EMERGING SECURITY ISSUES IN THE FOMBINA REGION OF LAKE CHAD BASIN: CLIMATE CHANGE AND HUMAN INSECURITY

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Abstract

This study explores the intricate security challenges facing the Fombina Area in the Lake Chad region, focusing on the interplay between terrorism, environmental degradation, intercommunal conflict, and criminal activities. Spanning Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, the Fombina Area has been historically shaped by climatic changes, ecological pressures, and socio-political tensions, contributing to a humanitarian crisis impacting over 17 million people. Through a historical lens dating back to 1809, the research examines how environmental stressors, such as the dramatic shrinkage of Lake Chad, both exacerbate local conflicts and create conditions conducive to the rise of extremist groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP. Utilizing the frameworks of Human Security and Ecological Security, this paper identifies the structural drivers of conflict and displacement, emphasizing the need for integrated, multi-level strategies to promote resilience and sustainable development. The findings underscore that effective policy responses must address both immediate security threats and the underlying socio-economic vulnerabilities that fuel instability. Recommendations include strengthening regional counter-terrorism cooperation, enhancing border governance, implementing community-based conflict resolution mechanisms, and investing in ecological restoration. By fostering cooperation among local, national, and international stakeholders, this research advocates for holistic approaches that can rebuild trust, promote peace, and facilitate sustainable development in the fragile Fombina Area.

Keywords: Security Challenges, Terrorism, Environmental Degradation, Intercommunal Conflict, Human Security

1. Introduction.

The Fombina Area of the Lake Chad Basin represents one of the most fragile and conflict-prone regions in Sub-Saharan Africa, shaped by a complex interplay of environmental change, historical transformations, and evolving security threats. Geographically spanning parts of northeastern Nigeria, northern Cameroon, western Chad, and southeastern Niger, the region forms a critical ecological and socio-economic zone centered around Lake Chad, once one of Africa's largest freshwater bodies. Over the past six decades, however, Lake Chad has shrunk by more than 90% due to a combination of climate variability, prolonged droughts, and unsustainable human exploitation (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2018). This dramatic environmental transformation has disrupted traditional livelihoods—particularly farming, fishing, and pastoralism, upon which millions of inhabitants depend, thereby intensifying competition over scarce natural resources.

Historically, the Fombina Area has been a dynamic space of migration, trade, and socio-political interaction dating back to the early 19th century. The period beginning around 1809, marked by the Sokoto Jihad and subsequent political reconfigurations, significantly altered patterns of settlement, authority, and intergroup relations (Barkindo, 1989; Last, 2009). These historical processes laid the foundation for contemporary ethnic configurations and, in some cases, entrenched grievances that continue to influence present-day conflicts. Colonial interventions further compounded these tensions by imposing artificial borders that fragmented communities and disrupted indigenous systems of resource governance and conflict resolution (Omulokoli, 1995).

In recent decades, the region has experienced a convergence of environmental stress, weak governance, and violent extremism, transforming it into a major epicenter of insecurity in the Sahel. The emergence of insurgent groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) has significantly escalated violence, leading to widespread displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and humanitarian crises affecting over 17 million people across the Lake Chad Basin (International Crisis Group, 2020; UNDP, 2020). These groups exploit socio-economic vulnerabilities, ecological degradation, and state fragility to recruit members and sustain their operations, thereby reinforcing cycles of violence and underdevelopment.

At the same time, climate change has intensified the frequency and severity of environmental shocks, including droughts, desertification, and irregular rainfall patterns. These stressors not only undermine agricultural productivity and food security but also exacerbate intercommunal conflicts, particularly between farmers and pastoralists competing for diminishing land and water resources (Okpara et al., 2015; WFP, 2017). Consequently, the Fombina Area exemplifies the intricate nexus between environmental degradation, human insecurity, and violent conflict.

This study therefore seeks to analyze how environmental and climatic factors intersect with socio-political dynamics to drive conflict and displacement. By integrating historical insights with contemporary analysis, the study aims to provide a holistic understanding of the region's emerging security threats and to inform policy strategies that promote resilience, peace, and sustainable development.

1.1 Scope of the Study

This paper examines the evolving security challenges in the Fombina Area of the Lake Chad Basin, a historically significant and ecologically fragile region spanning parts of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Covering approximately 12,000 square kilometers, the Fombina Area encompasses diverse ecological zones, from the Sahelian plains around Lake Chad to the tropical savannah of the Mandara Mountains, and is home to ethnic groups such as the Kanuri, Fulani, and Shuwa Arab.

