

Lake Chad Basin: Conflict and Food Insecurity

Updated 13 August, 2020

Highlights

- The population of the inner Lake Chad Basin is caught in a “conflict trap” of violence, poor governance, environmental volatility, and poverty, resulting in food insecurity and affecting the livelihoods of the 17.4 million people that live in the Lake Chad border regions within Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, and Chad.
- In 2002, the jihadist terrorist organization commonly referred to as Boko Haram emerged in northeast Nigeria’s Borno state to protest corruption and inequality within the newly established democratic system and to promote the imposition of Sharia Law.
- Violence perpetrated by armed opposition and counter-insurgency groups has hindered agricultural production, livelihood access, markets, trade, and humanitarian aid and has resulted in the displacement of 2.6 million people and acute food insecurity for 5 million people, as of January 2020.
- The Lake Chad Basin regions most impacted by conflict in order of magnitude include northeastern Nigeria’s Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states combined, Cameroon’s Far North region, Niger’s Diffa region, and Chad’s Lac region (Figure 1).
- Since the 1960s, the water body of Lake Chad has contracted 90 percent due to the effects of climate change, overuse, and unplanned irrigation. Water levels have stabilized over the past two decades. However, the area is subject to high variability in timing and magnitude of rainfall and temperature affecting the size of the northern basin and creating livelihood uncertainty.
- At the same time, the population of the lake’s catchment area has more than doubled, putting increased pressure on the lake’s resources and exacerbating resource-driven conflict.

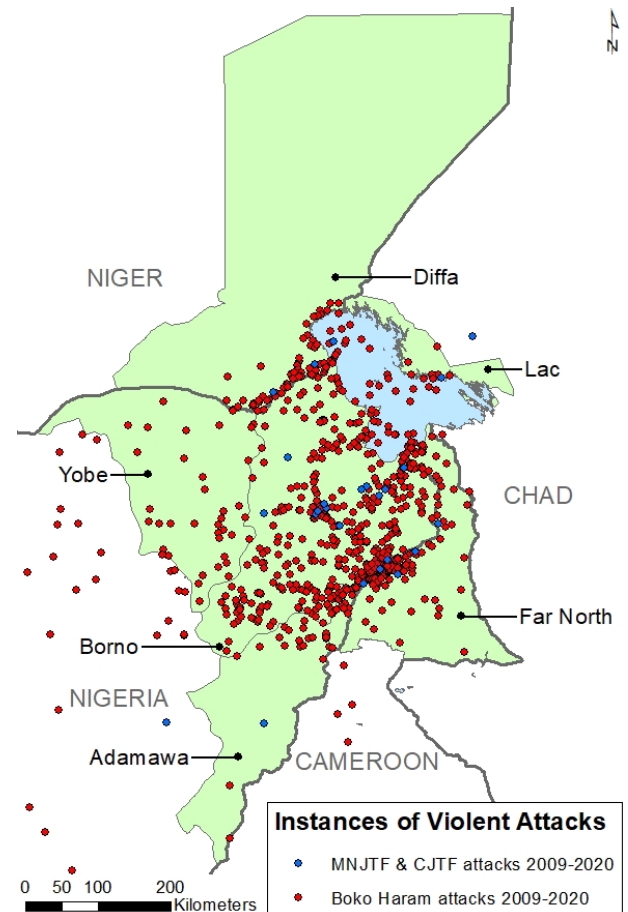


Figure 1. Instances of violent attacks committed by both Boko Haram and counter-insurgency groups in the Lake Chad Basin from June 2009 to June 2020. Source: Data points extrapolated from ACLED data warehouse.

Overview

In the 1950s and 60s, Lake Chad was an active centre for agriculture, livestock production, fishing, and cross-border trade, but in the 1970s and 80s, persistent drought conditions shrank the lake significantly. Regardless, the fertile lands around the lake attracted populations from drier areas of the Sahel, putting further pressure on the lake’s natural resources. Though the water levels were partly replenished in 1999 and have since stabilized, the region surrounding the lake remains vulnerable to unpredictable periods of intense rainfall and drought, making it extremely difficult to sustain livelihoods. Since the 1960s, the population of the lake’s catchment area has more than doubled,¹ putting further pressure on the lake and its resources.

In 2002, the armed opposition group commonly referred to as Boko Haram emerged in northeast Nigeria in protest of inequality and corruption and support of Sharia Law, and it has since maintained a presence in the surrounding areas of Lake Chad. With promises of money, food, and security, Boko Haram targets the impoverished communities of Lake Chad for recruitment. Counter-insurgency forces from all four countries bordering Lake Chad comprised of government militias and security forces as well as civilian taskforces have been somewhat successful in stifling Boko Haram’s attacks. However, many of these groups are also associated with violent tactics, disregard for civilian protection, and movement restrictions that are often

counterproductive and further fuel the region’s insecurity. Additionally, there is competition for resources among farmers, herders, fishers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and host communities.

These factors have caught the population of Lake Chad in a “conflict trap” where conflict, poor governance, and poverty have made it difficult for communities to adapt to climate variability, which is exacerbating the social, political, and economic issues that drive conflict. Furthermore, conflict is hindering livelihood access including agriculture, livestock, fishing, and labour activities and causing poverty, in turn, motivating populations to join Boko Haram in exchange for financial security and thus perpetuating conflict.²

