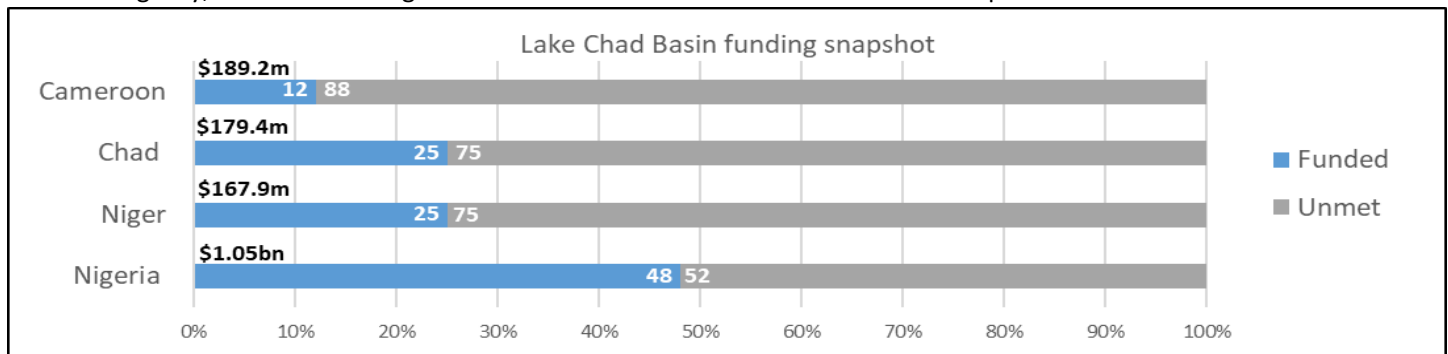**THREE PRONGED APPROACH: HARNESSING SUPPORT FOR LAKE CHAD COMMUNITIES ON THE PATH TOWARDS PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

This short paper was developed by the regional NGO Forums[1] to complement *"Supporting the Lake Chad Communities on the Path towards Peace and Sustainable Development",* a statement endorsed by 43 organisations providing multi-sectoral support in affected regions across north-east Nigeria, the Far North of Cameroon, Western Chad and south-east Niger. Whereas the ten requests in the statement directly target the governments of the affected countries, ***this paper sets out concrete recommendations for all actors, including, but not limited to, governments, non-government organisations (NGOs), United Nations, traditional and non-traditional donors, to action the requests.*** The paper recommends a three pronged approach of 1) building around community 2) safeguarding protection and 3) enabling environment that needs to be urgently implemented to simultaneously save and rebuild affected populations' lives.

Overview

With the Lake Chad Basin protracted conflict continuing into its ninth year, more than 10.7 million people remain in urgent need of life saving assistance and 2.4 million people, 1.7 million in north-east Nigeria, remain displaced. ***There needs to be an urgent change in operational modalities and programming to ensure closer collaboration between humanitarian and development actors to provide simultaneous life-saving assistance as well as undertake development, social cohesion and peace building activities***. This requires longer planning horizons, more strategic interventions and flexible, longer-term funding across the full spectrum from humanitarian to development programming. The current humanitarian funding is inadequate for meeting the acute emergency, medium and longer term needs as outlined in the Humanitarian Response Plans.

Key events, including *Oslo I Conference* (February 2017), *Berlin Conference* (September 2017), the first *Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum (*May 2018), have facilitated substantial progress in terms of political, funding, programming landmarks. A massive scale up of all actors in the response have resulted in many gains including the stalling of famine in north-east Nigeria in 2017 and massively reducing the number of food insecure people from 7.2 to 5 million across the four countries. However, despite commendable efforts, the response continues to fall short in meeting the short term emergency needs, especially of those coming across the borders or from 'inaccessible areas', and also the longer term needs of affected populations. There needs to be shift to a bottom up approach. **We, as humanitarian and development actors, must see communities as their own agents of change and support them to build on existing coping mechanisms to ever-evolving shocks.**

