

Lake Chad Basin Humanitarian Crisis Caritas Position Paper

National members of the Caritas Network are present in every country throughout the Lake Chad Basin, working with local communities in a variety of ways, including protection of civilians, support for land rights, livelihoods, community cohesion and peacebuilding, education, health and promoting localisation and the role of local actors in all aspects of our work.

As local and national actors, we have a long-term and ongoing commitment to the communities we serve and accompany. We understand their needs and customs and the roots of the many issues which have meant that the current regional conflicts have endured for over 9 years. Based on the breadth and depth of our work, we offer the following insights and recommendations both to the national governments gathered at the Berlin conference as well as to the international community, donors, UN agencies and NGOs.

1. Protection of Civilians

The protection of civilians must be the cornerstone of any response, yet 9 years after the start of the Lake Chad Basin conflict women and girls continue to experience high levels of sexual violence, men and boys are vulnerable to forced conscription or abduction into the armed groups. All sectors of society face widespread abuse of human rights, abduction, killings, torture and arbitrary detention. Humanitarian access remains a key challenge in many of the areas worst affected by conflict, which means that the most vulnerable people are excluded from humanitarian assistance.

“ Humanitarian access remains a clear challenge in many of the areas worst affected by conflict ”

As the conflict dynamics change over time, a significant number of internally displaced people (IDPs) have voluntarily returned to their communities, however, thousands more have been forcibly returned to their places of origin. In many cases without full disclosure of the safety of areas of return. This forced return has been mostly politically motivated.

Throughout the region Caritas organisations are working with thousands of IDPs who have been displaced in the course of the 9 years of conflict.

Caritas Nigeria and CRS Nigeria have set up an inter-faith committee to advocate a 'No forced returns of IDPs and refugees policy' working with a variety of stakeholders. Caritas Nigeria has held preliminary meetings with the leadership of the Federation of Muslim Women Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN) for joint advocacy on this and other issues.

In Northern Cameroon Caritas Maroua-Mokola has been helping parents get birth certificates for their children and help enable them to then enrol in school, and to facilitate the family mobility, while ALDEPA works on SGBV issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Governments must ensure that IDPs are given clear and unbiased information in order to make decisions as to whether to return to their homes. All returns must be safe, voluntary and dignified, and people must be supported to repair their damaged homes and given humanitarian assistance and basic services.
- The protection commitments of humanitarian actors must be operationalised at the programme level and donors should ensure the funding needed to monitor adherence to highest protection standards.

2. Access to Land

Tensions over land rights have fuelled conflicts throughout the region. People's access to fertile land has become more challenging with increasing desertification, and other climate-induced and demographic pressures, together with previously displaced IDPs returning to their places of origin. For displaced communities and returnees, access to land is an even more acute problem. Most returnee households in conflict affected areas are confronted with a high risk of losing their land to rich and influential persons. Especially in situations where land ownership was not based on inheritance but acquired via purchase of documents which then got lost during crisis and displacement.

“ People's access to fertile land has become more challenging ”

Disputes, instead of being governed by national laws, are managed by traditional bodies or end up being settled by violence. There is an inconsistency between the traditional courts and the state courts regarding ownership rights for smallholders. Traditional authorities sometimes play an ambiguous role in managing access to land. This is often compounded by radical Islamist movements which exploit the anger of smallholders who had lost their land and become urban underclass; for example, Boko Haram has repeatedly recruited fighters through promising access to land.

Caritas Maroua-Mokolo has supported farmers in establishing a semi-official recognition of land rights but a clear government policy is needed to work on the root causes of land conflicts, encourage poor farmers to stay in rural areas and invest in ecological conservation.

Caritas Nigeria facilitates access to farmland for IDPs and Returnees without access on her humanitarian projects by carrying out advocacy to community leaders to grant easy access to the IDPs as well provide stipends for them to rent land for agricultural purpose, where feasible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Governments need to establish clear regulatory frameworks to address land issues such as ownership, and purchase and leasing.
- Governments should implement a clear policy on the provision of land and housing for returnees and ensure the transparent allocation of land in close proximity to services and local communities.

