



Voices of the Children of the Lake Chad Region



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This book is an output from the Global Challenges Research funded networking project titled,

A 'hidden' crisis-in-crises: a transformative agenda 'Boko-haram and education' in the countries of the Lake-Chad region through visual narratives.

The networking activities were carried out in four nations of the Lake Chad region - Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad.

The networking research was led by:

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- Dr Margaret Ebubedike, Open University, UK

The name Lake *Chad* is derived from the Kanuri word "Sádə" meaning a large expanse of water¹. The Lake Chad region has a total area of 427,500 km² which covers Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. This region is characterized by several factors such as: underdevelopment and unemployment, environmental pressures enhanced by the receding waters of Lake Chad, and desertification. It 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 Sub-Saharan Africa². 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 insurgency has emerged as one of the greatest threats to human security in Africa, particularly in the Lake Chad region.

Boko Haram is an Islamic sect which 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 compound in Abuja in August 2011, killing 23 people³. The sect continued to attack and loot communities, and in particular schools, killing and abducting both students and their teachers⁴. 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" campaign⁵. Four years after, in February 2018, 105 schoolgirls aged 11–19 were kidnapped by the Boko Haram terrorist group from their College in Dapchi also in northeast Nigeria⁶.

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 region⁷ and have resulted in the displacement of over 2.4 million people⁸.

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. These collaborative approaches to research allow for community participation, and for research to be done in ways that remain sensitive to people's experiences. It also fosters bottom-up approaches to the co-creation of new knowledge, which has the potential to accelerate research impact.

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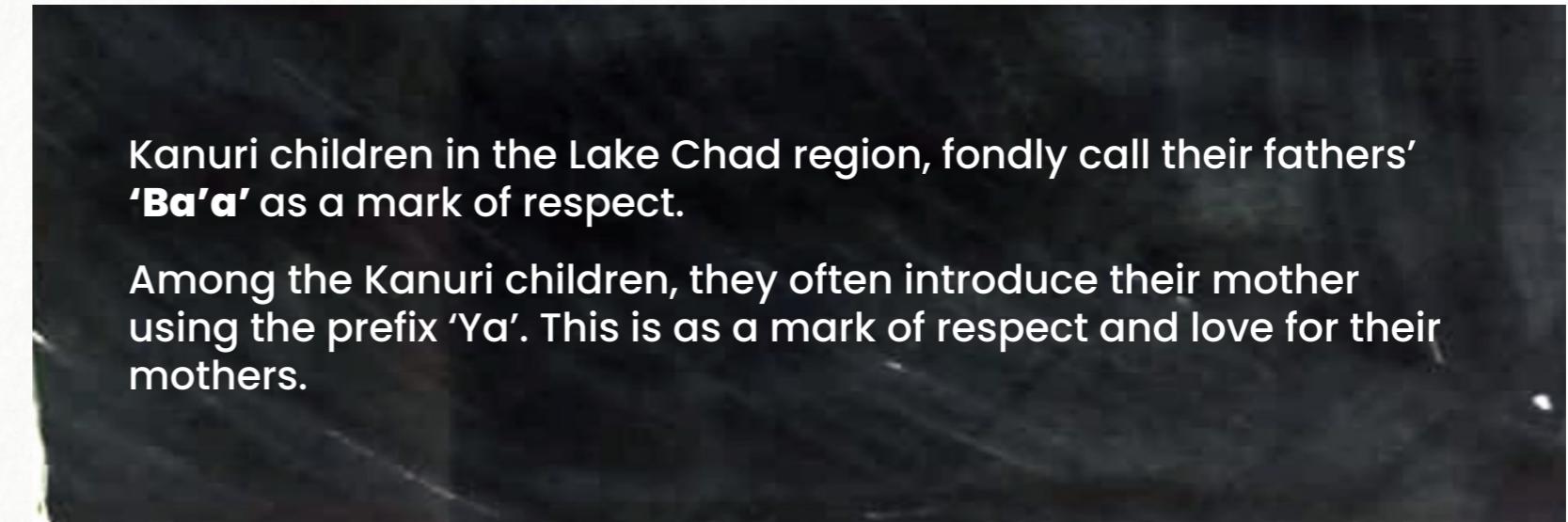
Thanks also go to those directly involved in the research, including our local network partners across the four nations: Dr Isaiah Kunock Afu (Cameroon), Dr Adaobi Nwoye (Nigeria), Ouya Bourma Malato (Chad), Yaya Soumaine (Chad), Mallam Isa (Niger), Kyari Mustapha (Niger) and others we are unable to mention for security and safeguarding purposes.

