



## Neglected Crisis

Poverty, Terror, and threat of Famine in the Lake Chad Basin.

'Poverty, terror and famine in the Lake Chad Basin' is part of a new series of snapshots of humanitarian emergencies that are leaving thousands of children out of school but are receiving little prioritisation in media coverage, international advocacy or funding.

**Theirworld**

## Overview

The humanitarian crisis in the Lake Chad Basin is one of the most severe and least addressed emergencies in the world today. The urgency of the situation critically affecting over 9 million people across Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon demands immediate action. At least two million are internally displaced within Nigeria itself, malnourishment and hunger exist on a massive scale, particularly in Borno State, and at least one million children risk permanently losing access to education. The situation is horrendous and getting worse. If the international community continues to neglect this suffering, the situation will continue to deteriorate, prolonging and intensifying suffering – especially for children.

At the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul this past May, Stephen O'Brien, head of UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), called the suffering in West Africa's Lake Chad Basin "the most under reported, the most underfunded and the least addressed of the big crises we face."<sup>1</sup> The hardships of poverty and climate change have been exploited and amplified by the violence of Boko Haram – an armed movement specifically targeting education – affecting 21 million people in the poorest regions of Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, forcing more than 2.7 million people to flee their homes, and creating conditions dangerously verging on famine.<sup>2</sup> According to OCHA, 9 million people – or almost one in every two people in the region – are in dire need of urgent humanitarian assistance.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the magnitude of the suffering, and a smattering of recent headlines highlighting the failure of the humanitarian system, mass instances of starvation and the looming threat of famine,<sup>4</sup> the crisis continues to receive attention and funding far below the scale of the disaster. Along with attacks on and closures of schools due to the ongoing violence, the right to education for refugee and displaced children is under severe threat with 60 per cent of refugee children in Cameroon and 81 per cent of surveyed children in Chad having never set foot in a classroom.

Current country level humanitarian appeals for the region are underfunded by an average of US\$265 million. In addition, the 2016 Nigeria regional refugee response plan was only 24% funded as of August. In July, OCHA launched an emergency appeal for US\$221 million to meet the most pressing needs through September 2016. Among those most pressing needs are emergency education services for displaced and vulnerable host community children to provide physical protection as well as crucial psychosocial support.

The conflict centred in Borno State garnered international attention and sparked interventions such as the Global Business Coalition for Education led [Safe Schools Nigeria Initiative](#) and the #BringBackOurGirls campaign when over 200 schoolgirls were abducted from their school in Chibok in 2014. Almost two years later however, the conflict and deep rooted poverty and deprivation that fed the rise of the insurgency have worsened and serious threats to human life continue to multiply.

At the dawn of the new Sustainable Development Agenda era that explicitly aims to "leave no one behind," it is absolutely essential that governments and the international community come together to address this massive humanitarian crisis.

## Background: A disappearing lake and education crisis

The situation in the Lake Chad Basin has been deteriorating for years. Climate change leading to severely reduced rainfall, along with human activities such as “overuse of water resources ... poor enforcement of environmental regulation, and weak capacity for water resources management,”<sup>5</sup> has contributed to the dramatic shrinking of Lake Chad. Today, the lake is one tenth of the size it was 50 years ago and with the reduced area of the lake comes reduced livelihood opportunities for the 21 million people who live in the Basin.<sup>6</sup> A disappearing lake, and the accompanying challenges of soil salinity, collapsed fisheries, crop failures, livestock deaths, as well as high population growth conspire to reduce livelihood opportunities in the region.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the economic and environmental challenges, access to basic services such as education remains limited, particularly in the northeast. According to data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), Nigeria has the world’s highest out-of-school population among primary age students by a margin of more than three million. As of 2014 (the most recent year for which data is available), 8.7 million children between the ages of 6 and 11 are not in primary school, representing nearly 14 per cent of all out-of-school children of primary age globally; the next highest is Pakistan with 5.6 million. For older children and adolescents as well as for those who have been displaced, out-of-school numbers are not even available due to a lack of reliable data, so the true out-of-school population may even be higher than this.<sup>8</sup>

Added to all of this is the violent conflict in the northeastern states of Nigeria that has threatened or completely barred access to school for at least one million children. Destruction, damage or occupation of over 1,000 schools, coupled by large-scale displacement and education sector responses that are woefully underfunded are resulting in a catastrophic education crisis, especially for for refugees and internally displaced children.<sup>9</sup>

