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The Socioeconomic Impact of the Boko Haram Insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin Region

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Abstract

The Lake Chad Basin (LCB), in West Africa, is surrounded by three countries with shared borders. In the previous years, the Lake Chad Basin was a flourishing area, as a result of the opportunities presented by the lake for livelihood, agriculture, tourism, and access to markets and trade. Severe drought has since decimated the socioeconomic potential of the Lake Chad Basin, but more recently, it has worse impact with the Boko Haram insurgency. The insurgency that started in 2002 from Maiduguri town, Borno State in Nigeria, has spread to the Chad and Cameroon leaving destruction, displacement, and the demise of a once-virile economy in its wake. The insecurity that plagues the region has forced millions to flee their homes and abandon their livelihood and trade around the lake. Major trade routes and markets in the area now have greatly reduced activity, as poverty and deep deprivation hold sway and inhabitants who have migrated or live within internally displaced persons camps depend on aid.

Keywords: Lake Chad Basin, Boko Haram, economy, insurgency, poverty, displacement

1. Introduction

Conflict ravaging the Lake Chad Basin region (LCB), driven by the Boko Haram-led insurgency, has taken monstrous proportions. The direct impact of this reflects in the socioeconomic state of populations and countries in the environs. This chapter discusses the socioeconomic impact of the Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad region. In analyzing the current situation, we will take into cognizance the historical antecedence of the region and the Boko Haram insurgency, as well as the group tactics and strategy in understanding the socioeconomic impact on the area. A microlevel analysis, studying violent extremism and the economic survival of people affected by the conflict, will be engaged. This is followed by the impact of this insurgency on the LCB and surrounding states at the macro-level.

Over time, the LCB has suffered various issues, from drought, severe effects of climate change, desertification, and poor governance that have contributed to deep poverty in the region. The LCB is encapsulating borders of Cameroon, Nigeria, and Chad. About 30 million people derived their means of livelihood from the resource provided by the 2,500,000 km^2 lake in this semiarid area [1]. Precipitation in the lake annually reduces from the south (more than 1000 mm yr. − 1) to the north

of the basin (less than 100 mm yr. − 1) [2]. The Chari/Logone River system may account for 90% of water inflow to the LCB, which has shrunk from 22,000 km^2 to approximately 300 km^2 between the 1960s and the 1980s [3]. This loss has been attributed to climate change and drought among other factors and has created a significant socioeconomic impact on the area [4].

The violent extremist activities started in Borno State, northeast Nigeria, by Boko Haram which spread into adjacent Lake Chad and became a regional problem. In 2002, Boko Haram came to the limelight in Nigeria as an Islamist terrorist group of the Sunni strain for preaching Jihad. Its formal name in Arabic is Jamā'a Ahl al-sunnah li-da'wa wa al-jihād, which is translated from Arabic to mean, "people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and Jihad" [6]. The phrase Boko Haram is, however, the widely accepted name of the group or more recently the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP).

The group has unleashed violence across the Lake Chad Basin region of West Africa, mostly in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. It was founded by Muhammed Yusuf, but the mantle of leadership was taken by Abubakar Shekau, the current leader after Yusuf was killed [7]. Translated from Hausa, "Boko Haram" means "Western education is sinful," and this reflects the group's two main aims: the opposition of what it considers to be the secular westernization of Nigeria, especially coeducational learning and democratic elections, and the creation of an Islamic state in Nigeria or at least in the country's majority-Muslim northern states [8].

The crises are now raging along the borders of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Between 2014 and 2015, the group held full control over large areas in northeast Nigeria. Later in 2015, however, Nigeria and the other countries affected in coalition succeeded in taking back many of those territories captured by Boko Haram. The insurgents have morphed their tactics to a guerrilla war-type, using suicide attacks, especially with women as lethal weapons. Their refuge being in areas around the Lake Chad hills around the Nigeria-Cameroon border and forests in Borno State [5].

2. History

The founder of the movement which became Boko Haram, Mohammed Yusuf, was heavily influenced by the ideology and writings of Ibn Taymiyyah, a Salafi scholar [9] explained some of Yusuf's beliefs thus, "…quoting copiously from Ibn Taymiyyah, Mohammed Yusuf describes as taghut (idolatory) any form of executive, legislative or judicial function derived from a secular constitution rather than from Islamic Shariah Law." This is at the root of his opposition to secularism, democracy, and partisan politics as practiced in Nigeria [8].

