

# INGOs RECOMMENDATIONS PAPER

Third Lake Chad Basin Conference, 23 and 24 January 2023, Niamey, Niger

## BACKGROUND

The Lake Chad Basin ('LCB') crisis remains one of the world's most protracted, with a devastating impact on the lives of millions in Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. After nearly 13 years of conflict, 11 million people continue to need life-saving assistance. 2.9 million are internally displaced, including 2 million in Nigeria alone, and 624,000 are refugees.<sup>1</sup> The dire consequences for populations in the region, including displacement and trauma sustained from indiscriminate violence, coupled with prolonged disruptions of access to basic services including food, water, shelter, and health, have rendered millions dependent on aid for their survival. The crisis in the LCB has required immediate and decisive action, including unimpeded humanitarian assistance. Despite this, the Humanitarian Response Plans of the LCB states have been consistently underfunded.

The third LCB Conference, in Niamey on 23 and 24 January 2023, offers a unique opportunity to draw the awareness of its attendees to the catastrophic impact of this crisis and the significant challenges for the safeguarding of humanitarian space and populations' access to humanitarian assistance and basic services. The Conference also presents the prospect of renewed support to address the needs identified in the humanitarian response plans. This support is vital for breaking the cycle of dependency and vulnerability, and to enable affected communities to achieve durable solutions through complementary humanitarian and development activities.

In advance of the Conference, this recommendations paper by INGO coordination platforms in Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria sets out concrete recommendations for donors and participants to ensure that candid, field-level perspectives from INGOs and the communities they serve are adequately represented and actioned upon - before, during, and after, the third LCB Conference.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. It is imperative to recognize, and address, the existence of immense humanitarian needs in the LCB region, as well as the obstacles that hamper people from accessing life-saving assistance.** Donor funding should first and foremost match those needs, and should not support projects that risk putting people at risk of harm (for instance, by supporting people returns to areas that are not safe and/or where there is no access to basic services). Opportunities for self-reliance, including access to livelihoods such as farming, remain limited in areas affected by hostilities and insecurity. About 5.6 million people are severely food insecure – the highest figure in four years – and 300,000 children are severely malnourished.<sup>2</sup> Decreased availability of humanitarian aid, as a result of insufficient or diverted funding, will undermine peoples' ability to meet their basic needs while trying to rebuild their lives.
- 2. Restrictions and impediments imposed by local/national governments and the military must be lifted to enable aid actors to reach people in need.** Besides the hindrance resulting from NSAGs' activities, operations of INGOs are also hampered by intended and unintended bureaucratic and administrative impediments. These range from a lack of alignment of policies to the imposition of constraints associated with counter-terrorism measures, affecting the implementation of a principled humanitarian response. Moreover, aid actors are faced with suspicion and/or accusations around engagement and affiliation with NSAGs by authorities, which has, among others, resulted in suspension of operations, arrest and detention, and the incitement of protests and negative public perceptions.

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<sup>1</sup> OCHA. [Lake Chad Basin: Humanitarian Snapshot \(As of 08 December 2022\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

3. **All warring parties must ensure that civilians, especially women, children, and other vulnerable groups, are protected in conflict.** Grave violations of human rights, which have been consistently and unequivocally documented throughout the conflict, must be monitored, reported, and addressed through established and well-funded accountability mechanisms. No solution will be durable without promoting rule of law, and addressing the legacy of violence and abuse, including sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, which is prerequisite to rebuilding trust between the State and its people. Upholding the protection of civilians must be central and conditional to all donor support.
4. **Protection of civilians must play a central role in stabilization strategies – and be a condition of donor funding.** The political nature of stabilization efforts risks exacerbating humanitarian needs and exposure of civilians to violence and insecurity. Donor support, whether political or financial, must be conditional to the attainment of benchmarks, including sustained safety, protection of civilians, and availability of basic services. These benchmarks should be developed with humanitarian actors as part of broader consultations on stabilization schemes, and analyzed in association with comprehensive risk analyses that have protection at their center. Actors that design and implement these strategies must be made accountable both to donors and to the communities they intend to serve.
5. **All organized movements must be conducted in a voluntary, safe, and dignified manner, in line with international standards.** This includes strengthening information sharing and consultations with affected communities. Indeed, government-led returns and relocations have exposed communities to harm and have compounded access challenges. Donors must promote the respect of international standards and of IDP and refugee protection, and resist government directives that restrict the provision of humanitarian aid to IDPs, refugees or returned/resettled communities, and support the participation of humanitarian actors in planning of such movements.
6. **The entire spectrum of durable solutions should be considered and supported; solutions should be explored to support people in regaining their livelihoods.** This must be coupled with the acknowledgement that in some areas, most notably in Borno State in Nigeria, the adoption of a development/stabilization lens is premature, and even dangerous to its people. The entire spectrum of solutions (returns, resettlement and local integration), must be explored to identify those that are realistic, sustainable, and humane, to facilitate meaningful (re)integration and eliminate needs associated with displacement. In areas where conditions are conducive for durable solutions, innovative approaches must be considered, including area-based approaches for sustainable and long-term impact.
7. **To address the growing humanitarian needs in the LCB states, donors should promote coordination, and avoid confusion, between different funding streams – stabilization, development, and humanitarian.** Steps should be taken to ensure that appropriate funding is allocated to the principled implementation of humanitarian action to address the needs of the most vulnerable, while stimulating coordination so that development funding, more ‘palatable’ to governmental actors, does not override funding for life-saving assistance and contributes to addressing root causes when conditions are conducive. Concrete outcomes may include financial pledges for 2023/2024, comprising flexible, multi-year funding. Funding streams must meet the humanitarian needs of the populations and all funding strategies should shift towards a “people-first” strategy that centers on communities in need, in due respect of the Geneva Conventions and the Humanitarian Principles.
8. **Coordination between humanitarian, development, and stabilization actors, including INGOs and national NGOs, must be strengthened through systematic and meaningful engagement.** In the LCB context, a precarious environment where a multitude of actors implement varying, and sometimes competing mandates and activities, it is imperative that adequate space is created for regular exchange and effective coordination among all actors including governments, military and aid actors to safeguard humanitarian space and ensure unimpeded access to assistance for affected populations. This coordination should

promote joint analysis and mapping of respective areas of work to facilitate practical, area-based conversations.

9. **Donors must break down the climate-humanitarian divide and support more programs for climate resilient agriculture, anticipatory cash programming, and investment in seed security programming.** Climate change has been identified as a threat multiplier in fragile contexts, with particularly pernicious effects in the LCB. Environmental degradation is exacerbating challenges faced by its mostly rural population, by undermining livelihoods and coping skills, worsening conflict over resources as well as the likelihood of recruitment into armed groups. Donors have the opportunity through their pledges to support Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon, to adapt to climate change threats.

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