

Appendix 1. The methodological problems

Development players, economic operators, and policymakers need long-term, cross-sectional indicators to develop and monitor their (re)construction policy for the regions around Lake Chad. Yet this is problematic. First of all, existing available data are unreliable and need to be used with the greatest caution. Secondly, they are not always accessible or centralised: they are rarely archived and are sometimes not published at all, so that field missions have to be organised to extract them on the ground. Thirdly, they are all too often neither standardised nor comparable across time and space, since they are not based on long time-series and are built differently from one country to the next and one period to the next. Last but not least, they are subject to political manipulation: figures on numbers of inhabitants, internally displaced persons, refugees, Muslims, Christians, and victims of terrorism or the security forces are all disputed and used to produce electoral rolls, claim a larger share of government revenues, complain about “ethnic” marginalisation, draw the international community’s attention, assert the dominance of a religious community, and so on (Pérouse de Montclos, 2013a, 2013b; Pérouse de Montclos *et al.*, 2016).

Such constraints mean that indicators need to be found that will capture the dynamics of the regional system at an intermediate level, without necessarily descending to the in-depth micro level of project monitoring and evaluation. The challenges are considerable. There is a striking lack of knowledge of the region. Mapping is not good and struggles with the limitations of oral place names—which prompted the Cameroonian authorities, for example, to try to make internally displaced persons give their camps different names from their home villages. The absence of civil registration data, not to mention land registry data, also creates aid recipient identification problems. Attempts to put a figure to needs, trade flows, and resources are equally problematic. Livestock, in its own way, reflects these problems. In many cases, herd headcounts are the result of arrangements between herders and tax officials, while estimates of agricultural production rarely take seasonal migration into account and are often based on samples of farmers chosen according to the local officials’ personal affinities.

Nobody even knows how many inhabitants the region really has. The problem is not due solely to the fighting and forced migrations that may have depopulated certain areas. It is also due to technical difficulties in the region’s four countries to access remote areas; overcome logistical, topographic, and linguistic barriers;

deal with vague administrative boundaries; prevent displacements in mid-count; and count nomadic and sometimes illiterate populations, not to mention women secluded in keeping with an Islamic principle of gender segregation (*purdah*). Household heads have also been known to return to their native village during census operations, which effectively minimises the urban growth rates, or report children who have actually gone to live elsewhere.

The case of Nigeria is particularly instructive in that the population figures may have been deliberately manipulated (Campbell 1976: 242–254; Ahonsi 1988: 553–562; Okolo 1999: 321–325). In some cases, the figures have been minimised to avoid paying taxes, a phenomenon observed in Borno back in 1903 (Tukur, 2016). In other cases, they have been inflated to secure better political representation and more funds from central government. Following the failings of the 1960s and 1970s (see Box 11), all censuses have been disputed. Although some have eventually been published and still serve as references for demographers today, the 1991 census gave a total of 90 million inhabitants, 30% less than the forecasts at the time, while the 2006 census with its 140 million inhabitants is suspected of having been revised upwards somewhat to meet the per capita income criteria required to renegotiate the country's debt with the Paris Club. Population projections are also doubtful: depending on whether forecasts are based on UN calculations or International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis figures, projections range from 371 to 399 million inhabitants by 2050 and from 576 to 752 million inhabitants by 2100, even rising to an upper bracket of two billion in some cases!

Obviously, these population inaccuracies render unreliable all the demographic, economic, and social indicators used by development assistance operators around Lake Chad, whether with respect to the age pyramid, gender ratios, migratory flows, or rates of malnutrition, fertility, mortality, and unemployment. There are also problems with the array of definitions, statistical tools, and methods of calculation, which prevent comparisons across regions. The International Labour Organization (ILO), for example, defines the unemployed as all adult persons without work, available for work, and seeking work during the reference period. Yet such a definition can scarcely capture underemployment, seasonal low periods, first jobseekers, and apprenticeship of minors in the Lake Chad region. Along the same lines, the household notion can cover rather different realities, depending on the situations. In principle, it is a socio-economic unit of one or more persons who live under the same roof and share the same food, but who are not necessarily tied by blood or marriage (Randall *et al.*, 2011). Yet matters become complicated in polygamous and highly mobile societies. For example, the Kanuri have a traditionally high divorce rate (Cohen, 1961), a characteristic confirmed by all accounts heard by this study's researchers. In addition, the insecurity has precipitated the dispersion of the region's populations, complicating even further any count of their households.

