

Implementing the stabilisation strategy in the Lake Chad Basin

Key lessons

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The implementation of the Regional Strategy for Stabilisation, Recovery and Resilience for the Boko Haram-affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin shows the importance of a comprehensive approach to peacebuilding. Combining security interventions with governance, recovery and resilience efforts has proven essential for addressing the region's deep-rooted instability. This report distils key lessons from implementation, highlighting how integrated, regionally owned approaches can strengthen coordination, promote recovery and sustain long-term stability across the Lake Chad Basin.

Key findings

- ▶ Stabilisation efforts in the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) face persistent challenges, notably the need to balance hard-security measures with human security priorities while also addressing the specific vulnerabilities of women, youth and other at-risk groups.
- ▶ The Regional Strategy for Stabilisation, Recovery and Resilience (stabilisation strategy) implemented a comprehensive whole-of-society approach to stabilise and rebuild affected regions.
- ▶ The strategy has promoted multidimensional ownership at regional, national and local levels, supported by platforms such as the LCB Governors' Forum. This has provided critical political, strategic and programmatic support for stabilisation efforts.
- ▶ Successful stabilisation requires effective coordination among diverse stakeholders, including the African Union (AU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), LCB Commission, Multinational Joint Task Force, national and local governments and international partners. Clear delineation of roles and complementarity among these actors is essential.
- ▶ Key milestones in implementation have been achieved through strong financial backing from the Regional Stabilisation Facility and international donors alongside civil-military cooperation that has improved coordination between security and development actors.
- ▶ The stabilisation strategy's blended model integrates security, governance, development and humanitarian components showing that structured cooperation can enhance protection outcomes and embed gender and youth inclusion across all phases.

Recommendations

- ▶ Sustain and consolidate progress from previous stabilisation strategy phases through continuous strategic engagement across all stages of stabilisation. The AU should maintain its leadership in validating and endorsing the strategy to strengthen political commitment. Regular engagement with Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Regional Mechanisms (RMs) and international partners – such as the UNDP, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Organization for Migration – is essential. These interactions should include political dialogues, field visits, joint monitoring and progress reviews to align leadership with realities on the ground.
- ▶ Clarify roles and mandates of all actors – AU Commission, RECs, RMs, national governments, UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations – to ensure complementarity and coherence in implementing the stabilisation strategy.
- ▶ Conduct joint context analyses before launching interventions. Lead agencies should map governance systems and structures, assess security risks and engage communities to design context-driven and locally owned strategies.
- ▶ Invest in grassroots capacity by aligning local expertise with conflict-sensitive, multi-sectoral needs to ensure relevance, sustainability and effective delivery of stabilisation goals.
- ▶ Institutionalise gender and youth inclusion by assigning clear responsibilities, integrating targets into budgets and reports and holding stakeholders accountable for measurable outcomes.
- ▶ Establish a regional knowledge platform, co-managed by the LCB Commission, AU Commission and UNDP to track lessons, share innovations and strengthen adaptive management and cross-regional learning.
- ▶ Align donor funding with priorities through integrated financial frameworks that track spending, promote transparency and build trust among stakeholders.
- ▶ Leverage research institutions, such as the ISS, to generate evidence-based insights and document lessons to inform future stabilisation efforts.

Introduction

In reaction to the security, development and humanitarian challenges in the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) region, the Council of Ministers of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) adopted the Regional Strategy for the Stabilisation, Recovery and Resilience (RS-SRR, hereinafter stabilisation strategy) of the Boko Haram-affected areas in the LCB on 30 August 2018. The African Union Commission (AUC), in collaboration with the LCBC and the four affected countries – Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria – led the development of the strategy. The AU Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) endorsed it, with relevant United Nations (UN) agencies, development partners and other stakeholders supporting its implementation.¹

The stabilisation strategy offers a regional framework for addressing the root causes of underdevelopment and the catalysts of violent extremism and conflict across the Lake Chad region. It lays out the mechanisms and processes required to build on the successes of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). National governments of the surrounding riparian states facilitate the implementation of its ambitions through eight Territorial Action Plans (TAPs), developed under their authority, coordination and guidance.

Multiple interconnected crises have displaced millions across the LCB.^{2,3} About 11 million people now need humanitarian help, with 2.4 million still displaced. The situation reflects a complex mix of local conflict and global jihadist influence, demanding sustained, coordinated action among neighbouring countries and partners.

Establishing stable peace in the countries surrounding Lake Chad presents an immense challenge.⁴ One key aspect has been dealing with former Boko Haram combatants. Through the years, people have been leaving Boko Haram's ranks. Several overlapping dynamics account for this trend. These include the disillusionment of individuals who joined the group due to socio-economic reasons and find themselves in dire conditions and insecurity within the group's camps. Others have left the group due to a perceived misalignment of their own objectives with the group's

agenda. This category of people found themselves entrapped by the necessity to serve their hierarchy's agenda rather than their own plans.

Finally, many have been disheartened by the widening gap between the group's religious rhetoric and its actions, including the indiscriminate killing of civilians, among them Muslims. Offering opportunities and guarantees of security and reintegration to those leaving Boko Haram, while supporting their return to their communities, is an important way to deprive the group of fighters and ensure community reconciliation.⁵

The stabilisation strategy provides a regional framework to tackle underdevelopment, terrorism and conflict in the LCB

The implementation of the stabilisation strategy evolved in a context-specific and organic manner without a prior template to guide it. Going beyond the limited approaches of addressing the realities of war-peace transitions,⁶ through its nine pillars, it integrated both immediate security measures, such as the actions led by the MNJTF against Boko Haram, as well as long-term resilience strategies. These include community engagement, infrastructure rebuilding and addressing the root causes of conflicts, such as poverty and a lack of education.

This report analyses lessons from implementing the strategy in the LCB during its first five years (2019–2023). It traces the development of a regionally owned approach, identifies key factors behind its relative success and distils lessons to guide stabilisation efforts in other contexts affected by violent extremism.

Methodology

The research draws extensively on discussions at the 2022⁷ lessons learnt workshop and the consultative workshop to review and finalise the AU Stabilisation Guidelines,⁸ complemented by semi-structured interviews with AU and LCBC experts and a desktop review of policy documents, reports and academic articles.

Conceptual perspectives of stabilisation

Stabilisation is a complex, evolving concept and practice, formally recognised in the early 2000s, including approaches to reduce violence, restore order and establish conditions for enduring peace. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2010) describes it as ‘a politically driven, integrated set of security, governance, and development measures designed to reduce violence, restore a minimum level of order, and create the conditions for longer-term peacebuilding.’ This definition underscores stabilisation’s predominantly political nature, its integrative approach and its role as a transitional phase between ‘conflict response and sustainable peace.’⁹

The UN and World Bank define stabilisation as a political process, whereby humanitarian, engagement and development efforts are used to deter a spiral into conflict and facilitate sustainable development.¹⁰ This definition emphasises the integration of security and development policies to prevent the recurrence of violence and maintain order.

