

NIGERIA AND THE LAKE CHAD REGION BEYOND BOKO HARAM

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Cover photo: School children at the Baga Sola refugee camp for Nigerians and Chadians who fled Boko Haram, January 2017. Photo: Espen Røst, Bistandsaktuelt, CC 2.0.

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In light of a recent UN Security Council resolution on the Lake Chad region, this policy note identifies major challenges that need to be addressed to create conditions for actors in the region to build a lasting peace. The issues include demobilising local vigilantes and resolving land-related conflicts.

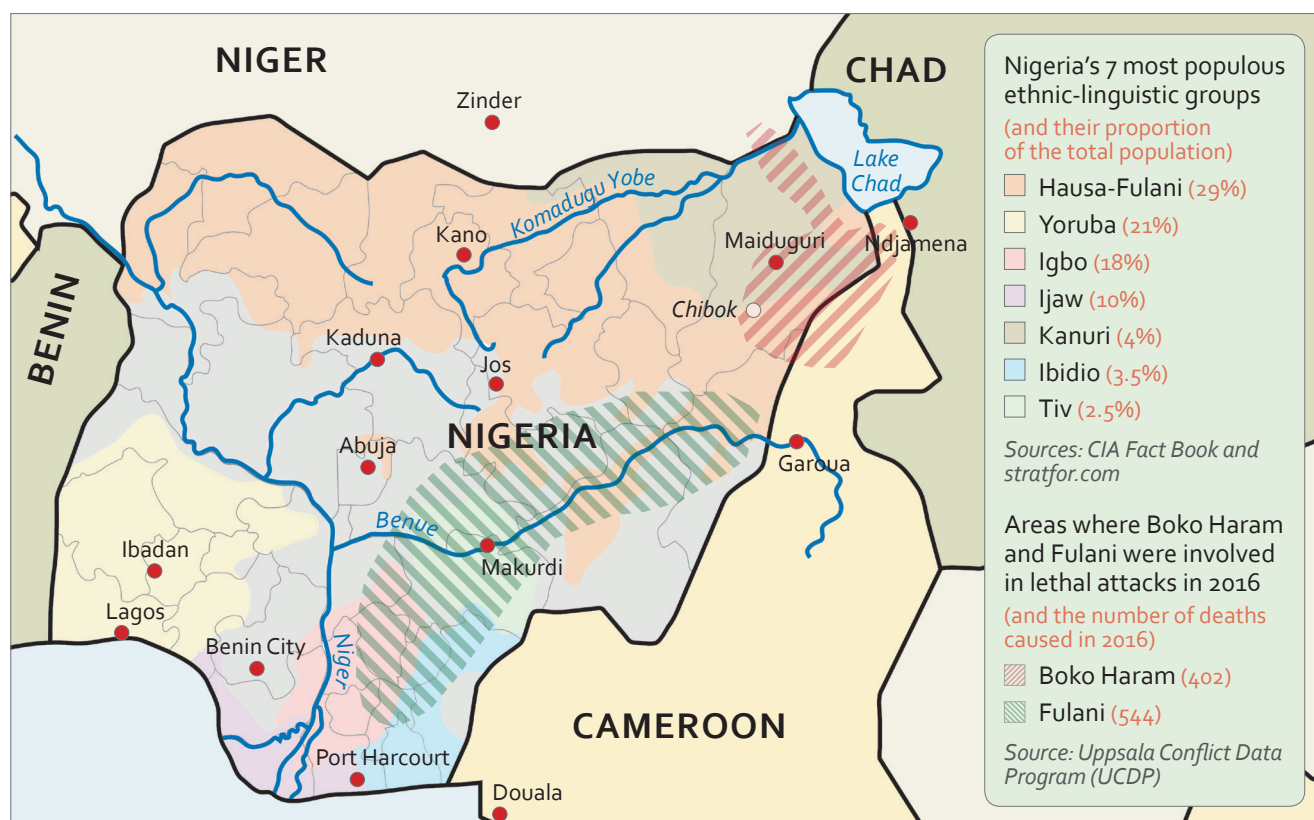
HENRIK ANGERBRANDT, Senior Researcher, the Nordic Africa Institute

Islamist insurgency Boko Haram has beset north-eastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region over the past eight years and caused more than 20,000 deaths. It has made front-page news worldwide through its abductions of schoolgirls and claimed affiliation to terrorist the Islamic State. But it no longer constitutes a threat to the Nigerian state.

