional summit was held in June 2015, and the Regional Intelligence Fusion Unit (RIFU) was reactivated. The MNJTF headquarters was redeployed to N'Djamena, Chad, and the governments of the Lake Chad borderland approved USD 30 million for the installation and equipping of the MNJTF headquarters.<sup>117</sup>

**Three major military operations.** With the reform of the MNJTF, three major operations were launched. First, Operation **Gama Aiki** (Hausa for Finish the Job) was launched in June 2016 in response to the devastating attack in Bosso, Niger. This was followed by Operation **Rawan Kada** (Crocodile Dance) with a focus on the stabilization of the Lake Chad borderland.<sup>118</sup> After operation **Rawan Kada**, Chad withdrew its forces due to commitments at the Libyan border. However, the increasing influence of IS on ISWAP in the region made the MNJTF announce a new operation in April 2018: Operation Anmi Fakat, aimed at consolidating the gains of **Rawan Kada**. This saw greater collaboration between Nigeria and Cameroon.<sup>119</sup> In early 2018, Cameroonian troops were present in the Gwoza area, while the Nigerian army also credited the support of Cameroonian forces in the re-opening of the road to Banki.<sup>120</sup> Both Cameroon and Nigeria organized the local vigilante groups to support the military against Boko Haram. In Chad, traditional chiefs were officially made informants to gather intelligence for the military. Nigeria declared a state of emergency in the northeast to curtail the movement of Boko Haram personnel, logistics, and weapons around the Lake Chad border area.

**Non-military responses to the conflict.** Military offensives – in addition to millions of dollars' worth of military equipment – at both the national and regional levels neither ended the conflict nor improved the capabilities of the security services. National and regional efforts were made to establish non-military responses, known as the soft approach. In January 2015, Nigeria set up the **Correctional-based Deradicalisation Programme**, also

known as the Prison-based Programme, for all ex-combatants undergoing trial, awaiting trial, convicted, or discharged. The objective of the program is to change the beliefs, views, values, and attitudes of ex-combatants and prepare them for eventual reintegration. Since 2015, the correctional-based deradicalization program in Kuje has dealt with more than 300 ex-combatants. For security reasons, information about those convicted or reintegrated remains classified. This program was followed by Nigeria's second DDDR program, **Operation Safe Corridor** (OPSC), which started in September 2015 to encourage willing and repentant low-risk defectors and surrendered Boko Haram insurgents to submit for subsequent de-radicalization, rehabilitation, and reintegration process. They are processed in Maiduguri by a Joint Investigative Committee (JIC). Those deemed high risk are sent to Kainji Barracks, Niger, while innocent civilians are sent back to their respective state governments for rehabilitation. The program lasts for 16 weeks. In April 2016, the Nigerian military announced that 800 Boko Haram ex-combatants had surrendered and were admitted into OPSC. This was followed by 97 others in June 2016: 96 male and 1 female. On November 22, 2019, 292 ex-combatants – the first batch of a total of 586 ex-combatants – were moved from Giwa barracks in Maiduguri to Gombe for rehabilitation. These numbers far exceed OPSC's DDDR capacity.

In Niger, between June and July 2017, over 1,000 arrested Boko Haram suspects were put in detention in Niamey, Kollo, and Koutoukale. About 300 were convicted, some were released, and others remanded in prison. Following the establishment of Niger's DDDR program in 2017, about 150 repentant Boko Haram fighters were housed in Goudoumaria, where deradicalization sessions are provided.<sup>121</sup> In Cameroon, disengagement officially began in 2016, with approximately 584 surrenders to date. Among them 115 are being held at the MNJTF facility in Mora, although one person also fled from custody. Those hosted at the MNJTF's camp returned with their wives (53) and children (111) who are living in the community. Following basic screening by administrative and security authorities, the rest of the ex-associates were released into the community. Some are divided between IDP camps in Zamai and Mozogo, as well as in the villages that remain relatively safe, such as Oupi, Madoussa, Gabas, Koza, and Zamai.<sup>122</sup> In Chad, disengagements began in early 2016 and about 2,200 people have so far deserted. However, a recent study states that there are 4,142 ex-Boko Haram associates in Lac Province. This discrepancy shows the challenge in having up-to-date official figures.<sup>123</sup>

