

Original Article

Forced migration and pressure on agro-pastoral resources in the Far-North Region Cameroon.

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Abstract: One of the major consequences of insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin is the massive displacement of populations towards secure territories. The influx of forced migrants is accompanied by increased exploitation of agro-pastoral resources. This is the case in the northern part of Cameroon, which since 2014 has hosted more than 100,000 refugees and 350,000 internally displaced persons, most of whom have agriculture and livestock farming as their main activities. The aim of this article is to show how forced migration contributes to the pressure on agro-pastoral resources (agricultural land, grazing land, wood resources). The study is based on field observation, supplemented by reports from organizations responsible for supervising migrants. Field surveys of a sample of 262 individuals, representative of the population under consideration were carried out in the territories of Moskota, Mozogo, Mokolo, Koza and Tokombéré bordering Bornou in Nigeria. Primary data were completed with data from the International Organization for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), and UNHCR reports on statistics relating to refugees and internally displaced people in northern Cameroon. The results of data analysis show that settlement of forced migrants has exacerbated the degradation of grazing land, forest reserves and the conflicts between farmers and breeders linked to the difficult access to agriculture plots (25% of conflicts), grazing land (58% of conflicts), water and firewood.

Keywords: Forced migrants; Boko Haram; peasantry; agropastoral resources; pressure, Cameroon.

1. Introduction

The recurrent ecological and socio-political crises in the Lake Chad Basin for almost a century have made this part of Africa a high mobility area [1]. Internal and cross-border mobilities have been recorded following these crises, creating a field of forced migrations [2] built around decomposing departure zones and recomposing settlement zones.

Cameroon's second most populous region with 3.5 million inhabitants, the Far North has been under attack from the Boko Haram sect on its border margins since 2013 and has received Nigerian refugees since 2009. It is therefore considered a refugee zone for displaced persons and refugees who are victims of cross-border insecurity, hence the creation of camps for Nigerian refugees and internally displaced persons, notably in the Mandara Mountains. This massive arrival of forced migrants for an indefinite period constitutes an additional pressure on the rural territories concerned. Since the 1980s, the massive arrival of Chadians following the various political disturbances has led the UNHCR to open refugee camps in the northern part of Cameroon. The camps of Poli-faro (with more than 4,000 migrants), Kouséri, and Langui (with nearly 3,700 migrants) are an illustration.

The first effects of the settlement of refugees and displaced persons in towns close to camps have already been observed and analyzed, notably in the town of Kousséri [3], where was noted a demographic growth of 14.2% between 1976 and 1987 [4,5] and other new social phenomena. Out of Lake Chad basin, analysis focused on [6] how the settlement of Congolese refugees affects social life in host communities in Rwanda. It emerges that interaction between refugees and host communities helps increase confidence between them; and economic and social support given to refugees plays a key role in reducing and preventing conflict between the two groups. Another issue on the relationship between the refugees' camps and the deforestation has been examined [7] in Uganda using geospatial data In the

countryside near camps settled in the northern part of Cameroon, very few scientific studies have been carried out; especially those concerning the pressure on natural resources. Indeed, the geographical context in which these camps are built is quite particular in that the settlement regions are old population basins or areas with strong internal demographic dynamics that are characterized by land saturation, conflicts between herders and farmers over water and land resources, and difficult socio-economic conditions [8]. The settlement of thousands of forced migrants, even if they are locked up in camps, constitutes an additional pressure for these local populations whose socio-economic situation is no better. In addition to the refugees living in the camps managed by the UNHCR, unregistered refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees have swelled the ranks of forced migrants by settling directly in the village areas of the Far North region, particularly in the Mandara foothills (Mayo Sava and Mayo Tsanaga). This makes the situation more complex. How do these forced migrants influence the access to agropastoral resources such as agricultural plots, pasture, water and even fuelwood resources?

We assume that forced migrants exert pressure on rural territories which manifests itself in conflicts related to access to natural resources and which modalities contribute to the control of their sustainable management. Do the forced migrants (refugees, displaced persons) be considered as free riders' actor in the sense of Mancur [9]? That would strengthen the neo-Malthusian position regularly adopted by scientists working in this region.

2. Materials and Methods

2-1. Study area

This study is spatially based on the Far North region of Cameroon bordering Eastern Nigeria. For an analysis at the local level, the rural territories of Gawar, Zamaï and Koza located near refugees' camp and hosting displaced persons were chosen (Figure 1). Each village selected makes it possible to study the relationship between local populations and forced migrants, focusing on a specific type of migrant (refugees, displaced persons, and returnees). The choice of the Zamaï and Gawar territories located near the Minawaou camp housing 69000 Nigerian refugees who are victims of the Boko Haram sect allows us to see the socio-spatial effects of the presence of forced migrants. These two areas are located in the Mandara foothills; Koza hosts a large number of internally displaced persons and migrants returning (returnees) from the border area, which is prey to the acts of the Boko Haram sect.