Three pronged approach

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[1] Nigeria INGO Forum (comprising of 41 INGOs), Cameroon Humanitarian INGO Forum, International Organisations Represented in Niger and representatives from INGOs operational in Chad

APPROACH 1: BUILDING AROUND COMMUNITY

The conflict has broken down all levels of social fabric, destroyed basic infrastructure and deprived communities of access to basic services, thus increasing the suffering of both internally displaced persons and host communities. It is important to work with communities who have been living in these marginalised and underdeveloped areas and support them to build on and expand coping mechanisms and resilience to shocks in order to better survive.

1. *Recognise affected communities as their own agents of change and enable a genuine shift to a community-centred approach ensuring accountability through the promotion of inclusive dialogue, inclusion and feedback.*

All actors continue to fall short on community engagement and participation. Coordination and planning does not involve communities in a genuine way. Inclusion, participation and shared ownership of the process by affected people can be reached by:

- **Adopting an anthropological lens** in context analysis and response to better understand local dynamics including power dynamics and relations, migration, networks of local solidarity, family unit activity and livelihoods opportunities.
- **Building on existing coping mechanisms** and increase understanding not only to prevent negative coping mechanisms but also how we can better support positive coping mechanisms.
- **Investing in community engagement** and ensuring all countries and organisations have fully resourced community engagement plans with allocations for translation and interpretation costs. This also includes investing in mapping of the languages of affected people and areas of expertise of all local actors, including their ability to be a blocker or ally.
- **Increasing consultations with context specific vulnerable groups** (women, children, adolescents, persons with disabilities etc) to better understand the specific challenges they are facing and their thoughts on solutions.
- **Collective drafting of community development plans**. NGOs would align and contribute to within certain timeframe.
- **Ensuring functional, multilingual complaints mechanisms** to effectively address and action all concerns and challenges.

2. *Explore immediately collective alternatives to military solutions for stabilising communities and set a precedent for rebuilding trust through the genuine engagement of communities to own solutions to the challenges they are facing.*

In order to stabilise communities, it is crucial to build on the structures they daily interact with and entities that represent them best. There are two important streams allowing the restoration of responsive structures to be taken into better consideration:

Traditional and civilian authorities

- **Mapping out and integrating traditional leaders, including religious leaders, in programmes and policy making,** including their critical role in reconstruction and rebuilding of peace.
- **Re-establishing civilian authorities, including police and local government entities,** especially in areas of return.

Local organisations and civil society

- **Building capacity of local organisations and civil society**, as well as universities and think tanks to ensure 'as local as possible, as international as necessary'. These entities need to be recognized and leveraged for their local expertise and presence. One example being Diffa University in Niger as it is specialized in agronomy which could potentially be a great partner in a region highly dependent on agriculture.
- **Increasing partnerships and ensuring stronger civil society representation** in decision making bodies.
- **Ensuring fair access of local civil society to funding,** including the in country Humanitarian Funds.

3. *Reinforce the critical role of youth and women in reconciliation and reintegration processes and commit to promoting social cohesion programming.*

Affected populations, especially women and girls, continue to be exposed to high levels of violence and harm from all parties to the conflict, including non-state armed groups, security forces and community militias. This results in killings, abductions, forced marriage and enslavement, untreated trauma, loss or separation from family members, massive pressure on resources, deterioration of living conditions and high levels of community stigmatisation. Past conflict can be resolved, future conflict can be prevented and social structures can be rebuilt through the prioritisation of the following activities:

- **Investing in and increasing individual and group psychosocial support activities** in collaboration with other sectors.
- **Ensuring a transparent process in screening centres** and transfering management of such centres to civilian authorities.
- **Designing common approaches for reintegration** of former combatants, vigilantes, 'abductees' or any individual formerly associated with armed groups in collaboration with the community to ensure acceptance.
- **Decreasing potential for radicalisation** through increasing education, vocational training and economic opportunities.
- **Working with affected governments to increase truth and reconciliation efforts** and ensure minimum standards for protection, including the abolishment of the death penalty and extra-judicial killings.

