



A displaced woman works with her sewing machine in an IDP camp in Damboa, Borno state, Nigeria. Photo: Tom Saater/Oxfam

# SUPPORTING LIVELIHOODS IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN

Ways forward for conflict-affected communities in Nigeria,  
Niger, and Chad

The protracted conflict in the Lake Chad Basin has cut off millions of women and men from their livelihoods, making them entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance to survive. Much emphasis has been given to the stabilization agenda, with a focus on securitization. However, Oxfam's research in late 2017 showed that early recovery and livelihoods development are much needed and should be prioritized to promote resilience among crisis-affected communities, to reduce dependency on humanitarian aid, and ultimately to promote sustainable peace.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

After nine years of conflict in north-east Nigeria, 4.5 million people in the Lake Chad Basin need immediate food support and are dependent on humanitarian assistance for their survival. They remain cut off from their traditional livelihoods in an area where agriculture, fishing, livestock rearing, and regional trade were dynamic prior to the crisis. The number of food-insecure people across the region is expected to increase to 5.8 million by August 2018.<sup>1</sup> The situation will keep deteriorating for the foreseeable future unless there is a concerted effort, driven by the governments of the conflict-affected countries, to lift communities out of a protracted crisis and support them to resume their lives and livelihoods. This cannot wait. A short-term humanitarian response, focused solely on keeping people alive, is not enough.

More than 2.2 million people remain displaced across Niger, Chad, Cameroon and north-east Nigeria as a result of the conflict. At the height of the conflict in 2014–15, non-state armed groups controlled about 20,000 square miles of land within north-east Nigeria alone (20% of Nigeria), where close to 1.8 million people lived.<sup>2</sup> Military strategies to cut the armed groups off from their economic resources and declared 'state of emergencies' have had disastrous impacts on civilians' access to livelihoods. Despite the government regaining control of areas in recent years, almost one million people are still living in out-of-reach areas and many communities remain displaced – or experience onward displacement – with little or no hope of returning to their homes due to threats from non-state armed actors and ongoing military operations in their villages of origin.

In Nigeria, one in five internally displaced persons (IDPs) have stated their intention to integrate locally in the current area of their displacement; and many others, while expressing the desire to leave, have asserted that the security situation is not yet conducive for going home.<sup>3</sup> A significant return movement is not expected among Niger and Chad's displaced communities in the coming year.

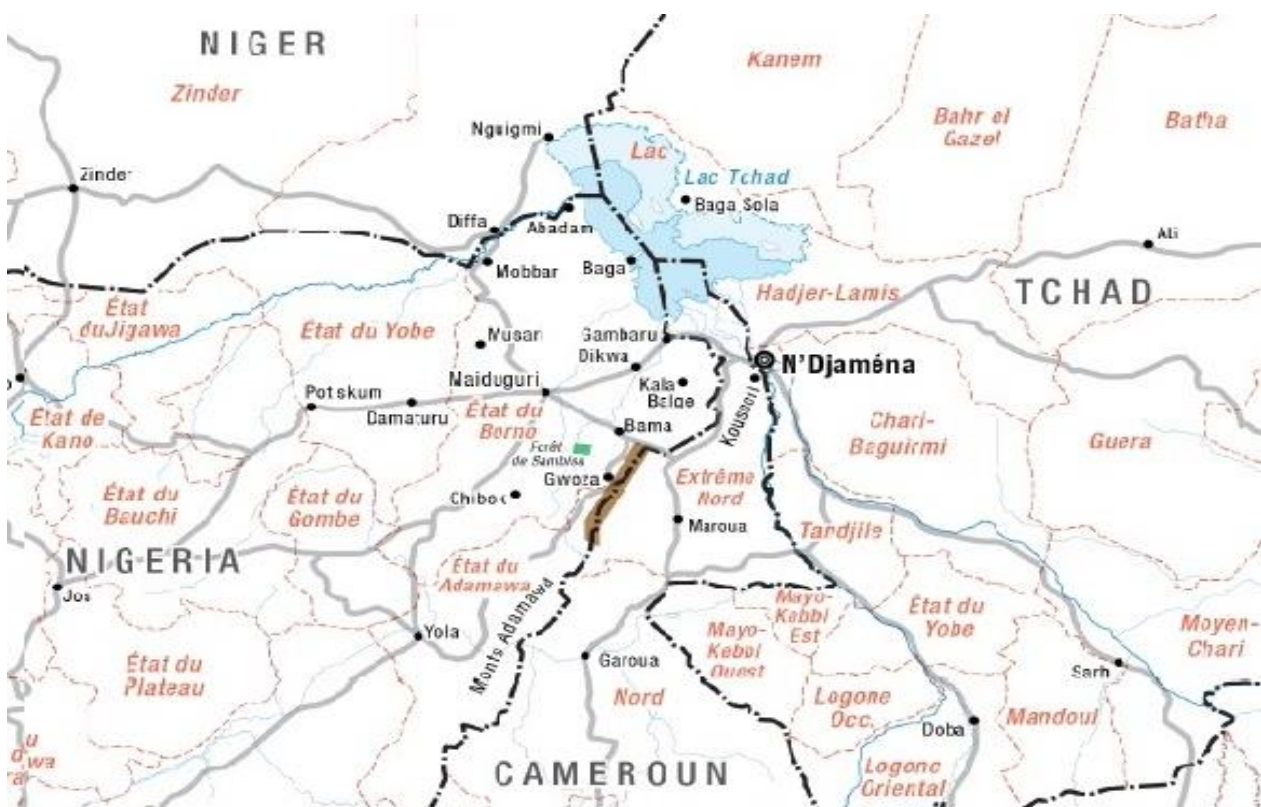
Ongoing insecurity, compounded by the lack of access to livelihoods, continues to expose displaced communities to protection threats such as killing, abduction, and sexual abuse, forcing them to resort to dangerous activities and negative coping mechanisms to survive. For women and girls, some of these negative coping mechanisms include early marriages (a direct consequence of lack of resources) or survival sex. Men and boys are also targeted and faced with abduction and killing as they go for firewood collection or to farm in insecure areas.

