
Weaponising Climate and Environmental Vulnerability: Violent Extremism, Girl-Child Suicide Bombers and Existential Threats to Childhood in the Lake Chad Basin in Central Africa

By

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Abstract: This study investigates how climate change, insecurity and extreme violence intersect to harm children, particularly the girl-child in the Lake Chad Basin in Central Africa. Anchored on the Strain Theory on Crime and the Objectification Theory, it explores how climate stressors and protracted conflict heighten vulnerability and enable the weaponising of the girl-child as suicide bombers. Using an exploratory descriptive qualitative approach, the research draws on a systematic review of open-source records, international instruments, and academic literature from 1960 to 2025. Findings indicate that children, especially going girls, are the worst hit by climate-security crisis in the region, while significant gaps persist in research, monitoring and reporting on children's rights affected by the climate-security nexus in the basin. The study urges on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, regional and sub-regional bodies, member states of the Lake Chad Basin and researchers on children's rights to recognise the growing evidence of the climate-security causality and integrate this into child-rights monitoring and reporting, policy and future research.

Introduction

Climate change poses multiple threats to livelihoods, which fuel social tensions and exacerbate vulnerabilities among marginalised groups. As much as it compounds existing vulnerabilities, it is identified as a source of insecurity (Kazeem

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Olayinka Sodik 2024; Papale Simone and Emanuele Castelli 2025). Although researchers have not reached a consensus on a direct link between climate change and violence, growing evidence supports the view that climate-induced degradation of the environment is a major driver of violent conflict, prompting many security scholars to emphasise climate action as a key strategy for conflict resolution (Maha Skah and Rida Lyammouri 2020).

The Lake Chad Basin (hereinafter LCB), located in Central Africa is a vast Pre-cambrian depression marked by high temperatures, erratic rainfall, and a semi-arid climate that transitions from savanna grasslands in the south to the Sahara Desert in the north. At its centre lies Lake Chad, a once expansive and shallow freshwater body that has diminished by nearly ninety per cent over the past six decades (Akinyetun Tope Shola 2023). Since 2009, extreme violence orchestrated by non-state armed groups (NSAGs) have compounded the suffering of children in the region. In an area already devastated by the shrinking Lake Chad, once the main source of livelihood for more than thirty million people, armed conflict has further intensified the hardships of childhood (Bakaki Zorzeta and Roos Haer 2023). Keren (2025) highlights the acute challenges faced by children in the basin, who live under constant threat from environmental disasters and abductions by insurgent groups, while Tiky Lembe and Ndiloseh Melvis (2025) underscore the absence of appropriate governance structures at regional and national levels to create sustainable peace in the area.

This study seeks to explore the compounded effects of climate change and extreme violence in the LCB and the disproportionate vulnerabilities it creates in children. Using an exploratory descriptive qualitative approach as outlined by Hunter David et al. (2019), this article analyses peer-reviewed articles and grey sources to examine how climate change functions as a driver of armed conflict and violence against children, particularly the girl-child. It investigates climate change as a driver of violence, the exacerbated vulnerabilities that these create in children and the role of different stakeholders in creating child-centred resilience in the climate security crisis in the LCB.

Purpose of the study

This study seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the existential threat to childhood and particularly that of the girl-child looming in the LCB plagued by both climate change and acute human insecurity. The effects of poverty on childhood development in the LCB began to manifest in the early 1960s due to the reduced volume of Lake Chad and other environmental stressors (Papale and Castelli 2025). An extra layer of vulnerability among children was created around 2009 when violent extremist groups that target children and particularly young girls began operating in the region (Skah and Rida 2020). Ever since, extreme violent groups have used women and young girls as military objects, enabling grievous gender-based violence in the region. According to Bakaki, Zorzeta, and Roos Haer (2023), Islamist groups operating in the LCB have used theology to systemise rape and the objectification of girls as suicide bombers. While the practice looks chaotic, lacking an ideological explanation, it fulfils a strategic aim: to propagate patriarchy, gender inequality and

cruelty, which are deeply rooted in Salafi-jihadist practices. This study responds to the critical need to investigate children in the LCB and provide an in-depth understanding for policy development and implementation on children in the LCB.

This study also seeks to contribute to the ongoing conversation about governance deficits in the Lake Chad Basin, which, according to Tiky and Ndiloseh (2025), is the main threat to the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of children, durable peace, and sustainable development in the region. It advocates for a participatory adaptive governance in which Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, states of the LCB, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (hereafter LCBC), academics and children themselves would collectively take appropriate measures to push back attacks on childhood in the LCB.

The Problem

One of the earliest attempts to make the environment an issue of national security was in 1971, when Robert Falk echoed the need “to revamp national security and economic growth to solve the problems of environmental decay” (Peter Hugh, 2014, as cited in Maha and Rida, 2020). While scholars push for environmental concerns to be upgraded as a security threat in the global agenda, others cautioned that this could have counterproductive effects, such as undesired militarisation of the environment.

