

# Conflict Dynamics and Obstacles to Peace in the Lake Chad Basin: Analysis and Perspectives for a Positive Dynamic of Peace.

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## ABSTRACT

The recurrence of conflicts in the Lake Chad basin positions this region in the high-risk zone of the African Sahel, described by researchers of the Center of Progress as “*arc of tension*”. Focusing on the southern shore of the lake, this article is based on analyses of the documentary content of scientific works dealing with conflicts in the Lake Chad basin, the results of research and scientific articles also devoted to the same issues, and empirical data was collected from community members (through personal interviews) in order to understand the process of renewal of conflict dynamics in this ecological basin. It also draws on the work of Thomas Homer-Dixon and his Toronto research group to demonstrate that the resurgence of conflict in this basin is attributable to the mismatch between the need for vital resources and the supply, as well as to the inadequacy of national and community instruments for regulating natural resources. The article attempts to answer the following questions: what explains the recurrence of conflicts in the Lake Chad basin? And what are the obstacles to peace in this area? Firstly, it shows how the activities of cross-border criminals, the Islamist sect (Boko Haram) and the scarcity of natural resources are fueling the process of renewed conflict dynamics in the Lake Chad Basin. It then identifies the factors blocking peace in this ecological basin, in particular the difficulty of access to land and natural resources, the scarcity of economic resources, the competition between social groups for access to and control of resources, and the system for managing these resources. Finally, as a way out of the conflicts circle in this region, the article proposes an environmental mediation approach based on the promotion of incentive mechanisms for the sustainable and concerted management of natural resources and the creation of a community of interests to strengthen peaceful cohabitation between peoples, with the aim of building a positive dynamic of peace.

**Keywords:** conflict dynamics, environmental degradation, mediation, peacebuilding, resource scarcity

## INTRODUCTION

Shared between four countries, namely Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria and Niger, the Lake Chad Basin, very rich in natural resources, is facing a recompositing of its social base nowadays, due to various changes it is undergoing. For several decades, this region has been the scene of numerous conflicts involving the regular armies of the member countries of the eponymous basin and the Islamist sect Boko Haram. Moreover, highways robbers, cross-border criminals, groups made up of local communities and national governments are not left out. The conflicts that are anchored there interact with social dynamics to structure the relationships between inhabitants (Chauvin, 2020).

According to Chauvin, (2020) “*not well known and difficult to access, conflict and violence areas in this region are not easily exposed to analysis by researchers and development actors*” (p.135). The various researches analyzing the conflicts in this hydraulic basin has been much more limited to the activities of the

Boko Haram terrorist group, the phenomenon of highway robbers, cattle rustlers and cross-border crime, without much innovation in their analytical perspectives. However, a multi-causal approach would certainly lead to a more complete analysis of the peace situation in this area. Thus, an in-depth observation of the security context of this ecological basin reveals other factors that play an important role in sustaining the ongoing instability. Some of these factors include environmental degradation, food insecurity, fight for limited natural resources, economic and social inequality, political instability, failure to regulate the natural resources, etc. It is established that the insurgency of the Islamist sect is one of the events that most disrupted peace in the Lake Chad area because it further revealed the vulnerability of cohesion between communities who are subject to all kinds of instrumentalization, both from some community leaders and from conflict entrepreneurs. Therefore, the evolution of conflict dynamics results in the manipulation of community memories to prolong the crisis episodes from their past (Mouadjamou & al, 2023). All this constitutes the factors sustaining and reproducing the violence in a process of tensions exacerbation through the interplay of inputs such as resources and power control, ethnic or clan affirmation and access to opportunities (Mouadjamou & al, 2023, *ibid*). Based on the above, the conflict dynamics in the Lake Chad Basin involve several actors that can be grouped into three main categories:

The first is made up of conflicts between States. This includes tensions between Nigeria and Cameroon, Niger and Chad, over the delimitation of their borders; conflicts between communities in these different countries and those involving non-state armed groups.

The second category refers to inter-community conflicts within countries which result mainly from the competition for accessing and controlling natural resources such as water, land and pasture. These conflicts are often linked to ethnic, religious and even linguistic tensions.

The last category deals with conflicts involving non-state armed groups and they are caused by groups such as Boko Haram that have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in West Africa and which seek to overthrow local governments and impose their own ideology. Altogether, these conflicts are an obstacle to lasting peace in the region.

This article is organized around three parts. First, the keys to understanding the process of conflict renewal are proposed. Second, the various obstacles to peace in this area are listed and third, an environmental mediation approach is proposed, based on the promotion of incentive mechanisms for the sustainable and concerted management of natural resources and the creation of a community of interests aimed at strengthening peaceful coexistence between peoples in order to build a positive dynamic of peace in the region.

## **METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS**

### **Methodology**

This analysis, which focuses on the Cameroon part of the Lake Chad Basin, is based on the results of qualitative data obtained from individual interviews and focus group discussions that we conducted in the field with scientists from the University of Maroua, experts from local civil society organizations, community's leaders and local populations. We also drew on the results of work by experts from the IRD and IUCN, and scientific articles that deal with conflicts in this region to further understand the renewal process of conflicting dynamics in this ecological basin

### **Theoretical framework of analysis**

In his book entitled "Environment, Scarcity and Violence" Thomas HOMER-DIXON and his Toronto research group establish the link between conflict and environmental conditions. For him, environmental

degradation leads to environmental scarcity, which exclusively concerns renewable resources (1999).