The food situation, far from improving, is expected to deteriorate from mid-2018, when climate-related stresses across the Sahel region are likely to compound the situation. According to a humanitarian needs forecast for the region, 62% of the Chadian population in the Lake region is expected to be food-insecure during the 2018 lean season: a 52% increase compared with 2017.<sup>4</sup> In Nigeria, 3.7 million people could become food insecure if appropriate assistance is not delivered (compared with 2.6 million in January 2018). According to the 2018 Nigeria Humanitarian Response Plan,<sup>5</sup> 5.7 million people are in urgent need of early recovery and livelihood assistance in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states. However, the early recovery and livelihood sector was only 7.7% funded in 2017.<sup>6</sup>

While many humanitarian and development actors consider that conditions for early recovery are met in certain locations (the Lake region of Chad, most of Adamawa and Yobe state in Nigeria, the western part of Diffa region in Niger), the relative improvement in the security situation over the past two years has not translated into an improved access to livelihoods in most areas. Thanks to generous funding – 70% of the 2017 humanitarian response plan was funded in Nigeria – and a massive humanitarian scale-up, famine was averted in the north-east of Nigeria. But a similar level of humanitarian assistance will be hard to maintain in 2018, and even if it can, this will not provide a long-term solution to the lack of access to food and livelihoods in this protracted crisis.

The continuing lack of safe livelihoods risks contributing to ongoing cycles of violence, fuelling grievances and further undermining the stretched coping capacities of impoverished communities. Massive investment in livelihoods opportunities is needed now, combining short- and long-term approaches, to prevent a deterioration of the situation. Action must be taken immediately: vulnerable women, men and children cannot wait until they are safe to go home for a more durable solution. A strong political vision is required from the governments of conflict-affected countries, which should take the lead in coordinating humanitarian and development interventions. Moreover, investment in livelihoods should be seen as an opportunity to empower women and youth and to reduce gender inequality, in order to promote long-term peace in the region.

**Figure 1: Map of the Lake Chad Basin**



Source International Crisis Group



## 2 IMPACTS OF THE CONFLICT

Oxfam conducted research to understand how conflict-affected people are coping with not being able to access to their traditional livelihoods, and what initiatives could be explored to support them into safe livelihoods. The research took place from November to December 2017, in Damboa and Gwoza Local Government Areas (Pulka) in Borno State in Nigeria, on Liwa-Daboua axis in the Fouli department of the Lake Region of Chad, and in the Chateau district of Diffa town in Niger.

The methodology used quantitative and qualitative tools (household surveys, 1,214 persons; focus group discussions, 140 persons; and key informants' interviews, 26 persons) and took place in both rural areas (Pulka, Liwa-Daboua axis) and urban areas (Diffa, Damboa). The research did not aim to explore new livelihoods, and additional research and market assessments should be conducted to find out which value chains could be viable and supported.