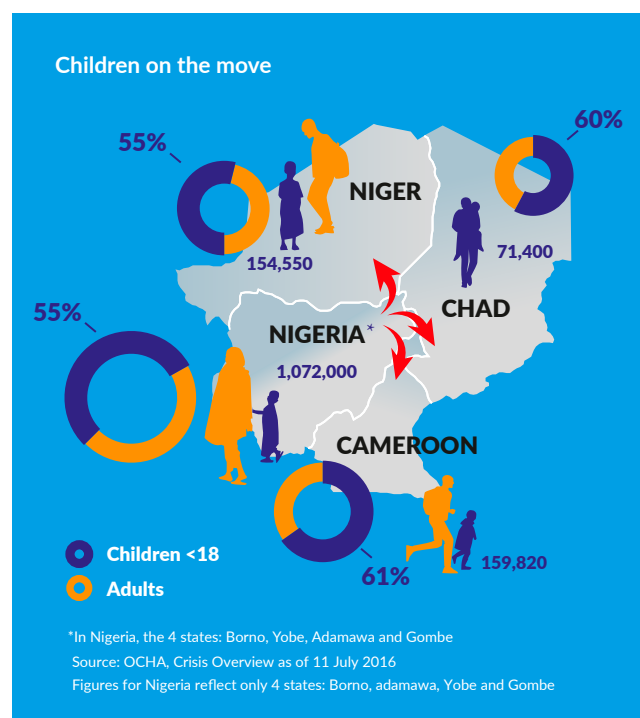
## The world’s deadliest terrorist group

As if the overlapping burden of climate change, poverty and lack of educational opportunities were not enough, the Lake Chad Basin is home to the pervasive menace of the world’s deadliest terrorist group: Boko Haram. In 2014, Boko Haram was responsible for more deaths than any other terrorist group in the world, including ISIS.<sup>10</sup> Raids, kidnappings — including the high profile abduction of over 270 schoolgirls from their school in Chibok in 2014 — and suicide bombings have led to widespread displacement, trauma and the destruction of food supplies, trade and infrastructure, particularly schools.

Boko Haram, also known as Jamā’at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da’wah wa’l-Jihād, or more recently as Islamic State’s West Africa Province (ISWAP)<sup>11</sup>, was established in 2003 and operated mostly as a communal movement until the death of its leader, Mohammed Yusuf, in 2009 while in police custody. Since 2009, Boko Haram has been responsible for the deaths of more than twenty thousand people and captured a wide swath of territory in northern Nigeria between 2011 and 2015, though most of this land has now been recaptured by Nigerian

government forces.<sup>12</sup> While the majority of attacks carried out by Boko Haram have been in Nigeria, in 2014 they expanded their reach into neighbouring Chad and Cameroon killing six and 520, respectively. Seventy-seven per cent of deaths have been private citizens.<sup>13</sup> In 2015, the number of attacks taking place outside of Nigeria expanded to include Niger as well as Chad and Cameroon.<sup>14</sup>

Children have been particularly vulnerable to harm and more than one million of those displaced within Nigeria are children. Reports of the recruitment of boys and girls for both combat and support roles, a growing number of girls being used as suicide bombers, and the use of children as human shields continue. Girls have also been subjected to rape, forced marriage and other forms of sexual violence by Boko Haram forces. Between January and December 2015 alone in Nigeria, over 300 children were either killed or maimed in violence committed by Boko Haram, and 13 documented suicide attacks were carried out by children.<sup>15</sup>



Source: UNICEF <sup>31</sup>

Boko Haram has explicitly targeted schools and education perceived as “Western.” Since 2014, the group has been responsible for the destruction of more than 1,500 schools,<sup>16</sup> and as a result, 600,000 children have lost access to education and over 800,000 are at risk of losing access through displacement. Teachers have also been targeted with 19,000 displaced and 600 teachers murdered. Three states in the northeast Nigeria are the most affected: Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. In Borno, three out of every five schools are closed and one in five are destroyed, damaged or occupied. Even in camps for the internally displaced, 75 per cent of children are not in school.<sup>17</sup>

Experts see a strong connection between the years of deepening poverty and lack of social services like education and the initial rise of the violence. Kashim Shettima, governor of Borno State in Nigeria, speaking at the World Humanitarian Summit, identified poor literacy, destitution and joblessness as core motivations of the insurgency. He said, “the root cause of this madness, this insanity, is extreme poverty. [When] we create jobs, engage the youth, this madness will certainly evaporate.”<sup>18</sup> If, however, the international community continues to fail to protect and provide education for those who have lost or are in danger of losing access to safe schools, the prospects of a better future for the rising generation are grim.

