

# Lake Chad Basin

## Socio-economic resilience in the shadow of Boko Haram

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This report presents evidence-based analysis to support ongoing processes to build resilience in the Lake Chad Basin through human mobility and commerce. It shows how economic actors in the region have been affected by the Boko Haram conflict and how some government measures have exacerbated their vulnerability. It also highlights actions taken by these actors to sustain livelihoods and adapt to the crisis.

## Key findings

- ▶ Before the rise of violent extremism, the flourishing fishing and agro-pastoral economies of the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) region (Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria) contended with violence from banditry and highway robbery.
  - ▶ The uneven and often contested state presence has marginalised communities and enabled Boko Haram to establish itself and generate revenues by appropriating and controlling many LCB economic activities.
  - ▶ The closure of trade routes, looting and destruction of property have had dire economic implications. Resilient businesses face declining capital due to changing sources of supply and trade routes, and higher transaction costs.
  - ▶ State counterinsurgency responses have distorted production, transportation and trade.
- Trade bans of commodities perceived to be of value to Boko Haram, abuse of power and extortion have not been offset by the provision of safety to communities.
- ▶ Communities have been forced to adopt coping strategies that include perverse social contracts, especially with violent extremist groups. These strategies also abet criminality and strengthen economies of violence.
  - ▶ Women economic actors have been particularly affected by the conflict, given pre-existing gender roles and discrimination. Several have had to reduce the scale of their activities, as the risks of using unsafe routes is too high. They are also at risk of gendered exploitation and abuse by state and non-state actors.

## Recommendations

- ▶ Increased protection against armed groups is crucial to restoring livelihoods and improving resilience. This includes protecting transport routes and improving security at markets and borders. This is the responsibility of LCB governments and the Multinational Joint Task Force.
  - ▶ Interest-free or low-interest credit facilities are needed for traders. These can be facilitated by LCB governments through private financial institutions, but can also be supported by donor organisations working in the region.
  - ▶ Behaviours such as extortion and harassment of traders and transporters need to be penalised. Taxes and other arbitrary charges levied against economic actors should be reduced.
- ▶ A clear division of responsibilities is needed between administrative bodies and security forces. Control and retributive mechanisms should be established to guarantee the accountability and prosecution of those responsible.
  - ▶ Addressing the needs of different social strata according to economic sectors, gender and social status is key. Despite the crisis, fishing and agriculture continue to attract farmers and are means of enabling resilience that should be strengthened. However, it is also important to support diversification of economic activities and develop new productive sectors.

## Introduction

The Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS), known as Boko Haram, but became violent in Nigeria in 2009. Since 2013, Boko Haram has deepened its regional violent extremist footprint, attacking and recruiting fighters from all four Lake Chad Basin (LCB) countries (Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria). By 2015, it had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The group splintered in 2016, with ISIS recognising the breakaway faction, which became the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi.<sup>1</sup>

This split was due largely to differences between other Boko Haram leaders and Abubakar Shekau, who was subsequently killed during a clash between his faction and ISWAP in May 2021. This has cemented ISWAP's position as the dominant violent extremist group in the LCB.

Over the years, Boko Haram has adapted its strategy largely in response to national and regional military interventions. For more than a decade, the group's two factions have wreaked havoc, depriving communities of goods and productive opportunities, and driving millions from their homes and production zones. ISWAP's strategy to win the 'hearts and minds' of communities by offering to protect and support their livelihoods creates urgency for the state to effectively respond to community needs.<sup>2</sup>

The LCB region, an oasis on the southern edge of the Sahara, has historically been a commercial crossroad.<sup>3</sup> Situated at the intersection of past-contesting empires, violence is not foreign to the region. However, the onset of Boko Haram violence in 2009 worsened security dynamics, necessitating national, regional and global attention and interventions. Simultaneously depending on and preying on communities around the lake and on different sides of national borders, Boko Haram has coopted economic and social livelihood processes to enhance its adaptability and resilience.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, state responses have also paradoxically both catered to and deepened community-based vulnerabilities.

During this decade-long conflict, communities' resilience and livelihoods have been severely affected, with the war hampering their ability to produce and

trade. Understanding how these communities live in the shadow of this crisis is particularly important where LCB states have adopted a holistic approach to stabilisation, focusing on restoring the livelihoods of riparian communities.

Resilience is conceptualised as the ability of individuals or groups to adapt to livelihood stresses and disturbances, and improve their lives through self-organisation and learning.<sup>5</sup> There are three key components: buffer capacity, self-organisation and capacity for learning. Additionally, 'robust livelihoods' underscore the utility of swift survival strategies for better outcomes.<sup>6</sup> Reactive capacities show adaptive ability, while proactive capacities capture the concepts of learning and creating new livelihood sources.

Although often applied to community adaptation to environment-related livelihood strains, this framework is also relevant to violence-induced pressures. It is useful to understand the factors that shape community resilience in the LCB. This informs the resilience component of the Lake Chad Basin Commission – African Union Regional Strategy for the Stabilisation, Recovery and Resilience (RS-SRR) of the Boko Haram-affected Areas of the LCB Region to holistically address vulnerabilities.

**Given ISWAP's strategy of protecting and supporting livelihoods, the state must urgently respond to community needs**

The RS-SRR places community resilience – the ability to withstand shocks and disruptions – at the heart of its work. In the LCB, these shocks are the economic, social and humanitarian consequences of the crisis, combined with the effects of climate change. Enabling communities to cope with and adapt to these shocks is, therefore, crucial.

Through the prism of human mobility and commercial processes in the LCB, this report makes available evidence-based analysis to support and enhance ongoing resilience-building. It provides empirical data on the buffer capacity, self-organisation and capacity for learning, and adaptation of economic actors. It shows how their activities have been affected by the Boko Haram conflict, and how some government measures have further increased their vulnerability.

It also highlights actions taken by these economic actors to sustain their livelihood sources and adapt to the impact of the crisis.

## Methodology

### Tools

This study combined primary and secondary data. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted from September 2020 to February 2021 to understand resilience activities and dynamics, and how conflict and violence influence resilience.

### Spaces

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) prioritises a regional understanding of dynamics of conflict, violence and insecurity in the LCB. This guides a multi-site

methodology that deploys research teams in all eight LCB regions directly affected by Boko Haram.<sup>7</sup> Specific research sites were chosen for their relevance to economic production, transport channels and market hubs for the main products in the border areas of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. Considering the region's very volatile situation and the protection of researchers and respondents, the monitoring of security developments also informed the choice of localities. Chart 1 shows the main areas visited.

### Interlocutors

In total, 158 interlocutors from four main stakeholder groups were met through either one-on-one interviews or focus group discussions. Details of the stakeholder groups have been provided in Chart 2.

