

**Second Regional Governors' Forum Meeting on Stabilization,
Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development for the Lake Chad Basin**
Niamey, July 16-18, 2019

Discussion Paper on Regional Youth Issues

Introduction

1. This paper¹ aims to inform the discussion of regional youth issues at the second meeting of the *Regional Governors' Forum on Stabilization, Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development for the Lake Chad Basin*, to be held in Niamey, Niger, July 16-18, 2019. It covers the challenges young women and men in the region face and suggests avenues for authorities and partners to respond through targeted policies and programs. The paper covers five central themes: (A) Rebuilding trust and promoting socio-political inclusion of young people; (B) Reducing security challenges; (C) Promoting economic inclusion; and (D) Mainstreaming youth-sensitive programming.

2. Youth is a critical issue for the Lake Chad Region (LCR), comprising the areas of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria closest to the Lake. Roughly two-thirds of the population of these countries is under the age of 25, making this among the youngest areas in the world. Ongoing conflict, limited livelihood opportunities and other disadvantages of the region affect youth disproportionately.

3. The key messages include the following:

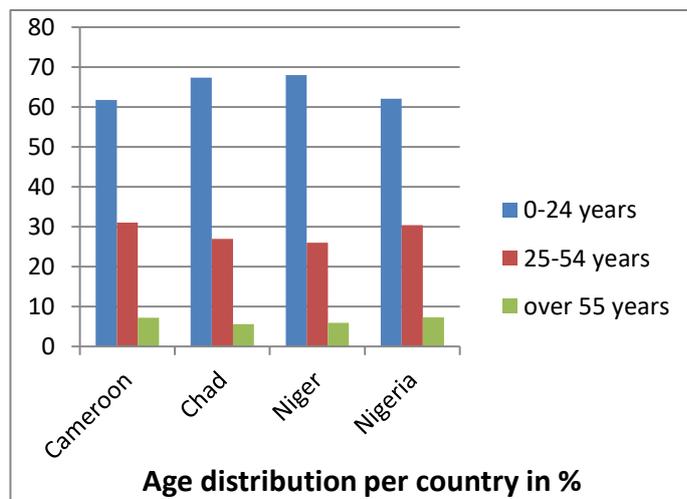
- While there are shared concerns and issues, youth are not a homogenous group but include a cross-section of society, a broad range of young women and men, as well as adolescents and children. Careful targeting of initiatives to support them is therefore crucial.
- Young people demand a seat at the table. The design of inclusive and participatory institutions presents an important vector for increasing trust into the State and for the strengthening of peaceful paths for societal transformation.
- Security challenges largely revolve around young men - and women, to a lesser degree - as members of state security forces, extremist groups, and vigilante and other non-state organizations - and also as victims of violence. A youth focus can improve the effectiveness and conflict-sensitivity of programs in areas including: counter-insurgency; demobilization, demilitarization and reintegration (DDR); and prevention of violent extremism (PVE).
- Effective participation in the economy and labor force is a key request and right of young women and men in the Lake Chad region. They have been hit particularly hard by the impacts of climate change, insecurity and displacement on agricultural and non-agricultural livelihoods.
- Better education and vocational training are essential to develop the human capital of regional youth and open economic opportunities for them.
- Targeted support is needed at four levels: for individual youth, for youth-led organizations, for youth networks and for inter-generational and institutional dialogue mechanisms.

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4. The paper draws on desk review, including of published youth consultations and studies that have engaged extensively with young people, discussions at the *Regional Consultative Forum of Civil Society Organizations, including Women and Youth, Traditional and Religious Leaders and Academics of the Lake Chad Basin* in Niamey, June 18-20, 2019 (the Pre-Forum) and individual interviews with youth representatives from the region.

Youth in the Lake Chad region

5. The population within and immediately around Lake Chad is around 2 million people, with about 20 million in the LCR as a whole. Nigeria makes up over half, Cameroon a quarter, and Chad and Niger around 17 percent and 3 percent respectively.² The LCR population growth is among the fastest of any region worldwide, at around 2.8 per cent. At this rate, the regional population will double again in 20 years.³



6. Within the LCR, youth dominate. In all four countries more than 60 percent – in Chad and Niger more than two-thirds of the population – is younger than 25 years. The median age ranges from 15.5 in Niger to 15.8 in Chad, to 18.3 in Nigeria and 18.6 in Cameroon.⁴ Across the LCR, the total fertility rate, the number of children a woman is expected to have in her lifetime, is more than 6. This is due to a set of well-known causes: high child mortality, low levels of education for girls, early marriage, and limited use of modern contraception.⁵

7. It is also crucial to address the overlap between gender and youth. Policy and programming often consider adult women and young girls under the category of gender, whereas male youth – often those vaguely defined to be ‘at risk’ – make up the core of the youth category. While this suggests a complementarity in the attempt to reach marginalized groups, it requires more reflection as the categories obviously intersect.⁶

8. Young women and girls in LCR are disproportionately subjected to gender-based violence (GBV) at the hands of armed groups or others in positions of power or authority.⁷ The reintegration of these women and girls in their communities can be difficult, as they face acute

² AFD (2018): *Crisis and Development. The Lake Chad Region and Boko Haram*, p.34.

