



Article

Re-evaluating the Impact of Violent Extremism on Lake Chad Basin Region of West Africa

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of violent extremism on the Lake Chad Basin Region. From being one of the most important agricultural heritage sites in the world that provided a lifeline to millions of people in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, violent extremism in the region has become a burden, among others accounting for loss of lives, with 29,376 deaths recorded in 2015 alone. The study therefore examined ways in which porous borders, security policies and governance outcome within the region contributed to persisting challenges there. Anchored on the deprivation, frustration and aggression theory, the study utilized documentary method for data collection while content analysis mechanism was adopted for analysis. The study found out that the Lake Chad Basin region's porous borders have, over the years, served as transportation routes for arms smuggling, thereby fueling violent extremism. It also found out that the contiguous countries' security policies have remained ineffective. The study therefore recommended effective border management as well as the need for authorities to address the cases of unhealthy inter-agency rivalry among the security agencies in the area.

Keywords: Lake Chad Basin, violent extremism, West Africa, porous borders, security policies, governance outcome

Introduction

The Lake Chad Basin in West Africa holds flourishing potentials and opportunities for livelihood, agriculture, tourism, and access to markets and trade (Idika-Kalu, 2020). As one of the most important agricultural heritage sites in the world, it provided a lifeline to nearly 30 million people in four countries

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- Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger (Salkida, 2012). However, its shrinking to around 90 per cent of its original size affected the main source of livelihood for the majority of the population that depends on it and provided fertile ground for extremism and violent conflicts (Adebola & Charles-Aniekwe, 2022). Currently, its 47 million population belongs to some of the poorest countries of the world with poor human development ranking. Out of the 177 countries listed in 2016, Cameroon occupied the position of 144, Nigeria 159, Chad 171 and Niger 177 (Huneau, 2017). The Islamic State in the West African province (ISWAP), has gained prominence in Lake Chad with recruits and supports in some communities (Sempija, et al, 2023). It is a region of conflict and currently a breeding ground for violent extremism and terrorism (Adebola & Charles-Aniekwe, 2022).

Salient questions are being raised globally on how to end the insecurity and promote the standard of living and economic health of the region. These form the concerns of this study which seek to specifically examine how the porous borders, security policy and governance outcome within the Lake Chad Basin region have exacerbated the challenge or otherwise. This is with a view to improving border policing, security policies and governance for the sake of stability in the region.

Significance of the Study

This study possesses some relevance. Theoretically, the outcome of the study enriches the available scholarly discourse on the Lake Chad Basin, with particular emphasis on the porous borders, security policy and governance outcome. Its recommendations intellectually contributed to the search for answers to the challenges facing the Lake Chad Basin. Practically, governments that form the Lake Chad Basin are expected to benefit from the recommendations of the study by way of finding effective antidotes to the challenges posed by violent extremism in the region. The study is useful to policymakers and other critical stakeholders connected to effectively resolving the challenge in the Lake Chad Basin region.

Literature Review

Violent Extremism: Perspectives and Causes

Attempting to define violent extremism remains evolving, just as the term remains unclear, ill-defined and elusive (Nasser-Eddine, Garnham, Agostino, & Caluya, 2011; Southers, 2013). Although the term is more often used in conjunction with those pertaining to radicalization and terrorism, the amalgamation of these terms and the lack of a single working definition of violent extremism present a number of prevailing issues that include the ability to truly understand and challenge its basis, as well as apprehend how it should be treated within legal frameworks and judicial systems. Regardless, violent extremism is an ideology that accepts the use of violence for the pursuit of goals that are generally social, racial, religious and/or political in nature (Striegher et al, 2015). This perspective helps to appreciate the fact that whether socially, racially, religiously, or politically motivated, it is evident that individuals are driven to use violence for the strategic benefits of inciting fear and forcing political agendas. This is what Nasser-Eddine et al. (2011) had in mind when they averred that violent extremism is a willingness to use or support the use of violence to further particular beliefs, including those of a political, social or ideological nature and may include acts of terrorism.