The AU has a comparable, holistic perspective, which understands stabilisation as the coordination of military and non-military actors to use both kinetic and non-kinetic means to consolidate military gains, address drivers of conflict and strengthen capacities for post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding.¹¹ This broader framework integrates security, governance and development and operations generally include elements of the rule of law, state-building and social services to prevent relapses into conflict. Understanding stabilisation in these terms is critical for evaluating its application in complex environments such as the LCB, where violent extremism, humanitarian crises and governance deficits intersect.

The above conception of stabilisation can be contrasted with its understanding in Peace Support Operations, where stabilisation is primarily understood through a security lens with the goal of creating a secure environment for political processes, development and humanitarian work by neutralising violent actors alongside efforts to restore governance and service provision.¹²

Stabilisation missions, such the AU Mission in Somalia and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali,¹³ were deployed with the primary aim of stabilising the volatile security environment through kinetic operations. However, there have been discussions around the concern that some of these missions, particularly the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, were not sufficiently tailored to the highly volatile environments they encountered. This approach reveals a risk of over-militarisation, prioritising offensive action over local peacebuilding initiatives.¹⁴

Stabilisation requires a conflict-sensitive approach that extends beyond counter insurgency

Increasingly, we have seen a shift from straightforward military interventions to more detailed, multidimensional stabilisation efforts tailored to each context. Stabilisation, as a term, is designed to reverberate with domestic audiences while addressing the nuanced realities of rebuilding stability in conflict-affected countries.¹⁵

In cases of terrorism and violent extremism, stabilisation refers to a coordinated set of political, security and development interventions to manage ongoing risks and some of the underlying risk factors that allow extremists to operate. While stabilisation may involve military gains, it is often focused on addressing the important tasks of restoring legitimate state authority, protecting civilians and providing basic services to areas in conflict or contested territory.¹⁶ In these cases, the order of implementation matters – actors must rapidly consolidate security gains by establishing governance structures, promoting economic recovery and supporting locally trusted dispute resolution mechanisms to prevent extremists from exploiting power vacuums.¹⁷

Scholars have highlighted that stabilisation requires a conflict-sensitive approach that extends beyond counter insurgency and pays attention to the root causes of political exclusion, socio-economic marginalisation and human rights violations.¹⁸

Combining kinetic and non-kinetic approaches to reduce violence and strengthen resilience, in line with the AU’s

approach to stabilisation, creates conditions for sustainable peace. In this regard, there is also an emerging consensus that effective stabilisation must address the root causes of conflict.¹⁹ Linking stabilisation and development by positing that development initiatives can mitigate the structural causes of conflict emphasises the need for a comprehensive approach that includes political, social and economic dimensions.

Success factors in stabilisation efforts

One key dimension of the stabilisation debate has been identifying success factors. Success may hinge on the simultaneous advancement of the various military, political, developmental and humanitarian efforts.²⁰ For instance, the initial regional response to the LCB crisis was heavily military-focused, exemplified by the formation and operations of the MNJTF and national armies. The regional force's operational concept is essentially military but includes facilitating the implementation of complementary non-military stabilisation actions in the affected regions, particularly the effective restoration of state authority and the return of displaced persons and refugees. It also involves securing the deployment of humanitarian aid by states and their partners, as well as humanitarian agencies.²¹

Stabilisation success may hinge on the simultaneous advancement of the various military, political, developmental and humanitarian efforts

Despite registered gains, the military-focused approach has limitations, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive and coordinated response that includes political, developmental and humanitarian efforts alongside military actions.²² Furthermore, Boko Haram, particularly Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), skilfully exploits existing vulnerabilities to ally itself with certain communities.²³

This imperative underpins campaigns such as the Hearts and Minds initiatives,²⁴ which aim to garner local support by improving security and governance and offering developmental opportunities essential to countering insurgent influence. The 'blended approach'²⁵ integrates political processes, community engagement and the efforts of developmental and humanitarian actors to address violent conflicts, build trust and pave the way for a more peaceful future.

In the case of the LCB crises, the AU PSC reaffirmed that defeating Boko Haram requires a comprehensive approach that includes sustainable solutions beyond military action. These solutions encompass development efforts to address the root causes of violent extremism and radicalisation, including poverty, illiteracy and massive youth unemployment in the region.²⁶

Such a strategic orientation, however, is open to implementation challenges, especially in translating concepts into practical policies and actions.



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For instance, despite the recognition of the need for political backing in stabilisation contexts, political resistance often arises from vested interests or conflicting priorities among stakeholders, hindering the smooth execution of stabilisation efforts.²⁷ Moreover, bureaucratic inefficiencies further complicate implementation, affecting the timely deployment of resources²⁸ and the coordination of diverse activities. This frequently leads to overlapping mandates and resource duplication, undermining the coherence of stabilisation strategies.²⁹

Three primary propositions were suggested to enhance the effectiveness of stabilisation efforts. First, institutional resilience and adaptability are pertinent in stabilisation efforts in conflict-affected locations, such as the LCB. Institutions must retool their strategies and establish structures to effectively navigate the complex socio-political context and shifting interests of stakeholders.³⁰ This adaptability enables these institutions to respond responsively to shifting alliances and developments in conflict, thereby increasing their relevance and influence over time.

Political backing is important to achieve stabilisation, but political resistance often arises from vested interests or conflicting priorities

Second, effective coordination among these institutions³¹ is necessary to overcome issues such as overlapping mandates and competing for resources.

Third, the nature of governance and legitimacy in stabilisation initiatives draws attention to the necessity of government institutions to develop trust and support among local communities through transparent and inclusive means.³² By adopting participatory decision-making and conflict-sensitive approaches, institutions can foster sustainable peacebuilding outcomes tailored to the local context.³³

Overview: evolution of the stabilisation strategy

The regional dimension of the insecurity in the LCB increasingly necessitated commensurately transnational responses. In 2015, Chiefs of Defence staff from the four countries of the Lake Chad region met in N'Djamena, Chad and agreed on plans to deploy a joint force to degrade and reclaim territories captured by the Boko Haram terrorist group.³⁴

The same year, the AU PSC, at its 484th meeting³⁵ at the level of Heads of State and Government, authorised the deployment of the MNJTF to create a safe and secure environment in areas affected by Boko Haram and other terrorist groups. Its mandate also included facilitating the implementation of stabilisation programmes by LCBC Member States and Benin, ensuring the full restoration of state authority and the return of internally displaced



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persons (IDPs) and refugees, as well as supporting humanitarian operations and the delivery of aid to affected populations. The AU PSC remained engaged on the matter and, at its 489th, 500th, 560th, 567th, 580th, 639th, 680th and 702nd meetings, continued to draw the AUC's attention to Boko Haram.

