



Photo Credit: Tom Saater for Mercy Corps

# LAKE CHAD BASIN

## Mercy Corps Position Paper

FEBRUARY 2017



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# Executive Summary

The Lake Chad Basin is currently suffering the world's largest overlooked humanitarian crisis with approximately 10.7 million people in need of immediate humanitarian assistance.<sup>1</sup> While the current crisis was ignited by violence associated with the Boko Haram extremist movement, it is rooted in longstanding development challenges. Indeed, many of these challenges stem from decades of governmental underinvestment, marginalizing the communities in the region and instilling a deep-seated sense of injustice, which in turn created the enabling environment for the extremist ideology of Boko Haram to spread. As such, Mercy Corps approaches the current crisis as a symptom of chronic underdevelopment and preexisting grievances that are root cause contributors to a self-reinforcing cycle of insecurity, violence and poverty.

In order to break this cycle, Mercy Corps proposes a strategic regional response to promote long-term stability in the Lake Chad Basin, while simultaneously responding to urgent humanitarian needs. It focuses on strengthening the capacities of people, systems and institutions in a way that supports their immediate recovery and reduces chronic socioeconomic, political and ecological drivers of vulnerability and conflict. Our vision is rooted in the idea that by promoting long-term, inclusive development, crises will not only become less likely, but communities will also be better able to bounce back from future shocks when they occur.

Mercy Corps' regional response Goal is:

**Alleviate the poverty, suffering and oppression of conflict-affected communities in the Lake Chad Basin region and improve regional stability, by both meeting immediate needs and supporting long-term integrated social and economic development that addresses the root causes of violence and poverty and builds resilience to mitigate future crises.**

We plan to reach this goal with specific interventions in the following sectors.

**Humanitarian Response** so that the immediate needs of displaced and conflict-affected households in the region are addressed, reducing their immediate vulnerability and dependence on negative coping strategies.

**Market-based Economic Recovery and Inclusive Market Expansion** so that conflict-affected citizens of the Lake Chad region are enabled to recover and diversify their long-term livelihoods in line with changing socioeconomic conditions, benefit from targeted market development, and attain self-sufficiency and financial resilience.

**Natural Resource Management** so that long-term natural resource concerns across the Lake Chad region are alleviated through improved coherence and coordination of water and land use management practices.

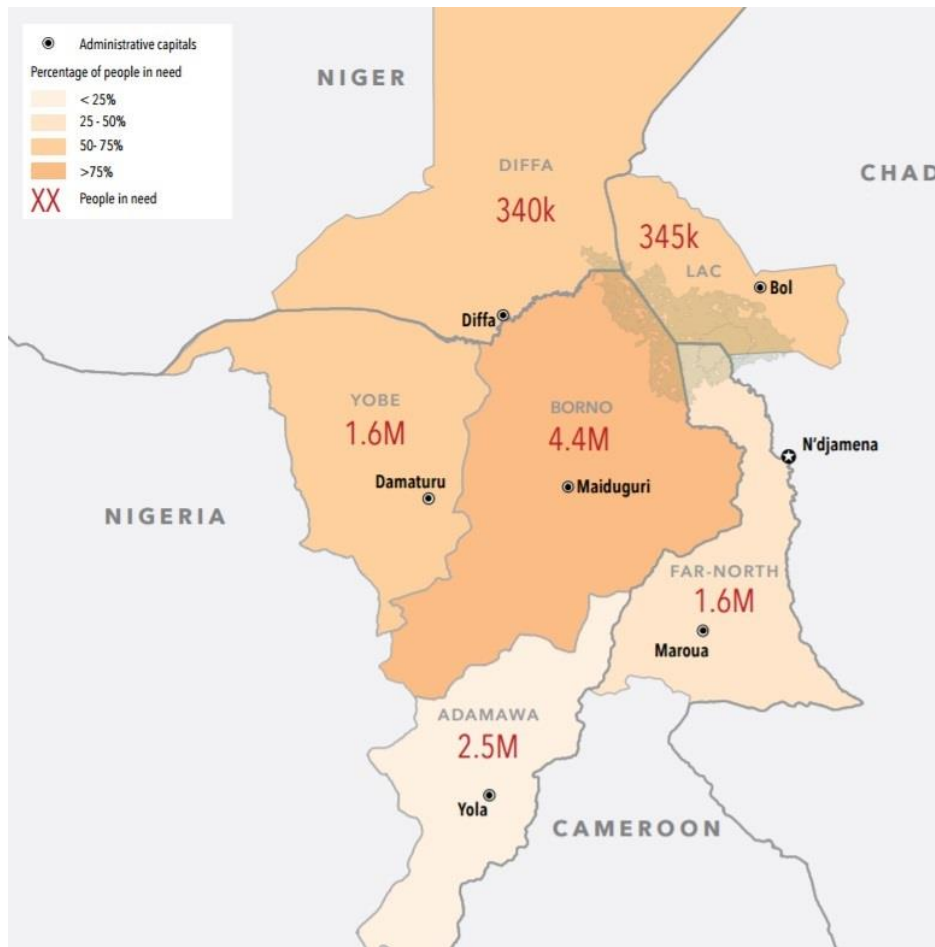
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<sup>1</sup> Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Update, UN OCHA, February 6, 2017. People in need by country: Nigeria – 8.5 million; Cameroon – 1.6 million; Chad – 345,000; Niger – 340,000.

➤ **Conflict Mitigation and Early Warning** so that the root-causes of violent conflict in the region are addressed across ecological, economic, social and governance systems, and local capacity for conflict management and mechanisms for early warning and improved response are strengthened.

➤ **Safe Migration** so that the negative consequences of migration in the Lake Chad Basin are reduced, the positive outcomes are enhanced, and the increased resilience of people of the region enable them to make informed and positive migration choices.

People in need in Lake Chad Basin region:



Source: Lake Chad Basin Emergency, UN OCHA, January 2017.

# Introduction

Lake Chad is bordered by four African nations: Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. The basin surrounding Lake Chad is home to an estimated 47 million people.<sup>2</sup> In 2014-15, violence associated with the Boko Haram movement plunged the region into the world's most overlooked humanitarian crisis.

There are currently 17 million people in the region living in areas affected by Boko Haram's violence, and an estimated 10.7 million of them are in need of immediate humanitarian assistance.<sup>3,4</sup> Over half a million children are suffering from severe acute malnutrition, of whom 75,000 could die if not urgently assisted.<sup>5</sup> Approximately 2.3 million people are displaced and insecurity is preventing the provision of humanitarian assistance in several areas.<sup>6</sup>

While many of the development challenges in the Lake Chad Basin are specific to each particular country, there are several strongly interconnected issues affecting all four countries bordering the lake. Conflict in one location, for example, often spurs displacement to another. The impacts of climate change – including desertification and diminishing water resources – know no boundaries; nor do radical ideologies, which typically flow across borders along ethnic and linguistic lines.