Background of Conflict

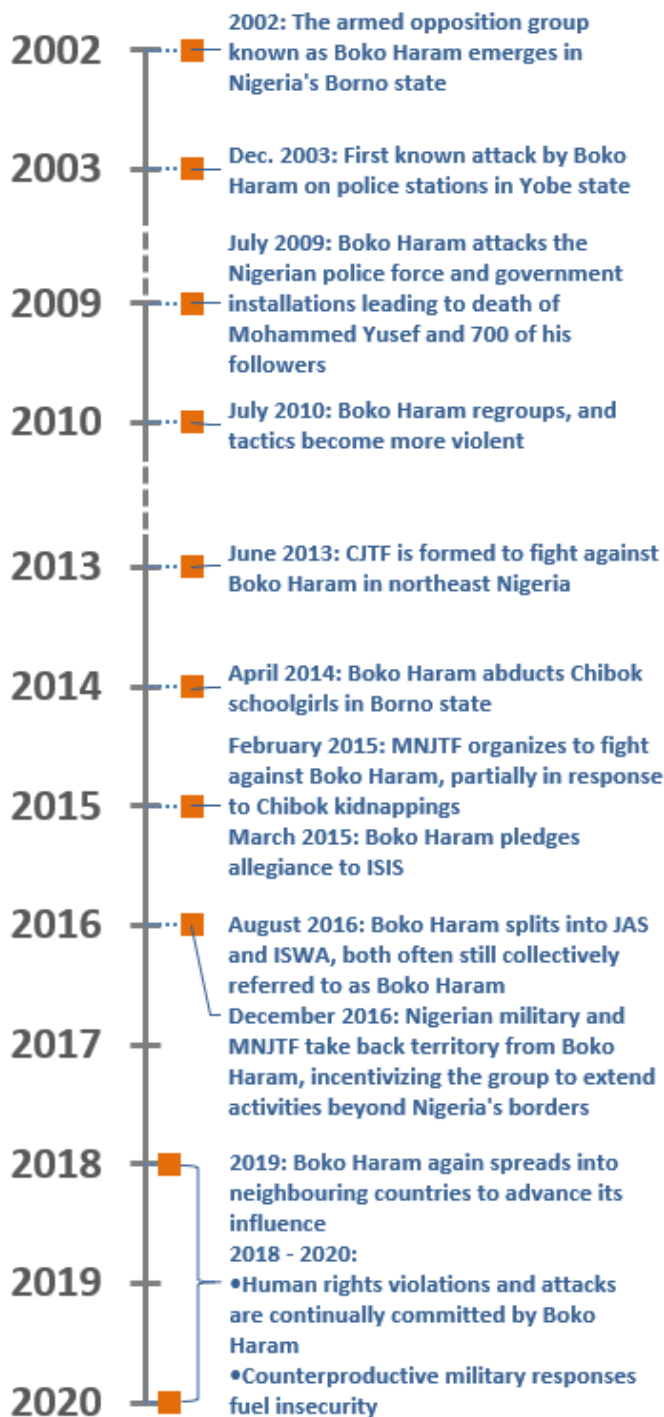
In 2002, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (JAS), translated as People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad, also referred to as Boko Haram, emerged in Maiduguri, capital of Borno state in Nigeria. The group was established under its founder Muhammed Yusef to protest corruption and inequality³ within the newly established democratic system,⁴ which the group blamed on Western influences.⁵ Boko Haram also sought to promote a return to a ‘purer’, more strict Islamic way of life⁶ with the imposition of Sharia Law.⁷

In July 2009, the group carried out attacks on the police force and government installations⁸ in Bauchi state, then spread to the states of Borno, Kano, and Yobe. In response, a joint military task force killed Muhammad Yusef and 700 of his followers and destroyed the group’s operational mosque.⁹ Boko Haram regrouped under new leadership in 2010, and attacks increased in frequency and became more violent. The group eventually declared control over territory, spreading into neighbouring countries where attacks have taken place in northern Cameroon, southeastern Niger, and western Chad.¹⁰

Counter-insurgency groups were established to fight against Boko Haram’s influence and have been somewhat successful at returning security to the region, but they are often linked to violent and counterproductive actions. For instance, the Multi National Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which consists of military personnel and militias from all four countries bordering Lake Chad, often engages in heavy-handed tactics focused on conquering territory and engaging in battle, having little regard for community livelihoods or protection. Additionally, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), a self-defence militia in Maiduguri, is often accused of assaults and killings of those in armed opposition groups, resulting in gender-based violence, diversion of humanitarian aid, and movement restrictions.¹¹

As depicted in Figure 2, instances of violent attacks have increased in frequency and have become more concentrated around Lake Chad over the past decade. While violence was initially concentrated in northeast Nigeria from 2009 to 2012, it has since spread more into bordering Diffa (Niger), Lac (Chad), and Far North (Cameroon) regions.¹² Between the four countries, there are contrasting perceptions regarding whether Boko Haram is a regional or primarily Nigerian phenomenon. This has resulted in each country pursuing different methods and degrees of commitment to counter-insurgency and has hindered coherent regional action.¹³

Lake Chad Basin Conflict Timeline



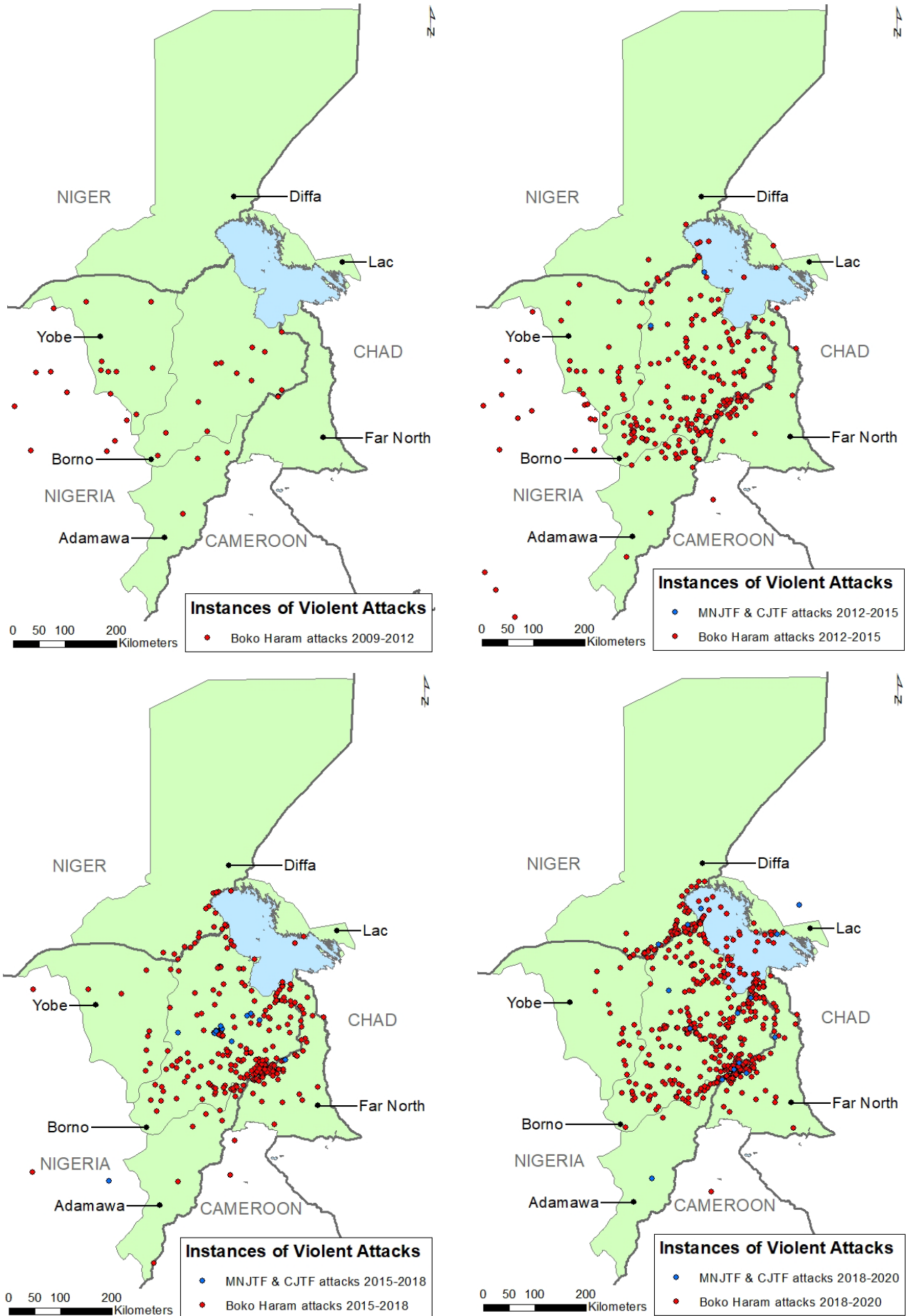


Figure 2. Instances of violent attacks committed by both Boko Haram and counter-insurgency groups in the Lake Chad Basin from June 2009 to June 2012 (top left), June 2012 to June 2015 (top right), June 2015 to June 2018 (bottom left), and June 2018 to June 2020 (bottom right). Source: Data points extrapolated from ACLED data warehouse.

