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## Tackling security and climate challenges in the Lake Chad Basin requires collaboration

*Climate-resilient livelihoods, local and regional partnerships are needed to help a region already suffering devastating consequences of climate change, writes Aminata Niang.*

The consequences of climate change in the Lake Chad Basin are not only environmental but also tied to conflict and insecurity. The resource scarcity caused by climate change is pushing communities into violent competition, and armed groups are using this to recruit.

Current policies have been unable to reverse that trend. What is needed is investment in climate-resilient livelihoods that will allow communities to adapt. But local responses won't be enough. There is a need for integrated better cross-border collaboration because the consequences of climate change will be felt across the region.

With over **50 million people** across Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, the Lake Chad Basin has faced the intersection of climate change and insecurity for many years. The Lake was once an abundant source of freshwater, but it has **shrunk by over 90 per cent** since the 1960s. This is due to **rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and unsustainable water management**. Environmental change has intensified resource scarcity, driving tensions among communities as well as aiding the rise of armed groups. The climate and security policies that have been adopted so far often lack a climate-resilient livelihood approach that can help people earn money in their new reality.

## Resource scarcity as a fuel for conflict

Over the years, temperatures in the Sahel have **risen 1.5 times faster** than the global average. For some parts of the Basin, there has been a rise of **nearly 2°C** since the 1960s. This has a devastating impact on communities in the region who depend on fishing, farming, or pastoralism. For every 1°C increase above 20°C, agricultural productivity **drops by about 2 per cent**. Rising temperatures have

led to a **water crisis** in the Basin. Rapid growth of the population has exacerbated the problem, increasing tension over increasingly limited resources.

This scarcity contributes to two main levels of conflict: intercommunal conflict over access to resources and insecurity associated with the activities of armed groups. Rising **intercommunal tensions** are manifested in clashes between farmers and herders over access to land and water. At the same time, armed groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Province have seized the opportunity to exploit environmental despair by turning climate vulnerability into a **recruitment tool**. By appearing as an alternative to governments and a resource provider, in an environment where every provision matters, they secure a large recruitment base, especially among young people

## Investing in climate-resilient livelihoods

One of the most direct ways to reduce climate-driven conflict is by adjusting livelihoods. Farmers, fishers and herders, need help to adapt their activities to climate shocks such as droughts or flooding. For example, to yield sustainable economic and food security gains, farmers can be trained to use **drought-resistant crops like millet or tubers**. Similar initiatives have been taken in other African countries such as **Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Senegal** with drought-resistant crops as an adaptation strategy for smallholder farmers. These practices can be developed for the Basin while adapting them to regional specificities.

One other important step in this adaptation approach is to invest in new ways of water conservation. Adopting techniques like **rainwater harvesting and small-scale reservoirs** can ensure access to resources during drought times. These methods, in addition of being low-cost, are also locally adaptable and can help reduce the pressure on the LCB. At the same time, they can support the recharge of the groundwater, protect against floods and improve access to water for the long term. Integrating these techniques into the pastoral and farming activities helps local communities to build resilience against resource scarcity.

## Reinforcing local integration and regional collaboration

Investing in climate-resilient livelihoods in the Basin will only be successful if the local communities are fully integrated in the design and implementation process and if the countries of the region (and beyond) work together.

One characteristic of the countries in the Basin is an **over-centralisation of the governance**. Most of the issues, including the climate ones, are administered by formal institutions. The integration of

local communities and their informal institutions is important as they are closer to the population, often more trusted and can have a deeper understanding of the security and farming issues. They can offer critical insights into local needs as well as mediating resource disputes.

Even where there has been an **attempt at decentralisation**, it remains weak. But there are examples of success. In the 1990s, **local commissions** were implemented in Chad to face the conflicts between migrant pastoralists and sedentary farmers. This shows that community-based resource management initiatives in the mediation of disputes over water points can prevent tensions that could be exploited by local armed groups in the Basin.

Beyond local integration, regional collaboration is also important to support climate adaptation across the countries of the Basin. While some regional organisations, such as the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), already exist, their effectiveness can be questioned. The LCBC aligns resource management and climate strategies but faces **several challenges**, including a lack of funds, limited field staff, poor information flows and a lack of institutional authority.

Consequently, innovative forms of regional cooperation should be considered. **Inter-basin water transfer** from the Congo Basin's Ubangi River to Lake Chad, halting its shrinkage and restoring water levels has been put forward. A next-level vision proposes developing an **international waterway** with transport links that can boost trade and regional connectivity and help to open landlocked areas in Chad and Niger through Nigeria and Cameroon.

While these propositions will require important levels of funding and coordination, they reflect some forms of collaboration that will be needed to build resilient solutions in the region.

To address climate and security challenges in the Lake Chad Basin, there is a need for urgent coordinated action. Investing in climate-resilient livelihoods, empowering and integrating local actors into the solutions process and strengthening regional collaboration will be the most efficient way to hit the target. By being sustainable, locally grounded and regionally supported, the climate policies will be more likely to ensure long-term peace and climate resilience.

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