Evidently, violent extremism is underpinned by a multitude of different belief systems and ideological dynamics of religion, socio-economic and personal tribulations; and are dependent on the regional location individuals come from (Aly & Striegher, 2012). Violent extremism describes the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals.

(Striegher et al., 2015). What this entails therefore is that all forms of violent extremism, no matter what their motivation, seek change through fear and intimidation rather than constructive democratic processes. It is in that light that Nasser-Eddine et al. (2011) stated that the major aim of violent extremism is to provoke the target into a disproportionate response, radicalize moderates and build support for its objectives in the long term. The implication is that the concept embodies unacceptable behaviour by using any means or medium to express views which foment, justify or glorify terrorist violence in furtherance of particular beliefs.

Evidently, there has been a growing interest among scholars on the factors that fuel violent extremisms with a plethora of perspectives in that direction. For instance, Agbiboa (2021) contended that violent extremism is often inspired or justified by, and/or associated with, an extreme political, religious or social ideology. As sound as his views on the concept appears, scholars are, however, divided on whether what he presented are all the factors which account for violent extremism. It is the search for other causes of violent extremism by scholars that led Nurudden (2010) to argue that relative deprivation, horizontal inequalities and even state failure equally account for violent extremism. His major contestation is that there is no way national leadership failures which exacerbated the challenges of poverty and unemployment could be exonerated in any fruitful search on what fuels violent extremism. That explains why his position was echoed by Okeke and Ezeamama (2023) who agreed that the issues of corruption among the political elites, worsened by Violent extremism, although reprehensible, is viewed as acts of protest towards issues which the technological and modern society has neglected to look into at the initial stage. What his argument implies is an unflinching persuasion that violent extremism is not, after all, an inbuilt urge towards destruction but influenced by the environment. Thus, violent extremisms have their roots in the nature of the domestic policies of nations. Put differently, what supplies oxygen for the survival of violent extremism in any given geo-political space is undetached from local politics and policies which are characteristically exclusive. Certainly, the root causes of violent extremism are complex, multifaceted and intertwined, and relate to the structural environment in which radicalization and possibly violent extremism can start to take hold. In essence, it is the product of historical, political, economic and social circumstances which have been expanded over time to include the impact of regional and global power politics (Axelsson, Eriksson & Grip, 2023; Fatokun. & Ibitoye, 2019). Also, growing horizontal inequalities have been identified by Adebola and Charles-Aniekwe (2022) as one of the drivers of violent extremism where unemployment and poverty not only serve as push factors but have come to be supplemented by perceptions of injustice, human-rights violations, social-political exclusion, widespread corruption and other dimensions of sustained mistreatment of certain groups. Other causative factors include the rejection of a state's socio-economic-political system and rejection of growing diversity in society by certain groups.

Empirical Review

Attempts had been made by scholars to empirically determine the effects of violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin region. For instance, Sampaio (2022) conducted an investigation titled, Conflict Economies and Urban Systems in the Lake Chad Region aimed at examining the role of urban areas in the illicit economies linked to armed conflict in the region. The study found that the situation in the Lake Chad Region is made worse by the rising urbanization in the region, with population growth in towns far outpacing the global average, orchestrated by resettling of displaced people, economic migration and organic growth. It also found out that the conflict involving ISWAP and the other Boko Haram faction relies to a significant degree on predation over small but growing towns and the transport corridors

linking agricultural hinterlands, towns and cities. Another finding is that the socio-economic development in communities that are part of the interdependent system, including those considered secure or part of super camps is compromised due to the loss of food producing towns, key routes and increased costs from insurgent taxation. It therefore recommends that regional governments and international agencies should urgently adopt urban development strategies for some of the region's largest towns to help them cope with both rising populations and vulnerability to insurgent attacks. It also recommended that relevant authorities should provide security and develop infrastructure in the region, starting in groups of towns.

In their contribution, Axelsson, Eriksson and Grip (2023) conducted an inquiry titled: *Managing Violent Extremist Clients in Prison and Probation Services: A Scoping Review* using mixed methods. The study found out that prison and probation services are constantly evolving to meet challenges with current issues, including placement, security management, risk assessments and staff training. It therefore recommended the importance of soft approaches through building of trust and resilience among violent extremist clients and facilitating their prosocial engagement.