The temporal scope for this study span from 1809 till date and it capture both historical and contemporary trends. It adopts a multidisciplinary perspective that integrates environmental, historical, and socio-political analyses to explore how climate change, ecological degradation, terrorism, intercommunal conflicts, and criminal activities interact to shape insecurity in the region. The study specifically investigates contemporary environmental pressures including desertification and the shrinkage of Lake Chad, and the role of non-state actors like Boko Haram and ISWAP in exacerbating instability. It further assesses the implications of these dynamics for peace, security,

and development, while proposing policy recommendations aimed at fostering resilience, sustainable livelihoods, and regional cooperation within the Fombina Area.

2.0 Literature Review

This literature review synthesizes academic, governmental, and policy sources to examine the interconnected dynamics of environmental degradation, climate change, natural disasters, conflict, and displacement in the Fombina Area of the Lake Chad Basin from 1809 onward. The literature highlights three critical thematic intersections: environmental and climatic stressors, historical and socio-political conflicts, and resultant displacement and insecurity, which collectively shape the region's complex crisis landscape.

A robust body of scholarship links the Fombina Area's challenges to profound environmental and climatic changes. Okpara et al. (2015) argue that the dramatic shrinkage of Lake Chad by over 90% since the 1960s (UNESCO, 2021) has severely disrupted agriculture, pastoralism, and fishing, the primary livelihoods of the region's Kanuri, Fulani, and Shuwa Arab communities. This ecological decline, compounded by desertification and erratic rainfall patterns, has driven resource scarcity, fueling local conflicts and mass displacement (World Bank, 2018; UNESCO, 2021).

Furthermore, Adger et al. (2001) highlight the nexus between climate variability and resource conflicts, suggesting that deteriorating environmental conditions contribute to societal instability. Specific case studies, such as the examination of the Lake Chad Basin by WFP (2017), illustrate how climate change leads to reduced agricultural productivity, food insecurity, and subsequent migration. These environmental stressors have not only destabilized livelihoods but also exacerbated competition over dwindling resources, contributing to cycles of migration and violence.

Historical analyses provide critical context for the region's instability, tracing its roots to early 19th-century conflicts. Barkindo (1989) and Last (2009) detail how jihads and inter-ethnic warfare, beginning around 1809, established patterns of violence and power struggles that persist today. The review has traced the historical context of conflict in the Fombina area, including the upheaval stemming from the trans-Saharan slave trade in the 19th century and the colonial exploitation of resources, which contributed to long-standing ethnic tensions (Omulokoli, 1995).

Colonial-era border demarcations further fragmented communities, disrupting traditional resource-sharing and conflict-resolution mechanisms, which intensified tensions among ethnic groups and laid the groundwork for ongoing disputes. Understanding these historical precedents can inform modern conflict resolution and development strategies, highlighting the need for approaches that address both the environmental and socio-political dimensions of the emerging crisis.

Contemporary literature highlights how environmental degradation and historical grievances have converged with modern conflicts, particularly since the rise of non-state actors like Boko Haram and ISWAP. Zenn (2020) notes that these groups exploit ecological vulnerabilities and socio-political marginalization to expand their influence, particularly in border areas where weak governance creates operational vacuums (International Crisis Group, 2020).

Additionally, the security landscape of the Fombina area is intertwined with larger geopolitical dynamics, including counter-terrorism initiatives and resource management strategies (Davis &Azad, 2022). The resulting violence has triggered widespread displacement, with millions forced from their homes, further straining the region's fragile ecosystems and social structures.

Institutional reports, such as those by the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC, 2021) and the United Nations Development Programme (2020), advocate for integrated responses, including ecological restoration, climate adaptation strategies, and inclusive governance to address conflict and displacement.

However, scholars like Davis and Azad (2022) critique the persistent lack of coordination among stakeholders and the gap between policy ambitions and on-the-ground implementation, which hinders effective disaster and conflict mitigation.

2.1 Gaps in Literature

While there is a growing body of literature addressing the interconnections between environmental issues and conflict, there remains a significant gap in the research concerning long-term longitudinal studies that explicitly link environmental change to patterns of displacement in the Fombina area from 1809 to contemporary contexts. Most studies focus on short-term impacts without considering how historical contexts and cumulative environmental changes shape present conflicts and displacement narratives. This paper aims to fill this gap by offering a comprehensive analysis that integrates historical data with current challenges in the Fombina area.

