Transhumance, Transhuman and Insecurity Challenges in North-Central Nigeria since the 21st Century

By

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Abstract

Nigeria is engulfed with various vex issues of recent, ranging from corruption, ethnicity, nepotism, poverty, violence and general insecurity, among others. These issues usually form the focal points for discussion in every forum because of their weights within and outside Nigeria. But one issue stands out that has driven. Nigeria into the valley of difficulty – human insecurity, especially in the north-east, north-central and north-west and specifically in Benue, Kogi, Taraba, Adamawa, Nasarawa, Katisina, Zamfara, Kaduna and Sokoto. For more than seven years now, the people of these states have been living in fear – many have been killed unjustly by people allegedly known as herdsmen and bandits. It is not known whether these killers are Fulani herdsmen or other ethnic nationalities. However, to some extent the Fulani herdsmen are involved and other nationalities from Lake Chad region. On the other hand, the paper links the dryness of the Lake Chad in the challenges of human insecurity in Benue, Kogi. Taraba Adamawa, Nasarawa, etc. Lake Chad is fast drying up and the human population of over five million are becoming restless because they depend on that Lake for their sustenance: some are herdsmen,

farmers, traders and fishermen. With the grass fast depreciating and drying, the herdsmen in particular started to move southwards to have a "new home" outside the Chad zone for settlement and grass for the animals. This southward movement leads to Benue Trough that has the resource needed for these people and their animals. The trough provides the much needed green grass almost all year around for cattle, camel, goats and sheep. This resource attraction is partly responsible for the conflict between the indigenous people of these states and these 'new settlers'. The paper is of the opinion that Lake Chad is an inland drainage lake and can be revitalized. The lake is important not only to Nigeria but to Chad, Niger, Cameroon and indeed Africa. The over five million people there need the lake as that would reduce conflict. The problem in Nigeria is the African problem and vice versa. The paper uses interdisciplinary approach as its methodology.

Keywords: Transhumance, Transhuman, Human security, Lake Chad resources

Introduction

Nigeria before today did not experience any human insecurity challenges in an ugly dimension as experienced in Benue, Taraba, Kaduna, Adamawa, Yobe, Borno, Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina. Boko Haram, banditry, Fulani herdsmen's violent killings are becoming thorny challenges on Nigerian state. Boko Haram insurgency has been a hydra on the flesh of Nigerians, especially in the north-east states of Bornu, Yobe, Adamawa, Taraba killing over a million people since 2014, turning many children into orphans, women into widows, men to widowers, children no longer have access to their education, displacing many people from their homes, above all, crippling the north-east economy and entrenching poverty and underdevelopment.

On the other hand, about three years ago, another group termed bandits took over the reign of power in the north-west especially in Katsina, Sokoto, Zamfara and Kaduna States. They have killed so many people and at a time schools were closed in Kaduna State; the killings, kidnapping have scuttled the internal trade and even hindered people within the state commuting. Besides farming in these states have

been nearly halted because many farmers are either killed in their farms, raped or kidnapped for ransom.

On another corollary, some Niger Delta youths constituted themselves into a violent band and were blowing hot few years ago, destroying oil and gas facilities, taking oil workers and other rich Nigerians hostage and in some instances the hostages were killed. Niger Delta youths, through their activities, were responsible for the non-implementation of national budgets because of inadequate supply of crude oil to international markets, thus causing part of the economic insecurity in the Nigerian State. Nigeria depends so much on crude oil sales for planning and executing of most of the economic programmes for national development. To block its sales means to soar her development.

About 2015, Fulani herdsmen and other ethnic nationalities from the Lake Chad region invaded and are still invading Nigeria, especially the Benue Trough states (Taraba, Kogi, Adamawa, Benue and Nasarawa). In so doing, this brings them in conflict with the indigenous people, especially of Benue State. Lake Chad is an inland drainage lake, and for centuries it supported a very large population that were either farmers, fishermen, pastoralists and traders; but about ten years ago, the Lake Chad began to dry fast and many whose livelihood depended on it began to be frustrated and started seeking a new area for sustenance. It is in this process that these 'new home' seekers use all that they have as arms to terrorise the Benue Trough dwellers, killing and maiming them in hundreds.