While Boko Haram's reach has been significantly rolled back in many areas, the region's development challenges remain. Indeed, long before the current insurgency, the territories bordering Lake Chad were marginalized. The state-provided services that did exist have been driven away by the conflict. Further, the region's fragile economy is heavily dependent on agriculture and livestock, livelihoods that are increasingly difficult to maintain due to climate change. In fact, Lake Chad's surface area is now a tenth of what it was in 1963, and yet, with the population of the region expected to double over the next 30 years, demand for water will only increase.<sup>7</sup>

## Mercy Corps' Strategic Response

To tackle these interconnected challenges and contribute to regional stability and sustainable growth for vulnerable populations affected by the current crisis, Mercy Corps will pursue a regional approach in the Lake Chad region. In line with Mercy Corps' FY17 agency-level Strategic Roadmap Objectives of leading in complex crises and better identifying and addressing their root causes, Mercy Corps' goal is to:



**Alleviate the poverty, suffering and oppression of conflict-affected communities in the Lake Chad Basin region and improve regional stability, by both meeting immediate needs and supporting long-term integrated social and economic development that addresses the root causes of violence and poverty and builds resilience to mitigate future crises.**

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2 Lake Chad Development and Climate Resilience Action Plan, Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), November 13, 2015.

3 Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Update, UN OCHA, February 6, 2017.

4 Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Overview, UN OCHA, February 3, 2017.

5 Lake Chad Basin Emergency, UN OCHA, January 2017.

6 Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Update, UN OCHA, February 6, 2017.

7 Lake Chad Development and Climate Resilience Action Plan, Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), November 13, 2015.

# Theory of Change

Our theory of change for improving socioeconomic development of the Lake Chad Basin and reducing drivers of regional instability connects change at both the country and regional levels:

## Regional Level



**If the countries around the Lake Chad Basin adopt improved cross-border mechanisms to sustainably manage regional natural resources and manage security, then markets will be maintained and grow, and men, women and youth will have the capacity to make more informed choices to safely migrate within the region, and participate in profitable livelihoods.**

## Country Level



**If the countries around the Lake Chad Basin are able to manage conflict and natural resources internally and are better able to address social, economic and political grievances, and if households have diverse and strengthened capacities to manage conflict, economic and ecological shocks and stresses, then the risks of people being displaced across borders and the subsequent spillover of crises will be reduced.**

Our theory of change for the Lake Chad Basin rejects a traditional view of the relief, recovery and development trajectory. Instead, we believe it is necessary to integrate all three “types” of programming as early as possible, beginning with what are typically defined as “development” interventions from the outset and planning to mobilize “relief” whenever shocks threaten to disrupt progress.

We will work through private sector channels to provide unconditional cash transfers to regenerate fragile markets, and as communities become re-established, we will monitor potential shocks and plan rapid interventions to minimize household asset losses. We will identify ways to rebuild cohesion by re-establishing markets and managing resources such as water. We will work with local governments and partners to provide relief, while building their capacity to serve populations in a way that addresses deep-seated grievances.

This approach underpins the high level of programming flexibility and collaboration with governments in the Lake Chad Basin that is necessary to adapt our immediate responses to the dynamic context, while driving forward a longer-term vision of increased socioeconomic development and reduced instability in the region.

# Programmatic Outcomes

**Goal: Alleviate the poverty, suffering and oppression of conflict-affected communities in the Lake Chad Basin region and improve regional stability.**

**Well-being Outcomes:** Meet immediate needs and improve socioeconomic development...<sup>8</sup>

**Humanitarian Relief:** Improved access to essential humanitarian goods and services including food, shelter, water, protection, health and sanitation.

**Improved Health:** Improved access to essential health services and improved individual and household health practices.

**Food and Nutrition Security:** Improved food and nutrition security.

**Economic recovery:** Increased economic and social inclusion of marginalized men, women and youth.

**Community Cohesion and Social Inclusion:** Increased social cohesion within conflict-affected communities and between host and displaced communities.

**Conflict Reduction:** Reduction of conflicts and improved mechanisms to resolve conflict through nonviolent means.

**Intermediate Outcomes:** Through increasing resilience to mitigate future crisis and addressing the root causes of violence and poverty.

**People:** Conflict-affected and socioeconomically marginalized communities in the Lake Chad Basin region have improved access to resources, and can apply strategies that increase their capacity to successfully anticipate, absorb and adapt to the shocks and stresses which drive violence and poverty in their communities.<sup>9</sup>

**Systems:** Development of cross-border markets, increased resilience of select transboundary natural resource systems, improved regional capacity to anticipate conflict spillover, and improved migration-related policies in local and national development plans.<sup>10</sup>

## Regional Programmatic Areas<sup>11</sup>

1. Humanitarian Response

2. Market-based Economic Recovery and Inclusive Market Expansion

3. Natural Resource Management

4. Conflict Mitigation and Early Warning

5. Safe Migration

## Programmatic Areas Incorporated at the Country Level

6. Food and Nutrition Security

7. Health

<sup>8</sup> Measured at household and community levels.

<sup>9</sup> Targeted and measured at household and community levels.

<sup>10</sup> Targeted and measured at sub-system level within country or across borders.

<sup>11</sup> Implemented via inclusive governance approaches to reduce social-political marginalization and increase transparency and cooperation with local government and community authorities.

# A Resilience Approach to the Lake Chad Basin Crisis

While the immediate threats of extremism and conflict are critical factors, Mercy Corps' strategy approaches the current crisis as a symptom of chronic underdevelopment and preexisting grievances that are root cause contributors to a self-reinforcing cycle of insecurity, violence and poverty in the region. In this way, our vision is rooted in promoting long-term, inclusive development of communities in the Lake Chad Basin in order to build resilience to future crises. It focuses on strengthening the capacities of people, systems and institutions in a way that supports their immediate recovery and reduces chronic socioeconomic, political and ecological drivers of vulnerability and conflict.

Grounded in Mercy Corps' resilience approach, our strategy takes a landscape-level view of the interrelated dynamics that contribute to regional fragility. We believe that risks and chronic vulnerability must be understood across multiple scales and systems so that our regional, national and sub-national strategies work together towards addressing the underlying drivers of the crisis. Similarly, resilience capacities need to be built simultaneously at multiple scales – from the individual and household level up to the systems-level – to support sustained positive development and ultimately, improved overall well-being of men, women and youth in the Lake Chad Basin region.