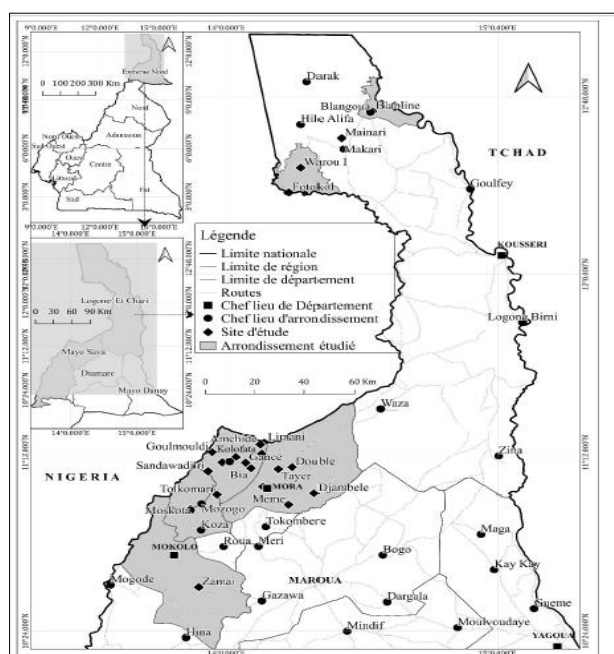


Figure 1. Location of study sites.

2-2. Methods

The general hypothesis-testing strategy is based on the use of the International Migration Organization's reference database, UNHCR data, supplemented by field surveys.

– Secondary data collection: the activity reports of organizations involved in the management of refugees, displaced persons, and returnees, and those of bodies responsible for the supervision of Cameroonian rural populations were

used. Displacement Tracking Matrices (DTMs) published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) from 2013 to 2022 dealing with migration in Northern Cameroon were consulted to study the movement of people from the border area to the interior of the study area. The DTMs make it possible to measure the general evolution of forced migratory movements from 2013 to 2022 in the Far North of Cameroon, and the more detailed IOM Baseline provides information at the village level on the settlement and reception of refugees, IDPs and returnees since 2013.

The reports of public authorities (municipal authorities, subdivisions officers and heads of primary and secondary schools) responsible for supervising the displaced provided us with information on the management of the displaced in countryside.

– Primary data collection: surveys of farmers and forced migrants (refugees, internally displaced persons) enabled us to assess their socio-economic conditions and to measure the relationships established between them, the methods of access to local resources, and conflict resolution.

They were preceded by discussions with the traditional rulers of Gawar, Zamaï and Koza. These discussions focused on the relationship between the host populations and the forced migrants, and the management of local resources.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents

Informants	Zamaï	Mayo Moskota	Koza	Total	type of survey
Public authorities	7	4	4	15	Semi-directive interviews
Lamido (Main Traditional rulers)	1	1	1	3	Semi-directive interviews
Lawan (Traditional rulers of 2nd degree)	3	19	2	24	Semi-directive interviews
Community leaders	-	5	2	7	Semi-directive interviews
NGO'S	1	2	1	4	Semi-directive interviews
host populations	40	40	40	120	Survey
IDP's	25	25	25	75	Survey
Refugees	14	0	0	14	Survey
Total	91	96	75	262	

Source: Field data

– *Data processing and analysis:*

After acquiring data from written and oral sources, and from field observations, we proceeded to data analysis. The qualitative data were subjected to content analysis and compared with existing knowledge of natural resource management and the statistics collected. Statistical data were processed manually, using a data analysis form in Excel format. Survey information was classified according to the various socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and the modes of access to resources in the areas concerned. The information collected was described in simple statistical terms. Demographic data relating to forced migrants were the subject of a frequency distribution by year, by settlement sites in histograms in order to identify the modes and determine the evolution of the number of migrants from 2014 to 2022. Data on conflicts recorded in the survey zones were grouped according to the resource concerned and distributed in a histogram to determine their frequency. The cartographic processing consisted in making a spatial distribution of forced migrants by surveyed territory after having proceeded to a discretization of the different categories of migrants (refugees, internally displaced people, return migrants).

3. Results

This section may be divided by subheadings. It should provide a concise and precise description of the experimental results, their interpretation, as well as the experimental conclusions that can be drawn.

3.1. North Cameroon, a quasi-permanent refuge area for forced migrants

The political and inter-ethnic crises in Chad, Nigeria and the Central African Republic have led to the refuge of several migrants since the 1970s towards Cameroon. Northern Cameroon, which borders these three countries, is a permanent

refuge zone and has sheltered migrants fleeing persecution and violence in Chad, the Central African Republic, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Some have refugee status, others do not. The former have been mainly confined to camps supervised by the UNHCR, while the latter have settled in the main towns of northern Cameroon and in certain rural areas where agricultural labour is needed (cotton production areas, areas where off-season crops such as sorghum and onions are grown). (Table 2).

