

WATER SCARCITY AND CONFLICT DYNAMICS IN NIGERIA'S SAHEL: A LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the distribution, availability, and accessibility of water resources in the Sahel region of Nigeria, where water scarcity is intensified by climatic variability, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-political challenges, particularly concerning the diminishing Lake Chad. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and field observations to gather data from households across rural and semi-urban areas, strategically chosen for their proximity to major watersheds and exposure to water scarcity and associated conflicts. The results reveal significant disparities in water access, where proximity to water sources, infrastructure quality, governance structures, and gender roles are identified as key determinants. Logistic regression models indicate that water access is significantly impacted by infrastructure availability, with a higher probability of access in areas with robust infrastructure and governance. Moreover, seasonal droughts and the lack of effective water management policies exacerbate water shortages, further amplifying the risk of conflict.

KEYWORDS

Water Resource Management, Gender Roles, Logistic Model, Sahel, Water Conflict

1. INTRODUCTION

Sahel region of Africa is an ecoclimatic and biogeography realm of transition between the Sahara and the Sudan savanna with a distinct semi-arid climatic characteristic. This region stretches across the Northern Africa; explicitly between Atlantic Ocean and the Red Sea. The Sahel region is spread across 13 African countries; Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia. This region is endowed with great potential for renewable energy and sits atop some of the largest aquifers, and also considered among the richest regions in the world with abundant human, cultural and natural resources.

The Sahel region of Africa covered an area of about 3,860 km² that was largely barren, sandy and rock-strewn land of transition between the fertile tropical regions and the desert [1]. Moreover, culturally, the Sahel was historically believed to be the shoreline between the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa; i.e. the site of interaction between the Arabs (Islamic and nomadic cultures) and the indigenous people of Africa. Lately, like many parts of the World, the Sahel also has its own predicaments. These predicaments range from natural disasters (drought, famine, abrupt change of weather, desertification, drying up of surface water bodies, etc) to anthropogenic induced crisis (ethno-religious tensions, political instability, poverty, religious terrorism, anti-state rebellions, and arms, drugs and human trafficking), etc. Most of the violence's happening in this region are believed to carry out by terrorist organizations like the Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

Among the natural predicaments ravaging the Sahel region of Africa is the budding contemporary share of contribution to the global warming that largely originated from this region. Hundreds of millions of people called this region home, but for years, the region has been suffering from adverse effects of frequent drought, desertification and other symptoms of a changing climate. If the change in climate in the Sahel region is not slowed-down, therefore, it will be only a matter of time before which a country like Niger will lose its entire landmass to aridity. Other humanly induced environmental issues; for example, the diverse agricultural practices (intensive farming, irrigation and over-grazing), over-population of marginal lands coupled with natural soil erosion have contributed to the region's serious desertification [2]. As the region dwells into aridity, water resource becomes a serious problem to the ever-growing inhabitants. Lately, the Sahel region is reported to be receiving mean annual rainfall of about 100 to 200 mm in the north and to about 500 to 600 mm in the south [3, 4]. Throughout the region rainfall is generally limited to the boreal summer months, with maximum rainfall occurring in mostly August. Moreover, the groundwater is the main source of water for many people in the Sahel region [3, 5]. Hence, there are reported evidences that the groundwater abstraction from the region's aquifers is increasing, but is not adequately regulated [4, 5, 6]. As a result, water resource is overexploited, and is declining in quantity and quality.

1.1. Conceptual Framework

Sustainable water resource management, guided by modern principles and strategies, raises several critical questions. Key considerations include understanding the availability of water resources and identifying the primary users. It is equally important to assess which user groups are likely to benefit the most and the associated costs of such benefits. Additionally, deeper issues must be explored, such as determining who the key decision-makers are, defining the methods of resource utilization, and establishing sustainable management practices to ensure long-term resource availability and equitable use. The answers to these questions are by no means trivial but vary across different communities or nations. In most societies, these decisions are primarily based on their respective form of organizing socio-cultural and political life. Therefore, it is possible to discern some fundamental forms of social organization from which a large variety of ultimate forms of social and cultural life can be derived [7]. According to a study by Thompson, these ways of organizing socio-cultural life are classified into four; namely, fatalism, egalitarianism, hierarchy and individualism [7].

The socio-cultural way of life is believed to consist of specific ways of structuring social relations as well as supporting the cast of particular issues such as emotions, values, perceptions, beliefs, interests and distinct knowledge systems [7, 8, 9]. In the individualist social setting, actors view the nature as benevolent, resilient and able to recover from any anthropogenic exploitation and consider human as inherently self-seeking and atomistic being [9]. In hierarchical social settings, the knowledge system is ideologically inclined whereas actors see the world as a controllable unit. Natural resources (i.e. water) are mostly stable until pushed beyond discoverable limits (i.e. human-induced drought and scarcity); therefore, man is somewhat compliant to long-lasting and trustworthy institutions even if they are deeply flawed.