Among scholars, the debate continues as to the relationship between climate and conflict. The argument that climate change is a catalyst of violence, conflicts, tensions, and strife is popular (Pearson 2018; Soumahoro et al. 2023). Early debates questioned the extent to which climate change contributed to armed conflict. Jürgen Scheffran et al. (2012, as cited in Maha and Rida 2020) argue that while not a sole cause, climate strife often leads to violence. In the case of the LCB, Pwa Abeng Amah (2020) notes that violence, cross-border migration, and internal displacement largely stem from poverty, unemployment and limited access to essential services, including education and healthcare. Akinyetun Tope Shola (2023) further highlights the fact that human suffering in the basin existed well before activities of radical Islamists began in 2009 and that migrations, forced labour, early marriages and sexual exploitation, malnutrition and different forms of gender-based violence (GBV) have simply been enhanced. It is however noted that the gendered weaponisation of children by extremist groups in the violent conflict in the LCB is a more recent phenomenon which needs more research (Papale and Castelli 2025).

The depletion of Lake Chad, the primary source of livelihood for communities across the basin, due to environmental stressors, the overexploitation of natural resources, livestock herding beyond the carrying capacity of land and rudimentary methods of farming and fishing that degrade the environment (Pwa Abeng Amah 2020; Maha & Rida 2020). Keren (2023) notes that over the past decades, the lake has contracted by about ninety per cent from 25,000 square kilometres in 1963 to just 1,500 square kilometres by the 1990s. This drastic recession has been associated with food insecurity, enforced migrations, human morbidity and loss of biodiversity. According to Achille Luigi (2023), extremist groups have entrenched a destructive feedback loop in which climate-related deprivation fuels recruitment, evidenced by

an estimated 10,000 children recruited between 2009 and 2019, an alarming indicator of how ecological decline and extremist violence converge to deepen the humanitarian crisis in the basin. Although local resilience initiatives successfully slowed down the lake's decline, Tiky and Ndiloseh (2025) observe that, paradoxically, violence continues to escalate and thus undermines prospects of a durable peace for men, women and children to live in dignity. This study broadens debates on the LCB, throwing a spotlight on children and the need for participatory governance to protect children and particularly young girls, in the region.