³ Figures are for the countries as a whole. There are significant disparities among the four countries: Cameroon (2.5 per cent per year) and Nigeria (2.7 per cent per year) record lower population growth rates than Chad and Niger, respectively at 3.3 per cent and 4 per cent in 2017, see UNFPA (2017): *Demographic Dynamics and the Crisis of Countries around Lake Chad*, p. 16.

⁴ Based on data retrieved from The CIA World Factbook (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>). There is no uniform definition of youth. For statistical purposes and without prejudice to other definitions by Member States, the United Nations defines youth as between the ages of 15 and 24, though United Nations entities use different age definitions. The African Youth Charter defines youth as 18-35 years.

⁵ UNFPA (2017).

⁶ Sommers, Marc (2015): *The Outcast Majority*, p. 189.

⁷ The Team of Experts for the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict documented 997 reported incidents of conflict-related sexual violence in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2017 (644 in 2016), including rape, sexual slavery and forced marriage by Boko Haram insurgents.

social stigmatization and suspicion of being affiliates of Boko Haram. Those who return pregnant or with children born of rape are frequently rejected or forced to choose between their babies and their families. In addition, instances of transactional sex have increased, as many women and girls are forced to exchange sex for food or freedom of movement.⁸

9. Other challenges for girls and young women remain, such as early and forced marriage, limited access to sexual and reproductive health services and to education in comparison with their male counterparts and an overall cultural and religious climate dominated by patriarchal values.⁹ Despite these substantial protection challenges, youth interventions should seek to ensure that the potential contribution of girls and young women to societal change is fully harnessed.

10. In general, it is important to bear in mind that ‘youth’ are not a homogenous group. Apart from being young, youth are as diverse as the population as a whole. Layers of identity include different age segments within youth (going up to 35 years by some definitions), sex and gender, religious affiliation, education and employment status, wealth and social standing, nomadic or sedentary lifestyle, migration status, and membership of armed or extremist groups. Health issues, including physical (HIV, sexual and reproductive health, disabilities, drug use) and mental ones determine further categories. This rich diversity of backgrounds and experiences among youth requires in-depth assessment and careful targeting of youth-support initiatives.

A. Rebuilding trust and promoting socio-political inclusion of young people

Context

11. The confidence of young people in state institutions in the LCR has been shattered. This relates to the state’s generally limited capacity to deliver on security and basic social services such as health and education. Mistrust is also often centered on the form in which the State engages where it is present.

12. The situation in the peripheral areas of the Lake Chad region is characterized by longstanding neglect by national development initiatives. For Nigeria, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) shows a stark contrast between the northern states and the south of the country.¹⁰ The same holds true for Cameroon; poverty in Niger and Chad is more equally distributed between regions, albeit at

Key takeaways from the Pre-Forum

Young people highlighted the negative impact of weak state presence and below-average service delivery on the relationship between constituencies and authorities. They demanded to have a seat at the table, to design more inclusive and participatory decision-making processes, the promotion of young people’s contribution to peacebuilding mechanisms in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) and the need for inclusive educational policies with a view to vulnerable groups.

⁸ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (2018): *Annual Report 2017* (by the Team of Experts: Rule of Law/Sexual Violence in Conflict), p. 33.

⁹ See for example Plan International (2018): *Adolescent Girls in Crisis. Voices from the Lake Chad Basin*, and Benoudji, Colette et. al. (2018): *Etude sur le Genre et la Résilience. Rapport final pour le projet RESTE/Trust Fund au Tchad*.

¹⁰ The MPI comprises ten indicators considering health, education and living conditions, see Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (2018): *Global MPI Country Briefing 2018: Nigeria (Sub-Saharan Africa)*, p. 9 (https://ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CB_NGA_2018.pdf).

overall very high levels. North-Eastern Nigeria is not only disadvantaged in comparison to the southern states, it also shows higher levels of inequality, which continue to rise.¹¹

13. This historic trend is further exacerbated by the current crisis. The education sector, crucial for the development of young people, has been hit particularly hard by Boko Haram, whose name translates roughly as ‘Western education is forbidden’. In North-Eastern Nigeria, it was estimated in 2016 that 600 teachers had been murdered, 19,000 teachers had been displaced, and 1,200 schools had been damaged or destroyed. As a consequence, 600,000 children lost access to learning since 2013 and in IDPs camps, 75 percent of children did not attend school.¹² Regionally, the ongoing conflict, displacement and fear of attacks on schools is putting the education of more than 3.5 million children at risk in the LCR.¹³

14. The four societies under consideration, allowing for cultural variations, are based on hierarchical power structures with strong patriarchal elements. The consequence is a stark under-representation, if not exclusion, of young people from decision-making processes. Young women and men in the region are frustrated with this situation and with more and more urgency request a seat at the table regarding all decisions that concern them.