## Regional Programmatic Areas

Much of Mercy Corps' work in West and Central Africa is country specific, with interventions tailored to specific local contexts and needs. While this holds true in many respects to the Lake Chad Basin, there are strongly interconnected issues, as noted above, affecting all the countries in the region, requiring a regional approach to designing interventions. With this in mind, Mercy Corps' regional programming seeks to include the following main areas<sup>12</sup>:

### 1. Humanitarian Response

**Outcome:** The immediate needs of displaced and conflict-affected households in the region are addressed, reducing their immediate vulnerability and dependence on negative coping strategies.

**Component 1:** Cross-border support to ongoing humanitarian interventions in border regions of Nigeria and Niger, including possible delivery of supplies via Cameroon.

**Component 2:** Programming support for refugee and IDP returns to Nigeria and Niger, including meeting immediate needs (food and nutrition, health, water and sanitation, shelter, protection) and supporting reintegration and recovery (livelihoods and economic recovery, psychosocial support).

**Component 3:** Advocacy in support of needs of both refugees and returnees in all countries of the region, including their integration in places of displacement should this be their choice.

### 2. Market-based Economic Recovery and Inclusive Market Expansion

**Outcome:** Conflict affected citizens of the Lake Chad region are enabled to recover and diversify their long term livelihoods in line with changing socioeconomic conditions, benefit from targeted

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<sup>12</sup> Given their unique needs and critical role in both current and future regional socioeconomic development and stability, adolescent boys and girls are a deliberate target group. Tailored interventions will ensure their inclusion across the following programmatic areas.



## market development, and attain self-sufficiency and financial resilience.

**Component 1:** Research into regional market systems and interdependent cross-border value chains, including those based on both on- and off-farm income sources that support contextualized risk diversification to enable better targeting of support to markets that have the best potential to provide employment and income to people in the region while reducing vulnerability. Includes research into what capacities can strengthen the resilience of key cross-border value chains to outbreaks of conflict, such as improving formal protection services or access to flexible value chain financing.

**Component 2:** Based on the above research, provision of business start-up support, information services, linkages and training for traders, producers, transporters and other market actors to access regional markets and facilitate enhanced regional market growth (for example, in food sector value chains).

**Component 3:** Programming to support diversification of pastoralists' and farmers' livelihood options to reduce resource competition and encourage adaptation based on changing climate realities.

**Component 4:** Advocacy to improve productivity and access to regional markets for agro-pastoralists and pastoralists engaged in production and processing.

## 3. Natural Resource Management

### Outcome: Long-term natural resource concerns across the Lake Chad region are alleviated through improved coherence and coordination of water and land use management practices.

**Component 1:** Research into cross-border patterns of water and land use, regional climate change patterns and stakeholder mapping to facilitate well-informed policy and advocacy interventions and adoption of new technologies that enable sustainable management.

**Component 2:** Design and roll out of interventions which improve resilience and peaceful management of shared natural resources at the community level, particularly related to land, water and transhumance corridors to alleviate strains caused by desertification and erratic, changing climate patterns.

**Component 3:** Capacity strengthening of basin-level institutions working on improving cross-border sustainable resource management, particularly in relation to groundwater, and networking support to local-level resource management groups.

## 4. Conflict Mitigation and Early Warning

### Outcome: The root-causes of violent conflict in the region are addressed across ecological, economic, social and governance systems, and local capacity for conflict management and mechanisms for early warning and improved response are strengthened.

**Component 1:** Research into drivers of conflict and local and national governance systems to inform programs that increase government capacity to meet service needs caused by resource strains.

**Component 2:** Advocacy for policy reform at sub-national and local levels to support inclusive governance which addresses the marginalization and exclusion of vulnerable populations and supports the grassroots engagement and access to services of ordinary citizens.

**Component 3:** Strengthen existing practices that reinforce social cohesion, and existing local conflict management and early warning mechanisms to prevent conflict from escalating and expanding to new areas.

**Component 4:** Research into effective models for improving cross-border communication to detect and respond to conflict and track insecurity-related early warning signals; design pilot interventions.

**Component 5:** Sharing of best practices from interventions across the region which aim to strengthen community and government structures to meet the needs of women and youth and empower them to influence and make decisions from local to national level.

## 5. Safe Migration

**Outcome:** Negative consequences of migration in the Lake Chad Basin are reduced, the positive outcomes are enhanced, and the increased resilience of people of the region enable them to make informed and positive migration choices.

**Component 1:** Programming for youth with higher likelihood or risk of migrating that specifically targets building their capacities to manage shocks and stresses better so they can improve their social and economic well-being and make informed choices about migration.

**Component 2:** Strengthening capacity of host communities to absorb and adapt to migration flows effectively and equitably through improved transparency of and access to social services, infrastructure, information, and building cohesion across lines of division.

**Component 3:** Conflict and violence prevention and mitigation interventions which reduce conflict-driven migration.

**Component 4:** Engagement of local and national authorities in a constructive dialogue to include migration-related issues in policies and local development plans.

**Component 5:** Increased participation and engagement of young men and women in policy discussions that affect, or are effected by migration, including young migrants themselves.

**Component 6:** Private sector actors and local civil society organizations are involved in development plans to address migration.

**Component 7:** Research into the links between migration, socioeconomic inclusion and stability (reduced violence and insecurity) to determine whether improving target groups' capacity to make informed choices about migration, and improving their access to strategies to practice safe migration, contributes to greater stability.

## Programmatic Areas Incorporated at the Country Level

Other critical intervention areas that have been particularly impacted by the crisis and necessarily contribute to this regional Theory of Change include food and nutrition security, and health. These are addressed via country level programming rather than factoring into regionally focused interventions. Also at the country level, programming will continue to address development constraints that impede social and economic progress, such as financial literacy and access to financial services, gender equality and general literacy.

## 6. Food and Nutrition Security

**Component 1:** Distribution of food via cash or electronic or paper vouchers as appropriate, unconditional cash transfers, and short-term support to livelihoods.

**Component 2:** Accompanying nutrition promotion via messaging on essential nutrition actions/essential family practices, as well as through linkages or direct partnering with nutrition specialist agencies.

**Component 3:** Programming that addresses the underlying causes of food insecurity, with approaches that

balance needs between displaced and host communities that are also facing chronic food insecurity, malnutrition, and livelihood loss.

## 7. Health

**Component 1:** Improving access to water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure in communities hosting IDPs and returnees.

**Component 2:** Hygiene promotion and provision of priority household items via cash or vouchers.

**Component 3:** Adoption of improved maternal health practices, access to maternal health services and Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) promotion.

