



Freedom Onuoha

# The State and Water Conflicts in Africa

A Focus on Lake Chad (1960 – 2006)

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## **DEDICATION**

**This work is dedicated to my loving wife, Onuoha, Amarachi Rita.**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

While I take full responsibility for weaknesses or strengths evident in this work, I would nonetheless like to express my profound indebtedness to individuals whose contributions made this work a lot easier. I am very thankful of the Almighty God for his grace and blessings. My parent, Mr. and Mrs. Eze I. N. Onuoha, deserve a special place in my heart, especially for their invaluable financial and moral supports which served as the pillars of my academic pursuit.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AEO	Annual Energy Outlook
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BICC	Bonn International Centre Conversion
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DEPI	(UNEP) Division of Environment Policy Implementation
DEWA	Division of Early Warning and Assessment
DFID	UK Department for International Development
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FBOs	Faith Based Organizations
GIWA	Global International Waters Assessment
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Network
IUCN	Integrated Union for the Conservation of Nature
LCBC	Lake Chad Basin Commission
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
UNESCO	United Nations education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Water is perhaps the most strategic and precious resource on earth, critical to the survival of nations and their people. Indeed, it is not only the central resource upon which all biological life is predicated, but also of paramount significance for the societal metabolism<sup>1</sup>. Unlike oil and most other strategic resources, freshwater has no substitute in most of its uses. It is essential for growing food, manufacturing goods, safeguarding health and sustaining marine life. It is strategic to life, to social development, industrial production and to economic progress. It is needed for drinking and for sanitation; for agriculture and, via fishing, as a source of protein. It is a vehicle for transportation and communication among nations, a means of generating electricity, embellishes the environment and offers an outlet for recreation and tourism. It has been the wellspring of religion and culture<sup>2</sup>.

Water has, so far, not been treated as a scarce and valuable resource but to a great extent as a free gift of nature. Until recently, it seldom comes to mind that water has economic value which actually is overwhelming its social value. Its political and strategic value equally attracts marginal attention from scholars until recently. However a renewable but not infinite resource, freshwater is becoming increasingly scarce and a source of tension and conflicts within and between nations.

According to some observers, water resources have become strategic with supply limited in forms of quality and quantity. Since 1950, the renewable supply per person has

fallen by 58 per cent as world population has swelled from 2.5 billion to 6 billion in 1999. Hence, as the volume of freshwater supply diminishes, the premium placed on water resources suggests that providing for water needs and demands will never be free from politics<sup>3</sup>.

As demand for water hits the limit of finite supply, potential conflicts are brewing between nations that share transboundary freshwater course. Postal and Wolf<sup>4</sup> have observed that more than 50 countries on five continents might soon be spiraling towards disputes unless they move quickly to strike agreements on how to share the rivers that flow across international boundaries.

This unfolding potential for water conflicts have been attributed to several factors namely, the gradual diminishing of freshwater supply as a result of climatic impact; the internationalization of basin (from 224 international basins in 1978 to 263 basins in 2000); and the increasing per capita consumption of water as a result of population surge. This scarcity, some writers argue will translate into growing tension for water resources between cities and farms, between neighbouring states and provinces, and at times between and among nations that share transboundary watercourses. Consequently, national water scarcity could trigger off existing tensions between nations and lead to flare-ups of simmering international conflicts.

As water is becoming scarcer, other natural resources that depend on it are also experiencing decline in quantity and quality. Thus, the potential for water-related conflicts is increasing, particularly around internationally shared rivers and lakes. In the wake of these conflicts, academic interest in water resources as actual or potential sources of conflict has largely concentrated on the Middle East and North Africa. Arguably, these

regions are marked by combustible hydro-politics over such shared water resources as the Jordan, Tigris-Euphrates and Nile Rivers. In terms of such global hydro-politics, Sub-Saharan Africa has essentially remained at the margin of international concern.

Incidentally, of the known 263 international basins in the world, Africa alone accounts for 63 international river basins. In Africa, 60 per cent of the continent is covered by transboundary river basins. Every African country has at least one shared river. There are at least 34 rivers shared by two countries, and 28 shared by three or more countries. Ten of the international river basins (Congo, Limpopo, Niger, Nile Ogouwe, Okavango, Orange, Senegale, Volta, and Zambezi) are shared by four or more African countries. According to Vermass<sup>5</sup>, more than two third of Africa's 60 river basin are shared by more than one country further fuelling potential clashes. It has been predicted that the main conflicts in Africa during the next 25 years could be over the most precious of commodities – water, as countries fight for access to scarce resources<sup>6</sup>. The potential for conflicts resulting from scarce water resources are likely in areas where rivers and lakes are shared by more than one country.