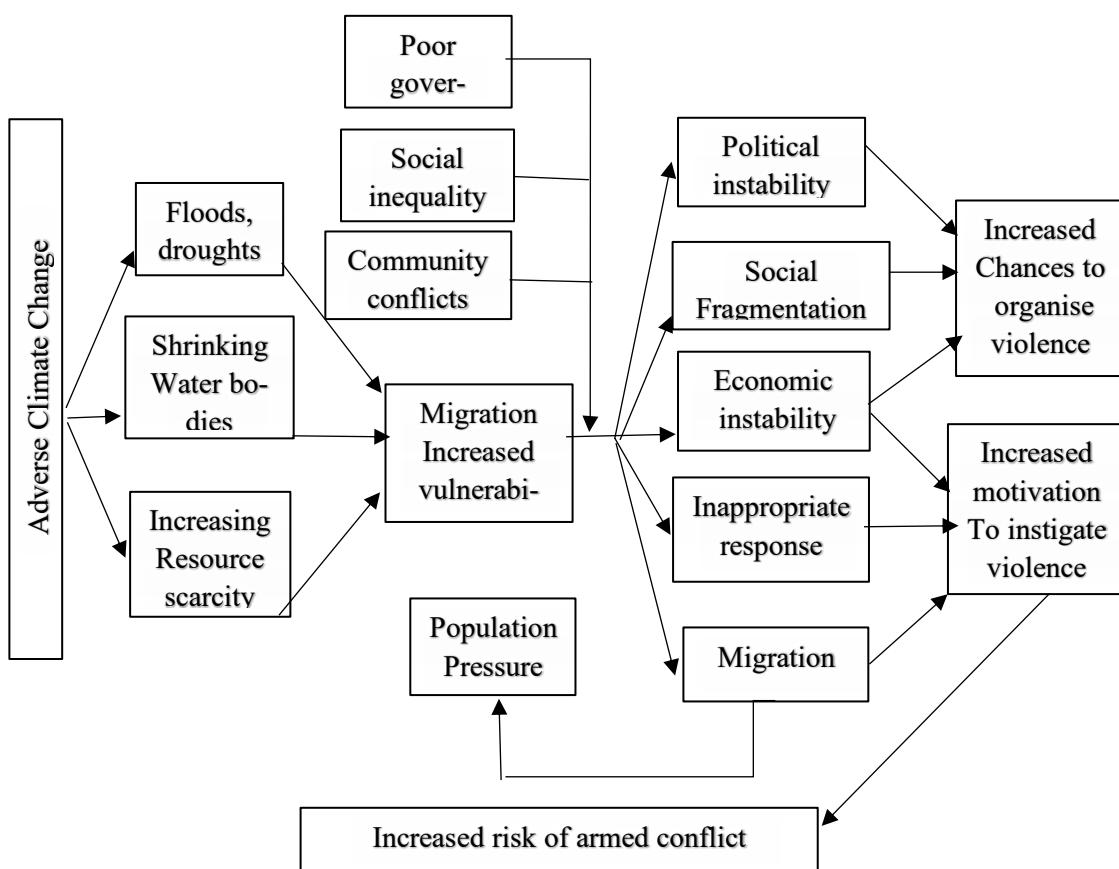
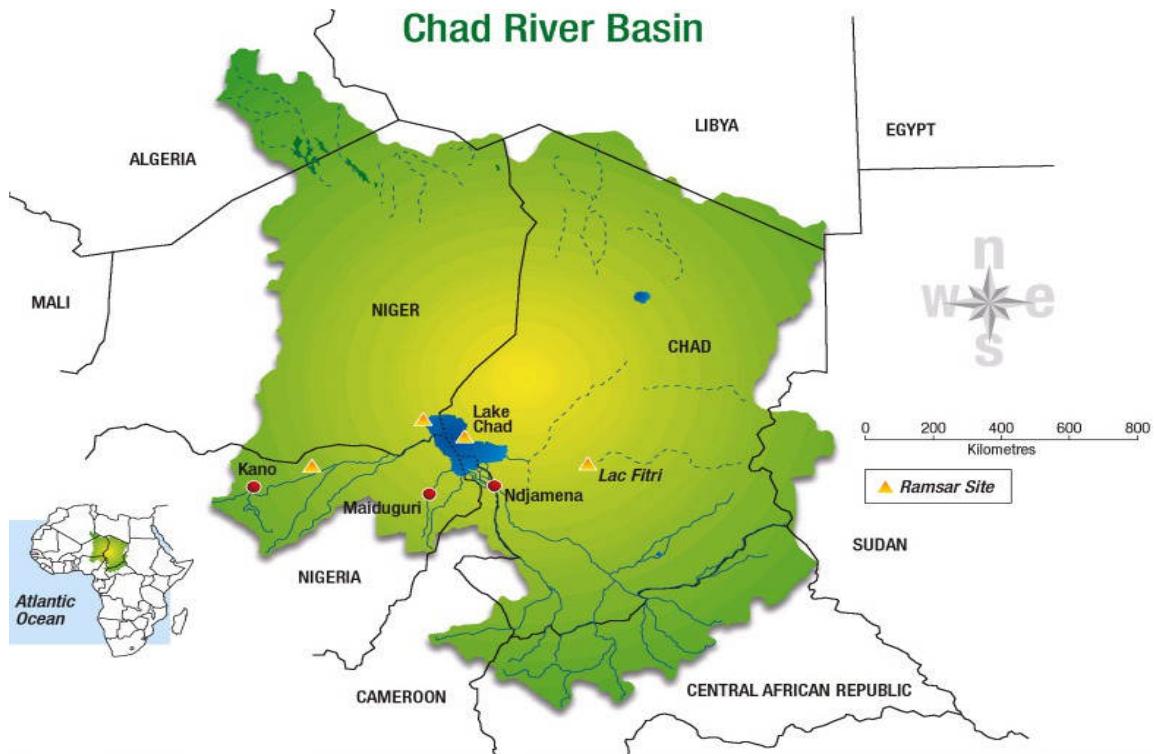


Figure 1: Adapted from Mearns Robin and Andrew Norton (2010, as cited in Rida Skah and Rida 2020, p. 10).

Given that population structure, composition, and distribution determine survival in communities, Akinyetun (2023) highlights the urgent need for deeper research on demographic dynamics in the LCB. To him, an estimated 40 million people, of whom approximately 30 million, representing seventy-five per cent, are under the age of thirty-five, inhabit the basin. Although his research does not inquire deeply into demography, Pwa Abeng Amah (2020), however, notes that women and young girls in the LCB face heightened vulnerabilities due to traditional practices that encourage early marriages, high maternal mortality rates, and increased exposure to

disease as a result of their outdoor social roles. He further highlights the extreme psychological distress faced by women and children who shoulder the burden of sustaining households amid scarcity, displacement, and violence. The consequences of the climate change–security nexus on human populations in the LCB are catastrophic. According to Bolanle Kayode (2023), beyond the adversity wrought by environmental hazards and maladaptive coping strategies to them, the presence of NSAGs is now a dominant driver of human suffering and social disintegration in the region. As such, the livelihoods and well-being have deteriorated to the degree that Raquel, Munayer and Stella Schaller (2018) characterise the situation in the basin as “one of the worst humanitarian disasters” since World War II, as armed groups continue to terrorise communities across Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, and Chad, creating a humanitarian crisis far worse than in Syria. Yet, the “international community” remains largely indifferent to these terrorist incursions whose primary victims are children and youth (Bolanle 2023), prompting Maha and Rida (2020) to describe the situation in the LCB as a “forgotten crisis”.