The concept of scarcity was at the origin of his work, which is a pioneer in research into security and environmental issues. This approach, which focuses on the depletion of resources, has been widely criticized, in particular for its emphasis on the role of the state. Since these early works, research into the link between environment and safety has multiplied. In particular, the work of political ecology has highlighted the cross-cutting nature of environmental issues affecting security. By demonstrating the interdependence of economic, social and environmental sectors, political ecology highlights the complexity of ecological conflicts and encourages us to put environmental tensions back into context. In particular, this means looking more closely at the consequences of dependence on resources rather than their scarcity, and linking social and environmental conflicts (Le Billon, 2001). Recent works by Jon Barnett and Simon Dalby offer a global vision of the place of the concept, the risks of its instrumentalization and its empirical foundations (Dalby, 2002; Barnett, 2010). They show the multiplicity of possible approaches from which a more comprehensive definition can then be formulated. Environmental security would include the various aspects mentioned above: the classic rivalries that can exist between two parties in conflict (States, but also communities, towns, tribes, etc.) following the degradation of their environment; the protection of human beings in the face of environmental threats that can be either natural (natural disasters) or human in origin (Robinson, 2008); the preservation of the environment and in particular in the event of conflicts that some describe as ecological security (Barnett, 2001; Dalby, 2009).

Based on the Homer-Dixon approach, we can see that the security situation in Lake Chad is perpetuated because its environmental context weakens the economic and social situation, creating a context of insecurity that fuels conflict. This approach shows that there is a mismatch between the need for vital resources and the supply, and that national and community instruments for regulating natural resources are poorly applied (Le Prestre, 1997). In an area beset by problems of environmental degradation, there is a shortage of resources for a growing population. On the basis of the HOMER-DIXON demonstration, the environmental context is revealed as an amplifier of instability. Thus, certain social groups have more limited access to these resources than others. According to Thomas HOMER-DIXON, this imbalance has three main sources: the degradation of certain natural environments such as water reserves, desertification, the degradation of fertile soils and the reduction in fishing stocks; the increase in population and therefore in demand; and the unequal distribution of resources (1999, *ibid*). These resources are highly accessible and controlled by elites, community and religious leaders and wealthy businessmen (Homer-Dixon, 1994).

Based on the above, the following questions firmly need to be addressed: what explains the recurrence of conflicts in the Lake Chad Basin? What are the obstacles to peace in this area? And what are the perspectives to build a positive dynamic of peace?

## **UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS OF RENEWAL OF CONFLICT DYNAMICS IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN: BETWEEN CROSS-BORDER CRIME, TERRORISM AND RESOURCE SCARCITY**

The process of renewal of conflict dynamics in the Lake Chad Basin can be explained by several interconnected factors. First, the cross-border crime that perpetuates insecurity, the Boko Haram terrorist group activities, and the scarcity of natural resources that is exacerbated by the effects of climate change, including drought and floods.

### **Cross-border crime and perpetuation of insecurity**

Cross-border crime in the Lake Chad Basin is part of the history of the socio-political and economic dynamics of this region shared between Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Niger, Nigeria and Chad.

These dynamics are based on cattle breeding and pastoral nomadism. This criminality has its roots in pre-colonial raids practiced by a few ethnic groups and is known as a form of parallel and quasi-legal economy. Formerly prohibited, these raids became clandestine under colonization and were transformed into trans-ethnic rural banditry led by convicts who relied, to evade the law, on cross-border ethnic solidarities.

By situating the historical context of cross-border insecurity in the Lake Chad basin, SAIBOU (2006) cited his own work that shows how the recurrence of economic adversity has created a culture of rapine characteristic of a subsistence economy in this ecological basin. He demonstrated how this cross-border crime results from a context of crisis that has generated investment crime (ibid, pp.119-146). He further affirms that the armed aggression formerly perpetrated by the heads of families, the village chiefs and the bosses of the great precolonial political hegemonies or even those sponsored very recently by the traditional authorities, which were nevertheless auxiliaries to the administration, made it possible to bear the social burdens of leadership in an environment where the rank and image of individuals in the society relate, above all, to their ability to satisfy the daily needs of their dependents and their clients (ibid). The explorers who crisscrossed the Lake Chad region during the 19<sup>th</sup> century had already “noticed that their greatest difficulty was not the conquest of the territory and its attachment to the colonial domains of the metropolis, but much more the conquest of the mentalities shaped by the harshness of the climate, martial customs and precariousness” (ibid). Taking the case of Chad, the author specifies that the long-term instability in which the country entered was marked by the violent alternation of political regimes in N’djamena and the dissemination of armed groups throughout the territory (ibid). This situation paved the way for the mutation of the rebels into groups of “rebel-bandits” using cross-border banditry throughout the Lake Chad region to obtain their livelihoods. At the same time, we have witnessed the emergence of multinational gangs supported by sponsors and motivated by the search for a significant gain that is likely to be recycled in the formal economy (, ibid). In this context, a true economy of crime has developed, with main actors being Mbororo herders and Chadian mercenaries operating in the Central African Republic.

The dangerous activities that seem relevant to qualify the insecurity induced by cross-border crime can be classified in five different groups: cross-border military banditry and the vagrancy of armed groups; trafficking in small arms and contraband products (fuel, pharmaceuticals, vehicles and spare parts); cross-border poaching and cattle trafficking; trafficking in human beings and identity documents and cross-border land insecurity.

These various disorders are linked and have repercussions on the demographic balances, the internal security of States and their economy. Repressive national security policies have been implemented with relative success. While criminal networks based on cross-border jurisdictions are being structured, cooperation between the Member States of the Lac Chad Basin Commission (CBLT) in terms of security remains timid.

What comes out from our observation is that cross-border crime is also dependent on the conflicts and instabilities observed in the Logone sub-basin and therefore in different States of the Lake Chad basin. The criminals acting in these conflicts have often been supporters of certain regimes in place in the sub-region. This has contributed to the multiplication of weapon bearers and to the strengthening of the militarization of these criminal groups (ibid). The scholar believes that these arms bearers were sometimes recruited as mercenaries in interethnic conflicts, particularly in the Far North region of Cameroon. This form of constraint weighing on the potential of individuals due to political, economic and social structures constitutes a situation of structural violence. We are in a context of near-bankruptcy of the State in the face of its mission to protect populations and their properties.