As Nigerians were struggling with Boko Haram, herdsmen and other ethnic nationalities from the Lake Chad region, there emerged the bandits from north-west Nigeria tormenting the dwellers of that region. These bandits killed and are still killing in hundreds of people, sacking communities, maiming, raping and kidnapping for ransom. In some areas, they also collect taxes from the indigenous people. It is true that the origin of these bandits are not known. They have halted the growth of economy and educational activities in some areas are terminated or partly halted. A combination of all these have become a national problem and an emerging security threat. It is emerging because this kind of security threat has never been experienced or observed in Nigerian state.

This work is divided into four sections: Section one deals with the introduction, conceptual clarification, section two espouses the people of Sahel region especially Lake Chad from the beginning and now dependants and impact of dryness; section three discusses the insecurity challenges and the need to revive Lake Chad and section four deals with the conclusion.

Conceptual Clarification

Transhumance: In the savanna zones there usually exists the rotation or movement of cattle from one area to another. In the dry season the grass on the upper plains is scorched and water is unavailable except in the streams or rivulets, in Lake Chad, and in the pools left behind in the flood plains of rivers as the floods recede. So the herdsmen drive their cattle down to these places for water and pasture. But with the unset of the first rains, the valleys become swampy, so the herdsmen migrate with their cattle to the higher plains which now have fresh and succulent grass. This annual movement or cycle is termed transhumance (Iloeje, 1976). This involves the driving of cattle from the valleys to the alpine pastures on the mountains in summer. With the return of snow in winter, the cattle are driven back to the valleys to be stall-fed or grazed on lowland meadows. It was common in Norway, Switzerland, Austria and in the Rocky mountains. It would appear this culture had been done away with in those regions (Leong, 1973). Transhumance is the movement of cattle from one area to another owing to climatic changes. The changes are as a result of dryness of the vegetation, the herdsmen would now drive the cattle to seek for fresh vegetation and water, when conditions improve in the rainy season, the animals are driven back for pasturing. Very common in the savanna zones of West Africa – from savanna to forest and vice versa. Initially it was not common for occupants of the Lake Chad to drive their animals down south to the Benue Trough.

Transhuman: To term transhuman implies the movement of people from one region to another as a result of difficult conditions imposed on them either by nature such as dryness, earthquake, landslide among other things. Transhuman can also be seen as transnationalism. Transnationalism describes activities that cross state boundaries, such as flow of ideas, information, money and credit, and people. The concern here is about people. In the political transnationalism of Andean indigenous groups, there are multiple scales of interaction, with no fixed

location within which actors or practices are found. In other words, transnationalism is as much about discontinuous space as 'relational' space (Mayhew, 2009). Of recent, transhumant has become a phenomenon in Lake Chad region where occupants of that region are seeking for a new settlement in Nigeria.

Conceptualising Security

The term security lacks a precise definition. It is a word commonly used by all manner of people to express the situation when life is lost in a manner that could have been prevented. Security therefore is seen as a state of mind not necessarily an objective state of being. It describes how people feel, not whether they are justified in feeling that way. To a large extent, it depends on the perception that people have of their environment. Imobigbe (1985) perceives security as a feeling of being protected and a feeling of freedom from danger, fear, anxiety, oppression and unwanted violence. According to Soroos (1997) cited in Collins (2007) contemporary security studies, security is the assurance people have that they will continue to enjoy those things that are most important to their survival and wellbeing while McNamara, a one-time US Secretary of Defense during President John F. Kennedy administration and later President of the World Bank, perceives security as development, security is not military force, though it may involve it; security is not traditional military activity, though it may encompass it, security is not military hardware, though it may include it; security is development and without development there can be no security (1968). In this perspective, McNamara looks at security because of the time – at the time he came out with this definition, the world was enmeshed in cold war. Thus, to him, he thought of the measure that would be advantageous to human development, especially the developing nations who had little or no business with the cold war. McNamara of the time was looking of dependency, which the developing world such as Nigeria was running to both West and East for assistance. Without security such assistance cannot be reached by either of the sides in contest.