Owing to the growing humanitarian crisis and the associated displacement of affected communities, the international community stepped up its intervention through the Oslo I (2017) and Oslo II (2023) Humanitarian Conferences that aimed to mobilise resources to support affected countries.

In addition to military efforts, the evolving situation in the region has further drawn the attention of key policymakers. Following a field mission to the countries of the LCB, the Council, at its 721st meeting in 2017, reaffirmed the imperative for a comprehensive approach in the fight against Boko Haram.³⁶ Consequently, the AUC, in collaboration with the LCBC, the countries of the region and international partners convened the Stabilisation Conference in N'Djamena from 2 to 4 November 2017 under the theme, 'Supporting the development of a framework for a regional stabilisation strategy for areas affected

by Boko Haram.' The framework marked the first step towards developing a comprehensive strategy to guide and coordinate the various initiatives aimed at stabilising the affected areas.³⁷

The strategy emphasises gender inclusion and capacity building, in line with the region's specific needs

The AU PSC, at its 733rd and 738th meetings (the 8th and 9th meetings on the issue), welcomed the outcome of the Stabilisation Conference, highlighting the critical need to address the growing humanitarian needs and the level of security restoration in the area.³⁸ It called upon the affected countries and partners to take the necessary steps to implement its recommendations and commitments. In accordance with the decisions of the AU PSC, the AUC, in partnership with the LCBC/ MNJTF, developed an implementation road map, with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) providing technical and financial support at various stages.

Chart 1: Timeline on the adoption of the regional strategy

Timeline	Policy actions/measures and intended impact on conflict dynamics
2014–2015	- Niamey ministerial meeting - AU PSC, at its 484th meeting, at the level of Heads of State and Government, authorises deployment of MNJTF
2016–2017	- AU PSC, at its 721st meeting, reaffirms imperative for a comprehensive approach in the fight against Boko Haram terrorist group, September 2017 - AUC and LCBC convene Stabilisation Conference in N'Djamena, November 2017 - Strategic pillars, guiding principles, objectives adopted at the First Regional Conference in N'Djamena, 2017
February 2018	AUC establishes Core Coordination Group / Task Force on the Regional Stabilisation for LCB region
April 2018	Task Force undertakes identification and selection of Joint Experts' Team that will reflect on establishment of an inclusive taskforce on regional stabilisation for Lake Chad region, including terms of reference, composition and timelines for the development of the strategy
April – May 2018	AUC and GIZ finalise and initiate Joint Experts' Team
April 2018	AUC, LCBC, MNJTF, Member States and international partners convene Disarmament, Demobilisation, Repatriation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRRR) workshop and identify strategic priority areas: screening, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration

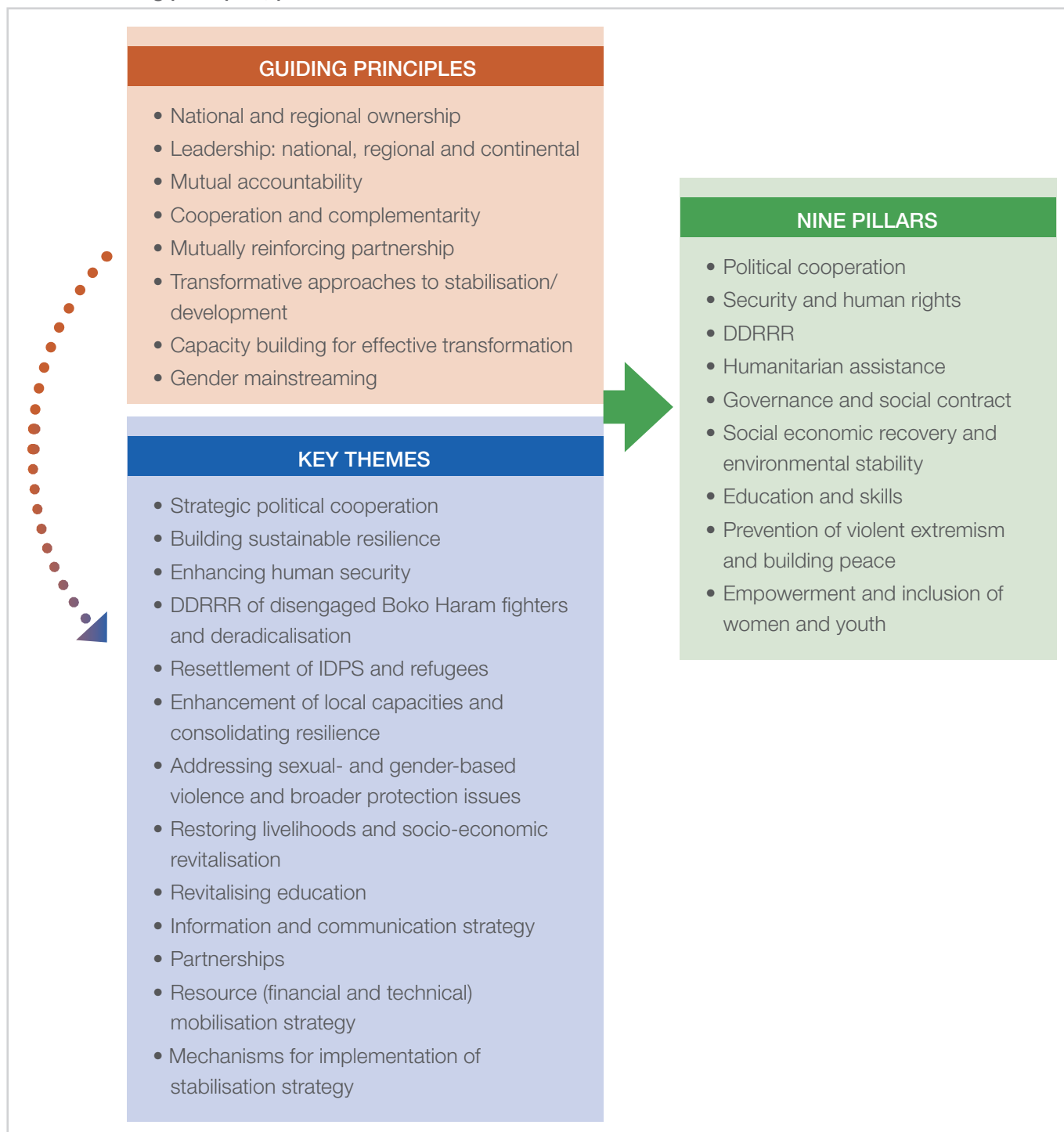
Timeline	Policy actions/measures and intended impact on conflict dynamics
May 2018	- AUC, LCBC, MNJTF and experts convene inception meeting to agree on terms of reference and provide strategic guidance to Joint Experts' Team on key deliverables expected from field mission to LCB region - AUC, LCBC, Member States and UNDP convene inaugural meeting of LCB Governors' Forum on peacebuilding, prevention, stabilisation and regional cooperation, Borno, Nigeria
June 2018	- Experts submit draft stabilisation strategy - AUC undertakes internal review of strategy - AUC, LCBC, MNJTF, Member States and international partners convene to review draft strategy
August 2018	- Validation workshop held with technical experts from LCBC Member States, LCBC, MNJTF - Ministerial conference convened to adopt validated strategy³⁹
November 2018	Consultative workshop with LCBC and MNJTF to agree on modalities for establishment of implementation mechanisms and structures
December 2018	- PSC, in its 816th meeting, endorses stabilisation strategy - AUC convenes ambassadors of LCBC Member States, donors, heads of UN agencies and other stakeholders in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
July 2019	Second meeting of LCB Governors' Forum for Regional Cooperation on Stabilisation, Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development, Niamey, Niger
Q4 2019–2020	AUC and LCBC start political sensitisation and resource mobilisation with LCBC Member States, donors and other relevant stakeholders
4–5 October 2021	Third meeting of LCB Governors' Forum in Yaoundé, Cameroon
December 2022	PSC at its 1126 session called to restructure MNJTF into multidisciplinary force with robust police and civilian components that take into consideration a comprehensive approach to addressing terrorism
5–7 July 2023	The LCB Governors' Forum for Regional Cooperation on Stabilization, Peacebuilding, and Sustainable Development held in N'Djamena highlights importance of enhancing community-based reintegration and transitional justice initiatives and supporting socio-economic development and need for finding long-term solutions for refugees and IDPs in the region
27 September 2023	Stabilisation strategy extended for a year following 4 th Steering Committee meeting to consider an adjusted stabilisation strategy for validation by Council of Ministers in August 2024
2023	First phase implementation concludes
April 2024	- AU PSC receives briefing on LCB situation at 1207th meeting on 8 April 2024 - Discussions on extension of strategy implementation
2024	- Implementation extends starting September 2024–2028 2024–2028 phase focuses on deepening security gains while addressing socio-economic issues and governance weaknesses (SPESA, 2024)⁴⁰