Table 2. Forced migrants in the Northern region since 1970

Années	Crises	Number and Nationality of migrants	Settlement area
1979-1985	Civil war in Chad	266000 chadians refugees	Far North region (Kousseri), North region (Poli-Faro (Taparé) Refugees Camp
2008	Civil war in Chad	9000 chadians refugees	Far North region (Kousseri), North region (Langui refugees camp)
2013-2021	Boko Haram/EIAO	52000 nigerians refugees	Minawaou (Refugies camp) Far North region
	Boko Haram/EIAO	14871 nigerians refugees living out of HCR Camps	Far North region
	Boko Haram/EIAO	144972 IDP'S	Far North region
	Boko Haram/EIAO	32023 Returned migrants	Far North region
	Flooding	36243 IDP'S	Far North region

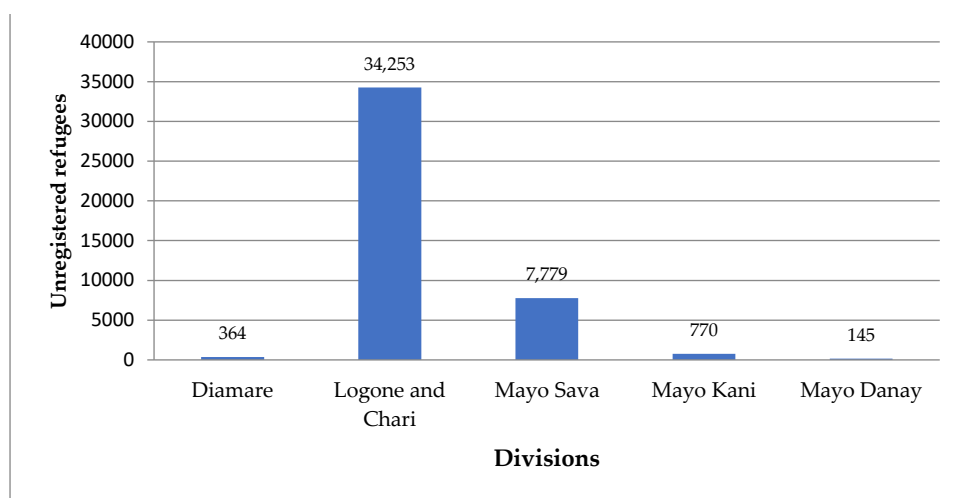
Source : Presidency of the republic of Cameroon, UNHCR, IOM

3.2. State of forced migration exacerbated by Boko Haram-related insecurity

The different phases of the spread of Boko Haram-related violence have resulted in various types of forced migration. The attacks in the Nigerian states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe have mainly resulted in a massive influx of Nigerian refugees and Cameroonian returnees. The extension of the conflict into Mayo Tsanaga, Mayo Sava and Logone et Chari divisions has led to internal displacement.

3-2-1 Registered and unregistered refugees

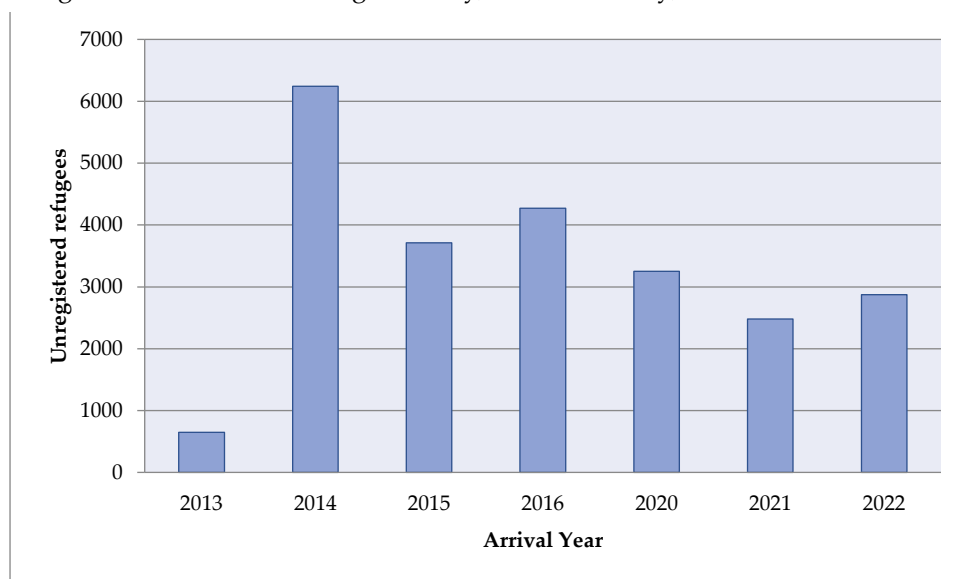
They are estimated at more than 115921, that is 69622 registered refugees living in the Minawaou camp in Mayo Tsanaga division and nearly 46000 other unregistered refugees who [10], live in host communities (59%), in spontaneous sites (12%) and others in rented accommodation (20%). The refusal to reside in the refugee camp can be explained by the distance of the camp from the villages of origin, the preference to settle in communities with which there are family ties, and the presence of pastures [11]. The distribution of this category of migrant follows the contours of the border areas in Nigeria. (figure 2).