The Boko Haram crisis has in effect revealed how fragile the international aid operators' indicators really are. The United Nations, with its contradictory positions on the subject, announced, for example, that following an attack by insurgents in 2011, more people had fled Damaturu than the city had residents, displaced persons included (Pérouse de Montclos, 2013b). For their part, the Nigerians have put forward school enrolment levels that are improbable, to say the least, in a country where government schools have been known to inflate their figures to secure more subsidies, while private schools understate theirs to avoid paying taxes. Some establishments in Borno exist on paper only. The case of the Chibok local government area (LGA) is particularly symbolic in the light of the international outcry at Boko Haram's kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls in April 2014. Despite the prevailing insecurity, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) announced that year a 153%, 48%, and 96% increase, respectively, in the number of primary school pupils, secondary school pupils, and lower secondary teachers. The total number of primary and secondary school pupils in the Chibok LGA is supposed to be 80% of a population of 103,790 inhabitants!¹⁵¹

In such a context, development and emergency operators are reduced to doing the best they can with imperfect and incomplete, if not totally false, data. All too often, consultants' reports on the humanitarian crisis around Lake Chad recycle figures and analyses taken from free online articles written by Nigerians or southern Cameroonians who, although more educated than the northerners, do not know the region. For instance, some reproduce all the Malthusian clichés on the Sahel, speculating about an alleged link between the demographic pressure, lake drying, unemployment, drug trafficking, and jihadist violence (WFP, 2016: 15).

Development operators can also conduct quantitative surveys to fill the gaps in defective statistics. Although these surveys definitely refine analysis at micro level, they quickly prove to have limitations over and above the immediate problems of access on the ground in dangerous areas.¹⁵² Without reliable data on the main socio-demographic characteristics of the populations studied, the first problem is that the samples chosen are not representative. Surveys of this kind are also local in their scope, which rules out any extrapolation. Without a baseline, the snapshot they present of the situation at a given moment in time cannot be used to identify trend upturns or downturns. Moreover, quantitative surveys generally have a purely declarative value; it is inadvisable to draw causal

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¹⁵¹ Similarly, the authorities reported 399,445 primary school pupils for 234,082 inhabitants in Magumeri in 2014. In Hawul, a similar sized LGA, the figures given were 63 pupils and 1,264 teachers in primary, and 1,254 pupils with no teachers in secondary education. Excel tables collected by Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos from the SUBEC in Maiduguri in May 2016.

¹⁵² *The Economist* magazine observed that "every number" in its first quantitative survey of Nigeria conducted in 1982 was "probably wrong" (Kohli, 2004: 331)!

links and explanatory determinants from them. Studies of household incomes and consumption are frequently biased in this way, since the rich are reluctant to reveal the real level of their wealth (Watts & Lubeck, 1983: 134).