Chart 1: The eight Lake Chad Basin regions affected by the Boko Haram crisis



All interlocutors were met in communities, and in markets within and outside the areas of the study because of the economic linkages between these spaces. To collect as much data as possible, every opportunity was taken to talk to the target groups, through both formal interviews and informal discussions.

### Limitations and coping strategies

Research took place against a backdrop of protracted conflict, complicating access to certain areas and for certain interlocutors. The conflict has also profoundly affected economic circuits and many major trade and commercial centres, such as Baga Kawa (Nigeria), Banki (Cameroon-Nigeria), Nguigimi (Niger) and Baga Sola (Chad), which have been abandoned. It was, therefore, necessary to use multi-site data collection,

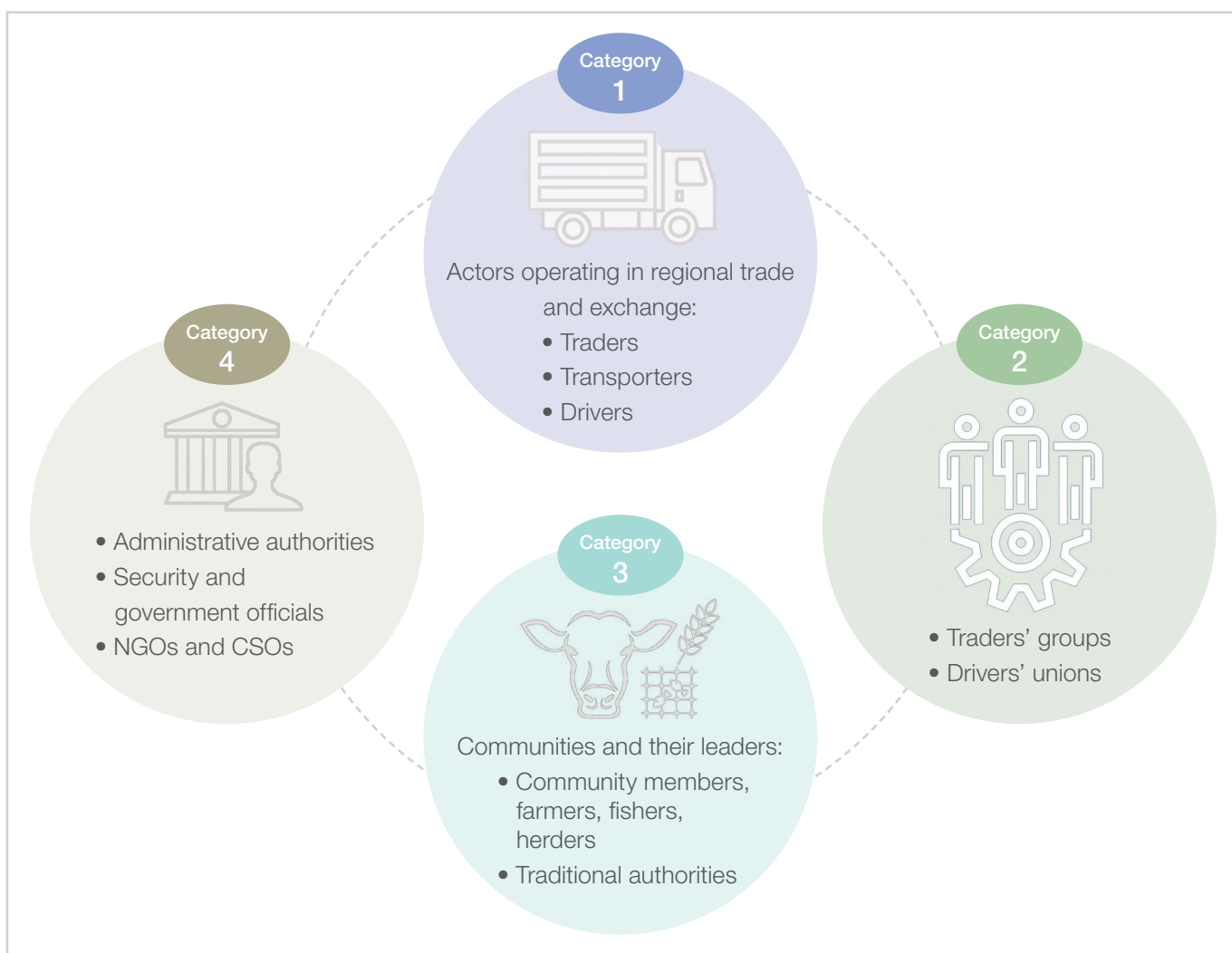
tracking information in accessible locations and moving certain actors from less-secure to relatively safer areas. This and timely data collection plans were possible due to maintenance of the active local partner network and continuous monitoring of security.

The data and analyses presented in this report, unless otherwise stated, are derived from insights provided by the interlocutors.

### Pre-Boko Haram economy

Most economic production in the LCB – including fishery, agro-pastoral production, trade and transportation – derives from and depends on the natural environment and its conditions. Cross-border communities established trade and economic linkages that leverage their natural, cultural and political environments on the

Chart 2: Interlocutors





or via Pala and Dumru to Mubi. Cameroonian livestock moves through Bogo and Malvouday to Nigeria. In Niger, from Nguigmi, cattle then pass through Karamga and Nguel Kollo to Nigeria.

‘Before, we could go to Nigeria via Baga Sola, then Ngouboua, Kaiga Ngouboua, Madaï and Baga Kawa to Lagos. On the Baga Kawa-to-Lagos route, we used heavy trucks and would travel for five days, with about two weeks to sell and return to Bol. These routes are now forbidden. With the crisis, the route we take to sell in Nigeria is Bol to Liwa, Kiskawa, Daboua, Nguigmi, Diffa, Gaidam and Lagos. It takes 22 days to reach Gaidam and another three days to get to Lagos. A round trip takes at least 40 days.’

*Livestock traders association focus group  
in Bol, Chad, 31 October 2020*

Nigeria, with large cities such as Maiduguri, Mubi, Baga Kawa, Gamboru, Yola, Gombé and Potiskum, offers the largest demand markets and is the major source of supply in the sub-region. Identifying informants who are familiar with trade in the region enabled understanding of key dynamics. This also applied to the other LCB countries. Key to this cross-border economy is the transportation of goods, by trucks, small cars, boats etc.

The relative and contested presence of the state and the concurrent socioeconomic marginalisation of communities<sup>12</sup> in these areas have enabled Boko Haram to establish itself. Meanwhile, the group’s trade viability underpins its ability to generate revenue. It has appropriated control over many economic activities in the areas under its control.<sup>13</sup> It imposed taxes and other payments – some coercive – on the populations living there.

To cut off Boko Haram’s supply chain, security forces have previously restricted or banned transportation of goods important for sustenance, including fish, fuel, livestock, sugar, fertiliser (urea<sup>14</sup>), motorcycle parts and batteries. In a region where state borders did not mean much before Boko Haram, the insurgency and its impact have greatly affected movements. It has also disrupted

what was a relatively smooth human and material mobility from one space to another.