After the extrajudicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf by the Nigerian Army, Boko Haram became less visible in debate and discussion and greatly manifested in violence. The post-Mohammed Yusuf Boko Haram that evolved displayed a very violent agenda of political domination and establishment of a Sharia state. To attain this lofty goal, all elements of modern government reflective of western civilization had to be destroyed. All people unsympathetic to the sect's ideology must also be exterminated. The *modus operandi* of the group is to use brutal force, combat, and suicide terrorism to achieve its objectives. All these have manifested in the activities of the members and have also been communicated to the general public through the use of social media, precisely through consistent YouTube videos of their spokesman and current leader, Abubakar Shekau [8].

The group has modified its tactics through the years. Old methods like killing security officials, village heads, and security operatives changed to bombing infrastructure, market places, and kidnap [9]. Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS in March 2015 and split into two factions. Abubakar Shekau continues to lead the Boko Haram faction and Umar Al barnawi, the IS-West Africa faction as they are known.

2.1 Boko Haram's structure and strategy

Boko Haram, like many terrorist groups, are not static but can alter their mission and approaches, to take on different shapes as they move from one location to the next—much as a sand dune does. They should be described and understood according to how they evolve and what their internal and external organizational patterns are, rather than what they happen to be at a given moment [10]. Instead of seeing these organizations as networks or hierarchical structures, it is described as a dune-like organization which shifts with the wind and is continually reshaped [11]. These key characteristics are evident in Boko Haram as well as Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah and Hamas which include adherence to a grand vision like a global jihad, no institutional presence, giving a ghost-like organizational reality based on its disappearance when necessary, and dynamic activity that sticks to sequential reasoning, among others.

Using the association between networks' density, centrality, and their outputs to evaluate the operational success of terror networks, [12] came up with conclusions that apply to Boko Haram today. He says the group's success in operations and resilience in its ability to survive and to continue to generate a systematic campaign of violence or, more specifically, its durability and productivity describe its success [12]. The significant use of women from kidnapping to suicide bombing seems to show a pattern that reflects Faure and Zartman's [10] description of stages in terrorist activities. This phase is described as the commercialization phase, using strategic violence, follows the incubation stage in the organizational life cycle of the group. For Boko Haram, this strategy would supposedly help deliver on their mission and goals. It would hold the attention of their target audience (government, public as well as the rest of the world).

2.2 Boko haram and multiple tactics

Boko Haram has deployed different tactics in driving terrorist activities in the LCB region. In analyzing factors using quantitative tools that lead terrorist organizations to attack undefended civilians, which they called "soft targets," Asal et al. examined two distinct processes in choosing to attack soft targets. The first one being the one-time decision to begin attacking soft targets and, second, being the continued use of violence against such targets. The analysis pointed to ideology—specifically religion—as the main factor in using civilians as targets, while organizational factors like group size and network centrality are related to the number of incidents perpetrated [13]. According to Bloom and Matfess [14], as Boko Haram shifted in its demography and prioritizing in terms of suicide operations, it adopted the "unexpected bomber" profile of women and children.

2.3 Female suicide bombers, kidnappings, and media in the evolution of strategy

The year 2013 showed an evolution in Boko Haram's tactics. Boko Haram carried out kidnappings, in which one of the main characteristics was the instrumental use of women. From data and reports from Mendelboim and Schweitzer [15], in 2017,

a record of 126 women and girls accounting for 92% of the global figures of female suicide bombers were of the Boko Haram sect, carrying out attacks in Africa. It has been argued, and logically so, that Boko Haram's recognition by global media gained from the Chibok kidnappings in April 2014 helped establish this pattern [16, 17]. The #BringBackOurGirls campaigns, after the group abducted about 276 school-age girls from a school in Chibok, Northeastern Nigeria, caused an increase in the use of women in waging war. Understandably, Boko Haram realized the potency of gendered dimensions, especially in media for its campaign. This is evidenced in terms of its current strategy and notoriety and continued pattern. Looking at the trend of actions between 2002 when the group started in 2019, the use of women only picked up after the Chibok case. It is crucial to note the specific role the media played.