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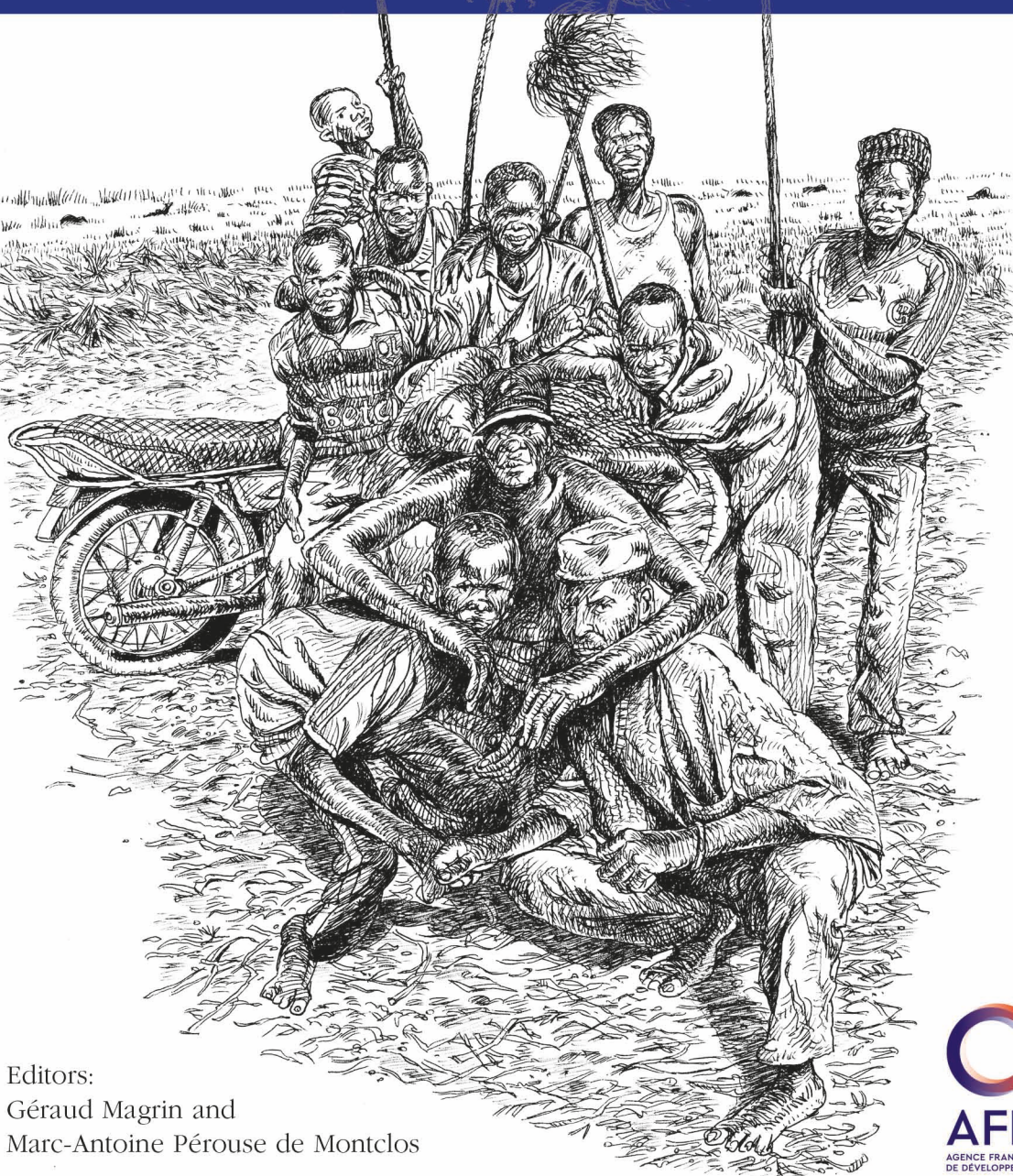
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Publications Director: Rémy Rioux

Editorial Director: Gaël Giraud

Adaptation of the cover: Flexedo.

Cover: Young people of different origins on the shores of the lake

Drawings: Christian Seignobos

Publication date: August 2018

Designed and produced by: Flexedo, info@flexedo.com

Cartography: Pauline Gluski

Printed by: DILA

Foreword

This report covers the benchmarking study on the Lake Chad region drawn up by the Research Institute for Development (IRD) under the terms of reference provided by the French Agency for Development (AFD). The main findings were obtained from workshops and field missions conducted from March to June 2017.

The introduction was written by Géraud Magrin and Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos.

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The study was reviewed by two IRD researchers, Christian Seignobos and Florence Sylvestre, to whom we are most grateful.