2.2 Theoretical Framework.

This study employs two prominent theoretical frameworks Human Security and Ecological Security to examine the intricate relationships between environmental degradation, climate change, conflict, and displacement in the Fombina area. Each theory offers unique insights into the dynamics and vulnerabilities faced by local communities.

2.2.1 Human Security.

Human Security as a concept gained prominence in the late 20th century, particularly with the publication of the United Nations' Human Development Report (1994), which was instrumental in broadening the understanding of security beyond merely state-centric concerns (United Nations Development Programme, 1994).

Human Security posits that the true essence of security lies in the protection of individuals rather than states. It emphasizes the importance of safeguarding against a range of human threats, including environmental destruction, poverty, disease, and violent conflict. The approach prioritizes the human experience, suggesting that insecurity in one area can spill over into others, creating a concatenation of vulnerabilities (Kaldor, 2013).

Critics of Human Security argue that its broad scope can lead to ambiguity, making it difficult to prioritize issues and allocate resources effectively. The lack of quantitative measures and benchmarks for assessing human security can also complicate policy formulation (Paris, 2001).

Additionally, the focus on individual experiences may obscure systemic issues related to state sovereignty and structural violence (Buzan, 1991).

In the Fombina context, Human Security is applicable through its focus on the vulnerabilities faced by communities impacted by climate change and conflict. By examining how environmental degradation triggers resource scarcity and subsequent conflict, this framework aids in understanding the myriad threats to individual security that arise from broader socio-political instability (UNDP, 2020).

2.2.2 Ecological Security.

Ecological Security was notably advanced by Thomas Homer-Dixon in the late 1990s. In his seminal work, Environment, Scarcity, and Violence (1999), Homer-Dixon explored how environmental stressors exacerbate conflict, particularly in resource-scarce regions (Homer-Dixon, 1999).

This theory asserts that environmental changes including resource depletion, climate fluctuations, and habitat destruction are significant catalysts for conflict. Homer-Dixon argues that competition over scarce resources can lead to social tensions and, ultimately, violent conflict, particularly when combined with existing socio-economic inequalities and political instability (Homer-Dixon, 1999).

While Ecological Security provides a compelling link between environmental changes and conflict, it has been criticized for oversimplifying complex socio-political dynamics by attributing conflict largely to ecological factors. This reductionist view may overlook critical underlying factors such as governance, historical grievances, and cultural contexts that also contribute to conflict (Levy, 1995). Furthermore, the deterministic nature of the theory may lead to fatalism, underplaying the capacity for human agency and conflict resolution strategies (Homer-Dixon, 2001).

In the Fombina region, Ecological Security is instrumental in analyzing how environmental degradation and climate change have led to the deterioration of livelihoods, resulting in intensified competition among ethnic communities for diminishing resources. This perspective enables stakeholders to grasp how the depletion of Lake Chad's waters precipitates conflict and displacement, thereby highlighting the need for integrated resource management and climate resilience strategies (WFP, 2017).

The integration of Human Security and Ecological Security frameworks in this study enriches the analysis of the Fombina area, providing a comprehensive understanding of how historical and contemporary environmental challenges interweave with social conflicts and displacement narratives. Therefore, by exploring these theories, we can better address the layered complexities that affect peace and development in the Lake Chad Basin.

3.0 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology grounded in historical analysis and thematic content analysis to explore the complex interconnections between environmental change, conflict, and displacement in the Fombina Area. Data were sourced from a wide range of secondary materials, including government reports from Lake Chad Basin countries, publications by

international organizations such as UNDP, UNESCO, and the World Food Programme, academic journal articles, books, archival records, and credible media reports. The data collection process involved systematic review and selection of relevant literature using key thematic search terms related to climate change, conflict, and migration in the Lake Chad region. Analytical procedures included coding and categorizing data into major thematic areas—environmental stressors, socio-political conflict dynamics, and patterns of insecurity and displacement—followed by a chronological and interpretive synthesis to identify causal relationships and long-term trends.