Security, therefore, is a condition in human life and development in which one is free within the confines of the law to exist without fear, threat, oppression and being about his business without modestation. Emerging insecurity has to do with threats to human existence in which a particular people or ethnic, nation or nation states never experienced. For instance, emerging security challenges of the Boko

Haram in the north-east Nigeria, banditry in the north-west and north central Nigeria, condition in human development in which radical groups take up arms against their nation because of lack of patriotic attitudes to their fatherland.

However, the current insecurity threat in Nigeria is not wholly about Nigerians, this is so because banditry activities and its origin is unknown. Many people in Nigeria are of the opinion that bandits migrate to Nigeria from Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, etc. What is important to us is the havoc they are commiting over time – killings, raping, kidnapping for ransom and levying taxes on the locals.

The People of the Sahel mainly Lake Chad Region

The people of the Sahel region mainly from Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria are many and varied, they are over five million. The occupants of the Nigerian section of Lake Chad are the Kanermari, Shuwa Arabs, Fulani, Hausa; those from the Cameroon flank are Fulani, Hausa, Fang, Bulu, Beti, etc. The people found on the other side of Chad bordering Lake Chad are Fulani while those of Niger are Kanuri, Arabs and Dosso. All these people depend on Lake Chad for a living especially during the dry season. This change in the volume of water in the Lake Chad becomes counter-productive for them. Hence need an alternative environment to eke their living.

History and Description of Lake Chad: The Soul of Sahel Dwellers

Lake Chad is an inland drainage lake. It is the fourth largest African lake after Lakes Victoria, Tangayinka and Nyassa (Malawi). Lake Chad itself is a vast expanse of shallow water with ¾ of its shores lying outside Nigeria. The actual area under water (170) varies from 4,000 to 10,000 square kilometers according to the season of the year, being most extensive between the middle of December and the end of January. Its depth is only 14-22 metres, making it (then) the shallower lake of its sizes in the world; however, during the low water season, the depth of water is much less. The average elevation of the Basin is 1000 metres above sea level and the lake level being 800 metres above sea level. A few rivers flowing towards Lake Chad actually reach the lake, but rivers as the Tedseram and the Alo disappear into firkin swamps at considerable distances away from the lake (Udo, 1978).

In the Nigerian portion of the lake, the most important river draining into Lake Chad (considering its length and volume of water) is the river Yo or the Komadugu – Yobe. Its course is marked by an alternation of well-defined valleys carrying a single stream, and open swampy flood plan (firkin), with many stream channels. However, 50 kilometres from Lake Chad the Yobe River virtually disappears and only a trickle reaches the lake. It contains no running water during the greater part of the year and consists only of a few large and many smaller pools during the end of the dry seasons. Normal flow begins from July, and by November its flat valley is completely fleece; and can no longer be forded till the end of January. Other rivers such as the Bunga, which flow through Jos as the Delimi, reach Lake Chad in flood once in generation (long time).

However, it is worth mentioning that, Lake Chad Basin is drained by River Shari – though Shari is outside Nigeria. It is important because it is by far the most important feeder of Lake Chad. It is estimated that about $^{2}/_{3}$ of the volume of water discharged into the Lake come from this river and it is therefore not surprising that the rise and fall in the level of the lake is determined by the regime of the river. The Shari rises outside the Sudan, and flows southwards into the drier north. Shari rises outside the dominating position because of the period of its flow into the lake. The Shari feeds the lake from the end of December – that is in the heart of the dry season, when all the other effluents are at their lowest level and when the majority of the Nigeria effluents are already dried up, the lake will be actually rising because of the quantity of water it receives from the Shari at this time (Akpan, 2018).

Meanwhile, it may interest many to understand that, the Lake Chad Basin is shared by Algeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, the Central African Republic, Libya and Sudan. The Basin is about eight percent of the size of the African continent, providing direct and indirect support to a population of about 40 million people (The Punch, March 23, 2019, p. 20).

The size of Lake Chad is one of the major Africa's fresh water reduced and keeps reducing at an alarming pace for the past 48 years. The length of time of water reduction produced today is what cannot be recollected. To show the loss of water or dryness of the Lake Chad, it is put that in 1960, the size of the lake was 26,000

square kilometers as opposed to 2,000 square kilometers today (Mahamdou, 2007; The Punch, March 23, 2018, p. 20).