The observation we make is that certain areas of the Cameroonian shore of Lake Chad are inaccessible due to the phenomena of highway robbers, hostage takers and terrorism that are well established there. Moreover, the porosity of borders in the basin has also paved the way for the mobility of armed groups and

the building of alliances across borders, giving cross-border crime a new aspect called terrorism.

### **Terrorism and conflict dynamics**

Although the Lake Chad basin had already been plagued by conflict for decades, the transnational links created between cross-border criminals facilitated the transition to a new form of insecurity identified in this region. The porosity of the borders between the countries of the area and the fragility of the populations living in precariousness was a boon for the Boko Haram sect, which took the opportunity to establish a powerful network of local supporters. It must also be said that the members of this sect took advantage of the wave of refugees in 2012 to infiltrate Cameroon, Niger and Chad and engaged in propaganda activities and the establishment of cells in these countries (Ntuda, 2017). Relying on local imams, itinerant preachers, young scholars recruited for some from Nigeria and Sudan, Boko Haram has initiated a campaign of proselytism and recruitment in the various countries of the sub-region.

On either side of the borders of Lake Chad, the phenomenon has a coloring that matches local realities. On the Nigerian side, the corruption of political and administrative elites and the resulting land insecurity have contributed to the proliferation of groups claiming to be Boko Haram and to their rise in power (Harnischfeger, 2014. pp33-62). On the Chadian border, the diversity of Boko Haram's actions has made it possible to discover the ability of the groups associated with it to join local socio-political dynamics (Cohen, 2015, pp. 75-92). The southern shore of the lake which is an integral part of Cameroon has not escaped control by the Islamic sect Boko Haram, as they have settled there since 2014 in times of high water, seeking to control certain localities and undertaking murderous assaults. The entrenchment of insecurity and violence in this region follows a period of rising uncertainty and political-land tensions linked to the recent democratization process in this part of Cameroon. This last period contrasted with the previous phase of halio-agro-pastoral colonization (begun in the 1960s), marked by the absence of major conflict between users (farmers, breeders, fishermen). While the region was experiencing remarkable demographic expansion and economic development, driven by the growing intertwining of activities in space and time, the absence of such a major conflict thereby comforted the effectiveness of modes regulating the competition between stakeholders in the accessing space and natural resources (Rangé, 2016. pp.45-63)

### **Resource Scarcity and the Conflict Cycle**

Formerly renowned for its wealth in natural resources, the Lake Chad region is today mired in an infernal spiral of conflicts that are renewed over the years. If the activities of cross-border criminals, highway robbers and the Islamist sect Boko Haram are singled out as vectors of instability, the economic context which is supported by agriculture, livestock, fishing and related activities plays a decisive role in the security situation. This is so true that the sustainability of these activities depends on the good health of the environment. Unfortunately, the degradation of the natural environment of this area has led to a considerable decline in agricultural yields, pastures and water resources while the population has grown exponentially.

At present, two reasons explain the scarcity of resources in the Lake Chad Basin: the population growth, which has created a disproportionality between available resources and populations, and the environmental degradation, which has led to environmental scarcity. The Chad Basin, centered around the lake of the same name, is home to more than 30 million people, more than half of whom live from agriculture, livestock and fishing. Yet, it has shrunk at an alarming rate, with the lake now covering less than the tenth of the area it occupied in 1960 (IUCN, 2019). The movements of populations fleeing the abuses of the Boko Haram sect combined with migrations induced by environmental degradation have increased the number of people applying for these resources. To better understand the influence of resource scarcity on the stability of the area, the work of HOMER-DIXON, also known as the Toronto Project, offers us a scientifically valid model to account for the environment/scarcity of resources and conflict dynamics. The first observations quickly revealed that "the problem revolved around the adequacy between needs and demands on the one hand, and

supply on the other. Therefore, the independent variable chosen was not environmental degradation, but environmental scarcity” (Homer-Dixon, 1994). The concept of environmental scarcity developed by HOMER-DIXON applies, in particular, to renewable resources as a result of the reduction in the amount of resources and, consequently, in accessing them. For HOMER-DIXON, this resources scarcity is part of the multi-causal chain of conflict in the Lake Chad Basin (1994). It therefore becomes necessary, in his opinion, to join its various variables into a model that explains the sources and consequences of the shortages of environmental resources and how these can contribute to exacerbating the already existing tensions that lead to open conflicts. Following the HOMER-DIXON model, we find the three sources of shortages, which consist of the decrease in the quantity and quality of renewable resources, population growth and unequal access to resources (Homer-Dixon, 1994, *ibid*). The socio-political effects of these shortages take the form of population migrations as well as a decline in economic productivity.

Following the logic of HOMER-DIXON, the scarcity of natural resources in the Lake Chad basin has insidious and cumulative social impacts, which affect the stability of the society. Conflicts caused by resource scarcity are fragmenting the society in the area. This can already be seen in the clashes between Choa Arabs and Musgum in the Logone sub-basin. Given that the same communities are found on both sides of the borders, clashes over resources may lead to interstate conflicts. HOMER-DIXON believes that the only way to avoid a downward spiral of poverty, chaos and violence is to stay in what he calls the race for ingenuity (1994).

## **OBSTACLES TO PEACE IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN**

The States of the Lake Chad Basin have not stood by idly in the face of the conflicts that are bogged down and renewed within the populations. Achieving peace in this ecological basin is being blocked by several factors, in particular: the difficulty to access the land and natural resources and the scarcity of economic resources, the competition between social groups to access and control of resources and the management mode of available resources.