‘The transport of fish and a category of chemical fertiliser is forbidden, because it is said that smoked fish supplied by accomplices is destined for Boko Haram and the fertiliser allows them to make homemade explosives.’

*Interview with a transporter,  
Diffa, Niger, December 2020*

Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has added to the difficulties faced by liminal communities in LCB countries. The constraints imposed to manage the disease have had repercussions for the daily survival of communities in areas already impacted by conflict.<sup>15</sup>

## **Boko Haram’s impact on productive economic sectors**

The crisis has had a profound impact on production, transport and trade at country and regional levels. The LCB’s main productive activities are agriculture, fishing and livestock.

### **Increasingly narrow fishing grounds**

The islands are the most favourable fishing places, with a large concentration of fishers, from the four countries bordering the lake and other West African countries such as Senegal and Mali. Many islands have Maliri (Malian neighbourhood in Kanuri) or Senegalese neighbourhood. Long before the crisis, competition forced fishers to go to increasingly remote areas for good catches. They were among the early Boko Haram victims on the islands of Lake Chad. Early in the crisis, many lost their lives, were forcibly recruited or were dispossessed of their property.

Furthermore, in all four countries, measures put in place to combat Boko Haram have consisted of banning people from certain areas, particularly the islands. In Chad, the Kaiga-Kindjiria, Ngouboua and Kangalam areas remain red zones to this day. In Cameroon, these zones are Darak, Hillé Alifa and Fotokol, in Niger the areas beyond Bosso, Gueskerou and the islands, and in Nigeria, the island villages in Abadam, Kukawa,

Guzamala, Marte, and Monguno local government areas of Borno state.

Fishing is as trapped in the crisis as any other sector. Fishers have had to reduce their range of practice, limiting themselves to areas still accessible. In these places, the water bodies are often overgrown, making fishing difficult. Some fishers still in Boko Haram-controlled areas are forced to collaborate with the group or pay fees to continue operating. This has forced most fishers to move, with catches well below expectations.

The invasion of fishing areas by weeds has destroyed nets and other equipment. Fishing in the shadow of Boko Haram, if it continues, faces much hardship, reducing the revenues of fishers and families.

'I was a fisherman before Boko Haram and I am under it, even with the ban on fishing by the authorities. I don't know any other activity. The security forces suspect fish transporters of being accomplices of or working for Boko Haram. They burnt several vehicles carrying fish.'

*Fisherman in Diffa, Niger, 8 December, 2020*

## A dry season

Agriculture flourished in the LCB by benefitting from the area's ecosystem, especially around the islands. Unlike in other areas in the Sahel band, these agricultural activities were sustained during the dry season through irrigation. The crisis has driven thousands of people from their production areas to safer zones, severely impacting their ability to produce.

This has had food security repercussions in and outside the LCB for areas that depended on the region for agriculture supply. It has increased pressure on arable land and led to tensions between and within communities. In addition, the floods of 2020 accentuated the precariousness of producers, many of whom saw their cultivated fields flooded. This has affected irrigated crops, as some polders have remained flooded beyond the usual period.

At the beginning of the crisis, production of certain crops was banned on suspicion that it fed violent extremists, as

in the case of pepper in the Diffa area. The harm this did to producers forced the Nigerien government to reverse it.<sup>16</sup> The most visible effect of the crisis on agriculture is access to the usual production areas, allowing farmers to produce in the rainy season or off-season. Here, too, many farmers have had to abandon the islands and retreat to the mainland, often to sandy areas unsuitable for farming.

'Some people have lost their cultivable space because of rising water levels and the polders must be redeveloped because many are currently flooded. This has to be taken into account.'

*Male, 35 years old, Melea, Chad,  
30 October 2020*

The conflict has shrunk agricultural space, leading to greater competition over cultivable land. Tensions, but also inter-group conflicts, have arisen from disputes over certain islands. Such a case is Melea around Baga Sola. As with some fishers, some farming communities remain in their production zones, sustaining their businesses through alternative contracts with Boko Haram factions, which provide security in exchange for taxes and other levies.

## Cows for cash and consumption

As Boko Haram has realised the importance of livestock for its funding and consumption, many herder families have been dispossessed and some have lost their lives. Others have seen their livestock decimated by lack of water and pasture land as they were driven off the islands. This is the case of kuri cattle, whose ideal habitat is the shores and islands of Lake Chad, where there is an abundance of grazing land and water in almost all seasons.

The situation is just as complex for livestock traders. As with the farmers, they have lost thousands of animals due to the crisis. The livestock traders' union in Chad's Lac Province estimates the total loss of its members at hundreds of head of cattle. To get their livestock back to Nigeria, which remains the main market, traders can no longer use the usual routes to Nigeria because of insecurity. They resort to longer and more expensive routes, but in addition, the livestock arrive there thin and not very profitable.



'Before the crisis, a Kuri cow cost about XAF500 000 to XAF550 000 (about US\$1 000). We spent at least XAF50 000 for the transport to Nigeria and there we used to sell the cow for at least XAF650 000. Currently, we buy a big cow at XAF300 000. For its transport to Nigeria we spend XAF85 000. There we sell it for XAF375 000 or XAF400 000. Now the oxen are thin, they are not well fed.'

*Livestock traders association focus group discussion, Bol, Chad, 31 October 2020*

## Coping with disruption of local and regional trade

### Cameroon

Cameroon plays an important role in the sub-regional economy, supplying both agro-pastoral and fishery products to the Nigerian metropolises and as a corridor linking Chad to Nigeria, through both Lac and Hadjer-Lamis provinces. Cameroon depends as much on these sub-regional connections.

The crisis has altered the activities of traders, disrupted transport routes and affected both the sourcing of goods for trade outside the LCB and the supply of goods to buyers in the region. Travelling to parts of Nigeria to stock up for resale in Cameroon has been hindered by the state banning of transport of goods perceived as enhancing Boko Haram's survivability and resilience.

In Mayo Sava and Mayo Tsanaga, for example, the importation of cereals from Nigeria was banned. This led to a rush for rice, which is increasingly in demand by households, resulting in higher prices. Trade in products such as sugar, batteries and fuel that can be used by violent extremists to make bombs and explosives was also banned. Heightened harassment and extortion from police and customs officials during transportation of goods to supply points in Douala and Maiduguri has led to transport cost increases, which are then felt by the end-consumer.

Generally, traders have moved to more secure areas, abandoning their traditional activities in favour of agriculture or changing the types of goods traded.

Traders unable to reconfigure their trading patterns have declared bankruptcy as they are unable to service the loans that supported their trade.

'Before the crisis, in addition to these goods, I sold many other things: petrol, food products. I was the head of a large shop but the crisis made me lose everything. Today, you see, there is nothing in this shop.'