However, Anthony William Akpan in his presentation of the 38th inaugural lecture of the University of Uyo entitled, "Imperiled Aquatic Ecosystem and Biodiversity, Anthropogenic Perturbation and the Paradox of Resource Sustainability", opined that by 1960, Lake Chad was the largest reservoir of flesh water in the Sahel region of Africa with 26,000 square kilometers of water. Recently, less than 2,500 square kilometers of water is left because it is drying up and causing serious challenges for the communities around the lake region (Akpan, 2014). It is not known the reasons for the dessication of Lake Chad, but it is to a large extent attributed to the climate change, and besides its location in the hinterland or continental climatic conditions and its effects.

Sahel Vegetation and Dependants on Lake Chad

Sahel region is very harsh, it has extreme temperatures. The sahelian zone borders the southern Sahara. Vegetation-scattered grasses, shrubs and trees – increases in density towards the southern margin. Annual rainfall is 200-400mm, but unreliable. Severe droughts bring losses of livestock, crop failures and famine. In this connection the only life line to farmers especially the pastoralists is to move their animals to the Lake region where vegetation and water are available (Mayhew, 2009). In a more precise way Lake Chad is of immense value to the inhabitants of the zone. It provides a means of livelihood to the millions of people who maximise the use of the environment to their advantage. Indeed, Lake Chad and its surroundings are the economic power house to the people – fishing, agriculture (crop production) pastoralism etc.

Fishing

Lake Chad is one of such fishing grounds in Nigeria. It is known that a large number of youths mainly live by fishing from the Lake Chad. In other words, small scale fishermen using traditional fishing gear and watercraft dominate the fishing industry. It is agreed that Nigeria produces about 5,000,000 metric tonnes of fish annually, thus these fishermen from the Lake Chad are part of those responsible for over 80 percent of the annual fish output (Yahmed, 2002). The fishes are delivered fresh daily to nearby markets while distant markets are supplied with

low quality smoked or sun-dried fishes. However, it would be contended that fishing provide food for the population, employment to segment of the society and a means for exchange relations.

Livestock

It may be difficult to say the number of livestock available or kept in the Lake Chad region. But it is on record that it is large and includes cattle, goat, sheep, donkeys, horses, camels and poultry. The contention is not about poultry, but about animals that feed mainly from available vegetation or fodder. For goats, sheep, donkeys, during the rainy seasons these animals are tied to pens and feed brought to them. But during the dry season, the animals are allowed to roam and graze freely in the open fields. On the other hand, the majority of the Nigerian cattle are being moved from one location to another as a result of seasonal changes that give rise to dryness or wetness. This makes the Fulani cattle to be moving about with their animals, apart from the fact that it is cultural to some of them to behave that way. This is transhumance, meaning that they depended on the water from Lake Chad for the animals and vegetation as fodder. In a perspective, these animals provide employment to many: some engage in milk distribution, some meat, some work on hide and skin and other derivatives. These activities to a large extent engage the population that live around the Lake Chad region. It may be of interest to add that human activities here provided for both internal and external trade. Trade is an axis of development.

Crop Production

Geographically, the physical environment plays an important role in the type of crop grown in a particular environment. Countries bordering Lake Chad are in Sahel savannah with minimal rainfall and a long dry spell as earlier chronicled. Thus the people grow mainly cereal crops such as maize, guinea corn (sorghum), millet, rice and other crops such as groundnuts and yams. This is possible during the three to four months rainy period. For those who dwell close to Lake Chad, they make use of the Lake during the dry season to irrigate their farms. Crops here provide food, employment to a large number of people in the region. The exchange of crops for economic purposes brings wealth to the people, thereby ushering in development. That had been the scenario over the years.

Lake Chad is posing a serious challenge on the people owing to its dryness because of the number of people who depended on it for their livelihood. It is generally believed that the lake was much more extensive in the past and there is considerable evidence to show that it is still diminishing. In the early 1920s, Baga Ngelwa was a large lake shore market, but in the 1930s the market had ceased to exist since the water had become too shallow to allow the approach of canoes. Apart from the loss of water due to evaporation, the reasons for the retreat of the lake is not yet understood.