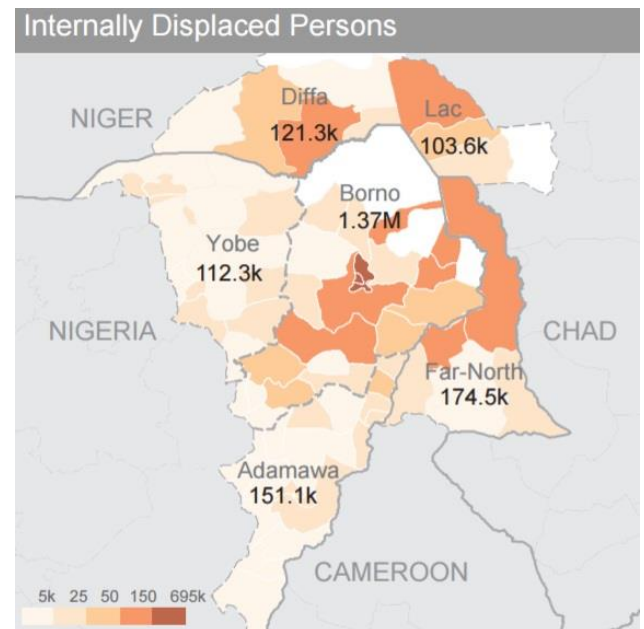
**Component 4:** Referrals, linkages or direct partnering with health specialist agencies, as well as capacity strengthening of local health outreach workers.

# Context

## Humanitarian Situation

The Lake Chad Basin is currently suffering the world's largest overlooked humanitarian crisis. There are 17 million people living in areas affected by Boko Haram's violence, and an estimated 10.7 million of them are in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>13,14</sup> Approximately 2.3 million people are displaced, of which over 1.6 million are in North East Nigeria alone.<sup>15</sup> Over 7.1 million people are currently facing crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity, with at least 55,000 people experiencing famine-like conditions in Borno State, Nigeria alone, and the figure is likely to double in the coming months.<sup>16,17</sup> Malnutrition rates for children under five have surpassed the emergency threshold in parts of all four countries bordering Lake Chad, with over half a million children now suffering from severe acute malnutrition.<sup>18</sup>

In Borno State, there are several districts where insecurity is preventing the provision of assistance of any kind to between 400,000 – 800,000 people.<sup>19</sup> Further, in the Far North region of Cameroon, the Lac region of Chad and the Diffa region of Niger, the number of displaced people continues to rise due to insurgent attacks in border areas and counter-insurgency operations by each country's



Source: Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Overview, UN OCHA, February 3, 2017.

13 Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Update, UN OCHA, February 6, 2017.

14 Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Overview, UN OCHA, February 3, 2017.

15 Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Update, UN OCHA, February 6, 2017.

16 Ibid.

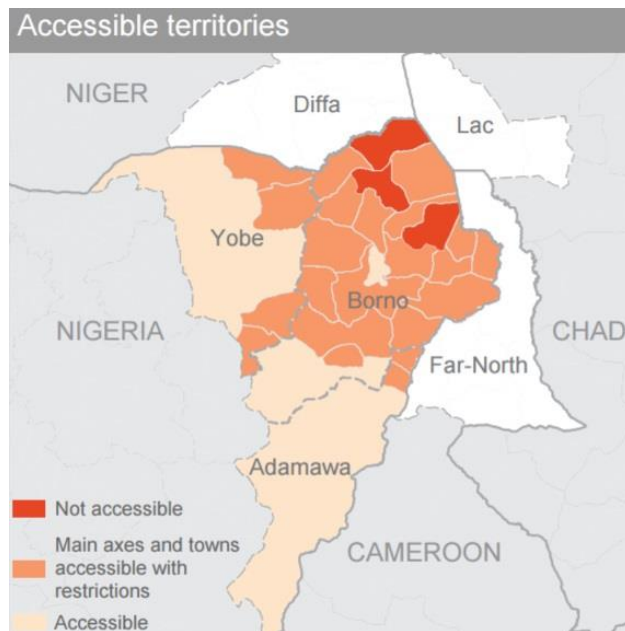
17 Lake Chad Basin Emergency, UN OCHA, January 2017.

18 Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Update, UN OCHA, February 6, 2017.

19 ACAPS Briefing Note: Humanitarian situation in newly accessible areas in Borno State, January 27, 2017.

respective national military forces. There are now an estimated 400,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in these localities, and a total of 2.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>20</sup> The crisis has thus unmistakably grown from being a North East Nigeria emergency with spill-over effects in border areas, to a truly regional issue with profoundly negative consequences for the people of all four countries bordering Lake Chad.

This is all occurring in spite of the fact that Boko Haram's direct control of territory has been significantly reduced since early 2015. Indeed, a re-energized campaign by the Nigerian army – which has gained momentum since the start of the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari in the spring of 2015 – combined with the support of the armed forces of Chad, Niger and Cameroon, has brought increased stability and access to some areas.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance, even in liberated areas, continues to increase. This is partly because the increased stability has created access to populations which were previously unreachable, and partly because additional conflict-related displacement is still taking place, notably in the Logone and Chari district of Cameroon and from the insurgency-affected villages along the Niger-Chad border. Moreover, in response to battlefield defeats, the insurgency has switched to a pattern of hit and run and suicide attacks on soft targets across a widening range of locations both inside Nigeria and in neighboring countries. Raids on villages and the use of improvised explosive devices continue to cause devastation, panic and renewed displacement. Many suicide attacks are conducted by children, adolescents and women and target civilians in markets, mosques and, increasingly, IDP sites.



Source: Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Overview, UN OCHA, February 3, 2017.

### Strained Social Cohesion and Security Concerns

Both community-government and intercommunal relationships are deteriorating, particularly in border areas of Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The response of the military and local authorities in all three countries is becoming increasingly heavy handed and risks alienating the local population, as happened when the Nigerian government cracked down on communities suspected of harboring or sympathizing with Boko Haram during the early years of the insurgency.

The Niger government's imposition of a state of emergency in the Diffa region, which has included banning the use of motorcycles and curtailing certain livelihood activities in an effort to reduce Boko Haram's revenue, has had the unintended consequence of breeding local resentment. Offensives by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) have themselves resulted in population displacement and retaliatory attacks on civilians by Boko Haram. Many communities near the border perceived to have links with Boko Haram face stigma and harassment. Distrust of refugees, displaced people and communities ethnically affiliated to Boko Haram supporters has led to inter-communal clashes. Vigilante groups established by the authorities have foiled many attacks, but have also reportedly engaged in unprovoked harassment of minorities. Meanwhile

<sup>20</sup> Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Overview, UN OCHA, February 3, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Military forces from Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, and Benin comprise what is called the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). Other regional military cooperation initiatives include the G5 against armed groups, consisting of Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Chad and Burkina Faso, as well as international military assistance from France, the US and other countries.

in North East Nigeria, the relative improvement of security in many areas has made the issue of reintegrating former members of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) more pressing. Many of these former militia members have high expectations relating to compensation for playing their part in defeating the insurgency, as do the families of the over 700 CJTF members who died fighting Boko Haram.