4.0 Emerging Security Issues

This section examines the multifaceted security challenges in the Fombina Area within the Lake Chad Basin, a region marked by historical, environmental, and socio-political complexities. By analyzing terrorism, environmental degradation, community conflicts, and criminal activities, this section highlights how these interconnected issues undermine peace, security, and development. The convergence of these factors has created a humanitarian crisis affecting over 17 million people across the Lake Chad Basin (UNICEF, 2021). Specific case studies illustrate the real-world implications of these challenges, grounding the analysis in concrete incidents and developments.

4.1 Overview of Key Security Challenges

The Fombina Area, faces a convergence of security threats that destabilize its social, economic, and ecological fabric. These challenges include the persistent threat of terrorism, primarily driven by groups like Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which exploit weak governance and socio-economic vulnerabilities. Environmental degradation, particularly the 90% shrinkage of Lake Chad since the 1960s (UNESCO, 2021), exacerbates resource scarcity, fueling intercommunal conflicts and displacement. Ethnic tensions among the Kanuri, Fulani, and Shuwa Arab communities, often centered on competition for land and water, further compound insecurity. Additionally, criminal activities such as smuggling, trafficking, and banditry thrive in the region's porous borders and ungoverned spaces. These issues are deeply intertwined, creating a vicious cycle of instability that disrupts livelihoods, education, healthcare, and social cohesion (World Bank, 2018). Through the lenses of Human Security and Ecological Security, this section dissects these challenges to reveal their structural drivers and impacts.

4.2 Terrorism and Extremism: The Role of Boko Haram and Other Militant Groups

Since the early 2000s, terrorism has emerged as a dominant security threat in the Fombina Area, with Boko Haram and ISWAP playing central roles. Boko Haram, founded in 2002, has exploited socio-economic marginalization, weak governance, and environmental vulnerabilities to expand its influence, particularly in northeastern Nigeria and border areas (Zenn, 2020). The group's violent campaign, marked by attacks on civilian populations, schools, and infrastructure, has resulted in over 35,000 deaths and displaced more than 2.5 million people by 2021 (International Crisis Group, 2020). ISWAP, a splinter group, has further intensified the threat by adopting more sophisticated tactics, including control of strategic territories around Lake Chad. These groups have capitalized on local grievances, using environmental stressors as recruitment tools to expand their influence (Zenn, 2020).

These groups exploit the region's ecological and governance crises. The shrinking of Lake Chad has disrupted traditional livelihoods, creating a pool of disaffected youth susceptible to radicalization (UNDP, 2020). Weak state presence in remote border areas provides operational space for these groups to establish bases, recruit fighters, and conduct cross-border attacks (Davis & Azad, 2022). From a Human Security perspective, the activities of Boko Haram and ISWAP threaten individual safety and community stability, while the Ecological Security framework highlights how environmental stressors amplify the conditions for extremism. The persistence of these groups underscores the need for coordinated regional counter-terrorism strategies that address both security and underlying socio-economic grievances.

4.3 Environmental Security: Impacts of Climate Change and Resource Scarcity

Environmental degradation, driven by climate change and resource scarcity, is a critical driver of insecurity in the Fombina Area. The dramatic reduction of Lake Chad's surface area by over 90% since the 1960s has severely disrupted agriculture, pastoralism, and fishing, the primary livelihoods of local communities (UNESCO, 2021). Desertification, coupled with other anthropogenic factors, has exacerbated soil degradation, depriving over 70% of the population dependent on agriculture of their livelihoods (World Bank, 2018). Erratic rainfall patterns, compounded by climate variability, have further diminished arable land and water availability, intensifying resource competition (Okpara et al., 2015). For instance, the World Food Programme (2017) reports that reduced agricultural productivity has led to food insecurity, affecting over 7 million people in the Lake Chad Basin by 2020.

These environmental stressors have cascading effects on security. The Ecological Security framework illustrates how resource scarcity fuels conflict by pitting communities against one another for access to dwindling water and land resources (Homer-Dixon, 1999). Displaced populations, unable to sustain traditional livelihoods, are often forced into urban slums or refugee camps, where they face heightened risks of exploitation and violence (UNDP, 2020). From a Human Security perspective, environmental degradation undermines access to basic needs like food, water, and shelter, exacerbating vulnerabilities. The lack of effective ecological restoration and climate adaptation strategies perpetuates this cycle, highlighting the urgent need for integrated resource management.