Indeed, the dessication of the lake has negatively affected human activities in the area. For instance, the region no longer sustains the quantity of fish usually caught in the Lake. Mahamadou puts it that fish declined from 243,000 tones between 1970-1977 to 56,000 tonnes in 1986-1989. As at now, the reduction in tonnage of fish caught are much and difficult to quantify. In this connection, it has deprived the people of revenue and put in poverty in the north-east of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger even the immigrant farmers and fishermen from Sudan, Central African Republic, etc (Mahamadou, 2007).

On the other hand, the dryness has also affected livestock as the fodder is no longer available for them. There is also very low production of crops for human and animal consumption, leading to food insecurity. This loss of livelihood has aggravated the poverty situation in the region. There is also large scale unemployment because of the loss in fishing, agriculture and livestock production, leading to internal insecurity and social adhesion.

In other to move forward, two things come to be – moving the animals away from the Lake Chad area to a more conducive environment and people moving themselves to a new settlement – traders, craftmen and farmers who specialised in crop production. Again, to save their cattle from dying, they needed to shift their base to where they can find enough fodder for their cattle. For now, no other alternative than the Benue Trough or Benue Valley. The Benue valley covers an area of over 22,000 square miles (35,000 square kilometers) in Nigeria, and is made up of two physiographic divisions: the river and its flood plains, and the lowland areas which lie above flood levels. The 22,000 square miles covers Benue State, part

of Taraba State, Nasarawa and Kogi states. The Basin covers the fly-free highlands of the Jos Plateau and the upland of the eastern borderlands (Udo, 1978).

The people who formally occupied the Lake Chad environment considered occupying Benue Trough – for farming, pasturing and full settlement. This forced occupation of the Benue valley brought them into conflict with the owners of the land. For them (the new settlers), the land belong to them. Their animals began to feed on people's farms destroying crops, when the owners raised their voices and condemned their activities, feuds ensued. That was the beginning of conflict in Benue Trough, but today it spills to include other areas in north-central, north-western and in some states in southern Nigeria.

Meanwhile, there are two things in the Benue Valley. Numerous fishing villages are built on natural ridges rising above high water level. Such villages include Numan, Yola, Ndom, Yumburu, Kabawa and Jen (these villages have had their urban status today). The numerous rivers in the Benue Trough provide enough water and moisture and green grass all year round. These grasses are free from cellulose and good enough for pasturing. The Benue Valley has a vast land and sparse population. Yet, this empty land is very fertile, particularly along the fadamas or river flood plains, which are well cultivated in the vicinity of the few settlements.

Nonetheless, in strict terms, transhumance was practised here. During the dry season cattle from the upland are driven to the plains of the Benue Valley, where grazing is available. At this time, the tse-tse flies are closely confined to the vicinity of streams. But since water is hard to get in parts of the plains, the cattle have to go to the streams where the flies are concentrated (Udo, 1978).

The dryness exacerbated human insecurity from north-east to north-central and beyond. In one of the correspondence, Iyorchia Ayu in an interview with the Tell Magazine on the issue of insecurity in Nigeria, contends that some insecurity challenges faced are caused by people who moved from the Lake Chad region southwards because of the dryness for space to graze their cattle. Against this background, he statistically opined that in 1963 Lake Chad had 28,000 square kilometers of water which was then used for fishing, irrigation and cattle rearing.

But by 1997, Lake Chad had dried up to less than 13,000 square kilometers. Today, it is estimated that it has shrunk to less than 1,700 square kilometers. He added, so Lake Chad has virtually disappeared – there is no more fishing, irrigation and no more effective cattle rearing.

Meanwhile, to portray the dessication of the Lake Chad and the cattle immigrants and settlers, their havoc and insecurity in central Nigeria, Ayu notes:

> While the fishermen and the farmers have nowhere to go, the cattlemen migrate. They're now beginning to come into central Nigeria and go down south. Those who own these cattle are hiring people to come and fight and kill people in places like Plateau, Benue and Taraba on a massive scale so that their cattle can have access to River Benue. And this thing is going to go on as the desert keeps creeping down because the desert is increasing at the rate of six kilometers per annum. So invariably, the entire ecosystem of the north-east has been destroyed, and that has affected the economic life of the area. For those who have no other thing to do and no access to government, they are easily susceptible to recruitment by this group of mentally deranged people who are out to kill (2014, p. 18).