3. Community Cohesion and Peacebuilding

Armed opposition groups and sometimes government forces act without due respect for basic human rights and international humanitarian law. This creates alienation among the population and intensifies and prolongs the armed conflict. Political groups fuel conflicts, for instance through the planned introduction of “Diya” in Chad, thus diverting attention away from the real needs of the population.

“ Armed opposition groups and sometimes government forces act without due respect for basic human rights ”

The current crisis has damaged the social fabric of the region and brought to the fore ethnic and religious tensions not previously seen. Strong links exist between the peoples of the 4 countries of the Lake Chad Basin. The populations move around and conduct their activities often regardless of national borders. Muslims and Christians who have lived side by side in many communities for decades, all suffer from the extremist violence and in many instances cooperate

together to ease the misery and develop peace-building initiatives which address both short term and long-term solutions.

Unfortunately, with the scaling up of humanitarian aid in recent years external actors with little knowledge of local realities tend to intervene directly, not minding the very real risk that they may exacerbate local tensions and end up doing harm to community cohesion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Governments of the four countries round Lake Chad should encourage local peaceful coexistence by collaboration and by pooling social services in the border areas (for example medical facilities, infrastructure and vocational training), integration of the economies and facilitation of police procedures at the borders to ensure free movement of goods and people.
- Governments should work with civil society groups to develop inclusive peace-building frameworks which take a bottom-up approach working from the community level to national level.

4. Education

Countries within the Lake Chad Basin have some of the highest illiteracy rates in the world, with a marked lack of good quality formal education and vocational training programmes, limited investment in teacher training and a paucity of scholarships to enable children to study. Furthermore many communities are unaware of their rights and do not know how to hold local government officials or the national government to account for the delivery of basic services and rights. This can lead to marginalization and fuel extremism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- As well as increasing the provision of good quality primary school education, governments and humanitarian actors should devise education programmes that contribute towards building an active civil society with communities aware of their rights and how to obtain them.

5. Livelihoods

There is a significant need for humanitarian relief, but donors should abstain from silo-ed thinking and allow comprehensive approaches supporting livelihoods and resilience of crisis-affected populations. The forced displacement from unsafe, rural areas to cities in the region has meant that cities like Maiduguri have grown in an unregulated way. Many displaced people are unwilling to go back home and need structured support to be able to make a living in their new environment, otherwise urban slums will develop and unemployed youth will be at risk of alienation and marginalization.

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In some of Caritas livelihoods programmes other interventions such as income generation, cash transfers, training on business management and savings and internal lending communities (SILC) are integrated in an effort to increase sustainability. This has helped IDPs, returnees and vulnerable host community members to start or upgrade their small businesses/agricultural activities/technical workshops, such as bean cake making, animal rearing, blacksmith tools and sewing machines, for increased household income in a sustainable manner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Donors should support livelihoods programmes which enable people to provide for themselves and their families.

6. Localisation: Respect of, Active Support for and Participatory Bottom-up Planning with Local Actors on the Ground

Members of local communities, and local staff and volunteers undertake the bulk of humanitarian response. All major donors and humanitarian actors have signed up to the Grand Bargain.¹ This commits them to increase investment in the institutional capacity of national responders, support the leadership of local and national actors and pass at least 25% of their humanitarian funding to local and national actors. Donors have to review their systems to effectively allow access for local actors to serve as coordinating bodies. The local organisations must not be simply reduced to the role of service providers. They must be strengthened to be fully involved in strategies for managing the different returnees (IDPs, refugees, ex-associates of Boko Haram), anti-violent extremism, support for resilience and effective stabilisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- International humanitarian actors must ensure that national and local actors are at the centre of coordination and decision-making in humanitarian response.
- All Grand Bargain signatories must ensure that they fulfil their commitments to increase funding to local actors.

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¹ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-hosted-iasc>