4.4 Community Conflicts: Ethnic Tensions and Disputes over Land and Water

Ethnic tensions and disputes over land and water are longstanding sources of conflict in the Fombina Area, rooted in historical grievances and exacerbated by environmental pressures. The region's diverse ethnic groups, including the Kanuri, Fulani, and Shuwa Arab, have historically relied on collaborative resource-sharing mechanisms (Mafany & Ngwa, 2020). However, historical grievances stemming from the trans-Saharan slave trade and colonial-era border demarcations disrupted these systems, fragmenting communities and sowing seeds of mistrust (Omulokoli, 1995). The shrinkage of Lake Chad and desertification have intensified competition for remaining resources, leading to violent clashes between pastoralists and farmers, as well as among ethnic groups.

For example, disputes over grazing lands and water points have frequently escalated into deadly conflicts, particularly between Fulani herders and Kanuri farmers (International Crisis Group,

2020). These tensions are not merely resource-driven but are also shaped by historical power struggles dating back to the 19th-century jihads (Barkindo, 1989). The breakdown of governance structures has limited conflict resolution mechanisms, facilitating an environment where violence thrives (Davis & Azad, 2022). The Human Security framework underscores how these conflicts threaten individual and community well-being, while the Ecological Security perspective highlights the role of environmental scarcity in amplifying tensions. Weak local governance and the absence of effective conflict-resolution mechanisms further perpetuate these disputes, undermining social cohesion and stability.

4.5. Criminal Activities: Smuggling, Trafficking, and Banditry

Criminal activities, including smuggling, human, drug, and arms trafficking, and banditry, thrive in the Fombina Area's ungoverned spaces and porous borders. The region's strategic location, connecting Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, makes it a hub for illicit trade (Davis & Azad, 2022). The collapse of traditional livelihoods due to environmental degradation has driven some communities to engage in these activities as alternative income sources (WFP, 2017). For instance, smuggling routes across the Lake Chad Basin have become pipelines for arms and fighters, enabling extremist factions and deepening the cycle of violence and insecurity (International Crisis Group, 2020).

Banditry has also surged, with armed groups targeting villages, markets, and humanitarian convoys, further destabilizing the region. These activities exacerbate insecurity by undermining trust in governance structures and diverting resources from development efforts. From a Human Security perspective, criminal activities threaten personal safety and economic stability, while the Ecological Security framework links these issues to the broader context of resource scarcity and weakened state capacity. Addressing these challenges requires strengthening border security and fostering economic alternatives to reduce reliance on illicit activities.

4.6 Case Studies

To illustrate the interplay of these security challenges, three case studies highlight specific incidents and developments in the Fombina Area:

4.6.1 Boko Haram Attack on Rann (2018): In March 2018, Boko Haram attacked Rann, a town in Nigeria's Borno State, killing humanitarian workers and displacing thousands of residents (International Crisis Group, 2020). The attack exposed the vulnerability of remote communities to extremist violence and the challenges of delivering aid in insecure areas. It also highlighted how environmental degradation, such as the drying of nearby water sources, had concentrated populations in Rann, making it a target. This case underscores the nexus of terrorism, environmental stressors, and weak governance, as analyzed through the Human Security and Ecological Security frameworks.

4.6.2 Fulani-Kanuri Clashes in Ngala (2020): In 2020, violent clashes between Fulani herders and Kanuri farmers in Ngala, Nigeria, resulted in over 20 deaths and the displacement of hundreds (UNDP, 2020). The conflict was triggered by disputes over access to a shrinking water source near Lake Chad, exacerbated by drought and desertification. This incident illustrates how environmental

scarcity fuels ethnic tensions and displacement, aligning with the Ecological Security framework's emphasis on resource-driven conflict and the Human Security focus on community vulnerabilities.

4.6.3 The Gokanna Incident: Ethnic Conflict and Governance Failure: In Cameroon, the Gokanna incident highlights how competing communities clashed over land rights exacerbated by intense droughts, reflecting governance failures and ethnic tensions (UNICEF, 2021). This case exemplifies how environmental degradation directly translates into violent conflict, often with devastating humanitarian consequences.

The Fombina Area stands at the crossroads of numerous security challenges stemming from environmental degradation, climate change, and socio-political strife. Ongoing research and evidence-based interventions must prioritize holistic approaches addressing the root causes of conflict, enhancing community resilience, and rebuilding institutional frameworks to foster peace and development in the region.

