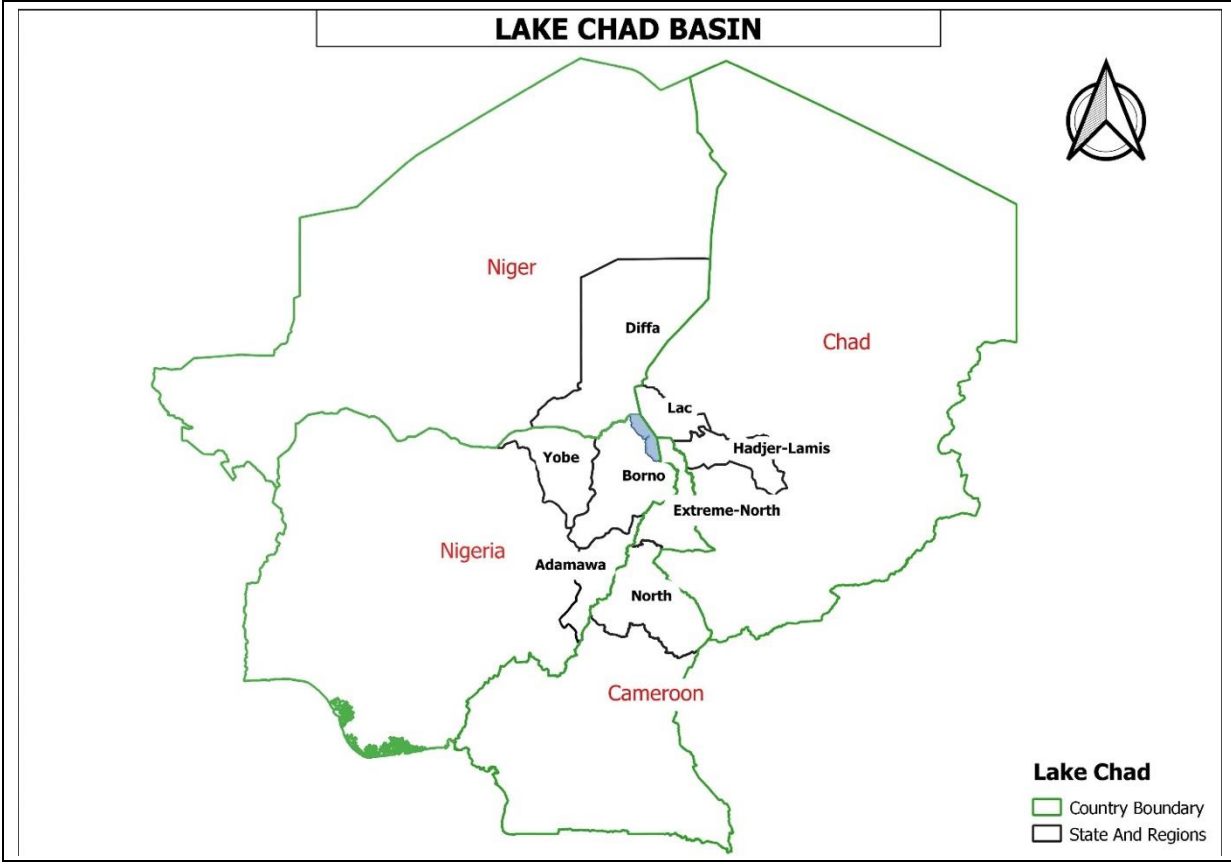


# Lake Chad Governors' Forum on Stabilization, Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development

Second Meeting in Niamey, July 16-18

## Discussion Paper on Cross-Border Trade and the Regional Economy



## 1 Introduction

1. This paper<sup>1</sup> has been prepared to inform discussions at the July 2019 meeting of the Lake Chad Governors' Forum. It deals with the important issue of cross-border trade and the regional economy. It identifies some of the constraints facing producers and traders in the Lake Chad region and provides suggestions for addressing these. It is hoped that consideration of these issues will lead to new policy and programming initiatives that will ultimately strengthen the region's private-sector operators, from micro-entrepreneurs to large national and international operators, thus creating more jobs and higher incomes for the many whose lives have been disrupted by the ongoing crisis.

2. In the Lake Chad context complex humanitarian issues remain to be resolved. These also have important implications from a private-sector perspective. In addition, progress in the areas of infrastructure (electricity, roads, storage, markets), rule of law (regulatory and legal environment and anti-corruption) and security are preconditions for success. There is also a need to encourage productive value chains, which require support from off-takers and input suppliers (fertilizers, seeds, pesticides, mechanical services, irrigation and transport services) skills (technical, business, financial and marketing) and financial services providers.

3. Overall, insufficient state and partner attention has been paid to engaging with and addressing the needs of the private sector, a potential engine for transformation and the only viable source of long-term economic growth and employment. Going forward, a balanced approach that both supports peace and stability and generates new opportunities for growth, using a coordinated multi-country approach supported by international assistance, is critical.

4. Given the complexities of the situation, a promising medium- to long-term option is the creation of Secure Economic and Trade Zones (SETZs), described in more detail below. While important and potentially impactful, such zones alone would not be enough.

5. Shorter-term measures that could be used to spur activity and build confidence across the private sector include support for strengthening business membership organizations (BMOs), representing both the formal and informal sectors, and other platforms to strengthen dialogue and collaboration with authorities and other stakeholders. The re-establishment of mobile telephone networks across the region is a further step that would facilitate commercial interaction through improved access to information (market intelligence, technical support) and easier access to financial instruments and transaction mechanisms.

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6. This draws on a desk review of available reports, a focus group discussion conducted in each of Nigeria and Cameroon, field research to explore selected cross-border routes (as security conditions allowed) and interviews undertaken on the main trading routes. Further research based on direct observations and interactions with private sector operators and other key stakeholders, to build on the insights of this short paper and the actions proposed, would add flesh to these initial ideas.