Source: LCBC, “Roadmap of Restoring Lake Chad”

This study is anchored on two complementary theoretical frameworks, the Objectification Theory and the Strain Theory of Crime and Delinquency. The Objectification Theory propounded by Fredrickson Barbara, and Roberts Tomi Anne (1997) explains how girls and women internalise social cues and perceptions to view their

minds, bodies and spirit from the perspective of an external gaze. The core caveats of the theory include sexual objectification, where the bodies of women and girls are perceived and treated as commodities and self-objectification, where they internalise external perspectives and treat themselves as if they were another. Both manifest consequences are that women and girls develop constant self-awareness, an inferiority complex, shame, and an enhanced risk of mental health issues. These dynamics are central to this study, to understand the experiences of the girl-child in the LCB where even before the beginning of Islamist violence in which young girls are used objects of war, cultural practices and a deeply rooted patriarchy in the areas already were pushing girls to early marriages, school drop-outs, domestic servants and sexual objects (Pearson 2918; Keren 2023).

The second framework, the Strain Theory, originated from Robert K. Merton's paper, *Social Structure and Anomie* written in 1938, which critically challenges sociological theories that attribute human violence solely to those who are not adequately restrained by social control. To him, non-biological determinants, such as environmental strife, engender "social processes of tension" that in turn trigger violence. Building on this foundation, Robert Agnew (1992) expanded the Strain Theory to explain how crime and violence emerge when young individuals are unable to achieve socially valued goals through legitimate means due to systemic and institutional barriers. In the LCB climate pressure, insecurity and generational deprivation intersect (Maha and Rida 2020; Akinyetun 2023), communities are marginalised and excluded from political participation, and the presence of the state is weak, manifested in the absence of social services (Pearson 2018; Tiky and Ndiloseh 2025). These strains help to illustrate why violence easily became systemic and why vulnerable groups such as children and women are susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups.

Methodology

This study focuses on the LCB, which spreads across four countries, Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad, in which violent extremist groups are highly active. It utilises an exploratory descriptive qualitative case study (Hunter David, et al. 2019) design to analyse and synthesise fifteen research monographs on the phenomena under study, as well as general comments on child rights instruments, official reports from international governmental and non-governmental organisations, and descriptive accounts of journalists. A thorough examination of existing literature on climate and environmental vulnerability, violent extremism by Boko Haram and the girl-child at its intersection was accomplished by finding and compiling primary research on climate vulnerability, the spread of violence and its effects on children, particularly the girl-child in the LCB. The study methodically selects literature that establishes links between climate stress, BH recruitments and gendered harm done to children and young girls. The review produces evidence of the weaponisation of young girls by violent extremists, notably Boko Haram, which itself came into being as a result of extreme poverty and hardship caused by the effects of climate and environmental vulnerabilities.

The selection of peer-reviewed articles that are used in this study was systematic. Four key criteria guided the initial selection of records. The first criterion addressed the topical relevance of the record to our study. Each of the records had to address at least one of the following three themes: (a) the situation of children in war and armed conflict; (b) environmental vulnerability; or (c) BH in the LCB. The second criterion was related to a selected temporal scope. Priority was given to studies conducted from 2009, the year in which violent Islamist attacks in the area under study were first recorded. The third criterion was based on keyword identification. For a publication to be retained, it had to include at least one of the core keywords, which I identified as environmental vulnerability, BH girl-child suicide bombers, childhood/children, or Lake Chad Basin. Synonyms and related terms, identified using an electronic thesaurus, were also applied to ensure comprehensive coverage. The last criterion was the contextual relevance. Only studies directly related to the climate-violence relationship or its social implications were retained.