Source: Displacement tracking matrix (DTM) of the International Migrations Organisation, 2021

Figure 2. Distribution of unregistered refugees in the Far North region of Cameroon in 2022.

This category of refugees has been evolving since 2013 with a peak in 2014 (figure 3) corresponding to the pattern of the security situation in Nigeria. However, despite the retreat of the sect on the ground in 2016, the number of unregistered refugees has not decreased significantly, on the contrary, there is a continued influx of these refugees.



Source: Report of the UNHCR, 2022, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/90835>

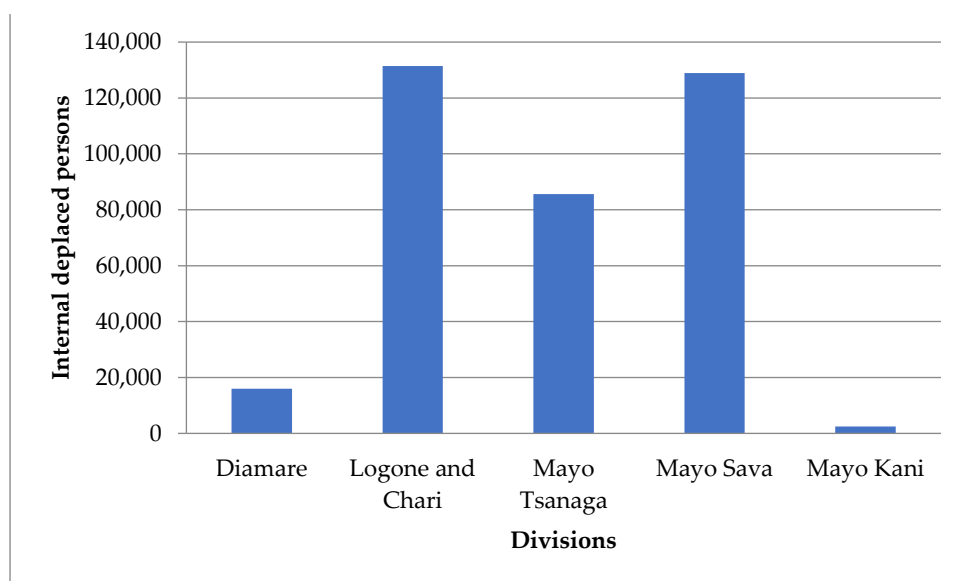
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Figure 1. Evolution of unregistered refugee arrivals between 2013 and 2022

Refugees living out of the camps still arriving in the last ten years by thousands; showing that the situation in the northwest of Nigeria is not secure and the pressure on rural areas in the far north region of Cameroon became permanent since 2014.

3-2-2-The number of internally displaced persons is still growing.

These are Cameroonians who have left their homes to escape the exactions of the Boko Haram sect. They are estimated at more than 321,000 individuals living mainly in host communities, spontaneous sites and rented accommodation. They are spread across the different divisions of the Far North region, with a strong presence in the Mayo Tsanaga, Logone and Chari and Mayo Sava Divisions which are sharing borders with Nigeria. (figure 4).



Source: Displacement tracking matrix (DTM) of the International Migrations Organization, 2022

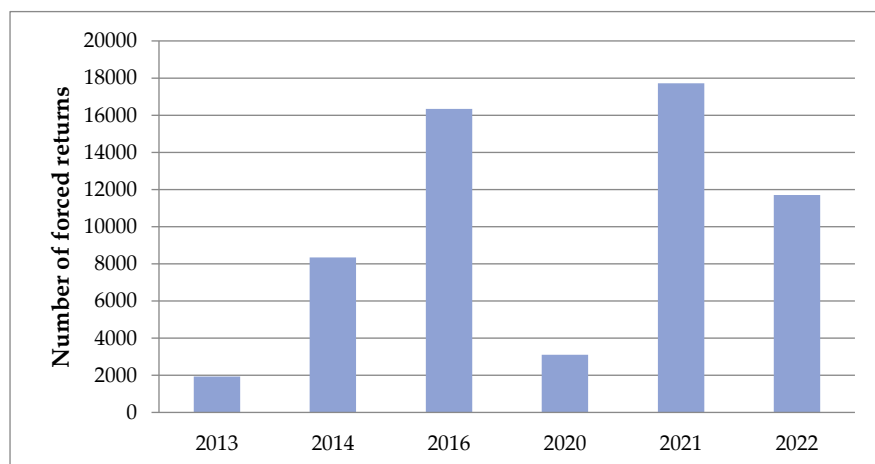
Figure 4. Distribution of Internal displaced persons in the Far North region

The distribution of IDPs within each division is not the same from one division to another. In Diamare division, the Maroua III and Pette subdivisions are the most affected, with 2204 and 1260 IDPs respectively; in Mayo Tsanaga division, the subdivisions of Koza, Mokolo, Mozogo and Mogodé have 10851, 6496, 5615 and 2362 IDPs respectively. In the Logone and Chari Divisions, all the subdivisions have a large number of IDPs: 39000 in Makari, 20000 in Kousséri and 15500 in Fotokol. The three subdivisions of Mayo Sava record a large number of IDPs: 21350 in Kolofata, 21950 in Mora and 1478 in Tokombere.