Meanwhile, on top of the conflict related emergency comes the risk of seasonal flooding, like what occurred in the final months of 2016. Alongside this flooding comes possible outbreaks of communicable disease, including cholera which is endemic to Nigeria and Chad and frequently recurs in flood-affected areas. These outbreaks can quickly cross borders and affect the other countries in the region. In fact, a public health emergency has recently been declared by the health ministers of all four Lake Chad countries, as well as the Central African Republic, in response to an outbreak of polio in Nigeria. Additionally, cases of measles and acute watery diarrhea among IDPs are reported to be increasing.<sup>22</sup>



Source: Tom Saater/Mercy Corps

On the positive side, governments in the region now appear to be much more actively mobilizing in response to the needs of their populations. The Nigerian Federal Government is starting to engage appropriately, stating “that coordination to date has not been sufficient given the scale of the crisis,” and a recent Presidential Executive Order raised coordination to an inter-ministerial level led by the Ministry of Budget and National Planning. The first Inter-Ministerial Task Force took place on September 29, 2016.<sup>25</sup> Further, after a slow and inadequate response to the crisis, donors are also starting to be more active and present in the region, and have roughly doubled the volume of assistance provided in 2015.



**Still, in 2016, 47 percent of UN appeals for the crisis went unfunded – a shortfall of \$347 million – and UN appeals for 2017 total \$1.5 billion.<sup>23,24</sup>**

## Economic and Social Destruction

The Lake Chad Basin region has always been underdeveloped socio-economically and in terms of infrastructure compared to the more urban parts of Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad, with most livelihoods heavily dependent on agriculture, livestock and trade. The conflict has inflicted huge damage on the already fragile regional economy, driving away what few state-provided services existed.

As mentioned above, governments of the region themselves have curtailed economic activities and trading in many areas in an effort to cut off Boko Haram’s revenue and means of subsistence, shutting down markets, restricting the sale of fuel and agricultural fertilizers, and temporarily banning trade in fish, pepper,

<sup>22</sup> UNICEF Nigeria Humanitarian Situation Report, September 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Update, UN OCHA, February 6, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Overview, UN OCHA, February 3, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Update on Government of Nigeria Coordination of Humanitarian Response in NE, September 26, 2016.

cattle and dried meat. The banning of motorcycles in the countryside has also severely impacted local mobility and markets, particularly in Niger.<sup>26</sup>

According to a recent regional market assessment conducted by the World Food Program (WFP), the ongoing conflict has disrupted trade flows by forcing traders to change trade routes.<sup>27</sup> Cross-border trade between Nigeria and Niger has been disrupted as transporters can no longer use the Damasak-Diffa axis because of security reasons. Cross-border trade between Nigeria and Cameroon has suffered from the conflict as well: Before the insurgency, most trade in northern Cameroon ran along the corridor from Maiduguri to Kousseri or Maiduguri to Maroua, but it has now reduced to a trickle due to the insecurity along those routes.<sup>28</sup> In Chad, restrictions on the export of livestock due to the conflict may mean losses of as much as a 41 percent of GDP.<sup>29</sup>

Social structures and services are also struggling. Overcrowded schools are strained to accommodate the large influx of newcomers, and some have closed in order to be repurposed as IDP camps. Traditional household and community structures have been disrupted and many women (between 13-28% across North East Nigeria) are now placed in the unfamiliar role of being the head of their household, requiring them to independently secure income and food to support their family.<sup>30</sup>



Source: Sean Sheridan/Mercy Corps

The cost of reconstruction is projected to be huge. In Nigeria alone, the World Bank led Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment (RPBA) estimates that about \$9 billion will be required for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of damaged infrastructure in the North East.<sup>31</sup> Agricultural damage caused by the conflict, an estimated \$3.7 billion, includes profound loss of livestock and agricultural production, ruined irrigation and farming facilities, and the collapse of extension services.<sup>32</sup> This burden comes at a time when the oil price collapse has pushed Nigeria's economy into a severe recession and left the government barely able to pay public sector wages.

Even if reconstruction is able to return the Lake Chad Basin to where it was – not an inspiring goal given the poor pre-crisis development indicators – the fact that the region's population is expected to double over the next 30 years raises concerns that the area will nevertheless remain fragile, with the perpetual risk of a subsequent larger scale emergency sweeping away development gains.

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26 Boko Haram on the Back Foot, International Crisis Group, May 4, 2016.

27 Lake Chad Basin Crisis: regional market assessment, WFP, June 2016.

28 Ibid: In the assessment, only one transporter out of 26 in Cameroon reported Nigeria as its main supply source of cereals suggesting that agricultural trade flows between Northeast Nigeria and North Cameroon have been greatly reduced.

29 The Lake Chad Basin at a cross-road: addressing urgent humanitarian needs in an overlooked crisis, UN OCHA, September 25, 2015.

30 Gender and SGBV Analysis, Maiduguri, UN OCHA, July 2016.

31 North-East Nigeria Recovery and Peace Building Assessment, World Bank Group, 2016.

32 Food insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin, FAO Regional Office for Africa, June 23, 2016.

# Underlying Problems

## Poverty and Economic Marginalization

Long before the current insurgency, all of the territories bordering Lake Chad were marginalized and mired in poverty after many decades of neglect and underinvestment by their governments. Cameroon, Niger and above all Nigeria have all seen steadily growing inequalities between their more prosperous southern or western regions and the Lake Chad area, with high birth rates, poverty and low levels of formal education particularly acute in these areas. In Nigeria, 76.8 percent of people in the North East live in poverty compared to 27 percent in the southern regions.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, although malnutrition affects all parts of the country and has been described by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as a national public health emergency, the vast majority of the 2.5 million children suffering Severe Acute Malnutrition are in the north.<sup>34</sup> In terms of education, prior to the conflict, North East Nigeria already had one of the lowest levels of primary school attendance in the world and Borno State had the lowest literacy rate in the country at 14.5 percent. Since the conflict began, the numbers of out-of-school children has continued to increase, particularly in communities hosting large numbers IDPs.<sup>35</sup>



