

RED GOLD AND FISHING IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN

Restoring destroyed livelihoods and protecting people in Niger's Diffa region

As part of its emergency response in Diffa, Oxfam in Niger undertook a modified EMMA (Emergency Market Mapping Analysis) in November 2016.¹ The broad aim was to understand the effect of the Boko Haram conflict and the military operations to counter them on the critical livelihood activities of conflict-affected people. The market mapping included an analysis of protection risks. This allowed an analysis of how the destruction of markets and livelihoods in the crisis and has left men, women, girls and boys facing new or increased protection threats. The report contains key recommendations for the government, the UN, donors and humanitarian agencies on programme options for supporting markets and livelihoods and protecting conflict-affected people in Diffa.

THE PROBLEM

Eight years of violent conflict involving a group popularly known as Boko Haram and the military operations to counter them have led to a devastating humanitarian and displacement crisis. 17 million people in the Lake Chad Basin countries of Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon are affected by the conflict originating in Nigeria, which has spilled over into the three neighbouring countries. More than 2.6 million people have been displaced by the conflict.



Map Sources: ESRI, UNCS.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Map created in Nov 2011.

Source: OCHA

In Niger’s easternmost region, Diffa, which borders north-east Nigeria, Boko Haram attacks which began in February 2015 have plunged the area into an unprecedented security and humanitarian crisis. 340,000 people² are affected by the extreme violence carried out by Boko Haram, as well by the military operations to counter them. People have been forced to flee their homes, productive farmland, rivers and Lake Chad. The majority of these displaced people are now located along a major road – known as the N1– linking Diffa to the small town of Bosso, in spontaneous settlements and in villages, hosted by communities who are themselves poor and have very little.

Niger is one of the world’s poorest countries and Diffa the most deprived of its regions. The arrival of large numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs), Nigeriens who have returned (Niger nationals who had migrated to Nigeria but returned to Niger) as a result of the conflict, and refugees in more secure areas around the main road, is causing a huge strain on already scarce resources. Both displaced people and vulnerable host communities lack access to basic services, and are in need of food, water, shelter and humanitarian aid. Although humanitarian agencies in the Diffa area have scaled up their response, the coverage of humanitarian aid remains patchy and there are still gaps in food distribution, water, shelter and other forms of assistance.

The Government of Niger declared a state of emergency on 11 February 2015 for the entire Diffa region in what it stated was a response to counter Boko Haram. This and its subsequent renewal in November 2016 have led to an increase in the military presence of the Niger Armed Forces and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF).³ The emergency measures involved the government relocating people in areas along the border with Nigeria as part of military operations and implementing a range of measures which restricted livelihoods activities, including catching or selling fish, red pepper production, and purchasing fuel and fertilizer vital for agricultural production. The measures also imposed restrictions on people's freedom of movement.⁴ Vast areas are now militarized and declared 'no-go' zones for civilians. Many market centres to the east of Diffa have been closed, and the use of vehicles with two wheels such as motorbikes is prohibited.

The government has stated that these restrictions are meant to prevent Boko Haram from accessing food, money and supplies. But with borders closed and military operations in these areas continuing, cross-border trade has also been severely affected. The government measures are having a drastic impact by destroying people's livelihoods, strangulating and decreasing economic activities, and limiting people's access to food and markets. This is further exacerbating the humanitarian situation and compounding hunger and malnutrition, since people in the Diffa region are heavily reliant on fishing and cash crop production (such as red peppers) as key sources of income. According to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), the effects of the conflict on local markets and livelihoods may prevent poor households in pastoral zones in Diffa from meeting their food needs, and could lead to Stressed (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification – IPC – Phase 2)⁵ or Crisis (IPC Phase 3) acute food insecurity without the continuation of humanitarian assistance.⁶

Fishing and red pepper (also known as 'red gold' because of its high value) production have been drastically affected by restrictions linked to the state of emergency, even while insecurity and fear of Boko Haram attacks represent a major source of threats for the affected population. Specific measures implemented as part of this declaration have had damaging and far-reaching effects on both the smoked fish and dried red pepper markets and the people who rely on them for income, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable households.

Before the Boko Haram crisis, the combined fish and red pepper trades contributed 28 billion CFA Francs (\$48m)⁷ to the Nigerian economy, with the vast majority of this coming from exports to Nigeria. Over 300,000 people relied on red pepper production and fishing to make a living.⁸ Many people have not been able to continue their livelihoods, while others – despite the restrictions put in place by the emergency measures – continue to engage in the fishing and red pepper markets at great risk. The state of emergency has pushed people towards adopting new, riskier coping strategies. In the longer term, these measures may also be counterproductive as previous research has shown people, in particular youth, may be incentivized to join Boko

