

Box 19.4: Restoring the Lake Chad Basin with local communities

The Lake Chad Basin is a key source of freshwater for more than 45 million people. Located at the crossroads of Cameroon, Chad, the Central African Republic, Niger and Nigeria, the basin is also characterized by degraded ecosystems that are imperiling livelihoods.

Between 1960 and 1985, the surface area of Lake Chad shrank by 95% owing to the decrease in rainfall, although its extent has been expanding since the 2000s. Insecurity in the area has been exacerbated by the Boko Haram sect, displacing large swaths of the population.

Since 2017, the Biosphere and Heritage of Lake Chad (Biopalt) project has set about improving the living standards of the riparian communities. Local people have been trained in how

to safeguard and sustainably manage the basin. An early warning system for droughts and floods has been put in place. The habitats of emblematic species such as the elephant and Kouri cattle (*Bos taurus longifrons*) have been restored. Communities have received financial assistance to develop 'green' income-generating activities, such as the production of spirulina, a high-protein plant.

The project is being implemented by UNESCO in partnership with the Lake Chad Basin Commission and with funding from the African Development Bank to the tune of US\$ 6.5 million. Representatives of civil society, local communities and indigenous peoples all participated in designing the project, which sets out to ensure that 'nothing is done for communities without communities'.

The Lake Chad Basin is rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage. It hosts two world heritage sites (Lakes Ounianga and Manovo-Gounda), a UNESCO biosphere reserve (Waza) and Ramsar sites of wetlands of international importance.

The project is helping countries to prepare their application for the creation of a transboundary biosphere reserve in the basin.

Lake Chad was recently inscribed on the World Heritage Tentative List of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. However, in September 2020, Chad requested the suspension of the application for World Heritage site status after signing agreements with companies for oil exploration inside the nominated property.

Source: UNESCO