## 2 Context, Challenges and Opportunities

7. The Lake Chad Region (LCR) is central to the historic trans-Saharan trade routes and a network of long-standing cultures and relationships. Border communities and the nearby towns long played a significant role in trade among and beyond the four countries. However, since the intensification of the insurgency, many of these communities have become virtually deserted, with few economic activities carried out. In place of trade, some of them now witness an upsurge in traffic of weapons, illicit drugs, armed banditry, kidnappings and various kinds of crimes (DREP Centre, 2017).

8. The LCR is frequently cited as a region suffering the consequences of climate change and desertification, resulting in limited economic activities around farming, fishing and trading which, in turn, increase susceptibility to violence and crime (LCBC, 2015). The four countries of the LCR are characterized by populations that are mostly poor and depend overwhelmingly on subsistence agriculture, with limited opportunities for value addition and innovation.

9. Low levels of population density and urbanization also create challenges for private-sector activity. The LCR population would rank it among the top 50 countries in the world, if it were a single nation. However, as reported by Magrin and Pérouse de Montclos (2018), the level of urbanization of the Basin is lower than the national averages (except in Chad).

*Table 1: Population Estimates for the Lake Chad Region*

	Niger	Nigeria	Chad	Cameroon	Total LCR Area
<b>Area km<sup>2</sup></b>	138,149	149,695	163,851	91,135	542,830
<b>2017 Population estimates</b>	627,828	16,661,258	4,469,250	7,370,988	29,129,324
<b>Density per km<sup>2</sup></b>	4.54	111.30	27.28	80.88	53.66

Source: AFD 2018

10. The four countries score poorly on indicators of the business environment even at a national level, (Table 2) and it can be assumed that conditions in the areas bordering Lake Chad are below the national averages. Over the last decade, the BH insurgency has undoubtedly had a negative impact on the infrastructure, rule of law and the overall regulatory environment with which businesses must interact.

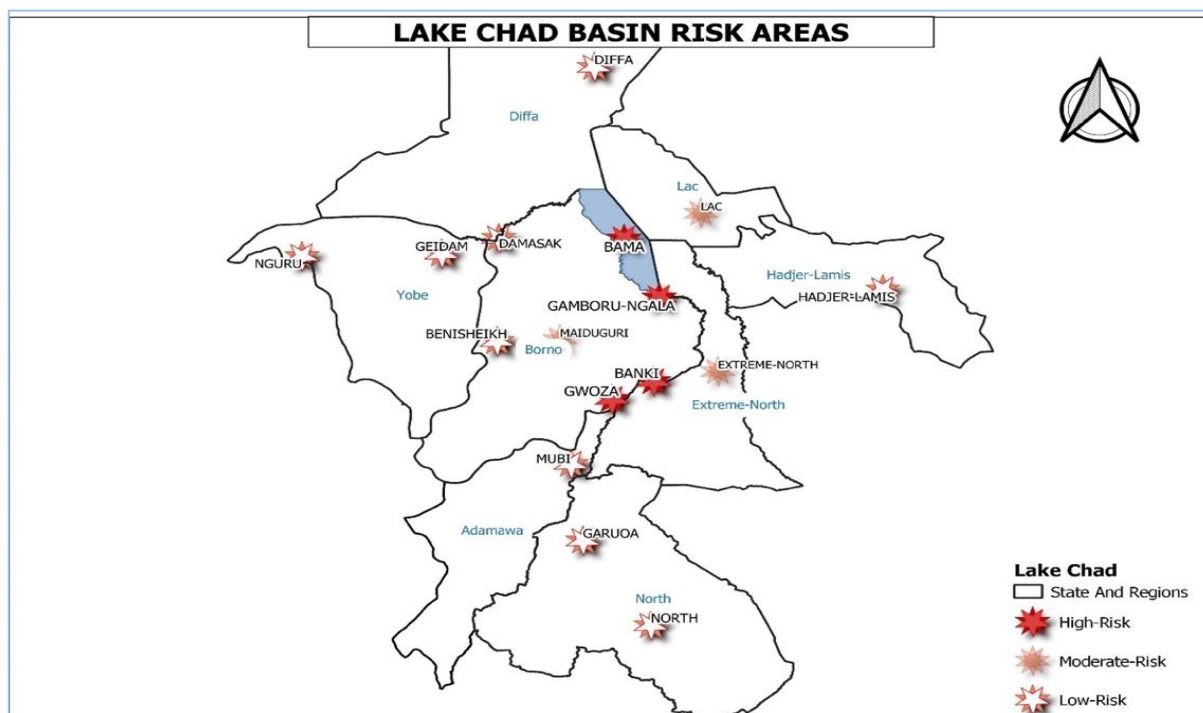
Table 2: Ease of Doing Business and Entrepreneurship Indexes

	Chad	Cameroon	Niger	Nigeria
Ease of Doing Business Rank Number of countries Covered: 181	181	166	143	146
Entrepreneurship Number of countries Covered :164	137	121	NA	101

Sources: World Bank, 2019; Global Entrepreneurship and Development Institute, 2019

11. Prior to the insurgency, the bulk of cross-border trade in NE Nigeria was carried out through Borno State. At present, the situation is completely different. Virtually all the routes via Borno, including those through Bama, Banki and Monguno are inaccessible in some areas. The North-East Nigeria Joint Livelihood and Market Recovery Assessment (2017) estimated that over 700 commercial vehicles had been attacked in previous years by armed groups, mainly in Borno. This led to the closure or restricted use of many major roads, a situation that has only partially improved since 2015. This has required transporters, traders and farmers to use alternative lower-risk routes mainly within Yobe and Adamawa, even though these greatly increase the distances to be travelled and the costs of transportation.