*Male trader, Koza, Cameroon, 20 November 2020*

Transporters also face challenges. They are victims of stigmatisation as they are often accused of being Boko Haram accomplices. Given the security situation, motorbike, tricycle and bus drivers travel along the roads to Nigeria at their own risk.

Several traders and transporters have changed their trading routes. Those settled in Logone and Chari and Mayo Sava continue to take risks by sourcing products from Banki in Nigeria despite the formal closure of the borders along the Mora-Kolofata-Kerawa-Banki route. Before the crisis, in Logone and Chari, traders bought supplies from Gamboru. However, the closed borders have forced them to go through Banki via Mayo Sava. Some traders avoid taking risks, preferring to stock up in Douala or Maroua with Cameroonian products.

Those settled in Mayo Tsanaga continue to obtain supplies from Nigeria but have switched from Maiduguri to Mubi. The most commonly used route is Maroua-Mora-Waza-Dabanga-Kousseri, which is referred to by users as the 'axis of death'. For this reason, transport is often by convoy.

### Chad

As in Cameroon, the Boko Haram crisis has greatly affected economic actors in Lac and Hadjer-Lamis provinces. Many Chadian traders and transporters have been killed in insurgent attacks. Those who survived are now bankrupt due to looting or destruction of their property, and by the closure of river trade routes between Lac Province (Chad) and Borno State (Nigeria).

From the crisis, new players have emerged in the economies of Lac and Hadjer-Lamis. These include

local and international NGOs and their staff, military escorts, vigilance committees, army guides and boat drivers. NGO staff affect the local economy in different ways, including by increasing the demand for certain goods and services. Other players were mostly already present in the local economy but modified their roles to adapt to livelihood disruption.

'I have been trading since 2014. Before the crisis, my specialisation was foodstuffs. I had a shop on the other side of the market. I used to sell rice, sweets, pasta, sugar etc.'

*Male trader, Bol, Chad, 1 November 2020*

Some major traded goods have been impacted by the crisis. In Lac and Hadjer-Lamis, locally produced items such as natrium, beans, smoked fish, livestock, maize, wheat, peanuts, peanut oil, animal skin, dried meat and handicrafts have been affected. Imports of goods such as fizzy and sweet drinks, cement, fuel, ice, maize, sugar, onions, cement, fuel, vehicle spare parts and other manufactured items imported from Nigeria and Cameroon have declined or ceased.

The crisis has led to the closure of some trade routes between Chadian regions and other LCB countries. Currently, the road networks connecting N'Djaména and Bol are very popular, as are those bypassing Niger. A popularly used route is the Bol-Baga Sola-Diffa-Kano/Geidam-Maiduguri alternative. Although the border between Hadjer-Lamis and Blangoua is still operational, it has been affected by COVID-19 restrictions. These have led to smuggling across the borders, usually at night, and with the connivance of some security and customs agents.

The crisis has also had an impact on the region's transport. Many canoes and speedboats have been stolen, destroyed, requisitioned by the military or are lying abandoned. Goods transportation by motor vehicle has also changed, with vehicles such as the Toyota Land Cruiser HJ-45 no longer being used for goods like agricultural and fishery products but are now used for sand in some cases.

In Hadjer-Lamis, vehicles, canoes and motorbikes still transport goods and people but their use has been limited in some zones through insecurity. Canoes now avoid waterways deemed dangerous, one being Mahada, where at least seven canoes made daily trips to Blangoua before the crisis. This number has since halved. A similar situation has been observed with vehicles on regular trips from the province to N'Djaména. The decline in economic activities in the region has affected the movement of goods and people, leading some transport operators to abandon Hadjer-Lamis for other localities.



MANY TRADERS HAVE LOST  
INCOME OR GONE BANKRUPT

## Niger

In Niger, many economic actors have simply ceased trading for reasons including blockage of supply routes, dispossession of assets and government policies that interdict continuation of activities. Several of these traders and transporters have lost their livelihoods, while some have switched to other economic activities.

As some businesses have folded, new economic actors have emerged, among them traders responding to construction industry growth driven mostly by the influx of NGOs. Other entrepreneurs have arisen due to an increase in NGO-related services such as car-rental agencies. To circumvent security challenges on the usual routes to Nigeria, these entrepreneurs are also increasingly using the connection with Benin, via Bosso and Nguiguimi, then Diffa.

Traded goods affected by the crisis through bans include fish, petrol, pepper, chemical fertiliser, wooden planks for boats and two-wheeled motorbike taxis. Routes have been affected by restrictions on driving hours, road blockages, high fuel prices and the ban on two-wheeled motorbikes because of their popularity among violent extremists and gangs for perpetrating attacks.

‘The trade in smoked fish, petrol and chemical fertiliser, transactions through two-wheeled motorbikes and the cultivation of peppers were at one time prohibited.’

*Male trader, Mainé-Soroa, Niger,  
17 December 2020*

## Nigeria

Crisis-induced changes in economic activities in Nigeria are similar to those of other areas studied. Some actors have completely lost their livelihoods, while others have found ways to cope. Badly affected have been the Buzaye people (Tuareg) from Niger, who transported high volumes of goods into Yobe State via thousands of camels. The Buzaye no longer operate in Yobe, leaving a few nationals from Nigeria and Niger to conduct lower volumes of trade between the two countries. Emerging economic actors have created a new demand markets, including fish smugglers,

and state and non-state armed actors (Boko Haram factions and other bandits).

Most traded goods have suffered, but particularly fish and fertiliser due to the trading ban by the military. Other foods have fallen foul of looting by non-state armed groups, including Boko Haram, seizing the products for personal or family use.

Camels and motor vehicles were the major means of transport in the region. Multiple security checkpoints where harassment by state officials occurs have forced traders to find alternative routes. Camels are also rustled by non-state armed groups for their personal use. Although Geidam-Garin Gada-Maine is the only well-constructed trading route, widespread insecurity disincentivises its use. This has forced vehicles to use the more difficult Sahara routes.

## Regional trade and commercial transport

Many traders are bankrupt, while those still in business have seen a drop in income. To continue to exist, they have had to resort to other sources of supply, take new, longer export routes and incur higher costs.

‘Now people bypass Diffa to go to Nigeria. So traders who can’t afford it don’t go. We can say that only 10% of traders use this route.’

*An official of Lac Province’s traders’ union,  
Bol, Chad, 30 October 2020*

A strategy has been to turn to other types of trade to survive. Some individuals have moved from food and clothes to hardware. This trade swapping is driven not only by survival but adaptability. Some traders have learnt to adapt to changing patterns of demand and supply caused by the presence of humanitarian and development agencies.

‘I have been trading since 2014. Before the crisis we used to buy a box of sugar for 3 000 francs in Baga Kawa and sell it in Chad for 6 000 francs. I could import up to 10 000 boxes a year. The crisis has disrupted the business and I had to convert. I

turned to the hardware business. Thank God things are going well with the installation of humanitarians in the region. I also store and resell foodstuffs such as maize, rice, beans and wheat.'