For many reasons, these water conflicts risks are evident in West Africa. First, West African countries are highly water interdependent; with the exception of the Cape Verde Island, each of the West African countries shares at least one of the regions 25 transboundary river basins. The Niger River basin is shared by 11 countries, the Senegal River by 8 countries, the Volta River by 6 countries and the Lake Chad by 4 countries. Second, climatic change and variability have resulted in severe decline in average annual rainfall and discharge in major river systems. Third, many countries have plans of increasing investment in large water infrastructure like dam with the anticipated result of

not only increasing water withdrawals but also radically changing natural allocation patterns between riparian countries<sup>7</sup>.

As available water in rivers and lakes diminish in quantity and degrade in quality, the supply of freshwater and its associated resources have also significantly decreased. The Nile delta and Lake Chad have been identified as the hardest hit in terms of this dramatic shrinkage. Thus, when countries rely on the same source of water to support their environments, sustain livelihoods and generate growth, transboundary water becomes not only a link between their citizens and their environments, but a source of friction in their international relations. For instance, if one state restricts availability or access of another or its nationals to such critical resource, this may lead to increase competition among various users leading to tensions and conflicts among users and between riparian states that share such transboundary watercourses.

In the light of this background, this study attempts to examine the problems of diminishing transboundary water resources and the pervasiveness of conflicts over Lake Chad.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

Until recently, water resources as key elements in intrastate and interstate conflicts have scarcely received scholarly attention. With the diminution of water resources and increasing competition for scarce resources, scholars have begun to pay attention on the flashpoints of conflicts over water and its associated resources around the globe. Case studies exploring international water relations often focus on high-profile regions such as the Middle East and Asia. The role of water and its associated resources in the incidences of conflicts in Sub Saharan Africa has remained on the margin of

scholarly concerns, and where they exist at all, they focus on Southern and Northern Africa. Yet, actual and potentials water-related conflicts abound in West (Central) Africa where rivers and lakes are ghastly disappearing.

Satellite photographs taken by the UNEP<sup>8</sup> shows than more than 600 lakes in Africa have shrunk dramatically over the past decades. These lakes contain more aquatic biodiversity than any other lakes in the world. They are sources of scarce natural resources such as fisheries, water birds, shrimps, freshwater for consumption, and irrigation, and other marine resources that sustain the livelihood of the local inhabitants. Although these lakes hold about 30,000 cubic kilometers of water and yield 1.4 million tones of freshwater fish each year, they are among the most heavily exploited of all the continent's freshwater resources.<sup>9</sup>

In this light, Lake Chad in West Africa is of particular interest. The lake is shared by Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria as the riparian states, which along with the Central African Republic (CAR) make up the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). Its basin extends over 967,000 km<sup>2</sup> and is home to about 37 million people. The size of the lake has continued to diminish over the past 40 years. According to Coe and Foley<sup>10</sup>, the size of the Lake Chad has gone from 25,000 km<sup>2</sup> to less than 1,500 km<sup>2</sup> between 1966 and 1997. It has fluctuated greatly during this period shrinking by up to 80 per cent in 1985, but reaching 1,900 km<sup>2</sup> once more in 2007.

As the lake shrinks and available supply of water resources diminishes, competition for water resources among the various users in the basin has significantly increased, leading to pockets of conflicts and clashes among the various users occasionally degenerating into interstate conflicts. At one point, the conflict is between



nationals of one state and security agents of another. At another point, the conflict is between riparians. In some occasions, the conflict is between and among pastoralists, fishermen, and farmers of different nationalities.

In spite of available academic work done on the role of scarcity of water resources in interstate conflicts in Africa, there is a serious dearth of scholarly investigation into the impact of water shortages on the emergence of social conflict in Lake Chad area. Yet, such conflicts manifest in the area and the potentials for future conflicts over the scarce water resources of the lake are anticipated to worsen in the near future. Against this backdrop, this study interrogates the following questions:

1. Is there any relationship between natural and anthropogenic factors and the diminishing of the water resources of Lake Chad?
2. Is scarcity of water resources a necessary and sufficient factor for inter-state conflicts over Lake Chad; if not what are the critical intervening explanatory variables?
3. What strategies can most effectively and efficiently be used in managing the inter-state conflicts over water resources of Lake Chad?

### **1.3 Objective of Study**

The main objective of the study is to examine the nature and dynamics of conflicts and cooperation over the water resources of the Lake Chad, particularly between riparian states. However, the specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- a. To examine, if any, the relationship between natural and anthropogenic factors and the diminishing of the water resources of Lake Chad?