### THE IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT

The ongoing conflict, including military strategies against armed groups, continues to have disastrous impacts on livelihoods across the region. Most conflict-affected communities lack any means of sustainable livelihoods. As of February 2018, 10.7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and are dependent on aid for survival. Hundreds of thousands of people are living in areas to which humanitarian actors do not have access, such as the islands of Lake Chad, or outside the government-controlled areas in north-east Nigeria.

Insecurity and military operations, as well as states of emergencies, have restricted the freedom of movement of communities and their ability to access their lands. Men and women living outside government-controlled areas and on the islands are often associated with armed groups, which means that civilians are often prevented from accessing their villages – and if they try, they risk being injured or killed. Those few who have returned to their homes, especially in Chad, have often lost most of their productive and financial assets during the conflict and do not have the means to start again. Even in relatively accessible areas, displaced people's limited access to land prevents them from farming and feeding their families.

Millions of people fled their homes at the height of the conflict and are now entering their third year of displacement. Most are living in host communities – except in Borno state, where the number of people in camps is almost equal to the number of people living in host communities. They are among the poorest, living in makeshift shelters and with little or no access to basic services such as food, water, health and education. The coping strategies of host communities are overstretched, and tensions are flaring in some places over the use of resources such as water and land.

Fishing is severely constrained by the loss of productive assets and lack of access to the lake, which was central to many people's livelihoods; most communities living by the water supplemented their diet or diversified their income through fishing. In Diffa region, according to a modified Emergency Market Mapping Analysis (EMMA) done by Oxfam in November 2016, most fishing stopped completely (where previously, an average of 89%

of the total income of fishing families came from this source).<sup>7</sup> For those who continued to fish, production fell by 94%. On-going insecurity, restriction of movement and emergency restrictions on movement have also severely restricted the mobility of pastoralists, who used to travel within and across countries in search of water and pasture.

The closure of markets, the destruction of infrastructure (roads, electrical power stations) and the loss of financial and productive assets have severely reduced production and contributed to an increase in prices of staple commodities; affecting the purchasing power of households and increasing food insecurity. In north-east Nigeria, staple food prices in December 2017 were approximately 60% higher than at the same time the previous year and up to 120% above the five-year average.<sup>8</sup>

Cross-border trade has been severely affected due to insecurity and military measures, such as curfews, limiting the flow of goods and people; new and longer routes, more costly and dangerous, are being used for trade. The booming markets of north-east Nigeria, which used to connect traders from Niger, Chad and Cameroon, have closed or have deteriorated as a result of restrained movements of goods and people. Other markets are functioning outside of states' control.

Increasingly aware of the impact of security restrictions on communities' well-being, the Nigerien authorities lifted the ban on red pepper production in October 2017 and reopened most markets in Diffa region in early February 2018. While this is a positive move for improving and restoring the livelihoods of communities, this effort could be limited by the ongoing insecurity and restrictions on accessing the production areas. More generally, there is a need to monitor the impact of the lifting of the red pepper production ban on community's livelihoods. In Chad, very limited parts of the lake are now available for fishing (mainly from the shore). Apart from these efforts, most of the security restrictions remain in the three countries.

The restricted access to livelihoods has had more impact on women, who already faced limited access to markets in rural areas,<sup>9</sup> and limited participation in trading activities, exacerbated by a limited access to capital and credit to finance their trade.<sup>10</sup> Existing long-term gender disparities in the region, such as limited access to education for girls, limited participation in civic life and little or no representation in traditional (and official) power structures and decision making bodies have been exacerbated by the conflict.

The conflict has also contributed to a shift in gender dynamics in the region, which has had both positive and negative effects on women. While men have often played the traditional role of the provider, they have been particularly targeted by all aspects of the conflict, through killings, abductions or illegal detentions. Without men, women have often become the main (or only) breadwinner in the household. In north-east Nigeria, on average, 30% of households are now headed by women (more than 50% in some locations).<sup>11</sup> However, this shift has also put a heavier burden on women, already in charge of domestic chores and children's care, and often without enough education to conduct business activities. This role shift can also fuel frustration among men, who feel disempowered, and can result in an increase in domestic violence.<sup>12</sup>

### **Box 1: Climate change in the Lake Chad Basin**

More than 2 million people depended on the lake for their livelihoods, and more than 17 million people in the region depended on it for their food security. However, the level of the lake is being affected by climate change, with severe consequences for the well-being and security of the people.