### **Difficulty to access the land and natural resources and scarcity of economic resources**

In its 2008 Report on climate change and international security, the European Union drew the attention of the world community to the fact that within the Sahel region, in particular the Lake Chad basin, “the worsening of the drought, increasing water scarcity and overuse of land will lead to land degradation and could result in the loss of 75% of arable land under rain-fed cultivation” (EU 2008: 6). It should be noted that the economy of the Lake Chad Basin is driven by agriculture, livestock and fishing, while other economic activities developed in this area are closely connected to the three main ones that were just mentioned.

Access to land, pastures and water resources are the *sine qua non* condition for aspiring to economic resources. The fight or competition to access to water resources between pastoral and agricultural populations is at the origin of several conflict episodes (Nyong and Niang-Diop, 2006). PATROW draws the attention of the global community to a potential “massive environmental crisis” that would accelerate the “intensity, scale and progression of conflict dynamics” underway (2008. Pp 159-172).

According to Thomas HOMER-DIXON’s diagram, resource scarcity in the Lake Chad Basin is caused by three factors: demand, supply and structural scarcity (1994).

- **Demand-driven resource scarcity**

Population growth in the Lake Chad Basin has generated an increase in the need for agricultural land, water, fishing products and pasture. This has led to an increase in the level of consumption of these resources.

According to DIZAOU MOUMASSOU Isaac, there is a population growth which is now constrained by a decline in resources as a result of the high demand leading to an overexploitation of said resources. The consequence of this situation is the breakdown of the production system maintaining this cycle (Moumassou, 2022).

The population that is directly or indirectly dependent on the lake's resources is now estimated to be over 30 million, while the surface area of this water reserve has declined from 25,000 km<sup>2</sup> in 1964 to 8,000 km<sup>2</sup> nowadays (IUCN, 2013). The consequence has been a fall in the level of freshwater and fish resources available on average per inhabitant. Despite the appearance of land newly exposed by the drying up of the lake, people are still faced with the scarcity of agricultural land. The scramble for these newly exposed lands and the pressure exerted by the population on the available resources play an important role in the new social dynamics, thereby exacerbating tensions in existing conflicts.

### • Supply-Induced Scarcity

The migration of people towards the agricultural production strongholds in the Lake Chad Basin due to the activities of Boko Haram and cross-border criminals have increased the demand in vital resources. Added to this are the consequences of environmental degradation which, according to Thomas Homer-Dixon's theory, have led to a scarcity of agricultural land, pasture, water and fish resources, making them less accessible to every individual. This has given rise to competition to control the few resources available. In the southern part of the basin, particularly in the Logone sub-basin, cycles of drought following changes in the physical dimensions of the environment have caused the collapse in people's livelihoods, making it difficult for them to meet their needs through agricultural and fisheries production. Faced with this general decline in natural resources, local supply is increasingly disproportionate to the expressed needs of an ever-growing population (Kassouma Liba, 2022). As a result, agricultural produce, fish and livestock are bought by traders who sell them in major towns. Supplying these traders, who pay more than the locals, further increases the deficit on the local market.

In addition, the shortage is exacerbating by the over-exploitation of available resources. On the Cameroonian side of the river, the rush to the land flooded by the drying up of the lake, to the Maga reservoir and to the Logone flood plain where irrigated agriculture is practiced, is an illustration of the scarcity of natural resources, which best expresses the fight for resources that further leads to strong pressure from farmers. This collapse in the means of people's livelihoods is responsible for the scarcity of economic resources.

### • Structural Scarcity

In some cases, the management of natural resources can lead to shortages to large segments of the population. In the Cameroon part of the Lake Chad basin, the access to land used to be by land clearance. Also, traditional chiefs have the power to allocate or withdraw plots of land from the local population. In this regard, they play an essential role in resolving disputes over land and resource use. In terms of water use, the Lake Chad Basin Vision 2025 calls for equitable and sustainable use and management of water resources for poverty reduction, socio-economic development, regional cooperation and the environmental protection. This vision comprises around ten goals among which the sustainable access to a guaranteed and adequate supply of water (and sanitation) to meet the basic needs of all and to guarantee food security. Farther in south, that is, in the Logone flood plain, the access to the land around Lake Maga is provided by leasing from SEMRY, which is responsible for ploughing and irrigation.

*"In the Logone and Chari department of Cameroon, the democratization and decentralization have paved the way to the political exploitation of land by local and regional elites now associated with national politics, in a factional logic similar to that analyzed by Giorgio Blundo in Senegal"* (1996) (Chauvin, 2021).

Mayors generally come from local notables and owe their position to the large *Shuwa Arab* traders from the region, who have exploited the pluralist elections to build up a vast network of political support for their activities.

In the fight to control the resources of the region, these great traders have been able to unite various local authorities around them and have therefore secured the support of state representatives to extend their territorial influence and guarantee access to land for their customers, who in return vote for the candidates of the ruling party whose election campaigns they have financed (Ahamat, 2011).

According to CHAUVIN et al (2021)., on the shores and islands of Lake Chad, two major traders, one of which is a great importer and a building contractor, and the other is a cross-border trader in livestock and maize, have dispute over the control of territories and resources. They are building up a network of allies around them in various spheres of power (civil servants, intellectuals, clerics, traditional chiefs, communal executives, ruling party bodies, administrative officials, gendarmerie commanders, etc.) in order to act in different aspects of legitimacy during land claims (p.).

These different strategies for capturing and controlling resources are deployed by the aforementioned players to consolidate their control over natural resources. This validates the structural origin of the scarcity of resources in this area. As the availability of economic resources is totally dependent on the availability of agricultural land, pasture, water and fishing resources, their scarcity is a major obstacle to peace in the Lake Chad Basin.

