



RESEARCH REPORT

**A 'Hidden' Crisis-In-Crises:
A Transformative
Agenda 'Boko-Haram and Education'
In the Countries of
The Lake Chad Region Through
Visual Narratives**



THE
ROYAL
SOCIETY



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1.1. Introduction

The networking research was built-on previous studies carried out by the network partners: Kunock-Afu (2019; 2017); Akanji (2019;2013); Ebubedike (forthcoming), to forge new-links with network partners and collaborators in the countries of the lake-Chad region to, generate innovative transdisciplinary research ideas with local Non-governmental organisations that work to support communities in crisis; to address the situation of a burgeoning out -of -school population four nations affected by the Boko-Haram crises in the Lake Chad region-Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Whilst the potential for art-based methodologies in educational interventions for conflict transformation has shown success but not complete acceptance, participatory photography, narrative storytelling, and participatory exhibitions have shown effective as a unique research tool that allows users to communicate deeply on sensitive subjects with potential to influence larger social change.

Our initiative was informed by 'Photovoice' Wang and Burris (1997), 'talking pictures' Bunster and Chaney (1989) which enabled us to put the research project's design, data collection, analysis, and presentation of findings in the hands of the participants (guided by the research team). The networking research allowed us to document, showcase and report how arts-based methodologies, specially photovoice, may serve as a practical, credible, and ethical methodology for research collaboratively by and for locals and aims to reflect how photovoice can yield new insights for developing context -focused initiatives and positive personal experiences for local participants, including providing some forms of empowerment.

Ultimately, the structural inequalities imposed by protracted armed conflict require redress if the goal is the long -term and sustainable empowerment of the affected communities including, children and young people experiencing increased loss of education and multiple developmental challenges due to Boko Haram attacks. The Lake Chad region is an economically and socially integrated area that has been undermined by multiple and interrelated drivers of fragility, conflict, and violence, with one of the largest concentrations of extreme poverty in Subsaharan Africa (Taguem, 2007). The people are primarily involved in agriculture, mostly fishing and farming, and have a long-standing history of Islamic conservatism which makes the region susceptible to the activities of non-state actors. It is in this region that Boko Haram has been able to thrive, taking advantage of several common developmental issues that affects the region.

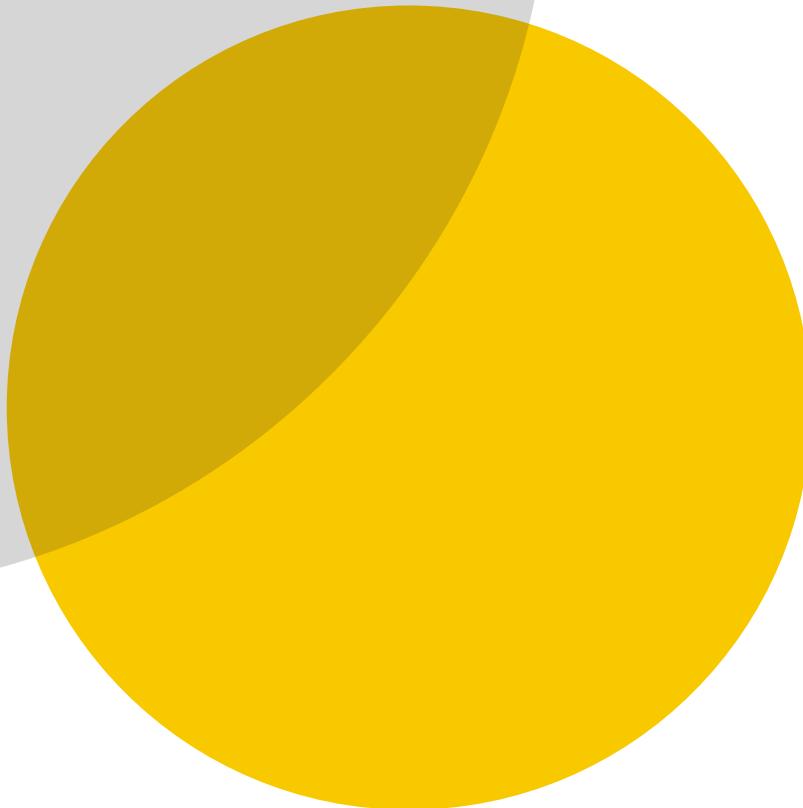
Boko Haram Islamic sect originated from the northeast region of Nigeria in about 2002, formed by a group dissatisfied with Western education, and with the challenging objective of creating a 'pure' Islamic state ruled by sharia law. Despite efforts by Nigerian authorities to suppress the group, the activities of the sect kept expanding across the region. The group gained global prominence after it successfully bombed the United Nations building in Abuja in August 2011, killing 23 people (Akanji, 2013). The abduction of 276 female students from their School in Chibok, Northeast Nigeria on 14th April 2014, attracted international condemnation and led to the "#BringBackOurGirls" campaign (Habila, 2017). Four years after, in February 2018, 105 schoolgirls aged 11-19 were kidnapped by the Boko Haram terrorist group from their College in Dapchi (Onuoha and Oyewole, 2018).

The series of attacks on school children, especially girls, in the region are an extreme illustration of Boko Haram's resistance to Western education, and the resulting violence particularly against girls that occurs in the Lake Chad region. Consequently, parents started withdrawing and hiding away their children, particularly the girls, from school, for fear of their being abducted and forced to marry Boko Haram fighters. These anti-education activities of Boko Haram have further exacerbated the situation of poverty and educational inequalities in the region (Ebubedike, 2020).

Efforts of regional and national government agencies to address the burgeoning out of school population in this region have often focused on top-bottom approaches that exclude the voices and experiences of the communities and children at the centre of the crisis. This project adopted art-based methodologies using participatory approaches that facilitate deeper engagement with local and socio-political contexts by carrying out research that remained sensitive to people's experiences. Our collaborative approach in this networking research which allowed community-based participation and engagement, speaks to the Goal 17 of the SDGs which echoes that "the SDGs can only be realized with strong partnerships and cooperation". Considering that a bottom-up approach in the co-creation of new knowledge, has the potential of accelerating research impact.

Other studies both within Western and non-Western contexts have reported the significance of using Community-based participatory research (CBPR), to respond to challenges of research in crisis communities (Afifi et al., 2020), co-create context relevant disaster reduction strategies with most vulnerable communities to meet a community's unique needs. (Crabtree and Braun, 2015), explore contexts relevant initiatives for refugee populations (Leaning, 2001), understand the immediate needs of marginalised populations (Bartlett et al., 2022; Muhammad et al., 2015), and to co-design peacebuilding initiatives with fragile communities experiencing conflict and crisis (Haider, 2009).

Our photovoice project across four nations in the Lake Chad country region- Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad, extends and builds on these studies to sensitively explore how to generate innovative transdisciplinary research ideas with the communities and network team to address the situation of a burgeoning out -of -school population in the case counties.



1.2 Research design

As researchers and as practitioners our work is framed through a postcolonial lens (Said 1985). The networking project was informed by the understanding around disrupting the power dynamics evidenced within the nexus of any colonial processes (Suarez-Balcazar, 2020), to highlight and to recognise other knowledge systems and ways of knowing. Our postcolonial framing is based on the understanding that there are multiple ways of knowing- for research to be relevant and meaningful to indigenous people, it should be driven by indigenous worldviews and cultural values and belief systems relevant to the people Chilisa, 2012), considering that these other ways of knowing are unique, place-based, historic and cultural. Hence, our commitment to ensure respect for the cultural norms and existing belief systems in our research contexts, to establish and maintain relationships (Pratt, 1992; Trivedi, 1993). Our aim was to enable a research project that is beneficial to both the researcher and the participating communities (Israel et al., 2013).