In similar vein, Idahosa, Ikhidero and Egesi (2003) in a study titled *Regional Security and Threat Dynamics: Lake Chad Region in Perspectives* adopted qualitative research method and Barry Buzan's regional security complex theory. It found that despite a plethora of research on resurging threats of violent extremism as well as the huge publicity of Boko Haram activities in the Lake Chad region, little is known within academia on the element of ethno-cultural and historical tendencies in regional security in the Lake Chad region. Thus, it recommended that addressing the challenge of regional security, especially in the Lake Chad would require holistic approach that takes into consideration the ethno-cultural and historical ties and challenges of the region. The study equally recommended that policies with local ownership and consideration would balance the expediency of regional security, hence, the kinetic militaristic strategies of regional clusters alone cannot combat violent extremism and defeat terrorism unless strategies are conducted in tandem with historical and ethno-cultural tendencies while addressing the root causes such as marginalization, poverty and social exclusion, injustice, lack of rule of law and bad governance.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted deprivation, frustration and aggression theory. The theory was propounded by Mac Dougherty in 1937 and is anchored on the argument that aggression is always a function of frustration with occurrences of aggressive behaviour always presupposing the existence of frustration. The theory argues that the cycle of conflict starts with a party or parties to conflict becoming frustrated in the desire to achieve an objective. It is this frustration that leads parties into aggression against the other parties they hold responsible for their woes and the aggression then leads to conflict and violence (Anifowose, 2006). The central gist of the theory is that scarcity is a by-product of insufficient supply or unequal distribution of resources occasioned by deprivation which ultimately leads to aggression (Chikelu, 2017). The implication therefore is that there must be a reason for conflicts as they do not just occur, and this includes deprivation, frustration, marginalization, exclusion and even injustice. The feeling or actuality of these conditions triggers aggression and ventilation of anger on the system which is responsible for it. In essence, aggression comes after deprivation and consequent frustration. In other words, frustration instigates aggression against vulnerable targets. In fact, it is a necessary and sufficient condition for aggression which can lead to serious conflict (Milner, cited in Chikelu, 2017).

Theory Application

In line with the adopted theory, an aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration. Certainly, there is no way national leadership failures which exacerbated the challenges of poverty and unemployment in the first place could be exonerated in any fruitful search on what fuels violent extremism in Lake Chad Basin Region. Contextually, violent extremisms have their roots in the nature of the domestic policies of the countries within the Lake Chad Basin Region which alienate and exclude majority of their citizens from local politics and policies. Thus, cases of marginalization, growing horizontal inequalities, perceptions of injustice, human-rights violations, socio-political exclusion, widespread corruption and other dimensions of sustained mistreatment of certain groups fuel violent extremisms in the Lake Chad Basin Region. This aligns with the major belief of the theory that the cycle of conflict starts with a party or parties to conflict becoming frustrated in the desire to achieve an objective while it is this frustration that leads parties into aggression against the other parties which they hold responsible for their woes and the aggression then leads to conflict and violence. Since the theory holds that there must be a reason for conflicts as they do not just occur, this study in its quest for solutions also aligns that violent extremisms in the Lake Chad Basin region do not happen for nothing. It is in this regards that this theory is apt for the study.

Methodology

For the realization of its objectives, this study utilized the documentary method to collate data from secondary sources while the content analysis mechanism was adopted for analysis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Porous Borders and Lake Chad Basin Region

For a long time, the Lake Chad Basin region has served as a transportation zone for arms smuggling, with weapons smuggled across the contiguous countries. The Lake Chad Basin countries find themselves encompassed by porous borders with increased environmental and security pressure. Generally, the Lake Chad Basin Region has struggled with insecurity for years and this has made the region a hotbed of trouble with far-reaching consequences. Countries in the Lake Chad Basin namely Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria grapple with these multiple challenges and are forced to contend with recurrent intra and inter communal clashes, abductions and contested state control, particularly along the borders. In 2022 alone, a total of 917 incidents were reported (Hanspal, 2023). The spread of Boko Haram activities in the Lake Chad Basin Region has affected trade activities and businesses within the region. Of course, Lake Chad Basin Region serves many purposes as Figure 1 shows.