Source: Authors' compilation

In September 2023, the Steering Committee for the stabilisation strategy met in Abuja, Nigeria, to discuss the need to accelerate the implementation of the stabilisation strategy. Accordingly, the meeting extended the strategy for a period of one year and tasked the LCBC with redeveloping the strategy for validation by the Council of Ministers in 2024.⁴¹

The strategy's aspirations reflect an ambition for a comprehensive approach to deal with insecurity. It outlines guiding principles and key themes, which subsequently form the strategy's fundamental pillars. Further, the nine pillars and 40 strategic objectives provide the framework for developing initiatives and programmes to alleviate and resolve the crisis in the region (see Chart 2).

Chart 2: Guiding principles, pillars and themes from the November 2017 Conference



Source: Authors' compilation

The stabilisation strategy exemplified a 'New Way of Working' by integrating the security–development–humanitarian nexus and fostering enhanced coordination among local, national, regional and global stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society. This evolving development approach offers

valuable insights into addressing enduring security challenges in other conflict-affected regions on the continent, including the Horn of Africa.⁴² It places strong emphasis on gender inclusion and capacity building, reflecting its commitment to addressing the region's specific needs.

Key lessons from implementing the stabilisation strategy

In its five years of implementation, the stabilisation strategy has registered mixed results. One indication of gradual positive changes has been the contribution to the reduction in the incidence of security events and fatalities in the LCB region. This showed a change, albeit minimal, from 2019 to 2023 as reflected in the graphs below, partly due to the operations of the MNJTF and national armies as well as the dynamics that followed the death of Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau.

Despite progress, terrorist groups such as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad and ISWAP continue to threaten the region through attacks, looting and abductions for ransom, which increased by 35% in 2022. Banditry and intercommunal conflicts compound the instability. The threat has also spread beyond traditional conflict zones into Nigerian states such as Taraba, Kogi, Ondo and Edo. This underscores the need to strengthen the MNJTF and national armies to sustain operations, especially on the Lake Chad islands, and further weaken Boko Haram factions.

On the humanitarian front, from December 2022 to December 2023, the number of IDPs in the area decreased by 2%, while returnees increased by 25%. However, the number of refugees increased by 3%. Specifically in Cameroon, IDPs increased by 18%, and in Niger, by 4%.⁴³

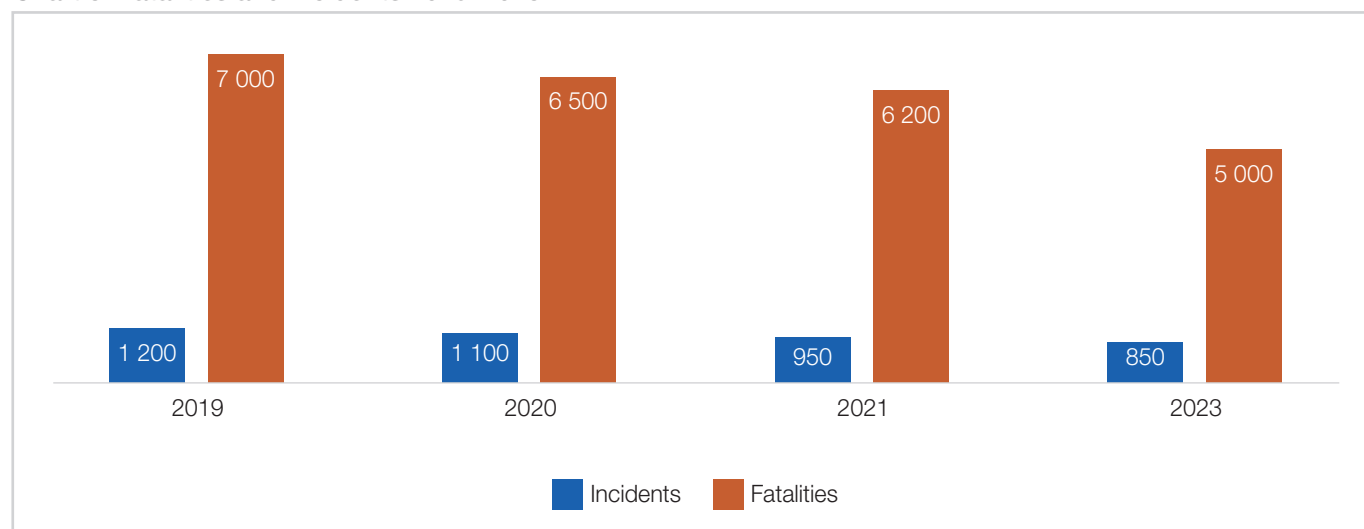
Furthermore, over 1.36 million people benefitted from stabilisation interventions conducted with the support of the Regional Stabilisation Facility (RSF), through TAPs, including 400 000 people who were able to return to their homes and rebuild their lives and over 65 000 people who received vital livelihood support through business grants, training opportunities and cash-for-work schemes.⁴⁵

