

Looking Ahead: Will Africa Become the New China?

Mohammed Bila is an Expert Modeler at the Lake Chad Basin Observatory, Lake Chad Basin Commission. He spoke to the conference on behalf of the Commission.

Claudio Celani: So, now it's over to you, Mohammed. Mohammed Bila—we have known each other for three years now, and he is also a Nigerian. Don't think that Nigeria is over-represented here, because he represents the eight countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission.



Mohammed Bila

Mohammed Bila: Thank you, Claudio. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the Lake Chad Basin Commission is delighted to be given this opportunity to interact with the Schiller Institute. I have to convey the apologies of our Executive Secretary. Due to some constraints, he could not come. That is why he sent me to portray the viewpoints of the Lake Chad Basin Commission to the participants of this conference.

I am a modeler for the Lake Chad Basin Commission; I have been there since 2002. So, all the developments that have been going on, even before 2002 within Nigeria,—I have seen the impact of the drying of Lake Chad. I have seen the attempts made by the different governments to solve the problem. I have seen the support that the international community has been giving to the Lake Chad Basin and the member states. But as of 2012, we had a totally different, new challenge, that is, an open conflict with people who feel they must change everybody. This problem, if we had looked for a solution 30 years ago, probably would not have reached this state.

The Congo-Lake Chad Inter-Basin Water Transfer became a solution to the problem of the drying up of Lake Chad, when the Eighth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), held in Abuja in March 1994, launched an international campaign to save Lake Chad. With the election

of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015 in Nigeria, and his appeal to the international community to help in recharging Lake Chad, to revive economic activities and reduce terrorism, the LCBC decided to look at one of the oldest proposals we had, which was called the Transaqua proposal. The proposal was developed in the 1980s as a comprehensive solution to the longest Sahel drought on record. It started in 1973, but in the 1980s, we still had this drought.

The Abuja Declaration of 2018

In March 2018, under the leadership of President Buhari, eight African heads of state and government came to Abuja to attend the International Conference to Save Lake Chad. Those eight heads of state, based on the proceedings and discussions in the workshops, chose the Transaqua project as the most viable option to save Lake Chad, but also to transform Africa.

In this meeting, we had the heads of state from the LCBC countries, five of them, and then we had a representative from the government of Libya, and also President Ali Bongo Ondimba of the Central African Republic of Gabon. We also had the affirmation of the proceedings of the conference by Denis Sassou Nguesso, the President of Congo Brazzaville; he called during the conference and said, "I give all my blessings to whatever comes out of this conference." So, this was the first time the African leaders came together and tried to look for a common solution that will solve the problem.

The Transaqua proposal consists of a 2,400 km waterway, to transfer between 30 to 50 billion cubic meters of water. The initial proposal that was done in the 1980s by the Italian engineer Marcello Vichi, thought we could get 100,000 billion cubic meters and move it to Lake Chad. But from then to now, we have been having a consistent drought, so the general thinking is that we might not get 100,000 billion cubic meters, but we can