Figure 1: Lake Chad Security Risk Areas



Source: Survey Data, 2019

12. Cross-border trade across the LCR is mainly informal. The market hubs have remained largely traditional with dilapidated structures and highly inadequate administrative arrangements. In recent decades, Niger has made efforts to develop basic infrastructure to

support marketplaces dealing in livestock, in view of the centrality of cattle and small ruminants to the local economy. Such efforts have been less obvious in Nigeria and Cameroon.

13. Today, the choice of routes is far beyond economics. The main concern of traders and transporters is safety. They follow longer routes and often unimaginable terrains to bypass multiple security threats. Even though the volume of goods traded has dropped sharply in the last decade, the ingenuity of the traders and transporters has kept many of the routes functional.

14. Despite these access and security limitations – and increased security presence in some areas - the complex network of family relationships, inter-connected border communities and local alliances, especially with the security personnel, can and do overcome many official restrictions on trade and movement of people, and LCR borders remain relatively porous.

## 2.1 Viable Cross-Border Trade Routes in LCR

15. Even though the LCR is still considered volatile, there are at least two viable routes into Cameroon, Chad and Niger in the Lake Chad region. These are the routes that traders and transporters have found relatively safe and capable of facilitating cross-border exchanges. They include:

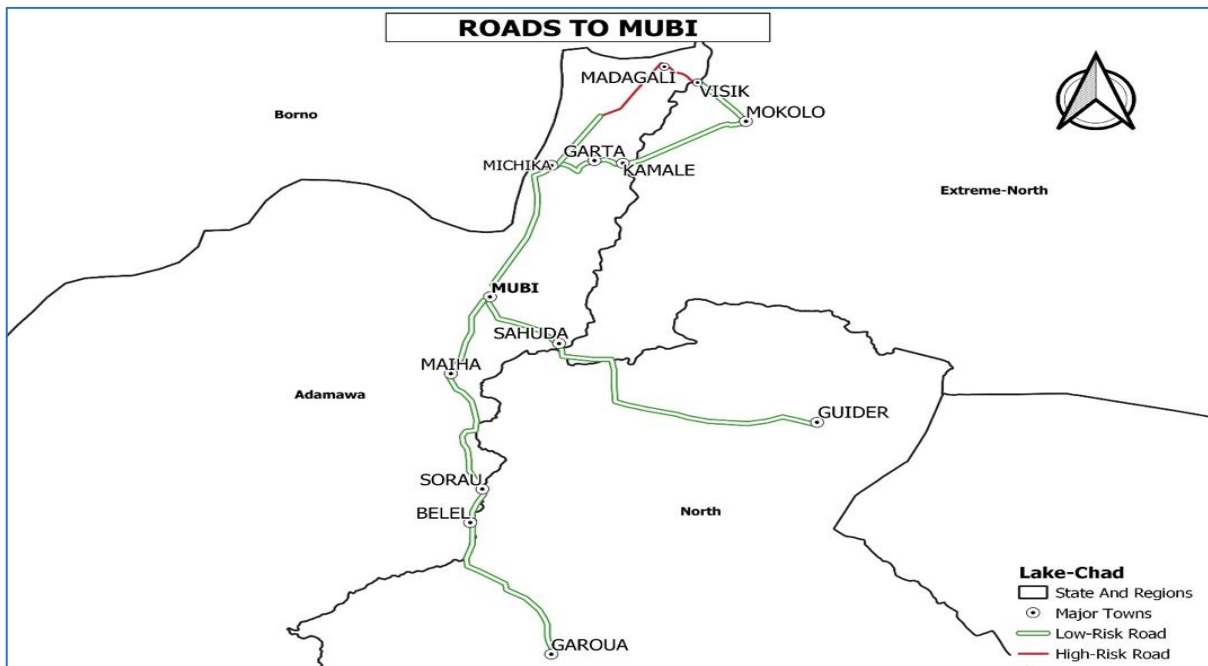
- a. Geidam/Nguru, Yobe State - Diffa, Niger route; and
- b. The Yola/Mubi, Adamawa State – Garoua, Cameroon route.

16. In terms of the security conditions of the routes, both were considered relatively low risk in June 2019 because of the following:

- a. The insurgency has been contained along the routes;
- b. Presence of security personnel in strategic locations;
- c. Proximity of the border crossings to major trading towns;
- d. Community involvement in security, and
- e. Relatively few attacks on traders by armed robbers.

17. The key challenge of all the routes is infrastructure, mainly the state of roads and bridges. The Nigerian side of the roads connecting Geidam and Diffa is fairly good compared with roads going into Niger. The Yola-Mubi roads are in reasonable condition but all the roads from Mubi into Cameroon were found to be extremely in bad shape and in several instances, unfit for use.