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We especially want to appreciate the role of Miss Nia Ndulue who designed the cover page picture of this book and lent her voice to help amplify the voices of children and young people in the Lake Chad region. Most of all, our sincere gratitude goes to the children and young people from the four nations of the Lake Chad region – Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon – who agreed to share their stories and their experiences by speaking out about the issues they believe are most important in their own lives and in the lives of millions of children living in regions of conflict and crisis.



**My name is Kalla.
I am 12 years old.**



Kanuri children in the Lake Chad region, fondly call their fathers' '**Ba'a**' as a mark of respect.

Among the Kanuri children, they often introduce their mother using the prefix 'Ya'. This is as a mark of respect and love for their mothers.

**My father (Ba'a), is a maize farmer.
My mother Ya Ngwari sells food stuff in the village market.
I have an elder sister Falta.
We all live happily in our little hut in our village.**

Picture by: Mahamat, 14 (Female) and Alima, 12(female) out of school



I want to be a teacher when I grow up.

My best friend Karu wants to be a nurse.

We both like to go to school.

In school we learn new things every day.

I like my teacher, mallum Ya'alta.

She said if we continue to work hard, we can be anything we want to be when we grow up.

'Mallum' is prefix used to refer to a female teacher. 'Mallum' is commonly used by children from the Lake Chad region as a mark of respect for a custodian of knowledge.

Picture by:
Adama, 15 (male) Ali, 14(male)
and Abba, 12 (female) out of school





But one night, all our lives changed.

It started with a loud bang outside.

Then we heard people screaming.

Ba'a (my father), quickly ran outside, to see what was happening.

Then, we heard some creaking sound, it was coming from our thatched roof.

Suddenly, our hut was filled with smoke.

Soon we realised our hut was on fire.

We ran outside and watched our hut go up in flames.



Picture by:
Bintu, 12 (female) Junior secondary 2 student



I saw women and children screaming.
Then I saw them, they moved close to us.
We tried to run.

One of them snatched my sister, Falta.

I could still hear her scream as
they vanished into the thick
forest.

I later heard that my friend
Karu was also taken that
night by them.

So many other young
women and girls
were taken.

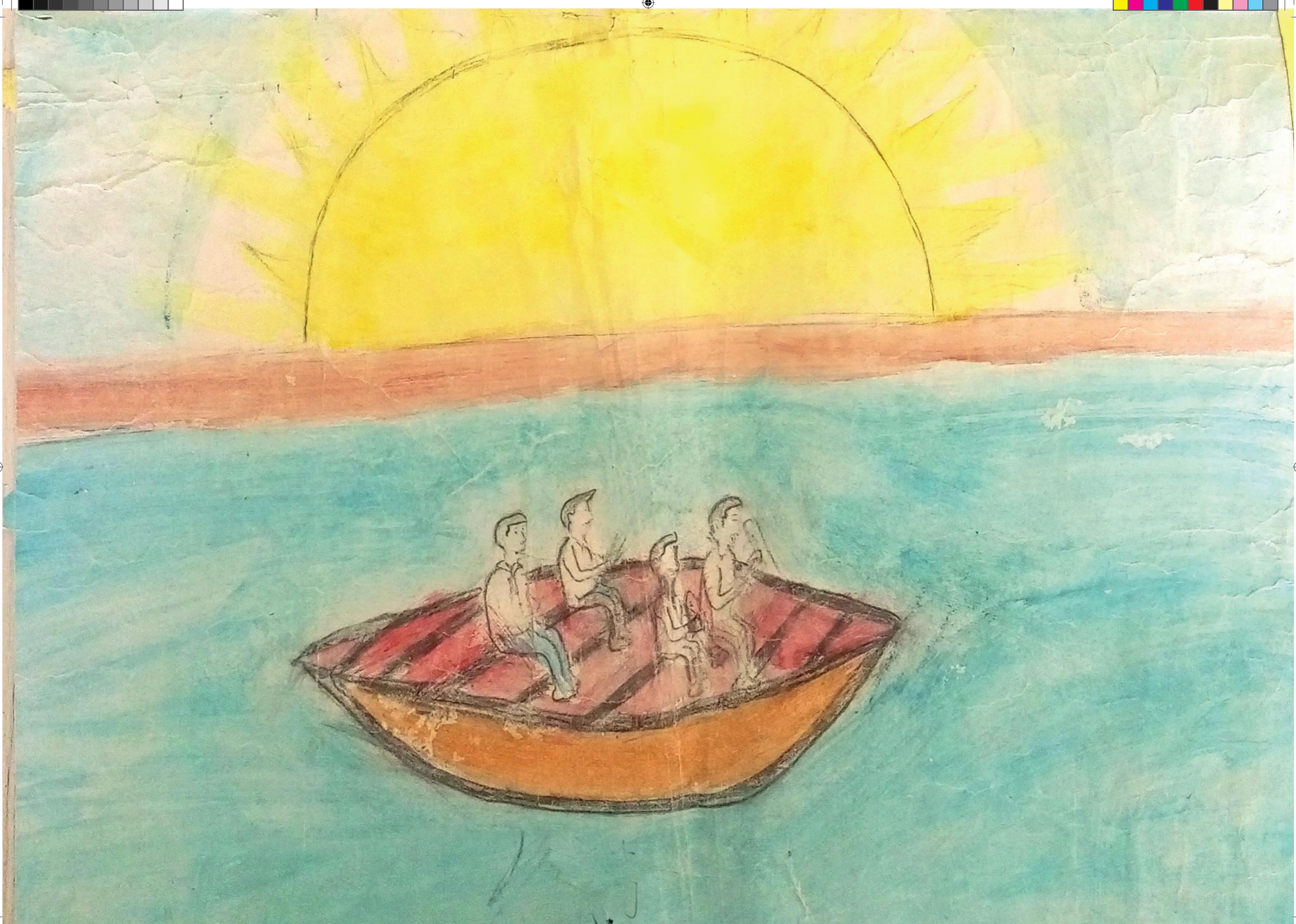
It was a long
dark night.