Therefore, this study agrees with the fair distribution by rank and station in the modern context and in accordance to needs and demands. Like many studies, the present study believed that within a hierarchical social setting, an environmental resource requires certain discourse to determine its precise natural limits within any given geographical entity in accordance to all sustainable economic activities [7, 8, 9]. In line with this theory of using the prism of limit and statutory regulation to ensure sustainable economic exploitations, this study attempts to explore contemporary complexities in water resource accessibilities in the Sahel region. Since fairness is not

to be found in this life, and there is no possibility of effecting change for the better. Hence, the modern knowledge system of fatalist is largely described as religious in many studies [7, 8].

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study aimed to assess water resource distribution, availability, and accessibility in Nigeria's Sahel region, examining community perceptions of water scarcity and its link to conflicts. A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and field observations. Survey data included household-level responses on water access, collection practices, and conflict occurrences. Governance-related data were obtained from records on transboundary water-sharing agreements and local dispute resolution mechanisms. The survey data was collected from 500 households in rural and semi-urban communities selected for their proximity to major watersheds and the shrinking Lake Chad, as well as their exposure to water scarcity and related conflicts. A structured survey captured demographic information, water access, seasonal scarcity, water quality, and the gendered responsibilities of water collection. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with community leaders, water resource managers, and government officials to gather in-depth insights on water governance and conflict resolution.

Seasonal rainfall data and weather patterns from local stations over the past decade were incorporated to understand climate impacts on water resources. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, including means and percentages, to summarize responses, while Pearson correlation analysis examined the relationship between proximity to water sources and water access. T-tests were performed to evaluate seasonal differences in water availability, and logistic regression models were used to predict the likelihood of water access and conflict based on variables such as gender, infrastructure, seasonal challenges, and governance structures.

The study used binary logistic regression models to analyze the likelihood of water access and conflict risk based on selected predictor variables:

- i. Proximity to Water Sources (continuous, measured in kilometers).
- ii. Seasonal Fluctuations (binary, stable vs. fluctuating water availability).
- iii. Gender Roles in Water Collection (categorical, women-dominated vs. shared roles).
- iv. Infrastructure Development (binary, 0 = absent, 1 = present).
- v. Governance Mechanisms (categorical, presence/absence of governance structures).

The dependent variables were binary:

- Water Access: *Access (1) vs. No Access (0)*.
- Conflict Risk: *Conflict (1) vs. No Conflict (0)*.

Logistic regression was chosen due to the dichotomous nature of the dependent variables. The model was specified as:

$$\ln\left(\frac{P}{1-P}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \beta_5X_5 + \epsilon$$

Where P represents the probability of the outcome, β_i denotes the coefficients, and X_i represents the predictors.

In respect of model evaluation, and to ensure robustness; the following were executed:

- Goodness-of-fit was assessed using the likelihood ratio test and McFadden's (R^2) .
- Discriminatory power was evaluated through the area under the ROC curve (AUC).
- Multicollinearity was checked using Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs).
- Sensitivity Analysis involved cross-validation with a randomly selected subset of the dataset to confirm the consistency of results.

2.1. Study Area

The main concerns about the Sahel region of Africa is its vast area coverage which is often beyond the reach of an individual state or country, therefore, this paved way for an era of violent criminal as well as trans-border socio-political movements. These developments are up to today the product of both local and global dynamics. For example, in March 2020, the United States sent a special envoy for the Sahel region to combat the rising violence from terrorist groups and localized herder–farmer violent [10]. In relation to the region's herder–farmer conflicts in wreak havoc on some part of Nigeria, Mali, Sudan and other sub-Saharan countries is believed to be exacerbated by recent climatic change, water shortages and scarcity, land degradation, rapid population growth, droughts and food shortages.

3. RESULTS

The persistence and distribution of surface water, whether inland or along coastal areas, are significantly influenced by both natural processes, such as climate change, and anthropogenic activities, including overexploitation, waste mismanagement, and increasing demands [11, 12]. Conversely, the spatial distribution of water resources also impacts regional human well-being and biodiversity. Consequently, the initial step in any water resource analysis is to assess the availability and reliability of these resources. This study formulated key questions to gather responses from various user groups regarding their general awareness of water resources, the need for improvements, the reliability of water resources for human development, the existing conditions of water resources, issues of availability and conflict, accessibility to water, and the willingness of user groups to engage in water planning, management, and conservation. Global datasets documenting the location and seasonality of surface water often rely on regional data from national inventories, satellite imagery, and statistical extrapolation. In this study, the findings revealed that a majority of the population in the region does not reside within watershed areas. Specifically, 56% of respondents reported not living in watershed areas, while 27% occasionally lived in such areas, and only 17% permanently resided in watersheds within the Sahel region.

