CHALLENGES OF REGIONAL PEACEBUILDING IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN AREA

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Abstract:
The Lake Chad Basin Area is witnessing one of the world's most devastating humanitarian crises. This humanitarian crisis, which manifests in the form of deaths, displacements and other forms of human rights violations, provided the basis for regional efforts towards containment. The *Jama'atul Ahlis-Sunna Liddaawati Wal Jihad* (JAS), popularly known as Boko Haram is principally responsible for this act of terrorism. Originally established as vehicles for achieving economic development, the spate of violent conflicts witnessed in Africa in the early 1990a, saw a major shift in the focus of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) from economic issues to security and stability. This shift is premised on the notion that the realization of economic development is highly dependent on security and stability. This paper examines the challenge of regional peacebuilding in the Lake Chad Basin Area, with specific reference to regional efforts against Boko Haram. The paper argues that regional peacebuilding initiatives constitute the building blocks of regional security in Africa.

Quote:
"…In today's world, the reality is that most transnational security challenges can only be addressed through collective action"[2]

Introduction:

The Lake Chad basin Area, made up of countries like Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, has become one of the most crisis-ridden zones of

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[2] Major General Babagana Munguno (rtd), Nigeria's National Security Adviser, stated this at the Sixth Session of the Nigeria-Cameroon Trans-Border Security Committee Meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, 5th February 2018.

the world, thereby attracting considerable national and international attention. While in the 1990s Liberia and Sierra Leone were regarded as West Africa's 'real strategic danger[3]', the current conflict in the Lake Chad Area made it to be identified as an 'arc of instability[4]'. The Lake Chad Area, one with the highest population growth and widespread poverty in the world, is also confronted with huge security challenges, fueled by the activities of Boko Haram, with its roots in Nigeria. The vulnerability of the people within the Lake Chad Area is heightened by security challenges that are interconnected such as poverty, terrorism, organized crime and climate change among others[5]. All of these account for the complex humanitarian emergency that the area confronts[6], making the Lake Chad crisis the second displacement crisis in the world, after the Syrian crisis[7].

The humanitarian situation in the Lake Chad Basin Area is largely a consequence of the acts of terrorism by the *Jama'atul Ahlis-Sunna Liddaawati Wal Jihad* (JAS), popularly known as Boko Haram (Ladbury et.al, 2010). The group is responsible for gross violation of human rights in the form of killing of civilians and security agents, abductions, sexual and gender-based violence, and attacks against strategic installations among others in Nigeria and the broader Lake Chad Basin Area. The act of terror led to the displacement of over 2

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[3] As far back as 1994, Robert Kaplan used the notion of 'real strategic danger' in drawing the attention of the world to the outbreak of violent conflicts in West Africa's Liberia and Sierra Leone.

[4] This statement was made by Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, Assistant Administrator and Director, Regional Bureau for Africa, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), at a briefing session organized by the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (USCFR), 23rd February 2017.

[5] See 7748th Meeting of the United Nations Security Council, SC/12463, Boko Haram violence blamed for massive insecurity, forced displacement, as Security Council considers situation in Lake Chad Basin. Available in

[6] Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, Lake Chad Basin Crisis Response Strategy (2017-2019): Mitigating the Impact of the Crisis and Strengthening the Resilience and Food Security of Conflict-Affected Communities, Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria, Rome, 2017.

[7] Lake Chad Basin Overview OCHA, January 2017.

million people in Nigeria, with 6.4 million who were forced into emergency levels of food insecurity (Mercy Corps, 2016; Kwaja, 2017). Also, 200,000 people were displaced in Cameroon, 110,000 in Chad, as well as 127,208 in Niger respectively[8].

The Lake Chad Area has some characteristics that make it increasingly vulnerable to conflicts[9]. First, it is a particularly underdeveloped region defined by a weak state capacity to exercise control over the instruments of force, against criminal groups. Secondly, the area is home to an increasing number of young under- or unemployed people who have proved vulnerable targets for those who seek to turn their resentment and despair toward violent and other illicit purposes, especially transnational terrorist groups. Thirdly, there is the evident proliferation of small arms and light weapons in ECOWAS member states resulting from years of protracted conflicts.

The activity of mercenaries or foreign volunteer fighters, in the context of the, how they fuel and sustain fragility and insecurity, has also been a major security dilemma in the Lake Chad basin Area. In fact, they are very much a dominant feature of the state of conflict and insecurity in the area. More so that access to Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) has made the situation more deadly and intractable. In a report released by the Directorate of Defence Information in Nigeria, some armed mercenaries of Chad and Burkina Faso nationalities were arrested by the MNJTF[10].

Regional Responses to Peace and Security in the Lake Chad Basin Area:

The assumption that economic growth and development can only be achieved through regional integration, dominated both scholarly and policy thinking in both the West and Central African regions (Marc et.al,

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[8] See Abuja Action Statement of the Regional Protection Dialogue on the Lake Chad Basin, Adopted in Abuja, Nigeria, 8th June 2016.