Regionally, the RSS strategy is one of the most comprehensive documents that articulates how the regional response to the conflict should unfold. Additionally, international development partners are providing substantial regional humanitarian response to the conflict. For example, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is working with both the Nigerian and Chadian governments to return about 11,300 Nigerian refugees living in Dar al-Salam Camp in Chad. Many of these refugees arrived as early as 2014, with latest arrivals in December 2019 due to increased clashes in Baga, a border fishing town between Nigeria and Chad.<sup>124</sup> IOM is equally working with counter-terrorism programs in Nigeria<sup>125</sup> and COVID-19 Committees of the Lake Chad border countries to either provide humanitarian support to victims undergoing rehabilitation or to track migrants, asylum seekers, victims of terrorist activities, displaced people, and refugees for testing against COVID-19.<sup>126</sup> However, discussions are ongoing between, for example, between the governor of Borno state and that of Diffa, Niger Republic, on modalities for the repatriation of refugees around the Lake Chad borderland.<sup>127</sup>

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## 8. CHALLENGES TO REGIONAL STRATEGIES FOR PEACEBUILDING

**Regional tensions exist where military operations span borders**, including high-profile cases where Nigerian soldiers have at times accused Chadian soldiers of looting Nigerian villages and towns.<sup>128</sup> These regional acrimonyes still exist and have played a key role in the way and manner the regional joint task force counter the activities of terrorists in the region. The fundamental weaknesses of the regional forces are linked to the issue of strategy, policy, and corruption. Trust among national forces, on which the MNJTF ultimately relies, remains weak. The mutual unease is not unexpected, given that the MJNTF's component units come from varied military cultures, adhere to different doctrines, deploy incompatible equipment (particularly communications gear), and speak different languages (English and French). There are disputes over funding, and delivery kits for operations are often held up – especially boats, needed for operations on the lake, and night vision equipment. When such equipment does arrive, MNJTF units have sometimes not planned for its use, due to poor foresight and internal communications.<sup>129</sup>

**There is constant change in the top echelons of the security forces at both the national and regional levels.**

For example, Nigeria has had three National Security Advisers, five Inspector Generals of Police (IGP), three Chiefs of Army Staff, and four Chiefs of Defence Staff,<sup>130</sup> all within less than six years. The constant change in the top echelon of the military and security forces resulted in inconsistent policy decisions with incomplete implementation without practical results. Another costly strategy that was adopted by regional governments is the use of vigilantes without due consideration of the existing political, business, and ethnic networks around the Lake Chad borderland. Some of the members of these vigilantes turned out to be spies and intelligence gatherers for Boko Haram and ISWAP.<sup>131</sup>

**Efforts to address structural issues that sustain poverty, essential to the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, have been largely unsuccessful.**

The Lake Chad borderland region has been facing a situation of insecurity for decades, yet structural issues of infrastructure, human development, and relative deprivation remain without significant progress. The borderland countries had an estimated population of 246 million in 2017, with a growth rate that is one of the highest worldwide, and with limited or no access to basic knowledge and equipment on population control. About 65% of this population is of the average age of 34. Fertility rates are said to be approximately 5.5 children per woman, ranging from 4.5 children per woman in Cameroon, 5.4 children per woman in Nigeria, 5.8 children per woman in Chad, to 7 per woman in Niger. It is expected that the Lake Chad Basin countries will double their population in a period of 25 years. The risk of increasing violence with this youthful population is therefore further exacerbated by poverty levels. Evidence suggests that populations of the Lake Chad borderland live on less than USD 1.90 a day. In Nigeria, over half (53.5 per cent) of the population lives on less than USD 1.90 a day. In Niger, this poverty level is 46%, whereas in Chad and Cameroon, 38 per cent and 24 per cent respectively live below the threshold.<sup>132</sup> Relative deprivation and infrastructural deficit in the Lake Chad border countries continue to lay the foundations for terrorist recruitment. Ongoing interventions around the Lake Chad borderland countries by donors, developmental partners, and the governments lack synergy, with every organization concentrating on their area of interest.

**The military and humanitarian response to the conflict has excluded a strategy for a religious response,** especially in addressing serious issues of ideology involving the engagement of regional religious scholars. The borderland governments have adopted military, humanitarian, and judicial responses as national strategy. However,

responding to the religious component of the conflict to address the extremist and exclusive jihadi-salafi ideology being preached in communities by radical elements on daily basis remains a challenge.

**Lake Chad borderland governments have failed to come up with comprehensive communications strategies that counter terrorist propaganda and augment other counter-insurgency measures.**

The increasing influence of foreign elements such as the IS in supporting the strategic and propaganda machine of ISWAP is an open secret. For example, ISWAP has not only infiltrated the ranks of militant groups in northwest Nigeria, but it is also using communications platforms to encourage clerics who are particularly critical of corruption and democracy to reject the Western concept of the state and instead promote Islamic rule – a message that resonates strongly in impoverished communities.<sup>133</sup> The ultimate goal may be to create an operational nexus that connects northeast-northwest Nigeria to the Lake Chad-Sahel nexus. No critical measures have been taken at the regional level on how to specifically engage these foreign elements at the borderland. In Nigeria, the Strategic Communications component of the PCVE program has not gotten off the ground.