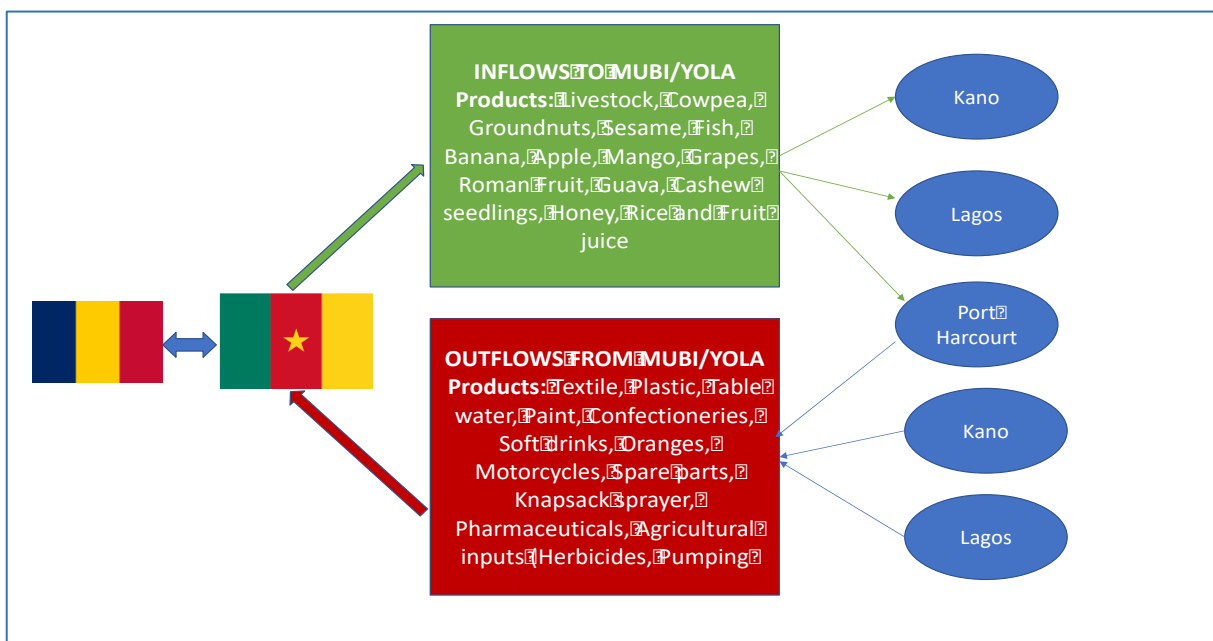
Figure 2: Roads to Mubi



Source: Survey Data, 2019

18. This is despite the Mubi route being generally more strategic for LCR because it links Nigeria with Chad via Cameroon and it appears that the volume and value of the goods traded were far larger than those of Geidam/Nguru-Diffa route.

Figure 3: Inflows and Outflows of Goods Traded Across Mubi/Yola Border Trade Hub with Chad and Cameroon

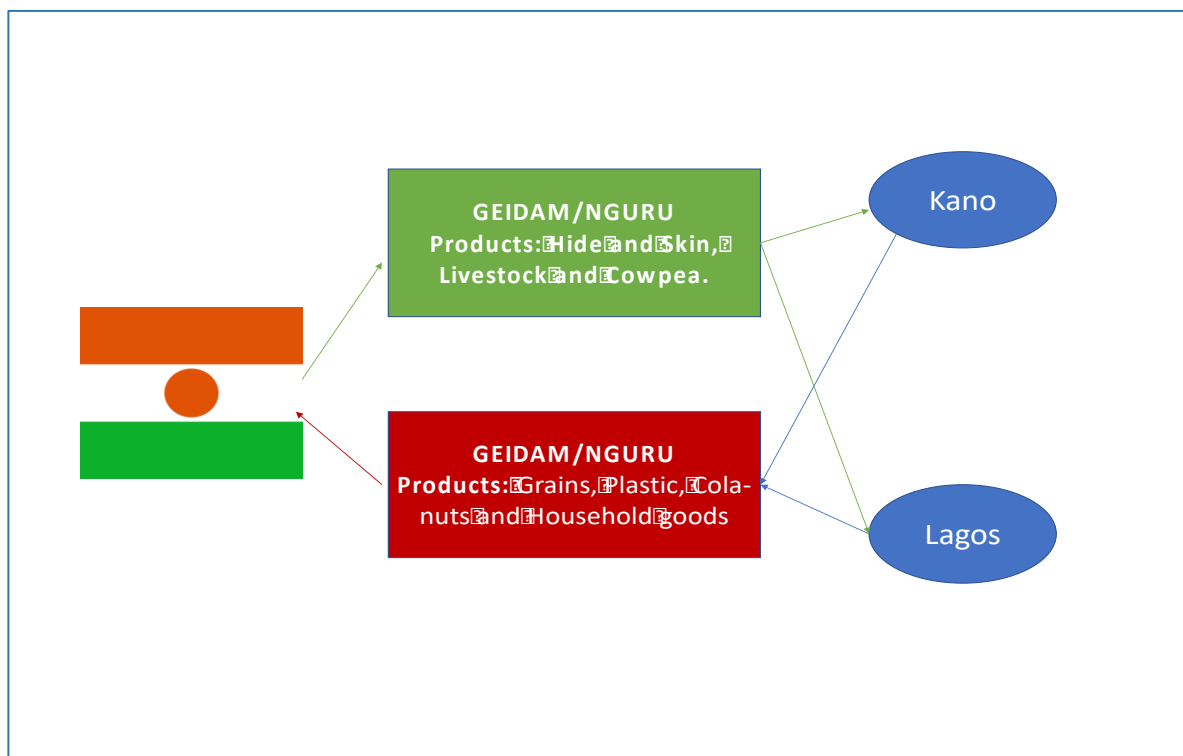


Source: Survey Data, 2019

19. These routes are traveled daily by local and foreign merchants and their representatives (many of them Indian, Chinese or Lebanese) who specialize in crop trading, medium and large-scale manufacturing companies (oil mills, breweries, confectionery etc.), crop speculators and networks of transporters. The huge supply of cash (estimated in billions of naira by local merchants) to the network of markets along these routes attracts crops and livestock from Chad, Cameroon and Niger. Farmers and traders from other Lake Chad countries in turn use some of the proceeds generated to buy finished and semi-finished products from the Nigerian markets for sale in their own countries.

20. Even with the differences in currencies that make formal transactions difficult, the traders have found it convenient to accept each other’s currencies at the major border markets; both the naira and the CFA franc are used in most border communities, such as Mubi, Geidam, Kizandi, Diffa, Bardnake, Ngeli, Gambori, and Potocol. For larger transactions, there are bureaux de change for currency exchange. What is interesting is that the language difference between English- and French-speaking neighbors does not hinder commercial activities, as Hausa is widely spoken in border markets, along with Fulfulde and Kanuri.