Haram for financial reasons and a lack of opportunities.⁹

Key facts and figures

- Before the Boko Haram crisis, the fishing and red pepper trades combined contributed 28 billion CFA Francs (\$48m) to the Nigerian economy prior to the onset of the Boko Haram conflict.
- 22.612 tonnes of fish were produced in 2014, worth 20 billion CFA Francs (\$34.5m) and fish exports contributed to 70 percent of the customs money in Diffa region around this time.
- The majority of fishermen have completely stopped all fishing activities. The fishermen interviewed used to get an average of 89 percent of their total income from fishing.
- 20 percent of the fishing households interviewed for Oxfam reported resorting to marrying their daughters earlier than they wanted to reduce pressure on resources.
- 96 percent of interviewees who mentioned red pepper production as a source of income before the crisis have now stopped this activity completely. Pepper producers report up to an 81 percent drop in income.
- From June 2015, the authorities have seized fish freight, burned cargo and vehicles, and arrested illegal transporters. In April 2016, the regional authorities destroyed 2.7 tonnes of smoked fish.

THE IMPACT OF EMERGENCY MEASURES ON THE FISHING AND RED PEPPER MARKETS

Since February 2015, the smoked fish market has been significantly affected in the Diffa region by the Boko Haram conflict and military operations to counter them, largely affecting freedom of movement and access to the fishing areas (primarily the shores of Lake Chad but also some areas of the Koumadougou River) where military presence and controls have become stronger. However, by far the most critical factor impacting the smoked fish market in Diffa has been the ban on fishing and fish selling declared by the government in the entire region of Diffa as part of the emergency measures. The government has justified these restrictions on the basis that a large part of Boko Haram's income was allegedly coming from the fish trade in Nigeria, but it means that the potential for the smoked fish market to provide income to the population in the Diffa region has been almost entirely destroyed. On average, fishermen who were making \$1,515 a year before the crisis are now making \$420 a year, which represents a 72 percent drop in their yearly revenue. This has huge implications, not only for household revenue and the ability to feed and support families, but for the local and regional economy as a whole and the many households who rely directly or indirectly on the smoked fish market. The majority of fishermen (mostly men and youths) have completely stopped all fishing activities.

The crisis has significantly decreased the potential of the dried red pepper market to act as a source of income for producers in the Koumadougou River area. The area has become heavily militarized and many pepper farmers themselves have become displaced within the Diffa region and separated from their productive land. Most of those who can still access their lands have only limited access and do so at high risk, as reported by the farmers Oxfam interviewed. Oxfam's data shows a 96 percent decrease in the number of people who report that they gain income from pepper since the conflict began. Those who continue to work as small pepper farmers can only earn 64 percent of the revenue they used to earn before the onset of the Boko Haram crisis. Small producers and sharecroppers said they were only able to access approximately one-fifth of the land they previously either owned or worked on in some areas. Under the current law, small and large pepper producers are required to have authorization from the Governor of Diffa to purchase agricultural inputs or to receive a quota of these from the government, particularly fertilizer and fuel.

CIVILIANS UNDER THREAT FROM BOKO HARAM AND EMERGENCY MEASURES

The state of emergency in the region, including the restrictions and limitations on certain activities, are affecting people's ability to generate income and thus household purchasing power and financial access. Households are relying on coping strategies which increase women's and young girls' exposure to abuse, extortion and violence, including sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), and men and boys to violence and extortion from Boko Haram and criminals, as well as arrest and detention by the military.

Fishermen still involved in fishing have all reported that they are now exposed to major new protection risks while practising this activity. Many people have been victims of Boko Haram attacks on their villages and have been exposed to indiscriminate violence. The lack of assistance and livelihood opportunities is forcing some poor fishing households to continue fishing at high risk to themselves. All the fishermen we spoke to feared getting caught by the military on their way to the fishing zones, as they could be arrested and detained on terrorism charges for accessing militarized zones for illegal livelihood activities. However, their primary fear is being killed by the military, who could confuse them with Boko Haram. Under the fishing ban, to avoid the military, fishermen now mostly fish at night and avoid military camps. This increases their risk of encountering Boko Haram. Other households are engaging in coping strategies which expose them to further protection risks, for example wood cutting, straw collection, sex in exchange for money or food and early marriage.

20 percent of the fishing households interviewed by Oxfam reported resorting to marrying their daughters earlier than they wanted in order to reduce pressure on resources. Firewood and straw collection are

increasing tensions between displaced populations and host communities who want to protect their environment against over-exploitation. To avoid being exposed to violence and conflict with local communities, as well as controls and potential arrest, displaced persons tend to go further into unpopulated zones, exposing themselves to further risks of harassment, violence – including gender-based violence (GBV) – and extortion by Boko Haram, criminals and the military.

Red pepper farmers fear Boko Haram attacks, looting and extortion in fields, on the road and in their villages, especially at night. Due to the heavy military presence, some farmers (mostly women) no longer feel safe accessing their productive land. People who do not own an identity card come under close scrutiny, and searches by security forces (which constitute a particular issue for women) are common, as is levying ‘taxes’ that people must pay to continue their journey. In addition, fertilizer is now tightly controlled (via permits). Some are crossing the river to Nigeria to buy fertilizer and fuel, or taking part in illegal trade. Both can potentially lead to arrest and detention. Some women are making money as daily field labourers in communities they are not familiar with, thus increasing the risk of sexual harassment. 15 percent of pepper farming households interviewed by Oxfam reported marrying their daughters earlier than planned, to reduce the pressure on the family resources.