Background of Agriculture

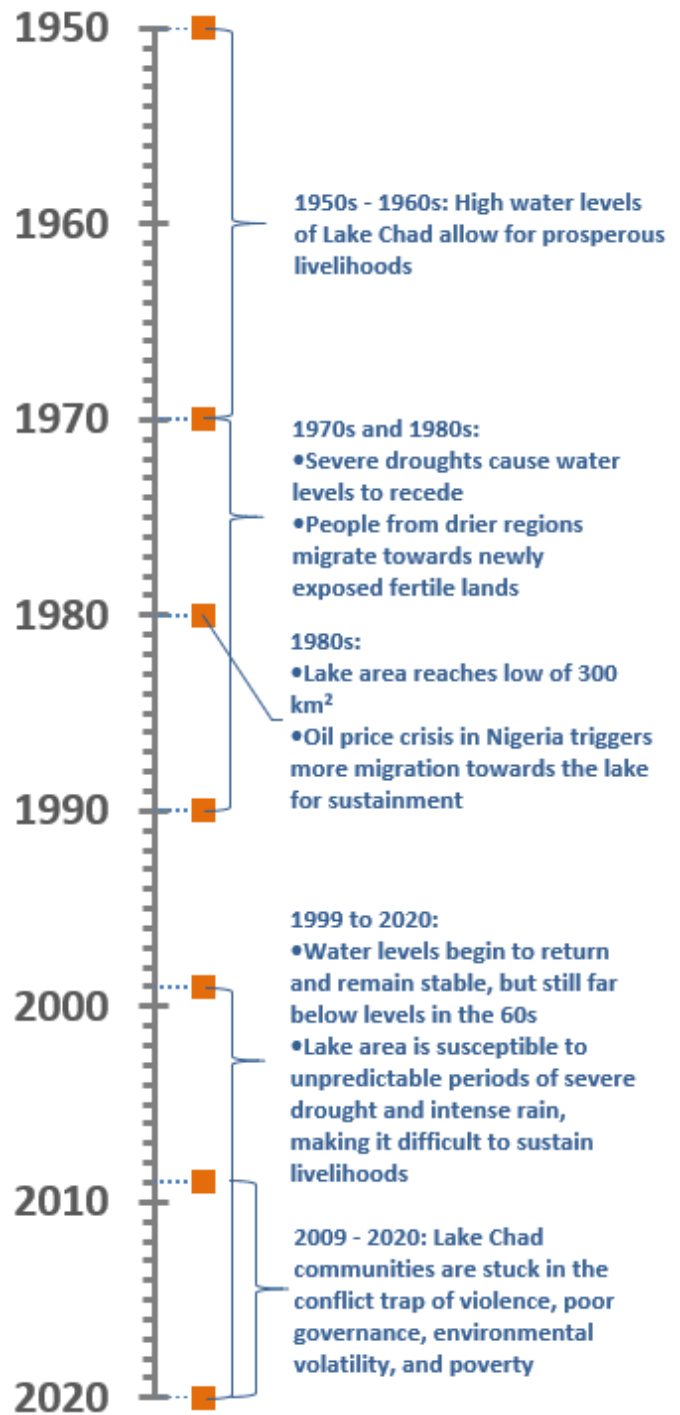
Lake Chad is located in the Sahel and borders Cameroon’s Far North region, Chad’s Lac and Hadjer-Lamis regions, Niger’s Diffa region, and northeastern Nigeria’s Borno state.¹⁴ In the 1950s and 60s, the water levels of Lake Chad allowed for prosperous livelihoods with plenty of fertile farmland, pasture, and fish,¹⁵ but in the 1970s, persistent drought conditions in the Sahel began to dry the lake, particularly in the northern basin.¹⁶ In the 1970s and 80s, people from drier regions of the Sahel began migrating to the fertile basin of Lake Chad, putting increased pressure on the dwindling resources¹⁷ as the lake’s catchment area doubled in population from 13 million to 26 million between 1960 and 1990.¹⁸ Today, the population of the Lake Chad catchment area is close to 30 million,¹⁹ of which 17.4 million reside in the inner basin regions bordering the lake.²⁰

By the 1980s, the lake area reached a low of 300 square kilometres, down from 22,000 square kilometres in the 1960s, and the northern basin remained dry for several months out of the year from the mid-1970s to late 1990s. Since the 1960s, the water body has contracted 90 percent due to the effects of climate change, overuse, and unplanned irrigation.²¹ Figure 3 depicts the rapid deterioration of the lake’s water levels between 1973 and 2017.

By 1999, the northern basin again had water year-round.²² The lake is currently not shrinking, and its size has been relatively stable over the last two decades. However, the lake size is subject to variability based on the timing and magnitude of rainfall and high temperatures as a result of the changing climate, largely affecting the size of the northern basin.²³ In 2018, open water was present throughout the year only in part of the southern basin, mainly in Cameroon and Chad, with the remaining lake basin subject to intra-annual variations in surface water distribution as depicted in Figure 3.²⁴

The variability in water surface area creates livelihood uncertainty²⁵ as 80 to 90 percent of the Lake Chad population depends on agriculture, livestock, fishing, and manual labour for livelihoods.²⁶ The number of extreme rainfall days over West Africa and the Sahel is increasing, and both drought and flooding are becoming longer and more frequent. In areas close to the lake where the risk of flooding is highest, occupants switch from farming to pastoralism and fishing depending on the lake level. Unpredictable changes to the lake level make it difficult to plan livelihood activities, resulting in decreased food production for the region.²⁷

Lake Chad Basin Climate Timeline



Lake Chad Water Surface Area in 1973 versus 2017 and Surface Water Seasonality in 2018