*Male trader, Bol, Chad, 1 November 2020*

In cases such as this one the conversion has been judiciously carried out, enabling the trader to continue to earn a living. Despite the insecurity, others have been forced to maintain the same business, albeit at reduced capacity and increased cost, because they have no choice.

'My biggest customers were from Chad and Cameroon but not anymore because of the insecurity. Before Boko Haram, I spent not more than N10 000 transporting my goods from Maiduguri to Banki. Now I have to transport the goods first to Banki, offload them from the vehicle and then take them by wheelbarrows to Amchidé, a Cameroon border town that is safer than Banki. That is the only way people from Cameroon or Chad can come to patronise my business because of border closure and insecurity.'

*Male trader, 67, Maiduguri, Borno, Nigeria, 27 October 2020*

The situation is equally precarious for transporters. Many have converted to agriculture and fishing. Those still operational have been forced to change routes, with the border to Nigeria still closed or for fear of encountering Boko Haram. They, therefore, either fall back on domestic routes or take longer, more expensive and less profitable trips. This means lower revenue and impoverishment for many.

'We have no support from the state. Many canoeists have become fishers or farmers. The hope is that the border with Nigeria will be reopened.'

*Boat driver, Koudouboul, Chad, 30 November 2020*

All LCB productive sectors and trade have experienced obstacles to movement of goods and people due to fear or prohibition. This has caused immense assets and earnings losses for producers and has put a large section of the population out of work, creating a domino effect that threatens the wellbeing of millions of households.

## Conflict and crises

The LCB is fragile in many respects. First, insecurity from organised crime has existed in this area since pre-colonial times.<sup>17</sup> In Nigeria, the phenomenon is exacerbated by kidnapping for ransom in particular, with possible links to violent extremist groups.<sup>18</sup> Other countries experience this, but to a much lesser degree than Nigeria. The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed additional restrictions, including the closure of borders. Chad and Niger reopened their land borders only in June 2021, after almost one year of closure and resultant trade disruption.

Finally, the effects of climate change are increasingly being felt, with frequent flooding and erratic rainfall cycles. In Lac Province, for example, the International Organisation for Migration recorded 30 000 new arrivals in internally displaced person (IDP) sites as a result of flooding in their communities. It also noted flooding in 2020 of the farms of more than 40 000 farmers, with 7 925 hectares of maize fields and 175 hectares of okra.<sup>19</sup> The combination of all these factors further increases the precariousness of the populations and reduces their resilience.

## Territorial control takes its toll

Boko Haram has a marked presence and has perpetrated violent attacks on civilians in villages in and around Sambisa forest, Alagarno forest and Mandara Mountains, and in the island villages in Abadam, Kukawa, Guzamala, Marte and Monguno. This is true, too, of Kaiga Kindjiria, Ngouboua and some islands around Kangelam in Chad, Darak and Fotokol in Cameroon, some areas around Bosso and islands such as Guémé and Barwa in Niger.

This presence allows the group to control large parts of the local economies. Communities that have been trapped are forced into alternative contracts with the

group or risk death. In return for paying ‘taxes’, they can continue their economic activities. In many cases, delay in or reluctance to pay these taxes leads to reprisals, particularly in areas such as Marte. Here, farmers, fishers and woodcutters are regularly targeted by the violent extremists, accused of feeding information to the army or of not paying the taxes imposed to allow economic and agricultural activities.<sup>20</sup>

Territorial control is very important for Boko Haram financing. The bulk of the group’s resources have been accumulated by controlling a large part of the trade in livestock, fish, agricultural commodities such as maize, peppers and wheat, and contraband products including fuel and sugar. Furthermore, forcibly replacing states in these areas is an important element in Boko Haram’s aspiration to establish a caliphate.

Communities afflicted by this crisis prioritise mainly continued production and provision for their basic needs. Thus, they carefully navigate realities with either the state or Boko Haram. By complying with the group’s requirements, producers retain access to their production areas, and move goods from farms to markets and between markets. And Boko Haram can continue to expand into areas where the state has not always been present, particularly the Lake Chad islands.

### Violent extremists regularly target farmers, fishers and woodcutters who they accuse of feeding information to the army or not paying ‘taxes’

Some supply chains have remained functional even in the areas under the group’s control. This has been made possible by the collection of transit fees from traders and by Boko Haram keeping some small markets in the region functional. These markets remain connected to distant areas such as the Central African Republic through Cameroon or Sudan through Chad.

One economic element that has escaped disruption is the dominance of the Nigerian Naira as the main currency of exchange in the region. The Naira is still widely used around Lake Chad, although the official currency for Chad and Cameroon is the Central African CFA franc and for Niger the West African CFA franc. In Baga Sola, Diffa and Amchidé (Cameroon), the Naira remains widespread. This is further evidence that areas controlled by Boko Haram and many places in the affected zones remain interconnected, allowing the group to continue to benefit from large financial resources.

### Women bear the brunt

Although communities in the LCB are vulnerable, this is even more so for women. A 2016 assessment of gender and markets in the LCB found that women were more likely to be retailers than wholesalers, and their general participation in agricultural trade was low.<sup>21</sup> Although this study was carried out in a crisis context, women in the LCB have historically been economically



marginalised, with their roles reflecting the wider gender disparities of the four countries.

In Cameroon, women have been the demographic most affected by the crisis. Women are over-represented in petty trade such as selling vegetables and other products because some small local markets in which they operated have been closed or abandoned due to insecurity. Small-scale female traders have been exposed to similar livelihood disruptions as larger-scale traders. Bankruptcy has pushed some women out of business and economic production, and goods have been looted. These issues have displaced several women, leaving them with little-to-no sources of income.

'I am a trader in groundnuts, rice, oil and flour. I used to sell groundnuts in Daban Masara in Nigeria and on the way back buy onions to sell in N'Djaména. In Mani, my customers came from places such as Nibek, Mahada, Garath, Nibelé and Mani Kossam. I financed my business myself and it was very profitable. We used to go to Blangoua regularly to sell beans and I would buy maize to feed my family, returning by motorbike.

'Once I carried at least 150 bags of groundnuts to sell in Daban Masara in Nigeria. That day I hadn't sold. I had gone home to leave the next week on a Wednesday, market day. But the local authorities<sup>22</sup> burnt the whole market, including my bags of groundnuts. It was seven or eight years ago. Now I am very indebted.'

*Female trader, Mani, Chad,  
26 November 2020*

Before the crisis, women in Lac Province were very active in trade but not as much in the transport sector. They formed associations to collectively carry out income-generating activities and specialised in foodstuffs such as fruit, vegetables, rice, tubers and fish. The largest traders regularly imported goods from Nigeria and N'Djaména. These women were important players in the local market economies and consequently contributed to the livelihoods of transporters.