**Affected communities around the border region resent the nature and processes of these DDRR programs.**

The Lake Chad border countries have taken different approaches to peacebuilding with diverse consequences for communities. However, most communities are not consulted or engaged, and are only expected to participate half-way through the process. For this reason, many communities are unwilling to accept some of these approaches. For example, a 2018 research conducted by The Kukah Centre and Conciliation Resources, UK, shows that in Nigeria, victims and affected communities are resentful of the perpetrators, distrust the DDRR programs, and reject the reintegration of ex-combatants.<sup>134</sup> In Cameroon, traditional rulers are entrusted with reintegrating Boko Haram fighters into communities via a reconciliation oath. Repentant Boko Haram members swear an oath on a copy of the Qur'an in the presence of the entire village, renouncing their commitment to the jihadist ideology and all links to the group or any terrorist group. Yet, these ceremonies have in themselves become a source of anger, resentment, and conflict as traumatized and angry victims do not want to see former Boko Haram members set free without accountability for their crimes. Niger's defector program, initially established in June 2017 in Goudoumaria to provide rehabilitation to 150 Boko Haram repentants, was partly motivated by the need to balance the desire for justice, the practical realities of dealing with large numbers of ex-combatants, and

the enormous resources required to handle the program in the midst of dwindling economic fortunes. Some of these sentiments are captured in a yet to be published report by the Institute for Security Studies.<sup>135</sup>

**Absence of Peace Architectures based on local infrastructures.** In most communities, there exist local peace initiatives based on traditional or local infrastructures historically designed to facilitate peacebuilding and support post-conflict reconstruction. However, due to limited consultation and engagement with local communities prior to government interventions, these local peace initiatives are often neglected or even marginalised. Sometimes the need to deploy local or traditional infrastructure to strengthen the peace processes is derided.<sup>136</sup> For example, in Nigeria, the DDRR programme did not include local peacebuilding mechanisms such as *sulhu* (reconciliation), oath-taking or self-exile very early on in its framework. This neglect allows for parallel structures that are costly, not impactful and resented by the communities.

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## 9. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### Lake Chad Governments

With the increasing levels of youth population, the Lake Chad borderland governments should support a comprehensive plan that addresses education deficit by rebuilding schools and ensuring youths return to school. This should happen along with the provision of industries and business start-ups to provide jobs and reduce poverty levels. This will significantly tame the might of Boko Haram recruitment and ISWAP shadow government that provides services and attracts the loyalty of people around the borderland.

Since a military approach alone cannot solve the conflict, the borderland governments should, in collaboration with religious authorities, design a strategic regional approach centered on religion and the articulation of alternative narratives to Boko Haram extremist ideologies. Moderate and influential religious leaders should be identified and trained. They should be deployed at two levels: to support DDRR programs where direct engagements will be needed with Boko Haram and ISWAP repentants; and in the communities where radical elements and potential recruits can be reached and engaged.

The Lake Chad border governments should also provide alternative measures to ending the conflict besides military offensives. One of the most underutilized

peacebuilding mechanisms is creating platforms for victim–perpetrator reconciliation and reintegration. Key communities’ stakeholders should be selected as entry points into the communities. Communities should be made aware on the nature, history, and the extent of this conflict. Any strategy for reconciliation should be the outcome of community engagement and consultation. The process itself should be inclusive, gender-sensitive, and with a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy.

Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have been defined by a lack of systematized regional approach that includes tackling how terrorists are exploiting the reality of the virus. For example, while Nigeria has reopened its borders, many borders lack testing kits. The collection and documentation of data remains low and mostly provided by international organizations like IOM. There appears to be no communication between the Nigerian Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 and other Lake Chad border countries. Borderland governments should consider a regional approach that addresses COVID-19 and cross-border migration, testing, and the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) around the borderland.