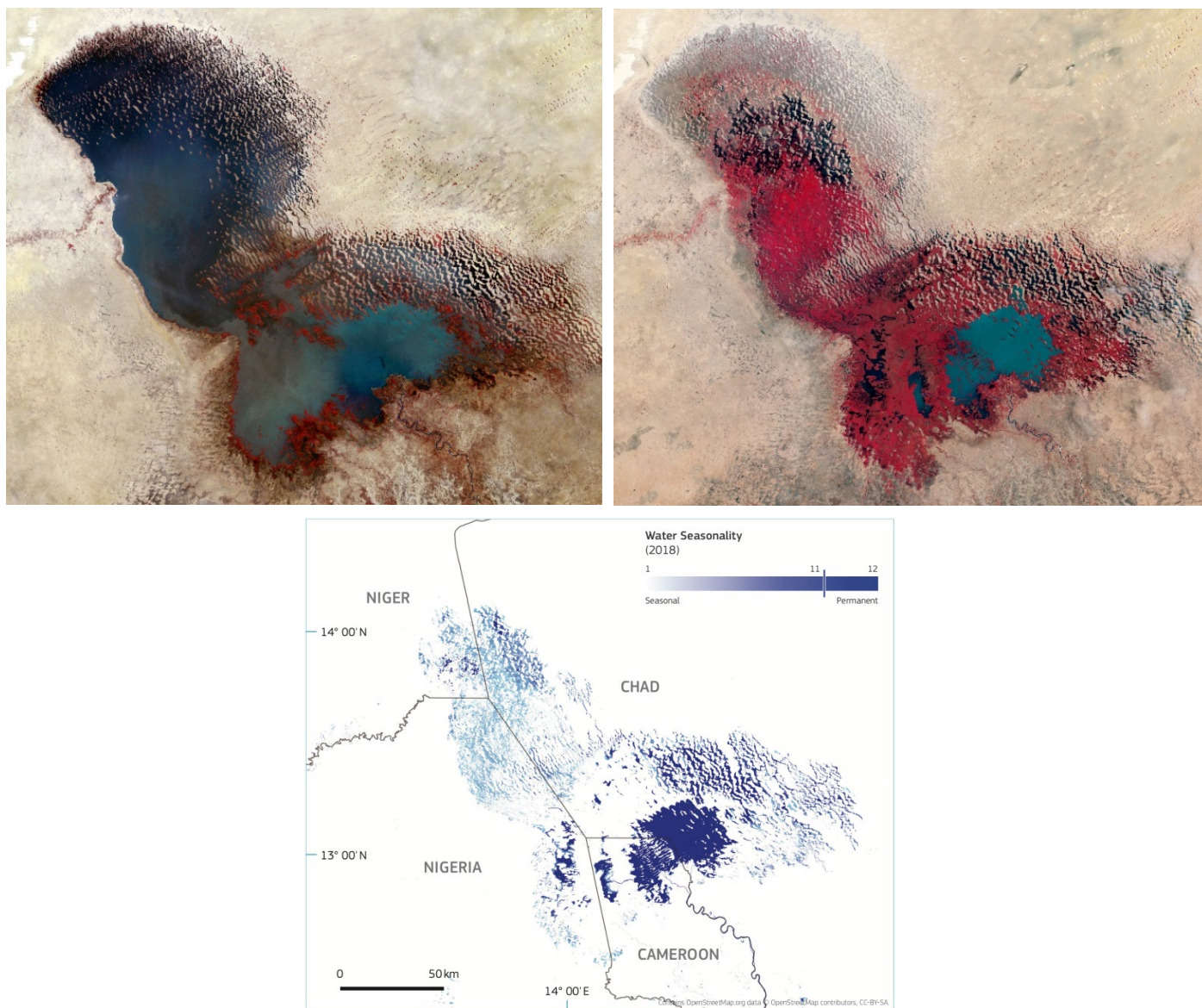


Figure 3: NASA Earth Observatory images of water levels of Lake Chad in 1973 (top left) versus 2017 (top right) using Landsat data and surface water seasonality map in 2018 (bottom centre). Source: "The Ups and Downs of Lake Chad." NASA Earth Observatory. <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/91291/the-ups-and-downs-of-lake-chad>. (top left and top right). Source: Belward, Alan, Jean-François Pekel, and Andrew Cottam. "Atlas of Global Surface Water Dynamics." PreventionWeb. 2020. <https://www.preventionweb.net/publications/view/72293>. (bottom centre)

Impacts of Conflict on Livelihoods and Food Security

Before the start of the insurgency in 2009, Lake Chad was active in cross-border trade in goods such as agricultural produce (cereals and cash crops), fish, and livestock and offered economic opportunities for its residents and migrant labour.²⁸ However, in recent years, Boko Haram has been widely involved in looting harvests, raiding livestock, and hindering fishing activities in the region.²⁹ Boko Haram related violence in combination with restriction measures put in place by counter-insurgency groups is disrupting livelihoods and basic social services and is hindering market and trade activities. Additionally, conflict and climate variability has limited land resources and is escalating conflict among the communities of Lake Chad.³⁰ Throughout the Lake Chad Basin, insecurity has resulted in the displacement of a total of 2.6 million people³¹ and acute food insecurity for 5 million people as of January 2020.³²

Impacts of Conflict on Farming Livelihoods

Agriculture is a significant part of the regional economy of Lake Chad and engages 60 percent of the basin's population.³³ However, insecurity, displacement, and military enforced movement restrictions have stifled agricultural livelihoods as people are often unable to access land or lack the means to farm. When they are,

crops are often destroyed or harvested by armed opposition groups.³⁴ Military imposed restrictions can also affect which crops can be planted and where they can be planted. In some areas with high insurgency activity, the production of tall agricultural crops such as maize has been restricted to deter hiding places for armed opposition groups.³⁵ While crop diversification is a primary method for populations to protect against climate variability, many have had to use their savings to escape violence and no longer have the means to plant multiple crops in different locations.³⁶

Additionally, in conflict-affected areas, insecurity often drives risk-averting behaviours within livelihood systems that result in lower production and increase food insecurity. For instance, farmers may withdraw their land and labour from market-driven to subsistence production, planting lower-value, quicker-maturing varieties closer to home. In the Lake Chad Basin, fear of insecurity and the threat of being kidnapped has prevented farmers from fully engaging in agricultural activities. In many cases, farmers abandoned their farms for fear of attacks and crop-raiding by Boko Haram insurgents.³⁷ Displacement and fear of attacks have also reduced the need for hired labour in the agricultural sector³⁸ as well as agricultural wages.³⁹

Also, in fragile states, higher population density in resource-rich areas drives competition for finite land and water resources, weakening livelihood opportunities for all. Around Lake Chad, widespread displacement has put additional pressure on the water and land resources of surrounding host communities and increased social tensions. For instance, arable land is often used for shelters for IDPs and hinders its productive potential for host community farmers. IDPs in host communities are also often given a plot of land to cultivate, putting added pressure on already impoverished host communities with limited natural resources.⁴⁰

Furthermore, suspected improvised explosive devices (IEDs) put in place by Boko Haram on farmland are limiting agricultural activities. For instance, between January 2016 and March 2018, 439 casualties resulted from landmines and unexploded bombs in northeast Nigeria.⁴¹ Authorities restrict the use of fertilizers for agriculture as they can be used to produce IEDs.⁴² Finding land that is safe, fertile, and unclaimed by host communities proves difficult for displaced populations, particularly for women if their husbands, fathers, or sons have been killed, captured, or recruited.⁴³