Figure 4: Trade to and from Niger through Geidam/ Nguru Trade Hub



Source: Survey data, 2019

## 2.2 Nigeria’s Strategic Position in Lake Chad Cross-Border Trade

21. Nigeria contributes about half of West African GDP, mainly due to its manufacturing base and historical hubs, through which large volumes of goods and services traded within and across borders, especially with neighboring countries. This happens despite dilapidated infrastructure, poor administrative support, weak governance and insecurity (Hoffmann &

Melly, 2015). In addition, the spending power of Nigerian consumers, due to the country's large and diversified economy and its petrodollars presents market opportunities for produce and livestock from other Lake Chad countries.

22. However, it is important to note that despite the large volume of cross-border trade and its significance to local economies, most of the Nigerian side of the border has been officially closed since the outbreak of Ebola and the large-scale insurgency activity in previous years. Interviews with local traders in June 2019 indicated that it cost an individual 4,500-5,000 naira<sup>2</sup> of unofficial payments to cross into the country through its border with Cameroon. For trucks to cross either way, the range was roughly N100,000-2,000,000. In short, cross-border trade in the LCR tends to be daunting, challenging and expensive.

### 2.3 Regional Efforts

23. Coordinated trade and economic development is one of the keys to national and regional stability. Each of the four countries and the states and provinces closest to the Lake have a critical role to play in trade facilitation. However, rebuilding trust and confidence to enable improved cooperation among private-sector actors will take time and considerable effort and investment in infrastructure, inputs, skills and improved rule of law.

24. Authorities should aim to secure and upgrade their border areas, to generate more opportunities for growth, market access, and job creation, which are essential for regional stability and development. In addition, they should work with appropriate national and international bodies to ease the incompatibilities among the financial systems in the LCR, in which the use of the West African CFA, the Central African CFA and the Naira compound the challenges of cross-border trade, as observed by Hoffman & Melly (2015).

25. Central among recent regional efforts is the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin region (RSS), formally validated by the LCBC and endorsed by the African Union (AU) in late 2018. (See box.) Enhanced efforts to promote regional economic activity and cross-border trade, such as those advanced in this paper, could be central to the implementation of the RSS, the implementation of which is an overarching theme of the Niamey Governors' Forum meeting.

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<sup>2</sup> Around USD12.50- 14.00 at a cash exchange rate of 360 naira to the dollar.



### *Box 1: The RSS, the Regional Economy and Cross-Border Trade*

The nine pillars of the RSS include:

Pillar 5 on Governance and the Social Contract, which discusses the need to improve cross-border cooperation; and

Pillar 6: Socio-Economic Recovery and Environmental Sustainability, which highlights the need to support sustainable livelihoods, improve infrastructure for regional economic integration, create conducive business environment and ensure environmental sustainability.

## 2.4 The Need to Develop Secure Regional Trading Structures

26. Capital of the volume required to rebuild infrastructure and re-establish job-creating value chains rarely flows into areas of conflict and violence, for obvious reasons. As already stated, security, infrastructure and market demand must be strengthened together if significant private-sector activity (from micro-enterprises to larger scale processors) is to become re-established in the region.

27. Recent reports have emphasized the need for the formalization of trade to help improve opportunities for growth, stability and jobs. These reports include Nigeria's Booming Borders: The Drivers and Consequences of Unrecorded Trade, (Chatham House 2015) and a short EU-funded report on the use of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in conflict-affected areas. These reports drew on global best practices and experiences in other countries. However, the operationalization of the recommendations would be difficult in the context of the LCR. This is a region with little history of systemic and formalized markets and clusters and some parts of value chains are operated by informal-sector operators relying on the culture of trust and familiarity. However, there is a limit to what informal arrangements can deliver in terms of growth and jobs.

28. As mentioned, an option to consider until the current conflicts are resolved would be to create SETZs. The Forum will no doubt have many ideas about the feasibility of this and for how and where these might be created, as well as the nature of the regimes under which these Zones might operate. The following characteristics might be considered as a starting point:

- Partnership between security forces, local and national governments to create secure areas enabling relatively normal business operations and living conditions;
- Secure accommodation for workers and families linked to essential social infrastructure such as schools, shops and hospitals;
- Serviced agricultural land for crop production linked to extension services, mechanization support and quality inputs;
- Serviced plots for value addition;
- Supporting services and infrastructure for transport and storage;
- A private-sector management regime based on a concession model responsible for promoting the zones and facilitating investors; and
- A clearly articulated security strategy to provide workers and investors with the confidence to build their operations.

29. The SETZs could start as small areas with potential to expand once the model has been confirmed. Eventually the Zones might have their own fiscal and regulatory regimes and even operate cross-border, levelling the playing field for producers and traders across the region.

30. Depending on their locations, SETZs might operate near to one-stop border posts, which could be established and operated jointly by authorities on both sides of certain frontiers, reducing the cost and time involved in international trade through shared infrastructure. Development partner support to construct such hardware and software would be helpful. Experience in the East African Community (EAC) region has created impressive results in increasing trade efficiency.