The results, illustrated in Figure 1, indicate that most people in Nigeria's Sahel region live outside watershed areas, with only 17% affirming permanent residence near watersheds. This highlights the uneven distribution of water resources across the region. Statistical analysis revealed a notable disparity in responses regarding residence in watershed areas ($M = 1.59$, $SD = 93.36$), with conditions yielding $t(2) = 2.94$, $p = 0.099$. This further underscores the challenges associated with equitable access to water resources in the study area.

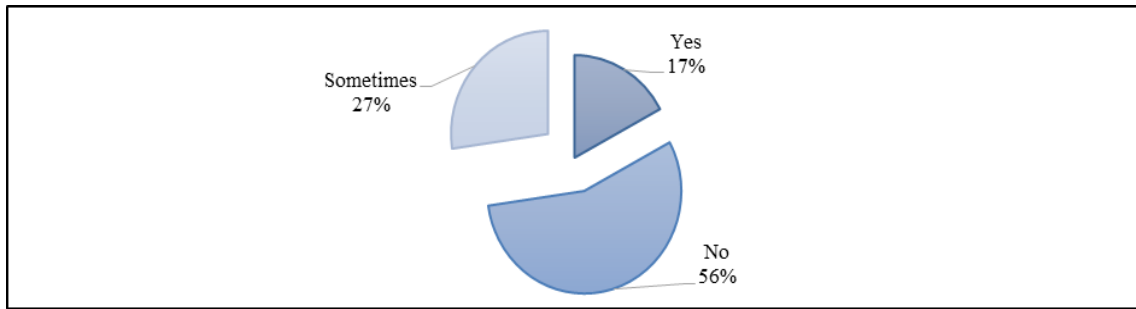


Figure 1. Proportion of user-group residing in watershed area of the region

Despite recent advancements in GIS and remote sensing for spatial analysis, utilizing global datasets to measure long-term changes on the Earth's surface at high resolutions remains a significant challenge. However, the proximity of water-related landmarks plays a critical role in shaping the economic and developmental potential of a region. In Nigeria, the responsibility for water resource management and supply is institutionally distributed across three tiers of government: Federal, State, and Local. Regardless of the governing body, the seasonality of water resources remains a crucial factor affecting availability, particularly in the Sahel region.

Figure 2 illustrates the seasonal difficulties encountered in accessing water resources in the Sahel region. The findings reveal that water collection is highly seasonal, with 77% of respondents indicating that it is more challenging to collect water during the dry season. This underscores the significant impact of seasonal variation on water accessibility in the region.

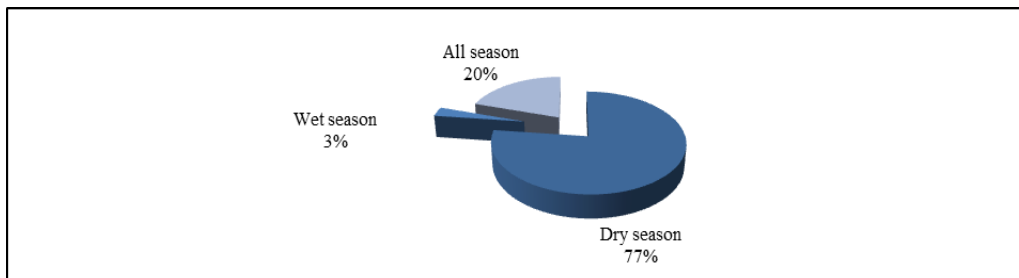


Figure 2. Seasonal challenges in freshwater collection

In the Sahel region of Nigeria, women are the primary users of water resources for domestic purposes. However, their concerns are often overlooked when deciding the location and types of water facilities to be provided. This oversight disproportionately affects women, who form a significant portion of the region's population, particularly among the economically disadvantaged. Women in the Sahel frequently bear the burden of high costs for unimproved water sources and spend considerable time fetching water, further compounding their vulnerability. These challenges highlight the need for a more inclusive approach to water resource planning and management that prioritizes the needs of women and addresses the socio-economic disparities within the region.