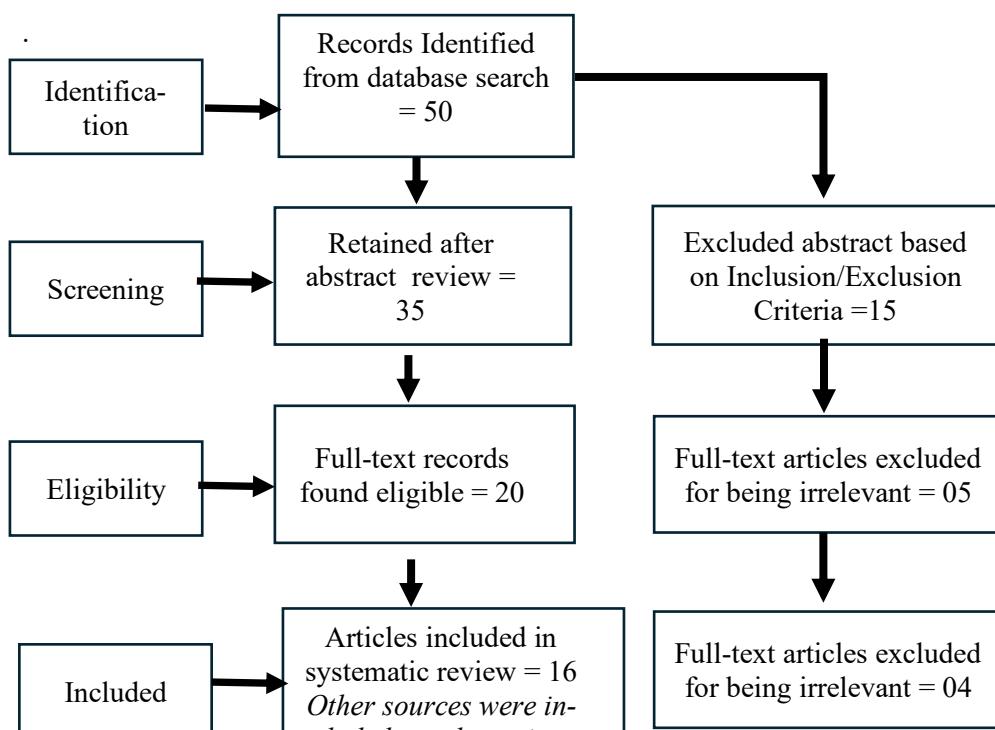


Figure 2: Method of selection of sources and records for the study

Figure 2 above illustrates the selection process. From an initial pool of 50 studies, each record was screened for relevance and quality. Fifteen were excluded at the first stage for addressing superficially related topics without a substantive analytical connection to the research focus. Following an abstract review, another 15 studies were removed for not explicitly linking children's concerns to war or violent extremism.

During the full-text review stage, four additional articles were excluded for insufficient empirical grounding or methodological weakness. The remaining sixteen publications were retained after a cross-screening process, during which direct references and full-text analyses confirmed that all four inclusion criteria were satisfied. These final sources were further appraised based on the “weight of evidence” principle, assessing the robustness, credibility, and contextual relevance of findings to enhance the validity and reliability of this study’s conclusions. However, the scope of this study extends beyond peer-reviewed publications. A substantial body of grey literature was also consulted to provide background, verify claims, and complement perspectives. This category included international and African regional legal instruments on child rights, general comments issued by treaty bodies, as well as policy briefs, blogs, and academic theses addressing the intersection of climate change, conflict, and child protection. The integration of these was essential for capturing contemporary debates, legal interpretations, and field-based insights that are often absent from conventional academic literature.

Climate Change as a Driver of Violence Against Children

It is argued that climate variation and the shrinking of the lake were the root causes of human suffering before the escalation of violence perpetrated by extremist groups in the Lake Chad region. It is also argued that this human suffering is creating despair and conditions that facilitate the abductions, kidnapping and weaponisation of young girls as suicide bombers in violent incursions.

A. Climate Stress and the Escalation of Extreme Violence

Before the escalation of violent Islamist activities in the Lake Chad region, the basin was already experiencing significant variations in its climate pattern that alternated between extensively humid periods and severe arid ones, creating fluctuations that severely impacted the environment, social and economic activities of the riparian communities (Skah and Rida 2020). According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC, 2024), recurrent droughts in the LCB prevented communities from growing crops, while flash floods restricted access to farmlands, agricultural inputs and local markets. These pressures, alongside the continual decrease of the volume of Lake Chad, became major drivers of the protracted food security crisis felt across Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. As Bakaki Zorzeta and Roos Haer (2023) observe, competition over increasingly limited arable land and water resources heightened tensions within and between families and communities struggling to survive.

Within this context, Kräthli and Toulmin (2020, as cited in Kazeem 2024) described the LCB as a “cradle of economic underdevelopment”, marked by environmental degradation, inter-community conflicts, unchecked migration, conditions which they trace back to the shrinking lake and the drastic effects of climate change, over-exploitation of natural resources and pollution. However, emerging scholarship challenges purely environmental explanations of the registered under development in the region. Soumahoro et al. (2023) point to political and institutional initiatives

adopted at national, regional and international levels, arguing that violence and insecurity stem from failures to manage scarce resources. Tiky and Ndiloseh (2025) similarly highlight deficits in food and water governance and weak conflict-resolution mechanisms.

According to Skah and Rida (2020), the LCB development indicators on health, education, infrastructure and basic public services lag far behind national averages in each of the four basin countries, and the need to adapt to climate change has undermined traditional natural resource management techniques and the resilience of transhumanism. The loss of traditional livelihoods stretches the coping capacities of communities and increases the propensity to explore alternatives, including extreme violence. According to Kazeem (2024), as people move in search of better living conditions, pressure increases on resources in receiving communities, exacerbating ethnic and community tensions. To him, the weak governance structures in the LCB to manage the impact of climate change led to the breakdown in law and order, making it easy for Islamist groups such as BH to exploit the vulnerabilities caused by climate change.

B. Gender Biases in the Basin

The social construct in the LCB has long been shaped by deeply rooted gender and age roles. As demonstrated by Chikuruwo Rufaro Emily (2023), before the manifestation of climate change, women and young girls were central to family and community life, sustaining practices in agriculture, fishing and domestic responsibilities. Women were custodians of tangible assets such as crops and livestock, and intangible assets such as indigenous wisdom and transmitted skills in pottery, textiles, ornaments, and even healing to young girls. Girls, in turn, took on much of the domestic burden, including fetching water, cooking, taking care of their younger siblings and supporting mothers to safeguard family well-being. While the men were responsible for planting crops and catching fish, it fell on women to process, preserve and sell them. Although the role of women and girls was highly critical, several studies reveal that the women in the LCB faced entrenched patriarchal norms that restricted their autonomy and access to opportunities (Pearson 2018; Chikuruwo 2023; Keren 2024). Families considered the education of the girl-child to be a poor investment, forcing them into early marriages. Access to land ownership, formal credit systems or market networks was restricted to men, and the disparity between the roles of females and the systemic challenges they faced set the stage for the complexities that they would face in the wake of climate change (Soumahoro et al. 2023).

