## Conflict Factsheet

**Transnational Conflict and Cooperation in the Lake Chad Basin**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of conflict</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
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<td>Main</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Locality</th>
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<tr>
<td>Western Africa</td>
<td>1980–2004</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Conflict Summary

Distributions of water resources in the Lake Chad Basin have varied significantly over the past half century. Many of changes have been attributed to Climate Change and infrastructure projects. As water bodies often transcend national boundaries changes are addressed in the context of unequal political power between riparian states. This is visible in particular within the main transboundary institution formed to manage shared resources: the Lake Chad Basin Commission. As the riparian countries take various actions to alter water courses, conflicts can arise where the water security of another country is compromised or natural boundaries are altered.
Conceptual Model

**Climate Change**
- Gradual Change in Temperature and/or Precipitation
- Altered Natural Boundaries
- More Frequent / Intense Extreme Weather Events

**Environmental Change**
- Natural Resource Scarcity
- Change in Access / Availability of Natural Resources
- Interstate Tensions

**Intermediary Mechanisms**
- Border Dispute

**Fragility and Conflict Risks**

**Social and Economic Drivers**
- Infrastructure Development

**Context Factors**

- Water-stressed Area
- Low Level of Economic Development

- Water
Conflict History

Water diplomacy in the Lake Chad basin has had a turbulent history. Conflicts over resource shares occurred in the wake of unilateral water infrastructure development. As countries built dams to harness hydroelectric energy and create irrigation reservoirs, downstream water security, fisheries and agro-pastoral resources in the basin were impacted, resulting in tensions with riparian states depending on these resources. Changes in the lake’s water levels have further led to the emergence of islands in the lake and increased the potential for competing claims to the newly available land. As climate change is expected to impact the make-up of Lake Chad and cause fluctuations in water availability, further challenges to water diplomacy in the basin may emerge.

A fluctuating lake

Lake Chad - which straddles Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria - is the fourth largest lake in Africa, and a vital resource for approximately 35 million people living around its water bodies (Magrin, 2016). The surrounding land and water system known as the Lake Chad basin also encompasses areas of Algeria, Libya, Sudan and the Central African Republic (CAR). Two river systems feed the surface pools of water: the Chari-Logone River system sources in the Central African Republic feeds the southern pool while the Kamadugu-Yobe River System which sources in Nigeria feeds the northern pool (Hansen, 2017; Asah, 2015). They also partially fed by rainfall. The lake is relatively shallow, with an average depth of 3-4 metres which results in large variations in the lake’s surface when rainfall and water inflow vary (Vivekananda et al., 2019). The lake’s current surface is around 14000 km$^2$ but dipped to around 2000 km$^2$ in the 1990s from a high of around 25000 km$^2$ in the 1960s.

Although the damming of river systems have arguably been the most important factor in altering water levels in the lake, climate change is also seen as a major risk factor affecting water security (Asah, 2015). While there is a prominent narrative attributing a shrinking of the lake to Climate Change, recent research shows that "Whilst the lake contracted significantly due to drought in the 1970s and 1980s, (…) the lake is currently not shrinking" (Vivekananda et al., 2019:10). However, increased variability in rainfall and water levels in the lake do threaten the water security of all riparian states, albeit to different extents.

Fluctuating shorelines and relations between riparian states

Water availability and anticipation of future water shortages influence diplomatic relations in the Lake Chad basin and affect opportunities for fishing, irrigation, and pastoralism for all riparian counties. Moreover, changes in the lake’s water levels have led to the emergence of islands in the lake as well as disputes over their legal status, national affiliation and emergent resources. Between 1959 and 1994, the shores of Lake Chad regressed significantly on the Nigerian side of the lake. Many Nigerians migrated and settled within Cameroon’s borders. Despite their location, these were, in many respects, Nigerian settlements with people identifying as Nigerians and paying taxes in Nigeria (Hall, 2009). Cameroon took the case to the International Court of Justice claiming that territory had been effectively annexed by Nigeria. However, the borders between the states within Lake Chad were not clearly defined. This meant Nigeria was successful in claiming that issues of territory should be resolved by the LCBC (ICJ, 1998), an institution over which it holds significant power (Asah, 2015).

Water infrastructure development
After the region was hit by severe droughts during the 1970s, several states of the Lake Chad basin initiated national hydrological projects to cope with future climatic shocks (Magrin 2014, Bächler & Spillmann, 1996). For instance, Nigeria initiated the South Chad Irrigation Project in 1973; Cameroon constructed dams on the Chari-Logone River – a main tributary to the Lake which contributes around 90% of its input (Zhu et al., 2019), whilst Niger constructed dams on the bank of the Komadougou-Yobe River (Odada et al. 2006). During this period, the volume of diverted water accounted for nearly 50% of the lake’s decrease in surface (Metz, 2007).

Many of these projects had severe consequences for downstream economies. As the riparians increasingly diverted the lake’s waters upstream, several conflicts over water, fish and land resources emerged downstream during the 1980s and the 1990s (e.g. see Odada et al 2006). Moreover, projects were conducted unilaterally and without consulting other affected states and led to political tensions, especially since they were conducted in violation of existing obligations between the riparian states (see section ‘Resolution efforts’ to the right).