2.1. Participants and sampling

Several representative groups engaged in the networking project, including SRF Coordinators who supported the networking activities locally in Niger, Nigeria and Chad and network partner in Cameroon who coordinated activities locally in Cameroon.

Participants were identified according to their grouping as shown in Table I below:

Table I: sample size for each group per participating country

Group name	Description	Size
Community group	Parents	2
	Religious and Community leaders	2
Children and Young People (YP)	Have experienced education	10
	Discontinued education (due to the on-going Boko haram crises)	10
	Never experienced education	10
Educationist group	Teachers	2
	School heads	2
	LEA staff	2
Total number of participants per country		40

Children and young people – the focus of data generation – were recruited for the study by network partners across the four participating countries- Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and through the existing community networks. All networking activities were held separately in each participating country.

2.2. Networking Activities

August 2021:

We held one-day introductory workshop in each participating country to inform the community group about the kind of activities their children and wards will be asked to engage in. It was also an opportunity for the network team to share details about the series of events that will be happening and the levels of engagement for the different members of the community. The enlightenment workshop allowed them to ask questions about the project and for the team to provide responses. The network team also used this opportunity to reassure the community members and get them to understand what is happening and how the project stands to benefit their children, wards, and the community.

August -October 2021:

2-day crash photography course with selected representatives of the children and young people cohort.

November 2021:

Weeklong photography and generation photo data

November 2021:

Weeks (one day a week) photo self-elicitation/narrative stories workshop.

The children and young people met for one-day every week to discuss details of photos taken and update the photo diary. The weekly meetings allowed them to reflect further on the stories they have chosen to tell. The networking team also waited to ensure that the stories they produced remained consistent over time.

Due to security issues, resulting from Boko Haram activities in the area, some of the workshops were rescheduled. The implication was that we had to go over the whole photo elicitation exercise again to ensure that the stories remained the same. Whilst this meant that our planned activities did not go according to how we scheduled, on the positive side, the break in the activities provided the children and young people time to reflect further and this resulted in the production of a picture book illustrated and narrated by the children and young people themselves

March 2022:

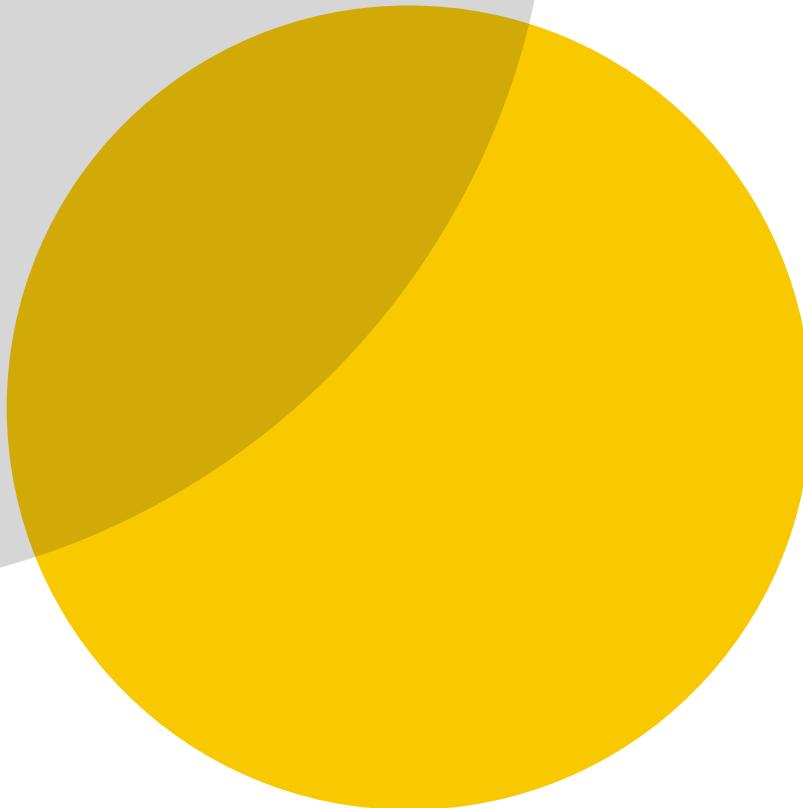
One-day participatory exhibition to involve all participants including the YP to share their findings with a cross section of stakeholders, NGO and government representatives, community, and educationist groups. The outputs from the photography sessions with the children and young people(YP), were showcased to generate valuable information that will help inform the set of themes that will be addressed during FGDs with the community group and interviews with educationist group.

One- day Focus group discussion (FGD) brought together the community group (parents, community and/ or religious leaders), to discuss further themes arising from the exhibition and to share ideas of possible solutions to the concerns raised during the exhibition.

Semi- structured interviews held with educationist group to follow up on themes raised during the FGD with community group and the exhibition of photos by children and YP.

May 2022:

One-day international exhibition held at the Open University, UK to showcase outputs from the networking activities carried out across four nations of the Lake Chad region- Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.



2.3. Method

Our photovoice research was designed in collaboration with its networked partners to enable children and young people in the protracted armed conflict and crisis context of the Lake Chad country region to record and reflect their concerns, to promote critical dialogue and knowledge through small-group photo-narrative sessions and to further showcase these outputs via exhibitions to reach key stakeholders even at policy level. The network partners were available to offer support and their expertise throughout the photovoice process (Nelson and Wright, 1995).

Our approach was designed to foster capacity building, promote community collective identity (Kwan and Walsh, 2018), for social change (Healy, 2001). Our intention is to give voice to participants (Wahab, 2003), and to create networked spaces for these voices to be amplified (Bradbury-Jones and Taylor, 2015).

Photovoice enabled participants to generate data with which they used to engage stakeholders and to reflect about protracted armed-conflict and its impact on their lives and well-being.

2.4. Data Collection

The network team in each country began by facilitating an initial planning meeting where the facilitators discussed the overall goal and understanding of the project, including ethics and responsibilities related to participating in the project and taking photographs with the children and young people. The children and young people were provided cameras, and we conducted photovoice activities in two separate work strands.

The first strand focused on orienting the children and young people to the photovoice process: the process of taking photographs, engaging in discussions about how to think about what they wanted to portray before taking photographs, and physically taking them out in groups to practice taking photographs. We also discussed issues around ethics of photography with the participants. The training covered topics such as ethics in requesting consent, respect and ethics concerning how participants interpret photographs taken by them. According to Wang (1999), researchers must be aware of their responsibility to participants' safety and wellbeing.

Image 1: a participant taking pictures after the photography workshop



Participants were given the following prompt: “take pictures of anything at the around you, something memorable, a scene or location that means something to you- in any way you want, that will help people understand something about your life and experience with the armed conflict.” This strand was loosely structured and was intended to gain insight into participants lived experiences of the armed conflict through the pictures they chose to take. After completing each round and developing each set of photographs, the research team conducted a series of one-on-one and group elicitation interviews with the children and young people where they contextualized, explained, and described each photograph. Each participant was asked to describe the photograph in their words, explain why they took it and what story it told, and talk about whether the photograph fully captured what they had intended and, if not, what they wanted to illustrate.

The facilitator in each group then asked each participant to choose their favourite group of photographs and give these photographs titles, which they would share in the larger group. Considering that the research was carried out in four nations. The research was carried out in the language used by locals in each research site. Kanuri language the most spoken language was used for most of the research activities in Diffa- Niger Republic, Dikwa-Nigeria, Bagasola and Liwa in Chad Republic. A combination of French and Kanuri was used in Kolofata, Cameron.