### **Competition between social groups to access and control the resources**

Competition for access over natural resources and their control can be justified by perceptions of existing inequalities, leading to a hardening of identity within a group, therefore catalyzing hostility towards other groups. In such circumstances, conflicts arising from the competition over resources may be expressed either as ethnic conflicts or conflicts between social classes.

“A stress generated by the physical environment can therefore, under certain social conditions, become a catalyst for deepening existing social segmentation and intensifying the competition and conflict between different groups” (Martin, 2005, pp329-346).

Since several decades, people have been following the shores of Lake Chad and emerging islands to settle there and develop their activities. In fact, Beauvilain (1989) believes that “*it is near the Lake Chad that the displacement of populations caused by drought is greatest, due to the gradual drying up of the Chari Delta and the potential stemming from the receding waters of the lake*” (pp. 747-748). For Kitoto (2016), the decline in certain resources, particularly water, fish, fertile land and ecosystem services, is a source of competition between the various users, in a context where there is a high concentration of populations around the lake. This strong pressure on resources is gradually leading to deforestation, desertification and environmental degradation as a result of overexploitation.

These different interactions reveal the construction of new identities as a result of population movements and struggles towards access and control of resources. The resources coveted by the migrants who make up the exogenous group, and who are also the target of the members of the endogenous group made up of natives, are controlled by the economically powerful elites who have taken time to weave their network with the administrative and political authorities who guarantee them control over the said resources. This situation pits three protagonist groups against each other: the first group wants to survive, the second group wants to continue satisfying their need in increasingly scarce resources, and the last group aims to consolidate their hold on resources whose loss of control would undermine their powers. Since interests are



conflicting, this competition has paved the way for the emergence of new conflicts and it exacerbates latent tensions between the protagonist communities, causing existing conflicts to escalate.

In his analysis of the competition to access and control agricultural land in the Lake Chad basin, Dezo (2015) identifies two groups of protagonists: the first is made up of local farmers and the political and economic elites who, according to TAJFEL and TURNER's approach, represents the endogenous group (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Their ambition is to keep hold on their land by extending its surface area so that production can meet the needs of their growing families, and to ensure a legacy for their descendants. They are Shuwa, Mousgoum, Toupouri, Massa, Kotoko, Peuhl and Kanouri Arabs. The fact that while some of them are land owners, others are farming make them consider themselves to be legal owners, puts them in a dominant position relative to migrants. The second group is made up of migrants, whether seasonal or permanent, whose pull factor in choosing the Lake Chad basin as their destination is its riches in vital resources. They come from Cameroon, others from Chad, Niger and Nigeria, and their ambition is to gain access to land for farming, with the main aim to make their stay in Maga profitable. The comparison between the two groups reinforces the hierarchy differentiating a group with a high status (natives) from a group with a low status (migrants). Migrants who know that they have a negative social identity deploy strategies aimed at submitting to the economic and political elites who allocate plots of land to be farmed on the condition that they return most of the harvest to them. Others ally themselves with members of their ethnic groups of origin, who join their farms by exchanging a share of the harvests and sometimes by payment. On the southern shores of the Lake Chad basin, in the Logone sub-basin, migrants clear the last available plots to develop their farms. Others choose the extremities of the rice-growing basins by digging anarchic irrigation canals to feed their fields. The fact that the two groups focus their interests on the same plots of land with different objectives is a factor in the emergence of conflicts and the escalation of existing tensions (Dezo, 2015).

The displaced people covet the land for subsistence farming, with part of the harvest sent back to their homelands, while the indigenous people want to expand their farms in order to consolidate their control over the resources. These conflicting objectives between different groups create conflict and reignites tensions. The situation at Maga is a good illustration of this, with the resurgence of conflicts between migrants and natives resulting from migrations organized and coordinated by the State after the creation of the water impoundment. When asked how they perceive the new influx of people to their locality, the majority of the natives feel that it increases the number of pretenders to their resources, causing them to dread the spectra of the 1980s. They see former immigrants as facilitators of the new arrivals, as some of them welcome the newcomers and help them to integrate.

The deputy to the Maga subdivisional officer also believes that the floods of recent years, the activities of Boko Haram and cross-border criminals, as well as land degradation accelerated by environmental degradation in the areas from which migrants come, have intensified the displacement of populations, which in his view is the cause of the recurrence of conflicts in recent years (Hamidou, 2017).

During the dry season in Darak, the flooding of the lake frees up fertile land that is immediately taken up by farmers. There is a sharp reduction in grazing land, and transhumance routes are becoming scarcer. And the narrowness of the cultivated plots is such that the transhumance routes form a labyrinth (Sambo, 2011. pp. 117-120) The roaming of transhumant herds in the plantations after the harvests is sometimes the cause of physical confrontations between them and farmers growing irrigated crops.

As a result, the farms developed near the artificial pools of water crystallize tensions between farmers and pastoralists, as the former take a very dim view of the fact that the latter come to water their cattle in these watering holes, which they reserve to irrigate their crops in the dry season. As well as depleting their water reserves, the cattle never leave without entering the plantations. Some of the disputes between farmers and fishermen concern claims to ponds that both claim to have been dug by their parents. Hence the conflicts

over the ownership of certain pools of water, which are sometimes claimed by the fishermen and sometimes by the farmers. Intensified fight for access to and control of resources is rekindling conflicts that we thought had already been resolved, and the solutions that initially proved effective are showing their limits (Dezo, 2015).