As highlighted by Chikuruwo (2023), a deeply rooted patriarchy that marginalised women and girls was enhanced when the LCB began undergoing an environmental shift in the early 1960s because of the shrinking lake and climate change. As the climate became increasingly hostile to livelihoods, women and girls were expected to absorb the shock and find solutions to the shifting dynamics. The ripple effect of the environmental change in the basin transcended the immediate economic scope into the inner core of societal armature. Analysis by Frimpong (2020), as cited in Chikuruwo (2023), reveals that with diminished resources, the societal scaffolding

built over generations would itself be fractured by competition over resources, suspicions and strategising for control. This destabilisation aligns with the Objectification and the Strain Theories in providing an explanation of how the deeply rooted marginalisation of women and girls, exacerbated by the shrinking Lake Chad and climate change, that in turn produced psycho-social strain that contributed to the rising violence and recruitment of children into extremist groups (Skah & Rida 2020; Chikuruwo 2023; Keren 2024; Tiky and Ndiloseh 2025).

C. Boko Haram and Violence Against the Girl-Child

According to Kazeem Olayinka Sodik (2024), what began as a vindication for economic empowerment and political inclusion in the Muslim-dominated, north-eastern parts of Nigeria soon became a violent extremist enterprise when BH announced in 2009 that it was changing tactics from pacific resistance to violence. The name Boko Haram, which roughly translates as “Western education is bad”, was given to the group by the residents of the city of Maiduguri, Nigeria, because the group forbade children from acquiring any kind of formal education or participating in social activities associated with what they termed western ideology including sports, recreation, dressing, seeking medical care, and free movement (Kokki 2020). Soon afterwards, they started nursing political ambitions to create an Islamic State in Nigeria, necessitating the radicalisation and recruitment of children for military attacks on state forces and civilian populations around 2009 (Bolanle 2023).

BH has adopted two main tactics to terrorise communities, undermine state authority and enforce compliance. These include suicide bombings using improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and deliberate starvation (Pieri Zacharias et al. 2023; Papale et al. 2025). Perhaps, the systematic use of young girls as suicide bombers in its operational tactics is the most brutal. Although suicide bombings are not new in guerrilla warfare, the BH group has employed female and girl-child suicide attacks more frequently than any other terrorist organisation in the world (Pearson 2018; Pwa Abeng Amah 2020; Pieri et al. 2023). The scale and breadth of violence inflicted on girls gained international attention in April 2014, with the abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok, Nigeria, an event that sparked a global campaign *#BringBackOurGirls* (Pieri et al. 2023; BBC, 2017). Subsequent atrocities have received far less international attention. Yet, as Amnesty International (2025) has highlighted, at least 15 mass abductions of girls have occurred since Chibok, highlighting an unaddressed crisis in which an entire generation of children risk missing out on their childhood development across the LCB. This severe vulnerability is attributed to weak state accountability of the LCB, poor adherence with national and international human rights obligations and insufficient regional collaboration to address the structural drivers of violent extremism and its effects on children.

Keren (2025) argues that the choice of young girls as suicide bombers is strategically made by exploiting cultural stereotypes that objectify women, to provoke widespread fear and capture global media attention. A broader study by Kazeem (2024) reveals that children living amidst such violence as the one in the LCB grow up with chronic trauma and heightened mental health risks, with limited access to social support systems.

Policy Response to the Climate – Security Nexus in the Basin

At the international policy level, although reservations persist regarding the integration of climate-related security risks into formal policy language, it is important to note that UN General Assembly Resolution 63/281 (2009) acknowledged the potential security implications of climate change (Maha and Rida 2020). In 2017, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution addressing the ongoing armed conflict on promoting strategic action to counter terrorism and protect civilians, notably women and children in the LCB. Although it did not explicitly link climate change to the root causes of insecurity in the region, it nevertheless recognised the importance of national strategies developed by the basin states to address underlying drivers of conflict, including climate change, youth disillusionment, and the shrinking of Lake Chad. Against this backdrop, Mathiesen and Sauer (2019, cited in Maha and Rida 2020) stress the need for the UN to establish an early-warning mechanism to identify regions, such as the LCB, where climate change is likely to exacerbate or trigger conflict. In Africa, states are increasingly recognising the role of climate change as a root cause of insecurity across the continent. In 2014, the African Union (AU) Climate Change Strategy Paper highlighted the growing pressure that climate variability, compounded by overpopulation, had on natural resources and the implications for both domestic and cross-border security. Since then, discourse on climate security has gained momentum among states, culminating in the AU Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022-2032), which explicitly identifies climate change as a primary threat to community and regional security across Africa. In the Lake Chad region, the Lake Chad Basin Commission is the body in charge of co-developing and implementing policies on issues common to the sub-region.