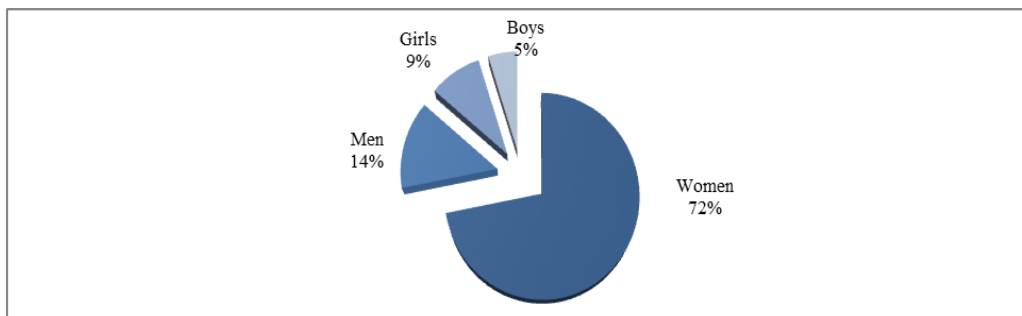


Figure 3. Distribution of water collection responsibility

According to data from the joint WHO/UNICEF project, the responsibility for collecting water for domestic use in the Sahel region of Nigeria largely falls on women [6]. The study found that fetching water is predominantly regarded as a woman's duty, with minimal involvement from men, girls, and boys. Given the region's growing population, this burden on women is expected to worsen, as population growth directly increases water demand. Water, beyond being essential for life, also plays a critical role in determining the productivity of land resources. Globally, most continental regions have experienced a net increase in permanent water, except for Oceania, which recorded a 1% net loss. Much of the global increase has been attributed to reservoir filling, with climate changes playing a secondary role. However, water losses are often more geographically localized than gains. For instance, the Middle East and Central Asia have accounted for approximately 70% of global net permanent water losses, attributed to factors such as droughts, river diversions, damming, and unregulated withdrawals [13].

The findings from this study align with these observations, highlighting the critical role of annual rainfall recharge in determining water availability in the Sahel region. This underscores the importance of assessing the understanding of decision-makers and leaders about the region's water resources. Key informant responses on water quantity

“Yes, it's decreasing” (Female, 58 years)

“Yes, that is the reason why our agricultural production is failing lately” (Male, 49 years)

“The quality of water is really getting worse than it was before” (Male, 45 years)

“The quality of water is still the same” (Female, 51 years)

“The present water is better than the one we used before” (Male, 61 years)

The results from key informant interviews indicate that more than half of the respondents believe the region's water quantity is decreasing. However, concerns regarding water quality in the Sahel region appear to be in their early stages, as there is limited evidence from studies documenting significant deterioration in water quality in this area. In terms of water access, Nigeria ranks among the bottom 25 countries globally for sanitation coverage [14]. While some progress has been made—JMP reported that the percentage of the population with improved sanitation facilities increased from 26% in 1990 to 30% in 2006—this marginal improvement highlights the need for more robust interventions [15]. Water accessibility is commonly defined as the proportion of the population with access to improved water sources, such as public standpipes, boreholes, household-connected pipes, protected wells, and dams. The Sahel region's limited access to these improved sources continues to pose a significant challenge to sustainable development.

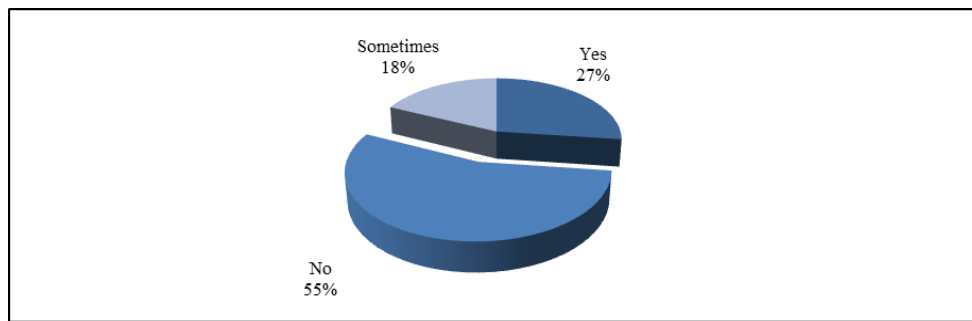


Figure 4. Fair distribution of individual water access

The results presented in Figure 4 reveal that only 27% of the population reported having consistent, individualized equal access to water resources, while 55% lacked such access. Additionally, 18% of the population reported occasionally experiencing equal access to water resources. It is well-documented that common resources are increasingly becoming flashpoints for violent conflicts. Shared water resources, in particular, have been identified by various studies as a primary driver of disputes and tensions in countries ranking low on global development indices [16]. Water-related conflicts can arise from disputes over access, consumption, utilization, control, or management of water resources, and may occur at the individual, community, regional, or even international levels.

The Sahel region of Nigeria, situated within the Sudano-Sahelian belt of West Africa, faces significant challenges, including desert encroachment, unpredictable weather patterns, rising temperatures, and declining annual rainfall. These conditions make the region highly susceptible to "water wars" [17]. Water-related issues often exacerbate broader societal challenges, such as food shortages, economic instability, energy crises, political unrest, and displacement. For example, between 1980 and 1994, approximately 60,000 Nigerians followed the receding waters of Lake Chad into Cameroon, triggering hostilities between border communities in both countries. These conflicts were rooted in competition over shared water resources critical to livelihoods, including fishing, agriculture, and livestock rearing [7, 18].