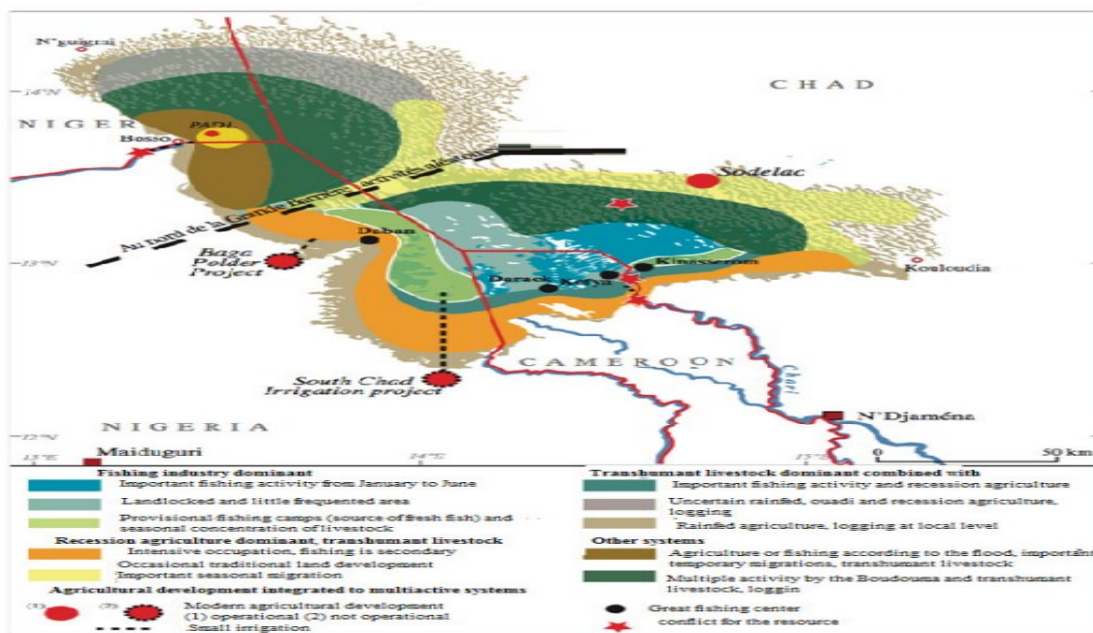


Figure 1: Multipurpose Nature of the Lake Chad Region

Source: Lake Chad Basin Commission (2023)

As the figure above shows, Lake Chad Basin region serves several agro-related purposes and is a source of livelihood for many households. Regardless of its many good sides, there were, however, an estimated 2.7 million internally-displaced persons in the Lake Chad Basin Region as of 2020. The violence has also led to widespread of civilian displacement, disruption of agricultural production, livelihoods and restricted affected populations from accessing basic services (Idahosa, et al., 2023). Figure 2 presents the total incidents and deaths from terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin, 2007-2020.