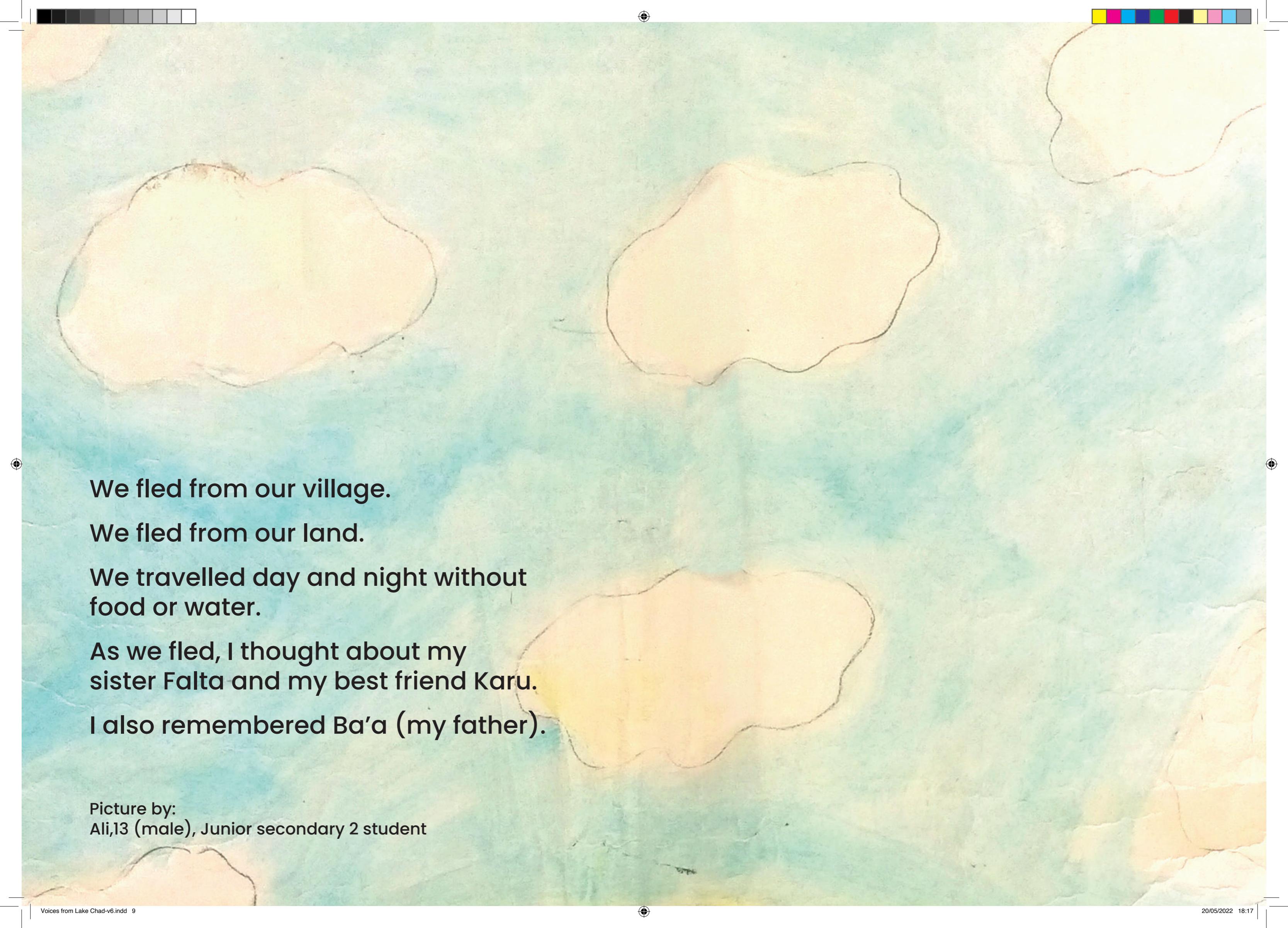
By the next
morning,
the whole village
was in chaos.