APPROACH 2: SAFEGUARDING PROTECTION

Widespread protection needs continue to be unmet with women, girls, men and boys subjected to ongoing human rights abuses by all parties to the conflict including killings, torture, sexual violence, abductions, forced recruitment, coerced child labour, forced disappearance and arbitrary detention. Civilians without national identification, specifically men and boys, suspected of association with non-state armed groups are frequently detained. Women and children continue to be used as carriers of person–borne improvised explosive devices (PBIEDs) with over 130[2] children (mainly girls) reported to have been used in north-east Nigeria in 2017 with approximately 58 children used in the Far North of Cameroon.

4. *Refrain from harming civilians and ensure all civilians, especially women, children and other vulnerable groups are protected through the development and implementation of accountability policies and frameworks.*

Despite the signature of all four countries to the *Abuja Action Statement* in 2016 committing to adhere to international binding principles, communities across the region continue to suffer from massive violations. The protection of the population must be at the core of every policy, decision and response through the following ways:

- **Supporting the affected governments in the development and implementation of accountability frameworks and policies** providing for investigation of allegations. This includes adoption of the *National Policy on Protection of Civilians and Civilian Harm Mitigation* in Nigeria and finalisation of the Strategy of Protection of Civilians of MNF in Niger.
- **Allowing unhindered access to monitor places,** including but not limited to screening centres and detention facilities, where reported systematic abuse is taking place.
- **Developing and/or implementing country specific Centrality of Protection strategies and/or national action plans**
- **Increasing systematized and collaborative processes to collect, process, analyse, store, share and use data and information.**
- **Strengthening civil-military coordination** and establishing mechanisms for reporting and addressing violations.

5. *Ensure all organised movement, including return, whether within borders or cross border, is voluntary, safe, dignified and informed.*

Widespread information campaigns highlighting conditions in areas of return must be increased and wider consultations with vulnerable groups must be undertaken with the aim of populations undertaking 'go and see missions' and developing community based minimum conditions for returns. Country specific return and durable solution strategies adhering to international standards must be developed and/or implemented and the *Kampala Convention* needs to be domesticated for all countries in the region. On a regional level, the following actions must be taken with immediate effect:

- **Increasing cross border monitoring and improving data collection, information and analysis** to enable better preparation for new arrivals including being able to better mobilise adequate funding for contingency planning.
- **Implementing existing regional coordination systems and frameworks**, such as the Tripartite Agreement. Joint UNHCR Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) and HRP planning needs to take place as there is cross-over coverage of areas.
- **Enhancing regional and cross border coordination**, including through greater engagement by States and actors with regional institutions such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

6. *Lift excessive military restrictions on freedom of movement and enable safe passage so that communities can access their livelihoods, including fishing, farming and markets, and so that cross border trade can resume.*

Access remains one of the biggest challenges in the Lake Chad response, with communities unable to access their livelihoods or pursue cross border trade due to military restrictions (especially those in entrenched camps or not holding documentation), ongoing hostilities and insecurity, bad roads and physical conditions. Data shows that hundreds of thousands of people are in inaccessible areas with actors having no way of verifying conditions. The following actions must be taken with immediate effect:

- **Developing and/or implementing access strategies** outlining steps to engage all parties to the conflict in country.
- **Engaging on a strategic diplomatic and/or military level** to increase freedom of movement. In Nigeria, this includes expansion of the perimeters of the government-secured 'garrison towns'.

7. *Uphold the rights of all citizens and safeguard their right to vote in a free and fair manner by ensuring all citizens are able to obtain civil documentation or, in cases where it has been lost, stolen or confiscated, replace necessary documentation.*

This includes supporting the Independent National Electoral Commissions with funds, equipment and personnel.