[9] See https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/insecurity-lake-chad-basin-regional-impact-situation-report-32-30-november-2017

[10] See http://www.informationng.com/2014/03/boko-haram-mercenary-from-chad-arrested-by-the-military.html

2015). This assumption provided the justifications for the emergence of Regional Economic Groups. By design, the ECOWAS and ECCAS were established to foster economic cooperation among their member states as a critical vehicle for regional economic development. The involvement of RECs in peacebuilding is also anchored on the assumption that economic cooperation and development integration cannot take place in an atmosphere of conflict, instability, state weakness or failure as the case may be.

By the 1990s the spate of conflict in countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone led to a major shift in focus for ECOWAS, premised on the realization that economic growth and development can not be achieved under an a regime of conflicts and insecurity (Iheme, 2006; Adetula, 2009). For the ECOWAS, the adoption of the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security in 1999 was informed by the desire to put in place a regional mechanism and strategy for the prevention, management and resolution of internal and inter-state conflicts[11].

The Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Pursuit for Security Cooperation:

In 1964, the Heads of State of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria established the Lake Chad Basin Commission as a catalyst for economic growth in the Chad Basin Area. The focus was on cooperation among the member states towards the exploitation of the Lake Chad and other resources within the area. As observed by (Tar and Mustapha, 2017:103):

> The idea of a regional bloc in the Lake Chad was considered by the political leaders of the region as a means to put the region in a better position to collectively harness the water resource for food production and also regarded regionalism as an engine to

[11] See ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security, adopted in Lome, Togo, 10th December 1999.

solve the economic malaise poverty, food insecurity and underdevelopment in the Lake Chad.

The spate of insecurity, which was characterised by criminality led to the establishment of the Multinational Joint Security Force (MNJSF) in 1998, in order to checkmate the activities of bandits (Musa, 2013). In response to the activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria, which also engulfed other member countries with the Lake Chad Area, the MNJSF was transformed into the Multinational Joint Task Force. The fact that the LCBC did not have the requisite expertise on peace and security, made the MNJTF to be under the political control of the African Union (AU), with the framework of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

There is a sense in which the ECOWAS and ECCAS are supposed to take the lead for stabilization and wider peacebuilding efforts in the Lake Chad Basin Area, largely due to the capabilities they possess, which are linked to the AU peace architecture. The reality on the ground is that such responsibility is under the LCBC which is saddled with the duty of coordinating military responses through the MNJTF, relying on the support of its member states for funding and troop contribution. In this sense, both the ECOWAS and ECCAS, in concert with the African Union, United Nations and other supra-national actors provide the much-needed expert, technical, as well as financial assistance as the case may be.

MNJTF as a Regional Security Architecture:

The MNJTF, with headquarters in Ndjamena, Chad, represents a regional security initiative that was established in response to rising insecurity as a consequence of banditry and other acts of criminality within the Lake Chad Basin Area. In line with the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) authorization, the mandate of the MNJTF had to do with:

(i) Creating a safe and secure environment in the areas affected by the activities of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups, in

order to significantly reduce violence against civilians and other abuses;

(ii) Facilitating the implementation of overall stabilization programmes by the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) members states in the affected areas, including the full restoration of state authority and the return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees; and

(iii) Facilitating within the limits of its capabilities, humanitarian operations and the delivery of assistance to the affected populations[12].

Troop Contributions to the MNJTF by Members of the LCBC:

Country	**Number of Troop Contributed**
Cameroon	950
Chad	3000
Niger	750
Nigeria	3,250

Source: Onuoha, 2016

Country-Level Responses to Peace and Security:

At the country level, the Governments of Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria and Niger have responded to the Boko Haram insurgency in varied ways. Such responses were designed to address some of the in-country manifestations of the insurgency as shown below.

Country-Level Responses to Insurgency-Induced Insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin Area:

Cameroon	Chad	Nigeria	Niger

[12] See 484th Meeting at the Level of Heads of State and Government, African Union, Peace and Security Council, Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on Regional and International efforts to Combat the Boko Haram Terrorist Group and the Way Forward, Addis Ababa, 29th January 2015.