15. Underlying this dynamic is a trust deficit on both sides. Young people often view state institutions critically, as part of an unjust and corrupt system, which limits their willingness to engage with these institutions. Government is perceived as serving only the interests of a select few and incapable of providing essential basic services.¹⁴ In all countries corrupt practices are widespread: Chad, Nigeria and Cameroon are below the average African score on the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2018 and only Niger is slightly above average.¹⁵ These practices further weaken the effectiveness and reach of government action and increase mistrust of the population in state institutions.

16. On the other side, young people are often considered by their elders as not sufficiently mature or responsible to take part in decision-making processes with far-reaching consequences. This perception is amplified by additional factors. ‘Youthhood’ is essentially a transitional stage in the life of a person with cultural signifiers marking the threshold to adulthood.¹⁶ In the Lake Chad region this transition is largely marked by marriage and starting a family within the confines of one’s own household. In the current social, economic and security context, this transition is unattainable for many young people who thus cannot correspond to traditional values and expectations and are therefore often perceived as social failures.

17. Finally, patriarchal and cultural norms have particular adverse effects on the participation of young women and girls, leading to a double discrimination based on age and gender. The

¹¹ Mustapha, Abdul Raufa (2014): Understanding Boko Haram, in: Mustapha (ed.) *Sects and Social Disorder. Muslim Identities and Conflict in Northern Nigeria*, pp. 147-198, p. 173.

¹² The Federal Republic of Nigeria, North-Eastern States, EU, UN and World Bank (2016): *North East Nigeria. Recovery and Peace Building Assessment*. Vol. I, p. 22.

¹³ UNICEF (2018): Press Release: Education at risk for more than 3.5 million school-aged children in the Lake Chad Basin <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/education-risk-more-35-million-school-aged-children-lake-chad-basin>

¹⁴ UNDP (2017): *Journey to Extremism in Africa. Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment*, ch. 4.

¹⁵ See <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018>: The average score for African countries is 32. The respective scores are: Chad (score 19/100; rank: 165/180), Nigeria (27/100; 144/180), Cameroon (25/100; 152/180) and Niger (34/100; 114/180).

¹⁶ See e.g. Furlong, Andy, Dan Woodman and Johanna Wyn (2011): Changing Times, Changing Perspectives. Reconciling “Transition” and “Cultural” Perspectives on Youth and Young Adulthood. 47 *Journal of Sociology*, pp. 355–70.

marked differences in education between girls and boys further create obstacles for girls and young women to participate in decision-making processes.¹⁷

18. Ironically, extremist groups are sometimes better than formal institutions at harnessing the potential of young people, putting them in leadership roles, investing them with real power, providing the sense of being part of a bigger social vision as well as through opening avenues out of ‘youthhood’.¹⁸ These are pull factors in recruitment, the power of which should not be underestimated, especially in a situation where many young people have lost hope in democratic channels for change.¹⁹

Responses and gaps

19. In the four countries, different mechanisms for citizen engagement, including youth, exist. Some are structured around communal or regional development plans, participatory budgeting and budget control, with an increased use of information technologies. Based on ongoing research by the World Bank in the region, these instruments have the potential to become viable platforms for active citizen engagement. However, the analysis shows that young people (and women in general) still play a marginal role.

20. Closing the feedback loop and providing a quality response to the needs of young people remains critical. However, the mechanisms in use are severely limited in their reach in the current security context and its consequences on access of humanitarian and development actors.

21. Beyond the need to include young people in existing institutions and ongoing initiatives, there is insufficient recognition and support for youth-led initiatives and their contribution to peacebuilding and development efforts. Examples of successful initiatives range from the local to the international level under the leadership of young women and men. There is a significant untapped potential for mobilizing young people. Young leaders, often amplified by social media, have enormous sway over their peers. They share the experiences of people in their surroundings, they speak the same language (literally and figuratively) and thus can connect at deeper levels than elders or outsiders. While politicians at times try to use this influence to their advantage, harnessing it for peacebuilding, community development initiatives and sensitization campaigns provides an important opportunity for youth-led change.

22. There is a risk of partners focusing on the same set of youth-led organizations that often represent elite youth well versed in the mechanics of international cooperation, thus becoming ‘donor darlings.’ This support can inadvertently deepen divisions if marginalized youth do not achieve effective representation. Efforts to level the playing field for different youth-led organizations are crucial to ensure diverse representation.