These Displaced persons arrived mainly between 2013 and 2016 following the intensification of the sect's activities in the Cameroonian region.

3-2-3 International and internal returnees

International returnees are Cameroonians who have returned from Nigeria where they have been living for several years for economic and marital reasons. Back in Cameroon, they do not always settle in their home areas. This is the case of the returnees settled in Zamaï in a makeshift camp who are still waiting for the help of Cameroonian public authorities. For the internal returnees, they are market gardeners and traders who have returned from the border areas where they had migrated for more than a generation. Most of them are migrants returning to their lands of origin. Their distribution in the Far North region follows the general pattern of forced migration. After a first wave of returns in 2013, the movement is still increasing between 2014 and 2022 (figure 5).



Displacement tracking matrix (DTM) of the International Migrations Organisation, 2022

Figure 5. Evolution of forced returns from 2013 to 2022

In total, there are more than 69000 regularly registered refugees, 40000 unregistered refugees, more than 320000 internally displaced persons and 120000 returnees. Globally, there are almost 500000 forced migrants, mainly in the Logone and Chari, Mayo Tsanaga and Mayo Sava divisions (figure 6). These last two divisions in particular constitute fairly important centers of settlement with densities that can exceed 100 inhabitants per square kilometer in places. However, for the past four years, they have been subject to additional demographic pressure which has had an impact on these territories, which are peripheral to the refugee camp, and which also receive displaced persons and returnees.

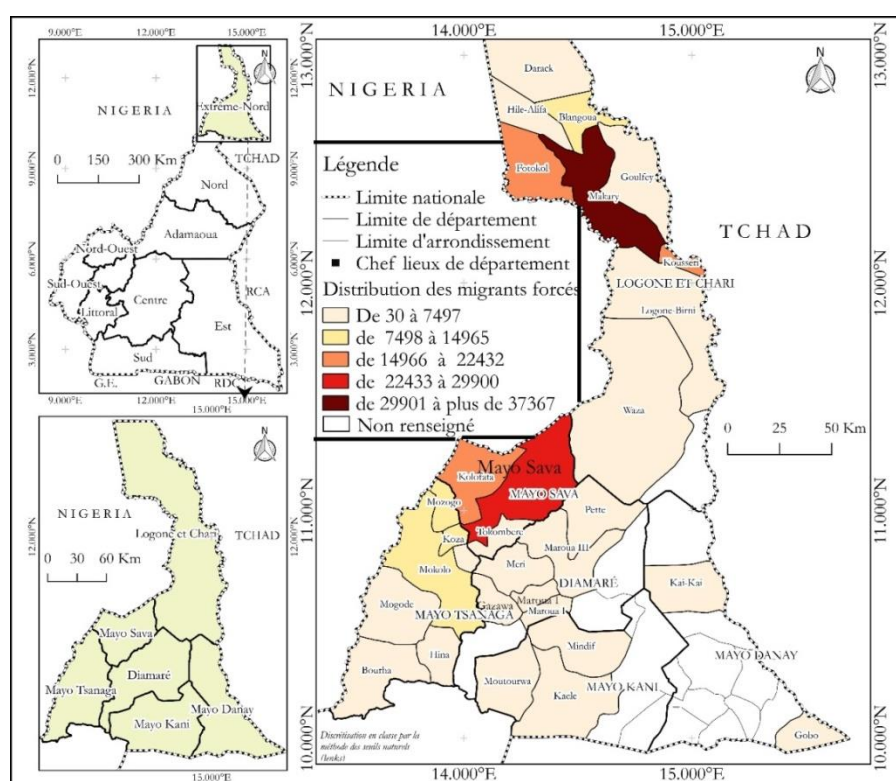
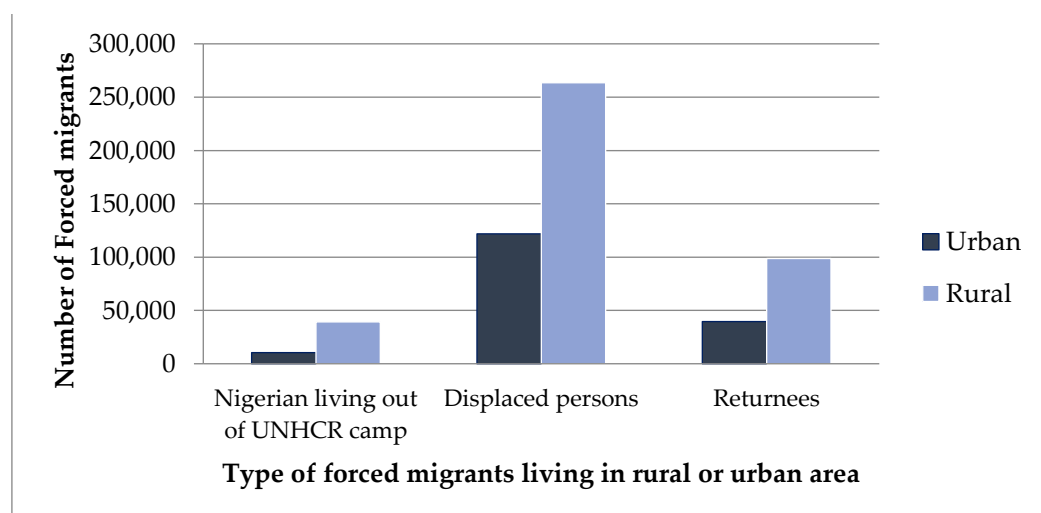