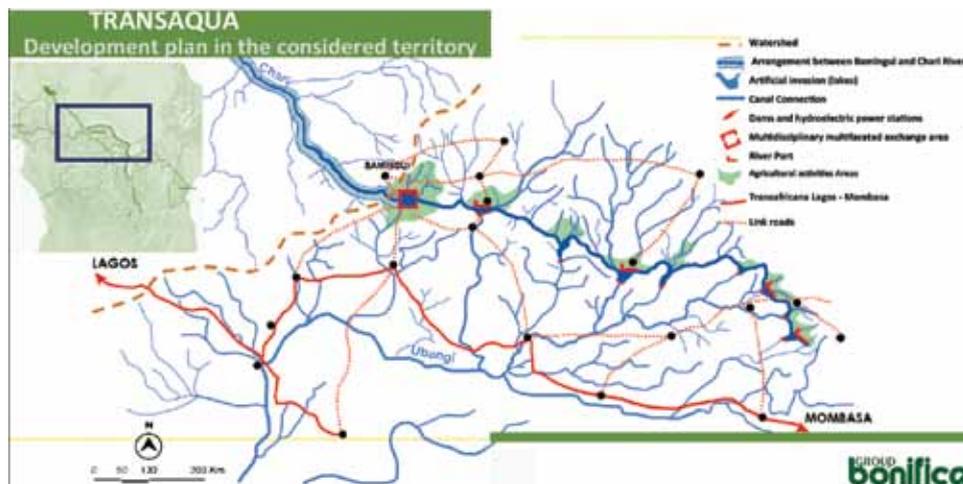
FIGURE 1



get between 30 to 50 billion cubic meters taken from the right-side tributaries of the Congo River transferred to Lake Chad. The project is expected to bring economic development to seven African countries and indirect benefits to five more countries associated with the Congo and Lake Chad basins.

At the end of the conference, the Abuja Declaration was endorsed by the Heads of State, in which they noted that the drying up of Lake Chad and the loss of sources of livelihood in the Sahel are affecting human security through southward migration and conflict towards Central Africa and Congo; insecurity of lives and property in the Sahel, the Lake Chad region, and West Africa in

FIGURE 2



general; and negating the stability of Central Africa in the long term. So, this is a gradual thing.

Since 1973, those who have assets, that is, those who have cattle, have been moving away from the Sahel; they have been going towards the center of Africa. That is where the grass is green. They are trying to protect what little assets they have by moving southward. This migration is taking them to a new region where they meet people with different cultures, with different languages. This is the main cause of the problem in the Central African Republic. So, we have concluded that if we don't revive the situation, this southward migration within Africa will cause more problems in the regions that are already experiencing internal conflicts. Also, this loss of livelihood is costing the young in the Sahel region to move up north through Libya to Europe.

The Abuja declaration endorsed the Transaqua Inter-Basin Water Transfer initiative as a pan-African project necessary to restore Lake Chad for peace and security in the Lake Chad region, and for the promotion of navigation, economic development, and industrialization in the whole Congo basin. The African Development Bank was mandated to facilitate the creation of the Lake Chad Fund of U.S. \$50 billion. The funding sources shall include a social component, funded through public sources from African states, and an economic component, funded using public funds and loans and donations by Africa's development partners.