The strategy spans eight Boko Haram-affected regions, necessitating sustained coordination

Despite notable progress in security, humanitarian aid and development, sustained efforts are still needed to address the root causes of instability and continuously adapt to a still volatile context. Challenges include the ongoing instability, complicated by the fragmentation of Boko Haram factions, their connection with other insecurity actors and ISWAP's ties with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

Locating stabilisation interventions and strategies within the conventional conflict prevention, management and resolution spectrum in such a context has proven to be difficult. This is primarily because some of the stabilisation-related tasks overlap with what is conventionally conceived of as peacebuilding and Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development interventions

Chart 3: Fatalities and incidents 2019–2023⁴⁴



Source: Authors' compilation

or with large multidimensional peace operations with complex mandates straddling security, political, development and humanitarian functions.

At the operational level, the stabilisation strategy spans a vast geographic area across eight key Boko Haram-affected regions, necessitating sustained coordination among a diverse array of stakeholders from military and civilian sectors. Despite these challenges, its implementation offers critical lessons and insights into the implementation of stabilisation strategies, demonstrated by its broad scope, nine pillars and extensive geographic coverage.

Lesson 1: Implementing the whole-of-society approach

The persisting insecurity and its implications have led to the fragmentation of the social contract between communities and governance structures, undermining the perceived presence of state institutions and constraining community engagement in governance. To address these challenges effectively, a multifaceted approach is required, aligning with the principles of the stabilisation strategy. The strategy emphasises a whole-of-society approach that bridges traditional gaps by integrating national and local governments, regional bodies, international organisations, civil society actors and communities into a cohesive stabilisation effort.⁴⁶

A key contribution of the stabilisation strategy is giving practical shape to a blended model combining hard- and soft-security measures

The principle of mutual accountability,⁴⁷ which underpins the strategy, emphasises the importance of shared responsibility and transparency among all stakeholders. The strategy also calls for transformative approaches⁴⁸ to stabilisation and development, which leverage both external expertise and local knowledge to foster sustainable peace and development.

While definitions of the whole-of-society approach often lean towards a practice-based perspective, one that seeks to enhance the effectiveness of externally-led peacebuilding and conflict prevention by grounding them in their social contexts,⁴⁹ the stabilisation strategy recognises that stabilisation efforts hinge on a comprehensive approach that integrates both external resources and internal capacities, at government and local levels.

The whole-of-society approach necessitates a comprehensive approach to stabilisation that combines military and civil efforts and has become a centre of discussions around the success or failure of stabilisation interventions. A key contribution of the stabilisation strategy has been to give practical meaning to an emerging blended approach or stabilisation model that combines hard-security interventions and soft-security measures associated with political and development responses.⁵⁰ This approach has fostered civil-military cooperation, exemplified by the establishment of the Governors'

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Forum. The Forum serves as a crucial platform for regional political consensus and coordinated policy responses, reflecting dynamic leadership and adaptive governance in addressing complex security challenges and crises in the Lake Chad region, which transcends national boundaries.⁵¹

Moreover, the stabilisation strategy has contributed to a growing understanding of the security–development–humanitarian nexus, translating policy frameworks into tangible developmental outcomes. This is facilitated through coordination between security and humanitarian actors, which significantly enhances its execution. It also emphasises the need for integrated, multidimensional approaches that adapt to evolving security landscapes and political dynamics.

Implementing a whole-of-society approach in the complex context of the LCB faces significant challenges

Given its aspirations to tackle various challenges, such as security threats to socio-economic recovery, the strategy offers insights into how to provide a comprehensive response customised to the region's needs. It highlights the role of empowerment initiatives for marginalised groups, such as women and youth, who are essential to sustainable development and peacebuilding. The strategy fosters local resilience by promoting capacity building and inclusive governance, supporting long-term stability in the LCB.

Implementing a whole-of-society approach for stabilisation, recovery and resilience in the complex context of the LCB faces significant challenges that require careful consideration and strategic coordination. First, while implementing this approach requires a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach that can simultaneously address the community's security and development needs and ensure the sustainable, permanent and voluntary return of displaced populations, the regional strategy's implementation faced a challenge of balance. MNJTF's drive to enhance security measures to combat insurgencies was not matched by parallel development initiatives. Initiatives such as those funded by the UN Stabilisation Facility

struggled with slow implementation. For instance, programmes aimed at rebuilding infrastructure and providing market support were delayed due to security concerns and logistical challenges.⁵²

While this dual approach stabilises security and rebuilds communities, which is essential for long-term resilience, its implementation has been slow. Stabilisation gains can only lead to lasting recovery if they are combined with conflict-sensitive strategies and a continuous state or security presence in areas that have already benefited from stabilisation investments, turning these zones into development hubs that support long-term growth resilience.

Another challenge here is the capacity gap, which refers to the lack of capacity at both national and sub-national levels. Considering the security dynamics and realities on the ground, limited resources constrained the stabilisation strategy implementers' attempts to involve all segments of society meaningfully. For example, in northeastern Nigeria, local government agencies have struggled to manage the influx of IDPs and provide essential services due to inadequate infrastructure and insufficient personnel. This clearly demonstrates the need for an increase in qualified human resources across diverse sectors at both national and sub-national levels.

Lesson 2: Fostering regional, national and local ownership of interventions

One key success factor for effective stabilisation interventions is fostering national and local ownership, which stems from the level of consultation with local populations during the design and implementation of such initiatives. While the AUC led the development of the stabilisation strategy, its ownership resides with the LCBC.⁵³

Different scales of ownership have been critical in implementing various phases of the stabilisation strategy, especially the second mandate, which aimed to facilitate the implementation of overall stabilisation programmes by LCBC and Member States, including the full restoration of state authority and the return of IDPs and refugees.

A critical mechanism for localisation has been the TAPs,⁵⁴ prepared and adopted by the eight states, regions or provinces most affected by Boko Haram in the LCB region. Designed to align resources with local

priorities, the TAPs involved local authorities, community leaders and national governments, fostering ownership and accountability. This approach ensured context-specific interventions that addressed root causes of insecurity and promoted sustainable peace and recovery.

The stabilisation strategy also builds on inclusivity and local ownership, recognising the Governors' Forum as the primary mechanism for cross-border political cooperation among the Governors.⁵⁵ The Regional Civil Society Platform⁵⁶ is another mechanism to ensure buy-in and ownership at the grassroots level, serving as a platform for the participation of affected communities and relevant actors (including traditional and religious leaders, women and youth) in the implementation of the stabilisation strategy at the territorial level.