Recommendations

23. The following recommendations can serve as a starting point to rebuild trust and strengthen the socio-political inclusion of young people:

- Central and local governments should design participatory and inclusive planning processes on modalities of service delivery, which include young people, as the main recipients of most of these services.

¹⁷ See AFD (2018: 79).

¹⁸ See Sommers (2015) for background. An illustration comes from following statement by Former Governor Kashim Shettima of Borno State: “The late Boko Haram leader, Mohammed Yusuf [...] had a youth empowerment scheme, under which he helped his disciples to go into petty trading and wheelbarrow porters. He also arranged inexpensive marriages between sect members, which enabled many of them to marry and gave them personal dignity and self-worth”, quoted in in NSRP (2014): *Winners or Losers? Assessing the Contribution of Youth Employment and Empowerment Programmes to Reducing Conflict Risk in Nigeria*, p. 16.

¹⁹ See UNDP (2017: 66).

- Draw on youth leaders to mobilize citizens, as they speak the same language and are conscious of the living conditions, aspirations and challenges experienced by their peers.
- Strengthen the organizational capacity of youth-led organizations so they can effectively engage in advocacy, participatory planning processes, and accountability and conflict resolution mechanisms.
- Create and/or strengthen transparent and effective feedback and grievance mechanisms as a channel for young people to voice their concerns.
- Program implementers should systematically include young women and men in program design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Link programmatic and policy interventions based on advocacy positions developed by young women and men.
- In bridging the trust deficit, programs should work with young people as well as elders, state authorities, traditional and religious leaders to create spaces of meaningful exchange and dialogue.

B. Reducing security challenges

Context

24. One youth representative at the Pre-Forum described the current situation in the Lake Chad region as one of “youth killing youth”. While most young men and women are not directly involved in armed conflict, as perpetrators or victims of violence, it is true that most rank-and-file fighters in the military, among insurgents and vigilante groups are young, as well as some insurgent leaders. Abu Musab al-Barnawi, leader of Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) until March 2019, is 25 years old.

25. The trap of equating youth, mainly young men, as actual or potential members of armed groups is all too common in the discourse about youth in the context of violent extremism. However, evidence does not support this. Boko Haram has an estimated 1,500-2000 members, while ISWAP’s total is generally thought to be 3,500-5,000.²⁰ The highest estimate that has been circulated is up to 20,000 fighters in 2018.²¹ Even this level would still only comprise a tiny fraction of the millions of young people living in the wider Lake Chad region.

26. The majority of young people in the Lake Chad region, as in comparable contexts, “are not involved in violence and are just eager to get on with their lives, and some of [them] are actively invested in crafting more peaceful societies for themselves and their communities”. As a result,

Key takeaways from the Pre-Forum

Young people highlighted the need to promote constructive dialogue between civil society and the military and effective support to victims of conflict including psycho-social support. They expressed concern that the desired outcomes of the DDR process have not been attained and that vigilante groups are not sufficiently considered in the process. Participants also underlined the importance of community-based dialogue and reconciliation efforts and the need for adequate protection of religious and community leaders engaged in these processes.

²⁰ International Crisis Group (2019): *Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province*, p. 2.

²¹ Global Initiative For Civil Stabilisation (2019): *Survival and Expansion: The Islamic State’s West Africa Province*.

much creative potential and resilience of young people remains untapped.²² Though it remains relevant that most of the people involved in conflict and violence are young.

27. Another recurring theme coming out of the interviews and which is supported by the literature is the mistrust by young people of security forces. Security forces were said to lack professionalism, have harassed young people, demanded bribes and at times engaged in other human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence.²³ Excessive behavior of security forces has even been identified as the most important trigger that can push young people into joining an armed or extremist group.²⁴

Responses and gaps

28. Essentially there have been three interlinked and parallel types of responses to the security challenges, namely military action in the form of counter-insurgency, DDR programming for people who have left armed or extremist groups and PVE activities with the intention to nip future extremism in the bud. All three have important implications from a youth perspective.



Counter-insurgency

29. The main security response in form of counter-insurgency is perceived as limited by young people. The increase in national military presence and the reinforcement of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) under the auspices of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) has changed the balance of power and succeeded in pushing Boko Haram out of its strongholds.²⁵ However, many challenges remain, which continue to lead young people to join groups such as *yan gora* (Civilian Joint Task Force – CJTF), *yan banga* (vigilantes) and *kungiyar maharba* (hunters) to play an active role in protecting their communities.²⁶

30. As mentioned before, counter-insurgency activities also have produced unintended negative consequences,²⁷ thus reinforcing mistrust of security forces. Attempts to strengthen accountability have had mixed results and the creation of effective accountability mechanisms with the inclusion of young people remains an important gap.

31. Beyond military efforts, success against the insurgency requires addressing the attraction of these groups as a perceived channel for venting young people's grievances and frustrations. According to recent analysis, ISWAP has changed Boko Haram tactics in significant ways and is apparently seeking more acceptance by the population as a whole and young people in particular.