5.0 Impact on Peace and Development

The security challenges in the Fombina Area terrorism, environmental degradation, intercommunal conflicts, and criminal activities have profound implications for peace and development in the Lake Chad Basin. This section assesses the effectiveness of current peace initiatives, examines how insecurity hinders economic development, education, and health services, and explores the erosion of social cohesion and trust. Through the lenses of Human Security and Ecological Security, these impacts are analyzed to highlight the urgent need for coordinated strategies to foster stability and sustainable development. Effective peacebuilding requires an integrated approach, addressing the historical context of conflict while promoting sustainable strategies to enhance resilience and cooperation among affected communities (UNDP, 2020).

5.1 Assessment of Current Peace Efforts

Peace initiatives in the Fombina Area operate at local, national, and international levels, yet their effectiveness is limited by fragmentation, inadequate resources, and a failure to address root causes. Locally, community-based peacebuilding efforts, such as those led by traditional leaders and civil society organizations, aim to mediate intercommunal disputes over land and water. For example, peace clubs and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms have sought to rebuild trust among communities affected by intercommunal violence (UNDP, 2020). The Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC, 2021) has supported dialogue forums to reduce tensions between ethnic groups like the Fulani and Kanuri. However, these initiatives often lack sustained funding and are undermined by ongoing violence, limiting their impact (Davis & Azad, 2022).

Nationally, governments in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger have deployed military operations, such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), to combat Boko Haram and ISWAP. In Nigeria, policies like the National Policy on Peace and Development have been introduced, but grassroots implementation remains inconsistent due to inadequate funding and bureaucratic inefficiencies (Davis & Azad, 2022). While the MNJTF has achieved some success in reclaiming territories, its focus on military solutions overlooks socio-economic and environmental drivers of conflict, such as resource scarcity and poverty (International Crisis Group, 2020). This approach

aligns poorly with the Human Security framework, which emphasizes addressing individual vulnerabilities rather than solely state-centric threats.

Internationally, organizations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank have implemented programs to stabilize the region. The UNDP's Regional Stabilization Facility (2020) supports livelihood recovery and governance reforms, while the World Bank's Lake Chad Recovery and Development Project (2018) focuses on ecological restoration and infrastructure. The World Food Programme (WFP) provides critical support in food security and community resilience initiatives (WFP, 2017). Despite these efforts, coordination among stakeholders remains weak, and implementation is hampered by insecurity and bureaucratic inefficiencies (Davis & Azad, 2022). The Ecological Security framework underscores the need for these initiatives to prioritize environmental restoration to mitigate resource-driven conflicts, yet current efforts fall short of integrating ecological and security strategies effectively. A more integrated approach, emphasizing long-term stability rather than short-term aid, could help create a sustainable peace framework (International Crisis Group, 2020).

5.2 Development Implications

The security crises in the Fombina Area have severely disrupted economic development, education, and health services, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and instability. Economically, the shrinkage of Lake Chad and ongoing violence have crippled traditional livelihoods such as agriculture, fishing, and pastoralism, which support over 80% of the region's population (World Bank, 2018). Farmers, reluctant to cultivate lands due to violence from extremist groups and intercommunal conflicts, face food shortages and increased prices for basic goods, undermining livelihoods and perpetuating economic instability (Zenn, 2020). Boko Haram's attacks on markets and trade routes have further disrupted local economies, while resource scarcity has reduced agricultural yields, exacerbating food insecurity for over 7 million people (WFP, 2017). The Ecological Security framework highlights how environmental degradation amplifies these economic challenges, as dwindling resources intensify competition and conflict.

Education has been particularly hard-hit, with Boko Haram's targeting of schools contributing to the closure of over 1,500 educational facilities in northeastern Nigeria alone by 2020 (UNDP, 2020). Reports of student abductions by extremist groups have intensified parental fears, leading to declining enrollment rates, especially among girls (WFP, 2017). This has left millions of children without access to education, perpetuating cycles of poverty and vulnerability to radicalization. From a Human Security perspective, the loss of educational opportunities undermines individual empowerment and long-term community resilience.