CONCLUSION

The expansion and intensification of the Boko Haram conflict and the military operations to counter them have had a devastating impact on the Lake Chad Basin and the population in Niger’s Diffa region in recent years. Even though Boko Haram violence is a key deterrent for many wishing to restart their livelihoods, the overwhelming prohibitive factor for the fish and red pepper markets in the current context is the state of emergency across the Diffa region. This is further exacerbating the humanitarian situation, compounding hunger and malnutrition and making people reliant on humanitarian aid. In addition to this, the limitations and restrictions decreed under the emergency measures taken by the government are not only hindering people from making a safe living via the smoked fish and dried red pepper markets, they are pushing people into taking great risks and exposing them to protection threats.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Niger

- Re-evaluate measures brought in under the state of emergency which are impacting people’s livelihoods related to fish and pepper production and increasing their exposure to threats, including:
 - In discussion with communities, looking at how people can have

- gradual and safe access to parts of the lake to renew fishing;
- Ending the ban on fishing and selling smoked fish in the markets;
- Reviewing measures which restrict people's freedom of movement and ability to trade (e.g. the curfew and motorbike ban);
- Improving people's access to fuel and fertilizer.
- Prioritize the safety and protection of civilians, their dignity and human rights under national laws, as well as regional frameworks such as the Kampala Convention and the African Union Convention on Refugees, international human rights and humanitarian law and standards;
- Develop effective strategies to identify and minimize protection risks resulting from the state of emergency to protect poor fishing households and pepper producers and other vulnerable actors in the chain, including:
 - Reinforcing training of security forces and civilian government personnel on their obligations and people's rights under human rights and humanitarian law standards, and strengthen accountability mechanisms.

To donor governments and the UN

- Fully fund the humanitarian response plan for 2017 which calls for \$139m to provide life saving assistance to conflict affected populations in Diffa;
- Ensure host communities as well as IDPs are equally prioritized for humanitarian and development assistance. Host communities have generously shared their meagre resources and also need access to food, basic services and livelihoods support;
- Fund and support safe livelihood opportunities for the most affected by this crisis, either through supporting current livelihood strategies or promoting new ones;
- Ensure greater coordination between humanitarian aid, long-term development and the private sector to strengthen linkages and implement humanitarian and early recovery programmes that support the recovery of people's livelihoods, provide them with alternative livelihood options and build their resilience;
- Work with the government and the communities themselves to re-evaluate measures brought in under the emergency state which are stifling and destroying people's livelihoods and income generating activities related to fishing and pepper markets.

NOTES

1 Full report and executive summary: Sissons, C. And Lappartient, C. (2016). *A Modified Emergency Market Mapping Analysis and Protection Analysis: Smoked fish and dried red pepper income market systems Diffa Region, Eastern Niger*. Oxfam. <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/a-modified-emergency-market-mapping-analysis-and-protection-analysis-smoked-fis-620163>

2 This figure includes Nigerian refugees, Nigerien returnees (i.e. Nigeriens who were living in Nigeria who have returned as a result of the conflict), people from the Diffa region who have been internally displaced, and communities who are hosting the displaced.

3 The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) is a combined multinational formation, comprising units, mostly military, from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. It is headquartered in N'Djamena and is mandated to bring an end to the Boko Haram conflict.

4 Two amendments have been issued by Decree dated 04/01/2017:

- **Decree 041:** the permission of motor-powered *tricycles* for the transport of persons and goods within the main towns of the Diffa region.
- **Decree 040 modification/amendment** of curfew hours: from 20.00–05.00: Prohibition of all movements of motorized vehicles and from 21.00–05.00 hours the prohibition of any movement of persons on foot or by any other means of displacement.

5 IPC 3 means that people are struggling to find enough to eat, there are high levels of acute malnutrition and people are forced to sell essential possessions. IPC 2 means that people have trouble meeting their basic food needs.

6 FEWS NET. (2016). Food security outlook update. *A l'exception de Diffa, la sécurité alimentaire et les moyens d'existence sont stables*. <http://www.fews.net/west-africa/niger/food-security-outlook-update/december-2016>

7 Sissons, C. And Lappartient, C. (2016). *A Modified Emergency Market Mapping Analysis and Protection Analysis*.

8 Sissons, C. And Lappartient, C. (2016). *A Modified Emergency Market Mapping Analysis and Protection Analysis*.

9 Mercy Corps, (2016). *Motivations and Empty Promises: Voices of former Boko Haram combatant and Nigeria youth*. <https://www.mercycorps.org.uk/research-resources/motivations-and-empty-promises-voices-former-boko-haram-combatants-and-nigerian>

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

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