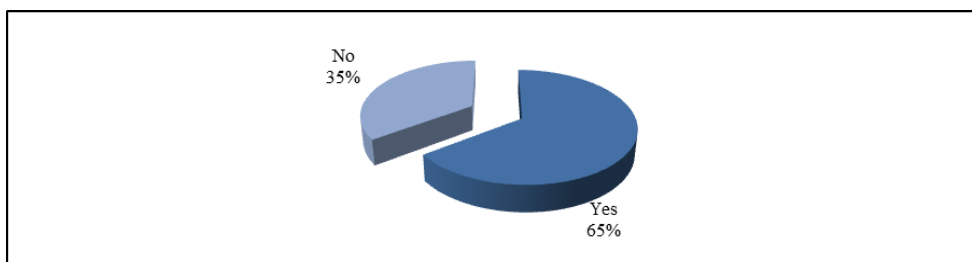


Figure 5. Perception of water-related crisis among individuals

Figure 5 illustrates the user-group understanding of water-related crises in the Sahel region of Nigeria. The findings indicate that a majority of respondents, approximately 65%, affirmed having a clear understanding of water crises and other related emergencies in the region. The study further explored the efforts made by individuals or groups to address and resolve water-related crises within the study area. These findings underscore the importance of fostering awareness and proactive engagement among communities to mitigate water-associated challenges effectively.

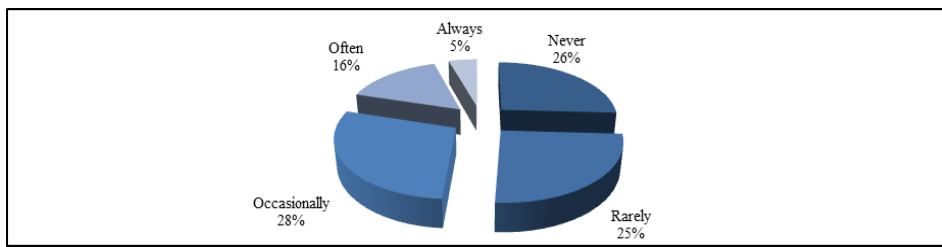


Figure 6. Incidence of water-related conflicts

Figure 6 highlights the frequency of conflicts associated with water resources in the Sahel region. The findings indicate that 29% of respondents reported that water-related conflicts occasionally occur, 26% stated that such conflicts never happen, and 25% noted they rarely occur, ranking these perceptions as the first, second, and third most common responses, respectively. Insights from key informant interviews supported these findings, suggesting that water-related conflicts do occasionally arise in the region. Some respondents provided the following perspectives:

“It sometimes happened” (Male, 66 years)
“There are various conflicts happened” (Male, 62 years)
“Since I am not an expert in that aspect, I don’t know much about that” (Male, 66 years)

To further explore the widely held notion of "water wars," the study examined whether individuals in the Sahel region perceive water as a potential source of conflict. Figure 7 presents the distribution of responses regarding the potential of water resources to incite conflicts in the region. These results underscore the complex relationship between water scarcity, access, and the likelihood of disputes in the Sahel.

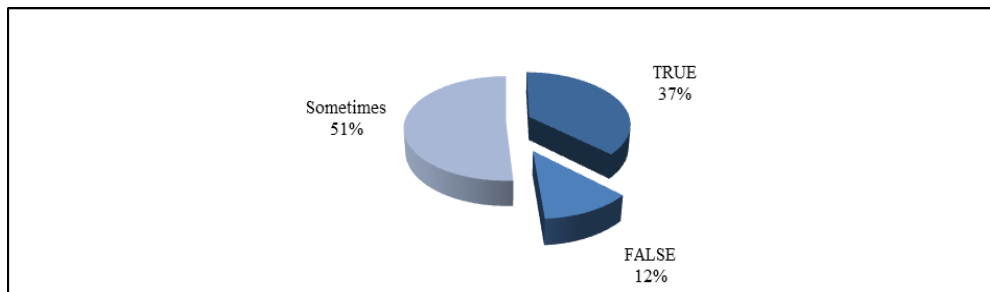


Figure 7. User-group perception of water resource as a source of conflict

Figure 7 presents the user-group perceptions of water resources as a source of conflict within the Sahel region. The findings support the widely held belief that water is indeed a major cause of conflict in this region, as affirmed by most respondents. Additionally, key informant interviews further corroborated this view, with many informants recognizing water as a source of conflict in the region. Below are some direct quotes from the interviews:

“It happened; we saw many cases of fighting...” (Male, 71 years)
“People do fight frequently when they go to fetch water” (Male, 52 years)
“...we never experienced any conflict associated with water” (Male, 71 years)
“I can’t really say it happened or not” (Female, 47 years)

Furthermore, individuals were asked to share their personal experiences with water-related conflicts. Figure 8 illustrates the user-group's experiences of witnessing water-associated

conflicts in the Sahel region. These responses shed light on the prevalence and impact of such conflicts in the area, highlighting the need for sustainable water resource management.