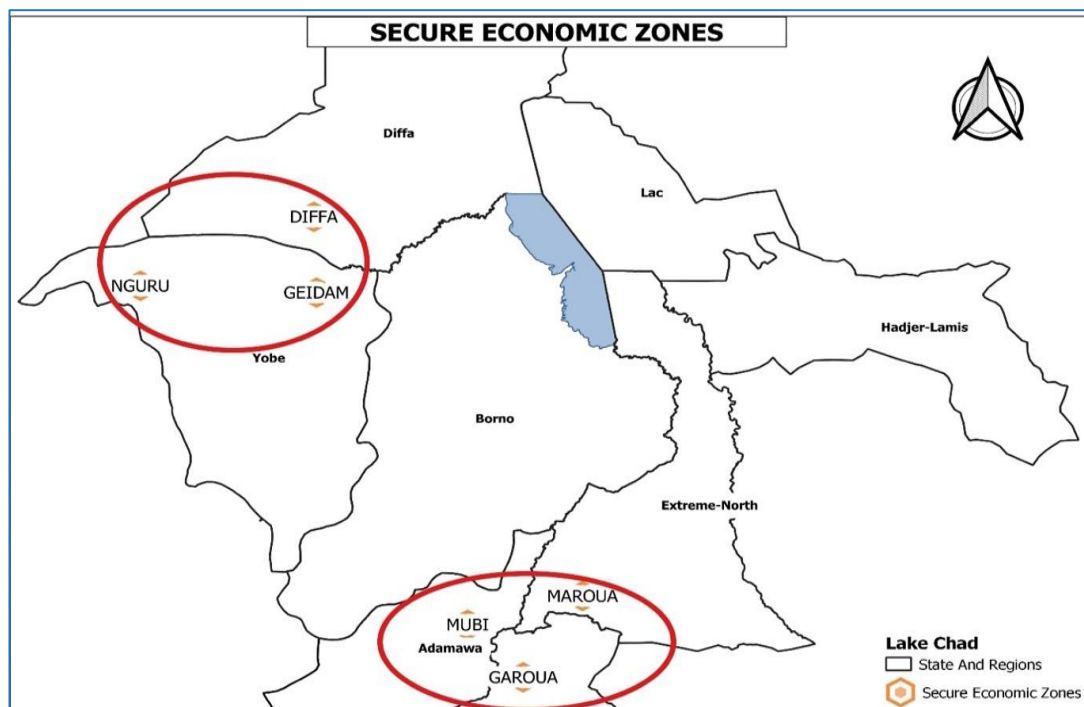
31. A parallel cross-border market arrangement where the informal transactions can operate alongside formal clusters in such a secure zone could provide an enabling environment for networks of farmers, processors, financiers, transporters, warehousing, common customs and security arrangements could start the essential process of building confidence among existing and potential investors in the region. The zones would also offer opportunities for off-takers and processors to invest in value-adding facilities in the region rather than exporting raw materials to other locations.

32. Rather than embarking on region-wide economic development initiatives, authorities could experiment with developing demand-driven Secure Economic and Trade Zones (SETZs) around the two high-potential cross-border trade routes identified. They are:

- a. **Yola/Mubi-Cameroon-Chad:** This secure zone would cover Yola (Jimeta, Gerei, Wuro-Bokki, Song, Gombi, Mubi, Sahuda, Bahuli and other surrounding towns); North and some part of Extreme North Regions of Cameroon (Bardnake, Nakong, Tchevi, Burha, Gili, Garoua, Maroua and other surrounding towns)
- b. **Geidam/Nguru-Diffa:** This zone covers Yobe (Geidam, Nguru, Babban-Gida) and Diffa

33. Establishing a secure zone around these cross-border routes would leverage the successes recorded in security and the ingenuity of the private-sector operators that currently ensure that a level of cross-border transactions is maintained.

Figure 5: Possible Locations of Secure Economic and Trade Zones



Source: Survey data, 2019

## 2.5 Strategic Trade Opportunities

34. Creating a secure zone is by no means a short-term exercise. It requires careful planning, coordination and a functional legal and administrative framework. More fundamentally, regional buy-in and multi-state economic and infrastructural development arrangements, as well as massive resources, would also be needed. Ultimately, if successful, a secure zone could become a flagship case that could be learned from and replicated in other areas of the LCR.

35. Because of the preconditions and timeframe involved in creating SETZs there is a need to consider other opportunities to create viable clusters, especially in sectors of regional comparative advantage.

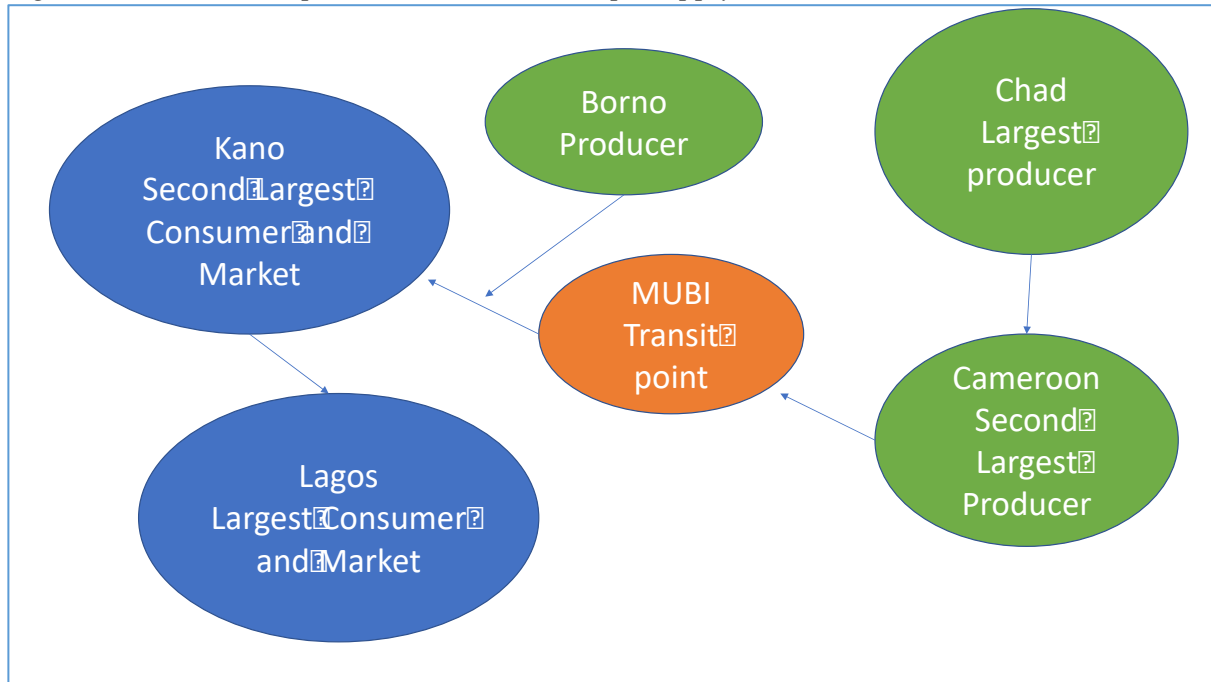
36. The opportunity to improve agricultural production, processing, cross-border trade and the growth of SMEs exists along the two demand-driving zones identified and other locations in the LCR. For example, there is huge demand for sesame in South-East Asia and LCR is the largest producer of the sesame exported through Lagos. Cowpea and ground nuts are cash crops for most of the farmers in the LCR. Cowpea is of high demand in southern Nigeria, and often exported to Europe, mainly through Lagos, while the groundnut is in high demand from oil mills in Kano.