Regional policies to mitigate the climate-security crisis in the LCB had largely been handled by the African Union under the auspices of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). The commission, created in 1964 by the four riparian countries, was initially mandated to manage the transboundary water resources in the basin, preserve the ecosystem, examine complaints, manage disputes, promote regional co-operation and safeguard peace and security in the LCB (Skah and Rida 2020). Today, the commission handles complex environmental and security challenges plaguing the basin. It is for this reason that the LCBC, the AU and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDE) unveiled the Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Plan (2025-2030) that carries recommended steps for states of the LCB to nurture their transformational capacity and mitigate the contributing factors of underdevelopment in the basin identified to be climate change and violence (Arushi Singh, 2022).

The stabilisation strategy, whose implementation is monitored by a group of administrative leaders from the four countries within a framework of the Forum of Governors of the LCB, earmarks education and skills acquisitions, socio-economic recovery, environmental sustainability, empowerment and inclusion as durable pathways to social transformation (LCBC, 2021, as cited in Arushi 2022). However, Tiky

and Ndiloseh (2025) note that transboundary water disputes, sustained violence owing to climate-induced social and economic disruptions, have contributed to the difficulties faced by member states of the LCBC in implementing joint decisions. The authors also highlight that the LCBC is working in a geographical context marked by decades of varying armed violence, political instability, and military coups and that the potential for finding a durable solution lies in the shift from a military-based solution towards solutions that would provide opportunities for climate resilience that in turn would support and value efforts of marginalised communities and groups. Abu Safiya Wada and Adam Okene Ahmed (2021), however, note that the LCBC has been unable to achieve the objectives it set for itself due to a lack of political will among member states, insufficient financial commitment from partners, cultural and linguistic barriers and an organisational structure that does not meet the demands of the complex reality in the region. The authors further recommend that the LCBC member states should reflect with the aim of reviewing the objectives of the commission and of modernising its operational strategy to include local participation in governance.

A. Monitoring and Reporting Children's Rights under the Climate-Conflict Nexus

The General Comment No. 26 on Children's Rights and the Environment, with a Special Focus on Climate Change, adopted by the Committee of the UNCRC, provides a comprehensive articulation of how climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation affect children. The comment underscores the intrinsic link between states as duty bearers and children as right holders, highlighting the critical need for states to adopt a holistic understanding of their obligations to address environmental challenges that undermine the well-being of children. GC26 identifies several key rights enshrined in the UNCRC that are most affected by climate change and environmental degradation (GC26, 2023).

Maria Antonia Tigre and Asteropi Iliopoulos (2023) underline major advancements brought about by GC26 in recognising climate change as a critical issue affecting both current and future generations. By incorporating the testimonies of child victims and young activists during its drafting, the comment notably broadens the scope of child participation to include climate change. The committee described the voices of children who are participating in climate change discussions as “a powerful force for environmental protection,” acknowledging that intergenerational inequality is now an inescapable aspect of climate justice. Donger (2022, as cited in Marie Antonia and Asteropi 2023) further emphasises that intergenerational equity and environmental protection have become the driving principles behind a surge in child- and youth-led litigation against governments and other duty bearers, with more than forty such cases currently active worldwide.

GC26 offers detailed guidance on the measures that states such as Cameroon, Nigeria, Chad, and Niger must adopt to ensure the realisation of the rights of children amid environmental threats. However, the comment was developed under the context of peacetime. With increasing evidence of climate change as a principal cause of violent conflicts (Skah and Rida 2020; Arushi 2022; Aminata 2025), there is a

critical need for tailored guidance on how states, such as the LCB members should develop policies, legislatures and practices that protect vulnerable groups and particularly children from the complex realities of climate insecurity and violence. Most recent concluding observations from the Committee of the UN CRC to the four member states of the LCB attest to their critical need, as the rights of children under climate threats are yet to be considered in the committee's final observations.

B. The UNCRC Committee's Concluding Observations on the Four Basin States

Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria are all state parties to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and participate in the periodic reviewing process mandated by the treaty body's committee, although with varying commitments (Abu and Adam, 2021; UN Treaty Bodies Database, n.d.). The committee's most recent concluding observation on Cameroon was in 2017 (CRC/CMR/CO/3-5), whereas Chad's last was in 2009 (CRC/C/TCD/CO/2), and ever since, the country has consistently failed to report on children in the country. Niger's combined third and fourth periodic review was in 2018 (CRC/C/NER/CO/3-5), while Nigeria's most recent dates back to 2005 (CRC/C/15/ADD257).

In their most recent reviews, all four countries have made progress in legal and policy reforms on matters related to possible violations of children's rights within the context of climate-security. Cameroon amended its penal code to criminalise torture, sexual harassment and practices that impact childhood development. Chad adopted laws that banned early marriages, female genital mutilation and sexual exploitation. Niger adopted a ten-year education plan, and Nigeria adopted a Child Rights Act that created child parliaments in states. These different measures taken by the states would protect children from violent organisations, foster climate education in schools and enhance child participation.