Women make up a majority of displaced persons<sup>23</sup> as they have abandoned their farms, homes, livestock

and other commercial activities to flee the conflict and settle in safer locations. They then face the challenge of reintegration into new communities despite the support of humanitarian actors in the form of access to land and capital to start revenue generating activities.

Some women not in IDP camps have become their families' sole providers. Their husbands have either been killed, arrested, kidnapped or have left them to marry other women in the camps to access humanitarian support. As in Cameroon, many women are bankrupt and unable to source goods for imports from Nigeria or N'Djaména. Women also experience insecurity as they face kidnapping, which causes the abandonment of markets.

Similarly, in Hadjer-Lamis, women have complained that their previous commercial activities are no longer profitable. They have reverted to petty trade and source goods from local markets. Given their precarious financial situations, some are no longer able to offer lines of credit to their customers.

### Women have historically been marginalised economically and their roles reflect gender disparities in the LCB

Pre-Boko Haram, women living in Diffa were engaged in cross-border trading with countries such as Nigeria and Chad. Their travel has since been disrupted, resulting in the abandonment of certain economic activities. Women have been kidnapped, recruited into the group against their wishes, and even used to carry and detonate suicide bombs.<sup>24</sup> They have had to flee their villages for refugee and IDP camps where gender-based violence is rife.<sup>25</sup>

In Nigeria, several women have been widowed, forcing them to become the sole breadwinners for their households while remaining responsible for domestic chores and childcare. Many have to compete in an economic environment that disproportionately favours men due to cultural practices that restrict and consign women to the homestead. Some also face sexual exploitation and abuse by state and non-state armed actors.

'Things have been hard, especially after I lost my husband to the crisis, which left me the breadwinner of the house. I'm also not able to keep my eyes on my children because of the demands of fending for the family. This is a big deal to me, being unable to properly bring up my children. Some women have gone into prostitution, some abandoned their children because they can't take care of them. Some have been caught stealing in the market to survive.'

*Female trader, Mubi, Nigeria,  
16 October 2020*

Data shows that women in the four LCB countries have developed as many coping strategies as possible. Most have reverted to petty trade and have reduced the scale of their trading activities to avoid the dangerous roads that their male counterparts are sometimes still able to use. They have also entered the trade of food and other household items to escape the bans placed on some goods and the declining profitability of others. NGOs have provided business and skills training to some women, allowing them to explore alternative livelihoods such as dressmaking.<sup>26</sup>

## Taking action

Across the region, states have sought to protect vital supply routes by increasing the number of military and police checkpoints along highways. These, however, have frustrated traders and transporters because they are often extorted by security agents at home and in other countries before being allowed to pass through safely.

Most bans on goods that were exploited by Boko Haram have been lifted. In 2015, the sale of red peppers was banned in Diffa because violent extremists were taxing the trade. The ban was lifted in 2017 after Boko Haram's activities in the region declined.<sup>27</sup> The ban decreased by 96% the number of people generating incomes from the production and trade of peppers in Diffa.<sup>28</sup>

Restrictions were also placed on the production and trade of fish and the purchase of fuel and fertiliser for agricultural production. Before the crisis, the fish and red pepper trades contributed US\$48 million to the

Nigerian economy, driven mostly by exports to Nigeria. More than 300 000 people were also dependent on the trade for their livelihood. During the ban, the incomes of fishers in Diffa declined from US\$1 515 to US\$420 per year.<sup>29</sup> Similar restrictions have been placed in Nigeria, particularly on fish and fertilisers.

Some transport routes have been closed to prevent their use by violent extremists, disrupting the activities of traders and transporters. International partners, notably the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), support the LCBC and African Union's RS-SRR. Despite continuing volatility in the region, progress is being made to strengthen community resilience. The governments of the LCB also support the livelihoods of traders and transporters.

## Despite continuing volatility in the region, progress is being made to strengthen community resilience

In Niger, after the ban on motorcycles in 2015,<sup>30</sup> the purchase of tricycles was subsidised by the government. In Hadjer-Lamis, the state partnered with the UNDP in 2020 to build an office and cold storage rooms and provide an ice-making machine for the fish traders union. It also provided fishers with nets and hooks, although the recipients report that they are not suitable.<sup>31</sup> In addition, canoes have been provided, but according to the beneficiaries, not enough.<sup>32</sup> Traders and transporters have benefitted from skills acquisition workshops provided by the UNDP.<sup>33</sup>

In Cameroon's north and far north regions, the state has responded to food inflation, organising fairs selling lower-priced products. Transporters are receiving security escorts and traders security support. This includes checkpoints on busy routes such as the Kousseri-Maroua axis. Military escorts have been assigned to traders and transporters in Nigeria, on Damaturu-Buni Yadi road in Yobe State, Maiduguri-Gamboru-Ngala road in Borno State, and Madagali-Gwoza road in Adamawa and Borno States.

Respondents maintain that the government's support is insufficient, forcing them to find their own coping strategies. In some cases, communities have had to turn

to violent extremists to secure their livelihoods. In Borno State, for instance, there are dozens of island communities in Abadam, Guzamala, Kukawa, Marte, Mobbar and Monguno local government areas over whose thriving economic activities ISWAP has wielded enormous control. The group's strategy of not attacking civilians has seen many people go to areas under its control to secure their livelihoods.<sup>34</sup>

## Implications and recommendations

### Invisibility of the state and perverse social contracts

Among other factors, the poor reach and visibility of public and government services in Boko Haram-affected regions contributed to the emergence of the crisis and have ensured its longevity. The continued absence of government support for restoration of livelihoods pushes communities to forge social contracts with violent extremists. Boko Haram associates offer protection to communities and extract rent and taxes from farmers, fishers and traders. This highlights the fragility, sometimes non-existence, of the social contract between states and communities.

The continued absence of government support for restoration of livelihoods pushes communities to forge social contracts with violent extremists

The state is more visible militarily than as a development actor. Centrally and in the directly affected regions, initiatives exist such as those of the governor of Borno or the Diffa N'glaa programme.<sup>35</sup> However, in general, the populations still expect much more from their states.

There is an urgent need for the state's presence in peripheral areas to be reinforced through provision of basic services, development, civil protection and strengthening of human rights, in addition to military presence. The RS-SRR and the mobilisation around it, notably territorial action plans, are adequate opportunities to do so. Indeed, LCB Commission member states, as the primary actors in security sector reform, should mobilise the means and political will to implement the action plans with the help of international partners.