The second strand of photovoice activities was led by the children and young people themselves. They felt that their experiences of the protracted armed conflict cannot be truly captured without self-expression. They believed that the experience of the armed conflict remains unique and deep-sited in ways different from the experiences of children and young people in other conflict regions. therefore, by creatively illustrating their experiences via drawings, paintings, poems, including using local arts and crafts activities such as mud painting, traditional drumming, etc, they were able to self-express without boundaries.

Image II: wall painting by participant



This process of documenting and reporting their story in a powerful way using localised arts approach which enabled the children tell their lived experiences in their own voice was seen as a therapeutic and agentic for the children. In this strand, the team allowed the children to choose how they wanted to express their deep sited experiences of the crisis. Other studies have explored art therapy with adolescents in crisis and found that hope is experienced through art and generative processes (Appleton, 2001). Others have used art therapy to provide refugee children with a safe space to heal and discover new-self, and to give refugee children a voice to express and share their lived experiences through picture stories (Akthar and Lovell, 2019). However, there remains a scarcity of studies have explored the potential of local art methods in supporting the well-being of children with experiences of crisis, especially as they prepare to return to school.

Image III: Art therapy session which provided children and young people with a safe space to heal, connect with others and gave them a voice to be heard.



The prompt to facilitate this session was: “produce something that can help us to understand what the armed conflict means to you, your friends, family and to your community. This includes depicting the lives, means of livelihood, daily routines, community lives, etc., how known ways of community life has been disrupted by the armed conflict situation.” Our emphasis was for their mode and choice of self-expression to help “develop a powerful narrative” so that a broad range of stakeholders could better understand their lives, and how these have been disrupted because of the crisis.

The networking activities were videotaped (in locations where we had the participants consent to), transcribed, and translated into English. Field notes of detailed activities of detailed notes and reflections of observations, interviews, and discussions were maintained in locations where the team did not have the consent to audio or videotape activities.

2.5. Analysis

Whilst the main data source where the photography and pictures produced by the children and young people, we also engaged the children in expressive art sessions where they used local arts methods to share their lived experiences. Although this was not the focus of this work, we saw that the children found the local art approaches therapeutic and engaging. We also engaged community members on FGD and community educationist group in interviews. The research team engaged in an iterative process of reflection, and data analysis to analyse the interviews with the educationist group, focus-group data with community cohort. Colour coding analysis within pairs and reflections on codes across the whole research team formed the basis on which writing around the identified themes took place. In analysing pictures and image data, we recognise that all research is a negotiated process and remains context specific, our intention was to employ reflexive visual research to engage in a collaborative iterative process that might enable participants to “reveal how they ‘see’ their world and their past, as well as how they wish themselves” and their unique lived experiences to be visually documented, represented, perceived, and understood and reported (Parker, 2005, p. 8).

2.6. Data Presentation

Our data representation, ‘understands lives as unfolding temporally, as particular events within a particular individual’s life. The result is a story’ (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007, p.636). We weave the data in a narrative form using themes to not to think about stories, but to think with stories (Frank, 1995), in a way that takes the story as already complete and to understand that there is no going beyond it (Frank, 1995, p.23). The aspect of voice is central to this project, and we have made effort to remain committed to ensure that the participants voices remain central in research about them.

To reflect the voices of the participants throughout this report, we draw the photography and drawings as well as the narratives provided by the children and young people, interviews with educationist group, and focus group discussion with community group, and at appropriate points to support each narrative thread, rather than presenting each datatype as separate finding.

The overarching research question is then reflected on explicitly within the discussion section. 'Cameos' of the children and young people drawn from their stories, were also used in some aspects of the report.

2.7. Data Themes

There were five overarching themes. In **Disruption of community spaces**, we collated all the data relating to the participants narratives, illustrations, images and descriptions of what used to be community spaces now abandoned and forgotten (wasteland). These spaces that held the community together and integrated new entrants into the community have either been bombed or burned down and dissented. This theme also captured narratives of how the disruption of the community spaces impacts on the wellbeing of the people. The final strand within this theme was the perspectives of the community group of how the disruption of these community spaces has increased vulnerabilities in the community and more and more young people are getting enlisted into the Boko Haram sect.

The second theme collated data around **Deprivation of childhood experiences**, we captured childhood experiences with the protracted armed conflict and crisis and the resulting impact of the crisis on the children and young people's lives. It also collated data around the multiple forms of exposures to poverty that comes with loss of the family breadwinner because of the insurgency. We also collated data on how different patterns of economic experiences shaped the socioemotional functioning of the children and young people and the unrelated stress and trauma that arises from loss and poverty. The experiences of poverty were not new to the communities and the participants. Economic deprivation which results in child labour already existed before the crisis, however the experiences of poverty as reported by the children and young people has been further exacerbated by the crisis- the resulting death of family bread winner, leaves the whole burden of supporting themselves and younger siblings on the child.

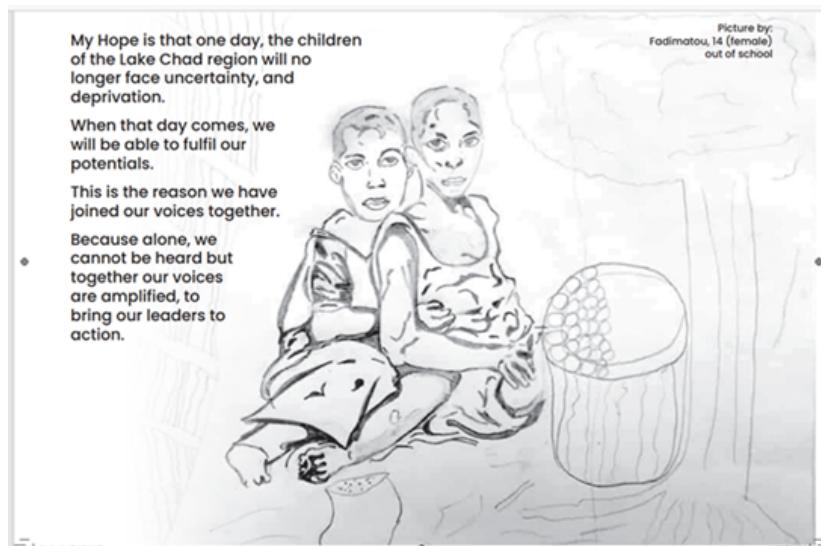
In **Impact of crisis on education of children and young people**, we included data about the ways in which the protracted crisis and conflict has exacerbated the already existing learning crisis in the Lake Chad country region. We also included data around how children and young people in the Lake Chad country region have continued to fall behind in their learning.

We considered that without urgent action, millions of students will have fallen so far behind in their learning that they will be left behind. In considering this, we looked at data from FGDs with Educationist group of how to continue supporting children learning in the affected communities-how learning can be repurposed to cater for the needs of children with unique experiences of the protracted armed conflict and crisis, how to ensure the safety of children, and the technologies that can be used to support teaching and learning.

This theme also included data around insights from the experiences of Swift Relief Foundation working with children and young people, especially girls from the four nations on how they were developing as educators through their education response initiative in that region. We also collated pictures, drawings and stories about the experiences of the children and young people with the protracted armed conflict and crisis on the related trauma that comes with such experiences whilst considering the implications these experiences have on their ability to continue in education.

In Resilience, we particularly collated data around how girls from the Lake Chad country region are confronted by place- based, multi-dimensional and inter-linking experiences of complexities. We spotlight a powerful photography and the accompanying narrative by 13-year-old Falamata (female) from Chad to describe vividly, how the protracted armed conflict situation is exacerbating existing vulnerabilities of girls, creating new ones, and deepening educational inequalities (UNFPA 2020; Plan International 2020; World Vision 2020), presenting a disproportionate impact on girls. We understand through the lens of Falamta's photography, how girls have had to adjust new ways of living in families and their communities, and the internally displaced persons camps (IDP), as they assume new identities presented by the crisis in ways girls from other contexts may not have experienced.