Health services have similarly deteriorated, with insecurity limiting access to medical facilities and humanitarian aid. Attacks on healthcare workers and facilities compromise the availability of essential health services, exacerbating existing health crises worsened by displacement and malnutrition (UNICEF, 2021). The displacement of over 2.5 million people has strained health infrastructure, leading to outbreaks of diseases like cholera and malaria in overcrowded refugee camps (UNESCO, 2021). The Destruction of clinics by extremist groups and the diversion of resources to military efforts further exacerbate health crises. These development setbacks not only hinder economic and social progress but also create fertile ground for further insecurity, as

marginalized populations become more susceptible to exploitation by extremist and criminal groups (Zenn, 2020).

5.3 Social Cohesion and Trust

The persistent insecurity in the Fombina Area has eroded social cohesion and trust, with profound psychological and social impacts on communities. Intercommunal conflicts, fueled by resource scarcity and historical ethnic tensions, have fractured relationships among groups like the Kanuri, Fulani, and Shuwa Arab. For example, disputes over water and grazing land have deepened mistrust, as communities perceive each other as competitors rather than collaborators (Mafany & Ngwa, 2020). Displaced populations often face hostility from host communities that perceive them as competition for dwindling resources, leading to increased social fragmentation and resentment (WFP, 2017). The Human Security framework emphasizes how such divisions threaten community well-being, as individuals face heightened risks of violence and displacement.

The psychological toll of ongoing violence and displacement is significant. Exposure to violence, loss of family and friends, and the stress of displacement lead to a high prevalence of trauma, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), particularly among children (Mafany & Ngwa, 2020). Displaced populations, often living in precarious conditions, experience fear and loss of identity, which undermine social bonds (UNDP, 2020). Boko Haram's attacks, such as the 2018 Rann assault, have instilled a pervasive sense of insecurity, discouraging community cooperation and collective action. The Ecological Security framework highlights how environmental stressors, such as the loss of Lake Chad's resources, exacerbate these tensions by forcing communities into competition, further eroding trust.

Moreover, weak governance and the failure of peace initiatives to deliver tangible results have diminished trust in institutions. Communities perceive national and international interventions as disconnected from their needs, fostering a sense of abandonment (International Crisis Group, 2020). Despite these challenges, community-driven approaches that emphasize inclusion, dialogue, and shared goals offer opportunities for resilience and recovery (UNDP, 2020). Addressing these psychological and social impacts requires peacebuilding strategies that prioritize community-led reconciliation and psychosocial support to restore trust and foster resilience.

6.0 Policy Recommendations

To address the multifaceted security challenges in the Lake Chad Area, the following policies are recommended:

i. Enhance the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) through improved funding, intelligence sharing, joint border patrols, and community engagement to counter radicalization.

ii. Deploy surveillance technologies (e.g., drones, satellites), train security personnel, improve inter-agency collaboration, and empower local/community-based security structures including vigilante groups.

iii. Establish inclusive local mediation platforms involving ethnic groups, promote equitable resource-sharing (fishing/grazing), and revive traditional conflict resolution systems.

iv. Adopt climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies, and develop early-warning systems for drought, desertification, and other environmental stressors.

v. Mobilize funding and technical assistance from international organizations, promote community-driven development grants, and facilitate knowledge-sharing between regions.

vi. Expand lake recovery initiatives, support reforestation, irrigation, sustainable agriculture, fisheries management, and community-based climate adaptation plans.

vii. Implement mental health and trauma support programs, and facilitate inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue to rebuild trust and community relations.

viii. Establish a regional coordination platform to align security, environmental, and development efforts, ensure inclusivity in policymaking, and implement strong monitoring and evaluation systems.

7.0 Conclusion

The Fombina Area of the Lake Chad Basin exemplifies a complex and interlinked crisis driven by environmental degradation, historical legacies, weak governance, and violent extremism. This study has shown that the drastic shrinkage of Lake Chad has disrupted livelihoods, intensified resource competition, and fueled intercommunal conflicts and displacement, while also creating conditions exploited by insurgent groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP. The resulting insecurity has significantly undermined economic development, education, healthcare, and social cohesion, leading to a prolonged humanitarian crisis. Current responses, largely centered on military interventions, remain insufficient without addressing the underlying structural drivers of instability. By applying Human Security and Ecological Security frameworks, the study emphasizes the need for integrated and holistic approaches that combine environmental restoration, livelihood support, inclusive governance, and regional cooperation. Ultimately, achieving sustainable peace and development in the Fombina Area requires coordinated efforts that address both immediate security threats and the deeper socio-economic and ecological challenges shaping the region.

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