## Severe food insecurity and the threat of famine

The deepening poverty, desertification and crop failure over decades of the Lake's gradual diminishment compounded by the violence and destruction of Boko Haram have resulted in an alarming situation for the Lake Chad Basin and a full-blown famine has become an increasingly real possibility. OCHA has identified 4.4 million people in the Lake Chad region as "severely food insecure,"<sup>19</sup> and warnings of the risk of famine have been sounded by parties both within and external to the UN system.

Seven years of violence from Boko Haram have left the farmland in Borno state devastated or abandoned, and this year will mark the region's third without a harvest. In June, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported that more than 1,200 people who had fled for safety from Boko Haram died of starvation at an aid camp in northeastern Nigeria. Around a fifth of the 800 children screened were severely malnourished and 450 had died in the past year.<sup>20</sup>

MSF has criticised UN agencies for failing to adequately respond when Boko Haram destroyed food production in Borno state in northern Nigeria.<sup>21</sup> MSF now states they have warned of the risk of famine for two years yet both UN aid agencies and international donors have failed to respond. The head of MSF operations in Nigeria, Isabelle Mouniaman, says "the vast majority of humanitarian organisations are failing in their responsibility towards the crisis in Borno."<sup>22</sup> As more areas become accessible to humanitarian aid organisations, the catastrophic scale of the crisis is becoming apparent and can no longer be ignored.<sup>23</sup>

Others, including the World Food Programme (WFP), have announced similar warnings that if the situation remains unchanged, lack of food, water and healthcare as well as poor sanitation and disease could converge to create a famine.<sup>24</sup> UNICEF has estimated that a quarter of a million children are severely malnourished and at risk of death in Borno state,<sup>25</sup> and continues to deliver aid despite a recent attack on a humanitarian aid convoy in which one UNICEF staff member was injured.<sup>26</sup> Despite the calls and continued work by humanitarian aid organisations in the region, lack of funding and international attention to the depth and urgency of the crisis will necessarily limit the ability of these groups to scale up or even maintain already planned interventions.

As Toby Lanzer, the UN Assistant Secretary-General and OCHA's regional humanitarian coordinator for the Sahel highlighted during the World Humanitarian Summit event: "We can make every plan on earth...[but] if we do not get resources from the donor community very little of that will actually happen."<sup>27</sup>

# Current state of humanitarian response

The crisis in the Lake Chad Basin sits within the broader Sahel crisis landscape encompassing at least nine countries that face extreme poverty and deprivation, food insecurity and malnutrition, high population growth rates, climate change vulnerabilities, and armed conflict and violence. The Sahel regional response plan was only 15 per cent funded in 2015.<sup>28</sup> In addition to the Sahel response, each of the four affected countries (Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon) have their own active country-level humanitarian response plans for 2016. Finally, through UNHCR, the Nigeria refugee response plan for 2016 is also active. As of July 1, OCHA launched a call for US\$221 million to meet urgent needs through the end of September 2016.<sup>29</sup> At the moment, however, data on the appeal's funding status is not available through the OCHA Financial Tracking Service.

As of 10 August, the 2016 crisis appeals stood at the following levels of funding:<sup>30</sup>

Cameroon	24%
Chad	18%
Niger	32%
Nigeria	32%
Nigeria refugee response plan	24%
Sahel regional response plan	24%

## Urgent action and funding needed NOW

The Lake Chad Basin is a perfect storm of vulnerabilities. Years of deepening poverty, environmental factors narrowing livelihood options, the rise of a violent insurgency and persistently underfunded humanitarian response have collided creating suffering that is almost unimaginable. With all these forces working together against the people — and especially the children — of the Lake Chad Basin, it is absolutely necessary for aid urgently to be given at the scale of the crisis. Two years of famine warnings have gone unheeded. Over one million children now risk permanently losing out on their right to education and any hope for rebuilding the future. Further neglect of this massive humanitarian crisis will result in an even greater tragedy for the people of Lake Chad and reveal the rhetorical commitment of the Sustainable Development Goals to “leave no one behind” to be an empty promise.

This September, as leaders from across the globe gather for the annual UN General Assembly, UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants, and Leaders’ Summit on the Global Refugee Crisis, they must not only focus on promises for the most visible and politically salient crises, but must commit to real solutions and real resources that can be directed where the needs are most pressing.

Specifically, leaders must:

1. Immediately provide US\$221m requested for urgent needs in the Lake Chad Basin through September 2016.
2. Ensure humanitarian response in the region includes provision of safe, quality education, safe spaces especially for the youngest, and psychosocial support for children, teachers and caregivers.
3. Fully fund existing humanitarian appeals for Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon as well as Nigeria regional refugee response.



## Footnotes

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