Figure 6. Distribution of forced migrants in the Far North region

The rural areas receive the bulk of the migratory flows resulting from the violence linked to the Boko Haram phenomenon. More than 400000 forced migrants have chosen to settle there, which represents 70% of them (figure 7).



Source: Report of the UNHCR, 2022, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/90835>

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Figure 7. Distribution of forced migrants settled in urban and rural areas.

The rural areas located mainly in the foothill plains receive a significant proportion of these migrants. This is the case of Gawar, Zamaï, Koza and Tokombéré located on the Mandara foothills. Gawar and Zamaï are two districts in the Mo-kolo subdivision and host a refugee camp of more than 50,000 Nigerians (Minawaou camp) and a site for internally displaced persons. This massive and sudden influx is not without socio-spatial effects, despite an a priori peaceful coexistence.

3-3 From the reception of migrants to the "discontent" of host populations

3-3-1 Opportunities linked to the presence of refugees.

The presence of the refugees is beneficial to the local residents who exchange food with them. The refugees regularly receive rice, beans, vegetable oil and many other utensils and materials which they sell at low prices to intermediaries who in turn offer them to local residents in the surrounding weekly markets. This exchange makes it possible to supply the local markets with cereals and other products (Photo 1).



Photo taken by the author.

Photo 1. The sale of UNHCR donations at the Zamaï market near the Minawaou refugee camp

The 50 kg bags of rice stamped WFP (World Food Programme), vegetable oil in five litre cans and blankets offered by the WFP to the refugees are sold in local markets.

Local populations benefit from a few development projects designed to 'strengthen the resilience of populations and prevent conflict (MINEPAT, UNDP, FAO, UNESCO, Japanese government); 'integrate gender into the humanitarian response' (UN-Women, Japanese government). These development projects are materialized by the construction of a livestock market, a shed for women traders (Plate 1).



Photos taken by the author.

Plate 1. Livestock markets and women traders' shed in Zamaï

Since the beginning of the security crisis linked to the Boko Haram phenomenon, several projects aimed at "reducing the risk of radicalization of young people in the Far North region" have been implemented. The strategy of the state and its partners consists of fighting against the unemployment of young people in rural areas through financial and material support in agriculture, small trading, and hand craft.

3-3-2 Tense relations between host populations and refugees

Contrary to the discourse of the traditional authorities, particularly in Gawar, which speaks of harmony between the local population and the refugees, the testimonies of the local population in Zamai reveal a certain unease about the presence of the refugees [12]. This is due to their violent behaviour and disregard for the rules aimed at preserving local resources. Several testimonies illustrate their aggressive and even insurrectionary reaction. According to the Lamido of Zamai, the refugees have destroyed the wood and wildlife resources that had been preserved until then, despite the warnings of the forest guards whom they regularly threaten. For some local residents, the Nigerian refugees are even "carriers of a Boko Haram gene" because they do not abide by any rules. This difficult and even aggressive behaviour was also underlined by some employees working inside the camp.

Surveys conducted in Langui in the northern region, where Chadian refugees were settled following the 2008 events in Ndjamen, also reveal a feeling of rejection of Chadian refugees by the local population and traditional authorities who find them difficult in social relations (disrespectful, insolent and violent). They no longer wish to receive Chadian refugees.

According to the Chadian refugees, a few isolated cases of theft and fights have been recorded, but these do not justify a generalization of the situation. For them, it is simply a matter of stigmatizing the Chadian, whom they would like to see subjugated at will because of his precariousness. This point of view corresponds well to the popular image of the migrant, who is sometimes considered to be the main disruptive element in the host society.