Source: Sean Sheridan/Mercy Corps

This marginalization and inequity of government service provision has contributed to the crisis by feeding community grievances, making the alternative narratives of extremist groups like Boko Haram more attractive. Indeed, in Boko Haram's early years of existence, the group explicitly offered poor communities access to basic welfare, charitable assistance and Islamic schooling, bypassing the state. What has made Boko Haram's message even more attractive is the fact that even where education is available through the secondary level, the lack of job opportunities has further increased the disillusionment and negative associations with state provided services, particularly education. With diminishing employment opportunities, educated yet jobless youth resent their enforced status, as do less educated, artisanally-trained workers in the informal economy.<sup>36</sup>



**The wholly inadequate provision of health, education and other basic services, and the resulting sense of injustice and neglect, undoubtedly contributes to the spread of radical alternative ideologies like Boko Haram.**

## Weak Governance

Poor or absent governance has itself also been at the root of the region's troubles. Huge national and state level corruption and mismanagement has bred grievances and profound resentment among the vast majority of the population who are not direct beneficiaries of state patronage. This is most acute in the oil rentier economy of Nigeria where democratic accountability is endemically weak, but it also characterizes

<sup>33</sup> Global Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index, UN, June 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Good Nutrition: An Investment for the Future, UNICEF press release, July 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Action Plan: Nigeria, UNESCO High level International Round Table on Literacy, September 6-7, 2012. National average literacy rate is 50%.

<sup>36</sup> Policy Brief: Violent radicalisation in northern Nigeria: Economy & Society, Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme, 2015.

the situation in the other three countries bordering Lake Chad. Niger’s troubled history with uranium mining, for instance, has fueled long-standing public dissatisfaction given that despite being the world’s fourth largest producer of the ore, the generated revenue has failed to translate into improved services for the majority of the country’s poor.

Cynicism towards all four states is further deepened by repeated unfulfilled promises of development, as well as taxations and predations of state officials – many of whom do not speak local languages – and their local government allies.<sup>37</sup> In this environment, promises from radical Islamists that egalitarian Sharia law will replace state neglect and injustices perpetrated by western educated elites have become all the more attractive.

It is in this context of weak state legitimacy that Boko Haram was able to successfully recruit youth and exploit governance-related grievances and frustrations over inequality by providing opportunities for youth to achieve their economic ambitions, leveraging peer networks to increase recruitment and silencing potential critics through campaigns of intimidation.

**Mercy Corps’ April 2016 study of ex-Boko Haram fighters’ attitudes tellingly notes that “about half of former members said their communities at some time supported Boko Haram, believing it would help bring about a change in government.”<sup>38</sup>**

Even though the insurgency is now in retreat in Nigeria, with its ideology and credibility in tatters, the government is missing an opportunity to win hearts and minds by failing to place protecting the population at the center of its counter-insurgency strategy. According to research conducted by the Center for Civilians in Conflict, citizens in Borno State perceive the Nigerian security forces as deployed solely to defeat Boko Haram, not protect civilians.<sup>39</sup> This risks exacerbating long-term frustrations over inadequate services. It also does nothing to address the daily structural violence that characterizes the political economy of the region, in which cattle-rustling, banditry, vigilantism, illicit trade and abuse by state officials “have all been pervasive and inter-connected.”<sup>40</sup> Separating the tight linkages between the economy and the use of violence remains a long-term challenge for both North East Nigeria and the wider Lake Chad Basin region.

### Fragile Ecosystems and Climate Change

Subsistence agriculture and livestock farming are the most common livelihoods in most parts of the Lake Chad region, with a great dependence on precious deteriorating ecosystems. With the population of the region expected to double over the next 30 years, there will be an increased demand for water for agriculture, industrial development, and



Source: Sean Sheridan/Mercy Corps

37 Boko Haram on the Back Foot, International Crisis Group, May 4, 2016.

38 Motivations and Empty Promises: Voices of Former Boko Haram Combatants and Nigerian Youth, Mercy Corps, 2016.

39 When We can't See the Enemy, Civilians Become the Enemy: Living through Nigeria's Six-year Insurgency, Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2015.

40 Boko Haram on the Back Foot, International Crisis Group, May 4, 2016.



human consumption.<sup>41</sup> This pressure comes on top of decades of steadily declining agricultural productivity in the region, as climate change, demographic pressures, and mismanagement of scarce water resources have created what the UN describes as an “ecological catastrophe.”<sup>42</sup> Lake Chad’s surface area is now barely a tenth of what it was in 1963, eroding the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of families. Because most people of the region lack the education or skills for anything other than farming, livestock rearing and fishing, there are few alternative sources of income – other than migration. Even for those with some education or skills, there are no industries to absorb them. In the words of one seasoned Nigerian analyst, “the region now houses an explosive mix of those who have actively resisted any exposure to education in the belief their future lay in the traditional occupations that had supported generations before them, and those whose exposure to a formal education has created rising expectations they can no longer hope to realize.”<sup>43</sup>

## Interlinked Regional Issues

In the Lake Chad Basin, many development challenges are specific to each particular country, where the contexts and priorities are different and solutions must be tailored to national and sub-national realities – especially in the domains of humanitarian response, early recovery and reconstruction. However, there are strongly interconnected issues affecting all four countries of the Lake Chad Basin which cannot be fully understood or addressed without having a coherent regional analysis and approach to designing interventions. For example, conflict in one location often spurs displacement to another, where people are already suffering from scarce land and water resources. This displacement risks expanding the impact of conflict across borders, and highlights the need to not only address conflict where it is occurring, but also improve resource management in neighboring areas. Similarly, addressing desertification and improving natural resource management – particularly of water resources which cross national boundaries and are critical to both pastoral and agricultural livelihoods – requires regional analysis, advocacy and program design.