The stabilisation strategy builds on inclusivity and local ownership, with the Governors' Forum as the primary mechanism for cross-border cooperation

As evident from the above discussion, the stabilisation strategy experience provides valuable insights for similar future endeavours in stabilisation contexts. This broad-based support has been instrumental in securing political, policy and programmatic backing for the stabilisation effort.⁵⁷ However, promoting ownership has encountered challenges, including clarifying roles and setting priorities, which have been more complex within the implementation of the stabilisation strategy.⁵⁸

Lesson 3: Enhancing partnership and coordination among diverse stabilisation actors

The idea of mutually reinforcing partnership is one of the critical principles of the stabilisation strategy,⁵⁹ which is conceptualised as a political process that requires strong collaboration among military actors, local and authorities and institutions working towards a common objective.⁶⁰

Partnership as a fundamental principle of stabilisation

Overall, the stabilisation strategy experience showed the importance of partnerships and the imperative for managing relations, offering critical insights on the added value and approaches to stabilisation partnerships.

The enormity of the stabilisation needs required various partnership arrangements among national and sub-state actors, including local communities, as no single actor's efforts alone could meet them. The whole-of-society approach to stabilisation necessitates the skilful management of relationships. This approach is rooted in collaboration that acknowledges the need for a comprehensive approach beyond military and security actors, encompassing development and humanitarian efforts to address the root causes of terrorism and violent extremism.⁶¹



THE STABILISATION
STRATEGY EXPERIENCE
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A key aspect of the partnership ecosystem surrounding the implementation of the stabilisation strategy is the collaboration between the LCBC and the AU, which has been strengthened through formal agreements. This initiative began with the establishment of a Strategy Taskforce and has since expanded to encompass strategic collaboration, including joint leadership of the Steering Committee, as well as operational cooperation. The Governors' Forum has further formalised the partnership and streamlined political processes.⁶²

Additionally, the UNDP, with support from the governments of Germany, Sweden, the UK and the EU, established an RSF to facilitate the implementation of the stabilisation strategy.⁶³ The RSF comprised national components in Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, as well as a regional component that enhanced the LCBC's Stabilisation Secretariat. The RSF mobilised funding and ensured the alignment of donor priorities with local needs, supporting both military and civilian efforts. By pooling expertise, it streamlined efforts and provided effective support in the fight against Boko Haram and extremism.⁶⁴

A key element of the strategy's partnership ecosystem is the collaboration between the LCBC and the AU

While external partnerships primarily focus on resource mobilisation, they also support capacity development, ownership and sustainability, particularly through civil-military cooperation in stabilisation. Persistent insecurity has demanded the sustained role of the MNJTF and national forces as the principal security providers, a prerequisite for effective interventions. To enhance coordination, the LCBC–MNJTF Civil-Military Cooperation Cell was created to link humanitarian actors, communities and the military in promoting recovery and resilience.⁶⁵

Coordination among diverse stakeholders in general is facilitated through various thematic cluster groups, aiming to align interventions with the security–humanitarian–development nexus. This approach prioritises local, national and regional ownership, strengthens partnerships and builds the LCBC's capacity

to establish a unified framework for addressing security, peace and development challenges. Institutionalising this capacity is essential to effectively address the region's structural vulnerabilities.⁶⁶

Addressing the challenges of coordination and alignment

Despite these concerted efforts, the implementation of such coordination mechanisms has faced significant challenges. The stabilisation strategy experience shows that putting a collaborative approach into practice is often hindered by ongoing coordination issues.⁶⁷ Engaging multiple governments, including Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, as well as local communities, civil society organisations and private sector actors remains complex. The cross-border nature of the crisis, coupled with overlapping mandates and bureaucratic inefficiencies has created gaps in coordination.

Moreover, the security situation in the LCB is made complex with military and non-military actors engaged with vastly different priorities and timelines. The differences among state, international and local actors reinforce the need for better coordination and consideration of how to refine management to adapt over time and the new realities that the region is experiencing.

In addition, it is important for objectives and targeted activities to be described within an alignment and to maximise efficiency and allocate funds without overlapping activities. Although platforms such as the International Support Group aim to coordinate international partners and donors, differing priorities and delays in funds allocation remain significant challenges.⁶⁸ This leads to overlapping interventions and gaps in coverage, ultimately reducing the overall impact on stabilisation.

For example, although the MNJTF and various UN agencies operate separately, there have been instances of overlapping strategies and resource wastage.⁶⁹ The MNJTF has concentrated on military efforts against Boko Haram, while UN agencies, including the UNDP and the UN International Children's Emergency Fund, focus on humanitarian and development tasks, such as community stabilisation, education and healthcare. Sometimes, their operations needed better alignment in some aspects, such as developing infrastructure in the same areas using different strategies and timelines.⁷⁰

Moreover, coordination challenges between humanitarian and security actors highlighted operational tensions that needed effective management. In this regard, structured coordination mechanisms, such as the Regional Action Plan and joint operational frameworks, facilitated alignment and unified strategic goals across sectors. These platforms contributed to streamlining efforts and optimising resource allocation and operational efficiency, resulting in tangible improvements in service delivery and community impact.

Additionally, promoting adaptive management practices that allow for flexibility in response to evolving dynamics can enhance the agility and effectiveness of interventions across the LCB. The stabilisation strategy could benefit from strengthening, both horizontally and vertically, through community engagement, existing coordination platforms and fostering a shared understanding of priorities and strategies among all involved parties.

Promoting adaptive management practices that allow for flexibility in response to evolving dynamics can enhance the effectiveness of stabilisation interventions

Cooperation is foundational for implementation as part of the whole-of-society approach, with the Governors' Forum serving as a platform for political dialogue and exchanges. This arrangement ensures political ownership, regional interaction and domestication of the strategy at the territorial levels closest to the affected communities. Platforms and opportunities for political coordination include annual engagements for developing Regional Action Plans and opportunities for multi-stakeholder participation and engagement, allowing diverse stakeholders, including local communities, civil society organisations and regional actors, to contribute to and consolidate gains in regional cooperation and implementation of the stabilisation strategy.⁷¹

Additionally, the Regional Task Force and its thematic cluster groups, including the Youth Network for Lake Chad, the Regional Civil Society Platform, and the LCBC–MNJTF Civil-Military Cooperation Cell, ensure ongoing consultation and collaboration through their activities. The AUC has strengthened these efforts by maintaining a dedicated team in N'Djamena to support coordination, offer technical expertise and facilitate collaboration between the LCBC, the MNJTF, donors and implementing partners.

At the community level, various civil society and community-based platforms and structures are used to foster regional and cross-border dialogues among key stakeholders. For instance, in Buni Yadi, Nigeria, Community Stabilisation Committees play a pivotal role in engaging communities, building trust and facilitating dialogue among residents, security forces and government bodies.