3-4 Pressure on local natural resources

The region, which hosts more than 500,000 forced migrants, is a semi-arid plain. Its environmental context is characterized by climatic deterioration. Since the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, this plain has been subject to rainfall deficits accompanied by dry events and a reduction in the number of rainy days. This has led to a reduction of agro-pastoral resources. The countryside where the camps and other reception sites for forced migrants are located is an old settlement area with high human density where the last unused spaces were filled with the descent of people from Mandara mountains in the 1970s. The reception of refugees and displaced persons is a source of additional pressure.

3-4-1 Establishment of camps and degradation of grazing land and forest reserves

The sites occupied by the camps are most often grazing or cultivation areas or reserves of natural resources (flora, fauna, land). In the case of Minawaou-Gawar refugees camp, the areas occupied are significant, that is more than 350 hectares. Those in charge of managing the camp stress the need to enlarge it or to open a new camp in addition. If for the *Lamido* (traditional ruler) of Gawar, the space occupied by the Minawaou camp was unexploited before it opened, for the farmers of the small Djamboutou village, this is not the case. They said that they are now landless.

In fact, Djamboutou is made up of around twenty families of farmers. According to them, more than 70% of the cultivation areas in Djamboutou are now occupied by the refugee camp, which is constantly expanding (Plate 2). The farmers admit that they are unable to resist the will of the traditional and public authorities who have decided to settle the camps. The last option for them is to leave.



Photos taken by the author.

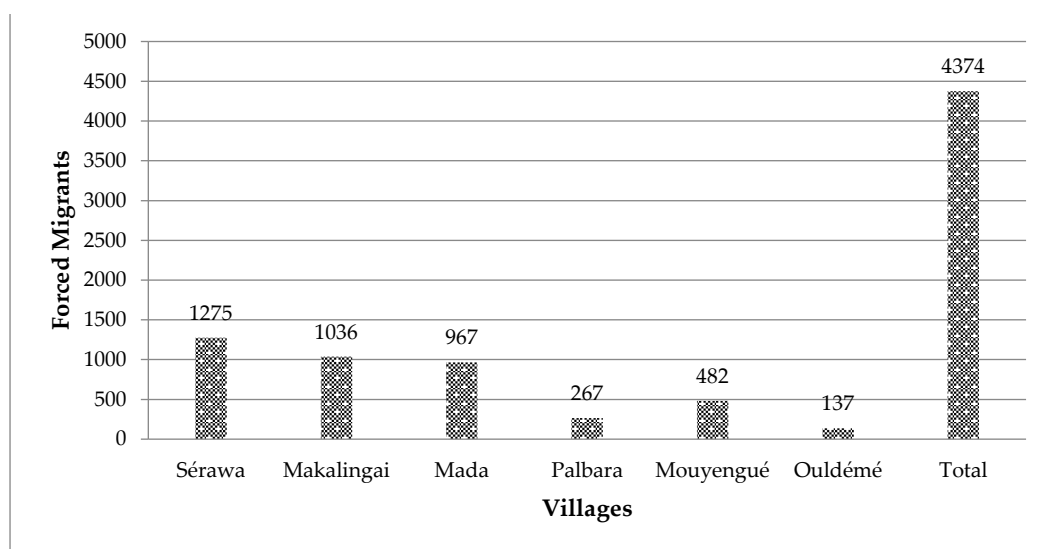
Plate 2. Extension of the Minawaou Camp to the Djamboutou-Gawar area

In the foreground, the space occupied by the small area of Djamboutou on the edge of the Minawaou camp. In the background, the edge of the Minawaou camp, which is progressively occupying the cultivated areas.

Forest reserves are subject to degradation by refugees, displaced people for fuelwood and charcoal production. Since 2013, the Zamay forest reserve on the foothills of the Mandara Mountains has lost more than 50% of its area. The consequences are the destruction of endemic flora and fauna. The Mayor of Hina, a neighbor subdivision of Minawaou refugee camp considers the presence of forced migrants as a problem for the protection of reserve forests and grazing land of his municipality. Refugees became charcoal and wood sellers.

3-4-2 Occupation and pressure on the last fallows, pastures and forests by displaced persons, refugees living out of the camps and returnees.

Since 2013, some villages have been hosting forced migrants made up of IDPs internal displaced persons, refugees living out of camps and some returnees [12, 13]. It is the case of Tokombere, Koza municipalities which host more than 10000 forced migrants. Some of them are moving with their cattle and need spaces for grazing. These migrants are unevenly distributed in the different villages (figure 11).