As far as competition for water resources is concerned, the farmers who run the farms use water channeling techniques for their irrigation. The fact that displaced people who also farm is not familiar with local practices, which recommend channeling part of the water while allowing people downstream to have access to it for their farms, creates new conflicts. Mahamat YAYÉ, a farmer on the south shore of Lake Chad, told us that the main difficulty they face with migrants in terms of water management in the lowlands is the fact that they use the water from the mayo and yahéré privately and as if it were never coming back (Dezo, 2015). In his view, the latter believe that the flowing water will soon disappear, as was the case in their homes. This leads them to want to take it with reserves.

The identified conflicts involving fishermen stem from the techniques used. Migrant fishermen use fishing nets that are too tight and prohibited by fishing regulations. “*Some local fishermen we met took us to the lake to show us their nets, which had been moved by migrants during the night in order to set theirs*” (Dezo, 2015). The categorization that arises from interactions between different groups of farmers ends up giving an ethnic coloring to the conflicts identified.

In the Logone sub-basin, competition for access to and control of resources has revived and then exacerbated the conflicts resulting from the migrations organized and coordinated by the State after the creation of Lake Maga, which at the time had pitted the migrants, encouraged by the public authorities, against the local populations. When asked how they perceive the new migratory situation, most of the people of Maga feel that it has increased the number of people vying for resources and reduced their share (Dezo, 2015). They fear the situation they experienced in the 1980s. For them, former migrants are the main culprits behind the new influx of people, as they are the ones who receive most newcomers and help them to settle and integrate. The deputy to Maga sub-divisional officer even goes so far as to attribute the recurrence of conflicts to the influx of migrants who have recently arrived in the locality.

The conflicts most often encountered in the Sahelian zone and the Lake Chad basin are between livestock breeders and farmers, and in order to curb them, governments have decided to collaborate by mapping out transhumance corridors and developing grazing areas reserved exclusively for livestock breeders to graze their herds. Although this reduced the conflicts for a while, it did not completely put an end to them, as the drying up of the lake and the resulting appearance of new villages reconfigured the area, causing the transhumance routes to disappear. Faced with this vacuum, the animals wander off to the plantations, destroying the farmers’ crops.

### **Resource management**

In the Lake Chad basin, the management of natural resources – land, agriculture, fisheries, etc... plays a central role in the conflict dynamics. It has been established that the deterioration of regulations and the way in which resources are managed play a major role in conflicts between agro-herdsmen and fishermen.

KHAL identified two causes of violent conflicts in fragile regions such as the Lake Chad basin: state failure and the exploitation of resources as a development model (Khal, 2006). Le Billon added that countries with special environmental circumstances which at the same time depend on the exploitation of natural resources are more exposed to the risks of emerging conflicts (Le Bilon, 2001). These two findings are similar to those of Homer Dixon, who considers the weakness of states as another factor in triggering conflicts.

On the southern shores of the Lake Chad, traditional authorities play a central role in land and resource

management. In this context, the rights to land and access to resources are poorly codified. Even if the populations are made of the same ethnic groups, their countries of origin and their legislation also differ. Regulating the access to resources in such circumstances becomes complex. One way out is to adopt exceptional community provisions. The fight for space between fishermen, herders and farmers in the Lake Chad basin has increased as a result of demographic pressure, which has made the population to triple (Chauvin & 2021). The difficulty of the growing number of young people in Lake Chad localities to have access to resources and earnings, as well as their fight with migrants, is taking place against a backdrop of deteriorating local capacity to regulate access to these resources.

According to RANGÉ and AMADOU, there have been two types of systems of access to resources in the Lake Chad basin: in the formerly populated areas, namely the Boudouma islands and the Kanembou polders, the natives controlled the land and did little to facilitate the settlement of migrants (Rangé and Amadou, 2015). On the shores, which had been deserted for a long time during the settlement process, a land tenure system was set up under the flexible authority of the chieftaincies in the hinterland, enabling cosmopolitan settlement and the establishment of an efficient agricultural system (Magrin, 2005). Everywhere, local political dynamics have been the source of growing tensions, against a backdrop of demographic pressure.

In the localities of the basin, the clientelism set up by economic operators and political entrepreneurs to secure their victories in local elections is creating land insecurity. In fact, these entrepreneurs are trading access to resources for the votes of the people they control through their vast networks of relationships with traditional, religious and administrative authorities. The resulting insecurity is compounded by rivalries between customary authorities (between Arabs and Kotoko). In addition, in the “most commercially integrated localities, the monetization of land has led to a rise in social inequalities and exclusion to the benefit of the richest peasants, or urban dwellers and traders” (Magrin, 2015). This context has been a godsend for the Islamic sect Boko Haram, which has taken advantage of the situation to establish itself and recruit among excluded or frustrated young people, particularly (but not exclusively) among the Boudouma and Kanuri communities.

While the traditional authorities are often at the forefront of allocating agricultural land and regulating access to pastoral and fisheries resources, their powers have been considerably eroded by the actions of political entrepreneurs and men who, using their vast networks, have secured control of the resources. A situation of “resources capture” which, by creating frustrated members of the population, forces those who have not made use of their networks to fall back on the meagre resources available. The desertion of localities by certain administrative and traditional authorities due to insecurity following attacks by Boko Haram and other armed groups has created an institutional vacuum with a substantial impact on regulations. This collapse is responsible for the conflict dynamics.

Faced with the threat of its disappearance and the resulting food challenge, the States bordering Lake Chad decided on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2012 to adopt a Water Charter for the eponymous Basin. What’s more, the efforts of the Lake Chad Basin Commission at that time were essentially focused on ways and means of getting water back into the main basin, rather than on managing this resource. For Kossoumna Liba, the weakening of the powers of traditional chiefs, who are the administration’s intermediaries with the people, the practice of corruption and the games played by certain elites are the best expression of the deregulation observed in the management of this resource. He believes that this has paved the way for a laissez-faire approach to resource management. What is left to all the nomads to do now is to pay the authorities a right of way during prohibited seasons to water their herds in privately-owned fishing channels (Kossoumna, 2022).