Despite the registered progress, deep concerns were noted in the persistent recruitment of children by NSAG in all four countries, with limited psychosocial support for returnee child captives, and the prolonged detention of children suspected of collaborating with violent extremist groups. Across all states, patriarchy was deeply rooted, limiting access to education and land ownership for girls and women. Nigeria and Cameroon were identified as extremely high-risk states for the recruitment of young girls in suicide bombings, sexual exploitation and early marriages.

Although all literature on the LCB mentions extreme climate stress, the committee's concluding observations barely articulate child-specific climate impacts. The four country reports mentioned food shortages, climate-induced displacements, droughts, and desertification. Nigeria's report is silent on the linkage between desertification, resource depletion and conflict, even though emerging literature is beginning to establish causality between climate and Boko Haram violence (Skah and Rida, 2020; Bakaki and Roos, 2023; Aminata, 2025). In all, the reports do not refer to the situation of children under climate change and environmental stress, revealing a significant gap in child-rights monitoring within the climate-security nexus in the LCB.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to researchers on children's rights in the LCB, to the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the African Union and member states of the LCB.

A. To Researchers on Children in the Lake Chad Basin

A significant research gap persists on the effects of climate change on children in the LCB. Most studies identified as relevant to children's rights are more preoccupied with the impacts of extreme violence perpetrated by NSAGs on children rather than how climate change or the climate-security nexus impacts children in the basin. Skah and Rida (2020), for instance, highlight the Climate Fragility Risk Assessment of 2014, the humanitarian summit in Oslo on the Lake Chad region in 2017 and a subsequent UN Security Council Resolution 2349 as important milestones that recognised climate change and its direct link with peace and security in the region. Yet, their analysis remains focused on broader human rights violations that occur in the region without specific attention to vulnerabilities that children face in the region. Similarly, Bolane (2023) acknowledges the connection between climate-induced security and human suffering but proceeds to analyse only the effects of violent extremism on children while overlooking climate change, which he acknowledges is a root cause of violence in the LBC. This imbalance underscores the critical gap in research on the lived experiences of children living under climate stress in the basin area. This study recommends deeper research on children, especially the girl-child in the LCB.

B. To The African Union and the Lake Chad Basin Commission

The AU Climate Change and Resilience Development Strategy (2022-2032) and other regional strategy frameworks on climate change clearly need to recognise environmental degradation and climate change as drivers of violence against children and young people. There is a critical need for the Lake Chad Basin Commission to integrate child rights frameworks and child-centred approaches during the implementation stages of its Stabilisation, Recovery, and Resilience Strategy (2025-2030). This can be achieved by seeking collaboration with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) with siege in Maseru, Lesotho, child-rights practitioners, and other child-rights stakeholders.

C. To the Member States of the Lake Chad Basin

All four states of the basin identified to be Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria are encouraged to ratify the UNCRC Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure (Optional Protocol III), having already ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its first two Optional Protocols which are the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (Optional Protocol

I), and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (Optional Protocol II). Ratifying the third Optional Protocol would constitute a significant step forward, granting children the right to hold their states accountable for violations of their rights. Beyond legal commitments, emphasis should also be placed on social services for children and young girls such as rebuilding schools destroyed by conflict, integrating climate change and insecurity into educational curricula, and the construction of health care facilities for children. Climate change and insecurity disproportionately affect children, with young girls bearing the heaviest burden. Therefore, the four countries should develop comprehensive policies and practical tools to prevent the recruitment of children into armed groups, strengthen accountability mechanisms for such violations, and implement gender-sensitive Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) programmes to support the rehabilitation and re-education of children with wartime experiences.

In the same vein, these states must empower children by providing them with information that would help them understand the phenomena of climate change and insecurity, as well as provide spaces for children to express their views through child participation.

Conclusion

Although scepticism persists in academic literature at to the direct link between climate change and armed conflicts, evidence from numerous studies demonstrate that climate change depletes natural resources and create scarcity that exacerbate conflicts and violence. The study uses an exploratory descriptive qualitative approach to analyse and synthesise peer-reviewed articles with the support of authoritative grey literature to provide evidence how the climate-security nexus is exacerbating vulnerabilities among children in the CB. Drawing from the Strain Theory and the Objectification Theory, the study fills an in-depth understanding of climate stress and violent behaviour and how violence in highly patriarchal communities enhances gender-based violence in multiple forms. Findings from the study confirm that there is a close link between climate change and extreme violence in the LCB and that its effects disproportionately exacerbates vulnerabilities among children. Young girls bear the greater brunt of climate change given their roles within families and communities in the study area, while the patriarchal structures of these communities are exploited by extremist groups such as Boko Haram to weaponise girls as suicide bombers. The study underscores the critical need for the regional bodies and member states of the LCB to integrate the (girl) child-centred approaches to policy development and implementation and for the UNCRC to consider the monitoring and reporting of children's rights in areas where there is evidence of a climate-security crisis interplay.

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