Source: Sean Sheridan/Mercy Corps

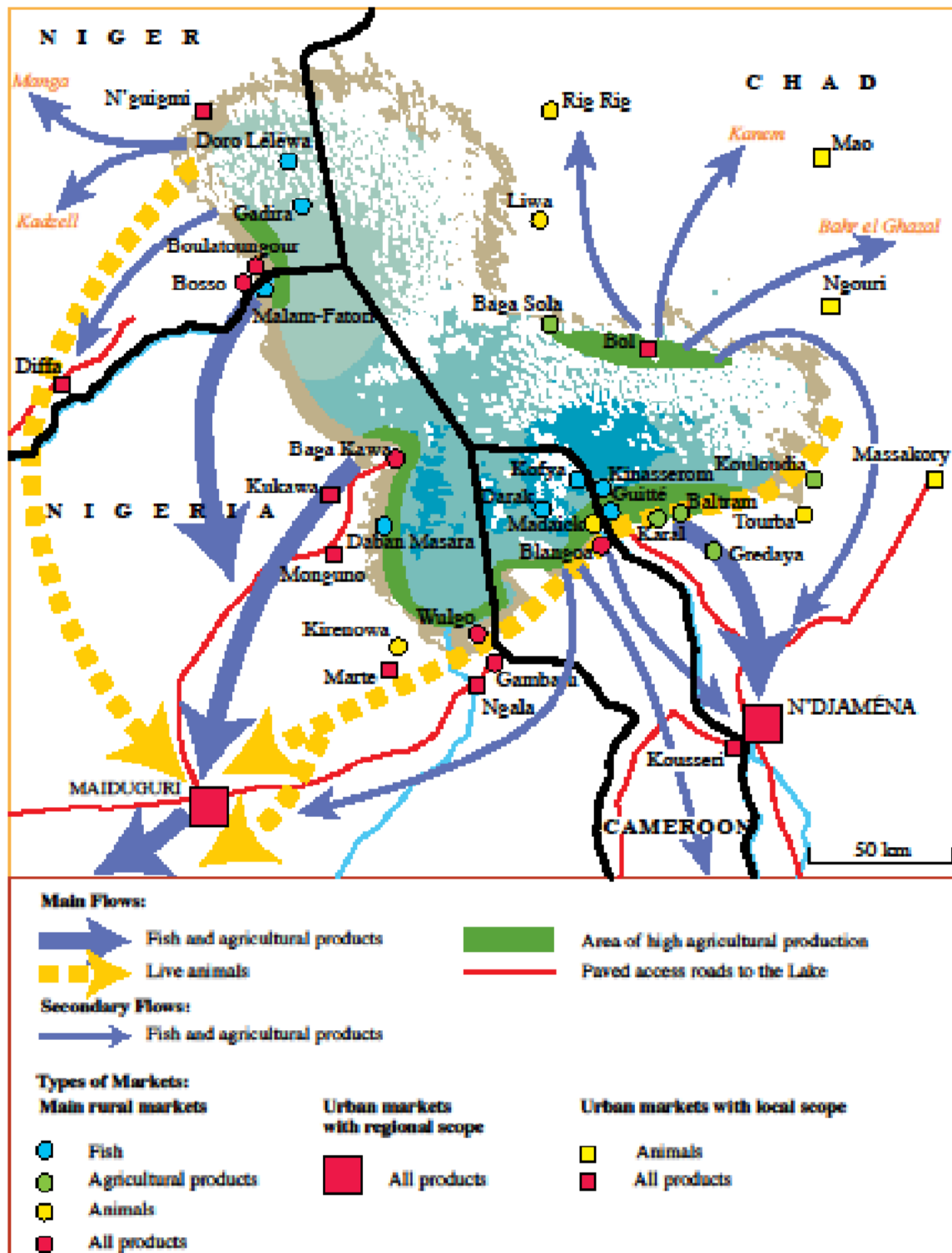
As the map on the next page illustrates, markets, trade routes and seasonal migration must also be understood in a regional context for value chains to be effectively developed in the interests of the poor, with inclusive economic opportunities. Radical ideologies also typically flow across borders along ethnic and linguistic lines rather than within national boundaries, and understanding their origins, influence and trajectory requires looking beyond bounded national spaces. Finally, the phenomenon of dramatic population growth shared across countries around the lake needs to be understood beyond the level of national statistics. In particular, rising urbanization rates and the untenable numbers of youth looking for work in emerging, largely informal economies, requires developing a robust regional understanding of population dynamics.

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41 Lake Chad Development and Climate Resilience Action Plan, Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), November 13, 2015.

42 Environmental Degradation, Climate Change and Conflict: The Lake Chad Basin Area, Ayo Obe, October 27, 2015.

43 Ibid.



Source: Lake Chad Basin: Desk Review, World Food Program, April 2016.

# Annex 1: Country Programming

## Nigeria

Mercy Corps has recently updated its strategy for North East Nigeria, the region which includes Nigeria's portion of Lake Chad, integrating not only our current and future humanitarian programs, but also the work we doing in early recovery, gender and conflict mitigation.

Since July 2014, Mercy Corps has provided humanitarian assistance to crisis-affected communities in the region, reaching over 100,000 individuals with multi-sectoral interventions that address humanitarian needs and support livelihood and economic recovery. Mercy Corps is currently implementing multi-sectoral programs in southern

Borno, providing assistance in the form of WaSH, protection, food, non-food items, cash-for-work, nutrition, livelihoods, and unconditional cash. As of November 2016, Mercy Corps is providing assistance to 17,200 households (120,400 individuals). By January 2017, Mercy Corps anticipates scaling-up to reach 68,000 conflict-affected households (476,000 individuals), while also expanding the type of assistance provided to include shelter, education, protection and livelihood support to adolescent girls and boys.

Mercy Corps has had an office in Maiduguri since September 2016 implementing a youth engagement program through local faith-based and civil-society organizations. We are currently in the process of opening up programming in newly accessible parts of Borno State, including Dikwa and Ngala LGAs which are close to the border with Cameroon and Lake Chad itself.

### Current Sectors of Intervention:

- **Food security** programming, chiefly distribution of food via electronic or paper vouchers as appropriate, phasing into distributions of unconditional cash as soon as possible.
- Accompanying **nutrition** promotion and linkages or direct partnering with nutrition specialist agencies.
- Integrated **protection** and social cohesion activities to mitigate the protection risks of conflict-affected households by reducing their vulnerabilities and increasing community cohesion and social capital, as well as providing psychosocial support, psychological first aid and protection referrals.
- Responding to **water, sanitation and hygiene** needs through the provision of infrastructure in communities hosting IDPs and returnees, and improving sanitation and hygiene practices through mass sensitization campaigns and the provision of cash or vouchers for priority household items.
- **Cash** grants for urban and rural individuals and groups to kick-start income generating activities.



Source: Tom Saater/Mercy Corps

- Increased **financial inclusion**, through access to microfinance services including the establishment of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA), which also provide an important platform for protection, nutrition, and WaSH awareness.

### Cross-Cutting Approaches:

- **Gender, youth and conflict** are used as lenses of analysis and are taken into account when designing and targeting all interventions.
- Mercy Corps explicitly **integrates local partners and government counterparts** into the design, planning, implementation and transition phases of all programs.
- Mercy Corps is in the process of commissioning or conducting further **research** to further inform our programs and advocacy, particularly in the sectors of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) agriculture, livestock and labor markets, as well as adolescent girls and youth.