3. Boko haram, welfare, and development: What is the existing evidence?

3.1 Development and socioeconomic situation

Generally, inhabitants of the LBC live with relatively high poverty rate and population pressure, with about 50 people per km^2 [19]. The human population in the area is expected to grow annually by an estimated 2.5–3.0% [18]. The area is also prone to intense water scarcity with access to less than 550 m^3 of water per year [20]. Their challenges include poor medical facilities, human literacy, and inadequate water supply [21]. The critical factor to the economy of this region is the level of displacement resulting from the conflict and the consequent unemployment and deprivation. As Boko Haram continues its attacks in the area, thousands are forced to flee across the borders between the countries around the LCB, and within the states [22], records of thousands of refugees fleeing Nigeria to Cameroon when insurgents sacked Rann, one of the border towns, recorded. The same was the case with over 5000 inhabitants of Baga, another city on the border of Chad, fleeing across the Lake into Ngouboua village in Chad. This new demographic is dependent on aid and accounts for a swelling vulnerable population and fragile economy in the LCB.

The main points for trade and access to local markets for inhabitants, which are the borders are mostly closed for security. Some livestock farmers move their herds through longer routes passing Niger, from Chad to sell at higher prices at the border markets. Commercial activities from fishing and agriculture have become restricted. Counter-terrorism endeavor by joint task force has been recorded to involve "clearing out" areas around the border, surrounding forests, and the lake shores. This military style operations targeted at flushing out insurgents have the side effect of destabilizing the lives of local fishermen and farmers [5]. Maiduguri, in Borno State, Nigeria, has an ancient history of serving not only as a cultural and religious hub but as the commercial heartbeat of the LCB region. Going back to thousands of years culturally, the Kanem-Bornu Empire and Kanembu of Chad are akin to the Kanuri in Nigeria in the way of life and language. The threat of constant Boko Haram activities over the last few years in the area has negatively affected business in the region and the rest of Northeastern Nigeria.

3.2 Poverty and ripe recruits

Following the high levels of displacement and refugee status, inhabitants of the LCB seeking a means of generating income and employment engage in hawking agric produce and menial tasks. Many send their children to Koranic schools,

entrusting their children whom they are unable to care for to religious teachers. In many cases, this leads to radicalization of the children and the perpetuation of extremism [23]. Scholarly work on reasons why insurgency and terrorism may thrive shows that the socioeconomic environment is a critical predictor. The response of people, especially women, to this is participation in these organizations [24, 25]. Governance failure, corruption, economic marginalization leading to poverty, unemployment, inequality, and hunger are challenges faced by people in Nigeria and the LCB in varying degrees. According to Matfess [26], and corroborated by Walker [27], some Boko Haram women exercised agency in joining the ranks to make their quality of life better. Contrary to the argument of some scholars like Zedalis [28], regarding this point poverty does breed terrorism.

Radicalization is associated with poverty in some cases [29], in the context of Northeastern Nigeria and the LCB, radical groups offer economic prospects. A *Time* magazine publication [30] giving an account of victims of Boko Haram tells of Fatima G. She narrates how 15 of her female friends accepted to be suicide bombers after being feted with treats and stories of martyrdom. Sen [31], in his seminal work on development as freedom, alludes to the fact that women's agency and well-being are critical to political and social action. The study showed women's agency and voice through independence and empowerment in literacy, education, earning power, and property rights as necessary. These same factors, or just put, the lack of their availability, cause the exercise of agency in mass violence by suicide bombing.

3.3 History, culture, and colonization

The history and culture of an area influence the nature of insurgency in the area. The long history of drought, for example, had left the LCB and Northeast Nigeria in poverty, before the insurgency started. Colonization played a part in the history and origins of conflict in Nigeria. In Nigeria, the colonial masters—Britain—left a historical legacy of social fractures in the northeast, making it easier for Boko Haram to recruit followers in the 2000s. The colonialists handpicked the mountain people from Gwoza, made them the elite class and the larger group—the Dgwhede who felt marginalized and are currently some of the most militant Boko Haram fighters [27].

The Kanuri-speaking people, covering Gwoza, Dgwhede, Borno, and Northeast Nigeria, also had a culture of *purdah* (seclusion of women) and *mubaya* (oath of secrecy). The culture alligns with religion practiced in the area now, as well as commonly held beliefs around patriarchy, polygamy, divorce, and women's work in the farms [32, 26]. Meagher [24] argues that the specific interaction of culture, agency, and power in social contexts and how they relate to economic networks and political process affect outcomes in an area. History has evolved with a strong culture of structural violence against women in places like Northeastern Nigeria. This oppression manifests itself in limited opportunities and repressive norms for them. It informs their participation with radicalized groups in a way that mixes coercion, consent, and autonomy [26].