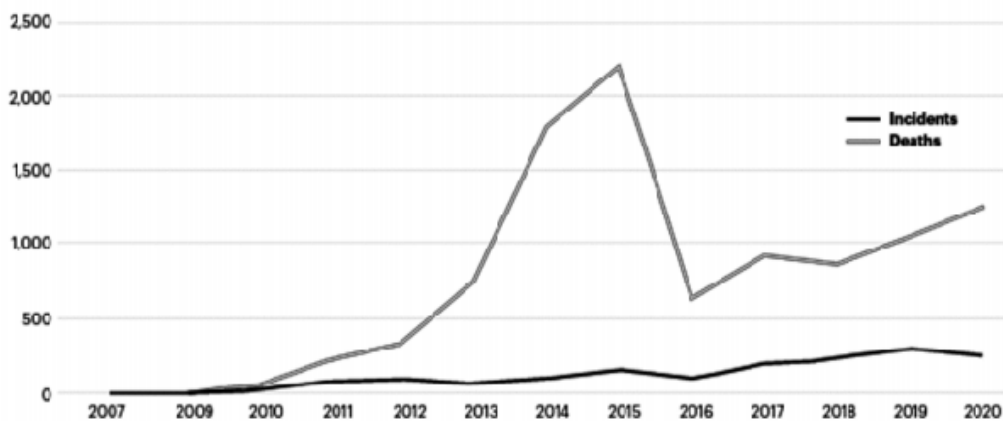


Figure 2: Total Incidents and Deaths from Terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin, 2015-2020

Source: Institute for Economics and Peace (2022)

As the figure above shows, there has been astronomical rise in the number of incidents and deaths from terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin region. This is, in part, fuelled by the challenge of porous border in

Lake Chad region which has remained the greatest challenge facing troops in the region. This is more worrisome considering the fact that border security management and defence are crucial to any measure that seeks to check effectively, transnational insurgency and other forms of cross-border criminalities in any part of Africa. In fact, the situation is such that increased border patrols have been identified as a viable strategy to ensure the realization of security in the region (Marama, 2017). To further buttress the growing incidence of violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin Region, particularly Nigeria, figure 3 shows that terrorism index in Nigeria has witnessed a growing trend.

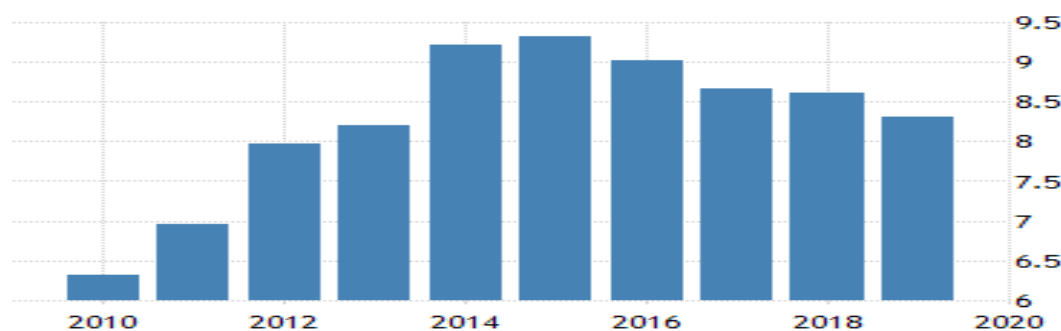


Figure 3: Nigeria Terrorism Index, 2015-2020

Source: Trading economics (2020).

As the figure above shows, the terrorism index in Nigeria was 9.31 in 2015 and 8.60 in 2018. Regardless of the fact that the index has fluctuated over time, the fact remains that insecurity remains a challenge. Addressing the issue of porosity of international boundaries which in most parts allows unhindered movement of people and goods across the boundaries has become a greater challenge for Lake Chad Basin countries, especially, Nigeria, Cameroun, Niger and Chad. The fragility of the basin countries security systems and porous borders allowed for armed groups and common banditry to flourish. Thus, these areas have become the route of Boko Haram terrorists, armed bandits and other criminal elements. Many contemporary insurgencies utilize the porosity of the borders to pitch governments against rebel organizations that span international boundaries, find sanctuaries in neighbouring states and receive support from rival governments. Because the military and police forces of recognized governments must respect international boundaries, militant groups often use border regions to their advantage as they seek safe havens in which to operate (Fatokun & Ibitoye, 2019). This is illustrated in Figure 4.