37. Capturing greater value in these value chains requires careful planning and the development of clusters, capacity strengthening, functional cooperative and women groups, business incubators for women and youth and improved access to finance, inputs and markets. The main challenge is that local economic activities are largely informal, with limited skills and resources available.

38. The LCR has demonstrated its agricultural viability in certain key crops. They include sesame, cowpea and groundnuts. Local farmers, especially women, often grow these crops as cash crops and exchange or sell the crops to purchase agricultural inputs for food production and to purchase basic household commodities or pay for health, transportation, and other services. It is common to see women walk for five kilometers or more to sell a few kilograms of groundnuts or cowpea in markets, and purchase soap, sugar and other basic goods with the proceeds. Clearly, farming activity in rural communities is largely subsistence-focused, utilizing basic manual tools. Even before the insurgency the growth of agriculture was constrained by lack of organized and certified input suppliers, limited local processing capacity, weak farmers' associations, and the virtual absence of extension services.

39. Large areas of cultivatable land, especially in Cameroon border areas- such as Tchevi, bBurha, Gili, Mogode, Bardnake, and Nakong - remain underutilized mainly due to lack of finance, inputs and support. As emphasized by the Lake Chad Agricultural Development Institute, there were earlier attempts to develop certain value chains in the LCR, which led to the establishment of agricultural research centers. The targeted crops included millet, sorghum, rice, vegetables, cowpea, sesame, soya beans, wheat. Livestock and fish were also included. Due to limited funding for the institutions, limited large-scale investment, and the ongoing insurgency, there has not been a noticeable improvement in most of the value chains over time. Today, farmers are gradually returning to their farms and international organizations, such as International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) have been supporting government agricultural programs in the LCR. Frequently, lack of coordination of interventions, weak farmers' associations, and limited private investments were identified as limiting factors.

Figure 6: Sesame, Cowpea and Groundnut Crops Supply Chain



Source: Survey data (2019)

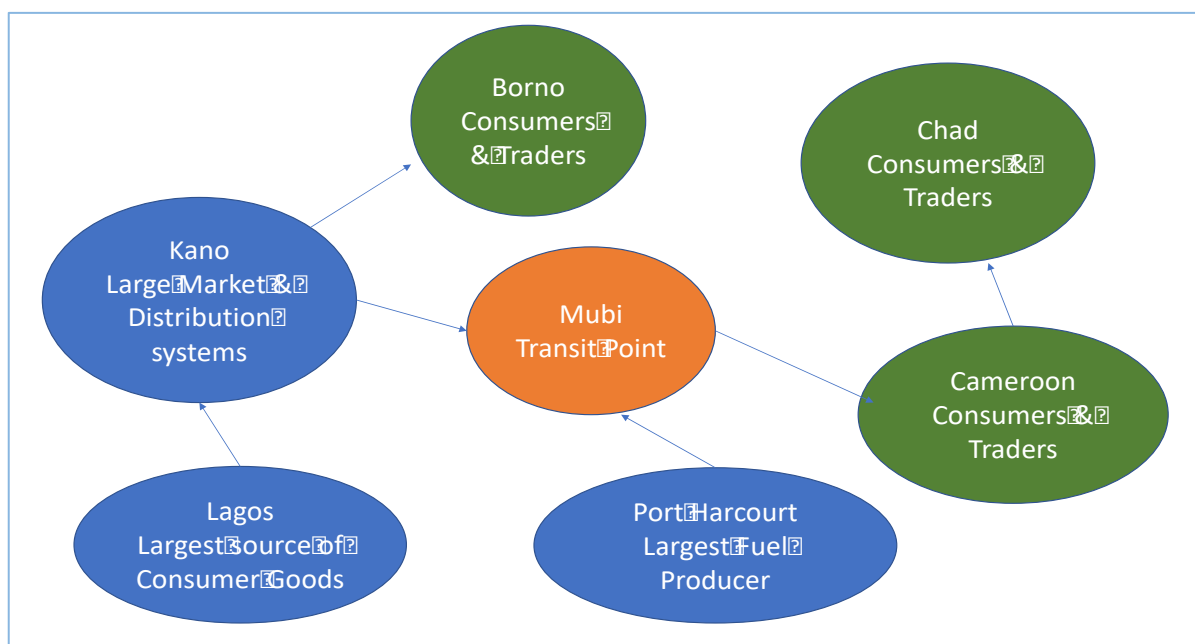
## 2.6 Community Skills Acquisition Centers

40. The LCR depends largely on distant hubs for the supply of basic consumer goods - including edible oil, furniture, metal products, table water, textile and garments - as shown in Figure 7. Capacity development through the establishment of community-based skills acquisition centers would help improve local productivity and provide labor and services to the above-mentioned clusters, SETZs and other sectors such as tailoring and garments, hospitality, construction, information and communications technology (ICT), and motor vehicle and electronic repairs. The main job creation alternatives for youth are motorcycle and tricycle transportation, petty trade and informal trading of fuel across borders. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have often ended up working in these sectors, lacking other opportunities.