Ba'a (my father),
had still not returned.

Picture by:
Adama, 15 (male);
Ali, 14 (male) and
Abba, 12 (female)
all out of school







We fled from our village.

We fled from our land.

We travelled day and night without food or water.

As we fled, I thought about my sister Falta and my best friend Karu.

I also remembered Ba'a (my father).

Picture by:
Ali, 13 (male), Junior secondary 2 student

I wondered if I'll ever see
them again.

If I'll ever see my homeland
again.

Then I wondered about my
dream to be a teacher.

Thoughts of this made me
very sad until tears welled
up in my eyes.



Picture by:
Bawa, 14 (female) Junior secondary school 3 student



Soon we arrived our new home.
It was different from our little village hut.
It was a camp made with tents.

Photography by: female age 10, out of school

I began to miss
my home all over
again.

I missed our little
thatched hut.

I missed my sister
and my best
friend.

I was also missing
Ba'a (my father).



Picture by: Bintou, 6 (female) primary 2 pupil



My mother Ya Ngwari became a shadow of herself.

She had lost her Bara'anzi (husband), her Fero (daughter), and her Fato (home).

Among the Kanuris of the Lake Chad region, names are a powerful representation of their identities and belief.

When a woman calls her husband 'Bara'anzi', it means the blessed one. By calling her husband the blessed one, she is projecting positivity to the work of his hands. In the Kanuri cultural tradition, men are the providers and breadwinners. By implication, when a man is blessed, he will continue to provide, and his family will not lack.

Daughters are often referred to as Fero by their mother's

'Fato' is a common name they use when they make reference to home.



Picture by:
Bawa, 14 (female) Junior secondary school 3 student





Soon I met other children in the camp.

There was Mele.

He was always wearing a long-saddened look
with chipped lips and sunken eyes.

His skin was dry and patched.

Mele told me his story.

He told me about how he stood and watched
his home burn down with his mother Ya Fandi
trapped inside their hut.

He saw his father Ba'a Modu run into their home
to rescue his Ya Fandi (his mother), from the fire.

He told me of how he waited until his family home
burnt down with no sign of his father or mother
making it through the door.

Picture by: Falmata, 14 (female) junior secondary school 3 student





**"I miss my Fato" (home), said Mele.
I miss the comfort and the calmness
of living in my own home.
My home may be small but
that is where I find happiness and joy.
It makes me feel sad that I have no
place to call my home anymore.**

Picture by: Bintu, 12 (female) Junior secondary 2 student



I told Mele about Ba'a (my father), my sister Falta, and my best friend Karu.

We both agreed that before the crisis our lives were beautiful and colourful just like garden flowers.

Picture by:
Bintu, 13 (female) Junior secondary 2 student



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







But like a tree we'll grow green again.

Our branches will spread again.

Because hope never dies.

Our Hope is as resilient as the roots of a tree.

Our Hope is powerful and so is our voice.

My Hope is that one day, I'll see my sister Falta and my best friend Karu again.

My Hope is that one day, Ba'a (my father), will return home.

My Hope is that one day, our classrooms will no longer be empty.