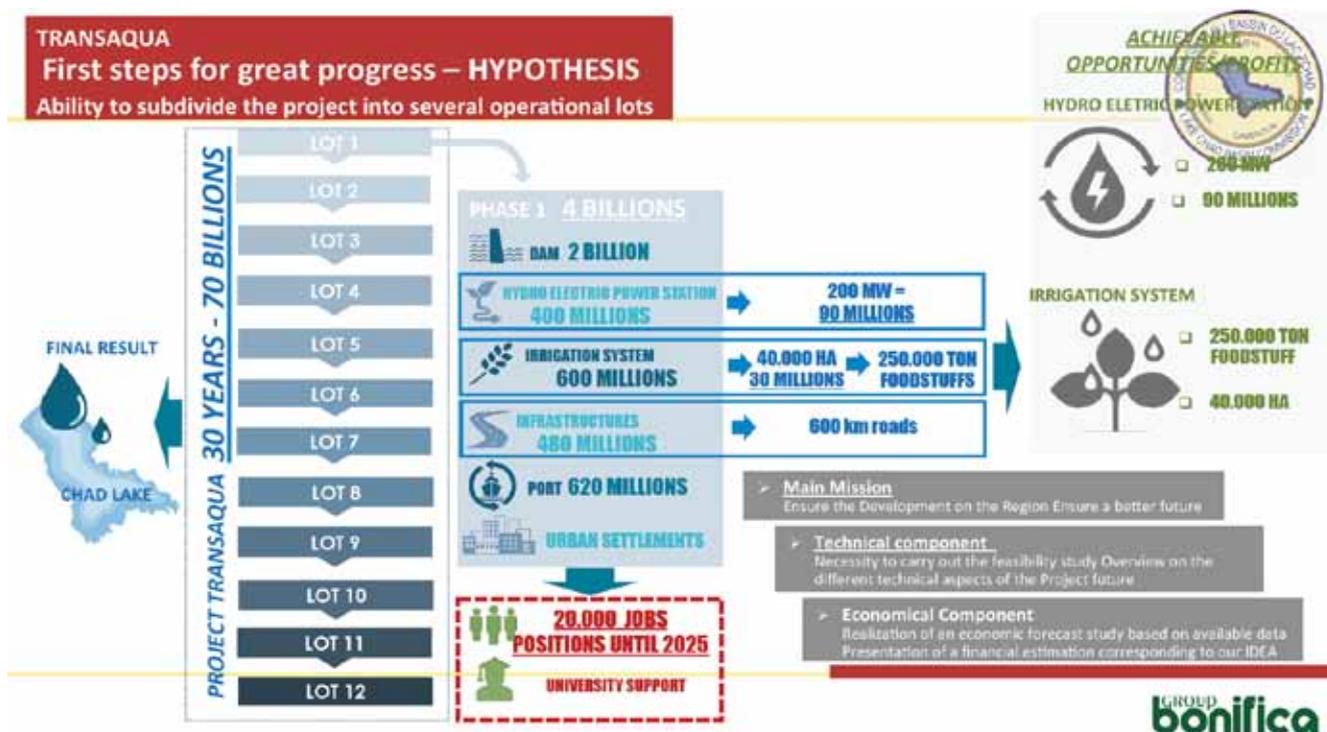
DR Congo Will Be First to Benefit

This picture of the Transaqua project [Figure 1] shows the rail links needed to create the infrastructure [being built with help from China, independent of Transaqua]. The blue in the center is the Transaqua

Water Navigation Canal, which will start in the south of the Lake Victoria area, the Lake Kivu region, which goes along the crest by gravity, reaching the Central African Republic, where we expect to develop an industrial zone. This canal will drop its water into the Chari River, which will gradually recharge the Lake Chad.

These are the regions that will be impacted by this Transaqua Project. [Figure 2] You can see that the first

FIGURE 3



beneficiary will be the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), because the water will be generated from that basin. We need new concepts to describe what is happening. The traditional concept is, you take water and allocate it to a country or to a group of users. But with the new concept of having a benefit sharing, win-win situation, we cannot go with the traditional concept. So here, we foresee a certain stock of water, which has one value, taken from the Congo River, moving along the canal. It's adding value in transportation of goods; it's adding value by replenishment of that canal. This water goes into the Central African Republic.

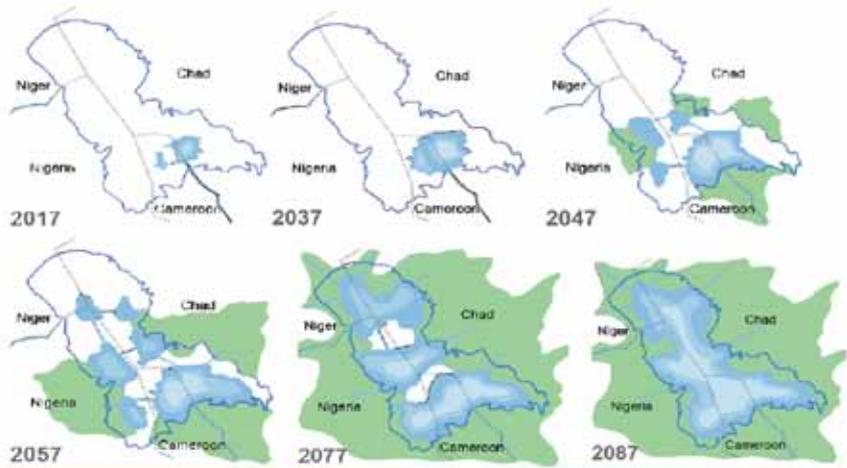
When this stock of water moves, dams will be created. We have identified that at the tributaries, dams will be created. These dams will generate electricity; so this is another added value from this stock of water. And as it moves to the Central African Republic, the hydroelectricity could be used, and the water could be used for irrigation. This same stock of water will move into the Lake Chad basin across the divide. Cameroon can use the water for irrigation, the electricity already generated can be shared by Cameroon, can be shared by Chad, because these are all regions where we don't

have electricity. So these are all benefits that come out from this project.