41. While there are many training programs underway and some skills acquisition centers have been established, these are mostly in urban rather than rural communities, and overall efforts are insufficient. It is therefore imperative to increase efforts to identify skills gaps and better design training and mentorship programs, tailored to local labor-market demand, as well as increasing training opportunities beyond main towns. Local development of skills could reduce dependence on other regions for the supply of basic goods and services, including in carpentry, tailoring, small-scale food processing, metal works, and the repair of vehicles, phones and electronics.

42. In summary, the skills requirements of people in the region go far beyond basic farming techniques. As well as the training and mentoring outlined, these would need to be complemented by other support mechanisms such as micro-finance, provision of equipment, tools and secure work space to ensure that newly learned skills can be used to earn a living.

Figure 7: Textiles/Manufacturing: Consumer Goods



Source: Survey data (2019)

### 3 Conclusions

43. The challenges facing governments, development partners and investors should not be underestimated. Addressing a complex set of constraints on private-sector activity that have been decades in the making will take time and a degree of political will and consensus among stakeholders, as well as considerable investment resources. That trade endures to the extent it does among the four countries is a testimony to the ingenuity and bravery of the traders rather than support from public institutions.

44. The opportunity to create SETZs could present a first step in normalizing at least some of the LCR but it would take considerable time and resources. The idea of cross-border zones, while not new, would clearly be challenging. Smaller-scale efforts such as secure zones in each country joined by one-stop border posts might also be considered as an initial confidence-building step. In the medium term, the integration of cross-border value chains could help deliver the secure and sustainable economies that citizens and governments of the LCR seek. This will require sustained value-chain development and capacity development, especially around areas of comparative advantage.

45. Some of the following action points, while ambitious, are more feasible in a short- to medium-term timeframe. It will be up to governments, private-sector investors and development partners to decide which to pursue and prioritize.

### 4 Summary of Recommendations

- 1) **SME Support Services:** It would be useful to encourage the development of light industries, such as carpentry, ICT, welding, tailoring, mechanics and metal works, to increase cross-border trade of finished goods and to provide job opportunities for women

and youth. Services could be delivered through a network of small business support agencies (perhaps called Enterprise Agencies). These Agencies could be set up at a sub-regional level and thus attuned to local conditions to ensure access to finance, skills, inputs and markets for existing and potential small-business owners.

- 2) **Cross-Border Trade:** Governments could work together to create a policy framework and infrastructure investment program that would improve cross-border infrastructure and reduce the formal and informal costs of cross-border trade.
- 3) **Access to Finance:** While commercial banks are starting to return to the region, they are generally collateral-based lenders with high minimum thresholds, which has limited relevance to most potential clients in the region. Enterprise agencies could potentially work with proactive micro- and larger finance providers to implement small loan programs and guarantee schemes that will encourage lenders to consider and support the region.
- 4) **Extension Services:** There is a need to work with agricultural development projects to support farmers with extension services, and provide quality inputs matched to current soil and climatic conditions and basic irrigation infrastructure.
- 5) **Skills Acquisition:** As already mentioned, there is a broad need for training across the region, including for those with limited education. Skills acquisition should be linked to the services mentioned above so that training and mentoring activities have practical economic outcomes.
- 6) **Key Value Chains:** The region has a rich history of agriculture and farming but is impacted seriously by climate change. A focus is needed on future crop types and activities that could flourish in the current environment, as well as on support services to enable their growth. An emphasis on key value chains will enable governments to consider the development of the specialized infrastructure such as transport and logistics, and telecoms that will render these sectors more competitive and attractive.
- 7) **Mechanization:** Efforts could be made to promote the use of modern implements through development of equipment-hire services to improve agricultural production and standards. It would be even better to assemble the equipment in the region.
- 8) **Small-Scale Processors:** There is a need to support the emergence of micro- and medium-scale processors that would add value to the produce traded across borders through equipment leasing, cash-flow financing and greater availability of small ‘plug-and-play’ factory units with appropriate services, including access to energy and raw materials.
- 9) **Working Together:** It would be useful to strengthen farmers and traders’ cooperatives and facilitate links with off-takers and buyers through development of market infrastructure, both physical and virtual.
- 10) **Business Membership Organizations (BMOs):** Supporting and strengthening BMOs would assist local companies in advocating to government to address priority concerns and needs. This would take some time, to build capacity and earn credibility and trust among stakeholders.
- 11) **Research:** Authorities and partners could liaise with agricultural research institutes to generate and disseminate technologies and seed varieties to farmers through the above extension services.
- 12) **Image-Building and Investment Promotion:** All parts of the Lake Chad region suffer from a poor reputation as a place to invest and do business, as conflict dominates the news

headlines. efforts to document real opportunities and take them to prospective investors will help change perceptions and build confidence in the region. This can be done through creation of state-level promotion structures perhaps with a coordinating body for the region. State-level structures are already operating in some other Nigerian states, from which lessons could be learned

- 13) **Grazing reserves:** Greater efforts could be made to promote the establishment of grazing reserves to encourage livestock production and the setting up of meat-processing facilities. Herders have recently been moving in large numbers to the southern part of Nigeria and elsewhere due mainly to the need for secure grazing reserves and ranching areas. Opportunities exist in dedicating grazing reserves in Adamawa State in Nigeria and North Region and Extreme North in Cameroon. In addition, Diffa in Niger and Yobe in Nigeria might have the potential to attract private investment in meat processing which would invariably generate greater local economic activities. This could potentially lead to a LCR meat value chain.

*July 10, 2019*

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