CIVIL SOCIETY AND
COMMUNITY-BASED
PLATFORMS FOSTER
REGIONAL AND CROSS-
BORDER DIALOGUES

Measurable outcomes are evident from an RSF survey, which showed that households reported enhanced community stability, increased state presence, improved access to justice and education, better provision of essential services, livelihood opportunities and increased satisfaction with government performance, surpassing annual targets. This success is attributed partly to the Community Stabilisation Committee, which has proven effective in mediating conflicts and achieving local peace agreements, demonstrating their role in stabilising Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states.⁷²

Clarifying roles and setting priorities

A clear definition of roles and priority setting at the inception of the stabilisation strategy is critical for developing and planning its implementation, as well as fostering a whole-of-society approach. The political nature of stabilisation uniquely demands agreement and plans that require buy-in from strategy beneficiaries, helping sustain political engagement even during government changes. The assortment of support needs in stabilisation contexts requires well-thought-through prioritisation, better fostered through local and sub-regional ownership of the beneficiaries.

Role clarification could be fostered through various mechanisms. First, a deliberate, inclusive process is needed to allocate functions in general. Defining actors at each level (local, national and regional) requires a deliberative process devoid of preconceived notions and assumptions and clearly defining who is to do what as part of the strategy's implementation.

Second, the implementation of the stabilisation strategy, especially at sub-national levels, should be discussed at the inception through consultation with stakeholders. Conducting a thorough actor mapping at the inception, similar to the one developed by the Training for Peace partners,⁷³ contributes to fostering role identification and allocation.

Lesson 4: Resource mobilisation, prioritisation and accountability

The strategy spans eight Boko Haram-affected regions, necessitating sustained coordination

The enormity of stabilisation support needs requires a sound resource mobilisation strategy, as the availability of resources makes or breaks stabilisation efforts. Financially, a variety of sources have contributed to the implementation of the stabilisation strategy. The RSF was the primary resource mobilisation structure for stabilisation activities in the affected areas within the riparian countries (Country Windows) and at the regional level (Regional Window), supporting the LCBC stabilisation strategy Secretariat's coordinating role.

Two key mechanisms have supported political and financial backing for the stabilisation strategy. The Oslo Consultative Group, established after the 2017 Oslo Humanitarian Conference, comprises Norway, Nigeria, Germany



HOUSEHOLDS REPORTED
ENHANCED COMMUNITY
STABILITY AND IMPROVED
ACCESS TO JUSTICE
AND EDUCATION

and the UN. The International Support Group (ISG) works alongside it, with a wider mandate to oversee the implementation of the stabilisation strategy and its Territorial Action Plans. The ISG unites donors, regional organisations, and implementing partners to assess strategic progress, coordinate financing in line with shared priorities and mobilise both financial and technical resources.

Financing stabilisation has provided a link between funding and strategic implementation. The RSF is a multi-donor basket fund⁷⁴ seeking to mobilise an estimated budget of US\$100 million to carry out stabilisation interventions in the affected communities. The ISG and organisations such as the Norwegian Refugee Council have also contributed by sending expert personnel.⁷⁵

Pooled funding allows various donors to contribute to a shared basket, therefore reducing duplication

This funding mechanism played a crucial role in bridging the gap between high expectations set by the stabilisation strategy and the actual resources available, supporting national efforts in the stabilisation process. However, this calls for clarifying responsibilities for mobilising and managing resources to avoid tensions among actors,⁷⁶ maintaining momentum and keeping partners engaged amid a changing international landscape. Additionally, issues such as bureaucratic delays, differing donor priorities and the complicated task of coordinating multiple stakeholders have created significant obstacles.

To address these issues, the RSF has introduced innovative financing solutions. Pooled funding allows various donors to contribute to a single fund, reducing administrative duplication and enabling direct allocation to priority projects. Flexible grant structures permit the reallocation of funds in response to changing security or humanitarian conditions – for example, shifting resources from delayed infrastructure projects to urgent livelihood or community security initiatives. Improved coordination between donors and implementing partners ensures that available funds are used for maximum strategic and immediate impact.⁷⁷

Impact of financing on stabilisation

Real-life examples illustrate how RSF-funded projects have advanced stabilisation efforts. In northern Nigeria, RSF resources have supported infrastructure rehabilitation, enhanced local governance capacities and provided critical humanitarian aid. Metrics such as reduced conflict incidents, increased school enrolments and improved local economic activities reflect the tangible benefits of these interventions.⁷⁸ These successes highlight the crucial role of financing in achieving stabilisation objectives.⁷⁹

Funding must be linked with priorities

A critical component of the stabilisation strategy implementation is the need for a mechanism to better align resources with nationally and locally identified stabilisation priorities. As mentioned earlier, localisation of the stabilisation strategy has been achieved through the development of TAPs, with each of the eight most affected states and regions adopting specific plans. The TAPs were instruments for linking funding with stabilisation priorities.⁸⁰ They were prepared under the authority, coordination and guidance of the national governments of the riparian states, offering opportunities to accommodate existing funding, both earmarked and unallocated.

However, the TAPs have so far been underused and have provided limited incentives for local actors to fully engage. There is therefore a need for substantive dialogue between political authorities (LCBC and Governors) and the donor community to rectify these limitations. The AU PSC has underscored the importance of this dialogue, encouraging the concerned countries to continue institutionalising the stabilisation strategy by implementing the TAPs to effectively channel resources to the most critical areas, enhancing local ownership and support.⁸¹

Integrating financial accountability frameworks

The experience in the LCB underscores the necessity for donors and regional countries implementing the stabilisation strategy to participate in an integrated accountability framework. This imperative emerged because, at the inception of the stabilisation strategy, various implementing actors raised funds in its name,

albeit with limited coordination.⁸² Such a framework ensures that funding is aligned with the implementation of the strategy and its constituent TAPs, safeguarding the proper allocation of resources and preventing any single actor from monopolising funds.

An integrated accountability framework promotes transparency and coordination by enforcing reporting obligations for local and national stakeholders. By linking local funding priorities with the TAPs, it tracks ongoing and planned activities and reports resource use to the Governors' Forum. This ensures stabilisation efforts are responsive to local needs. Donors can play a crucial role in enforcing this approach by coordinating closely with the LCBC. Such assertiveness is essential for ensuring a unified and efficient approach to stabilisation.

Lesson 5: Fostering gender mainstreaming and youth inclusion

The stabilisation strategy recognises the critical importance of gender mainstreaming and youth inclusion in achieving long-term stability in the LCB. This commitment is evident in its designation of children, youth and women as key focus areas, ensuring their protection and empowerment as integral components of the TAPs.