Two years ago, Boko Haram controlled large territories in north-eastern Nigeria. Now the military has

reclaimed the territory and the level of violence is diminishing. However, Boko Haram continues to spread insecurity in the Lake Chad region through suicide bombings and attacks on military installations. In addition, the insurgency has led to a number of challenges that need to be addressed to prevent another round of large-scale violence in the area.

The scale of the humanitarian crisis is such that it appears to be causing more deaths than the insurgents'



The Fulani constitute about 19.4 million people, which is more than 10 percent of Nigeria's total population. In 2016, the number of deaths in organised violence in which the Fulani were involved was higher than that of Boko Haram.

violence: 2.4 million people have been displaced and 6.4 million people are in need of emergency help. Half a million of these are children with severe acute malnutrition. But mobilisation of resources has been slow. A donor conference in Oslo in February 2017 raised US\$672 million, which is less than half of the estimated US\$1.5 billion required.

The post-conflict reconstruction that the governments together with international organisations have started needs to recognise that the roots of the insurgency are found in grievances related to perceptions of political marginalisation and lack of opportunities. Accordingly, it is not only necessary to rebuild the Lake Chad region, but to plan for long-term development that includes the local population.

Need for a regional approach

The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2349 on the Lake Chad Basin Region on 31 March 2017. The resolution acknowledges the regional cooperation of the countries in the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) in the form of the Multinational Joint Task Force and especially the efforts of the governments of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. However, we should recall

that the states have pursued a heavy-handed strategy and security forces have committed massive human rights abuses, which have contributed to deteriorate and prolong the conflict. Although the population's confidence in the military forces has increased somewhat when they have become more effective, it is still low in terms of the level of protection they offer. The governments need to prove their commitment to citizens' wellbeing.

The resolution throughout recognises Boko Haram as being associated with the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. However, attention should primarily be directed towards the dynamics of the area. It is in the Lake Chad region that motivations for as well as solutions to the insurgency are found. And while military cooperation through intergovernmental organisations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and LCBC, is important to maintaining pressure on Boko Haram, there is a particular need to initiate regional cooperation on social and economic development. Each country has formulated its own development plans for its part of the region – Nigeria, for example, has the “Buhari Plan” – and it is necessary to



Photo: Norwegian MFA/Ken Opprum.

Geoffrey Onyeama, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nigeria, and Special Representative Merete Lundemo at the Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region on 24 February 2017.

» The Civilian Joint Task Force is an impending security risk «

link these together. The economies of the populations in the region are integrated, which has been demonstrated when borders have been closed between countries, increasing people's vulnerability.

Border conflicts delayed cooperation

The Lake Chad crisis shares a characteristic with other security challenges in West Africa in that it demands regional cooperation in response to challenges that cross borders. The regional economic communities (RECs), which are affiliated to the AU, constitute the traditional mechanism for regional cooperation in Africa. The REC for West Africa is ECOWAS and for Central Africa ECCAS. Although these organisations now have security issues as part of their mandate and agenda, existing regional demarcations were not designed with present threats in mind. They were primarily designed to give states leverage over the internal affairs of neighbouring countries. This means new forms of cooperation need to be established.

West Africa as a region has become both more incoherent and divided. In the Sahel region, common interests with North Africa are strong. In the Lake Chad region, Central African states are important actors. Accordingly, the prevailing forms of cooperation are insufficient. The regional military cooperation in the Lake Chad region was accomplished through the LCBC, rather than ECOWAS and ECCAS. One reason for the delay in this crucial regional cooperation may be attributed to mutual suspicions and long-standing border disputes between the countries in the region, especially between Nigeria and Chad, and Nigeria and Cameroon.