Besides having an impact on inter-state relations in the basin, the diversion of water caused by the development of large dams also caused a decline in fisheries, reduced available water for farming and pastoralism, and thus aggravated resource use conflicts between local people and communities (see case study on local conflicts around Lake Chad).

Conflict due to altered natural boundaries
As the surface water of Lake Chad changed, territorial conflicts between riparian states and between sub national states emerged. In 1983 Chad fought with Nigeria over the status of some of the islands that had emerged as a consequence of the lake’s recession, which caused 84 fatalities (Bila et al, 2014). A settlement between the two countries ended this dispute (UCDP, 2019). More recently the ambiguity of their legal status has rendered the islands a political no man’s land lacking legally defined national affiliation, which has in recent years been occupied by insurgent groups (see also case study on Boko Haram), while the resources of the highly fertile islands are contested by land users and governments under international law.

Outlook
Although conflicts between states in the Lake Chad Basin were settled legally, tensions persist at the local level (see case on local conflicts in the lake Chad Basin). These could be exacerbated, if extreme weather events associated with climate change occur, or if large-scale infrastructure projects affect water security in downstream areas. Additionally, anticipation of future water scarcity may incite states to pursue further unilateral (and potentially conflict-prone) water infrastructure projects.

Resolution Efforts

Regional cooperation through the LCBC
Cooperation between countries around Lake Chad is organised and performed within the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). Created in 1964 by the four riparian states, the LCBC aims to foster regional integration and cooperation, to manage transboundary resources in a sustainable and equitable way, to preserve the ecosystem of Lake Chad, and to promote regional security (Maman, 2018). More specifically,
it aims to establish water sharing guidelines in terms of river basins, wetlands and ground water between the riparian states and looks at the planning of water infrastructure projects, which may have implications for shared resources. This includes the obligation of member states to inform the commission prior to initiating major projects. The LCBC further defines the roles of different functional bodies at the regional, national and local levels, and suggests some guidelines for engaging civil society (FES, 2011; OSU, 2008; Galeazzi et al, 2017).

Geographical situation, first and foremost, determines the membership of the LCBC, which, at its inception, only included those which bordered the lake’s shores. Later it came to include other countries with land contained within the basin: the Central African Republic in 1994, Sudan in 2006, and Libya in 2007.

The LCBC is supported by a number of international organisations and partners. Disputes amongst the co-riparian states of the Lake Chad are settled with the support of international bodies, such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Recently the approach of the Lake Chad commission has been characterised as multi stakeholder “regionalism” involving strategic partnerships with European governments with a focus on security and climate change (Akanni, 2018). In 2015, the African Union also declared support to a strengthened mandate of the LCBC to deal with cross border insurgencies such as Boko Haram (AU, 2015).

At the same time many other organisations are integrated in the Lake Chad Basin commission’s political network. These include UNEP, WWF, FAO and the World Bank (Asah, 2015). For instance, the World Bank was involved in the development of irrigation projects in the basin and IUCN is involved, together with the Global Environment fund, the Dutch, British and Nigerian government and the LCBC in designing legal frameworks for water allocation (ibid). These partnerships have some power to shape cooperation processes and thus the management of transboundary resources through the LCBC (ibid).

**Major efforts by the LCBC and its partners**

Since the beginning of the 2000s, growing claims of an urgent need to protect and restore Lake Chad have led the riparian states and the LCBC to engage in a number of joint water management initiatives with the support of a number of international organisations (Odada et al 2006; Onuoha, 2010). These include a major project to transfer the waters of the Congo Basin (Oubangui) to Lake Chad in order to replenish the lake – the “Transaqua” project (Onuoha, 2010) and a sustainable development programme for Lake Chad, which was launched in 2009 (FES, 2011). The Lake Chad Water Charter (LCWC) adopted in 2012 seeks to define water management and wetland management objectives based on shared concerns. It also seeks to define responsibilities of national and regional authorities and create the monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms needed to make agreements enforceable.

More recently the LCBC began to cover a broader security and military mandate as a way for the riparian states to jointly counter the Boko Haram insurgency, largely through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) (see also case study on Boko Haram). This is cementing the position of the LCBC as a powerful transboundary institution.

In 2014, the recognition of Boko Haram as a shared problem for the governments led to regional cooperation in the field of security through the LCBC. The regional military power (MNJTF), consisting of the combined militaries of Cameroon, Nigeria, Niger and Chad promised to deploy almost 3000 troops at a meeting in London. Other examples include the mainstreaming of border controls and exchange of
intelligence subscribed to in 2014 by the four riparian countries, Benin and France, and the negotiation attempts between Nigeria and Boko Haram arranged by the President of Chad (Comolli, 2015).