It is important to consider that conflict poses several constraints to in season agricultural monitoring, including limiting access to the field for regular crop assessments and surveys due to safety concerns. While satellite-based information can play a key role in monitoring agriculture where access to the field is not available, difficulties remain in the limited availability of ground-based datasets that help validate these satellite analyses due to the limited field access. These limitations make it difficult to assess real-time impacts of conflict on food production, creating some uncertainty regarding the food security of affected regions. Additionally, COVID-19 movement restrictions have further disrupted field surveys and crop assessments, resulting in greater uncertainty in yield estimation for 2020 cereal crops.⁴⁴

Impacts of Conflict on Pastoral Livelihoods

Pastoralists face similar difficulties in accessing grazing land and water for their herds as they are often moved by government security forces or displaced due to conflict.⁴⁵ The bed of Lake Chad allows for herds to access forage and water during a deficit or pastoral lean period; however, Boko Haram related conflict and security restrictions put in place by local authorities prevent access to this area. Transhumance and cross-border flows are also vital in times of fodder shortages, but movement is largely impeded by border closures and inaccessibility of some areas due to security constraints. As a result, the increasing concentration of livestock is putting added pressure on already limited water, land resources, and health care services, threatening the health of herds, and adding to social tensions of communities. Additionally, livestock is often killed or taken by armed opposition groups or abandoned by pastoralists fleeing violence.⁴⁶

Impacts of Conflict on Fishing Livelihoods

In Lake Chad, fishing is an important source of income for the population and contributes a significant amount to the local economy; however, environmental variability, conflict, and displacement have contributed to a 60 percent decline in fish production. Those that depend on fishing are often moved by security forces in an effort to deter Boko Haram activity and no longer have access to fishing equipment due to conflict.⁴⁷ For instance, the Nigerian military placed restrictions and embargoes on fishing activities in Lake Chad to reduce the risk of armed opposition groups using fisheries products to generate revenue. These restrictions, in combination with

the presence of insurgency groups, have drastically disrupted fishing activities in the region, and many people have abandoned boats and fishing equipment as they fled to safer ground.⁴⁸

Impacts of Conflict on Markets and Trade

In the Lake Chad region, fears of insurgency attacks and bombings keep people from accessing markets to buy and sell goods. Also, security forces have closed markets and disrupted internal and cross border travel of people and goods such as fertilizer in an effort to improve local economies and food security and disrupt potential revenue streams for Boko Haram.⁴⁹ However, as the economies of the four countries of the Lake Chad Basin are strongly integrated and interdependent,⁵⁰ the lack of market trade has increased staple food prices in some areas, further reducing food access for vulnerable communities.⁵¹ For example, in conflict-affected areas in Niger and Nigeria, staple food prices increased by 50 to 100 percent in 2017 compared to the previous year due to insecurity and increased transport cost.⁵² In Nigeria, the significant elevation in food prices in 2017 was compounded by a 16.5 increase in inflation, the highest since the 2005 increase of 17.86 percent.

Impacts of Conflict on Other Income Generating Activities

The civil insecurity and its effects on seasonal activities are continuing to disrupt food security in the region severely. Other sources of income such as farm labour, petty trade, timber production, charcoal and firewood sales, casual labour, and self-employment are generating well-below-average levels of income, contributing to the sharp reduction in household income and purchasing power in affected areas and limiting food access. For instance, movement restrictions, particularly in IDP and refugee sites, have led to deforestation as communities utilize firewood for cooking, which has in turn decreased the income-earning opportunity of firewood sales.⁵³ Additionally, some poorer households make money by selling their labour to wealthier local farmers.⁵⁴ When agricultural production is hindered by conflict, the incomes and purchasing power of these households are likewise affected.

Regional Impacts

Specifically, the regional impacts of the conflict trap on farming, livestock, and fishing livelihoods as well as market and trade activities are as follows:

Nigeria: Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states

- Agriculture production in the northeast has been severely affected by Boko Haram insurgency. A report by the CSIS Global Food Security Program estimated sorghum production decreased 82 percent, rice production decreased 67 percent, and millet production decreased 55 percent in Borno state between 2010 and 2015.⁵⁵ Additionally, an assessment conducted by the Government of Nigeria indicated that between 2014 and 2015, the country experienced \$3.7 billion in agricultural losses as a result of conflict, primarily in Borno state.⁵⁶
- The decline of agricultural production in the northeast is attributed to restriction of farm access by Boko Haram and the state military, delayed planting and harvesting due to lack of human capital, abandonment of fields due to population displacement, and disruptions of input supply and transportation and sale of harvested crops.⁵⁷
- Many youths who used to support agriculture in rural areas have moved, and others have been displaced as IDPs or refugees. This has reduced the labour supply needed for agricultural activities in Maiduguri, which was previously an important trading area between the agricultural regions of West and Central Africa and the drier Sahelian regions. The decline of trading activities there has had a substantial effect on food shortages.⁵⁸
- In the northeastern states of northern Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe, insecurity and restriction of movement caused by the presence of Boko Haram has severely hindered market access and trade.⁵⁹ For instance, between 2010 and 2014, grain flows to and from Borno state to other states decreased from 300,000 tons to 100,000 tons due to a decrease in production and disruptions in transportation and market access.⁶⁰ Also, in December 2018, Boko Haram militants seized control of the town of Baga in Borno state,⁶¹ blocking access to the market which was a main trade area due to its proximity to Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. This closure has resulted in a significant trade loss and price increases across all four countries.⁶² Additionally, in August 2019, the Government closed its borders to curb smuggling, particularly of rice, and to improve domestic production and the local economy; however, prices

- remained higher in the northeast compared to the rest of the country due to insecurity and floods.⁶³
- Prices of staple foods have increased significantly since the onset of conflict and further limited food access for affected communities. In 2017, prices of staple cereals in the northeast were 70-124 percent higher than the previous year.⁶⁴ In 2020, market prices remain at extremely high levels in the northeast due to persisting insecurity and its impact on trade and market access.⁶⁵
- According to a REACH initiative report monitoring the hard-to-reach areas of northeast Nigeria, the primary drivers of food insecurity from November 2018 to March 2019 were movement restrictions (both self-imposed restrictions based on personal risk and armed group-imposed farming bans and gender-based restrictions) and supply disruption (limited access to crop variety and inability to replace or repair destroyed or looted tools). The secondary drivers of food insecurity of the assessed settlements were confiscation of livestock and harvests, and the lesser drivers of food insecurity were the arrival of IDPs or returnees and price shocks.⁶⁶
- It is projected that between 2,104,761 and 2,300,000 people in the northeastern states will continue to face Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of acute food insecurity through September 2020, based on Cadre Harmonisé and FEWS NET projections. Figure 4 depicts a strong association between locations of Boko Haram and counter-insurgency related violence compared with locations of projected food insecurity.