Security issues overshadow the agenda

Cooperation through the LCBC has generated a model that other countries are following. In January 2017, for example, a joint military task force modelled on the LCBC task force was set up under the auspices of the Liptako-Gourma Authority (LGA) to "combat terrorism". The LGA is a regional organization that was

originally set up in 1970 to develop mineral, energy, hydraulic, and agricultural resources in the border area that Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso share. These are examples of how organisations originally created for managing and developing common natural resources are increasingly being used for security reasons. This may contribute to giving the organisations greater leverage, but with the risk that security issues capture the agenda.

Cooperation between countries is an important alternative to closing borders and restrict movement. Populations in border areas are often dependent on cross-border trade and exchange. As mentioned above, when borders have been closed it has increased vulnerability and poverty; for example, in the border regions between Nigeria and Cameroon, and between Niger and Libya.

Demobilisation of vigilante groups

The initially slow, heavy-handed and inefficient response of the Nigerian government to Boko Haram led communities in northern Nigeria and beyond to form

"The Security Council encourages governments in the region to sustain momentum, further enhance regional military cooperation and coordination"

UN RESOLUTION 2349, unanimously adopted by the Security Council on 31 March 2017 to condemn Boko Haram's and Daesh's human rights abuses in the Lake Chad Basin region, including killings, abductions, child, early and forced marriage, rape, sexual slavery and the increasing use of girls as suicide bombers.

local vigilante groups to defend themselves and identify possible members of Boko Haram. They are called the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and cooperate with the military. These groups have in many cases provided more security than the military has been able to offer. They are not, however, under military control and have been susceptible to massive abuses, including executions of both community and non-community members. Their 23,000 members have little training and enjoy impunity for their actions, instead establishing internal courts to deal with disciplinary issues.

The formation of the CJTF made Boko Haram target villages and civilians to a greater extent. Before, Boko Haram primarily targeted security forces and government officials. However, the movement has from the outset employed a “tit-for-tat” strategy and attacked those who turn against it. When the CJTF was formed, it led to an escalation in violence.

Today, the CJTF is an impending security risk. They are not subject to any formal command, but possess arms and demand recognition and compensation for their efforts. Local strongmen could easily use these groups for political purposes, unless a demobilisation

programme is directed towards them, as there is for Boko Haram members. Ordinary members of Boko Haram may surrender and join a programme for “rehabilitation” and reintegration into their communities. Reintegration is, however, controversial; many communities resist it, as people do not trust the former fighters. Considering that even family members who were abducted are met with suspicion when they have been freed, it is a long process before known fighters of the movement are welcomed back into the community.

Many CJTF members were unemployed before joining the force. Membership has brought them status and recognition and many are unwilling to just give up this position. Similar groups have been transformed into political instruments during elections in the past in Nigeria. Examples are militants in the Niger Delta, vigilante groups in the south-east of the country, and so-called “area boys” in the south-west.

Pastoralist-farmer conflicts with ethnic aspects

The security landscape in the Lake Chad region is increasingly defined by violent attacks associated with conflicts between herdsmen and farmers. Although



Photo: Espen Kasi, Sisrandekhueli, CC 2.0.