Prior to the conflict, Lake Chad was a dynamic area for fishing, farming and livestock breeding. Seasonal variations of the lake's surface leaves fertile lands which allow flood-recession cropping and provide good pasture for herders.

Over the centuries, the size of the lake has been alternating with large, medium and small phases. However, over decades, the size of the lake has reduced by more than its natural variations; one reason for this being low rainfall. The lake is currently in a 'small' phase.

In addition to below-average rainfall, a high population growth rate is leading to overexploitation of natural resources and environmental degradation.

## **COPING MECHANISMS**

Coping mechanisms are found to be similar among the women and men interviewed by Oxfam across the region. Many are resorting to negative survival mechanisms, mainly involving the reduction of food consumption – reducing the number of meals, limiting portion sizes and/or eating cheaper food. In Nigeria and Chad, after food reduction, health and education are the main expenses to be cut down: people told us that they do not go to health centres for treatment, and parents stop sending their children to school (girls being the first to be taken out of school). In Niger, right after reduction in food consumption, people have been coping through activities which were previously done by outsiders and were looked down on. Wood cutting, selling wood and charcoal, and working as a docker were mentioned as important coping mechanisms.

In Nigeria and Niger, dangerous coping mechanisms, such as accessing insecure areas for farming or firewood collection for income were mentioned by the interviewees. This vulnerability is mainly due to lack of access to livelihoods that forces people to depend on aid in an environment where humanitarian assistance is the major resource to survive. Furthermore, as a result of lack of resources, parents are also resorting to harmful coping mechanisms such as child marriage, so as to reduce the number of family members to feed.

When asked for solutions, both men and women stated petty trade as their preferred economic opportunity, given their current situation in which they have limited access to land for farming or livestock rearing; and to the lake for fishing. As a result, 54.1% of the respondents suggested petty trade as a viable solution to restart their livelihoods and lives, but 67.2% of people stated that the lack of capital and lack of access to credit has prevented them from growing activities such as ground-nut oil extraction and rearing and selling poultry and small ruminants, including goats.

In Nigeria and Niger, restriction of movement was mentioned as a major obstacle to livelihoods opportunities, second only to the lack of capital; however, in Chad, where security conditions are currently better and there are fewer restrictions on movement, over 70% of respondents stated that lack of capital was the major constraint for livelihoods.

In urban areas (Damboa and Diffa), the lack of vocational training was identified as one of the main barriers to accessing livelihoods for both men and women.

But despite ongoing humanitarian support, food needs remain unmet. Of the households interviewed, 71.4% said that they borrow food and 82.3% of them had to borrow money and get into debt in order to buy food. This gap must be addressed as the pre-condition to enable people to start petty trade or to engage in other livelihood activities. As long as people have to search for food to survive, the potential success of early recovery and livelihoods initiatives will be very limited. The results of Oxfam's survey also highlight the need for early recovery strategies to combine long- and short-term approaches.

### 3 INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT LIVELIHOODS

Despite the consensus of all the actors (conflict-affected governments, donors and humanitarian organizations) that the problems of the region are structural and go beyond what humanitarian action can cover, there is a lack of implementation on the ground to address these underlying issues in a sustainable way and to support the conflict-affected population to regain their livelihoods and resume their lives. While the security in some areas is still too volatile to implement early recovery and development interventions, such initiatives are urgently needed in some other areas: for example, the main parts of Adamawa and Yobe states and some places in Borno state, the western part of Diffa region and Lake region in Chad. Development initiatives are falling behind and lack a shared vision and coordination, risking undermining the efficiency and long-term impact of these actions on people's lives.

Chad is going through a serious economic crisis, which is limiting the ability of the state to invest in livelihoods programmes in the Lake region. This is in addition to the broader food security crisis across the country affecting millions of people. In addition, international donors' financial commitment to the crisis is lagging behind (only 33.4% of the required amount for the Lake Chad crisis was funded in 2017).<sup>13</sup> In this context, OCHA is leading the way in moving from humanitarian response to development with the organization of the first humanitarian–development forum in June 2017 to promote coherent and joint planning.

In Niger, coordination mechanisms between humanitarian and development actors are still lacking, despite a sector-wide agreement on the need to adopt a common approach. An OCHA consultant is currently drafting a common framework to implement the humanitarian–development nexus, and find concrete ways of joining humanitarian and development programming. The Prime Minister is leading a High Level Tripartite Committee to align the humanitarian plan of the government and the humanitarian response plan, but it is unclear how development goals will be included in this process – and there seems to be some confusion on how this initiative will feed into the nexus. The governor of Diffa region is positioning himself as a strategic actor to lead the humanitarian and development coordination efforts, but for now, no actions have been taken beyond words, either by the government or by the international community.