²² Compare UNFPA and PBSO (2018): *The Missing Peace. Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, p. 17 (highlight in original).

²³ See UNDP (2018): *Perspectives from Local Communities on Stabilization and Building Peace in the Lake Chad Basin. Discussion Paper presented at the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum*, p. 10, and Amnesty International (2018): *They Took Our Husbands and Forced Us to Be Their Girlfriends. Women in North-East Nigeria Starved and Raped by Those Claiming to Rescue Them*.

²⁴ See UNDP (2017: 74).

²⁵ Hogendoorn, EJ (2018): *To Help Defeat Boko Haram, the EU Should Push for Good Governance and Accountability* (The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism Policy Brief), p. 4.

²⁶ See Center for Civilians in Conflict (2018): *Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria*, Chukwuma, Okoli Al (2017): Nigeria. Volunteer Vigilantism and Counter-Insurgency in the North-East, in *20 Conflict Studies Quarterly*, pp. 34–55, and International Crisis Group (2017): *The Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram*.

²⁷ See for example the Human Rights Watch coverage on the military raid on Baga (Borno State) on 16-17 April 2013 (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/01/nigeria-massive-destruction-deaths-military-raid>).

Addressing this development with military means primarily, without sufficient efforts to tackle these perceptions might inadvertently strengthen rather than weaken these groups.²⁸

DDR

32. DDR covers another set of responses to security challenges in which youth dimensions are often hidden. In the Lake Chad context, DDR programs aim to reintegrate young men and women who have come in contact with extreme violence in a variety of ways back into society. This reintegration process is complicated by resentment of host communities, in particular their young members, toward ex-combatants. A further key issue is the ongoing discussion regarding the scope of DDR efforts, and how much young people from vigilante groups should benefit.

33. Programming in this area is a mix of disarmament, demobilization and screening of ex-combatants, as well as professional training combined with deradicalization interventions. These are followed by ex-combatants' reintegration in society, not necessarily their communities of origin. While the task is regional in nature, there is still no harmonized legal framework, as the participants of the Pre-Forum highlighted. It is crucial for all DDR approaches to fully understand the diverse experiences of ex-members of extremist groups (young men and women), who were forcibly recruited or joined voluntarily, and the physical, psycho-social and economic impacts of these experiences, to design holistic interventions that will lead to a durable reintegration into society. The deep impact of these experiences on predominantly young people during their formative years in terms of personality development requires particular attention and psychologically and culturally sensitive accompaniment.

34. The interviews have also provided examples of the strong role that young people can play in convincing their peers to leave extremist groups. Members of Boko Haram and ISWAP at times retain some form of contact with their families and parts of their old networks. These interactions provide informal but crucial opportunities for young people to engage in conversations on exit strategies. DDR activities should take advantage of these.

35. It is also important to understand the other side of the equation, i.e. the reality in host communities, which are also mostly made up of young people. There is evidence that young people show more resentment than their elders regarding the reintegration of ex-combatants. This seems to be in part due to feelings of betrayal about what ex-fighters have done to their communities, as well as perceptions that the participation in an extremist group gets "rewarded" by dedicated programming including economic support in a situation of competition for limited resources.²⁹

36. While authorities and other stakeholders are increasingly aware of these tensions, there is still a gap in coherent and holistic programming that targets both ex-combatants and youth members of host communities. The possibility of joint economic activities between ex-combatants and young people from host communities could be explored as an entry point on which further social cohesion activities could be built.

37. Finally, the scope of DDR mechanisms is under discussion. Youth participants at the Pre-Forum highlighted this point. Thus far there is no institutional response regarding the demobilization and reintegration of young people engaged in vigilante groups. It is advised to explore options of regularizing the security function they play by bringing it under state control and/or providing recognition and alternative civilian livelihoods. Developing inclusive solutions for this group of young people is an opportunity to prevent future frustrations and grievances that could easily turn violent, given that members of these groups are usually armed and accustomed to the use of force.

²⁸ International Crisis Group (2019).

²⁹ See UNDP (2018: 13).

Prevention of violent extremism

38. The third response to violent extremism is the prevention angle. The biggest challenge is targeting these interventions, as current theories of why young people join extremist groups do not allow for sufficiently precise targeting.³⁰ As a consequence, many interventions are spread widely, often relying on a mix of economic support and sensitization. This is based partly on donor prerogatives, as PVE programming can attract more (or additional) funding than regular development or employment initiatives, which leads to a simple rebranding of some interventions as PVE.

39. Even where prevention works at the individual level, the social effects of these types of interventions tend to be limited, as this essentially boils down to a numbers game: based on existing theories of radicalization, the number of potential recruits is very high, while the need of terrorist organizations for new recruits is miniscule in comparison. Therefore, the reduction of the pool of potential recruits through these types of PVE interventions will likely not have a significant impact on the ability of extremist organizations to fulfill their recruitment needs.