Today, there are more than 7,000 fishing canals in the Waza-Logone flood plain, and these canals are hotbeds of tension between fishermen and herders, who fight over ownership. Intervention by the authorities, whether administrative, judicial or traditional, has always exacerbated these tensions. A large

proportion of Shuwa-Mousgoum Arab conflicts is in relation with fishing canals (Nguedam, 2022).

In short, the management of water resources in the Lake Chad basin has now turned out to a security issue. Although the Water Charter was adopted in 2012 with the overall objective of “the sustainable development of the (Lake Chad) Basin through integrated, equitable and concerted management of shared water resources and the Basin environment” (Article 3(1) of the Charter), people’s access to these resources is still precarious due to the many and varied constraints to which the area is subject, coupled to the lack of effectiveness of the integrated water resource management (IWRM) policy” (Houdeingar, 2013). HOUDEINGAR believes that, despite the adoption of this charter, which is in line with the Africa Water Vision 2025, access to water remains precarious in the basin and the instruments for managing this resource remain inoperative (ibid). These shortcomings have opened the door to anarchy and conflict between users. These problems therefore need to be remedied if the right to water is to become a tangible reality for every human being living in the Basin.

One of the shortcomings of the way water resources are handled is the absence of a unified body of law and the juxtaposition of several systems for managing the right to water. This is a factor of discord between populations, with some claiming customary law to justify their control over water resources, and others resorting to identity or generational affiliation or invoking ‘modern’ positive law (Boukar, 2022). In addition, the major shortcomings observed in the promotion of integrated water resource management instruments have a visible impact on the conflict dynamics between farmers. It should also be noted that the populations encountered in the basin still carry their water habits along. In the River Logone and on its Cameroonian banks, Chadians have a very predatory attitude towards water. Their use of this resource is private and they always behave as if the waters of this river were their property. Tensions between Chadian and Cameroonian fishermen have been exacerbated in recent years because of the Chadians’ attitude to water (Guedam, 2022).

Another explanation for the conflict dynamics observed between agro-herdsmen and fishermen in the Lake Chad basin is the inability of the authorities responsible for the resources to manage the divergent interests and claims among the user groups.

In the Logone sub-basin, the resource that makes farmland attractive is water, as it facilitates the practice of irrigated agriculture. The irrigable land around the Maga reservoir is managed by SEMRY, which allocates it to the applicant populations, who in turns must pay a sum of 55,000 CFA francs each in exchange for half a hectare of land that SEMRY will have to plough and irrigate throughout the year. With the ever-increasing pressure from migrants, Chadian applicants and agricultural entrepreneurs, it is impossible to satisfy the majority. In the past, it was difficult for foreigners and migrants to gain access to land in this locality, but today the situation has changed and corruption and influence peddling have reshuffled the cards. Migrants who have not been able to obtain irrigable land from SEMRY may find themselves in the shallows or dig uncontrolled irrigation canals at the ends of the rice-growing basins to supply their plantations with water. Others dig underground pipes around the fishing channels to supply their fields. The conflicts that break out in the area generally pit against climate migrants, the local population and SEMRY. The Djahoro (canton or village chiefs), who were once effective regulators of water and other natural resource management, are now at the heart of the dysfunction. They form partnerships with climate migrants, to whom they allocate farmland in exchange for a large proportion of their harvests (Bouba, 2022).

The analysis of the management of irrigable plots by SEMRY reveals an “*institutional deficiency*” and a desire of people in charge of affairs to deprive some people of resources that are vital to them. What comes out here is the so-called social categorization; or in short, a *structural violence* (Galtung, 1996). These various failings destabilize social relations and exacerbate tensions between populations. As part of the peace-building process, it is becoming imperative to consider a mediation approach based on the promotion

of incentive mechanisms for the sustainable and concerted management of natural resources.

## **BUILDING A POSITIVE DYNAMIC OF PEACE THROUGH THE PROMOTION OF INCENTIVE MECHANISMS FOR SUSTAINABLE AND CONCERTED MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE CREATION OF A COMMUNITY OF INTEREST**

In a context as ecologically fragile as the Lake Chad basin, it is imperative that the environmental dimension is taken into account when adopting measures for the sustainable management of conflicts and the construction of a positive peace dynamic. Lake Chad is home to four countries, and the population of these countries is growing, while resources are declining considerably. This decline is at the same time attributable to the strong pressure exerted on resources and to environmental degradation, which is responsible for environmental scarcity. In the context of the exploitation of shared resources, Elinor OSTROM believes that economic rationality leads individuals who share a common good to over-exploit it (Ostrom, 1990). On the other hand, the cost of the wear and tear caused by the use of the asset is shared by all. Although the environmental factor is rarely mentioned as one of the causes of violent conflicts, the exploitation and misuse of environmental resources cannot only increase the severity and lifespan of conflicts, but also make their resolution much more complex.

Since the direct access to limited natural resources such as land, water, fish and grazing land is dominated by certain groups, it can lead to violent conflicts. Thus, the marginalization or exclusion of certain groups means that the group that controls these resources becomes the target for political manipulation (Ostrom, 1990). It should be recognized that measures are being taken to mitigate the impacts of climate change and strengthen the resilience of populations. The CBLT and its partners are also working to restore the basin's ecosystem. Alongside all this, we need to build a real collective dynamic to organize the management of the basin's shared resources. The Lake Chad Basin Commission did this in its own way by adopting the Water Charter in 2012, which is still inoperative till today. We therefore believe that promoting incentive mechanisms for the sustainable and concerted management of natural resources and creating a community of interest would help to build a positive peace dynamic.