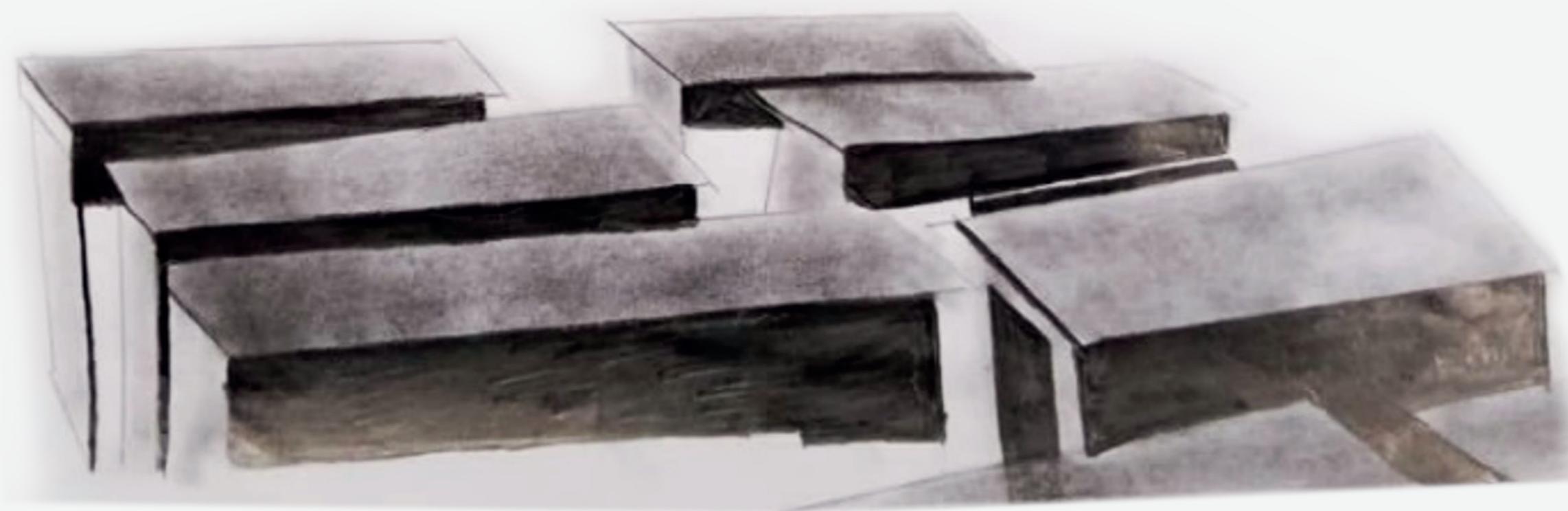
Picture by: Bundi, 15 (male) Junior Secondary 3 student



My hope is that one day,
I'll return to school to learn again.

My hope is that one day,
I'll become a teacher.

When that day comes,
I'll teach children about
peace, love, and
tolerance.



Picture by:
Adama, 15
(male)
Ali, 14 (male)
and Abba, 12
(female) out
of school



My Hope is that one day, the children of the Lake Chad region will live and learn in safe spaces.

When that day comes, underaged girls will no longer be given away as child brides to older men.



Picture by: Mahamat, 14 (Female) and Alima, 12 (female) out of school



My Hope is that one day, there would be equal access to basic amenities such as, safe drinking water, equal education opportunities, and basic health care for every child in the Lake Chad region.

Picture by: Bakary, 12 (male) out of school



My voice represents the voices of all children in the Lake Chad region.

