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Managing climate, peace and security risks in the Lake Chad Region

Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) Policy Brief

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Introduction

The Lake Chad Region is suffering from the compounding effects of violent conflict and climate-related extreme weather events that have an impact on water and food security and cause population displacement. In response, the countries bordering Lake Chad Basin – Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria – in collaboration with the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and the African Union, developed a Regional Strategy for the Stabilisation, Recovery and Resilience (RS-SRR).

The policy brief summarises findings from a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA), undertaken for the climate, peace and security risks in the Lake Chad region research project (CPS-Lake Chad). The REA is the first output of the research project, and its aim is to review the existing policy and academic literature to identify evidence gaps that can inform the research design stage of the research project. It should be understood as a preliminary and exploratory assessment, aimed at identifying gaps and establishing a baseline for further research at the start of the project.

Taking into consideration that most of the academic and grey literature has been produced by experts that are not based in the region, the REA complemented the literature review with two validation workshops, one with civil society and local researchers from the Lake Chad region, and the second with the policy community that is located in and engaged with the regional stabilisation strategy (RS-SRR), including representatives from the Lake Chad Basin Commission, United Nations system and international donors.

Background: A Regional Response to Climate-related Instability

The Lake Chad Basin is a region where climate change has significantly affected the livelihood opportunities of local communities. Millions of people rely on the Basin for their livelihoods, including fishing, farming, pastoralism and agriculture with an estimated 90 per cent of people's livelihoods in this area being vulnerable to the effects of climate change. In addition to the effects of climate change, environmental degradation and population growth, the region is characterised by violent conflicts and insurgencies

with Boko Haram being the most prominent violent extremist group in the region. Climate change shapes and influences the complex drivers of conflict, which include livelihood insecurity, negative experiences and related grievances with state intervention playing into the economic incentives that armed groups provide. Communities in the region are vulnerable to both climate change and conflict, and both are mutually reinforcing. Conflict undermines social cohesion and disrupt the ability of communities to adapt to the effects of climate change. At the same time, the effects of climate change stress food and water security and reinforce the political and socioeconomic conditions that drive the armed conflict.

Figure 1: Map over the countries surrounding the Lake Chad Basin.

Framing the challenges in the Lake Chad region in the context of the relationships between climate change, environmental degradation, peace and security, recognises that social-ecological systems are deeply and inseparably interconnected. The entry points for breaking out of this mutually re-enforcing cycles of climate-related insecurity requires a holistic approach that span the Humanitarian, Development and Peace (HDP) Nexus and includes actions to strengthen social cohesion, adaptive capacities, resilient livelihoods, basic services, gender equality, natural resource management, and local, national and regional governance institutions. The RS-SRR therefore addresses not only insecurity but also integrate aspects such as managing the effects of climate change and environmental degradation, responding to humanitarian needs, and developing governance capacity to deliver basic services and ensure rule of law.

The RS-SRR is a response to three separately identifiable, but deeply interrelated, cross-cutting and mutually reinforcing crises: (1) A structural and persistent development deficit; (2) A breakdown of the social contract that had manifested in lawlessness and violent extremist insurgency; and (3) A climate change-related environmental disaster that was considered impossible to stop, but which required attention and resources to mitigate impacts, and to help affected communities absorb shocks and adapt over time.

The RS-SRR and its implementation processes provide this CPS-Lake Chad research project project with an interesting case study of how one specific region is attempting to manage climate and environmental related risks. The RS-SRR is a multistakeholder effort where the Governors of the territories bordering the Lake Chad Basin, together with traditional leaders and civil society are key drivers and implementers of the strategy. Other stakeholders at the national, regional and international level provide political, technical and financial support at multiple scales. The strategy is aimed at generating holistic and whole-of-society changes that is intended to address both the symptoms and underlying drivers of instability.