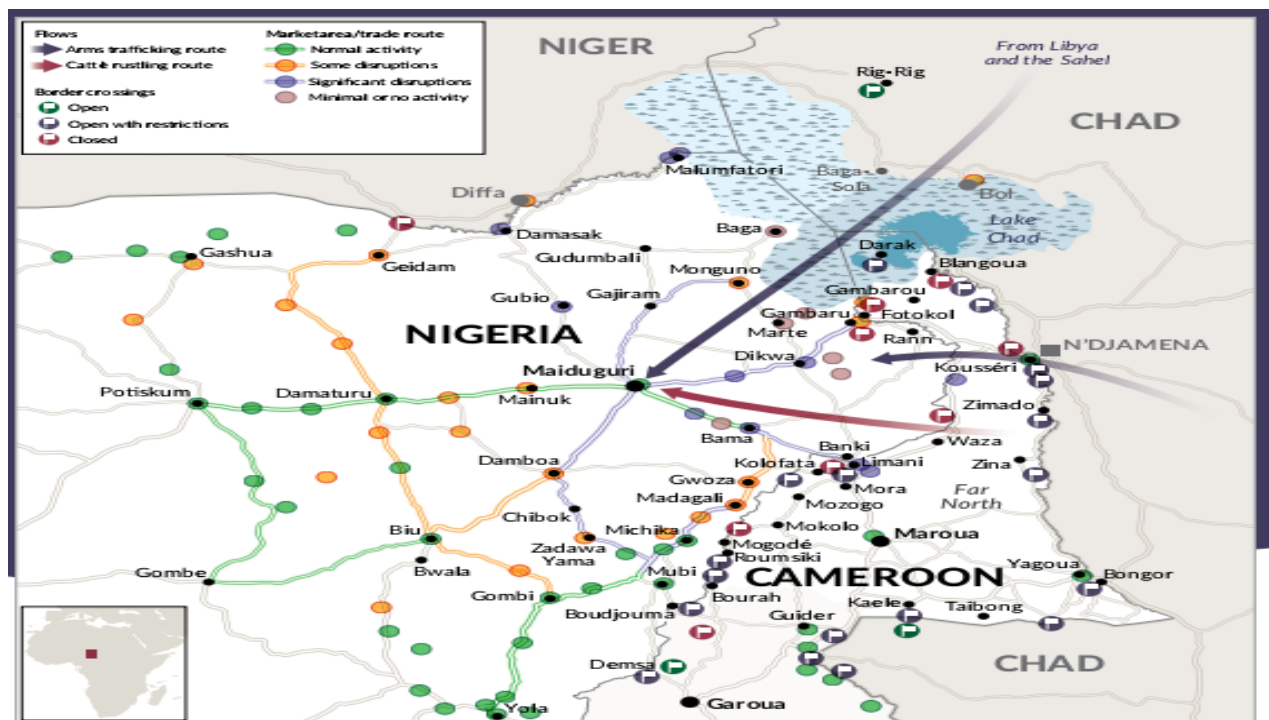


Figure 4: Criminal Flow in Lake Chad Basin Region, 2021

Source: Sampaio (2022)

As the figure above reveals, violent extremists in 2021 capitalized on the porous borders of the Lake Chad Basin Region to remain active and cause maximum destruction in the region. This has gone to confirm the fact that porous borders in the region support violent extremists’ free movement and arms smuggling enterprises in the region, as put forward also by Fatokun and Ibitoye (2019).

The Lake Chad insecurity in many cases has halted a lot of business operations with the closure of business enterprises (Isah & Bitrus, 2021). In general sense, business will never survive in an environment that lacks security and the situation in the Lake Chad Region has negative effect on both small and large-scale business operators. Specifically, it has reduced farming activities, fishing and other related activities, with attendant negative effect on the economic development of the Lake Chad Basin. Knowing that the Lake Chad Basin region is a war zone, no serious investor invests capital in the region and this has serious negative implication on the economy of the region. Such lack of investment leads to severe consequences which include less production of goods and services, massive unemployment, hunger and other consequent outcomes. More so, the insecurity had damaged social cohesion in the region (Isah & Bitrus, 2021).

Security Policy and Lake Chad Basin Region

There is a concern over the inability of security policies to restore normalcy in the region and the failure of the security agents to monitor and defend borders of the Lake Chad Basin region is worrisome. Some of the challenges that are confronting the security agencies which have links with security policies include unhealthy interagency rivalry and lack of cooperation and information-sharing between and among the security agencies, lack of adequately trained personnel and equipment to effectively discharge duties and lack of coordination of overlapping responsibilities. Others are infighting among the different services,

lack of cooperation within and between departments of agencies, inadequate system of reward and welfare for members of the services or poor motivation among border personnel, lack of political will and commitment of resources to effectively manage the borders as well as apparent lack of a system of consultation, co-ordination and information gathering from borders communities (Tahir 2011; Osimen et. al., 2017).