## Niger

Mercy Corps has a well-established presence in Niger rooted in food security, economic development and resilience-building interventions. We have deliberately not yet engaged in humanitarian work in support of refugees and IDPs in the Diffa region, due to the large number of agencies already established there, and because of our belief that the level of food insecurity in the region requires long-term strategic interventions, not just short-term humanitarian ones. However, based on recent assessments reporting the worsening of the humanitarian situation and the remaining large gaps of assistance (65% of humanitarian needs are not covered), Mercy Corps intends to develop programs that will respond to urgent needs while also addressing the drivers and root causes of food insecurity in Diffa.<sup>44,45</sup>



Source: Sean Sheridan/Mercy Corps

In the Diffa region, there are over 73,000 IDPs and 340,000 people in need of immediate humanitarian assistance.<sup>46</sup> The current situation in Diffa is becoming worse, as 84 percent of households have poor to limited food consumption and 82 percent of them have poor food diversity because pastoral and agricultural activities are hindered by the lack of security, as well as displacement and climate-related effects.<sup>47,48</sup> Rates

44 mVAM à Diffa : Utiliser la technologie mobile pour suivre la situation alimentaire des ménages en situation d'urgence, WFP, June 2016.

45 Echo de Diffa, August 2016.

46 Lake Chad Basin Emergency, UN OCHA, January 2017.

47 mVAM à Diffa : Utiliser la technologie mobile pour suivre la situation alimentaire des ménages en situation d'urgence, WFP, June 2016.

48 Lake Chad Basin Emergency: Revised requirement and response priorities, UN OCHA, September – December 2016.

of acute malnutrition are above the emergency threshold in Diffa with a Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rate of 17 percent and a Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) rate of 3 percent.<sup>49</sup>

### **Current Sectors of Intervention in Diffa:**

Mercy Corps has begun piloting a CVE project in Diffa targeting villages in the southern communes of the departments of Mainé-Soroa and Diffa. Mercy Corps has also identified Diffa and N’Guigmi for humanitarian assistance and early recovery activities. Indeed, these two departments have the most critical gaps in the region due to the sheer size of the crisis there, security concerns, cross-border movements and proximity to Chad and Nigeria, and in the case of N’Guigmi, distance from urban bases of operation.<sup>50</sup>

At the same time, even though the region has been highly food insecure for at least the last five years, almost all funding is short-term and does not address long-term or even early recovery needs.<sup>51</sup> Thus, rather than join the short-term scramble for the top down distribution of aid, Mercy Corps Niger is looking for longer-term interventions that will inclusively target host communities, refugees, returnees, and IDPs together. Meanwhile, we will continue advocating for strategies that address the underlying causes of vulnerability in Diffa and institute long-term development solutions.

### **Potential Sectors of Work:**

- **Food security** interventions through voucher and cash systems (including e-transfers as recently piloted) and livelihood support.
- Integrating food security interventions with program components that address the **underlying causes of food insecurity** – balancing support to host communities who are themselves already under significant stress in terms of food security, malnutrition, lack of income generation opportunities with the curtailment of their main livelihoods activities and environmental instability.
- Given the costs associate with implementing **WaSH** programs via infrastructure improvements, Mercy Corps’ first goal would be to provide hygiene promotion alongside locally available WaSH infrastructure.
- Large-scale support around **natural resource management** of land and water resources and support of local **conflict mitigation** processes and structures.
- **Preventing violent extremism** and building social cohesion.

## **Cameroon**

The humanitarian situation in the Far North region of Cameroon continues to deteriorate. In recent months the number of refugees and IDPs has increased to a total of 175,000.<sup>52</sup> The number of food insecure people is now 1.5 million, more than double the figure in May 2015 when Mercy Corps last conducted a scoping

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49 Echo de Diffa, August 2016.

50 Ibid.

51 The primary donors in Diffa are USAID (OFDA/FFP), the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM), ECHO and the UN.

52 Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Overview, UN OCHA, February 3, 2017.

assessment in the east and north of the country.<sup>53</sup> The Minawao refugee site now hosts more than 60,000 Nigerians, almost three times its capacity.<sup>54</sup> There are also protection concerns for refugees outside camps, especially near border areas, as well as for the over 22,000 Nigerian refugees who were deported en masse in the early months of 2016 to North East Nigeria (mostly to Adamawa and Borno States). There is also substantial ongoing support needed for Central African refugees in the east of the country, who account for 1.2 million of the 2.7 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>55</sup>

## Chad

The total number of people affected by the conflict in Chad is 345,000 of which 104,000 are IDPs.<sup>56</sup> More than 136,000 people in the Lac region are expected to suffer severe food insecurity during the lean season in 2017, with current GAM rates at 12.2 percent and SAM rates of 2.1 percent, slightly above the two percent emergency threshold.<sup>57</sup>

Severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods, imposed by the Chadian military is hampering the livelihoods of many of the marginalized communities that live along the shores of Lake Chad itself. Meanwhile, the annual rise of Lake Chad's waters is further complicating humanitarian access to several areas. As the waters have risen in various branches of the lake, aid organizations are exploring alternative routes to deliver assistance to Fourkouloum, Ngouboua, Kaiga Ngouboua and Tchoukoutalia localities.<sup>58</sup>



Source: Sean Sheridan/Mercy Corps

The country as a whole is also suffering from food insecurity aggravated by chronic drought, recurrent floods and negative coping strategies, as well as large scale displacement of over half a million refugees from neighboring crises in Libya, CAR, Sudan, and Nigeria. However, while humanitarian needs are significant, they are mainly related to other protracted emergencies with epicenters outside of the Lake Chad Basin region, above all CAR and Sudan where the great majority of refugees originate.

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53 Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Update, UN OCHA, February 6, 2017.

54 Ibid.

55 The remaining 1.5 million live in the Far North.

56 Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Update, UN OCHA, February 6, 2017.

57 Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Update, UN OCHA, February 6, 2017.

58 Weekly Regional Humanitarian Snapshot, UN OCHA, November 8-14, 2016.

## Annex 2: Advocacy Messages

To promote long-term stability in the Lake Chad Basin, while also responding to urgent humanitarian needs, Mercy Corps urges regional governments, the international community, donors, and non-governmental agencies to increase investments in all four countries. This includes:

- **Dramatically and urgently increasing humanitarian investments** to the actors best placed to combat malnutrition and food insecurity, address shelter and protection needs, and ensure safe access to water and sanitation.
- **Increasing long-term investments that support sustainable development** and help to return government administration to marginalized communities to provide crucial basic services – including security, rule of law, education and health – and address factors that push individuals to join movements like Boko Haram.
- **Developing and funding a clear plan for the reintegration and reconciliation of armed civilian protection groups** and vigilantes – with the participation of the groups themselves – including the Nigerian Civilian Joint Task Forces (CJTF) and their counterparts in Cameroon and Niger.
- **Paying particular attention to increasing the safety, opportunities, and personal agency of adolescent boys and girls** who have grown up in conflict and suffering.



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### About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.



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