### **The promotion of incentive mechanisms for the sustainable and concerted management of natural resources**

For stakeholders to participate effectively in the sustainable management of resources in the Lake Chad Basin, it is important to create favorable conditions. Elinor Ostrom proposes the principle of “*a self-organization and self-governance in common resource situations*“. In her view, these are pragmatic, effective and sustainable solutions since it is a practice of a collective action that responds to a wide range of economic problems. Contrary to the prevailing economic thinking, which at best concludes that “*a collective action [...] by individuals using common pool resources*” is economically inefficient, and at worst that common goods will be depleted in the medium to long term, OSTROM puts forward the solutions of “*a self-organization and self-governance in common pool resource situations*“. She sees these solutions as a practice of collective action that responds to a wide range of economic problems (Ostrom, 1990).

According to OSTROM's logic, the water charter adopted by the Lac Chad Basin Commission (CBLT) must be the result of a concerted action between the populations using the resources and this organization. The implementation of this charter will have to become widespread throughout the basin and management instruments such as water plans and others will have to be adopted by the populations. The public and community authorities will have to provide a framework for these actions so that the local people can decide for themselves on the rules of conduct. This will involve defining participation mechanisms and setting up

local self-governance and self-management bodies responsible for implementing the charter, such as management forums, early-warning committees, dispute management bodies and others. Although the Logone sub-basin is currently one of the few in the Lake Chad basin to have management plans, this practice must be extended to bottom-up management to involve local people more closely in the management and monitoring of resources. It will be essential to set up participation platforms such as stakeholder forums and the local funding mechanisms that should accompany them. The strategy of the LCBC, which has been experimenting the effective implementation of the water charter in the Logone (Cameroon) and Kamandugu Yobé (Nigeria and Niger) sub-basins since 2019, must be corrected and intensified in all sub-basins.

In her work on the tragedy of common goods, Elinor OSTROM demonstrates that when it comes to exploiting common resources, each individual follows their own interests. In doing so, they fail to take proper account of the cost of their actions, seeing only the short- or medium-term benefits – the resource is inexorably diminishing, for them and for others. To curb this, OSTROM advocates the development of new collective organizations at the level of farmers, which will significantly improve the situation by changing incentives and providing a means for monitoring and improving the application of collective decisions on the diversion of common resources. The various resource users, in particular fishermen, farmers and livestock breeders, need to be structured so that they are better represented in the cooperation frameworks that will be set up. This will reduce pockets of tension and prevent tensions escalating between farmers. This practice will also have the merit of pacifying community relations and laying the foundations for a positive peace dynamic.

### **Creation of a community of interest**

The success of the strategy for the sustainable management of shared resources and related conflicts in the Lake Chad Basin will depend on the creation of communities of interest around these resources by the LCBC and its partners. The fact that the populations living in the area come from the same ethnic groups, despite belonging to different countries, is an asset. It is a commonplace to see a Cameroonian living on the Logone plain owning fishing channels on the Chadian side and vice versa. Chadians also have more influence in livestock sales markets on Cameroonian territory, as they are the ones supplying raw materials. These various informal links should be used as a basis for building a community of interests.

OSTROM identifies eight principles for the successful management of common resources, which provide the basis for a theory to manage collective goods: a clear definition of access rights, the proportionality of benefits to costs incurred, the establishment of procedures for collective choices, the definition of supervision and monitoring rules, the application of graduated and differentiated sanctions, the establishment of conflict resolution mechanisms, recognition by the State of the organization put in place, and the organization of the entire system at several levels. This will help to test and assess the implementation of the Water Charter. The community of interest created will be decisive in promoting good practice and good governance of resources. It will be an opportunity to let the players talk to each other and work out their own operating rules together. After all, communication is an essential factor in the development of relationships based on trust between individuals. It will also be an opportunity to popularize the virtues of living together and the sustainable and responsible management of resources. It will be easier for people who understand that they have a common interest in living in harmony and rationing their consumption of resources to agree and look in the same direction.

Local systems for regulating resources need to be strengthened and the powers of traditional chiefs, who are reputed to be closer to the local population, need to be geared towards providing support and guidance. Cooperative management of valuable natural resources such as land and water will be an asset in building trust between the basin's populations. The environmental cooperation system should include joint measures to regulate access to arable land and fishery resources, as well as the tracing of transhumance corridors on

land that has been flooded due to the drying up of the lake. This will limit the predatory attitudes of certain populations towards resources. The promotion of environmental education activities will also help to equip local people with responsible and peaceful attitudes towards their environment. All this will add up to the various conflict resolution and peace-building efforts initiated on both sides of the lake to give a positive impetus to the Lake Chad Basin.

## CONCLUSION

In response to the questions what explains the recurrence of conflicts in the Lake Chad Basin? What are the obstacles to peace in this area? And what are the perspectives to build a positive dynamic of peace? Based on Thomas Homer-Dixon's research our demonstration has been structured around three points:

We firstly demonstrated that several interconnected factors explain the process of renewal of conflict dynamics in the Lake Chad Basin. First, the cross-border crime that perpetuates insecurity, the Boko Haram terrorist group activities, and the scarcity of natural resources that is exacerbated by the deterioration of regulations and resource management methods, the effects of climate change, including drought and floods.

Secondly, we identify three main factors that blocked peace in this ecological basin: the difficulty to access the land and natural resources and the scarcity of economic resources, the competition between social groups to access and control of resources and the management mode of available resources.

To break out of the continuous cycle of conflicts in this area, it is urgent to build a positive dynamic of peace through the promotion of incentive mechanisms for sustainable and concerted management of natural resources and create a community of interest to implicate all the inhabitants in the peacebuilding process.

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