At a policy level, the stabilisation strategy recognises the need to take meaningful steps to support women and youth, as highlighted in Pillar 9 of its strategy, which emphasises their importance. By doing so, the stabilisation strategy ensures these topics are central to its mission, rather than just secondary considerations.

Youth empowerment programmes have provided training and job opportunities, helping to prevent young people from being drawn into extremist activities



WOMEN'S COOPERATIVES
STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC
RESILIENCE AND GIVE
WOMEN A VOICE IN
COMMUNITY DECISIONS

Reports and interviews with stakeholders have highlighted several successful projects that are making a significant difference. For example, youth empowerment programmes have provided training and job opportunities, helping to prevent young people from being drawn into extremist activities. Likewise, women's cooperatives have been established to strengthen economic resilience and give women a larger voice in community decisions.

In Nigeria's Borno State, for instance, the stabilisation strategy helped establish women-led community watch groups that have improved local security and set up early warning systems. These groups empower women and build trust within the community, which is essential for creating an inclusive approach to stability. In Chad, youth councils have been formed through similar engagement programmes, providing young people with a platform to voice their concerns and participate in peacebuilding efforts.

The implementation of the stabilisation strategy, therefore, offers valuable lessons in promoting gender mainstreaming and youth inclusion. These two considerations and principles must guide the entire strategy, ensuring that gender and youth perspectives are integrated into all aspects of implementation. Establishing regular reporting and monitoring mechanisms is crucial for assessing the impact of gender mainstreaming and youth inclusion initiatives.

Programmes that empower local actors, such as women-led security groups or youth councils, are more likely to succeed and be sustainable. Strong partnerships with local, national and international actors are also essential. Collaboration with organisations such as the AU, UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations can provide the necessary support and resources to scale successful initiatives.

Conclusion

This report examines the implementation of stabilisation efforts and reveals the complexities involved in stabilising conflict-affected regions in the LCB. Its key findings emphasise that effectively addressing these complexities requires a comprehensive approach and an acknowledgement of the interconnected roles needed to achieve peace in the severely affected LCB region.

Maintaining the gains achieved relies on several important factors. First, the complexity of the crisis calls

for enhancing and sustaining a coordinated and unified effort among all stakeholders. Continued commitment from regional, continental and international partners, who bring valuable contributions in knowledge, expertise and best practices, is essential.

Second, effective resource mobilisation remains key, particularly given the ambitious goals of the stabilisation strategy and its substantial funding requirements. This demands robust and flexible approaches to resource allocation and prioritisation that address both immediate and emerging needs, while simultaneously supporting long-term initiatives beyond Quick Impact Projects to tackle root causes. This requires flexibility in strategy, given the fluid and changing context, alongside continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure interventions remain relevant and effective. Moreover, the strategy should draw on the insights and expertise of affected communities in both planning and implementation.

Additionally, the strategy provides an AU perspective on the crucial nature of stabilisation as a precursor to Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development, integrating military efforts with non-kinetic approaches. By tackling complex political, security and humanitarian challenges in the LCB, the stabilisation strategy has influenced the AU's wider stabilisation frameworks. Ongoing AU discussions continue to enhance and refine these approaches, ensuring lessons from the LCB contribute to more effective continental strategies.

Notes

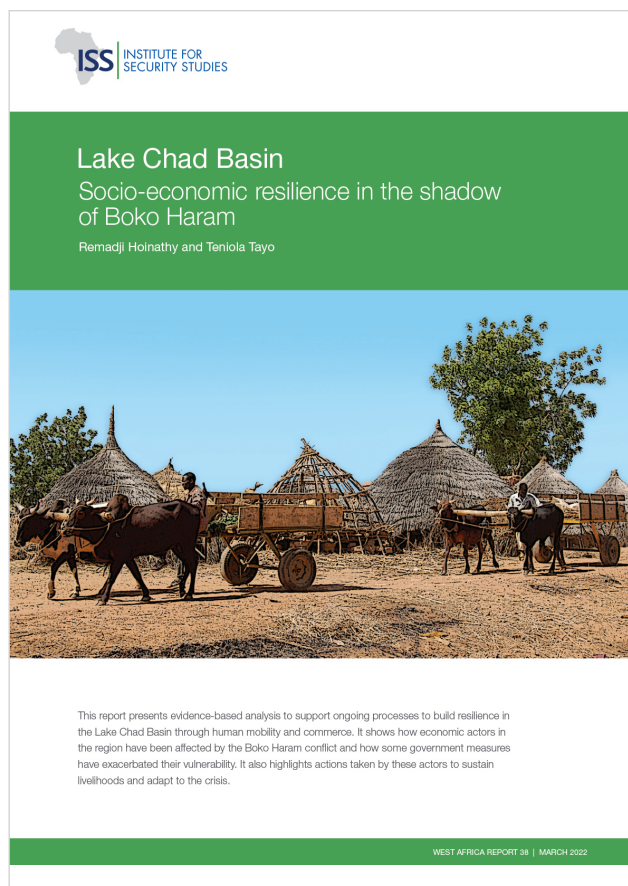
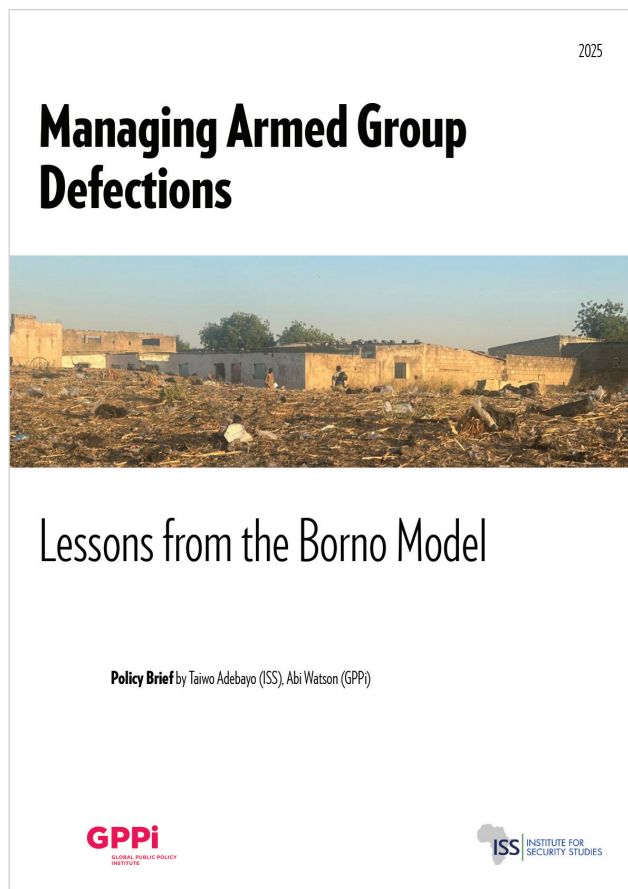
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