

# CLIMATE-FRAGILITY RISKS IN THE LAKE CHAD REGION: SCOPE FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESILIENCE BUILDING

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**CONTRIBUTOR:** FLORIAN KRAMPE (SIPRI)

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## OVERVIEW

Multiple stressors converge in the Lake Chad region, which lies at the southern end of the Sahara desert. In the region around the lake, which borders Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger, unemployment, depleted resources, poverty and conflict interact with climate change. Prolonged severe droughts have contributed to a massive shrinking of Lake Chad, a main source of livelihood for millions of inhabitants. The resulting livelihood insecurity and extreme poverty have exacerbated tensions between pastoralists, farmers and fishers. Insurgencies spreading from Nigeria have intensified the fragile security situation and increased cross-border displacement of populations. The impacts of climate change will exacerbate these pressures on the states and societies around Lake Chad.

The session on climate-fragility risks in the Lake Chad region brought together regional stakeholders, representatives of donor and development cooperation organizations, civil society representatives and hydrology experts. Considering the urgent and converging risks, the session aimed to inform the new research and policy agenda on climate-fragility risks in the region with the objective of understanding the different approaches to and next steps in building resilience. Specific focus was placed on the link between conflict prevention and climate change adaptation, and the role of youth and gender in addressing climate fragility risks.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development's overall goal was to collect evidence on 'what works'. Nonetheless, the complexity of the interactions between climate change and historic sentiments of exclusion among local communities, as well as the small evidence base on the effectiveness of responses in the region meant that the discussion on converging stressors in the Lake Chad basin centred on climate fragility risks. Inclusive development linking the population around the lake with national and local governments and other communities is believed to be essential to the sustainability of the Lake Chad region. Each of the countries bordering the lake contain peripheral regions that have seen little public investment over the years and are now experiencing the added pressure of climate change. These marginalized communities, which have limited access to education or information about regional challenges and interventions, have become susceptible to recruitment by Boko Haram and other violent extremist and insurgent groups that have become vehicles for exporting their concerns to the centre. Moreover, the food and water insecurities caused by climate change and the mismanagement of resources have resulted in deteriorating livelihoods and displacement. The resulting influxes of displaced persons provide a breeding ground for inter-group conflicts.

In the light of these challenges, ensuring equitable access to water in all parts of the region is critical to mitigating the conflict risk. Participants agreed that identifying and supporting the management of existing natural resources, and understanding how to increase their value chains, should be central to conflict prevention and resilience building strategies. The discussion also highlighted economic development as a pathway to reducing vulnerabilities among local populations and agreed that creating youth employment opportunities and increasing



market access for local populations would improve regional resilience. Unfortunately, due to their focus on national responses, aid institutions are largely ill-equipped to address most of the challenges facing local communities. Discussants indicated that strengthening regional cooperation would support trans-boundary responses, and that increased exchange between the riparian countries on the use of resources could help mitigate conflict risks in the long run.

Both civil society representatives and donors emphasized the importance of initiating education and information sharing programmes for youth and local women. As gender discrimination is rampant in the region, improving the education level of girls and implementing context-specific, gender-sensitive programmes were seen as preconditions for sustainable peace and resilience. However, tribal norms and the strong Islamic cultural heritage mean that only education perceived to be in line with traditional madrasa teaching would be acceptable to local communities. Ecologists and members of the Lake Chad Basin Commission stressed the need for reliable monitoring of the lake's ecosystem. As there is very limited data on the lake's real water level, effective monitoring systems would lead to a better resource management strategy and assist the Commission in fulfilling its mandate.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Based on the challenges identified, participants agreed on several important steps and made recommendations to various policy levels. To help promote action on climate security issues at the global level, the Swedish Government pledged support for a High Representative on Climate and Security at the United Nations. Members of the G7 climate fragility working group indicated an interest in focusing on the Lake Chad region and suggested that the findings and local experience presented would directly inform the shape of the group's future action.

At the regional level, discussants agreed on the need for a comprehensive risk analysis. In addition to mapping fragility risks, this would indicate priorities for engagement and the knowledge gaps requiring targeted research. The current work of the G7 Working Group on Climate and Fragility should be of great value. Furthermore, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2349 of 31 March 2017 on Lake Chad tasked the UN Secretary-General with organizing another high-level visit to the region with the World Bank to explore the scope for conflict prevention and resilience building.

At the local level, participants stressed the importance of inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches to providing education, employment and livelihoods. This could be achieved by making better use of the region's natural resources and strengthening institutions at the national and regional levels. There was clear consensus that education and information sharing, livelihood creation, and improved governance and institutional capacity building were the top three priorities for addressing the drivers of vulnerability in the region. However, participants noted that single sector responses to tackling these issues would not work. The linkages between the different drivers of conflict and climate risk need to be assessed further in terms of their implications for these sectors and responses would need to address these joint risks or at least do no harm to the others by addressing one. The stability and predictability of the lake's waters are deemed more important to helping local communities plan their lives and livelihoods than actual water levels. Efforts to strengthen monitoring of the lake's water table, for example, through more community-led monitoring stations, would be a valuable source of information to inform local communities and policymakers alike.