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[2] 133 children (42 boys, 90 girls and a baby of unknown sex) were used in 71 incidents of suicide attacks in north-east Nigeria in 2017. Source: UNICEF

APPROACH 3: ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Bringing communities towards the peace and sustainable development path means that all stakeholders- governments first- should contribute to the promotion of an enabling environment, both for the affected populations and operational actors providing support.

8. *Provide leadership for deliberate action and ensure transparent and accountable allocation of resources to address the root causes of the crisis whilst also addressing the increasing humanitarian needs.*

Recognising that before the crisis, under development, structural deficiencies and poverty were prominent features of the region, affected governments must be supported to provide stronger leadership to find solutions to the root causes including:

- **Strengthening government institutions,** specifically military and other critical departments, to ensure the respect for humanitarian law and human rights.
- **Ensuring correct usage of funding** through supporting the monitoring of activities of state and federal counterparts
- **Investing resources into empowering communities** through education, vocational training, social cohesion and peace-building activities to provide them access to livelihood and employment opportunities.
- **Reinforcing early warning mechanisms and prevention mechanisms** through increased investment in conflict analysis, research and contingency planning.
- **Ensuring all programming is climate, conflict, gender, social inclusion sensitive** and that the impact of interventions against these factors is monitored.

9. *Develop basic services, including schools and health facilities, and ensure as well as sustain an increased presence of civilian authorities and local government structures in rural areas*.

A chronic lack of investment in basic social services was worsened by the closing or destruction of health structures and schools. Rebuilding and/or investing in the development of basic infrastructure and services, including but not limited to access to education, health, water, food and livelihoods, must be prioritized by all actors-governments first- to develop human capital. This includes:

- **Signing and/or implementing the *Safe Schools Declaration.***
- **Reconstructing the economic pillar in the region to** increase access to the labour market and opportunities.
- **Supporting the return and/or increased presence of civilian authorities and local government structures** to their communities.
- **Supporting the expansion of local development plans.** This includes the promotion of activities, such as pastoralism and enhancing peaceful co-existence.
- **Coordinating more closely with all actors, including non-traditional donors such as the World Bank, African Development Bank and Islamic Bank** (who are already involved with humanitarian and development projects). Understanding that the international agencies, specifically the humanitarian actors will not be here forever and are already looking at the possibility of exit strategies, there needs to be joint coordination platforms for humanitarian and development actors to clarify gaps, needs and advocacy priorities.
- **Engaging in a more systematic and collective way with the private sector** to look into longer term saving plans, investment as well as how they can augment the stabilisation and development plans through renovation of infrastructure and an enabling environment for livelihoods.

10. *Establish regular platforms for exchange between government and civil society in order to address regulatory challenges and the use of violent security measures as well as to ensure legislation and frameworks are inclusive of the needs of all citizens.*

Civil society not only play a critical role in providing direct assistance but also challenging their governments to ensure a better quality of life for citizens. Negative media campaigns scapegoating NGOs are common. The work of NGOs continues to be impeded due to regulatory challenges and/or restrictive legislation, including the recent anti-NGO bill in Nigeria that was unofficially quashed after multi-faceted advocacy efforts. Regulatory challenges include visa issues, registration issues and challenges with the importation of life-saving goods. In order to have an enabling operational environment, the following actions must be undertaken:

- **Increasing the awareness of the critical role of civil society and** in order to foster greater understanding.
- **Advocating at a high level to affected governments** to ensure that restrictive legislation is not proposed and that anti-NGO rhetoric is curtailed and explained thoroughly.
- **Ensuring official streamlined processes for the regulatory challenges**, including agreed upon processes for registration, visas and importation of goods issues. Signed Communiques between the affected governments and the humanitarian community could be a potential way forward for overcoming and streamlining regulatory challenges.