40. However, there is an important role young people can play in PVE. Where youth form close networks, they can act as early warning mechanisms on radicalization processes and the response of peers, conscious of the living conditions of potential recruits, have shown good results. Anecdotal evidence is supported by the literature, which highlights the importance of peer-group contacts and the distrust that young people express of PVE programs that are led by community outsiders.³¹

41. There is also evidence that people do rejoin extremist groups after initial attempts at demobilization.³² This demonstrates that young people are not exclusively manipulated or forced into joining extremist groups but that the act of joining such a group can be based on a conscious choice between known alternatives. The task of PVE programs is therefore to provide peaceful pathways out of ‘youthhood’ to these young people, which are equally or more attractive and rewarding than what extremist groups have to offer.

42. Finally, it is important to recall that most young people do *not* join extremist groups. Therefore, it is crucial not to regard all young people through the PVE lens. In this sense, programming that builds on the creative potential of young people and provides them with a sense of belonging and opportunities to be part of a bigger societal vision not only will do justice to more young women and men but will also weaken these pull factors to join extremist groups.

Recommendations

43. The following recommendations would help to reduce security challenges for young women and men, without being limited to counter-insurgency, DDR and PVE:³³

- Invest in capacity development for national security forces and the MNJTF and establish or strengthen human-rights accountability mechanisms with the inclusion of young people.
- Develop psycho-social support services adapted to the needs of a variety of youth, including but not limited to victims of physical, sexual and gender-based violence, ex-

³⁰ See UNDP (2017).

³¹ UNDP (2017: ch. 5) highlights the importance of friends in joining or not joining an extremist group as well as the distrust of young people into the PVE initiatives led by the international community.

³² Adelphi (2019): *Shoring up Stability. Addressing Climate and Fragility Risks in the Lake Chad Region*, p.63.

³³ For further mapping of initiatives and recommendations, see The Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (2017): *The Role of Young People in Preventing Violent Extremism in the Lake Chad Basin - A contribution to the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security mandated by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015)*.

combatants, displaced populations and other vulnerable groups and ensure the psychosocial accompaniment of participants in DDR programs.

- Implement DDR programs in a holistic fashion, taking into account the relationship between ex-combatants and young people in host communities.
- Design programs geared towards the reintegration of vigilante groups to prevent feelings of frustrations.
- Recognize the key role of youth-led CSOs and youth leaders, including religious ones, as key partners in PVE and strengthen peer-to-peer approaches.
- Complement security interventions with the promotion of soft-policy approaches to PVE with support to safe spaces for continuous dialogue among governments, communities and young people.
- Involve young people in the development and diffusion of counter-narratives both on- and offline and include the voices of victims, survivors and displaced people.
- Ensure contextualized interventions that develop positive, non-violent alternative outlets for the frustrations, grievances and leadership potential that active young people possess.

44. As far as mistrust of state institutions, including security forces, and disillusionment regarding democratic change are concerned, there is an overlap with elements of rebuilding trust and strengthening socio-political inclusion of young people and the respective recommendations.

C. Promoting economic inclusion

Context

45. The need to secure livelihoods for young people is urgent. In the region, livelihoods are predominantly agricultural (roughly 80 percent) based on a highly adaptive system, which has been severely disrupted by climate change, security restrictions and increased pressure on existing natural resources due to displacement.³⁴

The remaining 20 percent of non-agricultural livelihoods have not been able to compensate for the negative impacts on the agricultural sector. The security situation has severely affected trade in the region due to insecurity of transport and market closures. According to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) half of the population or nearly 10 million people (more than 3 million of them below the age of 18) in the Lake Chad region are in need of humanitarian assistance, while hunger and malnutrition continue to cause concern.³⁵

46. This situation is exacerbated by demographic developments in the Lake Chad region: new-entrant cohorts (young people reaching the age of 15) totaled an estimated 80,000 in Chad,

Key takeaways from the Pre-Forum

Participants highlighted the negative impact of climate change, the Boko Haram insurgency and security restrictions on the local economy and called for security forces to enable economic activity. They urged for increased support to the creation of entrepreneurial platforms and income-generating activities for all parts of the population including vulnerable groups.

³⁴ Adelphi (2019: 56).

³⁵ OCHA (2019): *Lake Chad Basin. Crisis Update. June 2019*. (https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/LCB-SitRep-201906_June.pdf).

142,200 in Cameroon, 10,380 in Niger, and 315,000 in Nigeria in 2015.³⁶ This adds up to almost 550,000 new jobs needed per year to accommodate them, far more than are available.