The Nigerian government, with the support of multilateral agencies and donors such as the UN, EU and the World Bank, carried out a Recovery and Peacebuilding

Assessment in 2016; and since 2017 the government has been rolling out small-scale and short-term livelihoods projects through the Victim Support Fund (VSF). The North-East Development Commission, whose mandate is to focus on the development of the north, was officially created at the end of 2017. However, the governments' discourse on the stabilization process so far has focused on building physical infrastructure – an important element to revive the economy in the region, but which should be combined with an approach focused on recovery and sustainable development, with investment and support for livelihoods and early recovery to address the critical and immediate needs of communities.

In Nigeria, there are also ongoing efforts by the government, UNHCR, and UNDP to move forward on the durable solutions agenda, to find sustainable solutions for IDPs through integrated programming on protection, early recovery and livelihoods development, and reconciliation. However, these efforts have been at the planning and consultative stages since mid-2017, and given the scale of the displacement crisis in the north-east and neighbouring countries, there is an urgent need for collective action to address the immediate and long-term livelihood needs of displaced communities living in a protracted crisis.

In the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan, the humanitarian community has prioritized support for resilience and early recovery as its third objective, promoting 'joint analysis, planning and programming and a coordinated platform for the delivery of humanitarian and development assistance'.<sup>14</sup> Some development donors are implementing long-term projects in the north-east, such as the World Bank's multi-sectoral recovery project and the European Union's support package for early recovery and reconstruction needs in Borno state.

Despite the announcement of several regional projects in the Lake Chad Basin to support early recovery and livelihoods, actual implementation on these projects on the ground is not effective yet. The RESILAC project, funded by the French Development Agency and the European Union's Trust Fund, as well as Germany's and the UNDP's 'Integrated regional stabilization of the Lake Chad Basin' project have not yet started, despite the urgent needs for development actors to step up in the area.

## 4 WAYS FORWARD

Nigerian, Nigerien and Chadian governments, humanitarian and development donors and actors must and can do better to support livelihoods in the ongoing Lake Chad Basin crisis. There is an immediate need to move beyond the livelihoods programming planning phase to the implementation stage to ensure that the millions of conflict-affected people, especially women and girls, have access to safe livelihoods, and their vulnerability and exposure to protection threats as a result is reduced. Early recovery and livelihoods programming, combining short- and long-term approaches and with long-term funding and commitment, need to be implemented to help communities recover from stress and shocks resulting from the conflict, and to prevent the emergence of future grievances and conflicts in the region.

### **To the conflict-affected governments**

- Develop a political vision for the medium- and long-term development of the affected regions, prioritizing safe access to livelihoods for men, women and youth with the



objective of promoting long-term peace in the region and finding a solution to end the protracted crisis. Enabling people to access their livelihoods will also end the current dependency of displaced communities on humanitarian assistance.

- Re-evaluate the measures brought in under the state of emergency which are constraining people's freedom of movement and access to livelihoods. Acknowledge that states of emergency measures are not adequate for the management of protracted crises. Improve relationships with communities through meaningful engagement that ensures their active participation, and develop a strategy together to improve the security situation and identify ways to support people to have safe access to economic opportunities.
- Provide leadership in the coordination of efforts of both development and humanitarian actors to ensure that assistance is being delivered strategically and without diluting efforts. Fully engage in the identification of early recovery areas and the needs of populations using existing technical services. Use the coordination mechanism for joint planning, resource mobilization, programming and implementation on a regular basis.
- Develop policies and implementation frameworks for providing access to land for IDPs. This should be done in consultation with host communities and displaced people and conducted as part of the durable solutions strategy, in coordination with humanitarian actors.
- To Nigerien authorities, pursue the lifting of restrictions on livelihoods as an encouraging step towards the recovery of livelihoods in Diffa region. Adopt a nuanced approach to the needs of different areas – for example, the western part of the region might be more ready for early recovery activities than the eastern part.
- To Nigerian authorities, domesticate the national action plan on women peace and security via the adoption and implementation of state action plans to ensure that women and girls participate in the early recovery process and have safe and equitable access to livelihood support services.
- To Niger and Chad, adopt a national action plan on women peace and security which includes the economic empowerment of women and which will ensure women's participation in all processes, including early recovery and livelihoods opportunities.