In Hope, we collate illustrative data and narratives and using powerful metaphors, we understand the message of HOPE as voiced by the children and young people in the Lake Chad country region. This theme was more interlinking and heuristic than the description suggests because we sought to understand what HOPE means in Kanuri (the most spoken language of the people of the lake Chad country region). We were told HOPE means TIMA in Kanuri. A theory of change is being developed around the word TIMA (an acronym which we have chosen to represent or transition from a Transdisciplinary towards an Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Approach). 'HOPE' is 'TIMA', which foregrounds our work in the Lake Chad country region.



2.8. Limitations of the Research

Poor internet connectivity in some of the communities meant meetings and activities were duplicated resulting in loss of research time and resources.

Some planned activities were cancelled at the last minute due to security reasons and this also resulted in loss of resources and time.

Some of the network partners were refused visas to participate in the international exhibition. However, the exhibition was repurposed to enable them attend online.

The safety issue in the region meant that the UK lead was unable to travel to the Lake Chad region to participate in the peer research training. However, she joined online but connectivity issues meant that some sessions had to be repeated and this was time consuming.

2.9. Positionality of the research team

The research team consisted of academics and practitioners from University of Ibadan, Nigeria, Open University, UK, University of Yaoundé, Cameroon and Swift Relief Foundation, and Enugu state University, Nigeria and other network partners based in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. The team worked collaboratively throughout the study. This was in line with our commitments to cross-team learning and an intention that each team member would contribute different experience and expertise across the stages of the research process.

All members of the team have extensive experience of working and researching education in sub-Saharan Africa in general, and in regions of protracted armed conflict and crisis, particularly, the Lake Chad country region. We consciously tried to ensure responsibilities were thoughtfully distributed amongst the research team and its varied dynamics (academics and practitioners, those from the UK and those from Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad, and the local peer researchers who worked directly with the participants in the communities), to maximise inclusion of each team member's area of expertise and to maximise cross-team, cross-national learning and capacity development. We agreed on a way of working designed to promote reflexive dialogues and engagement across these distinct groups.

Given that the locally trained peer researchers are cultural insiders, we recognise that some of their personal values and experiences influence the research design, data collection procedures and reporting (Chavez, 2008). However, we also feel that the vulnerability experienced by the community and the sensitivity that comes with researching such contexts of high vulnerability necessitated a research team who were not only known and trusted by the communities, but also, their unique perspective of the history and culture of these communities which is known and understood by the local peer researchers themselves, remained the most significant advantage and enabled a deep level of understanding of deep-sited cultural nuances and interpretation. Considering that the communities researched are hard-to-reach, with experiences of protracted armed conflict, it would have been difficult for an independent researcher to respectfully gain full access to these communities. Throughout the research process, we continued to monitor and follow up on the peer researchers via de-briefing and briefing. We also offered continuous trainings to the peer researchers to ensure that ethical practices and commitments remained upheld (Fleming, 2018).

3.1. Findings

Five overarching themes emerged from the analysis of the pictures and images. These themes generated from analysis of pictures and images by the children and young people also informed interview and focus group analysis. Some of the children felt their experiences cannot best be represented through pictures taken via a camera. They expressed that their experiences are often not visible hence cannot be easily captured via camera. They talked about 'deep sited' personal experiences that can only be expressed via expressive art. Some chose to share these deep sited experiences via colouring, others preferred to draw, and a few others painted or represented their deep sited experiences via crafts (See, images II and III).

In this section, as we share data themes, some of the photographs taken by the children will be shared to provide pictorial description of what is been said. We will also share some of the pictures drawn by the children and young people themselves and the narratives they have chosen to share with each picture to powerfully demonstrate the lived experiences of the participants in such a way that the reader lives within the time and space of the experiences of children in these communities. Our intention as researchers researching uncharted spaces, is to remain faithful to the relations in that space and time, and to the stories that were so powerfully shared and the knowledge that was co-produced through this process, even if these stories have been shared in parts (Sultana, 2007). Considering that we can only partially access the lives of some of the children and young people across the four nations of the Lake Chad region- we see every story that generates an experience not as complete but as valuable. Whilst the main data is derived from the photovoice work with the children and young people, we also sparsely report focus group discussion (FGDS) with community group and interviews with educationist group.

Disruption of community spaces

The participants described the impact of the crisis on the social networks and the subsequent effects on community live. For example, common spaces where members of a community used to come together for interactive purposes (schools, farmlands, community spaces- town hall, market square) to help build and sustain social networks are no longer seen as safe spaces. Interviews with the community group revealed that access to these spaces promotes the wellbeing of individuals and the community.



They also shared during their interviews that the community spaces in the past have been useful for eliminating barriers to healthy behaviours. For example, people community members come together to discuss issues relating to on-social behaviour -and set up neighbourhood watch committees that will respond immediately to perceived anti- social behaviour.

The participants, particularly the girls, in their interviews explained that the destruction of their school building is a major setback for girls education in the affected communities. For them, the school provides a safe space where they can connect with their peers, gain critical life skills, and get the support they need to bridge gaps in academic learning or to decompress from challenging situations at home and to discuss these issues without judgment. They recall that their teachers especially the female teachers are very supportive and provide mentoring support for them.

They also suggest through their interviews the importance of relationship building and having classrooms where girls feel safe in order to maximize their learning.

This used to be our safe space and our playground. My friend Adamu and I have turned this place into our own play slides. You know how children often get into a mischief. Sometimes we come up here just to play around. (Abubakar (male) out-of-school: Age 12)

I wanted to show you what they did. They bombed our school building. They want us to stop going to school. Now we are all scared of coming here because when we come here, we are no longer safe. They destroyed our school building and burnt down everything. They have destroyed this place of hope. (14-year-old female who was forced to drop out-of-school due to Boko-Haram attacks in her community)

Alima is a 12-year-old out-of-schoolgirl from Cameroon was forced to drop-out of school for her own safety due to Boko Haram attacks in her community. She looked again at the picture, the facilitator asked her if she had taken the picture, she nods in affirmation as she begins to share the story behind the picture. "This is what is left of what used to be my school building. A place that used to be a beacon of hope and dream for children in this community has suddenly been destroyed. For me, my dream was to become a teacher. Every morning, I will walk miles to my school. I will come just to learn. I know that as a girl, education is important so, I worked hard.

In Deprivation of childhood experiences/Child labor

The majority of the children and young people across the four nations- Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, either reported feeling deprived memorable childhood experiences or feelings of the crisis rubbing them of childhood experiences they once cherished. They also spoke about how the crisis added another layer of burden to them. Most of the children and young people noted that as a result of losing their parents to the crisis, the burden of supporting their younger siblings has been completely left to them. They supported their narratives by providing practical examples of how this has happened, for example:

This has become our reality. Most of us have become overburdened with the responsibility of supporting our younger siblings. (Arouna 13 (male): out-of-school- Cameroon)

I want to talk about how some children do not find the time to study as they are over overburdened with the responsibility of supporting their families financially. (Adamu (male): Age 10 Primary 5 pupil- Nigeria).



The insurgency has taken away everything from us. Some of us, have lost our parents and close family members. Our childhood experiences have been marred by these ugly incidences. We want to go to school but how do we even think of school when hunger continues to knock on our door (Child from Niger).