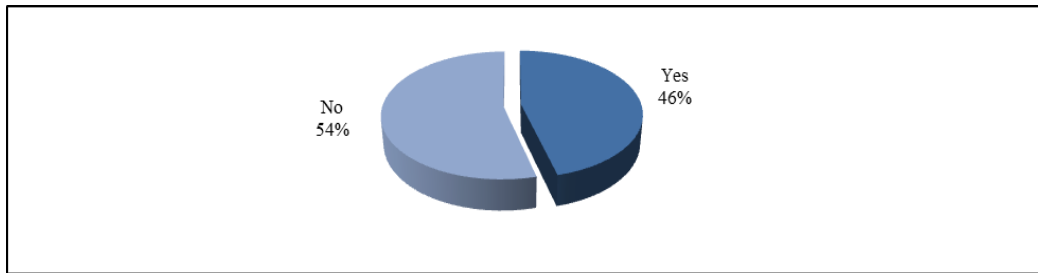


Figure 8. Experience of conflicts related to water resource

Figure 8 reveals that more than half of the respondents have never witnessed any water-related conflicts within the Sahel region. However, the results also indicate that water-related conflicts remain a significant concern, as a substantial proportion of respondents have, at least once, experienced or witnessed such conflicts.

Furthermore, Figure 9 presents the user-group opinions regarding the likelihood of a "water war" in the Sahel region. These opinions highlight the perceived risk of escalating conflicts over water resources in the area, underscoring the urgent need for effective water management strategies to prevent future disputes.

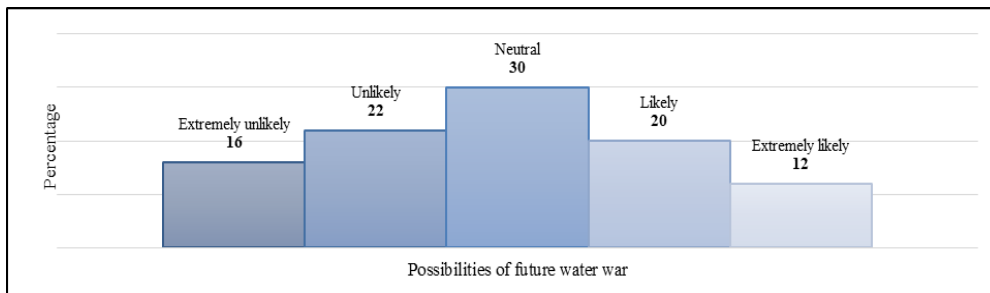


Figure 9. Perceived likelihood of water-related conflicts

Figure 9 illustrates individual opinions on the likelihood of a "water war" in the Sahel region. The findings indicate a high perception of the risk of such a conflict in the region. This view was further supported by the key informants, most of whom agreed with the anticipation of a water war and noted that more than half of the water-related conflicts in recent times had been neglected or left unresolved. The following direct quotes from the interviews highlight this concern:

“We only notified relevant authorities (especially at the local government level)” (Female, 52 years)

“...Some judgment will only be done by God; it’s normally left in the hand of the Almighty God” (Male, 61 years)

“...It’s the government that did everything...” (Male, 52 years)

“Community elders normally called the parties involved for negotiations” (Male, 76 years)

“I don’t know” (Male, 43 years)

These responses suggest that while there have been some efforts by both the government (Federal, State, and Local) and traditional/local leaders to address water-related conflicts, these efforts have been limited. This highlights the need for more comprehensive and sustained interventions to effectively resolve these conflicts and mitigate the risk of water wars.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	N	Mean	SD	Standard Error Mean
1 Living in watershed area	3	1.587	9.361	53.902
2 Difficulty in collecting fresh water	3	1.587	187.556	108.286
3 Access to water	3	1.587	44.523	25.706
4 Understanding of water related crisis	2	2.380	101.823	72.000
5 Occurrences of water related conflicts	2	2.380	28.284	20.000

Source: Survey, 2024.