4. Where do we go from here?

Consistent across findings from the previous study, development reports, and media analysis are the facts of a socioeconomic crisis in the LCB. Various policy recommendations have been made on improving the human and economic conditions of life in the LCB from academia to development experts. The World Bank, in building resilience for the area, initiated the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) to engage with the challenges and developed a plan. The purpose of the LCBC is

to reduce poverty and address climate change and food security. Furthermore, the LCBC, in cooperation with the French Development Agency, affected countries, and the World Bank, plans on allocation of about $1 billion to this cause. The priority themes for allocating the funds, however, show a paltry 8% for managing conflicts in the area [33].

The impact of Boko Haram activity in the area may require a direct or indirect significant allocation of resource in policy design, to defeat the insurgency, for meaningful progress to take place. Some have advocated for better cooperation between the countries in the LCB instead of closing borders, which increases poverty [5]. This approach may have a better potential for socioeconomic development in the region but has to take into account the large migrant flows between the countries as a result of the insurgency. The recommendation made by Okpara, Stringer, and Doughill [34] is vital to this end. They state that interventions should aid cohabitation as well as income opportunities for mixed migrants in the area.

Migrant populations displaced by the insurgency live as IDP's in camps within the northeast of Nigeria. These people, in their millions, have lost access to farmlands, tools, and markets to create a livelihood for themselves or contribute to the local economy. Many have fled across the national borders into Chad and Cameroon depending on aid for food and shelter and putting further stress on scarce natural and economic resources. The existing background of deep lack and deprivation in the LCB accelerated by Boko Haram attacks calls for solutions proffered with security implications well considered. While the shrinking lake and harsh climate have left a hitherto agrarian region severely affected by drought and lack of water, the impact of conflict concludes the disaster scenario. This triad of devastation can be engaged at different levels; however, for socioeconomic improvement to proceed, peace has to return as a precursor to investment, employment, and trade.

Proposed interventions with strategic components addressing security in the area directly as a step to socioeconomic change may be more impactful. In this regard, Angerbrandt [35] states the need for coordinating regional demobilization plans for vigilante members and stopping conflicts before they escalate. Enobi and Johnson-Rokosu [36] posit that eliminating terrorist finances or considerable reductions to their illicit financial flows by the government, and global effort is the direction to take. Providing water and food in critical parts of the LCB will remove an essential recruiting tool from Boko Haram. This is because 1.9 million displaced people and 2.7 million people with food insecurity live in the area according to the displacement tracking matrix of the IOM [37]. These people whose needs are as essential as food and water would succumb to offers that would offer these seeming benefits [38].

5. Conclusion

Meaningful intervention in the socioeconomic development of the LCB should not exclude significant investments in security, counter-terrorism measures, and food programs. Shelter, infrastructure, access to markets, and gender-informed policies are necessary to guide aid as well as policy and infrastructure that are gender-informed. The possibility of reviving trade in spite of the damage already done to the economy will have to entail more than military effort [5].

A clear strategy that considers the multilevel intersectionality of factors that drive the Boko Haram strategy and informs the economic condition in the area should be the basis of interventions. These factors are the unique historical, socio-cultural, and development context of the Lake Chad Basin as well as the effect of climate change on the lake and livelihood. Policy implementation that will defeat

the insurgency and direct investment into the region and boost socioeconomic development in the short- and long-term may not be easy to enact. This is because of the governance problems, corruption, and structural patriarchy that are common to the countries in the LCB. The gains, however, are essential and worth the effort—the equivalent of saving human lives.

In making recommendations, an essential point to note is the question of responsibility. In whose hands does the buck of responsibility regarding socioeconomic development of the Lake Chad basin rest? The perspective of state sovereignty will suggest Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, maybe Mali, and other interested West African nations to bear the brunt alone—regardless of their capacity to do so. A world polity theory perspective however will suggest differently [39, 40]. This framework highlights the global system as one social system with a cultural framework referred to as "world polity." This takes into account every actor in the world system and influences international organizations like the UN, states as well as individuals affected by both. This social system is governed by principles and models that shape the course and objectives of social actors and what they do [39, 40]. From this perspective, the security situation in the LCB, negatively impacting the economy and adversely affecting the lives of millions, does have grave global import.

Changing the socioeconomic situation in the region and turning the fortunes of its inhabitants should give attention to the global and local nature of the causes and proposed solutions. Independently, and in collaboration, the affected states and global actors, like development organizations, nonprofits and other states within the region, can gradually effect change. Insecurity from insurgency affecting the region is a global phenomenon so is climate change causing drought in the LCB. Interventions designed around intelligence, capacity building, foreign direct investment, and environmental protection driven locally and influenced globally will be key to restoration in the Lake Chad Basin.

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