The fragility of the basin countries’ security policies and porous borders allows for armed groups and common banditry to flourish, hence, the increasing cross-border nature of insurgency in the region (Danfulani, 2014). Transnational insurgent groups such as guerrilla movements and terrorist organizations move across national boundaries for sanctuary and aid to unleash violent attacks. These groups may take a variety of forms as fractions of nationalist or separatist movements based on nationality factors or premised on a given ideology. They are generally referred to as rebels across borders or transnational rebels (Salehyan, 2010). Once rebels cross borders, they cease to be problems for internal affairs and, therefore, necessarily draw in different countries (Stanland, 2005; Salehyan, 2010).

Evidently, border security is a factor of border management and borders are security issue for all governments. In particular, border security management in the Lake Chad Basin Region is poor. Border security and the management of borders in ways that promote national security have generally been given low priority. The security agencies at the borders are expected to patrol the long porous borders in an attempt to keep faith with legal frameworks that established them and duties assigned by the countries involved, the reverse is usually the case (Osimen, et al., 2017). As has been severally canvassed by stakeholders, despite the efforts of security agencies, Lake Chad Basin region still faces daunting challenges in the management of its borders with the problem of inadequate personnel, patrol vehicles, surveillance equipment as well as neglect or non-functioning of intelligence services. In fact, lack of proper border demarcation between the Lake Chad Basin states is one major challenge that has further compounded the issue of border security and has concomitantly contributed to the porosity of borders, which have made border security management challenging for border security agencies. Figure 5 shows that as at June 2023, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria were hosting an estimated 6, 061,037 affected individuals made up of internally-displaced persons, returnees and refugees.

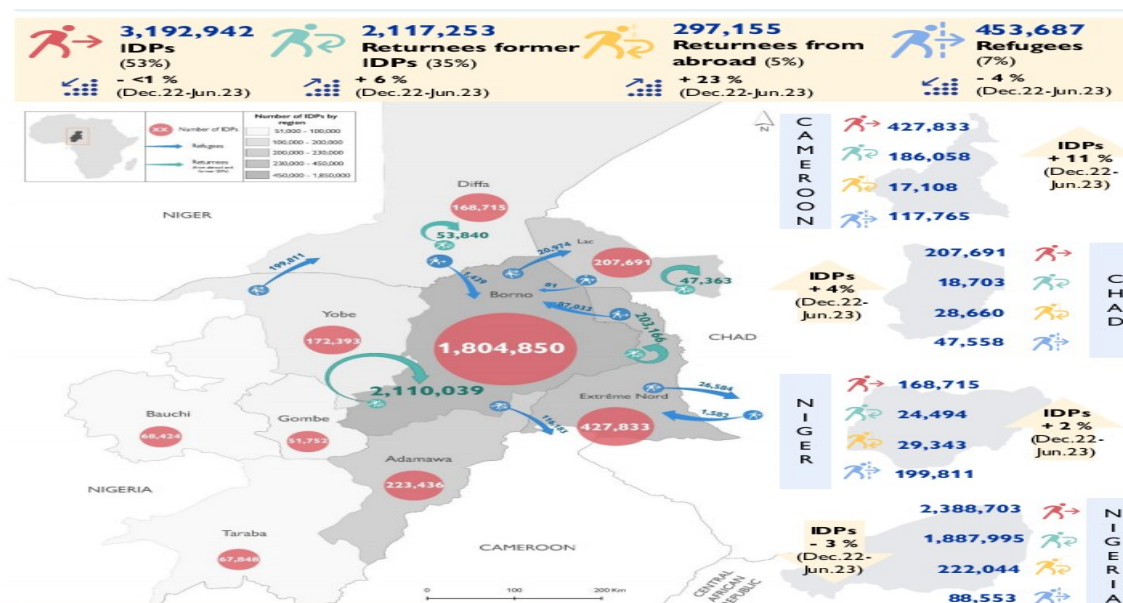


Figure 5: Internal Displacement in Lake Chad Basin Region, 2023

Source: International Organization for Migration (2023).

