



Lake Chad Basin Crisis:

An Analysis of Violence against Women, Children and Displaced Populations in the region
February 2017

Since Boko Haram declared allegiance to the Islamic State in the spring of 2015, the drive to gain territory has increased the group's attacks from Nigeria into Cameroon, Chad and Niger. **These countries of the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) are experiencing Africa's fastest growing displacement crisis**, compounding their existing vulnerability due to chronic drought, food insecurity, fast population growth and climate change.

As of December 2016, 2.3 million people have been displaced in the region with more than half being children. Protection issues have proven to be of grave concern yet are largely ignored, despite evidence of violence against women, children and displaced populations across the region.

Violence against Women

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a prevalent protection concern of the LCB crisis with particular attention focused on sexual violence and intimate partner violence. Women and girls have been targeted, abducted and held hostage by Boko Haram, with 7,000 estimated to have been abducted, raped or forced into marriage in Nigeria. When women and girls do manage to flee Boko Haram, security forces detain them for long, undetermined periods before they are allowed to leave and face stigma upon return.

Women and girls are forced into survival sex and other negative coping strategies including early marriage. Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) has been perpetrated by those in positions of power.

Violence against Children

Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) have been registered in all countries including an estimated 20,000 UASC in Nigeria's northeast states alone. Both children and families have reported stress, trauma and fear.

Child labor has been on the rise since the crisis began, ranging from petty trading to breaking rocks. Boys and girls are at increased risk of sexual violence, whether when collecting firewood to sell outside of camps or while living with host families. The plight of children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG) begins with the risk of abduction, recruitment and forced suicide attacks, to children being stigmatized for any association with armed groups such as Boko Haram.

Violence against Displaced Populations

Beyond Boko Haram, opposition military forces and armed group have been committing human rights violations and targeting minorities. Individuals and groups accused of association with Boko Haram have become targeted for arbitrary detention, especially men and boys. Restricted movement has been enforced in refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, and *refoulement*, or forced return to an unsafe country, has been witnessed at border points.

Difficulty in obtaining identification documents such as birth certificates and national ID cards limits services which displaced populations can access. The lack of access to information regarding the security of home lands affects opportunities to return.

"Despite being coined a 'protection crisis', earmarked funding is going to other sectors."

*– IRC Needs Assessment Report:
GBV and Child Protection, Cameroon*

The four countries in Lake Chad Basin face similar protection issues and work with the same populations across the region. As such, it is pertinent to ensure a regional approach to preventing and responding to violence against women, children and displaced populations.



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First, Violence Prevention and Response must be at the core of the response in the region, thereby upholding the Abuja Action Statement created in June 2016 by the four governments of the Lake Chad Basin.¹ The statement agrees on comprehensive actions to enhance protection and respond to the most urgent needs of refugees and internally displaced people, with a specific focus on women and children. Addressing the risks and consequences of violence is imperative to ensure people are safe, healthy, empowered and can take advantage of educational and economic opportunities. Programs and policies should prioritize both prevention and response actions to address violence.

Second, essential and specialized protection services need to be in place and sufficiently resourced while adhering to minimum standards. Violence prevention should focus on shifting power dynamics, promoting human rights and empowering people affected by violence to transform their futures. Violence response should focus on ensuring lifesaving client-centered, equal and safe services for people experiencing violence. Minimum protection standards for women, children and other vulnerable groups affected by Boko Haram should be upheld thereby ensuring the minimum essential and specialized services for these affected populations are sufficiently resourced and do no harm. Humanitarian access and coordination should be enhanced to allow for essential services to reach the most vulnerable populations and to reach scale.

Third, regional learning should be promoted and regional approaches should inform country-specific and cross-border programming. Government and NGOs should

share policy and programming tools and best practices, build on successes and challenges in neighboring countries, and work together to find solutions to shared issues of violence against women, children and displaced populations. Harmonized approaches can develop around violence prevention approaches, community mobilization and community-based approaches. Cross-border programming areas can be promoted around disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and family tracing and reunification.

Fourth, safe durable solutions should be promoted. Ongoing protection monitoring and regular and reliable information sharing should contribute to the identification of protection gaps while simultaneously ensuring that people receive regular and reliable information in order to make informed decisions about their choice of durable solution. Returns should only be encouraged when it is safe for women, children and displaced populations and should be voluntary. In order to ensure the voluntary and sustainable nature of returns, it is important that there is a common understanding among all government and NGO actors involved on what constitutes voluntary return and to establish a set of outcome level indicators to assess whether the conditions in the country of origin are conducive for return.

By establishing a clear mechanism to conduct joint analysis among state, private sector, humanitarian and development actors, coordinating on policy and programming, and setting collective outcome goals for self-reliance and protection, the most vulnerable populations of the Lake Chad Basin would receive a focused response through better aid.

¹ Regional Protection Dialogue on the Lake Chad Basin - [Abuja Action Statement](#), Government of Niger, Government of Chad, Government of Nigeria, Government of Cameroon, 8 June 2016.