Comparison of Boko Haram and counter-insurgency violence in Nigeria with projected food insecurity

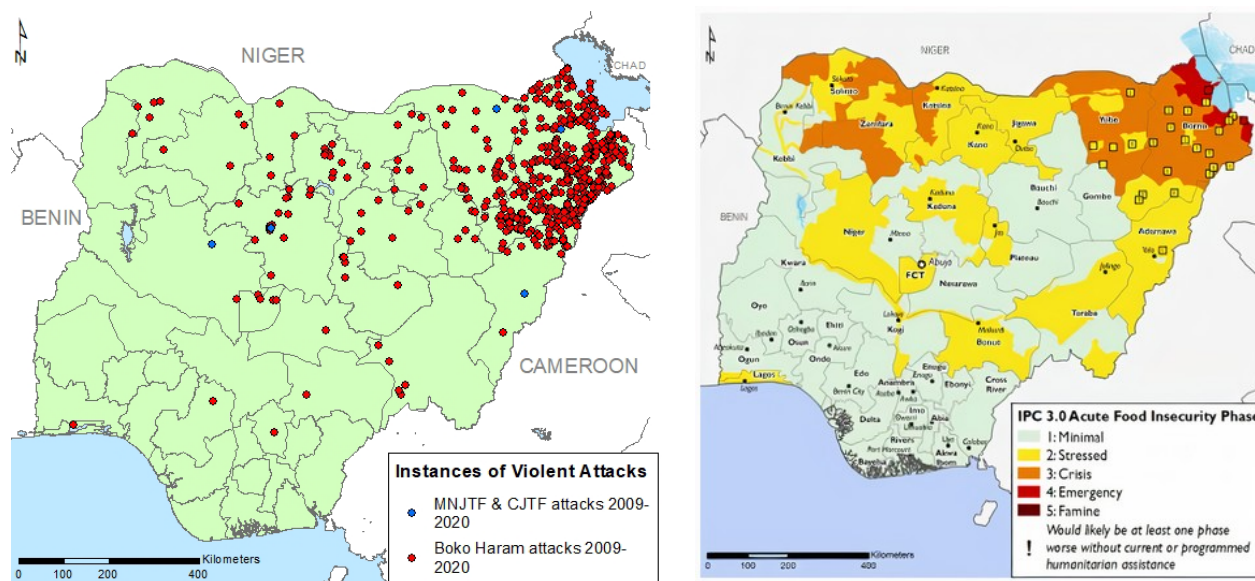


Figure 4: Instances of violent attacks committed by Boko Haram and counter-insurgency groups in Nigeria from June 2009-June 2020 (left) compared to projected acute food insecurity for the June-September 2020 period (right). Sources: Data points extrapolated from ACLED data warehouse (left); "West Africa Nigeria." Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET). June 2020. <https://fewsn.net/west-africa/nigeria>. (right)

Cameroon: Far North

- The security situation in the Far North worsened in 2019 as Boko Haram attacks increased 40 percent in the last three months of the year, constraining agricultural production and resulting in localized production shortfalls.⁶⁷
- Recent armed opposition group looting and violence in Logone-et-Chari, Mayo-Sava, and Mayo-Tsanaga departments impacted agricultural production during the recent October through December 2019 main harvest, disrupting livelihoods and increasing food insecurity.⁶⁸ Additionally, 2020 harvests in the Northwest are expected to be reduced for the fourth consecutive year as insecurity and displacements continue to affect agricultural activities and limit farmers' access to fields.⁶⁹ In the Far North, theft and destruction of productive assets are common, and armed opposition groups sometimes abduct farmers and fishers to work for them.⁷⁰
- Access to markets is limited, and many markets have been shut down as they are regularly targeted by suicide bombers of insurgency groups.⁷¹ Since the market in Baga closed, farmers are no longer able to export their crops to the Nigerian market and now must find alternative markets in their own country.⁷² The recent increase in Boko Haram incursions has prevented movement and limited income-earning

opportunities, particularly in places where border trade is a significant means of livelihood.⁷³

- Figure 5 depicts the relationship between locations of Boko Haram and counter-insurgency related violence compared with projections indicating that between 355,565 and 305,936 people will likely experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse levels of acute food insecurity for the June to September 2020 period in the Far North region, based on Cadre Harmonisé and FEWS NET projections.

Comparison of Boko Haram and counter-insurgency violence in Cameroon with projected food insecurity

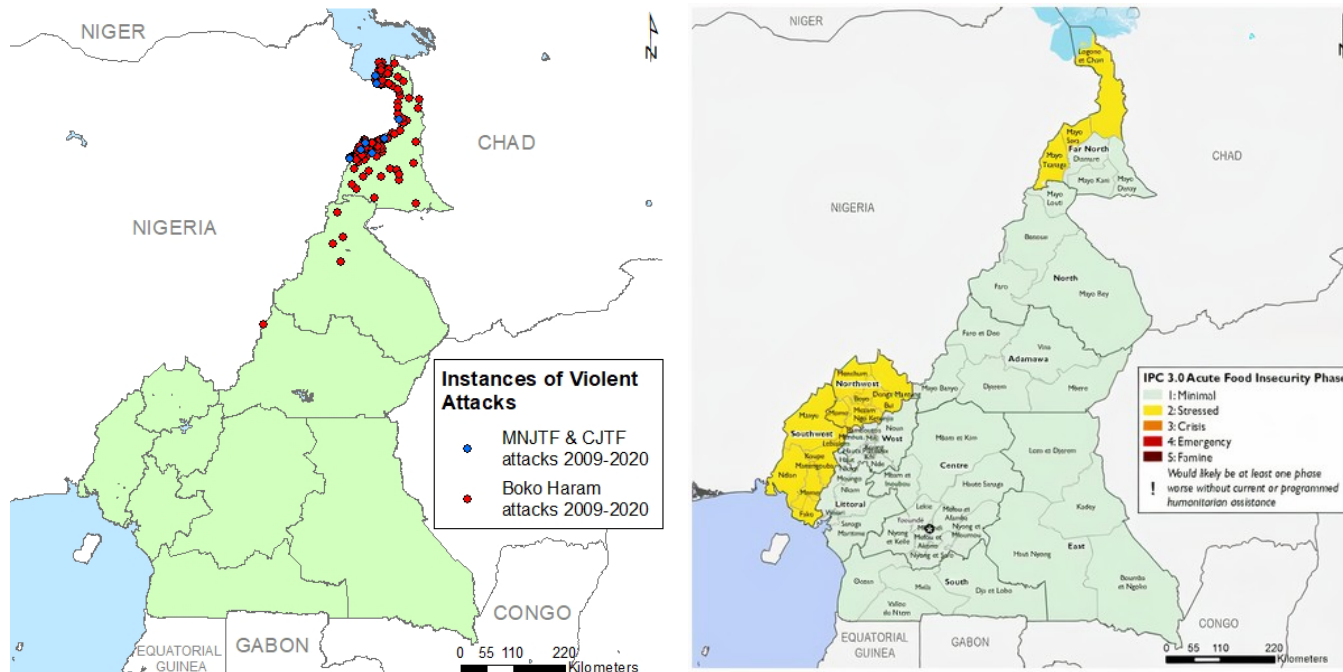


Figure 5: Instances of violent attacks committed by Boko Haram and counter-insurgency groups in Cameroon from June 2009-June 2020 (left) compared to projected acute food insecurity for the June-September 2020 period (right). Sources: Data points extrapolated from ACLED data warehouse (left); "West Africa Cameroon." Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET). June 2020. <https://fews.net/west-africa/cameroon>. (right)