47. Nigeria has seen an increase in unemployment from six percent in 1987 to an all-time high of 23 per cent in the third quarter of 2018.³⁷ Young people aged 15-35 years are over-represented in the overall number of unemployed people, as well as the underemployed, estimated to be a roughly similar level.

48. This continuous unemployment or underemployment of young people in the region leads to them being trapped in ‘youthhood’ as the lack of employment prevents young men from being able to pay bride prices, while families of young women cannot afford bride gifts. As such, the consequences are not merely economic but also social in nature. Even where opportunities exist, they are not necessarily accessed by those most qualified, due to nepotism and corruption. This further fuels inequality as well as the frustrations of young people.

49. Additional key factors are education and the development of marketable skills among young people. The impacts of the BH insurgency on the education system have already been mentioned. The effect is devastating to the human capital in the region, with particular adverse effects on girls and young women. In NE Nigeria, the literacy rate in 2013 stood at just 22 percent for women and 40 percent for men. Rebuilding the education system is thus a crucial task. Tertiary or even secondary education is unattainable for most, especially girls and young women, and little technical and vocational training is available. Employability is further reduced by the high proliferation of drug use, particularly of the opioid painkiller Tramadol. However, strengthening education without a serious boost to economic development (and the employment available) bears the risk of adverse effects, as current youth unemployment rates are positively correlated with level of education, leading to high unemployment rates for youth with secondary and post-secondary education.³⁸

Responses and gaps

50. There is a range of employment-generation programs across the region. In NE Nigeria, programs include the government-funded Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program (SURE-P) and the Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (YESSO, \$100m for the NE), financed by the World Bank. Programs in other countries have generally been smaller. They include the *Projet de soutien à l’insertion socio-professionnelle des jeunes tchadiens en situation de vulnérabilité*, with 10.3 million Euro from the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, implemented by the Agence Française de Développement and the *Projet de Promotion de l’emploi et Renforcement de la Résilience au Nord Cameroun*, with 7 million Euro from the EU Trust Fund, implemented by the GIZ aimed at strengthening socio-economic reintegration of vulnerable youth.

51. Programs cover short-term labor-intensive activities for food or cash, technical and vocational training, and entrepreneurship support including the distribution of starter kits, often with an overall emphasis on addressing short-term urgent needs rather than providing longer-term, sustainable livelihoods. Given the huge scale of employment and training needs, current programs are insufficient in quantity and quality and are often perceived as such by young people, including Pre-Forum participants. However, while much can be done to strengthen and expand such programs, only real economic recovery and the development of a more dynamic and diversified private sector in the region could dress the challenges of youth unemployment in the longer term.

³⁶ AFD (2018: 82).

³⁷ Adelphi (2019: 33); figures for the country as a whole.

³⁸ UNDP (2019): *National Human Development Report 2018. Achieving Human Development in North East Nigeria*, pp. 26-27.

52. Additional work is needed to strengthen the conflict-sensitivity and peacebuilding focus of employment programs. This includes tackling inequality in the distribution of resources and opportunities. With enhanced peacebuilding components, employment programs could serve as an entry point for fostering social cohesion by addressing micro-level drivers such as lack of opportunities, grievances or insufficient contact among individuals from different groups.³⁹

Recommendations

53. The following recommendations are a starting point to increase the economic inclusion of young women and men:

- Ensure equal access to quality (primary, secondary and tertiary) education for all, providing additional support for girls and young women, displaced persons, orphans and other vulnerable groups.
- Invest more in short-, (and particularly) medium- and long-term livelihood activities based on thorough participatory assessments of local economies and a focus on sustainability.
- Include young men and women in developing the selection criteria for participants in economic activities and ensure diverse representation and conflict-sensitive targeting.
- Focus on youth entrepreneurship and future-oriented employment opportunities such as climate-proof agriculture.
- Support volunteer opportunities for young people, which in turn should be recognized as work experience to facilitate the transition of young people into the formal labor market.
- Expand availability of vocational training programs, particularly for unemployed youth, ensuring new skills match with opportunities available locally.
- Strengthen dialogue with the private sector on key concerns, opportunities and bottlenecks, creating a new platform for this collaboration if needed.
- Consider increasing investments in social enterprises that provide durable employment for young women and men, as they hold bigger market shares, have better negotiating power and are more resilient to shocks than isolated individual market participants.
- While material support is crucial, capacity development, continuous mentorship and networking opportunities are equally important.
- As rapid population growth is overstressing existing resources, livelihood interventions should be coupled with family-planning programs.
- Protect investments from rent-seeking behavior from administrators, military, armed groups etc.
- Move beyond supporting individual economic activities to tackling underlying structures of economic exclusion and inequality.
- Use economic support as an entry point for peacebuilding interventions.