## **To humanitarian and development donors**

- Fully fund the 2018 Humanitarian Responses Plans in the three countries to ensure that the basic needs of people are met. The effective delivery and provision of basic services will enable people to regain their livelihoods and will ensure the success of livelihoods initiatives. In contrast, neglecting people's basic needs will maintain their dependency situation.
- Ensure that funding is based on vulnerability, as both host communities and IDPs continue to be affected by the conflict. The Lake Chad crisis has been taking place in one of the poorest regions in the world, with the lowest ranking in human development, and complex social structures. There is a need for a comprehensive response that recognizes the varying nature of community vulnerabilities and social dynamics and that is flexible and can adapt to the ever-evolving context.
- Combine a short- and long-term approach in livelihoods programming. Direct humanitarian assistance should be conducted simultaneously with long-term livelihoods activities. It will enable people to meet their basic needs while allowing them to conduct business activities.

- Prioritize community-based livelihood interventions based on a participatory market analysis, and by allowing conflict-affected populations to identify and determine their needs. Petty trade, for instance, has been identified as the preferred livelihood activity and as a viable solution, given limited access to previous livelihood opportunities.
- Increase access to credit, especially targeting women, by supporting the rehabilitation of *adashe* and other community-based saving groups such as the creation and promotion of Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLA) to help displaced communities start small businesses. Targeting women would enable them to get better access to markets and trade. Ensure that comprehensive risk assessments are conducted around targeting women for livelihoods, to mitigate any potential negative impacts.
- Ensure that current livelihood programmes are not reinforcing gender stereotypes by developing gender-sensitive livelihood programmes which are based on sound market and context analysis, and which aim to empower women in a sustainable way. The support for livelihoods could be a good opportunity to reduce gender inequality in the region and should be considered and designed as such.
- Promote multi-year commitments to improve the predictability of funding and enable long-term planning by humanitarian and development actors. Donors and humanitarian agencies should also ensure that flexible funding that includes crisis-modifiers is available to provide much needed life-saving assistance, and in parallel should address medium- to long-term humanitarian and development needs to reduce vulnerability and build community resilience. This could only happen through joint humanitarian–development approaches and collaborative implementation, monitoring and progress tracking.
- Explore ‘interim measures’ to support livelihoods, such as investing in market gardening or aquaculture in areas where the security situation and the climate is favourable.
- In parallel to the early recovery and livelihoods programming, invest in peacebuilding and governance programming to ensure success in livelihoods development, and invest in governance to restart basic social services. The crisis in the region is structural, and it is further aggravated by the virtual absence of state actors in some areas.
- In Nigeria, both humanitarian and development donors should provide funding for the early recovery sector for it to be reinforced and for the UN to fully implement its mandate for early recovery programming
- In Niger, support the recent reopening of markets and red pepper production in Diffa region through reactive projects that can adapt to the evolving context.

## **To OCHA and UNDP**

- Define a common framework for collective outcomes to ensure the nexus between development and humanitarian programming and the effective integration of early recovery and livelihoods interventions. Conduct a joint assessment to define strategic and geographic priorities for early recovery activities, based on common criteria, and to drive coordinated investment of both humanitarian and development donors.
- Align all livelihoods programming to national priorities and development plans. The early recovery cluster in Nigeria should ensure coordination for resource mobilization and timely intended results.

- Develop and implement a gender-sensitive approach to livelihoods to address the specific needs of women and men. Women have been facing risks such as abduction or abuse as they engage in activities such as firewood collection. A gender-sensitive approach is crucial in addressing protection risks such as sexual abuse and domestic violence. While promoting women's economic empowerment, it is also imperative to put in place measures to ensure that men are not stigmatized and do not feel excluded.
- In Nigeria, ensure that livelihood interventions are integrated into the durable solutions strategy to avoid duplication of efforts, and develop an action plan for immediate implementation. Make sure that the strategy and action plan clearly reflect the needs of people returning to their places of origin, and those who want to be integrated in areas of displacement or resettled in another location.
- In Niger, revive the early recovery working group and provide it with financial and human resources to be able to play its technical advisory role. Promote the funding and implementation of stand-alone projects on livelihoods.
- Ensure that all humanitarian and development actions are integrated into local development plans at the community and regional levels. The support to these plans will empower local actors and ensure that coordination between humanitarian and development actors is effective on the ground.

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