Eventually, this water will go into Lake Chad. Niger is going to benefit from irrigation and whatever else they want to develop the water for. So, this is a big opportunity for movement of goods and services from central Africa to the Sahel, from the new irrigation projects. Instead of Africa *importing* billions of tons of rice every year, this project will be capable of generating that quantity of rice *within* Africa. The industrial areas, the container terminals that will be set up along this navigable canal, will bring in new economic development.

This stock of water will also revive biodiversity; most especially in the Congo Basin, where they have large protected areas—parks. When you bring more water into those areas, you enhance the multiplication of biodiversity in these protected areas. So this project will not only develop Africa, but it will also help us to revive biodiversity, protect the Central African Republic, and at the same time also revive biodiversity in the Lake Chad. It will boost regional trade, create new economic infrastructures, such as river ports, container terminals, agro-industrial zones and new

FIGURE 4



roads. There are areas where there are no roads. In the DRC, if you move from one town to the other, if it is not on the Congo River it is a hell of a challenge for the people. They have to go either on a bicycle or a motorcycle. These projects will definitely build new roads.

Financial Return from the Beginning

The project doesn't need to be implemented all at once. The company that we have been working with, the Bonifica group of Italy, makes simulations. Their simulation says we can break it down into as many as twelve phases. From the first "operational lot" [phase], we can generate economic goods; and from the money generated by selling those goods, we can proceed to the next phase, the next lot. So, gradually, the African countries will even have the capacity to plan it in such a way that they can call whichever partner they want to participate in developing the different lots.

The simulation says that generating financial returns immediately when we start the first phase, is capable of providing stable growth for the next 30 years—the expected duration to really complete the project. So, you have a constant inflow of capital, a constant financial result, which is taken into the next lot of the project. So, gradually the project will provide financial sustainability right from the beginning.

The first lot of the project, which Bonifica has simulated, is building a dam in the Central African Republic capable of generating 200 MW of hydroelectricity; development of four irrigation systems covering an area

of more than 40,000 hectares; construction of up to 600 km of roads; building several new urban settlements; and building an industrial and logistical complex with the creation of the direct employment of at least 20,000 people and approximately the same number of jobs created indirectly. This is based on an investment of just about 4 billion euro. This result can be achieved by 2025.

Nkrumah Had This Dream

So, if I can go back to the question, "Will Africa become the next China?" The answer is yes, if we make this investment in the Central

African Republic, and we go ahead over the next 50 years—this partnership between Africa, Europe, and China. In 2016, China pledged to President Muhammadu Buhari to invest in this project. You are the first people who started the feasibility study to do it. Later on, we were so happy when Italy decided to join. During the conference in Abuja, Italy donated 2.5 million euro to the feasibility study. So, China has already invested \$1.8 million, and now Italy has joined with 2.5 million euro. So we now have the ability to do a comprehensive study for the Transaqua project. It's much more than just a water transfer project; it's a transformation project for economic growth in Africa.

The realization of the Transaqua infrastructure project with the support and partnership of Europe and China will surely launch Africa on the road to economic growth, human security, industrialization, peace, development, and the attainment of the dreams of pan-African leaders such as Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. Nkrumah had this dream in 1964. If we start investing in this partnership now, in the next 50 years, Africa will become the New China.

We have mapped out the roads that will be created in just the first lot, in the Central African Republic, and what we expect Lake Chad to be in 2087 with the lake no longer broken into the different pools we have now. We will have a single body of water. We have mapped the potential area to be irrigated along and around Lake Chad in all the countries. We have the strong belief that this will transform Africa.

Thank you for your attention.