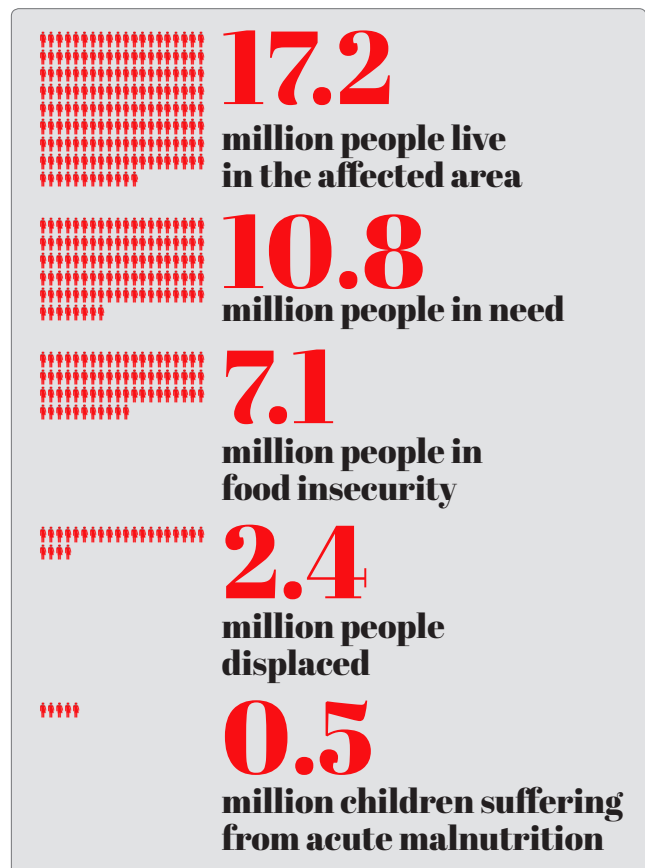
Boko Haram's attacks and military operations have displaced 2.4 million people across north-eastern Nigeria, Cameroon's Far North, south-east Niger and western Chad. Here a photo from World Food Program operations in the Lac Region of Chad.

» The risk is that Christian vigilante groups will target pastoralists and Fulanis «

more people were killed in these attacks than by Boko Haram in 2016 they do not attract as much media attention as Islamist violence. This type of conflict is not new but has been intensified by the insecurity that first and foremost has been created by Boko Haram, as the violence forces herders further south. But it is also a consequence of shrinking grazing routes due to expanding commercial land holdings and environmental challenges stemming from climate change and desertification. When mechanisms for managing conflicts over land resources are inadequate, as in Nigeria, they are more likely to result in violence.

The conflicts tend to feed ethnic and religious grievances as most pastoralists are Fulani, a predominantly Muslim ethnicity. In Christian-dominated areas – for example, in central and southern Nigeria – it is common to associate attacks with political ambitions, and claims of “Islamisation” are widespread in relation to the violence. The use of more sophisticated weapons in recent years is regarded as sign of connections to powerful actors. In some areas, such as conflict-prone Kaduna state in the north, people believe politicians are organising the attacks. This has led to an upsurge in vigilante groups, comparable to the CJTF, without connections to state security actors. The risk is that Christian vigilante groups will target pastoralists and Fulanis in general, resulting in a further deterioration in relations between farmers and herders.

The violence has claimed tens of thousands of lives over the past decade, but the issue has received little international attention, as it is not directly linked to conceptions of global threats. However, in line with renewed international focus on preventing rather than simply reacting to conflicts, it is essential to prevent these conflicts from spreading and further escalation. There is a risk that these conflicts could help Islamist militant groups to mobilise pastoralist grievances for their own ends and that the conflicts could in this way merge with violence extremist aspirations. However, the risk should not be overestimated as the sources of conflict as well as



The humanitarian crisis in the Lake Chad basin is affecting some 17 million people in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Sources: FAO and UNOCHA.

the character of the violence are different. Nevertheless, conflicts can spread and escalate when connections are perceived between pastoralists and Boko Haram, as this perception tends to breed local conflicts with devastating long-term consequences.

Policy recommendations

- Coordinate regional plans for social and economic development along with security
- Implement a demobilisation programme for CJTF vigilante members
- Invest in resolving land-related conflicts before they escalate further.



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About the Author



NAI POLICY NOTES is a series of short briefs on policy issues relevant to Africa today, intended for strategists, analysts and decision makers in foreign policy, aid and development. They aim to inform public debate and generate input into the sphere of policymaking. The opinions expressed in the policy notes are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute.

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