We wake up every morning not as children anymore but as adults who must work hard to bring food to the table. (Child from NE Nigeria)

Discussion will be supported by exerts of FGDs with community group and interviews with educationist group,

In Impact on children and young people's education

The crisis situation exacerbated the already existing poverty in the region. Farmlands have been abandoned and sources of livelihood lost. Moreso, parents for fear of the safety of their children and wards, withdrew their children from schools. The crisis presents multi-faceted, placed based, interlinking and long-lasting impact on children. Crisis affects children in different ways, disrupting their lives and education.

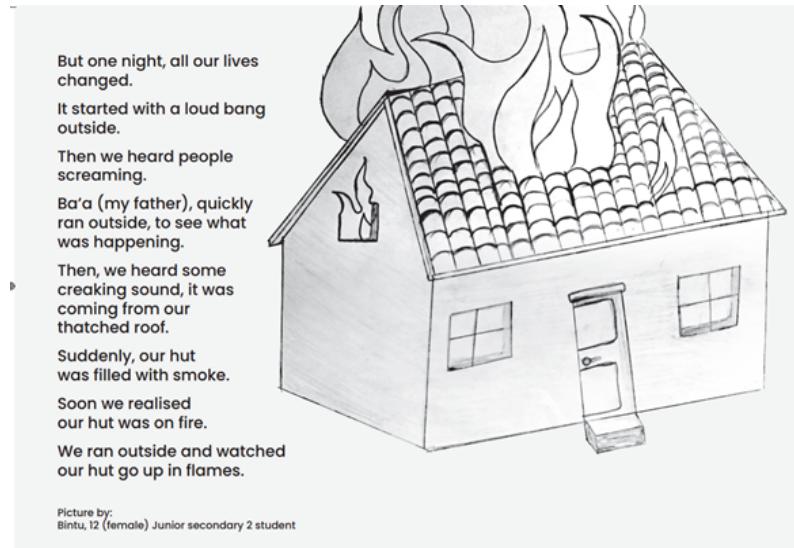
During the discussions with the children and young people, they generally talked about loss of the opportunity for education, how they have been forced to move into internally displaced person camps (IDP camps). They also express feelings of their lives been disrupted and how they continue to wait in hope for their lives to return to normal- if it ever does.

Some other children shared their experiences of physical disabilities resulting from the crisis and the trauma of loss of parents and loved ones either through death or by abduction. They also share feeling of isolation from their communities and homes and fear of being abducted and recruited as child soldiers.



The children mention that these experiences, directly or indirectly has impact on their continued education. Most times they are mentally not ready even when education is available. They mention that they require a healing of the mind more than they would require education.

Of what use is literacy and numeracy when my spirit is broken? My mind cannot even take it.
(Abubakar, 12(male) out of school - Cameroon)



The destruction of school buildings and facilities also added another layer to the identified complexities.

Our FGD with community group and interviews with educationalist group in Cameroon reveled that: there is no light in the community as result of boko haram first attack on May 29, 2014. Since then, nothing has been done: "children read a lot more at night. During the day it is saturated. The child comes home from school at 3-4 p.m., as soon as he finishes eating, night falls. And it is in the night that he takes advantage to read a little. And in the absence of light, the child is not able. This is why light has hindered the education of young people much more, just like water". As you can see, this is a real problem in the locality, since the lack of water and light are the main handicaps for the education of young people. In addition to trauma and insecurity, it is totally difficult to study in these conditions.



In Resilience

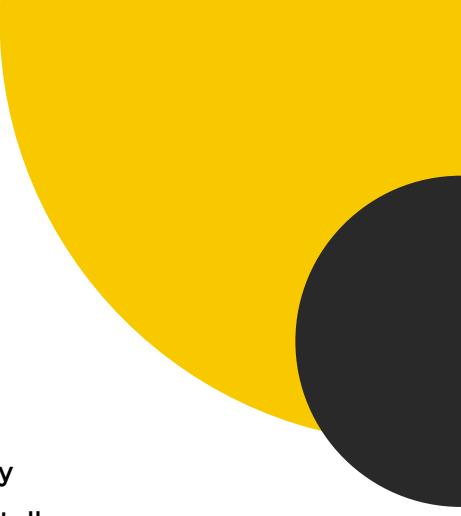
The children and young people shared their ... One striking image was a picture by Falamata (female): Age 13 Junior Secondary School 3 student from Chad. Falamata passionately shares the story behind the picture she had taken bringing a new and powerful perspective describing how girls in her community are adapting to difficulties and complexities some of which are mostly gendered- exacerbated by the crisis. For girls in this region, certain traditional practices and beliefs present severe and long-lasting barriers to their education or training. The crisis further worsened their vulnerabilities and inability to access, remain and complete education.

In one of the communities in Cameroon where the research was carried out, most of the children who do not attend school are young girls, because it is often said that they will be given out for marriage. Nothing should be expected from the young girl, since she cannot produce anything, so the girl is forcibly sent to marry, and as such GBV is perpetuated in early and forced marriages in the locality. This is why this situation does not change and these children continue to stay at home.

I have never been to school because my father says he does not know the importance of school. Moreover, he says what is the school for him. If you go to school, what can you help me with? Reason why I never went to school. And I don't have the opportunity to attend, since I don't have the means. School is a good thing. I see my friends going to school; It hurts me. They write their names, but I don't. What can I do? (Female, Northeast Nigeria).

Despite the challenges, many of these girls have demonstrated remarkable resilience by exploring alternative avenues for learning and personal development. Rather than being constrained by the absence of formal education, they have sought out and embraced various opportunities to acquire skills. In doing so, they redefine traditional notions of education, demonstrating resourcefulness that goes beyond conventional formal schooling. This adaptability not only reflects their commitment to self-improvement but also highlights the potential for alternative pathways to empower girls despite systemic barriers.

Falamata's narrative reminds us that fostering resilience extends beyond mere attributes of strength or composure in the face of adversity. As delineated in her narrative, corroborated by the accounts of other female participants, the process of building resilience is characterized as a dynamic and transformative endeavour. It is aptly conceived as a journey, one imbued with a profound learning and refining trajectory. Resilience, in this context, emerges as a skill set and mindset honed through experience, equipping individuals to extract optimal outcomes from the challenges inherent in their surroundings or circumstances as shared in the excerpt below:



Falamata: When we were asked to take these pictures. I was interested in an image that truly reflected the collective experiences of children from my community. When I saw the girl sitting. I knew this is the story I wanted to tell.

Facilitator: What is this story you want to tell?

Falamata: (stares down on the picture), the story I want to tell is not the type where we sit and talk about how our community has been destroyed and how we have been driven out of our homes. I do not want them to feel that they have destroyed everything and left us with nothing. I know that is the story everybody is telling because that is the truth of what has happened. But I want to tell a powerful story that brings another angle to the truth some people do not know about. It is even more powerful that this picture here is that of a girl. My story is simple but powerful. Many girls have been kidnapped. Their crime was wanting education. Families are afraid of sending their daughters to school. Even the culture here is against the girls. Girls like me are facing so many difficulties. But in the middle of all this, a girl is sitting here on a dusty road just outside her hut studying. My story is not to show how they have destroyed but how we have refused to be broken. How we rise above our attackers to show strength even in difficulties. I want to tell the story of a girl's resilience, strength, and determination in the middle of a crisis.



In Hope the participants expressed their feelings of optimism that is based on a continued expectation and believe that change will come soon, the crisis will one day stop happening. They see their experiences as children living in countries experiencing protracted armed conflict as time-based as they anxiously await and end to all this trouble. Through their discussions, they explain how they are longing for a new beginning that will usher in their happy ending. They draw on the fictional European books and films that they have had access to- where the evil ones get ousted and everyone lived happily-ever- after.

