

Analysis of the Lake Chad Basin Commission's Adaptive Capacity with a Focus on Conflict Management Mechanisms

Florence Metz¹, Koko Warner² and Michael Brzoska³

¹·ETH Zürich, Zürich, Switzerland

²·UNU-EHS, Bonn, Germany

³·IFSH, Hamburg, Germany

florence.metz@env.ethz.ch

The importance of international basin organizations has become ever more evident with the increasing climate and societal pressures on African waters. Only strong and adaptive basin organizations can effectively respond to water resource changes. By taking the Lake Chad eco-region as a case study area, the aim of this study is to analyze the Lake Chad Basin Commission's (LCBC) resilience in general and in particular its performance with regard to conflict management.

The LCBC (members: Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria, Niger) has the mandate, among others, to examine complaints and promote dispute settlement. Lake Chad has shrunk by 90% compared to its size in 1960. Nigerians followed the receding water and built 30 villages on Cameroonian territory. To tackle the border dispute, Cameroon reverted to the LCBC. But, the Commission did not succeed in settling the conflict and an armed clash arose in the mid 1990s.

Considering the huge potential for international conflicts in response to the environmental changes, the following research questions are addressed: How vulnerable is the Lake Chad region to environmental conflicts? Is the LCBC resilient enough to manage the changing environmental conditions and to provide for conflict management?

A two-step analysis is conducted: First, the linkages between environmental changes and conflict risks are identified by applying Homer-Dixon's environmental security model to the Lake Chad region. Second, the LCBC's resilience is tested based on common pool theory, which regards insufficient institutional capacity to deal with resource scarcity as a major predictor for resource conflict. The following four criteria are applied to the LCBC: adaptable management structure; clear and flexible criteria for water allocation and quality; equitable distribution of benefits; and detailed conflict resolution mechanisms.

The study reveals that the LCBC adapted to some extent to the environmental changes. But, major structural deficits remain, which affects the Commission's ability to manage conflicts. All in all, the LCBC is a rather weak institution; nevertheless, it is a valuable forum for conflict management and should therefore be strengthened. These findings support the hypothesis that only strong institutions can adapt to environmental changes. Yet, research needs to understand how resilient basin organizations should be designed.