### Conflict economies

Insufficient livelihood support has driven community members, including women, to take up alternative income-generating activities with Boko Haram. Some women willingly participate in the group's supply chain by procuring materials for bombs and working as paid labourers. Another dimension is military actors' extraction of rents from communities. Despite protection being a right that should be provided by the state, especially in the context of violent extremism, some security actors charge community members to secure their travel and activities. Communities are sometimes



A GOVERNMENT-BACKED  
CREDIT SCHEME IS CRUCIAL  
TO ASSISTING TRADERS

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harassed and extorted at checkpoints along trade routes. This extortion further harms the social contract between the state and communities.

Measures are called for to curb the excesses of government officials. Traders and transporters need the government to stop security force and customs extortion and harassment of traders and transporters on the roads. Taxes and other arbitrary charges should be reduced, as they drive up the cost of doing business and worsen vulnerabilities.

Subsidiarity and separation of roles should be enforced in the defence and security forces. A clear division of responsibilities must be defined between the different administrative bodies and the different security forces. Control and retributive mechanisms should be introduced to guarantee the accountability and prosecution of criminal and vicious agents.

### **Increased criminality**

Limited access to livelihood support and the overall poor security situation have worsened rural banditry and criminality. There has been an upsurge in crimes such as kidnappings for ransom, cattle rustling, road ambushes and robbery. Although the increase in criminality is driven partly by a need to secure livelihoods through any means, it is also evidence of the exacerbation of pre-existing criminality.

The death of Abubakar Shekau in May 2021 dispersed his fighters, many of whom are now involved in random acts of criminality.<sup>36</sup> Even before his death, there were established links between 'bandits' in Nigeria's northwest and northcentral regions and Boko Haram, with evidence of collaboration between the two on at least one mass abduction.<sup>37</sup>

This further highlights the issue of security and civil protection. In areas with more Boko Haram attacks, the primary request is increased protection against armed groups. This includes protection of transport routes and securing of markets. There is also an urgent need to systematically address the exponential growth of organised crime, which not only threatens communities but establishes pernicious links with Boko Haram factions. Community members have also

asked for strengthened border security. This will be the responsibility of LCB country governments, through their national and regional security agencies.

### **Cumulative vulnerabilities, poverty and conflict**

Increased household poverty due to interrupted livelihoods unwittingly contributes to the vulnerability of people to being coopted by violence entrepreneurs. Poverty is exploited by Boko Haram, whose recruitment narratives target especially young people. This short-changes the fight against insurgency by providing a pool of recruits for insurgents. The impact of this is also felt in the mental and physical health of children, especially those under five years.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, the combination of the security crisis with circumstances such as climate change is increasingly denting resilience in the fragile LCB. Competition for resources and means of production is increasing and is already leading to community conflicts that could exacerbate security fragility.

### **Limited livelihood support and the poor security situation have worsened rural banditry and criminality**

This implies the need for loans and credit facilities. Economic actors that have been plunged into debt and are no longer able to operate at pre-crisis levels are requesting the government's support to access interest-free loans. Credit facilities are crucial to the activities of traders. A government-backed credit guarantee scheme will boost economic activities. LCB country governments can provide these through private financial institutions, but can also be supported by donor organisations working in the region.

Support is essential to address the needs of different social strata according to economic sectors, gender and social status. Despite the crisis, fishing and agriculture continue to attract farmers and are, therefore, good means of resilience that should be strengthened. However, diversification of economic activities and development of new productive sectors are also important.

## Conclusion

The LCB was an area of intense production and flourishing economic activity before the conflict. Boko Haram has taken advantage of the contested presence of the state and the marginalisation of communities to gain a foothold and generate revenue by taking over and controlling economic opportunities. Many producers and economic actors have been bankrupted through looting or destruction of their property, loss of markets, government bans on products and closure of traditional trade routes. In addition to the insecurity caused by Boko Haram and its hold on economic activities, state counterinsurgency responses have also damaged production, transportation and trade.

Thus, trapped in this crisis, with the effects of climate change and temporary COVID-19 restrictions, communities have seen their mode of production and survival profoundly affected. Hence the use of adaptation strategies. Women have been hit particularly hard by the conflict, given their historically lower participation in the main commercial activities of the region.

In addition to the insecurity caused by Boko Haram and its hold on economic activities, state counterinsurgency responses have damaged livelihoods

These factors have implications for stabilisation in that the low resilience of communities allows Boko Haram to continue to offer alternative social contracts, thereby deepening the crisis and increasingly challenging state authority. ISWAP, having gained ground since Shekau's death, has been developing such an approach for several years, allowing it to ally itself with certain communities and capture revenues and resources.

Thus it is important to better secure communities and trade routes by developing more effective military engagement along with appropriate civil protection. The threats by security forces to the peace and resilience of communities must be curbed. Restoring community resilience also entails strong support to economic actors to revive crisis-affected sectors. It is also crucial to rebuild and strengthen trust and confidence between communities and security forces. Finally, the needs of people from different socioeconomic strata based on gender, age and social status should be addressed.



LOW COMMUNITY RESILIENCE  
ALLOWS BOKO HARAM TO  
OFFER ALTERNATIVES

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## Appendix 1: Summary of goods traded and trading routes

Country	Major actors	Main commodities traded	Main transport means	Main trading routes
<b>Cameroon</b>	Traders (large and small scale), farmers, livestock breeders, transporters, unions, and administrative, traditional and religious authorities	Agricultural produce, livestock, fish, crafts, manufactured goods, clothing, building materials, refinery products, hardware, and spare parts for cars, motorbikes and others	Motorbikes, tricycles, cars, trucks, bicycles, donkeys, carts, camels, horses, taxis and rickshaws	<p>In Mayo Sava: Mora-Kourgui-Amchidé-Banki or Mora-Kerewa-Banki</p> <p>In Logone and Chari:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blangoua-Makari-Fotokol-Gamboru-Maiduguri</li> <li>• Goulfei: Goulfei-Maltam-Fotokol-Gamboru-Nigeria</li> <li>• Makari: Tchika-Serbowel-Mada-Kousséri or Lake Chad-Nigeria or Mada-Makari-Chad</li> <li>• Blangoua: Blazam-Champs-Blangoua-Mada Kousséri or Blangoua-Mada-Makari-Fotokol-Nigeria</li> </ul> <p>In Mayo Tsanaga:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mokolo-Maiduguri</li> <li>• Mokolo-Chigoulé-Damang-Madagali-Moubi in Nigeria or Mokolo-Mogode-Bourha-Moutchala (Cameroon-Nigeria border) in Adamawa State on the Nigerian side</li> </ul> <p>In Diamaré: The most used axis is Maroua-Mora-Waza-Dabanga-Kousseri</p>
<b>Chad</b>	Boat drivers, boat owners, traders, trader liaisons, farmers, fishers, transporters, drivers, livestock herders, unions (traders and transporters) and public authorities (customs, security forces, water and forest agents, traditional authorities)	<b>Lac</b> Natrium, fish, livestock (beef, goats), corn, rice, soft drinks, oil, sardines, pasta, millet, sweets, biscuits , fruits and vegetables, beans, sugar, juices, artisanal products, ointments, fabrics, fuels, spare parts, vehicles, motorbikes, refrigerators, shoes, computers, blankets, mattresses and other manufactured goods	Canoes, motor vehicles, motorbikes, ploughs, dugouts, on board, on foot, donkeys, camels and horses	<b>Lac</b> <i>Waterways</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bol-Baga Kawa</li> <li>• Bol-Isserom-Kouloudia-Kangalam-Yourtou-Youngouy-Non Tawa</li> <li>• Baga Sola-Ngouboua-Kaiga-Ngouboua-Madaï-Baga Kawa</li> <li>• Baga Sola-Koulfoua-Darak-Massari on the way to Maiduguri</li> <li>• Bol-Ngorerom-Malia-Kinasserom-Guitté</li> </ul>