Bintu, 13 (female) Junior secondary 2 student from xxx drew a picture of a garden flower to demonstrate the kind of life she hopes for. She called it 'a beautiful life'. Bintu comes from the northeast part of the country located in the Sahel Savannah which is extremely dry. In this region, the people grow millet and maize. Garden flowers are barely seen here. Bintu through her illustration of a beautiful garden flower describes a 'beautiful life' the one she hopes for herself and for all the children living in the Lake Chad region. She further says in describing the picture of the garden flower she had drawn 'I see them, and I like them. I hear they smell so nice too. I see them a lot in books and films. I like how bright and beautiful they look. They bring happiness as well'

Another child named Bundi aged 15 (male) conveyed his message of hope in a powerful and inspiring way using the metaphor of a tree.

Once, my father cut down a big tree. After he cut down the tree, he burnt the branches and cleared it away. My father felt that the tree had grown so big that it needed to be cut down. It was only a few weeks after the tree was cut down that I started noticing it was growing new branches. They have destroyed our homes, our community spaces including our schools were children go to learn. It is only for a little while. Because our branches will shoot up and spread again. Our community will come alive. People will return to their farms and homes and children will return to school again.

But suddenly, it feels as if all Hope is lost.
As we watch our dream for a better future wither away.
It feels as if our life is trapped in this wilderness of 'no Hope'.

The English word 'Hope' means Fata in Hausa.
The Kanuri people of Lake Chad region refer to 'Hope' as Tima.

Picture by: Bundi, 15 (male) Junior secondary 3 student



Just like a tree, our branches will spread again. For hope never dies. Hope is resilient and enduring. Hope is just like faith. When you try to kill hope, it grows even stronger. Hope is an inner strength. Hope is something that is deep. I keep drawing from this deep well of hope to water my dream. My hope is that the children of the Lake Chad Region will flourish and fulfil our full potentials. Even when they try to cutdown our dreams, we will rise yet again and flourish like the tree. (Bundi, 15 (male): Junior Secondary 3 student- Nigeria)



4.1. Murayin Yaran Lake Chad (the voices of the children of the Lake Chad) exhibition

I found what Professor Akanji, Margaret and others have been doing to empower those children and give them a voice to be very moving and inspiring- Participant.

A series of images and reflections from a crisis-hit region was displayed at The Open University on 27 May. 'Muriyan Yaran Lake Chad', or 'The voices of the children of Lake Chad'. Outputs from the photography taken by children and young from four nations in the Lake Chad region- Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, were showcased to an international audience.

The event was attended by about 27 guest in person with over 50 participants joining online from different contexts.

As discussed earlier, the concept of 'HOPE' which was a recurring theme from the narratives provided by the children and young people to describe some of the ideas behind their drawings. Other studies hope is experienced through art and generative processes (Appleton, 2001). We chose to call HOPE 'TIMA' to identify with mother tongue of the research communities (among the Kanuri people of the Lake Chad country region, 'TIMA' is loosely translated to mean 'HOPE'). During the international exhibition, we carried out an activity using an activity tree named TIMA which we used as an acronym for moving from the Transdisciplinary towards an Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Approach (TIMA). During the activity tree participatory session, participants were invited to use sticker notes to describe their area of research, scholarship or practice and how to develop an extensive project around educational interventions for conflict transformation from an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary lens. These suggestions were put up on the activity tree. We further had discussions around developing a theory of change around our TIMA framework.

The TIMA framework will inform the next phase of this research. We plan to focus on multi and interdisciplinary approach to produce knowledge around educational interventions for conflict transformation.

5.1. Perceived Impact of photovoice research

Immediate Impact on Children and Young people

Photovoice is an ideal participatory technique through which young people living in conflict and crisis contexts can identify, represent, and promote change in the lives, appeal to policymakers and other people of influence to enhance their lives and community (REF). How then can we support children in protracted conflict and crisis, considering they do not have the same chances as children who do not have experiences of conflict and crisis. Considering that children and young people with experiences of crisis and conflict are often not included in research about them. This is because, they are often perceived as vulnerable and are confronted with diverse levels of trauma. Hence, in need of help. Other initiatives targeted to support education of children and young people in contexts of protracted armed conflict and crisis, often leveraged a top-down dissemination of targeted content.

Fewer initiatives have focussed on the use of participatory arts-based approaches, which not only fosters a deeper engagement with local and socio-political contexts, but also enable more collaborative and innovative bottom-up approaches to knowledge co-creation and exchange.

In this research project, we engaged with the children and young people themselves to gain their insight and to understand how they can be supported to attain their full potentials.

Our intention to include the voices of children and young people in research about them, reflects the projects commitment to achieving meaningful social change.

It's hard when these plans are made to help us without them involving us in making these plans.
(Name, age and country)

I might have had experiences of trauma resulting from the crisis but that doesn't make my experiences or voice irrelevant when decisions are being made about me. (Name, age and country)

In the end, it is all about us and for us to have better live chances. So, our perspectives should matter.
(Name, age and country)

I am the best person to speak on issues that concerns me. (Name, age and country)

The aspect of voice which remained fundamental in the networking research, was seen as an empowering process for the participants and their communities. Hence, during the project assessment, the network team asked the children and young people who participated in the photovoice project to describe what they have gained from participating, and how what they have gained will help them in future.

I felt like a leader especially when I spoke about the problems affecting all my peers. It was a rewarding exercise for me. I have become more confident participating in this project. It taught me how to express myself and how to negotiate with people to solve a problem. Violence is not the answer but peaceful dialogue with one another can help solve any problem. (Name, age and country)

I am now a good photographer. I will keep improving my new skill because I know that photographs can be used to effect change even if it is small. (Name, age and country)

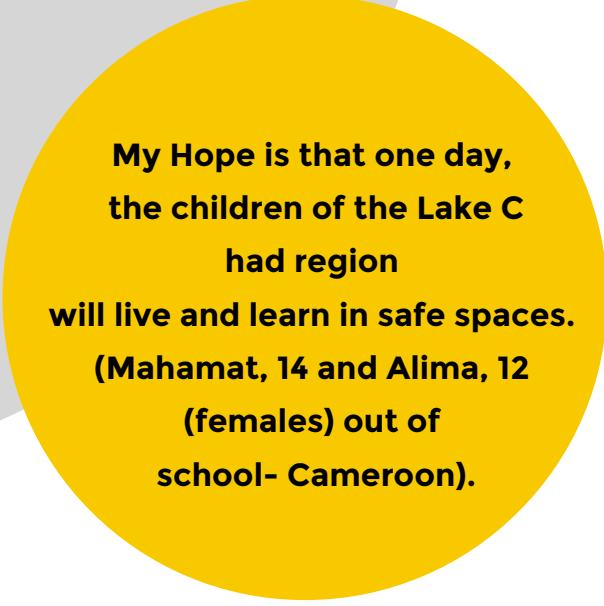
I have become more confident participating in this project. (Name, age and country)

It taught me how to express myself and how to negotiate with people to solve a problem. (name,age and country)

Immediate Impact on Local peer researchers

Local peer-researchers from the research communities who were trained to support the networking activities were also invited to take part in the evaluation. They were asked what they had gained from working on the network project, and how what they have gained will help them in future. They said that they enjoyed participating in the research....

I have learned how to facilitate events of this nature and to support children. This project has opened my eyes to a skill I did not know I have. I am now looking at how I can train to be a teacher. Because by working on this project, I now know I will be a good teacher to my students.