Source: Field data

Figure 9. Distribution of forced migrants in the municipality of Tokombere

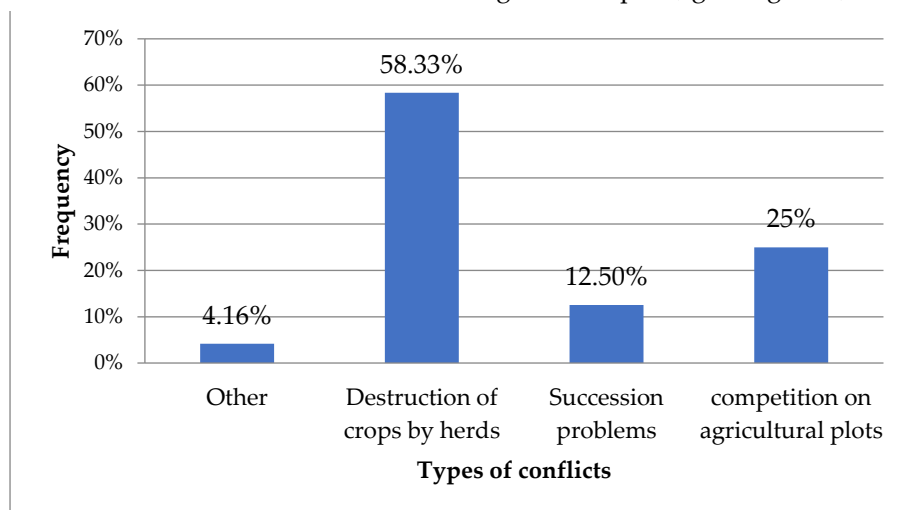
Of the six villages receiving migrants, Makalingai was previously the least dense, still having grazing space and fallow land. The installation of the 1036 migrants, 52% of whom are farmers and 27% of whom are herders, favours the occupation of the land reserves.

The influx of displaced populations is taking place on land that is already insufficient to meet the vital needs of its inhabitants. The ecological balance was maintained for a very long time through the careful management of resources, intensive farming practices on the terraces and thanks to inputs and irrigation on the plains, is being called into question. Above all, the traditional land tenure systems do not have the means to integrate a large population that suddenly arrives in the villages.

Concerning the forced returnees, their integration in their homelands is a challenge for the local populations. Indeed, with the security crisis in the border areas (Limani, Kérawa, Amchidé and Kolofata), several migrants or sons of migrants have chosen to return to their land of origin. This is the case in the locality of Ouldeme, where 137 migrants and sons of migrants have returned. Access to land was a challenge for these returning farmers. For some, renting is the first option in the hope of obtaining a plot of land from the fragmentation of other farms. The restitution of plots of land

used before they left the land is sometimes accompanied by resistance requiring the intervention or arbitration of the elders. In any case, these returnees bring back a know-how through the practice of market gardening, which is a new fact.

One of the main indicators of pressure on the natural resources is the growing of conflicts between farmers and breeders linked to the difficult access to agriculture plots, grazing land, water, and firewood (figure 10)



Source: Field data

Figure 10. Frequency of conflicts by type of conflict

Crop destruction by herdsmen from insecure border territories in north-western Nigeria and competition for agricultural plots due to population growth account for 83% of conflicts in the study sites. According to cattle breeders it is difficult to access to pastures, the grazing quality became poor and the prices of fodder high. The increase in the number of forced migrants as a result of insecurity and climate change [14], is making the situation very complex.

4 Discussion

Analysis of refugee management at national or international level has often failed to take into account the local effects of the presence of forced migrants. This study, which is based on empirical data from the case studies of the areas bordering refugee camps and hosting displaced persons and returnees, illustrates the link between the settlement of refugees and the dynamics of the surrounding rural territories. The socio-economic effects of the presence of refugees and displaced persons can be beneficial for host populations, as demonstrated in Rwanda in 2019 [5]. The case of northern Cameroon has shown that the presence of refugees gives local populations access to certain commercial infrastructures, such as livestock market, a women traders' shed and storage warehouses. However, social relations between the two communities can become conflictual when local resources begin to be exploited by transient migrants [9, 15], who sometimes behave like "free riders". Conflicts have arisen as a result of population growth in the face of dwindling agro-pastoral resources, exacerbated by the unstable climate. Despite the small sample size in relation to the total target population and the non-exhaustive survey of host sites, we have highlighted the fact that tensions can arise from differing perceptions of resource management: while the local population strives to lead a sustainable existence by preserving local forests and pastures, forced migrants try to survive by using all the resources in their environment. The consequence is the degradation of the environment as [5], demonstrated in Uganda in 2021.

5 Conclusion

The aim of this study is to show the link between forced migration and pressure on agro-pastoral resources in northern Cameroon, in a context of climatic deterioration. This part of the Lake Chad basin, already overpopulated, has been receiving massive movements of migrants over the last twenty years, fleeing areas of insecurity caused by the activities of Boko Haram. The establishment of refugee camps and the settlement of displaced persons in villages are responsible for the pressure exerted on grazing land and forest reserves and, in many cases, for conflicts between farmers and herders, migrants and local populations. Tensions are regularly managed by traditional chiefs and public authorities,

who have developed endogenous strategies and succeed in maintaining harmony. Forced migration, which would be constant over a long period, must be considered as a permanent planning modality in the Lake Chad basin.

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