Country	Major actors	Main commodities traded	Main transport means	Main trading routes
Chad <i>cont</i>		<p><b>Hadjer-Lamis</b></p> <p>Fish, peanuts, peanut oil, dried meat, beans, curdled milk, onions, corn, flour, kitchen condiments, oil, fruits, vegetables, groundnut tubers, sugar, livestock, animal hide, spare parts, fuel, soap, ointment, gasoline, manufactured products.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kinasserom-Blangoua</li> <li>• Wala-Baga (Nigerian border)</li> <li>• Tagal-Tambola-Gortola-Babour-Fodio-Chiwa-Kangalom-Baga</li> <li>• Tagal-Blarigui-Koufoua-Darak et Hile alifa (Cameroon)-Kirta-Bagazi-Massura (Nigeria)</li> <li>• Koufoua-Kofia-Bouloloroum-Blangoua (this axis is now enclosed by grass)</li> <li>• Tagal-Marcou-Dababa-Marté-Tchogollé-Guitté</li> </ul> <p><i>Roads</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bol ou Liwa-Baga Sola-Ngouboua</li> <li>• Kaiga-Ngouboua-Madaï-Baga Kawa-Lagos</li> <li>• N'Djaména (ou Abéché-Mongo)-Massaguet-Massakory-Ngouri-Isserom, Ngarangou-Matafou-BoBaga Sola-Liwa</li> </ul> <p><b>Hadjer-Lamis</b></p> <p><i>Waterways</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guitté-Kinasserom-Malia-Ngorerom-Bol</li> <li>• Mahada-Blangoua-Mahadai</li> <li>• Baltram (sub-prefecture of Karal or Mani)- (en route) Neira (Lac)-Kinasserom-Darak-(en route) Dabamassara-Maiduguri</li> <li>• Karal ou Mani-Blangoua-Gambaru-Maiduguri</li> </ul> <p><i>Roads</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N'Djaména-Djermaya-Massaguet-Massakory-Guitté Mahada</li> <li>• N'Djaména-Djermaya-Douguia-Mani-Dandy-Karal</li> </ul>

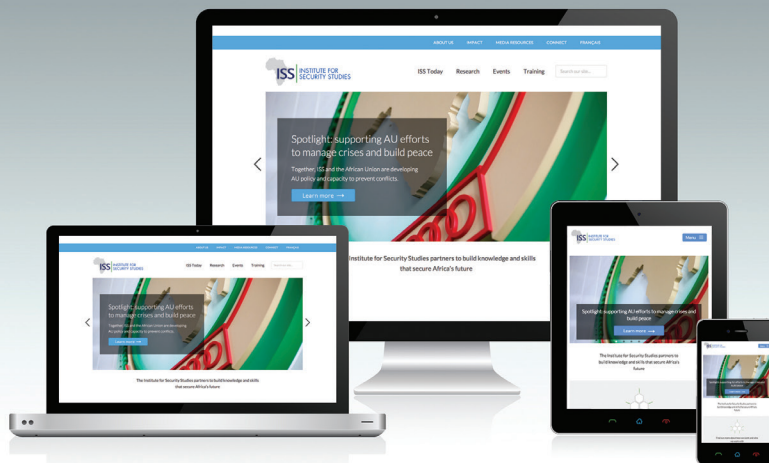
Country	Major actors	Main commodities traded	Main transport means	Main trading routes
<b>Niger</b>	Traders, transporters and farmers	Food products (rice, millet, sugar, dates, pasta, peppers, fruits and vegetables), building materials (cement, iron, sheet metal), spare parts for motorbikes and vehicles, cosmetic products (perfumes, ointments, incense)	Trucks, cars, canoes and motorbikes	<i>Waterways</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bosso and Malam Fatori</li> <li>• Abadam and Gamgara</li> </ul> <i>Roads</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diffa-Kano (via Geidam)</li> <li>• Diffa-Zinder</li> <li>• Mainé-Gaidam-Damaturu-Kano</li> <li>• N'guigmi-Diffa-Kano</li> <li>• Diffa-Doutchi</li> <li>• N'guigmi-Tchad (via Déboua)</li> </ul>
<b>Nigeria</b>	<b>Yobe</b> Buzaye from Niger republic, traders from Gaidam, Yunusari and Gashua local government areas, drivers/transporters from Machina, Nguru, Gashua, Yusufari and Gaidam local government areas	Livestock, millet, date palm, rice, spaghetti, milk, oil	Camels, horses, Toyota Land Cruisers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaidam-Grin gada-Maine, the only constructed road in the axis linking Niger and Nigeria</li> <li>• Yunusari-Kila Kam-Jajeri Kanada</li> <li>• Toshia-Maine</li> <li>• Kanamma-Maine (Sahara routes)</li> </ul>
	<b>Adamawa</b> Traders (large and small scale), farmers, livestock breeders, transporters and unions	Livestock, farm produce, household items, vegetables, building materials	Trucks, buses, VW Golfs	<i>Roads</i> Adamawa-Taraba-Benue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yola-Gombe-Potiskum-Damaturu-Maiduguri</li> <li>• Mubi-Sahuda-Cameroon</li> <li>• Michika-Madagali-Gwoza-Maiduguri</li> </ul>
	<b>Borno</b> Traders (large and small scale), farmers, livestock breeders, fishers, transporters, unions, traditional authorities	Livestock, farm produce, household items, vegetables, building materials	Trucks, buses, VW Golfs, pushcarts, Toyota Land Cruisers	<i>Roads</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maiduguri-Banki-Cameroon</li> <li>• Damasak-Gubio-Magumeri-Guzamala</li> <li>• Nganzai-Monguno-Kukawa-Abadam</li> <li>• Maiduguri-Gamboru-Ngala</li> </ul>

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The research for this report was conducted collaboratively by the authors – Remadji Hoinathy and Teniola Tayo – with support from other members of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Lake Chad Basin Programme. These are Malik Samuel and Akinola Olojo, and research consultants Illiassou Abdoulaye, Oumar Abdelbanat, Regis Zambo and Yerima Goni.

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