**My Hope is that one day,
the children of the Lake C
had region
will live and learn in safe spaces.
(Mahamat, 14 and Alima, 12
(females) out of
school- Cameroon).**

6.1. Discussion

Uncovering silenced voices: disrupting the ways of 'doing' and 'knowing'

Our overarching research question focused on how photovoice research can be used to support educational needs of children and young people living in the protracted armed conflict and crisis context of the Lake Chad country region in context relevant ways.

The potential for art-based methodologies in educational interventions for conflict transformation has shown success but not complete acceptance, photovoice, have shown effective as a unique research tool that allows users to communicate deeply on sensitive subjects with potential to influence larger social change. . 'Photovoice' Wang and Burris (1997), 'talking pictures' Bunster and Chaney (1989) and discussing the deeper meanings about the pictures (Catalani et al., 2012), will put the research project's design, data collection, analysis, and dissemination in the hands of the participants (guided by the research team).

Photovoice provides the space in a practical, credible, and ethical way for research collaboratively by and for locals to yield new insights for developing context -focused initiatives and positive personal experiences for local participants, including providing some form of voice and empowerment. Ultimately, the structural inequalities imposed by armed conflict require redress if the goal is the long -term and sustainable empowerment of the affected communities and the young people experiencing increased loss of education and multiple developmental challenges due to Boko Haram attacks.

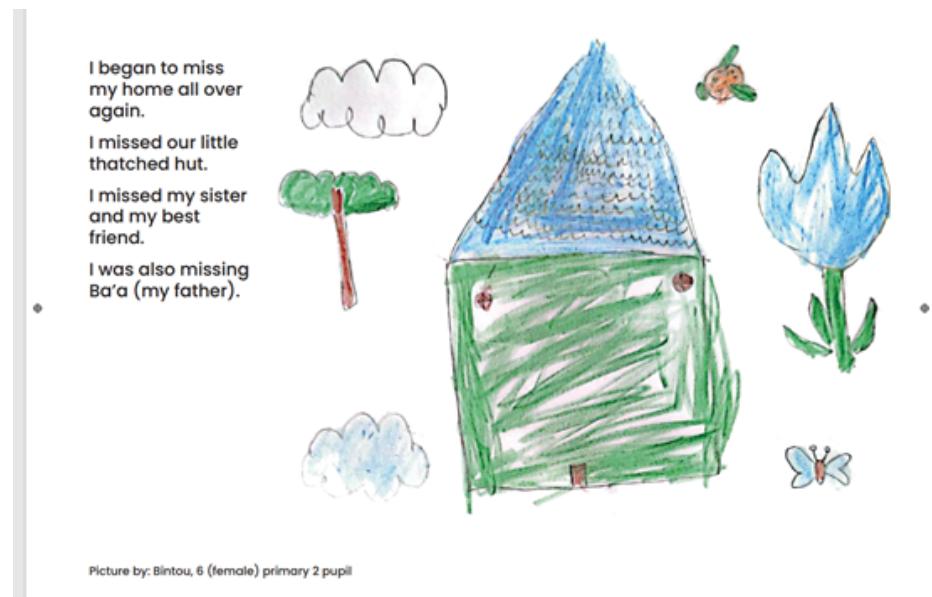
In the process of collectively discussing photographs, the children and young people who participated in this photovoice research started to feel increased ownership of their photographs, illustrations, and narratives. There was this feeling of pride and fulfilment that often comes with being able to control your own narrative. We argue the participatory process of this photovoice research with children and young people living in contexts of protracted armed conflict and crisis fostered self-expression, which not only aided the uncovering of silenced voices, but also amplified these voices to challenge their own critical consciousness of the ways in which they are oppressed and how to act against these oppressive elements of reality (Freire 2003). This positioning informed our postcolonial framing in this project which is based on the understanding around disrupting power dynamics often evidenced in our ways of doing research and the ways knowledge generated from research processes is shared.

In a process of retrospective reflection (Pinter and Zandian, 2012), participants were keen for their voices to be heard beyond this research. They wanted to document their stories, pictures and illustrations in a way and manner that would be meaningful to them. They asked if they could document these stories, images, and pictures into a picture book. In response, the network team facilitated additional workshops across the four nations to support this process.

The network team proposed the idea of creating an exhibit in each country, where each group of children and young people participants choose their favourite and most inspiring photograph, which we then encouraged them to talk a bit more of the picture they selected and why it was selected.

To support the children, develop the short stories around the pictures they have selected, the next phase of the process we adopted the SHOWeD acronym Wang (1999), to summarize the elements of a supported dialogue where we engage the children and young people in deep meaning-making conversations and analysis: What do you See here? What is really Happening? How does this relate to your lives? Why does this situation exist? What can we Do about it? We focused this workshop on the children and young people's interpretation of their drawings, the key message they hope to convey with each drawing, and a critical reflection of what action they hope each picture story may possibly generate. With the support of the facilitators, the children, and young people, used their personal experiences and stories, to weave their narratives and illustrations into one coherent powerful story that reflects the collective experiences of the children in the Lake Chad country region.

This picture book has the name tag of each participant involved in the process displayed on each page-to identify the child whose story and picture was shared. However, we have removed the children's family names for safety reasons.



The book titled the voices of the children of the Lake Chad Region, was unveiled during the international exhibition held at the Open University, UK on 27th May 2022 by Liz Chamberlain, Professor of Primary Education (Knowledge Exchange) Associate Head of School, Enterprise, and Innovation | (Past) Co-Director Children's Research Centre.



The idea of voice and empowerment with similar population of young people from marginalised communities has been used to think about how research listens and responds to voices of young people in creating transformative community projects (Greene, Burke, and McKenna, 2013; Sarti, SchalkersBunders, and Dedding, 2017). This networking project demonstrates how photovoice can be used to empower children and young people who live in contexts of protracted armed conflict and can be instrumental in bringing about an effective dialogue between children and policymakers. Photovoice facilitates this process by its focus on images that tell the children's own stories and to access their realties through powerful pictorial representations which conveys the message in ways words alone are cannot.

Overall, our intention was to understand how best data collection could be done in ways that are sensitive to local contexts and people's lived experiences, to prevent insensitive or even psychologically destructive research (Busher, Fox and Capewell, 2021). We jointly negotiated ethical practises with communities at every phase of the research process, to enable 'commitment to accessing voice' whilst 'creating spaces for these voices to be heard' (Bradbury-Jones and Taylor, 2015, p. 162).

We drew on a postcolonial frame that allows people emerging from all forms of colonial processes to reclaim their negotiating space for equity and to challenge the consequences of the past that are exploitative, to build a new society where liberty and equity prevail (Tikly and Bond, 2013).

The elements of voice remained important to our postcolonial framing, to recognise the unique strengths that each participant brought to the process of knowledge co- creation, especially in terms of agency and in contributing to the sustainability of the project gains beyond the project life (Ebubedike et al., forthcoming).

The climate of respect and mutuality within YPAR can create an environment in which youth discover their own agency. PAR is theoretically premised on a commitment to power sharing and to the value of knowledge that emerges from every social location. This theoretical ideal, however, received real-life support from our young coressearchers, who affirmed their discovery of their own ability to think critically and "outside the box," to offer their own views and opinions with more confidence, and to see themselves as having wisdom to offer the world. As one participant stated, "Everybody, I feel like, can teach someone.

Capacity building: people and community centred development approach

Participants including the local peer researchers, identified that the capacity-building approach used in the networking activities, that involved opportunities for community members to advance skills remained crucial to the success of our photovoice research (Li et al. 2001).

Participants, including the locally trained peer researchers, agreed that the photovoice research experience which provided the opportunity to gain research, photography and related skills was directly beneficial to them as well as for the sustainability of the program (Afifi et al. 2020; Donnelly, Toof and Silka 2021).