D. Mainstreaming youth-sensitive programming

54. While the previous sections have looked at strengthening youth considerations in the political, security and economic field, the final section will present an overview of how to successfully mainstream youth-sensitive programming. Essentially, the paper proposes to distinguish among four elements of programming support to young people in the Lake Chad region (with more details in the Annex table):

³⁹ See the joint World Bank, PBSO, UNDP and ILO study, International Security and Development Center (2016): *Jobs Aid Peace. A Review of the Theory and Practice of the Impact of Employment Programmes on Peace in Fragile and Conflict-affected Countries*.

- First, support for youth at the individual level: This should include all types of youth (elite and/or non-elite depending on the context). Quality assessments and clear targeting criteria are therefore important in specifying the participants of every intervention.
- Second, support for youth-led organizations: They are the continuation of the individual engagement of young women and men in a collective and more systematic form. Ideally, these organizations are as diverse as the constituencies they represent.
- Third, support for networks of young people and youth-led organizations: As the situation and challenges in the Lake Chad region are regional in nature, support to forging and strengthening the linkages for regional collective action is necessary.
- Fourth, support for inter-generational and institutional dialogue spaces: Young people cannot do it alone and they require open and cooperative counterparts to achieve durable change. The receptivity and willingness to engage of these counterparts and the spaces of encounter need to be created and strengthened.

55. While the mainstreaming of youth-sensitive programming would aim to include elements of support at all four levels, specific programs might emphasize one or two. The capacity to explicitly address these four dimensions should become a quality criterion in decisions on the allocation of resources.

56. This distinction also gives important guidance for the operationalization of the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region (RSS) adopted in August 2018. While the Strategy has the dedicated Pillar 9 (Empowerment and Inclusion of Women and Youth), it is important to consequently apply a youth lens to all other pillars.

The Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience

There are many links between what has been presented so far and the Regional Stabilization Strategy. Under Pillar 9 (Empowerment and Inclusion of Women and Youth), there is a set of objectives targeting young women and men. Apart from protection elements and some socio-economic objectives, it aims at addressing some of the key challenges young people face in the socio-political arena. In addition, to this specific pillar, the rest of the Strategy exemplify why mainstreaming of youth considerations will be a critical success factor:

- Pillar 5 (Governance and the Social Contract) touches on elements discussed under socio-political exclusion of young people,
- Pillar 2 (Security and Human Rights), Pillar 3 (DDRRR of Persons Associated with Boko Haram) and Pillar 8 (Prevention of Violent Extremism and Building Peace) are areas discussed under security challenges young people face, while
- Pillar 6 (Socio-Economic Recovery and Environmental Sustainability) and Pillar 7 (Education, Learning and Skills) are covered under economic exclusion of young people.

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Annex: Overview of how to mainstream youth-sensitive programming

	What to strengthen	What to avoid
Individual youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Associate young people already in the program design phase. - Ensure protection of young people but do always consider and support their sense of agency as a potential driver of change. - Support a diversity of youth, where necessary with a focus on the hard-to-reach (and invest in actually reaching them). - Prioritize peer-to-peer communication wherever possible - In results frameworks, include youth in outcomes and results, and disaggregate indicators by sex, age, location, identity, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't assume what young people want or need but invest in quality assessments to find out. - Don't stereotype youth, e.g. by limiting this group to violence-prone young men. - Don't treat girls and young women as an afterthought but make the intersection of youth and gender explicit. - Don't neglect opportunities for mentoring young people to play leadership roles. - Don't forget the context, which means all interventions must be conflict sensitive.
Youth-led organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invest in the development of organizational capacities of diverse youth-led organizations. - Balance the support of leaders as well as members of youth-organizations. - Invest in intra- and inter-group spaces as venues of empowerment and of exploring the positive potential of diversity. - Include young people and youth-led organizations in accountability mechanisms and the monitoring and evaluation of interventions and ensure their feedback is responded to. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't assume that youth-led organizations or CSOs as a whole will speak with one voice. Ideally, the voices emanating from youth-led organizations are as diverse as the constituencies they represent. - Don't assume that young people from different backgrounds will naturally work together but explore the potential of creating common denominators between them as a starting point for social cohesion activities.
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide networking opportunities for youth-led organizations at the regional, national and international level both on- and offline. - Invest in loose and more stable forms of networks to ensure exchange and more strategic forms of advocacy. - Use Security Council Resolution 2250 as an entry point. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't neglect networking opportunities for youth organizations from and in peripheral regions of Lake Chad.
Intergenerational and Institutional Dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young people cannot do it alone, they need partners in an intergenerational dialogue. - Rebuild trust between young people and state institutions as a stepping stone towards genuine dialogue. - Strengthen and implement National Youth Policies and make the link between programming and policy change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't assume that the mere fact of adding young people to existing mechanisms will provide them with an opportunity to effectively voice their concerns and have real influence on decision making. - Don't forget that trust is a two-way street, also invest in the capacity of state institutions to partner with young people.