This is the condition of Lake Chad, the challenges posed on the local communities around it and by extension the human insecurity challenges in the north-east and Central Nigeria.

The various ethnic nationalities occupying the Lake Chad region are aware of the potentials in terms of vegetation and availability of water in the Benue Valley. With the dryness, they all hope to make a new home in the Benue Valley. In the process, the only way they can achieve their dreams is to use all means to displace the indigenous people of the Benue Valley. Hence, they began to mobilize their people, provide arms of all sorts through the assistance of wealthy people, politicians and thus began their southward movement beginning from Taraba, Adamawa. It is also believed that the (new settlers) have gotten aid from outsiders in countries such as United Arab Emirate. This is translated to all the killings, kidnappings, rape, maiming experienced in Benue, Plateau and adjoining states.

In other words, all the human killings in this region did not begin just like that: they have the support of people who matter in politics around economy in Nigeria and outside Nigeria. It is difficult to know the exact number of people killed in these States, but it is believed to be between 3 and 5 million.

Means of Reducing Insecurity in Central Nigeria

There is no better ways of reducing insecurity in Central Nigeria than trying to revive Lake Chad. Lake Chad is the axis of development and wellbeing of many people in that region. Lake Chad had long been neglected by the States that own the Lake directly – Chad, Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon. It is known that there is a Lake Basin Commission. The Basin is handicapped otherwise the Lake's dessication would have long been checked. However, the Commission is not having adequate fund, hence cannot prosecute the projects envisaged. Chad is a very poor country and cannot on her own work to revive the Lake. Secondly, Chad just ended her civil war thus the government is in heavy debt and would not be able to shoulder such responsibility of bringing life back to the Lake on her own.

Lake Chad, as water, is used for various purposes: agriculture, fishing, minerals (potash) is reducing in size owing to various reasons such as siltation, desert encroachment and neglect on the part of the governments that own the Lake. The Head of States yearly meeting is held occasionally without adequate resolution to improve the Lake.

The governments and various agencies interested in the Lake should commit themselves towards dredging the lake to evacuate excess sand and other debris in the Lake. For the Lake to be revived after dredging, deliberate channeling of water from Yobe River, River Yo and Bunga, among others to the Lake, especially during rainy seasons for utilization in the drier times would assist in reviving the Lake. There is the need for a construction of wetland from the debris of the Lake Chad to rejuvenate it for agriculture. There is also need for afforestation of the Lake area and indeed the entire Lake Chad Basin. Lake Chad is a wetland. However, its dryness is becoming a challenge both for man and biodiversity. It is believed that if the Lake is revived, the environment would gain back its lost glory in areas of vegetation, human sustenance and other activities that were associated with the Lake. In this way it would draw back the immigrants from the Benue Trough or

Valley to their original land. This in turn would diffuse tension and return security to the people – the new settlers and indigenous people of Benue Valley. The revival of Lake Chad would mean the return of peace in the region.

Conclusion

Before now, that region bordering Lake Chad used to be relatively peaceful. The desertification of Lake Chad has brought in a lot of hardship to people who dwell in that region – because their means of livelihood centred on that Lake. As changes began with the loss of value of the lake, the people must survive alongside with their pastures. Thus, the downward movement towards Benue Valley. In the process pitched them with the indigenous people, hence the conflict that has taken many lives and property in the Central Nigeria.

Meanwhile, Lake Chad still holds pleasant future for the region if dredged and rivers such as Yobe, Yo and Bungo are channeled to feed the Lake during rainy season. The Lake Chad also needs some afforestation and construction of a wetland to complement its status. Apart from farming, fishing and the mining of salt and potash, Lake Chad has assisted in the preservation of biodiversity, an avenue for studies and research. As a reservoir, it provides tourism and assists in moderating the temperature of the area.

In all the emerging challenges, the only way out is to revive Lake Chad, so that some youths can return to farming, fishing and games. The owners (countries) and agencies interested in Lake Chad should have a political will through financial contribution to bring back the Lake: to end conflict and develop human capacity for the advancement of civilization in research and development. Lake Chad is Africa's pride, every government should show interest in the Lake for economic reasons. Besides, every government should think peace and development for the future, if that is so, then Lake Chad needs to be revived.

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