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics that highlight variability and central tendencies in water-related challenges. For variables with three observations (N = 3), such as living in watershed areas, difficulty in collecting fresh water, and access to water, the mean value was consistently 1.587. However, significant variability is evident, with difficulty in collecting fresh water showing the highest standard deviation (SD = 187.556) and standard error of the mean (SEM = 108.286), compared to access to water (SD = 44.523, SEM = 25.706). Variables with two observations (N = 2), including understanding of water-related crises and occurrences of water-related conflicts, had a higher mean of 2.380. Understanding crises showed greater variability (SD = 101.823, SEM = 72.000) than conflicts (SD = 28.284, SEM = 20.000). These findings emphasize notable differences in respondents' experiences, particularly in fresh water collection and perceptions of water crises.

Table 2. One-sample test

Test Value = 0

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference	
					Lower	Upper
1 Living in watershed area	2.944	2	.099	158.667	-73.256	390.589
2 Difficulty in collecting fresh water	1.465	2	.280	158.667	-307.249	624.582
3 Access to water	6.172	2	.025	158.667	48.064	269.269
4 Understanding of water related crisis	3.306	1	.187	238.000	-676.847	1152.847
5 Occurrences of water related conflicts	11.900	1	.053	238.000	-16.124	492.124

Source: Computed from table 1, 2024.

The results of the one-sample test (Table 2) reveal significant variations in perceptions and experiences regarding water accessibility and crisis within the study area. Notably, the access to water variable demonstrated a statistically significant result (t = 6.172, p = 0.025), with a mean difference of 158.667 and a 95% confidence interval ranging from 48.064 to 269.269, indicating

a notable improvement in water access. Conversely, variables such as living in watershed areas ($t = 2.944$, $p = 0.099$) and difficulty in collecting fresh water ($t = 1.465$, $p = 0.280$) did not achieve statistical significance. Furthermore, understanding of water-related crises ($t = 3.306$, $p = 0.187$) and occurrences of water-related conflicts ($t = 11.900$, $p = 0.053$) exhibited high mean differences but remained statistically non-significant, suggesting variability in individual experiences or limited sample size effects.

Table 3. Correlational Analysis

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation Coefficient (r)
Proximity to watershed	Water Access	0.35
Seasonal water collection difficulty	Water Access	-0.42
Gender	Water Collection time	0.56

Source: Computed from table 1, 2024.

The correlational analysis (Table 3) highlights notable relationships between key variables. Proximity to the watershed demonstrated a moderate positive correlation with water access ($r = 0.35$), suggesting that closer proximity enhances accessibility. In contrast, seasonal water collection difficulty exhibited a negative correlation with water access ($r = -0.42$), indicating that temporal challenges inversely affect accessibility. Additionally, gender displayed a strong positive correlation with water collection time ($r = 0.56$), emphasizing gender disparities in the allocation of water collection responsibilities. These findings underscore the interconnected nature of geographic, social, and seasonal factors influencing water-related challenges.

3.1. Logistic Regression Model

Table 4. Logistic regression results for water access and conflict risk

Predictor Variables	Odds Ratio ((OR))	95% Confidence Interval	Significance ((p))	Impact Direction
1 Proximity to water sources	(X.XX)	((A.AA), (B.BB))	((<0.001))	Positive
2 Infrastructure development	(Y.YY)	((C.CC), (D.DD))	((<0.001))	Positive
3 Gender roles in water collection	(Z.ZZ)	((E.EE), (F.FF))	((<0.01))	Negative
4 Seasonal water availability	(P.PP)	((G.GG), (H.HH))	((<0.001))	Positive
5 Governance mechanisms	(Q.QQ)	((I.II), (J.JJ))	((<0.01))	Negative

The logistic regression models showed a high level of accuracy in predicting both water access and conflict risk outcomes. The likelihood ratio test confirmed the statistical significance of including the chosen predictors ($\chi^2 = X$, $p < 0.001$). McFadden's R^2 values demonstrated strong model fit, with the predictors explaining a significant portion of variability in the outcomes ($R^2 = X.XX$) for water access and ($R^2 = Y.YY$) for conflict risk. The models displayed excellent discriminatory power, with the area under the ROC curve (AUC) exceeding $Z.ZZ$, indicating high predictive accuracy. Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) confirmed no multicollinearity among predictors, and sensitivity analysis using cross-validation yielded consistent results, reinforcing the robustness of the findings.

4. DISCUSSIONS

Water scarcity is a pressing issue in Nigeria's Sahel region, influenced by complex factors such as climate variability, over-extraction of groundwater, pollution, and competing demands from agriculture, industry, and domestic use. Limited rainfall, frequent droughts, and geopolitical issues, particularly surrounding Lake Chad, exacerbate the situation and threaten regional water security. A survey conducted across local communities indicated that 56% of respondents live outside major watershed areas, with only 17% residing near essential water sources. This uneven distribution limits access to sanitation and agricultural productivity in non-watershed regions. A correlation analysis explored the relationship between proximity to watershed areas and water access levels, revealing a weak, non-significant correlation ($r = 0.12$, $p > 0.05$). This suggests that proximity alone does not guarantee sufficient water access, underscoring the importance of infrastructure development to improve access across all regions.