Niger: Diffa

- At the extreme southeast of the country, cultivation is done using the residual soil moisture as the lake water levels recede after the rainy season, known as flood-retreat cultivation.⁷⁴ However, the Government has declared the most fertile area of the Diffa region off-limits to civilians and limited fishing and red pepper farming as they believed the profits would be used to support armed opposition groups.⁷⁵ Sweet red peppers are a valuable commodity on the market both in fresh and dried forms and are referred to as 'the red gold'.⁷⁶ The policy forced civilians to migrate to unproductive regions; however, some are returning to the Lake Chad area despite the risk as it is the only area in Diffa that can effectively support livelihoods. Military forces also mandated the height to which crops can grow for fear that they would provide hiding places for armed opposition groups.⁷⁷
- Persisting insecurity and threats of kidnapping caused pastoralists to lose access to grazing land. Where grazing land is available, it is often in poor condition due to a lack of vegetation and high concentration of herds, which in turn increases social tensions with agropastoralists. The closure of the border with Nigeria in August 2019 is hindering income-earning opportunities for livestock traders in Niger as livestock prices have decreased since October 2019.⁷⁸
- Restrictions on market access have also made it difficult for producers to sell their goods. For instance, Kindjendi and Gagamari markets in the Diffa region were closed to block supply routes for Boko Haram.⁷⁹
- In March 2020, authorities lifted the ban on fishing and pepper cultivation and trade to boost the local Diffa economy and stimulate a return to livelihoods.⁸⁰ However, ongoing conflict, insecurity, and displacement will continue to drive Stressed (IPC Phase 2) levels of food insecurity in Diffa through September 2020 as livelihood and market access are inhibited.⁸¹ Figure 6 depicts the relationship between locations of Boko Haram and counter-insurgency related violence compared with projections indicating that between 122,075 and 172,367 people in Diffa would likely experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3)

or worse levels of acute food insecurity through September 2020 without emergency assistance, based on Cadre Harmonisé and FEWS NET projections.

Comparison of Boko Haram and counter-insurgency violence in Niger with projected food insecurity

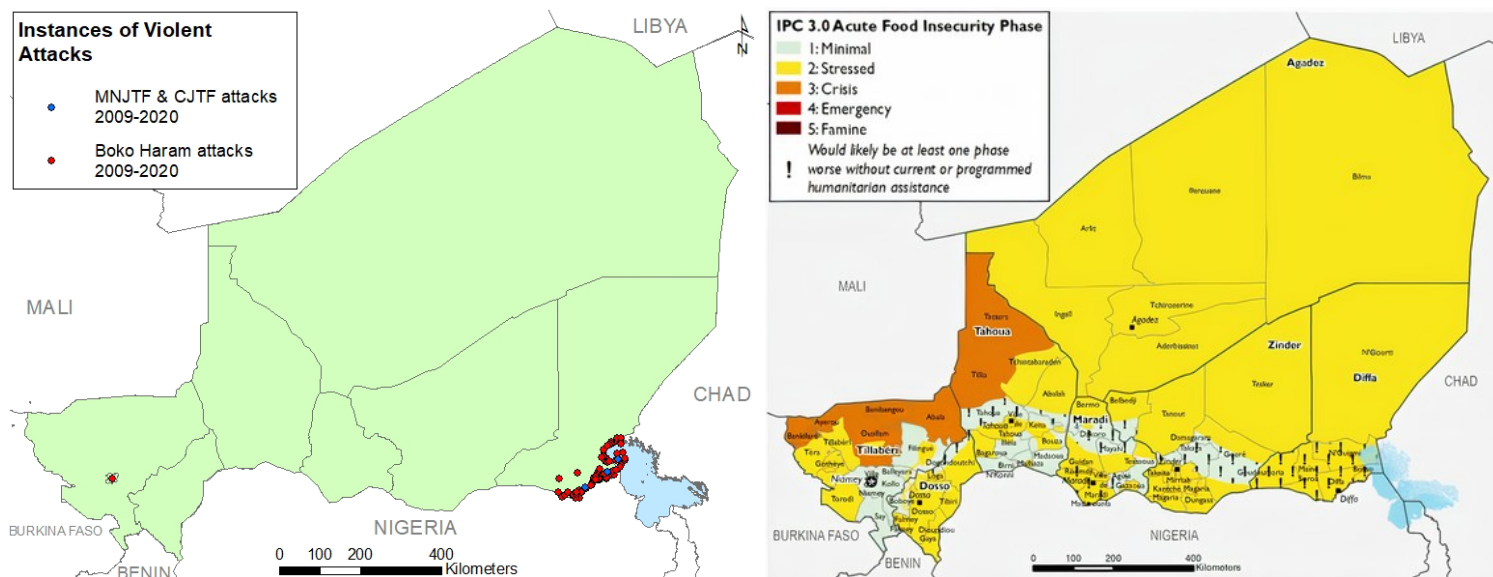


Figure 6: Instances of violent attacks committed by Boko Haram and counter-insurgency groups in Niger from June 2009-June 2020 (left) compared to projected acute food insecurity for the June-September 2020 period (right). Sources: Data points extrapolated from ACLED data warehouse (left); "West Africa Niger." Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET). June 2020. <https://fews.net/west-africa/niger>. (right)

Chad: Lac Region

- In Lac Region, the military banned fishing and farming activities on fertile and productive islands on the lake. As a result, civilians are forced to engage in banned activities and trade with armed opposition groups to earn money and are in turn targeted by security forces.⁸² Additionally, livestock is regularly stolen by armed forces, and fighting has undermined free movement and made it dangerous to move herds in search of grazing.⁸³ Pastoralists face lower purchasing power as attacks and cattle raiding by Boko Haram are disrupting trade activities.⁸⁴
- A projected increase in armed opposition group activity could increase displacement and result in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) levels of food insecurity in the coming months.⁸⁵ Figure 7 depicts an association between locations of Boko Haram and counter-insurgency related violence compared with projections indicating that between 110,372 and 240,000 people in Lac would likely experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse levels of acute food insecurity through September without emergency assistance, based on Cadre Harmonisé and FEWS NET projections.