The Lake Chad borderland governments should provide a comprehensive and holistic strategy for a regional DDRR program. Nigeria has the Prison-based and Operation Safe Corridor DDRR programs. Niger, in addition to its deradicalization program at Goudoumaria, has the High Authority for Peace Consolidation (HACP), and has established Peace Committees in all of Diffa’s 12 councils, composed of community members, and business and religious leaders. Conversely, Cameroon has delegated the process to traditional rulers. Beyond the RSS strategy, implementation of any regional strategy is limited. A regional strategy should include judicial and accountability processes for serious crimes that have been committed by the perpetrators using the regional Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice in Abuja, Nigeria. A regional DDRR program should be established in each of the countries, deploying bilingual experts. This should happen alongside or be collapsed into national programs that attend to the needs of victims, including the rebuilding of homes, schools, and the provision of basic needs of life. This will mitigate the perception that victims are neglected while perpetrators are looked after.

Beyond national peacebuilding approaches, a harmonized regional peacebuilding framework linked to the RSS regional strategy should be developed, so that countries can learn from each other’s experience

in terms of peacebuilding strategies. This regional approach should contain clear objectives aimed at reducing resentment against the reintegration of ex-combatants with programs of concern for affected communities. In this regional approach, DDDR programs should be implemented simultaneously with economic empowerment programs for victims and affected communities, including reparations and compensation where necessary.

### **Victims and Affected Communities in the Lake Chad Borderland**

With the support of key stakeholders and government agencies, victims and affected communities should organize themselves and conduct community engagement and consultation. They should express their views and perspectives, and internally design strategic and context-based policies on how to counter the extremism of Boko Haram and ISWAP at the community levels. This may include training women on identifying and reporting the radicalization of children, and setting up early warning signs on any Boko Haram infiltration, communication, or attack

Affected communities should undertake serious sensitization and awareness programs that provide strategies for countering climate change, improving security, and supporting peace and inter-religious dialogue programs, especially for children in schools and IDP camps. Initiatives such as reporting rape and sexual abuse, organizing and attending inter-religious dialogue sessions, and establishing peace clubs should be designed.

Victims and affected communities should be willing to accept reconciliation and, if possible, forgive in order to move forward. They should take ownership of the reconciliation processes, with the support of government and partners to achieve this. This should include other traditional methods of justice and reconciliation processes, which should be inclusive and gender sensitive. Before reintegration, face-to-face conversations between families, communities, and repentant Boko Haram members should be organized to provide opportunities for reconciliation.

### **International Development Partners**

International development partners should support the institutionalization of the DDDR process in the Lake Chad borderland. This will include providing support for the establishment of a legal framework that backs the program as indicated in Pillar III and Pillar VIII of the RSS Strategy and its Annex III. DDDR personnel should

be trained on issues of terrorism legislation, risk assessment, skills acquisition, linkages with government and donor partners for client jobs after reintegration, and processes of religious intervention.

Development partners should design and support a gender-sensitive strategy that addresses the tailored concerns of women, children, and those with disabilities. This should include programs of psychological counseling, confidence building, critical thinking, and participation in peacebuilding processes. An institute for women's development can be set up in northern Nigeria to broadly train women on public participation

At present, a regional transitional justice mechanism is missing. One that is Lake Chad context-based and designed by both experts and regional community stakeholders should be considered. The nature of this should be decided by the people of the region. However, elements such as punishment for perpetrators and compensation for victims should be considered.

### **Multinational Joint Task Force for the Borderland**

Claims of human rights violation made against the security forces should be independently investigated and addressed, and security personnel accused of abuses and serious crimes should be held accountable. Salaries and welfare packages of security services, especially in Nigeria, should be improved. Their housing, travel, and medical allowances should be paid promptly and the level of motivation to fight terrorism and terrorists should be improved. In this way, the government can hold them accountable for their crimes. Laws of different Lake Chad border countries can be applied in terms of accountability of security services.

Allegations of corruption among the top echelons of the security personnel<sup>137</sup> should be quickly dealt with by the various national governments to improve delivery. Compromised security officials should be court-martialed and dismissed dishonorably. Security personnel assigned to management roles should be based on tenures and redeployed once the tenure is over to avoid establishing a network of other corrupt officials.

Perceptions about the security services within local communities around the Lake Chad borderland remain negative and unappreciative. They are seen as collaborators with the extremists and as more interested in exploiting the conflict. Security personnel should improve civil–military relationships and incorporate communities into military responses to the conflict. This can be achieved through workshops, seminars, and a series of briefings.

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## Contact Information

 [hello.africaborderlands@undp.org](mailto:hello.africaborderlands@undp.org)

 [www.africa.undp.org/borderlands](http://www.africa.undp.org/borderlands)

 [@undpafrica](https://twitter.com/undpafrica) [#africaborderlands](https://twitter.com/undpafrica)

UNDP Africa Borderlands Centre  
Nairobi Thematic Hub  
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