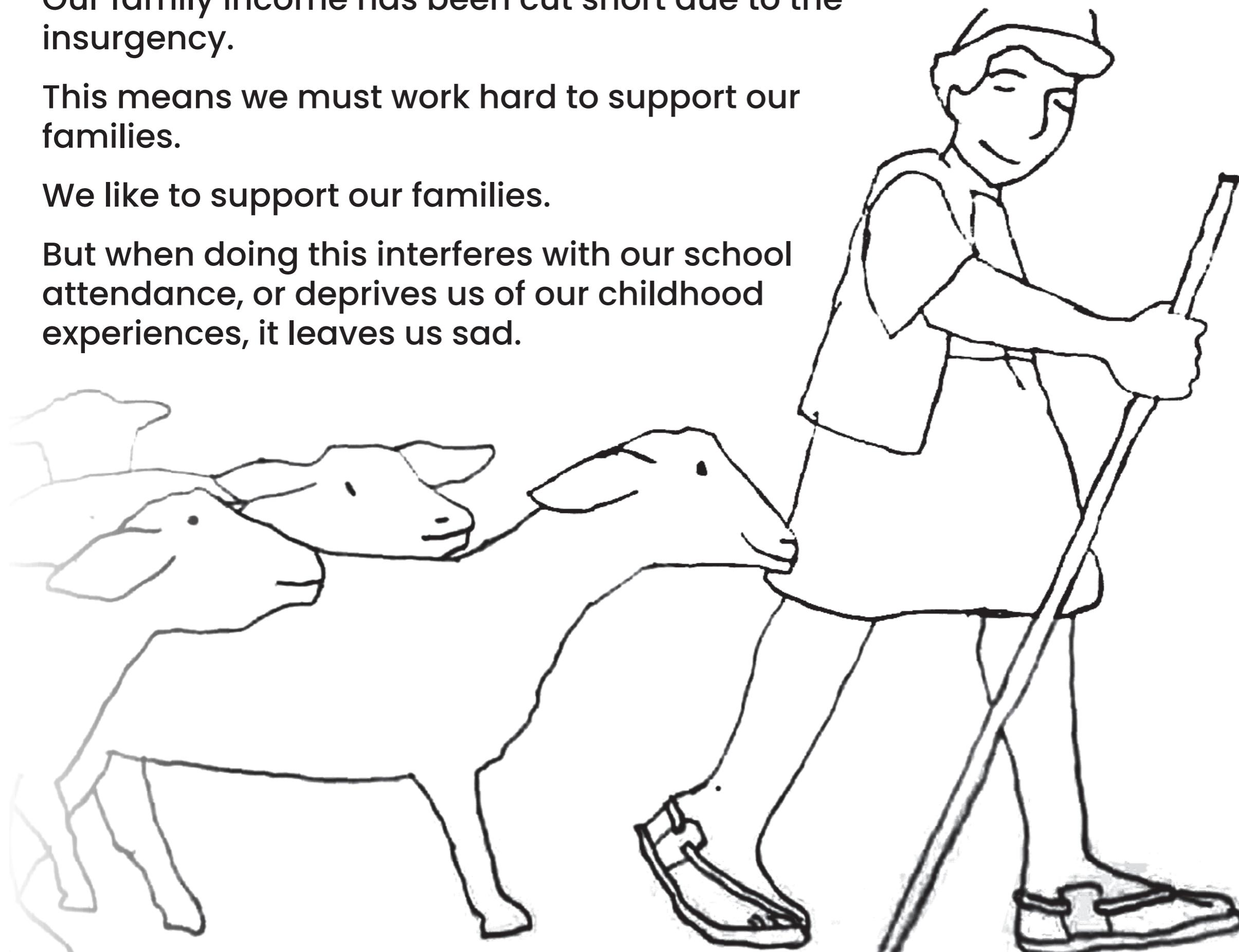
The conflict has exposed us further to child labour and extreme poverty.

Our family income has been cut short due to the insurgency.

This means we must work hard to support our families.

We like to support our families.

But when doing this interferes with our school attendance, or deprives us of our childhood experiences, it leaves us sad.



Picture by:
Abdou, 14 (male),
out of school



**My Hope is that one day, the children
of the Lake Chad region will no
longer face uncertainty, and
deprivation.**

**When that day comes, we
will be able to fulfil our
potentials.**

**This is the reason we have
joined our voices together.**

**Because alone, we
cannot be heard but
together our voices
are amplified, to
bring our leaders to
action.**

**Picture by:
Fadimatou, 14 (female)
out of school**



The children of the Lake Chad region deserve to be:

happy

loved

empowered to flourish

given a fair chance to
fulfil their potential

listened to

safe

protected

happy





Voices of the Children of the Lake Chad Region

The voices of the children of Lake Chad is a research output from Photovoice research with children and young people ages 6– 16 from four nations in the Lake Chad region – Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon – with diverse experiences of the protracted conflict and crisis fuelled by Boko Haram attacks in the region.

Children and young people in protracted conflict and crisis contexts are often not included in research about them, because they are perceived as vulnerable and needing help. This work contributes to disrupt this narrative and to demonstrate that the voices and lived experiences of children and young people living in regions of crisis and conflict are critical and central to decisions that affects their lives.

Through pictures and images drawn by the children and young people themselves, they record, reflect, and relate their concerns from the place of their own first-hand experiences to promote a critical dialogue and co-create knowledge to reach policy makers and diverse global stakeholders.

We have ensured that in producing this book that the narratives provided by the children and young people who participated in this book project was reported verbatim to remain consistent with their lived realities and experiences.

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