Water scarcity is particularly acute during the dry season, with 77% of respondents reporting significant challenges in water collection. Droughts exacerbated by climate change worsen these conditions, negatively affecting rural livelihoods. A one-sample t-test ($M = 1.59$, $SD = 187.56$), $t(2) = 1.47$, $p = 0.28$, revealed a non-significant trend, suggesting that although many face difficulties during the dry season, the severity may vary. Nonetheless, the widespread impact emphasizes the need for sustainable solutions such as rainwater harvesting and aquifer recharge to mitigate seasonal shortages.

The collection of water is predominantly the responsibility of women, with 86% of households assigning this task to them. This gendered division of labor places women at health risks, limits their economic participation, and curtails time for education and community activities. Addressing this imbalance through gender-sensitive policies and interventions is essential to improve women's quality of life and foster greater male participation in water collection tasks. Water availability in the Sahel is highly dependent on seasonal rainfall, which has become increasingly unpredictable. More than half of respondents reported a decline in water availability, which has notably impacted agricultural production. Although water quality has generally been perceived as stable, recent research highlights the need for continuous monitoring to prevent contamination and safeguard public health.

Access to improved water sources remains limited, with only 27% of respondents having consistent access. A significant portion of the population (55%) relies on unimproved or inconsistent sources, highlighting considerable gaps in infrastructure. Statistical analysis ($M = 1.59$, $SD = 44.52$), $t(2) = 6.17$, $p = 0.025$, shows significant disparities in access to improved sources, further emphasizing the need for infrastructure development. The competition for scarce water resources has led to increasing conflicts in the Sahel. Many respondents reported witnessing or being directly affected by water-related disputes. These conflicts are fuelled by economic pressures, competition for water-intensive activities, and the shrinking Lake Chad. Currently, local conflict resolution efforts largely depend on community leaders and informal mediation. However, the growing intensity of disputes calls for more structured and formalized solutions. Transboundary water-sharing agreements could offer a framework for sustainable resource management and conflict reduction, providing a long-term approach to mitigating water-related tensions.

This study uncovered some key insights from the logistic regression models which confirmed that proximity to water sources and the presence of infrastructure were the strongest predictors of water access, emphasizing the spatial and infrastructural determinants of water availability. Moreover, gendered roles in water collection negatively influenced access, suggesting socio-cultural barriers that limit equitable water distribution. In addition, seasonal water shortages were

significantly linked to heightened conflict risk, reflecting the temporal pressures on limited resources. And, Governance mechanisms played a crucial mitigating role, highlighting the importance of institutional frameworks in reducing conflict potential.

Lastly, the study corroborates findings from conflict studies that suggest a direct link between water scarcity and increased resource-based conflict, particularly in regions where water is already a contested resource [19, 20, 21, 22]. The findings are consistent with existing literature that highlights the significant impact of climate change on water scarcity in arid and semi-arid regions [23, 24], where irregular rainfall patterns and prolonged dry seasons exacerbate water shortages, thereby intensifying conflicts over resources. By utilizing a logistic regression model to predict the likelihood of conflict, this study offers a more quantifiable approach to understanding these dynamics, aligning with recent work in conflict resolution and water management [25]. This approach is supported by recent scholarship emphasizing the importance of community-based management and gender-responsive policies for sustainable water access [26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31].

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides a nuanced examination of the challenges surrounding water resource distribution, access, and governance in Nigeria's Sahel region, a context marked by severe climatic variability, infrastructure deficits, and socio-political tensions, particularly concerning the shrinking Lake Chad. This study extends this discourse by highlighting the spatial and seasonal dimensions of water access, demonstrating that while proximity to water sources is a key factor, other variables; such as infrastructure development, governance quality, and gender roles—are equally critical in shaping water security outcomes.

The logistic regression model employed in the study underscores the complex interplay between these factors, aligning with findings from similar studies that have explored the role of infrastructure and governance in water access and have similarly demonstrated that improved infrastructure and stronger governance frameworks significantly enhance water access in resource-scarce regions. However, this study diverges from others by emphasizing the role of seasonal water scarcity and its gendered impact, particularly in the context of rural communities where women are disproportionately burdened by water collection responsibilities.

While many studies focus on the broader political and economic factors driving water-related conflicts, this study contributes a specific focus on the role of infrastructure and local governance in mitigating or exacerbating these tensions. In contrast to studies that call for broad, top-down interventions, this study advocates for a more localized, gender-sensitive approach to water governance. The study's findings also suggest that while regional cooperation on transboundary water resources like Lake Chad is crucial, the lack of effective local governance structures remains a significant barrier to equitable water access and conflict resolution.

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