* Adoption of anti-terrorism legislation in 2014. * Deployment of military and security forces. * Banning of full-face veils or hijab in 2015. Committed troops to the MNJTF. * The 'Recovery Road Map' of the Special Youth Triennial Programme of Cameroon.	* Deployment of military and security forces. * Adoption of repression of terrorism act, 2015. * Prosecution and conviction of terrorists. * Banning of full-face veils or hijab, 2015. * Committed troops to MNJTF. * The 'Vision 2030: the Chad we want' of Chad.	* Adoption of the terrorism prevention act. * Adoption of a National Counter Terrorism Strategy. * Adoption of a Countering Violent Extremism Programme. * Deployment of military forces (Operation *Lafiya Dole*). * Declaration of a state of emergency. * Committed troops to the MNJTF. * The Buhari Plan.	* Tightening of its anti-terrorism legislation. * Declaration of a state of emergency. * Central service for the fight against terrorism. * Capacity building on investigation and prosecution. * Banning of full-face veils or hijab in 2015. * Committed troops to the MNJTF. * The programme renaissance of Niger.

Sources[13],[14]:

[13] Onuoha, C.F (2016) Boko Haram Insurgency in the Lake Chad Region: National and International Responses, Presentation at the Flintlock Senior Leaders Seminar, Dakar, Senegal, 9th February.

[14] See Security Council 7911th Meeting, available at https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12773.doc.htm

Challenges to Regional Response on Peace and Security in the Lake Chad Basin Area:

Linguistic Differences:

Though the membership of the LCBC is evenly split between two members of the ECOWAS (Niger and Nigeria) and the ECCAS (Chad and Cameroon), Nigeria is the only Anglophone country on the commission. This linguistic barrier constitutes a major challenge to coordination among the political and security actors. In most instances, troops deployed by Nigeria as part of the MNJTF, face the huge challenge of communication with their counterparts from Chad, Cameroon and Niger, and vice versa.

While the language barrier between the Anglophone and Francophone countries that make up West and Central Africa has been a major impediment to transnational partnerships and co-operations, the influence of France over its former colonies – Cameroon, Chad and Niger further complicate a such relationship, with Nigeria as the only English speaking country. This was one challenge that the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) was confronted with at the initial stage when it became evident that the insurgents can only be defeated through transnational cooperation.

Funding:

Funding has been a major challenge to the LCBC in its efforts towards addressing the security challenges of the LCBA. The financial burden of the LCBC rests on Cameroon and Nigeria, with the lowest share or control of the Lake Chad Basin. This has negatively impacted the ability and capacity of the commission to operate effectively, coupled with delays in the payment of dues, thereby making it depend heavily on donors. The reality for the Lake Chad Basin Commission is that its insufficient funds largely account for its operational constraints (Tar and Mustapha, 2017), which forces it to rely so much on external sources for it to carry out its activities.

Who Controls What and Who Gives What in the Lake Chad?

Country	Control of the Lake Chad Basin	Contribution to Budget
Cameroon	2%	26%
Chad	45%	11%
Niger	28%	7%
Nigeria	7%	52%

Source: Galeazzi et.al, 2017.

Unclear Status of the Lake Chad Basin Commission:

As an institution, the LCBC plays only a supportive role in terms of coordinating the activities of the MNJTF in the LCBA. This is largely due to the fact that though the AU recognizes the LCBC as an initiative by some of its members to address common economic and security issues, its operations are outside the legal framework of the APSA, which recognizes the ECOWAS and ECCAS as regional groupings. Above all, though the mandate of the LCBC covers issues that bothered on peace and security, its limited capacity in terms of experience and expertise in the field of peace and security accounted for the insistence by the AU that the APSA would be directly involved in providing the needed technical and operational support for the MNJTF (Assanvo, et.al, 2016).

Perception of Boko Haram as an 'Nigerian Problem':

The perception among member states of the Lake Chad Basin Area that Boko Haram was purely a Nigerian problem, defined their response to the issue, which was slow and un-cooperative in the initial stage. At the initial stage of the fight against Boko Haram, each country was more inclined to only defend its territory, depending on how it affected their national security and territory. This limited cooperation was evident in the disarming of some Nigerian soldiers by the Cameroonian armed forces, when they crossed into Cameroon in the fight against Boko Haram. The fact that Cameroon has not been a regional ally of Nigeria (International Crisis Group, 2016) was responsible for its refusal to grant Nigeria the 'right to pursuit' (Galeazzi et.al, 2017). Since Nigeria was the

worst hit, its willingness to initiate discussions and cooperate with other members of the LCBC was crucial.

Weak Transnational Judicial Co-operation among Member States:
One of the manifestations of the insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin Area has to do with the huge population displacements. While there has been so much emphasis on security-related co-operations, not much has been done on strengthening trans-national judicial cooperation, in terms of identifying and prosecuting perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses, as well as crimes, such as sexual and gender-based violence among others. Despite the series of arrests of suspected members of Boko Haram by the MNJTF, there has not been any concrete plan towards prosecuting the arrested suspects. For instance, 407 persons suspected to be members of Boko Haram or their relatives were arrested[15]. This raises questions about transparency and accountability in the fight against insurgency (Assanvo et.al, 2016).