According to the figure above, 12 percent of the affected population, representing 748,764 individuals is located in Cameroon while five percent resides in Chad, accounting for 302,612 individuals. Also, seven percent are in Niger, representing 422,366 individuals and 76 percent representing 4,587,295 individuals in Nigeria. Notably, violent extremism offers critical challenges at such a rate which has rendered inadequate many of the traditional tools of violence prevention, peace-building and democratic governance and which requires policy makers and practitioners to appreciate the unique nature of the underlying ideologies behind the violence. It has been found that some politicians and conflict merchants' take advantage of the huge pool of poverty and unemployment by recruiting and arming such people in pursuit of selfish political interests.

Governance Outcome in Lake Chad Basin Region

Governance outcome in the Lake Chad Basin region is aptly appreciated within the context of focus on the people as well as meeting their aspirations. Ideally, governance uses systems and institutions of government to meet certain responsibilities (Okeke, 2018). Good governance in particular and as the hallmark of democratic process points towards a situation in which those in power are guided by the principles of transparency and accountability (Jacob, 2010). Participatory, transparent and accountable ingredients of good governance are such that where they are lacking, what is left is short of good governance. Conversely, governance failure is the main factor implicated in the rising incidence of violent extremism. It is indexed by the manifest incapacity of public institutions to deliver critical public goods, such as water, electricity, roads, healthcare, job opportunities and security. The average people in Lake Chad Basin Region lack access to these basic services that are important to lead a healthy, satisfying and productive life in a society (Onuoha, 2011).

Conclusions

The study was necessitated by the violent extremism which has ravaged the Lake Chad Basin Region for decades and its impacts on the contiguous states, with emphasis on the porous borders, security policies and governance outcome in the region. The study therefore found out that the Lake Chad Basin countries find themselves encompassing a region of heightened mobility and porous borders and have come under severe and unprecedented security challenges among which are cross-border banditry, terrorism, insurgencies as well as increasing proliferation of small arms and light weapons. On the other hand, it was found out that the basin countries' security policies have remained ineffective. The failure of the security agents to monitor and defend the borders is anchored on some of the challenges to security policies in the Lake Chad Basin region and they include unhealthy interagency rivalry and lack of cooperation and information-sharing between and among the security agencies; lack of adequately trained personnel and equipment to effectively discharge duties and lack of coordination of overlapping responsibilities. Also, the study found out that governance failure remains a major factor implicated in the rising incidence of violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin region, indexed by the manifest incapacity of public institutions to deliver critical public goods, such as water, electricity, roads, healthcare, job opportunities and security.

Recommendations

In view of the findings, the study therefore recommended proper management of borders within the Lake Chad Basin Region with strong and durable demarcation equipments and technologies. Construction of demarcation fences with high-level security gadgets could complement the deployment of troops in the region and the border countries must pull resources together to ensure that this project is achieved in the overall interest of security of the region. Also, security policies at the Lake Chad Basin Region need to be evaluated and strengthened for better results. For instance, authorities need to address the cases of unhealthy interagency rivalry and lack of cooperation and information-sharing between and among the security agencies, lack of adequately trained personnel and equipment to effectively discharge duties and lack of coordination of overlapping responsibilities. Others are infighting among the different services, lack of cooperation within and between departments of agencies, inadequate system of reward and welfare for members of the security services or poor motivation among border personnel, lack of political will and commitment of resources to effectively manage the borders as well as apparent lack of a system of consultation, co-ordination and information gathering from borders communities. Specifically, there is a responsibility on the part of the governments of the region to develop areas within the Lake Chad Basin Region that have been denied development for a long time by ensuring that the communities that have been abandoned have access to infrastructure and services, their children go to school, youths have prospects for their futures and vulnerable people secure alternative means of living.

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