Creating and sustaining a multinational, multi-stakeholder collaborative effort such as the RS-SRR requires a number of interrelated enabling drivers. It requires a shared understanding of the problem and how to resolve it, framed in a strategy that enables the various stakeholders to each contribute to its overarching goals in their own respective domains. It requires a number of coordinating and decision-making mechanisms, such as the annual Governors Forum, that enable the various stakeholders to regularly meet to share information, reflect on progress and adapt plans. It also requires enablers such as funding facilities that generate the resources needed for programmatic activities and supporting processes, such as information and knowledge services. Lastly, it requires monitoring, evaluation and learning system that supports the process by generating evidence of performance and impact, to enable adaptation.

Key findings of the REA

The REA found that the potential to utilise climate change and environmental issues as entry points to foster stability, resilience and development, for example by building peace through shared management of resources, climate adaptation and environmental protection, remains under-utilised in the Lake Chad Region. There is potential for using the RS-SRR to make climate change and environmental initiatives more conflict-sensitive and peace responsive to ensure that stabilisation initiatives don't have negative impacts on the environment. When both climate change and environmental programming, as well as peace and security initiatives, are recognised as deeply interlinked parts

of a holistic approach to stabilisation, recovery and resilience, then new insights can be generated, new stakeholders can be identified and engaged, and new resources can be identified and generated.

The REA found that the RS-SRR has continuously adapted through learning based on feedback. The stakeholders of the RS-SRR have self-organised over time into a complex adaptive system that is collectively co-managing their efforts to try to stabilise the Lake Chad Region. The RS-SRR had to reconcile the dual objectives of localising interventions in specific socio-ecological context while maintaining strategic coherence across various scales and stakeholders. Strengthening the role of territorial action plans in the second phase of the strategy would contribute to further localising a diversity of responses. At the same time, care needs to be taken to ensuring that strategic coherence is maintained. Further developing and operationalising the resilience dimension of the RS-SRR could help to integrate its humanitarian, developmental and peace goals and activities.

While dispersed across several pillars, the RS-SRR has maintained a focus on learning and generating data and knowledge about its processes and progress, and this has enabled and supported several knowledge products and data collection efforts over time. These efforts have provided actionable and useful information to guide the continuous adaptation of the RS-SRR and related responses. There is also significant potential in drawing on the agency and knowledge of affected communities in designing outcome indicators, and participatory monitoring and evaluation systems. Considering the complexity, dynamism and power dynamics of stabilisation operations, monitoring systems should aim to be both participative and adaptive.

The policy dialogues point to the increasing impact of climate change on peace and security in the region and the implementation of the RS-SRR itself. Even though climate change has not been included as a pillar of intervention or strategic objective, the implementation of the RS-SRR has adapted and directly responded to the increasing impacts of climate change.

The RS-SRR is unique amongst its peers in its approach to devolving and localising stabilisation responses to regional and state levels; combining territorial action plans for implementation with forums such as the civil society, traditional leader and Lake Chad Governors Forum's. However, the implementation of the strategy is complicated by the diversity of stakeholders, scales and models of governance in the region, which makes it important to streamline and standardise mechanisms for ensuring coherence. The Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) has been key to the efforts of the RS-SRR to date, and the secretariat needs an increase in capabilities to consistently support implementation through the territorial actions plans, regional task forces and to use data and monitoring to ensure progress towards the strategic goals. The REA also found that while the strategy's design seeks to enhance coordination, inclusion, and integration, further improvements are necessary in all three areas. This includes delivering tangible outcomes for fostering stability, promoting development, and addressing climate-related security risks in communities impacted by conflict and climate change.

The REA found that the RS-SRR lacked a cross-cutting focus on gender and youth empowerment in the 2018-2024 RS-SRR, and a need to further mainstream themes of gender and youth consistently across all activities. Including women in peacebuilding efforts, including environmental peacebuilding, can help to draw upon the different roles that women and men may take on when conflict disrupts the institutionalised division of labour, and may help stimulate the role of women as agents of change, and change perceptions of women as solely victims. Including women in stabilisation, recovery and resilience efforts may hold an even broader range of benefits, due to the cross-cutting nature of stabilisation efforts that also includes developmental, humanitarian and peacebuilding activities across the HDP Nexus.