**Limitations of the LCBC**

Several factors are still hindering the implementation of restoration projects in the Lake Chad region. First, there is a clear lack of personnel and experts at the national and regional level. Second, international agencies involved in restoration projects often fail to effectively coordinate the work of their regional partners. Finally, the increasing threat of Boko Haram in the region is a major obstacle to the technical implementation of projects, such as the Oubangui transfer project, as the presence of the group makes it impossible to safely send technicians and experts on the ground (Sansusi, 2018; Odada et al 2006). Bilateral disputes such as those over island territories in the Lake and disputes and a “blame game” over a lack of military efforts in containing the insurgent threat can cause sticking points in negotiations and agreements (Comolli, 2015).

Meanwhile, basin wide cooperation is challenged by power imbalances between countries. The riparian countries are far from equal shareholders in the commission which can undermine trust that solutions will always yield mutual and equitable benefits. Nigeria, its largest donor and home to three quarters of all irrigated areas in the basin, yields substantial influence over agreed outcomes, development and security strategies (Asah, 2015; Galeazzi et al, 2017).

**Pitfalls of regional water infrastructure projects**

Concerns of climate change induced water scarcity in the basin have been used to justify large scale infrastructure projects, whose impacts on Lake Chad and the riparian countries are not always well understood. The most recent of them, the “Transaqua” project, was ratified by the Nigerian government and is associated with the Chinese state owned engineering company Power China and Bonifica (an Italian company) and the United Nations Development Programme. The 14bn dollar project (Findlay, 2018) aims to redirect water from the Congo River to replenish water in the Lake Chad basin (Magrin, 2016).

Motivated to a large extent by fears of a disappearing Lake Chad – an assumption motivated by satellite images showing that the lake shrunk considerably between the 1960s and 1990s – the rationale and high cost of the project are now under question, as more recent evidence shows that the Lake has regained in size and that water levels in Lake Chad have to be understood as the result of fluctuating dynamics rather than of a linear deterministic trend (see Vivekananda et al., 2019).

Otherwise, the project could have severe effects on the biodiversity in the Lake Chad Basin where species of water plants such as the Water hyacinth will be transferred downstream with as of yet unknown effects (Magrin, 2016; 2011). Yet, from a political perspective, abandoning the project might not be easy either, as it has established itself as a symbol of regional water cooperation.

**Outlook**

Given these challenges, sustainable water management cooperation between riparian states remain a challenge in the Lake Chad basin, both for national governments and international organisations involved in projects in the region.

Updating the information available to policymakers and other stakeholders may create a more solid base for policy based on the most recent as well as past observations. Not only are better climate and hydrological data necessary to inform water regulations and climate adaptation in the Lake Chad region, but the effects of large scale water infrastructure projects on ecosystems, livelihoods,
economic opportunities, and ultimately inter-state relations need to be better understood and taken into consideration (see Vivekananda et al., 2019).
Country Data in Comparison

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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
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<table>
<thead>
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Intensities & Influences

1.  
   - International / Geopolitical Intensity
   - Human Suffering

INFLUENCES

- Environmental Influences
- Societal Influences

Violent Conflict

Yes

Resolution Success

Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.

Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

The capacity to address grievances in the future has increased.
Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building
Cooperation
Lake Chad’s co-riparian States created the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) to foster better water management and cooperation between its members. The LCBC is currently conducting a project to transfer the waters of the Congo basin to Lake Chad in order to replenish the water basins.

Mediation & arbitration
The LCBC is supported by a number of international organisations and partners. Disputes amongst the co-riparian states of the Lake Chad are settled with the support of international bodies, such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The development of the Lake Chad Water Charter (LCWC) in 2012 sought to define water management and wetland management objectives based on shared concerns. It also sought to define responsibilities to national and regional authorities and create monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms, needed to make agreements enforceable.

Treaty/agreement
IUCN is involved, together with the Global Environment fund, the Dutch, British and Nigerian government and the LCBC in designing legal frameworks for water allocation.

Improving infrastructure & services
Concerns of climate change induced water scarcity in the basin have been used to justify large scale infrastructure projects, whose impacts on Lake Chad and the riparian countries are not always well understood. The most recent of them, the “Transaqua” project, was ratified by the Nigerian government and is associated with the Chinese state owned engineering company Power China and Bonifica (an Italian company) and the United Nations Development Programme. It aims to bring more water back into the Lake Chad basin but could result in mass displacement and further negative impacts often associated with large sale water infrastructure such as cross-border tensions between riparian states.

Improving actionable information
Improving the information available to policymakers and other stakeholders is another important point. Not only are better climate and hydrological data necessary to inform water regulations and climate adaptation in the Lake Chad region, but also the effects of large scale water infrastructure projects on ecosystems, livelihoods, economic opportunities, and ultimately inter-state relations need to be better understood and taken into consideration (see Vivekananda et al., 2019).

Environmental restoration & protection
Co-riparian states and the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) engage in a number of joint water management and restoration projects initiatives with the support of a number of international organisations. However, the implementation of most projects initiated by the LCBC has failed.
Resources and Materials

Conflict References

Local Conflicts over Resources around Lake Chad

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