Comparison of Boko Haram and counter-insurgency violence in Chad with projected food insecurity

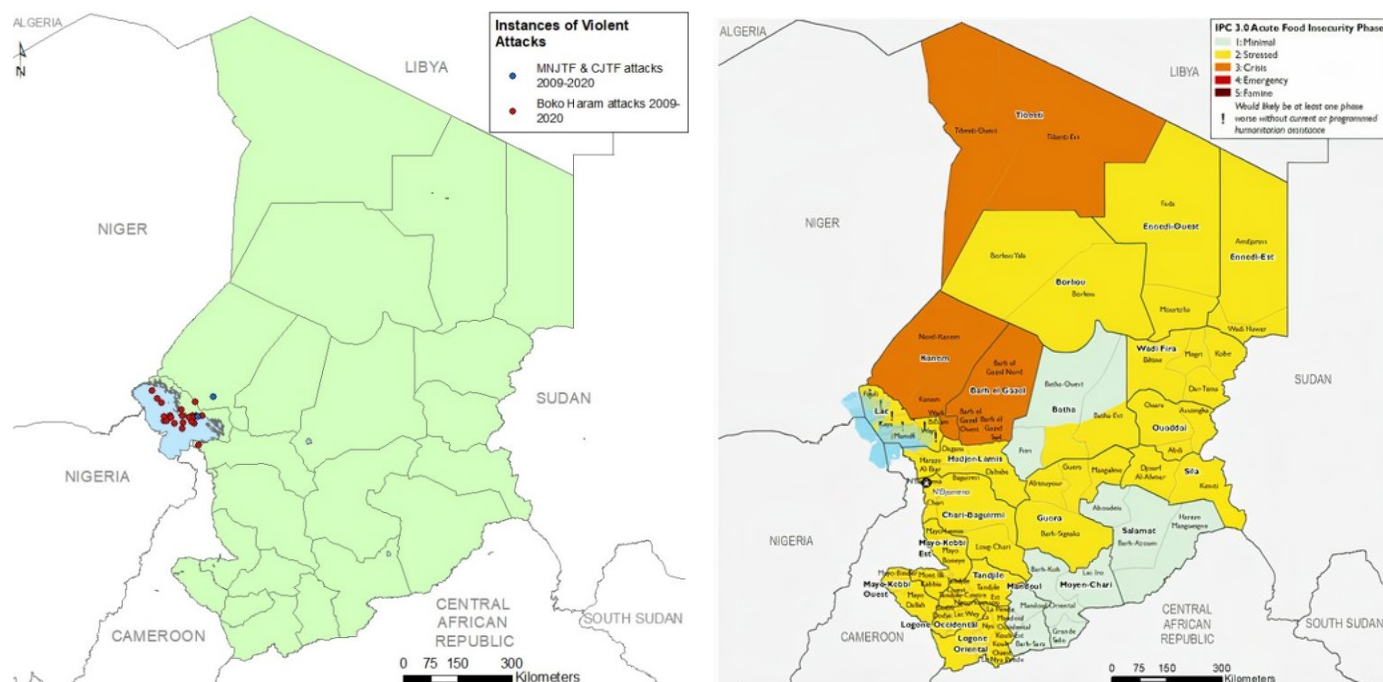


Figure 7: Instances of violent attacks committed by Boko Haram and counter-insurgency groups in Chad from June 2009-June 2020 (left) compared to projected acute food insecurity for the June-September 2020 period (right). Sources: Data points extrapolated from ACLED data warehouse (left); "West Africa Chad." Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET). June 2020. <https://fews.net/west-africa/chad>. (right)

Additional Drivers of Conflict and Food Insecurity

Livelihood and Resource Related Conflict within Communities

The growing human population of the lake region since the 1960s has necessitated increased food production, leading to unsustainable agricultural practices, increased livestock numbers and overgrazing, and intensified fishing. In turn, the replenishment capacity of the lake’s fish population and fertile soils has greatly diminished,⁸⁶ and competition for resources is exacerbated by the decrease in arable land, rainfall pattern variability, cropping on grazing areas, and scarcity of water.⁸⁷ Additionally, increased intensity and frequency of climatic shocks, such as droughts in the Central Sahel, are degrading natural resources such as cropland, water sources, and pastures.⁸⁸

Conflict and movement restrictions are putting further pressure on the availability of accessible and fertile land.⁸⁹ As a result, competition between and among farmers, pastoralists, and fishers for lake resources has become another source of conflict in the Lake Chad region. The receding waters of Lake Chad have also increased the frequency of contact between livelihood systems as farmers move closer to the lake’s shoreline to cultivate newly exposed fertile lands and pastoralists move their livestock closer to water sources, inciting additional competition for already limited land and water access.⁹⁰ Among fishers, dams and water projects in rivers feeding the lake along with lower water levels have contributed to the decline in fish populations. There is also conflict between newcomers and local fishers regarding “ownership” of fishing locations.⁹¹ Furthermore, competition for resources is also present between IDPs, refugees, and host communities⁹² due to perceptions that IDPs and refugees are benefitting more from humanitarian aid.⁹³

Impacts of COVID-19 on Conflict and Livelihoods

Amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Boko Haram factions continue to take advantage of the crisis, perpetuating violence and recruiting members as Nigerian security forces deal with the added responsibility of enforcing lockdowns. The fall in oil prices has also significantly impacted government revenue, which is likely to worsen funding of security forces and reduce the capacity to fight against Boko Haram.⁹⁴

Additionally, recent border and movement restrictions put in place by governments to control the spread of COVID-19 have compounded livelihood disruptions, impacting income-earning activities and diminishing the purchasing power of households. Also, disruptions to trade flows continue to be reported in conflict-affected areas, further limiting food access and putting upward pressure on prices. In the Lake Chad Basin, input and

labour supply shortages due to COVID-19 restrictions may affect crop yields in 2020, and movement restrictions are disrupting cross-border transhumance routes.⁹⁵

Conclusions

Lake Chad's erratic climate compounded with insecurity and competition for resources has caused widespread displacement, further hindering livelihood access and food production and triggering a humanitarian crisis in surrounding areas. As Boko Haram's numbers grow, counter-insurgency efforts become more widespread and heavy-handed in an effort to suppress armed opposition group influence, often involving movement, trade, and livelihood restrictions. The Boko Haram insurgency is negatively impacting food availability most prominently through the destruction of agriculture and transportation infrastructure as well as hindered market access and disruptions to the food system, all of which drive up prices and reduce food access.⁹⁶ If the situation is left unaddressed, biomass and crop production deficits will worsen,⁹⁷ and the communities of Lake Chad will continue to be stuck in the conflict trap and face increasing levels of food insecurity for years to come.

Endnotes

- ¹ Onuoha, Freedom C. "Climate Change and Natural Resources Confl icts in Africa." Institute for Security Studies Africa. June 1, 2010. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/Mono170.pdf>.
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