The networking team selected and trained peer-researchers from the participating communities to co-facilitate the networking events and their time spent working on the project was paid for. These peer-researchers are well known and trusted members of the community. By participating in this project, the peer researchers from these communities developed new skills (Makhoul et al., 2012), that could empower them to be more versatile to transition into other roles even when the research project ends.

During the project assessment, the network team asked the peer-researchers to partake in an evaluation. When asked what they had gained from working on the network project, and how what they have gained will help them in future, a peer- researcher offered the following response:

I have learned how to facilitate events of this nature and to support children. This project has opened my eyes to a skill I did not know I have. I am now looking at how I can train to be a teacher. Because by working on this project, I now know I will be a good teacher to my students.

Other researchers have identified that the capacity-building approach to CBPR that involve opportunities for community members to advance skills are crucial to a successful partnership (Li et al. 2001), as well as beneficial for program sustainability in relation to research with communities affected by humanitarian crisis (Afifi et al. 2020; Donnelly, Toof and Silka 2021). In their CBPR with the Lewiston, Maine community - a resettled refugee community from Somalia affected by humanitarian crisis - Afifi et al. (2020) hired and trained research staff from the community such as research assistants, community health workers, fidelity monitors, a clinical supervisor, and a local manager to support the project. These insights are consistent with literature that proposes that participatory research successes be measured in terms of evidence of transformation in conditions of inequity and marginalisation (Cleaver, 2001). Through our own work, we have also seen that the photography training, narrative workshops, local exhibition, and the co-production of knowledge, supported a variety of transferable skills that was developed among young people and the peer-researchers, thereby, contributing to the self-sustainability of the initiative.

Educating children in protracted armed conflict and crisis contexts: inclusive and culturally sensitive pathways for sustainability

We learn when we co-design with the communities- Dr Afu Network partner- Cameroon

This networking research built-on previous studies carried out by the network partners: Kunock-Afu (2019; 2017); Akanji (2019;2013); Ebubedike (forthcoming)carried out in four nations of the Lake-Chad country region and on existing community networks and connections to forge new-links and partnerships to deepen and extend community relationships to access a hard-to-reach population to generate innovative transdisciplinary research ideas with partners in the UK to address the situation of a burgeoning

Whilst the potential for art-based methodologies in educational interventions for conflict transformation has shown success but not complete acceptance, participatory photography, have shown effective as a unique research tool that allows users voice remain central in the research about them and to communicate deeply on sensitive subjects with potential to influence larger social change.

Exploring ways to respond to issues, such as the burgeoning out-of-school populations of young people, requires a continuous on-going approach to achieving sustainable change. This is even more so, in the context of protracted armed conflict and crisis where around 28 million children of primary school age are out of school. With 18% of the world's primary school age population, armed conflict contexts account for 42% of the world's out-of-school children (UNESCO, 2011).

Considering the networked research team's background experience in education of children and young people in the protracted armed conflict and crisis context of the Lake Chad region, the existing community networks and new connections formed in these communities, as highlighted previously, and the link to the network project, it becomes appropriate understand the concept and context of inclusion.

This idea informs our consideration of the concept of inclusion within the practical challenges and possibilities inherent in researching the protracted armed conflict and crisis context of the Lake Chad country region. Our intention is not to draw on the conventional ways of knowing or understanding inclusion or to draw inference on how we understand inclusion should be framed, but to discuss inclusion through the lens of the communities themselves, and their lived experiences of protracted armed conflict and crisis, layered by their unique place-based, historic, cultural, and social needs to understand how these multi- dimensional experiences, combine to produce local knowledge and capacities to support inclusive initiatives in ways that an independent researcher may not be able to.

Therefore, our understanding of inclusion in this networking project, is an attempt to understand its context within the protracted armed conflict and crisis context of the Lake Chad country region and its links to responding to the situation of a burgeoning out-of-school population as known and experienced in these communities.

We found that members of the community are still interested in the education of their children and wards—even the education of girls.

Participatory nature of the networking project with communities experiencing protracted armed conflict and crisis across four nations of the Lake Chad country region, generated detailed insights about their lives and communities. This involvement facilitated access to hard-to-reach populations and enabled the research team to utilise and build on some of the more complex and multifaceted issues that arise from researching vulnerable populations. For instance, during the introductory workshop with the community cohort (parents, community, and religious leaders), the network team communicated the benefits of the network activities to the community. This workshop allowed the community cohort to ask questions about the project and to suggest context-sensitive methods of engagement with the community and to enlighten the network partners about potential risks associated with some of our planned methods of engagement. They further provided advice on how these associated risks could be mitigated. For instance, the practice of purdah (female seclusion), is common and acceptable among Muslims in the Lake Chad region (VerEecke, 1993). Therefore, it was important to understand how factors such as Islam, colonialism and culture influence the indigenous structures, and the implications these changes have on the social positioning of Muslim women in northern Nigeria and the other lake Chad country regions. In response, to ensure equitable access, the network team trained female peer-researchers locally to engage in data collection with the females and the male peer researchers were trained to engage separately with the males. Additionally, these discussions gave us an idea of how to manage the time that was allocated to us so that our activities did not coincide with their time for prayers, to avoid conflict religious practices.

One of the most striking aspects of engaging the community was the parents' accounts particularly mothers. One mother who did not feel the current education initiatives supported the immediate needs of the girls in the community spoke of a wish for education programmes to include IT skills acquisition and empowerment. Another participant suggested that school feeding should be encouraged and will attract children to school. They mentioned that parents will allow their children to attend school if there is a proper feeding program. A participant from the educationist group suggested digital libraries that can be accessed from hand-held devices and off-line, will be an added advantage to the children learning process. They also suggested training teaching staff on how to support children continued learning in emergency and protracted crisis.

I will welcome a few more additions if I omitted anything from your reports Dr Afu and Aziz

7.1. Recommendations

- Focus on girls and young people with special needs and disabilities
- Children and young people are recognized as victims and perpetrators of violence in several truth-and-reconciliation commissions, but they have played little role in these systems. Therefore, include children's interests VOICES in initiatives that are designed to support their education and training.
- Ensure special consideration for children who are in flight from war zones and who live in camps for refugees and internally displaced people.
- Special considerations need to be given to mental health support for children and young people with experience of conflict and crisis before considering how to support their continued formal education and/ or training.
- The provision of facilities for education and play, art therapy and special help for children who are orphaned or left to bear family responsibilities due to the loss of family breadwinner as a result of the crisis.

8.1. Conclusions

Research with communities affected by humanitarian crises is often driven by expert assessment of needs and solutions. By marginalizing community voice, research in these settings risks further traumatizing and exclusion of populations, thereby, exacerbating inequities experienced prior to the onset of crises. CBPR particularly art-based methods in this instance, photovoice, is a research approach that can address the challenges of research with communities affected by crisis. Just as CBPR has enhanced rigor, relevance, and reach in other research settings (Balazs & Morello-Frosch, 2013), it can do the same in research with communities affected by protracted armed conflict and crisis. Further, we argue that it has the potential, when focused on voices that are often silenced in research, of recalibrating equity and power in vulnerable contexts, giving voice, restoring dignity, and creating for researchers to tap into the experiential knowledge inherent in local resources (Afifi et al., 2020).

Using photovoice as a methodology is uniquely placed to promote collaborative research with communities with experiences crisis.

It fosters inclusion and diversity, and participation in ways traditional research approaches may not be able to. Photovoice can contribute to advancing ethical, ways of doing research in such vulnerable contexts (Ebubedike, et al., forthcoming). We urge researchers, scholars and others who work in these settings to commit to recalibrating the scales of equity and giving voice to vulnerable populations through co-creation and co-dissemination of knowledge.