Civil society is already a crucial partner for implementing the RS-SRR which included a dedicated Civil Society Forum. The REA recommends that civil society should become further empowered and integrated into relevant bodies and mechanisms. Civil society should be more extensively involved in the assessment, discussions and decisions made through the Lake Chad Governors Forum, e.g. by consistently aligning and co-locating the Governors Forum with the Civil Society Forum. The adjusted RS-SRR underscores the potential for a greater regional role for civil society organisations. It also highlights the importance of civil society in updating and implementing territorial actions plans. There is moreover a significant potential for drawing more on the knowledge of civil society in designing monitoring and evaluation systems.

The civil society and policy dialogues conducted by the project point to not only the increasing impact of climate change on peace and security in the region, but also on the implementation of the RS-SRR.

Even though climate change has not been included as a stand-alone pillar of intervention or strategic objectives, the implementation of the RS-SRR has adapted and directly responded to the increasing impacts of climate change.

Conclusion

This REA is the first output of the CPS-Lake Chad research project. In the next phase, the research project will investigate the implementation of the RS-SRR to enhance our understanding of whether and how local, national, regional, and international initiatives undertaken in support of the strategy have contributed to preventing and managing climate-related peace and security risks. The goal is to extract insights into the factors that influence the effectiveness of efforts to prevent and manage climate-related risks to peace and security to guide future efforts in the Lake Chad Basin region and in similar contexts elsewhere. The end-result will be a set of key factors that influence the effectiveness of efforts to prevent and manage climate-related peace and security risks in borderland contexts.

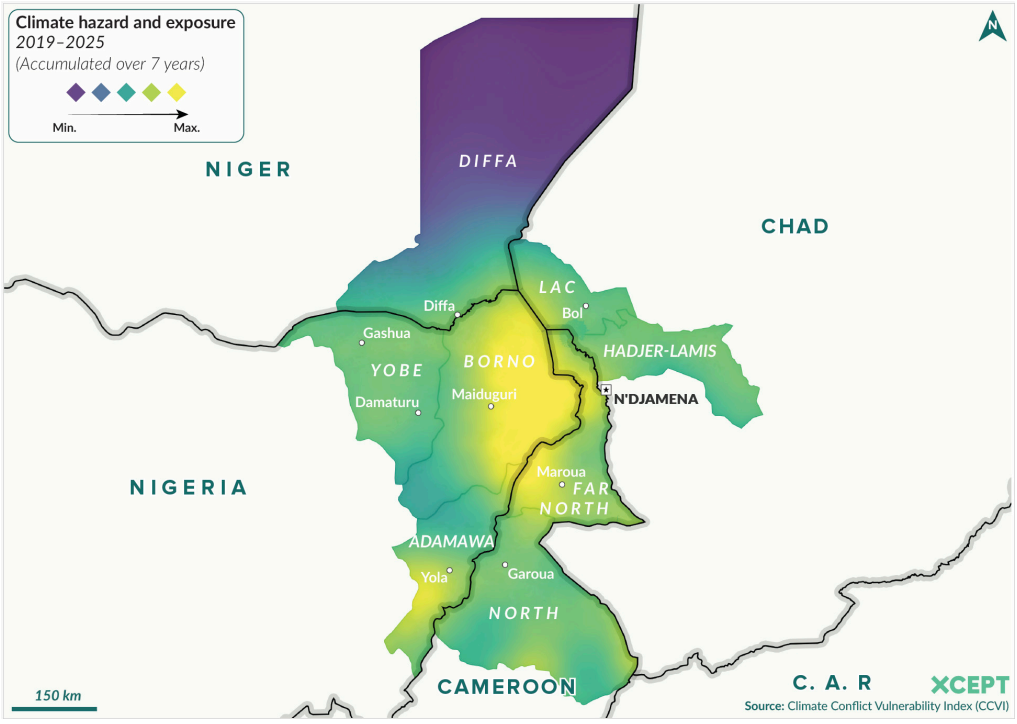

Figure 2 shows climate hazards accumulated over 7 years (2019-2025), derived from satellite observations. Hazards include droughts, heatwaves, heavy precipitation, wildfires, floods, and tropical cyclones.

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