Weak National Identification System:
The weaknesses associated with the ability of the Immigration officials of the respective countries that make up the Lake Chad Basin Area to effectively profile and document persons constitute a major national and regional security challenge. Such weakness has been responsible for the ease with which members of Boko Haram and other criminal groups move from one point to the other. With large borders that are largely unmanned, both the immigration officials and the MNJTF experienced series of difficulties in tracking the movements of these groups, coupled with the fact that members of Boko Haram can undermine security at the borders because of their knowledge of the area.

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[15]See https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/252608-407-boko-haram-fighters-families-arrested-lake-chad-%E2%80%8Eislands-nigerian-army.html

Over all, despite some of the challenges that the LCBC confronts, there is a sense in which it provided the needed platform for:

> …Strengthening the integrative dynamics developed in recent years between the States bordering the Lake: border agreements, joint mobilization and solidarity to restore security, and provide joint development projects to create employment and wealth, as well as become more concrete and effective in the field of economic development to guarantee and sustain stability[16].

Implications and Pathways for Durable Peace and Security in the Lake Chad Basin Area:

The search for durable peace, security and stability in the Lake Chad Basin Area, has preoccupied the attention of member states of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the international community in general. In light of the challenges highlighted above, this paper identifies several pathways to be pursued, with specific reference to strengthening regional cooperation towards durable peace and security in the area.

Prioritise the Teaching of English and French Languages:

As a matter of policy and strategy for strengthening economic, political and security cooperation among member states of the LCBA, member states should make the teaching of English and French as languages of priority in their respective countries. This would help foster and deepen transnational and regional cooperation and solidarity between and among the countries.

Boko Haram, No More a 'Nigerian Problem':

The notion and perception that Boko Haram was a Nigerian problem were inimical to regional efforts towards checkmating it. There is a sense in which since Boko Haram has transformed from a 'Nigerian problem' to a regional challenge, its response must be anchored on

[16] See speech of the Executive Secretary of the LCBC and Head of Mission of the MNJTF, H.E., Engr. Sanusi Imran Abdulahi, at the High Level Conference, Towards a Renewed Partnership with Africa, organized by the European Parliament, Brussels, 22nd November 2017.

strategies that are regionally designed, owned and implemented, with the full cooperation of all member states of the LCBC. Such cooperation would make it difficult for insurgent or terrorist groups to locate and use a particular country as a safe haven for its criminal activities.

Foster Trans-national Judicial Cooperation:

The Ministries of Justice of the member states of the LCBA should work with the LCBC, the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other relevant institutions, towards putting in place mechanisms for accountability in the context of crimes committed by members of the Boko Haram. Such mechanisms for justice should also take into consideration, incidences relating to the involvement of the MNJTF in perpetrating human rights abuses as the case may be. This underscores the earlier call by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the AU to the effect that the ICC should expedite the ongoing process relating to the crimes against humanity committed by Boko Haram[17]. In fact, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) had earlier drawn the attention of member states of the LCBC to:

> …The importance of strengthening cross-border judicial cooperation in identifying and prosecuting perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses, as well as the most serious crimes, such as sexual and gender-based violence[18].

Strengthen the System of National Identification:

As a national security policy, member states of the Lake Chad Basin Area should strengthen their system of national identification, in order to ensure the profiles of all citizens are captured. The fact that border security issues have not been accorded the desired priority makes it easy for criminals to move freely from one country to the other, within the Lake Chad Area. Having a robust system of identification, coupled

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[17] See 484th Meeting at the Level of Heads of State and Government, African Union, Peace and Security Council, Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on Regional and International efforts to Combat the Boko Haram Terrorist Group and the Way Forward, Addis Ababa, 29th January 2015.

[18] See United Nations Security Council Resolution 2349, 2017.

with an efficient system of intelligence sharing among the immigration of member states, would make it easier for them to monitor and track the movements and activities of suspected persons.

Conclusion:

One trend that emerged in response to the spate of insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin Area, is that the readiness of RECs and states to cooperate in ways that discourage insurgents from making neighbouring states their haven is a critical factor in strengthening and consolidating inter-state and regional cooperation. Despite the realization that the activities of mercenaries or foreign volunteer fighters have impacted negatively on the Lake Chad Basin Area, there have not been concrete efforts at the national and regional levels to address this phenomenon. There is a need for leg or policies at the national and regional levels, towards checkmating the activities of persons or groups involved in such transnational crimes[19].

While the activities of terrorists have sparked deep concerns over the future of the Lake Chad Basin Area, both in terms of economic development and security, regional efforts towards preventing isolation and instability have improved in the area. Regional cooperation has a critical role to play in supporting stability, as well as reducing the potential for violent extremist groups to rise in both the short and long term.

[19] The Organisation of Africa Unity (OAU) Convention for the Elimination of Mercenaries in Africa was adopted in 1977 in response to the rise of mercenaries in the African continent.

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